4th International Conference on New Horizons in Education

Procrastination, stress and coping among primary school teachers

Marcela Verešová*

Constantine the Philosopher University, Faculty of Education, Drážovská 4, 94974 Nitra, Slovakia

Abstract

In this paper we focus on finding the relationship between procrastination as personal feature manifested by behaviour, which is characterized by the postponement of activities and tasks to a later time, with the experienced stress (expressed by cognitive, emotional, social and physical dimension) and the preferred strategies of coping with stress (proactive coping, reflective coping, strategic planning, preventive coping, instrumental support seeking, emotional support seeking, avoidance coping). Based on professional resources, we assumed a considerable positive correlation between procrastination and experienced stress – cognitive, emotional, physical and social, positive relation between procrastination and avoidance coping and negative relation between procrastination and proactive coping by 194 primary school teachers from Slovakia (173 females, 21 males, mean age 38.6 years). To measure the research variables we used: General Procrastination Scale (Lay, 1986), Questionnaire for identification of stress level and burnout syndrome (Henning & Keller, 1996) and Proactive Coping Inventory (Greenglass et al., 1999). We confirmed our assumptions and we found a significant positive correlation between procrastination and stress (cognitive dimension r=.512, p<0.001, emotional dimension r=.229, p=0.001, social dimension r=.331, p<0.001) and avoidance coping (r=.424, p<0.001). We identify the negative significant correlation between procrastination and proactive coping (r=-.422, p<0.001), reflective coping (r=-.244, p=0.001), instrumental support seeking (r=-.143, p<0.05), emotional support seeking(r= -.152, p<0.05).

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under CC BY-NC-ND license.
Selection and peer-review under responsibility of The Association of Science, Education and Technology-TASET, Sakarya Universitesi, Turkey.

Keywords: procrastination, teacher’s stress, proactive coping, reflective coping, strategic planning, preventive coping, instrumental support seeking, emotional support seeking, avoidance coping.

1. Introduction

The teacher’s profession bestows quite demanding and psychologically diverse requirements on a person and it is possible to assert that especially in teacher’s profession it is possible to meet unique significant stressors

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +421 37 6408278.
E-mail address: mveresova@ukf.sk

1877-0428 © 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under CC BY-NC-ND license.
Selection and peer-review under responsibility of The Association of Science, Education and Technology-TASET, Sakarya Universitesi, Turkey.
which can negatively influence the subjective content and well-being of teachers. Kyriacou & Sutcliffe (1977) used the term “teacher’s stress”, which they defines as a response of negative affect, usually accompanied by potentially harmful physiological changes, resulting from aspects of the teacher’s job and mediated by the perception that job demands are a threat and by coping mechanisms used to reduce the threat. Kyriacou & Sutcliffe (1978) found four factors of teachers stress sources: pupil misbehaviour; poor working conditions; time pressures; poor school ethos. Křížohlavá (2001) determined these following stress sources: overload by the work quantity; time stress; excessively high responsibility; non-clarified competency; exhausting career effort; sleep deprivation; insufficient work possibilities on labour market; long-term tension; social conflicts. Chan et al. (2010) summarise from previous research and from their own research some significant stressors in teacher’s profession: education reform policies, workload and time pressure, misbehavior of students and indiscipline, school management, working relationships, redundant teacher-related issues, school violence, continuing further education, low salary and others. According to research by Blahutková, Vacková & Cacek (2002), the most significant teacher’s stressor (research conducted on a sample of Czech teachers) is the time pressure. Only after it there are other described stressors – low pupils’ discipline in class; incorrect relations and cooperation with other teachers; insufficient rest; insufficient time for professional development; lack of parents’ interest in cooperation with teachers.

Our research goal was to find out if procrastination can be a significant correlate of teacher’s stress. In the context of above stated significant stress sources (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978, Křížohlavá, 2001, Blahutková, Vacková, Cacek, 2002, Chan et al., 2010) we focus our attention especially on the stressor “time pressure”, whereas we are convinced that insufficient time management, stress and procrastination of teachers are highly coherent. Nutall (2013) expressly relates procrastination and time management and offers recommendations for superior time management: keep a daily ‘to-do’ list listing what must be done today, what should be done today and what might be done today. This principle is a significant barrier and stress source for procrastinating people because time planning strictly negates their feature of postponing the duties or work.

