

## **INDONESIAN EFL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF USING COPING STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH STRESS AT WORK**

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**Abstract:** Teaching has been recognized as one of stressful occupations. In Indonesia, EFL teachers also perceive stress at work due to abundant responsibilities that they carry out. The use of coping strategies is essential to help them deal with stress at work. Therefore, this study aims to explore EFL teachers' experiences, especially the sources of their stress, the coping strategies used by EFL teachers, and the advantages and challenges of using those coping strategies. Using a narrative-based approach to explore their experiences, the findings show that there were 8 sources of EFL teacher's stress at work. The coping strategies varied from five areas of: work demands, boredom, personal conflict, interpersonal conflict, and emotion. Those coping strategies were helpful to lessen the feeling of stress and resolve teachers' problems at work. Despite those advantages, the teachers also mentioned that lack of me-time can be a challenge for the optimum use of the coping strategies. Meanwhile, social support from family and friends can contribute to help the teachers deal with their stress at work.

*Keywords:* Coping Strategies, EFL Teachers, Experience, Stress

### **INTRODUCTION**

Teaching has been considered as a stressful job (MacIntyre, Ross, Talbot, Mercer, Gregersen, & Banga, 2019; Alhija, 2015; Stranks, 2005). Considering that when teachers perform in their workplace, they will carry out duties and roles related to their profession (Baety, 2021). In the Indonesian context, this has been organized in Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers. According to Article 4 of Law No. 14 of 2005, teachers as civil servants or government employees have a responsibility as learning agents whose roles include motivator, facilitator, and student inspiration. They also have to design, conduct, and assist the teaching-learning activity with a minimum of 24 working hours per week. These abundant roles and responsibilities show some examples of how fatigued this profession is. EFL teachers as language teachers are also exposed to stress at work, especially with the expectation to adapt, adjust, and continue providing communicative language teaching by utilizing online resources for their teaching (MacIntyre, et al., 2020). This draws the fact that teaching English is stressful as well and the EFL teachers inevitably experience stress at work. To understand what makes EFL teachers stressed at work, we need to know the circumstances that they deal with.

Stress in typical days generally happens to human beings. In the workplace setting, stress is seen as a "psychological state which can cause an individual to behave difunctionally at work and results from people's response to an imbalance between job demands and their abilities to cope" Stranks (2005). As mentioned by Stranks (2005), stress at work happens due to diverse causes such as imbalanced workloads, over or under-job promotion, conflicting job demands, incompetent head office, excessive work hours, and social interactions between work and family commitments. If we try to connect the term 'stress' to teachers, teacher's stress at work, according to Kyriacou (2001), defined as a teacher's experience of dreadful and negative.

emotions, such as madness, stress, anxiety, inconvenience, or nervousness, which impact in some particular phase of their job as a teacher. There are several sources of teacher's stress as follows: students' lack of motivation, establishing discipline in the classroom, time pressures and teachers' workload, experiencing changes, having an evaluation from others, facing challenging relationships with themselves or colleagues, self-esteem and status, school administration and management, role conflict and ambiguity, and having poor working management conditions (Kyriacou, 2001). In the EFL teacher's context, the sources of stress can come from curriculum changes, low language proficiency, and dealing with other responsibilities and the administrative tasks (Rizqi, 2017). Based on Diasti (2021), EFL teachers who work with a lot of administrative work have less focus on their students since they need to prioritize the administrative work and its accomplishment. Furthermore, according to Diasti (2021) the other sources of EFL teacher's stress include students' poor behavior which leads to stress for EFL teachers especially EFL novice teachers who have inadequate teaching experiences thus causing them difficulty in managing the classroom, low language proficiency, difficulty in building a relationship with others, and school environment and management.

