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Teacher Stress and Coping: A Qualitative Case Study

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Concordia University–Portland
College of Education
Doctorate of Education Program

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Teacher Stress and Coping: A Qualitative Case Study

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Higher Education

Mark Jimenez, Ed.D, Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Concordia University–Portland

2019

Abstract

This study examines how stress affects the teacher participants in a rural school in Alabama and how those teachers cope with stress. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the effects of teacher stress and the ways in which stress is dealt with through coping strategies.

Thirteen teachers from one school in the district were invited to participate. Eight teachers of the thirteen agreed to be interviewed as part of the study, which included all the K–6 teachers (with the exception of fourth grade), the literacy coach, and the physical education teacher. The final finding is that increasing support, creating positive work environments within the school, and incorporating a mindset of effective communication can reduce the effects of stress and build coping strategies. Understanding sources of stress and how they affect teachers will be essential to help guide future research and best ways of coping. The study of teacher stress and coping suggest a need to recognize stress and understand its affects are important to the teacher interactions of implementing coping strategies. Researched-based methods and models for reducing the effects of teacher stress are needed and identifying coping strategies is as well using guide lines for such an agenda.

Keywords: stress, burnout, coping, strategies, affects

Dedication

In honor of my mother and father, JoAnn and McNair Ramsey, without whose support and dedication to my ambitions, I would not be the person that I am today. Their loving and encouraging spirit taught me to think big and reach for my goals. In honor of my husband Nicholas, who encouraged me to never give up. In honor of my daughter, Jonaira, whose caring spirit and undying love carried me through the rough patches.

Occasionally in life there are those moments of unutterable fulfillment, which cannot be completely explained by those symbols called words. Their meanings can only be articulated by the inaudible language of the heart. – Martin Luther King Jr.

In loving memory of my grandparents, Marie and Joseph Anderson and Ruth Abner. May you continue to look down from heaven and smile because you have blessed my life in so many ways. I heard you and listened.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven”
(Ecclesiastes 3:1 King James Version).

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I also want to acknowledge my family who understood when I needed to focus and offered kind, loving, and patient support. You kept me motivated and gave much support and prayers. I've been blessed with a loving family and consequently have had tremendous help in accomplishing my educational goals. Thank you to all of you for always listening to me, supporting me, and being there for me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Teachers are important. Teachers are needed for the growth and development of students outside the home. Teachers are needed for the success and achievement of other careers as well. However, with the increasing demands and higher expectations of what teachers are to do within the classroom, the stress of the job and how the teachers cope has become a greater challenge (McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, (2009). Teaching is stressful, and the stressors involved can eventually deter a teacher's will to teach (Kyriacou, 2001). According to Abel and Sewell (1999), teacher stress is not just rooted in overcrowded classrooms or classrooms located in rough, urban communities; teacher stress can also be identified in rural classroom settings with a smaller population of children.

Scholarly research on teacher stress and coping identifies that teacher stress leads to burnout, emotional strain, and, in some cases, leaving the profession altogether. Chang (2009) discusses this theory and draws attention to the high levels of stress that affect teachers' internal and external abilities if coping strategies are not implemented. The American Psychological Association (2011) reported that most Americans identify their stress levels as being five or higher on a scale of 1 to 10. In comparison, over half of the teachers experience some form of stress; however, only 7% identify as having low stress and high coping skills. There is a need to further research stress factors and coping techniques for a more substantial understanding of what teachers are stressed about the most, is there a consensus in the stress factors, and how to cope with that stress.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) indicated in their research that teaching is one of the most stressful professions. In the literature, teaching-related stress is described as negative feelings

such as depression, frustration, and tension. It also shows that professional burnout results in performing tasks less effectively and taking longer to complete them. Mearns and Cain (2003) recognized that among teachers, burnout has been linked to negative outcomes and professional consequences, including emotional exhaustion, depression, impaired occupational functioning, and dissatisfaction with one's career choice. Burnout has negative consequences for students and teachers' families as well (Westman, 2001). Particularly vulnerable are novice teachers, who may choose to leave the field due to burnout. Past estimates are that as many as 20% of all new teachers give up teaching during their first few years on the job; those who leave may be the ones with the greatest potential for success (Fimian & Blanton, 1987). If teaching is known to be a stressful profession, then stressors may eventually erode teachers' enthusiasm and willingness to teach, leading to burnout. It is important to understand how teachers deal with the everyday demands and challenges associated with the teaching profession, not only to alleviate them of stress but also to reduce the possibility of burnout and promote engagement and learning within classrooms. Such information would be useful in order to begin to identify the coping process that targets early intervention and effective good practices.

Shaalvick and Shaalvick (2016) indicated that stress involved in teaching can lead to decreases in teacher motivation and engagement. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, stress is defined as bodily or mental tension resulting from factors that tend to alter an existent equilibrium. Day (2005) states that *stress* is not a useful term because the term implies a phenomenon. Because of this disagreement among academics, stress is not well defined and therefore difficult to measure. Day (2005), who referenced Seyle's theory, suggests stress is "the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change" (p. 1199). The definition the author referenced will be used in this study.

One reason stress is challenging, and at times complicated, is because there is a lack of coping methods for teachers. According to Skinner and Beers (2016), some individual actions that take place in response to stressors (e.g., venting, problem-solving, and supporting) are also coping methods. A healthy work environment is where teachers recognize their stress and find ways to cope. Therefore, this qualitative study sought to determine how stress affects teachers in their everyday work. The study also sought to show how teachers cope with stress recognizing variables that could lead to a new sense of awareness, empowerment of the job, and a feeling of improved support.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework of the Problem

Background. Awareness regarding teacher stress has increased over the years, according to Wiegel, Sattler, Gontiz, and Diewald (2016). The authors also suggest that working conditions have become more complex. For example, the demands of higher standards and increased levels of accountability, as noted by Day and Gu (2013), are among the challenges confronted by teachers. There is also evidence that shows a link between stress and burnout. Rubino (2009) found that stress and the demands of the job are influential factors towards burnout. The potential for stress in a teacher's work can be associated with several independent factors that, when cumulatively, may lead to more significant issues. It is assumed that there are causal bases for stress.

Context is often a cause, and sometimes an effect, of stress. Shernoff, Mehta, Atkins, Torf, and Spencer (2011) recognized that a high percentage of urban teachers reported significant work-related stress, with impacts on both their relationships and physical health. According to Berry (2012), this is also true for teachers who work in rural areas. Berry (2012) also mentioned factors such as limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, the behavior of students, and high-

pressure accountability policies and standardized student testing to be associated with distress and burnout.

Context. Yates, Egeland, and Sroufe (2003) restructured the problem of teacher stress and coping by framing the topic using Erikson's psychosocial theory with its eight stages of development. The eight stages of development were developed by Erikson (1956), and these stages outline how personality develops from birth to adulthood. During each developmental stage, a person experiences a psychological crisis which could have a positive or negative effect. The stages include areas like "trust vs. mistrust" and "integrity vs. despair." Being able to maneuver between crises and achieving goals through a healthy balance essentially helps the individual manage stress levels through coping. According to Erikson (1956), an effective balance is called *basic virtues and basic strengths*. Unsuccessful passage through stages results in certain behavioral tendencies.

The development of stress and the deficiencies of coping strategies can be associated with the underlying theory that some of Erikson's stages are not reached or met during the psychological adaptation. Erikson's concept of adaptation could help explain why early career teachers leave the profession and burnout. It could be that the teachers were not been able to adapt appropriately in this stage of their development. Some of the challenges of teaching for the early career teachers (i.e., millennium teachers) include dealing with a population of nontraditional students and being ill-prepared for the amount of work required to maintain a classroom despite their knowledge of 21st century skills such as inquiry-based learning and technology. Some of the greatest challenges concerning teaching occur during the early stages of one's career. The failure to adapt to the new changes can create difficulties such as fatigue, nervous tension, frustration, wear and tear, and difficulties in adapting to pupils.

History. According to Johnson and McElroy (2012), very little has changed in regard to the history of teachers. Teachers are still regarded as the gatekeepers of information. Johnson et al. (2012) do note that teachers now have added responsibilities of accountability and attempting to hold students' attention due to the impact of technology and the need to meet the needs of current cultures. The authors also noted that the dynamics of home life have changed and that teachers encounter single families as compared to two families. An effective teacher, according to Johnson et al. (2012), is not someone utilizing the methods and initiations of 1965 but embracing and adapting to the culture of today. Valli (2007) established that teachers' work responsibilities have increased, intensified, and expanded from the past in response to federal, state, and local policies. She also finds that teachers are asked to do more outside the classroom to intensify work within the classroom.

Conceptual framework of the problem. The problem of stress and coping can be explored through Vygotsky's (1934) theory of cognitive, social, and emotional development. According to DiParo and Potter (2003), Vygotsky suggested emotions as being socially assembled. Emotions, as they relate to the aspects of teacher stress, according to Darling-Hammond (2003), heighten concerns around teachers' ability to cope because the inability to cope leads to a departure of nearly 50% of new teachers within the first couple of years.

Statement of the Problem

Stress affects novice and experienced teachers in the school setting. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 6.5 million students attended a school where teachers missed 10 or more days per year. The Education Week Research center went deeper to find that one in four teachers missed 10 or more days per year. Nationally, 27% of teachers were absent from work for more than 10 days, with Alabama's average absenteeism rate being 32%. Absenteeism rates

of teachers in Alabama are comparable to the national rate. This study will explore reasons for teacher stress that contribute to absenteeism. This study will also evaluate how teachers cope with job-related stress.

A notable contributor to teacher attrition rates is the socioeconomic status of the neighborhood where the school is located. For example, according to the National Center for Education Statistics or the NCES (2017), the proportion of all teachers leaving the profession is noticeably higher in schools with higher rates of poverty: 9.8% annually in high poverty schools versus 6.9% in more affluent schools. Turnover for teachers is also highest in rural areas based on NCES studies. Examining these factors will provide insight into strategies that are needed to help teachers develop coping strategies and reduce attrition rates.

Johnson et al. (2005) noted that teaching ranks as one of the most stressful occupations. In comparison to police officers and healthcare providers such as nurses, who tied for first, teaching ranks second in association with stress. Stress differs from the role as well as strategies implemented to address stress. Stress management strategies specific to addressing perceived stressors are often not well discussed in the school setting. This study is an examination of teacher stress, awareness of stressors, and coping strategies in the school setting.

Stress has an impact on school climate. Collie, Shapka, and Perry (2012) determined how the perception of school climate is a key instrument in determining stress, teacher efficacy, and job satisfaction. Stress management among education personnel is a growing area of concern for school and district administrators, as evidenced by increased employee wellness programming and health screening opportunities for staff. Management of stress impacts student learning and personal interactions within the workplace, which may have a negative effect. Antoniou, Ploumpi, and Ntalla (2013) recognized that teachers are unaware of the potential stress they may

encounter before entering the workforce and their training left them ill-equipped in managing stress, making coping even more important.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how teachers deal with stress and what the effects of teacher stress are from the perspective of the teacher. This project assessed how teachers' stress levels affect behavior, examined patterns of stress that contribute to their experiences, and further investigated how teacher efficacy, emotion regulation, and coping may help ease feelings of burnout.

The goal of this study is also to provide a foundation for future research that addresses teacher stress with the premise of developing a stress management system. Herman and Reinke (2014) suggested that stress management could be as simple as an attitude change. Singer (2012) continued this theory by elaborating on attitude playing a key role in how people with stressful situations modifying their reactions may reduce the stress that leads to burnout. The idea of building coping skills, according to Dierking and Fox (2012), can be empowering because teachers feel more in control of their emotions and better able to handle stress in their workplace.

Research Questions

1. How does stress affect teachers in a rural Alabama area school?
2. How do teachers in a rural Alabama school cope with stress?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

There has been an increased amount of research done over the years on teacher stress and coping. Many of the research components focus on stress factors and the fact that teachers burn out. However, there has been little research on what teachers say about this and how they cope with stress. This study factors in teachers' points of view as it relates to their stress and how they

cope, the differences and similarities of the stress experienced, and how they maintain levels of coping. Based on findings by Miller (2012), 5.3% of teacher absenteeism is due to stress-related illnesses, costing school systems \$4 billion annually for stipends for substitute teachers and related administrative costs, recognizing that the financial cost of teacher absence is high. There are also nonfinancial costs of teacher absenteeism. Miller (2012) elaborated that teacher absence negatively affects student achievement and that every 10 absences per individual teacher can lower the average mathematics achievement equivalent.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in this study.

Attrition. Attrition is the action or process of gradually reducing the strength or effectiveness of someone or something through sustained attack or pressure (American Psychological Association, 2011).

Burnout. Burnout is described as “a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 397).

Coping strategies. Coping strategies are an action, a series of actions, or a thought process used in meeting a stressful or unpleasant situation or in modifying one’s reaction to such a situation (American Psychological Association, 2011).

Demand control. Demand control is job strain that shows how stress contributes to high work demands (Gluschkoff, Elovainio, Keltikangas-Jarvinen, Hintsanen, Mullola, & Hintsanen, 2016).

Effort-reward imbalance (ERI). Effort-reward imbalance is work stress caused by the non-reciprocity between high effort and low reward received (Gluschkoff et al., 2016).

Emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion is a state of mind where stressors of the external environment exceed the capacity of one's nerves and start to reflect on one's behavior (Shaheen & Mahmood, 2016).

Emotional stress. Emotional stress is a manifestation of tension and mental strain that can include anxiety and depression (American Institute of Stress, 2016).

Executive function (EF). Executive function is a set of cognitive processes integral to emerging self-regulatory behavior and the development of social, cognitive, and academic competence in young children (Bridgett, Burt, Edwards, & Deater Deckard, 2015).

Experienced teachers. Experienced teachers are teachers with four or more years of teaching experience (Bitterman et al., 2013).

General adaptation syndrome (GAS). General adaptation syndrome is a predictable way the body responds to stress (Seyle, 1956).

Mindfulness. Mindfulness is an ability to be fully present and aware of where and what one is doing as a way of understanding actions and experiencing moments (Taylor & Harrison, 2013).

Mobbing. Mobbing is a more recent concept describing certain kinds of terrorizing at the workplace by colleagues or principals (Leymann, 1996).

Novice teachers. Novice teachers are teachers with three or fewer years of teaching experience (Bitterman, Gray, & Goldring, 2013).

Organizational justice. Organizational justice is fair practices and decision making (Gluschkoff et al., 2016).

Physical stress. Physical stress relates to the emotions and feelings that affect the body such, as headaches, fatigue, and sleeplessness (American Institute of Stress, 2016).

Practice shock. Practice shock is an inability to act and a lack of opportunity to control the situation within the job (Capersen & Raaen, 2014).

Relational regulation theory. Relational regulation theory is the development of main effects on perceived support and mental health and the effects predicted by stress (Lakey & Orehek, 2011).

Resilience. Resilience is defined as the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).

Role conflict. Role conflict exists when two or more social roles overlap and are incompatible. Conflict occurs because the performance of one role interferes with the performance of another (Berryhill, Linney, & Fromewick, 2009).

Rural. Rural is a place with a population of fewer than 2500 people (Beeson & Strange, 2000).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997).

Stress. Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances. It is a non-specific response of the body to any demand (Seyle, 1956).

Social cognitive theory (SCT). Social cognitive theory is an individual's knowledge directly related to observing others' interactions, experiences, and influences (Bandura, 1969).

Social stress. Social stress is a situation that threatens one's esteem and sense of belonging within a group (Wheaton, 1999).

Teacher retention. Teacher retention is a field of education research that focuses on how factors such as school characteristics and teacher demographics affect whether teachers stay in

their schools, move to different schools, or leave the profession before retirement. (Sass, Seal, & Martin, 2011).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions. Assumptions made about teacher stress, according to Becker, Keller, Goertz, Frenzel, and Taxer (2015), are that teacher's emotions are associated with goal conduciveness and coping potentials. For this study, assumptions are based on teaching being a highly stressful occupation. It can also be an assumption that teachers understand the meaning of coping. Finally, it is assumed that the participating teachers answered question honestly and shared authentic experiences regarding stress and burnout.

Delimitations. This study included eight teachers who participated in an online survey and a semistructured open-ended interview. The participated were from different socioeconomic backgrounds and rural schools. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants, with the criteria including that each one was an employed teacher. Although small, this sample size is manageable for the researcher to conduct the study in a timely manner. Utilizing findings from studies about stress and coping can help educators understand the issues and provide specific support. However, as a result of this delimitation, the study may not be applicable to all teachers. Study participants were from one school, which included one middle school grade level. The study delimitations are teachers who are working or who have between one to three years as a novice teacher and four or more years as an experienced teacher in the grade levels of kindergarten through sixth grade in one specific rural Alabama school.

Limitations. This study has several limitations. First, the sample size was small since it had only eight participants, which resulted in findings specific only to this group. Second, the

study participants included only teachers in the grade levels of kindergarten through sixth grade.

Summary

In this study, the researcher sought to understand two primary questions: How does stress affect teachers in a rural Alabama area school, and how do teachers in a rural Alabama school cope with stress? It is hoped that educators will use this study to better understand perceptions of stress and coping. As discussed earlier, the purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how teachers deal with stress and what the effects of teacher stress are from the perspective of the teacher. Understanding the terminology in the study is helpful as the study of teacher stress and coping develops. This project assesses how teachers' stress levels affect behavior; examine patterns of stress that contribute to their experiences; and investigate how teacher efficacy, emotion regulation, and coping may help ease feelings of burnout.

