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## Variation in Stress in the Teaching Profession: Tanzania Teachers' Experience Based on Personal Factors

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### **Abstract:**

*In improving the quality of education in primary schools, teachers' job contentment is vital and an inevitable component. This article discusses the contribution of personal attributes as potential sources of teachers' stress. The study employed a sample of 200 respondents from 10 selected schools in Mbeya municipal council. The findings from an independent sample t-test revealed that variables such as sex, educational qualification and work experience of the teachers, were found to statistically significantly contribute to the stress level of the teachers at value of  $p < 0.05$ .*

*The article has a policy implication as the intervention efforts to address occupational stress among primary school teachers in Tanzania.*

**Keywords:** Stress, personal attributes, teaching profession

### **1. Introduction**

Internationally, the teaching profession is continuously overwhelmed by several serious problems. One of the most serious problems is teacher stress Bernard (1990). Kayuni and Tambulasi convincingly argue that the teaching profession is losing staff because of heightened stress. They discuss several potential stress factors including students' discipline, meeting deadlines, workload, limited time, continuous change, inadequate administrative support, poor working conditions, lack of participation in school decision making, the burden of paper work and the lack of adequate teaching resources. All these exert significant strains on teachers. Robbins (2001:563) defines stress as a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with opportunities, constraints, or demands related to what he/she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important. Stress can manifest itself in both a positive and in a negative way. Stress is said to be positive when the situation offers an opportunity for one to gain something. For example, an athlete can get into a stressful situation during preparation for competition, but this can lead to maximum performance. On the other hand, stress is considered to be negative as in case of when stress becomes part of the everyday life in school.

Varying life histories, work experience, personalities and cultural background influence how a person reacts to demands and threats. Some people when under stress become energized and can work for long periods of time using all their abilities. However, many people when overwhelmed may become distressed if measures are not taken to manage the stress (UNHCR, 2001).

### **2. Study Hypothesis**

The study tested three null hypotheses (1) There is no significant difference between the stress levels of head teachers on account of sex (2) There is no significant difference between the stress levels of head teachers due to work experience (3) There is no significant difference between the stress levels of head teachers due to educational qualification.

### **3. The Study Findings**

#### *3.1. Contribution of Sex of differences to teachers Stress*

An independent- sample t-test was conducted to compare the stress level scores of teachers in terms of sex. Information related to this question is tabulated in Table 1 below:

The level of Stress	Descriptive statistics				t-test				
	N	M	SD	Mean difference	T	Df	Sig (p-value)	95% Confidence Interval (CI)	
								Lower	Upper
<b>Males</b>	89	1.9551	.75242	-.53383	-4.035	132	.000	-.79555	-.27211
<b>Females</b>	45	2.4889	.66134						

Table 1: The Gender Factor in Stress Levels

Table 1 indicates that there was a statistically significant difference in scores for males ( $M = 1.95$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ), and those for females ( $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ );  $t(132) = -4.03$ ,  $p = 0.00$  (two tailed). By comparing the means, the females scored the highest mean 2.4 and males, the lowest. Therefore, the magnitude of the difference in the means (mean difference =  $-0.53$ , 95% CI:  $-0.79$  to  $-0.27$ ) was large ( $\text{Eta squared} = 0.108$ ). The results indicate that there was a significant difference between the stress levels of teachers in primary schools on account of sex in favor of male sex.

The results imply that sex of the employee makes the strongest unique contribution to explaining the stress level of the teachers, as females were noted to be more stressed than males. The difference might be related to a greater willingness on the part of women to declare **stress** than their male colleagues or to the increased pressures of work-life balance on women who may still have the major role in child care/domestic arrangements alongside their work or both, a findings that aligns similarly with past studies (Bemansour 1998 and Ngidi and Sibaya 2002).

Studies by Rout and Rout (2002), Mlaki, (2007), and Finlayson, (2003) suggest that, gender-related differences exist when the stress levels of male and female head teachers are compared. Their studies showed that females demonstrated higher prevalence of **stress** compared to men. This could be interpreted to mean that, women are often expected to meet domestic commitments and conflicting work and family demands that may add to their stressful responses.

Similarly, Jonas's study (2001) has indicated that female educators experienced higher levels of stress, while male educators reported higher perceived social support from families and friends, explaining their lower level of stress. Again, Van Zyl and Petersen (1999) report that married female educators in particular experienced high levels of stress simply because they have to be the homemaker, a supportive wife and mother and at the same time a competent professional educator (Van zyl and Petersen 1999; Van der Linde et al. 1999).

