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Research Article

Beyond Words: A Linguistic And Anthropological Analysis Of Distress Expressions Among Gen Z In Social Media Discourse

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Abstract

Introduction: Filipino adolescents use Facebook to voice stress, fatigue, and sadness through idioms such as "kapoy na jud," "di na nako kaya," and "puno na utak ko." Research on distress expressions has centered on clinical and community settings. Few studies examine these expressions in multilingual Filipino youth discourse online, where they shape how young people make distress visible to peers.

Objective: The study examined the distress expressions of Gen Z junior high school students in Facebook community interactions, their linguistic features, the cultural and social contexts shaping them, the meanings and social identities they reflect, and the sociocultural factors influencing their communicative practices.

Methods: The study used a qualitative, corpus-driven design guided by Systemic Functional Linguistics and linguistic anthropology. Purposive screening of 1,650 publicly accessible Facebook posts from the Caraga Region, published from 2020 to 2025, produced a final corpus of 550 posts. Analysis combined discourse analysis, open coding, linguistic and semantic analysis, digital ethnography, Critical Discourse Analysis, and anthropological interpretation. The Research Ethics Committee endorsed the study and granted a certificate of exemption.

Results: Nine categories of distress emerged from 165 distinct expressions. Exhaustion and energy depletion was the largest category (137 posts, 24.9%), followed by reaching one's coping limit (82 posts, 14.9%). First-person constructions appeared in 430 posts (78.2%), digital affect markers in 244 (44.4%), and negation and intensifiers in 219 each (39.8%). Academic and school concerns formed the largest context (232 posts, 42.2%), while 110 posts (20.0%) named no identifiable source. The analysis yielded eleven underlying meanings, eleven discursive identity positions, and five sociocultural factors.

Conclusions: Distress expressions in the corpus work as creative linguistic resources and as socially situated acts. Adolescents use them to represent exhaustion, perceived limits, and relational strain within school, family, peer, and online life. Educators and counselors benefit from reading these expressions in context, neither dismissing humor nor treating a single post as a clinical sign.

Keywords: Facebook discourse, Generation Z, distress expressions, linguistic anthropology, multilingual digital discourse, Systemic Functional Linguistics

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1. Introduction

Distress expressions are culturally shared ways of expressing emotional or psychological suffering through language, behavior, or symbolic forms (Nichter, 2010). People often voice suffering through figurative and socially recognizable expressions rather than clinical labels such as depression or anxiety. Members of Generation Z (Gen Z) now carry these expressions into online spaces. Phrases such as "brain fried," "lutang," "drained na," and "overthink malala" circulate on Facebook and TikTok, where adolescents express emotion, interact with peers, and build identity (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

Adolescents rely on humor, sarcasm, memes, figurative language, and exaggeration to voice stress online (Angelini & Gini, 2024; Fitzgerald et al., 2024). Expressions such as "mentally drained" or "burnout na" read as casual, yet they also point to academic pressure, social exhaustion, loneliness, and fatigue. Such forms let young people seek peer understanding while avoiding the stigma attached to direct talk about mental health. Ordinary words also carry traces of psychological suffering. Pennebaker (2011) showed how everyday language reveals emotional states, and Baradillo (2017) found emotionally charged lexical and semantic features in suicide notes.

Medical anthropology and global mental health research document idioms of distress across cultures. Kaiser et al. (2015) identified "thinking too much" as a common idiom across Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Patel et al. (1995) described the Shona term *kufungisisa* in Zimbabwe, and Kaiser et al. (2014) described *reflechi twòp* in Haiti as an idiom of sadness and burden. Backe et al. (2021) linked similar expressions in sub-Saharan Africa to poverty, grief, and family problems. These studies show suffering travels through culturally meaningful expressions rather than psychiatric terms. Language, as linguistic anthropology holds, reflects lived experience and social reality within communities (Duranti, 1997).

Social media platforms encourage expressive and multimodal communication through abbreviations, emojis, hashtags, memes, and exaggeration (Herring, 2013). Platform cultures shape both what users say and how others read emotional expression. Online communities serve adolescents as spaces for emotional release, peer validation, and support (Pink et al., 2016). Distress expressions thus become shared communicative practices within digital cultures.

The Philippines ranks among the heaviest users of social media in the world (We Are Social & Meltwater, 2024). Filipino Gen Z users express stress and exhaustion through expressions such as "ubos na social battery," "kapoy na," and "drained na gyud." These expressions mix English, Filipino, Bisaya, and internet slang and reflect the multilingual character of Filipino digital discourse (Androutsopoulos, 2015). Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) treat language as a social semiotic resource for expressing experience and negotiating relationships, so these forms count as meaningful choices rather than random internet talk. Filipino adolescents face pressure from schoolwork, peers, family expectations, finances, and online performance culture. Many avoid direct disclosure for fear of judgment and turn to humor and indirect expression shaped by values such as *hiya*, *pakikisama*, and family obligation (Enriquez, 1992).

