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ABSTRACT

Having completed a study on the causes of stress affecting teacher education students during practice teaching, some members of the team who conducted the project wanted to ensure that the findings made some difference to the lives of students. Therefore, an action research approach was adopted to develop strategies aimed at lessening the stress experienced by the students. The plan containing the following steps--identify the problem, investigate the problem, evaluate data, list possible actions, predict outcomes, select best action, implement action, and evaluate action--was chosen to achieve this aim. It was decided that the research study had already completed the first three steps of this process and so the listing of possible actions became the starting point for the action plan. The researchers concentrated on the 10 most potent and frequently occurring stressors. At a series of meetings, possible actions were listed, outcomes of these were predicted, and the most desirable actions were chosen. The plan was then implemented, evaluated, and refined. Results of the first cycle of the action research project were encouraging and suggested that the plan, with refinements, was worthy of continuing. (Contains 16 references.) (Author/LL)



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Merv Fogarty and Allan Yarrow

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Abstract

completed a study on the causes of stress Having affecting teacher education students during practice some members of the team who conducted the project wanted to ensure that the findings made "some difference to the lives" of students. Therefore, research approach was adopted to develop strategies aimed at lessening the stress experienced by the students. The plan containing the following steps: identify the problem; investigate the problem; evaluate data; list possible actions; predict outcomes; select best action; implement action; and evaluate action, was chosen to achieve this aim. It was decided that the research study had already completed the first three steps of this process and so the "listing of possible actions" became the starting point for the action plan. The researchers concentrated on the ten most frequently occurring stressors. At a series of meetings, possible actions were listed, outcomes of these were predicted and most desirable actions chosen. The implemented, evaluated and refined.

This paper reports the development, implementation, evaluation and refinement of an action plan that is a response to the findings of a quantitative research study that investigated teacher education student stress during practice teaching. The plan aims to lessen student stress during this phase of teacher education.

The research study, Fogarty, M.F., Andrews, A., Costin, G.A., Devenish-Meares, B.A., Massey, D., Williams, H.M.C. and Yarrow, A. (1989) identified the causes of stress that affected a wide range of teacher education students during practice teaching. The subjects were First, Second and Third Year Diploma of Teaching students as well as Graduate Diploma of Teaching students. The study followed up and extended a previous study, Fogarty, M.F., Andrews, A., Beer, N.A., Costin, G.A., Kelk, I.E., Massey, D., Williams, H.M.C. and Yarrow, A (1985) whose subjects were Third Year Diploma of Teaching Students. Both studies were funded by the Board of Teacher Education, Queensland.

The study, Fogarty et el. (1989) used the same instrument as that used in the 1985 study, Likert-Type Scales designed to measure the degree and frequency of stress experienced by students during their practice teaching. It culminated in the PERHMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS

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writing of a report, copies of which were circulated to supervising university lecturers, school administrators and supervising teachers in practising schools. The writing of articles for publication in appropriate journals was also set in process. However the researchers felt that something more was needed to ensure that changes in the lives of teacher education students, during practice teaching, occurred as a result of the study. There was the possibility that the report and the journal articles would be read, but no action taken. Even worse, these documents "could gather dust" on the tops of filing cabinets or in book shelves.

To ensure that the report and the journal articles did not become ends in themselves, the researchers took the decision to regard the major findings of the study as the starting point of an action research project that would develop a plan to be used as an intervention process to assist students lessen the stress of practice teaching. It was decided that the action plan be implemented in only a few schools during its first "cycle" and then gradually expanded, but taking into account idiosyncrasies of different schools, in succeeding cycles.

Stress During Practice Teaching

There is evidence to suggest that, for some teacher education students, practice teaching is stressful (Petrusich, 1967, 353). Sinclair and Nicoll (1981, 1) stated that the stresses and strains of day to day teaching are recognised widely and that, in the case of teacher education students, these often reach traumatic proportions.

Studies of stress during practice teaching have revealed a variety of factors as being potential stressors for students. The professional relationships that students are required to establish is a stressor identified by Coates and Thoresen (1976), Sorensen and Halpert (1968), Jones (1982) and Anderson (1971). The quality of these relationships is very important. Sorensen and Halpert (1968, 32) maintained that whether practice teaching is satisfying or disappointing does not depend upon student traits nor the kind of setting, but upon the interaction between the student and the school personnel.

