

A SURVEY ON FACTORS THAT CAUSE STRESS AND STRATEGIES TO
OVERCOME IT AMONG RURAL AND SUB-URBAN TEACHERS TEACHING
SCIENCE IN ENGLISH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE
KUCHING/SAMARAHAN DIVISION

by

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ABSTRACT

A Survey On Factors That Cause Stress And Strategies To Overcome It Among Rural And Sub-urban Teachers Teaching Science In English In Secondary Schools In The Kuching/Samarahan Division

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The purpose of this study was to find out the factors that cause stress and strategies to overcome it among rural and sub-urban teachers teaching science in English in secondary schools in the Kuching/Samarahan Division. The areas that the researcher focused on were teachers perception, teachers proficiency, teaching aids, lesson planning and preparation and students factors. The samples were teachers teaching science in English (Form one, two and three) in twenty selected schools in the Kuching/Samarahan division. The instrument used to obtained data for this study were questionnaires and semi-structured interview. 80 respondents responded to the questionnaires while 6 of the respondents were interviewed. The result showed that all of the respondents experienced stress in teaching the science subject in English. Based on the analysis, the most prevailing cause of teacher stress were students factors and teachers proficiency. 100 % of the respondents agreed that they were stress due to factors caused by their students. This was followed by teachers proficiency where 67 % of the respondents were stressed due to lack of proficiency in the English language. Teachers perception, teaching aids and lesson planning were seen to be minor contribution or factors to teachers stress where they showed less than 50 % of the respondents agreed that these factors caused stress to them. The findings also showed the most popular strategies used by the respondents to overcome their stress. Based on the analysis, most of the respondents chose to communicate frequently in English as strategy to improve and increase their proficiency in English and build their confidence in communicating and teaching. To avoid unforeseen circumstances due to the usage of courseware, Laptop and LCD, the respondents prepared back-up plans. Lesson planning and preparation was seen as not the main factor to teacher stress. However, the respondents preferred to solve the problems themselves while others refer to other science teachers lesson plans. To deal with problems caused by students, the respondents used strategies such as by attracting students' attention by using various and attractive teaching aids, etc. Motivating students was another most popular strategy used by the respondents. 92.5 % of the respondents motivated their students to learn science in English where they got the students involved in the lesson and let them have hands-on experience using the courseware.

ABSTRAK

Kaji selidik mengenai factor-faktor yang menyebabkan tekanan dan strategi yang digunakan untuk mengatasinya dikalangan guru-guru yang mengajar mata pelajaran sains dalam Bahasa Inggeris di sekolah menengah di kawasan pedalaman dan luar Bandar di Bahagian Kuching/ Samarahan.

