

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46502/issn.1856-7576/2025.19.04.3>

Cómo citar:

Nevoenna, O., Manchuk, V., Luchenko, N., Zelenin, V., & Tovstukha, O. (2025). Educational psychology of teachers and students in crisis-driven innovation environments. *Revista Eduweb*, 19(4), 31-49. <https://doi.org/10.46502/issn.1856-7576/2025.19.04.3>

Educational psychology of teachers and students in crisis-driven innovation environments

Psicología educativa de docentes y estudiantes en entornos de innovación impulsados por la crisis

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Recibido: 15/08/25

Aceptado: 10/11/25

Abstract

Educational innovation holds promise for transforming learning systems; however, it has also introduced significant emotional and psychological challenges for both students and teachers, particularly in contexts of rapid systematic reform and digital transformation. This study investigates the psychological effects of educational transformation in Ukraine, with comparative insights from Latin American countries such as Brazil and Colombia. Anchored in Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the research adopts a qualitative approach to examine experiences of stress, anxiety, and coping strategies within school environments. Using thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, the study reveals shared struggles of emotional uncertainty, institutional neglect, and cognitive overload among educational stakeholders. Nevertheless, evidence of adaptive resilience emerged, with some participants leveraging peer relationships and intrinsic motivation as buffers against reform-related stress. The findings highlight a critical gap in the emotional preparedness of



educational policy and practice. The study advocates for the integration of emotional readiness, psychological support mechanisms, and targeted training into reform agendas. By re-centering human experience within educational innovation, this research offers actionable insights for policymakers and educators navigating transformation across diverse global contexts.

Keywords: educational innovation, emotional burnout, emotional resilience, institutional support, professional self-realization, psychosocial adaptation.

Resumen

La innovación educativa es prometedora para transformar los sistemas de aprendizaje; sin embargo, también ha introducido importantes retos emocionales y psicológicos tanto para los estudiantes como para los profesores, especialmente en contextos de reforma sistemática rápida y transformación digital. Este estudio investiga los efectos psicológicos de la transformación educativa en Ucrania, con perspectivas comparativas de países latinoamericanos como Brasil y Colombia. Basándose en el modelo transaccional de estrés y afrontamiento de Lazarus y Folkman y en la teoría de los sistemas ecológicos de Bronfenbrenner (1979), la investigación adopta un enfoque cualitativo para examinar las experiencias de estrés, ansiedad y estrategias de afrontamiento en el entorno escolar. Mediante el análisis temático de entrevistas semiestructuradas, el estudio revela las dificultades comunes de incertidumbre emocional, negligencia institucional y sobrecarga cognitiva entre los actores del ámbito educativo. No obstante, surgieron pruebas de resiliencia adaptativa, ya que algunos participantes aprovecharon las relaciones con sus compañeros y la motivación intrínseca como amortiguadores frente al estrés relacionado con la reforma. Los resultados ponen de relieve una laguna crítica en la preparación emocional de las políticas y prácticas educativas. El estudio aboga por la integración de la preparación emocional, los mecanismos de apoyo psicológico y la formación específica en los programas de reforma. Al volver a centrar la experiencia humana en la innovación educativa, esta investigación ofrece ideas prácticas para los responsables políticos y los educadores que navegan por la transformación en diversos contextos globales.

Palabras clave: innovación educativa, agotamiento emocional, resiliencia emocional, apoyo institucional, autorrealización profesional, adaptación psicosocial.

Introduction

A crucial component in any country's educational reform or adjustment is the professional self-realization of teachers, whereby they become more resilient and perceive reforms as opportunities for growth and creativity (Yemelyanova et al., 2022). This enables them to fully utilize their knowledge, skills, abilities, creativity, and potential in the teaching profession, thereby overcoming academic workload and mental stress (Kurebay et al., 2023). It also strengthens their autonomy and control over their work, reducing feelings of helplessness (Nevojna et al., 2024). Addressing teachers' emotional well-being is essential for their continued professional development and long-term success. The interconnected challenges of emotional stress and the need for self-realization require innovative strategies for training education seekers, enabling them to effectively harness their potential, integrate creative thinking with research competencies, adapt swiftly to changing conditions, and realize professional opportunities (Deroncele-Acosta et al., 2021).

In recent years, the Ukrainian educational system has experienced major reforms due to the need to meet up with global educational standards and digital transformation (Ivanenko et al., 2023). These reforms like competency-based curricula, digitalized classrooms, and hybrid learning models have redefined both the purpose and delivery of education. However, such reforms have also been found to generate institutional and emotional strain on educators, particularly when expectations outpace institutional support (Tkachenko et al., 2024). Evidence from Latin America illustrates this trend. In Uruguay, for instance, López García et al. (2021) reported that 13.49% of teachers experienced moderate to severe stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, studies in Ecuador and Peru revealed alarmingly high rates of teacher



stress, with 90% in Ecuador and 91.95% in Peru presenting moderate to severe levels of stress (Flores-Paredes et al., 2021; Párraga-Párraga & Escobar-Delgado, 2020), highlighting the widespread psychological burden as a result of the introduction of educational reforms. These progressive reforms require educators and learners to continuously adapt, and the urgency of these reforms has been intensified by sociopolitical factors, including war-related displacement, which has forced schools and universities to implement remote and hybrid learning under constrained conditions.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping offers a useful theoretical framework for comprehending the emotional aspects of this shift. According to this paradigm, stress results from the dynamic interplay between people and their surroundings, where emotional outcomes are determined by how difficulties (stressors) are perceived and coping resources are available. According to this concept, the Ukrainian setting is characterized by digital changes, teacher workload, technical disparities, and wartime disruptions. These stressors can result in maladaptive effects like burnout, anxiety, and disengagement if they are not adequately addressed by institutional and emotional support.

