An Investigation of Stress and Coping Strategies among University-level EFL Teachers in the United Arab Emirates

Submitted by Jonathan Tadd Aubrey to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education in TESOL, February 2014

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Abstract

This research investigated the main sources of occupational stress that tertiary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers experience in the United Arab Emirates. A secondary focus was to identify the coping strategies used by EFL teachers who exhibit low levels of stress, and what types of support were needed by EFL teachers who exhibited moderate to high levels of stress. While theories abound in the literature on the reasons for stress and its consequences for teachers, little is known about the role of coping strategies and their specific usefulness in eradicating stress. Given the nature of the research questions, an interpretivist mixed methods approach was deemed appropriate. Data collection methods included a pre-tested online survey followed by 26 semi-structured interviews and a Likert-style questionnaire which were used to gain an in-depth understanding of the quantitative aspects of stress levels. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were used to examine the coping strategies of 113 self-identified EFL teachers with low stress levels. They were analysed through theme analysis and triangulated with other data to increase the robustness of the results. The sources of teacher stress derived from the analysis are ranked according to the 20 cited as most significant by the participants. They are discussed in detail under the headings of stressors related to classroom teaching, administration leadership style, professional issues and their own assessment as teachers. The strategies teachers use to cope with these stresses are varied and range from activities to attitudes. Key recommendations for the teaching faculty centre on general health and well-being, and overall workplace focus. Clearly, EFL teachers suffering from workplace stress must take care of themselves physically, psychologically and emotionally. Yet teachers in the UAE also expressed a desire for administrators who practice more democratic leadership styles, and acknowledged that the attitudes of their students toward learning English had a considerable impact on their own practices. Further inquiry is recommended into a more complete examination of teacher stressors and their relationship to cultural factors, specifically two of the cultural dimensions found in the UAE (power distance and uncertainty avoidance), which were found to be particularly relevant to stressors in the category of leadership style and practices.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Overview

The UAE is a rapidly developing federation of Emirates, whose economy was propelled first by the oil boom, and later, by the government’s endeavours toward economic diversification and expansion. In a bid to diversify its economy, the UAE government has invested in developing a world-class infrastructure and institutional support to cultivate both local entrepreneurship and international companies. There has been massive construction all across the nation reflecting the growth in businesses and services. The financial institutions have been strengthened to lend support to the economic growth.

In a holistic approach to growth, the UAE has also invested heavily in its educational sector. The educational sector is now looked upon as one of the most dynamic sectors, and it is striving to train and deliver world-class talent to run the country in the future. The country has brought about numerous educational reforms and amassed state of the art educational facilities and technologies. In continuation of its efforts to improve the quality of education and academic output, the UAE also attracts talented and experienced teachers from across the world.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers form an essential part of the educational workforce in the Emirates’ schools and colleges – simply because the country now recognises that English proficiency among students allows students to gain access to a higher quality of education and learning. There is a growing awareness that English skills give students access to a broad range of advantages through knowing the English language such as a vast array of research and knowledge, textbooks, seminars and workshops, an internationalised teaching forces whose primary language is English, better job prospects, and so on.

EFL teachers are largely recruited on the basis of their past teaching record, qualifications and experience in teaching English to speakers of other languages in a non-target language environment. While the screening and recruitment process has been standardised, there is no screening undertaken to assess the ‘cultural fit’ of teachers. This is nevertheless not surprising – because, even though the UAE is a multicultural setting, a test for the cultural fitness of a candidate is rarely taken in any place of employment in the UAE. This is changing, and in some workplaces, including schools and colleges, some cultural induction training is indeed imparted as a part of the overall orientation or induction training (Bickmore & Parker, 2010). However, much still needs to be done in this area.
1.2 Research Questions

Because a lack of cultural sensitivity or lack of cultural understanding may be one of the reasons that can create functional and even emotional problems among teachers (Klassen, 2010), this paper is aimed at assessing the current level of stress among the EFL teachers in the UAE as a probable result of the cultural, language and value differences. Specific levels of stress (high, mid, low) are identified by results on a Likert scale questionnaire. More specifically, the research questions are:

1. What sources of occupational stress do tertiary-level EFL teachers in the UAE experience?
2. What are the coping strategies of tertiary-level EFL teachers who exhibit low levels of stress in the UAE?
3. What types of support do teachers who exhibit moderate to high levels of stress feel that they need to cope with stress?

1.3 Personal Context

This research is of significance to me as I have been a teacher of English language in the UAE, for the past 14 years, and I have witnessed firsthand the cultural dynamics that can operate in the classroom environment and lead to both teacher and student stress. I have educated myself thoroughly on the local culture, customs and values, which makes me more culturally sensitive and responsive than some with my students. However, as a colleague and a friend of many EFL teachers, I have observed the wide variety of different ways that these talented and remarkable teachers may end up undermining their own abilities because of stress. I believe that there needs to be a structured and programmed approach for dealing with teacher stress (once it manifests), and also for ensuring that the teachers are better equipped right from the beginning so as not to have to face stressful situations. This research is therefore a personal quest as well as an academic endeavour on my part to find a holistic solution to the problem of EFL teacher stress.

1.4 Academic and Practical Significance of Research

This research has a substantial academic significance, as after a preliminary review of the literature it was found that no such research has been undertaken earlier in the context of the UAE. While there are many examples of research from across the globe regarding teacher stress and its impact on quality of education, there is hardly any work that is focused on the Middle East, or more specifically on the UAE. This dearth of information on this subject in the research is lamentable, especially owing to the fact that the UAE has a very large pool of expatriate teachers working in an environment that is culturally, significantly different than their own, and which has the potential of causing teacher stress. The current research therefore aims to fill this gap.
in the literature by exploring the UAE EFL teachers’ perceptions of stress and the coping strategies that they employ.

On a practical level, the insights gained from the research can be useful for the management of the institutions of higher education. These insights can be used to develop suitable cultural induction programmes for EFL teachers, develop cultural sensitivity based on performance appraisals, and facilitate counselling and assistance programmes for teachers.

1.5 Research Methodology

The research is conducted within an interpretive paradigm and unrestricted opinions and perceptions of the EFL teachers are sought in terms of raw data that could be used for analysis. The research has been conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods. A quantitative survey is used in order to identify the ‘sources of stress’ that EFL teachers face, the coping strategies that they use, and any institutional support that is available to them. The data collected from the survey is used to develop further exploratory questions for the interviews of selected teachers. The qualitative interviews reveal in-depth and detailed findings about what causes teacher stress, and the strategies or external resources that they use to combat stress.

1.6 Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1 Introduction is the first chapter and it gives an overview of the research. The chapter contains the research questions and discusses the personal, academic and practical context of the research.

Chapter 2 Background and Educational Context is the second chapter and it addresses the background, history, and set up of education and the systems of education in the UAE.

Chapter 3 Literature Review is the third chapter and it identifies stress as it pertains to the workplace and to teachers in particular.

Chapter 4 Research Methodology is the fourth chapter and discusses the methodology, process of data collection, and analysis of the raw data assembled.

Chapter 5 Results and Discussion is the final chapter reflecting upon the research results and discussion of the findings per se.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and Recommendations concludes with a summary of the main findings as well as limitations, areas for further research and overall general conclusions.
Chapter 2: Background and Educational Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the UAE educational context and discusses the geographical and historical significance of the country for EFL teaching and learning. It then moves on to discuss the cultural and religious diversity issues that expatriate EFL teachers may face in the UAE, and why the demographic profile of the teachers requires that they be made aware and educated about these issues. The chapter next covers the rise of the educational sector as a direct impact of the oil-propelled economic growth of the UAE, and later because of the focus on economic diversification strategy. The chapter also gives a background of the development of the education system in the UAE and gives an overview of the institutes of higher education in the country. Finally, it discusses the working and the teaching conditions encountered by the EFL teachers in the UAE.

2.2 Geographical Significance of the UAE and EFL Teaching

The United Arab Emirates is a federation of seven independent city-state monarchies that is located in Southwest Asia. The country sits on the eastern side of the Arabian Peninsula, sharing borders with the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; its location holds a strategic position along the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway that is vital to crude oil transportation. In addition, the region is a major hub for international business and educational conferences especially as it is endeavouring to diversify its economy from oil to tourism and other sectors. In an effort to meet an anticipated need for a more multi-skilled workforce, there has been a renewed focus on education and substantial investments to ensure that the UAE will have world-class universities that attract students and teachers alike (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010). Moreover, the region has become a major destination for EFL teachers from across the world, due, in part, to competitive salaries and generous benefit packages for employees (Stewart, 2014).

2.3 Historical Growth of English Language Teaching in the UAE

2.3.1 The Trucial states and British protection

The influence of the United Kingdom and the importance of English language have been prominent on the Middle Eastern states, and especially in the UAE. The region had received continued support from the British Empire historically, and trade
and social interactions between the two countries have been high.

The Trucial Oman known today as the UAE was before British influence under the control of the Portuguese, Omanis, and Persians of the past. By the late 1700s, the British in need of protecting their interests in the Indian sub-continent struck a deal with the Al-Busaids of the region allowing for this area to be protected by the British from the Qawasims, a seafaring group who threatened local shipping trade and control of the local major waterways (Luscombe, 2014). With the 1820’s General Treaty of Peace with the nine local Arab sheikhdoms the British set up camp in the area. This for all intents and purposes established the British in the area, bringing with them their values, cultures, language and English education system.

By the end of the 1800s, several European counties (including France, Germany and Russia) had taken note of the Gulf and the sheikdoms recognised a need to be protected from more powerful forces. In 1892 the sheiks signed their last important treaty with the British, whereby they entered into an exclusive arrangement not to sell or mortgage any territory to foreign governments without British consent. In return, the sheikdoms continued their rule as individual monarchies and Britain accepted responsibility for the protection and defence from all aggression. British protection continued until 1971 (‘United Arab Emirates: A Country Study’, 2011).

2.3.2 Independence, economic growth and educational standards

Post-independence, the UAE saw a tremendous growth in its oil and gas sector. Despite its relatively small size, the UAE currently boasts the world’s sixth-largest oil reserves, trailing behind Saudi Arabia, Canada, Iran and Kuwait (‘Countries with the Largest Oil Reserves’, 2010). From the onset, the government has used its oil revenues to help develop important infrastructure, transforming the country from impoverished desert principalities into a modern society with a high standard of living, and all within a very short period of time. Oil and gas revenues presently account for approximately 25 % of the country's GDP, a figure that the government would like to see decrease (Ibrahim, 2012). A large part of the revenues is directed toward building the educational sector of the UAE. The focus on the educational sector had come with the realisation that the UAE needs to diversify its economy, and in order to become competitive in diverse sectors, it needs to have a substantial pool of highly educated and skilled indigenous in its workforce.

Realising that oil and gas reserves will not last forever, especially with a new world order with increased energy demands from emerging industrial nations like China and India, the country has set out to reduce its dependence on oil revenues though economic diversification. In this regard, Dubai has, perhaps, been the most ambitious and successful. Under the leadership of H.H. Sheik Mohammed bin Rashed Al-Maktoum, the Emirate has established the Dubai International Financial Center, making it the leading hub for financial service in the region; its tourism and medical services sectors have also expanded dramatically over recent years (Thomas, 2010). This expansion and diversification has increased the need for having educated
personnel to run the operations and interact with international clients in the UAE. As such, there is an increased requirement to enhance the educational system and make it conform to international standards.

2.4 EFL Teachers’ Demographic Profile in the UAE

According to recent figures published by The National, a leading English language newspaper based in Abu Dhabi, the population of UAE now stands at about 8.2 million people. This represents a dramatic surge upward to 65% from 2006 estimates. Current figures were derived by comparing the new number of work visas in relation to the number of cancelled visas and the increase has been attributed to rise of foreign workers (The National, 2011). Recent reports estimate the current expatriate population at nearly 90%, with nationals or Emiratis comprising the remaining 10% (‘UAE sees expat population’, 2011). The population imbalance is under review by the Ministry of Interior (Habboush, 2010). It is also indicative of the fact that a large number of expat teachers are involved in the educational sector of the UAE.

Detailed demographic information about the current population is not currently available, however, studies conducted in 2009 provided a breakdown of nationalities (‘Population in UAE’, 2009). Of the six million people living in the UAE at the time, Indians comprised the largest group of foreigners, with 1.75 million. The second largest group was Pakistanis, at 1.25 million residents, followed by Bangladeshis at half a million. Expatriates from other Asian communities accounted for another million, and that figure included residents from the Philippines, Thailand, South Korea, Afghanistan and Iran. Western expatriates made up an additional 500,000 people. Less than 20% of the population were Emirati, a number which has since declined even further. This demographic breakdown highlights the fact that Western expatriates can be expected to comprise a substantial part of the ESL teaching work force. Also, the majority of the workers in the UAE (and those involved in EFL teaching), are Indians and most probably Hindus by religion. Also, the teachers from Philippines, Thailand, South Korea are Christians, Buddhists or Hindus. This means that EFL teachers mostly hail from diverse religious, ethnic, and sociocultural backgrounds than that which they encounter in the UAE. These cultural differences can be a leading cause for stress and adjustment issues among EFL staff.

2.5 Powerful Impact of Religion on Life in the UAE

Islam is the official and most widely practiced religion in the UAE, although Christianity and Hinduism are also tolerated (‘United Arab Emirates: A Country Study’, 2011). Islam is based on the belief that there is only one god and that Prophet Mohammed serves as his messenger. The religion carries with it a set of obligatory duties, known as the five pillars that permeate Muslim life and society. These include testimony of faith (Kalima), Prayer (Salat), fasting (Sawm) and Charity (Zakaat). While ‘faith’ has a personal nature, the other four pillars are manifested in a more public manner. For example, formal prayer is an integral part of society and Muslims are
required to pray at least five times per day (at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and night fall) as well as on Friday at a congressional service. Prior to prayer, the followers complete a ritual of washing various parts of the body as well as cleaning their clothes and cleaning the ground. For this reason, special washing facilities are often present in bathrooms and nearby places of worship (Hussain, 2012).

Also, as part of good practice in the offices and educational institutes in the UAE, it is expected that teachers grant permission to students to take breaks to offer their prayers on time. Similarly, during Ramadan it is common for students and Muslim teachers to grow tired from fasting as the day carries on. In order to compensate for this and also to ensure that students arrive home in time to break their daily fast, classes and regular school hours are usually shortened. All companies follow a similar policy for their workers and the business practices of the entire country come to a sudden halt in the hour approaching sunset. It is therefore clear that Islam pervades all aspects of life in the UAE, and Western and other teachers in EFL courses need to understand and accept this fact.

2.6 Education in the UAE

It is interesting to study how the concept of education has evolved in the context of the UAE in the past 60 years. Starting with the traditional education before the 1950s, the modern education system of the UAE was established in a step wise manner by building capacity and changing the educational focus. From the humble beginnings of the first modern education school in 1950, the UAE now is home to a vast number of elementary and secondary schools and colleges of higher education. The immense growth in enrolment in higher education colleges and in professional medical or technical courses is a reflection of the fact that a very large number of EFL teachers need to be recruited to facilitate the acquisition of English which is the language of teaching. This section gives a brief overview of the development of the educational system in the UAE and the current status of higher education.

2.6.1 Traditional education

Prior to the mid-1950s, the only type of education in existence in the region was that of Quranic schools, also known as Kuttab. This was considered the traditional form of education at the time and these types of schools carried with them a history dating back hundreds of years in the Arab world. By and large, emphasis was placed on the recitation and memorisation of the Qurran which aimed to equip learners with the skills needed to perform Islamic prayers. Students mainly learned by rote and basic literacy skills in grammar and arithmetic were sometimes included as part of their studies. Instruction was provided to both boys and girls but was gender segregated, and lessons were usually delivered by just one teacher, known as a Mutwaan or man of religion. As was common at the time, students were often taught in a single room while sitting together on the floor and their education was considered complete when they could recite the entire Quran (Heard-Bey, 1982).
2.6.2 Modern education

Beginning in the early 1950s, the region witnessed an influx of Arab expatriates, many of whom were teachers brought in by various Arab government aid programmes. This, in part, helped spark an interest in education reform and in 1953 the first modern school in the region opened its doors to approximately 500 students. Surprisingly, the school was located in Sharjah, a city that today is often considered to be one of the most conservative cities of the UAE. Taryam (1987) described the monumental event this way:

The year 1953 witnessed a turning point which was to have wide implications in the intellectual life of the society of the coast of Oman. The first-ever modern school in the history of the region was opened in Sharjah for the academic year 1953–4. It heralded a new system to replace the archaic muttawa (Quranic School) system. (p. 17)

From that date onward modern schools continued to multiply slowly throughout the region, the opening dates of which varied from one Emirate to another as local financial resources became available. The concept of modern schools revolutionised the educational system in the UAE and laid the foundation for more permanent and compulsory education for the people.

2.6.3 Secondary and primary education

Since its inception as a federation, the Emirates recognised the importance of education as an essential ingredient necessary for nation building. His Highness Sheik Zayed bin Sultan Al Nayhan, who served as President of the UAE from 1971 until his death 2004, articulated strong beliefs on this issue:

Excellence in education and knowledge is the route to glory. This can only be achieved through continuous efforts and academic progress. Education is the main pillar of progress and development, and the state has spared no effort to provide the necessary requirement of the educational sector. The state has a dire need of the efforts of all its educated citizens in the development of progress. (Zayed University, 2011: 1)

In line with his beliefs, was one of the very first pieces of legislation enacted in 1972 was a federal law requiring free and compulsory education at the elementary levels (Taryam, 1987). This act has ensured the continuity of the governmental investment in the educational sector.

Today, students still follow the same four-tier education system that remains relatively unchanged just as it was in the 1970s. The course of study begins with kindergarten, where pupils usually enter between the ages of four to five. At age six,
basic education becomes compulsory and students attend primary school for six years and exit at age twelve. At this point, the students elect either a technical or academic path of study to follow for the remainder of their education. This consists of three years of preparatory school, with the students exiting at age 15, followed by three more years of secondary school. In both cases, education is compulsory through the age of 18.

2.6.4 Higher education

Building on the focus on the educational sector and the ambition of the government to bring world-class education to the UAE, the country saw a rapid growth in its higher education facilities. Compared to many Arab nations, for example Egypt, the UAE has managed to establish a system of higher education in a very short period of time. The very first university emerged in 1976, only five years after the federation was established, and today there are a generous number of diversified institutions available to the student body. By and large, institutions of higher learning fall into one of three different categories: (a) federal universities that cater to only local citizens (UAE University, Zayed University, and the Higher Colleges of Technology); (b) Semi-governmental universities that are open to all and that are usually supported by the patronage of a local sheik or Emirate (including the University of Sharjah and the Ajman University of Science and Technology); and (c) foreign universities that are open to all and that are allowed to operate through various types of licensing agreements (for example, University of Wollongong and the British University of Dubai).

2.6.5 Federal institutions

UAE University

Located in the oasis garden city of Al Ain, the UAE University was the first university to open its doors in 1977. Since inception, the University's enrolment has mushroomed from just a little over 500 students to 12,000 students and it continues to serve as the nation's flagship institution of higher education. Nearly 80 percent of the current enrolment is made up of women and instruction is gender segregated, with separate campuses for men and women. The University consists of nine different faculties (humanities, law, business, agriculture, education, engineering, health sciences, and information technology) as well as the nation's single largest remedial English programme, the University General Requirements Unit (UGRU). UAE University is currently the only federal institution in the Emirates to offer PhD programmes.

Higher Colleges of Technology

The second oldest institution of higher education, HCT, was established in 1988 and began with only four colleges and 239 students. At the time of its opening, the Chancellor, Sheik Nahyan Mabarak Al Nahyan, articulated the mission statement:
The Higher Colleges of Technology are dedicated to the delivery of technical and professional programmes of the highest quality to the students, within the context of sincere respect for all beliefs and values. Graduates of the colleges will have the linguistic ability to function effectively in an international environment; technical skills to operate in an increasingly complex technological world; the intellectual capacity to adapt to constant change; and the leadership potential to make the fullest possible contribution to the development of the community for the good of all its people. (Kamili, 2007: 39)

HCT has over 19,000 students and 17 geographically separated campuses. During the 2011–2012, academic year there were 12,217 female and 7,298 male students enrolled on separate men's and woman's campuses. The institution offers 92 different programmes through its six academic divisions. The HCT also maintain a large General Education Division that delivers preparatory programmes, including a Foundations Year, whereby students work toward improving their English language, math and IT skills.

Zayed University

Zayed University (ZU) was established in 1998 and focused largely on women’s education. ZU helped to fill a gap in the federal system by providing degree programmes that were offered closer to students' families which encouraged parents to let their daughters study. The campuses are also closer to main centres of commerce, where more jobs existed. Current enrolment is slightly over 7,000 students, with two campuses in Dubai and one in Abu Dhabi. Instruction is now offered to both men and women and is segregated by gender.

2.6.6 Semi-governmental institutions

Established in 1997, it is a non-profit institution under the patronage of Dr. Sultan bin Mohamed Al-Qasimi, Supreme Ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah. It offers bachelor and masters’ degrees though 14 different colleges. Unique to the institution is a College of Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, and a medical teaching hospital that is currently under construction. The University is also one of two in the nation to maintain a College of Fine Arts and Design. Enrolment for the 2009–2010 Academic Year was 9, 546 students, with a demographic of 64 % female to 36 % male.

2.6.7 Private institutions

As has been the case with both federal and semi-governmental institutions, the private education sector, too, has witnessed rapid expansion in the last decade and students now have the option of pursuing foreign educational options in their home country. There are currently 70 private institutions offering 574 programmes in the UAE (‘Why DIAC?’, 2011). Although Abu Dhabi has several well-known institutions
(including Abu Dhabi University, New York University, and the Sorbonne University), many of these are clustered together in an free zone for education known as the Dubai International Academic City (DIAC). DIAC is the current host to 27 academic institutions, over 300 educational programmes, and 20,000 students.

2.7 Working and Teaching Conditions in the UAE

As seen in the previous sections, there is a substantial focus on developing educational institutes and facilities in the UAE and making them of world-class standards. The universities encourage students from all socio cultural backgrounds to enrol and become a part of the educational revolution. The teachers in the UAE are paid salaries depending on their skills, experiences and abilities, but typically the salaries range between $3500 and $5500 per month. The teachers work on a contract basis and these contracts can be renewed at the end of the term. In addition, the teachers receive health coverage for themselves and their families and accommodation and furniture allowances as well as free yearly airfare for their family for returning home. Teachers also enjoy a yearly vacation of 3 months from July to September. Further, teachers get several opportunities to expand their teaching experience by engaging in professional development programmes and activities available in the UAE.

These job conditions make the UAE an ideal destination for EFL teachers. It is a major reason for the large number of foreign teachers in the country. In addition to the above salaries and perks, the teachers in the UAE get the opportunity to work in integrated classrooms with multi-media technologies and ‘smart’ learning. The classroom size is limited to 18 to 22 students and teachers are encouraged to give adequate attention and focus to each student. There are therefore substantial tools and techniques available at the educational institutes to facilitate effective learning and good communication between the students and the teachers.

However, in spite of the availability of international standard facilities, the teachers have to face several challenges in the delivery of their lectures and keeping the students motivated and disciplined during the sessions. One major problem encountered by the teachers relate to the limited understanding of English by the students and limited or no understanding of Arabic by the teachers – which makes lecture delivery and subsequent explanations difficult. The students’ may not understand the lecture and may not be articulate enough to ask their questions. Also, the students’ past educational background may not have provided them with the basic and the solid foundation of concepts, and this poses a further problem for the teachers to explain higher level problems and concepts in classrooms.

However, the language issue may not be the biggest problem that the teachers face in the UAE classrooms. More prominent and blatant issues occur in the classroom are related to the cultural and value differences between the teachers and the students. For example, Western teachers are used to being demanding of their
students, and often use a direct approach in the classrooms. On the other hand, in the UAE culture, it is considered impolite to show too much directness or lose one’s temper. So, from the perspective of the students in the UAE, the foreign EFL teachers may appear impolite, rash and bad tempered. This alienates the students and prevents them from approaching the teachers with their doubts or problems. The teachers are apparently oblivious of the fact that their behaviour and drive is observed negatively by the students and that they may be alienating their class.

On the other hand, the teachers expect the students to be fully focused on their studies and career. This is because most EFL teachers have worked with students who either lived in hostels or lived independently and had complete freedom to manage their own time and resources. However, this is not true in the case of the UAE culture, where there are numerous demands on the time and energy of the young people. For example, most UAE students stay with their parents and in an extended family setting where there may be innumerable chores for them to complete. Working in tandem with the extended family dynamics means that the students may not always be on time in class, or may not be able to complete their assignments.

Another culturally specific issue that the teachers face in the classroom is the different emphasis that the teachers and the students place on tasks versus relationships. For a teacher, completion of tasks is essential and as such teachers tend to group the students in a way that they believe can facilitate better team work and coordination. The teachers’ assessment of group dynamics is therefore based on matching complementary skills and knowledge of students so that all students in the group can benefit. On the other hand, for the UAE students, relationships are more important than getting the task completed. As such, they prefer to be clubbed in groups based on friendships or familial relationships. They even tend to sit together with their relatives in classrooms. As such, it is possible that the teachers’ endeavour to get the work done in classroom fails, and ends up de-motivating the students.

Similarly, there is scope for stress and tension in classroom, as students believe that it is of no great consequence if they do not bring in their learning material or assignments, or if they are not prepared for the classroom session. The underlying thinking process for the students is that their academic life is just a small part of their whole life, and it should not be taken too seriously. On the other hand, for the ESL teachers who are used to the academic competition between Western students, it is bewildering to witnessing a laissez faire attitude among the students. The teachers can end up branding the UAE students as lazy or incompetent, while the truth is simply that the students may not consider their academic development as more important than other issues in their personal lives. Another reason for this apparent lack of seriousness among the students may be their upbringing and the conception that the state will take care of their future.

From the discussion above it is clear that the cultural differences and the differences in value systems of the teachers and the students can cause stress and challenges for the teachers’ and have an impact on their effectiveness as teachers. The
misperceptions about each-others’ attitudes and behaviours in the classroom setting lead to an environment of mistrust and antagonism and may lead to non-cooperation from the students. The students may feel de-motivated and may not actively involve themselves in the learning process and this can reflect badly on the teaching abilities of the teachers as well. The teachers also have to face the pressure to perform as the renewal of their contracts is largely dependent on their performance as well as on their equation with the students and the management of the institute. In the event that they are unable to encourage students to focus on their studies, the teachers may face dual pressures: first that relates to their own sense of incompetence and inability to do a good job, and second that is related to the external pressure of the management and maintenance of their means of livelihood.

2.8 Conclusions

This chapter has highlighted the importance of the UAE on the ESL map, and how the country itself is fully committed to developing a world-class educational sector that attracts international teachers and students alike. However, in spite of the large amounts invested in developing the educational infrastructure and providing one of the most competitive salaries and compensation packages to the teachers, the UAE teachers encounter problems related to stress and challenges that hamper their teaching effectiveness.