Nur Syazrina Abdullah

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti factor-faktor yang menyebabkan tekanan dan strategi yang digunakan untuk mengatasi tekanan dikalangan guru-guru yang mengajar matapelajaran sains dalam Bahasa Inggeris di sekolah menengah di kawasan pedalaman dan luar bandar di Bahagian Kuching/Samarahan. Aspek-aspek yang difokuskan adalah persepsi guru, penguasaan bahasa guru, penggunaan alat bantu mengajar, persediaan mengajar dan faktor murid. Instrumen yang digunakan dalam kajian ini adalah borang soal selidik dan temubual. Sampel kajian ini terdiri daripada guru-guru yang mengajar mata pelajaran sains dalam Bahasa Inggeris. (Tingkatan Satu, Dua dan Tiga) di dua puluh buah sekolah menengah yang terpilih di Bahagian Kuching/Samarahan. Lapan puluh orang guru menjadi responden manakala hanya enam orang guru daripada responden ditemubual. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan semua responden mengalami tekanan mengajar sains dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Berdasarkan analisa yang telah dibuat faktor-faktor utama yang menyebabkan guru-guru mengalami tekanan ialah faktor murid dan penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris guru-guru. 100 % daripada responden bersetuju bahawa tekanan yang mereka alami adalah disebabkan faktor murid. Ini diikuti oleh penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris guru-guru di mana 67 % responden menyatakan demikian. Persepsi guru, alat bantu mengajar dan persediaan mengajar adalah dilihat sebagai faktor sampingan yang mana kurang daripada 50 % responden bersetuju bahawa factor-faktor tersebut menyebabkan tekanan kepada mereka. Dapatan juga mendedahkan strategi yang digunakan oleh responden untuk mengatasi tekanan yang mereka alami. Berdasarkan analisa yang telah dibuat, kebanyakan responden memilih untuk berkomunikasi dengan lebih kerap dalam Bahasa Inggeris sebagai strategi untuk mempertingkatkan penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris mereka dan membina keyakinan dalam berkomunikasi dan pengajaran mereka. Untuk mengelakkan masalah di luar jangkaan, yang disebabkan oleh penggunaan dan pengendalian alat bantu mengajar, komputer riba dan LCD, responden telah menyediakan persediaan sampingan. Persediaan mengajar, dilihat sebagai masalah minor atau sampingan dalam menyumbangkan kepada tekanan guru-guru. Walaubagaimanapun, responden memilih untuk menyelesaikan sendiri masalah berkaitan dengan persediaan mengajar. Untuk menangani masalah yang ditimbulkan oleh murid, responden menggunakan strategi seperti menarik minat murid kepada pengajar dengan menggunakan pelbagai alat bantu mengajar yang menarik. Memotivasikan murid juga adalah salah satu strategi yang popular dikalangan responden. 92.5 % responden memotivasikan murid-murid mereka untuk mempelajari sains dalam Bahasa Inggeris dengan melibatkan mereka dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran dan membiarkan mereka untuk menggunakan alat bantu mengajar.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Stress is a normal feature of everyday life and most people will have to experience it at some stage in their life. It is a natural reaction of the body system to help adaptation to meet new demands. Stress is the body's way of telling that something is going wrong. It could be an essential signal for our survival and well being. However, when the system goes awry, we tend to exaggerate some of the problems and become tense. Stress can be seen from various aspects, namely stress at the workplace, stress caused by weather, stress caused by health problems, stress caused family and personal problems, stress caused by students and work as teachers.

According to Srinivas (1991:119), Stress is your body's physical, mental and chemical reactions to circumstances that frighten, excite, confuse, endanger or irritate you. In other word, it is the body's way of telling that something is going wrong. Schult & Schult, (1990 :540), stated that stress on job is costly and is reflected in a lower productive efficiency in the organization. And the stress has been shown to reduce employee motivation and the physical ability to perform task well. Hence, this may result in lower production levels and increased errors and accidents.

On the other hand, Addley, (1997) stated that “Not all stress is negative and some are necessary to make individuals function effectively and be productive.” This means that stress can be motivating if tackled in the right way. Stress could be experienced by anyone regardless of occupation, gender, age, background and so on. Teacher are also not free from experiencing stress in their working life as teacher. For example, a survey carried out by Mathews and Castel (1987) in the United States, had indicated that educators had significantly greater stress levels than others who worked in the banks, industries and postal services. Teachers are always exposed to stress.

According to Kyriacou (1989), “Teacher stress can be defined as those experienced by teachers of unpleasant emotions like anger, frustration, depression, anxiety, tension and nervousness, resulting from aspects of their work as teachers.” Meaning that a teacher is said to be in a stressed situation when he or she is easily angry, showing sign of frustration, nervous, showing sign of anxiety, etc. These signs and symptoms can be seen through their facial expression and their actions. Teachers show their stress by scolding students, punishing them, shouting at students, etc.

Teachers play important role for future nation building. Performance of students depend mostly on the mental, physical and emotional well-being of teachers. This is because teachers who are mentally, physically and emotionally disturbed or stressed due to their work pressure would not be able to perform well in their work. As a result, teaching and learning process would not be carried out smoothly and

successfully. Hence, it is important to identify teachers stress, as well as the factors that cause teachers to be stressed. Furthermore, teachers nowadays are burdened with various kind of commitments, responsibilities and demand at workplace which exposed them to stress. Prolonged experience of stress can cause all sorts of problems to teachers and may cause mental and physical illness which may directly or indirectly affect theirs and also students' performances.

There were many factors that cause teachers to be stressed. Teachers become stressed due to lack of or no confidence in themselves to face the new environment in their working life. For this study, it is the teaching of the science subject in English. Due to their lack of proficiency in English which is then the medium of instruction for the science subject, teachers have no confidence to teach, to prepare and conduct a good lesson. They faced difficulty to communicate confidently, smoothly, and effectively with their students. This situation would cause stress to them while teaching the science subject in English. In addition, to teach a group of students who are not efficient in the language, lack of confidence hinder active interaction between the teachers and the students. This would further result in students creating problem and misbehave in class. As a result, teaching and learning cannot take place. Hence, there would be no evidence of teaching and learning. This would further contribute to stress among these teachers.