The details of the study are described in the following chapters. The literature review, found in Chapter 2, describes the research found in relation to teacher stress and coping. The methodology used in the study is described in Chapter 3. The results of the study are detailed and interpreted in Chapter 4. Findings, suggestions, and recommendations are detailed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The constant high turnover rate of teachers, lack of interest in teaching, and limited commitment to the profession continue to be primary concerns for school administrators throughout the United States (Haritos, 2004). Helms-Lorenz, Grift, and Maulana (2016) noted that reasons for teacher turnover include searching for better careers, dissatisfaction with the job, and the overly challenging teaching assignments. Clement (2017) recognized that when teachers feel overwhelmed, they may lack the will to continue in their jobs, an issue that adds to the turnover rate. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) found that two-thirds of teachers leave due to dissatisfaction with the job. The authors also found that turnover rates are 50% higher in Title I schools. These schools have a large population of low-income students and a 70% higher diversity of students based on racial/ethnic differences, with the majority being students of color and staffed with fewer experienced teachers with less training.

The accountability bracket has increased, and teachers are trying to build students' skills to perform well on state tests to either at or above grade level. Teachers are required to teach to standard-based learning goals according to the Advanc-Ed census (2012). Many schools however, are failing to meet these testing goals. There is also a lack of parental support by helping students at home and assisting with discipline, as well as general a lack of administrative support. There are also issues of over-crowded classrooms. Once stress has taken its toll on teachers within a school system, like in rural Alabama, they may decide to leave the field due to a lack of coping skills to handle work-related stress. When highly qualified teachers are not retained in the classroom, the students suffer.

Hiebert and Farber (1984) discussed that, over time, teacher stress is pervasive in the field of education, and the authors reported on the evidence of this growing problem. Collie et al. (2012) rationalized that the variables of stress, teaching efficiency, and job satisfaction become relevant not just for teachers but also for school administrators and policymakers. Through the American Federation of Teachers, Will (2017) found that teachers, in general, are stressed 61% of the time. Moreover, according to Ingersoll (2014), 40% to 50% of teachers will leave the classroom within five years; a turnover rate that is 4% higher than other professions. Research has further established that there is a growing problem in the teaching field for work-related stress and limited coping strategies for maintaining functional work practices.

As a result of stress-related burnout and attrition rates in teachers, administrators face an overwhelming shortage of teachers (Sass, Seal, & Martin, 2011). Agai-Demjaho, Minov, Stoleski, and Zafirova (2015) considered organizational factors and theorized that organizational factors of work stress are related to the way teachers are expected to perform. It is compounded by unreasonable schedules, unrealistic deadlines, insufficient resources, lack of support and autonomy, and large classroom sizes. Adeera and Bullock (2010) noted that teacher stress contributed to varied cognitive, social, and emotional levels.

Without relational or social support, teacher stress is increased. Lakey and Orehek (2011) developed the relational regulation theory (RRT) that the relational and social support of a teacher is needed to maintain the emotional well-being of the teacher. The authors also mentioned buffering the impact of stress through social interactions, which occurs with a conversation, listening, making comments, and asking questions. The manifestation of stress becomes a component and concern for teacher sustainability if the need is not met through

relational and social support. The claim is that teachers need to transition stress into coping strategies, and school leaders need to address the stress risk.

Stress has become a common characteristic of educators. The increased amount of accountability on teachers, means that teacher stress is likely to increase more. According to research by the Greenberg, Brown, and Abenavoli (2016), students tend to have poor performance in math and language arts and display disruptive relationships with the teacher, other students, and parents when the teacher exhibits stress. Literature warrants a movement towards dealing with stress and coming up with strategies to manage the stress that is becoming an increasing problem in the retention of teachers.

Academic leaders are beginning to recognize the effects of stress on teachers as both veteran and novice teachers are leaving the profession. Darling-Hammond (2003) mentions the increased turnover rate among teachers puts schools in jeopardy and creates a financial strain for school districts. In the age of accountability, McCarthy and Lambert (2006) wrote that balancing demands and resources are essential in the overall balance of teacher welfare. Many teachers have lost interest in teaching. The high level of job-related stress is creating burnout. Jones (2007) has noted that many teachers are prematurely leaving the classroom before retirement, which creates problems for students and administrators on how to recruit and retain teachers.

If teacher stress continues without the means to cope, the result will be a continued shortage of teachers. The shortage of teachers is already creating a void in the number of teachers available for the school system according to Carver-Thomas et al. (2017). There is also evidence of a decline in students enrolling in college to major in education. According to Flannery (2016),

In a 2016 national survey of first-year college students, the number of students who say they will major in education has reached its lowest point in 45 years. Just 4.2 percent intend to major in education compared to 11 percent in 2000 according to data gathered by UCLA's Cooperative Institutional Research Program. (Para. 3)

Other factors relating to this shortage are teacher-to-teacher relationships, teacher-to-administrator relationships, crowded classrooms, extra duties demanded of the teachers after school's regular hours and the need for better discipline within the school systems and among parents with their children.

Experienced and novice teachers can have comparable or divergent responses to stressful experiences. All the factors contributing to teacher stress seem to contribute to the overall decline of retention. Robins (2010) stressed how the pressures of teaching, which occur in the daily work environment because of changing standards, technological advances, and other outside influences, can cause teachers to experience extreme anxiety and depression, causing many of them to leave the field of teaching prematurely. The stress factors determine levels of performance, retention, and burnout. Farber (1984), noted the high risk of stress and burnout that accompanies teaching could compromise and damage the educational practices that are consistently applied in schools. Given what is known about stress factors, it can be concluded that stress can lead to a decline in the teaching force unless strategies are put in place to decrease the factors contributing to it. The data from this study offer teacher insight into the drawbacks and impacts of stress that teachers face.

Educators, parents, students, and academic leaders should be concerned about teacher stress. Stress can lead to long-term health issues, depression, and frustration in working with students to reach their appropriate learning levels. Teacher absenteeism means that more

substitute teachers in the classroom who may not be as qualified. Recruiting new teachers when present teachers leave means investing in professional development needs for new teachers, which can be costly. Additionally, Greenberg et al. (2016) researched teacher stress and reported that in 2014, “46% of teachers reported stress during the school year and the percentage is tied with nurses” (p. 1). Nursing and other high-level jobs like physicians, and lawyers have been considered notoriously demanding and if teachers are now on par with the levels reported, the demands can be contributing factors to the high attrition rate in the profession. Undoubtedly, the increase in teacher turnover and stress, and a decrease in potential teacher candidates affects overall teaching attrition.

The connection between teacher stress, migration, and retention allows for a review of stress factors such as job responsibilities, work conditions, accountability, teacher preparedness, and conflict resolutions between coworkers and administration. The stressors lead to social and emotional burnout, health issues, absenteeism, early retirement, and reduced student achievement. According to Fantillt and McDougall (2009), teaching is one of the few careers where novice teachers have the same expectations and responsibilities as their more experienced counterparts. Teachers take their work home and are expected to be more than just a teacher for their students by providing them emotional support like a family in addition to meeting their educational standards. This responsibility is embedded within the role of a teacher and illustrates the work-life balance that teachers experience.

Purpose

Kyriacou (2001) highlights that teacher stress is a major concern that educational leaders are facing. Although this concern about teacher stress is often mentioned, acknowledging that stress impacts both teachers’ well-being and sustainability of the job is essential. There has been

limited research with teachers to determine the contributing factors that lead them to experience stress and discover how they attempt to cope. The goal of this paper is to gain understanding on how teachers deal with stress and what the effects of teacher stress are from the perspective of teachers.

Research Questions:

The literature review provides strong support for pursuing research to answer and address the following two key research questions:

1. How does stress affect teachers in a rural Alabama area school?
2. How do teachers in a rural Alabama school cope with stress?

Conceptual Framework

The current literature explores and identifies both the reasons and the consequences of stress and examples of how teachers are coping with their stress. From what has been discussed earlier, inferences can be drawn as to the nature of that stress and the coping mechanisms. Social interaction and social development noted by the theorists in this study are the conceptual framework for this study. Identifying strategies is important for sustaining teachers in their field and their continuing contributions to education. Exploring the connections to early theories of social development can offer new insights into what teachers experience and how they deal with the problem of stress.

Vygotsky. In thinking about stress and how teachers deal with it, it is necessary to focus and build on the philosophy of behavioral and social interactions, as well as, cognitive development. Vygotsky (1934) developed a social development theory that focused on the connections between people and sociocultural context. This theory stresses the fundamental role

of social interaction in the development of cognition. Vygotsky believed that community played a central role in the process of how individuals deal with common factors in life.

This social development theory can thus become a backdrop for how stress is handled in the workplace. Vygotsky (1934) further applied this theory by adding cognitive and emotional development. Since social development relates to how people relate and interact with others, cognitive development theory integrates an additional focus by examining how thinking develops within the individual. Emotional development considers identifying and knowing one's feelings, and then learning how to cope with those feelings. Experiencing stress and learning how to cope begins in early childhood and usually evolves as people develop into adults. Vygotsky's (1934) theory reinforces the thinking that stress can be managed if the cognitive, social, and emotional development facilitates the reduction of that stress and created positive outcomes for coping.

Erikson. Vygotsky (1934) introduced social development and the need for social interactions, along with the cognitive and emotional connections. These cognitive, social, and emotional interactions correlate with Erikson's (1956) stages of development theory. One stage of learning, *basic trust versus basic mistrust*, indicates that when trust is lost, our social-emotional competence is tested. Social emotional competence (SEC) is a set of skills that allows individuals to understand themselves, their emotions, their social context, along with relationships and decision making. As educators begin to recognize factors related to teacher stress and how to cope, both experienced and novice teachers, it can be concluded there is a growing body of research that supports the understanding that stress is connected to whether teachers stay or leave the career.

Stress requires a form of coping that balances stress levels. Attempts to reduce stress have focused on organizational or systemic change, but little progress has been made to date. Erikson's (1956) stages of social and emotional development however, can become the beginning of how adults deal with or cope with stress. There is thus a clear vision to pursue individual factors that may influence teachers' abilities to deal with stress effectively and retain their jobs.

Levinson. Experienced and novice teachers approach stress and how to cope with stress in different ways; these ways may originate in their prior sociocultural experiences and development stage progress. Teachers approach to stress can be a determining factor that relates to the field of teaching and its longevity. The social and emotional development within our schema influences our decisions and manipulates our coping senses. Levinson (1986) associated Erikson's (1956) stages of development to adult development and the stage of ego development. That contribution is based on the individual and the environment; "It is in part the cause, the vehicle, and the effect of that relationship. The life structure grows out of the engagement of the self and the world" (Levinson, 1986, p. 7). Examining stress factors and coping strategies in terms of maintaining teachers or losing them will expand the data by expressing the concerns of stress and coping associated with teaching and its course to losing qualified teachers to its effect.

The education profession may lose many excellent teachers in the future because they have reached a crossroad in their careers that forces them to decide whether to leave the teaching field rather than handle a lifestyle that is filled with stress. Teacher's career growth can also be examined using Levinson's (1986) theory of adult growth which examines roles, tasks, and coping behaviors. Levinson's theory also illustrates how life crisis like stress can cause a complete reexamination of one's career. Recruiting good teachers is challenging. Maintaining

them in the profession is even more challenging, and often to no avail, as good or excellent teachers leave often leave within three to five years. The goal of this study thus is to understand better the stressors and the coping strategies that are needed to retain component qualified teachers and further still consider the rationale behind teacher fallout, burnout, and early retirement compared to long-term teacher sustainability.

Maslow. Maslow's (1943, 1954) hierarchy of needs establishes a foundation of basic needs that human beings need, and explores how these basic needs, such as esteem develop in a way that helps understand the human motivation, i.e. that in like in novice teachers, in such a way as to encourage, satisfy, and support human behavior. Maslow's hierarchy of needs helps explain how humans essentially participate in behavioral motivation. Maslow uses terms in his pyramid that range from physiological as the lowest need at the base of the pyramid, to self-actualization as the highest need to describe that human motivation takes. McLeod (2007) discusses self-actualization, personal growth, and achievement in the classroom. The importance of self-actualization is to build on a continuous need to reach higher levels of satisfaction. Without the presence of motivation and job-satisfaction, self-actualization is lost, and teacher stress increases because the basic need to educate is not met. Gaining more self-actualization can thus lead teachers to know when changes are occurring an understanding that is very important when managing and adapting to stress.

Seyle. Hans Seyle (1956) developed a theory that stress is a biological syndrome. Based on his experiment, it was found that stress as a syndrome brings about biological changes. He also postulates that stress is a general reaction to stimuli known as general adaptation syndrome (GAS), which occurs in three different phases: alarm reaction, resistance, and exhaustion. During alarm reaction, stress stimuli or factors build a reaction to either fight or flight, meaning the body

itself tries to control its own actions. During the resistance stage, Selye noted that the body begins to adapt to the stressors to resist the impact. The exhaustion level begins if the stress continues and is not reduced, thereby forcing the body to reach full capacity, and resulting in burnout or other emotional breakdowns. Based on this research, the stress response is more than just one biological reaction; it is an interrelated process of stressors that are physiologically impacting the individual and the body.

Delp. As the years has progressed, so has the research on stress development. Delp (1963) completed a review wherein he shared his findings on school teachers reporting stress and stress breakdowns during the 1930s. He found that teachers can sometimes be maladjusted. This maladjustment is not based on teaching alone but rather multiple variables, including personal problems, professional issues, and community pressures. Delp (1963) also found that community criticism imposes a unique burden on teachers. Community attitude or belief about teachers aggravates their existing problem of stress. For example, community views on teachers can become negative when students fail to meet state standards or society may feel that teachers are not teaching to all students. These added pressures to conform to society's views may create stress and breakdown.

Bandura. Diving deeper into the reactions of stress and coping, the influence and resulting changes in behavior can be associated with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. Starting as a social learning theory in 1960, Bandura emphasized how behavior develops through past experiences and how people learn from one another. The theory factors in the behavioral actions and ways an individual learns and maintains behavior. Stress management strategies could be viewed as an example of learned behavior that is transferred through both relationships and social context.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

The review of literature related to the areas of stress and coping is gathered here for the purpose of answering the research questions offered in this study. The sources used were scholarly articles. Key words and phrases were chosen that were relevant to the research questions and the precise focus of the study. Various research methodologies including qualitative and quantitative approaches were also utilized. When considering issues of stress and coping, the challenges faced became the effects. The review of these articles offers key information that is valid for the research effort.

Bradley (2007) examined stressors that affect the work of experienced and new teachers alike. Teachers were selected for the study and analyzed for strains, social support, and job demands. Bradley's (2007) study explored the ways that stressor-strain relationships vary with the time spent in a job. Stressor-strain relationships are a combination of three aspects of work, namely, high job demands, low decision latitude or job control, and low social support. These factors result in stress coming from the job, and thus the teacher suffers, leading to having to cope with the stress and becoming a stayer, or giving in to the effects of that stress and becoming a mover or leaver. Kelchtermans (2017) associated stressor-strain relationships to attrition or teachers' actually leaving their profession. Den Brok, Wubbels, and Van Tartwijk (2017) also included leaving before retirement as one more component of teacher attrition. The opposite effect or outcome is keeping teachers in place and establishing retention.

Stress variables. One should understand that stress and burnout are two different outcomes, and yet the terms are often used interchangeably (Farber, 1982). Concerning stress, burnout falls in line with a cause and effect method being that burnout is an effect, and stress is the cause. Cosgrove (2000) examined how teacher burnout and stress is a condition that can

negatively impact teachers as well as the overall organizational health of the entire school, thereby decreasing the success of all teachers at that school. The negative progression of stress creates a ripple effect, and those symptoms can impact performance through illness, depression, and exhaustion, thereby building higher levels of stress and leading again to burnout.

It is well known that teaching is a job that involves many stresses, and according to McIntyre (2015), teacher stress is increasing and affects teachers' capacities to fulfill their job duties. As teachers' stress increases, so does the cost of absenteeism, which produces reduced performance in teaching and lower student learning. Stress effects can take on different forms, including physical, emotional, behavioral, and social. Teachers who are more aware and knowledgeable about their stress and levels of burnout could better manage the emotional challenges of stress. Denham, Bassett, and Zinsser (2012) described the importance of teachers' having the ability to deal with many challenging emotions and discuss those emotions, so they can then be more supportive to their students. Support between different groups of educators also should include a collaborative approach. According to Yu and Ning (2004), the lack of support from teacher peers increases individual stress. Schlichte, Yessel, and Merber (2005) also recognize that the lack of a mentor and colleague support will contribute to higher stress levels in among teachers. Support from the community, including parents and school partners, can reduce teacher stress and help all teachers succeed.

Novice and experienced teachers. Another variable associated with stress is between novice and experienced teachers. Novice and experienced teachers should have a certain level of job satisfaction to support their retention. Lam and Yan (2010) discussed job satisfaction with some new teachers. The research consisted of a four-step process that focused on workload, distribution of the workload, and autonomy. The research found that recruiting and retaining

highly qualified teachers is a problem in the education field precisely because of factors like job satisfaction and support. Maintaining a professional work ethic while managing a teacher workload that is satisfying is something that both novice and experienced teachers are evaluating to determine their decision to remain or leave.

Sharplin, O'Neil, and Chapman (2011) relate the satisfaction and the evaluation of it to workplace socialization. Troman (2000) identified a connection between stress and stress support towards conversation and satisfaction. For a connection to exist, a strong bond is needed. This kind of bond is not limited to between teacher and pupil; it should also exist between teacher and administrator, and teacher and the school system.

Working conditions. Working conditions are one of the main variables that influence teachers' decisions to stay or leave the profession in this study. According to Rieg, Paquette, and Chen (2007), the process of influencing teachers to stay is the transition that occurs from training to actual practice. Field experiences give the novice teacher firsthand experiences to know what conflicts and obstacles exist while also supplying clear coping strategies that the experienced teacher within the field can demonstrate. Clement (2017) adds that colleagues are either contributors or sources of resiliency or the main reason why teachers do leave the job, i.e. because of their inability to get along with co-workers.