Junior high school students in local Facebook communities post lines such as "brain fried na ko" and "di na kaya" to share distress and seek peer support. Local research in applied linguistics and linguistic anthropology on these expressions remains scarce. Existing Philippine studies focus on mental health prevalence, internet slang, or behavioral outcomes. Few combine linguistic, semantic, and anthropological analysis of distress expressions in adolescent digital talk. The present study addresses this gap. Its findings inform applied linguistics, digital anthropology, youth studies, and mental health communication, and they support Sustainable Development Goals 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and 4 (Quality Education).

1.1. Review of Related Literature

Nichter (2010) describes idioms of distress as culturally recognizable ways of expressing suffering and social burden. Their meanings extend beyond literal reading. "Thinking too much," for instance, signals anxiety, sadness, insomnia, or burden depending on context (Kaiser et al., 2015).

In digital settings, adolescents use social media to share emotions, build identities, and form peer ties (boyd, 2014; Papacharissi, 2011). Internet communication promotes innovation through altered spellings, abbreviations, and conversational styles (Crystal, 2006).

Digital discourse invites linguistic experimentation shaped by online culture and audience (Androutsopoulos, 2011). Users alter spelling, punctuation, capitalization, emojis, and repeated letters to signal emotion, humor, and identity (Tagg, 2015), as in "kapoyyy na" or "brain friedd." Code-switching lets Filipino speakers fit meaning to context and audience (Bautista, 2004), and Filipino youth mix English, Filipino, and regional languages online.

Context shapes these expressions. Filipino users turned to Facebook for collective coping after a disaster (Tandoc & Takahashi, 2017), and Filipino students use the platform to voice stress and frustration within peer communities. Academic stress tied to school performance, family expectations, and social comparison runs high among Filipino students (Alibudbud, 2021), and Filipino adolescents turn to online platforms for support (Cleofas, 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media became a coping space for loneliness, anxiety, and burnout (Cauberghe et al., 2021). Filipino digital communication is relational and community-oriented (Pertierra, 2012).

Distress language also carries identity. Goffman (1959) argued people present different selves to different audiences, and online self-expression involves emotional performance (Papacharissi, 2011). Humor and exaggeration reduce tension and invite participation (Dynel, 2016), and young users rely on internet humor to make hard experiences relatable (Ask & Abidin, 2018). Collectivist values such as *hiya* and *pakikisama* favor indirect and softened disclosure (Enriquez, 1992), and stigma around mental health pushes adolescents toward coded and humorous expression (Cleofas, 2022). The literature thus describes distress expressions as culturally embedded, linguistically creative, and socially situated, yet no study has examined them together in Filipino adolescent Facebook discourse.

1.2. Theoretical Lens

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) serves as the primary framework. SFL views language as a social semiotic system for meaning-making (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The ideational metafunction guided the analysis of how idioms represent distress experiences (RQ1 and RQ2). The interpersonal metafunction guided the analysis of how students express emotion and position themselves before an audience (RQ4 and RQ5). The textual metafunction guided the analysis of how posts organize meaning through comments, emojis, punctuation, and code-switching (RQ1 and RQ2). Linguistic anthropology supported the interpretation of cultural meaning, identity, and lived experience (RQ3 to RQ5), on the premise of language as a cultural practice (Duranti, 1997). Digital ethnography provided the contextual frame for treating Facebook posts as naturally occurring, co-constructed online practice (Pink et al., 2016). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) supported the critical reading of identity and social relations (Fairclough, 2013).

1.3. Purpose and Research Questions

The study analyzed how Gen Z junior high school students express distress through idioms in Facebook community interactions. The study addressed five research questions:

RQ1. What distress expressions are frequently used by Gen Z junior high school students in Facebook discourse?
RQ2. What linguistic features characterize these distress expressions employed by Gen Z junior high school students in social media discourse?
RQ3. In what social and cultural context do these distress expressions appear in the student Facebook interaction?
RQ4. What meanings and social identities are constructed through these distress expressions?

RQ5. How are Filipino socio-cultural values reflected in the ways distress expressions are expressed online?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

The study used a qualitative research design with a corpus-driven linguistic and anthropological approach. Qualitative inquiry suits studies of meanings and socially constructed realities in natural contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A corpus-driven approach lets patterns and categories emerge from naturally occurring language rather than from predetermined classifications (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001) and supports the systematic study of repeated linguistic features across a collection of texts (Baker, 2006). The linguistic strand examined the structure, meaning, and communicative function of distress expressions. The anthropological strand examined how the idioms reflect cultural meanings, shared experiences, and social realities among Filipino adolescents (Duranti, 1997).

2.2. Corpus and Sampling Procedure

The corpus consisted of publicly accessible Facebook posts, captions, comments, and short textual interactions produced in junior high school Facebook communities in the Caraga Region, Philippines. Posts written in English, Filipino, Bisaya (Cebuano), or code-switched forms and published from 2020 to 2025 were eligible. Purposive sampling targeted posts containing idiomatic expressions of stress, exhaustion, frustration, sadness, anxiety, academic pressure, or social burden. Posts without distress-related expressions or unrelated to adolescent online discourse were excluded, as were Instagram, TikTok, and private messages. The initial collection yielded 1,650 raw items. Screening against the inclusion criteria retained 550 items, a size suited to in-depth qualitative discourse analysis (Hunston, 2002).

