

Teacher Trainees' Perceptions On The Levels And Causes Of Stress During Teaching Practice

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to identify the levels and the causes of stress among TESL teacher trainees in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. 32 teacher trainees from 3 SPL (TESL) for 07/08 session have been chosen as the respondents. The factors that have been predetermined are school's regulation, teaching workload, interpersonal relationships and problems with the students at school. The instrument of this study is a set of questionnaire taken and adapted from Ahmad Syakri (1998). The reliability of the instrument is 0.848. The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 14.0. Descriptive analysis in terms of mean and frequency is used to analyze the level of stress. Results showed that the level of stress among TESL teacher trainees is at the moderate level. The results also showed that there were no significant relationship between the level of stress with gender, SPM result and teaching experience of the respondents. However, there were significant relationships between age and MUET results with the level of stress among the teacher trainees.

Keywords: stress, teacher trainees, Teaching Practice

Introduction

The experience of stress applies to everybody regardless of gender, races, incomes or occupations. The word stress itself is always associated with the conditions at the workplace. The stress in the workplace is known as work stress that triggers negative impacts to the workers such as they cannot perform up to their levels, which lead to depression and health problems. According to Okebukola and Jegede (1989), work stress is a condition of mental and physical exertion brought about as a result of harassing events or dissatisfying elements or general features of the working environment.

Teacher also encountered with work stress at schools. Sometimes, the job as an educator may become very stressful because they not only have to handle the students, but they also have followed the order from administrator, handling parents or conflict with colleagues. Moreover, the work of teachers at the present time is not only involved with the act of teaching but also include other things such as helping the administrators in handling certain occasions or functions and activities in schools.

Stress can also arise because of the changes of our surroundings; this is stated by Cornelli as cited in Brecht, (1996:7):

“Stress can be defined as wear and tear on the body and mind caused by life's many changes and demands. It is affected by both environment and the make-up of the individual in the environment.”

The teacher trainees may encounter this during the early stage when they have to start to teach in schools. They may deal with the problems to fit themselves with the system at school. If they cannot handle the problems, they will become tense and this lead to stress. These teacher trainees possibly cannot identify their own problems that lead to stress and also the levels of stress that they have suffered.

Stress may not be something new to the teacher trainees because they do not only have to step in the real school environment for the first time, they also had a lot of responsibility towards their students, cooperative teacher, supervisor and school. Thus, this study is designed to determine the levels of stress

among the teacher trainees so that several considerations and actions can be taken if it is proven that the teacher trainees deal with a high level of stress during their teaching practice.

The teacher trainees that suffered high level of stress during their teaching practice may choose to leave the field because they cannot bear the pressure. Particularly for those who have bad experience during practical teaching. Moreover, teaching is a difficult profession and stress has continued to plague classroom teachers. Current estimates are more than 20% of the public school teachers leave their positions within three years and 9.3% quit before finishing their first year (Weiss & Weiss, 1999 as cited in Cushing 2001). If they choose not to be a teacher after they graduated, they will waste the government's money that has provided facility and loan for them. Besides, the government intention to provide quality labor force for educational system will fail because the teacher trainees feel deterred to teach in school again due to stress that they have suffered during teaching practice.

Therefore, this research to investigate the levels of stress should not only be designed for the teachers that have worked for years but also for the teacher trainees who just stepped in the world of education since they do not have much experience in teaching and still looking for direction in the educational world. This is to ensure our nation will not run out of quality teachers who will teach our future generations.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the research are:

- i) to find out the levels of stress among TESL teacher trainees in UTM.
- ii) to identify the relation between demographic factors with the levels of stress among TESL teacher trainees in UTM.
- iii) to determine the real cause of stress among TESL teacher trainees in UTM

Significance of the Study

Stress can extremely affect the performance of a particular person. For the teacher trainees who have just been exposed to the world of education, stress can be a barrier for them to fit themselves in the system. So, this study is to investigate the levels and causes of stress among the teacher trainees so they will be aware about their emotional condition and seek for help if their condition is getting worse.

This study is also significant to the Faculty of Education because it provides information about the levels of stress among the teacher trainees during teaching practice. The teacher trainee can be envisage as a new born baby in a world of education which is very challenging nowadays. So, the teacher trainee should not be left out there without any guidance or surveillance during their teaching practice. By investigating the levels of stress among the teacher trainees during teaching practice, this study can be used by the faculty as a guideline to generate appropriate actions that can be taken to help the teacher trainees during their teaching practice.

