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**A STUDY OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AMONG
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN CHINESE
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KINTA DISTRICT
(PERAK), MALAYSIA**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher stress, identify the major sources of stress and determine if there are any significant differences between gender and teaching experience with the levels of reported stress. This study employed the survey approach involving 102 English Language teachers in seven Chinese secondary schools in Kinta District. The ELTSI used, as instrument in this study was an adaptation of Vickneasvari's (1997) questionnaire on Science Teacher Stress Inventory. Data collected was analyzed using frequency counts, percentages and t-tests. Results revealed that 43.2 percent of English Language teachers rated their jobs as either being very stressful or extremely stressful. The ten major overall sources of stress identified were compared with gender and teaching experience. Results revealed that though the major stressors were almost identical, each group perceived the stressors at different levels of intensity. T-test results revealed that there was significant difference for the ELTSI subscale of "Administrative procedure" for the demographic variable of teaching experience. There was however no significant difference between the independent variables of gender and teaching experience for the overall sample of the study with the ELTS subscales. Statistical significant difference was established between gender and ELTSI stressors for 'Poor attitude of students towards English Language lessons', "Not enough time to complete lesson preparation and mark exercises and work books" and "Failure of students to do homework" Finally, the findings also revealed that three stressors were significant related to the independent variable of teaching experience. There were "Students making noise and refusing to pay attention when teacher is teaching in class", "Having to teach students who are not motivated to learn English Language" and "Lack of incentives and rewards for hardwork".

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji tekanan kerja di kalangan guru, mengenalpasti punca-punca utama tekanan kerja dan melihat sama ada terdapat perhubungan yang signifikan antara jantina dan pengalaman mengajar dengan tahap tekanan kerja. Kajian dilakukan keatas 102 guru Bahasa Inggeris di tujuh buah sekolah menengah (Cina) di Daerah Kinta. Instrumen kajian, ELTSI yang digunakan telah diadaptasikan daripada soalselidik kajian Vickneasvari (1997), bertajuk Inventori Tekanan Kerja GuruSains. Data yang dikumpul dianalisa dalam bentuk kiraan kekerapan, peratus dan ujian-t. Hasil kajian mendapati 43.2 peratus guru Bahasa Inggeris menganggap tugas mereka sebagai guru sangat tertekan atau amat tertekan. Sepuluh punca utama tekanan kerja dibandingkan antara jantina dan pengalaman mengajar. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan walaupun punca-punca utama tekanan kerja adalah hampir sama, namun persepsi tahap tekanan terhadap punca-punca tekanan kerja adalah pada tahap yang berbeza. Hasil ujian-t mendapati wujud perbezaan signifikan bagi subskala ELTSI. "Prosedur pentadbiran" untuk variabel demografi pengalaman kerja. Namun, tiada perbezaan yang signifikan antara variabel bebas jantina dan pengalaman mengajar bagi keseluruhan sample kajian dengan subskala ELTSI. Wujud hubungan yang signifikan statistik antara jantina dan punca tekanan untuk "Sikap pelajar yang negatif terhadap Bahasa Inggeris", "Kekurangan masa untuk menyempurnakan persediaan mengajar" dan menyemak buku latihan dan buku kerja", "Pelajar gagal membuat kerja rumah dan latihan". Hasil kajian juga mendapati tiga punca tekanan kerja berkaitan dengan variabel pengalaman mengajar, iaitu "Pelajar membuat bisung dan tidak menumpukan perhatian di dalam kelas semasa guru mengajar", "Pelajar tidak bermotivasi untuk belajar Bahasa Inggeris" dan "Kekurangan insentif dan ganjaran untuk bekerja keras".


APPROVAL PAGE

TITLE OF PROJECT PAPER: A STUDY OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS
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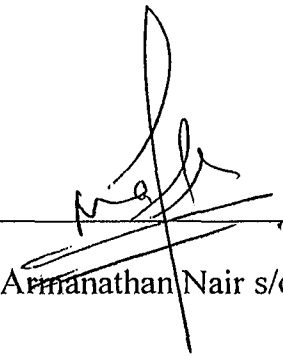

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project paper is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by reference notes and a bibliography is appended.