There is therefore a need for cultural acclimatisation of the foreign EFL teachers so that preconceived notions and misperceptions about the UAE students can be dispelled at the onset. It is essential that an understanding is developed about the cultural differences and this is possible through cultural orientation and training of the teachers at the onset of their careers. In addition, it is important that the teachers are provided with insights and support to deal with the cultural challenges in the classroom. By accepting the potential issues that can cause stress and tension for teachers, it is possible to pre-empt or resolve them.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a critical and detailed overview of the concepts and definitions of stress and theories of stress that are used to develop the theoretical framework for my research. The theoretical background developed from this discussion gives structure and direction to my research, as I am able to develop a framework that enables me to test the causes, impacts, and coping strategies for stress in teachers in the context of the UAE. The chapter also contains a critical review of the available research focusing on the impacts of stress, causes of stress and the coping strategies employed by the teachers. Hofstede’s six cultural dimensions theory is also reviewed as a possible framework for cultural differences and their relationship to stress levels. This review provides insights into my own research methodology and also highlights the gaps in existing literature. Finally, the chapter presents a detailed theoretical framework for my research.

3.2 Stress – Concepts and Definitions

3.2.1 Definition of stress

Stress has been defined in various manners over the past 65 years by researchers, psychologists, writers and health professionals. The current wealth of definitions and lack of consensus appears to be propelled by the fact that individuals may react differently to the same event. What may serve as a source of motivation for one individual could in fact overwhelm a different individual and, therein, lies part of the problem. Seyle, a pioneer in the field of stress research who coined the term ‘stressor’, was among the first to differentiate between ‘good stress’, which he called ‘eustress’ and ‘bad stress’ which he referred to as ‘distress’ (Seaward, 1997). Supporting this distinction is a more recent body of literature showing that some researchers report stress to have positive effects and allow individuals to remain productive at work. (eg. Thompson & Dey, 1998; Whitehead & Ryba, 1995), while others underscore that stress may also lead to burnout and negative health consequences (Maslach, 2003; Sirom, 2003). Not only does there appear to be a dichotomy in terms of how stress is understood, but there is also a lack of specific definition of what constitutes stress for teachers, which is the focus of the current paper.

For the purpose of this paper, this study uses the definition of teacher stress as proposed by Kyriacou (2001), who defines it as ‘the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher’ (p.28).
3.2.2 Conceptualisation of stress

Within the literature on the study of stress, there are three different, yet overlapping approaches (Cox, 1993; Cooper & Dewe, 2004). The first approach, the engineering approach, conceptualises stress as a stimulus and treats it as an independent variable. In contrast, the second approach defines stress as a response and views it as a dependent variable. The second approach is known as the physiological model as it presents stress as a physical response to an external agent. The third approach is known as the psychological approach and views stress in terms of the interaction between the person and the environment. In the section that follows, I will elaborate on the three approaches in further detail.

3.2.2.1 Engineering model

The engineering approach holds the view that environmental factors themselves are the sole sources of stress. When individuals are exposed to stressful stimuli in the environment, this leads to a reaction called strain, and that, in turn, can lead to poor health. The approach gets its name from the field of physics where stress is seen as an excessive force that places demands on the elasticity of substances. This approach can be viewed, in essence, as ‘the straw that broke the camel’s back’. When an individual is faced with a constant array of stressful stimuli and is unable to cope, then, there is a point at which he/she may eventually breakdown and damage will occur.

This approach was widely adopted during the 1940s and 50s and further developed during the late 60s and early 70s. Initially it was used with military research, but later found a place in the study of work environments during the rapid industrialisation period that followed WWII and beyond. Perhaps the best-known researchers to employ the engineering model were Holmes and Rahe (1967), who studied the extent to which stress contributes to illness among medical patients. To test their hypothesis, they developed the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS, also known as The Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale), which is a quantitative questionnaire consisting of 43 life events (such as death of a spouse, divorce, or marital separation). Each life event was awarded a life change unit, depending upon how traumatic it was. The researchers found that participants who scored 300 or more on this scale had an 80 % chance of becoming ill within the year.

The chief criticism of the engineering model is that is too simplistic and that it fails to account for psychological factors as well as subjective interpretations of the same stimuli. The excessive focus on the external stimuli is the reason that the engineer model of stress and Holmes and Rahe’s manifestation of stress is criticised for their inability to include a cultural dimension. For example, scholars like Houston, Meyer and Paewai (2006) have found that the external ‘stressful events’ as envisaged by Holmes and Rahe are not perceived in the same way by people from different cultural backgrounds, indicating the influence of an internal psychological component.
in how stress impacts people. Other critics like Hudgens (1974) have found that many of the life events used in the scale are actually the result of illness rather than the cause of illness. The scepticism regarding the objective impact of external life events on stress and health led to the exploration of other perspectives to understand stress. The next model that is discussed below is the result of this quest to understand the phenomenon of stress from an internal perspective.

**3.2.2.2 Physiological model**

The physiological approach to stress is rooted in a medical perspective and takes the position that a stress response brought about by stimuli is the actual stress itself, and that responses can lead to a disruption of normal physiological functioning. Hans Selye, a physician, pioneered the field of stress-related illnesses in the 1930s and 40s when he introduced a physiological response pattern known as the general adaption syndrome (GAS)(Seyle, 1983). His theory views stress in terms of a non-specific, universal response to demands made upon the body. This, in turn, is characterised by a plethora of symptoms such as loss of appetite and weight loss.

Selye's theory of GAS consists of three stages. First, in the *alarm reaction phase*, the body exhibits a fight or flight response. This, by and large, is a physical response (eyes dilating, body parts tensing up, etc.). Selye viewed this as a natural type of defence that the body undertakes to initially protect itself. At this stage, the response will go away if the cause of stress is removed; however, if things continue, the body enters into the second stage known as the *resistance or adaption phase* and attempts to counterbalance prolonged exposure by releasing various hormones into the bloodstream. The third stage of GAS is called *exhaustion*. This occurs when long-term exposure eventually depletes the body’s immune system and energy levels to the point that they become susceptible to damage and infection.

Although influential, Selye's GAS of stress was not accepted without a challenge from other scholars. Mason (1971) argued against the non-specificity concept of the theory; and provided empirical evidence to suggest that stress can be stimulus-specific. McGrath (1970) criticised the concept of universal response, stating that some complex stressors may elicit different responses and that not all responses follow a three-stage pattern. A third criticism levelled at the theory was that it failed to address the psychological dimensions of stress, in particular, the cognitive transformation of noxious stimuli into a subjective experience (Cox, 1993).

An expanded version of this theory comes to us from an early analysis by Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978a), who presented a model of teacher stress which conceptualised teacher stress as ‘a response syndrome mediated by an appraisal of threat to the teacher’s self-esteem or well-being and by coping mechanisms activated to reduce the perceived threat’ (p. 5).

Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978a) initially believed that how a teacher assesses the demands made upon him was dependent upon his or her personal characteristics and his/her perception of the demands, However, further research (1978b) with 257
teachers in 16 schools convinced them that the demographic characteristics (sex, qualifications, age, length of teaching experience, and position held at school) had little to do with stress appraisal. They found though, that personality characteristics might be a determinant and they reported that perception played a large role.

Both these models of stress (the environmental model and the physiological model) were developed during the first half of the 20th century as a reflection of the growing interest in the field of psychology brought about by pioneers like Pavlov, Jung and Freud at the turn of the century, and also because stress was a growing phenomenon at a time that was marred by industrial revolution and wars. Both these models developed as complementary to each other, as some scholars assumed the stance that stress was predominantly an external factor, while others presumed that it was an internal bodily response. Both models, however, failed to provide a complete picture of how stress operates as they failed to take into consideration the role played by the human mind and perceptions. The following model, therefore, endeavours to fill this gap by providing a more comprehensive explanation of stress.

3.2.2.3 Psychological model

A third conceptualisation in the study of stress is known as the 'psychological approach', which developed in response to the shortcomings of the previously mentioned stress theories. In this approach, stress is neither seen as stimulus nor as a response, but as a complex interaction involving the environment and the person. There are two distinct variants within the approach itself: the interactional theory and the transactional theory. The former places an emphasis on a person's 'fit' or 'lack of fit' within the work environment, while the latter is primarily concerned with the aspects of cognitive appraisal and coping.

3.2.2.4 Interactional theory of stress

The main premise of this theory of stress is the Person-Environmental Fit Model, which is grounded in the interactive perspective of psychology (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). This view stipulates that neither personal characteristics nor the environment alone adequately account for variance in behavioural and attitudinal variables, rather it is the interaction of these two factors together that determines a worker's well-being. Central to this idea is the belief that the amount of stress that a worker experiences increases as the extent of fit to their personality decreases. The theory focuses on three main types of congruence between the individual and his or her environment. The first type of fit is the Person-Job or (P-J) fit, and it refers to the match between job requirements and an individual's skills, knowledge and abilities. Person-Group (P-G) fit is another type of congruence that corresponds to the compatibility between the individuals and various workgroups, such as supervisors and colleagues. The third type of fit is the extent to which individuals and the organisation match, known as the Person-Organisation Fit (P-O) fit. The P-O Fit requires that individuals look for organisations that meet their employment needs, then move on to
different job positions when the organisation is no longer attractive to them.

Although the P-E fit model is a modern and popular conceptualisation of stress and it is still used in job interviews (Kay, 2006), it has several critics. For example, Nawab, Li and Nisar (2011) criticise this theory, stating that its fails to account for a misfit between the person and the environment as a result of cross-cultural factors, especially with regard to expatriate workers. Also, criticism pertains to the fact that there is lack of empirical studies to support the PE fit theory (Cooper et al., 2001). There are also an insufficient number of longitudinal studies linking PE fit theory to personality development (Roberts & Robins, 2004; Sonnetag & Frese, 2003). Spokane, Meir and Catlano (2000) have criticised the PE fit model for taking a 'static' point of view, in that the model mainly concentrates upon the relatively stable conditions of the person and the environment. Another frequent critique of the theory is that it is flawed due to an assumption that subjective perceptions of person and environment are only influenced by the objective features of person and environment (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Yu, 2009).

In spite of the numerous criticisms, the PE model is still relevant as it points out the potential of workplace stress that is the result of both environmental and personal factors. It also points out that since stress is largely an interactional outcome, there is probability of reducing stress workplace by interventions that improve the person-environment fit. As such, this model provides some insights and directions to my research which aims to understand the causes and possible remedies for workplace stress for teachers.

3.2.2.5 Transactional theory of stress

Whereas the interactional conceptualisation of stress is concerned with the congruence between a person and their environment, the transactional definition of stress focuses on the psychological evaluation and copying mechanisms that underpin the perception of stressful 'encounters' or transactions. Developed by social psychologists Lazarus and Folkman (1984), the theory asserts that events only become stressful when perceived and interpreted as such and that this occurs as part of an ongoing process; stressful factors do not exist on their own within the environment or within the individual.

A central tenet of the theory is that person-environment encounters and reactions to them are mediated through a process of cognitive appraisal and that this is divided into three types: primary, secondary, and reappraisal (Rüsch et al., 2009). Primary appraisal consists of assessments made about the environment and the extent to which events are relevant, significant or may pose as a source of potential harm. This is essentially a judgement call about what is at stake for the individual in terms of the possible effects of the demands and resources on well-being. Once a situation is perceived as a threat or as being potentially harmful; in turn, this induces the process of secondary appraisal. This process concerns possible options for coping with the threat or challenge. The third type of cognitive assessment is that of reappraisal, which
involves continuously re-evaluating and relabeling earlier appraisals as the situation develops further. As is often the case, reappraisal may include a change of perception about an event. What was once thought to be a threat might now be seen as irrelevant. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have noted that the different types of cognitive appraisals may mutually coexist and interact with each other, making measurement difficult, if not problematic.

This model provides a greater depth of understanding of how stress operates, as it takes into consideration the interactional aspects (the person feels the threat in the environment) as well as the transactional aspects of stress (the person comes up with an immediate response as well as a long-term coping strategy for combating stress).

This model, therefore, contains components of the environment, the physiological and the cognitive aspects of stress and gives a more holistic understanding of the mechanism by which humans perceive and combat threat. This model provides a useful framework for assessing the perception of stress among teachers in this study and in developing a plausible solution that encompasses strategies for modifying the workplace environment as well as changing teachers’ attitudes and perceptions toward the environment in an endeavour to reduce stress.

3.3 Empirical Studies on Workplace Stress

The previous section looked at the evolution of the concept of stress and the opinion of scholars about components of stress and thus, provides a framework for my research to study the phenomenon of stress among the selected teachers. This section reviews the empirical works of other scholars who have undertaken research on similar themes of workplace research. This section, therefore, provides insights about how other scholars have conducted their research and discusses their findings. This review is important as it not only provides guidance to my research methodology, but also provides a contextual frame of reference for my findings. It should be noted that most of the previously reviewed studies date back to the 80s and 90s with very few studies conducted in the last decade.

3.3.1 Effects of Stress on Teachers

There is a large amount of research dedicated to the study of the implications of stress on health and well-being. In the literature, the effects of stress are often categorised into research related to physiological manifestations; related to psychological manifestations, and those related to behavioural manifestations. The physiological manifestations caused by stress may include headaches, chronic fatigue, high blood pressure, muscle tension, ulcers, gastrointestinal illness and coronary heart disease (Black, 2003; Maslach & Leiter, 1977). The psychological effects caused by stress include anxiety, Maslach & Leiter, 1977). The psychological effects caused by stress include anxiety, frustration, depression and constant worry (Black, 2003; Dunham, 1976). Negative stress has also been long associated with a number of maladaptive behavioural responses, such as caffeine ingestion, cigarette smoking,
sleep disturbances, and an increased use of other substances (Maslach, 2003; Sirom, 2003).

While most of the above researchers have focused on the general population, a few studies target the study of stress and its impact on teachers. For example, a study using semi-structured interviews of teachers in urban schools in a Midwestern town in the United States found that teachers who reported having stress due to an excessive workload, a lack of resources and behaviour problems of students, also reported having physical and social problems. These teachers stated that they suffered from stress which resulted in their deteriorating health and also negatively affected their social lives (Shernoff et al., 2011).

In addition to the impact on the physical, mental and social health of the teachers, stress is also found to impact their behaviour related to their jobs. This is an important link between stress and workplace outcomes as teachers’ behaviour and attitudes were found to impact students’ outcomes (Glatfelter, 2006).

There is a large amount of literature that has recorded the impact of stress on teachers’ attendance in school. In a more recent study, Lepkowska (2004) found that almost 10% of all absenteeism among teachers was related to stress or illnesses that could be traced to stress. In fact, in the United States, a large percentage of medical insurance claims come from teachers who have reported illnesses due to stress. The US government also spends substantially in terms of disability payments, hiring substitute teachers and meeting medical costs (Miller, Birch & Jessop, 2012). In an earlier research, Kedjidjian (1995) found that stress among United States’ college teachers has led to adverse impacts like absenteeism, low productivity, low morale and low job satisfaction. The researcher also found that stress was associated with more health problems and high medical costs. Teachers’ absenteeism, in turn, was found to negatively impact students’ outcomes (Glatfelter, 2006), and this has been cited as a major problem, especially in developing countries (Kyriacou, 1987; Kay, 2006).

In addition to the problem of absenteeism, teacher stress is also found to be associated with problems in classroom teaching and student-teacher relationships. For example, a study of 1430 teachers in Canada found that teachers who were overworked or who were stressed due to the behaviour of students were more likely to feel less confident in managing their classes in keeping the students engaged and in using appropriate instructional strategies (Klassen and Chiu, 2010).

The above discussion has highlighted the multifarious impact of stress on teachers, ranging from physical and mental health issues to their capacity to function at their optimum in their jobs. The inability of teachers to perform their jobs well is, in turn, a dire consequence of stress, which has far-reaching and multiplied impacts on the students and the society in general. The direct impact of a teacher’s absenteeism and inadequacy in the classroom are measured in terms of low student engagement and low academic outcomes for students. On a larger scale, these problems may manifest in lack of interest in studies and colleges, higher rates of dropouts and the
subsequent inability of the students to obtain sustainable jobs in the future. On a macro level, these problems are reflected in greater unemployment, lower economic development, greater crime and a general deterioration of the society (Miller, Birch & Jessop, 2012).

3.3.2 Causes of teacher stress

Several researchers have focused on studying the causes of stress. The potential causes are numerous and have been linked to a variety of factors. These include the intensification of teaching and the increase in accountability, the changing roles of and expectations from teachers, enhanced workloads, student behaviour, administrative support, locus of control and autonomy, and emotional investment.

3.3.2.1 Intensification and accountability

Intensification refers to the amount of effort and time that teachers put into their jobs because of taking on larger workloads, more complex tasks and additional roles. This could happen due to introduction of new policies that require greater commitment, hard work and accountability from teachers in a bid to better the students’ outcomes (O'Donnell, Peetz & Allan, 1998). The available literature suggests that a greater intensification of work and greater accountability are a reality in today's educational environment, and may be adding to workplace stress for teachers. For example, Apple (1986) suggests that intensification and change are brought about by the external demands of governmental policy, changing societal expectations and a growing economic-oriented perspective of education. This, in turn, has manifested itself as part of an ongoing organisational restructuring process that is commonplace among universities and colleges in the USA and European countries (Apple, 1986). A similar trend has been observed in the Middle East, and especially in the context of the UAE where the educational system has been involved in massive changes and restructuring in the past decade. Apple’s (1986) research, therefore, indicates that the stressors associated with such a makeover of the educational system (stressors as seen in the Western countries during the 1980s), may now be operative in the context of the UAE. In a more recent study by Anderson (2009), the added emphasis on testing and performance appraisal of teachers was found to add high level of stress for the teachers. The enhanced need for accountability is found to stem from the fact that educational reform is often linked to economic policy, and institutions of higher learning and teachers have become more accountable to various government organisations, the general public and students as consumers (Patterson, 1996). The focus of education is now centred on achievements and grades, and the teacher’s effectiveness contingent on students’ performance in tests (Houston, Meyer & Paewai, 2006). These studies show that teachers are under additional pressure as a result of the intensification of teaching and being on constant radar for accountability. These factors have been found to contribute to teacher stress in studies in other countries, as discussed above. By extension, it can be presumed that teachers in the UAE also face
an increasingly similar intensified work environment due to the recent changes in the educational system of the country.

3.3.2.2 Role change

The term 'role' refers to a work-related set of activities or tasks that are expected in organisational or social positions (Turner, 2000). Basica and Hargreaves (2000) have broadened this definition to encompass multiple sets of activities in order to acknowledge a potential for conflicting roles like that of a teacher who may have to work as a mentor as well as a critic. A review of the literature has found that not only are teachers’ roles, and employers’ expectations from teachers are changing, but also this change is a cause of stress. For example, according to Bailey (2001), as the workloads of teachers have intensified, the numbers of roles teachers have taken on have expanded both inside and outside the classroom. Traditionally, teachers have been primarily concerned with classroom teaching, but the work of teachers is now multifaceted and may also include involvement in coordinated learning across various levels and colleges, conducting research, participating in community service and keeping up with professional development. Taking on additional roles on top of an existing full teaching schedule can be exhausting and a leading cause of stress (Bailey, 2000).

In addition to multiple roles, the literature also identifies a condition known as role ambiguity as an important source of stress in the workplace (Papastylianou, Kaila, & Polychronopoulos, 2009). According to Papastylianou, Kaila and Polychronopoulos (2009), role ambiguity invokes a lack of clear and consistent information about specific tasks, duties and responsibilities that teachers need in order to carry out their daily work effectively. In a research conducted among 562 teachers in Greece, the scholars found that role ambiguity and the perceived lack of closure with regard to task completion lead to teacher burnout. In another research study, scholars Starnaman and Miller (1992) found that American teachers worried about undefined expectations of colleagues and administration, especially as these are the people who later made a critical assessment of their job performance. Role ambiguity was also found to be associated with increased emotional exhaustion and related negatively with job satisfaction among the teachers studied by Starnaman and Miller (1992).

While the above studies have been undertaken in the context of other countries, the same situation is easy to visualise in the context of my research setting, the UAE. The changes introduced by way of educational sector reforms in the country have resulted in changed expectations from the teachers. Teachers are increasingly asked to use innovative and creative thinking skills to make their lectures engaging and to keep the students focused. There is, more than ever, a greater expectation from teachers to participate actively in students’ performance and to ensure that all students are kept involved and engaged. Teachers are also expected to provide ‘quality time’ and to be available to answer the students’ queries. In addition, there are stricter controls and norms, and teachers are often not sure how to balance the diverse
commitments. These factors indubitably indicate that the teachers in the UAE may be under stress.

### 3.3.2.3 Workload

The research literature suggests that workload, and, more specifically, overload, is a major factor contributing to stress among teachers. Overload involves both qualitative and quantitative aspects (French & Caplan, 1972). Qualitative overload refers to simultaneity, difficulty and complexity of the job demands. This may include making major decisions with respect to peers and supervisors, dealing with multiple situations at the same time that require a great deal of thought and careful consideration, and processing a large number of tasks to ensure a high degree of accuracy. Quantitative overload, on the other hand, refers to the sheer volume of work that is involved and the pace in which it must be completed.

Despite the fact that teachers are often thought to have a lighter timetable when compared with many other professions, much of the research on the topic states that teacher workloads are often intense and excessive and that they are associated with negative effects that impact their work life (Naylor & Schaefer, 2003). In research on Canadian teachers, Naylor and Schaefer found that teachers who reported being overworked were more likely to have less job satisfaction and high turnover. Similar findings have been reported from other studies like that of Harvey and Spinney (2000) who note that the teachers’ perceptions of time and workload pressures leads to increased levels of stress among teachers in the schools of Halifax, Nova Scotia. McClenehan, Giles and Mallett (2007) too have noted that the pressure brought on by an excessive workload contributes to psychological strain on teachers. This research is indicative of the fact that an excessive workload may be a contributing factor in the context of the current research setting.

### 3.3.2.4 Student behaviour

A number of researchers have pointed to disruptive student behaviours as a major source of stress among teachers. For example, according to Lhospital and Gregory (2009), student behaviour is one of the leading causes of stress for teachers in American schools. The researchers found that the 33 teachers who were involved in their research were more stressed if they had to get engaged with students who exhibited disruptive behaviour in classrooms. In addition, Blase, Payne and Furnham (cited in Geiving, 2007) identify student indolence or lack of effort as a category of student behaviour that teachers often regard as stressful. According these authors, examples of indolence include a lack of active participation in the classroom, not handing in important assignments and not attempting to answer questions (Geiving, 2007). Johnstone (1993) suggests that repeated minor offences over time are often perceived by teachers to be the greatest source of tension.

Although reported incidents of physical violence and extreme verbal abuse are quite rare at the tertiary level in the United Arab Emirates, many teachers would
probably agree that low levels of classroom disruption and students reflecting a lack of effort are areas of concern. Moreover, there is a strong cultural component to the UAE classrooms, where teachers and students are from diverse cultural backgrounds and may lack an understanding of each other’s perspectives and approaches to learning. This could lead to student behaviour that is misunderstood by the teachers and may lead to stress.

### 3.3.2.5 Administrative support

The literature also identifies conflicts with administration as a source of stress among teachers in the workplace. Russell (2010) points out that leadership may differ a great deal from one institution to another, however, teachers commonly report that they are dissatisfied with their administrations and suggest that incompetence and uncommunicative leadership styles are at the root of the problem. These findings were based on a mail survey of teachers across the State of Iowa in the United States, and involved over 2000 respondents. The researcher also found that teachers who reported as having supportive colleagues and supervisors were less stressed than those who had aggressive supervisors.

In addition, Lait and Wallace (2002) contend that bureaucracy may also cause stress in teachers. According to Lait and Wallace (2002), a conflict may occur when the prevailing norms and values of an institution are incongruent with teachers' values, especially in organisations that adopt very rigid procedures. This is in conformance with Hofstede and Hofstede’s theory on organisational culture. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2004), institutions of higher education that employ top-down leadership involving power-distance cultures, tend to encourage stressful situations. Teachers who are involved in an organisational-professional conflict are more likely to experience elevated levels of stress (Lait & Wallace, 2002).

On the other hand, teachers who receive greater administrative support may experience less stress and burnout. For example, the Russell (2010) study discussed above highlighted the low level of stress among teachers who reported having supportive supervisors. Similarly, Burke, Greenglass and Schwarzer (1996) found in a study of 362 teachers across the USA, that teachers who had supportive administrators were less likely to experience stress and stress-related health issues.

While the issue of availability or lack of a supportive environment for teachers in the specific context of the UAE has not been well researched, it can be postulated that teachers who do perceive their work environment as hostile or their supervisors as aggressive may be experiencing higher levels of stress. It is also noted that my research is in a position to add substantially to the lack of literature in the context of the UAE, with regard to teachers’ perceptions about administrative support.

### 3.3.2.5 Locus of control

The degree to which teachers are autonomous is a topic of interest to stress researchers. Definitions of teacher autonomy appear rather vague; however, one
commonly adopted in the literature is that of Pearson and Hall (1993). According to Pearson and Hall (1993), autonomy is the degree to which teachers are able to make independent educational decisions and control themselves and their work environments. With regard to workplace stress and teachers, a link to low autonomy and control has been underlined in a number of scholarly works. For example, Evers, Brouwers and Tomic (2002) assert that school climates that are non-supportive and non-cooperative and which prevent teachers from participating in important decision-making processes may result in poor morale, lowered professional esteem and a general sense of dissatisfaction. According to Evers, Brouwers and Tomic’s (2002) research, which involved teachers from schools across The Netherlands, it was found that teachers’ stress levels were directly associated with their perceived autonomy. Similar findings are reported from other scholars such as Kinicki and Latack (1990), who found in their research among 159 teachers in the USA, that difficult working conditions and schools with restrictive climates are generally perceived as being more stressful when individuals cannot exercise a degree of influence at the point of instigation. Constraints on perceived autonomy, lack of control and powerlessness have also been associated with anxiety, tension and frustration in teachers in a research by Pearson and Moomnaw (2005) in educational centres across Florida, USA.

While most of the above discussed research is not in the context of the UAE, I am taking liberty in presuming and in using Hofstede’s cultural dimensions framework, to show that the UAE Colleges can be expected to be low on providing teachers with greater autonomy. The rationale for this presumption is that the country is high on power-distance and uncertainty avoidance, factors which make it difficult for the bureaucratic structure of most institutions to empower teachers, or to delegate authority and provide autonomy. However, his presumption will be tested in my research as it explores this factor as a cause of stress for teachers in the UAE.

3.2.2.6 Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory is a framework for cross-cultural communication (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). It describes the effects of a society’s culture on the values of its members, and how these values relate to behaviour, using a structure that was derived from factor analysis. Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory has been widely used in several fields as a paradigm for research particularly in cross-cultural psychology, international management, and cross-cultural communication. This theory, which was derived in the 1960s and 70s, was one of the first that could be quantified and could be used to explain observed differences between cultures.

Hofstede’s theory is based on the idea that value can be placed upon six cultural dimensions. They are power (equality versus inequality), collectivism (versus individualism), uncertainty avoidance (versus uncertainty tolerance), masculinity (versus femininity), temporal orientation, and indulgence (versus restraint).
A description of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions follows (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010):

**Power Distance index**: According to Hofstede, ‘power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally’. This dimension does not measure the level of power distribution in a given culture, but instead analyses the way people feel about it. Low power-distance scores mean that a culture expects and accepts that power relations are democratic and members are viewed as equals. High power-distance scores mean that less powerful members of the society accept their place and realise the existence of formal hierarchical positions.

**Individualism vs. Collectivism**: ‘The degree to which individuals are integrated into groups’. This dimension has no political connotation and refers to the group rather than the individual. Individualistic cultures place importance on attaining personal goals. In collectivist societies, the goals of the group and its well-being are valued over those of the individual.

