

Academic Stress Experiences and Coping Mechanisms Among Pre-Service Teachers: Basis for Intervention Development

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Abstract. This study examined the academic stress experiences and coping mechanisms of pre-service teachers as a basis for developing support strategies that promote adjustment and well-being in teacher education programs. Specifically, it assessed academic stress in terms of workload, performance demands, time management challenges, and teaching practicum requirements, identified coping mechanisms, and examined the relationship between academic stress and coping strategies among pre-service teachers. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire from Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) and Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) students in a public university in Zamboanga City selected through voluntary sampling. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that pre-service teachers generally experienced a moderate level of academic stress, with workload and performance demands identified as the primary sources of pressure, while teaching practicum requirements were rated lower in comparison. Respondents commonly utilized problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, whereas avoidance coping was least practiced. Results further indicated no statistically significant relationship between academic stress and coping mechanisms, suggesting that coping patterns may not be directly associated with stress levels and may be influenced by other factors not examined in this study. The findings highlight the need for strengthened support systems for pre-service teachers. As an output of the study, the PRESTO: Pre-Service Teacher Stress Optimization Program is proposed to enhance coping skills, emotional resilience, and academic adjustment.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Coping Mechanisms, Pre-service Teachers, Stress Management, Intervention Program

Introduction

Academic stress is a persistent concern in higher education, particularly among pre-service teachers who must simultaneously manage demanding academic coursework and teaching practicum responsibilities. According to the transactional theory of stress and coping, stress occurs when individuals appraise environmental demands as exceeding their available coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In teacher education contexts, these demands typically include heavy academic workloads, performance expectations, instructional preparation, classroom management responsibilities, and time-management pressures, which have been associated with increased anxiety, emotional exhaustion, reduced academic engagement, and lower overall well-being among pre-service teachers (García-Martínez et al., 2021; Zito et al., 2024; Cavendish et al., 2020). Pre-service teachers are particularly vulnerable to these pressures due to the simultaneous development of pedagogical knowledge, teaching competencies, reflective practice, and professional identity formation within a highly performance-oriented training environment.

Both international and local literature underscore the critical role of coping strategies in mitigating the negative effects of academic stress. Studies indicate that adaptive coping mechanisms—particularly problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and emotional regulation—are associated with greater resilience, psychological adjustment, and academic persistence among pre-service teachers (Balakrishnan et al., 2017; Commey-Mintah et al., 2022). In the Philippine educational context, stress may be further intensified by institutional constraints, classroom realities during practicum, and limited exposure to structured stress management training, which may challenge students' ability to effectively regulate academic pressure (Paquette & Rieg, 2016; Cavendish et al., 2020; Zito et al., 2024). These conditions highlight the importance of comprehensive support systems that promote both well-being and professional competence in teacher education programs.

Despite the growing body of literature on academic stress and coping, there remains a need for context-specific evidence examining how these variables operate among pre-service teachers within Philippine higher education settings, particularly in relation to workload, performance demands, time management, and practicum experiences. While several studies have explored academic stress and coping

alongside other psychological and educational variables, fewer studies have directly examined their interrelationship within teacher education contexts in local settings. Addressing this gap, the present study seeks to examine the academic stress experiences and coping mechanisms of pre-service teachers and explore their relationship. The findings are expected to provide empirical support for the development of evidence-based interventions, student support programs, and institutional policies that strengthen stress management, resilience, academic adjustment, and professional preparedness among future educators.

Research Questions

This study aims to describe the academic stress experiences and coping mechanisms of pre-service teachers as a basis for intervention development. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of academic stress experienced by pre-service teachers in terms of:
 - 1.1 Academic Workload,
 - 1.2 Teaching Practicum Requirements,
 - 1.3 Performance and Evaluation Pressures, and
 - 1.4 Time Management Demands
2. What coping mechanisms are commonly used by pre-service teachers in managing academic stress in terms of:
 - 2.1 Problem-focused Coping;
 - 2.2 Emotion-focused Coping; and
 - 2.3 Avoidance Coping
3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of academic stress and the coping mechanisms of pre-service teachers?
4. Based on the findings, what intervention program may be proposed to help pre-service teachers manage academic stress effectively?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focused on examining the academic stress experiences and coping mechanisms of pre-service teachers at one of the public universities in Zamboanga City. Specifically, the study investigated the level of academic stress experienced by pre-service teachers in terms of academic workload, teaching practicum requirements, performance and evaluation pressures, and time management demands. It also examined the coping mechanisms utilized by pre-service teachers, including problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance coping.

