

TEACHERS' WELLBEING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 outbreak has added plenty of new pressures for teachers, including difficulties associated with the sudden switch to digital learning. Teachers, as frontline educators, have faced numerous obstacles since the beginning of the Covid-19 epidemic. In recent years, educational environments have placed a greater emphasis on teacher wellbeing. To better understand teacher wellbeing during this crisis and inform strategies that support them, this study examined recent research on teacher wellbeing. Researchers retrieved and analysed studies on teacher wellbeing from Science Direct, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The findings indicated that teachers experienced a significant level of stress and anxiety. In addition, the study showed the best coping mechanisms for teachers in order to adjust to new circumstances. Finally, recommendations for further research are made, as are the implications.

Keywords: wellbeing, pandemic, Covid-19, teacher

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed everyone's daily routine. Starting March 2020, all educational institutions in Malaysia were ordered to close, and learning and teaching sessions (*PdP*) were conducted online. A movement control order (MCO) and a physical distancing campaign have been implemented nationwide. These drastic changes significantly impact social relationships when they cause feelings of loneliness and isolation (Smith & Lim, 2020). The process of *PdP* was still uncertain, even though the Covid-19 pandemic has been going on for more than a year. This situation has caused teachers to experience anxiety, stress, fatigue, etcetera.

Previous studies have stated that the teaching profession is a career that has high pressure due to excessive workload, communication problems, and lack of training (Davidson, 2009; Kyriacou & Chien, 2004). It further causes anxiety and depression (von der Embse, Ryan, Gibbs, & Mankin, 2019). This pandemic situation indirectly increases teachers' stress, anxiety, and workload. Teachers need to adapt and improve their competence in using technology when doing online classes. This has caused the teachers to take leaves and being absent, which has decreased work performance (Salvagioni et al., 2017). In addition, the teachers' mental health can also be disturbed and cause relationship problems with students, colleagues, and administration, making it challenging to deliver knowledge in *PdP* sessions effectively.

The Covid-19 pandemic causes not only universal health problems but also involves global economic problems. It affects all career fields, including teaching. A study in the United States involving 131,154 teachers found that the pandemic has caused deep concern for teachers' mental health problems as compared to other professions (Kush, Badillo-Goicoechea, Musci, & Stuart, 2021). Distance education teachers are reported to have higher stress levels than school teachers. The Malaysian Minister of Education has announced opening schools and face-to-face *PdP* sessions in October 2021. However, until now, the Malaysian Ministry of Education still does not have clear guidelines, which causes concern among teachers, students, schools, and parents.

Opening schools in unexpected conditions causes anxiety for all parties, including teachers (Viner et al., 2021). This is because this situation will test teachers' endurance and flexibility levels and change their *PdP* method according to the situation. In addition, the health of teachers, students, and their families should also be prioritized before any decision is made. In Malaysia, research on teachers' wellbeing is still under-conducted and needs to be given attention in order to develop policies to help teachers achieve wellbeing. This study aimed to conduct a meta-analytical review of previous research related to the wellbeing of teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The following section will discuss the concept of wellbeing in terms of definition and concept.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars divide the concept of wellbeing into objective wellbeing and subjective wellbeing (Atkinson et al., 2016; Bellani & D'Ambrosio, 2011; D'Acci, 2011; Western & Tomaszewski, 2016). The basis for objective wellbeing is the non-emotional aspects of a person's life, externally evaluated, accepted, and normatively agreed upon, such as mobility and illness. In contrast, subjective wellbeing focuses on aspects of feelings with internal evaluation such as emotions, satisfaction, etcetera.

However, scholars also state that these two elements sometimes are overlapping (Dolan & White, 2007). Generally, the non-emotional aspects agreed upon are health, autonomy, life expectancy, and access to existing opportunities. If viewed, the aspect of health is likely to overlap with aspects or components of subjective wellbeing.