Procrastination has been defined as the irrational tendency to delay tasks that should be completed. Trait procrastination is the predisposition to postpone that which is necessary to reach some goal (Lay, 1986). According to the concepts of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), the procrastinators postpone their tasks primarily because they doubt their ability to accomplish them and they are afraid of possible negative consequences in case of their failure (Ariely, 2008). According to Burka & Yuen (1983), procrastination is a personal feature of people with lower self-confidence, tendency to laziness and loss of self-control. Cognitive frame of procrastination, which is not sufficiently covered by even CBT, claims that procrastination is an irrational personal disorder which represents logical but ineffective behaviour (Ariely, 2008). Nutall (2013) mentioned that people procrastinate for a variety of reasons: lack of time management skills; lack of experience of self-management; underestimating the task required; lack of interest in the task; aversion to discomfort: once you get used to putting things off, it’s hard to break through the ‘pain’ barrier; anxiety about failing, about not being enough, feeling overwhelmed; difficulty in concentrating because of personal problems.

Procrastination has positive associations with perceived stress, negative life events, and daily hassles (Flett, Blankstein, & Martin, 1995). Schraw, Wadkins & Olafson (2007, in Stead, Shanahan, Neufeld, 2010) emphasize the fact that experiencing stress resulting from procrastination. Melton & Briggs (1960) differentiate 3 types of stress: physiological stress (caused such extreme temperatures, lack of oxygen, etc.), psychological stress (intense sensory stimulation) and task induced stress (occasional by marked changes in the task requirements). Especially the last stress type is probably significantly accompanied by a person’s procrastination. From our point of view, interesting findings were introduced by the research of Tice & Baumeister (1997), where the authors point to the fact that academic stress of university students negatively correlates with the procrastination during the start of term but the stress cumulates later in exam period when the students procrastinators show significantly higher stress levels compared to non-procrastinating students.

Jennet et al. (2003, in Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010) states, that the majority of teachers copes with stress successfully. Nevertheless, long-time influence of stressors in connection with non-effective coping strategies can lead to burnout. Burnout is often described as the syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduction of personal success (Maslach et al., 1996). Maslach et al. (1996) identified emotional exhaustion as the key aspect of burnout, while Pines and Aronson (1998) included physical exhaustion characterized by low energy
and chronic exhaustion. Hennig & Keller (1996) describe four levels of experienced stress and teachers’ burnout. The cognitive level incorporates a negative view of one’s own abilities, loss of self-confidence, negative and even cynical relation to pupils or their parents, loss of interest towards one’s own professional field, problems with concentration and escape from reality. Emotional level is characteristic by irritation and impulsive behaviour, nervousness and inner tension, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, feeling of helplessness and despair, loss of pleasure from work and the feeling of underestimation. Physical level covers a fast fatigue, increased tendency to illneses, vegetative issues, headaches, sleep disorders, high blood pressure, muscle tension, vertigo and nausea, appetite disorders. The fourth level is the social level, characteristic by decrease of educational engagement, limitation of social contact with colleagues and friends, problems in family and private life, neglect of one’s hobbies.

Authors Hennig & Keller (1996) divide strategies for coping with stress to professional area, private relationships, life attitude and health. According to authors, there are three bases for stress prevention: 1) decrease of stress situations throughout the work day; 2) reduction of emotional excitement appearing together with stress and 3) change of way of dealing with stress situations, which the individual can’t influence. In the context of above mentioned, an effective method for coping with stress load in teacher’s profession can be considered the proactive coping. Proactive coping is oriented to achieving targets and includes future requirements, which can lead to self-development. (Greenglass, 2002, Šolcová, Lukavský & Greenglass, 2006). Swarzer et al. (1999) describes proactive individual as ingenious, responsible, scrupulous, who bears responsibility for his/her own results and applies the vision of success. Proactive coping includes target environment and persistent heading towards set goal. Proactive individual accumulates resources, he/she is able to mobilize all resources if necessary, he/she consecutively avoids the sources of exhaustion, owns highly developed social skills of how to mobilize resources.