Discussing stress links to coping. Coping is seen both as "thoughts and behaviors" that a person uses to handle the stressful events caused by the demands that come from both internal and external factors (Folkman, 2010; Bartram & Gardner, 2008). According to Demerouti (2015), the most established classification was proposed by Lazarus & Folkman (1984); problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies. Problem-focused strategies portray a direct action to react to a stressful situation, while emotion-focused strategies aim to alter the emotional response to stressful events. The number of responses in which people choose to deal with stress at work is varied. Therefore, Dewe, O'Driscoll, and Cooper (2010) proposed five categories of coping strategies to deal with stress at work. Firstly, coping with work demands by making time management which includes several activities such as defining goals and things to achieve in a specific period, deciding which tasks need to be performed to support the goals, prioritizing which tasks are important or urgent, and planning the time available to make sure that the goals are achieved. Then, coping with boredom at work by deciding whether the boredom will continue or whether there are ways to make some extra level of interest in their work. Thirdly, coping with organizational change by applying good management to support workers dealing with changes that may impact their work lives. Next, coping with job insecurity such as job loss, unemployment, termination, or simply changes in the job, work hours, or working conditions. The strategies involve making efforts to look for other alternative job chances, set goals and priorities, and plan and decision-making. Lastly, coping with interpersonal conflict including bullying and assault. Dealing with these issues cannot be straightforward, sometimes a compromise approach is more realistic than problem-solving collaboration which might be difficult and take too much time. However, the involvement of both individuals and managers to manage the issue is required to avoid forms of conflict, such as bullying and assaultive behavior.

In a teaching-learning context, facing students is the most common experience that teachers have to deal with. Habil and Lifa (2020) mentioned an important basis for maintaining a successful learning environment in any classroom is classroom management. They opined that effective classroom management provides a positive learning environment. Many researchers proposed coping strategies to deal with teacher's stress, for instance, according to Kyriacou (2001), there are some most frequent coping actions used by teachers when dealing with their stress at work in general, those include maintaining the problems in perspective, keeping their distance during

confrontations, taking time to relax after work, taking steps to deal with problems, trying to stay the feeling under control, concentrating more to specific tasks, talking about the problems and conveying what we feel to others, possessing a healthy home life, making a plan, deciding prioritization, and knowing self-limitations. In addition, Kyriacou (2001) argued that the school as an organization can play a critical role in helping teachers cope with stress at work by providing a positive atmosphere and social support. He explained that good management allows teachers to share problems. When social support exists, teachers can receive helpful suggestions or actions from a colleague that can be implemented or resolve the sources of stress. Kyriacou (2001) simplified that sharing matters or engaging with colleagues in some social activity can effectively contribute to dissolving feelings of stress.

Unfortunately, there is little research highlighting teacher's stress experienced by EFL teachers (MacIntyre, et al., 2019) which is surprising, as EFL teachers are struggling with the same issues yet lack concern. A similar study was reported by Diasti (2021) and Rizqi (2017) who explored the same topic focusing on Stress and Resilience among EFL Teachers. These studies mostly focus only on sources of teacher's stress, and there is very little research highlighting teachers' experiences of using those coping strategies to deal with their stress at work, particularly for EFL teachers in the Indonesian context. Thus, to fill these gaps, this study proposes a comprehensive discussion using a qualitative, narrative-based approach to collect EFL teachers' experiences which involves the area of sources of EFL teacher's stress and the coping strategies used by EFL teachers, and how the use of these strategies give them advantages and challenges in dealing with stress. Under this gap, this study focuses to respond the following research questions: 1) What are the sources of Indonesian EFL teacher's stress at work?, 2) What are the coping strategies used by Indonesian EFL teachers to deal with their stress at work?, and 3) What are the advantages and challenges of those coping strategies used by Indonesian EFL teachers to deal with their stress at work?. Thus, the aims of this study are to: 1) explore the sources of stress that EFL teachers experience at work, 2) explore the coping strategies used by Indonesian EFL teachers to deal with their stress at work, and 3) explore the advantages and challenges of using those coping strategies.

## **METHOD**

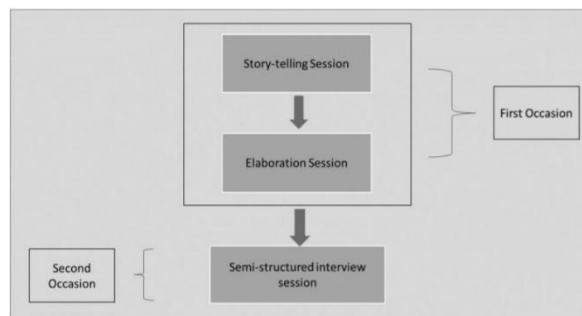
A narrative inquiry was implemented as the research design in our study to explore teachers' experiences. According to Creswell (2007), narrative inquiry is "best for capturing the detailed stories of the life experiences of the single life or the lives of a small number of individuals". This research was carried out at a state senior and junior high school in Balung sub-district, Jember Regency, East Java. Using purposive sampling, two EFL teachers were selected in this research based on two criteria: (1) experience stress at work; and (2) teaching English in a state high school in Balung Subdistrict, Jember Regency.