Besides, this study may provide a framework to the schools on how to handle the teacher trainees that may have a high stress level. This study will try to seek the real cause of stress among the teacher trainees and from here the schools can play their roles in helping the teacher trainees to overcome the problems.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is the group of 32 third year SPL students intake 2005/2009 from Faculty of Education in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor. This group of students just completed their teaching practice from July till October 2007.

This group is selected because the respondents need to answer all the questions in the questionnaires based on their experience during practical teaching. So this group is chosen since they had just completed their teaching practice and can still remember their experience in schools especially on problems and difficulties that they had encountered during their recent practical teaching experience.

Methodology

Respondents of the Study

The sample of this study is selected from a population of students in Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai, Johor Bahru. The respondents of the study are 32 students of 3 SPL who have completed their teaching practice from July till October 2007. This group of students is taking Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and had attended microteaching class before going for teaching practice. They have to undergo 13 weeks of teaching practice as a requirement for this course.

The respondents are chosen because they had just completed their practical teaching and still can relate their experience during teaching practice to answer all questions in the questionnaires.

Research Instruments Used

This research is using questionnaire to collect the data from the respondents. According to Mohd Najib (1999), questionnaire is easy to manage after it is wisely developed and not difficult to process for the data analysis.

This questionnaire is adapted from The Administrative Stress Index (ASI) that was developed and validated by Gmelch and Swent in 1977 and also other items that was developed from other sources such as Laughlin (1984), Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1974) and Mc Cormick and Solman (1992), taken and adapted from Ahmad Syakri (1998). The Administrative Stress Index (ASI) is used by Gmelch and Swent in 1977 as an instrument in their research to investigate occupational stressors of school administrators.

This questionnaire is divided into 3 sections. First section is based on demographic factors of the respondents. The questions are on personal information of the respondents.

In the second section, there is 46 items concerning the causes of stress among the teacher trainees. The factors that have been identified are school's regulations, teaching workload, interpersonal relationships and problem with the students. The items that have been chosen to test the causes of stress are adapted from The Administrative Stress Index (ASI).

The items in the second section used the Likert Scale which is "1" for Strongly Disagree and "4" for Strongly Agree. These 4 points Likert Scale is adapted from 5 points Likert Scale in Azizi Yahaya et. al (2007). The researcher has removed the neutral point usually labeled as "Unsure", "Uncertain" or "Neither". Some researches have suggested including a neutral point has the effect of reducing the percentage of positive responses. According to Hom, W. (2002), a no-opinion option apparently systematically encourages low-education respondents to avoid the effort of deciding how to answer the question, thereby reducing the impact they have on survey results. He suggested that if researchers want to collect as many valid opinions as exist, it appears that doing so may best be done by omitting no-opinion options and measuring attitude strength directly instead. As a result, this research preferred using a 4-point scale without the neutral question which results in higher scores than a similar 5-point scale with a neutral point.

The third section is on signs of stress experienced by the teacher trainees. These items are developed using the instrument used by Norazian (1995). There is 16 items in this section. This section is developed to inspect the signs of stress among the teacher trainees during their teaching practical.

Result and Discussion

The Level of Stress Among TESL Teacher Trainee

In general, the level of stress among TESL teacher trainees is at moderate level. As can be seen in Figure 4.9, 66 percent of the respondents suffered from moderate level of stress while 34 percent of the respondents endured low level of stress. There are several possible explanations for this result. First, the teacher trainees did not suffer from high level of stress because they did not have many teaching workload compared to service teachers. Probably, teaching hours of the teacher trainees is less than the in service teacher, therefore, they may not endured high level of stress during the teaching practice. However, they did not endure low level of stress due to lack of experience and expertise in handling students and situations at school that may cause pressure to them.

The finding of this study is similar to the findings of another study conducted by Johnson (2000) that investigated the level of stress among the primary teachers in Virginia and also the finding from the research done by Prof. Madya Dr. Azizi bin Hj Yahaya & Mazeni Binti Ismail (2005), to determine the level of stress among 400 teachers from 16 schools from Johor, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan and Selangor. The level of stress among these teachers is also at the moderate level.