Several studies, specifically in Ukraine shows that educators are not only expected to swiftly adopt new technologies but also expected to act as both pedagogues and digital facilitators to students who are coping with trauma and displacement (Kurapov et al., 2023; Londar & Pietsch, 2023). In similar contexts, digitalisation efforts in Brazil have highlighted the challenges of inequitable access and increased mental burden among educators (Carneiro, & Lima, 2022). The digitalization drive, although necessary, is not evenly distributed because under-resourced schools and vulnerable learners are often found struggling to meet up. The psychological impact of these changes is rising, and educators, who are expected to act as both pedagogues and digital facilitators, frequently report stress linked to inadequate training and workload.

Also research from Peru has shown that rapid digital transitions, when implemented without strong emotional support, negatively affect teacher wellbeing and, by extension, student experiences (Deroncele-Acosta et al., 2023). Moreover, emotional well-being is often not considered in the rush toward innovation, with teachers rarely given time to reflect on their own mental health in the pursuit of performance metrics and digital transitions (Lemon & Turner, 2024). Students, especially those from low-income or conflict-affected backgrounds, frequently report anxiety, alienation, and burnout (Kurapov et al., 2023). Evidence suggests that the intensity of academic stress increases in environments that adopt new learning systems without sufficient psychosocial scaffolding.

Importantly, while emotional wellbeing has been recognized as crucial to effective learning, ignoring the emotional well-being of learners risks distorting the very objectives that innovation seeks to fulfil. A study by Vovchenko et al. (2022) emphasized that emotional intelligence significantly influences the academic performance of students and highlights the need to incorporate mental health supports as essential to educational reforms. According to Iskakova et al. (2023), socio-emotional resilience among educators is essential to create an environment where both teaching and learning can thrive. Therefore, ensuring psychological preparation is important to meaningful educational reform.

Despite several policy initiatives and digital reforms in Ukraine, there is a lack of qualitative research that captures lived emotional experiences of students and educators during these reforms. Existing research, such as the study by Lim (2024) on psychological stress during Brazil's digital education transitions, and the work of Vovchenko et al. (2022) on emotional intelligence in Ukraine, tend to focus on outcomes rather than lived emotional processes experiences. This indicates a broader pattern across both Ukrainian and Latin American contexts where emotional experiences of educators and students remain underexplored. Studies with qualitative methods into teachers' burnout (Lavrysh et al., 2025) and students' emotional distress (Lopatovska et al., 2022) reveal the human cost of crisis-driven innovation. Also, research into wartime distance learning (Londar & Pietsch, 2023) and the role of institutional factors (Head et al., 2023) show ethical dilemmas and fractured support networks. However, none explore lived stress and anxiety among secondary-school educators and university students navigating rapid reform in Ukraine.



This study aims to explore the emotional impact of innovative educational practices on students and educators by examining stress and anxiety levels, identifying key psychological, social, and institutional factors influencing these responses, and assessing the coping and support mechanisms currently in use. Specifically, the study seeks to answer these questions:

RQ 1. How do students and educators feel the impact of innovative educational practices on their stress and anxiety levels?

RQ 2. What are the main psychological, social, and institutional factors contributing to their emotional responses?

RQ 3. What coping and support mechanisms are currently adopted by the educators and students?

Now that there is technological transformation in Ukraine's educational system, this study offers relevant and crucial perspectives into an ignored aspect of emotional impact of this digital advancement on both the students and educators. Although recent research has examined technology integration and learning outcomes quantitatively, and some qualitative studies have examined burnout and distress, little is known about the lived emotional experiences of secondary school teachers and college students navigating rapid innovation. This study aims to bridge that gap by qualitatively investigating the stress, anxiety, and coping strategies associated with these changes in education. The qualitative examination of the coping mechanisms, stress, and anxiety related to these instructive shifts will fill this research gap. Furthermore, the growing concerns about psychological overload, unequal access, and emotional estrangement in reformed learning environments by focusing on human experience, which offers a fresh perspective on educational success. The study enhances understanding of reform outcomes and provides psychological recommendations for future educational policy in Ukraine and other crisis-affected contexts by recording first-hand experiences of stakeholders.

The study focuses on Lazarus and Folkman's model as theoretical frameworks of explaining stress and coping due to educational changes. It then examines stress and anxiety as core responses to reform. It explores the impact of educational innovation on emotional well-being globally and in Ukraine context. The study also highlights the value of qualitative methods in capturing lived experiences, and stresses the need for Ukraine-focused research amid the pandemic and war.

Literature Review

As Ukraine's education system experience rapid innovation from digitalisation to competency-based models, stress and anxiety have quietly intensified among educators and learners. These emotional responses are not side effects but central to understanding how reforms impact real lives. This section reviews key concepts of stress, anxiety, and educational innovation, then reviews global and Ukrainian research on the effect of reforms on psychological well-being. Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping provides a useful lens to look into how individuals appraise and respond to educational demands that exceed their perceived resources. It helps frame the psychological toll of reform as a dynamic interaction between person and environment. It also identifies a gap: while reforms are well-documented structurally, the lived emotional experiences of those affected are still underexplored. This review sets the stage for a study that seeks to centre those voices and contribute needed insight into the human cost of change.