To ensure that they experienced stress at work, the selected participants were given a 10-item version of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) developed by Cohen (1988) to measure job stress on teachers. There were ten questions using 5-point Likert-type scales participants were asked to fill each question in one of the points starting from never (0) to very often (4). The items were based on participants' feelings and thoughts within the past month. To interpret PSS results in this study use categories as follow: score 27-40 are determined as high stress, score 14-26 are moderate stress, and score 0-13 are low stress (Bhat, Sameer, & Ganaraja, 2011). Teachers whose PSS scores were between 14-20 or above 27 were selected as participants in this study.

Based on the measurements from the PSS questionnaire, Wina who was a senior high school teacher with under five years of teaching experience, the PSS score was 25, and Fira who taught in a junior high school with seventeen years of teaching experience, the score was 17. The result indicated a moderate stress level. The PSS used in this study is the Bahasa Indonesia version translated by Saraswati (2017) which was also used by Faisaluddin et al (2023).

To collect the data, we used two types of interviews: a narrative interview and followed by a semi-structured interview. We conducted the narrative interview to collect detailed stories from the participants and get further clarification of those stories using semi-structured interviews.

**Figure 1: The Stages of Data Collection Method**  
 (Adapted from Fitriyah, 2018; 87)



The interviews data were analyzed thematically using a thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clark (2006). It is used for “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clark, 2006). The data were analyzed using both inductive and deductive methods based on Dewe, et., al (2010) which mentioned five areas of coping: work demands, boredom at work, organizational change, job insecurity, and interpersonal conflict at work.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The result of thematic analysis led to three main discussions in this session. To provide a thick description of the data, we provide some excerpts from the participant’s statements during the interviews to justify the findings.

**Figure 2: Coding Tree for thematic analysis**



### **Sources of EFL Teacher's Stress**

In the analysis of the interviews with the EFL teachers, we found eight sources that could lead EFL teachers to stress during their work.

*Workload and time pressures* were the first sources of stress experienced by EFL teachers in our study. Below statement revealed the pressures that they perceived in dealing with their workload and the timeframe that caused them stress.

*“The stress that I have experienced is usually caused by having a few difficulties at work or being depressed or under pressure.” (Fira, 1st interview, 21st June 2023)*

This corresponds with Diasti (2021) that stress happens when an individual perceives pressures. The pressures that we found in the interviews include giving a minimum score to underserved students, performing optimally in handling the overall jobs in the teaching and learning process, and having an uncondusive classroom situation and the target materials that must be completed. Moreover, the time pressures that they experienced linked to the insufficient timeframes to work. Wina multiple times said that she was pressured to finish her workload with insufficient timeframe, the workload includes recapping students' final grades, finishing a year-long lesson plan, finishing exam administration, and preparing the training for the extracurricular. She stated that:

*“The timeframe to make the [exam] questions was also relatively short so we were inevitably under pressure.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

This statement justifies that the pressures from their workload and insufficient timeframe are the sources of EFL teacher's stress. This is similar to Kyriacou (2001) who mentioned that time pressures and workload are sources of teacher's stress at work.

*Dealing with students.* It becomes the second source of EFL teacher's stress in this current study. In this context, dealing with students might be a challenge or difficulty for EFL teachers if the classroom situation is uncondusive and the students have, for example, poor behavior, lack of motivation, or lack of language proficiency. We can see the problem of dealing with students in this statement:

*“I'm feeling stressed when the students are out of control.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

This draws the fact that dealing with students, especially students' misbehavior, contributes to stress among teachers. Due to this issue, teachers need to establish discipline in the classroom that later also contributes to stress. This is explained by Kyriacou (2001) that students' lack of motivation, poor behavior or misbehavior, and establishing discipline in the classroom are listed as sources of teacher's stress.

