

**Perceptions about Stressors on Teachers of Undergraduate English Courses at University
of Nariño**

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English is one of the most spoken languages around the world, and institutions at all educational levels are making their best effort to enhance English Language learning so that their students become more competitive. In this sense, the University of Nariño offers courses of English to students of different programs because this language will provide them with more opportunities in their professional life. The courses at the university are in the hands of teachers that have different teaching strategies, but due to the fact that in every kind of job there is the existence of stressors, these teachers could experiment a hostile environment to perform their job, perceiving stressors that are constantly present in their work life as teachers.

Teachers may face different situations that create moments of stress in their daily lives, including lack of autonomy, poor work conditions, students' misbehavior, poor work relationships, and high job demands. A stressor is present when an employee feels an environmental demand as feelings of exceeding or threatening at their job. Due to the fact that stressors can affect the natural development of the courses, taking into account the ones mentioned before, one can infer that stressors affect negatively not only the teachers' mood but also the suitable teaching process at the courses being taught.

Certain stressors like students' misbehaviors or students' negligence can affect the teachers view and attitude toward their status or role as professionals. On the other hand, other stressors like problems outside the work place can affect the way teachers devote to the development of the lessons. As a result, these may interfere with classroom environment and in consequence with the goals of the course.

Abstract

For teaching a second language such as English, it is important to know how to distinguish the factors that cause stress and those that become stressors. Those stressors obstruct the English teaching process because they have different consequences depending on the person context. This study seeks to identify the main stressors that teachers of undergraduate English courses observe during the development of their classes and that represent a hindrance for the process of teaching the English language. This project focuses mainly on understanding the perceptions that that this group of teachers have about stressors based on personal experiences related to stress on their working days by analyzing the interviews applied to them. the semi-structured interview is the suitable model to follow in order to know what are their experiences with stressors and what are the most common and harmful to their well-being.

Table of Contents

Problem description	1
Problem statement	2
Objectives	2
General objective.....	2
Specific objectives.....	2
Significance of the study.....	3
Definition of terms	4
Perception	4
Foreign language	4
Stressors	4
Stress	4
Review of Literature	5
Methodology	14
Design	14
Method	14
Population	14
Sample.....	14
Data collection Instruments.....	14
Data collection Procedures.....	15
Data Analysis Procedure	15
Pilot Study.....	16
Conclusion.....	16
References	17
Appendix	20
Appendix 1: Interview	20

Description of the problem

The University of Nariño offers English courses to most of the undergraduate programs in order to generate knowledge and understanding about the English language. Since English is used in most of the world to create links between people from other continents and also job opportunities abroad, this language has attracted the attention of students of many areas and other educational and scientific contexts.

The figure of the teacher in society is of utmost importance and transcendence in people's lives since the process of education and academic training in multiple areas of life is in their hands. Teachers' role is fundamental in society; it carries a great responsibility and challenges in the context of a current society where this profession may lose prestige and recognition overtime. In addition, when employees experiment high pressure in their work environment, they are vulnerable to suffer from work-related stress. The International Labor Organization (Fink, 2016) declares stress as the epidemic of the 21st century. Foreign language teachers, who have to develop especial competences and challenges, are not exempt from suffering stress due to the complexity of their work teaching students.

According to Moreno (2018), stress is a state of mental fatigue caused by the demand for performance far beyond the normal and often leads to various physical and mental disorders. Many factors inside and outside the classroom can become stressors for a teacher, and in consequence, they create an undesirable environment for teaching and learning. Teachers from Universidad de Nariño who teach English as a basic competence could be vulnerable to stress at work, and their perception of the stressors can vary from one teacher to another. Some teachers may experience from mild symptoms such as irritability or fatigue to more serious health symptoms such as depression. Since stress primarily affects the teacher's mental and physical

health, the teacher's productivity is also affected. Among the many negative effects of stress on teachers, emotional exhaustion and the feeling of not achieving personal fulfilment are important to mention because they are related to their perceptions regarding their performance, and their overall self-image. Additionally, stress may impede the suitable development of their lessons in the courses at the university given that teachers act as leaders of a group, and their actions, mood, and attitudes could reflect a state of unwillingness to teach.

