

# Life-Affirming Activities of Teachers: The Role of Stress and Mindfulness In The Teaching Profession

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*Abstract* — This study validated the need for a newer approach to stress relief or management among teachers riddled with exacting and hurried challenges. Extent of exposure to stress inducing experiences was measured. Involvement or participation of 65 teachers from six (6) public elementary schools of Matanao II District of Davao del Sur in meditation or mindfulness activities was also analyzed along with extent in pursuing life affirming activities of teachers. These respondents were chosen through random sampling. Teachers experience stress sometimes. When they do, these stresses are focused on work-related concerns having to do with lesson preparation, much work on their hands, big classes, day's pace is too short, too much administrative paperwork and shortchanging of personal priorities. Teachers experience the least stress involving professional investment. Teachers are not in the habit of integrating mindful approach in their day-to-day interactions in school. They are not familiar with the concept of mindfulness being not actually aware of the benefits of a mindful approach to daily interactions; therefore, habits have not been formed or developed where mindfulness as a state of the mind is practiced reducing stress. Teachers are seldom engrossed in life-affirming activities especially regarding fun-related activities; they are restricted in their creative impulses and find it difficult to engage in meditation or quiet time.

*Keywords* — *Elementary public-school teachers, stress, stressful conditions, mindfulness approach, life-affirming activities*

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## I. Introduction

Over the years, many studies on stress in the teaching profession have been conducted to examine coping strategies employed by teachers and the implementation of an effective stress management program. These studies have involved respondents from the public and private school sectors in all levels of education with focus on measuring the efficacy of coping strategies. New studies have revealed that advancement in science and technology necessitated for new coping strategies to be explored. These new coping strategies make use of mindfulness issues, meditation, life affirming activities, and positive patches among others.

This study involves an examination of the stress levels experiences of public-school teachers as they are confronted with various changes and challenges brought about by reforms, innovations, and requirements. Teachers' meditation and life affirming activities will also be

looked into as these two coping strategies have been recently brought forward as efficacious and impacting in the alleviation of stressful factors.

While some teachers may handle stress and recharge by enrolling in zumba classes, going salsa dancing, training for marathons, videoke sessions or gardening at weekends, a new study by researchers at the University of California, San Francisco suggests a novel approach for those looking to find psychological relief from stress: mindfulness training.

The University of California in San Francisco (UCSF) study, published in the April 2013 issue of the journal *Emotion*, found that teachers who participated in an eight-week intensive mindfulness course were less stressed, [anxious](#), and depressed. What's more, after beginning to meditate, the teachers were also more compassionate and empathetic to others.

Life affirming activities are an effective way of confirming our self-worth, self-value and self-esteem. The normal processes of life place experiences that can leave people, teachers included, feeling bitter, powerless, and depressed. To counteract, and to prepare for these experiences, we need to consciously and directly create and maintain activities and relationships that feed the inner self with encouragement, validation, support, and joy. By making some good decisions in our personal and professional lives, we can promote a healthy emotional environment that fosters good emotional nutrition and good emotional health.

This study will be conducted to validate the need for a newer approach to stress relief or management in a profession that is riddled with exacting and hurried challenges. Extent of exposure to stress inducing experiences will be measured. Involvement or participation in meditation or mindfulness activities will be analyzed along with extent in pursuing life affirming activities of teachers.

Many factors and variables affecting teacher stress were researched and reported to be problems with discipline, classroom management and the lack of parental involvement with their children's education (Slaybaugh, Evans, & Byrd, 2019). Also factors like the lack of administrative support and in particular the isolation of beginning teachers came out to be the most frequent complaints (McCormick, 2019). Studies of occupational stress indicated that workload and communication were significant causes of teacher stress with anticipation, worry and helplessness emerging as psychological factors influencing stress (Wilson, 2019) both in the UK and globally.

The issue of teacher-child relations is an important aspect of how stress occurs in teaching. Unfortunately, not all students present at school feel they are there to learn. There seem to be students whose main purpose is the disruption of classes to the annoyance of other students and teachers. Violent and disruptive pupil behavior impacts negatively on teachers at all levels damaging their self-confidence both personally and professionally and seems to be a growing stressor for teachers, in some cases on a daily basis.

In a number of studies, change itself is implicated in teacher stress: it can be a problem or challenge. Over a decade ago Travers and Cooper (2019) reported that the five top sources of job pressure were all problematic changes. These included lack of support from central government, constant changes within the profession, lack of information as to how changes are to be implemented, diminishing social respect for teaching, and the move towards a national curriculum.

Teachers' stress may have an impact on teachers as individuals, on the schools in which they work and on the pupils they teach. It is also estimated to have an economic impact on the education system in terms of lost teaching time and additional costs of replacement teachers. Unfortunately, it is difficult to quantify these costs because reported effects may actually be strategies to help teachers cope and it would be unsafe to assume that those who report no symptoms are necessarily stress free (Travers & Cooper, 2019).

