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Research paper

Coping with Stress Among Academic Staff in Times of Crisis

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled higher education institutions to transition immediately to emergency remote teaching (ERT), placing significant professional and psychological demands on academic staff. Grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study examined how internal psychological and external professional resources were associated with perceived stress among academic staff at a multicultural teacher-training college in Israel. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed; quantitative data were collected from 83 faculty members using measures of perceived stress, resilience, self-efficacy, social-emotional competencies, and digital skills. In parallel, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 academics to deepen understanding of coping processes. Findings revealed moderate levels of perceived stress alongside relatively strong coping resources. Resilience emerged as the most robust predictor of lower stress in the regression analysis, whereas self-efficacy, social-emotional competencies, and digital skills did not demonstrate significant independent effects. Gender differences were observed, with women reporting lower resilience levels, and prior online teaching experience was associated with lower stress and higher resilience. The qualitative findings complemented and deepened the quantitative results by highlighting the role of self-awareness, relational support, and institutional professional training in sustaining coping during the transition to ERT. Although culturally nuanced coping narratives emerged in the interviews, these should be interpreted cautiously due to the modest qualitative sample. Overall, the findings are discussed from both theoretical and practical perspectives, emphasizing coping as a multilevel resource process and highlighting the central role of resilience in supporting adaptation during institutional crisis.

Keywords: conservation of resources theory (COR), coping resources, resilience, emergency remote teaching (ERT), higher education

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted one of the most disruptive global crises in recent history, profoundly affecting higher education systems worldwide (Kumar et al., 2021; Scheffert & Henson, 2025). Universities were required to suspend face-to-face instruction and rapidly transition to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), defined as a temporary and reactive shift to online delivery under crisis conditions (Hodges et al., 2020). Unlike established online education, which involves deliberate pedagogical planning and instructional design, ERT was implemented

under conditions of uncertainty, limited preparation time, and heightened institutional pressure (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Sosa-Díaz et al., 2025).

For academic staff, this transition was not merely a technical adjustment but a profound professional and personal challenge, involving shifts in instructional practices and professional identity under rapidly changing conditions (Peker et al., 2021). Faculty members were consequently required to redesign course materials, modify assessment practices, and navigate unfamiliar digital platforms, often while receiving minimal training or institutional preparation (Kaeane & Molokomme, 2025; Marek et al., 2021). At the same time, lockdown measures blurred work–family boundaries, intensifying role strain, particularly for those balancing caregiving responsibilities (Andrew et al., 2022). These cumulative demands contributed to elevated stress levels among academic staff (Marek et al., 2021; Shen & Slater, 2021), as the abrupt shift to remote instruction heightened uncertainty, workload pressure, and emotional exhaustion (Košir et al., 2022).

Importantly, stress responses were not uniform. Research has documented gender disparities, with female academics often reporting higher psychological strain, partly due to disproportionate caregiving responsibilities during lockdowns (Fenollar-Cortés et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2023). Differences have also been associated with prior experience in online teaching, suggesting that familiarity with digital instruction may influence adaptation to crisis-induced transitions (Littlejohn et al., 2021).

Although existing literature has extensively documented heightened stress levels during the COVID-19 pandemic (de Cordova et al., 2024; Emrich et al., 2024; Shen & Slater, 2021), fewer studies have examined the coping resources that enabled some faculty members to maintain professional functioning under prolonged crisis conditions. The present study addresses this gap by investigating the coping resources associated with perceived stress among academic staff at a multicultural teacher-training college in Israel, where faculty members include both Arab and Jewish academics.

Theoretical perspectives on coping in crisis contexts

Crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic activate complex coping processes that extend beyond objective demands. Several theoretical frameworks have been proposed to explain how individuals respond to acute and prolonged stressors.

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping conceptualizes stress as a function of cognitive appraisal, whereby individuals evaluate whether a situation poses a threat and assess their perceived capacity to manage it (de Cordova et al., 2024; Scheffert & Henson, 2025). This framework emphasizes the interpretive dimension of stress responses.

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory shifts attention from appraisal to resource dynamics, proposing that stress emerges when valued resources are threatened or insufficient to meet situational demands (Pan & Zhu, 2025; Sheng et al., 2025). Unlike appraisal-based models, COR provides a broader framework for understanding how resource loss and resource availability influence adaptation over time.

Complementary perspectives further illuminate coping mechanisms. Self-Determination Theory highlights the role of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in sustaining motivation under constrained conditions (Thomas et al., 2021), while Ecological Systems Theory situates coping within broader social and cultural systems that shape access to supportive resources (Sheng et al., 2025).

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that coping during crisis reflects an interplay between cognitive appraisal, resource availability, motivational processes, and sociocultural context.

Internal psychological resources

Within the theoretical frameworks outlined above, individual psychological resources play a central role in determining how faculty members responded to pandemic-related demands. Coping with the crisis required personal reorganization and adaptation, with crisis management broadly conceived as restoring a disrupted system to functional equilibrium (Williams et al., 2017).

