

Coping Mechanism on Academic Stress of Tiwi Community College Students

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 22026, 18(01), 710-713

Publication history: Received on 14 December 2025; revised on 20 January 2026; accepted on 23 January 2026

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijjsra.2026.18.1.0145>

Abstract

This qualitative study investigated the coping mechanisms employed by selected students at Tiwi Community College in managing academic stress during the school year 2024–2025. Guided by a phenomenological approach, the research sought to answer four sub-problems: the types of academic stress experienced, the coping strategies utilized, the factors influencing stress, and the development of a coping mechanism model. Data were collected through interviews with ten participants and analyzed using coding, theme identification, and mamboing. Three major themes emerged: academic stress, coping mechanisms, and influencing factors. The first theme highlighted stressors such as heavy workloads, time constraints, and performance expectations. The second theme revealed coping strategies including effective time management, reliance on social support networks, and spiritual practices. The third theme identified personal, institutional, and environmental factors that shaped students' stress experiences.

Findings show that while students face significant academic challenges, they demonstrate resilience through adaptive coping strategies that sustain their motivation to pursue higher education. Social and spiritual support systems, alongside personal discipline, play a crucial role in mitigating stress and fostering persistence. The study proposes a coping mechanism model that integrates these strategies with institutional support, emphasizing the importance of holistic interventions to address academic stress. By capturing the lived experiences of students, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how learners navigate academic pressures and highlights the need for responsive educational practices that promote well-being and academic success.

Keywords: Coping Mechanism; Phenomenological Approach; Personal Discipline

1. Introduction

Tertiary education plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' futures, equipping them with essential knowledge and skills for professional success. However, alongside its benefits, higher education often exposes students to significant academic stress. Globally, college students encounter stressors such as heavy academic workloads, performance pressure, financial constraints, and personal responsibilities. Excessive stress has been linked to anxiety, depression, and burnout, which can undermine students' well-being and academic achievement. Chronic stress, if left unaddressed, may lead to emotional exhaustion, decreased motivation, and disengagement from learning. This underscores the importance of equipping students with effective coping strategies and establishing institutional support systems to safeguard mental health and academic success. Within this context, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 on health and well-being and SDG 4 on quality education, emphasize the need to integrate mental health and educational quality as interconnected priorities.

In the Philippines, academic stress among college students remains a pressing concern, intensified by financial challenges, demanding coursework, and societal expectations. While moderate stress can motivate students to excel, excessive stress often results in negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and burnout. Reports from the World

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Health Organization (WHO) highlight alarming mental health trends among Filipino youth, including suicide attempts and rising calls to crisis hotlines. These statistics reflect the growing prevalence of academic stress and its impact on students' psychological well-being. External factors such as family dynamics, financial stability, and peer relationships further influence students' ability to cope with academic demands. Despite government initiatives like Republic Act 10931, which provides free tuition in state universities, many students continue to struggle with stress due to competitive grading systems and institutional challenges.

Addressing academic stress requires a holistic approach that integrates coping mechanisms, institutional support, and policy frameworks. The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533) emphasizes the development of well-rounded learners equipped with cognitive, social, and emotional competencies. This aligns with the need to foster resilience, critical thinking, and emotional well-being among students to mitigate the effects of academic stress. By recognizing academic stress as both an individual and societal issue, educators, policymakers, and institutions can work together to create supportive environments that promote student welfare, enhance learning outcomes, and prepare graduates for meaningful participation in society.

2. Materials

The study utilized both primary and secondary materials to ensure comprehensive data collection. Primary materials consisted of interview responses from ten purposively selected students of Tiwi Community College, documented through audio recordings and transcripts. Secondary materials included books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and related issuances that supported and validated the findings. The research instrument comprised two parts: questions on academic stress and an interview guide on coping mechanisms. To protect participant identity, secure codes were assigned. Validation was conducted through face validation by the thesis committee and content validation by external guidance counselors.

3. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, specifically the phenomenological approach, to capture the lived experiences of students regarding academic stress and coping mechanisms. Ten participants were purposively selected based on criteria such as experiencing academic stress, current enrollment, and willingness to participate. Data collection involved in-depth interviews, guided by a validated instrument, with participants providing informed consent. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded to ensure confidentiality and accuracy. Thematic analysis was applied following Braun and Clarke's six-phase procedure, complemented by Creswell's spiral process of coding, theme identification, and memboing. Ethical considerations were prioritized, including voluntary participation, confidentiality through pseudonyms, and respect for participant schedules. The process emphasized rapport-building to encourage openness and trust, ensuring rich, descriptive data that reflected the holistic experiences of students in managing academic stress.

4. Results

The study revealed three major themes: academic stress, coping mechanisms, and influencing factors. Academic stress was primarily attributed to heavy workloads, numerous projects, and paper requirements, which participants identified as their most significant challenges. Coping mechanisms emerged as adaptive strategies, with time management being the most common. Students described breaking tasks into smaller parts, completing assignments immediately, and using downtime productively. Social support also played a crucial role, with family, peers, and employers providing emotional and instrumental assistance. Spiritual support was another coping mechanism, as students relied on faith and prayer to sustain motivation and resilience. Influencing factors included financial difficulties and the challenges faced by self-supporting students who balanced academic responsibilities with employment. Despite these stressors, participants demonstrated determination to pursue their studies, drawing strength from supportive networks and personal discipline. Their experiences highlighted resilience and the ability to adapt, showing that while stress was pervasive, effective coping strategies enabled them to continue their academic journey.

5. Discussion

The findings underscore that academic stress is a multifaceted issue influenced by workload, financial constraints, and personal circumstances. Students' reliance on time management, social support, and spiritual practices reflects the importance of holistic coping strategies that address both practical and emotional needs. Time management allowed students to maintain control over academic demands, while social support provided encouragement and reduced

feelings of isolation. Spirituality offered a source of inner strength, aligning with cultural values that emphasize faith as a coping resource. Financial difficulties and the burden of being self-supporting students intensified stress, highlighting the need for institutional interventions such as scholarships, counseling services, and flexible academic policies. The study demonstrates that resilience among students is fostered not only by individual strategies but also by external support systems. These insights suggest that colleges should integrate mental health programs and stress management workshops into their curricula. By acknowledging the lived experiences of students, institutions can design responsive interventions that promote well-being, enhance academic performance, and align with broader educational goals such as those outlined in SDG 3 and SDG 4. Ultimately, addressing academic stress requires a collaborative effort between students, families, and institutions to ensure sustainable educational success.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, tertiary education is vital in preparing individuals for professional success, yet it inevitably exposes students to academic stress that can hinder their well-being and performance if left unmanaged. The findings highlight that excessive stress, driven by heavy workloads, financial challenges, and societal expectations, often leads to anxiety, depression, and burnout among college students, particularly in the Philippines. While government initiatives such as free tuition aim to ease burdens, institutional challenges and competitive systems continue to exacerbate stress. Addressing this issue requires a holistic approach that integrates effective coping mechanisms, strong social and spiritual support, and responsive institutional policies aligned with Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 4. By fostering resilience, critical thinking, and emotional well-being, educators and policymakers can create supportive environments that not only mitigate academic stress but also enhance learning outcomes, ensuring students are empowered to thrive academically and contribute meaningfully to society.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest should be disclosed.

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