

## Emotional Anxiety and Coping Strategies during the Covid-19 Pandemic among Language Teachers

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### *Abstract*

This study aimed to investigate the prevalence of anxiety, stress, and depression symptoms among teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. A high percentage of teachers were found to suffer from these negative emotions, surpassing the rates reported in a previous study conducted during the pandemic. These findings align with other studies conducted since the pandemic's inception, highlighting the adverse impact of lockdown measures on teachers' well-being. The emotional anxiety experienced by teachers primarily centered around frustration due to the inability to engage in their usual activities, concerns about the potential breakdown of the educational system, and worries about the health and safety of their students. While pre-pandemic studies already indicated elevated levels of emotional anxiety among teachers, this study revealed significantly higher levels during the pandemic. Nevertheless, teachers demonstrated resilience by employing coping strategies despite the limitations imposed by lockdowns. This research provides a snapshot of the coping strategies adopted by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and offers insights for implementing specific actions in educational settings. It underscores the urgent need to further explore teachers' experiences related to the pandemic and emphasizes the importance of institutional support in promoting their well-being. Furthermore, the study revealed a significant relationship between emotional anxiety and approach strategies, suggesting that teachers actively seek ways to cope with the challenging circumstances. Seeking emotional support from family and peers emerged as important coping mechanisms for teachers during this period. These findings shed light on the complex interplay between teachers' mental health and their coping strategies, underscoring the necessity of fostering supportive environments and providing institutional resources to enhance their well-being.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, teachers, mental health, anxiety, stress, depression, coping strategies, educational settings, institutional support.

## Introduction

Language teacher stresses have multiplied with the advent of COVID-19. Teaching loads that were once perceived as extensive have been complicated by a rapid transformation to online delivery for which many language teachers had not been prepared for. Balancing personal and professional roles is a challenge for many teachers, but online delivery of courses with work-at-home practices and online work-related activity create a lack of physical and psychological boundaries between school and home. In many cases, teachers have significant others sharing the same space and/or have their own children who also need their attention. In particular, the nature of the global pandemic brings a particular set of difficulties such as health concerns for oneself and loved ones, social and physical distancing, travel restrictions, closed borders, shortages of daily necessities, and uncertainty as to when life will return to the previous normal. Teachers' emotions have been shaken in the certainty of what "new normal" means now or what it will be in the future. The long-term consequences of the pandemic in the online teaching are unknown for language teachers. There is no denying that life with COVID-19 has suddenly and unavoidably become more difficult and complicated for everyone, including language teachers. The emotions of language teachers are affected and their coping strategies in the midst of the crisis are worthy of investigations.

According to Pekrun (2001), emotions influence our ability to process information and to accurately understand what we encounter. Emotions are often thought of as irrational or non-intellectual feelings that are beyond our control. However, academic emotions are complex states of mind and body, consisting of physiological, behavioral, and cognitive reactions to situations that can be managed and directed. Cognitively, teachers interpret an event as one that may be sad, dangerous, joyous, etc. Physically, the pandemic situation may yield tears, or a dangerous situation might lead to an elevated heart rate. Behaviorally, teachers may seek comfort when they are sad or run and seek help when they face danger. It is critical therefore to recognize the important link between academic emotions, thought, and action.

This paper aims to determine the level of emotional anxiety among the language teachers during the pandemic; to know the extent of coping strategies of the language teachers during the pandemic; and to determine if there is a significant relationship between the emotional anxiety and the coping strategies used by the language teachers.

## **Methodology**

### Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive-correlational research design whereby emotional anxiety and coping strategies of teachers during pandemic was described as they happened. The quantitative aspect delved on the effect of emotional anxiety and the coping strategies of the language teachers.

### Sampling Procedure

Complete enumeration of the respondents was employed considering the minimal number of the language teachers from the College of Arts and Communication.

### Research Instruments

The 14-item instrument on coping strategies has the factors approach strategies, avoidant strategies, neither approach nor avoidant strategies. This was adopted from the study of MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer (2020).

The 16-item instrument on teachers' emotional anxiety during pandemic was adopted from the study of Ballou, Gray, and Palsson in their study on Validation of the Pandemic.