The label placed on this element of wellbeing is often the subject of scholarly discussion (Alatartseva & Barysheva, 2015). This is because using objective and subjective labels is unsatisfactory in interpreting the components of wellbeing. Veenhoven (2007) is among the scholars who emphasize on the ambiguity in the meaning of objective wellbeing and subjective wellbeing that are confusing. He stated that feelings could also be studied objectively.

Even so, scholars in the field of psychology have presented various definitions, concepts, and theories of wellbeing. However, there is no unanimous definition of wellbeing (Carlisle, Henderson, & Hanlon, 2009), and the diversity of wellbeing theories has resulted in a vague and overly broad definition (Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Seligman, 2012).

There are five main philosophical perspectives on wellbeing: hedonic, life satisfaction, eudaimonic, wish fulfilment, and non-eudaimonic objectives (Armenta, Ruberton, & Lyubomirsky, 2015). Initially, wellbeing appeared around two philosophical perspectives, namely hedonic and eudaimonic, which later expanded to include concepts such as life satisfaction and fulfilment of will.

Most psychological scholars discuss the concept of wellbeing subjectively from psychological aspects such as life satisfaction, happiness, mental health, positive emotions, flourishing, and so on. Boniwell (2016) states that some positive psychologists often consider happiness synonymous with subjective wellbeing. Meseroll (2016) also agrees and states that most scholars have used the terms 'happiness' and 'wellbeing' interchangeably over the past few decades.

Seligman (2004) introduced a model of authentic happiness. He distinguishes between a pleasant, reasonable, and meaningful life in evaluating the genuine concept of wellbeing and how these three things contribute to satisfaction in life. According to Marks and Shah (2004), wellbeing is more than joy. Wellbeing includes not only feeling satisfied and happy but also self-development as an individual, finding satisfaction, and contributing to society.

Compared to the hedonic approach, Ryff (1989b) believes that wellbeing is a state of being in good health and being able to function optimally. This is not only about experiencing pleasure and happiness in life but also looking at the factors of a person's development, function in life, and evaluation or feelings about interactions between oneself and the environment. Ryff (1989a) integrated six dimensions as criteria for psychological wellbeing. These six dimensions are self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, mastery of the environment, purpose in life, and self-development.

Flourish is Martin Seligman's book in which he introduced a new concept of emotional wellbeing that is different from the idea that only focuses on happiness (Seligman, 2011). His new theory of wellbeing focuses on aspects of wellbeing that he describes as a set of building blocks for the development of individual life, including positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (PERMA).

These concepts of wellbeing have been widely used in educational and psychological studies. This wellbeing study is essential to help teachers increase satisfaction in life, and a sense of happiness, build positive relationships and control emotions well. Therefore, the study of wellbeing needs to be developed, especially in times of crisis, to explore elements that can drive the health and wellbeing of teachers.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research aimed to identify past studies on teachers' wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic. Keywords used in the search process for related studies include wellbeing, health, emotions, Covid-19, pandemic, and teachers. These previous studies have been obtained through online databases such as Science Direct, Web of Science and Google Scholar. The following criteria were used to find relevant previous studies:

- Research on welfare variables;
- This study focuses on the teacher's career;
- Use English and Malay and be accessible;
- Studies published between 2020 and now; and
- The study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

The selection of research publications from 2020 to date ensures that these studies are up-to-date during the pandemic. After the analysis was done qualitatively, a meta-analysis of the study findings is presented. Hence, a summary of the findings is as in Table 1.

Table 1: Meta-Analysis of teachers' wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic

Elements	Past Studies
1 Anxiety	(Allen, Jerrim, & Sims, 2020; Dabrowski, 2021)
2 School's Climate	(Chan, Sharkey, Lawrie, Arch, & Nylund-Gibson, 2021; Dabrowski, 2021)
3 Coping Strategies/ Support Needs	(Anderson, Bousselot, Katz-Buoincontro, & Todd, 2020; Chan et al., 2021; Hascher, Beltman, & Mansfield, 2021; MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020)
4 Job Stress/ Workload	(Anderson et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2021; Hascher et al., 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2020)
5 Self-Efficacy	(Hascher et al., 2021)
6 Teaching effectiveness / Autonomy	(Chan et al., 2021)
7 Creativity	(Anderson et al., 2020)
8 Satisfaction and Professionalism	(Alves, Lopes, & Precioso, 2021)