Occupational stress. Teacher stress is an occupational stress that affects teachers' emotional wellbeing. It includes the states of tension, frustration, anger, and depression that result from their effort as teachers (Karthikeyian & Babu, 2016). The specific effects of teacher stress can be devastating in the school. A teacher's emotional state can make or break a classroom academically, emotionally, and socially. Chang (2009) discussed how teacher burnout affects the teacher workforce both externally and internally. External affects are seen through

teacher attrition and teacher shortages and internal affects are associated with those teachers who remain in the profession where symptoms of stress can lead to ineffectiveness and burnout that unintentionally affects the classroom and the entire school. If a teacher is not performing effectively, then that teacher's emotional state may lead to burnout, disengagement, and dissatisfaction with the job. Jepson and Forrest (2006) stated that high levels of occupational stress over a long time can lead to burnout. Ablanedo-Rosas, Blevins, Gao, Teng, and White (2011) found occupational stress to be significantly related to negative relationships and work overload. These areas can create stressful situations and indeed challenge teachers to find ways to cope.

Types of stress factors. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016) discussed seven stress factors that contribute to the potential teacher stress and their motivation to leave the position. Variables associated with the study include emotional exhaustion, job efficacy, and teacher adaptation. The results indicate that teacher stress levels are a result of having time constraints, distractions, discipline issues, and conflicts of interest with both colleagues and administrators. Shaheen and Mahmood (2016) proposed that the variables associated with stress factors can also include age and gender.

According to Shumba, Maphose, Rembe, Okeke, and Drake (2016), teacher-related stress is induced by many factors, i.e., unhealthy school climate, overwhelming workloads, low-status quo, and learner discipline. Mearns and Cain (2003) cited many factors for the stress teachers face, including classroom discipline, administrative red tape, interpersonal demands, and even paperwork. These factors are a part of a teachers' daily work environment. The result of these stress factors can lead to health issues. Cooper and Dewe (2004) wrote that health factors related to stress could be categorized as psychological, behavioral, or both, with outcomes like

headaches, tiredness, chest pains, anxiety, frustration, job dissatisfaction, and feelings of inadequacy. Sandilos, Goble, Rimm-Kaufman, and Pianta (2018) found that early childhood teachers are under extreme stress because they are trying to encourage the learning of young children who have not been exposed. Sandilos et al. (2018) also described professional investment stress. This type of stress among teachers builds on the frustration of the lack of professional opportunities.

Jain, Tyagi, and Kumar (2015) explored the variables that lead to stress and found that stress levels tended to be higher among novice teachers rather than their experienced counterparts. The reasons for higher stress levels are based on less experience, less knowledge, and required adjustments to work demands. Caspersen and Raaen (2014) indicated that the experiences of teachers will differ when related to their education and their specific workplace. The difference may be overwhelming for the novice teacher because of what they perceived about teaching and then experience the reality shocks of actually encountering work as a teacher.

The way women and men handle stress is also a variable. Ferguson, Mang, and Frost (2017) emphasize that women are more likely than men to report experiencing stress because of their caregiving roles outside of work that further influences their decision to leave or stay in the teaching profession. Jain et al. (2015) listed other stress factors, namely, poor time management, an inability to concentrate, and being withdrawn from supportive relationships. Black (2004) stated that job stress affects teachers' health and performance. The author also indicates that stress takes a toll on the classroom as it affects both personal and family life. Aslrasouli and Vahid (2014) investigated teaching anxiety among novice and experienced teachers and found that levels of anxiety can be tied to gender, years of experience, school type, and physical conditions of the school or class, and can go as far as becoming a factor leading to leaving the

profession because of student relationships and administration problems. Anxiety in teachers adds to the stress levels already felt within the profession. Berryhill, Linney, and Fromewick (2009) found that anxiety contributes to stress as being associated with role conflict, teacher burnout, and policy pressures.

Students can also contribute to teacher stress. Pang and Tao (2012) recognized that students who are disruptive or challenging in their abilities can be a direct cause of teacher stress and lead to burnout. According to Hecker, Goessman, Nkuba, and Hermenau (2018), the increased stress level increases the tendency of having a less manageable classroom. Von der Embse, Pendergast, Saeki, and Ryan (2016) emphasized that even the increased idea of practical lessons and testing with students adds stress. Teachers spend the majority of their time with students. Sass, Seal, and Martin (2011) found that since teachers are isolated from their colleagues during the day, that may be another source of stress.

To add to this stress, the administration sometimes does not fully understand the difficulties of running the classroom. Tsang and Liu (2016) noted that when there is no empathy shown by an administrator, teachers feel both frustrated and unappreciated. Administrators set the tone for building, and can therefore destroy that institutional morale. Brown and Mitchell (2010) explained that the tone of an organization is established by how its leader communicates and rewards teachers; encouraging them to perform well can yield a better atmosphere and reduce stressful tendencies.

One form of bullying is mobbing. Mobbing is relatively a new term in the research of teacher stress. According to Van Dick and Wagner (2001), mobbing is a type of terrorism undertaken by either the principal or a teacher's co-workers in the workplace and is measured by four categories. Tanhan and Cam (2011) explain the categories as longstanding conflict,

stigmatizing behaviors, managing practices, and getting fired. This form of stress has a psychological effect on teachers and usually results in the mobbed victim leaving. Van Dick and Wagner (2001) wrote that some principals either treat the teacher as invisible or they over-criticize, while colleagues may create stress by spreading rumors or excluding teachers from social gatherings. Celik and Peker (2010) suggest that mobbing is done synonymously with bullying and results in creating a stressful work environment.

Gluschkoff et al. (2016) extended the psychological effects of stress by emphasizing three theoretical models: demand control (also called job strain), effort-reward imbalance, and organizational justice. The demand control model is how stress is impacted by high work demands. Effort-reward imbalance is a type of stress that focuses on high efforts and low rewards such as job security and pay. Organizational justice focuses on fairness practices and decision-making. The models mentioned are important to teacher stress because work stress might have an adverse effect on teachers towards preventing recovery and reducing efforts to maintain well-being.

Kyriacou (2001) emphasizes that the extended effects of stress can affect the physical and mental health of teachers, including elevated blood pressure, dietary changes, headaches, heart rate and hormonal changes, loss or gain of weight, and loss of energy, as well as reports of psychosomatic symptoms. Bauer et al. (2006) reported how stress produces feelings of inferiority, resignation, helplessness, nervousness, depression, and psychosomatic symptoms that create a synopsis that teachers are most likely to experience long-term stress. Some teachers respond to stress in confrontational ways, while other teachers exhibit behavioral, emotional, or physical changes. According to Russell (2000), the research into high-stress occupational groups, including teachers, police officers, politicians, and air traffic controllers, demonstrates that these

groups have a higher trend of developing depression that is severe enough to require therapy. According to Black (2003), stress has become a way of life for teachers and is now the norm.

Neuenschwander, Friedman-Krauss, Raver, and Blair (2017) concluded from a MetLife survey that elementary teachers are more likely to suffer higher stress than their counterparts who are middle school and high school professionals. In addition, teachers at schools with decreased budget and greater poverty experience more stress than their peers at higher socioeconomic schools. Neuenschwander et al. (2017) also mentioned that classrooms become more chaotic as teachers experienced higher levels of stress. These negative interactions make for less effective monitoring and support wherever behavior and learning are lacking.

Working conditions based on location is also something that connects and compares stress. Haberman (2005) found that while examining the stress of rural and urban teachers, rural teachers perceive certain factors as more stressful in comparison to urban areas (Abel & Sewell, 1999). Knowing the different ways teachers respond to stress makes it important to understand and know the stressors that teachers experience on the job. Knowing means being able to retain teachers without workforce loss due to the factors affecting teachers on different levels.

Prilleltensky, Neff, and Bessell (2016) discussed how stress factors are expressed on personal, interpersonal, and organizational levels. That understanding allows educators to investigate coping on three different levels. Interventions need to be in place because there is an imbalance of risk factors that will impact job performance, attendance, health, and retention. Hiebert and Farber (1984) indicated balance and change of stress needs to occur for teachers to manage and control their stress levels that will support a more effective classroom. Controlling stress levels means strategizing coping elements that respond clearly to specific stressful experiences.

Applying Kaur's (2018) findings, teacher stress is a situation where teachers are exposed to situations, whether internal or external, that hinders the normal flow of their daily activities and negatively affects performance at work. Robbins (2010) built on the findings about how pressures of teaching and ever-changing standards, outside stipulations, and technology advancements cause teachers to suffer from issues like anxiety and depression. Dua and Sangwan (2017) indicated that there are also unwanted stressors that are common among teachers, such as anger and anxiety. They also discussed the physical responses to stress, including fatigue, tiredness, stomach aches, chest pains, memory loss, difficulty concentrating, and loss of appetite. The physiological responses mentioned were high blood pressure and irregular heartbeats. McLean, Abry, Taylor, and Jimenez (2017) recognize that understanding teachers' mental health is important to meet the goal of effective stress support for every teacher.

Stress management. Coping has been defined as the process of managing demands that are taxing for a person. It involves analyzing whether the situation is something to bother about and deciding what can be done about to deal with it or solve it (Anderson & Willebrand, 2003). Stress management, as a part of self-efficacy and mindfulness, is important for the reduction of stress. Harris (2011) stated that the programs meant to help with teacher retention often fail to provide those teachers with effective stress management techniques. Howard and Johnson (2004) investigated the characteristics of resilient teachers and pinpointed the coping strategies utilized to deal with stress factors. The current literature identifies two paths that teachers often follow when dealing with stress: dysfunctional and depersonalizing. The dysfunctional path involved avoidance and unhealthy habits like drinking alcohol and smoking and then reacting to stress by taking leave from work and in some cases, medication for stress relief. The alternative approach

to reacting to stress can be relaxation, exercise, and seeking support from colleagues, friends, and family.

Meditation. Meditation can be a part of stress management. Meditation has been deemed as a positive way to cope with stress. Schreiner and Malcolm (2008) asserted that Focused Attention Meditation (FAM) can reduce anxiety, depression, and stress as well as improve cognitive functions. Yoga has also been suggested as a stress management technique. Brown and Gerbarg (2005) declared that yoga is as a movement-based meditation where breathing is used and controlled for relaxation. Shonin, Van Gordon, and Griffiths (2013) found that participants in traditional Buddhist meditation programs experienced an improvement in their stress levels and moods.

Mindfulness. Mindfulness training also helps in stress management. Mindfulness training, according to Taylor and Harrison (2013), is emerging as an effective way to deal with stress. As a coping mechanism, teachers are taught how to manage emotional situations, calm down, and be resilient during stress reduction. Taylor and Harrison (2013) offered mindfulness as a mental skill that focuses attention on the present. It is a way of understanding actions by having a clear awareness of experiencing stressful moments of using the absence of rational judgment that may not be relevant to the perceived situation. Reiser and McCarthy (2017) stated that mindfulness is a precursor to reducing stress and improves one's ability to manage conflict and reduce depression because the individual takes the time to reflect before reacting. The idea of a mindfulness-based intervention, according to Reiser et al. (2017), comes from a Buddhist practice that involves paying attention to the rooted trigger and breathing through the emotion to lower anxiety and negative emotions. Practicing mindfulness as a teacher is a strategy that can positively impact stress management.

Leadership. Teacher leadership also is associated with stress management and professionalism, according to Kilinc, Cemaloglu, and Savas (2015). The relationship between stress and leadership incorporates perceived stress, collaborations among colleagues, and student learning. Teacher professionalism and perceived stress were important variables predicting teacher leadership. Thus, the entire institutional culture should be supportive of both teacher leadership and stress reduction.

Positive influences. Positive influences help strengthen stress management. Available coping resources have a positive influence on teacher behavior and stress organization. Lambert, Crowe, and McCarthy's (2010) examination of the relationship between stress, job satisfaction, and coping shows that when teachers have a supportive coping resource within the job, they can devote more time to classroom professionalism. Dedicating time to design lesson plans that will engage and challenge students and attending enhancing seminars and workshops allow teachers to give more of their time to assist students. The less the teacher feels stressed, the more attention will be given to the students as opposed to if the teacher is more concerned about themselves and their health needs. Ferguson et al. (2017) connected to supportive coping resources through social support, finding that teachers who engage in communication and seek social support among their colleagues with positive content had lower levels of burnout, which buffers the effect of stress.

Methodological Issues

Methodological issues associated with the studies on stress have focused on the outcomes of teacher stress based on their ability to handle stress and make positive choices. Focusing on just the outcomes, however, creates a challenge when determining how to overcome the problem of stress. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) highlighted this issue when trying to examine how

teachers at different ages and stages in their careers reported their sources of stress and how individual teachers use certain coping strategies and consequences differently.

Kyriacou (2001) mentions how researchers have mismatched the term of stress between demands made on the individual and that individual's abilities to cope. The teachers' stress based on the workload can lead to classroom management self-efficacy. The higher the classroom stress is, the lower the self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Asa and Lasebikan (2016) pointed out in their study that even though researchers have worked on job stress, studies failed to connect the relationship of stress to its effects on teachers. The trend of a high turnover rate for teachers may be detrimental to their students' education because students will not be exposed to teachers with experience. Leroux and Theoret (2014) noted how literature had addressed ways to improve work conditions for teachers; little research has been done to explore resilience strategies. Colnerud (2014) addressed connections of resilience and self-efficacy to the risk of moral stress. This is disadvantageous given that experience in any profession helps to build confidence and develop enhanced skills and deliver better performance in a professional role.

Mclean et al. (2017) suggested that until recently, studies of teachers' experiences only examined negative mental health correlations, such as stress and burnout as independent of each other when, in fact, these factors usually occur concurrently. The actions that might follow as a result of stress have made the stress superficial, and the recommendations were only focused on the individual teacher and how that individual might cope better. Austin, Shah, and Muncer (2005) found within their study that teachers with high stress use negative coping strategies which indicated a rethinking on how to eliminate and reduce stress in the teacher population overall. This focus takes the studies away from strategies that teachers actually need and can use to cope with stress and which may determine retention, teachers' experiences, recruitment, and

resolving the problems of stress overall. Ferguson et al. (2017) also elaborated on supportive standing, noting that it is not foolproof and may not actually mediate burnout. Goddard and Goddard (2006) also pointed out that the past research on burnout concentrated on established/experienced teachers rather than on novice teachers, drawing conclusions that may only reference that group.

Dougall and Baum (2001) determined that most individuals adapt to or cope with stressful situations, and the wide variety of biological, cognitive, and behavioral effects of prolonged stress that have been documented. However, with teachers now being exposed to a wide range of stressors, they must manage larger workloads while preparing for and teaching their classes, completing paperwork, and encountering new administrative tasks. These tasks often occur outside of regular work hours, creating yet another strain and more stress. With changes in state accountability and periodical declines in the U.S. economy, so teachers are facing job insecurity, school closures, lack of resources, and increasing class sizes as well as less support from parents, reduced teacher allocation, and increasing incentives to establish charter schools. The occurrence of new complicated interactions with parents, state monitoring, and state takeovers of schools have also been identified as a significant stressor for many teachers.

Synthesis of Research Findings

There are many aspects regarding teacher stress that still need to be explored. With the research indicating that teacher stress causes adverse side effects in teachers, burnout, absenteeism, attrition, decreased job satisfaction, and even the potential to leave the profession, researchers are seeking new ways to help teachers cope with stress. Mearns and Cain (2003) acknowledged that burnout is linked to adverse effects and professional ramifications. Such negative results correlate with incidents of emotional exhaustion, depression, and dissatisfaction.

Chang (2009) mentioned that burnout affects teachers in internal and external ways by harming the teacher workforce through both attrition and shortages as well as having teachers who are suffering from emotional exhaustion and mental burnout. The experience of burnout within the classroom can also impact teachers' emotional response in their other contexts and their responsibilities as well as their student's learning outcomes.

Richards (2012) stated that if teachers experience stress over a long period of time and do not see a way out of their situation, they become perfect candidates for burnout. Burnout can impact their mental and physical health as well as affect relationships. Goddard, O'Brien, and Goddard (2006) addressed the work environment and noted that for beginning teachers, the current work environment could be demanding, creating high levels of stress and early burnout. Burnout occurs as a result of the emotional and physical strains of having increased teacher responsibilities.

Attrition is an issue that has moved higher and become a greater concern for how stress affects teachers. Clement (2017) maintains that connection to attrition by citing that beginning teachers worry over reemployment, survival on the job, and wondering if choosing to teach was the right decision. It is evident from the research that these factors are blended to indicate the likelihood of whether a teacher remains in education or leaves.

Asa and Lasebikan (2016) found that there is a significant correlation between teachers' stress and their illnesses, for example, when teachers experience depression and anxiety disorders. Other illnesses can appear through prolonged periods of high stress. Dua and Sangwan (2017) described the energy and physical tension that result from stress, and further, increased energy and tension can lead to serious health consequences such as stomach ulcers.

Shaheen et al. (2016) further imply that the physical illness state of emotional exhaustion after prolonged exposure leads to impersonal reactions and resentful behavior towards other people. This behavior affects the professional ability of the teacher to effectively complete key tasks. Shaheen et al. (2016) referred to this issue as depersonalization. Ablanedo-Rosas, Blevins, Gao, Teng, and White (2011) proposed that the stressors teachers experience is also connected to mental and physical illnesses like hypertension, insomnia, depression, and anxiety and further still, that on average, teachers take 13 days of sick leave, per year, due to stress and its effects.

Kyriacou (2011) specified that educator stress has been of interest to researchers for almost four decades and also investigated in many countries, indicating that teacher stress is a global education concern. There are also critics outside of education that seem to think that teaching is easy. However, Black (2004) conveys the viewpoint that these individuals do not realize the amount of stress that comes with this job. According to Kyriacou (2001), stress as a negative emotion that comes from the task of teaching includes frustration, anger, tension, and anxiety and it may be worsened through a teacher's perception of job demands becoming a threat to a person's coping resources. If teachers are dealing with their stressors, the conclusion would be that when teachers are paying attention to their own needs, then the needs of their students, and their capacities to cope with their own stress will be limited.