Stress due to professional relationships may be due, in part, to conflicting advice given to the student by supervising teachers and university personnel (Sinclair and Nicoll, 1981, 9). These writers (1981, 10) also noted the unclear status of students as a potential cause of stress.

Pettigrew and Wolf (1982, 375) saw the evaluation of students by administrators as a source of stress. Pettigrew and Wolf and Coates and Thoresen (1976, quoted in Sullivan, 1979,9) noted student anxiety due to the standards set by supervising teachers. Caruso (1977, 9) maintained that, as students become more competent, they may become frustrated with the supervising teacher whom they now see as impinging on their ideas and style. Caruso added that students cherish moments when they are alone with the children as "their" teacher. On



the other hand, supervising teachers may resent students' attempts "to take over".

Interactions with pupils may be a stressor for teacher education students. Elkerton (1983, 10) found that, irrespective of their degree of experience, students were significantly more stressed by concern for their relationships with pupils than by evaluation by supervisors or having to facilitate student learning. Sinclair and Nicoll (1981, 8-9), Thompson (1963 quoted in Pettigrew and Wolf, 1982, 375) and Coates and Thoresen (1976 quoted in Sullivan, 1977, 9) also identified relating to pupils as a potential stressor.

Sinclair and Nicoll (1981, 17) stated that the frightening prospect of losing control of the children was a central concern of students. This stressor was also noted by Petrusich (1978, 353), Pettigrew and Wolf (1982, 375) and Coates and Thoresen (1976 quoted in Sullivan, 1979, 9). Elkerton (1983, 10) saw classroom management issues relating to discipline and control, and gaining the respect of children as the most potent stressors while Caruso (1977, 59) maintained that children constantly test students' authority and that incidents and issues relating to control "chip away" at a student's "sense of competence".

The preparation and implementation of lessons may be a cause of stress for teacher education students. Coates and Thoresen (1976 quoted in Sullivan, 1979, 9) and Thompson (1963 quoted in Pettigrew and Wolf, 1982, 375) have listed mastery of the subject matter for lessons as a cause of anxiety. Thompson also included the preparation of lesson plans as a potential stressor while Elkerton (1983, 10) found it to be so for year two students, but not necessarily so for more experienced students.

The standards that students set for themselves may cause stress. Caruso (1977, 61) stated that students are continually frustrated because they are unable to attain the standards of perfection that they have established. In addition, how students see themselves may determine their level of stress. Doherty (1980, 33) found that students of low self-esteem, compared with students of high-esteem, experienced a higher degree of stress while teaching.

Evidence indicates that practice teaching is a potentially stressful experience for teacher education students. Failure to cope with negative stressors may impede the professional development of students. It is important to identify those factors that cause stress so that, ultimately, strategies for lessening stress may be developed.

Method

The People

The action plan was developed by a group of people that comprised a student counsellor, teachers and university



lecturers.

A Problem?

Initially the group addressed a change that had occurred since the report was made in 1989 and the possible effect that such a change could have on the currency of the report. The three year Diploma of Teaching course that was in existence when the research study was conducted had been replaced by a four year Bachelor of Education degree. Graduate Diploma in teaching courses were still being offered.

Having considered the changes that occurred with the move from a three to a four year course and their impact on practice teaching, it was decided that the findings of the research study would still have currency and that it would still benefit teacher education students if ways of lessening the stress they experience during practice teaching could be found.

Procedure

The Group accepted the General (Action Research) Plan methodology of Kemmis and McTaggart (1982), namely: Plan; Act; Observe; Reflect; Revised Plan; Act; Observe; Reflect. However it adopted a variation of the components: General Idea; Reconnaissance; Field of Action; First Action Step; Monitoring and Timetable, that Kemmis and McTaggart included in their Planning Stage. The group followed the stages suggested by Weeks and Scott (1992):

- Identify problem, issue or concern (survey, debate, discuss, brainstorm to discover its real nature);
- Investigate problem, project, issue or concern (causes, symptoms, extent, effects, aspects);
- . Evaluate data (consolidate and organise the data);
- List possible actions (consider alternatives, research solutions);
- Predict outcomes (consequences, benefits, effects. costs); and
- . Select best action (settle on course of action).