Literature Review

Academic Workload

Academic workload is consistently identified as a primary source of stress among pre-service teachers, but studies differ in how they conceptualize its determinants and effects. Commey-Mintah et al. (2022) attribute workload stress largely to structural demands within teacher education programs, emphasizing its negative impact on motivation and performance when academic requirements exceed students' coping capacity. This structural framing, however, tends to underemphasize individual variability in stress responses. In contrast, García-Martínez et al. (2021) suggest that the effects of workload are not uniform and are influenced by psychological resources such as emotional intelligence, which can buffer perceived overload. This introduces a more differentiated interpretation in which workload is not inherently stress-inducing but interacts with personal coping capacity. The divergence between these perspectives highlights an unresolved tension in the literature: whether workload stress is primarily institutional or transactional in nature. However, many studies still rely on cross-sectional self-report data, limiting causal interpretation and reducing comparability across educational contexts.

Teaching Practicum Requirements

Teaching practicum is widely recognized as both a developmental and stress-inducing phase, but the literature varies in emphasis on its outcomes. Cavendish et al. (2020) highlight practicum stress as arising from classroom management difficulties and unfamiliar teaching environments, framing it primarily as a challenge. In contrast, Zito et al. (2024) argue that practicum stress is significantly shaped by mentorship quality and structured supervision, suggesting that it can also function as a resilience-building experience. Compared to earlier studies that emphasize practicum as a stressor, more recent research adopts a dual-perspective approach that recognizes both stress and professional growth outcomes. This shift reflects an evolving understanding of practicum experiences; however, a key limitation remains the lack of longitudinal

studies examining how stress trajectories change across practicum stages, particularly from initial exposure to final teaching deployment.

Performance and Evaluation Pressures

Performance and evaluation pressure is consistently associated with academic stress, but explanations of its mechanisms vary across studies. García-Martínez et al. (2021) emphasize emotional intelligence as a moderating factor, suggesting that students with stronger emotional regulation skills experience lower evaluative stress. This individual-focused explanation contrasts with studies that attribute stress primarily to external academic demands such as grading systems and performance standards. However, much of the literature does not clearly differentiate between formative and summative evaluation contexts, despite evidence that these may produce different psychological responses. As a result, evaluative stress is often treated as a uniform construct, limiting theoretical precision. Additionally, institutional practices that shape assessment design remain underexplored compared to individual coping abilities, indicating a gap in system-level analysis.

Time Management Demands

Time management is frequently cited as a contributing factor to academic stress, yet interpretations differ regarding its root cause. Balakrishnan et al. (2017) conceptualize time management difficulties as a skill deficit, linking poor planning behaviors to higher stress and reduced academic efficiency. In contrast, other studies suggest that time-related stress may persist even among students with adequate planning skills, implying that structural workload intensity may also play a critical role. This discrepancy reflects an ongoing debate between individual responsibility and systemic academic pressure. However, empirical studies rarely isolate these factors, leading to an oversimplified attribution of stress to student inefficiency rather than programmatic design constraints.

Problem-Focused Coping

Problem-focused coping is consistently regarded as the most adaptive strategy; however, studies differ in how they explain its effectiveness. Commey-Mintah et al. (2022) emphasize individual strategies such as planning and prioritization, while Paquette & Rieg (2016) highlight the importance of institutional support systems such as mentorship and academic guidance. The contrast between these findings suggests that problem-focused coping is not purely an individual cognitive process but is significantly shaped by external academic structures. Nevertheless, most studies continue to categorize coping strategies at the individual level, with limited attention to how institutional environments enable or constrain their effectiveness.

Emotion-Focused Coping

Emotion-focused coping is widely acknowledged as essential in managing academic stress, yet its conceptualization varies across studies. García-Martínez et al. (2021) emphasize emotional intelligence as an internal regulatory mechanism, while other studies highlight external supports such as peer interaction, family support, and spirituality. This reflects a conceptual fragmentation between intrapersonal regulation and interpersonal emotional support. Although both dimensions are associated with reduced stress, few studies integrate them into a unified framework. Consequently, emotion-focused coping is often treated as a broad category rather than a multidimensional process involving both psychological and social components.

Avoidance Coping

Avoidance coping is consistently classified as the least adaptive strategy, yet its functional role is more nuanced than often acknowledged. Commey-Mintah et al. (2022) emphasize its long-term negative effects on academic performance, whereas other studies suggest that it may serve a short-term emotional buffering function under high stress conditions. This indicates that avoidance coping may not be entirely maladaptive but context dependent. However, empirical research remains limited in examining situational triggers and duration of avoidance behaviors, resulting in an incomplete understanding of when avoidance transitions from temporary relief to maladaptive disengagement.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design, which, according to Fraenkel and Wallen (2012), is a design that describes the characteristics of a population and examines the statistical relationships among variables without manipulating them. This design is appropriate for determining the level of academic stress experienced by pre-service teachers, identifying their coping

mechanisms, and analyzing whether a significant relationship exists between these variables. Data were collected through structured survey questionnaires and analyzed using statistical procedures to generate objective and quantifiable results. The descriptive component of the design was used to determine the levels and patterns of academic stress and coping strategies, while the correlational component examined the degree of association between them. Overall, this design allowed for an empirical and systematic investigation of naturally occurring variables to support evidence-based interpretation and intervention development.