Cosgrove (2000) indicated six significant sources of teacher stress. These sources included poor student behaviors, pupil discipline problems, time management pressures, poor student motivation, poor working conditions, low job status, and conflicts with colleagues. Leroux and Theoret (2014) outlined the prominent sources of teacher stress that fall under work-life stressors. These stressors include heavy workload, lack of time, resources, and support, student behavior problems, and the special needs of certain students in the classroom. The

stressors that are mentioned align with the sources of teacher stress outlined by Kyriacou (2001) adding low student motivation, challenging relationships with coworkers and administration, and poor working conditions. Stressors from the areas of work-life balance also occur when obligations from work overlap with the obligations from as teacher's personal life and become yet another source of stress.

It is crucial to realize that coping needs to be a part of teacher practices. Austin, Shah, and Muncer (2005) suggested that teachers can benefit from having coping strategies like problem-solving and the ability to seek social and emotional support from outside sources as well as from those in their inner circles. Pillen, Beijaard, and Brok (2013) state that emotion-focused coping behavior is affected by the teacher's personality factors, and most likely will transpire when new teachers believe that environmental conditions cannot be modified. Prilleltensky et al. (2006), supports the idea of emotional and professional support received through both internal and external means. Finding the most effective means to cope with stress however, involves a commitment to the personal conditioning of emotional and mental behaviors. Therefore, learning to cope with stress is vital to the successful longevity of maintenance in the teaching field. Richards (2012) implies that successfully learning to cope with stress has multiple benefits for teachers. Having a sense of wellbeing creates sustainability of the emotional and mental behaviors of teachers that then can affect their stress levels positively.

Critique

The literature review presents a variety of studies that offers insights, makes connections, and creates correlations between teacher stress and such related factors as attrition, burnout, and coping. The studies reviewed here offer different opinions, reasons, and causes of stress. For

example, the studies conducted by Mean and Cain (2003) associated burnout to negative effects of stress and interchange the term burnout with the term stress. Richard (2012) demonstrated in his study how teachers experience stress over long periods and become candidates of burnout. The study conducted by Clement (2017) associated stress with re-employment and job survival.

The study done by Asa and Lasbikan (2016) correlated stress to teacher illnesses as well as Ablanedo-Rosas et al. (2011) and their study on mental and physical health. Smith (2004) conducted a study that indicated it is hard to pinpoint stress in teachers, while Cosgrove (2000) conducted a study that was able to identify six major stress sources. The results of most of these studies do support the claims that teacher stress negatively affects teachers. More in-depth studies should seek to provide more insights into teacher stress and coping strategies, a goal for this current study and its focus.

Summary

A review of the current literature broadens the framework of stress and coping as well as the factors that produce stress. Thus, there is sufficient evidence to examine the impact of stress on the teaching profession overall. The literature offers information on teacher stress and coping, the theories behind that stress, its coping mechanisms, the leadership implications, and the manners in which teachers' stress and their effects may actually correlate. The main purpose of this review, therefore was to determine the important aspects, studies, concepts, theories, and findings that are specially connected to this study topic.

This review also offers relevant considerations of the current research that is presently available on this topic. Additionally, the review discusses the increasing concerns and problems associated with teacher stress, the complexity of coping, the lack of coping skills, and successful coping techniques. This review further indicated that there is a need for additional research that

addresses the specific topic of teacher stress and coping. Recognizing the difficulties of stress and working to relieve the many pressures placed on teachers through better coping strategies reveals a definite need to explore the effects of stress and current coping strategies on the teaching profession. The strength and weaknesses of the research discovered in the literature and reviewed herein included individual differences in the utilization of coping resources. It is, therefore, essential to gain further perspectives on the causes of stress and the coping mechanisms to gain stronger input that can lead to even stronger output of instructional success and the maintainability of the teaching profession as a whole.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Workplace stress is impacting teacher performance. According to Ingersoll (2001), one of the problems of teachers leaving the profession due to work-related stress is that school administrators may have to lower their standards of quality teachers to fill positions. Ingersoll also discussed high turnover rates, the lack of interest in teaching, and the lack of commitment and communication to the profession. Stress is causing teachers to burnout and encounter stress-related illness, which can lead to increased absenteeism or the decision to leave the profession.

Research concerning teacher stress and coping has been both qualitative and quantitative. Creswell (2007) discussed that qualitative research is appropriate because it provides an opportunity to identify factors and allow participants to share their experiences. The purpose of this qualitative study is to analyze and gain an understanding of teacher's perceptions about stress and how they cope with stress. This chapter describes the instruments that were used, the design of the study, participants, how the data was collected, procedures, and limitations.

Research Questions

1. How does stress affect teachers in a rural Alabama area school?
2. How do teachers in a rural Alabama school cope with stress?

Purpose and Design of Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of teachers' perceptions about stress and how teachers cope with stress. This project looked at how teachers' stress levels affect behavior and patterns of stress, how it contributed to their experiences, and how teacher efficacy, emotion regulation, and coping may help ease feelings of stress.

Reactions to stress and ways of coping are subjective. Qualitative research served as the principal methodology for this study. A qualitative, narrative case study approach enabled an understanding of stress and coping strategies as it relates to real-time experiences. In-depth interview questions were chosen in regards to experiences of workplace stress, effects of stress, and actions taken to cope with stress. Creswell (2007) discussed that a qualitative research design encourages the discovery of individual attributes to social problems. The rationale for selecting a qualitative design for this study is the need to gain a perspective and understanding of teachers' stress first-hand and understand what coping strategies are beneficial to support their retention. The current research involves a case study of one school using a series of individual interviews with teachers; thus, generating data that identifies contributors to stress and coping. Yin (2009) states that a case study approach is valuable because it allows for the real examination of theory in real-life situations.

The study used open-ended interviews. According to Troman (2000), research about teacher stress has often taken the approach of survey methods. Interviews help develop an understanding of what stress factors exist in operative time and is also established in real-time among novice and experienced teachers. The types of stress that may be potential flags for leaving the field, which can reveal possible strategies that can be implemented to cope with stress. Qualitative research uses first-hand experience, which includes real conversations that allow for some truthful reporting based on participants' meaning. Yin (2014) recognized case studies contribute knowledge about certain panel groups, be it individual, group, social, or phenomena; in this case, the target population was teachers.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for understanding teacher stress through which the findings were interpreted include theories from Vygotsky, Erikson, and Maslow. The theories provide insight into the emotional aspects of teaching. These theorists' ideas on social cognitive development connect to motivations with desires, needs, interests, and emotions. The goal of this study is to find out how stress affects Alabama teachers in a specific school setting. The research also hopes to learn how teachers cope or merge self-efficacy connections with behavioral ability and expectations, manifesting the effects of how teachers cope with stress in the workplace.

Social cognitive theory (SCT) was the foundation for this study's theoretical framework. SCT provides a strong directive for the potential conditions of stress and coping by emphasizing a person's psychosocial functions and their self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012). Self-efficacy is a way to manage behavior, which is a coping tool. The theory guides the idea of what Bandura (1977) refers to as reciprocal determinism, stating that personal factors and social environment influence a person's behavior. Hodges and Videto (2005) also tied social cognitive theory to stress conditions that influences behavior of stress and coping emphasizing self-efficacy, expectations, reinforcement, and behavior capabilities.

Research Population and Sampling Method

Novice and experienced teachers within the general education area were invited to participate in the case study through email. Bitterman, Gray, and Goldring (2013) define novice teachers as teachers who have four years' experience or less in the teaching profession while experienced teachers have five years or more of experience. The ranges of novice and experienced teachers' years of experience was chosen because Alabama teachers receive tenure after the end of the third year, when the teacher is asked back at the beginning of the fourth.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants from a single school. After the superintendent approved the study, the school principal was contacted so invitations could be sent out, using addresses provided by the principal. Teachers responded to the invitation by emailing their willingness to participate. Teachers ranged from kindergarten to eighth grade and were from a rural Alabama area. Participants were selected on a voluntary basis. Participants had the choice to end participation at any time during the process and are not obligated to complete the interview if desired. The participants included male and female novice and experienced teachers who had a wide range of educational experiences.

Instrumentation

This qualitative research investigation of teacher stress and coping is composed of two components. These components are in the form of an online self-evaluation survey and an interview with each participant. Eight teachers took the survey and were interviewed. Yin (2014) named five components of effective case study research design: research questions, propositions or purpose of the study, unit analysis, logic that links results to propositions, and criteria for interpreting findings. Interviewing is a key instrument in qualitative studies of participants (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2014) also emphasized that using multiple sources to collect data helps in triangulating data evidence.

To begin the process, the eight teacher participants completed self-evaluation questions via Qualtrics (see Appendix A). The self-evaluation provides an overall status regarding teacher stress and perceived coping mechanisms. The survey could identify reactions to stress, and a beginning self-evaluation survey sets a baseline for interview data.

The interview protocol includes ensuring that the interview questions are aligned with the stated research questions. Aligning the research questions reinforces the purpose of the study and

eliminates unnecessary experiences. Second, interview questions promoted conversation. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) stated, “The researcher questions are usually formulated in a theoretical language, whereas the interview questions should be expressed in the everyday language of the interviewees” (p. 158). Debriefing would be another component of the interview protocol since, as a principal investigator, answers to questions should be credible.

Through face-to-face interview questions, additional knowledge about stress factors, and the commonality of coping strategies were targeted. Interviews had a semistructured focus, which ensures that participants have more flexibility and range to allow for deeper connections and the gathering of more information. Kumer (2005) recognized that interviews of this type help in preparing participants for questions that could be complex or sensitive. The data were compared between novice teachers’ stress and experienced teachers’ stress.

Data Collection

The data for the study were collected through interviews and self-evaluations. For this inquiry, interviews were the primary method of capturing the teachers’ perspectives on stress, coping, and the factors contributing to work-related stress, while the survey served as a baseline. The data collected from the survey was done anonymously online to establish an overview of participants’ views of their stress and coping strategies. Knowing the survey participant’s identity could impact data by creating a means of dishonest feedback as well as fear within the respondents of reprisal answers. The interviews were done in-person in a private area where there were minimum distractions to build more explicit conversations of stress and coping encounters. The allotted time for interviews was based on the amount of time the participants had during their planning period. Participants chose to meet at a location of their choosing, which reinforced their rights to privacy and confidentiality.

Participants were contacted by email and telephone to confirm participation in the study. As a rule, it is important to conduct interviews carefully to ensure the reliability of the study, based on Hatch (2002). Here the goal is to have an analysis of a text to understand what participants thought, felt, or did in certain stressful situations or at some point in time during stress and coping. Using an audio recorder to document responses of the group discussion helped to organize the participants' responses and allowed the principal investigator to review the transcription. This procedure helped to ensure accuracy and allowed the information to be accurate, providing written evidence of participants' words.

Since the research was designed to describe the experiences from the participants' perspective, the interviews allowed teachers to express their experiences of stress and coping in their own words. The interviews were analyzed and transcribed. Components of stress were explored as defined by the teachers. Interview responses allowed for an inside perspective of what participants encounter as teachers.

Identification of Attributes

In this case study, the intent was to explore the effects of stress on teacher participants and their coping strategies. For the purpose of this study, the effects of stress consisted of physical, emotional, social, and mental characteristics. Based on Schneiderman, Ironson, and Siegal (2005), these characteristics elicit different patterns. Physical characteristics include low energy, headaches, and insomnia. Emotional characteristics included frustration and moodiness. Social characteristics included isolation from others, aggressive behaviors, and even anger. Mental characteristics included poor judgment, racing thoughts, and worrying.

Data Analysis Procedures

Creswell (2007) explains that data analysis procedures provide a descriptive account of participants' responses. The analysis interprets the responses that can be inferred or implied, highlighting the important factors. Creswell (2007) further explains that procedures involve copying and reading the interview transcripts, making notes in the margin when relevant information is presented. The notes made listed the different types of information found and categorized in a way that offers a description of stress factors and coping strategies presented. Once the information is transcribed, it is coded, interpreted, and verified. Categories are identified that link to stress and coping, listing them in major and minor themes. Major and minor themes are considered in light of reviewed literature. Once all the transcript data is categorized, the collected information is reviewed and confirmed as complete.

Participants may respond with multiple reasons for stress and strategies for coping. Therefore, responses must be viewed in light of common themes among participants. Hatch (2002) promoted a typological analysis that divides data set into categories based on predetermined typologies. When analyzing participant responses for this study, techniques described by Hatch (2002) were employed. Each interview question was analyzed in its category and relationships among participant responses identified. Triangulation of sources, as well as member checking, was used. Using a triangulation of sources increased the credibility of the results through cross-checking the data and capturing the different aspects of the same occurrences. Creswell and Miller (2000) notes member checking is utilized where results and conclusions are shared with the participants and the validity transitions from the researcher to the participants. Member checking allowed participants a chance to clarify information, make corrections, and provide additional information if added information is warranted.

All interviews were transcribed. Interview questions were not changed to improve the accuracy of the information provided, rather they were kept consistent throughout the study. Yin (2014) emphasized that interviews are a stable source of evidence because the participants' viewpoints come from first-hand accounts. The interviews are an exchange of one-on-one communication that allows the principal investigator to access perspectives from participants display insight and interpretation of their inner circle. This is particularly important because, without insight, research becomes an observational method and can be misinterpreted due to biased observations.

Atlas.ti was used to help organize interview information once it has been transcribed. The purpose of Atlas.ti is to help researchers uncover and analyze phenomena hidden within the data. The program provides tools that allow the researcher to code and annotates findings while visualizing relations. It also keeps track of notes made by the researcher in documents uploaded so analysis and coding can be completed. As the interview is being conducted, notes are made from first impressions, carefully going through each line. Next, Atlas.ti information is labeled for relevance. This can be done with word phrases or sections, something that is repeated or surprising, or a combination of all parts. Then, for a deeper understanding of the transcribed information during the interview, attention needs to be placed on the opinions, concepts, and processes of stress and coping.

Atlas.ti software was used to make sense of the data collected from the research, which allowed for more-in-depth insight and organization of similar components, which developed patterns. This software stores researcher information so data can be organized. Using Atlas.ti allowed me, as a principal investigator, to focus on the research questions, what the effects of

stress on teachers are in the rural area of Alabama, and how teachers in rural Alabama cope with stress.

Limitations of the Research Design

Kindergarten through sixth grade teachers were asked to take part in the study. A possible criticism that may be encountered with this study is that the case study may not be representative of a broad social grouping and the results of the research cannot be generalized. Another possible limitation of the study is the small number of participants, which requires the principal researcher to be careful with generalizing within the findings. Teachers' schedules must be worked out that coincided with other work-related duties. Alternatively, some teachers may not be interested in taking part in a case study or a teacher stress and coping survey.

Because it was possible that some participants' narrative could be recognized by others in the district, disclosure methods were used to protect the confidentiality of participants' responses. Some potential volunteers may have been fearful about sharing their stories openly. Additionally, because of my teaching experience, bias may have been created that could have hindered my analysis. Debriefing with teacher participants and having responses free of all identifying markers occurred to eliminate bias and identification.

Validation

Credibility. Creswell et al. (2000) recognized credibility in a qualitative study as having the research be believable which clearly and accurately presents participants perspectives. Using the participants as member checkers can accurately establish the believability because participants can correct mistakes and add additional information, further strengthening the results of the data presented. The information presented in this study was reviewed by the principal researcher and participants, so that accuracy is assured, and there is trustworthiness in the data.

Also, as a part of member checking, the teacher participants received an emailed copy of the transcribed interview. The participants were able to verify the accuracy and confirm the credibility of the results.

By following this process, the participants, principal researcher, and readers are assured that the information presented is accurate and credible. Moreover, all information provided by participants was held in the utmost confidence, and data would not be identifiable to the participants. Anonymous coding methods further supported confidentiality. Other precautions that were taken included limiting identifiable data, destroying or deleting study data and documents, and securing documents in a locked location away from school locations. This measure of confidentiality was explained to the participants before, during, and after the survey and interview process.

Dependability. Dependability relies on the assurance that the teacher participants gave authentic experiences and were allowed to discuss and describe their experiences. The triangulation of the data was used to analyze the research. Triangulation of the data, according to Yin (2014), is used in qualitative research to gather information from several sources for authenticating findings in a study. The study process was reported in detail to ensure dependability and enable future studies.

Expected Findings

Data were collected from the survey to identify practices for coping and identifying stress factors. The survey and interview questions were established before the interview. The data were compared to participants' perceptions and helped draw conclusions about stress and what coping patterns were revealed. It was expected that the results would reveal work-related stress may lead

to burnout without coping strategies and create the potential for teachers' possibly leaving the profession. It was expected that participants would:

- Reveal similar stressors that affect them on the job.
- Reveal similar coping strategies used to reduce stress.
- Give insight into the causes of their work-related stress.
- Answer questions that benefit stress reduction efforts.
- Reveal the effects of work-related stress, based on novice and experienced teacher's experiences.
- Reveal the consequences of work-related stress for teachers.

Showing specific patterns of stress and coping through teachers sharing their experiences aids in the understanding of stress and coping. It was also anticipated that defining their ideas of stress and coping can give insight to practices of reducing stress.

Ethical Issues

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is needed before research can begin. As a part of the Concordia University–Portland protocol, the researcher applied and gained approval because federal regulations require any human subject studies to be reviewed to determine the project to be exempt prior to the start of research (see Appendix C). Approval for the study also had to be received from the district superintendent, before contact was made to participants.

Each participant had to provide written consent prior to participating in the study. This consent form is descriptive and contains key facts of the study. In this case study, the names of participants, school, or system were removed, so that identify of participants remain confidential. Using this strategy, the participants could only be identified by the principal researcher. Since

audiotapes were used, names were not spoken during their taped conversations. Overall, the probability of risk, harm, or injury is low, and all the participants are highly-educated adults.