2.3. Research Instrument

The researcher served as the primary research instrument. The researcher set the selection criteria, reviewed the dataset, identified distress-related expressions, and coded and interpreted the data. An information technology (IT) specialist developed a Python script to automate the sorting and preliminary categorization of the collected materials according to the researcher's criteria. The researcher then reviewed the sorted dataset.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Before data collection, the researcher secured permission from the Dean of the Graduate School and obtained endorsement from the Research Ethics Committee. Collected posts were screened, encoded, and assigned codes (FB0001 to FB0550). Usernames, profile names, profile pictures, and direct links were removed. The data were stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher.

Analysis began with repeated reading and corpus preparation. Each research question then received a matched procedure. For RQ1, discourse analysis identified recurring idiomatic expressions (Gee, 2014), and open coding grouped them into categories (Saldaña, 2016). For RQ2, linguistic and semantic analysis guided by SFL examined lexical choices, figurative language, code-switching, orthography, abbreviations, emojis, and slang. For RQ3, digital ethnography examined how the expressions emerged within academic discussion, peer interaction, and shared digital experience (Pink et al., 2016). For RQ4, CDA examined how the expressions construct identities and social relationships (Fairclough, 2013). For RQ5, anthropological analysis interpreted how values such as *hiya*, *pakikisama*, family obligation, resilience, and peer connectedness appeared in communicative practice (Duranti, 1997). Each post received one primary distress category (RQ1) and one primary context (RQ3) based on its dominant meaning. Linguistic features (RQ2) were coded as overlapping, so one post carried several features.

2.5. Trustworthiness

The study applied the four criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985). For credibility, the researcher read the corpus repeatedly, conducted peer debriefing with experts in applied linguistics and discourse analysis, and compared interpretations against the raw posts.

For confirmability, an audit trail documented data collection, corpus organization, coding decisions, and theme development, and the researcher practiced reflexivity. For dependability, the corpus criteria were defined and applied consistently, coding followed a structured sequence of open coding, categorization, and thematic grouping, and the researcher consulted the adviser regularly. For transferability, the study described linguistic forms, language variation, contextual meanings, and the 2020 to 2025 digital setting in detail.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

The study used only publicly accessible Facebook posts and accessed no private accounts or restricted content. All identifying information was removed, each post received a code, and the data remained in password-protected files. The study complied with institutional requirements through the permission of the Dean and the endorsement of the Research Ethics Committee, which issued a certificate of exemption with a protocol code: GS-EX-06-26-0137, on June 26, 2026. The UIC-REC deemed it appropriate that the study be Exempted From Review. This means that the study may be implemented without undergoing an expedited or full review. Neither will the researcher/investigator be required to submit further documents to the committee as long as there is no amendment nor alteration in the proposal/protocol that will change the nature of the study nor the level of risk involved.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Distress Expressions Used in Facebook Community Interactions

Table 1 presents nine categories drawn from 165 distinct distress expressions in the 550 posts.

Table 1. Distress expressions used by Gen Z junior high school students in Facebook community interactions.

Distress Category	Representative Expressions (Corpus ID)	n	%
Exhaustion and energy depletion	"kapoy kaayo rn" (FB0343), "hago na ko" (FB0346), "kapoy na jud" (FB0023), "I'm so tired" (FB0323), "pagoddd na" (FB0011)	137	24.9
Reaching one's coping limit	"di na nako kaya" (FB0050), "dili na nako kaya" (FB0321), "ayoko na fr" (FB0361), "surrender na lang ko" (FB0058)	82	14.9
Irritation and emotional resistance	"lagot na ko" (FB0350), "sapot na ko" (FB0333), "samok na kaayo" (FB0020), "naiinis ako fr" (FB0352), "sawa na ako" (FB0344)	65	11.8
Fullness and emotional saturation	"sobra na jud" (FB0339), "napuno na jud ko" (FB0003), "puno na ko" (FB0331), "puno na utak ko guys" (FB0007)	64	11.6
Sorrow and emotional pain	"guol kaayo" (FB0326), "naguol ko" (FB0259), "sad kaayo ko" (FB0359), "nalulungkot ako" (FB0172), "naiiyak na ko honestly" (FB0070)	48	8.7
Pressure and structural collapse	"stressed na ko" (FB0324), "stress na stress ako sa requirements" (FB0046), "murag mahugno akong week sa activities" (FB0062), "nahugno na akong schedule" (FB0098)	47	8.5
Loss of desire and drive	"wa na koy gana" (FB0026), "tinamad na ko mag aral" (FB0061), "wala nay gana mag study" (FB0015), "wa na koy gana mag study karon" (FB0009)	47	8.5
Burden and loss of control	"lisod na kaayo" (FB0059), "bug-at na" (FB0334), "di ko na alam gagawin" (FB0168), "murag di na mahabol" (FB0043)	31	5.6
Academic threat and accumulation	"pressure na kaayo" (FB0019), "everything is piling up" (FB0006), "di na jud kaya ang back to back" (FB0091), "patay ko ani, exam napud ugma" (FB0067)	29	5.3
Total	*165 distinct distress expressions identified*	*550*	*100.0*

Note. Each post received one category based on its dominant meaning. One corpus identifier appears per expression.

