

Teachers' Workload, Stress, and Coping Strategies Under the New Normal

Karen Humiwat

Abstract

Teacher stress during emergency education is often discussed as an individual coping problem even when workload is produced by institutional design. This conceptual review distinguishes task volume, task fragmentation, emotional demand, decision uncertainty, and recovery opportunity. Evidence through 2021 is interpreted through a job-demands and resources perspective and organized into a Workload Recovery Ledger. The ledger asks schools to identify each recurring demand, its educational purpose, time pattern, duplication, responsible owner, available resource, and recovery protection. The synthesis argues that wellness seminars cannot compensate for conflicting deadlines, parallel reporting channels, continuous availability, or unbounded emotional labor. Individual coping remains valuable, but it should operate after unnecessary demands are removed and essential work is prioritized. The proposed framework links workload review with clear service standards, communication windows, escalation routes, peer support, and periodic stop decisions. This article reports no stress prevalence or intervention effect. It offers an organizational method for making invisible work visible and for evaluating whether coping support is matched by changes in working conditions.

Keywords: teacher workload; occupational stress; coping; job demands; work recovery

Introduction

Under the new normal, teachers redesigned lessons, learned unfamiliar platforms, printed and tracked modules, contacted families, documented participation, and responded to welfare concerns while managing their own households. The strain came not only from the number of tasks but from rapid switching, uncertain standards, and the expectation of continuous availability.

Coping advice can help a teacher regulate an immediate response, yet it cannot reconcile duplicate reports or create time between late-night messages and the next workday. A credible well-being strategy must examine how work is assigned, coordinated, and stopped.

Purpose of the Article

This article asks which workload features create avoidable stress, which resources protect teachers, and how schools can review demand without treating every responsibility as equally urgent.

Conceptual Approach

Design and Source Base

The review integrates job-demands and resources theory with studies of teachers' early pandemic experience through 2021. It interprets stress as an interaction among demands, resources, appraisal, personal circumstances, and recovery rather than a fixed characteristic of a teacher.

The proposed ledger is an analytic tool, not a clinical assessment. Severe or persistent distress requires qualified support and must not be reduced to workload management alone. Confidentiality is essential when staff disclose health or family concerns.

The Workload Recovery Ledger

Count Fragmentation, Not Only Hours

Ten small requests arriving through different channels can consume more attention than one planned task. Schools should record interruptions, platform switching, reformatting, repeated encoding, and waiting for approvals because these demands often disappear from official workload totals.

Recurring work should have one owner, one source of instructions, one submission route, and one decision deadline. Consolidation reduces the cognitive cost of reconstructing what is current.

Test the Purpose of Every Demand

A task earns priority when its relationship to learner safety, instructional continuity, feedback, or a legal requirement is clear. Reports collected only because they were collected before should be redesigned, sampled, automated, or stopped.

Leaders can use a stop-doing review before adding a new initiative. If a task is essential, the school should state what will be delayed or removed to create capacity. Addition without subtraction is a predictable source of overload.

Bound Availability and Emotional Labor

Communication windows protect teachers and families from uncertainty. Emergency routes can remain available for urgent welfare concerns, while routine questions receive a stated response time. Individual teachers should not function as twenty-four-hour service centers.

Teachers also absorb grief, frustration, conflict, and fear during family contact. Debriefing, case referral, shared scripts, and supervisory support acknowledge emotional labor without asking teachers to become counselors.

Match Resources to the Demand

Training is useful when the obstacle is skill, but not when the obstacle is time, equipment, unclear authority, or an unstable platform. The resource must address the actual demand. Peer templates can reduce design time; clerical support can reduce encoding; a decision protocol can reduce ambiguity.

Autonomy is protective when boundaries and priorities are clear. Delegating an ill-defined problem without authority merely transfers organizational uncertainty to the teacher.

Protect Recovery and Review

Recovery requires predictable periods in which work does not continue psychologically or digitally. Meeting-free blocks, message boundaries, leave access, and realistic turnaround times make recovery possible rather than aspirational.

The ledger should be reviewed with staff, not used to compare endurance. Repeated overtime, missed breaks, unclosed cases, and rising error rates are signals to redesign work. Participation must be safe enough for teachers to identify a failing process.

Table 1

Workload recovery ledger

Demand	Organizational question	Protective action
Fragmented requests	Can channels and deadlines be combined?	Use one owner and route
Low-value reporting	Which decision uses this information?	Simplify, sample, or stop
Continuous contact	What is urgent and what can wait?	Set windows and escalation
Emotional labor	Who receives complex cases?	Debrief and refer
Insufficient recovery	When is work allowed to end?	Protect breaks, leave, and quiet time

Note. The table is an analytic tool proposed in this article; it does not report field measurements.

Discussion

The ledger reorders intervention: remove needless demand, clarify essential work, provide the matching resource, protect recovery, and then strengthen personal coping. This sequence prevents resilience language from legitimizing avoidable overload.

Scope and Research Agenda

This conceptual review does not diagnose stress or determine the prevalence of burnout. Self-report can be affected by fear, role expectations, and crisis timing. Future studies should combine time-use data, task logs, organizational changes, confidential well-being measures, and follow-up sufficient to observe recovery.

Conclusion

Teacher well-being is a condition of educational continuity. Schools support it when they make work coherent, purposeful, bounded, resourced, and revisable. Coping strategies are strongest when they are accompanied by institutional responsibility for the demands teachers are asked to carry.

References

- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). The job demands-resources model: State of the art. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 22(3), 309-328.
- Kim, L. E., & Asbury, K. (2020). Like a rug had been pulled from under you: The impact of COVID-19 on teachers in England. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90(4), 1062-1083.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Gregersen, T., & Mercer, S. (2020). Language teachers' coping strategies during the COVID-19 conversion to online teaching. *System*, 94, 102352.
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2017). Dimensions of teacher burnout: Relations with potential stressors at school. *Social Psychology of Education*, 20, 775-790.
- World Health Organization. (2020). Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak.