



MAINTAINING HEALTHY FUNCTIONING AMIDST FORMAL COMPLAINTS: THE RESILIENCE OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The difficulty of maintaining healthy functioning among educators facing professional scrutiny is a growing concern in basic education. This study explored teachers' perceptions as they navigate formal complaints. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the researcher interviewed six (6) Junior High School teachers selected via purposive sampling and applied thematic analysis to analyze the data. Consequently, the study found that adversity and stress serve as major barriers to maintaining the healthy functioning of teachers who were accused of physically harming students. These conflicts resulted in court involvement and legal expenses, with complaints filed with barangay offices, school administrations, division offices, regional offices, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and even through the national 8888 complaint system. Educational leaders may support teachers by initiating seminars about teachers' rights and legal procedures. Future research may develop survey instruments and employ mixed-methods designs to further examine emotional distress, workplace pressure, coping mechanisms, institutional support, professional identity, resilience, and healthy functioning amid professional challenges and stressful experiences.

KEYWORDS: *Maintaining Healthy Functioning, Formal Complaints, Resilience, Junior High School Teachers*

INTRODUCTION

Poor teacher healthy functioning is disconcerting. It is widely acknowledged that teaching is one of the most difficult jobs, requiring teachers to handle administrative duties, manage student behavior, and fulfill instructional responsibilities. Across the globe, many teachers struggled to maintain healthy functioning as they experienced chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and burnout brought about by increasing professional demands and workplace pressures. According to the World Health Organization, burnout is a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed (WHO, 2019). Studies have shown that workplace conflicts, public scrutiny, excessive workloads, and a lack of institutional support have a substantial impact on teachers' physical, emotional, and psychological well-being (Kyriacou, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Furthermore, it is more difficult for teachers to balance work and personal life, which may leave teachers feeling less motivated, less effective in managing their classrooms, and more vulnerable to declines in well-being. As awareness of this issue increases, there is a greater need to understand the conditions that foster teachers' well-being and strengthen their ability to manage classroom responsibilities.

In several countries, teachers continue to experience difficulties in maintaining healthy functioning due to persistent occupational stress and demanding educational environments. According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017), several teachers in the United States reported experiencing emotional fatigue, anxiety, and burnout due to increased workloads, student behavioral issues, and pressure to meet academic standards. These factors have a detrimental impact on their general well-being and professional efficacy. Teachers in Japan were known

to put in excessively long hours while handling extracurricular activities and administrative duties, which led to mental exhaustion, illnesses linked to stress, and a deteriorating work-life balance (OECD, 2020). Similarly, teachers in South Africa frequently deal with crammed classrooms, a lack of resources, and difficulties at work that lead to mental discomfort and make it difficult to maintain appropriate psychological functioning (Jackson & Rothmann, 2005). These circumstances across various nations have revealed that, despite the rising demands of the teaching profession, teachers continuously struggle with their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.

Due to stressful working conditions and increasing professional demands, teachers in the Philippines also have difficulty maintaining healthy functioning. Stress, emotional exhaustion, and declining well-being can be triggered by the excessive workloads, big class sizes, administrative duties, and numerous non-teaching activities that public school teachers frequently have to deal with. Filipino educators faced increased worry and psychological strain during and after the COVID-19 epidemic as they adapted to flexible and distant learning modes while handling scarce resources and technical challenges and studies have shown that many teachers in the Philippines experience work-related stress and burnout due to heavy workloads and pressure to meet institutional expectations, negatively affecting their physical, emotional, and mental health (Tria, 2020). These scenarios show that, amid ongoing professional difficulties and occupational stress, teachers in the Philippine educational system often struggle to maintain healthy functioning.

When teachers fail to maintain healthy functioning, serious consequences may arise not only for the educators



themselves but also for students and the overall educational environment. Prolonged stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion can reduce teachers' motivation, job satisfaction, and teaching effectiveness, leading to decreased classroom engagement and lower-quality instruction (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Teachers experiencing poor psychological well-being were also more likely to develop physical and mental health problems such as anxiety attacks, depression, and chronic fatigue, which resulted in absenteeism and intention to leave the profession (Kyriacou, 2001). Furthermore, unhealthy functioning among teachers can negatively affect students' academic performance, emotional development, and classroom relationships because emotionally exhausted teachers may struggle to provide supportive and effective learning environments (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). These ramifications highlighted the importance of addressing teachers' well-being and creating interventions that support healthy functioning within the teaching profession.