Aim of our research is to analyse the coherences of experienced teacher’s stress (in all areas – cognitive, emotional, physical and social), strategies of dealing with stress load (Proactive coping, Reflective coping, Strategic planning, Preventive coping, Instrumental support seeking, Emotional support seeking, Avoidance coping) and procrastination of primary school teachers. We assume a significant positive correlation between procrastination and experienced stress – in all areas – cognitive, emotional, physical and social. We also assumed positive correlation between procrastination and avoidance coping and negative relation between procrastination and proactive coping.

2. Methods

2.1. Measures

To identify the level of stress and burnout syndrome by teachers, we used Questionnaire for identification of stress level and burnout syndrome from Henning & Keller (1996). The questionnaire is dedicated to define the level of stress influence on central psycho-physical functions and how strong is the general inclination to stress and burnout syndrome. Henning and Keller (1996) specify four areas of reaction on stress: 1) Cognitive dimension (CD): negative picture of own abilities, loss of self-confidence, a negative up to cynic attitude towards pupils or their parents; loss of interest for happening in own occupation field; problems with concentration and escape from reality. 2) Emotional dimension (ED): Irritation and impulsive behaviour; nervousness; and internal tension; affective exhaustion; anxiety, feeling of helplessness; self-reproach, feeling of hopelessness; loss of joy from work and feeling of non-appreciation. 3) Physical dimension (PD): quick exhaustion; increased tendency to diseases; vegetative problems (heart, breathing, digestion); headaches, sleep disorders; high blood pressure; muscle tension (stiff neck, shoulders, back muscles pain); vertigo and nausea; appetite disorders. 4) Social dimension (SD): decrease of educational commitment; limitation of contacts with colleagues and friends; problems in family and personal life; neglecting own hobbies and indulgences. Every area is measured by 6 questions, while the respondent answers on a scale: always (4 points), often (3 points), sometimes (2 points), rarely (1 point) and never (0 points). Level of inclination to stress and burnout syndrome (SB) is moving from 0
to 96 points, the higher values indicating a higher level of experienced stress and burnout. The internal consistency for the present sample was: SB α = .59; CD α = .68; ED α = .62; PD α = .85; SD α = .66.

To identify the strategies of coping with stress load, we used Proactive Coping Inventory (PCI) from authors Greenglass at al. (1999). PCI questionnaire consists from 7 scales: Proactive coping (PrC), Reflective coping (RC), Strategic planning (SP), Preventive coping (PvC), Instrumental support seeking (ISS), Emotional support seeking (ESS), Avoidance coping (AC), it is created altogether from 55 statements to which the respondent gives answers on a scale: (1) not at all true, (2) barely true, (3) somewhat true, (4) completely true. Level of Proactive coping is moving from 14 to 56 points, Reflective coping from 11 to 44, Strategic planning from 4 to 16, Preventive coping from 10 to 40, Instrumental support seeking from 8 to 32, Emotional support seeking from 5 to 20, Avoidance coping from 3 to 12. The internal consistency for the present sample was: PrC α = .70; RC α = .85; SP α = .68; PvC α = .75; ISS α = .82; ESS α = .61; AC α = .81.

To identify the procrastination of teachers we used General procrastination scale (Lay, 1986). The scale is composed of 20 items that measure trait procrastination on a variety of everyday activities. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (False of me) to 5 (True of me). The mean of all items yields a composite score, with higher values indicating a higher tendency to procrastinate. The internal consistency for the present sample was α = .85.

2.2. Participants

The research sample was created from 194 primary school teachers from Slovak republic. From the total number, 89% were females (N=173) a 11% males (N=21). Average age of research sample was 38.6 years, age scope was 24 to 58 years. Average length of teaching practice was 17.6 years (minimum 5 years, maximum 37 years of teaching practice).

We didn’t discover differences by teachers in observed variables (Procrastination, Stress and burnout level, Cognitive dimension of stress, Emotional dimension of stress, Physical dimension of stress, Social dimension of stress, Proactive coping, Reflective coping, Strategic planning, Preventive coping, Instrumental support seeking, Emotional support seeking, Avoidance coping) from the aspect of sex, or the duration of teaching practice.