Theoretical Framework for Stress and Coping in the Context of Educational Change

Scholars have adopted several theoretical frameworks to understand how individuals respond to educational change and psychological strain. Some of the widely used theories are: Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the Job Demands-Resources model, and Meichenbaum's Behavioural Stress Inoculation framework. Each provides a solid view for examining how environmental demands, cognitive appraisals, and individual resources interact. This study will be utilising a primary model which is; Lazarus and



Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress. The framework was selected because of how it centre on individual perception and response and also contextualise those experiences within the educational systems making them suitable for analysing the Ukrainian educational landscape. A shift toward holistic education that make use of technology, personality development, and philosophy is important to reduce the systemic stress caused by overly mechanistic learning reforms (Iskakova et al., 2023).

Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

This model posits that stress arises both from external events and how individuals appraise these events and assess their resources for managing them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Spătaru et al., 2024). In educational innovation, educators and learners evaluate reform-related demands, such as new teaching platforms and assessment methods to determine whether they possess the needed skills, institutional support, and time (Ghiasvand et al., 2024). Stress and anxiety is imminent when demands exceed available resources.

While trying to understand educator's burnout during reform periods, some studies have adopted these frameworks. Internationally, this model has been employed to explain emotional burnout in educators navigating hybrid or remote learning. In Peru, hybrid learning in public universities was linked to high levels of stress when institutional support was lacking, emphasizing teachers' primary appraisal of insufficient resources (Colina-Ysea et al., 2024). Similarly, research from Colombia on secondary teachers revealed both appraisal and coping strategies; inadequate preparation in remote teaching led to emotional exhaustion and maladaptive coping. A Brazilian study also revealed that sudden technology adoption without structured support increased burnout symptoms among educators, revealing secondary appraisal failures and impaired coping (Lim, 2024). In the Ukrainian context, recent qualitative findings show that students reported substantial emotional distress due to the war and a lack of institutional guidance or training, suggesting that primary appraisal of existing threats and systemic failure to offer resources leads to stress and anxiety (Kurapov et al., 2023). This model is particularly relevant in Ukraine, where teachers and students have been driven into digital reforms amid broader societal crises. Their cognitive appraisals which at the same time is shaped by uncertainty, collective trauma, and limited institutional guidance play a central role in how stress manifests and whether coping strategies are adaptive or maladaptive.

Stress and Anxiety

Stress and anxiety are deeply human responses to the pressures and unexpected change, and these are the challenges that students and teachers face in today's education systems. According to the American Psychological Association (2022), stress occurs when demands exceed one's ability to cope. Selye (1978) described it as the body's nonspecific reaction to any demand (Ghasemi et al., 2024; Szabo, 2023).

In educational contexts, stress can be triggered by academic workload, high-stakes testing, or the rapid changes in instructional methods. Research from Colombia found that teachers experienced intense stress when hybrid learning was introduced without adequate training. Similarly, a study in Peru noted increased anxiety among students where digital platforms were unreliable and teachers overwhelmed (Colina-Ysea et al., 2024).

When student expectations are not met during reform, motivation to continue online learning decreases, amplifying emotional strain. Research from Argentina showed that integrating social-emotional learning into reform processes reduced anxiety and improved student engagement.

Anxiety while often related to stress, is defined by the National Institute of Mental Health (2022) as a deeply excessive and prolonged case of worry and fear about everyday situations. In education, anxiety may arise from pressures to excel, the fear of failure, or unfamiliar technological environments (Vovchenko et al., 2022). Understanding and supporting emotional needs is vital for reforms to succeed in any educational context.



Educational Innovation and Emotional Wellbeing

Educational innovation in Ukraine has been shaped by necessity, from COVID-19's disruption of face-to-face learning to the war's destruction of physical infrastructure (Schleicher, 2020). Innovations such as digital platforms, competency-based learning, and hybrid teaching are aimed at increasing efficiency and continuity. However, these reforms often neglect the emotional readiness of those expected to implement them. Global studies demonstrate that poorly supported reforms contribute to emotional burnout. For example, Iskakova et al. (2023) noted that digital learning platforms, though innovative, exacerbated stress among educators when introduced without scaffolding. In Latin America, consistent burnout patterns across Uruguay, Peru, and Ecuador during remote teaching were identified (López García et al., 2021; Flores-Paredes et al., 2021; Párraga-Párraga & Escobar-Delgado, 2020). In Ukraine, Tkachenko et al. (2024) and Kurapov et al. (2023) reported similar trends, with educators feeling emotionally overwhelmed and unsupported. Despite this evidence, many reforms continue to prioritize measurable performance metrics over lived experience. As Avsec et al. (2024) warns, treating educational innovation as a technical upgrade rather than a human-centered transformation undermines its sustainability and equity.

Importance of Qualitative Approaches in Capturing Nuanced Emotional and Psychological Experiences

Quantitative studies reveal valuable trends but often flatten the emotional complexity of educational change. Qualitative methods such as phenomenological interviews, focus groups, and narrative analysis allow deeper insight into emotional experience and meaning-making processes (Papajorgji & Moskowitz, 2024). Ukraine-specific research remains sparse in this domain. Although Lavrysh et al. (2025) and Lopatovska et al. (2022) examined educator burnout and student anxiety, these studies did not center lived emotional narratives. Therefore, qualitative research is crucial for informing responsive policy and targeted interventions.