The Group took the decision, after careful consideration, that the first three steps: Identify problem ...; Investigate problem ...; and Evaluate data ..., had been completed by the Research Project and that the starting point for developing the Action Plan was "List possible actions ..." that could be taken to assist students to lessen the stress caused by the stressors identified. The group also decided, at this stage, not to attempt action plans for all scudent categories, but to restrict their work to one and then, after this plan had reached the replan stage, to commence forming action plans for



the others. Lessening the stress experienced by third year students was chosen for the first action plan. This decision was taken because, in the earlier study, third years were the students who experienced the greatest stress. (At the time of the study, there were no fourth year students). It is worth noting one difference between the third year students in the earlier study and the third year students involved in the action research. The former were in their final year of study while the latter were in a transition year, changing from a three year course to a four year course.

The starting point for the listing of possible actions was the findings of the earlier research study. Students had responded to a forty item Likert-type questionnaires in terms of the degree and frequency of stress caused them by the stressors identified in each item. Responses to each item had been totalled, frequencies, means and standard deviations calculated and items listed in order from the most potent stressor to the least potent stressor in terms of both frequency and degree. Aware that the listing of possible courses of action to lessen the degree and frequency of stress stressors would the forty be an insurmountable task, the Group decided to confine this process to the ten most potent stressors in terms of:

- . frequency of occurrence (See Table One); and
- . degree of stress caused (See Table Two).

TABLE ONE

TEN MOST POTENT STRESSORS IN TERMS OF FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE

- 1. Heavy workload
- Lack of time for preparation prior to each practice teaching session
- 3. Easier to achieve well in some schools than in others
- 4. Doing work that contributes minimal marks
- 5. Number of assignments and activities
- Different expectations from teachers, school administrators and lecturers concerning your performance
- 7. Lack of progressive feedback about assessment
- 8. Expenses that I incur
- 9. Mental tiredness
- 10. Teachers unsure of their supervisory role



TABLE TWO

TEN MOST POTENT STRESSORS IN TERMS OF DEGREE OF STRESS CAUSED

- 1. Heavy workload
- 2. Lack of time for preparation prior to each practice teaching session
- 3. Number of assignments and activities
- 4. Easier to achieve well in some schools than in others
- 5. Different expectations from teachers, school administrators and lecturers concerning your performance
- 6. Mental tiredness
- 7. Doing work that contributes minimal marks
- 8. Lack of progressive feedback about assessment
- 9. Lecturers don't make clear what they expect
- 10. Teachers unsure of their supervisory role

In formulating the action plan, team members met regularly during the sequential stages of: (a) listing possible courses of action; (b) Predicting the outcomes of the possible courses of actions; and (c) the selection of the best possible courses of action. The output of meetings during these stages were based on the appropriate literature and the considerable experience in practice teaching of team members. In progressively arriving at the Action Plan, small group techniques for moving towards consensus were employed.

The Action Plan

Set out below is the plan that has been constructed with the aim of lessening the stress experienced by teacher education students during practice teaching sessions. The plan contains:

- o the actions to be taken; and
- o the contexts in which the actions will be employed.

1. University

1.1 Ensure that a period of one week elapses between the conclusion of the end-of-semester examinations and the commencement of practice teaching periods;



1

- 1.2 University personnel should not add to students' practice teaching workload by requiring them to gather information, perform tasks and so on that are not directly related to practice teaching.
- 2. Pre-Practice Teaching Visits (Students)

Students should visit their practising schools to consult with their supervising teachers (this includes Initial Contact Day). Ideally, students should visit schools as many times as possible.

- 3. University Supervisors
 - 3.1 Students should be given one week's notice, at least, of a supervisor's visit so that they may prepare for such occasions;
 - 3.2 Supervisors should know and understand the evaluation scales used for each year level;
 - 3.3 Supervising teachers have had more opportunities to observe students' capabilities and potential than have university supervisors. This should be given due weight.
 - 3.4 Mindful of 3.3, university supervisors should act in a consultative capacity to both student and supervising teacher. In so doing, they should ensure that mid-way through the practicum and for the period of practice remaining, students are aware of their likely assessment mark.
- 4. Pre-Practice Teaching Meeting: University Supervisor and Students

University supervisors should make clear to students what their role is. This meeting should take place soon after the Initial Contact Day. With the direct relationship of certain university units to appropriate practice teaching periods, in the Bachelor of Education course, time for this should be possible during class sessions.