Studies indicate that the ability to cope with crises and quickly restore the previous state of affairs is associated with a number of resources, such as optimism, perceiving stressful situations as challenges to be overcome, commitment, ability to adjust to change, and resilience (e.g., Park et al., 2021; Ross et al., 2024). Scholars believe that coping with a crisis depends to a great extent on the level of resilience of the individual or institution (Ross et al., 2024; Southwick et al., 2014). Resilience is defined as the ability to adjust to traumatic or negative experiences in a positive manner (APA, 2022; Southwick et al., 2014). It is considered a multidimensional psychological resource which helps prevent people from becoming despondent and enables them to grow and succeed at times of distress, to effectively cope with stress, and to maintain a stable psychological function (Park et al., 2021; Sisto et al., 2019).

An individual's resilience is influenced by self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to achieve goals (Bandura, 1997). Studies have shown that beliefs of self-efficacy form as a result of past performance, perception of self-efficacy, efforts made, the task's level of difficulty, and the extent of available help (Zimmerman et al., 1992). Self-efficacy probably affects people's ability to adjust and cope with difficult situations in a flexible manner, as well as their aspirations, analytical thinking, and perseverance in the face of failure (Bandura, 1997). Moreover, the level of stress and tension that people feel during a crisis varies according to their level of self-efficacy (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005), so academics with a higher sense of self-efficacy will probably cope better during a crisis.

Another important resource for coping with stress is social-emotional competencies, which are crucial for higher education (Durlak et al. 2015). These competencies include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2022). These competencies enable individuals to regulate emotional reactions, sustain supportive relationships, and maintain psychological balance during uncertainty (Cavins, 2021).

External professional resources

In addition to internal psychological capacities, the pandemic underscored the importance of professional and technological resources in coping with the shift to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). The COVID-19 crisis has posed an extraordinary challenge to institutions of higher education around the world due to the necessity to transition from in-person to emergency remote teaching (Case & Luongo, 2025). In Israel, as elsewhere, academic staff were required to transition to ERT with little to no prior training in online instruction and limited experience with digital teaching methods. This transition generated considerable pressure and stress, such that a person with higher levels of digital skills or previous experience in online teaching will cope better with this new teaching method during the COVID-19 crisis than a person with low digital skills or no previous experience with online teaching (Littlejohn et al., 2021). Therefore, digital skills of the academic staff may function as an instrumental coping resource by increasing perceived control and reducing uncertainty during the COVID-19 crisis (Dorsah, 2021; Neborsky et al., 2020).

Effective crisis management in educational institutions has evolved from a reactive measure into a strategic imperative, requiring robust, coordinated planning rooted in legal and operational frameworks (Manisuru, 2025). Therefore, institutional responses, such as professional training on digital skills, were vital in providing faculty with guidelines for handling disruptions (Case & Luongo, 2025).

These external resources may buffer stress by reducing the friction associated with technological demands and enabling continuity of instructional practice.

Demographic and socio-cultural considerations

The effectiveness of both internal and external coping resources is not uniform across all faculty; rather, it is shaped by demographic and socio-cultural factors that influence how resources are accessed, valued, and deployed. Gender and cultural orientation do not function as direct coping resources in the manner of resilience but instead serve as contextual factors that shape whether and how those resources translate into buffering stress (Hamid et al., 2023; Matud, 2004).

Within this framework, gender is treated as a theoretically relevant demographic variable rather than as a purely descriptive characteristic. During COVID-19 lockdowns, female academics often faced intensified work–family boundary blurring and disproportionate caregiving demands, conditions that may reduce available coping resources and heighten vulnerability to resource depletion (Andrew et al., 2022; Fenollar-Cortés et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2023). From a COR perspective, such structural constraints may accelerate resource loss and amplify stress responses. Accordingly, gender comparison in the present study was theoretically grounded rather than exploratory.

Cultural orientation serves as a primary lens through which individuals appraise and navigate crisis-induced stress, reflecting broader sociopolitical and ecological frameworks that distinguish collectivist and individualistic societies within Israel (Hayosh & Binyamin, 2021; Rahal, 2024). Arab society is characterized as a collectivist, traditional, and patriarchal system where the "self" is an integral part of the family microsystem and community rather than an independent entity (Dwairy, 2021; Nijim-Ektelat et al., 2018; Rahal, 2024). Consequently, Arab individuals often utilize collective coping mechanisms, relying on extended kinship networks and social anchors to maintain stability during disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic (Dwairy, 2021; Hayosh & Binyamin, 2021).

In contrast, Jewish culture in Israel, which is more aligned with Western individualist frameworks, prioritizes personal agency, self-directed psychological care, and the expression of selfhood (Hayosh & Binyamin, 2021; Rahal, 2024). During periods of crisis, Jewish individuals tend to be more self-focused, centering their coping efforts on their own anxieties and perceived "magic-like" personal competence to overcome obstacles (Hayosh & Binyamin, 2021). While resilience remains a universal human capacity, these diverging patterns underscore that its expression

is a recursive, multisystem process mediated by the "nested social environments" that determine which resources—whether communal and identity-based or individual and self-oriented—are culturally validated and most effective (Hayosh & Binyamin, 2021; Nijim-Ektelat et al., 2018; Rahal, 2024).

Despite growing research on stress among academic staff during the COVID-19 crisis, limited attention has been given to examining internal and external coping resources simultaneously within multicultural higher education contexts.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: A CONSERVATION OF RESOURCES PERSPECTIVE

The present study is grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which offers the most fitting framework for this context precisely because it shifts the analytical focus from the objective severity of a crisis to the availability and mobilization of resources. This is particularly apt for the COVID-19 pandemic, where the demands placed on academic staff were largely uniform across institutions, yet stress responses varied considerably — variation that COR attributes to differences in resource portfolios rather than differences in objective exposure.

Within this framework, in the present study coping resources are conceptualized into two interrelated domains: internal psychological resources (resilience, self-efficacy, and social-emotional competencies) and external professional resources (digital skills of the academic staff). Both domains are treated as resource reservoirs whose relative availability is predicted to account for differences in perceived stress levels among academic staff. Demographic and socio-cultural factors — particularly gender and cultural orientation — are contextual conditions that determine how these resources are accessed and expressed across different faculty groups within this multicultural higher education institute.

AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Grounded in Conservation of Resources theory, the present study aims to examine how internal psychological resources and external professional resources contributed to academic staff's ability to cope with stress during the COVID-19 crisis. Specifically, the study investigates the relative predictive power of resilience, self-efficacy, social-emotional competencies, and digital skills while considering demographic and cultural factors within a multicultural teacher-training college in Israel.

To address these objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What were the levels of perceived stress and coping resources among academic staff during the COVID-19 crisis?
2. Do stress levels and coping resources differ according to demographic and contextual variables (gender, nationality, prior online teaching experience)?
3. To what extent do internal psychological resources (resilience, self-efficacy, and social-emotional competencies) and external professional resources (digital skills) predict perceived stress among academic staff?

Research hypotheses

To guide the quantitative analysis, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Stress levels and coping resources will differ across demographic and contextual variables, particularly gender and prior online teaching experience.

H2: Internal psychological resources (resilience, self-efficacy, and social-emotional competencies) and external professional resources (digital skills) will be negatively associated with perceived stress among academic staff.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and analyzed separately, and the findings were integrated during interpretation. The quantitative component examined levels and predictors of stress and coping resources, while the qualitative component provided in-depth insights into academic staff's lived experiences and coping processes during the COVID-19 crisis.

Study participants in the quantitative part

The study included 83 academic staff members from an academic teacher training college in the north of Israel. The participants included 67 Arabs (80.7%) and 16 Jews (19.3%); 36 were men and 47 women. Most participants had a Ph.D. (72.3%), and the rest (27.7%) had a master's degree. The age range was 28-70 years (M=51.2, SD=8.9), and the teaching experience ranged between 2-46 years (M=24.6, SD=10.5). Fifty-nine percent of the participants had no prior experience in online teaching, compared to 41% who did have such experience.

Study participants in the qualitative part

Fourteen academics were selected using layered purposeful sampling to ensure representation across nationality and gender. In addition, age and years of teaching experience were considered to enhance diversity within the qualitative sample (see **Table 1**).

Table 1

Background characteristics of the qualitative participants

Variable	Category	n
Age	28–49	8
	50–70	6
Gender	Female	7
	Male	7
Nationality	Jewish	7
	Arab	7
Teaching experience (years)	2–20	7
	21–46	7

Procedure

The study was approved by the Ethics committee of the college. The questionnaire was constructed using Google Forms and sent to the academic staff via e-mail and WhatsApp in the summer of 2020. At the same time, the researchers interviewed 14 members of the academic staff who had agreed to participate. The rules of ethics were upheld with regard to the interviewees and the respondents of the anonymous questionnaire, alike. Before conducting the interviews, the researchers explained to the participants that they had the right to discontinue the interview, if they felt uncomfortable, and promised to protect their privacy and maintain confidentiality. To protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality, all names used in the qualitative findings are pseudonyms. Participants were informed that their identities would remain confidential and that pseudonyms would be used in reporting the findings. Given that the sample was drawn from a specific institutional group, no identifying personal details (such as real names, specific academic roles, departments, or other traceable information) are disclosed.

Measures

Quantitative measures

In the current study five questionnaires were used, including the following variables (see appendix A for examples): 1) Perceived Stress Scale-PSS (Cohen et al. 1983). A 14-item scale with a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (often); 2) A general self-efficacy questionnaire developed by Chen and Gully (1997). This questionnaire includes 14 items with a 5-point Likert scale (1=not at all, 5=to a large extent); 3) Social-emotional competencies questionnaire (SEC-Q) (Zych et al. 2018), which contains 16 items with a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree); 4) Digital skills of academic staff in higher education inventory (Blau & Antonovsky 2009), 15 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 6=Strongly agree) ; 5) The Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al. 2008) which includes 6 items with a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree).

These five questionnaires were combined, and the version of the current study questionnaire included a total of 65 statements in Hebrew. The questionnaire required approximately 20 minutes to complete, however, completion time was not formally recorded and participants were not subject to a time limit. The first section of the questionnaire gathered demographic and professional background variables, including age, gender, nationality (Arab or Jewish), education, years of teaching experience, and previous online teaching experience. Online teaching experience was assessed as a dichotomous variable ("yes"/"no"), indicating whether participants had taught online before the COVID-19 crisis. The measure was designed to capture prior exposure to online instruction rather than its duration or intensity.

For consistency, all questionnaire items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very small extent, 2 = small extent, 3 = moderate extent, 4 = large extent, 5 = very large extent). Some transformations were conducted prior to scoring. The Hebrew version of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) includes six negatively worded items (Items 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, and 14) and eight positively worded items (Items 4–10 and 13). The positively worded items were reverse-coded prior to analysis (1=5, 2=4, 3=3, 4=2, 5=1), ensuring that higher values consistently reflected higher perceived stress. The final stress score was calculated as the mean of the 14 items, resulting in a possible score range of 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater perceived stress.

In the Brief Resilience Scale, three negatively worded items (Items 2, 4, and 6) were similarly reverse-coded prior to calculating the mean score; thus, higher scores indicate higher resilience. No reverse coding was required for the remaining measures (self-efficacy, social-emotional competencies, and digital skills), as all items were positively worded and scored in the same direction.

Qualitative measure

The qualitative component was conducted using a semi-structured interview, which combines the flexibility of open-ended inquiry with the organizational structure of a guided interview format (Sabar-Ben Yehoshua, 2001). This approach was chosen to complement the quantitative findings and to provide in-depth insight into academic staff's experiences during the COVID-19 crisis. The interview guide was developed based on the theoretical framework and literature reviewed in this study and was aligned with the research questions. The questions were designed to explore participants' emotional responses to the crisis, their experiences with the transition to emergency remote teaching, and the internal and external resources they mobilized to cope with the situation.

Examples of interview questions included:

- "Describe your experience during the COVID-19 semester."
- "How did you experience the transition to emergency remote teaching?"
- "What helped you cope with this period?"
- "What sources of emotional, social, or technical support were available to you?"

Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows (Version 28.0; IBM Corp., 2021). The analyses included descriptive statistics, assessment of internal consistency reliability, repeated-measures analyses to examine differences among questionnaire variables, correlation analyses to assess associations between variables, and multiple regression analyses. Specifically, regression analyses were conducted to examine the effects of background variables (age, gender, and prior online teaching experience) on stress and coping resources, and a simultaneous-entry multiple regression model was used to assess the unique contribution of resilience, self-efficacy, social-emotional competence (SEC), and digital skills to stress levels.

Qualitative data analysis

The interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017), a content analysis method that begins with a holistic reading of the data and continues by breaking it down to topics that converge into themes. The data analysis was carried out by all researchers, which validates the reliability of the study.

FINDINGS

Levels of perceived stress and coping resources during the COVID-19 crisis

To examine the first research question, 'What were the levels of perceived stress and coping resources among academic staff during the COVID-19 crisis?', a descriptive statistical analysis was carried out on the five variables that were evaluated in the questionnaire, and reliability was assessed as internal consistency. The findings are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2

Means, standard deviations (in brackets) and the reliability of questionnaire variables (N=83)

Variable	M (SD)	α value
Stress	2.89 (.90)	.87
Self-efficacy	4.08 (.60)	.92
Social-Emotional Competencies SEC-Q	4.15 (.46)	.88
Digital skills of the academic staff	3.83 (.62)	.91
Resilience	3.43 (.77)	.84

As shown in **Table 2**, the average stress score indicates that the stress level experienced by the academic staff due to the Covid-19 crisis was moderate (M=2.89), while the averages scores of the different resources that helped them cope were higher than the average level of stress. Reliability analysis was performed using internal consistency, as can be seen in **Table 2** the Cronbach alpha coefficients of the research tool are high and sufficient for analyzing the study findings.

To compare the differences between the averages of the questionnaire measures a repeated measures analysis was performed. The results showed that there was a significant effect for the type of measure ($F_{(1.92, 157.39)}$ =47.93, p<.001). Post-hoc comparisons with a Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons showed that the differences between the averages of all questionnaire measures were statistically significant (p<.05) except for the difference between the self-efficacy and the SEC-Q averages (p=.76). The high scores in self-efficacy and social-emotional competencies (SEC) indicate that the academic staff tends to report themselves as having a high level of self-efficacy and social-emotional competencies. In general, these significant differences indicate that the resources that helped the academic staff maintain learning continuity during the Covid-19 crisis, exceeded their level of stress which was reasonable.

The findings described above are supported by the statements of the 14 interviewees, who talked about their feelings of stress and the resources that helped them cope with it. When describing the stress that they were experiencing, they referred to two levels: personal and professional. On the personal level, the participants mentioned feelings of stress and worry due to the crisis, as the pandemic was seen as a threat to the entire world. For example, *Omri* expressed concerns about the virus and said *"At first, the situation was scary and difficult. The information on television overloaded my brain and overwhelmed my emotions... it was very hard for me, because I had to use the public transportation... that was the most stressful thing for me."*

On the professional level, the participants mentioned the challenges arising from their lack of experience in online teaching and their inadequate digital skills. Most of them reported stress, overload, and frustration due to the transition to online learning. *Adi* said, "*I had no prior experience in teaching an online course. I was really tense, wondering: what's expected of me? How can I teach like that?*" Similarly, *Adam* described the difficulty as a high mountain he had to climb without the proper gear. He said, "*I can walk, but I'm not sure I will be able to climb the mountain and what awaits me there, and it's extremely stressful.*"

In addition to the feelings of stress, interviewees talked about the resources that helped them cope and keep the stress at a moderate level, as is reflected in *Omri*'s words: "*I didn't let myself give in to the stress. I was under a lot of stress, but I didn't let it overwhelm me. I took it to a different place, a place of working and learning.*" Similarly, *Dana* added, "*I didn't let the stress take control of me. I recruited my inner strength to reorganize myself... I felt that I had to cope with the chaos, and within it I found strength.*" In conclusion, the participants' words reflect a reasonable stress level beside high level of coping resources, as displayed in **Table 2**.

Differences in stress and coping resources by demographic and socio-cultural considerations

To answer the second research question: 'Do stress levels and coping resources differ according to demographic and contextual variables (gender, nationality, prior online teaching experience)?', multiple regression was carried out to the five questionnaire measures by background variables; age, gender, nationality (Arab or Jewish), education, years of teaching experience and prior experience in online teaching. It is important to note that the item that assessed prior experience in online teaching was answered by either 'yes' or 'no'. The whole model was significant only for stress measure ($F_{(7,74)}$=2.42, p<0.05) and resilience ($F_{(7,74)}$=3.21, p<0.01) thus the background variables explained 19% of the variance in stress and 23% in resilience. Although, only the prior experience in online teaching was significant for prediction of stress (β=-.25, p=0.04) namely, academics with previous experience in online teaching tended to report lower levels of stress and vice versa.

With regards to resilience, significant differences were found in gender (β=-.25, p=0.03) between the academic staff indicating that on average, men reported higher levels of resilience during the crisis than women.

Elaborated figures concerning the differences among the academic staff members in the level of stress and the resources that helped them cope with it, emerged in the interviews that reflect differences in cultural background. The interviews revealed differences related to cultural diversity which implies an individual versus collective coping; this did not manifest in the quantitative analysis due to the size of the groups, which did not allow for analysis of variance according to nationality (Arabs: n=67, Jews: n=16). Arab academic staff members spoke of the importance of the physical space, such as the balcony at home and the local park, as an emotional-social anchor enabling interpersonal communication during lockdowns which helped them cope with the stress. By comparison, the Jewish participants highlighted such aspects as self-directed care and the importance of maintaining a normal routine and healthy habits. This approach helped *Adi, Yafa* and *Rani* to look after their health and cope with stress during the crisis. *Adi* explained, *"I'm an active person, watch my health, love spending time outdoors. It energizes me... I go out for walks every day and swim at the club." Similarly, Yafa* followed a daily routine to manage her stress.

Furthermore, age and gender norms played a role within the Arab academic staff members. Younger staff members, especially those with young children, faced stress due to the overlapping of work and family life. For instance, Amir mentioned how his daughter interrupted his Zoom lecture, causing him stress. Similarly, Sami felt overwhelmed as he had to look after the children while working from home because his wife was an essential worker. In contrast, *Omri*, an older Arab academic staff member, said that his wife took care of his quiet working environment. He said, *"My wife made sure I had the appropriate conditions to work at home in peace and quiet. Sometimes she*

even had to leave the house to give me a quiet space". This suggests that younger Arab men such as Amir and Sami challenged conventional gender norms by actively assisting their wives. This was in contrast to the patriarchal traditions observed by older generations.

Before examining the predictors that helped the academic staff to cope with the stress caused by the Covid-19 crisis, it was important to test the relationships between the questionnaire measures; stress, self-efficacy, social-emotional competencies (SEC-Q), digital skills of the academic staff, and resilience, therefore, a correlational analysis was performed. Pearson coefficients are presented in **Table 3**.

Table 3

Correlations between the questionnaire variables (N=83)

Variable	Stress	Resilience	Self-efficacy	SEC-Q	Digital skills
Stress					
Resilience	-.63**				
Self-efficacy	-.45**	.57**			
SEC-Q	-.37**	.52**	.76**		
Digital skills	-.30**	.23*	.33**	.37**	

**p<.05, **p<.01*

The results revealed significant medium to high correlations (ranging between .23-.76), the highest was a positive correlation between self-efficacy and social-emotional competencies SEC-Q (r=.76, p<.01). The next high correlation is between stress and resilience (r=-.63, p<.01) and this correlation was negative, namely an increase in the level of resilience of the academic staff leads to a decrease in the level of stress. In addition, significant negative correlations were found between stress, self-efficacy and social-emotional competencies. These correlations suggest that academic staff members with higher levels of coping resources had lower levels of stress.

In addition, the correlation analysis demonstrated that the digital skills of the academic staff are less related to stress, resilience, self-efficacy, and social-emotional competencies may be because digital skill is an external resource that requires learning and practical experience.