Justifying the Need for Ukrainian-Contextualized Research in a Post-Pandemic, War-Affected Educational Environment

Teachers and students are navigating educational innovations amid trauma, displacement, and infrastructural collapse due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing war (Mayer et al., 2023). This delicate landscape necessitates research that centers emotional survival alongside institutional functionality. UNESCO (2023) projects a surge in youth requiring psychological support, and Tkachenko et al. (2024) emphasize creative resilience-building among teachers as a protective factor. However, as Ikwuka et al. (2024) note, educators are growing resistant to digital surveillance and weary of technocratic mandates. These overlapping crises reveal a deep policy gap: reforms continue while the psychological cost is ignored. These unique challenges demand a pressing need for research that is tailored on the Ukrainian educational experience, focusing on the psychological impacts of these crises and leading to informed and specific interventions to support learners and educators in managing well in this complex and fast changing system.

Rationale for Conducting This Study and Its Contribution to Existing Knowledge

This study aims to fill a critical gap in the literature by exploring the psychological experiences of Ukrainian students and educators amid the dual crises of the pandemic and war. While previous research has addressed mental health challenges within these groups, there remains a lack of qualitative studies that capture the emotional depth of their lived experiences (Schulze-Hagenest et al., 2023). By using qualitative methodologies, this research provides a rich understanding of how educational reforms affect the emotional well-being of both students and teachers. These findings are important for developing sustainable support systems and mental health policies within the Ukrainian educational community.



This study also contributes to international education research by offering insights into coping strategies and the institutional role in supporting psychological resilience during crises. Although this research is contextualized within Ukraine, the methodology and findings are transferable and may be replicated in other conflict-affected or reform-intensive contexts, particularly across Latin American countries. In summary, this study enhances our understanding of the psychological toll of reform in crisis and supports future education reform initiatives both locally and globally.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews, effectively explores complex psychological phenomena like stress and anxiety in specific sociocultural and institutional contexts. This approach supports the interpretivism approach, capturing the depth, texture, and meaning of lived experiences.

Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility, focus, and openness for researchers to guide discussions, allowing participants to share personal narratives and insights, ensuring richness and consistency in data (Naeem, et al., 2023). The study employed methodological transparency, careful coding procedures, and ongoing researcher reflexivity to ensure trustworthiness and reliability. Inter-coder reliability was also utilized to increase the legitimacy of the thematic analysis. Given its contextual sensitivity and adaptability, this methodology can be replicated in Latin American countries facing similar educational and psychosocial challenges, offering cross-regional insights into how students and teachers experience reforms during crisis.

Participants

This study involved 10 secondary school educators and 12 students from public schools and universities across Ukraine, and all of them have direct experience with innovative educational practices e.g. blended learning, digital platforms and project-based instruction. Purposive sampling method was employed to select participants who were actively engaged in and affected by recent educational reforms and this approach ensures that the data gathered are from informed perspectives (Palinkas et al., 2015; Campbell et al., 2020).

Ethical protocols were strictly observed as all participants provided informed consent, and they were assured of anonymity and confidentiality in handling their data. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review boards before collection of data.

Data Collection

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, conducted either in person or via Zoom, depending on participants' availability, safety, and preferences. This method was chosen for its ability to capture rich, narrative-driven data, allowing participants to articulate their emotional experiences in their own words, while also giving the interviewer the flexibility to probe for depth and clarification where necessary (Adams, 2015; Naeem et al., 2023).

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with an emphasis on relevance to the research objectives. The study involved 10 secondary school educators and 12 students (from both secondary schools and universities) who had first-hand experience with innovative educational practices such as blended learning, digital platforms, and project-based instruction. Additional selection criteria included; active participation informal education in Ukraine during ongoing educational reforms, willingness and ability to reflect on emotional responses to those reforms educators have at least one year of experience teaching under new or hybrid instructional models, students with recent experience with remote or digitally enhanced instruction.



Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and was conducted in either Ukrainian or Russian, depending on participant preference, then translated into English during transcription where necessary.

The study used a semi-structured interview protocol, focusing on four core areas: emotional responses to educational innovations, coping strategies, institutional support, and emotional resilience. Participants were asked to share their initial reactions, coping strategies, perceptions of institutional support, and experiences of burnout or psychological strain. The format allowed for flexibility in exploring individual experiences.

Methodological Limitations

This study acknowledges some limitations even as it provides meaningful insights into the emotional experiences of learners and educators during educational reforms. First, the study employed a small, purposively selected sample consisting of 10 secondary school educators and 12 students. While this enabled in-depth exploration of lived experiences, it limits the generalizability of findings across the broader Ukrainian educational system (Palinkas et al., 2015). Future studies should employ larger and more diverse samples, possibly using stratified sampling to include various demographics, school types, and teaching contexts. This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how emotional responses vary across different segments of the education sector.

Most participants were drawn from relatively stable central and western regions of Ukraine as such, the lived experiences of learners and educators in heavily displaced regions such as Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and parts of Zaporizhzhia may not be fully represented. This introduces a regional bias that must be considered when interpreting findings. Future research should aim for greater regional coverage, particularly including voices from frontline or displaced areas.

The dependence on self-reported interviews also introduces the potential for socially desirable responses, where participants may consciously or unconsciously downplay distress or exaggerate resilience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Conducting Zoom interviews might have affected the level of emotional expression because the physical absence can limit the researcher's ability to observe non-verbal cues and deeper interpersonal rapport, which are important in sensitive psychological topics (Farrell, 2020). Future studies should consider mixed-method designs, incorporating observational techniques, longitudinal tracking, or validated psychological assessments to triangulate data.