Sampling Design

The study utilized a total enumeration (complete population sampling) approach, wherein all identified pre-service teachers enrolled in the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) and Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) programs were invited to participate. Total enumeration refers to the inclusion of the entire accessible population as respondents, provided full participation is achieved, making it appropriate for small and well-defined populations. In this study, the target population consisted of 150 pre-service teachers. However, participation was voluntary, and only 56 respondents completed the survey during the data collection period. As a result, the study reflects a voluntary response sample from a census frame, rather than a complete enumeration of the population. This indicates that while all members of the population were given equal opportunity to participate, the final dataset represents only those who responded, introducing a self-selection limitation that may affect representativeness.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at a public university in Zamboanga City, Philippines. The institution offers various academic programs, including teacher education, technology, and applied sciences. The College of Teacher Education (CTE) serves a large population of pre-service teachers, making it a suitable setting for examining academic stress and coping mechanisms. The locale was selected based on its accessibility to the researchers, relevance to the study variables, and the availability of respondents who are actively engaged in academic coursework and teaching practicum requirements.

Research Participants

The target population consisted of 150 pre-service teachers (58 BSED and 92 BEED) enrolled in the College of Teacher Education for the Academic Year 2025–2026. All members of the population were invited to participate in the study; however, participation was voluntary. From this population, 56 respondents completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 37.33%. Although total enumeration was initially intended by including the entire accessible population, the final data collection reflects a voluntary response sample drawn from a census frame, rather than a complete enumeration of all 150 students. The discrepancy between the target population and actual respondents is attributed to non-response due to student availability, willingness to participate, and limited engagement during the data collection period. Given this, the findings should be interpreted as representing only the characteristics of the responding subgroup and not the entire population, with consideration of potential non-response bias that may affect generalizability.

Research Instrument

The survey instrument was adapted from established studies on academic stress and coping mechanisms (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Commey-Mintah et al., 2022; Del Rosario, 2023; Kao, 2024), with modifications to ensure contextual relevance to pre-service teachers. The instrument was designed to measure academic stress experiences and coping mechanisms among respondents. The questionnaire consisted of three (3) sections: (1) demographic profile, (2) academic stress experiences, and (3) coping mechanisms. Academic stress was measured across four dimensions, namely: workload, teaching practicum demands, performance evaluation pressure, and time management. Coping mechanisms were categorized into three types: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance coping strategies. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always) was used to quantify responses.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection followed institutional approval and ethical clearance procedures. After securing permission from the Dean of Graduate Studies and endorsement from the College of Teacher Education, the survey was distributed via Google Forms using a QR code shared through official program group chats. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to answering the questionnaire. Responses were automatically encoded in a secure spreadsheet to ensure accuracy and minimize encoding errors.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1. What is the level of academic stress experienced by pre-service teachers in terms of academic workload, teaching practicum requirements, performance and evaluation pressures and time management demands.

Table 1. Level of Academic Stress Experienced by Pre-Service Teachers in terms of Academic Workload

	Statements	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1.	I feel overwhelmed by the number of academic requirements I must complete each week.	3.09	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed
2.	I experience difficulty keeping up with deadlines for assignments and projects.	2.71	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed
3.	I feel pressured to complete multiple tasks at the same time.	2.89	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed
4.	I spend long hours studying or working on assignments to keep up.	3.28	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed
5.	I feel that my workload affects my ability to relax or enjoy personal time.	2.98	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed
	Over-all Mean	2.99	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed

Table 1 indicates that pre-service teachers experience a moderate level of academic workload stress, with mean scores ranging from 2.71 to 3.28. Among the indicators, “I spend long hours studying or working on assignments to keep up” obtained the highest mean (3.28), suggesting that extended study time is the most prominent manifestation of workload-related stress. This finding may be attributed to the unique academic demands placed on pre-service teachers, who are often required to balance coursework, lesson planning, teaching demonstrations, field study activities, and other academic responsibilities simultaneously. Unlike students in other programs, pre-service teachers must prepare not only for examinations and written requirements but also for practical teaching tasks that require significant time, preparation, and reflection. As a result, they tend to dedicate longer hours to studying and completing requirements to meet academic expectations and professional standards. Meanwhile, indicators such as feeling overwhelmed ($M = 3.09$), pressure from multitasking ($M = 2.89$), and limited time for relaxation ($M = 2.98$) further reflect consistent but manageable stress levels. These findings align with foreign studies which emphasize that pre-service teachers commonly experience stress due to heavy academic demands and multiple responsibilities. As discussed by Balakrishnan et al. (2017), academic workload is a major contributor to stress, often affecting students’ motivation and ability to concentrate. Similarly, the moderate stress levels observed in this study support the idea that while stress is present, it has not yet reached a level that severely disrupts functioning, consistent with Commey-Mintah et al. (2022), who noted that moderate stress can still be manageable but may become harmful if prolonged.

Table 2. Level of Academic Stress Experienced by Pre-Service Teachers in terms of Teaching Practicum Requirements

	Statements	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1.	I feel stressed by the demands of classroom observations and teaching practice.	2.54	Rarely	Low Stress Level
2.	Preparing for practicum lessons and reports often causes me anxiety.	2.34	Rarely	Low Stress Level
3.	I worry about making mistakes during teaching practice.	3.30	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed
4.	I feel unprepared for classroom management during practicum.	2.13	Rarely	Low Stress Level
5.	The practicum schedule interferes with my other academic responsibilities.	2.25	Rarely	Low Stress Level
	Over-all Mean	2.51	Rarely	Low Stress Level

Table 2 shows that pre-service teachers generally experience low levels of stress related to practicum activities, with indicators such as classroom observations and teaching practice ($M = 2.54$, Low Stress Level), preparing lessons and reports ($M = 2.34$, Low Stress Level), feeling unprepared for classroom management ($M = 2.13$, Low Stress Level), and practicum schedules interfering with other academic responsibilities ($M = 2.25$, Low Stress Level) perceived as minor stressors. However, worry about making mistakes during teaching practice stands out as a significant stressor ($M = 3.30$, Moderate Stress Level), highlighting performance anxiety as a key concern. This may be because pre-service teachers view practicum experiences as critical opportunities to demonstrate their teaching competence and readiness for the profession. Since teaching practice involves direct interaction with students, mentors, and supervising instructors, pre-service

teachers may feel pressure to meet expectations and avoid errors that could affect their evaluations and self-confidence. Their fear of making mistakes may also stem from limited classroom experience and uncertainty in applying theoretical knowledge to actual teaching situations. These findings align with both local and international research indicating that while pre-service teachers may manage routine practicum tasks effectively, the pressure to perform well and avoid mistakes can negatively impact confidence and emotional well-being (Balakrishnan et al., 2017; Commey-Mintah et al., 2022; Cavendish et al., 2020; Zito et al., 2024). Studies emphasize that coping strategies such as mentor support, reflective practices, and peer guidance are essential for helping pre-service teachers navigate practicum challenges, build resilience, and maintain psychological well-being during professional training (Paquette & Rieg, 2016).

Table 3. Level of Academic Stress Experienced by Pre-Service Teachers in terms of Performance and Evaluation Pressures

	Statements	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1.	Exams, quizzes, and grading requirements make me feel pressured.	2.84	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed
2.	I worry about meeting teachers' expectations in my academic performance.	3.11	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed
3.	I feel anxious about getting good grades.	2.88	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed
4.	I fear failing or underperforming in my courses.	2.98	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed
5.	Constant evaluation affects my confidence in my abilities.	2.79	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed
	Over-all Mean	2.92	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed

Table 3 indicates that pre-service teachers experience a moderate level of stress related to academic performance and evaluation, with mean scores ranging from 2.79 to 3.11. The highest stress was associated with worrying about meeting teachers' expectations ($M = 3.11$), followed closely by fear of failing or underperforming ($M = 2.98$) and anxiety about grades ($M = 2.88$). This suggests that evaluation demands consistently influence students' emotions, confidence, and overall academic experience. The high level of concern regarding teachers' expectations may be attributed to the desire of pre-service teachers to prove their competence and readiness for the teaching profession. Since they are preparing for careers that require professional skills, ethical behavior, and academic excellence, they may feel pressured to meet the standards set by their instructors and mentors. In addition, frequent assessments, classroom demonstrations, and performance-based requirements may intensify self-doubt and fear of negative evaluation, which can affect their academic confidence and emotional well-being. These findings align with literature indicating that performance pressure, fear of failure, and grading requirements are significant sources of academic stress among pre-service teachers (Balakrishnan et al., 2017; Commey-Mintah et al., 2022).