Problem statement:

What are the perceptions about the stressors teachers of English for undergraduate programs at University of Nariño have?

Objectives

General Objective. To identify the perceptions about the stressors teachers of English for undergraduate programs at University of Nariño have.

Specific Objectives.

1. To identify the main stressors that affect teachers of English for undergraduate programs at University of Nariño
2. To find out what stressors have negative consequences on the teachers' role in English classes at the University of Nariño.

Significance of the Study

An optimal environment for learning a second language is not a place only conditioned with different teaching resources for learning, it is also a place that considers teachers' performance, classroom management, and their perceptions about their classes. In order to keep a good learning environment for the students, it is important to develop enriching attitudes on the part of the teachers. Otherwise, their negative behaviors can hinder the learning of a second language for the students.

As stated before, stress affects in many ways both the person who suffers it and the work environment, in this case the teacher and the students. However, it is possible that many people can be experimenting situations of stress, but they try to bear and go on for other compelling reasons like the necessity of the job. It is also possible that some teachers do not perceive stress as something serious and consider it as something natural or temporary. For these reasons, the present study aims to study the perceptions of English teachers about their common stressors and what drawbacks they represent at the moment of conducting lessons. Teachers play a strategic role in the process of learning a second language; therefore, the institutions should take care of their mental health in order to guarantee an optimal learning setting.

Through the research on this matter, it will be possible to raise awareness about the consequences of stressors on the English teaching process. Although a lot of research can be found about stressors on students, there is little research regarding the teachers' point of view and stand. As a consequence, it is interesting to start a research about English teachers' stressors and if they represent a threat to carry out their job. This research aims to help teachers of English as a foreign language to identify the different stressors present in their classes and work

environment that can affect their work performance and their quotidian life outside the classroom.

Definition of terms

For a good understanding of our research, we consider important to explain some terms.

Perceptions. Perceptions are thoughts, believes, or opinions, often held by many people and based on appearances. Kashyap (2015) defines the term perception as it follows “Perception is the process through which the information from outside environment is selected, received, organized and interpreted to make it meaningful to you. This input of meaningful information results in decisions and actions.” (Par.1)

Foreign Language. Ocampo (2019) defines a foreign language as one that is taught and used, but that does not work as an alternative to the official language of a country. For example, English and French are foreign languages in Colombia.

Stressors. Stressors can be defined as a factor that causes stress physically or mentally on people. For Shors and Horvath (2001), stressors are both physical and psychological, are pervasive and challenge the well-being of an organism (p.15194).

Stress. Stress can be defined as a feeling of emotional or physical tension. According to the Mental health organization (Stress, 2021) “Stress is our body’s response to pressure. Many different situations or life events can cause stress. It is often triggered when we experience something new, unexpected or that threatens our sense of self.” (Par. 1)

Literature Review

First of all, this literature review is thematic. The basis of this literature review comes from different theories and concepts developed by researchers and authors who have undertaken several studies related to stress among teachers. It is believed that the teaching profession is not considered as a high-stress job such as medicine, law, accounting, etc. However, some authors like Llanque (2014) consider that the groups of workers who are most susceptible to experience high levels of stress are those who have a personal involvement or a constant and direct relation with other people. For this reason, it is possible to find some research devoted to study the stress on teachers as a matter of significance in the field of education. The following studies refer to the causes and consequences of stress among the teachers and their possible stressors.

Antecedents

The study conducted by Cardozo (2016) had as objective to analyze the phenomenon of stress on teachers who are in the program “Bachelor of science in education for graduate teachers” at Universidad Salesiana of Bolivia. The author considers the role of teachers as a vital motor in the development of the society, and their welfare is a commitment for an optimal functioning of the education process; therefore, his study aimed to discover the psychological and somatic expressions of stress that the teachers of this university display. First of all, through this investigation, Cardozo (2016) concluded that the psychological expressions of stress were evident and clear and comprised four factors: Depression, which refers to feelings of lack of energy or the feeling of doing things more slowly. Teachers showed difficulties to concentrate and remember things. Another one is the sensibility factor that involves the feeling of solitude which is paradoxical due to the working dynamics that requires interaction with many people. Here some teachers express feelings of hostility and dislike towards their profession instead of

those of gratitude and admiration. The anxiety factor is an emotion that is related to the presence of feelings of fear that led several of them to avoid certain things, places and situations. Here, teachers expressed feelings of having been suddenly frightened for no apparent reason. Second, the somatic expressions of stress comprise physical disturbances that include the experience of sensations of heaviness in the arms and legs. It comes with a striking frequency that speaks of this sensation of tiredness and exhaustion in the extremities, which is typically generated by the tension that includes being subjected to daily stress. A very close consequence of stress in teachers is the known burnout, which can affect teachers in certain cases and also be recognized as a stressor in their professional life.

The research "Teaching, Stress and Burnout. Concepts, Causes, and Effects", by Zavala (2008), revises the concepts of stress and burnout as a consequence of chronic stress. He offers statistics related to perceptions of teachers about stress in Latin American countries. According to Zavala (2008), in this region, studies about teachers' stress keep being merely of academic investigation, and stress and its effects on teacher's health is a little-known and undervalued topic.

Among many factors that can be sources of stress, Zavala focuses mainly on demographic traits like gender, age, and civil state to test their level of influence increasing stress. It seems undeniable for the author that gender does represent a possibility to increase stress. For example, stress increases in women not as an independent variable but as the result of a multiple relation with others like having a double working day (at work and at home). The difference of age is a polemic topic for the author; however, he concludes that the gap of forty years separates stages of more to less stress. Regarding the civil state trait, the author encounters that single teachers were more likely to suffer from stress and burnout maybe due to the fact

that married teachers have more social bonds, and in consequence, sociability seems to be a mechanism that reduces the vulnerability to stress and burnout. Finally, the author mentions possible consequences of stress on teachers such as absenteeism, constant complaints, less commitment with work, deterioration of performance and productivity, and staff turnover. On the other hand, it is also important to know the factors that cause stress for teachers, how they are identified by them, and how stressors affect the academic performance of their students.

In the same line, Garcia, Martinez, and Linares (2017) conducted a mixed research. They applied two tests to 30 teachers and 100 students. The objectives of the study were mainly to identify the factors causing stress to the teacher and identify the factors that affect the academic performance of the student due to the teacher's stress.

Teachers pointed out six main sources of stress or stressors: Bureaucratic or administrative work (filling out reports and meetings), poor willingness to work on the part of the students, lack of material resources, shortage of equipment or work facilities, too much work to do, poorly defined or poorly detailed programs, and lack of time to advice individual students. On the other hand, the survey applied to students showed how they perceived the behavior of teachers under stress: Little attention to the student, unnecessary reprimands, and tedious classes, among others. It was also observed in this study that female teachers were more stressed out than male teachers. The author concludes that the teacher must be trained in learning strategies in order to achieve a connection with the student and eliminate possible stressors.

There is very little research available that investigates language teachers' psychological health (exception Mercer& Kostoulas, 2018). However, the mixed study "Stressors, Personality and Wellbeing Among Language Teachers" carried out by MacIntyre,

Ross, Talbot, Mercer, Gregersen, and Banga (2018) suggests that foreign language teachers are in a high-stress job with stress levels that continue to increase over time. Due to this, their health is compromised physically and psychologically in a negative way. According to MacIntyre, Ross, Talbot, Mercer, Gregersen, and Banga (2018), there are two types of stressors in a teacher's work life: chronic stressors and life events / daily hassles. Moreover, the fact that the foreign language teacher suffers of unique stressors in the job such as language anxiety, unstable job contracts, and insecure working conditions, teaching internationally, cultural differences between teacher and pupils, high emotional labor costs, negativity arising from perceiving the state of the profession as precarious, uncertain work conditions, and feelings of job insecurity. This study was made with the help of a mobile application called "eMoodie" and the participation of 47 professors who were recruited internationally through email. Along with the results of this research, there was a better understanding of the sources of stress at work.

Taking into account the research reviewed above, the following section presents the literature review related to the stress that language teachers experience in their professional life. The next section starts with an overview of the concept about stressors.