A similar observation was made by Byrne (1991) in her study of 642 teachers across all grade levels whereby a self-report data revealed that, the female role may also be useful in conceptualizing the increased propensity for stress. Considering that many women are still responsible for both emotional and physical needs of family, female teachers may conceivably be required to express emotional investment through a "double dose" of caring both in the school and in the home (Byrne, 1991).

### 3.2. The relationship between work experience and teachers stress

Analysis of variance of groups was conducted to explore the impact of work experience on level of stress among the primary school head teachers studied. Respondents were divided into four groups according to their work experience (Group 1: 1 year or less, Group 2: 2 to 5 years; Group 3: 6 to 10 years; Group 4: 10 years and above).

Work experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1yr	2	3.0000	.00000	.00000	3.0000	3.0000
2-5yr	17	2.8235	.52859	.12820	2.5518	3.0953
6-10yr	34	2.3824	.69695	.11953	2.1392	2.6255
>10yr	81	1.1358	.34471	.03830	1.0596	1.2120
Total	134	1.6940	.85160	.07357	1.5485	1.8395

Table 2: Means of Groups of Head teachers stress levels based on work experience

Again, table 2 above indicates that stress level mean scores for head teachers with less than 5 years work experience recorded the highest, while those with more than 10 years work experience recorded the lowest. This is interpreted to mean that work experience had an impact on the stress levels of teachers, respondents.

This implies that head teachers with few years of work experience more stress compared to those with many years of work experience.

This finding concurs with the study conducted by Lau et al., (2005), which concluded that head teachers with few years in work experience were significantly more stressed out than their older colleagues. More specifically, the trend suggests that young age was a strong predictor for both the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization burnout factors (Lau et al., 2005) experienced in occupational stress.

Similarly, studies on relationship between work experience and stress levels in head teachers in Hong Kong and UK concluded that there was a strong relation between head teachers experience and stress. Head teachers with few years in the position were significantly more stressed than those with many years of experience (Byrne, 1991).

### 3.3. Contribution of Education Level to Stress

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	26.702	3	8.901	19.016	.000
Within Groups	60.850	130	.468		
Total	87.552	133			

Table 3: ANOVA of Teachers Stress levels based on Educational Qualifications

The results of ANOVA in table 3 above indicate that the effect of education level was highly significant ( $F=19.016$ ,  $df = 133$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). The mean scores, standard deviations and the results of t-tests among the four education levels of respondents have been

presented. The table shows that the stress levels of respondents who possessed degree is significantly higher than that of diploma, grade IIIA and IIIB. The stress level of grade IIIB respondents was also found significantly higher than that of diploma and IIIA respondents. Therefore the results indicate that there is a positive relationship between stress and educational level of the respondents.

The results of the study suggest that, the stress of graduate and grade IIIB respondents was significantly higher than those with diploma and grade IIIA. Again, the findings tend to suggest that people with higher educational qualification as well as those with very low education qualification tend to experience high stress level than their counterparts with other qualifications. This result can be interpreted to mean that head teachers in these particular groups had educational qualification which mismatched with their positions they held. This interpretation is partly consistent with the argument by Nhundu (1999) who argued that experience, economic, personal and social causes are responsible for this discrepancy.

In order to raise the quality of education in primary schools, professional qualification was considered as a pillar of education among teachers. It was considered to be so because it gives the teacher knowledge about the subject matter and teaching techniques to use so that they will be able to teach effectively and efficiently (Jacobsson et al., 2001). The study showed that teachers education qualifications was categorized into four parts, namely, degree, diploma, grade IIIA and grade IIIB. Graduate teachers were those who hold bachelor's Degree. Diploma teachers are those who completed form six and joined the teaching profession. This category hold diploma in education. Grade IIIA teachers were normally form four leavers who had joined the teaching profession after completing secondary school education while grade IIIB teachers were teachers who had completed standard seven and had joined the teaching profession, both of the two categories hold certificates.

Relevant training is required to meet the demands of the profession. Inadequate training programs may directly or indirectly contribute to the development of stress because they often fail to provide teachers with specific skills to meet the demands of the profession (Wisniewski and Gargiulo, 1997). Thus, it could be concluded that at primary school level, teachers who were grade IIIB had low levels of education, implying that they could not handle difficult tasks. This could be one of the factors contributing to the high stress levels they reported having.