#### *Mindfulness Approach to Reduce Stress*

An approach to stress reduction that has gained increasing recognition is mindfulness training to target attention and emotion processing (Bishop, Lau, Shapiro, Carlson, Anderson, Carmody & Devins, 2019). Used across a variety of settings, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction is a widely known form of mindfulness training that has been shown to reduce stress, depression, and anxiety (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2019; Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2020). These mental health concerns are frequently reported among educators (Kyriacou, 2021). Therefore, teachers may derive benefit from learning and practicing mindfulness techniques. However, given considerable workload demands, often juggled with family responsibilities, teachers may not seek out such training from a health care provider. Making training readily accessible and specifically relevant to educators outside of a strictly mental health care framework are important considerations.

Mindfulness is described as paying attention in the present moment, on purpose, and without judgment. Mindfulness, which is derived from centuries-old meditative traditions and taught in a secular way, has been linked to heightened activation in brain regions responsible for regulating attention and positive affective states including empathy and other prosocial emotions (Davidson, Kabat-Zinn, Schumacher, Rosenkraz, Muller, Santorelli & Sheridan., 2019; Lutz, Greischar, Rawlings, Ricard, & Davidson, 2019; Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2019). Emotions, attention, and introspection are ongoing processes that may be understood and studied as skills that can be trained, similar to other human skills like music, mathematics, or sports (Davidson & McEwen, 2022). Use of MBSR in the workplace has shown that 8 weeks of training for employees of a biomedical company resulted in significantly increased relative left-sided anterior activation of the brain, a pattern that is associated with positive affect and well-being (Urry, Nitschke, Dolski, Jackson, Dalton, Mueller & Davidson, 2020). The intervention group also showed more robust immune response to an influenza vaccine and significantly decreased self-reports of anxiety (Davidson et al., 2019).

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### *Applications of Mindfulness for Teachers*

Mindfulness has been proposed as a form of professional development to manage the demands of teaching and several programs exist that offer this type of training; however, there is a need for more rigorous empirical research in this area (Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2022). The applications of mindfulness for classroom teachers are just beginning to be explored, with relatively few studies investigating the effects of mindfulness training for teachers. There is no consensus yet on the recommended format for such training. Investigators have used different approaches to mindfulness training, varying in terms of the breadth and types of practices taught (content of lessons), length of sessions, and overall duration of training. In the qualitative literature, Napoli (2019) conducted a study with three teachers who reported improved ability to manage conflict and anxiety and improved productivity in the classroom subsequent to mindfulness training.

One of the few empirical studies in the literature using a sample of classroom teachers employed a 5-week “standardized meditation” training that included weekly classes and a recommended dose of two daily 20-min home and school practice sessions (Anderson, Levinson, Barker, & Kiewra, 2019). The standardized meditation training included mantra, observing breath, and group practice. The sample consisted of elementary, middle, and high-school teachers randomly assigned to an intervention ( $n=45$ ) or control group ( $n=46$ ). Effects of training were assessed at pre-, post-, and 1-month follow-up on measures of anxiety, burnout, and stress. Results showed improvements in state and trait anxiety, less emotional exhaustion (a facet of burnout), and reduced stress at posttest, and less depersonalization (another facet of burnout) at 1-month follow-up. Strengths of this study were the inclusion of a control group and 1-month follow-up assessment. Limitations were relying only on self-report measures, a relatively short training period, and no measurement of mindfulness (as a purported key ingredient for change).

### *Life affirming Activities*

Paul Kurtz (2019) in his book, *Affirmations: Creative and Joyful Exuberance*, contends that life has many ups and downs but stressed that it is how we handle these that makes life worth living. He continues to write that the mature person has developed a reflective attitude that enables him or her to place these misadventures and setbacks, painful as they may be, in a broader context. He or she can compensate for the shortcomings of life by pointing to the times that he or she has overcome adversity; and he or she still finds life worth living because of poetry and profundity, laughter and delight, romance and love, discovery and ingenuity, enlightenment and success, and the times that he persevered and prevailed. If a person’s career and life is like a work of art, then we need to appreciate its full collage, its contrasts and highlights, tones and shades, colors, and forms. Marshaling some stoicism in periods of anxiety, hopefully a person will find that the good that one experiences can outbalance the bad, the positive the negative, and that optimism can master pessimism.

The affirmative person may sum up his or her life and declare that, after all is said and done, it was worth living, that though one may have some regrets for what one could have done but did not, or for what might have been but was not, all told it was good. And, ah, yes! Although there were periods of pain and sorrow, these were balanced by those of pleasure and joy. What an adventure it was—far better to have lived and experienced than not to have lived at all!