Contribution of internal psychological and external professional resources to stress levels

To answer the third research question: 'To what extent do internal psychological resources (resilience, self-efficacy, social-emotional competence (SEC) and external professional resources (digital skills) predict stress levels?', a multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether resilience, self-efficacy, social-emotional competence (SEC), and digital skills predicted stress levels among academic staff. Prior to conducting the regression analysis, multicollinearity diagnostics were examined. Tolerance values ranged from .374 to .858, and VIF values ranged from 1.17 to 2.67, all below the conservative threshold of 5, indicating no serious multicollinearity concerns. Following this procedure, the overall regression model was significant, $F_{(4, 78)} = 15.10$, $p < .001$, explaining 43.6% of the variance in stress ($R^2 = .436$, Adjusted $R^2 = .408$).

Among the predictors, resilience emerged as a significant negative predictor of stress ($\beta = -.56$, $t = -5.36$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of resilience were associated with lower stress. However, self-efficacy, social-emotional competencies SEC, and digital skills were not significant predictors (ps > .10).

This finding indicates that resilience is the strongest predictor of coping with stress among the academic staff.

In addition to resilience, the interviews revealed that staff utilized internal and external resources to manage stress and maintain learning. The participants noted that one of the internal resources that helped them cope was self-awareness. For example, *Mira* said, "*The crisis made me look inward, in search of strength to cope with the new reality*."

Another internal resource that was mentioned as being a significant factor in coping with stress was the academic staff' perception of self-efficacy. *Yafa, Dana, Sarah, Eden* and *Mira* all said that discovering their abilities contributed to their sense of self-efficacy. *Mira* said, "*I discovered my determination and ability to persevere. I don't give up, and I know how to turn the crisis into growth*".

In addition to the internal resources, most of the interviewees mentioned two external resources: social support and professional training. The social support came mainly from their family members, friends and colleagues. *Yasmin* talked about the support she received from her family: "*They were very concerned about me and even helped me. I suddenly felt that they understood the stress I was experiencing*".

Also, the academic staff finds the professional training provided by the college's IT team to be a valuable and essential external resource. They understand the importance of learning the required digital skills and make an effort to stay updated by attending all the training sessions offered by the college. *Mira* explained that "*the training sessions held by the IT team were like a compass for me, guiding my work with students*".

DISCUSSION

The present study examined how academic staff coped with stress during the COVID-19 crisis within a multicultural teacher-training college in Israel. Grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and employing a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, the study aimed to investigate (a) levels of perceived stress and coping resources, (b) differences across demographic and socio-cultural factors, and (c) the relative contribution of internal psychological and external professional resources in predicting stress. By integrating quantitative and qualitative findings, the study provides a multidimensional understanding of coping processes during emergency remote teaching (ERT) in higher education.

Stress levels and coping resources

Quantitative findings indicated moderate stress levels alongside relatively high levels of coping resources. The qualitative findings converged with this pattern: participants described substantial professional and emotional challenges during the transition to emergency remote teaching (ERT), yet they simultaneously articulated adaptive strategies that enabled continued functioning.

It is important to note that while workload intensity and role complexity are inherent features of academic work, the pandemic introduced a range of crisis-specific stressors. These included the sudden shift to emergency remote teaching (ERT), compressed timelines for course redesign, technological uncertainty, and blurred work-family boundaries (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020; Marek et al., 2021; Simorangkir, 2025). As a result, the stress experienced during this period reflected not only the usual academic pressures but also a rapid accumulation of demands in an uncertain environment.

From a Conservation of Resources (COR) perspective (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), the coexistence of moderate stress levels with relatively strong coping resources suggests that participants were able to mobilize protective assets and prevent substantial resource depletion (Webb, 2026). The qualitative findings enriched this interpretation by demonstrating how these resources were enacted in practice. While the quantitative model assessed resilience, self-efficacy, social-emotional competencies (SEC), and digital skills, the interviews highlighted additional internal capacities such as self-awareness and self-efficacy alongside relational and institutional supports. In particular, participants emphasized the value of social support from family, friends, and colleagues, as well as the digital training provided by the college, which facilitated their adaptation to emergency remote teaching. Because these contextual resources were not directly captured in the regression model, the qualitative strand expands the explanatory framework beyond individually measured variables and highlights the embedded nature of coping within relational and organizational resources.

Differences in stress levels and coping resources

Gender differences were evident, with women reporting lower resilience levels. This aligns with research documenting increased caregiving burdens and work–family strain among women during pandemic lockdowns (Andrew et al., 2022; Fenollar-Cortés et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2023). From a COR perspective, the unequal distribution of role demands may limit available emotional and temporal resources, leading to increased exposure to stress.

Age and years of teaching experience did not significantly predict stress or coping resources. Although this finding may appear unexpected, the pandemic constituted a context in which professional seniority may not have conferred adaptive advantage. Skills such as digital adaptation, emotional flexibility, and tolerance of uncertainty may have been more relevant than years of teaching experience. Similar inconsistencies between age and stress levels have been documented in higher education research during COVID-19 (Shen & Slater, 2021; Akter & Hossain, 2026). This finding supports the resource-based perspective, suggesting that coping in crisis situations is more influenced by specific psychological resources than by demographic factors.