Stressors Definition

Stressors are defined as any event, force, or condition that results in physical or emotional stress. Stressors may be internal or external forces that require adjustment on the part of the affected individual (American psychological association, 2021). On the other hand, Sapolsky (1992) considers stressors as perturbations on the environment that put the optimal function of the person at risk, and as a response to any stressor, the human body starts to experience stress as response that inhibits the optimal function of the body and the mind. Additionally, Wheaton and Montazer (2009) define stressors as "Conditions of threat,

challenge, demands, or structural constraints that, by the very fact of their occurrence or existence, call into question the operating integrity of the organism” (Pag.171). The present paper will follow the definition of Lazarus (1966), who defines stressors as “Demands made by the internal or external environment that upset balance, thus influencing physical and psychological well-being and requiring actions to restore balance” (p.19).

Stressors can be classified into many kinds, but the two main broad categories are the physiological stressors and the psychological stressors. Physiological stressors are the ones that are known for putting a strain on the body such as: extreme weather (very cold/hot temperatures) injuries, chronic illnesses, or pain in general. For example, a teacher who needs to be standing almost six hours a day could experience physiological stressors such as exhaustion, leg pain, foot pain, and back pain. On the other hand, psychological stressors are events, situations, individuals, comments, or anything we interpret as negative or non-encouraging for teachers. These stressors may come from the classroom noise and mess.

Considering stressors, authors have classified types of stressors. The two main types of stressors among teachers are frustration and anxiety. Dunham (1976) talks about these two types of stressors among teachers. The first is frustration that is associated with physical pain, physical illnesses and psychological changes such as headaches, stomach upsets, sleep disturbances, hypertension, and body rashes; the worst case is the development of serious depression. The last is anxiety associated with feelings of lack of competency, lack of confidence, erratic thoughts, and panic. The present paper will follow the definition of Dunham (1976); however, it is important to mention other criteria of authors in the classification on stressors.

The center for studies on human stress (Stressors, 2017) addresses other types of

stressors proposed by scientists who divide stressors into absolute and relative. Absolute stressors are those that everyone exposed to them would interpret as being stressful. These are objective stressors that are universal, for example, an earthquake. On the other hand, relative stressors are stressors that only some people exposed to them would interpret them as being stressful because they are subjective perceptions and cause different reactions on people, for example, time pressure at work. Furthermore, in psychology, researchers generally classify “the different types of stressors into four categories: 1) crises/catastrophes, 2) major life events, 3) daily hassles/micro stressors, and 4) ambient stressors” (Psychological stress,2021).

After identifying the types of stressors, it is necessary to discuss the sources of the stressors teachers have to face in foreign language classes. The next section presents the sources of the stressors that can be identified in FL classes.

Sources of Stress

According to Albrecht (2010) there are four common sources of stress such as: Time stress, anticipatory stress, situational stress, and encounter stress. Time stress represents the kind of stress that has time as a source. Anticipatory stress represents the kind of stress that has anxiety of future events as a source. Situational stress represents the kind of stress that has unpredictable situation as a source. Finally, encounter stress represents the kind of stress that has social interaction as a source.

In foreign language teachers' daily- life, there can be many stressors that can be classified in one of the previous categories because it is a very demanding job that requires organizational skills on the part of the teachers. In this case, foreign language teacher's agendas can be very extended because of the fact that a teacher's working day does not end in the

schedule of the institution, but continues as teachers have to perform other activities such as grading tests and planning lessons, which require extra time and effort.

The English teachers for undergraduate students at University of Nariño are expected to have a high proficiency at teaching the foreign language; therefore, this situation could put them under pressure and stress as their aim in most cases is to do their best in their professional life. The group of non-native teachers seemed to share more specific sources of stress. In the study of Mousavi (2007), the stress in non-native and native teachers of EFL was explored. There, the young non-native teachers had less teaching experience which made them more vulnerable to stress. Nonetheless, the factor that appears to differentiate non-native teachers from the native ones is their language group membership because this condition can imply merits or deficiencies in them. The results showed most of non-native teachers felt that they did not have a proficient knowledge of the language. Therefore, if teachers worry constantly about their language abilities, they might experience stress at the moment of responding students' questions because their self-image is threatened. Moreover, teachers can blame themselves for student's misunderstanding or low achievement. Another important finding to mention is that half of non-native teachers felt that communicative language teaching places more responsibility on them increasing their work load, but native teachers did not agree with this. Since communicative language teaching approach requires mastering language skills, this situation could increase stress levels on non-native teachers who did not feel confident enough about their language abilities.