However, the present findings did not seem to be consistent with other research done by Ngo (1995) on the levels of stress among 251 primary schools teachers in Hong Kong that revealed 31.1 percent of the teachers rated as either very stressful or extremely stressful.

The present finding did not support previous research by Helen Malaka et. al (2005) that found 94.3 percent of the 35 respondents in one religion secondary school in Johor Bahru experienced low stress level while only 5.7 percent endured moderate stress level. The present study also contradicted the studies by Azizah et. al (2006) that revealed the TESL teacher trainees experienced high level of apprehension levels during teaching practice and also the study by Wan Zarina Wan Zakaria et. al (2002) that discovered the level of anxiety and concern among the TESL teacher trainees is also high during teaching practice. Peters and Mayfield (1982) also found that 50% of faculty members report a high degree of stress due to various factors.

In this research, although the finding revealed that generally the level of stress among TESL teacher trainees is moderate, it is possible that the level of stress among the respondents can slightly change to high or low level at anytime during their teaching practice depending on their current situation at that time.

The Causes of Stress Among TESL Teacher Trainee

As mentioned earlier, this research focused on four main factors that cause stress among TESL teacher trainees. The predetermined factors are school's regulation, teaching workload, interpersonal relationships and problem with the students.

The result for the causes of stress among TESL teacher trainees is presented in Figure 4.10. On average, the respondents seemed to have moderate level of stress during their teaching practice because of these four factors. However, there are 9.4 percent of the respondents who suffered high stress level due to

teaching workload factor and 3.1 percent of the respondents who endured high level of stress due to problems with the students. It seems probable that these results are due to factors that teacher trainees still cannot handle the teaching workload for example preparation for teaching and learning process, materials' preparations and at the same time they have to take over the classes of absent teacher. These situations may give pressure to them since they are still new to the educational world, lack of experience and worried about an evaluation done by the supervisor and cooperative teacher. Besides, problems with the students can trigger stress among them as the students nowadays are slightly indecent and pay less respect to the teachers especially to a new and young teacher.

The present findings seem to be consistent with other research by Helen Malaka et. al (2005) that concluded the main cause of stress among 35 teachers in one religious secondary school in Johor Bahru is work load and followed by school factors.

Based on the result of this study, it seemed to confirm the findings by Cushing (2001). He discovered that the teachers' experienced high level of stress when they are dealing with misbehavior students in schools. Besides, these findings also agree with Azizi Hj. Yahya and Nik Diana Hartika (2007) findings which shown disciplinary problems among students became the main cause of stress among the teachers.

However, the findings of the current study do not support the study conducted by Mohd Sazali Nordin, (1997) that revealed the main cause stress experienced by the teachers is the scheme of work. It is probably because as the teacher trainees, they are not directly involved with many works at school compared to in service teacher. Besides, the teacher trainees only responsible to teach only 2 or 3 classes and have less teaching hours compared to the in service teacher.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to investigate the level of stress among TESL teacher trainees in UTM during their practical teaching. Besides, this research also focused on the causes of stress that they had endured during the practical teaching. These causes include school's regulations, teaching workload, interpersonal relationships and problem with the students.

Furthermore, this study is also designed to determine the relationship between demographic factors such as age, gender, MUET result, English SPM result and teaching experience with the levels of stress.

This study involved 32 respondents from 3 TESL students in Faculty of Education, UTM session 07/08. The respondents have to answer a set of questionnaire to determine their levels and causes of stress during teaching practice.

In short, the respondents only suffered moderate level of stress due to all four factors which are school's regulation, teaching workload, interpersonal relationships and problem with the students.

Moreover, gender, English SPM result and teaching experience did not have any relationships with the levels of stress among UTM TESL teacher trainees. However, the MUET result and age of the respondents have significant relationship with the level of stress among the respondents. The respondents in the range of Band 5 seemed to have lower stress level compared to the respondents in the range of Band 4 and the older teacher trainees seemed to have low level of stress compared to the younger teacher trainees.

In conclusion, although the result from this research revealed that the TESL teacher trainees only endured moderate level of stress, they should receive full support and encouragement during their teaching practice therefore they will not be demotivated to involve in the educational world after their graduation.

As for the trainee teacher, they should know how to cope and handle their stress and treat it as a challenge to become a great teacher in the future.

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