**Uncertainty-Avoidance index**: ‘A society’s tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity’. This is a dimension that measures the way a society deals with unknown situations, unexpected events, and the stress of change. Cultures that achieve high scores on this index are less tolerant of change and tend to minimise the anxiety of the unknown by implementing rigid rules, regulations, and/or laws. Societies that score low on this index are more open to change, have fewer rules and laws and function with looser guidelines.

**Masculinity vs. Femininity**: ‘The distribution of emotional roles between the genders’. This dimension measures the level of importance a culture places on stereotypically masculine values such as assertiveness, ambition, power, and materialism as well as stereotypically feminine values such as an emphasis on human relationships. Cultures that are high on the masculinity scale generally have more prominent differences between genders and tend to be more competitive and ambitious. Those that achieve low scores on this dimension have fewer differences between genders and place a higher value on relationship building.

**Long-term Orientation vs. Short-term Orientation**: This dimension describes a society’s time horizon. Cultures oriented to the short-term value traditional methods, take a considerable amount of time to build relationships and, in general, view time as circular. This means the past and the present are interconnected and that which cannot be done today can be done tomorrow. The opposite of this is long-term orientation, which sees time as linear and looks to the future rather than the present or the past. It is goal-oriented and values rewards.
Indulgence vs Restraint: This dimension measures a culture’s ability to satisfy the immediate needs and personal desires of its members. Those that value restraint have strict social rules and norms under which satisfaction of drives is regulated and discouraged.

Hofstede stresses that the cultural dimensions are only a framework to help assess a given culture and thus better guide decision-making. There are other factors to take into consideration such as personality, family history, and personal wealth. The proposed dimensions cannot predict individual behaviours and do not take into account individual personalities.

3.3.2.7 Emotional investment

One area that is underrepresented in the literature on teacher stress has to do with the role of emotions and how they may have an impact on teachers. Outside of stress research, a number of authors have identified the teaching profession as a highly emotional pursuit (Day & Leitch, 2001; Hargreaves, 1998; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; O’Connor, 2008; Shapiro, 2010; Zembylas, 2004) that is in many ways on par with the nursing profession, as it often involves constant attention and a care-giving type of relationship. Hochschild (1993) calls these types of emotional transactions ‘emotional labor’. Taking Hochschild’s research into account, Hargreaves and Evans (1997) allude to the fact that the emotional aspects of teaching may harbour stressful dimensions:

This emotional labor requires a kind of acting: not just acting out feelings superficially, but also consciously working oneself into experiencing the necessary feelings required to perform one's job well...In many respects this emotional labor is a positive aspect of teaching. Classrooms would be (and sometimes are) barren and boring places without it. But emotional labor also exposes teachers, making them vulnerable when the conditions of the demands on their work make it hard for them to do their emotional work properly. (p. 109)

The above section has discussed the plethora of research that is available on the causes of teacher stress. However, in the review of research there can be seen a conspicuous gap in empirical research in the context of the UAE. My research is therefore, poised to fill this gap as it explores the causes of stress for teachers in the specific context of the UAE.

3.3.3 Coping strategies for stress

Defining coping is a difficult task as it has been expressed in various ways over three decades (Cohen & Lazarus, 1994; Folkman, 2011). The concept is elusive because
it involves some degree of thought by an individual, and this problem is further compounded when trying to separate predispositions of individuals from the predispositions of teachers. In a review of the literature, Somerfield and McCrae (2000) found coping research to be ‘disappointing, tentative, modest, sterile …’ (p. 21). This is in part due to the fact that there has not been a consensus as to what constitutes the best conceptualisation of coping (Cook & Hepner, 1997). The lack of consensus, in turn, largely stems from the fact that the concept of coping involves a degree of ‘personal willingness to change how you approach life and work in order to gain more control over the pressure you face, as well as forge a commitment to build up a repertoire of coping experiences and skills’ (p.21). This means that a subjective element is involved in the conceptualisation of coping, which makes the development of an objective definition difficult.

For the purposes of this paper, the present study adopts the definition offered by Lazarus, who defines it as ‘constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person’ (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984, p. 141).

With this understanding of stress, I will now turn to a discussion of available research and studies that have focused on coping strategies employed by people, and, more specifically, by teachers.

Although the literature is replete with general information on coping strategies, very little is known about their specific usefulness in eradicating stress. Based on a review of the literature Table 1 indicates some of the most common coping strategies adopted by teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adopting time management procedures</td>
<td>Cooley &amp; Yovanoff, 1996; Hartney, 2008; Huxley, Freeman &amp; Frydenberg, 2004; Kyriacou, 2001; Reynolds, Taylor &amp; Shapiro, 1993b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive and cooperative</td>
<td>Cooley &amp; Yovanoff, 1996; Huxley, Freeman &amp; Frydenberg, 2004; Reynolds, Taylor &amp; Shapiro, 1993a</td>
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<tr>
<td>communication strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding confrontations</td>
<td>Kyriacou, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing techniques</td>
<td>Cooley &amp; Yovanoff,1996; Hartney, 2008; Hayes, 2006; Reynolds, Taylor &amp; Shapiro, 1993a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused meditation</td>
<td>Cooley &amp; Yovanoff, 1996; Hartney, 2008; Reynolds, Taylor &amp; Shapiro, 1993a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a sense of humour</td>
<td>Hartney, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical exercise</td>
<td>Cooley &amp; Yovanoff, 1996; Hartney, 2008; Reynolds, Taylor &amp; Shapiro, 1993a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In observing the aforementioned table one notices that teachers may employ a variety of strategies in order to help them manage and reduce their levels of stress. Kyriacou (2001) classifies these strategies into two main categories: direct action techniques and palliative techniques. Which are which – or do they cross over? This needs to be linked to the table.

Direct action techniques focus on the actual sources of stress and how they can be eliminated. This helps teachers obtain a better understanding of the source of stress and, then, implement a course of action that will change the situation so that it is removed. Direct action techniques may involve developing better and assertive communication strategies as indicated by Huxley, Freeman and Frydenberg, 2004 (see Table 1 above), managing one’s self more effectively (which would involve techniques like time management (Hartney, 2008); Prioritising work events (Kyriacou, 2001); seeking support if appropriate (Hartney, 2008); setting goals and staying organised (Hartney, 2008)), creating new knowledge and skills (like recognising one’s own limitations (Kyriacou, 2001); and enhancing learning (Kyriacou, 2001).

The above techniques are focused at making a direct impact on the root cause of stress and trying to reduce or eliminate it. For example, Hartney (2008) found that teachers can reduce their stress levels by becoming more organised and managing their time well. This research also highlighted the fact that teachers who were very

<table>
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<th>Focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prioritising work and events</td>
<td>Cooley &amp; Yovanoff, 1996; Hartney, 2008; Kyriacou, 2001; Reynolds, Taylor &amp; Shapiro, 1993a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognising one’s own limitations</td>
<td>Kyriacou, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-framing thoughts</td>
<td>Cooley &amp; Yovanoff, 1996; Huxley, Freeman &amp; Frydenberg, 2004; Kyriacou, 2001; Reynolds, Taylor &amp; Shapiro, 1993a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking support if appropriate</td>
<td>Hartney, 2008; Hayes, 2006; Huxley, Freeman &amp; Frydenberg, 2004;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting goals</td>
<td>Cooley &amp; Yovanoff, 1996; Hartney, 2008; Reynolds, Taylor &amp; Shapiro, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying organised</td>
<td>Hartney, 2008; Kyriacou, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress awareness training</td>
<td>Bunce &amp; West, 1996; Griffith, Steptoe &amp; Cropley, 1999; Hartney, 2008; Huxley, Freeman &amp; Frydenberg, 2004; Long, 1988; Reynolds, Taylor &amp; Shapiro, 1993a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking with others/ Ventilation</td>
<td>Hartney, 2008; Kyriacou, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking with others/ Problem-solving</td>
<td>Huxley, Freeman &amp; Frydenberg, 2004; Hartney, 2008; Kyriacou, 2001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
disciplined and set personal goals were able to manage their stress better. Similarly, another study by Kyriacou (2001), found in an exhaustive review of literature pertaining to empirical research conducted on teacher stress, noted that it was important for teachers to keep themselves updated with not only subject contextual knowledge, but also with the latest educational technology so that they can cope with the multiple pressures that are placed on their time and skills.

In addition to the above-mentioned direct coping strategies, palliative coping strategies are also employed by teachers to combat stress. These strategies do not focus on eliminating the actual source but are aimed at reducing the subjective feeling of stress that occurs by altering or controlling one's emotions (Kyriacou, 2001). Palliative strategies may be both mental and physical. According to Huxley, Freeman and Frydenberg (2004), mental techniques involve re-framing the situation so as to change one's perspective. This study was conducted in Melbourne, Australia and used qualitative journals for teachers to understand the strategies they used for managing stress.

In addition, other researchers like Hartney (2008) and Kyriacou (2001) have found that teachers may involve palliative coping strategies like talking to sympathetic others or talking with people who can help them solve their problems and combat stress. Similar findings were also reported in the study of Huxley, Freeman and Frydenberg (2004) in which the researchers reported that teachers employed ‘venting’ as a coping strategy. Unlike the mental techniques, physical techniques concern reducing tension and establishing a relaxed state of being. These coping strategies have been found in the research of Reynolds, Taylor and Shapiro (1993) who found that teachers resorted to physical exercising and meditation in order to reduce their stress levels.

3.4 Summary

This chapter presented a review of the theories on stress and touched upon the difficulties in defining the term, while also presenting three different, yet overlapping conceptualisations of stress as presented by the engineering model, the physiological model, and the psychological model. The conceptualisation of stress helps in developing a framework for understanding the impacts, causes and coping strategies related to stress. This framework further guided the next section of the chapter which consisted of reviewing the available research and studies focusing on the impacts of stress, the cases of stress and the coping strategies that are employed by teachers to combat stress. It was found that the common stressors for teachers related to work include intensification and accountability, role change, workload, student behaviour, administrative support, locus of control and emotional investment. The negative consequences of stress include impacts on health and well-being, psychological issues, and behaviour issues like absenteeism and lack of efficacy in managing classrooms and keeping students engaged. Finally, the complexity of the issue of coping strategies at
the conceptual level was addressed and an overview of common coping strategies that are used by teachers was presented.

This review provides deep insights about the direction of stress-related research and also informs the development of the research methodology for my own research. This chapter helped in the development of the theoretical framework for my research. The psychological model of stress and the transactional approach is accepted for the context of the research, and it is postulated that both external environment characteristics as well as the teachers’ internal qualities have an impact on their perceptions of stress. The external stressors are perceived and responded to by teachers in three stages (primary assessment, secondary assessment and long-term assessment or reappraisal). This three-stage model of stress indicates that there is scope for positive intervention and reduction of perception of stress at all three stages. At the primary stage, teachers are involved with an initial assessment of threat or stressors in their environment. A strategy that can be used to reduce the perception of stress could be to make teachers learn to use positive thinking and reframe their thought process to become more positive. They can also be encouraged to indulge in meditation and breathing exercises to help them remain calm and conduct an objective assessment of their situation. The modification of the manner in which teachers perceive their environment can lead to a reduction in the stress that they feel.

At the secondary level, the response is more of a voluntary one, where teachers take a decision to adopt a coping strategy to meet the challenges of the perceived stress. At this stage, teachers can be encouraged to make an objective assessment of the situation and develop appropriate strategies like discussing problems openly and using assertive communications. Similarly, teachers can be taught to adopt long-term coping responses to stress in the form of better organisation, time management, work prioritisation, and problem-solving skills.
Figure 1: Theoretical framework

Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework for my research, and also provides the basis for the research methodology and research instruments used. As Creswell notes, the idea for a research project emerges from one’s ‘world view’ or philosophy. This tends to shape inquiry, methods and strategies used when doing research (2009, p. 8). My outlook corresponds with what Creswell describes as a ‘pragmatic worldview’ (p. 10). There is no set truth or reality; rather the researcher seeks to find the answer to a question or to describe something using whatever available means fit the circumstances. Throughout this work my focus is on the research problem (i.e. investigating major sources of stress for EFL teachers in the workplace and identifying their coping strategies). This view allows a researcher to use whatever methods are available in order to explore the research problem, and allows for a flexible approach to the research method and style. Throughout this research, I adopt appropriate methods as necessary to understand what the major stressors are for EFL teachers in the workplace in the UAE and what coping strategies are used by EFL teachers with low levels of stress. A pragmatic worldview gives me the freedom to explore in a positivistic way certain aspects of my research questions while also allowing for an interpretive perspective to examine the actual participants’ perceptions of the problems. Thus, there are elements of constructivist views in the sense of looking at the nature of social reality and learning from an individual perspective, in this case through questionnaire and interview data.

This particular worldview lends itself to a mixed methods approach with the interweaving of both quantitative and qualitative methods helping to eliminate biases and limitations of any one data collection method. Triangulation of data sources is
used to verify the data gathered. The quantitative aspects of stress levels are examined in this research with a Likert-like scale online questionnaire. Coping strategies of self-identified EFL teachers’ with low levels of stress were also examined with qualitative semi-structured interviews.

My theoretical framework was based on my observations from the relevant literature as well as on my own conceptualisations of stress in the workplace. The research instruments contain questions that assess the existence of different types of external stressors and the different responses that teachers have to these stressors. It also contains questions related to the effectiveness of different coping strategies (interventions) on adjusting the responses of the teachers to these stresses.
Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Design

4.1 Theoretical Framework and Methodology

According to Creswell and Clark (2011), it is essential that any endeavour to conduct research is preceded by the development of an awareness of the philosophical assumptions that surround the nature of existence (ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology). It is also suggested that for it to be a good practice it is important to include, as part of the research paper, the research paradigm and epistemological and ontological considerations in an explicit manner. The rationale for such an inclusion being that one’s view of reality does have an impact on their thoughts about knowledge; and one’s views of knowledge will, in turn, influence decisions about methodology (Kuhn, 1996). This section therefore addresses some of the key issues at hand, mainly those related to the research paradigm, the nature of existence, and the nature of knowledge and research methodology.

4.1.1 Research Methodology

The main approach chosen for use in this study was a post-positivistic interpretivist approach. The fundamental belief of social constructivism is that individuals ‘seek understanding of the world in which they live and work and develop subjective meanings of their experiences’ (Creswell, 2003, p. 8). The implication of this is that our understanding and knowledge of the world is subjective and individual, so what is taken as truth is also subjective and individual. The idea of a universal truth and knowledge becomes controversial. Each person’s experiences and knowledge of the world is completely individual. Therefore, what is true for one person may not necessarily be true for someone else. Social constructivist researchers recognise that their own background shapes their intentions so they ‘position themselves’ in the research to acknowledge how their interpretations flow from their own personal, cultural and historical experiences (Creswell, 2003, p. 8–9). The goal of this particular research approach relies on participants’ views of the situation in question, and this is facilitated by not having a theory as a starting point but by allowing meaning to emerge from the series of research questions. Therefore, I acknowledge that my background has shaped my intentions and will discuss this more fully in this chapter and in the conclusions.

4.1.2 Research paradigm, epistemological and ontological considerations

The current research uses a mixed methods approach with a positivistic and an interpretative framework that enables the researcher to obtain rich contextual and comprehensive data from the perspective of the respondents. Mixed method research
(MMR) is not qualitative research per se, nor is it quantitative research. Formal mixed methods research, which surfaced in the literature a little over a decade ago, can be defined as:

...an intellectual and practical synthesis based on qualitative and quantitative research; it is the third methodological or research paradigm (along with qualitative and quantitative research). It recognises the importance of traditional quantitative and qualitative research but also offers a powerful third paradigm choice that often will provide the most informative, complete, balanced, and useful research results.
(Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p. 129)

As young as MMR is, there are already five types identified in the literature (Johnson et al., 2007). They include: Pure qualitative and pure quantitative, qualitative mixed, quantitative mixed and pure mixed. The present study can be classified as qualitative mixed research because it combines both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, but with the qualitative perspective dominating the study.

The interpretative paradigm encompasses a variety of interpretative and constructivist approaches. Researchers working with the interpretive paradigm hold the belief that knowledge is socially constructed through different types of interaction (Richie & Lewis, 2003). According to the interpretative paradigm, epistemology consists of interactions that take place in natural contexts and real world settings where social agents can impact one another. The types of interaction can vary, including researcher-researcher, researcher-participants, researcher-environment, and all are mediated. Boucher (Paul, 2005) extends the role of mediation to include human language and adds that knowledge can never be held as objective because ‘we can never distinguish unequivocally between what is in our minds and what is out there in the real world’ (p.65). Hence, knowledge in the interpretative paradigm is subjective, value laden, and inevitably shaped by the perspectives of the researcher and the participants.

Ontology within the interpretative paradigm means the world does not exist independently of the knower (Grix, 2010). Researchers participate within the reality of what they are researching, which, in turn, is individually negotiated through social construction and subjective interpretation. Many points of view are possible given any one research project, (i.e. that of the researcher and the participants). The current research uses this interpretative paradigm as it aims to explore the diverse perspectives of the people who are directly involved in the situation, and whose opinions play a crucial role in understanding the situation. The current research is informed by the value laden perspective of the target respondents, and hence warrants the need of an interpretative paradigm.

The current research conforms to the above epistemological and ontological assumptions, as the study as a whole, as well as the research questions that were
posed, stemmed from my own worldview. I believed that teachers’ stress was a reality and that there was a need to explore the situation using academic research that can provide useful insights into addressing the issue. Furthermore, the research aimed to include the perceptions and opinions of the teachers who were experiencing the situation first hand, and whose experiences were a direct result of their social interactions.

The issue of quality in the interpretative paradigm has been under consideration for at least 20 years and has yet to reach a consensus. Predominantly, the problems associated with the use of the interpretative paradigm relate to the criteria of quality standards and research protocols that need to be established. Essentially, there are two positions: the first holds that interpretative research should be held to the same criteria used in the scientific paradigm; the second position argues that because qualitative research is different at epistemological and ontological levels it warrants a different set of criteria altogether (Edge & Richards, 1998). However, an interpretative paradigm can be employed using considerations of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). Trustworthiness is generated by a preponderance of evidence, transparency with procedures, and overall accuracy in research design (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). Credibility relates to internal validity and refers to the truthfulness of the data collected, types of methods employed, and length of exposure to the context. Transferability is a form of external validity and refers to how applicable the findings are to other settings; dependability, which is largely an issue of reliability and consistency; and confirmability or objectivity, which concerns how neutral the findings are and the extent to which they remain unbiased by the researcher.

The current research has therefore taken careful consideration regarding trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to ensure that the research is conducted rigorously and according to research protocol. The trustworthiness and credibility is maintained by adhering to an exemplar of self-integrity in data collection and reporting, as well as through developing an exhaustive background of research through a literature review and following rigorous ethical considerations. The dependability and confirmability of research is developed through the use of tried and tested methods of data collection, which ensure that any future research using similar methods will arrive at similar results and outcomes. The transferability of the results is ensured by employing a simple approach that brings about clarity in the discussion and interpretation of the result and which openly describes the limitations of the research result’s application.

4.1.3 Research methodology

The data collection methods I chose were a survey and a semi-structured interview. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 112) state that ‘the use of two or more data collection methods in the study of some aspect of human behavior’ is defined as triangulation. The rationale for choosing this combination of data collection methods was the
acknowledgement that teachers, their experiences, and the way they interpret the same environment was highly individualistic and in turn open to the interpretation of the researcher. It is possible that the use of one method could ‘distort the researcher’s picture of the particular slice of reality’ that a researcher is investigating (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 112). Where positivist research could illuminate patterns and dominate attitudes numerically in the form of a survey, semi-structured interviews allowed me to probe attitudes and possible reasons why respondents had particular beliefs. In addition, it was hoped that the use of two different data collection methods would lend credence to and if one corroborated the findings of the other, it would prove the results robust.

4.2 Research Questions and Objectives

The present study investigated the following research questions:

1. What sources of occupational stress do tertiary-level EFL teachers in the UAE experience?

2. What are the coping strategies of tertiary-level EFL teachers who exhibit low levels of stress in the UAE?

3. What types of support do teachers who exhibit moderate to high levels of stress feel that they need to cope with stress?

4.3 Methods of Data Collection

Within the field of stress research, many authors agree that the most important thing [stress and coping] researchers can do is to explore the process in much greater depth, attempting to take into account the situational, personal, and interpersonal factors that relate to coping strategies use and to the effectiveness of coping efforts overtime (Ptacek & Pierce, 2003, p.120, cited in Onwuegbuzie, Jiao & Collins, 2007).

With the above-mentioned goals in mind, this study used a mixed methods approach. According to Ptacek and Pierce, 2003, in research that endeavours to explore a multitude of factors in the situation, from personal and interpersonal perspectives, it is advisable to deploy an array of data-collection methods. By using multiple methods, it is possible to capture the situation from a multi-dimensional perspective and obtain a varied and deep insight (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Creswell, 2003). The need for obtaining in-depth and holistic information from the situation is aggravated when the focus of the research is to understand human social interaction or human psychology. This is exactly what the current research aims to do, namely: explore and understand teachers stress, their coping strategies in stressful situations, and the support that they get. This is a study that places the task of assessing and evaluating both deep psychological factors as well as situational and contextual factors involved in the situation. As such, it is appropriate that a mixed method strategy is
employed for the current research, so that a comprehensive overview of the situation can obtained.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) define mixed methods research as: ‘Mixed methods are] the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques into a single study’ (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2007, pp. 17–18). Thus mixed methods means using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. Such an approach to data collection ensures that the advantages and benefits of diverse methods can be obtained, while the drawbacks of the single methods are minimised (Bryman, 2012; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). For example, quantitative data collection methods are useful as these allow the researcher to obtain quick responses from a very large number of respondents through surveys (Åkerlind, 2005).

For the current research, this quantitative method is extremely useful as it has helped the researcher in exploring the scope of the problems related to teachers’ stress and in understanding the prevalence of stress among a wide section of the population of teachers. However, since quantitative survey methods cannot obtain in-depth or detailed and perceptive information (Åkerlind, 2005), it was found useful to complement quantitative methods with qualitative interviews. Together, these qualitative and the quantitative methods can be expected to cover both spread (opinion from a very large sample of respondents) and depth (in-depth qualitative and high quality information from a smaller sample).

First, at the conceptual level, a qualitative approach was employed. The study as a whole, as well as the research questions that were posited, stem from my own worldview with regards to both ontological and epistemological considerations.

Second, at the data collection research tools/methods level, the design was mixed. Within the present study, the quantitative research portion, which was mostly descriptive, consisted of an online survey. The survey allowed the researcher to reach a large number of subjects who were in various places throughout the country. Two added benefits were that it was economical and allowed the researcher to collect the data quickly. The qualitative portion consisted of a follow-up survey whereby data were collected from semi-structured and open-ended interviewing. This approach was selected because it allowed the researcher to explore complex phenomena and the views of the participants in more depth than using only a pre-defined menu of set items.

Third, data analysis combined both quantitative and qualitative data to address the research questions. The first research question used quantitative methods of analysis; the remaining research questions employed qualitative methods to interpret teachers’ views of coping.

The research design and the research methods employed in the current research are discussed below.
4.3.1 Quantitative research design

A quantitative research design was used to obtain data from a 113 teachers from TESOL Arabia. The aim of the quantitative research was to obtain a list of sources that caused occupational stress in tertiary-level EFL teachers, a list of coping strategies that they may be using, and a list of any institutional or social support available to teachers who exhibit moderate to high levels of stress. The quantitative research was therefore used for setting the scope and laying the contextual ground for the research to move into a deeper exploration through the semi-structured interviews. The following sections give details of the sample selection rationale and methods, data collection instruments and methods, and data analysis methods that were used for the quantitative research.

4.3.1.1 Sampling

There are two main categories of sampling in social science and educational research: (a) probability and (b) nonprobability sampling. The difference between the two has to do with whether all the members of a population are known and whether each has a chance to be selected in the sample (Davies, forthcoming). The sampling method used for the present study is nonprobability sampling, in particular, convenience sampling. Nonprobability sampling refers to sampling techniques in which selection proceeds without a full listing of population members/units and without randomised selection. Nonprobability sampling involves selecting members on the basis of availability, accessibility, or convenience. Convenience sampling was selected as in applied linguistic research, probability samples are rare and nonprobability samples the norm (Davies, forthcoming).

There is general agreement in the applied linguistics research methods literature that nonprobability sampling techniques limit generalisation, primarily because of the unknown representation of the population by the non-randomly selected sample. However, steps were taken to minimise bias and improve the representativeness of the sample. It should be noted that the results of this study are only generalisable to those who participated in it.

The sample for the quantitative research portion of this study was obtained from the region’s largest English language teacher association, TESOL Arabia. There were several reasons for focusing on TESOL Arabia as a pool for prospective respondents in the survey. The first reason was that it was thought unlikely that educational institutions as such, would be willing to allow this research to be conducted among their teachers, as they might not want the teachers to reveal the internal dynamics and operations of their institutions. Another rationale for choosing TESOL Arabia was that it has a very large database of teachers – which gave the researcher a very large population pool from which to select a sample. In addition, the association reflects the teacher population from diverse institutions and teaching colleges, thus it was expected to provide a more representative sample. The sampling
The method used was convenience sampling of the database of teachers who met the following criteria:

(1) They taught EFL at a university in the United Arab Emirates;

(2) They were employed full-time.

A total of 134 teachers responded to the survey: consisting of 61.9% male and 38.1% female participants. The majority of the participants (61.1%) were single and never married, followed by married participants at 25.7%. Of the respondents 11.5% reported themselves as divorced while only 1.8% were widowed. A very large majority, consisting of 61.1% of the respondents stated that their mother tongue was English. Arabic was cited as the mother tongue by 22.1% of the participants while the remaining 6.2% respondents reported other languages including Urdu, Malayalam, Berber, Farsi, and French. The majority of the respondents (54%) were between 41 and 55 years of age, followed by 25.7% who were older. There were ten respondents who belonged to the 36–40 range and eight in the 31–35 range. Only four were found to be between 26–30 years, and only one under 25 years of age. The sample consisted of diverse nationalities ranging from Americans (26.5%), British (21.2%), Australian (10.6%) and Canadians, to Egyptians (5%). Other nationalities included Indians, Jordanians, Tunisian, Irish, Pakistani, Iraqi, Emirati, Algerian, Lebanese, Syrian, Saudi, Palestinian, Moroccan and Poles. The respondents mostly belonged to the federal universities (61.9%), but some also worked for local government or semi-government universities (26.5%) and for private universities (11.5%). The majority of the respondents (77.9%) had a Master’s degree in TESOL/EFL/Applied Linguistics/English, while 19.5% reported having a doctorate in the same subjects. Another 19.5% stated that they had RSA/Cambridge/Trinity Diplomas while RSA/Cambridge/Trinity Certificate and PGCE were held by 13.3%. USA state teacher certification in TESOL/EFL was mentioned by only 6.2%. (A table of demographic information is presented in Appendix 5).

4.3.1.2 Data collection instrument

The data collection instrument consisted of a questionnaire of multiple-choice type questions. The questions in the questionnaire were categorised in three clusters, each cluster conforming to one main research question. Please see Appendices 3 and 4 for the list of questions and the questionnaire. Surveys are considered a very efficient method for the collection of data from a large sample size, as these can be undertaken in a short period and allow the respondents to give quick answers to a very large number of questions (Bryman, 2012). In addition, surveys can be conducted online or over the telephone, thus avoiding the costs associated with face-to-face meetings such as interviews and focus groups (Creswell, 2003). In addition to saving time, surveys allow the researcher to reach out to a large number of respondents with less time spent per respondent (Creswell, 2003). While this ability to save time and costs, and to
allow a large number of respondents to give answers on a variety of questions, is appreciated, the survey method does lack in a few aspects. One drawback of a survey is that it does not allow the respondents to give their opinions freely and hence it restricts the amount and the quality of information that can be obtained per respondent (Åkerlind, 2005). Another drawback is that surveys, especially when undertaken online where the respondent can just fill in the survey and submit, may lead to lack of interest in the survey. The respondents may be too busy to complete the survey, may fill out the survey half-heartedly leaving some of the questions unanswered, or they may altogether forget to do the survey (Åkerlind, 2005). In spite of these drawbacks, it is possible to obtain a substantial number of fully completed surveys given an adequately large sample size. Another disadvantage of a multiple-choice questionnaire is that it restricts the responses to only a few choices, and hence prevents the respondent from giving new information or personal opinions that could have benefited the research (Creswell, 2003). Nevertheless, since qualitative interview methods were also used to allow the respondents to give detailed responses, any disadvantage from the constraints of the multiple-choice questionnaire was mitigated.

The questionnaire was uploaded online at the SurveyMonkey website.

4.3.1.3 Data analysis

The data was analysed using two quantitative analysis software programs: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software and Excel. The quantitative methods of data analysis yield objective and specific findings that can be interpreted in an unequivocal way, as it does not allow for subjective interpretation (Bryman, 2012). The disadvantage of the quantitative methods of data analysis is that it does not allow the researcher to include any contextual information, and hence the interpretation of the results may give only restrictive and limited knowledge about the situation under study (Miller et al., 2012). However, as the current research uses mixed methods, these disadvantages are compensated by the use of qualitative data.

4.3.2 Qualitative research design

As stated by Flick, qualitative approaches seek to ‘unpick how people construct the world around them, what they are doing or what is happening to them in terms that are meaningful and that offer rich insight’ (2007, p. x). Since I aimed to obtain information about teachers’ personal experiences of stress, data for the study was collected by semi-structured interviews, which fits well with the purpose of the study. One advantage of this approach is that it allows researchers to ‘explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject’ (Patton, 2003, p. 343).
4.3.2.1 Sampling for qualitative interviews

Participants for the qualitative semi-structured interviews were selected in two ways: (1) whether their responses on the online survey indicated that they either suffered from high stress or low stress levels, and (2) whether they indicated that they would be amenable to participating in a follow-up interview. A total of 26 respondents fit these two criteria and were contacted for further data collection. All those contacted agreed to participate in the semi-structured interview part of the study. Such a sample was expected to provide a variation in the perception of the respondents and hence provide the data for comparing how teachers with high stress and those with low stress coped with their respective situations. In turn, such a comparison was expected to yield information regarding successful and less effective coping strategies available to the teachers in the UAE; as well as elucidate the impact of a supportive environment on the teachers’ stress level.

The sample size of 26 was presumed to be substantially large, especially with respect to the qualitative nature of the research. It was therefore expected that very detailed, in-depth, relevant and exhaustive information could be obtained through the selected sample.

4.3.2.2 Data collection instrument

The interview schedule of the qualitative part of this study used open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are useful when it is essential for the study to gain in-depth and detailed information and to obtain the perspective of the respondents (Miller et al., 2012). Since the current study aimed at exploring and understanding the factors that cause stress, the coping strategies used by teachers and the availability of support for the teachers to deal with stress, it was found appropriate to use open-ended questions that can give the teachers an opportunity to express themselves freely. A semi-structured interview format is useful in allowing the interviewee to have the flexibility to explore deeper issues and to cross question the respondents to obtain better insights (Åkerlind, 2005).

4.3.2.3 Data collection method

The data was collected through the methods of direct personal interviews, as well as telephone interviews. The direct personal interviews provide an opportunity to the researcher to get detailed information from the respondents (Bryman, 2012) and also to obtain non-verbal and contextual cues from the face-to-face personal setting (Åkerlind, 2005). The contextual cues and body language cues enable the researcher to get a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the respondents, and hence enrich the research findings considerably (Miller, Mauthner, Birch & Jessop, 2012). However, since the sample size was considerably large and the respondents were dispersed across a wide geographical area, two-thirds of the interviews were conducted over the telephone. Telephone interviews suffer from the limitation of not being face-to-face and hence being rather impersonal when compared to the direct
interviews. However, telephone interviews provide the advantage of convenience of time and resources as both the researcher and the respondent can participate without expending any costs or time in travel and interview arrangements.

### 4.3.2.4 Data analysis

The analysis of the responses was done using the qualitative analysis method suggested by Tesch (1990). This process of analysis involves using codification of the responses into different categories, collation of all the data within those categories and then analysis on the basis of the framework from the literature review (Tesch, 1990). An advantage of the qualitative method of data analysis is that it allows the researcher to make use of the contextual cues and insert his perceptions regarding language intonations, body language, and other situational cues from the interviews (Creswell, 2003). Thus, the analysis is more comprehensive and inclusive of the whole picture. However, a disadvantage of the qualitative method is that it is subjective to a large extent, as the researcher operates at his or her own discretion while categorising and coding the responses (Creswell, 2003). This issue can be overcome by enlisting the help of a colleague or any third party member, who can go through the work of the analysis and eliminate any discrepancies or incidences of bias or short sightedness on the part of the researcher (Åkerlind, 2005). Another issue that can arise due to the qualitative analysis of the data is that there is a chance of researcher bias entering the process, where the researcher’s personal opinions and perceptions about the situation under study may have an impact on his or her analysis (Creswell, 2003). The researcher bias can be eliminated by ensuring that the researcher is self-reflective regarding his or her own opinions and that he or she has done considerable self-inspection so that while conducting the qualitative analysis, he or she can proactively guard against any personal bias from entering the analysis (Åkerlind, 2005).

### 4.4 Procedures

#### 4.4.1 Survey

**4.4.1.1 Online questionnaire development**

Because teacher stress research in the Middle East is non-existent, I was unable to locate any instruments that accurately reflect the working conditions of the present work context. Therefore, an instrument was created. Initially, I attempted to collect data about sources of stress through focus groups, but turnout was low on two occasions, so that strategy was abandoned. Finally, I contacted 15 teachers directly through email. These were personal contacts who I knew and they were representative of the target population (5 university EFL teachers from private universities, 5 university EFL teachers from semi-governmental universities, and 5 university EFL teachers from federal universities). Teachers were asked the following three questions:
1. What sources of stress do you have in the workplace?
2. What are some of the coping strategies that you may have employed to deal with stress?
3. Does your institute have any supportive activities for addressing stress in teachers?

These teachers then returned their responses via email, which were analysed and the most frequent responses were then incorporated into an online survey. One advantage of this approach was that the teachers were very trusting because they knew me and knew that their information would be kept anonymous and confidential, so their responses to my questions were both abundant and very candid.

Next, the insights developed in the literature review regarding the reasons and factors that may cause teacher stress, the coping strategies that teachers are likely to use in stressful situations, and any supporting factors that help them mitigate the stressful situations were used to develop further questions to add to the final online survey.

In addition to the preliminary email survey and literature insights, I also used the insights and findings from a previous study that I had conducted years earlier with university EFL teachers in the UAE (Aubrey & Coombe, 2011).

The final instrument consisted of a biodata section, along with the previous mentioned set of combined stressors. Because the study sought to collect data about the degree to which teachers find something stressful, the survey was mainly comprised of items that were rated using a six-point Likert scale (scored 1 to 6, or as not applicable) and was designed in accordance with the procedures suggested by Brown (2001), Dillman (2007), and Dornyei and Taguchi (2009). Likert scales ensure that participants' responses go beyond mere 'yes' or 'no' statements and Wellington (2000) asserts that it removes some of the fact finding aspects found in qualitative methodology.

However, before the actual survey was conducted, a pilot study was done to ensure the reliability of the instrument. The pilot study of the online survey was conducted with four participants. Several changes were made to the visual design in an attempt to make the online experience more user-friendly and one section was re-ordered so that it was easier to follow. The pilot study participants also suggested a few minor word changes that helped to make some of the items more coherent. These changes were incorporated into a final version that was then critiqued by two Ph.D. holders who are active in survey research. The final version was used without further revisions.
4.4.1.2 Sample development

The TESOL Arabia database was used to randomly select 150 teachers who were regular teachers and taught EFL classes. Once the contact details were accessed, only 134 out of the 150 were found to have updated details. Hence, these 134 respondents were initially contacted over email and sent a letter that explained the purpose of the study, along with a detailed set of instructions for completion of the survey and a confidentiality agreement form. The respondents were required to give their consent stating that they understood the purpose and nature of the research and also agreed to the confidentiality agreement. Once the consents were received, the respondents were sent an invitation letter that also contained a link to the online survey, which was made available for a period of ten days.

4.4.1.3 Data collection

The respondents accessed the survey and were able to complete it on an average of 15 minutes per person. The surveys were completed anonymously and were subsequently checked by the researcher for complete responses. A total of 21 surveys were missing more than 20% of the items on a section, mostly demographic information, and were discarded by the researcher. Of the 134 surveys that were received, 113 were completed in full and used for the study.

4.4.1.4 Data analysis

The data collected in this study was not complicated and was made available in real-time by the webware (online software) used to create the survey. Upon completion, the data was exported to an Excel format file and then imported into SPSS. The results were then checked for accuracy a second time and subsequently reorganised into tables when appropriate. The interpretation of the findings was done using both descriptive statistics and percentage charts and graphs.

4.4.2 Interviews

4.4.2.1 Interview questionnaire development

The questionnaires for the interviews were developed using insights from the literature review, the email survey of the 15 teachers (as explained in the section on ‘Online Questionnaire Development’ and my previous study with university EFL teachers in the UAE (Aubrey & Coombe, 2011). So, a similar approach to the development of the interview research instrument was undertaken as was done for the online survey development. However, since the aim of the interviews was to obtain detailed and in-depth information, the interview questionnaire used open-ended questions corresponding to three main themes:
1. Factors leading to stress among teachers
2. Coping strategies employed by the teachers
3. Institutional or social support available to the teachers.

Moreover, the questions were supported by prompts and additional questions that the interviewer used at his discretion.

4.4.2.2 Sample development

The sample for the interview was developed from among the participants of the online survey. Once the online surveys were completed, the individual responses were analysed and 32 teachers whose responses placed them in either a low stress or high stress cohort were selected. These teachers were contacted with request for participation in the interviews and were given information about the purpose of the research and confidentiality of the research. All teachers who were contacted agreed to participate in the semi-structured interview phase of the study.

4.4.3 Data collection

After obtaining permission from the University of Exeter and letters of informed consent, participants were given a copy of the interview schedule and asked to jot down their answers in brief note form. After writing down their own responses about the ways that they cope with stress, participants were then sent a list of common coping strategies. If any of the strategies on the list were also strategies that they employed, but forgot to write down earlier, then they were asked to add those to their notes for the interview. This procedure was used as it enabled the respondents to engage in self-reflection and think about their situational stressors, as well as their coping strategies before they came to the actual interview. Such an approach, where the respondent is somewhat prepared beforehand, helps in gathering more informative, accurate, and relevant data during the interviews (Elbow, 1986). It also helps in saving time during the interviews where the respondents are forthcoming with well thought out information (Elbow, 1986).

Participants were then interviewed using the interview schedule and allowed to use their notes during the conversation. Their responses were digitally recorded. Due to vast differences in geography, the majority of interviews were conducted by telephone and only one-third, or nine were conducted face-to-face. The interviews lasted between 40–60 minutes in length, the duration being determined by the interviewee. Copies of the interview schedule and a list of common coping strategies are provided in the appendices (see Appendix 4).

During interviews, care was given to avoid the phenomenon of power asymmetry and to incorporate member checks as a form of validation. Asymmetrical relationships pertain to situations whereby the researcher hears what they wish to hear or guides the interview in that particular direction (Nunan, 1992). As suggested by
Kvale and Brinkman (2009), all interviews incorporated friendly interaction between researcher and participants ensuring that the conversation was not unidirectional. In addition, participants’ comments, or my own interpretation of their views, were stated back to them during the interview process for confirmation. Kavale (2006) asserts that restating participants’ comments helps to decrease or equalise assumed relationships of power.

4.4.4. Data analysis

The individual interviews were conducted by the researcher and digitally recorded. The responses were then transcribed verbatim and read many times as a way of entering into the teachers’ perceptions of stress. Elbow (1986) refers to this as a process of self-insertion and asserts that it is a useful way of coming to know the participants’ experiences. After reading through and getting a general sense of the transcripts, the data was analysed more in-depth by using an eight step process as suggested by Tesch (1990, pp. 142–145).

Get a comprehensive overview of the entire responses
This can be done by reading all the transcripts carefully, more than once, and noting down any points that stand out to the researcher.

Start with individual respondents
Select one of the respondent’s transcripts and start reading it with the objective of fully understanding what the respondent is saying, both in terms of the explicit and the implied meaning of the responses. The meaning of the responses, any nuances, anything that requires further thought on the part of the researcher, are then noted in the margins.

Collate all information
When all the respondents’ individual responses have been analysed using step 2 above, it is time to make an overall list of the themes or the topics that have emerged. Then segregate these topics into different categories – topics that are common to most responses, topics that are unique, and leftovers.

Coding
This list of topics can be converted into codes which can be denoted by abbreviations. The next step is to re-read all the responses and then write the codes next to the appropriate segments. This exercise is expected to lead to the discovery of new topics or un-coded text that can further be included in the list of topics.

Categories
The topics that are thus obtained can be denoted by descriptive words for better ease of understanding and recall. The topic categories are then reduced by collapsing similar categories.
Final categorisation

The last step in category development is to make a list of the main categories and use appropriate abbreviations for the same.

Data analysis

Once the categories are set, all the data belonging to each category is assembled together and read together. This preliminary analysis is followed by an analysis of the data using the literature background and insights from previous authors’ research.

Recode, edit

Before the analysis is concluded, the categories can still be modified or changed and the data recoded if needed.

The above-mentioned steps were used to develop a sense of themes emerging from that data. These themes were labelled and then categorised. The final step was to compare these across all of the participants, noting the similarities and differences as to how the various aspects of teacher stress were perceived. Several of the codes were anticipated in consideration with the review of the literature. The analysis of the responses was done using the framework developed from the literature review. Once the data analysis was completed, it was found useful to enlist the help of two senior teachers who were acquaintances of the researcher, to go through the results. This ensured that any instances of personal bias from the researchers’ side could be eliminated and the findings and analysis were pronounced objective.

4.4.5. Position and the role of the researcher

In qualitative research, data is collected through an interviewer who may expose their own set of assumptions, biases, and personal values during the various stages of a research study (Creswell, 2003). Having worked at three institutions of higher education over a period of 10 years and having conducted one previous study in the UAE on stress and coping strategies, I had a number of preconceived assumptions at the onset of this study as to how teachers might respond to many of the questions that were asked. I was aware of many of my own assumptions and every effort was made throughout the study to completely suspend any judgement of the answers provided by the participants. This was crucial as researchers using qualitative data collection methods must remain neutral as regards to a hypothesis. To further ensure consistency, participants were interviewed using the same interview schedule throughout the research process.

4.4.5.1 Credibility and trustworthiness

The questionnaire was checked for validity by obtaining information from senior teachers regarding the main research questions – factors that lead to teacher stress, coping strategies employed by teachers, and support available to teachers to
combat stress. In addition, the reliability of the questionnaire was established through a pilot test that was undertaken with a sample of four respondents selected from among the researchers' own acquaintances. Further, the researcher ensured that the analysis was kept completely free from any personal bias by enlisting the help of two colleagues who cross-checked the analysis individually.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

4.5.1 Certificate of ethical research approval

The present study paid close attention to ethical issues. It began with a proposal that was reviewed by the Graduate School of Education of the University of Exeter. Permission was granted to undertake the research for the protection of the participants. The ethical issues addressed included provision of informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality.

4.5.2 Cover letters and informed consent

As suggested by in Creswell, (2009), all participants reviewed a letter of consent prior to being interviewed. This (a) identified the researcher, (b) explained the purpose of the research, (c) guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, (d) welcomed and thanked the participants, and (e) provided contact information of the researcher in the event that participants had any questions. Participants were informed that neither their names nor the names of their employers would be used in any publication based on this research. In addition, they were advised that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants agreed to their participation by signing the consent forms and were given a copy of the document to keep and examine.

4.6 Summary

This chapter describes the methods of the study of stress and coping strategies as perceived by selected EFL university faculty in the United Arab Emirates. The chapter described the ontological and epistemological considerations, research design, survey instrument construction, data collection, data analysis procedures and ethical considerations. The next chapter contains an analysis of the data, along with discussion of the research findings.
Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

Question 1: What sources of occupational stress do tertiary-level EFL teachers in the UAE experience?

5.1 Sources of teacher stress

5.1.2 Survey data

Demographic information

The sample consisted of 62% male and 38% female participants. The majority of the participants (61.1%) were single and never married, followed by married participants at 25.7%. Of the respondents 11.5% reported themselves as divorced while only 1.8% were widowed. A very large majority, consisting of 61.1% of the respondents stated that their mother tongue was English. Arabic was quoted as the mother tongue by 22.1% of the participants while the remaining 6.2% respondents reported other languages including Urdu, Malayalam, Berber, Farsi, and French. The majority of the respondents (54%) were between 41 and 55 years of age, followed by 25.7% who were older. There were ten respondents who belonged to the 36–40 range and eight in the 31–35 range. Only four were found to be between 26–30 years, and only one under 25 years of age. The sample consisted of diverse nationalities ranging from Americans (26.5%), British (21.2%), Australian (10.6%) and Canadians, to Egyptians (5%). Other nationalities included Indians, Jordanians, Tunisian, Irish, Pakistani, Iraqi, Emirati, Algerian, Syrian, Saudi, Palestinian, Moroccan and Poles. The respondents mostly belonged to the federal universities (61.9%), but some also worked for local government or semi-government universities (26.5%) and for private universities (11.5%). The majority of the respondents (77.9%) had a Master’s degree in TESOL/EFL/Applied Linguistics/English, while 19.5% reported having a doctorate in the same subjects. Another 19.5% stated that they had RSA/Cambridge/Trinity Diplomas while RSA/Cambridge/Trinity Certificate and PGCE were held by 13.3%. USA state teacher certification in TESOL/EFL was mentioned by only 6.2%. (A table of demographic information is presented in Appendix 5).

Sources of Stress

Analysis identified more than 20 sources of stress that received an average score of 3 and above on the 6-point Likert scale (1=no stress, 2=slight stress, 3=slight to moderate stress, 4=moderate stress, 5=moderate to excessive stress, 6=excessive stress). A full version of the table, both by rank and by category is presented in Appendices 6 and 7.
Table 2: Top 20 stressors by rank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stressor</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching uninterested students</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>4.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping students motivated</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last minute urgent announcement by administration</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top-down/undemocratic leadership style (university level)</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>9.7% (11)</td>
<td>13.3% (15)</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td>21.2% (24)</td>
<td>32.7% (37)</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers not being consulted about what's best for students or programme</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>9.7% (11)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
<td>15.0% (17)</td>
<td>38.9% (44)</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of a clear direction for the future of the institution</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>8.8% (10)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>15% (17)</td>
<td>19.5% (22)</td>
<td>31% (35)</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling that you can’t speak up freely</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>15.9% (18)</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
<td>37.2% (42)</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of open communication between administration and teachers</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>15.9% (17)</td>
<td>19.5% (22)</td>
<td>31% (35)</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration does not communicate clearly about important matters</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>15% (17)</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td>14.2% (16)</td>
<td>20.4% (23)</td>
<td>30.1% (34)</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum decisions made by administration and not by teachers</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>13.3% (15)</td>
<td>9.7% (11)</td>
<td>14.2% (16)</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td>34.5% (39)</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration does not value teachers' opinions</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
<td>9.7% (11)</td>
<td>15.9% (18)</td>
<td>23% (26)</td>
<td>26.5% (30)</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of collaboration between administration and teachers</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>15% (17)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>18.6% (21)</td>
<td>27.4% (31)</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration does not ask teachers' opinions</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>13.3% (13)</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>21.2% (24)</td>
<td>18.6% (21)</td>
<td>26.5% (30)</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching students of mixed ability</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>15.9% (18)</td>
<td>14.2% (16)</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
<td>22.1% (25)</td>
<td>27.4% (31)</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators who do not teach and are not in touch with classroom practices</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
<td>13.3% (15)</td>
<td>15% (17)</td>
<td>30.1% (34)</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>3.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support by administration</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>15.9% (18)</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td>15.9% (18)</td>
<td>15% (17)</td>
<td>26.5% (30)</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived lower status of English programme in relation to other departments</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>14.2% (16)</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td>13.3% (15)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>31.0% (35)</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration does not show interest in well-being of faculty</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>8.8% (10)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>17.7% (20)</td>
<td>15.9% (18)</td>
<td>26.5% (30)</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>3.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration does not care about teachers</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>8.8% (10)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>15.9% (18)</td>
<td>27.4% (31)</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going through a contract renewal</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>19.5% (22)</td>
<td>15.0% (17)</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
<td>14.2% (16)</td>
<td>28.3% (32)</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N/A: Not applicable
From the table, the findings show that all the 39 sources of stress were perceived to be higher than average, as indicated by the readings, which are all above the average score of 3.

The most prominent stress contributor was found to be ‘Teaching uninterested students’ at an average score of 4.59. This was followed by ‘Keeping students motivated’. Both these top stressors belong to the category of stressors that are classified in the questionnaire as **classroom teaching**.

The next two leading teacher stressors were identified as ‘Last minute urgent announcement by the administration’ at an average score of 4.38, and ‘Top-down/undemocratic leadership style (university level)’. Both of these stressors are identified to belong to the category of **leadership**. In fact, leadership-related stressors were found to occupy the next 5 to 13 spots on the list of stressors. These included ‘Teachers not being consulted about what’s best for students or programme’ at 4.3; ‘Lack of a clear direction for the future of the institution’ at 4.2; ‘Feeling that you can’t speak up freely’ at 4.19; ‘Lack of open communication between administration and teachers’ at 4.16; ‘Administration does not communicate clearly about important matters’ at 4.15; ‘Curriculum decisions made by administration and not by teachers’ at 4.13; ‘Administration does not value teachers’ opinions’ at 4.11; ‘Lack of collaboration between administration and teachers’ at 4.07; and ‘Administration does not ask teachers’ opinions’ at 4.06.

‘Teaching students of mixed ability’ at 4.04, is the 14th most stressful factor found for the surveyed teachers. This factor is found to belong to the category of **classroom teaching**. This was followed by ‘Administrators who do not teach and are not in touch with classroom practices’ at 3.99. This factor, as well as the next one, ‘Lack of support by administration’ (at 3.99), belonged to the **leadership** category of the questionnaire.

Only one factor was found for the category **profession** that made the list of the top 20 stressors for teachers. This factor was ‘Perceived lower status of English programme in relation to other departments’, and it scored an average of 3.92. The next two factors ‘Administration does not show interest in the well-being of faculty’ (at 3.91), and ‘Administration does not care about teachers’ at 3.87 also belonged to the category of leadership. The last description on the top 20 list of stressors was found to be ‘Going through a contract renewal’ at 3.87 and it was, again, the only factor that fell under the category of **teacher assessment**.

It appears clear that the majority of the top stressors were related to the problems and issues of leadership quality. Only three of the top 20 stressors belonged to the category of classroom teaching, and only one each to profession and teacher assessment.

### 5.1.3 Interview data

The following section presents qualitative data collected about the top ranking sources of stress named in the online survey. Twenty-six teachers participated in the
follow-up interviews and their responses were subsequently categorised into themes.

**Teaching Uninterested Students**

*Teachers have to instil a work ethic*

A predominant cause of stress in the classroom setting, as reported by seven teachers, was dealing with students who were not interested in their studies, or even in coming to the class. Absenteeism, failure to hand in assignments, and lack of responsiveness in class were cited as one of the most frustrating behaviours that the interviewees had encountered from their students. In most cases, teachers tried their best to empathise with the students, assuming correctly that their bad behaviour was the result of their upbringing. Even with the understanding of the root cause of student’s behaviour and actions, the teachers could not help but feel vexed and frustrated, as clearly seen in the following quote from a teacher.

*You know, it bugs me. I find it insulting. I find it distracting to some extent. But what I do is I focus on the 90 per cent of the class that’s mediocre to good, and I’ll let that inevitable 10 percent that’s spoiled go. I just do my best to keep them from getting negative. You know how they can do, they can get really negative and hostile and if you – if you do – I mean, that’s like my first semester. I alienated the students by maybe being a little too strict.* (Teacher 9, Lines 821–825)

A similar sentiment was expressed by Teacher 10 who said:

*Well, you know, I’ve got students who – they don’t want to sit still. They want to be late. They want to talk in the middle of – you know, you’re showing them something, they want to get up and use the bathroom. They want to talk with their friends. They are throwing things around the room. They don’t have – you know, oh, it takes them 20 minutes to settle down and plug in a laptop. They don’t want to…its – it’s frustrating.* (Teacher 10, Lines 486–490)

The above revelations highlight the fact that in some cases teachers have to face a very hostile audience and deal with students who are not only uninterested in studies but also disrespectful and belligerent.

*Teaching is one directional, takes additional time to prepare but students do nothing and time is wasted*

Four teachers were of the opinion that they spent a lot of time and energy on developing course material and planning for their lessons, but it all went to waste as the students were not interested. According to Teacher 2, these conditions create substantial frustration and stress among the teachers.
Well, if the students know that it doesn’t matter if they come late, if they know they don’t have to do any of the work, it just creates stress because you’re going through everything preparing, trying to make sure everything – yeah, you’re doing your best and – and you feel that – that you’re the only one, the only one with some – some of the students that are, you know, sort of doing – doing the work. (Teacher 2, Lines 384–387)

Similarly, another teacher highlights how teachers who are passionate about their jobs may end up being highly stressed out while trying to work out things for uninterested students:

I’m sure a lot of people find it difficult because they are passionate about what they do. And then when you walk in and the students aren’t interested or have a lack of motivation, they don’t know how to deal with it. There’s a way of doing it, and it’s a difficult thing to do. So I can see why some people would be frustrated because they’re trying to get through the syllabus and students aren’t doing anything, so it could make it difficult and be frustrating. (Teacher 25, Lines 285–289)

Students who were uninterested or misbehaved not only create a stressful and hostile situation for the teachers in the class, but they also demoralise the hard-working teachers who may have spent hours in preparing for their lectures.

**Teachers not in control of subject; English is forced on the students as a requirement and is not their choice**

Another cause of stress related to students not being interested in class was reported by four teachers as they stated the lack of interest in learning English could well be the cause of unruly behaviour of some students.

According to Teacher 4, the students may be interested in their subjects, but they do not like to study English and they do not feel obliged to study it even if it is part of their curriculum.

