

Work Stress among Teachers: A Comparison between Primary and Secondary School Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the level of stress among primary and secondary school teachers and comparing the level of stress based on demographic factors. There are 268 respondents, the samples are teachers from selected primary and secondary schools in a district in Selangor. Survey questionnaire was utilized and the instrument employed is Teacher Stress Inventory and Self Report Teacher Stress Questionnaire. The findings revealed that mean stress level score for teachers in secondary school is higher than primary school with significant difference in the mean stress level for primary ($M = 2.13$, $SD = .558$) and secondary school teachers [$M = 2.54$, $SD = .834$; $t(230) = -4.720$, $p = .0001$]. The study also showed that secondary school teachers perceived more stress in all stress factors which are rapport with parents, rapport with co-worker, work load, time constrain, student attitude, recognition and support and lack of resources than primary school teachers. The result also revealed that there was a significant difference in the mean stress level scores for single and married teachers with mean difference (0.42, $p < .05$). The finding also indicates that teachers who have teaching experience between 11-15 years experienced more stress and teachers in age between 31-50 years experienced more stress compared to the younger age group (20-30 years) and older age group (51-60 years). It is hoped that the findings will help relevant authorities to design effective stress management programs for the teachers to prevent negative effects of stress.

Keywords: Work Stress, Primary School Teachers, Secondary School Teachers

Introduction

Stress is usually experienced by all men and women when they are not happy. Based on the report by World Health Organization (WHO) found that stress has become an increasingly threatening disease in the world. WHO researchers found that, stress is global epidemic of the century (Seaward, 2006). This situation catalyzes the emergence of the phenomenon of stress that needs special attention in order to understand. Now, stress is everywhere and frequently cited as a major threat to the mental health of mankind (Andrews, 2005).

The teaching profession is a form of social service that is so challenging and stressful. Teachers and educators are needed to be sensitive to developments. Therefore, with the implementation and range of various reforms in education would have made the role and responsibility of the teachers to be more challenging (Juraini, 2007). According to Jepson and

Forrest (2006), a teaching career is a job that has a high level of stress than others. High stress level of a teacher causes disappointment, aggressive behavior, anxiety, avoidance of work, absence from work, and poor work performance (Rupp, 2005).

Teacher stress is defined as an uncomfortable feeling, negative emotion such as anger, anxiety, pressure and disappointment sourced from their work aspects as a teacher (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978). For this matter, a stressed is someone with uncontrollable emotion towards changes in education culture which requires a teacher to give their knowledge, and at the same time, they have to educate students to be a good community member. Normally, high level of stress will lead into unsatisfactory work, work absenteeism, and work abandon. Stress adapting reactions of a teacher includes psychological reactions (anxiety and sadness), physiological (headache, high blood pressure) and attitude related (alcohol and smoking addiction, lifestyle and insomnia). Bad working environment will lead into stress factor and causing unsatisfactory work too. Ultimately, a teacher will have desire to leave their profession. High stress level of a teacher causes disappointment, aggressive behaviour, anxiety, avoidance of work, absence from work, and poor work performance (Rupp, 2005).

In 2001, Ministry of Education Malaysia had introduced the Education Development Pelan 2001-2010. Among the motives of this scheme is to develop individual potential to produce mankind who are emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and physically balanced, consistent with the philosophy of National Education; to promote creativity and innovation among students; to enhance knowledge, sciences, and technology culture; to increase lifelong learning; to prepare an efficient and effective education system which can achieve international standard to become the educational centre that can provide excellent education and to increase Malaysia education's prestige in international level (Education Development 2001-2010, 2001).

In the realization of this motive, our country has put high expectation in our school teachers. They are perceived as the architect, designer, and saver of the future of our children who are responsible to educate them. However, we have to realize that teaching is not an easy job as what other people think and perceive. In fact, teaching is an occupation which is always demanding and changing (Johannessen, 2004). If seen in the Malaysian context, it appears that the phenomenon of stress among teachers is gaining attention. According to the General Secretary of the National Union of Teaching Profession (NUTP) Loke Yim Pheng (2005), many teachers in Malaysia are now suffering from critical diseases and even getting psychiatric treatment because of increasing stress due to increased workload (Abdul Muin, 2005). The NUTP also pointed out that stress levels among teachers are becoming more common and worrisome due to the increased workload. Furthermore, the study by NUTP found that 70 percent of the 9,000 teachers nationwide were depressed not only because of the workload, but also had to contend with the vagaries of principals, clerks, parents and students (Siti Nor Afzan, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Our education system expands rapidly for achieving the target of '*Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (KBSM)/Integrated Secondary School Curriculum, Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (KBSR)/Integrated Primary School Curriculum, and also the newly implemented Penilaian Berasaskan sekolah (PBS)/School-based assessment*'. Indirectly, this integrated curriculum is causing additional workloads to the teachers especially in preparing teaching aid materials and so on. Changes in this new curriculum need teachers to be good in