RQs 1. What are the criminal, civil, or administrative complaints received by the Junior High School teachers?

2. What keeps Junior High School teachers maintaining healthy functioning amidst complaints received?

Theoretical Lens

The researcher anchored this study on Resilience Theory, developed and expanded by Norman Garmezy in 1991. This theory centers on individuals' ability to maintain healthy functioning and adapt positively in the face of adversity, stress, or significant life challenges. Garmezy's resilience theory emphasizes that resilience is not merely the absence of problems but the presence of protective factors such as personal strengths, social support, and coping mechanisms. These enable individuals to overcome adversity and maintain competence, stability, and psychological well-being despite exposure to risk and hardship. In education, this theory explains how teachers manage to sustain their professional roles and motivation even when facing emotional challenges, institutional pressures, and formal complaints by relying on adaptive processes and resilience factors.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researcher used a qualitative descriptive methodology to investigate how teachers handled formal complaints. Because it seeks to give a thorough and uncomplicated account of participants' experiences, attitudes, and responses in their natural environment, qualitative descriptive research is suitable (Sandelowski, 2000). This design enabled the researcher to gather detailed accounts of the emotional, social, and professional challenges teachers face when facing formal complaints without overinterpreting the phenomenon. As Kim et al. (2017) emphasized, qualitative descriptive studies are useful for obtaining rich descriptions of human experiences and for understanding events from participants' own perspectives. This study was conducted in a Junior High School in Panabo City under the supervision of the Department of Education, Division of Panabo City, Davao del Norte, Philippines. The locale was

selected because it provided an appropriate context for investigating teachers facing formal complaints, comprising 17 secondary schools, both public and private.

Notably, some teachers come from different cities and provinces, often carrying undisclosed personal and professional circumstances as they continue their teaching careers, and are deemed well-suited to understanding teachers navigating formal complaints. For this study, the researcher selected six (6) Junior High School teachers who had experienced different formal complaints in their professional careers. The participants were considered information-rich cases because they could provide direct, meaningful accounts of how adversity and stress affected their ability to maintain healthy functioning in their teaching careers. Each participant was a teacher at least 30 years old and working full-time in public secondary schools in Panabo City. They were chosen especially for their 10 to 20 years of experience as teachers and their expertise in handling formal complaints, including both criminal and civil cases, and are currently regular employees at a secondary school.

To choose people who could offer first-hand, pertinent accounts of the topic under study, the researcher employed purposive sampling. Because it allows researchers to deliberately choose individuals with in-depth knowledge and expertise in the subject under study, purposeful sampling is acceptable in qualitative research (Palinkas et al., 2015). The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide to gather participants' responses regarding formal complaints. The interview guide allowed for asking follow-up questions to clarify and expand the participants' responses.

The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and organizing patterns or themes within qualitative data. This method was appropriate because it clearly mapped how adversity and stress served as barriers to maintaining healthy functioning. Following Braun and Clarke (2022), the researcher read the transcripts, coded key responses, developed and reviewed potential themes, named the refined themes, and wrote up the final narrative findings. This structured method of transcript immersion and inductive thematic tracking builds directly upon established academic standards optimized for exploring psychological strain and adaptive traits within local qualitative datasets (Undaloc & Galache, 2026).

Trustworthiness was anchored in the proper administration of written informed consent, which was obtained after the study's protocols were reviewed and approved by the Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE), the institutional ethics board of the Holy Cross of Davao College Graduate School. Such oversight ensures that every participant is formally informed about the purpose of the study, that participation is voluntary, and that they retain the option to withdraw at any moment. To ensure data quality and enhance clarity, the researcher maintained a professional, nonjudgmental setting. Shank (2002) contends that the ability to assess sincerity is a central component of trustworthiness, noting that interpretive errors often stem from structural uncertainty.

RESULTS: In this section, the researcher discussed the study's findings. And presented the modified paradigm.