Exhaustion and energy depletion formed the largest category (137 posts, 24.9%). Writers named tiredness directly through *kapoy*, *hago*, *pagod*, and "tired," and they sharpened these words with intensifiers (*kaayo*, so), particles (*na*, *jud*), and time markers (*rn*). In "kapoy kaayo rn," *kapoy* names tiredness, *kaayo* raises its degree, and *rn* places the state in the present. The elongated "pagoddd" adds visual emphasis.

Through the ideational metafunction, these choices construe the writer's condition as depleted energy (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Exhaustion alone does not establish a cause. "Kapoy kaayo rn" names no source, and an academic reading requires evidence from the rest of the post.

Reaching one's coping limit followed (82 posts, 14.9%). Here distress shifts from tiredness to a perceived limit. In "di na nako kaya," *di* negates *kaya* (capacity), and *na* marks a threshold already crossed. "Ayoko na fr" voices unwillingness, and "surrender na lang ko" frames the response as giving up. These expressions state a stance toward a situation and do not prove the writer stopped an activity.

Irritation and emotional resistance (65 posts, 11.8%) and fullness and emotional saturation (64 posts, 11.6%) ranked third and fourth. Irritation appeared through *lagot*, *sapot*, *samok*, *naiinis*, and *sawa*, each anchored to the self through *ko* or *ako*. Saturation drew on the image of a full container. "Puno na utak ko guys" names the brain as the full entity, and the vocative *guys* turns the statement toward an audience. Sorrow and emotional pain (48 posts, 8.7%) named sadness directly (*guol*, sad, *nalulungkot*) or through crying ("naiiyak na ko honestly").

The four smaller categories framed distress through demands. Pressure and structural collapse (47 posts, 8.5%) used stress terms and images of collapse, as in "nahugno na akong schedule," where a schedule falls like a structure. Loss of desire and drive (47 posts, 8.5%) centered on *gana* (inclination), often tied to studying, as in "wa na koy gana mag study karon." Burden and loss of control (31 posts, 5.6%) expressed difficulty (*lisod*), heaviness (*bug-at*), and uncertainty ("di ko na alam gagawin"). Academic threat and accumulation (29 posts, 5.3%) presented demands as piling up or approaching. In "patay ko ani, exam napud ugma," the next day's exam supplies explicit academic context, and *patay ko ani* works as an emphatic, nonliteral expression of anticipated difficulty. Academic references also appeared in other categories, so this small share understates the presence of school in the corpus.

These results extend cross-cultural work on idioms of distress. Like "thinking too much" (Kaiser et al., 2015), the Facebook idioms carry several meanings depending on context. The corpus frames distress mainly as a problem of capacity: the writer is tired, unable to continue, or facing demands beyond reach. The range of categories also shows distress encompassing more than sadness, with irritation, reduced motivation, and loss of control all present. The categories serve as analytic groupings of dominant meaning rather than psychological classifications of the writers (Nichter, 2010), and some posts carry overlapping meanings.

3.2. Linguistic Features of Distress Expressions

Table 2 lists ten linguistic features, ordered by frequency.

Table 2. Linguistic features characterizing the distress expressions of Gen Z junior high school students.

Linguistic Feature	Corpus Evidence	n	%
First-person and self-referential constructions	"gikapoy na ko" (FB0002), "napuno na jud ko" (FB0003), "wa na koy gana" (FB0009)	430	78.2
Digital affect and paralinguistic markers	"lol 😭" (FB0001), "😩" (FB0004), "huhu... 😭" (FB0010)	244	44.4
Negation and inability constructions	"wala na kong energy" (FB0004), "di ko na alam" (FB0008), "wa pa jud nahuman" (FB0010)	219	39.8
Intensifiers and degree markers	"damn tired" (FB0001), "pressure na kaayo" (FB0005), "sobra na kasi" (FB0008)	219	39.8
Multilingual code-switching	"pressure na kaayo sa school" (FB0005), "wa na koy gana mag-study" (FB0009), "pagoddd na ko... still catching up" (FB0011)	217	39.5
Internet slang and abbreviations	"ngl so damn tired rn... btw lol" (FB0001), "guys pls" (FB0007), "annoyed fr" (FB0014)	206	37.5
Temporal and cumulative markers	"naa napud math practice" (FB0002), "everything is piling up" (FB0006), "another deadline tomorrow" (FB0014)	200	36.4
Ellipses and fragmented syntax	"di ko na alam... sobra na kasi..." (FB0008), "suko na... pagoddd na" (FB0012)	109	19.8
Direct audience appeals and vocatives	"school oy" (FB0005), "guys pls" (FB0007), "pahinga naman" (FB0013)	87	15.8
Metaphorical burden, accumulation, and saturation	"puno na utak ko" (FB0007), "bug-at na" (FB0334), "murag mahugno akong week" (FB0062)	56	10.2

Note. Features overlap within posts. Percentages use a base of 550 posts and do not sum to 100.