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The impact of Covid-19 epidemic has had a significant impact on the wellbeing of teachers and in the general education field. The studies conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic found that the stress level of teachers' work is high and worrying (Anderson et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2021; Hascher et al., 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2020). Studies before covid-19 have found that most teachers had high levels of stress and pressure (Duxbury & Higgins, 2013; Naylor & White, 2010). This can indirectly explained why as the teacher's stress increases due to the pandemic. The stress that occurs will cause a risk of health problems (Selye, 2013). Quick and Cooper (2003) stated that stress is the seventh leading cause of death worldwide, closely related to cardiovascular disease in men and women. In addition, job stress contributes to psychological health problems such as anxiety and depression (Grant et al., 2004). This shows that the critical situation now was affected teachers' wellbeing directly and can interfere with their teaching duties and personal tasks at home. This pandemic also causes high anxiety in teachers due to the uncertainty of the situation they will go through (Allen et al., 2020; Dabrowski, 2021).

The increase in workload is seen as one of the causes of stress and wellbeing of teachers during pandemic (Dabrowski, 2021). There is no denying that teachers' workload before the pandemic was also excessive with time (Lam & Yan, 2011). Changes and developments in the world of education have forced teachers to adapt by improving intellectual competence and emotional management and providing the latest pedagogy, teaching techniques and technological knowledge. So, during the pandemic, the burden on teachers increases with distance education that has to be done (Van der Spoel, Noroozi, Schuurink, & van Ginkel, 2020), which also affects the burden on students (Niemi & Kousa, 2020). Teachers need to improve their technology skills using new and rarely used applications in online teaching. Therefore, this increased responsibility causes teachers to experience stress and interfere with their wellbeing.

A good school climate and culture can help teachers achieve continued wellbeing (Gray, Wilcox, & Nordstokke, 2017). Most elements of wellbeing do not touch on the aspects of school climate and culture that caused difficulties for teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic (Chan et al., 2021; Dabrowski, 2021). The drastic transition to online learning disrupts the school climate, and culture teachers and students must go through. New experiences with social relationships, learning new norms and changing perceptions and attitudes towards education and school interfere with teachers' wellbeing. Teachers must suddenly adapt to the new climate, causing anxiety and conflict in work matters (Oliveira, Grenha Teixeira, Torres, & Morais, 2021). Alves et al. (2021) stated that teachers' satisfaction and level of professionalism during the pandemic greatly have affected their wellbeing. Teachers expressed satisfaction with the situation before the pandemic compared to during the pandemic. This shows the impact on their wellbeing as the pandemic worsens.

Teaching effectiveness and the autonomy given to teachers are essential elements seen by Chan et al., (2021) on the relationship with the wellbeing of teachers when the Covid-19 pandemic occurred. Teachers with good wellbeing can control the situation well and convey knowledge well during the learning session. Teaching effectiveness and autonomy also have a solid relationship with teacher's job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). The autonomy given to teachers can also increase productivity (Johari, Tan, & Zulkarnain, 2018), professionalism (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005) and performance (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2010). Self-efficacy is also crucial for teachers because their belief in themselves can help them achieve goals and objectives during learning and teaching. This confidence can also encourage them in the implementation of appropriate behaviour. Hascher et al., (2021) stated that teachers with low self-efficacy are the cause of the deterioration of teachers' wellbeing at work during the pandemic.

Next, coping strategies are fundamental in critical situations such as the current pandemic. Researchers recommend that teachers use coping strategies that are appropriate for themselves when facing this situation (Hascher et al., 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2020). Using coping strategies can help teachers reduce the stress and anxiety they experience and thus improve their wellbeing at work. The teacher's strategy in overcoming problems is important because the situation also affects the students (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). MacIntyre et al., (2020) stated that the primary coping strategy teacher's use in this pandemic is acceptance. Teachers accept the general provisions to adapt to the new education norm as soon as possible. In addition, coping strategies that are often used are planning lessons, looking at problems from a positive perspective, actively doing something about the situation, and using work or other activities as a distraction.

