

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Supervision strategies in managing stress of instructors due to inevitable academic overloads and pressures

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ABSTRACT

This study underscores the importance of responsive academic supervision in addressing stress caused by academic overload among instructors, particularly within resource-constrained higher education settings. Faculty benefit from a combination of workload accommodations, emotional support, and open communication, all of which contribute to greater resilience and job satisfaction. While many supervisory practices were seen as supportive, participants also identified gaps between institutional rhetoric and meaningful structural change. This highlights the need for sustained efforts to align faculty well-being initiatives with concrete policy adjustments. The study contributes to a growing body of literature on faculty stress management by presenting context-specific supervisory strategies relevant to regional institutions. It also underscores the need for leadership approaches that are both empathetic and systemically supported. Future research may explore how these findings apply across diverse institutional types and examine how supervisory practices evolve under emerging pressures such as digitalization, accreditation demands, and shifting student expectations.

Keywords: Supervision; Strategies, Stress; Instructors

1. Introduction

In the evolving landscape of higher education, instructors globally face increasing stress due to high academic demands and performance expectations^[1,2]. Quantitative workload such as extensive teaching hours, administrative responsibilities, and research obligations is a primary stressor contributing to burnout and decreased well-being among educators^[3,4]. Adaptive strategies have been explored in various educational contexts to manage such stressors^[5].

In the Philippines, public school teachers especially those in senior high schools often exceed their prescribed workloads by handling ancillary duties like paperwork, student advising, and community activities, which exacerbates stress and health issues among educators^[6-9]. For instance, Mingoa^[6] reports

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excessive class loads and ancillary tasks as primary stress sources, while Embang et al.^[8] link these issues to reduced job performance and well-being. Economic disruptions, such as those experienced by women educators during the pandemic, further complicate adaptive responses to workload pressures^[10]. Workplace policies and protections like the Magna Carta for women health workers and teachers provide important frameworks for addressing such stress-related issues^[11]. Furthermore, self-initiated protection behaviors are crucial in mitigating workplace violence and stress among vulnerable educators^[12].

Within regional state colleges such as Northern Bukidnon State College (NBSC) in Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon, instructors contend with rapid enrollment growth and expanding program offerings. Faculty are burdened with multiple subject preparations, accreditation paperwork, extension projects, and limited supervisory guidance. The challenges of handling multiple subject areas require adaptive attributes that instructors develop to manage instructional delivery under pressure^[13]. NBSC currently lacks a formalized supervision system to alleviate workload stress, heightening the risk of burnout and diminishing instructional efficacy. Teachers' multiple administrative functions also impact their professional interest and integrity, contributing to occupational stress^[14].

Although mentoring and supervision programs have been shown to mitigate burnout in healthcare and corporate sectors by offering psychosocial support, career guidance, and resilience-building, empirical studies in the Philippine higher education context remain scarce^[15-17]. For example, Eby et al.^[15] demonstrate benefits of structured mentorship in lowering stress and burnout levels; Anurat et al.^[16] highlight how mentor behaviors reduce burnout among medical students; and organizational research confirms mentoring significantly reduces burnout in institutional settings^[17]. Additional stressors faced by academic leaders, such as public speaking anxiety, further emphasize the need for effective coping resources and supervision strategies^[18]. Campus journalism engagement has also been linked to developing confidence and coping skills in academic environments^[19].

Moreover, emerging academic pressures include navigating new technologies like generative AI, which affects educators' perspectives on academic integrity and workload^[20]. Innovative coping mechanisms, including AI-assisted learning, show promise in managing specific academic-related anxieties such as math anxiety and lack of confidence^[21].

This leads to a clear research gap: while individual stress coping mechanisms among Filipino educators are documented, the effectiveness of supervision and mentoring as institutional strategies to manage academic overload has not been rigorously investigated, particularly in regional state colleges like NBSC.

This study aims to address this gap by examining how supervision strategies encompassing mentoring, workload management, peer collaboration, and performance monitoring can manage stress stemming from inevitable academic overload. Current supervisory structures at NBSC will be evaluated, and their effectiveness explored through faculty feedback. This research intends to propose a tailored, responsive framework grounded in institutional context and instructor experience.