Despite these limitations, the study serves as a valuable foundation for understanding the emotional impact of educational reforms in crisis areas. Future research should consider larger samples and mixed methods of data collection across more affected regions.

Results and Discussion

Participants' Demographic Profile

The study involved 10 educators and 12 students from public schools and universities in Ukraine, all with direct experience in innovative educational practices, as presented in Tables 1 and 2.



Table 1.
Participant's Demographic profile (Students = 12)

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Education Level	Institution Type	Digital Literacy level
Student 1	Male	16	Secondary (Grade 11)	Public School	Moderate
Student 2	Female	19	Undergraduate	Public University	High
Student 3	Female	17	Secondary (Grade 12)	Private School	Very high
Student 4	Male	21	Undergraduate	National University	High
Student 5	Female	20	Undergraduate	Public University	High
Student 6	Male	16	Secondary (Grade 10)	Public School	moderate
Student 7	Female	18	Secondary (Grade 12)	Rural School	Moderate
Student 8	Male	22	Undergraduate	Polytechnic	High
Student 9	Female	16	Secondary (Grade 11)	Boarding School	Moderate
Student 10	Female	21	Undergraduate	Private University	Very high
Student 11	Female	21	Third-Year Undergraduate	State University	High
Student 12	Female	16	Secondary (Grade 10)	Public School	high

In terms of gender representation 67% were female indicating a higher female participation. The participants range in age from 16 to 22 years, covering both secondary school students (ages 16–18) and university undergraduates (ages 19–22). 50% students were from the secondary school and 50% were university undergraduates (see Table 1).

Table 2.
Participant's Demographic profile (Educators = 10)

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Teaching Level	Institution Type	Years of Experience	Digital Training
Educator 1	Female	34	Secondary	Public School	10	Basic
Educator 2	Male	45	University	National University	20	Advanced
Educator 3	Female	29	Secondary	Private School	6	Intermediate
Educator 4	Male	39	University	Pedagogical Institute	13	Advanced
Educator 5	Female	50	Secondary	Public School	25	Basic
Educator 6	Male	31	University	Technical University	8	Advanced
Educator 7	Female	42	Secondary	Rural School	18	Intermediate
Educator 8	Male	37	University	Public University	15	Advanced
Educator 9	Female	28	Secondary	Boarding School	5	Basic
Educator 10	Male	33	University	International Program	9	Intermediate

The study includes 5 female and 5 male educators, ranging in age from 28 to 50. The years of experience range from 5 to 25 years, digital training levels are advanced (4 educators in higher education), intermediate (3 educators), and basic (3 educators in secondary schools) (see Table 2). Additionally, the study utilized open-ended questions to gather detailed accounts of participants' experiences during educational reforms, focusing on cognitive and affective aspects, stress, coping, and educational change (see Table 3).



Table 3.
Open-ended Questions and Purposes

Interview Question	Purpose of the Question
1. Can you describe any case where a new educational method increased your stress or anxiety?	To explore direct personal experiences with stress-inducing educational practices or reforms.
2. How have the ongoing changes in your school or university affected your emotional well-being?	To assess the overall emotional and psychological impact of sustained institutional changes.
3. What kinds of support (if any) have helped you manage stress during educational reforms?	To identify protective or coping resources (institutional, peer, or personal) that mitigate stress.
4. In your experience, how do students or teachers react to new educational technologies?	To examine emotional and behavioral responses to technological innovation in education.
5. Can you recall any strategies that helped you adapt emotionally during educational transitions?	To uncover adaptive coping mechanisms and personal resilience strategies.

Thematic Coding Overview

The study utilized a deductive thematic approach for qualitative data analysis, importing interview transcripts into NVivo software and generating codes using a significant information coding strategy (Adu, 2019; Allsop et al., 2022). Based on the significant information identified from participant's responses, a label was developed indicating the code representing that information. After developing the codes, the codes were categorized to form themes make meaningful connection between the data, addressing the research questions of the study as shown in Figure 1. These themes help ground the study in the realities faced by students and educators undergoing reforms under pressure.