- 5. Pre-Practice Teaching Meeting: University Supervisor, School Administrators and School Supervisors
 - 5.1 Students have a "settling-in" period of 2-3 days so that they may familiarise themselves with the supervising teacher and the class and so that the teacher and the class may familiarise themselves with the student;
 - 5.2 University personnel, school administrators and supervising teachers should all be familiar with the requirements in the various practising school manuals. The work load in the manuals should not be



added to by any of the three categories of personnel involved.

- 5.3 Supervising teachers should be discouraged from giving students work that would be more appropriately given to teachers' aides;
- 5.4 All involved, university supervisors, school administrators and supervising teachers should know and understand the assessment requirements for each student year level. Each year level is an entity in itself, and therefore, it is possible for students, in each year level, to attain the maximum assessment;
- 5.5 Supervising teachers have more opportunities to assess students' capabilities and potential than do university supervisors and school administrators. This should be considered when student assessments are made; and
- 5.6 Mindful of 5.5, university supervisors should act in a consultative capacity (as already stated in 3.4) and school administrators should perform a moderation role, ensuring consistency in supervisory teachers' assessments of students.

Implementation of Action Plan

The action plan was implemented in three schools. The number of students in the three schools totalled 24 with eight in one school and ten in each of the other two schools. The one university lecturer was responsible for supervision in all three schools.

The plan was not able to be implemented in its entirety. Because this practice teaching period was scheduled in midsemester, it was not possible to provide students with a period of one week between the cessation of classes and the commencement of practice teaching (1.1). As a result, some students had an assignment to submit during the week prior to the commencement of their practice, a small number were required to sit an examination during their practice, while some had to sit an examination immediately after their practice (1.2). These situations were due to the fact that the students involved were changing from the three year course to the four year course and as a result, were completing some transition subjects offered to second year students in the new course. Second year students were not involved in practice teaching at this time. This situation should not arise in future years.

Sections 2 and 3 of the Action Plan were implemented in their entirety. It was not possible to arrange a meeting with students after Initial Contact Day (4), but the lecturer met with students individually or in small groups to discuss their role. Four students were not contacted in this way. Section 5 was implemented in its entirety, apart from the fact that a



small number of supervising teachers, because of other commitments, were unable to attend meetings.

Evaluation of Action

It was decided that an appropriate way of determining whether or not the Action Plan had made some difference to the lives of students at the three schools was to ask them to fill out the same questionnaire as was used in the earlier study. Students were asked to respond to each item in terms of frequency and degree of stress to them, on five-point Likert-type scales. Frequency was recorded as: 1 = never; 2 = not very often; 3 = sometimes; 4 = fairly often; and 5 = all the time. Degree was recorded as: 1 = no stress; 2 = little stress; 3 = some stress; 4 = fair degree of stress; and 5 = lot of stress.

Mid-way through the practice teaching period, the lecturer distributed the questionnaires, individually, to each student and asked them to complete and return them, to him, during his visit in the last week of the practice period. Twenty-eight questionnaires were distributed and eighteen were returned. Filling out the questionnaires was voluntary.

Analysis of Questionnaires

Frequencies for both "Degree of Stress' and "Frequency of Occurrence" for the 40 stressors were calculated by summing the numerical values of the responses given, that is 5 = "Lot of Stress" down to 1 = "No Stress" for the former and 5 = "All the Time" down to 1 = "Never" for the latter. The frequencies were employed to compute means and standard deviations for both sets of responses and to rank order these responses. Table Three shows the ten most frequently occurring stressors with means and standard deviations for the earlier study and for the action research project while Table Four shows the ten stressors causing the greatest degree of stress with means and standard deviations for the earlier study and the action research project.