Situated in Bukidnon, NBSC typifies under-researched rural/state higher education settings where instructors juggle multiple roles teaching, research, extension, and administration with minimal structural support. Examining supervision within this locale allows for insights relevant to similar institutions nationwide.

Expected outcomes include a context-aware supervision model designed to reduce instructor stress and enhance administrative support systems, benefiting faculty well-being, fostering a healthier academic culture, and improving educational quality.

2. Literature review

Instructor Stress and Academic Overload. Academic instructors increasingly report high levels of occupational stress due to multifaceted responsibilities such as teaching, research, administrative duties, and student support. These competing demands often lead to academic overload, which refers not only to the volume of tasks but also to the pressure of balancing quality performance with unrealistic institutional expectations^[22,2]. Burnout syndrome prevalence also varies across global regions. For instance, a cross-national comparison of Latin American university educators revealed higher burnout rates in Mexico and Colombia compared to Ecuador and Peru, likely due to differences in institutional resources and stress coping infrastructures^[23]. Kinman and Wray^[24] emphasized that prolonged exposure to such overload results in burnout, emotional exhaustion, and disengagement. During the pandemic, these issues were compounded by the rapid shift to online education, which significantly altered assessment expectations and placed additional demands on instructors^[25].

Understanding Stress in the Academic Context. The stress experienced by instructors is unique, stemming from the intellectual, emotional, and bureaucratic pressures within academic institutions. Kyriacou^[1] highlighted common stressors, including time constraints, limited resources, and classroom management challenges. Additionally, shifts toward a corporatized academic culture have intensified stress, as instructors face continual assessments, performance reviews, and policy changes that often lack faculty input^[26,27]. Broader educational challenges, such as the lack of parental support in modular learning or students' difficulty adjusting to remote formats, add to the contextual pressures that indirectly affect instructors' stress levels^[28].

The Role of Supervision in Managing Instructor Stress. Supervision plays a pivotal role in managing stress among instructors by offering support through mentorship, administrative structure, and emotional guidance. Gmelch and Gates^[29] noted that strong academic leadership can reduce stress by ensuring fair workload distribution and transparent communication. Institutions with a culture of supervisory support often experience fewer reports of burnout and job dissatisfaction^[30]. International studies have confirmed the pivotal role of leadership in mitigating stress. In Oman, strong leadership support significantly reduced faculty turnover intentions and improved their commitment to institutional reforms, including accreditation-related changes^[31]. Furthermore, supervisors who regularly acknowledge faculty achievements and concerns contribute to greater faculty resilience^[32]. The evolving teaching environment, especially with increased student diversity and new curricular expectations, requires supervisors to be sensitive to shifting instructional pressures^[33].

Supervision Strategies: Types and Effectiveness. Several supervision strategies have demonstrated effectiveness in managing stress among instructors. One such strategy is mentorship programs, which support professional development and provide emotional support, particularly for new faculty members^[34]. Collaborative supervision is another effective approach, where team-based decision-making processes help reduce feelings of isolation and increase instructors' sense of control over their workload^[35]. Additionally, well-being and mental health initiatives such as wellness sessions, peer support groups, and stress-reduction workshops have been shown to significantly enhance instructors' psychological resilience and overall well-being^[36]. At the University of Udine in Italy, academic staff utilized approach-oriented coping strategies, particularly planning, active coping, and acceptance. Targeted wellness interventions, especially for women and early-career academics, were found to effectively reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression^[37]. Finally, flexible workload allocation, where supervisors consider individual strengths and capacities in task assignments, can effectively mitigate role overload and reduce stress^[38]. Strategies that mirror parental

support approaches where motivation, empathy, and encouragement are central may also offer useful parallels for supervisory practices in academic settings^[39].