Table 4. Level of Academic Stress Experienced by Pre-Service Teachers in terms of Time Management Demands

	Statements	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1.	I struggle to balance schoolwork, practicum, and personal responsibilities.	2.50	Rarely	Low Stress Level
2.	I often feel I do not have enough time to complete all academic tasks.	2.50	Rarely	Low Stress Level
3.	I procrastinate because I cannot manage my time effectively.	2.54	Rarely	Low Stress Level
4.	I feel rushed and stressed when deadlines approach.	2.75	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed
5.	Poor time management negatively affects my academic performance.	2.93	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed
	Over-all Mean	2.64	Sometimes	Moderately Stressed

Table 4 shows that pre-service teachers generally experience low to moderate stress related to time management, with mean scores ranging from 2.50 to 2.93. Struggling to balance schoolwork, practicum, and personal responsibilities ($M = 2.50$, Low Stress Level), feeling that there is insufficient time to complete all academic tasks ($M = 2.50$, Low Stress Level), and procrastination due to ineffective time management ($M = 2.54$, Low Stress Level) are perceived as minor stressors. These findings may indicate that pre-service teachers have developed basic coping strategies and routines that allow them to manage daily academic and personal responsibilities effectively under normal circumstances. Their familiarity with academic requirements and schedules may help minimize stress in routine tasks. However, stress increases when deadlines approach ($M = 2.75$, Moderate Stress Level), and poor time management is recognized as negatively affecting academic performance ($M = 2.93$, Moderate Stress Level). This suggests that while pre-

service teachers may generally manage their responsibilities adequately, stress becomes more pronounced during periods of increased academic pressure, particularly when multiple requirements and deadlines accumulate simultaneously. The moderate stress levels may also reflect the demanding nature of teacher education programs, where students are expected to balance coursework, practicum preparation, and performance-based tasks within limited timeframes. As academic demands intensify, ineffective prioritization and limited time for rest may contribute to increased pressure and reduced academic efficiency. These findings correspond with both international and local literature showing that pre-service teachers often face challenges in managing multiple academic and personal responsibilities, which can heighten stress and impact performance (Balakrishnan et al., 2017; Cavendish et al., 2020; Commey-Mintah et al., 2022). Studies suggest that developing effective time management skills, prioritizing tasks, and establishing structured routines are essential coping strategies to reduce stress, improve academic outcomes, and maintain well-being during teacher education programs (Paquette & Rieg, 2016; Zito et al., 2024).

Table 5: Summary of the Level of Academic Stress Experienced by Pre-service Teachers

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
Academic Workload	2.99	Moderately Stressed
Teaching Practicum Requirements	2.51	Low Stress Level
Performance and Evaluation Pressures	2.92	Moderately Stressed
Time Management Demands	2.64	Moderately Stressed
Over-All Mean	2.77	Moderately Stressed

Table 5 reveals that pre-service teachers experience an overall moderate level of academic stress (Mean = 2.77), which supports existing literature indicating that academic stress is common but manageable in teacher education (Commey-Mintah et al., 2022). Among the factors, academic workload (Mean = 2.99) and performance and evaluation pressures (Mean = 2.92) were rated moderate, confirming findings that these are primary stressors among pre-service teachers (Balakrishnan et al., 2017). The higher variation in performance pressure suggests that stress perception differs among students, consistent with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. Time management demands (Mean = 2.64) were also moderate, aligning with studies that highlight the challenge of balancing multiple responsibilities (Paquette & Rieg, 2016). In contrast, teaching practicum requirements (Mean = 2.51) were rated low, which may indicate the presence of effective support systems, as suggested in local studies (Cavendish et al., 2020). Overall, the findings support the Conservation of Resources Theory, suggesting that students are able to manage stress due to available coping resources. This implies that while stress is present, effective coping strategies and institutional support help keep it at a manageable level.

Research Question 2. What coping mechanisms are commonly used by pre-service teachers in managing academic stress in terms of problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance coping?

Table 6. Commonly Used Coping Mechanisms of Pre-Service Teachers for Managing Academic Stress in Terms of Problem-Focused Coping

Statements	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1. I make a plan to solve academic challenges I encounter.	3.66	Often	Commonly Used
2. I seek help from teachers or peers when I face academic difficulties.	3.32	Sometimes	Moderately Used
3. I break complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps.	3.34	Sometimes	Moderately Used
4. I set goals to stay organized and meet deadlines.	3.75	Often	Commonly Used
5. I prioritize tasks based on importance and urgency.	3.71	Often	Commonly Used
Over-all Mean	3.56	Often	Commonly Used