TABLE THREE MOST FREQUENTLY OCCURRING STRESSORS

	Earlier	Study	Action	Res
Stressor	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Heavy workload	4.12	0.84	3.56	0.78
Lack of time for preparation prior to each block practice period	3.75	1.15	4.17	1.10
Easier to achieve well in some	3.71	1.10	3.17	0.79

schools than others				
Doing work that contributes minimal marks	3.53	1.23	3.39	1.04
Number of assignments and activities	3.49	1.19	3.83	1.10
Different expectations from teachers, school administrators and lecturers concerning your performance	3.40	1.23	3.22	1.00
Lack of progressive feedback about assessment	3.39	1.05	2.89	1.02
Expenses that I incur	3.33	1.22	2.89	0.83
Mental tiredness	3.31	1.01	3.50	0.86

A comparison of the means of the earlier study with those of the action research project shows that on seven items, the frequency of stress has lessened.

Teachers unsure of their 3.23 1.13 2.67 0.84

supervisory role

TABLE FOUR

STRESSORS THAT CAUSE THE GREATEST DEGREE OF STRESS

	Earlier	Study	Action	Res
Stressor	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Heavy workload	3.97	0.97	3.78	1.11
Lack of time for preparation prior to each block practice period	3.75	1.26	4.11	1.13
Number of assignments and activities	3.46	1.26	3.94	1.30
Easier to achieve well in some schools than others	3.44	1.24	3.00	1.14
Different expectations from teachers, school administrators and lecturers concerning your performance	3.42	1.32	3.50	1.25
Mental tiredness	3.37	1.14	3.11	1.32



Doing work that contributes minimal marks	3.37	1.36	3.33	1.14
Lack of progressive feedback about assessment	3.33	1.18	2.61	0.98
Lecturers don't make clear what they expect	3.25	1.13	3.50	0.92
Teachers unsure of their supervisory role	3.10	1.26	2.56	1.10

A comparison of the means of the earlier study with those of the action research project shows that on six items, the degree of stress has lessened.

t-tests were conducted comparing the means of the ten most frequently occurring stressors and the ten stressors causing the highest degree of stress in the earlier study with those of the action research project. Analysis showed that none of the differences, in means, between the former and the latter were significant at the .05 level.

Discussion

Frequency of Stress

On 7 of the 10 most potent stressors, the frequency of stress lessened according to the mean score for the action research project. Whether this is solely or partly due to the action research or some other factor or factors is open to question. Certain arguments, however, can be advanced.

During his consultative visits to the three practising schools, the lecturer, in his discussions with school administrators, supervising teachers and students, monitored their understanding of practice teaching procedures and, in general, he found this to be sound. The action plan then was most likely to have lessened the frequency of stress with regard to:

Teachers unsure of their supervisory role;

Different expectations from teachers, school administrators and lecturers concerning your performance;

Doing work that contributes minimal marks;

Lack of progressive feedback about assessment; and

Heavy workload.

In these cases, it is valid to assume that the lecturer's various meetings and discussions with school administrators, supervising teachers and students, combined with this own knowledge and understanding of the practice teaching program for third year students, contributed to a better knowledge and understanding of the roles of all stakeholders by all



stakeholders. It is reasonable to claim then that the action plan was effective in lessening the frequency of the stress causes by these five stressors.

It is more difficult to argue that the frequency of stress due to the two stressors:

Easier to achieve well in some schools than in others; and

Expenses that I incur,

was lessened, to any great extent, by the action plan. Some change in relation to the stressor, "Easier to achieve well ..." may be due to the action plan, but its pilot-type implementation in this instance, could only have resulted in a minimal contribution. It is likely, however, that when the plan is implemented, for all third year students, direct improvements may result. The stressor, "Expenses that I incur", is difficult to address and is unlikely to have been influenced by the action plan. As far as possible, students are assigned to practising schools that they choose from a list of such schools. Perhaps an addition such as "Investigate the broadening of the practising school list" could be added to the next phase of the action plan.

The frequency of stress caused by the three stressors:

Lack of time for preparation prior to each block practice period;

Number of assignments and activities; and

Mental tiredness,

increased on the "mean" measurement. The first two directly attributed to the relocation of the practice teaching period to the middle rather than the end of the semester. No preparation week could be given and it proved to be a time for the collection of mid-semester assignments. Mental tiredness could be due to a range of factors, for example no respite concluding the academic program commencing and practice teaching. Other possibilities are the students' need for part-time employment and the competitive environment that exists with students eager to excel in both academic and practical endeavours in an effort "to be at the cutting edge" in a very competitive job market.