*Additional administrative duties* are the third source of stress. In the Indonesian context, it is very common for teachers to carry additional administrative duties at school, including EFL teachers. We can see below the example of additional administrative duties that EFL teachers in my study have to carry.

*“Then, apart from being a teacher in class, I also have the additional task of handling English Day (ED) extracurricular.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

The additional administrative duties in this context make them work more since they already have responsibility at school and this causes stress at work. This is in line with Rizqi (2017), who explained that other school responsibilities contributed to the stress of EFL teachers. As a result of these duties, they have less focus on their main responsibility at school, which is teaching.

*“So, my focus was not on the student's lessons in class, because I still had to make preparations and I also made an event proposal to get the funds for the students' event.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

It implies that EFL teachers who work with a lot of administrative duties have less focus on their students since they need to prioritize the administrative work (Diasti, 2021).

*Excessive workload and working hours at school* are the other sources that we found in our study. According to Clipa & Boghean (2015), an excessive workload contributes to the most factor of teacher's stress. Teachers, specifically in Indonesia, have abundant responsibilities which they need to carry at school. Thus, it causes stress at work. This explanation is in line with participant's statement:

*“So that was stressful, [and] tiring, every day I have to go back and forth to the city for the Technical Meeting and then come back to school to prepare everything and that's at the same time with the students who are going to the Olympics.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

The statement shows us the fact of the teacher's workload at school. On some occasions, they would handle 2 to 3 workloads at the same time. Besides, they also deal with excessive working hours. A participant stated that:

*“[I am] tired of teaching from morning to noon, then [I still] need to teach the extracurricular again [in the afternoon].” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

We noticed from those statements that the excessive workload and working hours somehow make teachers exhausted, a study conducted by Shumba, et al. (2016) mentioned that tiredness and physical exhaustion are the result of the psychological effects of stress on the human body.

*Personal conflict at work.* It is also included as the source of stress to EFL teachers. A participant in this study experienced a specific source of stress which is personal conflict at work. The conflict is that she blamed herself for being unable to manage her students' misbehavior.

*“I was kind of blaming myself.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

Diasti (2021) described this phenomenon as the personal factor that causes stress. The self-blaming was the result of her feeling unable to manage students' misbehavior. In this case, Diasti (2021) mentioned that students' misbehavior causes stress to EFL teachers, specifically the EFL novice teachers who have inadequate teaching experiences thus causing them difficulty in managing the classroom. Wina as described above has under 5 years of teaching experience and

probably has less teaching experience than Fira with seventeen years of experience as a teacher, which causes her difficulty in managing the classroom thus resulting in self-blaming. However, although the other participant did not experience the conflict above, we found an interesting statement that she made in the interview:

*“If we keep it to ourselves, we don't want to discuss it with friends, or share it with friends, it seems difficult. Sometimes it gives more burden to us instead.” (Fira, 2nd interview, 28th June 2023)*

We sum up that unwillingness to share or discuss with others, especially with a colleague, potentially becomes a source of stress to the teachers with many responsibilities at school.

Moreover, the personal conflict at work in this study also includes workplace bullying in the form of being underestimated and labelled by the students.

*“Many young teachers are underestimated by the students because the teacher is still young, it's impossible to do this and do that.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

*“Sometimes [we are] labelled as a bad teacher, a good teacher, that's for sure. The teachers will be labeled.” (Fira, 1st interview, 21st June 2023)*

Dewe, et al (2010) found that workplace bullying and assaultive behavior can cause stress at work.

*Interpersonal conflict at work.* This is the sixth source of stress in this study. The participants in our study encountered an interpersonal conflict with their colleagues. For instance, Wina in the first interview told several times about her less cooperative colleagues.

*“Mostly, it was me who thought about the work. It made me so tired that everything was delegated to me while after making the teaching modules I still had to present it in front of other colleagues and my colleague didn't help.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

As the result of this conflict, it might create a tension among teachers as stated by Fira:

*“Then maybe from those pressures create a work atmosphere in which in the end there is a bit of tension with other colleagues.” (Fira, 1st interview, 21st June 2023)*

The statement above illustrates that their work demands impact their relationship with other colleagues as there is tension among them. Dewe, et al (2010) argued interpersonal conflict contributes to stress among workers. In the teaching context, interpersonal conflict can be a stressful situation for teachers at the workplace.