Regarding cultural differences, the relatively small number of Jewish participants (n = 16) limited the robustness of quantitative comparisons by nationality and reduced statistical power to detect reliable group differences in stress and coping resources. Accordingly, the quantitative findings should not be interpreted as providing a comprehensive test of cultural variation. The qualitative findings, however, offered indicative culturally nuanced coping narratives: Arab participants more frequently emphasized collective support and relational coping, whereas Jewish participants more often highlighted individual agency and structured self-regulation. These patterns are consistent with literature describing collectivist orientations in Arab society and more individualist tendencies in Jewish Israeli contexts (Dwairy, 2021; Hayosh & Binyamin, 2021; Zadok Boneh et al., 2022). Nevertheless, due to the limited qualitative sample, these cultural interpretations should be considered exploratory and necessitate further examination in larger samples.

The finding that prior online teaching experience is associated with lower stress levels and higher resilience aligns with the perspective that familiarity with digital instruction serves as an instrumental coping resource,

mitigating uncertainty and task-related strain during crisis transitions (Littlejohn et al., 2021; Acar et al., 2025). In this study, prior online teaching experience was measured as a dichotomous background variable, distinguishing between faculty who had any prior exposure to online instruction and those who transitioned to it for the first time during the COVID-19 crisis. This operation aimed to determine whether prior familiarity with online teaching acted as a protective resource during the abrupt shift to (ERT). To gain a more comprehensive understanding of how prior online teaching experience contributes to coping with stress during ERT, future research should investigate the duration, intensity, and quality of such experiences and their differential effects on stress and resilience outcomes in crisis contexts. Taken together, these findings provide partial support for the first hypothesis, which anticipated differences in stress and coping resources according to demographic and contextual variables.

Predicting ability to cope with stress

The second hypothesis proposed that internal psychological resources (resilience, self-efficacy, and social-emotional competencies) and external professional resources (digital skills) would be negatively associated with perceived stress. The regression analysis demonstrated that resilience was the strongest predictor of perceived stress among the psychological and professional variables included in the model.This finding is consistent with recent empirical studies during COVID-19 showing resilience as a central protective factor against stress and burnout (Versteeg & Kappe, 2021; Yildirim & Arslan, 2022; Clemons, 2025).

Conceptually, resilience represents an adaptive capacity that enables individuals to maintain or regain psychological stability under adversity (Southwick et al., 2014). Within COR theory, resilience can be understood as a core resource that enhances individuals' ability to prevent or recover from resource loss (Hobfoll, 2001). The strength of resilience in the present model suggests that global adaptive capacity may outweigh more domain-specific competencies in prolonged crisis conditions.

Although self-efficacy and social-emotional competencies are theoretically relevant to coping processes, they did not exhibit significant independent contributions when resilience was included in the analysis. This pattern suggests that these constructs may be interconnected, with resilience reflecting a broader adaptive capacity that encompasses confidence, emotional regulation, and recovery under stress. Similarly, digital skills, viewed as a professional resource, did not show a significant independent effect on stress in the multivariate model. The qualitative findings further highlight this trend by demonstrating how coping was facilitated through both personal and contextual resources. Participants reported using self-awareness and intentional emotional regulation while also relying on relational support and institutional training, as previously discussed in this section.

Taken together, these findings suggest that coping during crisis reflects a dynamic configuration of psychological, relational, and organizational resources. This interpretation aligns with COR theory's emphasis on resource networks (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) and with social-ecological resilience models (Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2011; Walter & Siwar, 2021). Conceptualizing coping as a multilevel resource process therefore offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding stress adaptation in higher education settings**.**

Limitations and future research

Several limitations merit consideration. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences. Future research may benefit from longitudinal designs that examine changes in stress and coping resources over time, including potential resource loss or gain spirals as conceptualized within Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001).

Second, the regression model incorporated a limited range of background variables. Contextual factors such as workload intensity, caregiving responsibilities, personal health status, and duration of pandemic exposure were not assessed and may influence both resource availability and stress levels. Therefore, incorporating such variables in future investigations could contribute to a more comprehensive explanatory framework.

Third, prior online teaching experience was operationalized as a dichotomous variable (yes/no), which does not capture variation in duration, intensity, or quality of experience. Further research may explore whether these dimensions differentially relate to stress and resilience during crisis-related instructional transitions.

Fourth, the relatively small number of Jewish participants reduced statistical power for quantitative comparisons by nationality. As a result, conclusions regarding cultural differences should be interpreted with caution. Studies employing larger and more balanced samples may allow for more rigorous examination of culturally embedded resource processes.

Finally, although the qualitative findings provided meaningful insight into coping experiences, the modest interview sample size suggests careful interpretation, particularly regarding culturally nuanced patterns. Replication across larger qualitative samples and additional institutional contexts may strengthen the generalizability of these findings.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to research on coping and higher education by extending the application of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to academic crisis contexts. The findings suggest that stress adaptation among faculty may be more appropriately conceptualized as a multilevel resource process rather than as the outcome of isolated psychological traits. In this respect, resilience appears to operate within a broader constellation of psychological, relational, and institutional resources.

The results also offer further insight into the role of resilience in academic settings. Although prior COVID-19 research has identified resilience as a protective factor (Versteeg & Kappe, 2021; Yildirim & Arslan, 2022), the present findings indicate its relative prominence when examined alongside self-efficacy, social-emotional competencies, and digital skills. This pattern suggests that resilience may function as an integrative resource that supports the coordination of other coping capacities under prolonged uncertainty.