Conflict of interest. A conflict of interest for this study can be created due to the possibility that the researcher might have a dual relationship with the participants being interviewed. At the time of the study, I, the researcher, had a professional connection with the district; however, the involvement was limited to interviews, which took place at a private location, minimizing any conflict of interest. Participants were informed that their responses were recorded. Participants were provided a confidentiality form stating the confidentiality guidelines. Any notes taken during the interview process would be stored in a secure location until the completion of the dissertation process, at which point the information would be destroyed. This is conducted in accordance with the American Psychological Association standards, and requirements from the Concordia University–Portland IRB. The researcher also signed the contract with the participants and is held accountable by the confidentiality standards (see Appendix E).

Researcher's position. As a principal investigator, the aim is to maintain an objective perspective. The responsibilities of the principal investigator included the review and monitoring of the information. The information was presented as memos. The memos were reviewed, and transcripts were created and written in their entirety several times to fully comprehend the data and maintain data integrity.

Ethical issues in the study. Participants were encouraged to explore their own common experiences and communicate their understandings. The interview questions identified norms and beliefs. Participants were encouraged to participate in open discussions during the interview process to express how their perceptions of stress impact their practices to cope and either stay or

leave the profession. Any ethical issues related to the study were factored into the process of interviewing participants with the possible risk of divulging information that would identify specific schools or participants. Precautions were established to eliminate those factors using transcribed materials.

Summary

Presented in Chapter 3 is information designed to investigate stress and coping of kindergarten through eighth grade teachers. This chapter provided the rationale for the methodological decisions for this case study. The theoretical perspectives, methodology, and analyses helped to unravel the various complexities and experiences of the teachers and their dealings with stress and strategies for coping. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the strategies that were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings including ethical considerations to protect the participants and data.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to share data results on how stress affects teachers and how teachers cope with work-related stress. Research has demonstrated that teacher stress is linked to several factors such as a lack of support, daily tasks, and student issues, as well as teachers being unprepared to occupy the time allotted for teacher task(s) (Shaalvik & Shaalvik, 2015). The information presented in this chapter gives a first-hand account of the participants on the effects of stress and their coping strategies while providing causes of stress, effects of stress, and coping strategies that help in dealing with stress.

This chapter first covers a description of the sample, which includes a description of the participants' grade level, gender, and years of experience. Next, data collection and analysis is described. The chapter provides summaries of the findings. Lastly, results and conclusions are included to report findings and give interpretations while reinforcing and summarizing the main points. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How does stress affect teachers in a rural Alabama area school?
2. How do teachers in a rural Alabama school cope with stress?

The role of the principal investigator for this case study was to logically and objectively analyze and draw conclusions from the participants' data. Once site permission was gained, another role as a principal investigator was to invite and recruit participants for the study, distribute an anonymous online survey, and conduct face-to-face interviews. Upon completion of the interviews, each of the interviews was transcribed and the participants were allowed to review the information for accuracy. After verification was complete, the participants received a

debriefing form to either enable or withdraw their information and participation in the study. All documentation was securely stored to ensure confidentiality.

Description of the Sample

The sample population for this study included eight teachers who had taught between two to 20 years. The teacher participants were all African-Americans, consisting of two men and six women. A homogeneous sampling was chosen because the participants share specific characteristics, such as teaching in a classroom. Other groups within the school that did not pertain to teaching within a classroom included custodial, secretarial, and cafeteria staff. The eight participants that took the survey and answered the interview questions were full-time teachers, employed in the same school and district, certified personnel, and have two to 20 years of experience.

Other methods of sampling were not used because of attributes necessary to answer the research question. For example, in a quota sampling, there are sub-groups. A snowball sampling is used to identify subjects in a study that are hard to locate. This study has a population that does not need sub-groups, and the community is not hard to identify. Homogeneous sampling was sufficient for achieving research goals.

The participants were eight full-time teachers from a rural Alabama school district. All eight participants who were asked to participate in this research provided the required information. The eight participants were interviewed and participated in a self-evaluation survey concerning work-related stress and coping. The role I served in this study is that of the principal researcher. The participants were asked the same questions during their interviews to avoid bias (see Appendix B). If the answers were vague, teacher participants were asked to elaborate further. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

The sample size also allowed the principal researcher to establish a relationship with the participants. Potential identifying markers could arise within this study because of the small sample size, so participants are identified as teacher one, and continues to teacher eight. Also, the identity of the school district used was removed to eliminate the identification of the school, school district, and participants because of pending reduction in force, budget cuts, and closing of schools for consolidation.

Participants in this research are listed in Table 1. Table 1 includes participants identified as teacher one through teacher eight, their current role, and their years of experience—noting whether they are a novice or experienced teacher.

Table 1

Research Participants

Participants	Current Role	Experience
Teacher one	1st Grade	13 years**
Teacher two	3rd Grade	3 years*
Teacher three	K–6 Instructional Coach	18 years**
Teacher four	2nd Grade	20 years**
Teacher five	Kindergarten	2 years*
Teacher six	6th Grade	18 years**
Teacher seven	5th Grade	14 years**
Teacher eight	K–6 PE teacher	12 years**

* Novice teacher ** Experienced teacher

Research Methodology and Analysis

Data collection. Once approval for the research was given by the Concordia University–Portland IRB in April 2018, within the next two weeks, approval was granted by the superintendent of the district. The superintendent was contacted through a phone call and followed-up by email. The superintendent then sent an application to conduct research form to be completed. When this information had been sent and approved by the superintendent, contact was made with the school principal and teachers. The principal and teachers were contacted by email. The teacher participants are all from the same school district, and each participant was selected based on having a certified position, their experience, and willingness to participate.

Eight teachers were met with, consent forms were signed (see Appendix E), and procedures are explained concerning interviews and the survey. Data collection first began with a survey. The eight participants were given a link to an online survey and completed an introductory survey about their stress and coping strategies. Participants were reassured that this survey is anonymous. The interview is a process of collecting data from a group of typically four to six people, according to Creswell (2012). Audio recordings of individual interviews with teacher participants served as a collection tool for the study while the online survey served as a starting point to build and determine levels or degrees of stress and coping. At the conclusion of the interviews, participants were debriefed and given a debriefing form, allowing them to read statements and verify the information documented (see Appendix F). The debriefing also allowed participants to change their minds about their participation.

The online questionnaire was administered through Qualtrics. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions designed to measure the development and effects of stress as well as what stress is encountered, and then analyze a person's coping process. The response format of

the questions was a combination of yes/no responses, rankings of mild to severe, and multiple selections of the answer for all that apply or fit teachers' standards (see Appendix A) for survey questions).

The interview process consisted of in-person, one-on-one interviews with each teacher participant. The purpose of the one-on-one interview was to gather each participant's account of stress and coping during the past school year. Participants were asked to identify and describe how stress affects them and how they cope with it. Participants were also asked to provide details about their stress and coping strategies. The focus was placed on specific comments about stress triggers and beliefs as well as any emphasis on frequency and times of occurrence. The interviews provided an in-depth focus and understanding of each participant. The interviews also provided an understanding of the context within the phenomenon while allowing for the chance to dig deeper.

Teacher participants met with the principal researcher at a mutually agreed upon time and place. The interview was conducted using the same format for each participant—in a conversational tone that was respectful of privacy and confidentiality as well as unbiased, allowing the teachers to express their experiences fully. According to Creswell (2009), implementing an active listening technique such as rephrasing the question, checking for understanding, and paraphrasing others are vital in conducting an interview. As a researcher, becoming an active listener helped in clarifying what the participants wanted to portray as well as reinforcing to the participants that what they are saying is stated with accuracy.

Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was audio recorded. Word-for-word transcripts were created and hand-coded by the researcher with the assistance of the Atlas.ti

software. The coded data allowed the researcher to create several themes and descriptions used to convey findings in the study.

Analysis. The focus of the data analysis was to identify emerging themes of stressors among novice and veteran teacher participants. Analysis began as each data-gathering phase was completed. The interview recordings were transcribed. Notes were taken to develop and identify reasons for stress, effects of stress, and coping strategies. After interviews were transcribed, participants were given the opportunity to examine the transcriptions and check for accuracy. Hatch (2002) mentions that member checking is used to increase the trustworthiness of the data and ensure that interpretations are adequate. Saldaña (2014) suggested member checking as a way of confirming the findings at the end of the interview. Member checking is the process by which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2012). Each participant had the opportunity to read through their interview transcript to confirm the understanding of the transcript captured. Each participant approved their transcriptions of the interview for accuracy and was presented with a debriefing form to ensure final approval and continued participation.

After the process of analysis, the frequency of words and phrases was used to identify emerging themes. Creswell (2012) defined coding as labeling and segmenting text information to form descriptions and broad themes. The data collected showed that the effects of stress and how the participants coped with stress depended on what caused the stress. The causes of stress became themes, with the effects identified and discussed within the theme. These themes were (a) work environment, (b) administrative support, (c) accountability, (d) parent support, (e) student behavior, (f) teacher responsibility, and (g) coping. Stress effects fell within each one of the themes that emerged. In connection to these themes, stress effects were broken down further

into sub-themes of (a) physical effects, (b) mental effects, (c) social effects, and (d) emotional effects.

The next process of analyzing the text in qualitative research was coding the data. Coding is defined by Creswell (2012) as a process of segmenting and labeling information to form themes and descriptions. The coding is an ongoing process and was used to help analyze data. Atlas.ti is used in this process by allowing the researcher to upload document information so the researcher can code and create identifying pieces of information. Reading and reflecting on the data is necessary according to Yin (2014), so focusing on details and specifics of the interview, such as themes becomes the identifying attribute to revealing themes. Themes emerged within the transcriptions (see Appendix D). As mentioned in the data collection, there were eight themes and four sub-themes that emerged. Each theme was summarized in the summary of findings with responses by both novice and veteran teacher participants. Teacher participants are referred to as T1 through T8.

Summary of the Findings

This qualitative case study addressed the research questions for the effects of stress and coping strategies. Collecting data from the survey and the interviews provided an array of information. Each piece of data contributed to the researcher's understanding of teacher stress and coping. Analysis of the data revealed that the teacher participants deal with teacher stress and coping through a combination of methods and strategies. Findings also showed that the participants evaluated themselves and reported that they manage stress in different ways, depending on the cause of the stress. All teachers used the common strategies found in the literature mentioned in Chapter 2. The summary of findings is divided between each research question.

In analyzing the data, it was found that participants' stress is rooted in organizational factors of work such as time management and planning as well as related to the way they are expected to work, compounded by deadlines, lack of resources, and lack of support. The evidence of this came out during the interview. All eight participants who participated in the interview stated that their stress is compounded by factors related to demands and expectations at work with connections to a lack of support from administration. Teacher participants reported being depressed, fatigued, and anxious, which are indications of mental and emotional states of stress. These reports from the case study show that stress can affect the body, feelings, and behavior. Teacher participants also reported that the lack of support from parents and administration creates feelings of frustration, anxiety, and even anger. These findings support evidence that the organizational factor of work and the lack of support contributes to teacher stress, affecting them in ways that are emotional, physical, and mental.

Teacher stress and coping influence teachers in this rural Alabama school district. The research questions used to guide this study were the following: How does stress affect teachers in a rural Alabama school, and how do teachers in a rural Alabama school cope with stress? According to the data collected from the individual interviews, similar participant perceptions towards stress became evident. All participants perceived that they were stressed by their job and felt stressed from work either often or daily. All participants felt that they did not have enough or adequate support to do their job.

Teacher-related stress was induced by factors such as an unhealthy school climate, overwhelming workloads, low-status quo, and learner discipline. The participants discussed that low administrative support, high workload, and low parent involvement were variables causing them work-related stress. Most participants felt that stress impacted their daily work activities,

but retention of teachers and contemplation of leaving the profession or their current school was not considered. Participants also discussed student performance. Student performance was deemed stressful only because the administration and the department of education added pressure to reach certain goals or face the consequences. The researcher discovered that as teachers are held accountable for student achievement and faced with threats, removal, or forced retirement, this adds stress and makes coping become survival by any means necessary. This is in association with pacing guides and added paperwork of present levels of performance (PLP) evaluations related to self-assessments, anticipated forms of professional development, and evidence of these professional developments.

Extended effects of stress can affect teachers' health both physically and mentally. Of the eight participants, all eight stated during the interview that they suffer from the effects of stress. The effects of stress manifested as headaches, burnout, fatigue, and irritability. The survey revealed that all eight participants responded that stress affects them physically and mentally in a negative way.

With all the possible stress factors, it is noted that these factors have a varied span of medium to high impact on the participants, so finding solutions to reduce or eliminate the stress in teaching should become a priority for the improvement of teachers' well-being. The different stress sources have an important role linked to either the Alabama education department and its political instability, where changes often occur within the educational system, or the support given to the children by their parents in their first years of life, which also involves behavioral support towards the teacher or the specific activity teachers assume while incorporating multiple roles within the school.

Presentation of the Data and Results

Data was gathered through two different phases: Online surveys and teacher interviews. Each phase created information that related to the research question. In this section, data are presented by teacher participants' responses as it correlates to each research question. The data and results are also presented as survey findings and interview findings.

Continuing analysis of the data, it is revealed that there is a triangulation between factors identified from the Qualtrics survey and responses by teacher participants during the interview. Table 2 below summarizes the overlap of variables to establish validity. The validity of the information is in comparing the Qualtrics survey to the personal interviews of the teacher participants analyzing the information from different perspectives. Teacher participants reported from the survey and the interviews that physical, emotional, and mental effects of stress were the most commonly cited variables and were a common theme during discussions.

Table 2

Triangulation of the Data: Effects Contributing to Stress

	Qualtrics Survey	Personal Interviews
Physical	x	x
Emotional	x	x
Mental	x	x
Social		x

Survey Findings

Upon the completion of the survey responses, the survey findings were divided between the two research questions. Within the survey sections, the data pertaining to the appropriate

research question were analyzed and reported based on the information that was provided by the teacher participants. The survey and interview data are presented separately to show how the survey established a baseline of individual teacher perception of their stress and coping strategies through the survey and to show the more detailed explicitness of the interview.

Research question one: How does stress affect teachers in the rural Alabama area of one school within a district?

Finding 1 of 2: Teacher Stress. Eight teachers took a survey about stress and coping before being interviewed. The findings of the survey showed that many of the participants experience some school-related stress. The findings also indicated that these teachers, in some way, have a strategy for coping with stress. Tables 3, 4, and 5 show the survey findings of stress in its frequency, level, and time it occurs (see Appendix A). The occurrences are based on the eight teacher participants' interpretations and feelings indicating the time stress occurs the most from their point of view.

Table 3

Time stress occurs

Category	Number of Responses
Beginning of the Year	1
Middle of the Year	3
End of the Year	4

Table 4

Levels of Stress

Category	Number of Responses
Mild Stress	3
Moderate Stress	3
Severe Stress	2

Table 5

Stress Outcomes

Category	Number of Responses
Never	0
Rarely	0
Occasionally	4
Often	4

Table 5 shows the findings of the survey, where teacher participants acknowledge the negative effects of teacher stress. Table 6 shows the negative effects of teacher stress for the eight teacher participants. The teacher participants chose to identify all areas that applied to them.

Table 6

Negative effects of stress for teacher participants

Categories	Number of Responses
Headaches	6
Irritability	7
Difficulty Sleeping	5
Frustration	5
Distance self from co-workers	3
Distance self from family and friends	2

Research question two: How do teachers in an Alabama rural area school cope with stress?

Finding 2 of 2: Coping strategies. Eight teachers took the survey before interviews took place. The finding revealed that teachers do have some coping strategies in place. All eight teacher participants stated in the survey that they have a coping strategy in place. Table 7 shows how the eight teacher participants responded to questions about having a coping strategy. The X indicates that a strategy is being used. Table 8 shows the types of strategies used by the teacher participants.

Table 7

Strategies for Coping

Survey Question	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
Has a Coping Strategy	X	X	X	X		X	X	X

Table 8

Types of Coping Strategies

Coping Strategies	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
Time off Work	X	X		X		X		X
Support from Family		X	X	X	X	X		
Exercise							X	X
Prayer/Meditate	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Avoid Situation						X	X	X

Interview Findings

Research Question One: How does stress affect teachers in the central Alabama area of one school within a district?

Finding 1 of 7: Work environment. In the interview, three of the eight teachers reported that the work environment was a component of his or her most stressful job-related situation. The data collected from teachers show that overwhelming expectations for teachers can negatively affect teachers. Physical stress, such as headaches and body aches, appeared to be influenced by the work environment. One teacher participant describes the effects of stress because of their work environment. The teacher explained:

There have been too many times when I get headaches and stomach aches. No custodian to clean the bathrooms, the air conditioning not working during the warm months and the heat not working during the cold ones. These are the conditions a teacher should not have to worry about. You are expected to continue teaching in these conditions and find a way to adjust. I feel sick to my stomach when I enter the building. I get overwhelmed because I have to change classrooms

and go to a room that has heat or air. There are times two teachers are sharing a room, trying to teach and be comfortable. This frustrates me because how can you teach without disrupting another class. My head is pounding by the end of the day, and my heart is racing because I am trying to figure out a way to make this work.

A school's work environment influences teachers' ability to teach and students' ability to learn. The environment sends a message about the value of school and learning. This affects teacher retention as well as influences the distribution of teachers across schools. Another teacher, who is a novice, stated:

It's not good to walk into a building, and the first thing that comes to mind is what will this day be like. I am worried, irritated, and anxious before the day even begins. School culture is important to me. Sometimes I tend to overload myself with tasks. Working together cooperatively, will reduce the level of stress. Work should be a place where you are productive, and all involved achieve some level of success. I must remain positive because positive vibes always reduce stress.