Institutional and Policy-Level Considerations. While effective supervision is crucial, institutional policies must also support stress management. These may include reasonable class sizes, equitable task assignments, sabbatical opportunities, and consistent recognition of teaching and research efforts^[40]. Institutions that integrate wellness into their culture generally experience improved retention and morale among faculty^[41]. Similarly, wellness programs implemented at the Technical University of Kenya have shown moderate success in improving employee performance. However, faculty expressed the need for more robust stress management and physical wellness components, indicating that institutional wellness frameworks must be dynamic and responsive to user feedback^[42]. In addition, recognizing how students' changing engagement patterns such as Gen Z learners' interactions with grammar and digital platforms impact teaching demands can help inform more responsive academic^[43].

Gaps and Future Directions. Despite growing interest, research on supervision strategies in stress management remains limited, particularly in the context of non-Western academic institutions and under-resourced universities. Future studies should explore the intersection of supervision with demographic variables such as age, gender, and academic discipline. Tailored, evidence-based supervision models hold promise for supporting instructor well-being amid evolving academic challenges. Faculty members at a rural university in South Africa reported ongoing difficulties in balancing research and teaching duties, particularly amid constrained funding and limited institutional support^[44]. These challenges echo the situation in regional Philippine colleges, reinforcing the need for context-sensitive supervision frameworks in under-resourced academic settings.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study will employ a qualitative exploratory research design to investigate the supervision strategies used by academic leaders to help instructors manage stress caused by excessive academic workloads and pressures. The exploratory approach is suitable for examining complex human experiences and uncovering patterns in supervisory practices and instructor coping mechanisms that may not be evident through quantitative methods.

3.2. Population and sampling

The participants of the study will consist of 20 college instructors selected through purposive sampling. This method is appropriate for qualitative research, as it aims to gather rich and detailed accounts from individuals who possess relevant and meaningful experiences related to the research topic. To ensure the relevance and depth of insights, inclusion criteria will require that participants have at least two years of teaching experience, have encountered periods of academic overload, and have had regular interactions with academic supervisors. Additionally, efforts will be made to include instructors from diverse academic departments and institutional roles to capture a broad range of perspectives.

3.3. Instrument

An interview guide based on the study's objectives has been developed to ensure consistency across interviews while still allowing flexibility in participants' responses. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, several strategies will be employed. Member checking will be used, allowing participants to review key findings or summaries to validate the accuracy of the interpretations. Peer debriefing will also be conducted to help minimize researcher bias during data analysis. Additionally, a pilot

interview may be conducted prior to the main data collection to refine the interview questions for clarity and relevance. **Table 1** presents the list of guide questions used by this research study.

Table 1. Interview guide questions

Objectives	Interview question
1. To explore the supervision strategies employed by academic leaders in helping instructors cope with stress caused by excessive workloads and academic demands.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What specific strategies or practices do your academic leaders use to support instructors during stressful or demanding periods? 2. Can you describe a time when your supervisor helped you manage a particularly heavy academic workload? 3. How effective do you think your academic leaders are in recognizing and responding to stress among faculty members?
2. To understand the experiences and coping mechanisms of instructors in relation to supervisory support during periods of academic overload and pressure.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you personally cope with academic overload and stress in your teaching role? 2. What kind of support from your supervisor has been most helpful to you during times of pressure? 3. Can you share any suggestions for improving supervisory support to better help instructors manage stress and workload?

3.4. Data gathering procedure

Data will be collected through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, which will provide participants the opportunity to openly share their experiences while keeping the discussion aligned with the research objectives. Each interview is expected to last approximately 30 to 45 minutes and will be conducted either in person or via secure video conferencing platforms, depending on the participants' availability and preference. The interview questions are designed to address the study's two main objectives: (1) to explore the supervision strategies employed by academic leaders in helping instructors cope with stress caused by excessive workloads and academic demands, and (2) to understand the experiences and coping mechanisms of instructors in relation to supervisory support during periods of academic overload and pressure.

3.5. Data analysis

The collected interview data will be analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify, interpret, and report patterns within the narratives of participating instructors. This method allows for an in-depth exploration of how supervision strategies influence stress management amidst academic overload. Initially, interviews will be transcribed verbatim and read repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the data. Subsequently, meaningful segments will be coded inductively, allowing themes to emerge organically from the participants' experiences rather than imposing preconceived categories. These codes will then be grouped into broader themes that reflect common supervision practices, instructor coping mechanisms, and perceived effectiveness of supervisory support. Throughout the analysis, reflexivity will be maintained by the researcher to acknowledge potential biases and to ensure the credibility of interpretations. The use of member checking and peer debriefing will further validate the findings, enhancing the trustworthiness of the analysis. The final themes will provide a comprehensive understanding of the supervisory approaches that help mitigate stress in academic environments, offering actionable insights for institutional leaders and policymakers.

