

## Work Overload and Teacher Stress: Insights from Secondary Schools in Bachok, Kelantan

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### Abstract

The study explores the relationship between work overload and stress among school teachers in Bachok, Kelantan, using a quantitative approach with 80 participants from two secondary schools. The research assesses the impact of workload, teaching experience, age, and gender on stress levels. Findings indicate that demographic factors do not significantly influence stress, as both male and female teachers report similar stress levels due to workload. Additionally, no significant correlation was found between teaching experience and stress, challenging the notion that more experienced teachers manage stress better. The study identifies non-teaching responsibilities, including administrative duties and technology adaptation, as primary contributors to stress. These findings highlight the need for systemic changes in the education sector to alleviate work overload and improve teachers' well-being. The research calls for policy interventions to enhance work-life balance and reduce stress, to support the sustainability of the teaching profession.

**Keywords:** Work Overload, Teaching Experience, Teacher's Stress

### Introduction

According to Isola Rajagopalan (2019), teachers, known as people, impart knowledge and skills to students. The teacher's career has been seen as a professional since the teacher may be a catalyst for a student to pursue their dream and have extraordinary skills towards shaping the personality and thinking of the students to help them achieve their goals (Karim, 2022). Besides, teachers can be multi-talented, helping their students achieve student targets, such as architects, accountants, designers, and many more to help them succeed (Kavita et al., 2018).

At the same time, many people, especially students, choose their career as a teacher due to intrinsic factors like interest to be a teacher or extrinsic factors when the environment has influenced them to be a teacher soon (Davies et al., 2018). According to a previous study by Nargis et al (2021), the teacher career is the most chosen among people, especially among pre-service teachers, because of the intrinsic motivational factor(interest), extrinsic

motivational factors concerned with economic and other internal incentives which can spend time with family, employment security and social status and followed by altruistic motivational factor.

Nowadays, the occupation of a teacher is also associated with stress for many reasons. Many assume a teacher's career is manageable due to having much time, working half a day, spending much time with family, and many more. Instead, most of them needed to learn the fundamental responsibility that the teacher faced to achieve their student goals (Gomez, 2022). According to Makhbul (2019), there is too much stigmatization from other people, especially other workers or parents themselves, when they assume working as a teacher is not stressful and "relaxing" when they do not have to do much work and teach the student at school. However, at the same time, they did not know the truth when the teachers had to face their careers as a tutor or teacher. According to former Education Minister Dr. Maszlee Malik, 4.4% or 2,123 teachers experience moderate stress levels because of workload, family matters, finances, and many more (Radhi, 2018). The data has shown that the teacher's career differs from what people assume or say because different careers have responsibilities they need to face.

Besides, psychological problems such as stress happen because of overwork in the workplace (Hayden et al., 2018). Work overload occurs when the person's responsibility exceeds their ability, time, resources, and many other things (Odogwu, 2021). Therefore, when this happens, it will lead to stress, especially among the workers. Work overload and additional work among school teachers nowadays are the main problems that can lead them to an early pension because they must struggle with their careers to achieve the school's target. Moreover, Ibrahim et al (2021), need to face the changes in the syllabus from time to time to achieve the target of Malaysia Education. Thus, there can be work overload for teachers nowadays compared to previous eras.

### **Problem Statement**

Human service professionals like teachers are not strangers to experiencing stress. According to Scott (2022), stress can be described as a feeling of tension because of physiological, psychological, and environmental demands. Stress is a common psychological problem in our lives, especially nowadays, in the modern era. Stress occurs among school teachers because they have to carry much responsibility, such as accountants, architects, and clerks, to help their students succeed in the future (Kavita et al., 2018). Therefore, when all the positions the teachers had to carry, of course, will have an impact on their sense of efficacy, job satisfaction, student engagement and physical health (Hayden et al., 2018).