Date : 17 November 2000

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To my wife, S. Susila,
for your encouragement, patience and sacrifice.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Abstrak	iii
Approval Page	iv
Declaration	v
Copyright Page	vi
Dedication	vii
Acknowledgement	viii
Table of Contents	ix
List of Tables	xii
List of Figures	xiii

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

1.0	Background of the Study	1
1.1	Statement of Problem	3
1.2	Objective of the Study	5
1.3	Significance of the Study	5
1.4	Research Questions	7
1.5	Limitations of the Study	8
1.6	Definitions of Terms	9

Chapter Two: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0	Introduction	11
2.1	Definition of Teacher Stress	11
2.2	Prevalence of Teacher Stress	13
2.3	Sources of Teacher Stress	16
2.4	Association Between Teacher Stress and Demographic Variables	19
2.5	Teacher Stress and Gender	19
2.6	Teacher Stress and Teaching Experience	22
2.7	Summary of Findings	24
2.8	Conceptual Framework	24

Chapter Three: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0	Introduction	26
3.1	Scope of the Study	26
3.2	Design of the Study	27
3.3	Sampling	27
3.4	Adaptation of the Instrument	29

3.5	Pilot Testing	41
3.6	Reliability of ELTSI Subscales	41
3.7	Data Collection	43
3.8	Data Analysis Procedure	44

Chapter Four: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTEPRETATIONS

4.0	Introduction	46
4.1	Descriptive Statistics of the Total Sample	47
4.2	Prevalence of Stress Among English Language Teachers	48
4.3	Mean Scores of ELTSI Subscales for English Language Teachers	50
4.4	Ten major Stressors Experienced by English language Teachers	52
4.5	Ten Major Sources of Stress Experienced by Male and Female English Language Teachers	57
4.6	Ten Major Sources of Stress of Experienced and Less Experienced English Language Teachers	62
4.7	Relationship Between Demographic Variables and ELTSI Subscales	64
4.7.1	Relationship Between Teachers' Gender and Their Level of Stress as Measured by ELTSI Subscales	68
4.7.2	Relationship Between Teachers' Experience and Their Level of Stress as Measured by ELTSI Subscales	69
4.8	Relationship Between Demographic Variables and ELTSI Stressors	70
4.8.1	Relationship between Teachers' Gender and Their Level of Stress as Measured by ELTSI Stressors	70
4.8.2	Relationship between Teachers' Experience and Their Levels of Stress as measured by ELTSI Stressors	72
4.9	Conclusion	73

Chapter 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1	Introduction	77
5.2	Discussion of Major Findings	78
5.3	Conclusion	89
5.4	Recommendations	92
5.5	Suggestion for Further Research	95

REFERENCES	97
APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE	102
APPENDIX B: LETTERS	112

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
3.3.1	Sample Size and Percentage of Response from Chinese Secondary Schools in Kinta District	28
3.4.1	Deleted STSI(A) Items	32
3.4.2	Retained STIS(A) Items	33
3.4.3	Modified SIT(A) Items	34
3.4.4	New ELTSI Items	40
3.6.1	Cronbach-Alpha Coefficient of ELTSI Subscales	42
4.1.1	Descriptive Statistics for Variables Based on Gender	47
4.1.2	Descriptive Statistics for Variables Based on Qualification	48
4.1.3	Descriptive Statistics for Variables Based on Teaching Experience	48
4.2.1	Overall Prevalence of Stress among English Language Teachers	50
4.3.1	Mean and Standard Deviation of ELTSI Subscales	51
4.4.1	Mean and Rank of ELTSI Stressor Subscales	53
4.4.2	Mean and Rank Order of Ten Major Stressors for the Whole Sample	56
4.5.1	Mean and Rank Order of Ten Major Sources of Stress Experienced by Male English Language Teachers	59
4.5.2	Mean Score and Rank Order of Ten Major Sources of Stress Experienced by Female English Language Teachers	60
4.5.3	Ten Major Stressors: Mean and Rank Order for Male and Female English Language Teachers	61