4. Results

Research Objectives 1. To explore the supervision strategies employed by academic leaders in helping instructors cope with stress caused by excessive workloads and academic demands.

Question No. 1. What specific strategies or practices do your academic leaders use to support instructors during stressful or demanding periods?

1.1 Mental Health and Wellness Support in Academia

Ten (10) respondents expressed the importance of wellness-oriented supervisory practices during high-pressure academic periods. Initiatives such as reducing meeting loads, introducing "quiet weeks," and providing access to counseling reflect a broader institutional shift toward prioritizing faculty mental health. These strategies not only reduce workload intensity but also acknowledge the emotional toll of academic labor. Such actions suggest that supportive supervision is increasingly framed not just in terms of task delegation but in fostering psychological well-being through institutional care.

"Our dean minimizes meetings during peak academic weeks and instead sends updates via email, demonstrating consideration for faculty time."

"Our academic leader recently introduced wellness initiatives like 'quiet weeks' where no major admin requests are allowed, especially during finals and grading season. They collaborated with the guidance office to provide confidential counseling services, reflecting an institutional commitment to faculty mental health."

1.2 Flexible Deadlines and Administrative Support

Flexibility in administrative requirements emerged as a critical supervisory strategy. Ten (10) respondents shared that extended grading deadlines and shielding from non-essential tasks during peak times significantly alleviated pressure. These accommodations enable instructors to focus on core responsibilities, particularly teaching and student engagement, and demonstrate how responsive leadership can mitigate overload without structural reform. The findings support previous research emphasizing the value of adaptive workload management during high-demand periods.

"Our department chair gives us flexibility on internal deadlines for things like submitting grades or curriculum updates. During finals, they also shield us from extra meetings or administrative requests so we can focus on students and grading."

"Our academic dean gives us an optional grading extension during finals week, especially if we're juggling large classes. It's never forced but available if needed. That eases a lot of pressure."

1.3 Open Communication and Check-Ins

Five (5) respondents expressed that supervisors who maintained consistent, low-pressure communication during high-stress times were viewed positively by faculty. Regular check-ins and email outreach served both practical and emotional functions, providing a forum for voicing concerns, requesting support, and feeling acknowledged. These relational strategies strengthened perceptions of leadership attentiveness and contributed to a more inclusive, human-centered academic culture.

"During peak periods, my dean checks in not to micromanage, but to offer support, such as additional TA hours, adjusted meeting loads, or simply space to express concerns. This type of responsive leadership is deeply valued."

"Our department chair sends weekly messages during critical periods to check on faculty well-being and offer assistance. These small but consistent gestures help foster a sense of support and recognition."

Question No. 2. Can you describe a time when your supervisor helped you manage a particularly heavy academic workload?

2.1 Practical Workload Support Through Delegation and Temporary Relief

Ten (10) respondents expressed that supervisors who proactively reassigned duties or delegated support personnel were seen as particularly effective. Faculty recalled instances where graduate assistants were assigned or committee roles were temporarily shifted to allow instructors to focus on critical teaching or curriculum tasks. Such targeted interventions highlight the value of managerial attentiveness in identifying overload and acting decisively, especially during institutional peaks such as midterms or accreditation cycles.

“During midterms, while I was coordinating a new course and overwhelmed with grading, my department chair provided support by assigning a graduate assistant and temporarily reassigning some committee responsibilities.”

“During a particularly busy term when I was developing a new curriculum and teaching multiple courses, my department head arranged for an adjunct instructor to cover one of my classes”

2.2 Strategic Workload Reduction to Support Faculty During High-Demand Periods

Ten (10) respondents expressed that some supervisors employed structural interventions by reducing teaching assignments or reassigning advising responsibilities during high-demand semesters. These decisions were viewed as highly impactful and indicative of leadership that recognizes both the complexity of academic work and the limits of faculty capacity. The intentional redistribution of labor enabled faculty to maintain instructional quality while avoiding burnout.