Table 6 indicates that pre-service teachers often utilize problem-focused coping strategies in managing academic stress, as reflected in the average weighted mean of 3.56 (Often). This suggests that respondents generally employ active and task-oriented approaches, particularly in planning, prioritizing, and organizing academic responsibilities. Higher ratings in items such as setting goals to stay organized (M = 3.75), prioritizing tasks (M = 3.71), and planning solutions to academic challenges (M = 3.66) demonstrate a

tendency toward strategic and self-regulated behaviors. These results support the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which explains that individuals use problem-focused strategies when stressors are perceived as manageable. Similarly, these findings are consistent with Commey-Mintah et al. (2022), who reported that students commonly rely on problem-solving and time management to cope with academic demands. However, lower ratings in seeking help from teachers or peers ($M = 3.32$) and breaking tasks into manageable steps ($M = 3.34$), both interpreted as Moderately Used, suggest a lesser reliance on collaborative and task-simplification strategies. This may indicate that pre-service teachers prefer handling academic stress independently to maintain a sense of personal control and competence. Some students may perceive help-seeking as a sign of weakness or lack of capability, particularly in teacher education programs where independence and professional readiness are highly valued. In addition, limited interaction with mentors or peers, fear of negative judgment, or lack of confidence in expressing academic difficulties may further reduce their willingness to seek assistance. While self-directed coping can promote responsibility and autonomy, excessive reliance on independent coping may increase vulnerability to stress during more demanding academic situations. This observation aligns with Cavendish et al. (2020), who emphasized the importance of mentorship and peer support in enhancing coping among pre-service teachers. From the perspective of the Conservation of Resources Theory, strategies such as planning and prioritization reflect efforts to manage and conserve personal resources, particularly time and effort. However, the limited use of social support may indicate a gap in resource acquisition. Overall, while pre-service teachers demonstrate strong engagement in self-directed coping, enhancing collaborative strategies may further improve their ability to manage academic stress effectively.

Table 7. Commonly Used Coping Mechanisms of Pre-Service Teachers for Managing Academic Stress in Terms of Emotion-Focused Coping

	Statements	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1.	I take time to relax or meditate when I feel stressed.	3.43	Often	Commonly Used
2.	I engage in positive self-talk or prayer to manage my emotions.	4.02	Often	Commonly Used
3.	I talk to friends or family about my feelings to reduce stress.	3.75	Often	Commonly Used
4.	I use hobbies or leisure activities to cope with stress.	3.54	Often	Commonly Used
5.	I focus on positive outcomes rather than dwelling on negatives.	3.86	Often	Commonly Used
	Over-all Mean	3.72	Often	Commonly Used

Table 7 shows that pre-service teachers commonly utilize emotion-focused coping strategies to manage their academic stress, as indicated by an overall mean of 3.72 (Often/Commonly Used). This demonstrates that respondents actively engage in methods that help regulate their emotional responses to stress, complementing their task-oriented coping approaches. Among the items, engaging in positive self-talk or prayer ($M = 4.02$) and focusing on positive outcomes rather than dwelling on negatives ($M = 3.86$) received the highest ratings, highlighting that respondents commonly used cognitive and reflective strategies to maintain emotional balance. Rather than functioning as isolated coping behaviors, these emotion-focused strategies appear to operate in a complementary and reinforcing manner. Cognitive reframing (positive self-talk and optimistic thinking) likely serves as the internal mechanism that helps pre-service teachers reinterpret academic stressors in a more manageable light, while social support (talking to friends or family, $M = 3.75$) provides external validation and emotional reassurance. These interpersonal interactions may, in turn, strengthen positive thinking by reducing feelings of isolation and reinforcing adaptive perspectives. Meanwhile, leisure activities ($M = 3.54$) and relaxation practices ($M = 3.43$) function as restorative mechanisms that help regulate emotional exhaustion, allowing students to recover from sustained academic pressure and maintain psychological equilibrium. These results align with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which classifies emotion-focused coping as strategies used when stressors are perceived as less controllable. The findings also support previous research by Commey-Mintah et al. (2022), which emphasized that pre-service teachers often engage in emotional regulation techniques, social support, and leisure activities to manage academic stress. Overall, the data suggests that pre-service teachers actively use a combination of cognitive, social, and leisure strategies in an interconnected way, reflecting adaptive coping processes that may enhance resilience and overall well-being.