Besides, this research aims to determine why many teachers in Malaysia are now deciding to take early pension because of stress. Whether male or female, Malaysian teachers have shown an increasing number of early pensions before retirement. This issue has been proven by Aminuddin Awang, the President of the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP), when most of the teachers in Malaysia committed to taking an early pension because of work overload or additional work at school (Hibrahim, 2022). Karim (2022), and Lihan (2022), in their article mention that over 10,000 have submitted their annual paper in the past few years for early retirement because they cannot handle the changing of the syllabus and the modern technology used in teaching, which can contribute to work overload, especially

among veteran school teachers. Modern technology will also challenge teachers' abilities because it is beyond the teacher's ability that will make them stressed and have to take an early pension (Batanero et al., 2021). If the school teacher decides to retire early, their task will continue to other teachers. It can also be a reason for work overload among school teachers, leading to stress because they need to complete the tasks from teachers' early retirement or absent teachers (Gorard et al., 2021).

President of the Sarawak Teachers Union, Adam Prakash Abdullah, has mentioned in his statement that the government nowadays puts the teachers' career in a clerk position when teachers need to do a lot of clerical work (Lihan, 2022). Most school teachers had to key in all the student data by themselves. For example, exam marks, attendance, and currently, they had to key in the student data under the District Transformation Program (DTP) every month online by themselves. Chaudhari et al (2022), mentioned in their article that when teachers, known as educators, have been forced to do non-academic tasks such as putting data in the systems when some of them do not know how to use modern technology, that can cause them to stress easily. Therefore, teachers in clerk positions will get stressed easily because it can involve their time to complete all the data given. Working as an administrator takes around three or four hours to complete all the data since they have to key in all the data through the platform. The same goes for teachers in school; when they need to key in all the student data, they have to teach in parallel with the Malaysia Education mission even though they do not need to be involved with that position.

One of the most stressful occupations is a teacher's career, among other occupational stress, and the researcher identified the teaching career as in the top rank of stress (Nor, 2020). Unfortunately, many stigmatized people, especially other workers, and parents, assume teachers' careers are not stressful because they are flexible, have half-day work, have some time with family, and many more (Makhbul, 2019). According to Carroll et al. (2022), teachers nowadays have to face many challenges, such as student behaviour, modern technology use, and excessive workload, and it is also related to their socio-demographics, which can contribute to stress and early pension. The teacher's responsibility is to focus on teaching and be involved in all other positions to fulfill their school needs and help the students succeed in the future (Sen, 2019).

Even though much research has been conducted to find the root cause of stress among schoolteachers, the researcher's findings on this topic still need to be improved to understand its reasons. In the 21st century, Malaysians have faced new challenges, such as globalization, liberalization, internationalization and information and communication technology development. Thus, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has developed programs to improve knowledge, ICT literacy, skills and many more (PIPP (2006-2010)). With this, stress among school teachers, mainly rural area teachers, has increased since they have to face the new technology use and the possibility of changing the syllabus, contributing to work overload. Most teachers in rural area schools need help getting an internet connection, and some teachers there also need to gain skills in using modern technology. In her article, Faizma (2013) stated that most teachers, especially veteran teachers (50 years above), need more skills to use modern technology than fresh or young teachers. 33.6% of teachers in Kelantan agree that the lack of modern technology will increase their stress and contribute to teaching failure (Idris et al., 2010).

Although numerous studies have been conducted on stress in the teaching profession, very few have focused specifically on the impact of non-teaching responsibilities, such as administrative tasks and adapting to new technology, on stress levels among teachers in rural Malaysian schools. It also implies that the influences of demographic factors such as gender, age, and teaching experience on teacher stress must be explored since previous research is inconsistent in its findings regarding whether these factors significantly affect stress levels. Lastly, this study evidences the gap in policy-focused research addressing structural changes within the educational system that could alleviate work overload and thus provide support for teachers' mental health and job satisfaction, especially in rural and under-resourced schools.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theory chosen for this study is The Transactional Theory of Stress by (Lazarus et al., 1984). This theory is the most influential for conceptualizing stress and coping processes across occupational contexts, including education. The Transactional Theory from Lazarus et al (1984), contends that the individual has to face and cope with the challenges from the consequences of transactions or interactions that occur between a person and the environment, which means that the person having stress because of their situation and environment that influences them becomes stressed. Silinda (2018) stated that stress also has a relationship with individuals and the environment, which the individual appraises as taxing or exceeding the resources or the ability to hurt their well-being.