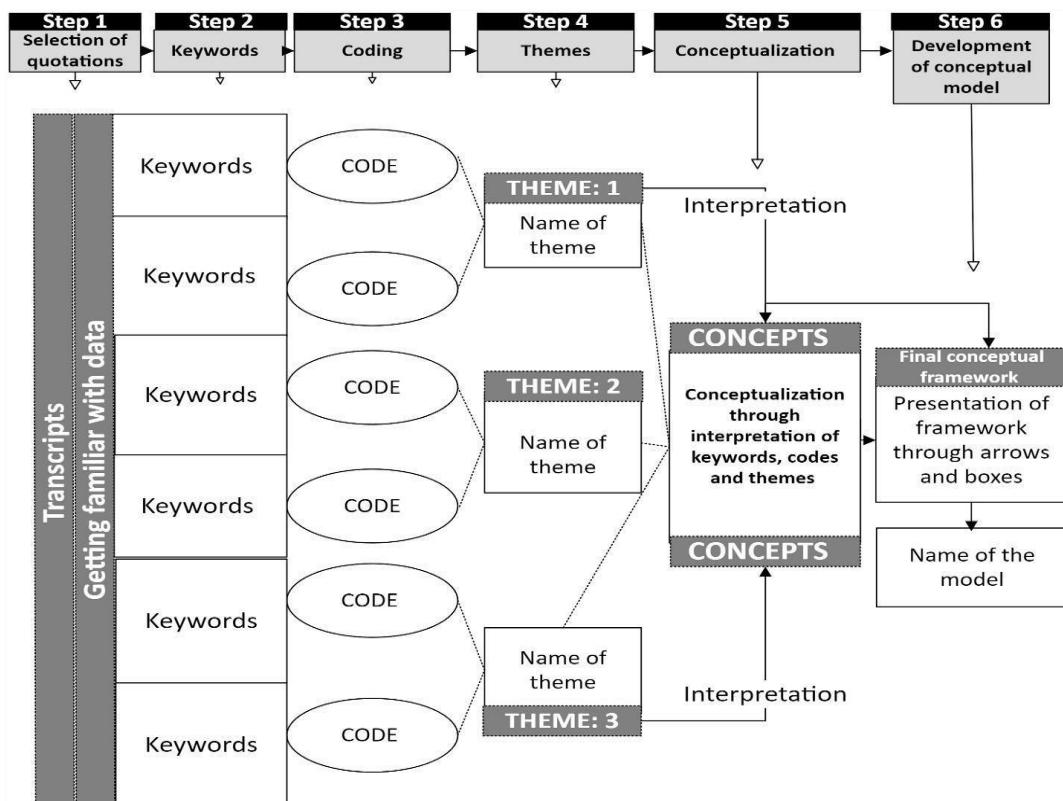


Figure 1. Thematic Analysis Six-Step Process

Source: (Naeem et al., 2023)



Table 4.
Coding Matrix (Themes × Participants)

Participant ID	Theme Perceived Pressure	Theme Emotional Exhaustion	Theme Lack of Psychological Support	Theme Coping Strategies	Theme Redefining Success
S1	2	0	2	2	0
S2	3	0	0	0	0
S3	0	0	0	3	0
S4	0	3	0	0	0
S5	0	3	2	0	0
S6	0	0	3	0	2
S7	0	2	0	0	2
S8	3	0	0	0	0
S9	0	0	3	0	0
S10	4	2	0	2	0
S11	0	0	2	0	0
S12	0	3	0	0	3
E1	0	2	3	0	0
E2	0	3	3	0	0
E3	1	0	3	0	0
E4	0	0	0	3	0
E5	0	3	3	0	0
E6	2	3	0	0	0
E7	0	2	3	2	2
E8	3	0	3	0	0
E9	0	0	3	0	0

Note:

S represent student

E represent educators

0 represent no significant information was coded from the participants.

Thematic Presentation of Findings

The in-depth interview from the participants (students and educators) resulted according to the research question resulted in five themes as visualized in Figure 2. These themes were discussed in detail and the participant's pseudo-names and quotes were randomly selected and used throughout.



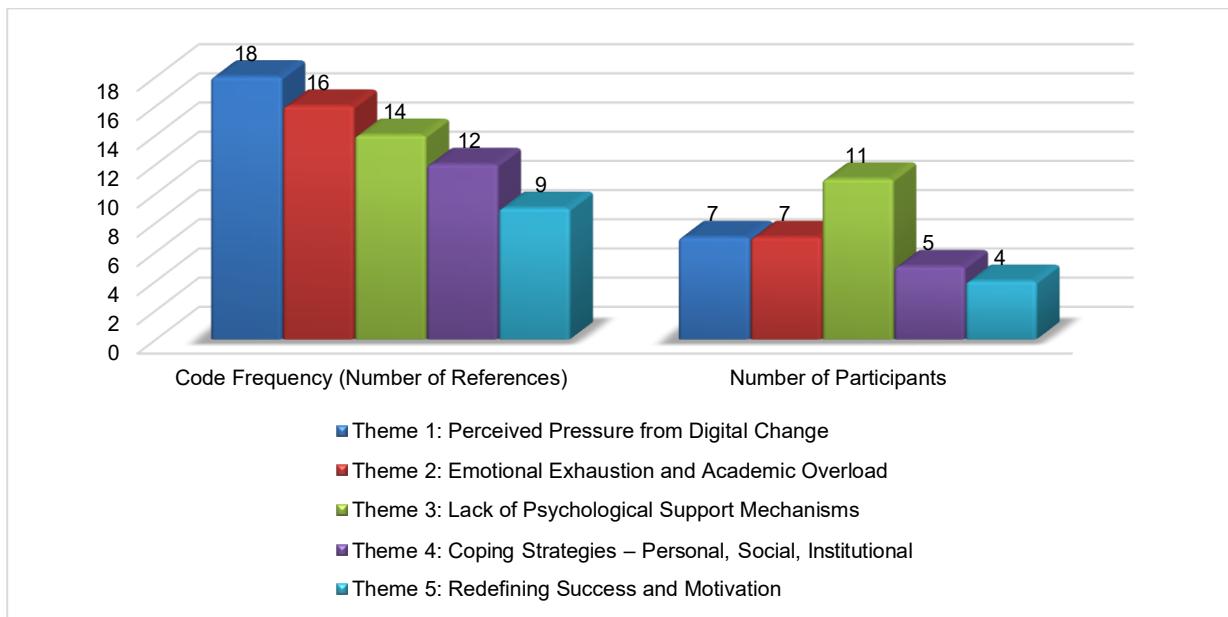


Figure 2. Participants and Code Frequency across Themes.

Theme 1: Perceived Pressure from Constant Change and Digital Demands

Participants frequently tagged their feelings as being 'overwhelmed' whenever the change is happening fast and there's a quick expectation to adapt to digital tools with little or no support. This overwhelming responsibility was reported by both educators and learners but from different points of view.

