Workplace Stress and Self Reported Teaching Performance among Learning Support Teachers in Shkodër Albania

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ABSTRACT

Learning support teachers play an important role in enabling students with disabilities to participate in mainstream education. Understanding the association between their workplace stress and perceived teaching performance can inform professional support. This cross-sectional descriptive correlational study examined workplace stress, self-reported teaching performance, and their relationships with age, gender, and teaching assignment among 80 learning support teachers working in public schools in Shkodër, Albania. Participants included 68 women and 12 men; 39 held full learning support teaching assignments and 41 provided learning support for part of their teaching load. Workplace stress was assessed using an eight-item Workplace Stress Scale, and perceived teaching performance was assessed using a ten-item self-report questionnaire. The supplied study reported Pearson correlations, chi-square tests, and independent-samples t tests. Stress and performance scores were strongly negatively associated ($r = -.762$, $p < .001$). Age was positively associated with stress ($r = .800$, $p < .001$) and negatively associated with performance ($r = -.571$, $p < .001$). Twenty-four participants (30.0%) fell within the two highest stress-score bands, while 33 (41.3%) were classified in the two lowest performance categories. Comparisons by teaching assignment were not statistically significant for stress ($p = .409$) or performance ($p = .650$). Gender comparisons require caution because of sparse contingency-table cells. These findings identify an association between greater reported stress and lower perceived performance within this sample, without establishing causal direction. Interpretation is limited by the cross-sectional design, reliance on self-report, and unresolved documentation concerning sampling, piloting, and performance-score classification. Professional supervision, clearer role expectations, and organizational support warrant evaluation in future research using longitudinal designs and independently assessed teaching outcomes.

Keywords: workplace stress; learning support teachers; self-reported performance; inclusive education; Albania

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education depends on the capacity of schools to provide sustained support for students with disabilities. Learning support teachers contribute to this work through individualized assistance and cooperation with classroom teachers. In the Albanian context, the term mësues ndihmës refers to this teaching role. In this article, "learning support teacher" denotes these teachers rather than an unqualified classroom assistant. Their working conditions and perceived ability to fulfil teaching responsibilities are therefore relevant to the organization of inclusive schooling.

Research on special education teacher burnout has examined both individual and workplace characteristics. Brunsting et al. (2014) synthesized evidence on burnout in special education teachers, establishing a foundation for examining the conditions under which these teachers work. Burnout and workplace stress are related but distinct constructs; findings about burnout should not be interpreted as direct measurements of stress [1]. A more recent synthesis reviewed 29 studies addressing special education teachers' occupational wellbeing or burnout and identified working responsibilities and available support as recurring research

concerns. Its account of predominantly cross-sectional studies also highlights the need for stronger temporal evidence [2].

The job demands–resources model offers a framework for considering how work demands and available resources may relate to occupational strain. The model links sustained demands and limited resources with processes relevant to exhaustion and motivation [3]. It provides a conceptual basis for discussing support needs, but the present study did not independently measure or test the model's components. A systematic review of teacher occupational wellbeing identified workload, work conditions, professional relationships, and personal capabilities as relevant domains [4]. These domains help situate the present research without implying that they were all measured here.

This study examined workplace stress and self-reported teaching performance among learning support teachers in public schools in Shkodër. Its primary question was whether higher stress scores were associated with lower perceived teaching performance. Secondary questions concerned associations with age and differences by gender and teaching assignment. A negative stress–performance association was hypothesized. The study was designed to examine associations within the participating group, rather than to establish that stress causes changes in performance or to estimate national prevalence.

METHODS

Study design and setting

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive correlational design in public mainstream schools in Shkodër, Albania. The supplied material identifies teachers supporting students with disabilities and reports that participants worked across 46 schools. The precise collection dates are not specified in the methods and require author confirmation before submission. The year in the source filename is not treated as sufficient evidence of the fieldwork period.

Participants and recruitment

The analytic sample comprised 80 learning support teachers: 68 women (85.0%) and 12 men (15.0%). Eligibility required employment as a learning support teacher in a public school in Shkodër, either for a full teaching load or for part of the teaching load. Recruitment was described as purposive, using information and school contacts obtained through the Local Education Office. The source also describes the sample as the entire local population while elsewhere referring to 156 learning support teachers. Because the geographic and temporal denominators cannot be reconciled from the supplied material, the present article does not claim complete population coverage or a response rate.

Thirty-nine participants had a full learning support assignment and 41 provided learning support for part of their teaching load. This distinction concerns allocation of teaching duties. It should not be interpreted as a comparison of full-time and part-time employment contracts. The largest age group was 31–40 years (n = 27). Table 1 presents the sample composition.

Table 1. Characteristics of participating teachers

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Women	68	85
	Men	12	15
Age	21–30 years	9	11.3
	31–40 years	27	33.8
	41–50 years	23	28.8
	51–60 years	17	21.3

	61 years or older	4	5
Learning support assignment	Full teaching load	39	48.8
	Part of teaching load	41	51.3

Note. N = 80. Percentages are calculated from the reported counts and rounded to one decimal place; totals may differ slightly from 100%.