The theory explains how the context of factors contributes to stress and how people cope with stressful situations. Psychological stress happens due to environmental factors, a crucial aspect of this model, and teachers have to deal with various life stressors. A few causes of teacher stress were revealed, including high job demands, student misbehaviour, poor working conditions, work overload, poor relationships at work, role conflict, and many more (Silinda, 2018).

The coping resources are another critical element of this model that determines experiences of stress. The coping strategies adopted to deal with work-related stress are generally classified in the research literature as problem-focused or emotion-focused (Herman et al., 2020). It aims to manage the stress or the individual's response to it. Lazarus (1984) showed the two cognitive appraisals: primary and secondary. Primary appraisal refers to an individual action of the event that will threaten or challenge themselves. Meanwhile, secondary appraisal is related to primary appraisal in terms of how the person builds a strategy or copes with uncomfortable situations such as stress.

### **Literature Review**

#### *Gender and stress among School Teachers*

According to Tang & Vandenberghe (2021), work overload can be defined as a perceived role demand that exceeds their time, energy, and capabilities. Role overload or work overload can lead to psychological strain since they have to handle things beyond their ability. In this case, gender is also linked to work overload, which can lead to stress easily. Therefore, this has been proven by Kamaruddin & Taat (2020), when most of the stressful teachers in school are female teachers because they have a lot of responsibilities to do, such as chores at home and need to carry many responsibilities at school, compared to male. Meanwhile, the same study

has argued that males are more stressed than females since they have to handle many things (Kamarudin et al., 2020). It depends on whether the school or organization has a bias or more beliefs towards someone, whether the female or male teachers there. Thus, this can contribute to stress because of the work overload that the person needs to carry.

Other than that, Kuwabara et al (2021), also conducted a study about school teacher stress in Japanese schools. They found that males (54.1%) more than females (45.9%) in their survey, showing that males are more stressed than females when they need to face overwork, work on holidays, and work at home.

#### *Age and stress among School Teachers*

Age is also one of the factors work overload occurs that can lead to stress. It is because as someone getting older, they tend to be attacked by various diseases, especially psychological stress. In their research, Kavita and Hassan (2018), found that teachers between 31 and 50 years old are more likely to get stressed than young teachers aged 20 to 30. This is because they have much responsibility since they have been labelled as a quality or have more experience handling things in school than young teachers. In other words, Akin (2021), teachers of that age tend to be strong people to improve or maintain the mission and vision of that school.

Besides, previous research has found in their study in Japanese schools that most of the participants in the Brief Job Questionnaire (Stress Test) are teachers 50 years old with psychological stress compared to 20-29-year-olds (Kuwabara et al., 2021). Thus, when this occurs, the school cannot maintain experienced and professional teachers because they are not interested in teaching the students in that school and will make them decide on early pension (Sze et al., 2022).

#### *Involved with Administrative Tasks*

Teachers nowadays are also burdened with non-academic tasks and need help concentrating on their responsibilities, which can contribute to stress easily due to involvement with administrative work. According to Pacaol (2020), teachers are overworked because they have faced hidden tasks that must be finished within a given time, whether related to their teaching or non-teaching tasks. However, the researcher affirms that most teachers are overloaded with work because of non-teaching work, such as being involved with administrative or school paperwork, sports events, numerous meetings, etc. Therefore, this issue has been proven by previous studies when teachers' stress is not because of teaching activities only, but they face work overload, which is clerical tasks like making records of student attendance in the system, file management, collecting fees, preparing performance report and other (Jafar et al., 2022 & Rusdi et al., 2021).

