

## Stress and Adaptability among English Lecturers: An Interview Analysis

<sup>1</sup>Haryati, <sup>\*2</sup>Diyah Iis Andriani

<sup>1-2</sup>Universitas Pamulang, Indonesia

**\*Correspondence:**

diah\_chuan@yahoo.co.id

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### Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic affects education and leads to stress as a problem in the teaching process in schools or universities. Lecturers need to find joy in their teaching activities and make them comfortable in the working place by having adaptability acquired from their surroundings. The study aims to find out the sources of stress among English lecturers and how they overwhelm stressful situations. This study applies the descriptive qualitative method to elaborate the analysis. It also engages 6 EFL lecturers from the English Department of Universitas Pamulang selected from some categories: working more than six years and showing a high level of stress. They are selected through the questionnaire distribution. Furthermore, the writers conducted an in-depth semi-structured interview to obtain the data. The interview focuses on seeking two main points: to identify and describe the source of stress in the teaching process during the pandemic and to enlighten aspects that assist the lecturers to have adaptability in the stressful circumstance. As the result, the participants share the factors why they get burnout within pandemic circumstances: E-learning system, other system changes, students' low communication, workload, and impromptu task; moreover, they share how to adapt to the situation they face: family relationship, positive personality, positive vibes, and working partners. These assist the lecturers to encourage themselves to work more to achieve the teaching and learning goals.

**Keywords:** Covid-19 pandemic, factors of lecturers' stress, lecturers' adaptability,

### INTRODUCTION

As one of the vital systems of a country, education is an important spotlight for the issue of preventing coronavirus. Consequently, UNESCO is launching distance learning practices and reaching students who are most at risk (Tadesse & Wuluye, 2020). To conduct distance learning, digital application platforms, such as Zoom Meeting, Google Meeting, and Google classroom were used by most students of countries as a form of instruction. Each

platform provides facilities that are publicly accessible and free (Abidah et al., 2020). Online teaching and learning activities are the best options during the Covid-19 pandemic. Students are not required to come to school or university and avoid crowds which are indicated as one of the causes of Coronavirus transmission. However, the fact is that online learning options still lead to numerous problems; one of them being mental health problems. According to Tadesse & Wuluye (2020), the closures of schools or higher education that use online learning systems negatively affect the mental and physical health of children, students, parents, and teachers in the world, especially in developing countries.

The negative impact of the pandemic Covid-19 is not only on students but also teachers and lecturers who begin to have mental health problems, especially stress. Bedewi & Gabriel (2015) explain stress is a body's reaction to a new situation or pressure since someone has to do a lot of responsibilities and requirements. In line with the definition, in human terms, Rosdialena et al., (2021) define stress as pressure that occurs due to a mismatch between the desired situation and expectations, here there is a gap between environmental demands and the individual ability to fulfill. It can be concluded that the stress experienced by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic is related to being forced to adapt to things that have never been done. Faced with these facts, teachers have had to adapt at a dizzying pace not only to new methodological approaches but also to their confinement, presenting high levels of stress (Diaz, 2020).

Furthermore, academic stress perceived by the teacher can be influenced due to some factors. Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., (2021) assume female lecturers often describe their obstacles to carrying the responsibility of being lecturers and house survivors; both personal and professional responsibilities. The heavy workload of both their personal and professional responsibilities leads to enhance frustration. Today's education system is facing a drastic change from the conventional to the online mode which may create additional stress for lecturers. They are also encouraged to present better teaching in two-way communication and interaction (Chitra, 2020). Regarding online learning, a teacher or a lecturer is expected to provide feedback to students on each assignment, and this process will certainly take a lot of time. In addition, during online learning, a lecturer cannot directly ensure that his students have achieved teaching and learning objectives well or not. Therefore, taking all the lecturers' inconveniences and mental aspects into account, sometimes they lose control of their patience and end up rebuking students on odd occasions (Ferdous & Shifat, 2020). Furthermore, it also causes another polemic, for instance, the lack of facilities and infrastructure that supports online learning is a major obstacle in the online learning process, not all remote villages already have online learning media, including internet networks which are the obstacle in remote areas, so that satellite or internet signals cannot be connected (Abidin & Tobibatussa'adah, 2020) Thus, lecturers have to comply and deal with the increased workload, mental stress, and frustrations on their insides. This pandemic balance between personal and professional life is challenging for many lecturers because staying at home creates a physical and psychological gap between home and school (Macintyre et al., 2020).