The meaning of life is not to be found in a secret formula discovered by ancient prophets or modern gurus, who withdraw from living to seek quiet contemplation and release. Life has no meaning per se; it does, however, present us with innumerable opportunities, which we can either squander and retreat from in fear or seize with exuberance.

The so-called secret of life is an open scenario that can be deciphered by everyone. It is found in the experiences of living: the delights of a fine banquet, the strenuous exertion of hard work, the poignant melodies of a symphony, the appreciation of an altruistic deed, the excitement of an embrace of someone you love, the elegance of a mathematical proof, the invigorating adventure of a mountain climb, the satisfaction of quiet relaxation, the lusty singing of an anthem, the vigorous cheering in a sports contest, the reading of a delicate sonnet, the joys of parenthood, the pleasures of friendship, the quiet gratification of serving our fellow human beings—all of these activities and more.

The meaning of life is tied up intimately with our plans and projects, the goals we set for ourselves, and our dreams and the successful achievement of them. We create our own conscious meanings; we invest the cultural and natural worlds with our own interpretations. We discover, impose upon, and add to nature.

The College of Occupational Therapists (2020) forwarded the philosophy that man's occupation, whatever it is, can be positively contributing to our mindset if properly viewed within the mirror of life and its importance.

People's occupations enable them to survive (eg. feed themselves, earn money, keep the domestic environment clean, manage personal hygiene); interact with others in ways that give them a satisfactory role, contribute to social identity, self-validation etc. (eg. be a good student, look after the children, do a good job at work, be a good grandparent); and find pleasure and meaning in activity for its own sake (eg. surfing, gardening, drinking, playing computer games).

None of these is mutually exclusive and the range of activities engaged in by an individual will be different according to such factors as age, responsibilities and interests. In the eyes of the world, and in our own eyes, we are largely what we do. If an individual is unable to do any of these activities in a way that is satisfactory and appropriate to her/his time of life, then that person will suffer decreased self-confidence, feelings of isolation, uselessness, depression and anxiety.

This study anchors its exploration on stress among teachers, life affirming and mindfulness activities on the Theory of Stress by Shupe and McGrath (2018) in combination with the concepts of Cummings, Cooper and Warr (2017). Concepts and philosophies on mindfulness and life affirming activities are also presented in this section.

The theory of stress outlined by Shupe and McGrath (2018) describes “a dynamic, adaptive process theory” (Cooper, 2019) which, when focused at the individual level, suggests a complex cycle connected by four processes: the appraisal process (interpreting events); the choice process (the choice of a coping response); the performance process (the coping phase); and the outcome process (the consequences for the individual). Shupe and McGrath go on to outline the complexity of these interconnected processes and the implications this complexity has for researchers in terms of measurement and interpretation. Similarly, Cummings and Cooper (2019) offer a “cybernetic theory” of work stress. The emphasis here is on time, information, and feedback.

These constructs are viewed as essential, and they are regarded as underlying the stress process as it moves from “the detection of strain, through the choice of adjustment processes to cope with the threat situation, and on to the subsequent feedback about coping effects”. Cummings and Cooper also go on to outline the complexity of the process, such as the operational and measurement issues involved as the process moves through its four (detection, choice, adjustment, and affects) phases. At the heart of this theory is the idea that “individuals are active purposive managers of stress, and that knowledge can help them anticipate and manage stress” (Wethington, 2019). The cybernetic approach is further developed and cited by Edwards (2019) through the idea that the goal of “self-regulating systems” is to regulate discrepancies between the individual and the environment. Discrepancies are expressed in terms of a negative feedback loop, and so stress, coping and wellbeing are crucial elements in this self-regulating process.

Warr (2019) explored the way in which work leaves us feeling happy or unhappy. While acknowledging the definitional difficulties surrounding terms like happiness and unhappiness, and the preference at times to use the term well-being, Warr and Clapperton (2020) suggests that happiness should be considered not just in terms of its energizing and tranquil forms, but also in terms of whether it is being used in a contextual (work) sense or even a facet (work component) sense. When exploring work and happiness, Warr (2019) draws attention to the transaction between the person and the environment. When considering the environment, Warr identifies 12 sources of work happiness, but recognizes that there is no correct number of work sources, as these will differ across and within jobs, and will depend also on individual differences. Discussing these work sources, Warr suggests that the best way to think about these different sources is to liken them to vitamins where, in much the same way as vitamins, they are good for the person but only up to a certain level.

Warr (2019) outlined how, like vitamins, moderate levels of these work sources produce happiness, but beyond a certain level there is a “tipping point” (Warr & Clapperton, 2020) where



the demands of some of these work sources reduce happiness and well-being and where, for other work sources, providing more does not produce more happiness as you have already reached as much as you want. The absence of these work sources does, of course, produce unhappiness.