The school culture or environment is important. The effects of stress as it relates to a school culture can affect performance. As noted by yet another teacher:

When you feel good and feel important, I tend to do more and go out of my way to perform better. I will stay late and come early just because the environment is conducive to me wanting to do more. However, there are times when I don't always feel part of a positive environment. I become self-conscious and worry over little things, which affects my performance. I get depressed because it's a feeling of why am I doing anything if things are going to always be the same

mundane routine day after day. It's a combination of negative vibes. You do have people who do not work well with others which makes me feel isolated. It's just another thing that adds depressed feelings and anxiety to my list of stress.

Finding 2 of 7: Lack of administrative support. In the interview, five of the eight teacher participants reported that the lack of administrative support causes stress and affects them emotionally. Feelings of being frustrated, irritated, and, overwhelmed can decrease enthusiasm and cause crying. One teacher stated:

There seems to be a great divide between administration and teachers. You are both working towards the same thing, but the approach can be very overwhelming. If the administration cannot trust what you are doing, then what is the point in teaching, and this is frustrating. I sometimes cry because I feel like I have no one backing me up. Administration observes and evaluates your performance, which is a part of the job, but sometimes don't take into consideration what may have occurred before you entered the classroom. It is overwhelming the number of things I deal with on a daily basis, and as a teacher, you must work hard to avoid confrontation and the many opinions others have. All I need is support. I can't sleep at night because this is on my mind.

A novice teacher spoke on how the lack of administrative support affected them and explained:

I have only been in this for two years, and I'm still trying to figure out what to do. The frustration I feel and the amount of anxiety is disheartening. Administration from the school level to the district level says they are here to help you, but I have yet to see it. Co-workers give me helpful hints and mentor me, but I need more than that. I feel there

needs to be more professional development. I need to know upfront what the expectations are. It's irritating not knowing what to do, when to do it, or how to do it.

Teachers felt that the treatment they receive from administration causes animosity and hostility.

The conflict of interest can create work-related stress and affect teachers. One teacher explained:

I feel that if I were talked to in an adult professional matter, things would be better. I wouldn't feel overwhelmed and depressed. The nervousness of getting called out in front of others or yelled at creates a strain. There must be a better way of reprimanding than doing it openly and not in private if reprimanding is necessary. Communication is key. I avoid contact. A simple good morning and good evening is all I want to say. The sooner I can go home, the better.

Finding 3 of 7: Accountability. In the interview, all eight teacher participants mentioned how accountability affects them. Accountability for the teacher participants means holding everyone responsible for high standards of performance and teaching. However, three of the eight were affected by accountability because of grade-level testing. These three participants teach third, fifth, and sixth grade, where standardized testing takes place. The effects caused by accountability mentioned by the teacher participants are worry, headaches, fatigue, stomach aches, and even chest pains. One teacher's view is:

Accountability is one big headache. A teacher's job is on the line when it comes to this. I get so worked up I start to get headaches, I get anxious, and physically fatigued (mind and body). I can feel my chest tighten up. I get so frustrated and overwhelmed during that time of the year because you know what is at stake. I have had so many sleepless nights thinking about accountability that I sometimes cannot function the next day.

Another teacher stated:

I can only do so much. So, where do I draw the line for stress from the general education classes and students with mental issues and learning disabilities? As a teacher with both students in the classroom and students mainstreamed, I get angry and anxious. I lack motivation and focus because of the combination. All students are assessed on the same level, which irritates me because I know the students are not on that level. To me, this is a double-edged sword. I get so frustrated because the result falls back on me and my instruction despite whom I have in the classroom. It's too much to be held accountable for.

During yet another interview with a novice teacher, it was explained:

I feel particularly anxious about implementing the common core curriculum and testing it. I feel like I have not been trained. What people on the outside need to realize is that teaching is more than just "a test." The accountability standard is so high; it is overwhelming. It brings me to depression, shortness of breath, sleepless nights, and heart palpitations. At this point, I would rather be in a non-accountability grade.

A veteran teacher goes as far as reporting the accountability is more than just testing. This teacher states:

It seems like every other year, there is a new test for accountability. We have even gotten word that Alabama is adopting yet another state test to replace the one we are presently using. How can we even see the success of the students if the test keeps changing? Then there is the accountability outside of testing; our certifications. Every five years, we must renew our certification. This means classes, continuing education units that must be earned while you are working. I worry about how I will get it all done. The days of people saying teachers have it made and get summers off is non-existent. I am

accountable for getting this done in a timely matter or risk not being able to return to my position because my certification has expired.

Finding 4 of 7: Lack of parent support. In the interviews, five teacher participants reported that they get irritated and frustrated because of the lack of parent support. The lack of parent support is tied into how students behave, and these teacher participants spoke on how student discipline and parent support go hand and hand. One participant shared:

You must have classroom management in the classroom if you want to teach. A disruptive class means there will be little learning going on. Parent support is important in having classroom management. If the student knows that the parent is in support of what you do and that you and the parent are working together, there's usually fewer student issues. However, a parent that never sees their child as wrong sends a message to that child that they can do what they want with no consequences. The year will be long, and the pressure to find other means of support creates conflict.

Another teacher noted that stress develops because of the lack of parent support. The participant reported:

There are different kinds of parents we deal with daily, and each type is a lack of true support. You have that absent parent, you have the uncooperative parent, and you have the demanding parents. Each one shows a lack of support. When you have an absent parent, it becomes frustrating because you never see this parent until it is too late. You try to make contact, and your number gets blocked. These are the parents that never show up for conferences or PTA (Parent Teacher Association) meetings. The parent that is demanding causes me so much stress because nothing I do is enough.

Finding 5 of 7: Teacher responsibility. In the interviews, all eight teacher participants reported that teacher responsibilities, such as writing a lesson plan, managing classroom discipline, and morning and afternoon bus duty, brings stress and affects them. Teacher responsibilities reported by the participants included doing lesson plans, morning and afternoon bus duties, and serving as committee members and leaders of different school-related activities such as afterschool programs, coronation, and school improvement review. Two teacher participants specifically spoke about having some serious negative outcomes because of teacher responsibilities. One reported:

We are somewhat of a small community, so our responsibilities are nearly double to other schools. At this school, there are 13 total teachers. We all share responsibilities, but one teacher may be responsible for four different things related to leadership roles such as grade level chairperson and Response to Instruction facilitator as well as being a part of the School Improvement Committee. These duties on top of other work-load responsibilities of morning duty, after school duty, and bus duty is overwhelming. I cannot think clearly. I get headaches. I get so confused and sometimes, to be honest, I cry out of pure frustration.

Another teacher commented on how many common core standards and program adjustments are added, but previous teaching material is not taken away. The teacher stated:

The district doesn't give anything a chance to develop and work before you are introduced to something else new. You must give something time to work before you spring something new on you to try. Keeping up with reading programs and communicating data is a headache. I take things home, so I can catch up. I cannot even think about getting ahead because I am so far behind.

Finding 6 of 7: Effects of stress. In the interview, all eight teacher participants discussed the effects of stress. The effects of stress revealed through the interviews show that there are physical effects, social effects, and emotional effects. One participant reported on the physical side by stating:

The amount of stress I feel causes me to have severe headaches. The headaches can be so draining. Teaching becomes difficult, and I result in just given the students quiet work to do because standing up and teaching a lesson is out of the question. I have seen a doctor about my headaches because they get so bad. It's amazing though that when I get my holiday breaks or summer breaks that my headaches are not as frequent or none existent.

Other teachers talked more about the emotional toll of stress. One teacher reported:

The fact that I get overwhelmed and frustrated at work from the number of things required to do is too much. My focus is off, and it can be difficult because the frustration hinders my ability to do my best job. It also affects the kids. My attitude can make or break the day.

Another teacher reported:

It takes me a long time to get out of the car in the morning to go into the school. I sit and watch the students go in from the bus and do not move until I must go in. I must mentally prepare myself for the day, for the work left on my desk, and for what the students will bring with them from home. As a teacher, I am so much more than just a teacher, which is emotionally draining. I call it a brain overload.

A novice teacher stated:

They don't tell you in college, what the job is really like. I would have liked to have gotten some insight. I spend sleepless nights thinking about the students and worrying

about them. It isn't just the test score or if they make the progress they need. It's the students' home life. You learn things in the classroom. Then there's the time when you must report abuse or neglect. You deal with illnesses and pink eye. Teaching in an area that is smaller than most you establish a personal relationship quick. You become that surrogate mother, and that weight is heavy because you are that surrogate for not just one but eighteen.

Finding 7 of 7: Student behavior. Misbehaving students makes for a difficult time in the classroom. Teachers cannot teach effectively with this kind of distraction and, as noted by some teacher participants, increases their level of stress and impacts them mentally. One teacher explains:

Your hands are tied when it comes to disciplining the students in your classroom. You are limited as to what you can do. I can't concentrate. I can't focus on the lesson. Of course, the days paddling is long gone, but now in this area, you cannot suspend a child. It is only used for extreme measures such as fighting, and then if the student has an Individual Education Plan or IEP, that child can only get 10 days of out of school for the whole year. That means a meeting and due process hearing must take place. This frustrates me. Parents do not want you to chastise or place their child in time out. Office referrals are limited too. As we are sometimes told, it makes the school look bad and yourself if there are so many written and turned in. It makes you look like you have no classroom management. This frustrates me even more, and I'm not mentally prepared to deal with this all day every day.

The themes identified all have common effects. Each teacher had experienced an adverse effect, whether physically, emotionally, and/or socially. During the interviews, the participants incorporated the effects within their discussion about work-stress.

Finding 1 of 4: Physical effects. During the interview, three teacher participants mentioned the physical aspects of school-related stress. A novice teacher reported:

My chest hurts sometimes, and I know that it is stress related. I worry about if I am doing things right because I am new. I get worked up on how much I must do and when to do it. I can feel my heart racing. It does not feel good, and I must work through it.

A veteran teacher stated:

A little stress now and then is not bad, however when I start getting frequent headaches, body aches, and find that I can't sleep at night or even wake up during the night several times because of work, then that is a problem. I have seen a doctor about my headaches, and the diagnosis is always stress-related. It's funny how my headaches are more frequent during the teacher work season (the nine months out of the year where I work with students), but during the summer, my headaches seem to disappear.

Another teacher participant further explains:

Having headaches is just part of my stress problem. The stress I feel literally makes me sick. My stomach gets upset. It's like a nervous pit in my stomach that creates an uneasy rumbling. The stress can be so overwhelming that there are times I cannot even eat.

Finding 2 of 4: Emotional effects. During the interview, teacher participants not only discussed the physical part of stress effects but also mentioned its emotional aspects. All eight teacher participants discussed some form of emotional stress, whether it was irritability, depression, or anxiety. This type of stress can have a long-lasting effect and can be tied to

physical stress, as mentioned by earlier teacher participants. Noting emotional stress, one teacher participant reports:

Sometimes I just react out of my anger over certain situations. I have bottled up what I want to say out loud that at times, as the day progresses, I get frustrated and irritated. Yes, sometimes because of built-up frustration, I take it out on the kids. There really isn't any relief. I try to remain professional, but it is difficult.

Another teacher reported:

I dwell on my mistakes. I have feelings of guilt, remorse, and regret that linger throughout the day, and they make the day difficult by sapping all my energy. I try to make a conscious effort to do something to change the mood. I practice mindfulness techniques when I feel myself drifting into regrets about past actions. You learn from it, and you try to forgive yourself for past mistakes, but it still brings you down and into a depression.

One other teacher participant associated their emotional stress with eating. This teacher stated:

I am an emotional eater. When stressed, I eat even more and all the wrong things. As a teacher, you are already pressed for time. With only 25 minutes to eat lunch and being under stress, I find I eat without thinking. During the school year, I gain so much weight, and it's because I'm trying to find a comfort zone, which is eating to relieve the stress. The best part about this is that I know I am stress eating and not trying to exercise to counteract the effects, which makes it worse.

Finding 3 of 4: Social effects. During the interview, two teacher participants mentioned what can be recognized as social stress. The complication of working with different personalities creates conflict. A veteran teacher reported:

You cannot get along with all people all the time. Sometimes you have to agree to disagree. However, it makes for some uncomfortable work environment when you work with people you do not like. The strain of being sociable when you do not want to, avoiding certain people, and trying not to “rock the boat” is draining because how can you avoid people that you have to work with without causing friction. It is impossible, so you are miserable at work and unhappy.

Finding 4 of 4: Mental effects. During the interview, mental effects of stress were established. Four of the eight teacher participants complained of tension, depression, loss of motivation, and a lack of concentration. One teacher stated:

I cannot seem to concentrate on a single task. I have a hard time even completing a task once I have started it. My lack of motivation hinders my train of thought. I forget what I'm doing, find that I cannot find things, I get confused, and feel like I am in a fog.

Research question two: How do teachers in a rural Alabama school cope with stress?

There are ways in which teachers can cope with work-related stress. These strategies can be both negative and positive. These strategies can also have a strong impact on teacher effectiveness. Findings of positive and negative strategies for coping varied. During the interview, there were some identifiable positive and negative means of coping with work-related stress. Based on the survey, participants reported having severe to moderate stress, and in the interview, they indicated that they were more willing to seek support from family and friends, which could be positive. Those participants that reported mild stress indicated a way of relieving stress was to take time off work, which can be seen as negative.

Finding 1 of 2: Positive strategies. In the interview, three teacher participants discussed having a positive coping strategy. As noted by one veteran teacher:

Over the years, I have learned to cope with stress at school. It is a mind-set you must establish that you cannot solve all the problems of education. I meditate and pray a lot. School systems have taken prayer out of schools and replaced them with a moment of silence. This is the time that I take to pray to myself. Even through this interview, I have learned that writing things down and talking openly about stress has relieved some of my stress. This has been helpful.

Another veteran teacher reported using prayer to deal with stress. The teacher participant stated:

I come into the school in the morning before the students arrive and read from the Bible and say a little prayer. If you start your day on a positive note, the rest of the day can go by smoothly. You are less stressed and more focused on the task of doing your job. Fewer things bother you, and I am relaxed, not as anxious, and less depressed.

Another participant mentions yoga as both a meditation and exercise regimen that relieves stress.

This participant reported:

Exercise helps me to unwind after a day at school. It is peacetime where it is just you and your breathing. The exercise also relieves the tension in my neck and back because sometimes teaching causes wear and tear on the body. Your mind is full by lunchtime. Your thoughts are jumbled; the students have worn me out, so if I can create a balance of peace and calm, then why not do it.

Another teacher reported how coping would be better if there were some type of professional community, stating:

If there were a school community group that teachers can gather with, I believe coping would be easier. What is available are resources that I am not sure is secure enough that talking to that resource would not jeopardize my job by using what I say against me.

Now, this is not to say that the school group would be any better, but teachers do have trusted colleagues they can confide in and vent to.

Another teacher stated:

I try not to talk to anyone at work about my stress because sometimes the source of the stress is those at work. I cope by venting at home. Sometimes this is a family member. But usually, it is a friend that is in the same profession as me. They understand what you are going through, and since they are not at the same school and same district, you do not have any added stress that what you say will get back to your work area. Talking about what stresses me away from work is a coping strategy that benefits me as well. If I do not get it out of me, I'm worse the next day.

Finding 2 of 2: Negative strategies. Even if a teacher is coping with work-related stress, not all strategies are positive. During the interview process, three teachers disclosed coping strategies they used could be negative. A veteran teacher reported:

When stressed, I may have to have some alone time which leads to a day off. I know I shouldn't do this, but this is the best I can do to relieve stress and regroup. Sometimes I think about changing professions, but I know that I am better prepared now to educate than I was four years ago. This leads me to think that if I leave, then the educational arena would suffer from the absence of yet another teacher. So, yes, I take days that I know isn't the best solution, but it's my quick fix.

Part of a coping strategy is to be able to talk about what is bothering you. One teacher participant stated that talking to others is a coping strategy that is useful but can also be negative.

I need to be able to talk out my issues to someone else. I would like to talk to my spouse, but there is the realization that he does not understand the stress involved in education.

So, the best way to get my feelings out is to talk with someone that is in the same area.

As teachers, we gather around and just have a venting moment to release our anxiety and frustrations from the day. However, I feel there needs to be something more concrete than talking in the halls. It does help to get things out to someone who knows your pain, but the hallway is a little less private, and it sometimes gives the impression of hallway gossip.

The next teacher participant stated:

You want to be a part of the group in the school community. Social interaction with administration, co-workers, parents, and students is important. The worried feelings I have in trying to manage each separately leave me feeling overwhelmed. You can't please everyone, but as a teacher, you have to work with all members.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings that emerged from interviews and the survey that was taken. The data collection process and findings for the study focused on teacher perceptions of how stress affects them and how they cope. The data from this research showed that the participants have some physical and emotional effects related to their stress. Coping strategies for dealing with stress involved moral support from other teachers in the school or others outside the field. Indirect approaches to dealing with stress included meditation and physical exercise. A coping strategy that came out during the interviews is that most teachers in this district take time after work for themselves.

The findings and results showed positive and negative aspects of stress and coping. The findings are embedded within the role of the participants highlighting the unique work-life stressors that teachers experience. Many factors contributed to the stress reported in the findings

by the participants. A heavy workload, classroom discipline problems, lack of parent support, and a lack of support from administrators was common among most of the participants. In addition, the participants felt that stress had a negative impact on their classroom instruction and their interaction with parents, colleagues, and administrators. Teacher stress cannot be accredited to one issue and can surface due to a variety of reasons.

