



OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND SELF-EFFICACY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS IN TAGUM CITY

**Maria Shella Cabanero¹, Camille M. Maputol², Chie Ann B. Marquez³
Estella Marie P. Alicante-Martel⁴**

^{1,2,3}Student, University of Mindanao Tagum College, Tagum City, Philippines

⁴Faculty, University of Mindanao Tagum College, Tagum City, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study focused primarily on the occupational stress and self-efficacy experienced by early childhood teachers, with a specific focus on Tagum City. A cohort of 100 early childhood educators participated in this research. Employing a descriptive-correlational methodology, the study aimed to assess the levels of occupational stress and self-efficacy among teachers and to uncover any significant associations between these variables. The findings revealed a moderate level of stress, with specific stressors including working conditions, curricular activities, and classroom management. However, teachers demonstrate high levels of self-efficacy, indicating a strong belief in their teaching abilities. The findings also highlighted a significant relationship between the self-efficacy and occupational stress of early childhood teachers in Tagum City, as evidenced by an R-value of 0.021. These results highlighted the importance of addressing stressors and promoting self-efficacy among educators to improve their well-being and effectiveness in the classroom. Future research and interventions should focus on supporting teachers in managing stress and enhancing self-efficacy to benefit the educational landscape.

KEYWORDS: Occupational Stress, Self-efficacy; Early Childhood Teachers, Descriptive-correlational, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood teachers hold a pivotal position in facilitating children's learning and growth. However, they face various stressors that can detrimentally affect their self-efficacy (Lipscomb, et al., 2022). Similarly, the presence of stress in the school setting has a detrimental effect on teacher's self-efficacy, which can lead to unfavorable feelings (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Barni, 2019). Besides, teachers with low self-efficacy may struggle more in the classroom and experience higher levels of occupational stress (Karabatak & Alanoglu, 2019).

In Indonesia, 59% of early childhood teachers reported experiencing low self-efficacy, which they attributed to challenges like feeling unprepared and stressed (Sibagariang & Pandia, 2021). Furthermore, in Ghana, a study conducted by Kuyini et al. (2022) revealed that primary teachers only have a moderate level of self-efficacy, especially regarding the implementation of inclusive education, showing concerns and demonstrate less positive attitudes. Additionally, self-efficacy is crucial for teachers in achieving their objectives, completing tasks, and navigating instructional challenges. Teachers with low self-efficacy tend to avoid challenging tasks, perceive creative activities and situations as daunting, interpret many situations negatively, and experience a loss of confidence in their abilities (Hussain et al., 2022).

Occupational stress commonly serves as an indicator of teachers' psychological condition and has been associated with aspects of teacher well-being, job performance, emotional fatigue, and levels of engagement (Han, et al., 2019). Moreover, teachers perceive their work as highly stressful due to various factors, including excessive workload, insufficient resources, negative feedback from students, lack of support from colleagues and superiors, inadequate wages, and challenging relationships with parents (De Stacio, et al., 2017). Additionally, they struggle with low self-esteem, limited control over their work, unclear work goals, and difficulties managing non-academic situations. The consequences of stress and burnout among teachers typically include increased rates of absenteeism, reliance on substitutes, early retirement, and a decline in their belief in their ability to effectively instruct (Girard et al., 2016).



Self-efficacy serves as a valuable asset for teachers in handling stressful circumstances (Rabaglietti, et al., 2021). Similarly, self-efficacy beliefs serve as personal assets that offer protection to teachers amidst occupational stressors. These beliefs also play a pivotal role in mitigating the impact of job-related stress on educators (İpek et al., 2018). Moreover, self-efficacy, a sense of autonomy in decision-making, and positive personal dispositions have been found to contribute to higher levels of teaching performance (Purwanto, 2022).