Degree of Stress

On 6 of the 10 most potent stressors, the degree of stress lessened according to the mean score. Again, whether this is solely or partly due to the action research or some other factor or factors is open to question. In general, however, similar arguments to those raised for frequency of stress may be advanced.

The degree of stress caused by the stressors:



Teachers unsure of their supervisory role;

Doing work that contributes minimal marks;

Lack of progressive feedback about assessment;

Heavy workload; and

Easier to achieve well in some schools than in others,

was shown to have lessened. The frequency of stress caused by these stressors was also shown to have lessened and so it may be assumed that the same arguments advanced for frequency of stress also apply for degree of stress.

The stress caused by the stressor, "Mental tiredness", was shown to have decreased in degree even though it was shown to have increased in frequency. This is somewhat perplexing, but perhaps it was due to the fact that, because stress had been lessened on a majority of stressors, the degree of mental tiredness caused was less intense even thought it occurred more often.

The degree of stress caused by the two stressors:

Lack of time for preparation prior to each block practice period; and

Number of assignments and activities,

increased on the "mean" measure. The frequency of stress caused by these stressors was also shown to have increased and so again it may be assumed that the same explanations advanced for frequency of stress also apply for degree of stress.

The stress caused by the stressor, "Different expectations from teachers, school administrators and lecturers concerning your performance", was shown to have increased in degree even though it was shown to have decreased in frequency. This is somewhat perplexing, but perhaps it arises because stress form this source, being now more infrequent, is more difficult to address when it does occur.

That stress due to the stressor, "Lecturers don't make clear what they expect" has increased in degree though it is not listed in the ten most frequently occurring stressors is surprising. Perhaps there are parallels here with the stressor, "Different expectations from teachers ...". It may also be due to the fact that some students may be having a little difficulty adjusting to the change of role of the lecturer from that of supervisor to that of consultant and perhaps there is a need to emphasise this change more in future communication with students.



Refinement of Action Plan

The results of the first cycle of the action research project are encouraging and suggest that the plan, with refinements, is worthy of continuing and extending to include all third year students completing their practice teaching.

Although 1994 is the last transition year for students wishing to change from the three year diploma course to the four year degree course and as a result, stress caused by stressors such as "Lack of time for preparation ...", "Number of assignments and activities" and "Mental tiredness", should consequently lessen, there is still a need for more intensive work at (1), "University". Efforts should made to ensure the co-operation of lecturers who do not have an involvement in practice teaching to consider more carefully their timing for assignment due dates and for setting examinations.

There is also a need for more intensive work at (4), "Pre-Practice Teaching Meeting: University Supervisor and Students" to ensure that students clearly understand the consultative role of the university supervisor as well as the assessment roles of school administrators and supervising teachers. Being able to devote some on-campus class time to this endeavour should be beneficial.

Consideration should be given to ensuring that teachers who cannot attend meetings scheduled in (5), "Pre-Practice Teaching Meeting: University Supervisor, School Administrators and School Supervisors", are conversant with the roles of all practice teaching stakeholders. Consideration should also be given to ways of adding to the list of practising schools available.

In general, the action plan appears suitable and it is expected that its further implementation, with the suggested refinements, should contribute to the further lessening of stress during third year practice teaching. This apparent suitability of the action plan should also be followed by the development of appropriate plans for graduate diploma students and the other year levels of the four year degree course.

The Team

The team that composed the Action Plan included: Merv Fogarty (Convenor); Robyn Colwill; Graham Costin; Jan Millwater; Paul Neuman; Col Purdy; Narelle Shannon; and Dr Allan Yarrow.



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DEGREES OF STRESS

	Earlier	Study	Action	Res
Stressor	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
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Lack of time for preparation prior to each block prac period	3.75	1.26	4.11	1.13
Number of assignments and activities	3.46	1.26	3.94	1.30
Easier to achieve well in some schools than others	3.44	1.24	3.00	1.14
Different expectations from teachers, school administrators and lecturers cooncerning your performance	3.42	1.32	3.50	1.25
Mental tiredness	3.37	1.14	3.11	1.32
Doing work that contributes minimal marks	3.37	1.36	3.33	1.14
Lack of progressive feedback about assessment	3.33	1.18	2.61	0.98
Lecturers don't make clear what they expect	3.25	1.13	3.50	0.92
Teachers unsure of their supervisory role	3.10	1.26	2.56	1.10