In conclusion, proficiency of these teachers is the root problem that cause them to be stress. This is because proficiency in the language would allow teachers to confidently teach in the language.

1.1 Background of study

Teachers nowadays are faced with various demands at their workplace. If a teacher perceives that meeting certain demands will be difficult or impossible, and that failure to do so will threaten his or her mental, physical and emotion well being, then a teacher is very likely to experience job stress. Prolonged experienced of this stress would affect teachers' job performance, which include teachers' absence, low level job satisfaction and commitment and even impaired quality of classroom teaching. Eventually, teachers' job stress may result in the teacher leaving the profession or opting for early retirement. A study carried out by International Labor Organization in 1981 has found out that occupational stress experienced by teachers had become the major reason why teachers quit the profession (Okebukola & Jagede, 1989)

Since the implementation of Bahasa Melayu as the medium of instruction in all schools as stated in the Razak Report, 1956, and the eradication of English as medium of instruction, less attention was given to maintain, improve and upgrade the standard of English. As a result, the standard of English continue to decline and this

worries the government. The government found it necessary for Malaysian to master the language because of its function as language of global information.

The government aims to arrest the declining standard on the English Language among students and to enhance English fluency among Malaysians to upgrade the national competitiveness to better position the country to face the challenges of globalization, liberalization and information and communications technology. Hence, the teaching of literature as a component in the English subject as well as the teaching of science and mathematics in English in 2003 were introduced and currently implemented.

The implementation of the teaching of Science in English in schools has added to problems faced by teachers and resulted in stress among teachers. This is because the government had spent RM 5 billion on this programme and the government want to see its success. Parents are worried that the change in the medium instruction in the teaching of Science might decrease the interest of their children in the subject and as a result not performing well in it. Hence, the high expectation of the government, parents and society to see the programme achieve its objectives and not merely wasting the government's give pressure to teachers and further made these teachers to become stressed to teach the subject.

Many Malay, Chinese and Tamil mother-tongue educationists believed that the government must improve the teaching of English instead of introducing English in other subject. Once English is used to teach Science and Mathematics it may be then used in other subject. Eventually, mother-tongue may only be taught as a subject. (Dr. Tan Seng Giaw, 2002). This statement shows that many parties disagree to the implementation of the teaching of Science in English.

1.2 Statement of problem

It has been two years since the implementation of the teaching of Science in English starting with the Year One and Two at the primary school level and Form One, Two and Form Six at the secondary level.

The problem now is that most of the English teachers who are asked to teach the subject in English most of them are not familiar with the technical terms or terminology in science and the science concepts which are in English. Due to their lack of knowledge on the scientific terms or terminology they find it difficult to explain them to their students. Their lack of confidence to teach due lack of knowledge on science terminology and concepts cause these teachers to be stressed, even though they have the proficiency and competency in English Language.

As for the science teachers, although they are trained to teach science and are familiar with the science terminology and subject matter, they lack the competency and proficiency in English. Hence, they are not confident to communicate in English which further create barriers in communication. They are not able to communicate smoothly with the students and find it difficult to teach and make students understand what is being taught. Both the English trained teachers and Science trained teachers will experience stress when trying to make their students understand what they are teaching. Teachers will experience mental stress trying to teach the subject in English despite the fact that they do have the proficiency in the language. Emotional stress will also result due to lack of proficiency. This will further result in physical stress to teachers. This is very important because if the stress is not reduced or prevented the teachers concerned would face mental and emotional problems.

The students, on the other hand, also face problems due to the change in the medium of instruction. The medium of instruction used is new to them and they seldom communicate in English, read materials in English or write in English. Furthermore, after many years of studying science in Bahasa Melayu, these students are more familiar with the science terminology in Bahasa Melayu. Hence, they find it difficult to understand the terminology and concepts in English. Students find that learning science in English is difficult. Being not familiar with the science terminology and concepts in English resulted in students not being able to understand what is being taught. For these reasons, students become less interested in the lesson and

become demotivated, bored and refused to learn science in English. Hence, difficulty in understanding, lack of proficiency and competency in the language and a sudden change in the medium of instruction had develop stress in students as well. Students attitude such as not paying attention in class, misbehaving in class when the teaching and learning process was in progress, refused to participate in class activities and refused to do the exercises or tasks had created stressful environment for teachers to carry out their teaching. As a result, the teaching and learning process doomed to failure and could not be conducted smoothly. The objectives of the lesson would not be achieved and there would be no evident of teaching and learning. All of these problems caused teachers to be stress.