“During a particularly intense semester with multiple course preparations and accreditation work, my dean allowed me to reduce my teaching load by one class for that term.”

“While I was leading a program review and mentoring two new faculty members, my department chair allowed me to teach only one course that semester and assigned another faculty member to take over my advising responsibilities temporarily.”

2.3 Deadline Extensions and Student Support to Alleviate Faculty Workload

Five (5) respondents mentioned that instructors also appreciated supervisors who extended institutional deadlines and arranged for additional student learning support. These dual strategies not only reduced faculty workload but also sustained instructional effectiveness by addressing student needs concurrently. Such integrative approaches exemplify supervision that is both faculty-sensitive and student-centered.

“When I had back-to-back large classes and was preparing for a major curriculum redesign, my supervisor helped by giving me an extension on reporting deadlines and advocated for additional tutoring services for my students, which helped alleviate the instructional burden.”

“During a semester with an unusually high enrollment, my supervisor granted me an extension for submitting my syllabus revisions and arranged for supplemental instruction sessions to help manage student learning needs.”

Question No. 3. How effective do you think your academic leaders are in recognizing and responding to stress among faculty members?

3.1 Proactive Leadership Response to Faculty Burnout and Stress

Ten (10) respondents expressed that leaders who made timely adjustments, such as modifying committee work or allowing instructional flexibility, were perceived as responsive and empathetic. Their ability to implement immediate, visible changes following faculty feedback enhanced trust and affirmed the legitimacy of instructors' concerns.

"Our academic dean is very responsive. Last year, when multiple faculties raised concerns about burnout, he adjusted committee assignments and gave us more flexibility with deadlines."

"After several of us expressed how overwhelmed we felt during the pandemic, our department chair paused non-essential committee work and let us revise our course delivery methods to reduce pressure."

3.2 Lack of Structural Changes

Ten (10) respondents expressed that despite rhetorical commitments to well-being, some supervisors failed to implement substantive changes, leading to faculty frustration. Participants reported that wellness discourse was not always matched by reduced workloads or actionable support, revealing a gap between intention and institutional follow-through.

"I don't think our department leadership fully understands the extent of the burnout faculty are experiencing. It feels like we're expected to just power through."

"Although leadership frequently claims to be listening, faculty meetings often result in additional responsibilities. This disconnects between discourse and action exacerbates frustration."

3.3 Misaligned Institutional Priorities

Five (5) respondents expressed that wellness initiatives were sometimes critiqued as superficial, particularly when juxtaposed with frozen budgets and increased workloads. Faculty perceived these efforts as performative rather than transformative, reflecting deeper systemic misalignments between institutional messaging and operational priorities.

"We've had workshops on mental health and stress management, but they sometimes feel like a checkbox exercise. What we really need is lighter teaching loads and more realistic expectations from admin."

"Although wellness appears prominently in strategic plans, budget allocations often fail to reflect these priorities."

Research Objectives 2. To understand the experiences and coping mechanisms of instructors in relation to supervisory support during periods of academic overload and pressure.

Question No. 1. How do you personally cope with academic overload and stress in your teaching role?

Boundary Setting & Time Management

Ten (10) respondents expressed instructors commonly employ self-regulation techniques to manage academic stress, particularly through clear boundary setting and structured time management. Strategies such as limiting email responses outside work hours and scheduling protected time for grading reflect a deliberate

effort to prevent cognitive overload and maintain work-life balance. These practices indicate a proactive orientation toward managing stress in the absence of institutional safeguards.

"I've started setting firm boundaries no emails after 6 p.m., and weekends are for me. It's hard, especially when students expect 24/7 responses, but it's the only way I stay sane."

"I block out 'quiet hours' on my calendar for grading and reflection. Otherwise, meetings and emails eat my day. Scheduling time for deep work has been a lifesaver."