In addition, lecturers assume that stress leads to negative effects. It has been strengthened by Palau et al., (2020) who state E-learning has also provoked changes in teachers' workload, at least in six motivational characteristics of the academic teachers' job (task identity, task significance, skill variety, feedback, autonomy, and social dimensions of

the work). All of these changes have impacted teachers' motivation toward lecturers' work (Kulikowski et al., 2021). Consequently, this crisis has caused symptoms such as anxiety or depression in teachers, in addition to increased rates of divorce and domestic violence, all of which may limit their ability to teach adequately (Lily et al, 2020). Furthermore, Stauffer & Mason (2013) assume that poor relationships with students, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the academic system with the absence of adequate reward and leader support lead to burnout; work pressure, financial problems, depression, and loneliness can be the terrible impacts of feeling burnout (Adib, 2012); education requirement, students poor motivation and behavior, lack of information from the policymakers, and home-work interface lead to burnout (Richards, 2012).

Moreover, this pandemic situation makes the case worst, as they need to cater to the students' and parents' needs through online mode. High levels of stress over an extended period can lead to teacher burnout, and teachers who are burning out have more conflict with students, less satisfactory relationships with them, and their students have lower academic outcomes (Alarcon et al., 2011). Already several studies have reported the lecturer's problem with work-life balance; (Gagnano et al., 2020) describes lecturers face conventional problems such as taking online classes, online assignments and tests, sending feedback to students, trying hard to capture the students' whole attention; therefore, they could not find time to spend with their family. As a whole, the pressure on lecturers has gone up nowadays (Chitra, 2020). It can be assumed that lecturers face more pressure in the pandemic situation.

However, some teachers assume to transfer the negativity of stress into positive energy. To get rid of all the negative energies in their minds, and keep up with the workflow, teachers usually adhere to work, escape frequent dissentient standings, and engage in religious activities (Ferdous & Shifat, 2020). Alternatively, while teachers may have initial decreases in efficacy in light of the new demands, their efficacy may recover over time as they learn to adapt to the new situation or as they take advantage of external resources available to them (Sokal et al, 2020). Thereby, this process is called adaptability, it builds to elevate their motivation, learn more, and have experience. Adaptability is part of resilience (Seibert et al., 2016). It involves the process that a person tries to adapt to traumatic events, sources of stress, and hardship. It can be also the ability of someone who can be back from hardship he faces and tries to realign from unpleasant experiences to comfort life. (Lanza, 2020) assumes that lecturers can transfer their burnout with some positive attempts like being proactive in the classroom or online classroom and ignoring the negative thought of students. It is in line with Hayes et al., (2013) who claim that support from co-workers, students, and institutions will affect positive adaptability. It can be assumed that the process of adaptability from the stress circumstances is achieved through individual support and environment.

However, the previous related studies just focus on investigating the stress causes, and not covering the ways to cope with the stress and having teachers and students at schools as the participants. Consequently, of all the phenomena and objects of study that have been described, the writers have a convincing eagerness to observe stress and adaptability among English teachers during covid-19. Based on the previous explanation, the goals of this study are to analyze the sources of stress on teachers during the covid 19 pandemic and how teachers adapt to all workloads during the pandemic.

## **METHOD**

The researchers used a descriptive qualitative approach to conduct research. Stake (2010) defines that qualitative research relies on human perception of the subjects and understanding. Furthermore, the type of this study is in the form of a description of the data and result, opinion, and observation rather than numerical data (Walliman, 2011). Moreover, the study took place at Universitas Pamulang Tangerang Selatan, Banten, and it was conducted within 6 months (June to November 2021); it has been using E-learning as a learning application during the pandemic. The total of participants was about 80 lecturers, and the writers used purposive sampling to obtain the participants.

The researchers used questionnaire questions as the instrument for data collection. Moreover, the researchers used the interview section to obtain the factors of stress and the adaptability processes; briefly, an interview is one of the techniques for collecting data conducted by obtaining the participants' interpretation of the phenomenon or situation (Sugiyono, 2018). The researchers selected the participants through some particular categories: have been working for 5 to 10 years (Sugiyono, 2018) and have a high level of stress during the pandemic to know more in-depth things about participants in interpreting situations and phenomena. The lecturers who have been working for 5 to 10 years are considered more experienced lecturers and more easily adaptable to challenging situations. Further, the lecturers who have a high level of stress during the pandemic can be seen through the interview. By having achieved the categories, the writers obtain 6 participants who support the study. Doney (2013) describes that the qualitative approach may have 6-10 participants to support the study. Although this study involves 6 lecturers to support the data, the analysis had depth description of the responses of the stress sources and the ways to get adaptability.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

Achieve the objectives of the study, it involves some procedures. The writers selected the participants to support the findings of the stress source among lecturers during the pandemic situation and the ways they cope with their burnout by distributing the questionnaire through google form to seek the two main points that are stated previously. After obtaining the participants, the writers conducted direct interview sessions to achieve the objectives of the study. The interview followed the guidance of questions. The writers questioned the sources of stress and dug more into the arguments of participants. Afterward, the participants also shared the ways to cope with the stress during the pandemic related to the teaching and learning process. Then, participants shared the depth responses regarding adaptability. The process of the interview was recorded for data analysis. The recorded result was converted into written data as the transcription. After having the transcription, the writers read the transcription results and classify the sources of stress and the ways to cope with stress. The writers also identified the same and distinct arguments among participants, and they were described as clusters. As the result, the clusters were created as the theme.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This section describes the findings of the research questions: the causes of stress and the way of lecturers to adapt the situation. Moreover, the writers quote the lecturers' statements in the interview section to strengthen and support the findings.

## Stress Sources

### *System Changes*

Covid -19 and stress present a close relation; both terms are illustrated as a circle. Due to Covid-19, universities apply the new learning system by conducting online learning in the whole teaching and learning activities. A commented that her stress existence is led by the new system created by the university; the system itself governs the lecturers to obey all systems like a hundred minutes of conventional learning is transformed to be a hundred minutes of online learning. It is in line with Rizki, (2017) that found the system change stated in the curriculum is one crucial aspect leading to burnout of lecturers. The online learning system triggers the lectures to have a complex workload of learning activities (Angdhiri, 2020). The lecturers need to deliver an interactive teaching process to avoid the student' boredom and reach the teaching and learning goals. The new system requires the lecturers to provide the material presented on PowerPoint and prevent the discussion presented by the students; the teaching process involves the lecturers' explanation, and lecturer and students' discussion. As the participant A emphasized:

*"When the university announced online learning in the whole teaching and learning activities due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I appreciated and understood. However, in one semester of the pandemic, they change some regulations. The lecturers should provide the online material from the power point which is created with the format, the teaching and learning activities should be both on a learning management system and video conference; we are not able to instruct the students to present the topic in the team during the learning process; the activities should be dominated by the lecturers' explanation and question and answer section in a hundred minutes, and mid-term and final exam must be conducted through video conference with its regulation" (participant A)*

Moreover, the mid-term and final exams have to be conducted online, and given five days to submit the exam. The period led the high plagiarism among the students; they have much time to search for a lot of information on the internet and discuss the answers with their peers. It leads to stress since the lecturers experience worried and doubt about the students' work. Syahputri et al., (2020) describe that the new system encourages burnout and lecturers' fatigue; demotivation and procrastination in their work are also the main sources of mental burdens during the pandemic. Meanwhile, the conventional test or sit-in test declines the cheating activities; however, the online test and the extended time produce high plagiarism. It affects the validity of achievement results; it also does not conceal the students' comprehension. In addition, the challenges in using online learning, university authority determines the policy in short term and transforms it into the new one within one semester. It leads the lecturer to adapt to the new policy, and lecturers need to explain to the students more. Sometimes, the students consult the problems to face the rapid change of policy. The respondent explained that:

*"The changes I should face are the system of midterm and final exams in which the students initially submit the exam to the E-learning system within five days of the due time, and now the exams have to be conducted synchronously" (Participant C)*

It leads to plagiarism and cheating raise among students; it can be seen from the same answers they have. However, the synchronous exam provides limited time to conduct the test since it is done based on the schedule. The synchronous test can reduce the plagiarism and cheating process done by the students during the test since their activity is controlled by the web camera.

Not only the change in the exam system but also many documents and links that lecturers must upload during the teaching and learning process, post activity, and exams are also challenging. The documents must be uploaded are the attendance, the score, the teaching journal, the exam questions, the link to video conferences, the link to the synchronous test, and others. Its process builds a hectic situation among lecturers and causes them to get stressed in any distinctive stage. Moreover, the inconsistency of the E-learning schedule precedes the pressure among lecturers since 2 meetings on E-learning may be conducted 3 or 5 days a week or 4 meetings in 3 days only. The respondent also added that:

*“Before the pandemic, we only uploaded crucial documents to support the teaching and learning activity. Nevertheless, the pandemic insists us to upload many links and documents to substantiate our teaching and learning activity. Continuously, the E-learning schedule is unpredictable as the short meeting is conducted over a long period while the four meetings are conducted in a short period, and sometimes the exam schedule is included. We cannot picture it out” (Participant C)*

### **Students’ Low Motivation**

Another cause of stress experienced by the lecturers is student low motivation. The hybrid learning process presents some obstacles to conduct: unpreparedness of facing hybrid learning, students’ low motivation, poor connection, and others. These factors lead the lecturers to have stress during the pandemic. B faces these issues during the pandemic, but the students’ low motivation affects her a lot. The respondent commented that:

*“When I had online learning through a learning management system, the students share their responses once and seldom elaborate on their answers. They only participate to share the answer without a revisit to check the lecturers’ responses. Therefore, it seems that their participation is only a kind of conventionalism or has the attendance” (Participant B)*

Further, the respondent also added that:

*“During the video conference on Google Meet, most students did not turn their cameras on due to some excuses; it automatically shows their low motivation, and they did not respond when I ask their comprehension; it seems that I speak with myself” (Participant B)*

Hybrid learning activities through electronic learning and video conferences lead the students to have low motivation. Dhawan (2020) shares a similar argument that students’ low motivation increases when they join hybrid and video conference activities; it affects the lecturers’ stress presence. Herman et al (2021) also reveal the distinct finding lecturers’ burnout boosts significantly due to the incompetence to succeed students’ attitude and involve them in learning activities. The students’ low motivation can be investigated from their participation; they participate once and seldom recheck the lecturers’ feedback. They

just want to have their attendance not share their material comprehension. In addition, most students share the answers which are taken from online sources. Whatever they do, they will search on the smart engine; it could be a common way for them. They also seldom ask for the unclear information shared by the lecturers; therefore, in electronic learning, I could not find any discussion between lecturers and students.

Furthermore, in the video conference activities, the students show their low motivation by having no responses in the question, answer, and discussion sections. They hesitate to discuss a particular topic, they do not turn their camera on, the significant one is they do not respond when the lecturers call or their name to check their comprehension, and when the meeting ends, some students still join the meeting since they do not keep attention to the meeting. In addition, during the video conference, many students complain that they need to meet the lecturers to obtain more comprehension.