In addition, we also found that Wina experienced an overwhelming time finishing the workload without any assistance from her colleagues. In the interviews, she said:

*“On D-day, I was hectic alone dealing with this.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

This is the result of having less cooperative colleagues that makes one worker have to work more and double to complete the workload.

*Boredom at work* is the next source of stress. Boredom at work potentially becomes the root of stress that every worker may experience in their career. The statement below described participants' experience of boredom at work.

*“Once I was really bored. At one point it was boring. So, my routine is going to school in the morning, then going home [in the afternoon].” (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)*

It can be concluded that boredom at work contributes to the stress that EFL teachers experience at work. This corresponds with Dewe, et al., (2010) who clarified boredom at work as the cause of stress for workers.

Lastly, *Workplace management*. One of the teachers encountered a predicament due to the school management policy. Wina who described this experience mentioned:

*“Then at that time, we submitted a proposal, but the school did not fully accept the budgeted funds. I was even more confused since the event was less than 2 days but the funds didn't come out according to our budget.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

The narrative above explained that the school management policy hindered teachers in carrying out their duties. Thus, Wina was confused and stressed. According to Shumba, et al. (2016), the implementation of school management is the cause of teacher's stress in the workplace. Additionally, Diasti (2021) also revealed organization factors which are school environment and management can contribute to EFL teacher's stress at work.

### ***Coping Strategies used by EFL teachers***

Based on the data analysis, the results reported five areas of coping strategies that EFL teachers in this study applied to deal with their stress at work. The findings of this research, however, only found three categories that are similar to Dewe et al., (2010), those categories of coping are: work demands, boredom at work, and interpersonal conflict at work. As a result of the interviews with participants in this study, they did not experience any organizational change or job insecurity during their time working as a teacher. Therefore, those categories of coping did not appear in this discussion. Meanwhile, we found the other two emerging categories of coping strategies in this study: personal conflict at work and emotion.

*Coping with work demands*. The first category of coping in this study is coping with work demands. The work demands in this context encompass variables such as workload, work time frame, dealing with students, work management, and working hours at school. Specifically, each participant revealed different strategies to deal with the workload. However, the results show that participants in this study shared similar experiences that sharing and collaborating with others are the most common strategy that they use frequently to deal with work demands. The comment below showcases the example of how the participants deal with those demands.



*“Especially when we meet with friends, [we] share stories, [we] share experiences, [and we] keep sharing that helps us relieve our minds, [and] our burden.” (Fira, 2nd interview, 28th June 2023)*

This finding is corresponding with Kyriacou (2001) that sharing matters or engaging with colleagues can effectively contribute to dissolving feelings of stress. It is also supported by Clipa (2017) who found that discussing problems with family, friends or colleagues is one of the solutions that teachers can use to cope with their stress at work.

Furthermore, the other coping strategies that EFL teachers in this study used include:

**Table 1: Coping Strategies by EFL Teachers**

Coping Strategies	Statements
Deciding Prioritization and Making a plan	<i>“Well, when there are a lot of demands and stress, the way I handle it is by making a plan. I make a plan such as a to-do list which I have to do first, [or] which is more urgent first.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)</i>
Practicing a good time management	<i>“Thus, we need to be good at managing time. When the students already go home, the teachers don’t go, so this is what we need to manage the time to complete the tasks.”</i>
Taking a break	<i>“When my brain is overloaded, I leave it for a while. I will take a short break, maybe an hour. I use it for Salah (praying), [or] maybe for eating. the main thing is to calm my mind, I left everything and then we started again.” (Fira, 2nd interview, 28th June 2023)</i>
Taking a relaxation	<i>“Then, I listen to the sound of rain. If there is rain, I listen to it, [but] if there is no rain, I listen on my phone. I played for a long time until I completely calmed down after that [I] started working again.” (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)</i>
Joining training	<i>“[You have to] join training frequently.” (Fira, 2nd interview, 28th June 2023)</i>
Working faster	<i>“It means I should work faster, right?” (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)</i>
Classroom management	<i>“If that's happened, how to solve it is we manage it by using class management, thus our material is conveyed.” (Fira, 1st interview, 21st June 2023)</i>
Taking a step to deal with problems	<i>“I make an action so that they don't do that anymore.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)</i>
Adopting a healthy lifestyle	<i>“Besides, the most important thing is that our nutritional intake must be balanced.” (Fira, 1st interview, 21st June 2023)</i>