An interview guide was used to delve further into the emotional experiences of the language teachers as well as how they coped up with the pandemic. Themes were generated from the responses in the interview and were used to back up the discussion in the quantitative part.

### Data collection

The study involved quantitative data collection methods. An online questionnaire using Google Forms was used to collect the data.

## **Results and Discussion**

### Emotional anxiety during Pandemic

The emotional anxiety of teachers during pandemic was determined and is presented in Table 1. It shows that most of the teachers felt frustrated about not being able to do what they usually enjoy doing (3.61) and they were worried about the possible breakdown of educational system (3.61). These teachers were also worried about the health and safety of their students (3.39). These findings show that most of the teachers were still anxious in conducting classes even though it is online. The interview with some of the teachers confirmed that they still worry about their personal health or safety.

It is good note however, that most teachers did not have difficulty in sleeping (2.22) nor depressed during the pandemic (2.22). This is

understandable considering that they do not worry about getting necessities like groceries or medications even during lockdowns (2.0).

**Table 1. Emotional Anxiety during Pandemic**

<b>Emotional Anxiety During Pandemic</b>	<b>WM</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>I feel frustrated about not being able to do what I usually enjoy doing.</b>	3.61	High extent
<b>I am worried about the possible breakdown of educational system.</b>	3.61	High extent
<b>I am worried about the health and safety of my students.</b>	3.39	Moderate extent
<b>I feel that the future seems darker or scarier than before.</b>	3.06	Moderate extent
<b>I am being less productive in online classes.</b>	3.00	Moderate extent
<b>I am anxious conducting online classes.</b>	2.94	Moderate extent
<b>I am having difficulty concentrating with my online classes.</b>	2.94	Moderate extent
<b>I am worried about my personal health or safety.</b>	2.89	Moderate extent
<b>I am worried conducting online classes because of limitations in my finances.</b>	2.83	Moderate extent
<b>I am bored with my online classes.</b>	2.78	Moderate extent
<b>I feel angry or irritated with my online classes.</b>	2.72	Moderate extent
<b>I feel more grief or sense of loss.</b>	2.50	Less extent
<b>I have difficulty in sleeping.</b>	2.22	Less extent
<b>I feel more down or depressed.</b>	2.22	Less extent
<b>I am worried about getting necessities like groceries or medications.</b>	2.00	Less extent
<b>Mean</b>	2.85	Moderate extent

#### Coping Strategies

##### *Approach Strategies*

The coping strategies of teachers were measured with different strategies. Their approach strategies (Table 2.1) show that there was a high extent of acceptance or acknowledgment of the reality of the pandemic thereby learning to live with it (3.81). These teachers find emotional support by obtaining emotional support and seeking comfort and understanding from their families and peers (3.78). There were also those who sought help and advice from others about what to do in the current situation (3.22). The result of short interview showed that some

teachers saw the pandemic from a different perspective like this is bound to happen and they see something good in it.

**Table 2.1 Approach Strategies**

<b>Approach Strategies</b>	<b>WM</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>Acceptance: Acknowledging the reality of the pandemic and learning to live with it</b>	3.81	High extent
<b>Emotional Support: Obtaining emotional support and seeking comfort and understanding</b>	3.78	High extent
<b>Instrumental Support: Seeking help and advice from others. Trying to get advice or help from others about what to do</b>	3.22	Moderate extent
<b>Positive Reframing: Seeing the pandemic from a different more affirming light; seeking something good in it</b>	2.78	Moderate extent
<b>Active Coping: Concentrating efforts on doing something about the pandemic and taking action to try to make it better</b>	2.78	Moderate extent
<b>Planning: Devising a strategy about what to do. Thinking hard about the steps to take</b>	2.78	Moderate extent
<b>Mean</b>	3.19	Moderate extent

*Avoidant Strategies*

Some teachers also use avoidance strategies as coping mechanisms during the crisis (Table 2.2). Some of them consume alcohol to feel better (3.89) while other criticize themselves for things that happened (3.78). Some have even verbalized unpleasant feelings to let pandemic escape, or generally expressed negative feelings (3.78). These findings show that some teachers resort to avoid the reality by doing these activities. Indeed, the horror of the pandemic is real to some if not most of the teachers involved in the study.