Occupational stress is significantly linked with self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to accomplish tasks and handle challenges effectively within the workplace. When individuals possess high levels of self-efficacy, they tend to perceive stressful situations as more manageable and are better equipped to cope with them (Antoniou, et al., 2023). Likewise, stress perception being influenced by individual self-efficacy means that how stressed someone feels in a given situation depends on their belief in their ability to handle that situation effectively. Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to view stressful situations as challenges they can overcome, leading to lower levels of perceived stress (Lee et al., 2016). Added to that, high levels of occupational stress among teachers, coupled with inadequate coping mechanisms, correlate with unfavorable consequences including increased burnout, diminished teaching self-efficacy, less proficient classroom management techniques, decreased student learning achievements, and heightened depressive symptoms (Lauermaann & König, 2016).

Teachers who possess high self-efficacy and receive adequate professional support demonstrate increased work engagement. Providing early childhood educators with the resources they need to effectively perform their jobs and feel capable of making a meaningful impact on children's lives may enhance their work engagement, leading to greater passion, dedication, and positive energy in their work (Lipscomb et al., 2022). The cultivation of self-efficacy can be influenced by the work environment. Teachers in supportive school settings that are more adept at handling difficult situations and stress (Hadar, et al., 2020).

It is apparent that the efficacy of teachers strongly affects and significantly shapes their pedagogical development across various aspects (Barni et al., 2019; Alibakhshi et al., 2020) Consequently, as teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy improve, their level of job satisfaction is likely to increase (Arslan, 2019; Kasalak & Dagyar, 2020).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to bring new insights into the descriptive approach, to analyze and understand the relationship between occupational stress and self-efficacy. The following were the study's main objectives:

1. To identify the level of Occupational stress among Early Childhood teachers in Tagum City in terms of:

1.1 Curricular and Extracurricular Activity

1.2 Classroom management

1.3 Working conditions

2. To identify the level of Self- Efficacy of Early Childhood teachers in Tagum City in terms of:

2.1 Locus of control

2.2 Classroom Anxiety

2.3 Persistent Behavior

2.4 Professional mastery

3. To know if there is a relationship between Occupational Stress and Self- Efficacy of Early Childhood teachers in Tagum City.

At a significance level of 0.05, the study's hypothesis according to which there is no significant relationship between Occupational Stress and Self-Efficacy.

METHOD

Research Design

This quantitative study employed a descriptive research design to measure the occupational stress and self-efficacy of Early Childhood teachers in Tagum City. A descriptive study was conducted to determine and support this research. Descriptive research involves collecting data to test and answer questions in a subject study. It aims to comprehend how individuals interpret or derive significance from their experiences (Kahlke, 2014). The descriptive design is commonly utilized in both health and social science disciplines (Kim et al., 2017). Descriptive data are usually collected through a questionnaire survey, and pertinent data will be gathered through questionnaires and subjected to appropriate statistical treatment.

Research Participants

This study involved early childhood teachers from Tagum City using a random sampling technique, resulting in a total of 100 respondents. Random sampling was deemed appropriate due to its wide applicability in diverse sampling environments (Rahman et al.,



2022). In selecting participants, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. The inclusion criteria encompassed teachers who had been engaged in teaching early childhood education (ECE) for a minimum of two years, were employed in public schools within Tagum City, and taught at the elementary level, ranging from Kinder to Grade 6. Additionally, willingness to participate in the study was a prerequisite. Conversely, individuals who did not meet these inclusion criteria, such as those with less than two years of teaching experience, those employed in private schools in Tagum City, or those teaching at the high school level, were excluded from participation. Moreover, individuals unwilling to participate were also excluded. These criteria were employed to ensure the selection of a homogeneous sample, thereby enhancing the study's internal validity and the generalizability of its findings within the specified context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Occupational Stress of Early Childhood Teachers

Table 1 shows the Occupational stress of early childhood teachers in Tagum City. With an overall mean of 2.783, described as moderate, and a standard deviation of 0.216. This means that the Occupational stress of early childhood teachers in Tagum City was moderately observed.