4.6.1	Mean Score and Rank Order of Ten Major Sources of Stress of Experienced English Language Teachers	65
4.6.2	Mean Score and Rank Order of Ten Major Sources of Stress of Less Experienced English Language Teachers	66
4.6.3	Ten Major Stressors: Mean and Rank Order of Experienced and Less Experienced English Language Teachers	67
4.7.1	T-test Analysis of Gender in Relation to ELTSI Subscales	68
4.7.2	T-test Analysis of Teaching Experience in Relation to ELTSI Subscales	70
4.8.1	T-test Analysis of Gender in Relation to ELTSI Stressors	72
4.8.2	T-test Analysis of Teaching Experience in Relation to ELTSI Stressors	73
4.9.1	Distribution of Ten Major Stressors on ELTSI Subscales	75

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Conceptual Framework	25

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Secretary-General of the National Union of Teaching Profession, N. Siva Subramaniam has reported that at least one teacher in every urban school suffers from some form of 'mental' illness due to overwork and stress and that there are more than three hundred teachers who need immediate psychiatric treatment. (Star, 21 July 2000)

This report is alarming because it indicates that teaching has become such a stressful profession that many teachers are experiencing emotional and psychological problems. Apparently, these teachers are not only stressed, but they also seem to suffer from a variety of other serious problems that appear related to their jobs.

In recent years, Malaysian teachers have been severely criticized for not meeting performance standards. The National Union of Teaching Profession of Malaysia attributed the drastic changes in teacher performance and attitude to unfavorable working conditions, for example, large classes, heavy workload, unnecessary clerical work and disruptive students (Suseela 1994).

Even worse, there have been numerous cases of mentally ill teachers who reportedly abused their students (Star 21 July 2000). In a 1990 survey by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, the findings indicate that the total number of teachers suffering from psychosis was 169 and neurosis 1,119 (Suseela 1994). Although it was not clearly established that these teachers developed their psychoses and neurosis from their jobs as teachers, it is believed that the stress they experienced daily may be one of the contributing factors leading to mental illness.

Extensive studies involving the multiple dimensions of the stress in the teaching profession have been carried out in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and New Zealand. This however is not the case in Malaysia as very few research has been done to shed light as to what effects the Malaysian teachers in executing their duties in school and in the classroom.

Thus there is an urgent need for extensive studies in various aspects of teachers stress in the Malaysia context. These studies would significantly enhance deeper understanding of the stress phenomena. The generalization of the findings and suggested recommendations would be of invaluable assert to educators in their quest for education excellence.

1.1 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There has been an increase in confidence of Malaysians towards Chinese medium schools, be it at the primary or secondary level recently. This can be seen in the drastic increase in the number of non-Chinese students who have enrolled in these schools. According to a recent report, there are more than 45,000 non-Chinese pupils who have enrolled in Chinese medium schools. (Utusan Melayu, 28 October 1996)

The Deputy Minister of Education, Dr. Fong Chan Onn has attributed economic reasons and the desire of parents wanting their children to learn an extra language as reasons for this recent trend. In addition, he also attributed the increased confidence in these schools to the high emphasis on discipline, the uniqueness of the teaching methods and approach and employed in these Chinese schools. (Utusan Malsysia 4, January 1994)

The general perception now, is that the teaching approaches and methods employed in these Chinese schools are unique, as these schools have been able to produce students with outstanding academic achievements.

Given this prevailing trend, the teachers in these Chinese Secondary schools face undue pressure as a result of the high expectations from parents, the Chinese community,

In particular, the English Language teachers in Chinese medium schools face an uphill task as language teachers because English Language is considered a third language and only secondary to Bahasa Malaysia and Mandarin.

Students too, have a weak command of this language as they are only introduced to it language in year 3 of their primary schooling. This is compounded by the fact that students in Chinese medium schools are not motivated to study English Language and generally give it the least priority as compared to Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, Mathematics and other Science subjects.

The English Language teacher here, has a mammoth task of preparing these late starters for the common English Language examination in the public examinations such as the PMR, SPM and the newly introduced Malaysian University Entrance Test (MUET).

From the review of literature, it was found that no specific study has been done on occupational stress faced by English Language teachers locally, especially in Chinese secondary schools. There is an urgent need for extensive studies in various aspects of teacher stress in this context. Thus this study mainly focuses on the assessment of teacher stress experienced by English Language teachers in Chinese secondary schools in Kinta District.