Table 8. Commonly Used Coping Mechanisms of Pre-Service Teachers for Managing Academic Stress in Terms of Avoidance Coping

	Statements	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1.	I avoid thinking about stressful academic tasks.	3.20	Sometimes	Moderately Used
2.	I procrastinate or distract myself from academic responsibilities when stressed.	3.18	Sometimes	Moderately Used
3.	I ignore problems hoping they will resolve themselves.	2.61	Sometimes	Moderately Used
4.	I delay completing tasks due to fear of failure.	2.34	Rarely	Seldom Used
5.	I avoid seeking help even when I need support.	2.50	Rarely	Seldom Used
	Over-all Mean	2.76	Sometimes	Moderately Used

Table 8 indicates that pre-service teachers occasionally employ avoidance coping strategies, as shown by the overall mean of 2.76 (Sometimes/Moderately Used). This suggests that, while avoidance behaviors are present, they are generally less frequently used compared to problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. Among the specific items, avoiding thinking about stressful academic tasks ($M = 3.20$) and procrastinating or distracting oneself from academic responsibilities ($M = 3.18$) received the highest ratings, indicating that pre-service teachers sometimes rely on temporary distraction or mental disengagement to cope with stress. In contrast, delaying tasks due to fear of failure ($M = 2.34$) and avoiding seeking help ($M = 2.50$) were the least practiced, reflecting a low tendency toward complete withdrawal or rejection of support in managing academic challenges. These results suggest that avoidance coping among pre-service teachers is primarily situational and short-term rather than habitual. While such strategies may provide temporary emotional relief by reducing immediate psychological pressure, their occasional use may also indicate a risk of delayed task engagement, particularly during peak academic demands such as deadlines, assessments, and practicum requirements. If not regulated, even intermittent avoidance may contribute to task accumulation, increased time pressure, and heightened stress in later stages, potentially undermining the benefits of more adaptive coping strategies already in use. These results align with prior research indicating that avoidance coping, while occasionally used, is generally considered less adaptive, as it does not address the source of stress and may contribute to cumulative stress over time (Commeey-Mintah et al., 2022; Paquette & Rieg, 2016). The findings also support the Conservation of Resources Theory, which posits that individuals aim to protect their personal resources; in this case, avoidance strategies may serve as a short-term mechanism to conserve energy or reduce immediate emotional strain, but excessive reliance could limit resource acquisition and problem resolution (Hobfoll, 1989). Overall, the data suggest that pre-service teachers primarily favor active and adaptive coping strategies (problem-focused and emotion-focused), using avoidance coping only occasionally, which may indicate a generally balanced coping profile, though continued monitoring is important to prevent potential long-term stress accumulation.

Table 9. Summary of Coping Mechanisms Used by Pre-Service Teachers in Managing Academic Stress

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
Problem-Focused Coping	3.56	Commonly Used
Emotion-Focused Coping	3.72	Commonly Used
Avoidance Coping	2.76	Moderately Used
Over-All Mean	3.35	Moderately Used

Table 9 shows that pre-service teachers moderately used coping mechanisms overall ($M = 3.35$). Among the strategies, emotion-focused coping ($M = 3.72$) and problem-focused coping ($M = 3.56$) are commonly used, indicating frequent use of emotional regulation and problem-solving strategies, while avoidance coping ($M = 2.76$) is only moderately used, suggesting it is less preferred. This finding supports the literature of Commeey-Mintah et al. (2022), which highlights that pre-service teachers commonly rely on adaptive coping strategies such as emotional regulation and problem-solving, and aligns with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, emphasizing the use of active and emotion-focused approaches in managing stress.

Research Question 3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of academic stress and the coping mechanisms of pre-service teachers?

Table 10. Relationship Between Academic Stress Level and Coping Mechanisms of Pre-Service Teachers

Variable	Spearman's rho (ρ)	df	p-value	Strength of Correlation	Significance
Academic Stress and Coping Mechanisms	-0.143	54	0.293	Very weak negative	Not statistically significant

Table 10 reveals a very weak negative and non-significant relationship between academic stress and coping mechanisms among pre-service teachers ($\rho = -0.143$, $df = 54$, $p = 0.293 > 0.05$). This indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between the level of academic stress and the coping strategies employed by pre-service teachers. Although the hypothesis predicted a significant relationship, the result aligns with the literature showing that pre-service teachers often use problem-focused and emotion-focused coping independently of perceived stress (Commey-Mintah et al., 2022; Cavendish et al., 2020). According to Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984), coping is influenced by individual appraisal and available personal and contextual resources, such as personality, resilience, social support, prior experience, and time management, which may explain why academic stress levels did not significantly correspond with coping strategy use.

Research Question 4. Based on the findings, what intervention program may be proposed to help pre-service teachers manage academic stress effectively?