Table 1. Level of Occupational Stress of Early Childhood Teachers in Tagum City

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Equivalent
Working Condition	3.234	0.328	Moderate
Curricular and Extracurricular Activity	2.596	0.355	Low
Classroom Management	2.518	0.385	Low
Overall	2.783	0.216	Moderate

The working condition had the highest mean score of all the indicators, coming in at 3.234 with a variance of 0.328 and the descriptive equivalent of moderate. The curricular and extracurricular activities came in second with a mean score of 2.596 and an average deviation of 0.355 and a descriptive equivalent of low and the classroom management came in third with a mean score of 2.518 and standard deviation of 0.385 and a descriptive equivalent of low.

This result is aligned with the study findings of İpek et al. (2018) that teachers experienced moderate levels of stress, and the teaching environment influenced their stress levels. This result is also supported by the study of Rajendran et al. (2020) which highlighted that teachers experience only mild stress and this is due to student misbehavior. Additionally, disruptive behavior caused by a lack of student engagement can make it challenging for teachers to maintain classroom control (Shakespeare et al., 2018). Furthermore, teachers experiencing elevated occupational stress alongside ineffective coping mechanisms are linked to negative outcomes such as increased burnout, reduced teaching self-efficacy, and less effective classroom management (Lauermaun & König, 2016).

Early childhood Teachers' occupational stress at work stem from a lack of control over their jobs, limited collegial relationships within the program, and perceived challenging behaviors exhibited by children (Shaack, 2020). Moreover, challenging working conditions also impacts teacher well-being and student outcomes. Addressing the various aspects of working conditions are paramount for improving the overall quality of education (Viac & Fraser, 2020). In addition, encouraging creativity and fostering innovation proved beneficial for both school leaders and teachers in navigating and coping with changes and stress (Daffon, 2024).

Self-Efficacy of Early Childhood Teachers

The level of self-efficacy is shown in Table 2 of early childhood teachers in Tagum City, with an overall mean of 4.523 described as very high with a standard deviation of 0.123. This means that the teaching self-efficacy of early childhood teachers in Tagum City was always observed.

Among all the indicators, professional mastery had the highest mean score 4.572 with a standard deviation of 0.262 with descriptive equivalent of very high. This was followed by classroom anxiety with a mean score of 4.566 with a standard deviation of 0.218 with a descriptive equivalent of very high. Next was the locus of control, with a mean of 4.514 with a descriptive level of 0.245, which is equivalent to very high. Lastly, the indicator persistent behavior obtained a mean score of 4.440 with a standard deviation of 0.436 with a descriptive equivalent of very high.



Table 2. Level of Self-Efficacy of Early Childhood Teachers

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Equivalent
Locus of Control	4.514	0.245	Very High
Persistent Behavior	4.440	0.436	Very High
Classroom Anxiety	4.566	0.218	Very High
Professional Mastery	4.572	0.262	Very High
Overall	4.523	0.123	Very High

The level of self-efficacy of early childhood teachers in Tagum City is very high. This could be interpreted as a positive sign for teachers. This result aligned with the study of Engin (2020) which cited that primary school teachers have high level of self-efficacy. Teachers possessing high self-efficacy also exhibit elevated levels of motivation. Similarly, a study conducted by Orakçı et al. (2023) revealed that teachers reported high levels of self-efficacy and felt confident in their teaching abilities. The high self-efficacy levels of teachers can also be linked to an improvement in the quality of education.

High self-efficacy among teachers is advantageous for the early literacy development of all young learners in early childhood education (Guo et al., 2021). Furthermore, Teachers' work engagement was positively associated with their self-efficacy and the level of professional support they received, while also considering factors such as job demands (Lipscomb, et al., 2022). Consequently, early childhood teachers' self-efficacy is flexible and can be strengthened through preparation, effective professional development, and support from leaders (Von Suchodoletz et al., 2018).

Significant Relationship between Occupational Stress and Self-Efficacy of Early Childhood Teachers

Presented in Table 3 the results of the correlation analysis between occupational stress and self-efficacy of early childhood teachers. The study's findings revealed a significant positive correlation between the levels of occupational stress and self-efficacy as indicated by an R-value of 0.221. This correlation was further supported by a p-value of 0.027, which fell below the predetermined significance level of 0.05, affirming the existence of a significant relationship between the two variables which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that as levels of occupational stress increase, so do levels of self-efficacy among early childhood educators.

