

Examining The Impact of Stress on Preschool Teachers in Bangi, Malaysia: A Case Study

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Abstract

The topic of stress among preschool teachers holds immense significance due to its pervasive impact on the attrition rates and overall quality of early childhood education. Research consistently underscores the prevalence of stress and burnout within the ranks of preschool educators, as validated by (Jomuad et al., 2021). The combination of extended teaching hours and heavy workloads exacerbates these issues, underscoring their relevance in the field. The ramifications of stress go beyond individual teacher well-being, resonating throughout their professional lives. Job satisfaction, productivity, and absenteeism suffer, ultimately leading to high turnover rates and early retirement requests. Furthermore, stress erodes not only mental and physical health but also enthusiasm and job engagement. If unaddressed, stress can evolve into burnout, further deepening dissatisfaction, straining teacher-student relationships, and quelling educator motivation. Such outcomes can undermine the positive contributions teachers make to the educational landscape. This research adopts a comprehensive approach, delving into the roots of stress among preschool teachers, exploring its multifaceted impact on both professional and personal spheres, and proposing interventions aimed at mitigating stress and fostering well-being. By shedding light on these pivotal aspects, the study aspires to contribute to the formulation of effective strategies that bolster the support and retention of preschool educators, thus nurturing a sustainable and conducive educational milieu. To achieve these objectives, the study employs rigorous research methodologies and analyses. By doing so, it generates invaluable insights poised to guide educational policymakers, school administrators, and relevant stakeholders in tackling the challenges engendered by stress within the preschool teaching domain. By addressing the intricacies of stress, this research underscores its urgency, aiming to cultivate an environment where preschool teachers can thrive, leading to enhanced educational outcomes and the enrichment of the broader educational landscape. As a result, this study sets the stage for further research endeavors that can continue to refine and expand the understanding of stress among preschool teachers and its implications.

Keywords: Stress, Preschool Teachers, Burnout, Well-Being.

Introduction

The profession of a preschool teacher holds great significance and deserves recognition and appreciation from society. Preschool teachers play a crucial role in shaping the lives of young children, going beyond imparting academic knowledge to become key agents of socialization. Their guidance helps students reach their full potential, fostering responsible citizenship and personal development. Nevertheless, being a preschool teacher is no easy task, demanding both physical and emotional commitment. These educators are not just teachers; they exemplify good behavior and educate students from the ground up, constantly elevating their professional expertise. During the recent pandemic in Malaysia, teaching emerged as one of the most stressful occupations. Despite the challenging circumstances, preschool teachers persevered to ensure positive academic outcomes for their students. However, teaching preschool comes with its unique set of challenges, as educators face numerous demands from parents, authorities, and the community. The cumulative effect of these pressures has led to a gradual increase in stress levels among preschool teachers, significantly impacting their well-being, work attitudes, and turnover rates. The link between teacher stress and its influence on teaching performance and student academic outcomes has become apparent. High levels of stress have, at times, prompted teachers to leave the profession, leading to instability among staff, students, and the community. Consequently, schools have resorted to hiring less experienced teachers, resulting in lower student achievement and substantial training costs for the education system.

The initial part of this research has focused on conceptualizing terms such as "teacher's stress," "teacher's performance," "teacher's resources," and "teacher's personality traits." The subsequent discussion explored the moderating effects of teachers' resources and personality traits on job stress and performance. Understanding these moderating effects is critical in managing teacher stress and optimizing performance, leading to greater individual and school productivity and growth. This research aims to examine the sources and effects of preschool teacher stress, while highlighting programs that can effectively reduce stress and enhance teacher well-being and performance in the context of Bangi, Malaysia. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which started towards the end of 2019, has given rise to numerous challenges and difficulties in daily life, significantly impacting social health, the economy, and the education system. Preschool teachers have had to adapt swiftly to the new norms, becoming proactive and innovative in achieving the educational authority's vision and mission. The impact of occupational stress on psychological well-being has been the subject of serious consideration, and the health consequences of stress are well-documented (Lingam et al., 2017). Overburdening teachers with work while disregarding their human capital development can lead to a negative impact on the quality of schoolwork. Stress should be understood within the unique occupational context it occurs, as individuals with uncontrollable emotions towards changes in the education culture are susceptible to stress (Kavita & Hassan, 2018). Stress, often recognized as an unpleasant emotional state, arises from prolonged pressures that individuals find difficult to manage. It can lead to poor job performance, absenteeism, job dissatisfaction, accidents, and various health problems, including hypertension, diabetes mellitus, stroke, and ulcers. Stress can also affect teachers' productivity, attitudes, and interactions with colleagues and students. It is a body's reaction to changes that require physical, mental, or emotional adjustment (Balboa, 2020). The teaching profession has faced challenges due to social change and economic imperatives, necessitating an examination of its effects on teachers over the last decade (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003). External factors like technological advancements and changes in the economy

have contributed to increasing stress at work (Tennant, 2001). As stress among preschool teachers becomes a pervasive phenomenon, it has become increasingly important to investigate its implications. Stress, when left unaddressed, can lead to mental disorders, making it crucial to manage stress effectively to avoid detrimental effects on mental health (Melchior et al., 2007). Research on stress at the workplace highlights its ubiquitous nature among workers, affecting employee performance and business productivity (Tennant, 2001). Stress can lead to illness, increased time off, and reduced productivity, making it a matter of concern for both organizations and employees. The consequences of stress in an organization include increased employee turnover, absenteeism, and reduced productivity (Shaubman et al., 2011). Therefore, understanding the causes of teacher stress is vital in addressing this pressing issue and optimizing teacher performance.