3. Results

Descriptive indicators (Table 1) are the representation of gross score (minimum, maximum, average and standard deviation) in observed variables. In the area of stress experiencing and burnout by teachers, we discovered that in average are teachers in the light stress level. Most intensive reaction to stress is visible in teachers’ physical symptoms, but average values also in this area show only mild level of stress experiencing. In the level of burnout (score over 73 points) appeared 4 teachers (females).

In the area of analysing the relation between procrastination of teachers and experiencing stress and burnout (Table 2) we discovered significant positive correlation (r = .295). Likewise we noticed significant positive correlation between procrastination of primary school teachers and three areas of reaction to stress - cognitive (r= .512), emotional (r= .229) a social (r= .331). We haven’t noticed a significant correlation between procrastination and the physical area of experienced stress, although the direction of this correlation is positive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Descriptive Statistic of Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procrastination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stress and burnout 1 77 27.95 12.83
Cognitive dimension of stress 1 17 7.03 2.30
Emotional dimension of stress 1 21 7.25 3.30
Physical dimension of stress 1 22 8.04 3.95
Social dimension of stress 1 19 5.62 3.28
Proactive coping 23 58 41.72 6.12
Reflective coping 15 42 33.65 6.09
Preventive coping 14 38 30.12 4.59
Strategic planning 6 16 11.42 2.52
Instrumental support seeking 9 32 24.21 4.09
Emotional support seeking 8 20 16.29 2.46
Avoidance coping 3 12 8.96 2.37

In the area of analysis of relation between proactive coping and procrastination of teachers (Table 3), we observed highly significant negative correlation ($r = -.422$), which means that teachers which are proactive have low value of procrastination. Procrastination of primary school teachers significantly negative correlates with some other coping strategies: reflective coping ($r = -.244$); instrumental support seeking ($r = -.143$); emotional support seeking ($r = -.152$). In the area of analysis of relation between avoidance coping and procrastination of teachers we observed highly significant positive correlation ($r = .424$), which means that teachers which are procrastinators prefer avoidance coping as a coping strategy.

Table 2 Correlation Analysis of Procrastination and Levels of Teacher’s Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=194</th>
<th>1.</th>
<th>2.</th>
<th>3.</th>
<th>4.</th>
<th>5.</th>
<th>6.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Procrastination</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.295**</td>
<td>.512**</td>
<td>.229**</td>
<td>.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig.(2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Stress and burnout</td>
<td>Person Correlation</td>
<td>.295**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.431**</td>
<td>.585**</td>
<td>.502**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig.(2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cognitive dimension of stress</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.512**</td>
<td>.431**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.474**</td>
<td>.365**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig.(2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Emotional dimension of stress</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.229**</td>
<td>.585**</td>
<td>.474**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.682**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig.(2-tailed)</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Physical dimension of stress</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.502**</td>
<td>.365**</td>
<td>.682**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig.(2-tailed)</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Social dimension of stress</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.331**</td>
<td>.503**</td>
<td>.454**</td>
<td>.598**</td>
<td>.458**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig.(2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Correlation Analysis of Procrastination and Coping Strategies of Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=194</th>
<th>1.</th>
<th>2.</th>
<th>3.</th>
<th>4.</th>
<th>5.</th>
<th>6.</th>
<th>7.</th>
<th>8.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Procrastination</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.422**</td>
<td>-.244**</td>
<td>-.127</td>
<td>-.070</td>
<td>-.143</td>
<td>-.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig.(2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.334</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Discussion and Conclusion

Procrastination, a human feature mostly being linked with irrationality, connected with voluntary postponing or delay of intended activity course despite the presumption that the delay will not lead to increase of one’s usefulness. In reality it means that a procrastinating person has a certain resolution to work on a set task but because of various reasons he starts to work on it much later than he planned or should. Procrastination is basically repeated voluntary decision making towards something that harms the person (Steel, 2007). Decision making process is connected with the intention to maximize a positive benefit (pleasure) and to minimize a negative benefit (pain) (Čerešník, 2012). In this sense, procrastination can be perceived as an occasional evading of activity or task execution with the aim to avoid actual strain and effort necessary to achieve it. This leads to positional experiencing of irrational positive benefit. Lay (1986) states that it is natural, if an individual occasionally procrastinates, however excessive procrastination causes the feeling of guilt from unfinished task which should have been accomplished.