First-person and self-referential constructions dominated (430 posts, 78.2%). The pronouns *ko*, *kong*, and *ako* placed the writer at the center, as in "gikapoy na ko" and "wa na koy gana." Through the interpersonal metafunction, these constructions position the writer as the experiencer of distress, while the ideational metafunction represents the experience itself. Distress in the corpus was thus personal and immediate rather than impersonal. The wording alone does not establish a deliberate strategy of disclosure.

Digital affect and paralinguistic markers ranked second (244 posts, 44.4%). Emojis such as 😭 and 🥵 and text markers such as *huhu* and *lol* supply cues missing from written text, including facial expression and tone. Their function varies with the accompanying words. A marker intensifies, softens, adds play, or creates ambiguity, and *lol* beside a crying emoji does not signal insincerity by default.

Negation and inability constructions and intensifiers each appeared in 219 posts (39.8%). Negation presented energy, motivation, or certainty as missing ("wala na kong energy," "di ko na alam"). Some negation marked noncompletion rather than inability, as in "wa pa jud nahuman." Intensifiers such as *kaayo*, *jud*, *sobra*, and damn raised the degree of the reported state. They show linguistic emphasis rather than an objective measure of severity.

Multilingual code-switching (217 posts, 39.5%) and internet slang (206 posts, 37.5%) reflected the mixed resources of the corpus. "Pressure na kaayo sa school" sets English nouns inside Cebuano grammar, and "pagoddd na ko... still catching up" moves from Filipino to English. Abbreviations such as *ngl*, *rn*, *btw*, *pls*, and *fr* kept messages brief and conversational. These findings support descriptions of digital discourse as a site of linguistic experimentation (Androutsopoulos, 2011; Crystal, 2006) and of Filipino code-switching as a resource shaped by context and audience (Bautista, 2004). The present study extends this work to the expression of distress.

Temporal and cumulative markers (200 posts, 36.4%) framed demands as recurring or growing. *Napud* in "naa napud math practice" signals repetition, and "another deadline tomorrow" adds a demand ahead. The less frequent features shaped message form and audience. Ellipses and fragmented syntax (109 posts, 19.8%) left statements open, as in "suko na... pagoddd na." Such fragments reflect pauses, unfinished thoughts, or informal style, and they do not prove emotional overwhelm. Direct appeals and vocatives (87 posts, 15.8%), such as "guys pls" and "pahinga naman," oriented posts toward readers. Metaphors of burden, accumulation, and saturation (56 posts, 10.2%) turned abstract strain into familiar physical images of fullness, weight, piles, and collapse.

The features overlap within posts. FB0001 alone joins internet slang (*ngl*, *rn*, *btw*), an intensifier (damn), a temporal marker (tomorrow), and an emoji. Distress idioms thus operate at the lexical, grammatical, orthographic, and visual levels at once, and an analysis of isolated words misses much of their meaning. The pattern matches accounts of how online users adapt spelling and informal forms to express emotion and identity (Tagg, 2015).

3.3. Cultural and Social Contexts of Distress Expressions

Table 3 shows the primary context assigned to each post.

Table 3. Cultural and social contexts shaping the distress expressions of Gen Z junior high school students.

Context	n	%	Corpus Illustration	How the Context Shaped Expression
Academic and school	232	42.2	"ngl so damn tired rn, quiz tomorrow too btw lol 😭" (FB0001)	Academic demands, deadlines, and workload-related exhaustion
Unclear or minimally specified	110	20.0	"me trying to survive, everything is piling up 😭" (FB0006)	Distress without an identifiable source
Personal and emotional	44	8.0	"naguol ko for no reason, puno na ko fr" (FB0442)	Emotional heaviness, worry, and saturation

Context	n	%	Corpus Illustration	How the Context Shaped Expression
Multiple or overlapping	24	4.4	"may project pa tapos sermon sa bahay, pagod na ako..." (FB0415)	Combined academic, family, or material pressures
Romantic and relationship	23	4.2	"seen ra gihapon... dili na nako kaya ko 😩" (FB0321)	Relationship-related frustration and difficulty
Peer and friendship	23	4.2	"left out sa gc again, I'm so overwhelmed kaayo!" (FB0332)	Teasing and social exclusion
Family and home	22	4.0	"mama sige compare nako sa uban, sapot na ko 😭" (FB0333)	Family-related irritation and emotional burden
Financial and material	20	3.6	"money is tight at home, no motivation fr" (FB0325)	Financial strain, reduced motivation, and overwhelm
Social and community	19	3.5	"sige kog think unsay isulti sa uban, stressed na ko 💀" (FB0327)	Concern about social judgment and others' reactions
Health and physical well-being	18	3.3	"zero sleep again, di na nako kaya na ko fr" (FB0351)	Sleep loss, physical discomfort, and difficulty coping
Online and social media	15	2.7	"gi-post nila sa gc, lagot na ko..." (FB0363)	Hurtful comments and online interactions
Total	*550*	*100.0*		

Note. Each post received one primary context. Percentages total 100.1 because of rounding.

Academic and school context was the most frequent (232 posts, 42.2%). Posts named quizzes, mathematics practice, projects, reporting, requirements, and deadlines beside expressions of exhaustion. In FB0001, "quiz tomorrow" sits beside "so damn tired," and in FB0002, "naa napud math practice" precedes "gikapoy na ko." These results show frequent co-occurrence of school references and distress in the corpus. They do not show a causal link or a prevalence rate among Filipino adolescents. The finding agrees with research on academic stress among Filipino students (Alibudbud, 2021) and on Facebook as an outlet for student emotion.