The concept of mindfulness has been developed and expounded primarily by the psychologist, Ellen Langer, although it also has roots in Eastern philosophy. The concept has been adopted by many scholars working in the intercultural field, including William Gudykunst and Stella Ting-Toomey (2019). Ellen Langer has done a lot of wonderful work on the social psychology discipline of mindfulness, but she uses the term in the context of projecting more outwards: seeing things from a broader perspective, open-mindedness, seeing things from the other person's viewpoint. But its perspective is actually taken from a very strong concept in Buddhism – it's one of the three precepts of Buddhism: compassion, mindfulness and wisdom. So it has a very strong Eastern philosophical root. It's quite interesting – rather than projecting outwards, it turns into yourself, to listen to the internal noises and clutter within yourself, and to declutter the arising reaction emotions, and that is a very layered and dialectical process (Canado, 2019).

A theory borne out of the Holocaust, logotherapy was conceived by Viktor Frankl. Frankl's theory holds that there are three capabilities that express mankind's noological (human dimension) possibilities: self-detachment; self-transcendence (as the essence of human existence); and the ability to "spiritually be in touch" (German: geistiges Bei-sein) with something or someone, independent of spatial and time dimensions.

Logotherapy teaches us to transcend our negative belief patterns that inhibit our internal growth. By releasing these chains that bind our mind and spirit, we are free to pursue our deepest desires and achieve satisfaction of life and fulfillment of purpose. Logotherapy guides us to alternate our perceptions in order to view situations differently and to accept and embrace what is beyond our control. By affirming the positive in life, a person transcends its meaning, and a fuller dimension of life is experienced. This is where Logotherapy becomes a useful tool for pursuing life-affirming activities.

## II. Methodology

This study used the descriptive-exploratory design of research where validated measurements were used to explore the efficacy of a newer approach to an existing issue or concern. The design made use of survey instruments to determine the level of stress inducing experiences of teachers along with their mindfulness and life affirming activities. It explored a recent approach to lessen effects of stress in the teaching profession.

The 65 respondents were chosen from six (6) public elementary schools of Matanao II District of Davao del Sur. The six (6) public elementary schools are Sulatorio Elementary School, Manga Central Elementary School, La Suerte Elementary School, Marciano Apiag Elementary School, Langa-an Elementary School, and Cabasagan Elementary School. These respondents were

chosen through random sampling. On the other hand, the size of teaching force, proximity and frequency of academic activities were made as inclusion criteria for the selection of schools. The selected teachers were faced daily with the handling of students coming from marginal and depressed areas, limited school resources and bad transportation. These conditions usually produced stress in the workforce.

Three instruments were used in this study. All these three instruments have been validated and tested for reliability in previous studies.

The Teachers' Stress Inventory (TSI) was adapted from Hasty (2019). Validity was established by having teachers and outside observers simultaneously rate the teachers' stress levels (Fimian, 2020). Regular education teachers were asked to rate their stress levels, as well as having significant others rate the teachers' stress levels. Results indicated stress ratings of teachers and significant others were related for the Total Strength ( $r=.65$ ;  $p=.0001$ ) and the subscale ( $r=.49$  to  $.69$ ;  $p=.0001$ ). Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to determine internal consistency and whole scale reliability at .93 for the combined sample, .92 for special education teachers and .93 for regular education teachers (Fimian, 2020). This demonstrates that the TSI is reliable for whole scale consideration. "In sum, the TSI is a potentially valuable instrument for use in public school settings to assess teacher stress. The manual provides extensive support for its reliability and validity as well as a fair description of the norm group."

The second instrument is the Five Facets Mindfulness Questionnaire-Short Form (FFMQ-SF) which is a shortened version of the FFMQ. It is a self-report questionnaire mindfulness measurement. Mindfulness is the ability to be able to focus on the present moment, in a non-judgmental and accepting manner. The FFMQ-SF was developed and validated in the Netherlands among people with anxiety and mood disorders (Bohlmeijer et al., 2020). It is a shortened version of the FFMQ, developed and validated among Asian students, meditators, and the general population (Baer et al., 20196; Baer et al., 2020).

The third questionnaire is the Life-Affirming Activities Inventory (LAAI) constructed by Mejica (2009). Reliability was done involving 60 members of the HCDC community: faculty, students, employees, and parents. Cronbach's coefficient alpha (.87) was used to establish reliability and the result confirmed its reliability to be used among personnel involved in academic activities.

The gathered data were subjected to statistical treatments which included the following: percentage, ranking, mean, standard deviation, t-test, ANOVA, Pearson r and Likert scales.

