

Exploring the Relationship between Role Overload and Intention to Leave the Profession among Elementary School Teachers

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Abstract

Teacher role overload has vibrantly been of a considerable concern for school administrators since the birth of formal education. The phenomenon often leads to teacher early departure from the profession due to uncontrolled stressors. This study investigates the relationship between role overload and intention to leave the profession among teachers in three Chinese medium elementary schools in Malaysia. It also explores whether or not role overload exists in the sampled schools. The study uses a convenience sampling technique and distributed 65 survey questionnaires to the sampled school teachers. The findings reveal that role overload had moderately correlated with intention to leave the profession among teachers in the sampled schools. Furthermore, the findings also disclose that aspects role overload moderately existed in the settings of the sampled schools. The practical and theoretical implications of the study for teachers, school administrators, and further research on the teachers' role overload related issues were also addressed.

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Introduction

Intention to leave the profession is becoming a growing concern in the teaching profession. The local and international literature on the phenomenon has confirmed that more and more teachers are seeking permissions for leaving or intending to leave their jobs earlier than the known retirement age (BBC News –Education and Family, 2014; Ding, 2000; George & George, 1995; Merseth, 1992). Many teachers try to avoid the teaching profession by either taking up other school based positions or pursue their career outside of education (George & George, 1995). It has also been reported in the same study that if teachers were to start their work life again, it would be unlikely that they could choose teaching as a career. In another study, 50% of the teachers surveyed had resigned from their profession within 7 years of experience (Merseth, 1992).

In 2014, it has been reported that more than two-thirds of secondary school head teachers and deputies in England are considering taking early retirement with most blaming an excessive workload, a survey suggests (BBC News –Education and Family, 2014). More specifically, the survey found that 82% of head teachers and senior staff claiming that their workload had increased from a year ago.

Malaysia is not exempted from the above issue. A study of Malaysian secondary school teachers reported that 73% of them indicated moderate to high level of intention to quit (Ding, 2000). This is an alarming figure to indicate the urgency of addressing this problem. In 1997, the National Union of Teaching Profession (NTUP) reported that 15,000 teachers in the country have quit the profession since 1992.

The complaints that teachers are burdened with extra responsibilities, including administrative and clerical tasks that hinder their main duty of educating students, have intrigued the concerns of the Ministry of Education (MOE) towards paying more attention towards teacher safety and welfare (The Star 2013). As such, a Special Committee of Teachers' Workload Survey (SCTWS) has been formed to study the extra workload handled by teachers nationwide

and study passion of teacher doused by the system (The Star 2013). It has been emphasised that one of the transformation efforts to be given attention in implementing the National Education Development Blueprint ([NEDB], 2013-2025) is finding a suitable formula to reduce the workload of teachers. Thus, the suggestion to reduce teachers' workload has been proposed (The Malaysian Insider [MI], 2013). The emphasise goes on pinpointing that the achievements and success of a school depended very much on the teachers, therefore their needs should be given a priority to motivate them to serve the nation as educators (MI, 2013).

Given the foregoing discussion, this study investigates the relationship between role overload and intention to leave the profession among teachers in three Chinese medium elementary schools in Malaysia. It also explores whether or not role overload exists in the sampled schools. Thus, examining whether or not role overload is a potential factor leading teachers choose to leave the profession or apply for early retirement. As such, the study, therefore, poses the following questions:

Research question 1: what is the level of role overload among teachers of selected Chinese medium elementary schools?

Research question 2: is there a significant relationship between role overload and teacher intention to leave the profession?

Scope of the study

This study is unique in that it looks at Chinese medium elementary school teachers. To be more specific, the scope of this study is limited to the teachers in three Chinese elementary schools in Johor, Malaysia. Elementary school teachers were the main focus in this study and questionnaires were distributed to 65 teachers of the conveniently selected elementary school teachers. While the finding of this research may be limited to teachers from the sampled schools, it is reasonable to expect that some form of generalisation of the study's findings may reflect the relationship between role overload and intention to leave the profession in Chinese medium elementary schools in Johor.