In conclusion, this research delves into the sources and effects of preschool teacher stress, identifying effective programs that can reduce stress and improve teacher well-being and performance in Bangi, Malaysia. The ongoing pandemic has further emphasized the importance of managing teacher stress to foster a nurturing and productive educational environment. By examining the impact of stress on teachers and exploring interventions to manage stress effectively, this study contributes valuable insights to support and retain preschool teachers, ensuring a sustainable and conducive learning environment.

Literature Review

Stress is an inherent aspect of daily life that affects individuals physically, socially, and psychologically. How individuals manage stress plays a pivotal role in determining its impact on their overall well-being. The teaching profession has been a subject of significant research regarding stress management. This literature review delves into the topic of stress among teachers, with a particular focus on preschool teachers, and explore coping strategies employed by educators to manage stress effectively. Numerous studies have been conducted to identify stress factors among teachers. Research by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016); Shaheen and Mahmood (2016) revealed various stressors, including depression, feelings of success, deficiency of emotional support, workload, interpersonal relationships, and the work environment. Stress factors encompass both physiological and psychological effects, leading to health issues, anxiety, anger, depression, and feelings of inadequacy (Cooper and Dewe, 2004; Dlamini et al., 2014). Teacher stress has significant implications for both educators and students. High stress levels have been linked to reduced job commitment, job satisfaction, and teaching quality (Caprara et al., 2006; Klassen and Chiu, 2010). Stressed teachers may also display less effective teaching methods and classroom management, negatively affecting student learning outcomes.

To manage stress, teachers employ various coping strategies. These strategies can be broadly categorized as palliative and direct-action techniques. Palliative techniques aim to reduce emotional discomfort and include activities like exercise or even smoking and drinking (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Direct action techniques involve proactive measures to address stressors, such as seeking advice from colleagues or consulting mental health professionals. Social support is a crucial factor in coping with stress, with teachers often relying on colleagues and administrators for support (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Positive social networks have been linked to better physical and mental health for teachers (Betoret, 2006). Additionally, support from spouses and romantic partners plays a significant role in teachers' well-being (Birditt & Antonucci, 2007). Preschool teachers face unique stressors due to their responsibilities of nurturing young learners. As per the *Kurikulum Standard Pra Sekolah* -

Standard Preschool Curriculum, teachers are tasked with preparing students for national assessments, leading to challenges like lack of parental and administrative support and overcrowded classrooms. The stress experienced by preschool teachers has implications for their job satisfaction and commitment, potentially leading to attrition and affecting the quality of education for young learners.

Teacher stress is a prevalent and concerning issue, with various factors contributing to its development. The negative impact of stress on teachers and students calls for effective coping strategies and social support systems. By understanding the challenges teachers face and identifying successful coping mechanisms, the teaching profession can work towards creating a supportive and sustainable work environment. Further research is essential to develop stronger coping strategies and ensure the well-being of teachers and students alike, ultimately promoting a nurturing and effective learning environment.

Methodology

For this case study, a qualitative research design was chosen to explore and understand stress among preschool teachers in Bangi. Qualitative research allows for in-depth understanding and does not rely on hypotheses or theories. This approach enables researchers to explore methodologies with greater accuracy and gain insights from participants in their own words. The study used purposeful sampling to select six preschool teachers from various preschools in Bangi, Malaysia. The participants were chosen based on their potential to contribute valuable insights to the research. Five of the participants were female, with ages ranging from 23 to 30 years, and represented diverse educational backgrounds, including diplomas and undergraduate degrees. All six teachers were full-time employees, and the interviews were conducted online. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, which allowed for personal and unstructured discussions with the participants. Semi-structured questionnaires served as interview guides, focusing on the teachers' perceptions of their profession, sweet memories, relationships with employers and colleagues, challenges faced in their work, and coping mechanisms. Each session of the interview lasted between 25 to 60 minutes. The data obtained from the interviews underwent content analysis to identify themes and patterns related to stress among preschool teachers. Qualitative research does not rely on closed questions, allowing for open-ended discussions and providing rich and nuanced data for analysis.

The study ensured ethical considerations by obtaining informed consent from the participants. A letter was sent to each participant through their employer, explaining the voluntary nature of their involvement and the confidentiality of their responses. The researchers maintained a climate of comfort during the interviews and avoided any harm or psychological abuse. The study faced certain limitations, including a relatively small sample size of six participants, which may affect the generalizability of findings. Additionally, the online interviews did not allow for face-to-face interactions, potentially impacting the depth of responses.

