



Understanding Teacher Stress in Rural Ghana: A Study of the Causes and Manifestations Among Basic School Teachers in the Asikuma Odoben Brakwa District

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Abstract

This study explored the causes and manifestations of teacher stress among basic school teachers in the Asikuma Odoben Brakwa District, a rural setting in Ghana's Central Region. Using a cross-sectional mixed-methods approach, the research collected quantitative data from 237 teachers through structured questionnaires and qualitative data from six purposively selected teachers via in-depth interviews. The findings revealed that major sources of stress included lack of teaching and learning materials, student indiscipline, large class sizes, inadequate administrative support, and poorly defined discipline policies. Manifestations of stress were observed in the form of fatigue, headaches, emotional exhaustion, irritability, and reduced motivation. The qualitative narratives further highlighted how institutional conditions, rather than personal limitations, were the main stress triggers. The study concludes that teacher stress in rural Ghana is systemic and widespread, driven by work-related pressures and environmental constraints. It recommends targeted interventions such as improved resource provision, administrative responsiveness, and teacher wellness programmes to mitigate stress and enhance teacher well-being.

Keywords: teacher stress, rural education, basic schools, stress causes, stress symptoms, Ghana



Introduction

Teacher stress has emerged as a significant issue in educational discourse, particularly in developing countries where teachers often operate under challenging working conditions. In Ghana, the situation is more pronounced in rural areas where schools are frequently under-resourced and teachers face substantial professional and logistical barriers. These conditions not only affect the physical and emotional health of teachers but also have implications for their job satisfaction, performance, and long-term commitment to the teaching profession.

Basic education forms the foundation of Ghana's formal education system. Teachers at this level are expected to perform critical functions such as lesson preparation, classroom management, student engagement, and assessment. However, when these responsibilities are carried out in environments marked by high stress, the quality of teaching and learning is inevitably compromised. Stress can lead to absenteeism, burnout, reduced motivation, and even premature exit from the profession. According to Kyriacou (2001), teacher stress arises when educators perceive a mismatch between the demands placed on them and the resources available to meet those demands.

Although the issue of teacher stress has gained attention in global literature, there is limited empirical data specific to the Ghanaian context, especially in rural districts. Most existing studies focus on urban schools or examine broader issues of teacher retention and motivation. This

study seeks to fill that gap by focusing on the lived experiences of basic school teachers in the Asikuma Odoben Brakwa District of the Central Region of Ghana. The district is largely rural and presents a context where teacher stress is likely to be shaped by resource scarcity, administrative inefficiencies, and community-related challenges.

The study aims to identify the key sources of stress and describe how stress manifests in the lives of teachers. By using both quantitative and qualitative data, it provides a nuanced understanding of the stress landscape faced by rural educators. The findings are intended to inform education stakeholders and policymakers about the structural and psychosocial pressures confronting teachers and to suggest appropriate interventions that prioritize teacher well-being and sustainability within the profession.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, specifically an explanatory sequential design, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the causes and manifestations of teacher stress. This design was deemed appropriate as it allowed the researcher to use quantitative findings to identify patterns and trends, and qualitative data to provide deeper insight into those findings.



Research Setting and Population

The study was conducted in the Asikuma Odoben Brakwa District of the Central Region of Ghana, a predominantly rural area characterized by limited infrastructure and social amenities. The target population consisted of basic school teachers (i.e., Junior High School teachers) in the district.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A total of 237 teachers participated in the quantitative phase of the study. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across gender and school types. For the qualitative phase, six teachers (three males and three females) were purposively selected based on their responses in the questionnaire, teaching experience, and willingness to participate in interviews.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using two instruments:

- **Questionnaire:** A structured, closed-ended questionnaire was administered to the 237 teachers. It covered items related to demographic characteristics, causes of stress (e.g., workload, lack of resources, student behavior), and observable manifestations of stress (e.g., anxiety, absenteeism, fatigue).
- **Interview Guide:** A semi-structured interview guide was

used to conduct in-depth interviews with six selected teachers. The guide explored teachers' personal experiences with stress, how it manifests in their daily lives, and contextual factors that contribute to their stress levels.

Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was subjected to expert review to ensure **content validity**, and a **pilot test** was conducted among 20 teachers outside the study area to assess clarity and reliability. The reliability coefficient obtained was **Cronbach's alpha = 0.78**, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) to identify the most prevalent stressors and their intensity. For qualitative data, a thematic analysis approach was used. Interview transcripts were coded, and emergent themes related to stress causes and manifestations were identified and categorized.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Education, Winneba. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process.



Results

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 237)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	159	67.1
	Female	78	32.9
Educational Qualification	Diploma	108	45.6
	Bachelor's Degree	91	38.4
	Postgraduate	38	16.0
Teaching Experience (Years)	1–5	59	24.9
	6–10	102	43.0
	11–15	45	19.0
	16 and above	31	13.1

Most respondents were male and had 6–10 years of teaching experience, with a substantial portion holding diploma or bachelor's qualifications. This suggests a moderately experienced and somewhat gender-imbalanced workforce.

Table 2: Causes of Stress Among Teachers (N = 237)

Causes of Stress	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of teaching and learning resources	182	76.8
Poorly defined discipline policy	170	71.7
Student indiscipline	160	67.5
Large class size	148	62.4



Heavy workload	142	59.9
Frequent changes in educational policy	130	54.9
Poor accommodation and social support	114	48.1
Pressure from parents	92	38.8

Structural factors such as lack of resources, student indiscipline, and large class sizes dominate the stress landscape. This points to systemic challenges rather than personal shortcomings as the root causes of stress.