Significance of the study

This empirical study investigated the relationship between role overload and intention to leave the profession among elementary school teachers. The study sought teachers' perceptions on the role overload and the significant bearings on how they respond to their work and in this case to the intention to leave the profession.

The results of this study may provide a reference source to reduce the workloads of teachers in elementary schools. The findings would be essential in that elementary school teachers would be encouraged and guided on how to cope with different roles in their profession as teachers. The findings may also be used in developing strategies to reduce role overload stressors among teacher in selected Chinese medium elementary schools and other elementary schools nationwide.

Literature review

Role overload

Role overload occurs either when there are too many roles at one time for an individual or roles are changing and too many new roles develop at once (Johnson, n.d.). It happens when the required work weights the capabilities of an individual who is responsible for carrying out the task within a given timeframe and resource (Kumar and Govindarajo, 2014). Role overload can lead to extreme stress or depression. This in turn can lead to failure at all of the roles expected of one person (Johnson, n.d.). Johnson also argues that when a person is so radically fragmented in the roles, it appears natural that the person will begin to question his own identity, wondering, what if anything, lies behind those roles.

Educational administration and teaching worldwide are becoming increasingly complicated, demanding and difficult. However, there has been inadequate research or comment into the nature of stress on people within the organisation and much of it is outdated (Droppert & Bale, 1995). Nowadays, teachers worldwide experience various obstacles related to assuming their professional duties. Squire (2001) discusses issues relating to the recruitment and retention of teachers, whilst Marrow (1994) explores stress among teachers in schools and suggested that time constraints and role overload were among the main causes of teacher stress. It seems normal in literature on schools to merely refer to 'role overload', yet Smylie (1999) argues that seven factors are mainly responsible for stress, including role conflict, role ambiguity and work

overload. High levels of stress have been found in further education (FE) colleges Male and May (1997), Pithers and Soden (1998), with role overload being the main source of stress. Furthermore, studies have shown that role overload can exert a direct influence on job satisfaction and physical symptoms, which in turn influence turnover intentions and finally affects teacher decision to leave the profession (Hendrix et al., 1985; Kemery, Bedeian, Mossholder, & Touliatos 1985; Sullivan & Bhaqat, 1992).

Malaysian teachers are not exempted from encountering teaching related obstacles or changes. According to Ding (2000), teachers in Malaysia not only teach in schools, but also have to do a lot of paper works and administration work. They face many problems accruing from the shortage of appropriately qualified teachers, the negative consequences on schools of the ever increasing social problems, and also transformation in education system (Ding, 2000). As a result of these changes in both the external and the internal environment of the public school system, which, becomes increasingly more complex, educational administrators function under high pressure and experience high levels of job stress (Chand, 1990; Eastman & Moirochnik, 1991; Richardson, 1998).

According to Forlin (1997), teachers face numerous stresses including student behaviour problems, heavy workload Nagel and Brown (2003), dealing with aggressive parents Howard and Johnson (2004), maintaining discipline Austin, Shah, and Muncer (2005), being evaluated by others Kyriacou (2001), attending after school hours to some remedial classes and evening meetings Romano and Wahlstrom (2000), lack of stimulation Burke and Greenglass (1993), and high external expectations (Murray-Harvey Slee, Lawson, Silins, Banfield & Russell, 2000).

It is undeniable fact that role overload can lead to extreme stress and in his study, Kyriacou (2001, p. 2) defined stress as “the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of his/her work as a teachers”.

A pilot study by Younghusband (2004) assessed the level of stress among elementary, middle and high school teachers in a school district in Newfoundland, found that the greatest stressor was role overload; 74 percent of teachers reported this as a stressors and endorsed that it occurred ‘most of the time’. Role overload referred to having too many tasks with insufficient

time to complete them, increased job responsibilities, performing tasks without training, taking work home, not having sufficient resources and doing more work than is reasonable.