Procrastination affects every fourth to fifth person, at students is this number almost 40%. The occurrence of procrastination in the world (with the exception of USA) historically increases, while at individuals decreases with age (Diaz-Morales et al., 2008; Steel, 2007). Steel states that the reason of this phenomenon could be a lifelong learning of effective self-regulation strategies. Ferrari (1994), Milgram & Tenne (2000) distinguish two main types of procrastination: behavioral and decision procrastination. The combination of these two types of procrastination is known in the literature as dysfunctional procrastination, which is defined as the chronic delay of tasks (Ferrari, 1994). Decision procrastination means to put off making a decision within some specific time frame (Orellana-Damacela et al., 2000) and it is based on postponing the decision based on fears, worries and inner confusion, which activate metacognitive solution of a problem, which at the same time leads to postponing of the decision (Milgram & Tenne, 2000). Behavioral procrastination is the tendency to delay the beginning and/or the completion of tasks (Orellana-Damacela et al., 2000).

In our research we focused on observation of the relation between primary school teachers’ procrastination and the level of their experienced stress, as well as with the strategies of handling stress. We discovered that the experienced stress is highly related to primary school teachers’ procrastination. A procrastinating teacher has a higher tendency to experience postponed tasks and duties than stressors, although according to existing findings of other authors (Tice & Baumeister, 1997), their experienced stress probably rises adequately to approaching deadline of the task. Research studies suggest that decisional procrastination represents a stable individual difference variable characterized by delays in making decisions, particularly under stressful circumstances.
(Ferrari & Dovidio, 1997). Our findings show that the most saturated area of experienced stress in relation to procrastination is the cognitive level of experienced stress. High correlation shows that either actual cognitive stress experiencing, accompanied by negative picture of own abilities, loss of self-confidence, negative attitude to pupils/parents, loss of interest about events from professional field, problems with concentration and escape from reality directly activates teacher’s procrastination in the sense of decision procrastination, or the teacher normally behaves as a procrastinator, thinks and decides in the direction of postponing the tasks and duties, which cumulates his experiencing of stress in cognitive area and displays itself in above stated personal characteristic features.

Procrastination has been linked to several negative emotional states and outcomes and procrastinators perceived this behaviour as a problem they wanted to reduce (Orellana-Damacele et al., 2000, Steel, 2007). We discovered a significant correlation between teachers’ procrastination and emotional manifestations of experienced stress. Teachers procrastinators express themselves by irritation and impulsive behaviour, nervousness and inner tension, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, feeling of helplessness and despair, loss of pleasure from work and the feeling of underestimation. We also discovered that teachers procrastinators significantly experience stress also in social level, they are characteristic by decrease of educational engagement, limitation of social contact with colleagues and friends, problems in family and private life, neglect of their hobbies.

Procrastination as a personal feature (Lay, 1996) has a positive relation to avoiding behaviour. According to our findings the teacher procrastinator voluntarily prefers avoiding behaviour as a strategy of coping with stress. Behavioural procrastination itself is related with the delay of accomplishment of bigger and smaller tasks. It means evasion and aberration from a given task in favour of other activities. We also discovered that teachers’ procrastination is in negative relation to proactive behaviour which is considered to be an effective coping strategy. Proactive behaviour belongs to highly effective strategy of handling stress situations. It is a direct decrease of negative impacts, including depression and burnout syndrome, especially emotional exhaustion and cynicism, but also the feeling of anger. It is a positive strategy which is perceived as a support of individual’s independent growth, his professional and life efficiency (Greenglass et al., 1999). According to our findings, with the stressor in operation, procrastinating teachers don’t prefer orientation on goals and future demands that could lead to self-development but they have the tendency to avoid it.

References