An intervention program that may be proposed is the PRESTO: Pre-Service Teacher Stress Optimization Program, which is directly anchored on the study's findings showing moderate academic stress primarily related to workload, performance expectations, and time management, alongside strong use of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies and a non-significant relationship between stress levels and coping mechanisms. The program will therefore focus not on increasing coping frequency, but on enhancing the effectiveness and balance of existing coping strategies and addressing identified stress hotspots. Specifically, the program will include academic workload and time management optimization sessions to address stress associated with deadlines and task accumulation; performance confidence and anxiety reduction workshops to target worry about meeting expectations and fear of mistakes during practicum; and guided reflective practice activities to strengthen adaptive emotion-focused coping such as positive reframing already frequently used by participants. In addition, structured peer collaboration and help-seeking reinforcement activities will be integrated to address the relatively lower use of collaborative coping strategies identified in the results. A mentorship-based monitoring system will also be implemented to support continuous adjustment of coping strategies based on individual student needs rather than stress level alone, consistent with the finding that stress does not significantly predict coping behavior. Overall, the PRESTO program aims to refine and strengthen pre-service teachers' existing adaptive coping patterns while addressing specific stress domains identified in the study, thereby enhancing resilience, academic efficiency, and practicum readiness.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards in educational research to ensure the protection of participants' rights and welfare. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Dean of the Graduate Studies Program and the College of Teacher Education (CTE) of a public university in Zamboanga City. Informed consent was secured from all respondents after coordination with the Dean of CTE and program coordinators, following a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary participation. Data were collected through Google Forms to ensure accessibility and minimize disruption of classes. Access to the online survey responses was restricted only to the researchers through password-protected accounts. All collected data were downloaded, stored in an encrypted file, and backed up in a secure, access-controlled device. No personal identifiers were collected to maintain anonymity, and responses were coded for analysis purposes only. Participants were informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence. In compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173), all data were handled strictly for academic purposes and were not shared with unauthorized individuals or third parties. Data will be retained only for the duration required for academic completion and will be permanently deleted afterward. Overall, the study ensured that confidentiality, privacy, and participant protection were maintained throughout the research process.

Conclusion

The study concluded that pre-service teachers experience a moderate level of academic stress, indicating that stress is present but generally manageable. The primary sources of stress were academic workload, performance-related demands, and time management challenges, while practicum-related activities were rated comparatively lower in stress, with only specific aspects such as performance expectations emerging as more salient concerns. In terms of coping mechanisms, pre-service teachers predominantly utilized adaptive strategies, particularly problem-focused coping (e.g., planning, prioritization, and task organization) and emotion-focused coping (e.g., positive self-talk, prayer, relaxation techniques, and seeking social support). In contrast, avoidance coping was less frequently employed, suggesting a general preference for active and adaptive approaches to managing academic demands. The results also showed no significant relationship between academic stress and coping mechanisms, indicating that the coping strategies used by pre-service teachers are not primarily determined by stress level, but may instead be influenced by other factors such as individual coping resources, prior experiences, and personal characteristics. Based on these findings, the study underscores the need for interventions that strengthen and optimize existing coping strategies rather than simply increasing coping frequency. Thus, the proposed PRESTO Intervention Program is recommended, focusing on enhancing time management skills, reinforcing adaptive coping practices, strengthening peer and mentor support systems, and providing continuous reflective and monitoring activities to support pre-service teachers' well-being and academic effectiveness.

Reccomendations

In light of the findings showing moderate academic stress levels, dominant use of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, and a non-significant relationship between academic stress and coping mechanisms, it is recommended that higher education institutions shift their focus from stress-driven interventions to strengthening coping effectiveness and support systems independent of stress levels. Priority should be given to implementing structured programs such as the PRESTO Intervention Program, which focuses on enhancing time management, performance confidence, and reflective coping practices rather than assuming that higher stress automatically requires increased coping support. Institutional leaders may further support this by integrating continuous but targeted student development programs that reinforce adaptive coping skills already commonly used by pre-service teachers. College administrators are encouraged to review academic requirements and scheduling practices to maintain balance, particularly during peak periods of deadlines and performance-based assessments, which were identified as key sources of stress. Faculty members should prioritize clear instructions, consistent feedback, and assessment transparency to reduce performance-related anxiety, especially concerning expectations and fear of mistakes identified in the results. Student support services, including guidance offices and student affairs units, should strengthen mentorship-based and peer-assisted support systems, with emphasis on help-seeking encouragement, given the relatively lower use of collaborative coping strategies. Instead of general stress management seminars, interventions should be more focused on enhancing adaptive coping efficiency, reflective practice, and confidence-building strategies. Pre-service teachers are encouraged to continue utilizing their existing adaptive coping strategies while also strengthening help-seeking behaviors and collaborative support when faced with complex academic demands. Future researchers may further examine other moderating variables such as resilience, personality traits, and social support to better explain coping behavior beyond stress levels.

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