### **Workload and lack of Communication**

The lecturers should prepare many things before beginning teaching; the preparation can be the kids, husbands, and students' needs. Thus, they need to have proper time management to assist them to overwhelm their activities. The pandemic also insists them to work at home and their children study at home; it triggers them to release their time to be a tutor for their kids, handle the household, and lecture for the students. Muhamad et al., (2021) claim that the sources of stress are poor motivation, workload, and negative perspective of seeing one thing. It is in line with Zouaghi & Beltou (2018), who mention that workload and overcommitment lead to emotional exhaustion and presenteeism and are negatively related to job satisfaction and performance. Although the teaching process is conducted through hybrid learning, it does not mean that they do not meet the unimpeded things. It is the summary of participants D and F:

*"We try not to blame the pandemic condition, but we blame ourselves why we cannot solve our hectic situation and having beneficial time management. We need to do many routine chores every day, so they lead to our boredom and pressure. We also realize our responsibility that we need to take care of the children and teach the students at the same time. However, we cannot relax or feel worried about all the small things" (Participants D & F)*

They added similar arguments:

*"The covid-19 pandemic makes us lack of having good relationships among working partners. Sometimes, we think that hybrid learning and video conference through Google Meet precede them to be individualist as we think about our responsibility, and chat the crucial matters only. Due to the lack of communication, we pressure ourselves and care about our matters" (Participants D & F)*

The responsibility of the lecturer is not simple to do. They should complete their task on time and properly; also, they need to maintain good relationships among colleagues to create a conducive working situation although they work from home. Maintaining relations is central in working place since it will demonstrate good teamwork in any kind of situation. However, the researchers obtain that the stress among lecturers during the pandemic increases due to the way the leader of the faculty has one-sided communication to delegate

the task and the passive student interaction during a video conference. Pressley et al., (2021) share a similar finding that poor communication between the study program and lecturers and virtual learning activities enhance the lecturers' burnout. Building good relationships during a pandemic is also important, yet it does not mean that people should please everyone; people can trust, ask for help and respect each other. Consequently, the situation produces good relationships and productive personalities.

### ***Impromptu Task***

The leader also contributes to the source of stress of participant E. the respondent claims that the authority of a high position is misrepresented by distributing the task in injury time.

*"Honestly, I can adapt to the effect of a new situation like the Covid-19 pandemic as it is my responsibility as a lecturer. Nevertheless, I cannot tolerate the impromptu task from a high position. It deals that lecturer has many tasks to do; however, he assigned us the task in a very short period to conquer. If it is distributed or announced some days before, I think it will be more unproblematic to finish" (Participant E)*

Running a lot of tasks makes lecturers overwhelmed and stressed. Etxebarria et al., (2021) also argue that the main cause of instructors' psychological discomfort during the pandemic is the institutions that have been unable to deal with the concerns and obstacles posed by the pandemic, and one of them is a lack of knowledge, competency, and resources for online teaching activities which create some impromptu tasks. Generally, our brain has a limited capacity to work; hence, if they force to think or work a lot, it affects the lecturer's emotions. It also leads them not to have any effective solution how to overwhelm the obstacles they face. The respondent also realizes that not everyone loves this work a lot; conversely, if the respondent always thinks that it is a fair thing to do, the respondent potentially has stress, and it impacts her to other aspects of life.

### **The Adaptability to overwhelm the stress**

Stress is a common condition occurred in lecturers' life. It is believed that everyone has experienced stress, but the condition cannot be allowed extensively in order not to precede health problems. Hence, people especially lecturers in universities should be familiar with the ways to overcome their stress. Stress can share a positive perspective among lecturers; they argue that they can complete their responsibilities on time since they know how to overwhelm the stress or feel reliant.

### ***Family Support***

Family support is a kind of bond that strengthens the relationship among family members. It can refer to someone in the family who can give support and advice. It can be emotional support showing sympathy, empathy, and attention. Moreover, they can share a suggestion or best guidance for them when they get pressured or get stressed. It relieves their burden as lecturers, wives, and mothers by sharing their problematic matters in the workplace.