A very important aspect to take into account in this paper corresponds to the stressors that influence the work of the teachers in a foreign language context. The next section provides information on these stressors.

Stressors in teachers

In the words of Shirom (2010), “An increase in stressors will be followed by an increase in psychological strains” (p. 313.). The following studies are important for this research because they tackle aspects related to stress factors (stressors) that affect teachers' performance.

Stress among teachers may be due to numerous factors such as: role conflict or role ambiguity at the work place, the competence of the teacher, the work-load upon him, the skills of the teacher at his job, the poor working conditions, the fair and unfair demands made to the teacher, and the sources outside of his role and job as a teacher (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1977). Although research on stress is still on an early stage of development, it is clear that teachers have difficulties most of the time at their work place because there is not enough concern about this problem among them. In this sense, the study of Danish, Qaseem, Mehmood, Ali, Ali, and Shahid (2019) shows in a way that public and private sectors should focus on solving the issues of job conflict and job burnout to keep loyal employees, in this case teachers, because job conflict and job burnout present a significant relation with employee loyalty (Feeling of attachment towards the work place). Additionally, the use of inadequate reward policies has a significant relation with an employee performance because these serve as an instrument of motivation to keep the employee less stressed out about their work-load. On the other hand, the implementation of policies that have a negative impact on their job will become a stressor. It can be useful to understand and discuss the findings of this study because it deals with some factors related to stress and how they can inhibit the teacher's performance and well-being.

Furthermore, the research of Forlin (2001) identified potential stressors in a regular class, classifying stressors into three general clusters such as: administrative stressors,

classroom-based stressors, and personal stressors. In the administrative stressors, the researcher specified that workload, time management, and lack of general support were the most common. According to Forlin (2001), the most stressful administrative issues for teachers are “Those that were perceived as interfering with a teacher’s instruction time, including increasing amounts of paperwork, extracurricular demands, and interpersonal conflicts” (p.236). On the other hand, classroom-based stressors were those that involved direct contact with students, the disruptive behavior and lack of student discipline were the most prominent in his research instead of the students’ abilities or the lack of materials for a suitable curriculum. Forlin (2001) specified that stressful classroom issues are “lack of resources, class size and student discipline. In addition, younger and less experienced teachers reported greater stress” (p.237). Finally, personal stressors are those which inhibit the teachers’ goal at every class such as workload problems related to insufficient planning time and excessive amount of time necessary to prepare for students’ needs, demands for accountability and excessive paperwork (Forlin, 2001). It is useful as a reference to classify the stressors into different categories.

Methodology for Research

Design

To conduct this study, the qualitative research was selected. According to Creswell (2014) “qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.” (p.32)

Method

The appropriate method for this study is phenomenology, according to Groenewald (2004) “The operative word in phenomenological research is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts” (p. 44). It focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. This method is suitable for this research because it focuses on teachers' experiences. The study will be developed with interviews to collect the necessary information from teachers, so they will have to answer some questions, (See Appendix 1).

Population:

This study will be carried out with 35 teachers who teach English to undergraduate students at University of Nariño. The age range of the teachers is from 25 to 55 years old approximately.

Sample:

In this study, there will be 5 participants taken from the population described above.

Data Collection Instruments

The semi-structured interview is the instrument that will be used for this research

because it is really useful to provide reliable and comparable qualitative data. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) study found the following:

Many researchers like to use semi-structured interviews because questions can be prepared ahead of time. This allows the interviewer to be prepared and appear competent during the interview. Semi-structured interviews also allow informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms. Semi-structure interviews can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data. (p.1)

For this reason, a semi-structured interview is going to be applied. For the development of the interviews, the teachers will be chosen randomly, and they will provide the necessary information for some questions (See appendix 1).