Yes. This – this – this really causes a lot of stress for me because students – some students are, for example, with English, some students have to take certain courses. There are certain university requirements when they are, you know, like majoring in fields that do not require English as the medium of instruction. In our university, for example, there are three majors like journalism, Shari’ah, Islamic jurisdiction and law. They study in Arab, but they have to take two or three courses in English, you know. And in that case, students feel that they are obliged to take these courses. (Teacher 4, Lines 300–306)

A similar experience is revealed by Teacher 15, who stated the following:

Sometimes – I mean, particularly with students who are learning English, whom I’ve taught before, that students are not really interested in the English language; they don’t really want to learn it, but of course, it’s part of the package. And so, they tune
out of English, but tune into business or study skills or IT or whatever. And so, sometimes they are made to do things, which [are] a bit of a problem, something that I realised and try to deal with in terms of electives. (Teacher 15, Lines 233–238)

The findings therefore highlight that dealing with students who have a preconceived notion that they do not want to study English, causes substantial stress on teachers who are tasked to see that these very students do obtain passing grades at least.

**Uninterested or not, teachers are held accountable by student evaluations**

Three teachers provided another source of stress, closely related to the behaviour of the students toward the teachers. According to these teachers, it was the teacher who was always blamed for the poor performance of the students, even when the facts indicated that students had low attendance, did not submit their assignments or were completely uninterested in the class. The problem is aggravated by the fact that many educational institutes encouraged the students to give feedback and rate their teachers, and these students may well try to make a scapegoat of the teachers. This is reflected clearly in the following quote from one teacher:

*What I – what I don’t like is I think – I think it’s quite common in universities here for a lot of thoughts will be set by students’ evaluations of teachers. These disinterested students who – who can’t – who don’t engage with the class will then complain that the class is boring. And you know, that’s a – that’s a pain. As long as you have some other students who are more engaged to giving you positive evaluations, then it’s – then it’s okay. But I know at UAEU they do seem to take lots of account from students’ evaluations.* (Teacher 3, Lines 283–288)

The teachers’ stress is enhanced by the fact that in spite of investing substantial amounts of time and energy, and being genuinely concerned about the welfare of the students, the teachers get bad ratings and evaluations from the very same students. This is reflected in a conversation that one of the teachers’ narrated that occurred between her and one of her students:

...And I just try to instil this work ethic and this – you know, that I’m sure they don’t have any role models or you know – I mean like I’ve said to one student, *You know, ‘if you don’t bring your books and materials tomorrow, then I’m going to call your mother,’* and she goes, ‘Well, you don’t know how to make my mother angry because she sleeps all day.’ Well, now that’s really impressive. Yeah. I said, ‘Well, actually it will be you making your mother angry because it will be because of you that I’ve had to wake her up.’ (Teacher 16, Lines 279–284)

These findings indicate deeper problems related to their home environment or parenting style at home, which manifests in terms of lack of respect for authority, lack of discipline or lack of interest and motivation to work toward improving their knowledge. However, it is apparent from the findings that the situation could be
stressful for teachers, especially those who are coming from cultures where students have a different work ethic and culture.

**Keeping Students Motivated**

*Students do not know why they are there, and the university as a holding tank*

Six teachers stated that a large proportion of their mental faculties and energy was spent in trying to keep the students motivated, although they were apparently not interested in their studies or academic progression. According to one of the teachers, the students’ motivation was low because they were not really aware of what it means to have academic knowledge, or why they need to have a career:

They are – they’re all very young. They don’t get adequate career counselling at school. I mean, even in medicine we have students who turn up and they say they want to be doctors, but they have no idea what it means to be a doctor. Some of them seem to barely know how long it’s going to take when they — when they arrive. I think that students are not motivated because they don’t really understand what it means to study. (Teacher 3, Lines 329–333)

Another teacher aptly summarised the attitude of many students toward education:

So, you know, it’s just like a – I mean, actually, I worked in a private university, and it was almost like – the attitude was like, ‘Well, I paid for this. Why don’t you give me this degree?’ you know. So in other words, ‘We put the money down. Now, give us the degree. Give us the paper.’ (Teacher 5, Line 383–386)

Another teacher highlighted why trying to keep the students motivated is stressful for teachers:

A lot of our job when you’re in the classroom is instilling a work ethic and instilling a sense that you’re a student at a university. You’re no longer in high school, and you’re expected to behave in a certain manner. I pity those teachers in high school because I’m just wondering what the heck is happening down there. But when they get to us, it is extremely difficult. And I think it’s a very stressful situation. (Teacher 10, Lines 503–507)

**Last Minute Announcements by Administration**

Many teachers had reported that a prominent cause of stress for them was the ever changing policies, protocols and direction that they received from the administration.
Time pressure/rushing/creates emergency

Seven of the teachers interviewed stated that they felt overburdened and underappreciated because their efforts were simply overlooked and sidetracked when new policies were randomly introduced. The following excerpt from one teacher illustrates the situation well:

Yeah. I mean, a bit but not so much last minute announcements but sudden changes and u-turns in — in policy. That’s — that’s what causes me stress. So I spend ages catching a student on plagiarism in their essay, and I write a report on that and I put a lot of work into it. And then somebody says, ‘Oh, well, we’ll just let them write the essay again.’ Argh, you know. It sort of devalues the work that I’m doing. It may be — I mean we — we have this ludicrous curriculum change from April to September. That’s not long to implement a new curriculum but, you know, the times — last minute announcements and changes — not — not the — apart from things like this curriculum where I think a lot of people would say, ‘What? April to September? You were lucky’. (Teacher 3, Lines 349–357)

Last minute and urgent announcements were also cited as the reason for high level of stress by another teacher:

This happens the whole time at – at the place where I work, and it’s extreme distressful because such urgent announcements can ruin all your plans and can change all your schedules and can make you – or push you and force you to go with the – with so much work and putting so much effort and so little time. So this is – this is enough to make you very stressed. (Teacher 4, Lines 412–416)

These revelations indicate a lack of continuity in policy making and implementation as well as lack of coordination between the management and the teachers. In turn, these pitfalls lead to enhanced stress among teachers.

Disrupts exam pacing

Four teachers reported that there was undue interference from the administration in the day to day operations of the classroom, including scheduling of exams. According to one teacher:

...suddenly the activities manager has organised a trip for our students, but we’ve got an exam tomorrow. Oh, take the exam another time, and you know, you’ve been planning it for weeks and you got it set down in a timetable and all the students prepared for it. But somebody out of a whim has decided the students can do something else. And because they’ve decided to do that, all – all your plans go out the window, and that’s really frustrating.... (Teacher 1, Lines 568–571)

Another teacher elaborated the scenario further:

You come in to class and say, ‘Oh, the students are not here today. They’ve all been
taken off to something in Abu Dhabi or Dubai for the day.’ Or you might find out the afternoon beforehand, ‘Oh, there’s a guest speaker coming in.’ And you think this would have taken – they would have known about these months ago. They just forget to tell you. (Teacher 2, Line 444–447)

There is a constant lack of control that teachers experience in their capacity as teachers; they are not able to stick to their schedules and they are not allowed to carry their initiatives to maturation. These frustrations lead to enhanced teacher stress.

**Puts classes out of sync**

Another problem that was reported was the disruption of the regular classroom schedules. Teachers were constantly asked to give away their classes as students were engaged in other activities or classes as decided by people in the administration. According to Teacher 10, this break in classes was harmful to the students as they were never able to learn at an even and continuous pace.

*It sends them out of sync. And then, of course, you know, what that means is that in the next level, you’ve got students who are like, ‘But Miss, we’ve done this. We’re bored.’ And then you’ve got other people who are – who don’t want to say anything because they haven't done it but then you go on to the next thing and they're lost because they haven't done the three steps to get there so....* (Teacher 10, Lines 581–582)

It was also frustrating for teachers as indicated by one teacher:

*So that – it’s – it's very frustrating when – when we are constantly being told, ‘Oh, send your class here. Send your class there.’ It – it is. It’s disruptive, and it’s very difficult to get through the curriculum.* (Teacher 10, Lines 573–575)

**Top-Down Undemocratic Style of Leadership**

*Teachers have no voice/feel forced/Devalued*

The teachers cited the fact that they felt devalued and unheard in their work places, and this caused them stress. For example, Teacher 3 noted that:

*So yeah, that is very frustrating. I mean, I mentioned earlier, you know, you go to meetings, you express your opinion, and then it is ignored. It’s quite clear at the next meeting that all the misgivings are just – are just being swept under the carpet. It seems to be the local management style.* (Teacher 3, Lines 407–410)

This whimsical decision-making is also reflected in the following excerpt by Teacher 10:

...we have a chancellor just like everyone else, and – and I don’t know how much the chancellor actually gets involved in what happens. He probably has a whiff of
something and – and says something in a conversation and slowly it begins to trickle down. But we have people that – that are much higher than our college who suddenly make decisions. (Teacher 10, Lines 685–688)

**Constant development of material**

One of the major sources of stress was the need to develop material for new subjects and courses to which teachers were randomly assigned. According to Teacher 7:

*They don’t find the person’s strength, and stick with and support them in that position. They move people around to give them sort of a refreshing – I don’t know what they’re thinking. But they move people about constantly. So, I’ve been, in the last 5 years, a business teacher, an IT teacher, an English teacher and I have a Masters in English.* (Teacher 7, Lines 842–845)

Teacher 7 also revealed that this constant need to change classes and subjects and develop new content material for teaching is even more magnified for the teachers of the lower grades.

Another teacher voiced a similar opinion:

*But the point of the – the point of the story is this top-down/undemocratic leadership. They never asked us. It’s just people in Abu Dhabi sitting back and saying, ‘Okay, what can we do this year? How can we change everything this year?’ So now a lot of teachers don’t spend a lot of time making detailed curriculum or detailed lessons. They keep them flexible because they know that within a year they’ll have to adapt their work to the next thin. Like I wouldn’t be surprised this iPad thing will finish and we’ll get the Galaxy, you know, the Samsung Galaxy. That will be the – they’ll throw an iPad and I’m bringing that. And then when that’s done, it will be something else.* (Teacher 22, Line 548–554)

**Decisions made to be trendy/for show and not because they are pedagogically correct**

Two teachers, among those who discussed the top-down undemocratic style, stated that they felt that the decisions that were being passed down to them were merely the result of some fads or for show – rather than being appropriate in the context of the college or the students’ welfare. One of the teachers explained how this situation was causing stress to him:

*And decisions aren’t made because they are pedagogically correct. They’re – they are not made because they’re what’s right for the students. They are made because somebody has told somebody. Somebody has read an article and says, ‘Oh well, we want to do this’. Somebody has come along and had lunch with someone and said, Oh, you know, if I had the money, I’d do this, and then someone goes, ‘We...we do have the money, we can do that’. And that’s how I think a lot of decisions are made. They are*
not based on any theory...they are just like, Hey, that sounds like a good idea, we’re going to do it! (Teacher 10, Lines 723–729)

Another teacher explained why decisions may seem to be made just for show or to be trendy. According to this teacher (Teacher 17), the HCT system is at the centre point of the government’s educational policy and it cannot be seen to fail at any cost. The decision-making is therefore an attempt to ensure that it (HCT) is hailed a success.

I think HCT cannot be seen to fail. It is the biggest system in the country. It is government system. It is providing education for those who may be aren’t quite gifted academically. If it fails, it’s the failure of – of, you know, of the system of the government, you know. They invested so much money in it. It cannot be seen to fail. Why – this whole idea of never letting things run course before you evaluate them, it’s always like – you know, because if there’s a sign of lack of success within a few months, scrap it and do something else. (Teacher 17, Line 654–659)

The above quote from Teacher 17 probably captures the rationale for these apparently hasty decisions and indicates that fear of failure motivates the decision-makers in trying out newer and newer fads and trends instead of letting things develop and moving forward in a systematic manner. The resulting impact on the educational outcomes in the institute is a topic for another research study dealing specifically with the state of education and decision-making in the UAE. Nevertheless, the quotes from the teachers do reveal the inherent frustrations and lack of continuity that teachers experience while operating in such an environment.

5.2 Analysis of stressors

The finding that all of the 39 stressors were scored as average or above average in terms of their influence, reveals that there are innumerable and competing sources of stress for teachers working in the UAE Universities. This fact is a cause of alarm as it indicates an immediate need for the university administration and educational policy makers to awake to the issue of teacher stress and to take steps to mitigate the problem.

Classroom Teaching Related Stressors

The leading stress contributor was found to be ‘Teaching uninterested students’ at an average score of 4.59. The reason for this issue being such a high stress factor could be that teachers need to have a sense of control and direction and require their class to work toward a goal in a systematic manner, all of which is challenged by uninterested students.

The second highest stressor, ‘Keeping students motivated’ was also related to classroom teaching, where the teacher is under pressure to perform in a manner that
keeps the students interested and motivated so that they achieve better results. Another stressor related to classroom teaching was ‘Teaching students of mixed ability’. The pressure to perform according to expectations and the awareness that the students may not have the needed motivation to work, may lead to a heightened sense of stress among teachers.

Since the top two stressors were related to the category of classroom teaching, it can be said that the classroom is a source of substantial stress for the teachers, and most of the stress seems to emanate from the attitude of the students. This is an important insight and one that can be utilised for developing better coping strategies for classroom teachers.

**Leadership-related Stressors**

Another prominent finding is that 11 out of 39 stressors belonged to the leadership category. For example, the next highest source of stress (after ‘Teaching uninterested students’ and ‘Keeping students motivated’) was found to be ‘Last minute urgent announcement by administration’. This factor becomes operational when the leadership lacks planning and organisational skills.

Other stressors related to leadership were ‘Top-down/undemocratic leadership style (university level)’ and ‘Teachers not being consulted about what's best for students or programme’. Both these factors highlight the autocratic approach taken by the administration and the leaders of the universities studied. The teachers also reported additional stressors like ‘Curriculum decisions made by administration and not by teachers’, ‘Administration does not value teachers' opinions’, ‘Lack of collaboration between administration and teachers’, ‘Administration does not ask teachers' opinions’, ‘Administrators who do not teach and are not in touch with classroom practices’ and ‘Lack of support by administration’. The presence of all these stressors reflects an environment of lack of trust and mutual respect between the administration or management and the teachers. The lack of trust and lack of collaboration and information sharing may lead to low productivity for teachers, which in turn may lead to additional stress.

The undemocratic leadership approach involves the top management not encouraging teachers’ participation in decision-making related to their own classroom teaching, or related to any other aspects of their jobs. Such a leadership style may well end up making teachers feel that they do not belong, or that they are simply tools in the hands of the management and have no say or freedom to contribute. In addition, the stressor, ‘Feeling that you can’t speak up freely’ clearly indicates the feelings of those teachers who work under a non-democratic leadership style. All decisions are made at the top and teachers are required to fall in line without voicing their own opinions. The above-mentioned factors relate directly to Hofstede’s third cultural
dimension: the uncertainty-avoidance index. This index examines a society’s tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. This is a dimension that measures the way a society deals with unknown situations, unexpected events, and the stress of change. Cultures that score high on this index are less tolerant of change and tend to minimise the anxiety of the unknown by implementing rigid rules, regulations, and/or laws. Societies that score low on this index are more open to change and have fewer rules and laws, and looser guidelines. Although there are no specific cited statistics on this index for Arab countries, it makes sense that given the number of teachers of different nationalities who participated in this study that this index might create mismatches between administrators and teachers.

Another prominent stressor was found to be ‘Lack of a clear direction for the future of the institution’. This factor suggests a low quality of leadership, which shows a failure to not only articulate a vision for the institute but also fails to communicate that vision or show direction to the teachers and other employees. Any employees anywhere would like to experience a sense of continuity and security, which is manifested in the form of a long-term vision of the future of the institute and their roles in that future. The fact that the respondents in this research felt stressed on account of a lack of clear direction for the future of the institution indicates a need for the management to change their perspective and vision.

Leadership is also considered as responsible for facilitating organisational communications for an easy flow of information and knowledge. This is crucial for decision-making and productivity. However, the respondents listed factors such as ‘Lack of open communication between administration and teachers’ and ‘Administration does not communicate clearly about important matters’ as one of the top stressors in their jobs. The lack of communication leaves scope for distrust and a hostile environment, and creates further stress for teachers. In addition, the lack of communication results in delays because of lack of information sharing and decision-making; this creates further barriers and difficulties for teachers to perform optimally.

The next two factors: ‘Administration does not show interest in the well-being of faculty’ and ‘Administration does not care about teachers’ also belonged to the category of leadership. These two factors are closely related to the concept of organisational trust. Teachers did not feel that the organisation cared for them or was interested in their well-being, and these feelings led to feelings of insecurity as well as alienation. Under these circumstances, the motivation levels of the teachers cannot be expected to be high. Coupled with the fact that the leadership style was undemocratic, the lack of a sense of belonging may lead to feelings of conflict in the teachers, and ultimately result in high stress levels.

These findings have highlighted the fact that leadership plays a very important role in creating a work environment that can lead to teacher stress. Alternatively, it
can also be said that effective leadership involving a more participative style of leadership, and open communication and cooperation between management and teachers can lead to lower levels of stress among teachers. In taking Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory into consideration, the results of top stressors under the leadership category relate directly to the first dimension, that of power distance (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). According to Hofstede, ‘power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.’ This dimension does not measure the level of power distribution in a given culture, but rather analyzes the way people feel about it. Low power-distance scores mean that a culture expects and accepts that power relations are democratic and members are viewed as equals. High power-distance scores mean that less powerful members of the society accept their place and realize the existence of formal hierarchical positions. As far as global statistics on the world’s nations are concerned, Anglo and Germanic countries have a lower power distance whereas countries in the Arab world show very high power distance scores (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010, p. 76).

**Profession-Related Factors**

It is noteworthy to mention that only one factor, ‘Perceived lower status of English programme in relation to other departments’ was found for the category profession that made it into the list of the top 20 stressors. The category profession included factors such as ‘Lack of job security’ and ‘Lack of job satisfaction’ which would seem likely to play a more crucial role in teacher stress, but were found not to do so in the current study. While all the stressors did score higher than average, it is surprising that factors like job satisfaction and job insecurity did not rank particularly high on the list of stressors. The premise for the case of these two factors being likely to be high on the list is that these are the most relevant work outcomes in many organisational behaviour theories. It is generally believed that people who are satisfied with their jobs and who feel that they have secure and long-term jobs, are more happy and motivated to perform optimally. On the other hand, people who have low job satisfaction and high job insecurity are likely to be highly stressed, since they neither like their jobs nor feel secure in their employment. However, in the current study, both these profession-related factors fell far below the rank of the top 20 stressors. In fact, the one profession-related stressor that appeared in the top 20 list was ‘Perceived lower status of English programme in relation to other departments’. This may appear superficial, but this factor seems to relate more intricately to job satisfaction and insecurity. When teachers work in a department that is considered of less value in comparison to other departments, they are bound to absorb a sense of low self-esteem and dissatisfaction with their jobs. The fact that the department is not considered as central does little toward creating a sense of job security, as the long-term future of such a department is also perceived as uncertain. Thus, it can be seen that teachers who believe that their jobs or departments are not ‘good enough’ may be more stressed than teachers who
have a sense of the contribution and importance of their departments and their roles.

**Teacher Assessment-Related Factors**

Only one stressor, ‘Going through a contract renewal’ was found to belong to the category of teacher assessment. Like the category ‘profession’, the ‘teacher assessment’ category also had several stress factors that were expected to play a more important role in constituting teacher stress. For example, factors like ‘Lack of transparency of teacher evaluation criteria’, ‘Being observed’ and ‘No release time for extra-curricular activities’ were found to be relatively low level stressors though lack of transparency in evaluation criteria is usually found to lead to employee discontentment and lack of motivation. However, it is probable that the contract renewal time and process are highly stressful for teachers since they are mostly expatriates and contracts renewal involves high stakes. For example, if a teacher’s contract is not renewed, he may not only find himself out of employment, but also without a residence or permission to stay in the country.

**Other Category Stressors**

The stressors related to external environment, teaching environment, compensation and benefits were also found to have scored above average, but these did not rank on the list of the top 20 stressors. It is again interesting to note that the stressors related to the category of compensation and benefits were not on the list of top stressors. This may be due to the lack of problems related to compensation and benefits that teachers face in the UAE.

This discussion has highlighted the significance of leadership on teacher stress in university settings in the UAE. Leadership quality is therefore the focus of any steps that need to be taken for mitigating the stress levels of teachers. Moreover, it was also seen that the top contributor to stress were two factors related to classroom teaching – uninterested students and the need to keep students motivated. This finding indicates a need for more teacher training related to the use of content and material in classrooms, and the approach taken to teaching. Finally, it was also seen that the low status of the English programme was a serious cause of stress, as was the teacher assessment-related stressor – contract renewal. Management therefore needs to be aware of the role that the status of the programme plays for teachers, and should help to develop an image of the programme that reassures them. Further, contract renewal process may also require reassessment in order to decrease teacher stress.

**5.2.1 Question 2: What types of support do teachers who exhibit moderate to high levels of stress feel that they need to cope with stress?**

In follow-up interviews, 26 teachers were asked what their employers could do
to reduce stress in the workplace. They responded with a variety of suggestions that they felt would be helpful, but also admitted that some of their ideas might be a bit too specific to their own contexts. The responses they shared that displayed some consensus were categorised into the following themes.

**Improve communication**

*Provide advance notice/Be more transparent*

One suggestion offered by eight of the participants was that employers should plan further in advance and make much stronger efforts to keep teachers informed about both short-term and long-term events. One teacher explained it this way:

*Some communication would be nice. To be informed of things that are happening, to know ahead of time, if possible, or to know when they can't tell you ahead of time, when they don't know what's going to happen, to know that they don't know what's going to happen helps, too, you know.* (Teacher 7, Lines 598–602)

Another expressed similar sentiments:

*Yeah. Well, it's very simple, you know? If they planned things ahead, and everything comes on time, okay, it should be done properly and without any hassle. And give time, proper time for people to do things properly. Most of the time we are asked to do things tomorrow, on top of everything else that we do. It doesn't make sense, you know?* (Teacher 19, Lines 451–454)

Overall, teachers felt that the administration needed to plan well in advance and that communicating these plans to staff was an important factor in reducing stress levels. Many pointed out that there needed to be a greater emphasis placed on piloting new programmes and technologies rather than just adopting the latest trends sight unseen. In general, teachers felt that there was also a need to take things more slowly so that they could be more thoughtful and reflective with the tasks that they were being asked to do and, in return, this would also give the administration a better opportunity to listen and reflect upon the information received.

**Improve communication**

*Involve teachers in important decisions*

Seven participants also thought that involving teachers in important decisions would help to reduce stress levels. To quote one teacher:

*I think it’s important that employers improve the lines of communication, not micromanage that much, not be so top-down. The other mistake that they made is that they impose decisions rather than consulting first. And they could also have produced a better working environment by getting more people to work together. They will have their own offices, not tend to isolate people. As you put more teachers together, they tend to be more collaborative.* (Teacher 1, Lines 386–372)
Another teacher explained their feelings about the topic this way:

*I think, you know, regarding policy decisions or decisions in general, teachers should be consulted because they are intelligent people, they’re professional people, they’re qualified people, and they are the ones who are at the ones who spend the most time with the students. So basically, making decisions without consulting teachers is a mistake, and it’s also very, very insulting I think for teachers if they’re not consulted. Decisions are made and then teachers don’t buy into it, and therefore it’s difficult to implement because the players in that policy they don’t agree with it or were never asked.* (Teacher 17, Lines 430–436)

Teachers felt that being involved in important decisions was essential to establishing a healthy work climate. Having their ideas incorporated into working educational policy was seen as a necessary ingredient for a programme to be viewed as truly being successful by everyone involved. Some teachers mentioned that when they were not consulted they also felt disrespected. This was because in some cases teachers believed that had gone through a difficult and competitive interview process in order to get their positions only to have opinions subsequently ignored.

**Provide training that is meaningful**

Another way that teachers thought that stress could be reduced is by providing better professional development opportunities. In all, six teachers cited this suggestion and all underscored the need to keep abreast of the latest educational advances. One teacher put it this way:

*I find using technology stressful and I think the training has just been a joke. I mean one or two days a year we have devoted to training. You’re supposed to have a mentor teacher but you’d always feel that you’re bothering them. I think that teachers should have training once a week or tutoring. I think tutoring would be the best thing if you had a tutor that you could just go to and say, ‘help, help.’* (Teacher 8, Lines 459–462)

Others emphasised a need for flexibility and relevance such as this teacher:

*I think, you know, if you can provide professional development for your staff, make sure that it’s something which they want to do. So it shouldn’t be too prescriptive. Of course, it should be something which is beneficial to the institution, but you should have enough PD available for them to follow their own interests in the benefit – to their own benefit and to the benefit of your institution. So sometimes, you know, you get people who are forced to do a PD session but don’t want to do it and that – that can be quite annoying and quite stressful.* (Teacher 17, Lines 423–428)

Teachers felt that keeping up to date is a very essential and necessary part of their jobs that shouldn’t be overlooked or thought of lightly. Some teachers mentioned that they felt that they were slowly becoming de-skilled because the types of professional development offered by their institutions did not really meet their needs, especially
with regard to keeping up with new technology. Others felt that the PD offered to them was really just for show by their institution and not something that was taken very seriously by administrators, or was often seen as less essential during a time when universities are looking for ways to cut back on their expenses.

**Be fair with workload and scheduling**

Teachers also indicated that the supervisors need to treat all workers fairly, especially in regard to workload, and equated that with helping to lower their stress levels. In all, five participants had similar points of view on the matter such as this teacher:

*I think I’ve said already about being fair. I think that’s very important. A manager has to be fair. They have to treat people the same. I decided to leave because I was getting much more work than others... I felt that was being taken advantage of and I didn’t want to work there anymore. I thought this is not fair. I don’t mind working hard and I don’t mind working harder than average, but it should be the same for everyone.*

(Teacher 19, Lines 486–496)

Another teacher was quick to point out the inequality involved for writing teachers and that teaching conditions should be the same for all teachers:

*One of the big stresses is the grading that you take home and try to keep up with. Some people only teach reading and there’s a huge difference [to] when you come home with 124-page typed essays to correct. We actually figured it out that it was like 80 hours of additional work... it's really frustrating that the grading time is not factored in when they do hours for teachers... So instead of teaching five classes, teachers with these courses should have only 3. It's not fair that we get the same amount of hours as other teachers.*

(Teacher 12, Lines 474–495)

The general undertone expressed by the participants was that they were involved in a two-tier system in which there were the privileged and less privileged. All five of these responses indicated that there were scheduling and workload issues that needed to be considered, and a few mentioned that these problems coexisted alongside other issues of staff inequality such as some teachers receiving better housing and office space than others. Some teachers felt that they were being taken advantage of by the administration because of their teaching conditions and wanted to see a more equitable work environment for everyone involved.