The study's findings offered a means to evaluate the effectiveness of the participants' own ways of coping and whether the situation causing the stress was worth stressing over. The case study offered a means of self-evaluation for participants' work-related stress and established a way to connect to positive coping techniques. The discussion and interpretations of the data findings and conclusion are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to discuss the results as they relate to the literature, including limitations, implications for practices, and recommendations for further research. Many factors can cause the effects of stress. These factors can be emotional, physical, social, or mental. The demands and stress of teaching are becoming more of a focus. Working conditions and educational policies have become more difficult. The nature of stress and its effects can wreak havoc on a teacher's ability to perform effectively in the classroom, maintain a level of professionalism in and out of the school setting, and attend to accountability measures. However, if stress is managed appropriately and with the help of colleagues, especially the leadership within a given school setting, stress can be limited.

The research was conducted using an online questionnaire through Qualtrics and in-person interviews. The study intended to answer how stress affects teachers in a rural Alabama school and how these teachers cope with stress. The study included information from eight teachers currently teaching in a kindergarten through sixth-grade school and included both novice and experienced teachers.

There are many relationships that connect the effects of stress and coping strategies together. How participants see the effects and their understanding to deal with it is important because teachers are faced with the challenge to educate children to meet standards and become college and career ready based on the state's guidelines and to enable the students to in general be able to relate to life in and of itself. Despite the many studies that have been done on stress and coping with teachers, there is still much to learn.

Summary of the Results

The research took place in a rural school district in Alabama. There were eight teacher participants. The research questions to guide this study are the following:

1. How does stress affect teachers in a rural Alabama area school?
2. How do teachers in a rural Alabama school cope with stress?

The research questions were answered based on findings from the data collected from the survey and interviews. Themes emerged from the data collected, and each theme contained sub-themes.

The eight teacher participants had a combination of emotional, physical, social, and mental responses to stress. The teacher participants had anxiety and depression, which are considered emotional effects. Participants mentioned headaches, fatigue, and concentration problems, which are physical and mental responses to stress. Participants acknowledged that stress responses could be mild to severe. The effects of stress experienced by the teacher participants were unique to his or her circumstances and the direct effect of repeated exposure to stressful situations, which influences the way it is managed.

Findings indicated that all eight participants had coping strategies that reduce the effects of stress for them, to maintain effectiveness and persistence. Participants' coping strategies included exercise, mediation, talking with family and friends, and time alone/time off work. When connecting the effects of stress to coping strategies, it is recognized that teacher participants with mild stress used coping strategies such as exercise, prayer, and meditation. Teacher participants that acknowledged having moderate and severe stress turned to taking time off and seeking support from family to cope.

Collecting data from the survey and teacher interviews provides an array of information to draw from (Yin, 2014). The convergence of each piece of data contributed to the researcher's

understanding of teacher stress and coping. Analysis of the data revealed that the participants recognize stress and coping through a combination of methods and strategies. The researcher found that the participants used common strategies found in the literature that was mentioned in Chapter 2. The discussion begins with guided research and then moves into a discussion based on the two research questions.

Discussion of the Results

Through teacher interviews, data were acquired that answered the two research questions. This section presents a discussion of the results and interpretations centered around the research questions. Data taken from each teacher participant are analyzed separately. After examination, themes emerged, showing similarities and differences. What follows is a discussion of results in relation to the research questions and how stress affects teachers and how the teachers cope.

The effects of stress for each participant is complex in itself, so the first step in coping with the effects of stress is knowing the stressors. Effects of stress are defined as a state of mental or emotional strain resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. The eight participants' stressors are divided into six primary sources.

Work environment. When asked about their experiences with stress and the work environment, the eight teacher participants spoke about physical and emotional effects. Those effects were noted during the interviews as body aches, headaches, worry, and anxiousness by some participants. According to Robins (2010), the pressures of teaching, which occur in the daily work environment, can cause teachers to experience the emotional effects of stress.

Administrative support. Participants at each interview discussed low administrative support. Teacher participants described look for support or approval from their supervisor, whether it is the school administration or the district administration, and without that support the

effects of stress are heightened, especially if there appeared to be disapproval from administrators. Anxiousness and fear were some effects, along with restlessness and worries. Tsang and Liu (2016) stated that no empathy shown by administrators could cause frustration and feelings of being unappreciated. The feelings noted by the participants connect to Vygotsky's (1934) social development theory, which plays a role in how emotional processes are acquired.

Accountability. Higher standards and increased levels of accountability are among the challenges of teachers, as noted by Day and Gu (2014). Accountability faced by teachers include adherence to professional norms, compliance with state regulations, and student performance on research-based test. The results showed that all eight teacher participants experienced worry due to accountability requirements. Some participants suffered from headaches, stomach aches, chest pains, and fatigue. These effects are signs of physical and emotional stress. Teacher participants also found themselves irritable and tense because of accountability.

Student behavior. Another source of stress indicated from the findings is student behavior. The results showed that the teacher participants described being irritated, angry, frustrated, and exhausted from dealing with students' behavior. These are signs of emotional stress. As this related to stress and coping, Cosgrove (2000) recognized student behavior as one of six significant sources of teacher stress creating a negative effect. Trying to convince students to behave, as one teacher participant described, makes focusing on the lesson harder and can be emotionally draining.

Teacher responsibility. All eight participants felt the effects of stress from their job in some form because of teacher responsibilities such lesson plans, bus duties, and documenting student progress. The eight teachers interviewed reported sleepless nights, frustration, and

feelings of being overwhelmed as effects of stress due to teacher responsibilities. The teacher participants are expected to maintain their classrooms while remaining apprised of fire drills procedures, lunch assignments, and bus duties. Sandilos et al. (2018) discussed how high workloads contribute to the effects of stress. The findings indicate that the eight participants are affected due to limited control over expectations.

Parent support. The results showed that the eight teacher participants felt like there was a lack of parental support. Lendrum, Barlow, and Humphery (2015) acknowledged that positive engagement among parents is crucial, and their active involvement leads to better educational outcomes reducing the effects of stress for teachers. Prakke, Van Peet, and Van der Wolf (2007) wrote that teachers who experience stress from challenging parent behavior, suffer from frustration and have a loss of job satisfaction leading to stress.

Coping. The results show that the effect of stress is a common feeling among the eight teacher participants. The results showed the strategies are noted as positive and revealed that engaging in meditation, physical activities, and taking short breaks are the preferred activities to overcome the feelings of stress. With stress being an ever-present emotion in life, the lingering effects of stress can be draining, but learning about coping strategies such as stress management, meditation, and physical activities may be beneficial. Hepburn and McMahon (2017) found that many cultures use meditation as a form of stress relief, and with the addition of physical activities and stress management programs, teachers can reduce stress hormones and build resilience. This was recognized by the participants that discussed meditation and exercise as a form of coping.

As a teacher, I reflected on my personal thoughts about teacher stress. Interviewing the faculty provided me the opportunity to interact with individuals who have experience with the

stress of teaching. What stood out from the survey and interviews was the mention of the need for support: school-based, central office-based, and state department-based. Participants commented that there is a divide or disconnect as to what teachers need and what they receive.

After analyzing the collected data, the eight teacher participants have different levels of stress that affect them. The results show that shuffling between classroom duties and other stressors affects them and makes them have a feeling of being overwhelmed, frustrated, fatigued, and anxious, which was discussed during the interviews. The eight teachers have coping strategies that are reflective of lowering the stress encountered while at work. Most teachers did have at least one other person at work they could confide in. This is a co-worker willing to be that listening board for the other teacher. Other means of at-work coping took place during teachers' planning time when they have time alone to regroup while students are out of the classes (physical education and music).

The conceptual framework for this case study is based on the theories of Vygotsky, Erikson, and Maslow. The social and emotional development towards fulfilling needs gives meaning to the fact that stress can affect the teaching mindset. Coping strategies can reduce the effects of stress, depending on whether those coping strategies are positive or negative.

Stress management intervention (SMI), as mentioned by Holman, Johnson, and O'Conner (2018), emphasizes that with the proper assistance, lessening of stress can be achieved. Based on the findings, most teacher participants used some stress management intervention, which can be identified through individual and organizational means. Individual means are those actions participants completed distinct from the school, such as exercising and meditating. Organization interventions for participants showed that they removed the cause of stress by changing the practices and the job characteristics such as managing work-time to

enhance their well-being. Also, findings showed that participants expressed that a change in schedule could help to reduce stress. Such work schedule changes could be a four-day work week or even a year-round schedule where teachers would get a nine-week work schedule and two-week breaks.

The research showed that teachers typically rely on certain coping tactics: social support, direct action, indirect actions, active planning, experiences, and suppression of competing behavior. Each is related to previous research by Kyriacou (2001) that indicates that there should be measures in place to deal with stress. Social support and direct action are not new to the research on the effects of stress and coping strategies. Using professional development as a means to cope with stress can be seen as innovative. This strategy refers to teachers “putting aside all activities in their lives so that they can concentrate solely on work. Lessening the demand for other aspects of life and only focusing on work” (Bano, 2018, p. 71). The idea of putting all activities aside and concentrating solely on work may seem idle; however, findings showed that most of the participants in this study are not solely concentrating on work. Their activities and work are intertwined because they take work home.

Discussions of Results in Relation to the Literature

Within the teacher stress and coping literature, studies investigated what teachers find to be effects of stress and how they cope with it. Clement (2017) noted that stress is prevalent when teachers are overwhelmed and may lack the will to continue in the job. The findings within this school showed that the eight teacher participants are overwhelmed but are dedicated to doing the job and have no intention of leaving because of stress. The dedication and will to continue in the field despite the stress coincides with Leroux and Theoret’s (2014) thoughts that instead of

teachers experiencing burnout and considering quitting the profession, they may take stress as challenging and try to improve professionally, also known as resilience.

Additionally, the results of previous studies can be associated with this study. Noting from Lam and Yan (2011), the idea of job satisfaction with new teachers begins a process that focused on workload, distribution of the workload, and autonomy. The study shows there is an opportunity to experience job satisfaction through the implementation of modeling and coaching. Modeling and coaching can be connected to mentoring programs where novice teachers are matched with an experienced teacher to help guide and support through the first years of teaching to help reduce stress. Teacher participants reported feeling overworked and having insufficient time to communicate their concerns or opinions to administrators effectively. Having mentoring programs that include modeling and coaching can help in reducing stress. This can influence their sense of autonomy and self-efficacy in the classroom as recognized by Ingeroll and Smith (2003).

The results revealed that the eight teacher participants in this Alabama school are faced with responsibilities and performance-based accountability for student achievement, which affects them in ways such as feeling anxious and overwhelmed. Teachers are responsible for participating in the morning and after school duties, after work responsibilities associated with committees and organizations, and managing the classroom for instruction and behavior. Agai-Demjaho et al. (2015) considered these responsibilities as organizational factors that are a part of work-related stress, how they affect teachers, and the way teachers are expected to work. Understanding the types of stress that teachers can encounter makes coping a complicated endeavor and is something that needs to be established if the educational platform is to be maintained with educators. As Berryhill, Linney, and Fromewick (2009) found, anxiety builds

towards stress being associated with role conflict, teacher burnout, and policy pressures, teachers with added duties and responsibilities face having to strategize ways to cope with balance feelings of being overwhelmed.

Occupational stress was found to be a reference point for the eight participants. The eight participants reported that exhaustion and frustration were the most frequent effects of occupational stress. Kyriacou's (2001) discussion on low student motivation, challenging relationships with coworkers and administration, and poor working conditions connect to participant responses. This is confirmed by the previous literature and supports the theory that these stressors do negatively affect teachers, both physically and mentally.

In this study, the findings showed that novice teachers mentioned the relationship with students, other teachers, and administration as a cause of stress-related worries, which is consistent with the works of Rieg et al. (2007). Social factors, such as interactions with students and administrators, can have a drastic effect on burnout and teacher demoralization, as mentioned by Santoro (2011). The eight participants' feelings of stress associated with the lack of administrative support are consistent with feelings associated with social stress effects and make the connection to coping with stress essential to the learning behavior that affects people at work. The participants are currently looking for ways to make connections with their working relationships of administrators, teachers, parents, students, community, and district leadership.

The participants discussed that the work environment has an impact on how stress affects them. If the environment is not positive, then the work is less fulfilling. Kaur (2018) mentions that unwanted factors such as an environment that is not positive are both internal and external and hinder job performance. The fulfillment in the work environment is an area reported by participants where teachers need to be fulfilled. This connection seems to be relevant to what has

been found in the theory Kaur interprets as factors that have both an internal and external way of hindering performance. Coping is vital in the reduction of stress and its effects on teachers and different methods of coping can be effective in reducing stress. Jepson and Forrest's (2006) suggested that reduction of stress leads to the establishment of work environment intervention for the security of retention and the maintenance of a stress-free workplace.

Participants reported health factors in this study, and this warrants more insight into the implications these factors seem to have on the teacher participants. The factors identified by the participants included headaches, tiredness, chest pains, anxiety, frustration, job dissatisfaction, and feelings of inadequacy. Cooper et al. (2004) mentioned that health factors related to stress could be categorized as psychological, behavioral, or both. An understanding of the factors contributing to stress is yet to be fully realized by people outside the education profession. Some health factors identified by Cooper as issues are influencing the teacher participants within the study. With the underlying development of stress, programs are available but not implemented. Establishing a productive way for the community to assist teachers in finding flexible and clear means to reduce the stress load, the expectations of coping strategies will remain minimal and be a continued desire for participants.

Limitations

This qualitative study has both strengths and weaknesses. The design included purposeful questioning and selection of participants. While the study is a qualitative study and the researcher confirms that qualitative research is the appropriate choice for this study, qualitative research materials such as interviews might not capture distinctive facts. More credibility could be given to the study if combined with quantitative research. For instance, quantitative research relies on verified observations, and the research results are expressed in numbers and

percentages. Using percentages could help understand the impact of stress and coping. Experimental quantitative research could uncover cause-and-effect relationships.

Another limitation of this study is that the findings are specific to only eight teachers within one district and school in the rural setting. Using multiple districts and expanding the research to include urban and metropolitan districts can provide a wider synopsis of comparisons and verify specific stressors that most teacher experience within the same grade levels.

The data collected from the survey showed stress and coping by creating a census of commonalities of responses. The research was also conducted purposefully to sample only currently full-time certified teachers who are both experienced and novice. Therefore, a third limitation is that the data can only be representative of the eight teacher participants from this school who are full-time certified employees excluding any teachers that are retired, contract, part-time, or classified.

A fourth limitation of this study is regarding the demographics of the participants involved. In this study, all eight participants were African American. Of the eight participants, two were men and six were women. This would indicate that the selection might not represent the average causes of stress, effects of stress, or coping strategies teachers use to manage stress. Moreover, the demographics show that there were two novice teachers and six veteran teachers. The small number of novice teachers again might not be representative of the average novice group of teachers.

The fifth limitation of this study is the timing in which the interviews and surveys were completed. The participant interviews and surveys were completed at the end of the 2017–2018 school year. The end of the school year is usually a stressful time of the year for teachers because of school testing requirements, end-of-the-year checklist, and review of student records. The

timing of this study could have created a bias for the participants as stress is more likely during this time. Moreover, access to the participants for this research was contingent on the teachers' and the researcher's schedules, which placed some limits on the amount of data collected because of the short interaction during teachers' planning time and researcher's time frame. While multiple data sources provided an abundance of evidence, the study could have been richer if data collection had followed a longitudinal design.

Creswell (2014) asserted that researcher bias exists in all qualitative studies and creates limitations that should be notified to the reader because background knowledge and experiences shape the interpretations of the findings. When interpreting the results of this study, it is important to recognize that as the principal investigator, the researcher's experience with stress might have affected data interpretation. Precautions were taken to avoid this bias by keeping surveys anonymous and keeping interview responses confidential.

Another important factor to consider as a limitation when interpreting the data is that the school district was undergoing budget cuts, possible school closings, consolidation of schools, and reduction in force (RIF). This transition was very public within the community and involved preliminaries of voluntary retirement, voluntary resignations, and voluntary transfers to other schools for consolidation. The perceived conflicts and tensions created a unique circumstance that might have heightened perceptions about negative impacts and effects of stress on the eight teacher participants within this study.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Chapter 2 included theories that align with the hierarchy of needs, social, cognitive, and emotional interaction, biological syndromes, and self-efficacy theories of Maslow. Maslow's (1954) theory of a hierarchy of needs suggested that only by fulfilling the needs of security,

safety, and belonging, can a person recognize and have the fulfillment of growth, or self-actualization. In this study, personal support and good working conditions in an educational work environment and rewards and recognition are closely linked to the support, the hierarchy of needs, and self-efficacy of the Maslow theory.

Practice. The finding showed that the eight participants feel less stressed when they have an opportunity to talk with another co-worker or teacher. In the case of talking to another person, it would be appropriate for the school system or an individual school setting to organize “How Was Your Week” sharing sessions. These sessions would be held at the end of each week, with the inexperienced teacher or senior experienced teachers who are stressed along with the principal, assistant principal, and the school counselor. They would be able to come together in the How Was Your Week sharing session and discuss their week’s experiences as a part of faculty meetings.

During these sharing sessions, everyone would be given the opportunity to share their concerns and the causes of their stress related to school activities. Those in attendance would offer suggestions. On certain occasions, a professional in the area of stress would be invited to be a part of the gathering. To encourage attendance, perhaps some inexpensive fellowship snacks would be provided, or each classroom parent of that teacher would support the sharing sessions with a dish or purchased items from a business food store.

Delp (1963) discussed that the social mindedness of the community creates added stress for the teacher. For example, the performed-based accountability society has imposed on education and teachers in the classroom have increased. This is supported by what participants in this study discussed during the interviews. Performed-based accountability is a fundamental part of the educational system, and with accountability, teachers are pressed to make gains or risk

reprimands or removal from the job. The findings showed that the teacher participants are concerned about performed-based accountability and feel pressed to make gains, worrying about the ramifications if they do not perform well.