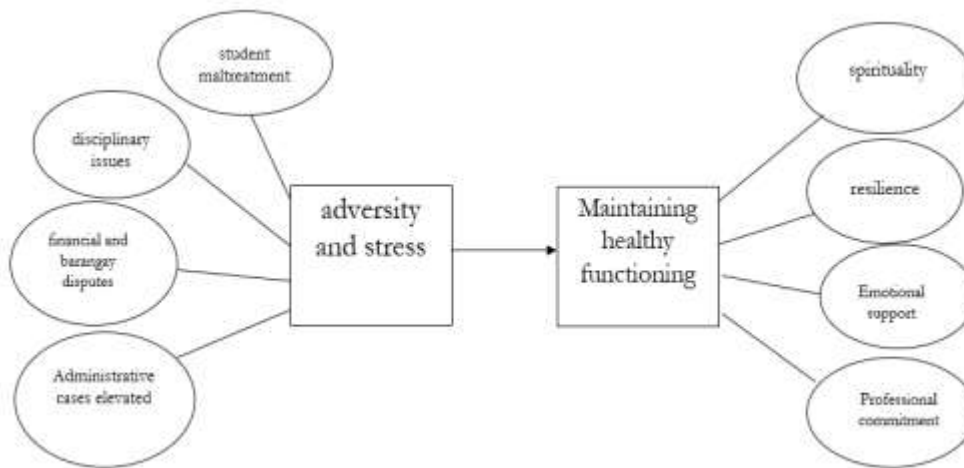


Figure 1. Emergent Themes on the Adversity and Stress Paradigm of Teachers in Maintaining Healthy Functioning

Criminal, Civil, or Administrative Complaints received by the Junior High School Teachers

Theme 1: The Multi-Level Impact and Nature of Complaints Against Teachers

This main theme encapsulates the complex, multifaceted, and systemic nature of accusations encountered by Junior High School teachers, highlighting how formal and informal grievances severely disrupt their professional stability, emotional well-being, and classroom practices.

Sub-theme 1.1: Diverse Administrative, Civil, and Legal Accusations

Teachers face a wide spectrum of complaints ranging from alleged physical maltreatment during student discipline to personal financial issues, which often incur substantial legal expenses and formal court interventions that deeply disrupt educators' personal and financial stability. As Participant 5 (P5) recounted regarding a false physical discipline allegation, "Actually, ma'am, I already had a hint because there were stories reaching me that I allegedly physically hurt the student, which was not true. There were expenses involved because we really had to face the case, even after it reached the court."

Sub-theme 1.2: Multi-Agency Escalation and Systemic Pressure

Complaints rarely remain localized within the school premises; instead, they rapidly escalate across multiple institutional, local, and national oversight bodies, multiplying the administrative burden and psychological pressure placed on educators. Illustrating this intense systemic escalation, Participant 4 (P4) shared that "when I received the complaint, I received several complaints from the division, region, CHED, and 8888 from the same person. It reached the point that we were reported to the barangay and repeatedly called by the principal for confrontation." Similarly, Participant 1 (P1) highlighted how an issue connected to students outside school premises expanded into a national concern, recalling, "I felt dragged down because

the issue spread not only within the school but throughout the country. I received memoranda from the national, regional, and division offices. As a teacher, I had no right to take sides because I am not the type of person who is one-sided."

Sub-theme 1.3: Severe Emotional Distress and Public Shame

Facing formal administrative actions inflicts profound psychological strain, including intense fear, anxiety over career loss, and public embarrassment across the surrounding community. Describing the psychological impact of receiving a formal summons regarding financial debts within a teachers' association, Participant 2 (P2) expressed that "it was my first time receiving a summons. I became frightened and ashamed. The issue even reached the division and regional offices." Furthermore, even unverified informal grievances create persistent anxiety regarding long-term job security, as Participant 6 (P6) noted, "Even before, I had already received complaints, but they were only informal complaints. I became afraid I might lose my job over the complaint."

Sub-theme 1.4: Pedagogical Hesitation and Fear-Based Discipline

A critical consequence of formal grievances is the chilling effect produced on classroom management, as teachers experience heightened hesitation and fear when enforcing standard rules, fundamentally altering their pedagogical approach out of self-preservation. Detailing this defensive shift in classroom discipline, Participant 3 (P3) explained, "It was part of our agreement and class rules that there would be consequences for students who repeatedly came late. My teaching style remained the same, but there were major changes in how I disciplined students because I became afraid to do so."