Data collection procedures

The study will need teachers of the undergraduate courses at Universidad de Nariño, so these teachers will be the ones with whom the semi-structured interviews will be developed. The semi-structured interviews are thought to be carried out in a time frame of three months; the interviews will be developed in the free time of the interviewed teachers and in a quiet place inside the facilities of the university. The interviews will be recorded, and the teachers will be asked about their perceptions and what kind of stressors are present in their classroom and work environment.

Data analysis procedure

The factor analysis will be used as the data analysis procedure because this one will help us to organize the data collected in a more systematic way. For Rummel (1988), factor Analysis helps the researcher to study behavioral phenomena of great complexity and diversity.

With the outcomes, the researcher can organize the data collection systematically to mold his information into scientific theories because factor analysis offers both a technique of analysis and a theoretical structure (p.3). The researcher can organize the data into categories or groups that share common features and are distinguished from others. The features are key to understand the causes and consequences of stressors as a phenomenon.

Pilot study

As the purpose of the research is to know the perceptions of the teachers of English about the stressors present in their classes which can affect them, this pilot study aims to check if the semi-structured interview designed is suitable to get enough information for answering the research questions.

This procedure will be developed with 10 English teachers taken from the population. The time to do the interview will take around 20 minutes per person. Taking into account the teacher's availability, it is important to know when they are free to answer the questions of the interview.

Conclusion

Stressors have varied sources and should be considered a matter of attention, prevention and care. Stressors become an undesirable hindrance when it comes to perform to the fullest a job, in this case the teacher's profession because stressors affect the relationship between students and the teacher. Besides, foreign language teachers present particular stressors due to the nature and complexity of this education field. A deep understanding about stressors in teachers is the first step to improve the learning process because achieving an adequate management of stress implies maturity and commitment for the teacher and these attitudes will surely boost students' motivation.

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Appendix 1

Perceptions about Stressors on Teachers of English as a Basic Competence at Udenar

INTERVIEW

The purpose of this interview is to understand the beliefs and perceptions of teachers of English as a basic competence at the University of Nariño. The questions intend to know what kinds of factors are considered stressors for you and if they represent a hindrance for the teaching and learning process. The interviewer will be cautious about the personal information you provide, which includes name, age, and occupation. We assure you that we will protect your integrity by making your personal information not public.

Questions

1. What is a stressor for you? Can you explain it to us? If not, what do you think it is?
2. Being a teacher is said to be a very stressful job. Do you consider that this conception is true? Why?
3. Forlin (2001) classifies stressors into three types: administrative stressors (those that interfere with a teacher's instruction time e.g. increasing amounts of paperwork), classroom-based stressors (those that involve direct contact with students e.g. students' misbehavior), and personal stressors (those which inhibit the teachers' goal at every class e.g. lack of time to prepare for students' needs). Into which of the previous categories do you include your own stressors?
4. Which of the following stressors are the most common in your classes. Multiple answers are possible.
 - a. lack of attention on the part of students

- b. students' misconduct
 - c. lack of time to prepare lessons
 - d. students' negligence
 - e. students' low motivation toward learning
 - f. difficulties to teach or explain some themes
 - g. High demands on the part of the students
 - h. Bothersome administrative work
 - i. Lack of material
 - j. Lack of equipment
 - k. Feeling of lack of self-confidence during the classes
 - l. An unsuitable study program for the course
 - m. Any other _____
5. Do you think that some stressors affect more a type of gender or a stage of life as teachers than the others? Could you mention some personal experiences?
6. Can you mention the major sources of stress during work for you? Where do they come from?
7. Do you consider that stressors affect the development of your lessons? If so, why?
8. What behaviors of the students may cause situations of stress for you?
9. Do you think your students notice when you are stressed out? If so, how?
10. What situations of stress have affected the most in your classes?

11. Do the stressors affect your health? If so, in what ways?
12. How do your students react when they notice you are stressed out?
13. Have you ever experienced moments of such a stress that you would have desired to do any other job?
14. What strategies do you apply to handle situations of stress and keep the order and flow of the class?

Background information

Name: _____ **Sex:** _____ **Age:** _____

Years of Experience Teaching: _____ **Current Level taught this year:** _____