To interpret the mean as computed, Likert scales were constructed to analyze the level of stress, the mindfulness and life affirming activities participated or involved in by teachers.

For level of stress, mindfulness activities, and life-affirming activities, likert scales were constructed to assist in the interpretations.



### III. Results and Discussion

#### *Extent of Stress Experienced by Teachers from Their Activities*

Teachers sometimes experience stress in all seven (7) dimensions of stress-inducing activities. Most of the stresses sometimes experienced by teachers are in the work-related concerns (3.45). These work-related concerns involve little time to prepare lessons, too much work to do, classes are too big, day's pace is too short, too much administrative paperwork and shortchanging of personal priorities.

Time-management stresses (3.31) are also sometimes experienced along with fatigue manifestations (3.23), discipline motivation (3.19) and professional distress (3.12).

Of the seven (7) dimensions of stress sometimes experienced by teachers, the least being experienced are those that involve professional investments (3.09). Professional investments consisted of such experiences as airing personal opinions, lacking control over school matters, not intellectually stimulated on the job, and lacking opportunities for professional involvement.

#### *Extent teachers experienced mindfulness activities in their day-to-day interactions*

The result of the survey indicates that teachers only sometimes experience mindfulness activities. All five factors revealed that teachers are not in the habit of integrating mindful approach in their day-to-day interactions in school.

On closer examination, non-reactive actions of teachers obtained a mean of 3.01 which infers that teachers only sometimes allow internal experiences to come and go without having to respond or be caught up in it. This means that teachers only sometimes do the following: observe their feelings without being carried away by their emotions, carry around disturbing thoughts, be calm when having disturbing thoughts, not doing anything when disturbing thoughts occur, and continue to do tasks even with disturbing thoughts.

The rest of the factors such as observing (2.91), acting consciously (2.77), non-judgmental actions (2.68), and describing (2.64) were only sometimes experienced by teachers. Several inferences can be forwarded by these results: teachers are not familiar with the concept of mindfulness; teachers have not actually been aware of the benefits of a mindful approach to daily interactions; and thus, because of these two, habits have not been formed or developed where mindfulness as a state of the mind is practiced reducing stress.

#### *Involvement of Teachers in Life Affirming Activities*

It's quite interesting to note that teachers engaged themselves in challenging activities (2.80), though on an irregular basis, to celebrate life. Two other activities, athletic (2.71) and nurturing (2.53) were also done on an irregular basis. Their responses, however, did not indicate whether these activities were engaged during school days or weekends.

Three types of life-affirming activities, fun (2.30), creative (2.40), and quiet or contemplative (2.43) were rarely done or participated in by teachers. The rare occurrences of doing these activities infer that teachers are seldom engrossed in fun-related activities as enumerated in the survey form. It also means that teachers are restricted in their creative impulses and find it difficult to engage in meditation or quiet time.

*Significant differences in the stress experiences, mindfulness activities and life affirming activities of teachers when analyzed according to their demographic profile*

Significant differences in the three variables of stress experiences, mindfulness activities and life affirming activities were tested at 0.05 level of significance when teachers were analyzed through their educational qualification and length of service.

No significant differences were found in the result of the hypothesis testing. No significant difference was established in the stress experiences, mindfulness and life-affirming activities of teachers when grouped according to educational qualification. The p-values of .643, .871 and .212 provided evidence to the result.

No significant difference was also found in the three variables when teachers were grouped by length of service. The p-values of .211, .395 and .356 attest to the decision which failed to reject the hypothesis.

The result infers that educational qualification and length of service do not differentiate teachers in their stress experiences, mindfulness and life-affirming activities. Teachers generally have the same stress experiences, mindfulness involvement and life affirming activities regardless of their educational qualification and length of service as teachers.

Teachers' stress may have an impact on teachers as individuals, on the schools in which they work and on the pupils they teach. It is also estimated to have an economic impact on the education system in terms of lost teaching time and additional costs of replacement teachers. Unfortunately, it is difficult to quantify these costs because reported effects may actually be strategies to help teachers cope. It is safe to say that unless teachers deliberately choose to engage in mindfulness and life affirming activities, they will continue to suffer from stress.

*Significant Relationship between Variables*

The three variables namely stress experiences, mindfulness activities and life-affirming activities were applied with correlation test to determine the existence of any significant relationships between these variables. Pearson r was used at 0.05 level of confidence. The results revealed that all variables when tested with Pearson r produced significant relationships with each other.

Stress experiences are significantly correlated with mindfulness activities as revealed by the data of  $r=.296$  and the p-value of .020. The result infers that although stressful conditions are

only sometimes experienced by teachers, they still experience stress due to their low or infrequent (sometimes) involvement in situations needing mindful attention.