Theme 2: Coping Mechanisms and Maintaining Healthy Functioning Amidst Adversity

This main theme illuminates the internal, relational, spiritual, and vocational anchor points educators draw upon to preserve their psychological stability, uphold their dignity, and sustain their professional roles despite ongoing complaints.

Sub-theme 2.1: Spiritual Grounding and Faith Practices

Spirituality and religious practices serve as primary foundational anchors for emotional release, comfort, and inner strength during periods of severe distress. Reflecting on faith as a crucial coping tool during dark moments, Participant 1 (P1) emphasized, *"I constantly talked to God... and I really went to church. That became the best weapon whenever we are surrounded by darkness. If you stop believing in yourself, I don't think there's any need for you to come forward."* Likewise, Participant 2 (P2) linked spiritual practice with acceptance and emotional openness, sharing, *"Prayer was the number one thing that helped me the most. Then my family and true friends who genuinely supported me. It is true that everyone has debts... I did not run away from mine, so I should not be ashamed."*

Sub-theme 2.2: Relational and Familial Support Networks

Strong interpersonal bonds with immediate family members, spouses, parents, and trusted friends provide essential emotional safety nets and practical relief from mental strain. Describing how family support helped buffer fear and mental exhaustion, Participant 4 (P4) advised others to *"just continue praying always and rely on family support. Because I am naturally fearful, especially when I am not used to such situations that greatly affect mental and emotional health. During weekends, my husband would bring me to my mother's place in the province so I could socialize and feel better."*

Sub-theme 2.3: Emotional Regulation, Patience, and Selective Trust

Maintaining healthy functioning requires intentional internal strategies, including pausing to release emotions, practicing self-restraint, managing anger, and exercising caution about whom to trust in the workplace. Detailing the need for emotional restraint and boundary setting, Participant 3 (P3) observed, *"I needed to calm myself and avoid being ruled by anger. I became careful about whom I could trust and talk to. What I really wanted was simply to continue teaching."*

Sub-theme 2.4: Professional Commitment, Personal Values, and Dignity

Educators stay resilient by anchoring themselves in their core values, standing by the truth, maintaining personal dignity, and drawing motivation from their dedication to their students and families. Demonstrating this commitment to professional role-modeling alongside parental backing, Participant 5 (P5) reflected, *"I really stood by the truth. With my parents' help, I was able to face it. Show them that even if we are hurt, we remain role models as teachers."* Finally, Participant 6 (P6) illustrated how personal values and family obligations drive ongoing

perseverance: *"What I did during that time was to pause first. I prayed, paused again, and went outside the school to cry at Sto. Niño Church to release my emotions. Maintaining my dignity when I feel judged is less about proving myself and more about staying anchored in my own values. This profession as a teacher... and of course, my child is the reason why I keep going."*

Summary of Findings

The results reveal that some Junior High School teachers were accused of physically harming students, which resulted in court involvement and legal expenses, complaints filed in barangay offices, school administrations, division offices, regional offices, CHED, and even through the national 8888 complaint system. Meanwhile, these teachers received formal complaints and maintained healthy functioning amid them through prayer, family support, emotional regulation, self-belief, and commitment to their profession.

DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the study's findings are presented. The researcher also presented the implications for practice and the study's future direction.

Complaints Encountered by Junior High School Teachers

The findings of the researcher state that some Junior High School teachers were accused of physically harming students, which resulted in court involvement and legal expenses, complaints filed in barangay offices, school administrations, division offices, regional offices, CHED, and even through the national 8888 complaint system. Several complaints concerned classroom discipline, particularly the implementation of punishments and the enforcement of classroom rules. Some participants also received formal summons that affected their professional reputation, promotions, and emotional well-being. Furthermore, teachers experienced informal complaints that later escalated into formal ones, resulting from their fear of losing their teaching career, feelings of shame, anxiety, and hesitation to discipline students. Collectively, the complaints involved allegations of student maltreatment, disciplinary issues, financial and barangay disputes, and administrative cases elevated to higher educational authorities.