The materials used in teaching such as workbooks, reference books, etc most of them were still in Bahasa Melayu. Students and teachers found it difficult to look for materials in English yet. Without sufficient references and materials in English both teachers and students would face problems to understand Science in English better. Hence, difficulty of accessing materials in English had also caused teachers to be stressed.

The factors mentioned above such as students, problems faced by the teachers, materials, etc, drew the researcher to find out the problems further. Hence, the aspect that the researcher would like to focus on the areas that may cause stress to teachers teaching science in English are teachers' proficiency and students factor, Besides

that, the use of teaching materials, lesson planning, and students' attitude would also be looked into. Teachers' proficiency look into aspects such as teachers confidence, areas teachers are weak in, how they build their confidence and improve their proficiency. Lack of proficiency will result in lack of confidence which will lead to stress. Students factor looked into the aspect of stress that are resulted by students such as students misbehaviour, attitude. In terms of the teaching aids, aspects such as the suitability of the teaching aids and the problems encountered. Lesson planning looked into the aspects of suitability of the module an problem encountered.

For this study, the researcher would like to find out what are the factors that cause stress among teachers and what are the strategies they used to overcome or deal with them.

1.3 Objectives of study

The purpose of this study is to:

- a) identify factors causing stress to teachers who are teaching the science subject in English.
- b) identify the strategies used to overcome stress by teachers who are teaching the science subject in English.

Consistent with the above objectives, the research questions of this studies are:

RQ 1. What are the main stress factors experienced by teachers teaching Science in English in these schools ?

RQ 2. What are the strategies that teachers teaching Science in English in these schools used to deal with their stress in teaching the subject ?

1. 4 Definitions of terms

1.4.1 Stress

According to Greenberg (1996), “Stress is defined as a pattern of emotional states and physiological reactions occurring in response to the demands from outside or inside an organization.

1.4.2 Teacher stress

Kyriacou (1989) defined teacher stress as an experience of unpleasant emotions as anger, tension, frustration, anxiety, depression and nervousness, resulting from aspects of their works as teachers. On the other hand, Swick and Hanley (1980) defined teacher stress as the occurrence of perceived negative situations that result in adverse teacher reactions or behaviours.

1.5 Significance of the study

Teachers play a very important role in developing and building the nation's future generation. Moreover, while carrying out their duties as teachers, they are also burdened with other demands and expectations from the ministry, the public, parents and their immediate schools authorities. These demands and expectations may have been their sources of stress and may cause teachers to perform at a less satisfactory level.

This study hopes to identify the factors causing stress and the strategies used to overcome it among teachers teaching Science in English in the Secondary school. This study also hopes to provide ideas and strategies for other teachers to deal with their stress problems. This is important because some teachers might be too shy to reveal their weakness directly by asking their colleagues of how to solve their problems. The findings can also be a reference for the Ministry of Education to look into the problems faced by teachers so that preventive measures can be taken to help teachers to cope with stress. In addition, when offering courses the authority concerned can put into consideration these stress factors.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

This study only identified the factors causing stress and strategies to overcome stress among teachers teaching Science in English in selected rural and sub-urban secondary schools in the Kuching/Samarahan division. As working environment differs and the way one handles stress also differs, the finding of the this study is limited to the population within the study area. Hence, this study would not be representative of all teachers teaching Science in English in the secondary schools in Sarawak

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter, discussed the major topics related to the study such as the definition of stress in general, teacher stress, sources of stress and studies and researches done related to stress.

2.1 Definition of stress

The definition of stress, is usually based on their own implications. According to Bruess and Richardson (1992), “stress is defined as any physiological response of the body to demands from external environmental and internal mental process like fear, happiness, worry, anger anxiety, etc, based on the interactive or transactional model of stress.”