Stress experiences are also significantly correlated with life-affirming activities as evidenced by the result of  $r=-.498$  and the p-value of  $.000$ . The decision to reject the hypothesis because of the existence of a significant relationship implies that stress conditions sometimes experienced by teachers are brought about by life affirming activities engaged by teachers on an irregular or rare basis. This means that stress experiences increase when there is less (irregular or rare) involvement in life-affirming activities.

Mindfulness activities are also significantly correlated with life-affirming activities as produced by the results of  $r=.153$  and the p-value of  $.234$  which pointed to the rejection of the hypothesis and the establishment of a significant relationship. The findings conjecture that a mindful approach to life contributes to an increase in the engagement of life-affirming activities. This means that being attentive and conscious of what is happening at the present gives additional significance to the celebration of life.

### *Discussion*

Teachers sometimes experience stress in all seven (7) dimensions of stress-inducing activities. Most of the stresses sometimes experienced by teachers are in the work-related concerns (3.45). These work-related concerns involve little time to prepare lessons, too much work to do, classes are too big, day's pace is too short, too much administrative paperwork and shortchanging of personal priorities. Time-management stresses (3.31) are also sometimes experienced along with fatigue manifestations (3.23), discipline motivation (3.19) and professional distress (3.12).

Of the seven (7) dimensions of stress sometimes experienced by teachers, the least being experienced are those that involve professional investments (3.09). Professional investments consisted of such experiences as airing personal opinions, lacking control over school matters, not intellectually stimulated on the job, and lacking opportunities for professional involvement.

The result of the survey indicates that teachers only sometimes experience mindfulness activities. All five factors revealed that teachers are not in the habit of integrating mindful approach in their day-to-day interactions in school. On closer examination, non-reactive actions of teachers obtained a mean of 3.01 which infers that teachers only sometimes allow internal experiences to come and go without having to respond or be caught up in it.

Life affirming activities are engaged either on an irregular or rare basis by teachers. Teachers engaged themselves in challenging activities (2.80), though on an irregular basis, to celebrate life. Athletic (2.71) and nurturing (2.53) activities were also done on an irregular basis along with other three types of life-affirming activities, fun (2.30), creative (2.40), and quiet or contemplative (2.43).

No significant differences were found in the result of the hypothesis testing. The result infers that educational qualification and length of service do not differentiate teachers in their stress experiences, mindfulness, and life-affirming activities. Teachers generally have the same stress experiences, mindfulness involvement and life affirming activities regardless of their educational qualification and length of service as teachers.

Correlation test results revealed that all variables when tested with Pearson  $r$  produced significant relationships with each other. Teachers still experience stress due to their low or infrequent (sometimes) involvement in situations needing mindful attention; when they are less involved in life affirming activities; and a mindful approach contributes to an increase in the engagement of life-affirming activities.

Teachers experience stress sometimes. When they do, these stresses are focused on work-related concerns having to do with lesson preparation, much work on their hands, big classes, day's pace is too short, too much administrative paperwork and shortchanging of personal priorities.

Teachers experience the least stress involving professional investments. Airing personal opinions, lacking control over school matters, being not intellectually stimulated on the job, and lacking opportunities for professional involvement are conditions that bring the least stress to teachers.

Teachers are not in the habit of integrating mindful approach in their day-to-day interactions in school. Teachers are not familiar with the concept of mindfulness; teachers have not actually been aware of the benefits of a mindful approach to daily interactions; and thus, because of these two, habits have not been formed or developed where mindfulness as a state of the mind is practiced reducing stress.

Teachers are seldom engrossed in life-affirming activities especially regarding fun-related activities as enumerated in the survey form. It also means that teachers are restricted in their creative impulses and find it difficult to engage in meditation or quiet time.

Teachers generally have the same extent of stress experiences, involvement in mindfulness situations and engagement in life affirming activities regardless of their educational qualification and length of service as teachers.

Less involvement in situations needing mindful attention and irregular or rare engagement in life affirming activities results in stressful conditions for the teacher in the public school.

A mindful approach without being affected emotionally and cognitively contributes to decrease incidences of stressful conditions which in turn results in a life full of positive affirmations brought by constant celebration of life.

Stress cannot be eradicated. It is part of life. Thus, school administrators can assist teachers in the alleviation of stress through the planning or designing and implementation of activities that would provide a break from everyday stressful activities.

Teachers need to be introduced to the concept and practice of mindfulness training. A series of training sessions can be designed by the principal to familiarize teachers with the practice and the benefits derived from the practice.

Life affirming activities, especially those that involve simple but fun affairs designed to reduce stress and provide a break from the routines of classroom work can be planned and introduced by the school administrators. These could include such programs as a weight reduction contest, a mini-marathon contest, a blood donation program, or a school face-lifting project.