In contrast, Hascher et al., (2021) found that teachers use coping strategies such as mastery over the situation, maintaining social relationships with students, collaboration with colleagues, and proper administrative management. According to Anderson et al., (2020), creativity can also be the best strategy that can be done during this pandemic. Thus, coping strategies used by teachers can effectively foster their wellbeing (Soykan, Gardner, & Edwards, 2019).

In addition to coping strategies, the need for support is essential for teachers in carrying out their career duties. Support from various factors such as resources, flexibility in working, emotional support, increased technological competence, support of colleagues and school leaders, and a clear educational plan (Chan et al., 2021; Hascher et al., 2021) is significant. This support requirement can help teachers overcome various problems arising in online teaching sessions. In this uncertain situation, what teachers need is emotional support. In addition, concern from their colleagues and school leaders can continuously benefit them. Support from colleagues and school leaders not only improves wellbeing but also reduces stress (Ford, Olsen, Khojasteh, Ware, & Urick, 2019), improves performance (Schuitema, Peetsma, & van der Veen, 2016), and teachers' ability to solve problems (Honingh & Hooge, 2014). The development and learning of digital skills are also significant at this time. Learning and teaching online is a new thing that most teachers need to acquire. This is because the provision of support for the improvement of technical skills is crucial. Teachers stated that the difficulties faced during the pandemic were the problem of digital and technology skills competence (Portillo, Garay,

Tejada, & Bilbao, 2020). The existence of interventions that can help teachers improve digital skills and emotional management is significant in enriching their wellbeing (Alves et al., 2021).

5.0 CONCLUSION

The pandemic caused many inevitable changes in various job sectors, including teaching. The causes that can be seen affecting the wellbeing of teachers are increased workload, job stress, anxiety, and lack of digital skills in the implementation of distance learning. In addition, these studies during Covid-19 show the need for teacher to cope with strategies and social and physical resource support in carrying out their responsibilities as educators engaging with virtual learning. Therefore, the results of this review can provide readers with an understanding of the factors and strategies teachers can use to face the challenges during this pandemic. With the drastic closure of schools, teachers are forced to develop new skills and coping strategies and need support from various parties. This transition creates new challenges in the field of education. However, exploring elements that can help teachers overcome problems, stress, satisfaction, and wellbeing during the pandemic are still limited. The emotional, social, and spiritual aspects have a close relationship with the satisfaction and wellbeing of teachers (Armenta et al., 2015; Carmeli, Yitzhak-Halevy, & Weisberg, 2009; Zulkifli & Hashim, 2019). So, this aspect can be studied in the teacher population in Malaysia to find out the extent to which emotional, social, and spiritual elements help teachers during the Covid-19. In addition, other factors that have a lot to do with the wellbeing of teachers and may be studied in this pandemic situation are happiness, grit, perseverance, leadership, and others. Findings from the article found studies in Malaysia on the wellbeing of teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic were absent, which became gaps that need to be filled in future studies. A number of studies on the issues of wellbeing during the pandemic in Malaysia were carried out on school students (Amran & Jamaluddin, 2021; Wahed & Khidir, 2021), university students (Kunjiapu & Kunasegaran, 2021; Sundarasan et al., 2020; Zainal Badri & Wan Mohd Yunus, 2021), frontliners (Aziz, Zulkifli, Kasmani, & Khan, 2021; Leong, Idris, & Malek, 2020), and academicians (Noh, Yusoff, Akhir, & Hassanuddin, 2021). The importance of teachers' wellbeing is equal to the extent of students' wellbeing and should be studied without neglecting their needs in this Covid-19 pandemic situation. This is so that the intervention effects can be developed and implemented by the authorities in helping teachers and students achieve satisfaction and wellbeing.

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