In addition, Ibrahim (2020), mentioned the teachers on Peninsular Malaysia's West Coast when most of them have to work outside their working hours to complete all the data and assessments due to system overload during working hours since they had to key in all the data through the online website provided by the school. Therefore, when this occurs, it can lead school teachers to psychological stress; some teachers will decide to take early retirement beyond their ability (Sze et al., 2022).

### *Teaching Experience*

The teaching profession is considered a stressful profession. Schools mainly trust teachers who have more experience teaching than new teachers. Thus, when all the things they need to handle are overloaded, it can cause the teachers to have a work overload. Kavita et al. (2018) indicate that teachers who have worked for 11-15 years are more stressed because people assume that they have a lot of experience or information to improve the education in the school.

Teaching experience can be related to work overload because the school, such as the principal or young teachers, depends on teachers' experience (Hussain, 2022). This is because teachers need to learn how to develop good teaching skills. Sometimes, they ask veteran teachers to create student examination papers since they have experience with many types of exam questionnaires. Thus, the researcher mentioned that it can make them stressed and cause them to decide to retire too early because of the work overload.

Experienced or veteran teachers are known as rooted trees because they maintain the skills and share information that can be used in the study with the students (Akin, 2021). At the same time, the school or organization did not know the psychological stress that the teachers had to face. The school should reduce this work overload with experienced teachers to maintain the quality of that school's education, such as by giving them appreciation and many more.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the relationship between teaching experience and teachers' stress?
2. Is there any difference in age contributing to teachers' stress?
3. Is there any difference in gender contributing to teachers' stress?

### **Hypothesis of Study**

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between teaching experience and teachers' stress.

Hypothesis 2: There is a difference in age contributing to teachers' stress.

Hypothesis 3: There is a difference in gender contributing to teachers' stress.

### **Methodology**

This research adopts a quantitative approach with a correlational design to explore the relationship between work overload and teacher stress in selected schools. The study was conducted at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Putri Saadong (SMKPS) and Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Sri Gunung (SMKSG) in Bachok, Kelantan.

The study's respondents included 80 school teachers, comprised of 18 males and 62 females, selected using convenience sampling. This technique was employed due to its ease of access to respondents willing and available to participate in the survey. The research instrument used was a Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI), adapted from previous studies and consisting of 36 questions. The TSI measured factors contributing to stress, such as teaching experience and workload, and sociodemographic variables, such as gender, age, and marital status. The instrument was divided into two parts: Part A collected demographic information, while Part B assessed teacher stress levels using a 5-point Likert scale.



Data collection was conducted through an online survey distributed via WhatsApp to teachers at the selected schools. The survey was prepared in Malay to cater to the predominantly Malay-speaking respondents, and SPSS was used for data analysis, including descriptive statistics, correlation, and reliability tests. A pilot test with 30 respondents was conducted to ensure the reliability of the adapted instrument. The test result showed a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.714, indicating acceptable reliability for the research.

## Results

### *Sociodemographic Information*

The study was conducted among school teachers in SMK Putri Saadong and SMK Sri Gunung at Bachok, Kelantan. Convenience sampling has been chosen for this study because the target population is readily available. As for this research, the researcher has been chosen among school teachers since the researcher is nearby with both schools and has connections there. So, it is easy for the researcher to get the respondents to answer the given questionnaire based on their willingness. 103 respondents from both schools were surveyed using the survey questionnaire.