Good, wholesome, and positive interactions among and between school personnel can bring long term benefits for the school. These interactions can be done by strengthening linkages with the home and community and the teachers themselves through the faculty club and the parent-teachers organization.

Further studies by future research can be conducted with focus on specific benefits resulting from the conduct of mindfulness seminars and life affirming activities.

A bigger cluster of respondents involving a wider scope of participation from both public and private schools can be considered for future research to measure effects of stress on classroom work.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Studies have shown that teachers suffer a lot of stress from problems with discipline, classroom management and the lack of parental involvement with their children's education, lack of administrative support, workload and communication, role conflict and ambiguity, time demands, large class enrolment, troublesome or disruptive students (Wilson, 2019; Schonfeld, 2019; Slaybaugh et al, 2019; McCormick, 2019; Dunham, 2019; & Borg, 2019).

The findings of these studies however do not resonate with this study. Teachers in this study experience stress sometimes. Several explanations could be attributed to these findings: the survey took only two weeks to administer, a time when teachers were experiencing a lull in their work; teachers may have only considered their present experiences; and those who report with least stress are not necessarily stress-free (Travers & Cooper, 2019).

One other explanation could be that teachers experience a cyclical low in their stress experience at the time of the survey. As Bell et al (2019) explained, experiences of stress have its ups and downs according to environmental stressors.

Environmental stressors are further explained through the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory which states that “individuals strive to obtain, retain, protect and foster those things that they value” (Hobfoll, 2018). That is, people endeavor to both preserve resources and to accumulate resources in order to better navigate their way through life’s demands and challenges. A “resource” is anything that is important to the person, contributes positively to their well-being and enables them to adjust. In his overview of COR theory and its applications, Hobfoll indicated that 74 different types of resources have been identified through research. Some of these are what he referred to as “personal” resources, whereas others are features of the environment (external resources). Personal resources include attributes such as personal values (e.g., the importance of achievement), personality traits (e.g., internal locus of control, hardiness, dispositional optimism, generalized self-esteem) and other characteristics, including positive affect (Nelson & Simmons, 2017). Environmental resources will vary depending on the kind of environment the person functions in. In a work context, for example, features such as having autonomy in one’s job, the amount (and type) of feedback received on one’s job performance, and the level of rewards obtained for successful job performance, are all illustrations of environmental resources (Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2019). Social support from work colleagues and organizational support for individuals (accommodating their needs) also represent major environmental resources, which can reduce stress and burnout (Halbesleben, 2019), as well as enhancing positive well-being (Luszczynska & Cieslak, 2019).

Used across a variety of settings, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a widely known form of mindfulness training that has been shown to reduce stress, depression, and anxiety (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2019; Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2020). These mental health concerns are frequently reported among educators (Kyriacou, 2019). Therefore, teachers may derive benefit from learning and practicing mindfulness techniques.

Benefits derived from the practice of mindfulness go through a skill-building process just like learning music or sports (Davidson & McEwen, 2022). The results point to the fact that teachers in the public school where this study was conducted are not aware of mindfulness or its training. Training attention enables the deliberate cultivation of positive qualities through specific practices designed to promote empathy and pro-social attitudes. With its roots in yoga and some Eastern meditational practices, mindfulness can be seen by teachers as something exotic, and thus, can only be practiced within the home premises.

This unfamiliarity of connecting it with yoga practices can be resolved by stressing among teachers that the main difference is that it entails observing and noticing the surroundings without reacting to or intentionally altering direct experience in the moment (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2021). Teachers need to know that mindfulness involves a positive approach to noticing body sensations, observing thoughts, and emotions related to stress and practicing self-compassion.

The “sometimes” level of experiencing mindfulness can be increased to a greater frequency among teachers with its integration as a form of professional development to manage the demands



of teaching. Though short in empirical conclusions, the few studies on mindfulness provide evidence to suggest that mindfulness meditation and mindfulness-based treatments are effective at reducing physical and psychological symptom severity as well as improving aspects of positive affect, empathy, spirituality and increasing the use of more adaptive coping strategies (Anderson, Levinson, Barker, & Kiewra, 2019; Gold, Smith, Hopper, Herne, Tasey, & Hulland, 2020; Kemeny, Foltz, Cavanagh, Cullen, Giese-Davis, Jennings & Ekman, 2022).

Laurie Sue Brockway (2019) in her book [\*Rituals for Love and Romance: Attract Your Soulmate with Ceremony and Self-love\*](#) wrote that some put so much focus on taking care of others that they neglect their own needs. And some of them are so accustomed to giving their love away to others that they forget to save some for themselves. This could be one reason why teachers are irregular in life-affirming activities.