"I had to switch to a new platform mid-semester without training. It felt like we were expected to just know what to do" (Educator 3)

"Sometimes I just keep staring at the screen not knowing where to begin. Everything keeps changing and it's becoming much more difficult to catch up" (Student 2)

Educators face challenges with unfamiliar technologies, frequent pedagogical changes, and inadequate institutional support, while students experience confusion and stress due to inconsistent digital learning environments. The findings of this study agree with Tkachenko et al. (2024) study, where teachers faced similar burnout from reform-induced digital transitions and Vovchenko et al. (2022) study where students with limited digital literacy in reform-heavy environments felt increasingly strange and stressed. Chen (2024) also highlighted how sudden shift of pedagogical methods without emotional readiness increase stress among teachers and learners.

Theoretically, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Wang et al., 2024) opines that participants' views of new implementations as threats instead of challenges reflect a resource-deficit perspective, particularly under rapid reform conditions. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), Joubert & Jacobs (2024) supports this theme that macro-level reform decisions disrupted micro-level teaching and learning environments, creating a mismatch between expectations and local capacity.

Practically, these findings suggest a pressing need for reform strategies that include emotional readiness and transitioning in phases so that digital innovation will not be a contributor to psychological strain in addition to war and systemic instability already being experienced in Ukraine.



Theme 2: Emotional Exhaustion and Academic Overload

Educational innovation for both students and educators has often meant an unrelenting stream of assignments with deadlines, and mental strain. Participants described being “always on,” with little difference between study, work, and rest.

“I have a whole three separate platforms to check for one subject—Telegram, Moodle, and email. It is quite exhausting and stressful to just keep track of all platforms.” (Student 4)

“I love teaching, but the constant changes now make me dread Mondays. I’m already tired even before the week begins.” (Educator 2)

This emotional and cognitive distress agrees with Lazarus and Folkman’s model, where stress emerges when perceived demands exceed available coping resources (Saleem & Malik, 2023). Educators lamented that increasing administrative work and constantly changing digital platforms are distressing emotionally and this finding agree with Vovchenko et al. (2022) studies, where similar burnout symptoms were reported among Ukrainian educators engaged in remote innovation efforts, while students, on the other hand are feeling helpless due to lack of structured support.

The pattern is in line with Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, as emotional exhaustion was shaped by institutional structures (mesosystem) and also broader societal stressors, e.g ongoing geopolitical instability (macrosystem). Majority of the participants reported that national crises multiplied their academic stress and also fueled personal and systemic anxiety (Han et al., 2023).

This theme also agrees with Tkachenko et al. (2024) observation that while reform policies encouraged digital learning, there is usually insufficient emotional preparation which left students feeling overwhelmed. Practically, there is a need to address emotional readiness within educational reforms to achieve innovations that are effective technologically and also sustainable psychologically. Schools in Ukraine could benefit from incorporating stress monitoring checkpoints, anonymous chat rooms to vent out fears, pressures and stress and peer-support systems into reform implementation plans.

Theme 3: Lack of Psychological Support Mechanisms

Sense of isolation and the absence of psychological safety were recurring trends across learners and educators’ groups, many of the participants reported that while educational reforms were quickly implemented, the emotional wellbeing of those experiencing the change was not fully considered.

“We are told to adapt, but no one asks how we feel. There is brief training for tools, but none at all for our emotions.” (Educator 5)

“Sometimes I cry after classes because I can’t cope with the pressure, I feel like I’m losing it and I don’t know where to go for help.” (Student 6)

This gap in emotional support reflects what Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Tong & An (2023) describes as failures within the exo-system; structures like school administration and policy institutions that indirectly have effect on individuals. While students and teachers interact daily with educational tools (microsystem), their emotional responses are deeply affected by the presence or absence of supportive systems at these broader levels.

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Krys & Reininger, 2025) also expatiates that when individuals lack psychological support, then, their ability to reappraise challenges constructively diminishes and as a result, what might have been manageable becomes overwhelming, leading to increased anxiety and helplessness. Vovchenko et al. (2022) emphasized on the importance of regular psychological intervention in Ukrainian education systems especially during periods of reforming

education as lack of psychosocial support during reforms lead to reduced teaching effectiveness and student disengagement. This proves that technical solutions only are not sufficient without emotional readiness.

Practical implication is that the Ukrainian education systems must integrate formal psychological services into school reform plans, this includes; regular mental health check-ins, access to trained and empathetic counsellors, and confidential reporting mechanisms as they are now important and not optional.

Theme 4: Coping Strategies – Personal, Social, and Institutional

In the middle of emotional toll due to ongoing reforms, many participants described their ways of coping which ranged from personal resilience to supportive relationships and, there are also institutional interventions but in rare cases. These coping strategies are different in accessibility and effectiveness and are often shaped by both individual and systemic views.

“When I feel overwhelmed, I take a stroll or journal, just to clear my head. I’ve learned not to rely on school systems to help me.” (Student 3)

“We support each other. The only reason I haven’t quit is because of my colleagues. We listen to one another, we vent and rant together, and we survive together.” (Educator 4)

From Lazarus and Folkman’s Transactional Model, these examples reflect problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies where individuals attempt to either manage the stress or regulate their emotional response. The model’s emphasis on appraisal is shown as teachers and students who viewed stressors as something that could be managed often had access to informal support or personal routines that encourages resilience.

In contrast, Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory highlights the role of the mesosystem and exosystem such as peer networks, school leadership, and external mental health services in enabling or obstructing coping. When these systems functioned well, they amplified individual efforts but when absent, even the most adaptive strategies were strained.