Balancing demands and resources are essential in the overall balance of teacher welfare. Communication is necessary for there to be a reduction in stress. Novice teachers need mentors, administration, and other personnel that can help with specific needs related to communication. Having a mentor, administrator, or both can lead to open communication where questions can be asked about anything reducing the effects of stress. For veteran teachers, communication as an experienced teacher can mean professional learning communities with the mindset of working for the betterment of all and sharing ideas to improve the work environment because of the experience each veteran teacher has to offer. This can improve and maintain communication among colleagues, providing a great release of stress when the pressure becomes too great.

Teacher's professional growth and development also has ties to balancing demands and resources and is another form of stress relief for teachers. This is especially important for novice teachers because training and workshops can develop a mindset of growing professionalism. To continue to grow as a teacher, one should never stop learning. Teachers must renew their certifications every five years. By staying on top of the latest trends of accountability, teachers can assist in reducing stress.

Policy. From the eight participants, the experienced teachers revealed that leaving the profession early or retiring is not considered. The experienced teachers felt that the longer they stay, the easier it becomes to recognize that they are stressed and adjust. One of the eight participants, who was a novice teacher, did mention the possibility of leaving the position and/or retiring early. The remaining seven participants acknowledged their stress but also demonstrated

that this is a chosen profession, and they would not retire early or quit because of the stress or its effects. Therefore, attention should be placed on novice teachers to build longevity since this teacher participant needs sustainability in the profession possibly through being assigned a mentor.

The factors that can affect stress according to Tsang and Liu (2016) can include other teachers, school administrators, policies, and bureaucratic decisions on educational reform. Participants mentioned this during the interviewing process. Despite these considered factors, stress is manageable, and coping is in place. If the stress of teachers is focused on having support from the administration as stated by participants and noted by Tsang and Liu (2016), then the perception and well-being seem to be related to their environment. The consensus is then a need for empathy from the administration to cope. This seemed to be the overall outlook among the participants.

It would be advantageous for a school system to provide teachers with a partnership of well-rounded teachers (those in the profession who have experienced what they are currently going through) to serve as mentors/counselors to those who experience stress-related concerns. Perhaps visiting professional teacher counselors could serve to assist such stressed teachers with outlets for coping. As one participant stated: “Just to be able to talk with someone else about the stressful situation provides excellent help.” Interventions aimed at reducing burnout would assist in the reduction of teacher stress. Coping skills and workshops aimed towards preventing burnout and intervention based on mindfulness and relaxation techniques using social skills, educational approaches, and social support through professional development can significantly help teachers reduce the likelihood of burnout and, in turn, decrease the levels of stress.

Theory. The participants in the study reported a need for personal growth and development. This motivation can be associated with self-actualization and growth within a job. The level of fulfillment is based on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs where human motivation is an individual's ability to seek fulfillment and change. The participants reported in the findings a motivation towards belonging, having a sense of significance and coping with stress that in turn, may fulfill their basic need for attaining self-actualization.

The research developed through this study supports the conceptual framework, which relied on Vygotsky, Erikson, and Maslow. The effects of stress and fulfilling the needs of teachers create teacher mindsets while coping strategies reduces the effects of stress. Vygotsky (1943) applies key developments of thinking, Erikson (1956) associates building socialization of learning behavior towards work and personal outlook, and Maslow (1954) establishes basic needs to self-esteem and satisfaction. Applying the methods used in this research substantiates that stress impacts teacher's satisfaction, social and emotional development, and basic needs, as well as coping strategies, support and maintain teachers in the educational system.

Stress can sometimes have an effect that creates changes physically. The changes can be obesity, heart disease, or depression. Selye (1956), refers to these changes as a biological syndrome that brings about biological changes. Factors such as these and coping strategies are actions that impact stress. Erikson's (1958) theory of psychosocial development encourages the belief that changes in behavior belong to a social learning theory that emphasizes individual behavior. The behavior encountered can be due to past experiences or learned from others. The teacher participants reported findings that indicated stress has a biological impact. Biological impacts include high blood pressure, insomnia, decreased productivity at work, and irritating headaches, which can affect teachers in a variety of ways. Coping based on a social learning

theory can be managed through learned social interactions with others be it through mentoring or support. Social support can be defined as support that is accessible to an individual through social ties to others. This idea of social support is what Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is based on. Understanding how stress affects teachers and influences their coping strategies can create both positive and negative outcomes.

Vygotsky's theory is that people learn from one another through observation, modeling, and imitation. It combines attention and motivation in learning from others. Often in stressful situations, it is helpful to engage in activities that will enable the person to focus attention on other things and to think through the things that brought on the stress in order to reduce its effects. Participants discussed mentoring with other teachers and talking with co-workers in professional learning communities. Observing others can help in arriving at a solution to reduce the effects of stress, which relates to Bandura's theory that people can learn from others and engage in activities that focus attention away from stress.

Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further research were drawn from the findings, limitations, and implications of the study. The recommendations came in forms of expansion of the sample size, inclusion of other schools and school districts, observations, and interviews over the span of a year, and expansion of the sample of novice teachers interviewed and their observation from the beginning progressing to their tenure status.

This study's finding was limited to a small sampling size of eight participants. The topic should be explored on a wider scale to lend itself to more feedback that might bring extended insight into the stressors and coping strategies teachers encounter. This is not to say that the information issued and shared during the study was not valuable. This is to note that with a larger

sampling, more information can be provided concerning teacher stress and coping strategies. Increasing the number of participants to include more teachers in the kindergarten through sixth-grade level might help to validate the views of the teachers in the effort to understanding teacher stress and how they cope.

Another recommendation for further study will be to expand the research to other districts. This study addressed the effects of teacher stress in a specific rural Alabama school district. There are several areas of inquiry that remain to be addressed. First, further research should attempt to make comparisons between rural and urban areas to investigate whether the effects of stress influencing teachers are consistent with the finding of this study. Second, if further research is conducted, involving a variety of case study designs is required. While this case study only included teachers in the K–6 area, further research could study teachers in the classroom setting of middle and high schools. By doing so, the study might find links between the elementary, middle, and high school teachers' effects of stress and coping strategies.

How teachers are affected by stress at the beginning of the year might not be the same as the end of the year. Conducting research from the beginning of the year to the end is recommended. This can help identify the similarities and differences in how stress affects teachers as it might change during the year.

Another recommendation is to observe elementary and secondary teachers within the district to identify a consistent pattern among teachers within the same district. Some issues might expand outside the elementary school setting. Identifying system-wide issues might improve district stability. As a researcher, it might be beneficial to provide incentives to help motivate more teachers to participate. The recommendation is to recreate this study on a larger scale by investigating teachers over several districts. Extending the interview time, whether they

are face-to-face or via phone conference, or by conducting several full-day observations to see how teachers maintain or cope with stressors throughout the day as it relates to biological changes, noting the patterns, factors, and techniques could also benefit the study.

Participants within this study, especially novice teachers, should be interviewed three to five years from now once they have received tenure status, to see if their perceptions have changed. As teachers gain more knowledge and understanding with experience, ideas might evolve. With the changing requirements for teaching and the continuous changes in curriculum and accountability, it could be interesting to examine if these teachers' feelings have remained the same or have evolved positively or negatively.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how teachers are affected by stress and the coping mechanisms they adopted in a rural Alabama school district. This study focused on the qualities of coping mechanisms and their effectiveness as well as how stress affects both novice and experienced teachers. Underscored throughout the study is the need for effective stress management skills, professional development geared towards developing a stress model, and creating a positive school culture. Moreover, the researcher sought to identify any significant differences between the frequency of stressors in terms of the experience and coping mechanisms utilized by novice and experienced teachers.

Coping strategies were examined to determine how stress is dealt with. The data revealed differences in the coping mechanism utilized and the effectiveness of the same. Most of the teachers identified exercise, meditation, and getting away as one of the most frequently utilized strategies; exercise was most effective for both novice and experienced teachers. Teacher participants reported mentoring or communication with fellow co-workers, helpful in managing

occupational stress. Another concern was the need for a supportive administration. There was minimal support from the central office and principals regarding stress. Professional development was mentioned by teachers as one of the strategies in place to help them develop coping skills to manage occupational stress. Other themes that were identified by one or more participants is the need for wellness programs. The study suggested that exercise is the most frequently used coping strategy and the most effective, yet this district does not have wellness programs in place.

The study's findings raise awareness for the eight participants that stress is associated with emotional physical, social, and mental effects. Support for these teacher participants is critical in the accountability standards enacted by our state and federal policy-makers. Effective stress management programs should be in place to assist teachers, especially our novice teachers, as they begin to create and sustain learning communities. There is a need for improvement in supporting teachers with occupational stressors. Current district personnel and policy-makers must not ignore this issue. Our teachers must be supported and encouraged as they grow into educational leaders of the future.

The teaching profession is stressful. Teaching is not easy and can leave a teacher feeling stressed, overwhelmed, and with a sense of ineffectiveness if not managed. Based on the interviews conducted and surveys completed, most of the interviewed teachers suffer from some type of stress in the form of emotional, physical, or mental factors. The teachers agreed that daily activities, duties of the job, student interaction, parent connections, and lack of administrative support creates stress and often lead to overwhelming challenges that elevate and increases the stress. The participants recognized that coping helps ease the negative effects of stress. Stress management techniques such as talking to coworkers and reflecting should be implemented.

Programs can be put into place as they will aid the management of stress. While individual coping matters, sustainable success is not plausible without an inclusive school-wide commitment to creating a positive and productive school climate for staff members. Researchers must understand the causes of stress for teachers and realize the impact of stress on having realistic expectations of coping.

It is not enough for teachers to be informed of the effects of stress or to discuss coping strategies without the knowledge of what caused the stress. Extensive involvement in the academic life of a teacher is much more than the initial effects of stress. If a school district is to have well-rounded teachers, the individual as a whole must be looked after and provided for in all phases of academic life. Prolonged exposure to stressors while receiving little to no relief might leave teachers susceptible to suffering from high levels of stress, which can affect them emotionally, physically, and mentally. Moreover, other breakdowns in life might occur, including the loss of excellent educators as they experience deficiencies in their emotional resources while the demands for their job increases. Stress can be like an iceberg in water; you see what is on the surface; however, what lies beneath can be shocking. If you look deeper than the surface of stress, you can see the many levels of stress that lead to the effects of stress and then be able to find the best way to cope with it. The most critical element of dealing with stress is knowing how to cope effectively with it, which further leads to personal accomplishments and the need to relieve oneself from stress.

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Appendix A: Qualtrics Survey Questions

Q1: Have you ever experienced work-related stress?

- Yes
- No

Q2: Have you ever taken time off because of stress?

- Yes
- No

Q3: Is stress more prevalent during certain times of the year?

- Yes
- Sometimes
- No

Q4: When is stress more likely to occur?

- Beginning of the year
- Middle of the year
- End of the year

Q5: Do you sometimes take the stress of the job home?

- Yes
- Sometimes
- No

Q6: How would you rate your stress?

- Mild
- Moderate
- Severe

Q7: How often do you find your work stressful?

- Often
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never

Q8: Do you have a way that you cope with stress?

- Yes
- No

Q9: What negative effects caused by stress do you experience? (Check all that apply)

- Headache
- Irritability
- Difficulty sleeping
- Frustration
- Distance from family and friends
- Distance from co-workers

Q10: What actions do you take to cope with or prevent your stress or anxiety? (Check all that apply)

- Exercise
- Time away
- Seek support from family or friends
- Pray or meditate
- Avoid the situation
- Do nothing
- Other/Explain

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How long have you worked in this profession?
2. Explain what stress means to you?
3. Do you feel stressed at work? How often?
4. What do you find to be the most stressful about the job?
5. When do you find yourself most stressed? Explain.
6. Is teacher stress different from general stress? Explain.
7. What triggers the stress and why?
8. How does stress affect you? Example: headaches, frustration, etc.
9. When stressed, what do you do?
10. Have you ever thought about doing something else other than education?
11. What do you think can be done to reduce workplace stress?
12. Do you perceive any negative effects from the stress you experience?
13. What strategies have you learned over your years of teaching that better help you handle stress?
14. How do you cope with stress at home and at school?
15. Is there anything further you would like to add or discuss?

Appendix C: CU IRB Approval



DATE: April 3, 2019
TO: Jennifer Ramsey Tolliver
FROM: Concordia University–Portland IRB (CU IRB)
PROJECT TITLE: [1411688-1] Teacher Stress and Coping
REFERENCE #: EDD-20180123-Jimenez-Tolliver
SUBMISSION TYPE: Continuing Review/Progress Report

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: April 3, 2019
EXPIRATION DATE: April 13, 2020
REVIEW TYPE: Administrative Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The Concordia University–Portland IRB (CU IRB) has APPROVED your submission.

This submission has received Administrative Review based on the applicable federal regulations.

Please refer to your original approval letter for this project; your role and responsibilities remain the same. The new expiration date is April 13, 2020. Your research records, kept privately and under lock-and-key (and/or password protection) will have to be kept for 3 years after the date in which you close out your project. Feel free to send your close out request forms as soon as you are done with research activities and analysis.

If you have any questions, please contact Amon Johnson at [redacted]. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Concordia University–Portland IRB (CU IRB)'s records. April 3, 2019

Appendix D: Initial Theme from Stress and Coping Interview

Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6	Teacher 7	Teacher 8
Too much paperwork	Lack of parent support	Lack of support (parents, students, administration)	Tired	Headaches	Emotionally tired	Lack of appreciation	Keep to myself
Parents do not help students at home	Disruptive students	Inappropriate behavior	Cranky	Tiredness Sleepless nights	Physically drained	Body aches	Exercise
Strong lack of support from parents	Extra required work	Frustration	Find something that makes me laugh	Lack of Parent support	Paperwork	Headaches	Disorganization
Classroom expectations	Frustration	Anxiety	Student behavior	Isolation	Overwhelmed	Irritation	Changes to the schedule
Irritation	Overwhelmed	Irritability	Classroom interruptions	Students lack motivation	Disrespectful children	Sleep problems	Concentrate
Crying	Agitated	No Control		Meditate / go to my quiet place	Stop and reflect	No parent helps	
Sleep deprived	Interferes with instruction	Headaches		Counseling	Vent to other people	Student learning needs	
Dizziness	Worry	Sleeplessness			Find something I like to do after work	Extra assignments outside of regular teacher duties	
High blood pressure	Accountability factors	Body aches			Relax	Heart racing	
Prayer	Migraines	Relaxation like hot baths				Talk to family	
Venting to friends outside of the profession	Reading and working out	Taking deep breathes				Write in a journal	
Hard to motivate myself	Mental overload	Counting to ten				Medicine	
		Accountability					
		Depression					
		Stress ball					

Appendix D: Initial Theme from Stress and Coping Interview (Continued)

Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6	Teacher 7	Teacher 8
Need for teacher support		Mentoring					
Organization							
Feelings of being overwhelmed							

Appendix E: Consent Form

Concordia University–Portland Institutional Review Board
Approved: April 16, 2018; will Expire: April 13, 2019

Research Study Title: Teacher Stress and coping
Principal Investigator: Jennifer Ramsey Tolliver
Research Institution: Concordia University–Portland
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Mark Jimenez

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this survey is to partially gain a perception of how teachers deal with stress and what the effects of teacher stress are from the perspective of the teacher. We expect approximately 7 to 10 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on April 16th, 2018 and end enrollment on April 23rd, 2018. To be in the study, you will complete a self-evaluation on stress. Once the self-survey is complete, volunteers will participate in an interview, where questions will be asked about work-related stress and coping strategies for dealing with that stress. Doing these things should take less than one to two hours of your time.

Risks:

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, I will protect your information. I, Jennifer Ramsey Tolliver, the principal investigator, will record the interviews. The recording will be transcribed by me. As soon as the transcript is checked for accuracy and the transcription is completed, the recording will be deleted. Any data you provide will be coded so people who are not the investigator cannot link your information to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption on my password protected computer locked inside the cabinet in my office. The recording will be deleted as soon as possible and all other documents will be kept secure for three years. After three years those documents will then be destroyed.

Benefits:

Information you provide will help in completing the research while gaining an understanding of how stress affects teachers, what stress factors exist, and how teachers cope. You could benefit this by understanding what stress factors affect you and how well you cope under stressful conditions.

Confidentiality:

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Jennifer Ramsey Tolliver at email [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

Participant Name _____ Date _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator Name _____ Date _____

Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator: Jennifer Ramsey Tolliver; email: [redacted]
c/o: Professor Dr. Mark Jimenez;
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221

Appendix F: Debriefing Form

Thank you for participating in the study of teacher stress and coping! I hope you enjoyed the experience. This form provides background about my research to help you learn more about why I am doing this study. Please feel free to ask any questions or to comment on any aspect of the study.

You have just participated in a research study conducted by Jennifer Ramsey Tolliver, [email redacted]. The information within this study is important because teacher work-related stress can affect the success of a school. By knowing how stress affects you as a teacher can help in steps toward coping for sustainability.

You were told that the purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how stress affects teachers and how teachers cope. This is the only purpose behind conducting this research. There are no secretive aspects behind this study and there are no hidden agendas or deception involved.

As you know, your participation in this study is voluntary. If you so wish, you may withdraw after reading this debriefing form, at which point all records of your participation will be destroyed. You will not be penalized if you withdraw.

Please return this debriefing form to me, the principal investigator. A copy of this debriefing will be provided to you for your record. Contact information for the researcher and the CU-IRB is on your copy of the consent form, which you may keep for your records as well.

If you have questions now about the research, please ask. If you have questions later, please e-mail me, Jennifer Ramsey Tolliver at [redacted]. If, as a result of your participation in this study, you experienced any adverse reaction, please contact the Concordia University, Portland IRB at [redacted].

I wish for my information to be used in this study_____

I wish to withdraw my information from this study_____

Participant's Signature

Date

Principal Investigator's Signature

Date

Appendix G: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy.

This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association.

DocuSigned by:
Jennifer Ramsey Tolliver

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Digital Signature

Jennifer Ramsey Tolliver

Name (Typed)

August 6th, 2019

Date