Participants A, B, and E require family support to strengthen when they get problems. They argue that sharing a lot with their husband or parents comforts them and reduce their hectic situation. Not only sharing section but also the help from the husband means a lot to



them; consequently, the family relationship is formed. Therefore, they do not need to share their stress with others to relieve them since they believe in family relationships. Furthermore, they argue that sharing with family and listening to their wise advice makes their work spirit grows and feel whipped to complete their work. Here is the summary of three lecturers' arguments talking about the way to overcome their stress during the pandemic. The participants stated:

*"When we get down or stressed, the first thing we need to do is share with someone who is always there and trusts us, family. We have someone that we believe in, we share, we argue with, and we give advice and support when we obtain problems at work or other places. We think that problems or complaints should be shared with someone that we trust not those whom we cannot assure that they have the wrong perspective or suggest the wrong way to us"* (Participants A, B, & E)

### **Working Partner and positive vibes**

Working partners and positive vibes in the workplace are considered the factors that can help workers work comfortably. In campus, lecturers feel helped to have a supportive working partner to create a positive vibe environment. Ika (2020) argues that sharing with intimate friends and family is the way to proceed with the adaptability to changes during the pandemic. This is in line with the statements of participants C and D. They stated:

*"Fortunately, we have close colleagues who always share the problems we have at work including students' attitudes, new regulations, and many others so that we do not feel alone when we get burnout. We think having close friends will motivate us to work and to adapt to the new situation we will have later; it also influences the positive vibes in the workplace although we need to work from home"* (Participants C & D)

Fundamentally, lecturers are social creatures who need help from others or friends. Hence, lecturers must have some intimate colleagues to support them when they get burnout and to communicate when they feel miserable. They argue that sharing with colleagues can reduce their burnout syndrome; in fact, they do not focus on obtaining the solution, but they need friends to talk only and accommodate their complaints. They believe sharing with colleagues can reduce their burden as they have experienced to get burnout. Moreover, they should talk and share with their colleagues as they think that the work vibe can be more positive and conducive. During sharing with others, they relax, and a positive vibe will arise.

### **Positive Personality**

Participant F uttered:

*"Burnout can be solved with a positive personality of an individual. I experienced to get stress when I faced the new system of teaching and learning process, but I think I was able to adjust to the new change by doing all things as a challenge and new phenomenon"* (Participant F)

Someone's courage is needed to adapt to the burnout among lecturers in the pandemic situation. It is the ability to switch the negative perspective of a new system that leads the stress to positive perspectives: taking all simply and gaining them as a challenge. Moreover, the respondent explores that commitment reflects someone's goals when the

respondent decides to work. The increase of having work commitment and being grateful during the pandemic can reduce burnout among lecturers (Muhamad et al., 2021). The respondent realizes well their responsibility and does not give in to pressure. Controlling emotion is one of the important aspects when people get burnout. It is one of the positive personalities of someone that can impact the situation they face. Furthermore, taking all activities as a challenge, not a threat can be another positive perspective to overcome burnout.

## CONCLUSION

Drawing on the results and discussion, it is seen that the Covid-19 pandemic is detrimental to education as the teaching and learning activities are conducted online. The research found that mental health problems, especially stress were embraced not only by students but also by Lecturers. Further, there are some sources of stress experienced by lectures as a result of the system changes. Complex workload, students' low motivation, the raise of plagiarism, lack of communication, and impromptu tasks are the sources of stress that occurred in the lecturers' life. To overcome the stress, lecturers need support and motivation from their family members and working partners that influence a positive vibe at home and in the workplace. Moreover, strong positive emotions as part of a positive personality that leads them to adjust to the new change as a new challenge and phenomenon have been well documented as key features of resilience. Moreover, this research reveals the mental health condition of EFL teachers during the pandemic.

However, this research was conducted only for English lecturers; it should be applied to other study programs to gain enriched findings. It is expected that this research provides multiple benefits, especially for other teaching sites which share a similar issue. Furthermore, the writers suggest that research will show the path for the next researchers to conduct a larger project on the teachers' and students' mental health in other areas and their efforts to overcome their problems to improve their resilience.

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