1.2 Creative Outlets & Hobbies

Five (5) respondents expressed that faculty also turn to creative and restorative activities outside academia to cope with sustained pressure. Engagement in hobbies such as baking, playing music, or spending time outdoors provided psychological distance from academic responsibilities and helped restore a sense of autonomy and control. These findings align with broader research on the role of leisure and creative engagement in reducing occupational stress and improving emotional well-being.

"I play guitar after class or take long walks with my dog. Getting out of the academic headspace for a bit keeps me grounded."

"I bake. Measuring flour and kneading dough is calming and gives me a sense of control when everything else feels chaotic."

1.3 Support Systems & Peer Connection

Ten (10) respondents expressed that informal peer networks emerged as a crucial source of emotional support and practical coping. Regular social interactions, collaborative practices such as sharing grading tips, and mutual academic coverage created a sense of collegial solidarity. These peer-based systems function as de facto resilience mechanisms, compensating for the gaps in formal supervisory support structures.

"Honestly, venting with colleagues is my therapy. We have an informal group that meets for coffee once a week just to check in. It makes a big difference knowing I'm not alone."

"My department is small, but we support each other. We swap grading tips, share rubrics, and cover for one another when emergencies happen. That sense of camaraderie helps a lot."

Question No. 2. What kind of support from your supervisor has been most helpful to you during times of pressure?

2.1 Flexibility & Understanding

Ten (10) respondents expressed that supervisors who responded with flexibility during personal or academic crises were perceived as highly supportive. Adjustments in teaching loads, delegation of responsibilities, and trust-based autonomy allowed instructors to navigate complex situations without compromising well-being or professional standards. Such relational flexibility is essential in high-pressure environments where rigid oversight can exacerbate stress.

"When I had a family emergency, my department chair immediately offered to adjust my teaching load and found a colleague to cover one of my classes. That kind of flexibility is rare but incredibly appreciated."

"My supervisor doesn't micromanage. When I'm swamped, they trust me to manage my time and check in without pressure. That autonomy helps more than anything."

2.2 Clear Communication & Realistic Expectations

Five (5) respondents expressed that transparent and timely communication of expectations helped faculty manage workload more effectively. When supervisors communicated early about priorities or explicitly acknowledged non-essential tasks, instructors were better able to focus their efforts and avoid last-minute pressures. These findings highlight the value of clarity and empathy in supervisory communication.

"During finals week, our program coordinator reminded us that it's okay to prioritize and let go of non-essential tasks. That message alone helped lower my stress."

"It helps when my supervisor communicates clearly and early about deadlines and expectations. The fewer surprises, the better I can plan and stay calm."

2.3 Practical Help & Resource Allocation

Ten (10) respondents expressed that tangible institutional support, such as assigning graders, redistributing committee duties, or increasing staff assistance, was cited as among the most effective forms of supervisory aid. Faculty noted that such support not only eased workloads but also signaled that leadership was willing to act on concerns rather than merely acknowledge them.

"My supervisor helped me get a grader for a large class without me even having to ask. That proactive support eased a major burden."

"She reallocated some committee responsibilities when our department was short-staffed. She addressed burnout not only rhetorically but through tangible administrative actions."

Question No. 3. Can you share any suggestions for improving supervisory support to better help instructors manage stress and workload?

3.1 Increase Flexibility and Understanding

Ten (10) respondents expressed that faculty advocated for more adaptive supervisory approaches that recognize the fluctuating nature of academic workloads. Suggestions included more flexible teaching assignments during grant season, accommodations for personal circumstances, and the option for remote or asynchronous meetings. These recommendations underscore the need for supervisory policies that reflect the realities of academic labor.

"Supervisors should demonstrate greater flexibility with deadlines and adjust teaching loads during high-demand periods, such as grant preparation phases or personal emergencies."

"Recognize that faculty have lives outside work. Offering options like remote meetings or flexible office hours would help reduce pressure."

3.2 Provide Practical Resources and Support

Ten (10) respondents shared that a recurrent theme was the need for greater access to teaching assistants, graders, and administrative support, ideally provided proactively rather than requested reactively.

Additionally, the rotation of committee duties was recommended to distribute burdens more equitably. These proposals reflect a desire for structural, not just interpersonal, improvements to workload management.