giving knowledge, and at the same time they have to educate students in the aspects of physical, emotion, intellects and attitudes. Furthermore, educational reforms such as '*PBS*' or '*School-based assessment*' gave teachers more pressure in order to implement these aspirations. Teachers now have to deal with these changes in education until the workload has gone to an extreme.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the stress level of primary and secondary school teachers.
2. To compare the level of stress among primary and secondary school teachers based on demographic factors (marital status, age, experience of teaching and education qualification).

Literature Review

Encountering stress is part and parcel of an adult's life. One of the main factors that cause stress is work. Work life is considered to be stressful due to several reasons mainly the competitive nature of the working environment. Hence, many people spend most of their time at work while ignoring other aspects of life in order to produce a good outcome of their work. In the long run, it gives negative effects in terms of their health and also their social life. Often, it effects the way they treat and communicate with peers and family members. They may feel frustrated or "burn out" when they face problems with peers and customers. This may lead a negative impact to the organization itself. Therefore, it is very important for employer and employees to realize the stress and the stressor that cause all the negative effects.

Study on teachers stress, need to be endeavour in order to improve teachers performances. There are several studies documented here on teachers stress. For instance, a study done by Antoniou, Polychroni, Vlachakis, (2006) showed that the most highly rated sources of stress among teachers were referred to the problems in interaction with students, lack of interest, low attainment and handling students with "difficult" behavior. Female teachers experienced significantly higher levels of occupational stress, specifically with regard to interaction with students and colleagues and workload.

The study done by Johari and Noornazifah (2010), showed that primary school teachers experience low stress level and they also faced stress in terms of personality which was moderately high. This indicate that the level of stress not influenced by the personality of the respondents. Meanwhile another study done by Nurul Izzah (2010) in primary schools in Klang Valley showed that most of the teachers experience moderate stress level (71.7%) and only 12.1% had low mental health status. The study concluded that, these primary school teachers experienced stress mainly due to the students misbehaviour and their mental wellbeing were influenced by the workload and gender. Female teacher with heavy workload had shown significant relationship with lower mental health status.

Meanwhile, a study by Fazura (2012) in primary school showed that there were significant differences on the level of stress among the respondents in terms of race, relationship with parents, and appreciation and support to the stress of teachers.

Teachers in secondary school are also perceived to be stressed in schools. A study by Kamaruzaman (2007) indicated that as many as 57.2% of teachers experienced medium levels of job stress, 37.2% experienced low levels of job stress, while only 4.7% of teachers experienced high level of job stress. This study also showed that pupil misbehaviour is the

most significant factor of five factors that lead to work stress. The researcher suggested that the school need to implement disciplinary measures against sound policy implementation, basic facilities geared to assist teaching and learning, appropriate segregation of duties and sensitivity toward the relationship among teachers and organize training courses or work stress management skills among teachers. Meanwhile, a study by Azizi and Nik (2009) identifies that aspects of stress in secondary school are workload, interpersonal relationship, student's discipline problem and school rules.

A similar study was also done by Raja Maria (2011) on the secondary school teachers to examine the level of job stress and factors which cause stress among the teachers. Findings showed that job stress based on stress factors yield mean scores in the range of 2.10-2.66 at a moderate level. Time constraint factor had the highest mean score (2.66), followed by the heavy workload (2.58), and the lowest mean score on the student hassle factor (2.10).

Methodology

The design of the study is descriptive quantitative survey, intended to examine the comparison of work stress between primary and secondary school teachers. The sample population of this research were teachers from schools in a district which was selected using simple random sampling. There are 20 primary schools 11 secondary schools. The sample size was determine by using the Krejcie and Morgan Table (1970). The number of population in this study is 512 and using the Krejcie and Morgan Table (1970) the minimum required sample is 220 respondents in two primary and two secondary schools.

Instrumentation

Questionnaires were distributed to determine respondent's background information, stress level and stress factors. Part A requires respondents to fill in demographic background such as gender, race, age, marital status, qualifications and experience of the respondents. In part B, the Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI) based on the questionnaire level of stress from the study by Boyle, Falzon and Baglioni (1995) had been adapted in this study. The pilot study was carried out as a guide to improve the items used. Cronbach alpha value obtained was 0.957.