Intention to leave the profession

Intention to quit the profession has been widely studied by past researchers (Cohen, 1999; Liou, 1998; Tett & Meyer, 1993). The concept of intention to quit was often referred to as turnover intention (Cohen, 1999; Liou, 1998) or intention to terminate one's job or the propensity to leave one's organisation (Rahim & Afza, 1993). More specifically, it means having an inclination or disposition to leave the present organisation or it is a conscious and deliberate will fullness to leave the organisation. In this study, it is referred to as having the thoughts or intention to leave the profession.

According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), the theory of reasoned action suggests that intention is a psychological precursor to the actual behavioural act (Vallerand, Deshaies, Cuerrier, Pelletier & Mongeau, 1992). An individual's intention to perform or not to perform a behavioural act is the immediate determinant of a given action. Based on this notion, an individual who nurtures the thought of leaving his/her present profession is more likely to do so if the right conditions (such as an alternative job or best employment opportunities) exists, or if the adverse condition that warrants the thought of intent persists. Several studies have actually reported association between quit intentions and turnover or role overload, whether it is a job or occupation (Blau & Lunz, 1998; Chen, Hui & Segó, 1998; Koslowsky, 1987).

The validity of studying intention in the workplace can also be drawn from Sagar's (1994) longitudinal study of salespeople, in which intention to quit was found to differentiate effectively between leavers and non-leavers. However, while it is reasonable to argue that intentions are an accurate indicator of subsequent behaviour, little is known about what determines such intention when it comes to Chinese medium elementary school teachers.

Methodology

Sample

A convenience sample of three Chinese medium elementary schools was selected from the 25 elementary schools in the district of Johor, Malaysia. A Self-report survey instruments were

distributed to 65 teachers in three sampled elementary schools. Teachers were conveniently selected and they voluntarily participated in answering the survey questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents during their free time. They were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement to the survey instruments. Of the total survey questionnaires distributed, 50 completed were returned, accounting for 77% of response rate. The analysis revealed that 89.2% (n=46) of the respondents were female teachers, and 10.8% (n=4) of the respondents were male teachers. Furthermore, the analysis also disclosed that the majority (n=45, 87.7%) of the respondents were from Chinese ethnic, while only 12.3% (n=5) Malay ethnic group participated in the study.

Instrumentation

As mentioned earlier, data were collected through a self-report survey instrument measuring role overload and intention to leave the profession. The instrument comprised sections. Section one is used to collect the demographic information of teachers, such as gender and ethnic group.

Section two has 10 items of Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI) revised. The inventory is adapted from Schutz and Long (1988). The TSI –revised is used to measure the level of stressful events that teachers encounter.

Section three comprises three items adopted from Wiesberg and Sagie (1999). These statements were used to measure teachers' intention to leave their profession. The responses from the three items were then summated to obtain an overall score for teachers' intention to leave. The data from field survey were analysed using predictive analytic software (PASW) for window version 21.0. Data analysis in the study includes descriptive analysis and correlation analysis. A five-point Likert scale was employed for data collection. The scale is interpreted as: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither disagree nor agree, 4= agree, and 5= Strongly agree.

Results

Role stress

Since instruments used in the study were standardised ones, reliability of TSI with 10-item scale identified what types of situations teachers reported as being stressful (Schutz & Long, 1988)

instruments after modification was performed. The overall internal consistency reliability coefficient was 0.76 for the first scale. This indicated a substantial internal consistency between individual items; thus, the items had positive covariance, while the alpha fell within the desired zone (Nunnally, 1978). More specifically, Nunnally (1978) has indicated 0.7 to be an acceptable reliability coefficient. This evidence represents a test that relative to other tests with the same number of items, and measuring the same construct of interest (Hatcher, 1994).