1.2 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

More specifically this study attempts to assess the prevalence of stress and the stress factors affecting English Language teachers in Chinese Secondary schools. It primarily aims to investigate the factors which cause stress among English Language teachers in Chinese secondary schools clustered under the following subscales:

- a) Student characteristics
- b) Teacher characteristics
- c) School environment
- d) Administrative procedures
- e) Conditions of service

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In an international review of teacher stress and burnout, Kyriacou (1987) refers to the occurrence and consequences of stress in the teaching profession in countries as widespread as Great Britain, the United States, Israel, Canada and New Zealand.

In Malaysia, very few documented studies in this field have been carried out. Junaidah (1995) studied perceived teachers stress in selected schools in Selangor, Tunku Badariah (1997) investigated occupational stress and coping strategies related to culture and gender, while Mutters and Yong (1982) studied the symptoms and psychological

components of stress among trainee teachers. In addition, Siti Rohani (1991) investigated the influence of school factors on teacher stress, Suseela (1994) researched on stress factors and the prevalence of stress among teachers in Selangor and Vickneasvari (1997) investigated major stressors experienced by secondary Science teachers in Penang.

From the review of literature, it was found that no specific study of this nature examining the sources and influences of various stress factors on English Language teachers in Malaysia Chinese secondary school has been carried out. Thus, the need to know the sources of stress is extremely important to help find ways of reducing the stress levels of these teachers. This will enable them to carry out their professional duties effectively and efficiently to the expectations of the parents, the community, the relevant education authorities and the general public.

The present study examines the phenomenon and prevalence of teacher stress and the relationship between the various stress factors as experienced by English Language teachers in Chinese secondary schools. The findings of this study will be discussed in reference to the existing international literature and more specifically in terms of the Malaysian educational context, will add to the existing data on teacher stress. It will also provide valuable insight information that would be useful to the relevant authorities to improve the teaching environment of English Language teachers in Chinese secondary schools.

It is hoped that the results and discussion will help to instill more understanding of the relationship between the demographic factors of sex and teaching experience on English Language teacher stress in Chinese Secondary schools.

In addition, the findings of the study will provide significant implications on the Malaysian policy and system of education and its teacher training programs.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study specifically seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How prevalent is occupational stress among English Language teachers in Chinese secondary schools?
2. What do English Language teachers in Chinese secondary schools perceive to be the ten major sources of occupational stress?
3. Is there any difference in the ten major sources of occupational stress for the different subgroups of gender and teaching experience?
4. Is there any significant difference in the levels of stress as measured by each of the ELTSI subscale for the different subgroups of gender and teaching experience?

5. Is there any significant difference in the stressors for different demographically subgroups based on gender and teaching experience?

1.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The sample subject used directly limit the nature of this study.

1. The targeted samples of this study comprise only English Language teachers in government aided Chinese secondary schools. As such the findings should not be generalized to fully independent private Chinese secondary schools. The latter has a completely different set up in terms of policy matters, administration procedures and school governance.
2. The study is restricted to examining occupational stress factors among English Language teachers in Chinese secondary schools. The samples do not include nor generalize English Language teachers in primary Chinese schools. The nature of occupational stress factors in these primary schools may differ.
3. The study only involves samples from all seven government aided Chinese secondary schools in Kinta District, Ipoh. As such this greatly limits the generalization of the study to English Language teachers in Chinese secondary schools in other districts in Malaysia.

study to English Language teachers in Chinese secondary schools in other districts in Malaysia.

4. The stress factors researched in this study are solely based on work-related stress (student and teacher characteristics, school environment, administrative procedures and conditions of service). It does not take into consideration non-work related factors which could have a bearing on the results of the findings.

1.7 DEFINITIONS OF THE TERMS

For the purpose of clarification, the following terms used in this study are either adopted from other studies or given the following operational definitions.

1.6.1 Stress

A condition of mental and physical brought about as a result of harassing events or dissatisfying elements or general features of the working environment.

1.6.2 Stressor

Stress causing elements or events.

1.6.3 Graduate teachers