Measures

Workplace stress was measured with an eight-item Workplace Stress Scale attributed to The Marlin Company and The American Institute of Stress. The administered Albanian version used five frequency options scored from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). Items 6–8 were positively worded and were described as reverse-scored. With this coding, the possible summed score is 8–40; the source's stated minimum of zero is inconsistent with its response coding. Higher totals represent greater stress. The source used bands of ≤15, 16–20, 21–25, 26–30, and 31–40. These are descriptive score categories and do not constitute clinical diagnoses. The currently available institute version phrases all eight items negatively; its wording must not be substituted retrospectively for the administered version [5].

Self-reported teaching performance was assessed with ten items attributed in the study to Mawoli and Babandako. Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating better perceived performance. Items concerned punctuality, attendance, assessment, feedback, and related teaching duties over the preceding year. A traceable publication by these authors appeared in 2011 and investigated academic staff in a university setting [6]. The exact correspondence between its instrument and the school adaptation requires confirmation. These scores reflect self-perceptions of selected teaching behaviours, not independent observations or student outcomes.

The source reports pilot internal consistency coefficients of $\alpha = .942$ for stress and $\alpha = .895$ for performance. It gives conflicting pilot sample sizes of 29 and 50 teachers; therefore, the pilot denominator is not specified here. These coefficients describe the reported pilot work and should not be presented as reliability estimates newly calculated for the 80 participants. Internal consistency alone does not establish validity of the translated or adapted measures.

Procedure and ethical safeguards

Participants were informed about the study purpose, anonymity, and research use of their responses. The source reports that the right to refuse participation was respected and that permission was obtained from the Local Education Office and school management. Instruments were read aloud to clarify questions, after which teachers completed them individually in a quiet setting. Administration took approximately 15–20 minutes, and questionnaires were coded. No ethics committee name, approval identifier, or formal exemption is documented. Administrative permission is therefore reported separately from formal ethical review.

Statistical analysis

The study reports analyses in IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. Descriptive frequencies and percentages summarize participant characteristics and the reported score categories. Pearson correlations were reported for age, stress, and performance scores. Independent-samples t tests compared teaching assignment groups. Pearson chi-square tests examined gender differences in categorized outcomes. The current manuscript reproduces the supplied statistical outputs rather than claiming a new analysis of participant-level records. Values printed as .000 are reported as $p < .001$. Statistical significance is interpreted at the two-sided .05 level, with secondary comparisons regarded as exploratory.

The source does not supply normality diagnostics, scatterplots, the coding used for age in the correlations, or adjustment for teachers nested within schools. Consequently, assumptions and independence cannot be fully evaluated. Gender contingency tables contain sparse cells, so their asymptotic tests are presented cautiously

rather than as definitive evidence of equivalence. No undocumented means, standard deviations, or adjusted estimates have been introduced.

RESULTS

Distributions of stress and perceived performance

Twenty participants (25.0%) were in the lowest stress-score band and 17 (21.3%) in the 16–20 band. Nineteen (23.8%) were in the moderate band. The 26–30 and 31–40 bands contained 10 (12.5%) and 14 (17.5%) participants, respectively. Thus, 24 of 80 teachers (30.0%) were in the two highest bands. These figures describe questionnaire scores within the sample and should not be read as diagnostic prevalence estimates.

Table 2. Reported distributions of workplace stress and perceived teaching performance

Measure	Reported category	n	%
Stress	≤15	20	25
	16–20	17	21.3
	21–25	19	23.8
	26–30	10	12.5
	31–40	14	17.5
Performance	Poor	11	13.8
	Low	22	27.5
	Moderate	19	23.8
	High	6	7.5
	Excellent	22	27.5

Note. Each measure has N = 80. Performance labels reproduce the source classification. Its complete threshold scheme is not consistently documented; categories are therefore provisional and should not be interpreted as validated proficiency standards.

For perceived performance, the reported poor and low categories together included 33 teachers (41.3%). Nineteen teachers were classified as moderate, six as high, and 22 as excellent. The study does not provide sufficient information to reconstruct these categories from individual scores. The central inferential result is therefore the reported association between scores, rather than the categorical performance labels.

Associations among stress performance and age

Table 3. Reported Pearson correlations

Variable pair	r	p	N
Stress and perceived performance	−.762	<.001	80
Age and stress	0.8	<.001	80
Age and perceived performance	−.571	<.001	80

Higher stress scores were strongly associated with lower self-reported performance ($r = -.762$, $p < .001$). Age was positively associated with stress ($r = .800$, $p < .001$) and negatively associated with performance ($r = -.571$, $p < .001$). These are unadjusted bivariate correlations. They neither establish age-related change within individuals nor demonstrate an independent contribution of stress after accounting for age. Interpretation of the age correlations also depends on whether age was entered in years or as ordered groups, which requires verification.

Teaching assignment comparisons

Table 4. Reported independent-samples t tests by learning support assignment

Outcome	t	df	p	Levene p
Stress	−.830	78	0.409	0.886
Perceived performance	0.456	78	0.65	0.936

Neither stress nor perceived performance differed significantly between the two assignment groups in the reported equal-variance t tests. These results do not establish that the groups are equivalent. Group means and standard deviations are not provided, and the subtraction order for the reported mean differences is unclear. A directional claim about which group was more stressed or performed better is therefore not made.