Table 1

*Demographic Table of Respondents*

| Variables              | Category          | n, (N=80) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------|-------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender                 | Male              | 18        | 22.5           |
|                        | Female            | 62        | 77.5           |
| Age                    | 24 – 33 years old | 9         | 11.3           |
|                        | 34 – 43 years old | 9         | 11.3           |
|                        | 44 – 53 years old | 47        | 58.8           |
|                        | Over 54 years old | 15        | 18.8           |
| Teaching Experience    | 1 – 5 years       | 6         | 7.5            |
|                        | 6 – 10 years      | 6         | 7.5            |
|                        | 11 – 15 years     | 11        | 13.7           |
|                        | 16 – 20 years     | 18        | 22.5           |
|                        | Over 21 years     | 39        | 48.8           |
| Marital Status         | Married           | 66        | 82.5           |
|                        | Single            | 9         | 11.3           |
|                        | Divorce           | 5         | 6.2            |
| Educational Level      | Diploma           | 1         | 1.3            |
|                        | Bachelor's Degree | 57        | 71.3           |
|                        | Master's Degree   | 20        | 25             |
|                        | PhD               | 2         | 2.5            |
| You are a teacher from | SMK Putri Saadong | 53        | 66.3           |
|                        | SMK Sri Gunung    | 27        | 33.8           |

*Relationship between Teaching Experience with Stress among School Teachers*

In Table 2, it was found that there is no significant relationship between teaching experience and teacher stress. The result for teaching experience and teachers' stress was found at  $r = -0.033$ ,  $p = 0.772$ ), and all alternative hypotheses were thus rejected.

Table 2

*Correlation Analysis Results of Having Overwork and School Teacher Stress*

|                     |                         | School Teacher Stress |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Teaching Experience | Correlation Coefficient | -0.033                |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)         | 0.772                 |
|                     | N                       | 80                    |

**\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

*Difference between Age and School Teachers' Stress*

As shown in Table 3, the result reveals no significant difference between age and school teachers' stress  $F(3,76) = 0.434$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Besides, the Mean value of age between 24 and 33 years old is 3.559 (SD = 0.239). For ages between 34 – and 43 years old, it is 3.526 (SD = 0.441); 44 – 53 years old, it is 3.479 (SD = 0.361), and over 54 years old, it is 3.589 (SD = 0.338).

The ANOVA test showed no significant value, which was 0.729, more than 0.05. Thus, the alternative hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3

*One-Way ANOVA Test for Age and School Teacher Stress Result*

| Teacher Stress | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F     | Sig.  |
|----------------|----------------|----|-------------|-------|-------|
| Between Groups | 0.165          | 3  | 0.055       | 0.434 | 0.729 |
| Within Groups  | 9.611          | 76 | 0.126       |       |       |
| Total          | 9.776          | 79 |             |       |       |

*Significant value at  $p < 0.05$*

*Difference between gender and School Teachers' Stress*

Table 4 revealed the mean data for both genders, male and female. Female teachers' results showed a higher mean ( $M = 3.5161$ ,  $SD = 0.34313$ ) compared to male ( $M = 3.0564$ ,  $SD = 0.39051$ ,  $t(78) = -0.103$ ,  $p = 0.919$ ). However, since the value of  $p > 0.05$ , the outcome displayed no significant difference between teachers' stress and gender. This brought to the conclusion that there is no difference in stress between male and female school teachers in Bachok. Thus, the alternative hypotheses are rejected.



Table 4

*Independent T-Test for Gender and School Teacher Stress Result*

|                | Gender | N  | Mean   | Standard Deviation | t-statistic (df) | Sig.  | Sig. (two-tailed) |
|----------------|--------|----|--------|--------------------|------------------|-------|-------------------|
| Teacher Stress | Male   | 18 | 3.0564 | 0.39051            | -0.103 (78)      | 0.402 | 0.919             |
|                | Female | 62 | 3.5161 | 0.34313            | -0.095           |       |                   |

*Significant value at  $p > 0.05$*

## Discussion

The research objective of this study was to investigate whether work overload happens because the teaching experience can contribute to stress among school teachers, to examine whether overwork can contribute to stress, examine if the teachers working on holiday can get stress easily, to identify if the teacher bringing work to home can contribute them to stress, to identify any differences between the age that can contribute to school teacher stress and to evaluate any differences of the gender will contribute to the stress among school teacher in Bachok, Kelantan.