This finding affirms the study by Longobardi et al. (2022), which found that teachers frequently encounter complaints and accusations related to classroom disciplinary practices, student behavior management, and allegations of student maltreatment, often resulting in emotional distress and professional insecurity among educators. It emphasized that accusations and disciplinary procedures from students or parents may affect teachers' emotional well-being, confidence, and professional relationships within the school community. This is parallel to the researcher's study because Junior High School teachers experienced complaints involving disciplinary actions, allegations of physical harm to students, and formal cases elevated to school administrations and higher educational authorities. Both studies highlight that disciplinary-related



complaints can place teachers under emotional pressure and threaten their professional stability.

Similarly, Collie (2023) asserted that administrative demands, workplace conflicts, and formal investigations significantly contribute to teachers' stress, anxiety, fear, and reduced confidence in classroom management. The study explained that teachers who receive complaints, memoranda, or formal investigations often become hesitant to implement discipline due to fear of legal consequences, reputational damage, and career-related effects such as delayed promotions or job insecurity. Furthermore, the researcher's assertion that informal complaints escalated into formal administrative and legal cases supports the previous claims. Together, these studies affirm that complaints related to discipline, allegations of student maltreatment from the surrounding environment, and administrative conflicts can affect teachers' emotional well-being, professional reputations, and their ability to perform their teaching responsibilities with confidence.

However, the researcher's claim contradicts Aldrup et al. (2018), who explained that although teachers encounter student misbehavior and disciplinary challenges, these situations do not always result in severe emotional distress, professional insecurity, or reduced teaching effectiveness when teachers possess strong classroom management skills and supportive school environments. Their study found that effective teacher-student relationships, emotional competence, and institutional support can mitigate the negative impact of disciplinary conflicts and help prevent teachers from experiencing significant anxiety or fear when managing students. In contrast, the Junior High School teachers in the researcher's study described how complaints, allegations of student maltreatment, memoranda, and formal investigations created fear, emotional stress, hesitation to discipline students, and concerns about professional reputation and job security. This distinct vulnerability to institutional structures aligns with findings from Hu et al. (2023), who noted that modern teaching has increasingly become a high-risk occupation in which teachers grapple with severe anxiety and powerlessness due to the legalistic and administrative uncertainties surrounding discipline.

Furthermore, Gahungu (2018) highlighted that when educational institutions face structural shifts in disciplinary policies, the resulting compliance frameworks and lack of clear alignment with school administration often place teachers' careers and professional stability at risk. Thus, while Aldrup et al. (2018) emphasized that supportive environments and effective classroom management may lessen the harmful effects of localized disciplinary issues, the participants of the researcher's study highlighted how macro-level formal complaints and administrative cases override these interpersonal safeguards, severely intensifying emotional pressure and professional insecurity among teachers (see also Nwoko et al., 2023).

Teachers' Coping Mechanisms Amidst Complaints

The researcher's findings indicate that Junior High School teachers maintained healthy functioning amid complaints through prayer, family support, emotional regulation, self-belief,

and commitment to their profession. Many participants relied on spirituality, such as praying and going to church, to cope with emotional stress and fear. Trusted family members, colleagues, friends, and loved ones also served as sources of emotional strength and encouragement. The participants further emphasized the importance of controlling emotions, choosing trusted confidants, and remaining grounded in their personal values and dignity despite others' judgment. Some maintained their resilience by standing for the truth, accepting their situation, and continuing to fulfill their teaching responsibilities to students. Ultimately, spirituality, resilience, emotional support, and professional commitment helped Junior High School teachers remain emotionally stable and continue functioning despite the complaints they received.

The finding affirms the study by Lee and Kim (2022), which found that teachers who experience occupational stress are more likely to maintain emotional stability and resilience when they receive strong social and emotional support from family, friends, and colleagues. It highlighted that strong interpersonal relationships help teachers cope with emotional exhaustion, strengthen psychological well-being, and sustain professional functioning despite workplace adversities. This aligns with the researcher's study because the Junior High School teachers identified that their immediate family members, trusted friends, and loved ones were important sources of encouragement, comfort, and emotional strength amid complaints and professional challenges. Both studies highlight that emotional support systems serve as protective factors, helping teachers remain resilient and committed to their responsibilities despite stress and adversity.