Exploratory gender comparisons

For categorized performance, the source reports $\chi^2(4, N = 80) = 4.283$, $p = .369$. For categorized stress, it reports $\chi^2(4, N = 80) = 7.920$, $p = .095$. However, there were only 12 men distributed across five categories. Expected counts calculated from the supplied margins are below five in five of ten cells for performance and four of ten cells for stress. The stress table also reports a likelihood-ratio p value of .039, which differs from the Pearson result. Sparse cells and this discrepancy preclude a robust conclusion about gender differences without an appropriate exact or simulation-based analysis. Absolute counts of women in high-score categories should not be interpreted as higher female risk because women comprised 85% of the sample.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of the principal finding

The principal result is a strong negative association between workplace stress and self-reported teaching performance. Within the participating group, teachers reporting greater strain also tended to report less favourable performance. This supports the hypothesized direction of association. It does not show that stress caused lower performance: perceived difficulty meeting teaching responsibilities may itself contribute to stress, and shared influences may affect both measures.

The result can be considered alongside research on occupational conditions in special education [1, 2]. Nevertheless, the present questionnaire assessed stress rather than burnout, and the Albanian learning support role may differ from special education posts in other systems. Comparisons should therefore focus on the broad relevance of teacher support rather than directly comparing prevalence figures across unlike instruments and roles.

The job demands–resources framework provides a plausible interpretation in which demands and available support may shape occupational experience [3]. Yet this study cannot identify which particular demand or resource explains the association. Although the stress questionnaire includes aspects of workload, control, and recognition, no item-level results or separate domain estimates are supplied. It would be inappropriate to rank these as empirically established causes of stress in this sample.

Age and assignment related findings

Age showed substantial associations with both outcomes. These findings warrant investigation rather than assumptions that older teachers necessarily become less effective. Age may overlap with teaching experience, health, assignment complexity, training opportunities, or other unmeasured characteristics. The study contains no longitudinal evidence and no adjusted model that separates these possibilities. The unusually strong age–stress correlation also makes verification of age coding and score construction particularly important.

The lack of statistically significant assignment-group differences suggests that the simple distinction between a full and partial learning support load did not clearly separate the reported outcomes in this sample. Assignment type is a coarse indicator of working conditions: it does not quantify student support needs, number of

students, administrative responsibilities, or collaboration time. Future research should measure these features directly. Gender findings remain inconclusive because of sparse cells, rather than demonstrating that gender has no relationship with either outcome.

Implications for practice

The findings justify closer attention to the working experiences of learning support teachers. Schools could assess whether teachers have clear role expectations, regular opportunities for consultation, access to relevant training, and practical support for individualized teaching. These are areas for needs assessment and evaluation, rather than interventions proven effective by the present data. Research on teacher wellbeing supports considering organizational relationships and work conditions alongside individual capabilities [4].

School psychologists and professional learning networks may provide settings in which teachers discuss difficult situations and seek guidance. Such support should preserve confidentiality and avoid using a self-report stress score as an employment judgement. Future evaluations should examine whether changes in school support are followed by improvements in stress, independently assessed practice, and student participation. Findings about teachers' self-perceptions alone cannot establish effects on children's educational outcomes.

Strengths limitations and reporting priorities

A strength is the focus on a specific professional group whose work is directly relevant to inclusive education in Shkodër. The supplied material contains explicit sample counts, questionnaire items, and statistical outputs, enabling a focused account of the central association. However, the cross-sectional design prevents temporal or causal conclusions, while simultaneous self-report measurement may increase associations through shared response tendencies. Perceived teaching performance is also a limited proxy for instructional quality and may not capture the individualized nature of learning support.

Sampling coverage is uncertain because the source provides inconsistent population totals and mentions both complete coverage and refusals. Generalization beyond the participating teachers is therefore restricted. School clustering was not addressed, and no evidence is supplied concerning linearity, outliers, missing-data procedures, or the coding of age. The performance categorization is incompletely specified, and the appendix contains duplicated response columns that require checking against the administered form. These issues affect reproducibility and should be resolved using original study documentation where available.

The conflicting pilot sample sizes must also be reconciled. High reported alpha coefficients cannot substitute for evidence of translation quality, construct validity, or suitability for the local professional role. The exact adaptation of the performance measure should be documented, including any changes from its university context [6]. Future studies should retain scoring documentation, use independently assessed performance, consider longitudinal follow-up, and plan analyses that account for relevant covariates and school-level grouping.

CONCLUSION

Among 80 learning support teachers in public schools in Shkodër, greater reported workplace stress was associated with lower self-reported teaching performance. Age was associated with both measures, while the reported comparisons by teaching assignment were not statistically significant. The findings support further examination of teachers' working conditions and support needs. They should be interpreted as local, cross-sectional associations, subject to measurement and documentation limitations. Confirming the study dates, sampling frame, scoring procedures, and ethical review status is necessary before journal submission.

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