**Reduce class size**

The fifth and final theme to emerge from interviews was that of reducing class size in order to help reduce teacher stress. The five teachers who mentioned this theme all taught classes that contained between 40–70 students. Teachers, such as this one,
were all quick to point out the complexities of their situation:

*The most stressful thing that they need to change is the class size. That's the first thing. If the classes were reduced, we could do a much better job. I can teach 40, 50, 60. It doesn’t matter. But if that's the case, then I'll just lecture and then go home. How can students learn a language just sitting there without any interaction? It’s amazing how some administrators don't seem to know the difference between a language course and a history course.* (Teacher 18, Lines 562–566)

Another teacher put things this way:

*They're way too big. Next year they're going to take in 80 female medical students, and we can only divide them into two groups for language and communication, so that would be classes of 40. It's ridiculous. You can't even learn their names. You can't do the types of activities that you want to if you do. And how can you give them assignments if they need to learn how to write? And you've then got gazillions of things to mark.* (Teacher 3, Lines 167–171)

Participants stated that teaching large classes was problematic for them and that large numbers of students tended to multiply difficulties in the classroom and that required additional time and effort that they did not always have available. All teachers mentioned that they felt that increased class size goes hand in hand with increased workload, which refers back to one of the other themes that were previously mentioned. Further, some participants felt that the training they received as teachers was aimed mostly for that of smaller interactive classrooms that were primarily student centred, and that changing to a teacher centred style was a daunting and difficult context in which to adapt.

5.2.2. Question 3: What are the coping strategies of tertiary-level EFL teachers who exhibit low levels of stress in the UAE?

*Interview data*

*Coping strategies of teachers with low stress*

Follow-up interviews were conducted with 13 teachers with the aim of learning more about the types of coping strategies that they employ. The teachers having low scores from the survey who also self-reported having low stress were selected. Data from the interviews were arranged into themes and are presented in the table below:
**Table 3: Coping strategies of low-stress teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<th>1</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stay Organised</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Look at the big picture/ Put things in perspective</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Vegetate in front of the TV</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Avoid Confrontations</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Talk to people (friends, colleagues, family)/ seek support from them</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Listen to Music</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

This table shows the list of categories that were used for coping with stress by the 13 teachers interviewed, who were identified as low stressed teachers (these teachers were given codes between 14 and 26). The coping strategies are ranked from the most popular (those reported by more people) to the less popular ones (reported by a lesser number of interviewees). It should be noted that each interviewee could state more than one coping strategy, and the final rank of the strategy is therefore calculated using the total number of people mentioning it (even when the same people may have mentioned other coping strategies as well). Also, this table does not contain an exhaustive list, as some of the strategies that were quoted by three or fewer interviewees were omitted from it.

The table shows that ten strategies were ten used most often; these can be ranked from 1 to 6 (as several occupied the same rank as seen in the table). The most
popular strategy, cited by ten respondents was ‘Stay organised’, followed by ‘look at the big picture/Put things in perspective’, which was stated by eight people. ‘Exercising’ was a useful coping strategy as reported by seven respondents. ‘Vegetate in front of the TV’, and ‘Avoid confrontations’ were stated by six of the respondents. The next two strategies, ‘Talk to people (friends, colleagues, family)/seek support from them’ and ‘Take breaks away from negative situations’ were mentioned by five respondents. Finally, three more strategies were provided by four respondents, and these included – ‘Do not take work home’, ‘Listen to music’ and ‘Try to laugh’.

**Interview Results (Coping Strategies)**

The interviews were aimed at identifying teachers’ opinions on successful coping strategies that they used to reduce their stress levels. The teachers contributed a varied list of activities that they used to manage their stress levels. At times the teachers were very forthright, saying that they ‘tried to look at the bigger picture’ but at times they reported things like ‘understanding the others’ point of view’, ‘seeing the situation in its entirety’, ‘trying to have a bird’s eye view of the situation’, or ‘distancing oneself from the situation’. All such mentions were grouped under one common theme – ‘looking at the big picture’ for the sake of analysis. In a similar manner, the following ten themes were identified.

**Stay organised**

One of the major coping strategies offered by ten of the interviewed teachers was staying organised and preparing for eventualities in advance. The advance preparation included not only preparing for the actual proposed event (like classroom teaching, teachers’ meetings or other tasks), but also preparing for contingencies. The utility of such pre-planning and readiness to meet demands is explained in detail by one of the teachers:

*I make sure things are working. I get organised. I’m very organised so – and I write everything down so – and I plan basically. I always plan and I always have in mind if things don’t – you know, worst-case scenario kind of thing. So if, you know, if I plan for – for an event and I know something might happen during the week, I would have another plan B or C and so on.* (Teacher 26, Lines 151–155)

A similar approach to coping with stress was shown by another teacher who said: ‘I try to be organised in my computer and be on top of things like that might be a little messy but again – I try to know where things are and again with a mental review, I try to keep up to date, like, you know, keep on top of whatever is going on’. (Teacher 26, Lines 141–144)

Similarly, other teachers also revealed that they tried to remain on top of things, to plan beforehand and to prioritise. Being organised and keeping the deadlines in
control was considered to be a great way to stay away from stress due to pending and nagging issues. A similar attitude was recommended by another teacher as quoted below:

*I also do stay very organised...I’m always ahead of deadlines. And if we start off this semester and let’s say I’m responsible for tests three and the final, I’ll have them ready early just because I don’t want them hanging over my head and – so that definitely helps. And I definitely plan ahead and prioritise, I make what my husband used to call Fun Stock Lists where – you know that means that helps me stay organised and then pick things as I get them done.* (Teacher 16, Lines 115–119)

The findings suggest that the majority of the teachers who were successful in managing their stress used the strategy of being well organised and planning ahead for the unexpected. By planning and preparing for lectures, meetings, and upcoming events, the teachers were able to keep themselves on schedule and also find ample time to manage things in a relaxed manner.

**Look at the Big Picture/Put things in Perspective**

Eight teachers in the low-stress group reported using the strategy to focus on the bigger picture or putting things in perspective. For example, one of the teachers mentions that:

*Well, to me is, I always think about what do I want to achieve and what’s the goal for, for example, this semester, what am I going to do for my students and how can I give the best kind of learning experience for my students? And that’s what really matters and why am I here? Why am I doing this job? That’s you know the other thing. So yeah, having that big picture is like, it’s – it’s very important.* (Teacher 26, Lines 299–303)

By keeping the bigger issue in focus (‘what really matters is why am I doing this job’) teachers are able to stay focused on the more important things and this prevents them from placing undue importance on smaller issues. Another teacher also confirmed the importance of keeping things in perspective and always focusing on the overall picture:

*I take the big picture view, you know. I look at the big picture and keep things in perspective. That helps me a lot. I mean, put it this way. I’m an English teacher, you know. It’s not – as a guy said to me once years ago, ‘It’s not rocket science. How hard can it be?’ You know. You’re teaching English. You’ve done it for years, you’re qualified for it. I mean for God’s sake. Take the big picture. Don’t ruminate and get hung up on the small details.* (Teacher 22, Lines 76–80)
However, it can also be seen that taking the full picture into account may not be an easy thing to do, as acknowledged by another teacher: ‘...and [I] look at the big picture and put things in perspective. I always try to say things like you know, well, in ten years, is this going to be that big a deal?, you know? Although, sometime, it’s hard to step back and look at it like that...’ (Teacher 16, Lines 112–115).

Seeing the bigger picture is a very important coping strategy, but teachers need to consciously make an effort to do that and put things in perspective. Many times they may be tempted to get involved with the mundane issues and to fight petty battles, but the teachers who were successful in managing their stress levels were aware of the futility of taking such a narrow perspective and hence actively kept reminding themselves of the bigger picture.

**Exercising**

Exercising appeared as a recurring theme in the interviews of several teachers, though many of them did not explicitly note that they exercised as a coping strategy for stress at work. As one of the seven teachers who did explicitly link exercise with stress alleviation put it, ‘Sometimes I go for a swim, not for exercise, just for relaxation’ (Teacher 23, Line 231). It was also interesting to note that most of the teachers did indulge in some form of exercise and that they all realised the importance of staying alert and healthy. Moreover, the range of exercises ranged from a simple relaxing stroll in the lawns to extensive running, swimming and kickboxing or tae-kwon-do. Teachers liked to play formal or semiformal sports that involved social interaction like golf, as one of the teachers noted: ‘[I reduce stress] with exercise, I do that...playing golf plus I work out in the gym’ (Teacher 22, Line 177). Such sports provide the participants with not only the physical exercise, but also a chance to be socially active and interact and network with others.

One of the respondents also revealed that exercising helps him to lower stress levels, but in order to maintain an overall, permanent low-stress life, he needs to use other strategies like putting things in perspective or talking and venting with friends: ‘I go to the gym and work out. And after an hour of running and pumping and punching, it’s all gone. But that’s kind of a different – and that’s just relieving the overall daily stress’ (Teacher 20, Lines 186–187).

These findings highlight the importance of physical exercise as a way of relieving stress, even if exercising may give only momentary relief rather than addressing the stressful issues directly. The popularity of this coping strategy is reflected in the fact that almost all of the low-stress subjects mentioned exercising in some form or other. The fact that this coping strategy has been attributed only to seven respondents is because these seven explicitly mentioned using exercise as a stress relief strategy while others simply stated that they exercised regularly.
Vegetate in front of the TV

Six of the low-stress category teachers reported that they found relaxation in watching TV at the end of the day. ‘Vegetate in front of mindless TV programmes, yes, when you are too tired or stressed, you put something on and just – you watch it and even if it’s not interesting, it helps’ (Teacher 18, Lines 437–438).

Teachers revealed that the mere presence of something on the TV, even if uneventful and uninteresting, is sufficient to take their minds off their troubles at work and gives them some peace. Similar sentiments were expressed by another teacher who stated: ‘Vegetate in front of TV programme, yes, and unfortunately a far too common occurrence for me in the evenings. I switch on the TV for a couple of hours and just chill out’ (Teacher 17, Lines 330–332). Another teacher also revealed how TV is used as a source of relaxation, on weekends or holidays: ‘There are times when I might just take a day on the weekend and vegetate in front of the TV and just stay in my jammies all day. I just think that’s therapeutic to have a day of – you know doing that...’ (Teacher 16, Lines 123–125).

These comments from teachers highlight an important fact: that it is important for them to stop thinking about their stressful work day and focus on something else entirely, which is less taxing and does not require them more than a passive presence. TV fits such a requirement very well, and hence most of the teachers reported using their television time to forget their work and take their mind off their worries. While reading or relaxing on the couch can be useful, it is possible that TV is intrusive and prevents negative thoughts from impeding, even subconsciously.

Avoid confrontations

Another prominent coping strategy that emerged from the interviews was that teachers tried to avoid confrontations – with students, colleagues and with administration. This strategy was reported by six teachers. The rationale behind this strategy was probably because the teachers perceived that the local culture, values and ethics are different, and so, it is highly improbable that conflicts can be resolved amicably. For example, as one of the teachers mentioned:

*This is the way they do things...If a student misses one, two, three classes, then this is what the administration wants. Why do I get upset about it? It’s a way of, you know, it’s a way of compromise...and it solves the problem as I ask myself, if you go and worry about it and get anxious and raise hell about it, what are you going to do? You’ll just poison your life.* (Teacher 21, Lines 81–85)
The underlying belief among the teachers about the futility of raising issues and confronting students or administration is strengthened because of their past experiences, as revealed by the following quote:

Some people I work with like they are coordinators, and I try actually to avoid confronting them especially even if there is an issue where I can – I know I can – I’ve got an opinion on that. I even knew what they are doing is wrong, I try not to really express my opinion just for the sake of avoiding confrontation because that’s going to be unhealthy because I tried this before. (Teacher 24, Lines 235–239)

Avoiding confrontation is used as a useful coping strategy by other teachers as they realise how difficult it is to work in a hostile environment. One of the teachers mentioned that confrontations need to be avoided, even when they (the teachers) believe that they are right and can win the argument. This is clearly highlighted in the following quote from the interview of one of the teachers:

Confrontations, I try to avoid confrontations. I try to work things out or you know — because sometimes you see people having a bad day, and they might say something so I try to give them the benefit of the doubt because it’s no — you know, if you start an argument at work with somebody, it just makes it worse, you know, because you have to work with that person. So, I will try and talk with them or whatever and find a solution. (Teacher 25, Lines 156–161)

Confrontation avoidance strategies used by other teachers involved not voicing their opinions openly, and maintaining an emotional disconnect from the situation. As one teacher noted, ‘I tell myself to keep a distance between me and the administration too’ (Teacher 21, Lines 75–76); maintaining a healthy distance from others is found to be a useful coping strategy.

**Talk to People (friends, colleagues, family)/Seek Support from Them**

While avoiding direct confrontations at the workplace was cited as a useful coping strategy by the teachers who rated themselves as at low stress, venting and talking to others unrelated people was also found to be therapeutic. One of the five teachers who reported using this strategy elaborated on how he used this strategy to combat workplace stress: ‘[I] get together with my friends and we vent, and you know it doesn’t go any further. It’s just, you know, stays with them but it’s — that’s also helpful because a lot of them are in the same boat’ (Teacher 16, Lines 49–50).

Another way that talking to people (not necessarily for venting personal or professional issues) helps in reducing stress is by connecting with those who have a positive attitude, and avoiding those who have a negative one. One of the teachers explains this as follows: ‘I try to really socialise or mix with those who have positive way of thinking. Those that focus on the negative and complain I avoid’ (Teacher 24, 227–230). However, another theme that seems to emerge about this particular coping
strategy is that most teachers prefer to talk with their friends, rather than their family members: ‘Yeah, I talk with my friends, yeah. Not all – everybody. Yeah friends, just talk…that relieves stress definitely yes. Family, no. Friends, yeah, you tell them about things, happenings, and stuff like that’ (Teacher 18, Lines 243–245). One of the reasons behind choosing friends over relatives could be that many teachers are expatriates and they do not have access to their families. They are more connected to their friends due to physical proximity, and hence find solace in talking to those who are available on the spot.

This is reflected in one teachers’ conversation:

*Human contact is important I think for everybody and that you are going home to somewhere where there isn’t anyone because you are living on your own, that can – that can be a problem if you’ve had a bad day. So, I do think that’s, you know, it’s important to get out and meet people and, of course, we have social networking as well which can help to – get in contact with people.* (Teacher 17, Lines 192–196)

These findings show that teachers are aware of the importance of remaining connected with other people as a means of venting and letting go, and as a means of maintain a positive and healthy outlook on life. This strategy is especially useful for teachers who do not have close family or relatives staying with them.

**Take breaks away from negative situations**

Taking breaks per se, is found to be a useful strategy for lowering the work place stress by five teachers. This is one of the most effective ways by which teachers who reported themselves to be low on stress, were able to pace their work and keep a relaxed and positive approach to completing their tasks. The importance of taking breaks is emphasised in the following quote by one of the teachers:

*A lot of people I think feel guilty taking breaks so they feel worse after the break than they get, you know, before. So, it’s kind of self-defeating, so I don’t do that. I take a break. Right now I am on a break and, I don’t care what’s come up.* (Teacher 22, 190–192)

Another teacher too revealed that taking break is a useful strategy for coping with daily stress: ‘Then take a few moments for a quiet times…have a break …it helps a lot’ (Teacher 18, Line 432).

It was also seen that taking a break helped people to lighten their work load and to ensure that they do not burn themselves out. As seen in a quote from one teacher, taking a break was considered to be important even when the work was not stressful and the respondents liked doing it:
If I’m really into – into something I’m doing at work I can just go with it for hours. But I will tend to, you know, make sure that I stop doing what I do, go over and interrupt somebody else to talk about anything. Sometimes, I’m in Knowledge Village, not often but every now and then I just go down to the library and chat with the library staff, go for a walk to the Knowledge Village, just up and down, you know, 10 minutes. (Teacher 17, Lines 350–355)

Moreover, the respondents also revealed a wide array of approaches to taking breaks. It could be a coffee break, a stroll in the lawns or chatting with acquaintances; it could simply be disconnecting with the negative situation as one of the respondent said:

_During stressful periods, I tend to take breaks or take time-outs away from the situation. I don’t think it’s helpful to remain and to be immersed in it and be caught in a negative response. And so, if and when it is applicable, I often take breaks to come away from that environment. And that might not mean necessarily going very very far, but actually just coming away from that environment and taking some time to actually relax, sometimes to think/rethink, and sometimes to just break away from that situation as it may or may not be in my control_ (Teacher 15, Lines 22–28).

The interviews have shown that the concept of break as a coping strategy is rather versatile. People use breaks to break away from negative situations, to pace their work or to simply give themselves a little boost in order to stay stress free.

**Do not take work home**

Another coping strategy that was highlighted by four teachers was that of not taking the school work or stress home. This was quoted by respondents as a difficult thing to manage; as teachers most of them were required to put in some hours from home as well to combat the workload of assessing the papers etc. But, it is also quoted as one of the most effective strategies for coping with stress, as seen in this quote:

_I guess try to leave work home – try to leave work at home. You know, when it’s time to go home, it’s time to go home. There are days where I do work at home because as a teacher, we all make marking and stuff like that. There is a lot of time where I try to make time for my family, and I try to have time to go out with my friends, and we golf once a week. So those kinds of things help as well._ (Teacher 25, Lines 115–119)

Another teacher revealed a similar approach to managing work and life balance:

_I do try to keep work-stuff at work (at school) as much as possible, and as teachers, of course, we do marking at home and we tend to check our email and this kind of things. But as much as possible I try to maybe spend an extra hour at work and get things finished rather than bring it home with me._ (Teacher 17, Lines 34–37)

The importance of separating work life from home is further highlighted by another teacher who mentioned:
I think the big thing is that you make a clear separation between your work and the rest of your life. I think you have to learn to say okay, I’m finished for the day, I’m going home, and then do something completely different. And that’s something I’ve learned over the years because when I was younger, I wasn’t actually able to do that: and that, you know that anxiety, that stress you have during the day, you bring that home and it affects the whole family. (Teacher 14, Lines 41–46)

The interviews have revealed that the teachers are aware of the role played by their ability to strike a balance between work and personal life and their stress levels. Teachers who were successfully able to manage their stress levels were the ones who made a conscious effort to stay focused on the separation of their work and personal life and who ensured that they did not take work home with them every day. A clean break from work at the end of the day was therefore considered to be a healthy strategy for coping with stress.

**Listen to music**

Another recurring theme that emerged in the interviews was the role played by music in relieving stress among teachers. It was noted that almost all the low-stress level respondents mentioned that they liked to listen to music, but only four mentioned using music in an intentional manner as a coping strategy. According to one teacher, free time is used to relax by listening to music: ‘And sometimes, I don’t meet people in the morning so I try to listen to music, and I try to walk in a nice green area’ (Teacher 24, Lines 66–67).

Another teacher expressed a similar sentiment:

*Listen to music, yes. I love music....well you know, about music, when I’m really bored of doing something, I go to the YouTube and I just watch a clip of a song that I really like because sometime I—when I like a band I see them perform on....generally music makes me feel more comfortable and relax* (Teacher 19, Lines 412–415).

Similarly, another teacher stated that he uses music as a means of relaxation and stress relief: ‘I tune into music sometimes when I am on a break, and then...when I am driving and even at home, when I come back I just up my music system’s volume while I am changing or relaxing on the sofa’. (Teacher 25, Lines 192–193).

The low-stress teachers were therefore found to use music in an attempt to manage their moods and to reduce their work-related stress. The teachers reported listening to a wide variety of music, ranging from classical to rock and punk to the latest genres, and they also revealed that they had their favourite times for listening to music.
Try to laugh

Laughter or a sense of humour was stated as one of the most useful coping strategies by four teachers. One teacher recounted how he used fun and light-hearted banter as a way to start the class and set a relaxed teaching atmosphere:

And once I walk to the classroom, I just try to have fun, to put myself actually in good mood and then that would be reflected on the students. And I talk about silly things, like what did you have for breakfast or what did you eat, you know, and so on. So I just try to put also the students in good mood. When I feel that my students are in good mood; that also reflects on. I mean, I like that very much, yes. And then, that’s it. I think about holidays and I look at travel books and magazines, all of that beside me handy. And I look at like pictures of beaches and beautiful places and, yeah....
(Teacher 24, 141–147)

The teachers were of the opinion that maintaining a good sense of humour was equivalent to maintaining sanity, as it helped them to lighten the situation and also to minimise their worries and stress. This is reflected in one teacher’s response: ‘Sense of humour, that’s very important, very important. You have to have a sense of humour, otherwise you just lose your, you know, you lose the sense, you know, what do you call it? The commonsense or whatever, you lose your mind’ (Teacher 18, Lines 432–434). The teachers who used their sense of humour to cope with stress found that it was a useful strategy in a variety of situations, ranging from classroom teaching to difficult administrators and competitive colleagues.

5.3 Discussion of coping strategies

The aim of the current study was to understand how teachers, who show a low level of stress, are able to manage their stress. The concept of coping, as discussed in the literature review, is elusive and subjective as different people find solace in different approaches and strategies (Somerfield & McCrae, 2000). However, as Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as a single behaviour, or a set of cognitive and behavioural efforts to combat situations and demands that go beyond one’s regular faculties and resources, coping strategies can be manifested in a variety of ways. This is also witnessed in the interview data where it appears that there is no one formulaic strategy that can be used by everyone to cope with stress. Instead, there are a whole gamut of activities, approaches and behaviours that are used by teachers to manage their stress levels.

The participants provided an array of coping strategies that they used either as a conscious attempt to combat their workplace stress, or as a learned but implicit response to stress. In either case, the coping strategies that they were employing helped them in managing their work lives in a more effective manner as they could perform with less anxiety and stress in their daily lives. Even though there is no one specific formula for combating stress and all effective strategies are only subjectively effective, it is still possible to categorise the reported strategies into two basic types –
those that are palliatives and those that are direct action strategies (Hartney, 2008). The direct action activities are those that target the root cause of the problem, or which help to make changes to the situation in a direct manner. Staying organised and engaging in direct and clear communications are considered to be the most useful direct action strategies for managing stress (Kyriacou, 2001). In the case of the teachers interviewed, many of the low-stress teachers did understand the importance of getting organised, and following a voluntary discipline and schedule so that they stay ahead of deadlines and are not overwhelmed by last minute tasks or pressures. Teachers who were able to prioritise their work and make long-term plans as well as planning for contingencies were found to show a lower stress level. Staying organised and focused on the task requirements has been recognised by scholars like Hartney (2008), Kyriacou (2001). According to Hartney (2008), people who manage their time effectively and plan ahead are more likely to have lower stress levels. Similar findings were found in the interviews of the respondents, where teachers who believed in prioritising, and effective resource allocation of their times and energies were found to exhibit lower stress. While, the available literature indicates that a more direct and open communication or engagement within the context of the stressful situation is an effective coping strategy (Huxley, Freeman & Frydenberg, 2004), the current research findings contradict this. It was seen from the response of several teachers that they preferred to do just the opposite – instead of engaging directly with the situation or embarking on direct communications, they preferred to avoid confrontations as a means of coping.

While the findings may belie the empirical evidence from different contexts (that direct communications, instead of avoiding confrontations is the effective way of managing stress), it is possible make sense of these findings if they are interpreted in the light of the context of the UAE. In the UAE, there is a high power-distance culture, where the difference in the status of teachers vis a vis the administrative managers, native colleagues or native students is low. In such a setting, direct communications may not be encouraged and may even be considered as defiance of authority or protocol. This can land the teacher in more serious problems. Further, it is also possible that in the local culture, a top-down approach to management is popular, which means that the teachers need to be compliant and conciliatory in order to retain their jobs. The local cultural context therefore makes it important for the teachers to acknowledge the futility of direct communications, and hence they resort to the strategy of avoiding confrontations. By avoiding confrontations, the teachers intend to reduce tensions and not engage in situations that may lead to power struggles. In the context of the UAE, it can be said that avoiding confrontations is a useful and effective strategy for coping with stress.

In addition to the direct strategies, there are several palliative strategies reported in the literature, which were also mentioned in the interviewed teachers’ narratives. For example, one of the most popular strategies used was to ‘see the larger picture or to put things in perspective’. This was a simple strategy where the teacher
was able to focus on their real purpose or objective – teaching students or earning money – and minimising the mundane issues. It was with the focus on the bigger picture that they were able to ignore the impertinence of students, or the attitude and behaviour of the management. By putting things ‘into perspective’, the teachers were not trying to make changes to the situation, but simply trying to alter their view of the situation and to modify that view to make it more palatable. This was an extremely useful strategy as often the classroom setting, the management and leadership behaviour, and the institutes rules and regulations are beyond the control of the teachers. All that the teachers can do is to accept the circumstances as they are and remind themselves of the overall reason for their being in that position. A similar pattern has been reported in the research by Huxley, Freeman and Frydenberg (2004), where it was found that teachers were able to alter their stress levels by re-framing the situation, and readjusting their own perception.

Another palliative strategy that has been reported by several scholars including Reynolds, Taylor and Shapiro (1993), Hartney (2008) and Kyriacou (2001) involves talking to sympathetic others who may or may not be in a position to help solve the problems. Talking to others, and especially to friends who can also empathise, has also been reported by the interviewees as one of the most important strategies they employ. Simply talking to sympathetic others appears to provide a release for the teachers, which helps in taking the pressure off and prevents stress from escalating. Several teachers stated that they sought out close friends or spouses to discuss stressful work place scenarios – simply having the other listen to them was cathartic. Other strategies quoted by teachers included exercising and relaxing with music; both appear to have a substantial impact on stress management. Exercising is found to lead to the release of stress alleviating hormones in the body and, as such, has an established utility as stress reliever. Listening to music and indulging in other activities that give happiness and peace of mind – like participating in sports, reading, writing or meeting with friends, have also been found to relieve stress according to Huxley, Freeman and Frydenberg (2004) and Hartney (2008).

Another important strategy that was revealed in the interviews was striking a balance between work and personal life. By compartmentalising and ensuring that work does not intrude unduly on one’s personal life or encroach on personal time, teachers were better able to strike a balance in their lives. Teachers who rated themselves low on stress reported that they made an effort to ensure that they finished their day’s work within work hours and then went home with an open mind to enjoy their personal time. Even during the day, the low-stress teachers were able to manage their work and breaks well. They would fit in rewarding breaks such as a short stroll on the greens, a quick visit to the library to chat with friends, or a sneak peek at an online clip – breaks that immediately refreshed them and energised them to do their work with more focus and effectiveness. Moreover, low-stress teachers also realised the importance of distancing themselves from problematic situations, or take breaks from negative situations by focusing on the positive aspects of life. These
strategies for achieving work life balance, and creating distance from negative situations and people, have not been well-documented in the literature, although they are supported by information popularly available and are considered to be matters of general knowledge.

These interviews have revealed the importance of using coping strategies for managing stress levels among teachers. It can therefore be inferred that the teachers who had a low level of stress were able to manage their moods and moderate their subjective experiences of stress using different strategies in a very conscious and intentional manner.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter will summarise briefly the research main findings and implications of the study. It will make recommendations for future research and decreasing the stress levels that EFL teachers in the UAE may experience. It will also briefly look at my thesis journey, and what I have learned as an educator and researcher in the field of TESOL during the course of this research.

6.1 Summary of Main Findings

The overarching purpose of this research was to empirically investigate the main sources of occupational stress that tertiary EFL teachers in the United Arab Emirates experience. A secondary focus was on identifying coping strategies that EFL teachers exhibiting low levels of stress use successfully. In addition, this study sought to investigate what types of support were needed for EFL teachers who exhibited moderate to high levels of stress.

6.1.1 Research Question 1: What sources of occupational stress do tertiary-level EFL teachers in the UAE experience?

From the results from this study, it appears clear that the majority of the top stressors for EFL teachers in tertiary-level institutions of the UAE were related to the problems and issues of leadership quality. Only three of the top 20 stressors belonged to the category of classroom teaching, and only one each to profession and teacher assessment.

