RESEARCH BRIEF SERIES

Teacher Resilience in Singapore
Insights from a Mixed-methods Study

Fang Yanping, Ken Mizusawa, Chen Chen Angela and Ng Chee Shyan

KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Resilience practices involve developmental, transformational, and expansive learning vital in the lives of Singapore educators.
- Cognitive appraisal and reappraisal of stressful events stand out as the very basis of our internal coping mechanisms. More importantly, we can train teachers to do it.
- Policy makers need to adopt a positive, developmental, and supportive stance in responding to the problems teachers face in regards with their wellbeing and career development which can decline or become stagnant.

BACKGROUND

Teacher resilience research has gained prominence in an increasingly uncertain world characterized by teacher stress, attrition, and burnout that the pandemic has only intensified. In Singapore and elsewhere, developing resilient teachers who can not only cope with but thrive under the daily pressures of the profession is crucial. This 3-year large-scale mixed-method research is a pioneering study on teacher resilience in Singapore aiming to provide a holistic understanding of teacher resilience to advance and better support theory, policy and practice.

FOCUS OF STUDY

Our research unpacked the constructs of teacher resilience, stressors and coping to identify the common stressors impacting Singapore teachers and their ability to be and remain resilient in the face of systemic pressures. To do this, we explored the coping strategies and experiences of resilient teachers through both survey and narrative data. Special attention was given to the impact of COVID-19 outbreak on resilience practices. The study uncovered coping patterns as well as contextual factors affecting teacher resilience in Singapore.

KEY FINDINGS

To examine the quantitative survey data, exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation analysis and relative weight analysis were employed to generate findings. To bring these findings into alignment with the qualitative narrative data, data mixing was conducted using NVivo. The mass coding of 50 teacher narratives was done to surface numeric patterns. This was enhanced with line-by-line coding, thematic analysis and conceptual building from written narratives and interview transcripts.

1. Three most prominent stressors were identified: task-based stress (M = 2.97, SD = .65), role conflict (M = 2.94, SD = .96), and role overload (M = 2.85, SD = .87) indicating that teachers struggled most to cope with their day-to-day tasks.

An Institute of

NIE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SINGAPORE

NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY SINGAPORE

2. Stress-related predictors also carried a strong weightage in explaining every outcome variable, namely, resilience, wellbeing, job satisfaction and commitment (Mean = 40.96%, Min = 25.96%, Max = 64.17%) indicating that Singapore teachers are likely to struggle most with fulfilling the demands of everyday tasks (as daily hassles) rather than dealing with large, unexpected problems or traumatic events.

3. Three broad coping strategies were identified both quantitatively and qualitatively: approach coping (through which teachers directly confront the problem), avoidant coping (through which they avoid the problem) and meaning making coping (through which they make sense of the problem and their identities).

4. Teachers' resilience and coping strategies were shaped both positively and negatively by the fast-paced, hierarchical, and top-down Singapore education system.

5. The three career tracks MOE had implemented ensured that all teachers had a clear career trajectory based on their strengths. The tracks ensured equitable professional progression and allowed for either in-depth or upward spiral progression.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Our research has contributed to four areas of theory and practice.

1. Contribution to Theory building: We borrowed coping theory from trauma psychology, resilience from positive psychology and narrative inquiry in teacher education and brought them together using cultural-historic activity theory. This allowed us to study resilience practices, in an unprecedented manner, as developmental, transformational, and expansive learning undertaken by Singapore educators.

2. Contribution to NIE coursework: Our research findings have become the basis for a new graduate course, "MEM 919 Understanding and Supporting Teacher Resilience" to be offered to existing and aspiring school KPs.

3. Potential for intervention design: We have accumulated rich case material that can be employed to strategically develop local educators' coping and appraisal approaches and resources to enhance their resilience practices via timely intervention at key career stages.

4. Implications for Policy: A) To adopt a positive, developmental and supportive stance in responding to lows in and stagnant points or stages in a teacher's career since these could be moments when a teacher is accommodating changes in workload or work scope and/or reappraising values or priorities to ensure personal/professional growth. B) Where possible, expand the access of school senior leadership support to teachers. The survey data indicated that such support is vital for teachers in times of difficulty.

PARTICIPANTS

Close to 200 participants were surveyed online, 50 written narratives analyzed, and 19 in-service teachers interviewed twice to generate a comprehensive portrait of the resilient Singapore teacher. Participants were sourced from a pool of postgraduate students from a long-established NIE-based postgraduate course on narrative inquiry taught by the PI and their network of teacher colleagues and subordinates. Together they represent a wide demographic of Singapore teachers, appointment holders and school leaders.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study has adopted a convergent parallel mixed-method research design. Both quantitative and qualitative components were collected, analysed independently, weighted equally in data analysis, and compared for findings integration and data mixing purposes. Three sources of data were collected: 1) written teacher narratives originally submitted as postgraduate coursework, 2) an online teacher resilience survey, and 3) teacher interviews.

How to cite this publication

Fang, Y., Ken, M., Chen, C. A., & Ng, C. S. (2022). *Teacher Resilience in Singapore: Insights from a Mixed-methods Study* (NIE Research Brief Series No. 22-018). Singapore: National Institute of Education.

Request for more details

Please approach the Office of Education Research, National Institute of Education, Singapore to obtain a copy of the final report.

>> More information about our research centres and publications can be found at: http://www.nie.edu.sg