The second largest group, unclear or minimally specified context (110 posts, 20.0%), marks insufficient evidence rather than a social circumstance. "Me trying to survive, everything is piling up" conveys pressure without naming its source. This category kept the analysis from assigning unsupported causes, and its size reveals a limit of short posts: many express distress without explaining the source.

Relational contexts formed a smaller but varied group. Personal and emotional posts (44, 8.0%) foregrounded heaviness and saturation. Romantic posts (23, 4.2%) referred to unanswered messages ("seen ra gihapon") and crushes. Peer posts (23, 4.2%) referred to teasing and exclusion from a group chat. Family posts (22, 4.0%) referred to comparison by a parent and disorder at home. Social and community posts (19, 3.5%) expressed concern about what others say. Distress in these posts is tied to recognition, acceptance, and conflict within relationships. The meaning of an idiom shifts with these contexts. "Bug-at na" reads as emotional weight in a post about household conflict and as a different burden elsewhere, consistent with the caution against fixed meanings in idioms-of-distress scholarship (Kaiser et al., 2015; Nichter, 2010).

Material, physical, and digital circumstances also appeared. Financial posts (20, 3.6%) linked "money is tight at home" with "no motivation," and posts referring to school fees or short allowance tied school participation to material constraint. Health posts (18, 3.3%) referred to sleep loss and feeling unwell. Online posts (15, 2.7%) referred to hurtful comments and content shared in group chats. A post belonged in this last category because of a reference to an online interaction, not because the post appeared online. Finally, 24 posts (4.4%) combined two or more circumstances, such as a pending project and a scolding at home. Distress in these posts is cumulative. The pattern supports a reading of the corpus as situated discourse reflecting intersecting social experiences, each post offering a partial view (Pink et al., 2016).

3.4. Underlying Meanings and Social Identities in Distress Language

Table 4 summarizes eleven underlying meanings, and Table 5 lists eleven identity positions constructed through the same evidence.

Table 4. Underlying meanings reflected in the distress language of Gen Z junior high school students.

Underlying Meaning	Discursive Evidence
Distress as depleted personal capacity	"naa napud math practice unya gikapoy na ko" (FB0002), "naa napud presentation unya wa na koy energy" (FB0222)
Distress as academic survival	"me trying to survive, everything is piling up" (FB0006), "murag di na mahabol sa school" (FB0043)
Distress as emotional saturation	"napuno na jud ko sa TLE activity..." (FB0003), "puno na utak ko guys pls" (FB0007)
Distress as loss of control	"di ko na alam gagawin tapos may quiz pa" (FB0195), "di na nako kaya sa English reporting" (FB0050)
Distress as socially softened vulnerability	"kapoy naaaa, naa pay project lol" (FB0017), "school fee unya kulang baon, guol kaayo hehe" (FB0357)
Distress as a call for recognition	"help, this is stressing me out" (FB0069), "kapoy naaa jud sa assignments, send help" (FB0028)
Distress as multilingual youth identity	"wa na koy gana mag study karon rn" (FB0009), "sobrang pagod na fr" (FB0533)
Distress as negotiated belongingness	"gi-left out sa gc, awkward pa sa klase... guol kaayo" (FB0326), "my friends keep teasing me, I'm so pagod na" (FB0329)
Distress as restrained disclosure	"suko na... pagoddd na" (FB0012), "ang bigat na" (FB0397)
Distress as resistance to excessive expectations	"ayoko na sa requirements" (FB0044), "di na jud kaya ang back to back" (FB0091)
Distress as culturally situated relational experience	"mama sige compare nako sa uban, sapot na ko" (FB0333), "thinking unsay isulti sa uban... I'm so tired rn" (FB0323)

Table 5. Social identities constructed through distress language and their critical interpretation.

Social Identity Constructed	Critical Interpretation
The exhausted student	Students position themselves as individuals whose emotional and physical resources are consumed by continuing expectations.
The pressured and struggling learner	School discourse appears as an environment requiring endurance, speed, and continuous performance.
The overwhelmed adolescent	Metaphors of fullness present distress as an accumulation of demands rather than a single incident.
The helpless or constrained student	The language reveals limited perceived agency and a sense of insufficient coping resources.
The vulnerable but socially adaptive peer	Humor and playful markers let students reveal difficulty without appearing overly serious or out of place.
The support-seeking peer	Public or semi-public disclosure invites acknowledgment, reassurance, companionship, or practical help.
The digitally connected multilingual Gen Z user	Hybrid language signals local belonging and alignment with broader youth and internet cultures.
The peer-oriented adolescent	Emotional well-being is tied to acceptance, participation, and visibility within friendship and online groups.
The guarded emotional self	Students communicate enough distress to be understood while withholding details open to judgment or conflict.
The resistant student voice	Giving-up expressions read as possible criticism of excessive workloads, recurring demands, and limited opportunities for rest.
The relational Filipino adolescent	Distress appears as an experience embedded in family, school, peer, and community relationships.