Table 3. Significance of the Relationship between Independent Variable and Dependent Variable

Variables	R-value	R-square	P-value	Decision
Occupational Stress	0.221	0.0488	0.027	Reject Ho
Self- efficacy				

This result is corroborated by the study of Antoniou et al. (2023) which highlighted that when teachers demonstrate high levels of self-efficacy, they tend to perceive stressful situations as more manageable and are better equipped to cope with them. Similarly, teachers facing higher levels of stress due to workload tend to have greater confidence in their abilities to manage their classrooms effectively (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Moreover, the study of Fathi & Derakhshan (2019) cited that self-efficacy is associated with stress. The level of confidence and belief that teachers have in their ability to perform their teaching duties effectively can significantly influence the amount of stress they experience in their role.

In addition, the study of Bolton (2018) showed that improving teacher self-efficacy is important for managing stress among teachers. This shows that if the teacher has the motivation and higher self-efficacy, they may not struggle to achieve teaching success or the quality of teaching that the students deserve. Also, self-efficacy can better prepare teachers to handle stressful situations effectively (Rabaglietti et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this descriptive-correlational study among early childhood teachers in Tagum City, several key conclusions can be drawn.



Firstly, regarding occupational stress, the overall mean score of 2.783 suggests that teachers in Tagum City experience relatively moderate levels of stress in their profession. However, specific stressors such as working conditions, curricular and extracurricular activities, and classroom management still contribute to moderate to low levels of stress among educators.

In contrast, the level of self-efficacy among these teachers is notably high, with an overall mean score of 4.523. This indicates a strong belief in their capabilities to effectively perform their teaching roles. Indicators such as professional mastery, classroom anxiety, locus of control, and persistent behavior all demonstrate very high levels of self-efficacy among early childhood educators in Tagum City.

Furthermore, the calculated R-value of 0.221 indicates a positive correlation between occupational stress and self-efficacy. This suggests that as occupational stress increases, self-efficacy also tends to increase among early childhood teachers. Additionally, the obtained p-value of 0.027, falling below the significance level of 0.05, further confirms the significant relationship between these variables.

In conclusion, while early childhood teachers in Tagum City experience relatively moderate levels of occupational stress, there exists a significant and positive relationship between stress and self-efficacy. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing occupational stressors and fostering self-efficacy among educators to enhance their overall well-being and effectiveness in the classroom. Further research and interventions aimed at supporting teachers in managing stress and boosting self-efficacy could yield significant benefits for the educational landscape in Tagum City.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this descriptive-correlational study among early childhood teachers in Tagum City, the researcher proposes the following specific recommendations:

1. Early Childhood Teachers must proactively adopt stress management techniques such as mindfulness, time management, and seeking social support to effectively cope with occupational stressors.
2. Early Childhood Teachers may engage in professional development opportunities aimed at boosting self-efficacy, such as workshops, training programs, and peer support groups.
3. Early Childhood Teachers must strive to maintain a healthy work-life balance by setting boundaries, prioritizing self-care activities, and disconnecting from work during non-working hours.
4. School Administrators should ensure that teachers have access to resources and support systems to manage stress effectively, such as counseling services, wellness programs, and professional development opportunities.
5. School Administrator must foster a supportive and collaborative work environment where teachers feel valued, respected, and appreciated for their contributions and facilitate the establishment of peer support networks or mentorship programs among teachers to provide emotional support and share coping strategies.
6. School Administrators may organize workshops or training sessions on stress management techniques tailored to the specific needs of early childhood teachers.
7. Future Researchers may conduct further research to explore contextual factors that may influence occupational stress and self-efficacy among early childhood teachers, such as cultural differences, school policies, and community dynamics.
8. Future Researchers may design and implement intervention studies to evaluate the effectiveness of various interventions, such as mindfulness training, social support programs, or organizational changes, in reducing occupational stress and enhancing self-efficacy among early childhood teachers.

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