Saying yes to life starts first with a positive attitude. It means having an open mind, an open heart, curiosity, and gratitude. It means taking risks to explore the unknown rather than hiding in the security of the known. It means being willing to try and fail rather than not trying at all. It means seeing with eyes of wonder and delight rather than sophisticated boredom and being willing to feel the pain of loss and disappointment rather than choosing not to feel at all (Warr, 2019).

Saying yes to life also means choosing life-affirming actions. Healthy food, physical activity, and caring for the earth all support our lives. The diet of highly processed foods and animal products and a sedentary lifestyle led to sickness, disability, pain, and a dependence upon medications and surgeries, none of which can replace a healthy, life-affirming lifestyle (Warr & Clapperton, 2020). Choosing a cheeseburger and fries is life-denying; choosing bean soup and salad is life-affirming.

Saying yes to life does not stop with us. We say yes to life when we honor the lives of other people, animals and plants, and the soil, air, and water of this beautiful planet. This means really thinking about the needs of these other lives and seeing how we affect theirs. It also means taking responsibility for the choices we decide, recognizing that there is really no such thing as a totally “personal choice” because all of the choices we take on have a ripple effect that end up affecting everyone and everything (Urry et al, 2020)

Renideo (2019) wrote that life affirming activities make an individual see life and all its dimensions as something to live, partake, rejoice and be happy about. Thus, when teachers in this study miss these dimensions, they are unconsciously contributing to making their lives stale and inanimate as opposed to a life that is fun, creative, nurturing and challenging.

Mindfulness really refers to awareness. It's what we all recognize when we are doing something knowing that we are doing it so, if we are walking and it's a beautiful day, we might actually appreciate the fact that we are walking, we actually know that we are walking as we are doing it. And mindfulness, usually through meditation practices, cultivates that ability to do things

knowing that we are doing them (Bishop, Lau, Shapiro, Carlson, Anderson, Carmody, & Devins, 2019).

One of the things that people need when they are stressed is to find within themselves a place of stillness. And mindfulness, through meditation practices, is one of the things that can really benefit people by enabling them to find stillness in the middle of a frantic world. When a person gets stressed, whether it's anxiety, depression, worry, ruminating, brooding, one of the things noticed by the person is that his/her attention begins to fade away; attention gets hijacked by other things. The person wants to focus on one thing, but the concentration gets away (Anderson, Levinson, Barker, & Kiewra, 2019). One of the things that people report about mindfulness training is that, after a few weeks of training, they can really attend to things, they can really focus better, their concentration improves, and their memory improves as a result.

On the other hand, affirmations are positive, specific statements that help a person overcome self-sabotaging, negative thoughts. They help visualize, and believe in, what a person is affirming to himself, helping to make positive changes to life and career (Kemeny, Foltz, Cavanagh, Cullen, Giese-Davis, Jennings, & Ekman, 2022).

While there's limited research into the effectiveness of using affirmations in a general setting, there is evidence that the use of positive affirmations can successfully treat people with low self-esteem, depression, mental health conditions and stressed outlook (Kurtz, 2019).

For instance, in a study by researchers at Northwestern State University, people who used positive affirmations for two weeks experienced higher self-esteem than at the beginning of the study (Gold, Smith, Hopper, Herne, Tasey, & Hulland, 2020). Also, in a study published in the *Journal of American College Health*, researchers found that women treated with cognitive behavioral techniques, which included use of positive affirmations, experienced a decrease in depressive symptoms and negative thinking. A study by researchers at the University of Kentucky, Lexington, had similar results, and came to a similar conclusion.

It is important to realize that although some people have successfully used affirmations to overcome depression and negative thinking, the technique may not work for everyone. Some people may view affirmations as "wishful thinking," or simply looking at the world with an unrealistic perspective. Quite a lot can depend on your mindset. So, try looking at positive affirmations this way – many people do repetitive exercises to improve their body's physical health and condition. Affirmations are like exercises for the mind and outlook; these positive mental repetitions can reprogram thinking patterns so that, over time, people begin to think, and act, in a new way (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2019).

As a summary, mindfulness is simply about paying attention to present moment experiences with a sense of openness, curiosity, and acceptance, and the fruits of mindfulness practice include kindness, compassion, and better health (Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2020).

It is a state of the mind, an attitude, a way of looking at things designed to enhance our innate human capacity for mindful, wholehearted awareness.

This interactive, engaging, practical service is grounded in practices that enable people to recognize habitual patterns of reaction. Responding intentionally instead of reacting emotionally becomes a possibility. People may discover long-held emotional and behavioral patterns that create unnecessary stress. These reactive patterns are often the basis of mental, physical, and spiritual disease and suffering. As insights arise through self-observation, an increased sense of stability, kindness, compassion, and joy emerges (Kemeny, Foltz, Cavanagh, Cullen, Giese-Davis, Jennings, & Ekman, 2022).

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