Positive relationships between stress and education have been reported in different studies (Mlaki, 2007; Philip, 1976). The results of these studies were also in line with the trend of the present study which confirms that teachers with low educational qualification feel incompetent in their work hence experience more stress compared to their counterparts (Adams, 1999). When teachers have little confidence in their work, they will probably give up easily when confronted with difficult tasks. This will consequently lead to feelings of ineffectiveness in maintaining school order. Inadequately trained teachers tend to lack self confidence and also to doubt their ability to communicate effectively with subordinates (Tosi et al., 2000).

Inadequate training can lead to teachers' stress, since a higher degree of learning orientations reduces stress and increases feelings of mastery (Jacobsson et al., 2001 p. 48). However, the present findings indicate that head teachers who had degree qualifications were the most stressed group. This could be interpreted to mean that, head teachers in this particular group had low job satisfaction level due to status accorded to them right after the completion of their studies. Thus one of the respondents in this particular group indicated:

“ I feel inferior for being in this position, I thought , after completion of a bachelor degree, I would have been appointed to teach in secondary school or teacher education colleges. But I am back to primary school where the difference between me and those with low qualifications is not significant. The difference is not even significant in terms of remuneration. This is an insult...” (Graduate teacher)

Based on the statements above it is obvious that graduate head teachers were dissatisfied in their job due to misallocation or misplacement and poor promotion after they completed their studies. Similar conclusions had been reached by Haki Elimu, (2005); and Philip, (1976) in their studies.

Job dissatisfaction indicates negative feelings that individuals have regarding their jobs or facets of their jobs (Spector, 1997). The findings of the present study also concur with Herzberg, (1959) who formulated a two-factor theory categorizing factors affecting job dissatisfaction as well as job satisfaction. The author used the term hygiene factors to refer to factors that affect job dissatisfaction. Examples of hygiene factors include benefits, organizational policies, salary, supervision, and working conditions.

#### **4. Strategies for Stress Managing**

The present findings are in line with the views of previous scholars, educational officials and organizations who proposed strategies for managing stress to the ones unearthed in the present study. Among those stress control strategies emphasized by previous investigations include the following:

##### *4.1. Social Support*

Findings from this study reveal that teachers lack social support from their colleagues. This is also applicable to some other ordinary teachers. Furthermore, it was revealed that some teachers sought sharing their problems with persons who are reliable. This finding concurs with those by Robbins (2001) who found that social support which means availability of people both inside and outside of school whom one can rely on when one is stressed is of vital importance in managing stress. The existing literature suggests that people who provide you with emotional support and caring, who value you as a person and who can offer you some practical help of advice during difficult times are part of your social support system. The result of the present study shows that some head teachers have one person as their support system while still others have a number of persons both inside and outside the school from whom they can receive support.

#### 4.2. Physical Exercise

A growing body of research indicates that individuals who exercise regularly are much less prone to stress and hypertension than those who don't exercise regularly (Lunenburg 2000; Long, 1988). Engaging in physical exercise is said to produce chemical response within the body that diminishes many of the physiological symptoms of stress. Teachers can get involved in other activities that take their mind off school issues. Exercising is documented to be particularly effective in reducing stress and the physical symptoms associated with stress (Bernard, 1990).

#### 4.3. Counseling at Work

The present study shows that some of the teachers use seeking for help counseling as a way of coping with their stress. This has a big support from research by different scholars (Lunenburg, 2000; Rout and Rout, 2002; Schonfeld, 2001). It was found that counseling at work is where a professional counselor or a trained individual uses a set of techniques or skills to help another individual take responsibility for and to manage their own decision-making whether it is work-related or personal. Trained helpers are required since most managers do not possess either the talent or the training for counseling, the most they can be expected to contribute is an awareness of when counseling may be appropriate for an employee Cole (2002) and Robbins, (2001).

### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Stress is often resulting in negative consequences, both to teachers' personal lives and professional functioning. The study presented a good picture of stressors in terms of personal attributes of teachers. Results imply that the personal factors to teachers' stress were sex differences, work experience and education levels. In this regard, the following policy recommendation was made: Training on stress coping strategies by the school teachers is very important in improving the situation observed in primary schools. This was confirmed by teachers who mentioned that efforts should be made to equip them with knowledge for coping with stress since for years most problems of primary schools in Tanzania are unsolved.

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