Table 3: Manifestations of Stress (N = 237)

Manifestation of Stress	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Headaches	172	72.6
Fatigue and loss of energy	158	66.7
Frustration and irritability	150	63.3
Sleep disturbances (insomnia)	139	58.6
Anxiety	128	54.0
Frequent absenteeism	110	46.4
Poor concentration in class	102	43.0
Joint and muscular pain	91	38.4

Stress manifests primarily in physical and emotional symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, and irritability. These signs of burnout can directly affect teacher effectiveness and classroom climate.

Qualitative Results: Themes from Teacher Interviews

Interviews with six purposively selected teachers revealed deeper insights into the lived experiences of stress. Three major themes emerged:



Theme 1: Inadequate Teaching Resources and Overcrowded Classrooms

“Sometimes I have to improvise almost everything... Even chalk is a problem. And imagine teaching over 40 children alone” (*Male Teacher, 7 years experience*).

Interpretation: Teachers perceive the lack of instructional materials and large class sizes as major stressors. These issues lead to frustration and feelings of helplessness in delivering effective lessons.

Theme 2: Emotional Toll and Physical Fatigue

“There are days I go home so tired I can’t even talk. The stress shows in my body—headaches, joint pain, sometimes I can’t sleep.” (*Female Teacher, 10 years experience*).

Interpretation: Teachers reported somatic and psychological stress symptoms, echoing the quantitative findings. The convergence across data sets reinforces the validity of these manifestations.

Theme 3: Lack of Support from Administration and Community

“No one really checks on us. Parents blame us, heads don’t help, and we are left to struggle.” (*Male Teacher, 12 years experience*).

Interpretation: A recurring sentiment was the absence of supportive systems. This lack of encouragement or empathy from both school leadership and the community intensifies stress and demoralizes teachers.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings validate and expand on the quantitative data. While the questionnaire identified structural and personal stressors, interviews revealed how these stressors emotionally and physically burden teachers in daily practice. Teachers not only identified what stresses them but vividly described how these stressors affect their health, job satisfaction, and commitment to teaching.

Discussion

This study explored the causes and manifestations of stress among basic school teachers in the Asikuma Odoben Brakwa District. The findings provide valuable insight into the difficult teaching conditions in rural Ghana, which contribute significantly to teacher stress. The results indicate that teacher stress is not simply a matter of individual weakness but is often shaped by broader systemic and institutional factors.

The quantitative data showed that the most commonly reported causes of stress were lack of teaching and learning materials, poorly defined school discipline policies, student indiscipline, and large class sizes. These results are consistent with findings by Kyriacou (2001), who described teacher stress as the experience of unpleasant emotions such as anxiety and frustration that arise when teachers perceive that their work demands exceed their coping resources.



Similarly, Agyemang (2013) argued that stress among Ghanaian teachers is largely driven by conditions that are beyond the teachers' control, including policy changes, poor infrastructure, and lack of support from school administration.

The qualitative findings enriched the study by offering real-life accounts from teachers. Participants spoke of physical symptoms such as frequent headaches and fatigue, as well as emotional symptoms like frustration and helplessness. These manifestations align with the views of Akyeampong and Stephens (2002), who observed that stress affects not only the mental health of teachers but also their classroom performance and ability to relate to students effectively. In this study, some teachers also described how stress disrupted their sleep and affected their concentration in class, which further supports the findings of Mkumbo (2014), who noted that unaddressed stress among teachers in African contexts often leads to burnout and absenteeism.

The study also aligns with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress, which posits that individuals experience stress when they perceive that the demands placed on them exceed their ability to manage those demands. Teachers in this study expressed similar feelings, particularly when faced with overcrowded classrooms and unrealistic workload expectations. The lack of support from both school leadership and community stakeholders worsened their stress, leading to emotional exhaustion. This resonates with the findings of Yeboah and Agyenim-Boateng (2017),

who reported that institutional neglect is a major factor in the rising levels of teacher demotivation in Ghana.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest a pressing need for the Ghana Education Service (GES) and Ministry of Education to prioritise the welfare of teachers, particularly those working in rural and underserved areas. There should be consistent provision of teaching materials, improvement in classroom infrastructure, and implementation of clearly defined disciplinary policies. In addition, school administrators should receive training on how to identify early signs of teacher stress and offer the necessary support. As noted by Mensah and Owusu (2021), improving teacher working conditions can have a positive effect on motivation, retention, and educational outcomes.

Despite the contributions of this study, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The study was conducted in only one district, and therefore the findings may not be generalised to other contexts in Ghana. Also, the number of participants in the qualitative phase was limited, which may not capture the full range of teacher experiences. Furthermore, reliance on self-reported data raises the possibility of response bias, as some participants may have underreported or exaggerated their experiences.

Nevertheless, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data strengthens the credibility of the findings. The study adds to the growing literature on teacher stress in sub-Saharan Africa and highlights the



importance of addressing stress not only as an individual issue but also as a policy and institutional concern.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that stress among basic school teachers in the Asikuma Odoben Brakwa District is largely influenced by structural and institutional challenges such as lack of teaching resources, indiscipline among students, large class sizes, and insufficient administrative support. These stressors result in a range of physical and emotional manifestations that negatively affect teacher performance and well-being.

Teachers in this context are working under difficult conditions that limit their effectiveness and reduce their motivation. Addressing these challenges requires deliberate policy action from the Ghana Education Service and other stakeholders in the education sector. Measures such as improved resource provision, smaller class sizes, professional development in stress management, and administrative support systems can significantly reduce stress and improve teacher morale.

Ultimately, supporting teachers to manage and overcome stress is not only beneficial to their personal health but also essential for improving the quality of education in rural Ghanaian schools.

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