In addition, the convergent mixed-method design provides a more nuanced theoretical understanding by identifying contextual resources not captured in the quantitative model. The qualitative findings indicate that institutional and relational supports form part of the broader resource system shaping adaptation. This perspective aligns COR theory with socio-ecological models of resilience (Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2011), encouraging a conceptualization of coping that incorporates both individual strengths and contextual supports.

Finally, placing the study within a multicultural institutional context encourages additional theoretical exploration of how resource mobilization might be culturally embedded. Although the cultural findings remain exploratory, they suggest that resource processes may vary across socio-cultural orientations and may merit greater attention in future resource-based models of stress adaptation

Practical implications

The findings also carry actionable implications for higher education institutions, particularly in preparing for future disruptions.

Reframing coping beyond individual resilience

Given that resilience has emerged as the strongest predictor of stress, institutions may benefit from reframing coping to avoid viewing it solely as an individual responsibility. Instead, policies should focus on reducing resource depletion by clarifying expectations during crises, prioritizing essential tasks, and minimizing unnecessary administrative demands. Protecting faculty time and reducing ambiguity are structural strategies that align with the principles of Conservation of Resources (COR).

Strengthening structured peer-support mechanisms

Qualitative findings indicate the importance of collegial support during crisis transitions. Institutions might consider formalizing peer-mentoring networks, cross-departmental teaching communities, or temporary faculty support groups. Such initiatives may transform informal relational support into more sustainable organizational resources.

Developing targeted digital pedagogical training

Rather than relying solely on general technology workshops, professional development initiatives may focus on high-demand instructional components, including online assessment design, student engagement strategies, and workload management in digital environments. Ongoing and responsive training structures may be particularly beneficial during extended periods of disruption.

Enhancing psychosocial awareness in academic leadership

Leadership practices may influence the extent to which resource strain is mitigated or exacerbated during disruption. Providing department heads and administrators with training to recognize signs of resource depletion and to respond supportively may strengthen institutional resilience.

Taken together, these recommendations emphasize that coping capacity is shaped not only by individual traits but by institutional environments. Sustainable crisis preparedness in higher education therefore requires coordinated strategies that strengthen psychological, relational, and organizational resources simultaneously.

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Ethical statement

This study adhered to current ethical conventions regarding written consent obtained for all participants and the study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the Academic Arab College for Education-Haifa, Israel.

Competing interests

We confirm that this manuscript reports original work, is not under consideration by any other journal nor has it been published previously in any form**.** All authors have approved the manuscript and agree with its submission to the Asia Pacific Journal of Education and Society and report no potential conflict of interest.

Author contributions

Hanadi Abu Ahmad: Research concept and design, collection and/or assembly of data, data analysis and interpretation, writing the article, critical revision of the article, final approval of the article. Eman Abu Hanna Nahhas: Research concept and design, collection and/or assembly of data, data analysis and interpretation, writing the article, critical revision of the article, final approval of the article. Khawla Zoabi: Research concept and design, collection and/or assembly of data, data analysis and interpretation, final approval of the article. Hila Kanner: Research concept and design, collection and/or assembly of data, data analysis and interpretation, final approval of the article. Ety Shachar-Siman-Tov: Research concept and design, collection and/or assembly of data, data analysis and interpretation, final approval of the article.

Data availability

The data is available upon request from the first author.

AI disclosure

During the preparation of this work the authors used ChatGPT and Claude.ai for language improvement. After using these tools, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed. They take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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APPENDIX A

Representative sample items from the quantitative questionnaire

All questionnaire items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale:
1 = Very small extent
2 = Small extent
3 = Moderate extent
4 = Large extent
5 = Very large extent

Perceived stress scale (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983)

The PSS assessed the degree to which participants perceived situations during the COVID-19 pandemic as stressful. Example items include:

- During the pandemic in the second semester, to what extent were you bothered by thoughts about things you had to accomplish?
- During the pandemic in the second semester, to what extent did you feel nervous and tense?
- During the pandemic in the second semester, to what extent did you feel a lack of control over important things in your life?

Note. Positively worded items were reverse-coded prior to analysis.

Brief resilience scale (Smith et al., 2008)

This scale measured the ability to recover from stress. Example items include:

- I tend to recover quickly after encountering a difficulty.
- It doesn't take me long to overcome a stressful event.
- It is difficult for me to bounce back quickly when something bad happens. (reverse-coded)

General self-efficacy scale (Chen & Gully, 1997)

This measure assessed beliefs about personal competence. Example items include:

- I am certain that I can perform most tasks well.
- When I'm determined, I can succeed at any task.
- I can achieve most of the goals I set for myself.

Social-emotional competencies questionnaire (SEC-Q; Zych et al., 2018)

This scale assessed emotional awareness and interpersonal skills. Example items include:

- I usually know how to help people who need help.
- I can name my feelings.
- I make decisions based on careful analysis of possible outcomes.

Digital skills inventory (Blau & Antonovsky, 2009)

This measure assessed perceived technological competence in higher education contexts. Example items include:

- I feel comfortable using Zoom to teach my courses.
- I am familiar with different functions in Moodle.
- I believe that using computerized technologies promotes communication with my students.