Note. Identity labels describe discursive positions made available by the posts, not verified identities of the writers.

The first cluster of meanings concerns capacity and demand. Distress as depleted personal capacity joined exhaustion with recurring tasks, as in "naa napud presentation unya wa na koy energy." Distress as academic survival framed school as endurance, where *survive* works as figurative language for difficulty, not literal danger. Distress as emotional saturation drew on fullness, and distress as loss of control foregrounded inability amid new demands ("di ko na alam gagawin tapos may quiz pa"). These meanings construct the positions of the exhausted student, the pressured and struggling learner, the overwhelmed adolescent, and the helpless or constrained student.

A second cluster concerns how writers present distress to others. Distress as socially softened vulnerability paired worry or fatigue with *lol*, *hehe*, or elongated spelling, as in "school fee unya kulang baon, guol kaayo hehe." Humor markers soften tone or keep a casual register, yet the text does not show writers deliberately hiding serious distress. Distress as a call for recognition used appeals such as *help*, *pls*, *send help*, and *pahinga naman*, which invite acknowledgment. The excerpts do not confirm whether anyone replied. Distress as restrained disclosure appeared in brief, open-ended lines such as "ang bigat na." These meanings build the vulnerable but socially adaptive peer, the support-seeking peer, and the guarded emotional self. The coexistence of disclosure and humor fits work on digital self-presentation and online humor (Dynel, 2016; Papacharissi, 2011) while leaving individual posts ambiguous.

A third cluster concerns belonging and expectation. Distress as multilingual youth identity combined local languages, English, and digital abbreviations.

Distress as negotiated belongingness referred to exclusion, teasing, and group chats. Distress as resistance to excessive expectations voiced refusal and fatigue toward repeated demands ("ayoko na sa requirements," "di na jud kaya ang back to back"). Distress as a culturally situated relational experience tied emotional difficulty to family comparison and concern about others' words. The matching positions are the digitally connected multilingual Gen Z user, the peer-oriented adolescent, the resistant student voice, and the relational Filipino adolescent.

These identities are discursive positions made available by the wording, not verified or permanent identities of the writers. The reading follows Goffman's (1959) account of self-presentation and boyd's (2014) work on how networked environments let adolescents negotiate visibility and peer ties. From a CDA view, the resistant student voice draws attention to the tension between institutional expectations and reported capacity (Fairclough, 2013), although the posts do not show any institution as objectively unreasonable. The relational reading resonates with Filipino relational values (Enriquez, 1992), yet the label does not claim all Filipino adolescents share one experience.

3.5. Sociocultural Factors Influencing Online Distress Expression

Table 6 presents five sociocultural factors reflected in the communicative practices of the corpus.

Table 6. Sociocultural factors reflected in the online communicative practices of Gen Z junior high school students expressing distress.

Sociocultural Factor	Influence on Communicative Practice	Corpus Indicators
Academic and material performance pressure	Distress voiced through exhaustion, overload, and difficulty meeting school demands, with financial limits affecting motivation	Academic context in 232 posts (42.2%), financial context in 20 posts, e.g., "pressure na kaayo sa school oy" (FB0005), "money is tight at home, no motivation fr" (FB0325)
Social judgment, peer belongingness, and support seeking	Indirect language, slang, humor, and direct appeals used to seek recognition, inclusion, or support	Direct appeals in 87 posts (15.8%), e.g., "thinking unsay isulti sa uban... I'm so tired rn" (FB0323), "send help" (FB0028)
Family and intimate relational expectations	Emotional burden and frustration expressed in response to family expectations, conflict, rejection, and relationship difficulty	Family context in 22 posts, romantic context in 23, e.g., "gubot kaayo diri sa balay, bug-at na" (FB0334), "nagbulag mi, naguol ko lol" (FB0465)
Multilingual digital youth culture	Cebuano, Filipino, and English combined with slang, abbreviations, emojis, and humor	Cebuano or Cebuano–English in 339 posts (61.6%), code-switching in 217 (39.5%), e.g., "ngl so damn tired rn... btw lol " (FB0001)
Persistence amid overlapping lived realities	Overlapping pressures voiced alongside continued effort to meet responsibilities	Overlapping contexts in 24 posts, e.g., "wa koy gana pero need gihapon mahuman" (FB0088), "project stress tapos barkada drama, sobrang overwhelmed" (FB0322)

Academic and material performance pressure shaped both the topic and the phrasing of distress. School concerns (232 posts) appeared through exhaustion and the struggle to keep up, while financial concerns (20 posts) appeared beside reduced motivation and emotional burden. The corpus does not establish financial limits as the cause of any emotional response.

Social judgment, peer belongingness, and support seeking shaped audience orientation. References to what others say, to exclusion from group chats, and to teasing placed the social environment inside the distress narrative. Direct appeals in 87 posts addressed a community rather than private self-talk, consistent with research on social media as a site of peer connection and collective coping (boyd, 2014; Tandoc & Takahashi, 2017). These patterns fit the Filipino values of *pakikisama* and *hiya*, yet the text does not prove writers acted from either value.