The leading stress contributor was found to be ‘Teaching uninterested students’. The reason for this issue being such a high stress factor could be that teachers need to have a sense of control and direction and require their class to work toward a goal in a systematic manner, all of which is challenged by uninterested students. The second highest stressor, ‘Keeping students motivated’ was also related to classroom teaching, where the teacher is under pressure to perform in a manner that keeps the students interested and motivated so that they achieve better results. Another stressor related to classroom teaching was ‘Teaching students of mixed ability’. The pressure to perform according to expectations, and the awareness that the students may not have the needed motivation to work, may lead to a heightened sense of stress among teachers.

Since the top two stressors were related to the category of classroom teaching, it can be said that the classroom is a source of substantial stress for the teachers, and most of the stress seems to emanate from the attitude of the students. This is an important
insight and one that can be utilised for developing better coping strategies for classroom teachers.

Another prominent finding is that 11 out of 39 stressors belonged to the leadership category. For example, the next highest source of stress (after ‘Teaching uninterested students’ and ‘Keeping students motivated’) was ‘Last minute urgent announcement by administration’. This study has highlighted the significance of leadership on teacher stress in university settings in the UAE.

6.1.2 Research Questions 2 & 3: What are the coping strategies of tertiary-level EFL teachers who exhibit low levels of stress in the UAE? What types of support do teachers who exhibit moderate to high levels of stress feel that they need to cope with stress?

The interview data in this study shows that there appears to be no one single formulaic strategy that can be used by everyone to cope with stress. Instead, there are a range of activities, approaches, and behaviours that are used by teachers to manage their stress levels. In terms of support needed, EFL teacher responses were varied.

The coping strategies employed by teachers in this study helped them in managing their work lives in a more effective manner as they could perform with less anxiety and stress in their daily lives. Even though there is no one specific formula for combating stress and all effective strategies are only subjectively effective, it is still possible to categorise the reported strategies into two basic types – those that are palliatives and those that are direct action strategies.

As far as support needed, EFL teachers in this study cited more open communication and more input into decisions that directly have an impact on them to be the two most important pieces of support needed to make life easier and less stressful.

6.2 Research Limitations

6.2.1 Participants

The data obtained in the present study was self-reported and taken at face value. The answers provided by both the online survey and through interviews were taken as true and there was no way for the researcher to independently verify the responses. Participants may have exaggerated some of their responses, while it is possible that others may have forgotten pertinent details altogether. With self-reported data, there is also a chance that some of the responses may have been influenced by how a participant felt on a particular day. If a participant encountered stressful events just prior to participating in
the survey or an interview, then their responses may have been reported as more negative.

In addition, for some, the topic of stress may have been viewed as a social or workplace stigma and as something that is not to be shared in public. Being stressed is a sensitive topic; some teachers may neither have wanted to fully admit that it was a problem for them nor wanted their employers to be aware of their feelings. While every attempt was made to put the participants at ease and assure them of ethical conduct at all times, there were a few interviews where participants appeared too embarrassed by the topic to reveal their personal details in-depth. This was revealed by the respondents themselves who explicitly expressed their concern about their identities being revealed by the research.

6.2.2 Data collection and analysis

The quantitative research used an online survey method which suffered from the limitations associated with this method of data collection. This included the disadvantages of getting unfinished surveys from the respondents, and the restrictions of answers that could not be interpreted using any contextual input. Another possible limitation might be the presence of certain biases, namely acquiescence bias or prestige bias, both of which are common in questionnaire research.

6.3 Implications and Recommendations

During interviews with teachers, comments regarding workplace stressors as well as coping strategies have lead me to consider ways of improving the current workplace environment for EFL teachers in the United Arab Emirates. The following sections will highlight implications and recommendations for major stakeholders in the educational environment, namely, teachers, administrators and students.
6.3.1 Teachers

The major recommendations for teaching faculty centre around two different areas: (1) general overall health and well-being and (2) general overall workplace focus. Based on the results of this study it is recommended for EFL teachers suffering from the effects of stress in the workplace to take care of themselves physically, psychologically and emotionally. Eating the right things, getting enough sleep and engaging in regular exercise were considered crucial for managing stress levels. Additionally, remaining focused on what is important (students) and what you have control of (your classroom) is another recommended strategy for staving off burnout from high stress levels. A final suggestion for teachers is to avoid what one participant called ‘administrivia’ or gossip as this practice tends to encourage a negative outlook.

6.3.2 Administrators

Most recommendations for administrators dealt with leadership style and practices as well as the need for increased transparency. Teachers in this study expressed a desire to have administrators who practice more democratic leadership styles. For example, teachers wanted to be consulted before decisions were made about issues that directly affect them (e.g. calendar, vacation dates, curricular and assessment procedures). Teachers also expressed dissatisfaction with last minute announcements and suggested that these be kept to a minimum. It was also noted that administrators needed to know the conditions under which teaching faculty worked and expressed an interest in having administrators make visits to their classrooms so that they could accurately gauge the classroom climate and observe student behaviour first hand.

6.3.3 Students

Recommendations directed at students varied. A common theme was the issue of positivity. Teachers indicated in this study that the attitudes of their students toward learning English had a great impact on their practice. Teachers requested that if students want to be respected then they should show respect to their teachers. They also suggested that if a student was truly against learning English, they should consider the many other options open to them for their future career plans, namely, the police or the military. A final recommendation was put forward by teachers concerning the Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs). Teachers pointed to the importance of the SETs as a mechanism for receiving feedback on their teaching. However, in many cases, they made mention that students used these SETs to get ‘revenge’ on teachers for poor grades.
6.4 Suggestions for Future Research

The present study on the sources of stress and their impact on tertiary-level EFL teachers in the UAE, and successful coping strategies identified by teachers who exhibit low levels of stress, has brought to the fore some areas that merit further empirical investigation. There is a general need for more studies undertaken at the tertiary level in all contexts, not just the EFL context in the UAE. Most of the literature to date has focused on stressors encountered by teachers in the primary and secondary schools. There is also a general dearth of studies on EF/SL teachers, so more research needs to be done with this demographic. The knowledge base would also be expanded with studies investigating the impact of conflict resolution training as well as stress management instruction and their effects on teachers’ stress levels. The role of emotions on stress levels or what O’Connor (2008) terms ‘emotional labor’ would be another very interesting thread of research.

The field would benefit as well from investigating other variables that might affect teacher stress levels. Among them include the subject matter a teacher delivers (i.e. listening, reading, writing, speaking), the type of English language teaching (i.e. general, academic, ESP, IELTS or TOEFL prep). Another important area for further inquiry is a more complete examination of teacher stressors and their relationship to cultural factors (i.e. Hofstede’s cultural dimensions). Two of the cultural dimensions (power distance and uncertainty avoidance) were found to be relevant to stressors found within the category of leadership style and practices. Others might be found to have an impact on different elements of teacher stress.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical approval

Certificate of ethical research approval

STUDENT RESEARCH/FIELDWORK/CASEWORK AND DISSERTATION/THESIS
You will need to complete this certificate when you undertake a piece of higher-level research
(e.g. Masters, PhD, EdD level).

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor
and finally by the Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site:
http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines/ and view the School’s statement on the GSE student
access on-line documents.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR
COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). DO NOT
COMPLETE BY HAND.

Your name: Jonathan Add Aubrey
Your student no: 540027507
Return address for this certificate:
Jonathan Aubrey
Univ. of Sharjah
Dept. of English Language & Literature, W-3
P.O. 27272
Sharjah
United Arab Emirates

Degree/Programme of Study: Ed.D. TESOL
Project Supervisor(s): Dr. Susan Rely, Dr. Christine Coombe
Your email address: teacher.jonathan@gmail.com
Tel: +(971) (50) 728-4007

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis
to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed: Jonathan Aubrey
Date: 8 Feb 2011

NB: For Masters dissertations, which are marked blind, this first page must not be included in your
work. It can be kept for your records.

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee
updated: July 2011
Certificate of ethical research approval

Your student no: 540027507

Title of your project:

An Investigation of Occupational Stress and Copying Strategies Among Tertiary-level EFL Teachers in the United Arab Emirates.

Brief description of your research project:

Although teaching is often described as a stressful profession, the phenomenon of stress in teaching is not well understood. The purpose of this mixed method study is to identify and explore the sources of occupational stress in selected EFL teachers and the types of copying strategies that they employ. Extrapolating from the data collected, I hope to uncover information relevant to reducing stress among EFL teachers who work in university settings.

Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):

All participants will be adult EFL teachers who are employed in private, semi-government and federal universities.

Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:

a) informed consent: Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents. An example of the consent form(s) must accompany this document.

All participants will be issued a letter of informed consent prior to being interviewed, which will, (a) identify the researcher, (b) explain the purpose of the research, (c) guarantee confidentiality and anonymity, (d) welcome and thank the participants, (e) provide contact information of the researcher in the event that participants have any questions, and (f) note that participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time should they wish.

b) anonymity and confidentiality

The researcher will ensure that the participants will not be identifiable. Names will be changed and the institution at which they work will not be stated. All interview transcripts will be returned to the participants for verification prior to using the data.

Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

Data Collection

Data will be collected in three phases:

Phase one: Focus groups

The researcher will conduct a focus group consisting of a random sample of university EFL teachers. The primary purpose of this will be to determine the sources of stress that are relevant in this context.
Phase two: Survey

Using the themes that emerged from phase one, the researcher will construct and administer an online survey to a convenience sample of university EFL teachers. The purpose of the survey will be to rate various occupational stressors and identify stress levels.

Phase three: Interviews

Based on the results of the survey, the researcher will conduct both face-to-face and telephone interviews with participants who exhibit low to moderate levels of stress, and moderate to high levels of stress. Participants for interviews will be selected from those who answered an optional section of the survey that requests contact information.

Data Analysis:

The qualitative data from phases one and three will undergo thematic analysis using Atlas.ti; quantitative data from phase two of the study will be analysed using tools built into the online webware and may undergo further analysis using SPSS if warranted.

With regards to all collection and analysis procedures, the researcher will adhere to those suggested in current BERA guidelines, including:

All participants will be informed that the data collected will be used as the basis for a doctoral thesis and of the ethical considerations of the study.

Participants' names and the names of their employers will not be used in the analysis.

Participants will select their own times and dates for the interview process.

Participants will be free to leave the study at any time.

Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recording interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):

The researcher may hire a third-party professional service to assist with the transcription process. In such a case, the service will be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement.

Audio and text files will be kept on an external hard drive and kept in a locked file cabinet, in a locked university office with 24 hour security.

Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

The nature and topic of this study does not specifically concern participants' political beliefs, religious beliefs or sexual orientation, and the researcher does not foresee any additional factors that may raise ethical issues. As the portions of this study are qualitative and interpretative, any ethical points-of-view raised by participants may actually strengthen the data. The strict confidential measures built into the study protect participants while also allowing them freedom of speech.

This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's Research Support Office for the

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: July 2010
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor.

This project has been approved for the period: 17th Feb 2011 until: 30th September 2011.

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature): ___________________________ date: 17th February 2011

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

GSE unique approval reference: ___________________________

Signed: ___________________________ date: 18/02/2011
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee ___________________________

31/05/2012

This form is available from http://education.exeter.ac.uk/students/

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: July 2010
Appendix 2: Informed consent

Welcome to the Teacher Stress Survey

Please read the information provided below carefully. If you have any questions or concerns at this point or in the future, please feel free to contact:

Jonathan Aubrey
University of Sharjah
Dept. of English Language and Literature, W-3
P.O. Box 27272
Sharjah
United Arab Emirates

Email: teacher.jonathan[at] gmail.com
Telephone: 050 728-4007

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of occupational stress and coping strategies among university-level EFL teachers in the United Arab Emirates.

WHAT WILL I NEED TO DO AS A PARTICIPANT?

You will be asked to participate in anonymous surveys that ask about your sources of stress in the workplace. The surveys should each take approximately 10–20 minutes to complete.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND BENEFITS TO ME?

Risks or discomforts:

No risks or discomforts are anticipated from taking part in this study. If you feel uncomfortable with a question, you can withdraw from the study altogether. If you decide to quit at any time before you have finished the questionnaire, your answers will NOT be recorded.

Benefits:

There may not be a direct benefit to you personally for participating in this study. However, the information you provide in the surveys will enable professionals to create low-stress work environments that are of benefit to everyone.

HOW WILL THE FINDINGS BE USED?
The results of the study will be used for scholarly purposes only. The results from the study will be presented in an Ed.D thesis, in educational settings, at professional conferences, and the results might be published in a professional journal in the field of TESOL.

ARE MY ANSWERS CONFIDENTIAL?

This study is completely anonymous and your confidentiality will be maintained at all times.

WHAT IF I DON’T WANT TO PARTICIPATE?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can discontinue the survey at any time by simply closing your browser.

PARTICIPANT’S STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT:

If you agree with the following statement and wish to participate in the study, please click on the circle in front of ‘I agree’ below. If you do not agree, simply close your browser.

‘I am at least 18 years of age, have read and understand the explanation provided to me and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.’

PRINT THIS ‘INFORMED CONSENT’ PAGE FOR FUTURE REFERENCE
CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of this project that intends to explore occupational stress and coping strategies among tertiary-level EFL teachers in the UAE. I understand that:

I understand that there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation.

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me.

Any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications.

If applicable, the information which I give may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form.

All information I give will be treated as confidential.

The researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

Participant..........................…….. Researcher..........................………………..

Date: 15th June 2012

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Jonathan Aubrey
University of Sharjah
Dept. English Language and Literature
P.O. Box 27272
Email: teacher.jonathan@gmail.com
Mobile: 00971 50 728 4007

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University’s registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.
Appendix 3: Instruments survey

Jonathan Aubrey

NEW STRESS SURVEY
April 25, 2012

Introduction

Dear Teacher:

I would like to ask for your help by taking a few minutes of your time to answer the following questions concerning teacher stress among university-level EFL teachers. This project is being conducted by me as partial fulfilment for my Ed.D in TESOL degree at the University of Exeter (UK) and all responses are anonymous and confidential.

Please complete the survey by May 31, 2012.

Thanks in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Aubrey
University of Exeter

Please participate in the survey if you are a university-level classroom teacher in the United Arab Emirates. This includes departments of English, Intensive English Programmes, Academic Bridge Programmes, and university preparatory programmes.

Please do NOT participate if you are an administrator.

Informed consent

Welcome to the Teacher Stress Survey

Please read the information provided below carefully. If you have any questions or concerns at this point or in the future, please feel free to contact:

Jonathan Aubrey
University of Sharjah
Dept. of English Language and Literature, W-3
P.O. Box 27272
Sharjah
United Arab Emirates
Email: teacher.jonathan[at]gmail.com
Telephone: 050 728-4007
WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of occupational stress and coping strategies among university-level EFL teachers in the United Arab Emirates.

WHAT WILL I NEED TO DO AS A PARTICIPANT?

You will be asked to participate in anonymous surveys that ask about your sources of stress in the workplace. The surveys should each take approximately 10–20 minutes to complete.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND BENEFITS TO ME?

Risks or discomforts:

No risks or discomforts are anticipated from taking part in this study. If you feel uncomfortable
with a question, you can withdraw from the study altogether. If you decide to quit at any
time before you have finished the questionnaire, your answers will NOT be recorded.

Benefits:

There may not be a direct benefit to you personally for participating in this study. However, the information you provide in the surveys will enable professionals to create low-stress work environments that are of benefit to everyone.

HOW WILL THE FINDINGS BE USED?

The results of the study will be used for scholarly purposes only. The results from the study will be presented in an Ed.D thesis, in educational settings, at professional conferences, and the results might be published in a professional journal in the field of TESOL.

ARE MY ANSWERS CONFIDENTIAL?

This study is completely anonymous and your confidentiality will be maintained at all times.

WHAT IF I DON’T WANT TO PARTICIPATE?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can discontinue the survey at any time by simply closing your browser.

PARTICIPANT’S STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT:

If you agree with the following statement and wish to participate in the study, please click on the circle in front of ‘I agree’ below. If you do not agree, simply close your browser.
‘I am at least 18 years of age, have read and understand the explanation provided to me and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.’

On a scale of 1–10, please rate your level of occupational stress at your current place of employment.

Use a 10 point scale where

1= no stress at all
10= most stressful job you have ever had in your life

LEADERSHIP

At your current place of employment, to what extent do the following leadership issues cause you stress?

Use a seven point scale where

1 = no stress
2 = slight stress
3 = slight to moderate stress
4 = moderate stress
5 = moderate to excessive stress
6 = excessive stress
NA = not applicable

Administration does not ask teachers’ opinions
Administration does not value teachers’ opinions
Administration does not communicate clearly about important matters
Lack of open communication between administration and teachers
Lack of a clear direction for the future of the institution
Administration does not show interest in well-being of faculty
Top-down/undemocratic leadership style (university level)
Top-down/undemocratic leadership style (department level)
Administrators who do not teach and are not in touch with classroom practices
Too many managers
Not enough paid full-time managers/ part-time unpaid teachers as managers
Last minute urgent announcements by administration
Lack of collaboration between administration and teachers
Lack of support by administration
Feeling that you can't speak up freely
Teachers not being consulted about what's best for students or programme
Curriculum decisions made by administration and not by teachers
Administration does not care about teachers
Frequent change of management
TEACHER ASSESSMENT

At your current place of employment, to what extent do the following teacher assessment issues cause you stress?

Use a seven point scale where

1 = no stress
2 = slight stress
3 = slight to moderate stress
4 = moderate stress
5 = moderate to excessive
6 = excessive
NA = not applicable

Being observed
Lack of transparency of teacher evaluation criteria
Going through a contract renewal
Required non-teaching expectations
No release time for extra-curricular activities
Required community service
Required in-house PD
Lack of funding or release time to attend external PD opportunities

COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

At your current place of employment, to what extent do the following compensation and benefits issues cause you stress?

Use a seven point scale where

1 = no stress
2 = slight stress
3 = slight to moderate stress
4 = moderate stress
5 = moderate to excessive
6 = excessive
NA = not applicable

Poor remuneration for overtime
Delayed payments for overtime
Housing benefits
Health insurance benefits
Child education benefits
Pay not commensurate with cost of living

THE PROFESSION

At your current place of employment, to what extent do the following issues about the
profession of English Language Teaching cause you stress?

Use a seven point scale where

1 = no stress
2 = slight stress
3 = slight to moderate stress
4 = moderate stress
5 = moderate to excessive
6 = excessive
NA = not applicable

Changes in student enrolment
Lack of job security
Perceived lower status of English programme in relation to other departments
Lack of job satisfaction

CLASSROOM TEACHING

At your current place of employment, to what extent do the following classroom teaching issues cause you stress?

Use a seven point scale where

1 = no stress
2 = slight stress
3 = slight to moderate stress
4 = moderate stress
5 = moderate to excessive
6 = excessive
NA = not applicable

Programme change
Mandatory overtime
Schedule
Frequent change of textbooks
Too many course objectives
Heavy preparation load
New courses to develop
Marking assignments
Lack of materials in ELT
Number of students in classroom
Teaching students of mixed ability
Keeping students motivated
Teaching uninterested students
Teaching students who are repeating a course
Workload too high
Increased workload
Using technology
OTHER TEACHING DUTIES

At your current place of employment, to what extent do the following other teaching duties cause you stress?

Use a seven point scale where

1 = no stress
2 = slight stress
3 = slight to moderate stress
4 = moderate stress
5 = moderate to excessive
6 = excessive
NA = not applicable

Administrative paperwork (marks, attendance)
Examination scheduling/ teaching while major exams are in progress]
Proctoring/ invigilating examinations
Providing makeup examinations or resit examinations

TEACHING ENVIRONMENT

At your current place of employment, to what extent do the following teaching environment issues cause you stress?

Use a seven point scale where

1 = no stress
2 = slight stress
3 = slight to moderate stress
4 = moderate stress
5 = moderate to excessive
6 = excessive
NA = not applicable

Lack of ample office/desk space
Poorly maintained classrooms
Poorly maintained teaching equipment

EXTERNAL FACTORS

At your current place of employment, to what extent do the following external factors cause you stress?

Use a seven point scale where

1 = no stress
2 = slight stress
3 = slight to moderate stress  
4 = moderate stress  
5 = moderate to excessive  
6 = excessive  
NA = not applicable  

Taking work home  
Student registration problems  
Unclear academic calendar  
Department undergoing international accreditation  

Demographic profile  

Biodata  

Please select your gender.  
Male  
Female  

Please select your marital status.  
Single  
Married  
Divorced  
Widowed  

Please select your mother tongue.  
English  
Arabic  
Berber  
Farsi  
French  
Hindi  
Malayalam  
Spanish  
Urdu  
Other (please specify in text box below)  

Please select your age.  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28
Please select your age range.

Under 25
26–30
31–35
36–40
41–55
Over 55

Please select your nationality

Algerian
American
Australian
British
Canadian
Egyptian
Indian
Iranian
Jordanian
Lebanese
Pakistani
New Zealander
Syrian
Tunisian
Other (please specify in text box below)

Please select the type of university that you work for

Federal (eg., UAE University)
Private (eg., New York University)
Semi-government/local government (eg., University of Sharjah)

Please select the total years of teaching experience that you have
0–4
5–9
10–14
15–20
Over 20

Please select the teaching qualifications you have completed or are currently studying
(tick all that apply)

Doctorate TESOL/EFL/ Applied Linguistics/English
Masters degree in TESOL/EFL/ Applied Linguistics/English
RSA/Cambridge/Trinity Diploma
RSA/Cambridge/Trinity Certificate
PGCE
USA state teacher certification in TESOL/EFL

Follow-up interviews

If you answered 1s and 2s for many of the questions in this survey, OR if you answered 5s and 6s for many of the questions in this survey, then your input in a follow-up interview is especially needed. If you would be willing to participate in a brief follow-up interview, please supply your contact details in the box below.

If you are leaving on holiday for the summer break, what would be the last date that you would be available for an interview?

Last page

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your time is greatly appreciated.
Appendix 4: Instruments – Interview schedule

1. What strategies do you use to cope with stress? Tell me about the ones that are most important and frequent for you.

[Can you tell me more about that?] [explain what you do when you...] [How does this make you feel?]

[What is it about X that helps you deal with stress?]

[Are there any important ones not on the list?]

2. What could your employer do to reduce stress in the workplace for you?

[How?]

3. In the survey, respondents reported that _______ caused a lot of stress for them. Why do you think that is?

A) Teaching uninterested students: 4.59
B) Keeping students motivated: 4.41
C) Last minute urgent announcements by administration: 4.38
D) Top-down/undemocratic leadership style (university level): 4.31
E) Teachers not being consulted about what's best for students or programme: 4.30
F) Lack of a clear direction for the future of the institution: 4.20

4. Please do not forget to send in the consent form.

5. Thank you for the interview.
### Appendix 5: Data demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Demographic Categories</th>
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<th>%</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Divorced</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>Mother Tongue</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
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<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Berber</td>
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<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farsi</td>
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<td></td>
<td>French</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>36–40</td>
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<td></td>
<td>31–35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26–30</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Under 25</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canadian</td>
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<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jordanian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tunisian</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Iraqi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emirati</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Algerian</td>
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<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lebanese</td>
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<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syrian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saudi</td>
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<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Palestinian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroccan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
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<td>0.9%</td>
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<td>Iranian</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Zealander</td>
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<tr>
<th>Employment Type</th>
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<tr>
<td>Federal (e.g. UAE University)</td>
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<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-government/local government (e.g., University of Sharjah)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private (e.g. New York University)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
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<td>Over 20</td>
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<td>15–20</td>
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<td>20.4%</td>
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<td>10–14</td>
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<td>16.8%</td>
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<td>5–9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
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<th>Qualifications:</th>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Masters degree TESOL/EFL)/Applied Linguistics/English</td>
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<td>77.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate TESOL/EFL/Applied Linguistics/English</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA/Cambridge/Trinity Diploma</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA/Cambridge/Trinity Certificate</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGCE</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA state teacher certification in TESOL/EFL</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coping strategies list

Avoid confrontations
Seek support from friends and family
Try to relax after work
Look at the big picture/ put things in perspective
Stay organised
Plan ahead and prioritise
Just say ‘no’/choose what you want/be careful about volunteering/ recognise your own limitations
Vent quickly and let it go
Devote more time to particular tasks
Take action to deal with problems
Exercise
Pray
Listen to music
Eat a proper diet
Take just a few moments for quiet time
Have a sense of humour
Vegetate in front of a mindless TV programme
Pamper yourself after work
Take breaks during the work day
## Appendix 6: Stressors by rank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRESSOR</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching uninterested students</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>4.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping students motivated</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last minute urgent announcement by administration</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top-down/undemocratic leadership style (university level)</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers not being consulted about what's best for students or programme</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of a clear direction for the future of the institution</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling that you can't speak up freely</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of open communication between administration and teachers</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration does not communicate clearly about important matters</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum decisions made by administration and not by teachers</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration does not value teachers' opinions</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of collaboration between administration and teachers</td>
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<td>12.4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>Administration does not ask teachers' opinions</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
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<td>Teaching students of mixed ability</td>
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<td>Lack of support by administration</td>
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<td>Perceived lower status of English programme in relation to other departments</td>
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<td>17.7%</td>
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<td>Workload too high</td>
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<td>Increased workload</td>
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<td>No release time for extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
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<td>Lack of job security</td>
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<td>3.73</td>
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<td>Heavy preparation load</td>
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<td>Pay not commensurate with cost of living</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
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<td>Too many course objectives</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
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<td>Programme Change</td>
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<td>Too many managers</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>3.59</td>
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<td>Lack of job satisfaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Top-down/undemocratic leadership style (department level)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>(17)</td>
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<td>Lack of funding or release time to attend external PD opportunities</td>
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<td>Changes in student enrolment</td>
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<td>Number of students in classroom</td>
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<td>Delayed payments for overtime</td>
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<td>Administrative paperwork (marks, attendance)</td>
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### Appendix 7: Stressors by category

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<th>6</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tr>
<td>Last minute urgent announcement by administration</td>
<td>2.7% (3)</td>
<td>13.3% (15)</td>
<td>17.7% (20)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
<td><strong>38.9% (44)</strong></td>
<td>4.4% (5)</td>
<td><strong>4.38</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Top-down/undemocratic leadership style (university level)</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>9.7% (11)</td>
<td>13.3% (15)</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td>21.2% (24)</td>
<td><strong>32.7% (37)</strong></td>
<td>3.5% (4)</td>
<td><strong>4.31</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers not being consulted about what's best for students or programme</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
<td>9.7% (11)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
<td>15.0% (17)</td>
<td><strong>38.9% (44)</strong></td>
<td>2.7% (3)</td>
<td><strong>4.3</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of a clear direction for the future of the institution</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
<td>8.8% (10)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>15% (17)</td>
<td>19.5% (22)</td>
<td><strong>31% (35)</strong></td>
<td>2.7% (3)</td>
<td><strong>4.2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling that you can't speak up freely</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>15.9% (18)</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
<td><strong>37.2% (42)</strong></td>
<td>4.4% (5)</td>
<td><strong>4.19</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of open communication between administration and teachers</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>15.9% (17)</td>
<td>19.5% (22)</td>
<td><strong>31% (35)</strong></td>
<td>0.9% (3)</td>
<td><strong>4.16</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration does not communicate clearly about important matters</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>15% (17)</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td>14.2% (16)</td>
<td>20.4% (23)</td>
<td><strong>30.1% (34)</strong></td>
<td>0.9% (1)</td>
<td><strong>4.15</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Curriculum decisions made by administration and not by teachers</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
<td>13.3% (15)</td>
<td>9.7% (11)</td>
<td>14.2% (16)</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td><strong>34.5% (39)</strong></td>
<td>6.2% (7)</td>
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<td>Administration does not value teachers' opinions</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td>10.6% (12)</td>
<td>9.7% (11)</td>
<td>15.9% (18)</td>
<td>23% (26)</td>
<td><strong>26.5% (30)</strong></td>
<td>2.7% (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of collaboration between administration and teachers</td>
<td>8.8% (10)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>15% (17)</td>
<td>12.4% (14)</td>
<td>18.6% (21)</td>
<td><strong>27.4% (31)</strong></td>
<td>5.3% (6)</td>
<td><strong>4.07</strong></td>
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<td>Administration does not ask teachers' opinions</td>
<td>11.5% (13)</td>
<td>13.3% (13)</td>
<td>8% (9)</td>
<td>21.2% (24)</td>
<td>18.6% (21)</td>
<td><strong>26.5% (30)</strong></td>
<td>0.9% (1)</td>
<td><strong>4.06</strong></td>
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<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>p-value</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrators who do not teach and are not in touch with classroom practices</td>
<td>14.2% (16)</td>
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<td>Lack of support by administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administration does not show interest in well-being of faculty</td>
<td>15.9% (18)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administration does not care about teachers</td>
<td>17.7% (20)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many managers</td>
<td>15% (17)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Top-down/undemocratic leadership style (department level)</td>
<td>15% (17)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frequent change of management</td>
<td>18.6% (21)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not enough paid full-time manager/part-time unpaid teachers as managers</td>
<td>25.7% (29)</td>
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## Teacher Assessment

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<td>Going through a contract renewal</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td><strong>28.3%</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(32)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>No release time for extracurricular activities</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
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<td>(15)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Required non-teaching expectations</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td><strong>23.9%</strong></td>
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<td>Lack of funding or release time to attend external PD opportunities</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td><strong>23.9%</strong></td>
<td>4.4%</td>
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<td>(19)</td>
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<td>Pay not commensurate with cost of living</td>
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<td>5.3% (6)</td>
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<td>Delayed payments for overtime</td>
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<td>8.8% (10)</td>
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<td>21.2% (24)</td>
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<td>Poor remuneration for overtime</td>
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<td>9.7% (11)</td>
<td>7.1% (8)</td>
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<td>Perceived lower status of English programme in relation to other departments</td>
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<td>14.2% (16)</td>
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<td>Lack of job satisfaction</td>
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## Other Teaching Duties

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## Teaching Environment

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<tbody>
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<td>24.8% (28)</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>28.3% (32)</td>
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<th>Lack of ample office/desk space</th>
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<tbody>
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## External Factors

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Appendix 8: Sample transcript

Amanda - Part 1

Interviewer:
I'm glad we finally were able to get together.