Similarly, the study by Bakar et al. (2023) found that spirituality, emotion regulation, and positive coping strategies contribute significantly to teachers' resilience and psychological well-being in stressful situations. It emphasized that practices such as prayer, self-reflection, and emotional control help teachers reduce anxiety, maintain self-worth, and continue performing their professional duties effectively. Furthermore, the researcher's assertion that Junior High School teachers maintained healthy functioning through prayer, self-belief, emotional regulation, and commitment to their profession supports the previous claims of this study. Together, these studies affirm that these things are the coping mechanisms of teachers that enable them to be emotionally stable and function despite emotional pressures and workplace complaints.

However, the researcher's claim contradicts Pressley's (2022) assertion that many teachers experiencing prolonged workplace stress, emotional pressure, and professional challenges struggle to maintain healthy functioning despite personal coping strategies and support systems. The study found that continuous stressors in the teaching profession often led to emotional exhaustion, burnout, anxiety, and intentions to leave the profession, especially when institutional support is lacking. In contrast, the Junior High School teachers in this study described how prayer, family support, emotional regulation, self-belief, and commitment to their profession enabled them to remain emotionally stable and continue to fulfill their responsibilities



despite complaints and adversity. While Pressley emphasized the damaging effects of chronic stress on teachers' well-being and professional functioning, the participants in the researcher's study highlighted resilience, spirituality, and emotional support as protective factors that helped them maintain healthy functioning amid workplace pressures and formal complaints

Implications for Theory and Practice

Drawing on the study's modified paradigm, these findings broaden our understanding of the relationship between administrative stress and teacher well-being. The paradigm demonstrates that while formal accusations disrupt an educator's sense of security, their capacity to remain functional depends on both internal anchors, such as faith and emotional regulation, and external support systems. This perspective shifts the view of resilience away from an isolated individual trait, framing it instead as a dynamic process heavily influenced by whether an institution's climate is supportive or punitive.

For school leaders and policymakers, these findings highlight the need for tangible support structures when formal grievances arise. School administrators should conduct regular, practical seminars on teachers' legal rights and administrative due process, ensuring educators do not have to navigate complaints without guidance. Additionally, the Department of Education (DepEd) should modernize its mental health helplines to provide confidential, accessible counseling for teachers, staff, and students during high-stress investigations. Providing clear procedures, psychological aid, and institutional backing protects teachers' well-being and allows educators to maintain their commitment to the classroom despite ongoing legal or administrative challenges.

Future Directions of the Study

As the researcher looks forward to this study, which may explore the relationships among adversity, stress, resilience, and healthy functioning among teachers facing formal complaints, using a larger sample from diverse educational settings and regions. Additionally, future research may develop survey questionnaires based on the themes identified in this study, including emotional distress, workplace pressure, coping mechanisms, institutional support, professional identity, resilience, and healthy functioning. Mixed-methods research may also be conducted to examine further how formal complaints, occupational stress, and school-related adversities influence teachers' emotional well-being, teaching performance, and professional relationships. Furthermore, future studies may investigate the effectiveness of mental health programs, counseling services, and institutional interventions in helping teachers sustain healthy functioning despite professional challenges and stressful experiences.

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Ethical Consideration

To ensure the quality and integrity of the research, participants will be selected through purposeful sampling to yield credible and meaningful outcomes. Trustworthiness will be anchored in the proper administration of written informed consent, which will be conducted after the study's protocols have been reviewed and approved by SMILE, the ethics board of the HCDC Graduate School. Such oversight ensures that every participant is formally informed about the purpose of the study, that participation is voluntary, and that they have the option to stop at any moment. To ensure data quality and enhance clarity, the researcher will maintain a professional, nonjudgmental setting. Shank (2002) contends that the ability to assess someone's sincerity is the most important component of trustworthiness, noting that errors often stem from uncertainty.

Conflict of Interest

The researcher declared no conflict of interest in the conduct of this study. The study was conducted with honesty, fairness, and objectivity to ensure that the results were based solely on the data collected and the research purpose. This statement highlights the researchers' dedication to ethical practices, transparency, and the reliability of the study's findings.

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