The results revealed no correlation between teaching experience and school teacher stress in SMKPS and SMKSG. Stress being a school teacher can be either young or experienced teachers. The young teachers are creating their teaching environment, giving good performances, and have to do many new things in the school. Meanwhile, experienced teachers are still maintaining the skills and sharing the information that can be used in the study with the students (Akin, 2021).

A study by Qadimi et al (2015), indicates a relationship between teaching experience and occupational stress. However, other factors, such as specific demands within the educational setting or personal coping mechanisms, maybe more significant regarding the stress levels experienced. This indicates that no matter how long one is in the teaching profession, one's stress levels remain constant.

On the other hand, the One-Way ANOVA has been conducted to examine the differences between the level of age and school teachers' stress. The result of age shows there is no significant between age and school teacher stress in SMKPS and SMKSG. The previous study showed the same results for age using the ANOVA Test, and they found no significant difference between age and stress in the four categories of age (Jumahat, 2013). However, Lau (2002), found that young teachers are more stressed than veteran teachers when they have to do many things in school since they have just entered the school and are scared of being fired. Therefore, the findings from previous research show that age is not a determining factor in measuring school teacher stress since they have experienced stress at the same level.

In determining differences between gender and teachers' stress, the T-test result showed no significant relationship between gender and the school teacher SMKPS and SMKSG. This means that male and female teachers feel the same stress since they face many school challenges, especially work overload. The current research is similar to the research done by (Kim, 2006). He found out that there is no significant difference between males and females in Teknik school at Johor, Melaka and Negeri Sembilan. The same results were presented in the Ganaprakasam et al (2021), study conducted in a high school in Kedah,

Malaysia, where each gender has gone through the same stress level in that school. Therefore, from the result above, both genders, males and females, nowadays have to face the same challenges in school, especially work overload. If compared with the previous era, maybe male teachers had shown higher stress than females because of the minority of male teachers in the school when they had to do much work compared to females, such as need to be warden, teaching discipline, managing the sports day and many more. However, nowadays, each school no longer follows the stereotypes when female teachers also can handle those things.

The findings of this research have contributed to the understanding that school teachers are still experiencing stress regardless of age, gender, or teaching experience. In order to maintain good mental health as an individual, a teacher should maintain a good lifestyle that could reduce stress, such as improving their timetable management, indulging in favourite hobbies, spending time on holidays, and being involved in healthy activities. These activities could contribute to developing a sound teaching mood and environment for school students

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that work overload significantly contributes to stress among Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Putri Saadong (SMKPS) and Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Sri Gunung (SMKSG) in Bachok, Kelantan. However, demographic factors such as gender, age, and teaching experience showed no substantial differences in stress levels. Both male and female teachers experience similar stress levels due to work overload, contradicting traditional gender assumptions. The absence of a correlation between teaching experience and stress contradicts the idea that more experienced teachers handle stress better. The study emphasizes systemic challenges in the education sector, including misaligned roles and insufficient support mechanisms, contributing to increased teacher stress levels.

Although the research did not find significant correlations between demographic variables and stress, it highlights the need for further attention from the Ministry of Education and school management to alleviate these stressors. Implementing better work-life balance initiatives and reducing non-teaching responsibilities can help mitigate teacher stress. Despite the challenges, teachers remain dedicated to their students, but addressing these issues is crucial for sustaining their long-term well-being and job satisfaction.

Future research also should explore the long-term effects of work overload on teacher well-being and job performance across different educational settings, including rural and urban schools. It would be beneficial to conduct comparative studies that examine how stress factors vary between primary and secondary school teachers, as well as among educators with different levels of teaching experience. Additionally, future studies should consider the role of coping mechanisms and organizational support in mitigating stress and the impact of recent technological advancements on teachers' workloads. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews, could provide deeper insights into teachers' personal experiences and the specific challenges they face in managing work overload.

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