Stress is also a state of arousal with which the body responds to challenges and demands in our life. Cartwright (1997), further defines stress as any force that puts a psychological or physical function beyond its range of stability, producing a strain within the individual. In addition, Srinivas (1991), stated that stress is the body’s

physical, mental and chemical reactions to circumstances that frighten, excite, confuse, endanger or irritate a person.

On the other hand, Lazarus (1966) suggested that the intensity of the stress experience is determined significantly by how well a person feels he or she can cope with an identified threat. If a person is unsure of his or her coping abilities, they are likely to feel helpless and overwhelmed. According to Kirsta (1987), “our personality, behaviour and lifestyle all have important influences on our stress level, she also stated that much stress occurs through emotions such as aggression, impatience, anger, anxiety, stress responses. Stress is what we perceive it to be, some people may thrive on a particular situation, while others may find it terrifying and highly stressful. Stress can only be harmful when we cannot control our responses to it.”

From the above definitions of stress, we can say that there are endless causes of stress and stress itself should be seen or interpreted depending on its nature. Stress does not always bring negative effects on an individual but it also can act as a motivator to do certain things. Different people respond to stress differently. Hence, it is important to recognize the causes of stress as to enable us to control our responses to it.

2.1.1 Teacher stress

Swick and Hanley (1980) defined teacher stress as the occurrence of perceived negative situations that result in adverse teacher reactions or behaviours. They further explained that teacher stress can result from situations in three areas namely; environmental stressors encompassing living conditions, job security, scheduling pressures and federal programs and regulations, interpersonal stressors, resulting from relationships with family, friends, students, parents, boss and colleagues, and intrapersonal stress, arising from personal or professional feelings of inadequacy, role conflict or ambiguity, lack of influence or a sense of alienation. So, in the case of this study, the cause of the teachers stress that the researcher, would like to look into is teachers' proficiency or professional feelings. As mentioned by Swick and Hanley (1980) the professional feelings of teachers is the root of teachers' stress.

Kyriacou & Sutcliffe (1989) defined teacher stress as an experience of unpleasant emotions as anger, tension, frustration, anxiety, depression and nervousness, resulting from aspects of their works as teachers. On the other hand, Swick and Hanley (1980) defined teacher stress as the occurrence of perceived negative situations that result in adverse teacher reactions or behaviours. Kyriacou (1989) describes teacher stress as negative feeling or unpleasant emotional state resulting from work as a teacher; if high enough it can have severe physical and

psychological consequences for teachers, including fatigue, tension, anxiety, depression, poor teaching performance and judgment as well as low job satisfaction

Beside all the definition given, teachers stress are stress caused by anything that is in the teaching profession especially new things for instant, the teaching of science in English.

2.2 Model of stress

2.2.1 An Interactive Model of Stress (source : Sutherland and Cooper (1993)

In this model, stress is conceptualized as an interaction or transaction between the person and the environment. This model emphasize on the 'characteristics of the organism and the responses they evoked' (Derogatis and Coons, 1993, p.202). According to this model, an individual mediates the environment impact and at the same time the perceptual, cognitive and physiological characteristics of the individual affect and become a significant component of the environment. An individual influences and responds to his or her environments. This model advocates a dynamic, cybernetic system in which an individual and the environment constantly interact with one another. It is not the environment per se that is stressful, but it is the relationship between the person and the environment which may result in the experience of stress. Stress occurs when a person cannot cope with the magnitude of the stimuli or causes of stress.

2.2.2 A Stimuli-Response Model (source: Sutherland and Cooper (1993))

In this model individual are look upon as an influence and respond to their environments. Stress is then conceptualized as an interaction or transaction between the person and the environment and stressful transactions are seen as a product of the two interacting systems. Stress occurs at the point at which the magnitude of the stress stimuli exceeds the individual's capacity to resist.

From the two models, the researcher agreed that individual and the environment that cause stress constantly interact with one another. The researcher also believe that teachers must know how to deal with the environment that cause stress in order to have a strategy to deal with it.

2.3 Sources of Teacher Stress

2.3.1 National Studies on teachers' stress

The study on teachers' stress by Yong Choo Tiong (1998) had proven or shown that teachers were stressed with their work. He revealed that when teachers were experiencing mild or extreme stress, students' performance were relatively low. Due to the change in the medium of instruction in the teaching, teachers as well as students are sure to face problems which is the main factor of stress among teachers.