Findings and Discussion

This study was conducted on 268 respondents with 133(49.6%) teachers from secondary schools and 135 (50.3%) from primary schools; 55 (20.5%) were men and 213 (79.5%) were women. The majority of the respondents are from the age group of 20- 30 (34.3%). As for race, most of the respondents are Malays 207 (77.2%), Indian 52 (19.4%) and Chinese 9 (3.4%). The highest number of academic qualifications achieved are bachelor holders 212 (79.1%), followed by Diploma holders 47 (17.5%) and Masters/PhD holders 9 (3.4%). Married teachers form the highest number of respondents with 228 (85.1%), followed by single and unmarried with a total of 40 (14.9%). The majority of respondents had 11-15 years of teaching experience which is 73 (27.2%) of respondents.

Based on results of the study, there is no significant difference noted for the mean stress level score for education background of the teachers. This finding is consistent with the studies by Aftab and Kahtoon (2012); Siong (2002) which revealed that there is no significant difference between education background and teacher stress level. Meanwhile, the result shows that married respondents experienced more stress compare to other categories of marital status. That is a statistically significant difference in the mean stress level score for

single and married teachers with mean difference of .42434, $p \leq .05$. This result however is inconsistent with the study by Aftab and Kahtoon (2012).

Findings of the study shows that a significant difference in the mean stress level score for teachers aged between 20-30 and 31-40 years. This study also found a significant difference between aged 20-30 and 41-50 years, and a significant difference between aged 31-40 and 51-60 years. On the other hand, no significant difference was noted for the mean stress level score for age 20-30 and 51-60 years. The finding indicates that the middle age between 31-50 years experienced more stress compare to the younger age (20-30 years) and older age (51-60 years). This result partially support the study done by Aftab and Kahtoon (2012); and Azizi Yahaya (2010).

As for the experience of teaching factor, the finding reveals that there is a significant difference in stress level mean between 1-5 years teaching experience and 11-15 years teaching experience. This finding is inconsistent from the study done by Siong (2012) that showed that there was no significant difference in stress level and teaching experience. However, no significant difference was noted for the mean stress level score for teaching experience between 1-5 and 6-10 years, and no significant difference between teaching experience 1-5 and 16-20. The findings of the study indicates that teachers that have teaching experience between 11-15 years experienced more stress compared to other categories of teaching experiences.

An independent sample t-test was applied to determine the difference of stress level and stress factors between primary and secondary teacher. This study analyzed seven factors namely rapport with parents, rapport with co-worker, work load, time constraint, students attitude, recognition and support and lack of resources. The results of the study reveals that teachers in the secondary school are more stressed as compared to the teachers in primary schools. This result is consistent with the study done in Hong Kong by Chan, Chen and Chong (2010), and the study done by Johari and Noornazifah (2010). For the stress factors, this study analyzed seven factors namely rapport with parents, rapport with co-worker, work load, time constrain, student attitude, recognition and support and lack of resources. All seven factors tested show that teachers in secondary school experienced more stress than teachers in primary school. Findings revealed there was a significant difference in mean stress level score for primary school teachers ($M = 2.13$, $SD = .558$) and secondary school teachers ($M = 2.54$, $SD = .834$; $T(9230) = -4.720$, $p = .0001$). These two means suggest that secondary school teachers experienced more stress compared to primary school teachers. As such, high stress level teachers cause disappointment, aggressive behavior, anxiety, avoidance of work, absenteeism, and poor works performance. Therefore, this study could benefits all parties especially teachers, school and MOE (Ministry of Education) in order to improve teachers performances.

Conclusion

The work pressure of teachers in primary and secondary schools are at the intermediate level. Meanwhile, the comparison between schools had shown that teachers in secondary schools are more stressed compared to primary school teachers. As a conclusion, it is suggested that several actions to be considered by the Ministry of Education, State Education Department, District Education Office, schools and teachers themselves. Nowadays, many changes are taking place in Malaysia education system, and certainly any changes make will put pressure on teachers. Thus, teachers as catalysts to education reform need to be ready

mentally and physically to deal with arising problems. Teachers also need to be more capable of managing stress and always be ready to provide excellent services to create good students who one day will steer our country. This paper suggests to further investigate the factors that keep teachers motivate to perform well by considering both intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors. Thus, it is crucial to investigate the most influential motivational factors that lead to teachers' superior performance. Further studies should examine other types of extrinsic and intrinsic factors for teachers' motivation in different culture and ethnic.

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