Intention to leave the profession

This factor consists of three-item self-report instrument adopted from Wiesberg and Sagie (1999) scale. These items are a) I have considered leaving the current school I teach at. b) I think that if I were choosing my place of work again, I would choose other professions, and c) I think in the near future, I will leave teaching at this school. All these three items modelled after Wiesberg and Sagie (1999). Moreover, the internal consistency reliability coefficient for the pool of the items was 0.66. This value, though failed to meet Nunnally (1978) requirement $<.70$, it has met the rule thumb suggested for basic research. According to George (2006), some variables may fail to fulfil reliability criteria, but they are maintained for theoretical and practical reasons. Provided that the reliability coefficient of this factor exhibited 0.55, which is considered as the cutoff point of basic research (Tharenou, 1993).

Correlation Analysis

For this study, Pearson correlation analysis was used to inspect whether role overload and intention to leave the profession have significant relationship to each other. The scale suggested by Hair et al., (2003) is used to describe the intensity of relationships between the dependent and the independent variable of the study as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Pearson's r Indices of Correlation

Pearson's r	Indication
Between ± 0.80 to ± 1.00	High correlation
Between ± 0.60 to ± 0.79	Moderately high correlation

Between ± 0.40 to ± 0.59	Moderate correlation
Between ± 0.20 to ± 0.39	Low correlation
Between ± 0.01 to ± 0.19	Negligible correlation

Note: The correlation coefficient is computed to investigate the strength of association among the variables. The level of significance is set at .05 or less.

Discussions

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of role overloads among teachers from three elementary Chinese medium schools in Johor. The average mean is 3.46, according to the mean scores categorised based on guidelines given by Glass and Hopkins (1996) the mean score obtained is identified as average. This means that respondents revealed that they suffered from a moderate role overloads level. This finding corresponds with Marrow (1994) who found estittance of role stress among teachers in schools due to issues related to role overload and time constraints.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on role overloads among the teachers

No	Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I can predict what will be expected of me in my work tomorrow.	50	2	5	3.52	.762
2	I find that I have extra work beyond what should normally be expected of me.	50	2	5	3.98	.769
3	I am doing too much responsibility without adequate authority to carry it out.	50	2	5	3.34	.688
4	I have a hard time satisfying the conflicting demands of students, parents, administration and teachers.	50	2	5	3.18	.720
5	Trying to complete responds and paperwork on time causes me a lot of stress.	50	1	5	3.72	1.051
6	I find that dealing with student discipline problems puts a lot of stress.	50	2	5	3.46	.908
7	There is a lot of stress just keeping up with changing professional standards.	50	2	5	3.46	.788

8	Having to participate in school activities outside of the normal working hours is very stressful to me.	50	2	5	3.40	.756
9	I receive enough information to carry out my job effectively.	50	2	5	3.38	.635
10	I am given school-related duties without adequate resources and material to carry them out.	50	1	5	3.10	.707
	Valid N (listwise)	50			Average mean is 3.46	

Note: Glass and Hopkins (1996) mean score obtained. To be more specific, mean scores range from 1.50 - 2.50 were labelled as low, mean scores range from 2.51 - 3.50 were identified as average and mean scores range from 3.51 – 5.00 or greater were classified as high.

Table 3 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of intention to leave the profession among teachers in three elementary schools in Johor. From the analysis, an average mean score was also found (2.81) for intention to leave the profession among teachers in three sampled schools. Table 3 depicts the details.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics on intention to leave the profession among teachers

No	Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I have considered leaving the current school I teach at.	50	1	5	2.80	1.050
2	I think that if I were choosing my place of work again, I would chose other professions.	50	1	5	2.72	1.126
3	I think in the near future, I will leave teaching at this school.	50	1	5	2.90	1.074
	Valid N (listwise)	50			Average mean 2.81	

The results confirmed the existence of a moderate role overload among three elementary school teachers in in Johor. This finding is consistent with Harlow (2008) study of teacher role stress who found that the main stressors as measured by the TSI are similar to the stressors that are faced by all teachers. And it also showed that role overload had a significant amount of

variance in their job. Role stress focuses on stressors surrounding a teacher's responsibility such as performance criteria, extra work, conflicting demands, and lack of resources and materials. Kyriacou (2001), Chaplain (1995) and Romano and Wahlstrom (2000) also found teachers' stress resulted from conflicting demands, inadequate resources and role overloads, respectively.