The qualitative research design provided a strong basis for understanding stressors among preschool teachers in Bangi, Malaysia. Themes such as time pressures, children's needs, non-teaching tasks, maintaining early childhood philosophy, personal needs, issues with parents, and interpersonal relationships emerged from the data. The study highlighted the complexity and demands of preschool teaching and shed light on the internal and external factors contributing to stress. The findings underscored the importance of addressing stress among teachers to maintain job satisfaction, motivation, and overall well-being.

Findings

The findings of a case study conducted to explore the causes and effects of stress among preschool teachers in Bangi. The study aimed to identify strategies and programs that can reduce stress among teachers for the benefit of early childhood education. Six teachers from different preschool centers in Bangi, Malaysia participated in the study, and data was collected through interviews. The study identified several factors contributing to stress among preschool teachers. The primary causes include

- 1) **Heavy Workload:** Teachers face an overwhelming volume of tasks, including teaching, administrative work, and disciplining students. The lack of sufficient personnel results in work overload, leading to exhaustion and compromised quality of teaching.
- 2) **Unreasonable Demands from Parents:** Some parents place unreasonable demands on teachers, attributing poor performance solely to them, which adds pressure and frustration.
- 3) **Lack of Resources:** Insufficient resources in schools make it challenging for teachers to carry out their work effectively, causing stress and frustration.
- 4) **Lack of Consultation and Engagement:** Teachers' lack of participation in decisions affecting their work environment leads to helplessness and stress, particularly when they are forced to implement policies without understanding or agreement.

The study revealed that stress adversely affects teachers' performance, resources, and personality traits. Stress can lead to absenteeism, lateness, and a decline in the quality of teaching. It also affects teachers' emotional well-being, resulting in personality changes, sleep disturbances, and health issues. To address stress among preschool teachers, the study proposes several strategies and programs

- 1) **Improve Communication:** Employers should foster open communication with teachers, allowing them to voice their concerns and ideas freely. Regular motivational talks can also boost teacher morale.
- 2) **Recognition and Appreciation:** Employers should recognize and appreciate teachers' efforts through awards, salary increases, and privileges, boosting their motivation and reducing stress.
- 3) **Organize Bonding Events:** Hosting events like Family Day and Teacher's Day can foster a positive work culture, building better relationships between management and staff.
- 4) **Provide Training and Courses:** Offering additional training in early childhood education can enhance teachers' skills and confidence in handling new challenges.

Stress among preschool teachers has significant implications for their personal and professional lives. This case study highlighted the importance of addressing the causes and effects of stress and implementing strategies to reduce it. By improving work systems and culture, employers can create a positive and supportive environment that enhances teacher performance and well-being. While this study focused on preschool teachers in Bangi, Malaysia, its findings may be valuable for other occupational groups and industries facing similar stress-related issues.

Summary, Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

While this study provides valuable insights into the stress levels and contributing factors among preschool teachers in Bangi, Malaysia there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of only 6 preschool teachers. While efforts were made to ensure the representation of different age groups, teaching experience, and other characteristics, a larger and more diverse sample could

provide more comprehensive findings. Secondly, the study relied on self-reported data from the participants, which may be subject to bias or inaccuracies. Participants may have underreported or overreported their stress levels and coping strategies. Future studies could incorporate observational or objective measures to complement self-reported data. Thirdly, the study focused solely on preschool teachers in Bangi, Malaysia. The findings may not be directly generalizable to other regions or educational settings. It would be beneficial to conduct similar research in different locations and among teachers at different levels of education to determine if the findings hold true across various contexts. Lastly, the study only identified four main determinants of teacher stress. There may be other factors contributing to teacher stress that were not captured in this study. Exploring additional determinants could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of teacher stress.

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, several recommendations can be made to address the issue of stress among preschool teachers in Bangi

- 1) School administrators and policymakers should consider implementing support programs and workshops to help teachers manage stress effectively. These programs could focus on stress management techniques, time management, and work-life balance.
- 2) School management should ensure that teachers' workloads are reasonable and manageable. Proper workload distribution and periodic assessments of teacher's tasks can help reduce stress related to overwhelming responsibilities.
- 3) Promoting effective communication between school management, teachers, and parents can enhance understanding and cooperation, ultimately reducing stress caused by misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations.
- 4) Encouraging a positive and supportive work environment can significantly impact teacher well-being. School management should foster a culture of appreciation and recognition for teachers' efforts and accomplishments.
- 5) Considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' stress levels, it is crucial to provide adequate support and resources for teachers during challenging times. This may include additional training for online teaching methods and emotional support for teachers coping with pandemic-related stressors.
- 6) Incorporating regular counselling sessions or support groups for teachers can offer an outlet for discussing and managing stress. These sessions can also provide teachers with coping strategies and emotional support.

Further research should be conducted to explore additional factors that may contribute to teacher stress in other contexts and locations. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of teacher stress and inform targeted interventions. In conclusion, this study sheds light on the challenges faced by preschool teachers in Bangi, Malaysia, in managing stress. Stress management and support strategies are essential to ensure the well-being and effectiveness of teachers in their vital role in shaping the education and future of young learners. By addressing the factors contributing to teacher stress and implementing effective support systems, schools can create a more conducive and positive environment for both teachers and students.

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