This theme agrees with findings from Liu, Yan & Fu (2022) that Institutional support and recognition can reduce burnout among hybrid learning teachers, but unavailability of coping mechanisms like psychological services and administrative flexibility can lead to emotional fatigue over time (Vovchenko et al., 2022).

Practical implications include the urgent need to formalize and scale supportive practices that are informal. School leaders should institutionalize mentoring programs, peer support groups, and access to counselling not as extras, but as essential features of reform implementation.

Theme 5: Redefining Success and Motivation Amid Crisis

For many participants, traditional notions of academic success such as grades, productivity, and constant performance have been redefined in light of ongoing crises. Both students and educators described a shift toward more internal, survival-oriented motivations.

“These days, I feel proud of myself for just showing up and staying calm. I am no longer chasing top marks like before.” (Student 6)

“I have stopped pushing for perfect lessons. If my students feel safe and understood, I count that as success.” (Educator 7)



This theme, in line with Lazarus and Folkman's model, where the reappraisal of what constitutes a "threat" or a "goal" leads to new emotional outcomes and coping priorities. Individuals adjusted their internal goals to shield them from chronic stress while picking emotional well-being over academic distinction.

Bronfenbrenner's theory explains that this shift reflects macrosystem-level changes, cultural reorientation, and institutional instability which deeply influence personal values and expectations. Due to the disruptions in Ukraine, traditional educational benchmarks have been subdued to embrace more adaptive, health-conscious measures of achievement and this pattern follows the findings by Tkachenko et al. (2024), who found that Ukrainian students in hybrid settings often prioritize their emotional stability over competition in their academics. Iskakova et al. (2023) also reported that teachers under pressures from reform changed their priorities to simply preserving their mental health. Chen (2024) observed that teachers in uncertain project-based learning redefined motivation as being able to adapt over performance metrics. These changes provide a broader psychological recalibration of what "success" means under sustained pressure.

Practically, these evolving motivations could guide educational support systems to become more responsive. Academic curricular and assessments should be more flexible to ensure psychological safety while after academic pursuits especially in war-affected and post-pandemic areas.

Cross-Analysis: Comparing the Experiences of Students and Educators

The ongoing war in Ukraine has deeply and negatively influence their educational system, especially the students and their educators, leading to greater stress and challenges emotionally, although, both groups share certain struggles but their experiences and coping mechanisms are quite different.

Shared Challenges: Both students and educators reported increase in stress and emotional exhaustion. A study by Tkachenko et al. (2024), highlights that over half of Ukrainian educators' experience symptoms of depression and burnout while the war is ongoing. Students, also experience academic disruptions leading to anxiety and instability.

Divergent Experiences: Educators are caught in between the responsibility of managing their own stress while supporting their students' well-being. The unpredictability of teaching conditions such as shifting between online and offline modes due to safety concerns adds to their burden. Kurapov et al. (2023) discusses the increasing stress educators face from adapting to online education during wartime, emphasizing the need for psychological support that address these circumstances. Students experience isolation due to lack of routine and peer interaction in remote learning, impacting social development and engagement for both learners and educators.

Coping Mechanisms and Support Systems: To address these challenges, some initiatives have been designed to provide the needed psychological support e.g UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, launched the "I Understand" online course, which has been joined by over 3,500 teachers and school psychologists. The online training provides teachers the skills they need to control their emotions and effectively help their students (UNICEF, 2022). UNESCO's Community of Modern Teachers and Psychologists is another example, it provides a forum for educators to exchange experiences and access materials on psychosocial support, assisting them in coping with the difficulties of teaching in times of war (UNESCO, 2023). This analysis explains the intertwined yet distinct experiences of students and educators in Ukraine, emphasizing the need for support mechanisms that solely address their specific needs, a priority that also resonates with educational communities in Latin America facing parallel challenges amid systemic reforms.

Conclusions

This study examines the emotional experiences of students and educators in Ukraine amid ongoing educational reforms in a context of national crisis. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with individuals directly involved in post-pandemic, war-affected education, the research highlights stressors and coping



strategies relevant not only to Ukraine but also to Latin American countries facing similar systemic challenges.

Findings reveal significant psychological strain among both teachers and learners, attributed to frequent pedagogical changes, digital demands, academic overload, and limited psychological support. Participants reported emotional exhaustion and feelings of being overwhelmed, compounded by inadequate institutional backing. Despite these challenges, many demonstrated resilience through personal, social, and institutional coping mechanisms.

The study underscores the importance of integrating emotional well-being into educational reform efforts, shifting the focus beyond academic outcomes to include the psychological realities shaping teaching and learning. Grounded in Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the research provides a unique perspective on how individuals adapt to systemic change.

It contributes to the growing discourse that prioritizes emotional sustainability in education and offers a foundation for future comparative research, particularly in Latin America. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- Structured mental health support should be implemented in schools and universities, that include regular access to counseling and psychological first aid, particularly in regions affected by war or prolonged disruption.
- Training for educators on digital tools, emotional resilience, and digital pedagogy to better manage their own stress and support student well-being should be provided.
- Promote international models of psychological support, with institutions such as UNESCO, CEPAL, and OEI integrating emotional sustainability into educational innovation policies.
- Comparative research with Latin American education systems undergoing similar reforms, to understand regional variations in coping mechanisms and support systems should be carried out.
- Longitudinal and mixed-method studies should be carried out to track the evolution of stress and coping strategies over time in crisis-responsive and innovation-driven educational settings.

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