Interviewee:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
And thanks for helping me out. I appreciate it too.

Interviewee:
That’s all right.

Interviewer:
So I have kind of sort of three groups of questions. The first group is just kind of ask you how you cope with stress. The second one is how you think your employer can reduce stress, you know, and work for you. And the third group is just your — your feedback on some of the — the top stressors that were reported and, you know, why you think maybe this cause a lot of stress for other people.

Interviewee:
Right. Okay.

Interviewer:
Okay. So back at question one, you know, what strategies do you think you use to cope with stress? Maybe you could just tell me the ones that are, you know, most important to you and most frequent for you.

Interviewee:
Well, the thing that I do that helps the most is I try to do all my work at work and not bring it home, and I would rather say a bit of extra time on marking and things like that at work than bring it home. I just try and keep it separate because I know that if I — if I start to bring — I used to bring a lot of stuff home, and it would destroy weekends and evenings and things like that. And I just find with a bit — with better time management and also being more reasonable about how long it’s going to take me to mark a load of [0:01:36] [Inaudible] that helps the stress a lot. So that’s — that's one of the main things I do especially — I call it compartmentalising, you know. So if it’s — if it's not here, I’m not thinking about it.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Interviewee:
I mean I do check my work email at home sometimes, but I won’t act on anything unless
it's absolutely urgent especially you know the students, but they're emailing me at 9:00 on a Saturday night is when they’re going to get an answer back. And students complain that I don’t respond to their questions by email over the weekend. I just tell them that I’m allowed the weekend, and they’ve got to put up with it.

Interviewer:
So you just say, ‘No, this is my time’, right?

Interviewee:
Yes, yes.

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Interviewee:
Yeah. What I also do, I do to de-stress at work, I have breaks and I try and make sure that the lunch break is — is proper. I mean, we — we have canteen at the faculty mess then I make sure that the — the people that I sit with are people who, yeah, maybe they're going to bitch about work a bit, but they’re not going to try and turn having lunch at the same table into — into a meeting when you’re discussing serious stuff. So I’m fairly picky who I sit with. Sometimes you can’t choose who plunks themselves down next to sit and wants to talk about X, Y, or Zed. But, you know, occasionally you just have put up a bit. But I try and make my breaks proper breaks and certainly like agreeing to have lunch with somebody who's just going to talk about work all the way through. And that's — that’s important.

Interviewer:
So where do you usually take your breaks?

Interviewee:
Well, I mean, at the faculty mess and I'm supposed to be there from 7:30 until 5:00 every day. So I mean, I take — I take a break in the canteen sometimes. Sometimes I go for a walk. It’s not very — not a very pleasant place to go for a walk but, you know, I can just — one trip to the hospital. There's a Starbucks in the hospital. In there, you know, you’re not going to see colleagues necessarily, so something like that.

Interviewer:
Okay, and anything else that you’re doing?

Interviewee:
Just trying to think.

Interviewer:
Were there anything on that list?

Interviewee:
Well, one of the things that I do is I try and... Because... I don’t know what that is. Is it a cause of stress? Yes, students hassling me about things can be a source of stress. So I have...
I tell them that if my office door is shut, that means do not disturb. And some of them will require a few reminders that, you know, then they're going to knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock. And I say, you know, I say, ‘If the door is shut, it means I'm not free.’ So saying no to students is something I will do because they can be very demanding. And another thing I'll do is if it's things like marking first [0:05:20] [Inaudible] to that size, I don't do it in my office. I go and hide somewhere in the library where they're not going to come and find me, and then I could get the stuff done.

So, you know, I'm — I'm in the building. I'm working but the students don’t know where I am, and that's a good... I suppose you choose a stress reliever because it stops you from constantly dealing with interruptions, and interruptions are — are pretty stressful. I mean, I would — I would think those are the main things really.

Interviewer:
Okay. What do you think the University could do to reduce stress for you?

Interviewee:
Improve communication and — and be more — I mean, there — there are people who are not very realistic about what could be achieved within a certain time frame. I mean, there's particular problems with the faculty I've mentioned at the moment to do with curriculum change. They — we have a new curriculum being rolled out, but it was — it was decided in April 2011 that the new curriculum was going to go live in September 2011. Can you imagine? You know, so that kind of thing. It's a decision that's taken at the top without adequate consultation of faculty members, and there's hardly anybody who's happy about the decision. So better — better communication and realising that people — people have their limits. I mean my workplace is very — morale is very low at the moment, very, very low.

Interviewer:
People aren’t leaving, are they?

Interviewee:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
Oh, really?

Interviewee:
Yes.

Interviewer:
Wow!

Interviewee:
Yes, but I mean that's not — that's not just the ESL people. I remember I have two ESL colleagues and the rest are all scientists and clinicians, but they're leaving, yes.

Interviewer:
Okay, anything else that comes to mind? So better communication.

Interviewee:
Better — well, yes, better communication. I mean, it's a truism this whole business of management have changed, better management have changed so that people actually feel if they say what they think of some things that somebody is listening because — about this new curriculum, we'd had so many meetings and you express your misgivings. Sometimes it's all just ignored. So communication management had changed.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Interviewee:
Or class size, that is also stressful. I mean, that — I don’t know whether that — that counts on your list.

Interviewer:
It sure does. Sure. That was a question on the survey.

Interviewee:
Yes, yeah.

Interviewer:
Class size. What are your class sizes? I'm just curious.

Interviewee:
They're way too big. Next year, we're — yeah, they're going to take in 80 female medical students, and we can only divide them into two groups for language and communication, so that would be classes of 40. It's ridiculous. You can't — you can't learn their names. You can't — can't do the types of activities that you want to if you do decide — decide that you want to give them a writing assignment because they need to learn how to write. You then got gazillions of things to mark. So yeah, class size is a major source of stress.

Interviewer:
So they should reduce the class size is what you're saying.

Interviewee:
They need to increase the number of teachers. You can't reduce the class size without increasing the number of teachers.

Interviewer:
Right.

Interviewee:
I mean, 80 students daily should be — I would want them divided into five groups.

Interviewer:
Right. Yup.
Interviewee:
Not even four, you know. It's kind of [0:09:49] [Inaudible] but we've — we've not got enough — enough teachers to cover that.

Interviewer:
Okay. I hear you. That's — that's tough and that's a —

Interviewee:
Yes.

Interviewer:
— that's a the situation on phase two, right? I have about 40 students here too, believe it not.

Interviewee:
Where are you working now?

Interviewer:
At the University of *******.

Interviewee:
Oh, really? And you have classes at night?

Interviewer:
We do, believe it or not.

Interviewee:
Yeah, well, no, I do believe it because that I have suffered it. Yes.

Interviewer:
Yeah. It’s a — it’s a big problem here too, and I can totally relate to that, let me tell you.

Interviewee:
Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer:
Okay. But anything I say I have to transcribe and write down so I’m trying to —

Interviewee:
Oh, right, you’re catching stuff up so...

Interviewer:
— just keep it quiet here.

Interviewee:
Okay.

Interviewer:
Question three, okay, in the survey, the respondents reported that... And then I have six things, you know, the top answers that — okay, so this is 3(A) Teaching disinterested students caused a lot of stress for them. This is in the survey.

Interviewee:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
Why do you think that is? Do you have an opinion on that or...?

Interviewee:
Yes. I mean it... It depends whether you see it as your responsibility to make them interested. I mean, I tend to have the attitude, you know. They're in the faculty events, and they think they want to study that. In order to not to get too stressed about that, I think, right, well, you know, if I’m only going to be…
Amanda - Part 2

Interviewee:
Teaching three-quarters of the class instead of 100% of the class is fine by me just as long as you don’t teach rough, I don’t care. And you will not do well on the course, you know. I don’t see it as my responsibility to motivate them at this level. Now, I would if I were working in a foundation programme where you’ve got to maybe convince them that what you’re going to do is — is beneficial, but these are — these are slightly older students. If they are unmotivated and disruptive, then it is — it is more of a stress. But we are encouraged if they’re — if they're too disruptive and I think it’s shameful that there are disruptive students to the faculty I've mentioned, then we’re encouraged to check them out the class.

Interviewer:
Oh, you can?

Interviewee:
Well, I’m afraid it’s a little bit hard. I’ve certainly — I've certainly done it myself once. I got the student in question. It was a male, and he came to see me afterwards to apologise because he realised he had been out of line. But, you know, I have — I have other colleagues that don’t allow anybody in who’s late, for example, that kind of thing, and that means that the disruptive unmotivated ones end up excluded. If they're late, you know, more than five minutes late, they cannot come into the class. It seems fine by me.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Interviewee:
What I — what I don’t like is I think — I think it’s quite common in universities here for a lot of thoughts will be set by students’ evaluations of teachers. These disinterested students who — who can't — who don’t engage with the class will then complain that the class is boring. And you know, that’s a — that's a pain. As long as you have some other students who are more engaged to giving you positive evaluations, then it’s — then it's okay. But I know at the University they do seem to take lots of accounts from students’ evaluations.

Interviewee:
That’s a very good point so no one mentioned that. I didn’t think about that. Yeah. Playing into — to that is also— the second answer is really is kind of related so it’s 3(B) Keeping students motivated. So it’s a bit of the same of what you just said really.

Interviewee:
Well, do I find that stressful? I mean...

Interviewer:
No, I'm just saying, people — people reported that is stressful —

Interviewee:
People say they find it stressful.
Interviewer:
So why do you think? Yeah.

Interviewee:
I think in — in some ways, that can come by lack of experience in the context or generally. I mean, they're keeping students motivated. You — you do that in terms of — or you try and do that through activity design materials, design variety, pointing out to students the relevance of what you're doing and so on. I mean, I... I can see — again, I would expect that to be more the problem in foundation programmes than — than where I'm teaching where I know there are — there are some students who are not really sure why they are at university or — or college.

Interviewer:
So how — how did they end up there not knowing?

Interviewee:
Well, because that's what you do in the UAE, isn't it? You graduate from high school. You get your CEPA mark and then you — you want to get married or you join the police or you go to one of the universities or colleges. That seems to be the options for the — for young Emiratis.

Interviewer:
Yeah, that's a —

Interviewee:
They are — they're all very young. They don’t get adequate career counselling at school. I mean, even in medicine we have students who turn up and they say they want to be doctors, but they have no idea what it means to be a doctor. Some of them seem to barely know how long it’s going to take when they — when they arrive. And I assume they know little more about the other subjects that they say they’re going to do. So it's... I think that students are not motivated because they don’t really understand what it means to study.

Interviewer:
There’s a mismatch between... yeah.

Interviewee:
Yes. Yeah. And a lot of them will learn in the first six months or so, but the ones that can’t really work it out are quite shorthand students.

Interviewer:
All right, yeah, that’s great. This is 3(C). I’m sure you can relate to this one. I could when I worked at the University. Last minute urgent announcements by administration cause a lot of stress. What do you think about that?

Interviewee:
Yeah. I mean, a bit but not so much last minute announcements but sudden changes and u-turns in — in policy. That's — that’s what causes me stress. So I spend ages catching a
student on plagiarism in their essay, and I write a report on that and I put a lot of work into it. And then somebody says, ‘Oh, well, we’ll just let them write the essay again’. Argh, you know. It sort of devalues the work that I’m doing. It’s may be — I mean we — we have this ludicrous curriculum change from April to September. That’s not long to implement a new curriculum but, you know, the times — last minute announcements and changes — not — not the — apart from things like this curriculum where I think a lot of people would say, ‘What? April to September? You were lucky’, or I wouldn’t say so much. I mean, again, maybe that’s different in the — in the foundation programme where people can suddenly discover that their timetable is changed, that their class section is changed, and things like that.

Interviewer:  
They used to — they had a lot of curriculum change there too when I was there.

Interviewee:  
Yes, yes. So new textbooks all the time.

Interviewer:  
So does that happen where you are too or no?

Interviewee:  
Well, I can say it’s an entirely new curriculum. We’ve gone from an integrated course to a — to separate courses again, but, I mean, I’m response — now that — now that we have this system, I have courses that I’m responsible for myself. So there have been some changes to other people’s courses that have impacted on me, so something I thought was going to be taught next semester that I could follow-up is going to be taught in semester four of the programme, not semester three. That’s a bit annoying. But otherwise, I have my course. I have my objectives. I write the exam. I decide how it’s assessed, et cetera. So I’ve got — I’ve got a measure of independence.

Interviewer:  
So yeah, well, that's — that's helpful, isn't it?

Interviewee:  
Yes. Yes.

Interviewer:  
Yeah, for sure.

Interviewee:  
There are some things that — I know there’s one thing that was changed this semester that really annoyed me. They said albeit somebody decided — some committee had decided that there was policy that 60% of the marks on all courses should go on the final exam and only 40% go to the midterm and the continuous assessment. I had already announced to the students how I was going to assess the course I was teaching. And I quietly spoke to some colleagues about it and they said, ‘Well, you know, if you want to ignore it and see if anybody notices’. So that's the policy that I've taken because here I don’t want 60% of the marks on the final exam. It’s long in a skills-based school. So I put a measure of
independence, plenty of bullshit into measure of independence.

Interviewer:
Okay. This is 3(D) people said that top-down/undemocratic leadership style at the university level. This caused a lot of stress for them too. I guess it’s —

Interviewee:
Well, yes, the — I mean this — this curriculum nonsense has been precisely that because it was a decision taken by the dean that we all have to put up with. And even the associate dean for education — for medical education couldn’t fight back. So yeah, that is very frustrating. I mean, I mentioned earlier, you know, you go to meetings, you express your opinion, and then it’s ignored. It’s quite clear at the next meeting that all the misgivings are just — are just being swept under the carpet. It seems to be the local management style. And unfortunately, it seems as well that when expatriates come in to see new positions in the UAE, they rapidly adopt this local management style of sending some of the balls from the top of the mountain and watching people jump around.

Interviewer:
I think you’re absolutely right. Yes, other people have mentioned something like that today too, yeah. Here is 3(E). This is somewhat what you’re saying too. Teachers not being consulted about…
Amanda - Part 3

Interviewer:
What’s best for students or programme. So I guess that would be lack of collaboration between...

Interviewee:
Yeah. I mean, I — I don’t always wait to be consulted. I’ll express myself like the class size. I’m constantly going on about the class size but, ‘Oh, they are just bringing their friends. We can’t employ anybody else. We haven’t got the classrooms’, you know, nonsense — nonsense kind of answers. We — so — but as I mentioned earlier in terms of things like what — and what goes on in my classroom once I’ve put up with the fact that I’ve got 40 students and reasonably autonomous. The one thing that — that has been imposed which I do not like is the faculty is supposed to be paperless.

And given how much we’ve all gone on about learning styles and student independence and encourage them to find the style that suits them, suddenly telling all the students, ‘Oh, well, all your materials are going to delivered in the blackboard and you don’t get handouts anymore’ is dictating one particular learning style, and I have quite a few students who don’t like it and who do like things printed even though they know all the techie stuff about how to annotate things on a digital copy. I will support them and get shouted out for photocopying too much. So I mean that kind of decision I think certainly is being taken without looking at the effect on students. Yeah, it came from one person without consultation. It has caused endless problems throughout the faculty.

Interviewer:
Okay. That’s a good point. And the very last one, people reported cause of stress for them was a lack of a clear — clear direction for the future of the institution.

Interviewee:
Well, the faculty have — yeah, we know — we do know what we do. We’re supposed to be producing medical students. In terms of lack of direction, it’s been a bit — the area that’s been a bit started on whether it’s relevant to research is the research programme because it’s just been — you know, it suddenly seemed to have — research has always been important, but the faculty was primarily a teaching institution. But now we’ve got a Ph.D. programme in the sciences. There’s the Master in Public Health. There’s the D pharm, and they’re about to set up the Master's in medical education. And all of this has happened very rapidly. And one area where the direction is being lacking is on what kind of students they’re trying to attract to the Ph.D. programme because being a first year, scholarships for everybody didn’t matter what nationality they were and then all of the sudden they decided, ‘Oh, no, we can’t afford to give all the scholarships to Indians and Filipinos and so on’. It [0:03:59] [Inaudible] and perhaps being very disruptive for those involved. I mean the University is trying to make itself into a research institution and a respected international university. What a lot of nonsense!

Interviewer:
Can you — can you say more?
Interviewee:
Yeah. Well, the one thing that really amuses me is the University does well on these — these rankings, and I had to look at some of the criteria. And one of the criteria where UAEU scores very highly is number of international teaching staff or researchers or whatever. Now in a place like Harvard or Oxford or Manchester or wherever, if you’ve got a large number of people from other countries, that’s because they are being attracted by the prestige of the institution. So of course, that means — that means that it’s good. But at the University, you’ve got humpty dumpty percent of people who are non-Emirati. And that’s because they just don’t have Emiratis available to teach in, for example, Ukro or various other places. I have got quite a lot of Emirati colleagues at the faculty of medicine, but they by no means the majority and the majority are from all the over the place. And it just seems odd but — but that should be what’s pushing the Universitiy up the rankings.

You know, it doesn’t make much sense. On research as well, it’s a number of — number of research papers published with international authors, as I’m saying, people come from another country part of the way through a project. It’s published well here. And then they leave after four or five years. And that’s why there’s so much collaborative research published. So it’s all — it’s all to do with the demographic and people coming and going. And the fact that you haven’t got Emiratis working in the university, that they managed to be where they are.

Interviewer:
It does seem like there’s a big shift because it was like a — it was a teaching university when I was there.

Interviewee:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
And now — yeah. It seems like all these institutions, they don’t — they've changed what their — you know, their original vision was.

Interviewee:
Yes. Yes.

Interviewer:
You know, so I can see why people are saying this because they are caught up in between the tides of change.

Interviewee:
Oh, no, yeah, I mean, at the colleges it’s the same. It used to do very well out off of its certificate and diploma courses preparing Emiratis for the workplace. And then suddenly they decided that they have to be a degree institution only. And I don’t know what happens to the Emiratis that used to do the lower-level courses. There’s no way for them to go anymore fast.

Interviewer:
So now those people at the colleges are competing with the people who were at the
University.

Interviewee:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
But now you’ve changed to becoming a research institution.

Interviewee:
Yes. I mean, yeah, they are trying to do more research.

Interviewer:
It seems like they're all clamoring for different — for the same clients and then change it —

Interviewee:
Yes, yes.

Interviewer:
— because they are replicating things, yeah.

Interviewee:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
All right. Well, you know, thanks so much. Those are really all my questions. You had — you had some very insightful thoughts especially for the last part, you know. This was really helpful. So…

Interviewee:
Yeah. I would just repeat your coping strategies list that I printed. Did you want to look at that at all or not?

Interviewer:
Oh, it was just — if any of them really jumped out at you —

Interviewee:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
— saying, ‘Oh, yeah, I do that.’ That’s an important way that I, you know.

Interviewee:
Yes. Okay. Okay.

Interviewer:
So was there — I thought you looked at it. Was there anything —

Interviewee:
No, no, no. Well, no, not — not really. I don’t think — I mean we’re all — like everybody else I try and stay organised. I mostly fail. No, I mean, I wouldn’t say any of them were particularly things that I used to cope with work stress rather than generalise the inverse everything, you know.

Interviewer:
Oh, okay. That’s fine. I just, you know, I provide that also just to give people some ideas in case —

Interviewee:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
— they don’t, you know, they forgot.

Interviewee:
Yes.

Interviewer:
You know. So I don’t want to lead people with the list. It just —

Interviewee:
No.

Interviewer:
Yeah. So...

Interviewee:
No, because — because then they’re just going to use that as a checklist and not thinking [0:09:05] [Inaudible].

Interviewer:
Exactly. So I think — this was great. So we’re all set here and you sent me the consent form.

Interviewee:
I did, yeah.

Interviewer:
So I have that. And you know, in September I’m going to put everybody’s name in for a drawing for winning, you know, one of the Amazon gift certificates. So hopefully, maybe you’ll win one of those.

Interviewee:
Well, maybe I will. Yes. So what — are you doing? Is this qualitative analysis you’ve got to do now?
Yeah. This is a mixed method study. So yeah.

Interviewee:  
It’s going to take you forever.

Interviewer:  
It takes about four hours to transcribe an hour of text.

Interviewee:  
At least.

Interviewer:  
So yeah, it’s a big project.

Interviewee:  
Yeah, yeah, okay.

Interviewer:  
So that’s my summer.

Interviewee:  
That’s your summer or more.

Interviewer:  
Exactly.

Interviewee:  
I know. I mean, you said I’ve got a load of tapes sort of recorded materials sitting in my office sort of reproaching me, and it’s been there for ages. And it’s just a question of when can I actually get onto it and analyze it. Research institution. I’m supposed to do research if I get the time. There you go. One last source of stress, the fact that I’m supposed to have a research commitment, and I have so much teaching that I never managed to get it done.

Interviewer:  
A lot of people said that. Yeah.

Interviewee:  
Yeah. I mean, every — every year since I came to the UAE, I’ve given at least one conference paper, TESOL Arabia or a nonconference and things like that. I’ve never managed to write flaming things to the conference proceeding because I don’t have the time.

Interviewer:  
Yeah.

Interviewee:  
Which is a waste. But I forgot to mention that. That is a big source of stress.

Interviewer:  
Yeah, I can relate to that too.
Interviewee:
Yes, yeah.

Interviewer:
Yeah, the same with me so... Okay.

Interviewee:
Okay.

Interviewer:
Well, great. Thank you so much for everything. Finally — I’m glad that we finally were able to get together.

Interviewee:
Yes. Yes. Well, if there’s anything you didn’t understand or you need any follow-up, you’ve got my number now so you can give me a call, okay?

Interviewer:
Okay. Thanks so much and have a nice break.

Interviewee:
Thank you. Bye.

Interviewer:
All right. Bye.
Appendix 9: Sample coding table

Q2 – What could your employer do to reduce stress for you?

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<th></th>
<th>Improve communication – give advanced notice/be more transparent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Improve communication – involve teachers and allow them to have a say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reduce red tape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Provide training/PD opportunities that are meaningful to teachers, especially w/IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Be fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Establish trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Be respectful of other teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Reduce class sizes</td>
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</table>
Appendix 10: Sample coding

What can employers do to reduce stress in the workplace?

Improve Communication
Be More Transparent/Provide Advanced Notice

Teacher 1
Interviewee:
2-368 Not a lot, but, for example, the [0:03:09] [Inaudible] where I worked before, I would tell that they, you know, improve the lines of communication, not micromanage that much, not be so top-down. The other mistake that they made is that they impose decisions rather than consulting first. And they could also have produced a better working environment by getting more people to work together. They will have their own offices, not tend to isolate people. As you put more teachers together, they tend to be more collaborative.

Teacher 1
2-393 I mean, I was in Abu Dhabi, for example, I had a meeting once a month. And between that meeting the gossip got worse and worse because we didn’t have enough meetings. He’s the director of the program in Abu Dhabi. Because he only had one meeting a month, by the time we got to the meeting, there had been so many rumors and gossips flying around. They had to deal with that first and sort of -- and so... But he didn’t learn from it. He didn’t have more meetings or he didn’t communicate better. So it perpetuates itself every month. He didn’t improve. But that -- that was his way of managing so that’s what he did.

Teacher 3
Interviewee:
1-111 Improve communication and -- and be more -- I mean, there -- there are people who are not very realistic about what could be achieved within a certain time frame. I mean, there’s particular problems with the faculty I’ve mentioned at the moment to do with curriculum change. They -- we have a new curriculum being rolled out, but it was -- it was decided in April 2011 that the new curriculum was going to go live in September 2011. Can you imagine? You know, so that kind of thing. It’s a decision that’s taken at the top without adequate consultation of faculty members, and there’s hardly anybody who’s happy about the decision. So better -- better communication and realizing that people -- people have their limits. I mean my workplace is very -- morale is very low at the moment, very, very low.

Teacher 7
Interviewee:
2-587 Well, communication was the biggest -- the biggest thing. I had so many problems with communication with my boss. My boss never told me anything. I would hear about things -- I heard about my downsizing of my office after people had been moved out of my office. I had no idea that my own employees had been moved out from under me. The people I was supervising had been moved out from under me until after it had been done. Nobody informed me of anything.

Teacher 7
Interviewee:
2-598 So communication would be nice. To be informed of things that are happening, to know ahead of time, if possible, or to know when they can’t tell you ahead of time, when they don’t know what’s going to happen, to know that they don’t know what’s going to happen helps, you know. Knowing
References