Family and intimate relational expectations appeared through parental comparison, conflict at home, unanswered messages, and a breakup ("nagbulag mi, naguol ko lol"). Family obligation offers a lens for these posts, but the evidence does not show family obligation as the motive behind any single expression.

Multilingual digital youth culture shaped the form of distress. Cebuano and Cebuano–English posts numbered 339 (61.6%), code-switched posts 217 (39.5%), internet abbreviations 206, emojis 140, humor markers 132, and ellipses 109. Local languages, English, and platform conventions worked together, so the emotional meaning of a post resists separation from its style. This result supports work on networked multilingualism (Androutsopoulos, 2015)

Persistence amid overlapping lived realities appeared in 24 posts combining several pressures and in posts pairing distress with continued duty, as in "wa koy gana pero need gihapon mahuman." Such posts represent constraint and persistence together. The finding supports a cautious reading of resilience as a discourse pattern rather than a stable trait or a guarantee of task completion.

3.6. Theoretical Synthesis and Implications

The findings show the complementary roles of the study's frameworks. SFL explains how first-person constructions, negation, intensifiers, temporal markers, and metaphors construe distress, and how appeals, emojis, humor markers, and fragments manage the relation with an audience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Linguistic anthropology situates these choices in school, family, peer, financial, and online life (Duranti, 1997). Digital ethnography frames the posts as situated online practice (Pink et al., 2016), and CDA supports a critical reading of identity and expectation (Fairclough, 2013). Together, these lenses show distress expressions as linguistic forms and as socially situated acts of communication.

Three implications follow. First, research on distress language needs to account for multilingual forms and digital markers instead of extracting standard-language phrases alone. Second, the prominence of school context points educators toward the practical conditions students name, such as repeated tasks and deadlines, without treating the corpus as a measure of clinical distress. Third, readers of online disclosures, including teachers and counselors, benefit from a context-sensitive approach. A humorous marker does not make a post unserious, and "di na nako kaya" does not by itself indicate a clinical condition.

4. Conclusion

This study examined distress expressions in 550 public Facebook posts by Gen Z junior high school students in the Caraga Region. Exhaustion and energy depletion (24.9%) and reaching one's coping limit (14.9%) were the most frequent categories, so the corpus framed distress mainly as diminished capacity. First-person constructions (78.2%) led the linguistic features, joined by digital affect markers, negation, intensifiers, code-switching, slang, and temporal markers. Academic and school concerns formed the largest context (42.2%), but personal, relational, material, physical, and online circumstances also appeared, and one in five posts named no source. Eleven meanings, eleven discursive positions, and five sociocultural factors emerged from the analysis.

The study contributes an integrated SFL and linguistic-anthropological account of youth distress in a multilingual Philippine digital setting. Distress expressionsin this corpus work as creative linguistic resources and as socially situated acts. The conclusions apply to the analyzed corpus and do not establish the prevalence of distress among Gen Z students or the mental health status of any user.

Several recommendations follow. Teachers and school administrators should listen to student accounts of workload and deadlines and give students clear routes to seek help. Guidance counselors should take familiar local and humorous expressions seriously and follow up through confidential and supportive procedures rather than judging from slang alone. Parents and caregivers benefit from knowing adolescents voice frustration indirectly through humor, code-switching, and brief posts. Future researchers should compare regions, platforms, languages, and age groups, triangulate public posts with ethically approved interviews or focus groups, and report coding decisions, category overlap, and denominators for every frequency.

5. Limitations of the Study

The study analyzed publicly accessible Facebook posts from the Caraga Region published from 2020 to 2025. Instagram, TikTok, and private messages fell outside its scope, so idioms and meanings outside the corpus are missing. The purposive corpus of 550 posts supports depth of analysis, not statistical generalization to all adolescents or platforms. Short posts often lacked context, which produced a large unclear category and limited causal interpretation. The text-based design gave no access to writers' intentions, emotional states, or verified demographic details, so identity labels remain analytic interpretations. Interpretations of linguistic, semantic, and sociocultural meaning also depend on the analytic approaches chosen. Future studies should triangulate posts with interviews, extend coverage to other regions and platforms, and document intercoder agreement to strengthen the evidence base.

6. Supplementary Details

6.1. Supplementary Materials & Data availability statement:
The anonymized research corpus and coding sheet are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical considerations, particularly because some of the Facebook posts included in the study may have been authored by minors. The research materials are maintained in password-protected digital files under the custody of the researcher and are accessible only to the researcher. The corpus and coding sheet are not deposited in a public repository or made available for unrestricted access to protect the privacy of the individuals whose publicly accessible posts were examined. Any request for access to the research materials would be subject to appropriate ethical review and institutional approval.

6.2. Author Contributions:
This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT).

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Rachelyn P. Montejo	✓	✓		✓						✓		✓		

C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
Va : **Va**lidation
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis
I : **I**nvestigation
R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

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6.4. Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the policies of the University of the Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee, Davao City, Philippines, which exempted the protocol from review on June 26, 2026 (Protocol Code GS-EX-06-26-0137) because the study used secondary data for discourse analysis.

6.5. Informed Consent Statement:
Informed consent was waived because the study analyzed publicly accessible, anonymized posts and involved no interaction with users.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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