**Table 2.2 Avoidant Strategies**

<b>Avoidant Strategies</b>	<b>WM</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>Substance Use: Using alcohol or other drugs to feel better</b>	3.89	High extent
<b>Self-Blaming: Criticizing oneself or censuring oneself for things that happened</b>	3.78	High extent
<b>Venting: Verbalizing unpleasant feelings to let pandemic escape, or generally expressing negative feelings</b>	3.78	High extent
<b>Denial: Saying to oneself 'this is not real'. Refusing to believe it happened</b>	2.33	Less extent

<u>Avoidant Strategies</u>	<u>WM</u>	<u>Interpretation</u>
<b>Behavioral Disengagement: Giving up trying to deal with the pandemic or abandoning attempts to cope</b>	2.22	Less extent
<b>Self-Distraction: Turning to work or other activities to take mind off things. Doing something to think about pandemic less</b>	2.00	Less extent
<b>Mean</b>	3.00	Moderate extent

### Neither Approach nor Avoidant Strategies

It is good to note that some teachers found comfort in religious activities during pandemic (Table 2.3). They have found praying or meditating as coping strategies during the crisis (3.68). Others turned the situation into funny moments by making jokes (2.56). This means that some of the teachers can still find other ways to cope with the situation.

**Table 2.3 Neither Approach nor Avoidant Strategies**

<u>Neither Approach nor Avoidant Strategies</u>	<u>WM</u>	<u>Interpretation</u>
<b>Religion: Finding comfort in spiritual beliefs/Praying or meditating</b>	3.68	High extent
<b>Humor: Making jokes about the pandemic /Making fun of the situation</b>	2.56	Less extent
<b>Mean</b>	3.12	Moderate extent

### Relationship between Emotional Anxiety in Teaching and Coping Strategies

The relationship between emotional anxiety in teaching and coping strategies was measured using Pearson r (Table 3). It shows that there is a significant relationship between emotional anxiety and approach as coping strategies ( $r=0.313$ ). This means that most teachers who have high extent of emotional anxiety in teaching acknowledge the reality of the pandemic and learning to live with it by obtaining emotional support and seeking comfort and understanding of the situation.

**Table 3 Relationship between Emotional Anxiety in Teaching and Coping Strategies**

	<u>Parameters</u>	<u>Approach Strategies</u>	<u>Neither Approach nor Avoidant Strategies</u>	<u>Avoidant Strategies</u>
<b><u>Emotional Anxiety in Teaching</u></b>	Pearson Correlation	<b>0.313</b>	0.111	0.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<b>0.049</b>	0.54	0.64
	Interpretation	<b>Significant</b>	Not Significant	Not Significant

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The results of this study have confirmed that a high percentage of teachers suffered from symptoms of anxiety, stress and depression during the pandemic. The high percentage of negative emotions is somewhat high in comparison with those reported in another study conducted during the pandemic (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2020). Nonetheless, these findings are in line with those of other studies carried out from the beginning of the pandemic showing that during lockdown, teachers have suffered from stress, anxiety (Huang and Zhao, 2020), and other psychological and physical symptoms (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)).

Among the emotional anxiety evaluated here, the most striking findings to emerge are those related to frustration about not being able to do what they usually enjoy doing, worrying about possible breakdown of educational system and the health and safety of students.

While it is true that according to some studies, emotional anxiety levels were already high among teachers before the onset of the pandemic (Teles et al., 2020), the results of this study revealed that the levels of emotional anxiety are considerably higher during the pandemic.

It is good to note, however, that teachers have come up with coping strategies despite the limitations because of lockdowns. This study presents a snapshot of the coping strategies reported by the teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. These results provide ideas for specific actions that can be promoted in educational settings. This study calls attention for a need to further explore teachers' experiences concerning the pandemic and the importance of providing institutional support to enable well-being.

The significant relationship between emotional anxiety and approach strategies imply that teachers find ways to cope with the hard situation. They try to live with it and find emotional support from families and peers.

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