“Faculty should be granted timely access to graders, teaching assistants, or administrative support without bureaucratic difficulty.”

“Allocate resources to reduce committee overload and consider rotating duties to avoid burnout.”

3.3 Improve Communication and Transparency

Five (5) respondents mentioned the importance of consistent, early-stage communication about deadlines, performance expectations, and institutional plans. Furthermore, they called for regular supervisor check-ins that prioritize well-being, not merely performance metrics. Transparent and empathetic communication was viewed as foundational to building trust and managing stress in academic environments.

“Clear, early communication about expectations and deadlines would prevent last-minute surprises that cause unnecessary stress.”

“Supervisors should hold regular check-ins focused on workload and well-being, not just productivity metrics.”

5. Discussion

This study explored how academic supervision strategies shape instructors’ ability to manage stress arising from persistent academic overload. Drawing from rich qualitative data, the findings reveal that supportive leadership practices, ranging from workload flexibility to wellness initiatives, can substantially reduce burnout risk, enhance emotional resilience, and create a more sustainable academic environment. Equally important, the results illuminate key gaps in structural support and communication that continue to undermine faculty well-being.

Several participants described how targeted wellness programs, such as meeting reductions, “quiet weeks,” and access to counseling, contributed to a sense of institutional care. These findings are consistent with broader international research showing that supportive work environments significantly buffer stress in higher education^[45,23]. In particular, actions that acknowledged emotional strain, not just task quantity, were perceived as meaningful. Supervisors who maintained regular, low-pressure communication channels also fostered psychological safety, reinforcing faculty engagement during critical academic periods.

Flexible administrative policies, such as deadline extensions or reduced course loads, played a pivotal role in mitigating stress. Supervisors who proactively adjusted assignments or redistributed duties were described as responsive and effective. This aligns with the job demands-resources (JD-R) framework, which highlights how job autonomy and resource availability can buffer the negative effects of work demands^[4,31]. Notably, these practices were valued not just for their practical relief, but for signaling institutional recognition of faculty labor.

Despite positive examples, participants also reported inconsistencies in supervisory responsiveness. Some perceived wellness initiatives as performative, especially when unaccompanied by reductions in workload or tangible resource support. This gap between rhetorical commitment and operational follow-through reflects institutional misalignment, a pattern also observed in international contexts, such as Kenyan and South African universities facing structural under-resourcing^[42,44]. These findings suggest that stress mitigation requires not just empathetic leadership but systemic reform in workload distribution and policy execution.

Instructors demonstrated considerable agency in managing stress through boundary-setting, time management, and engagement in creative or physical activities. These coping mechanisms provided autonomy and emotional regulation in the absence of institutional relief. Informal peer support networks further emerged as critical buffers against burnout, affirming existing research on the value of collegial solidarity in emotionally demanding professions^[32,37]. However, reliance on individual resilience and peer support also underscores the limitations of current institutional safeguards.

Participants offered practical suggestions to enhance supervisory support, including greater flexibility, more equitable access to teaching resources, and improved communication practices. These recommendations point toward the need for a more relational, context-sensitive model of academic supervision, particularly in under-resourced institutions such as NBSC. Integrating faculty voice into institutional planning, rotating committee roles, and proactively managing workload allocation may form the foundation of sustainable faculty well-being frameworks.

6. Conclusion

This study underscores the importance of responsive academic supervision in addressing stress caused by academic overload among instructors, particularly within resource-constrained higher education settings. Faculty benefit from a combination of workload accommodations, emotional support, and open communication, all of which contribute to greater resilience and job satisfaction. While many supervisory practices were seen as supportive, participants also identified gaps between institutional rhetoric and meaningful structural change. This highlights the need for sustained efforts to align faculty well-being initiatives with concrete policy adjustments. The study contributes to a growing body of literature on faculty stress management by presenting context-specific supervisory strategies relevant to regional institutions. It also underscores the need for leadership approaches that are both empathetic and systemically supported. Future research may explore how these findings apply across diverse institutional types and examine how supervisory practices evolve under emerging pressures such as digitalization, accreditation demands, and shifting student expectations.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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