The results also disclose that the level of intention to leave the profession is average among elementary school teachers in sampled schools. This finding corresponds to the findings of Ledebro (2005) who reached the conclusion that teachers who were willing to continue with the profession were who derived pleasure from teaching young children and were, therefore, committed to the profession, and vice versa is true due to role overload and other stress related issues. The results underscore the importance of being satisfied with profession, which is crucial to the development of positive effect, and willingness to remain in the profession.

The results of Pearson correlation analysis indicates that intention to leave exhibits a reasonable score. The correlation between role overloads and intention to leave the profession is ($r = .457$; $p < .001$). And according to the scale suggested by Hair et al. (2003) it is a moderate correlation. The results analysis further suggest that intention to leave the profession is moderately related with role overloads among the respondents. Refer to Table 4 for more details. This finding coincides with results of various studies which reached the conclusion that role overload can exert a direct influence on job satisfaction and physical symptoms, which in turn influence turnover intentions and finally affects teacher decision to leave the profession (Hendrix et al., 1985; Kemery, Bedeian, Mossholder, & Touliatos 1985; Sullivan & Bhaqat, 1992). The findings also through less effects were in congruent with Younghusband (2004) found role overload as high as 74% stressor causing teacher decision to leave the profession in Newfoundland district schools.

Table 4. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations between study variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2
Role Overload	34.66	4.47	-	
Intention to leave	8.42	2.50	.457**	-

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study it can be concluded that teachers' intention to leave the profession is not in high correlation as determined by role overload due to some changes in the conditions of teaching profession. Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 stated numerous future plans that teacher will enjoy better working conditions, performance-based rewards and enhanced pathways. They will work in schools with adequate facilities and appropriate working conditions. They will have a reduced administrative burden so that they can focus their energy in their core activities of teaching and learning.

The study unveiled the existence of an average level of role overload and intention to leave the teaching profession among selected Chinese elementary schools. This suggests school administrators and ministry of education need to work closely in putting measures to reduce factors leading to role overload and enhance factors leading to career commitment through identifying appropriate role performance.

Limitation of the study

Several limitations could be drawn from the process of investigating role overload and teacher intention to leave the profession. First, the sample size is relatively small; 50 respondents participated from the three sampled elementary schools. Future studies should sample more schools and increase the sample size to capture the depth and breadth of the factors affecting teacher decision to leave the profession.

Second, the study uses convenience sampling technique to collect the data. Consequently, the finding can be generalised only to the sampled three schools. Future studies should consider using a random sampling, stratified random or other sampling technique that allows findings to be generalised to similar situations.

Implications

This study has implications for current and future administrators and ministry of education. It does provide some practical contributions to applied research in the context of Chinese elementary medium schools. It is important for the school administrators to know the relationship between role overloads and teachers intention to leave the profession. The findings

can be used by school administrators to design intervention programmes to assist teachers cope with some types of minor stressors they often encounter as teachers.

Human resource development practitioners and professionals in the selected elementary schools may use the findings to justify their efforts in designing, developing, and implementing appropriate teaching and teacher performance improvement interventions. An effort as such, could lead to retaining high potential school teachers who are committed and satisfied with their profession and institution, which in turn might put an end to some professional issues such as the intention to leave, absenteeism, workforce turnover that often exhibit negative effects on contemporary organisational performance.

Further research should examine the efficacy of different types of programmes and school factors that could help to reduce beginning teachers' stress and to better prepare them to cope with the demands of teaching (e.g., mentorship programs between beginning and experienced teachers).

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