These strategies have been used in most of the existing studies that we found. For instance, a study from Kyriacou (2001) found similarities in some of the coping strategies above. It includes making a plan and deciding on prioritization, taking a break after work, and taking steps to deal with problems. These coping strategies were some most frequent coping actions used by teachers when dealing with their stress at work. This also corresponds with Dewe, et al. (2010) who mentioned how to deal with work demands by prioritizing which tasks are important or urgent, and practicing good time management as a coping strategy to deal with work demands.

Another researcher reported a similar finding with this study. As the results show, taking relaxation is the coping strategy to help teachers calm the mind due to work demands. This strategy is called a 'relaxation response' which involves a quiet environment (Richards, 2012) to help calm her mind so she can perform the work. The form of relaxation that we found in this study includes listening to the rain, and Salah or praying. The findings from Richards (2012) also found that having a healthy life was the coping strategy that teachers in his study used to deal with stress at work. This is similar to Clipa (2017) who mentioned that eating healthy food can help teachers cope with stress. Clipa (2017) also reported that training can help teachers deal with work demands. The response above suggests that training can help EFL teachers improve their skills and fulfill the demands that are given to them. By joining training, the stressful situation that they perceive can be avoided so that they can be productive.

The finding of this research also shared similarities with a previous study from Akbari & Eghtesadi (2017) who reported that classroom management is the Iranian EFL teachers' coping strategies to help them deal with students' challenges in their studies. However, none of those existing studies mentioned working faster as the way to deal with work demands, especially the work timeframe and time pressures. Therefore, this finding is interesting to know that working faster can help teachers overcome insufficient work timeframes so that they can complete the work demands by the benchmark dates.

*Coping with boredom at work.* In this research, we found that boredom at work contributes to EFL teacher's stress at work. This happened due to the same routine that they have to face every day with the excessive demands they receive at work. Under these circumstances, coping with boredom at work plays a critical role for an individual teacher to decide whether the boredom will continue or try to find more interest in their work (Dewe, et., al, 2010). We can see the strategies to deal with boredom at work below:

*"I got bored so I shared it with one of the teachers, she said I have to find other activities so I don't get stressed." (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)*

The narrative above mentioned that sharing with others and seeking suggestions can help teachers overcome boredom at work. This is similar to the strategy to cope with work demands by sharing with others and this is supported by Kyriacou (2001) who mentioned that talking about the problems and conveying what we feel to others is teachers' coping strategy to overcome their stress at work.

*"For me, I watch Korean dramas, [and] playing games sometimes." (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)*

*“After that, I also made a plan for English day (extracurricular) to fill my spare time instead of thinking about the routine every day.” (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)*

The two statements above imply that getting entertainment, for instance in this case, watching Korean dramas and playing games, can help EFL teachers cope with boredom at work as well. These activities aim to release the boredom that she experienced at work. Then, Wina also talked about how to deal with this by doing other activities such as mentioned above, and making plans for other duties so that she has work to do.

Additionally, the other strategies were revealed by other participants.

*“The way I get rid of boredom is sometimes looking for a new atmosphere, it is necessary to heal once in a while too, [such as] take a ride to nowhere. Then sometimes it gets boring when we’re with students in class all the time, well the school usually has a program at the end or in the middle of the semester. This is what we use, like class meetings. This activity is also sometimes our healing so that we don’t get bored with the same class atmosphere. So, we create a class meeting or do productive work.” (Fira, 2nd interview, 28th June 2023)*

We can see that EFL teachers in this study have tried to find some extra level of interest in their work as follows: getting entertainment, finishing other responsibilities, or taking healing activities such as taking a ride. Those statements also revealed that school can contribute to minimizing boredom at work by conducting productive activities outside the classroom. It is beneficial for both teachers and students who are exposed to boredom at school due to the atmosphere in the class. This is in line with Kyriacou (2001) who explained that school can contribute to creating a positive atmosphere to help teachers deal with stress at work.

*Coping with personal conflict at work.* Personal conflict at work includes workplace bullying in the form of being underestimated and labelled by their students. A participant shared her experience of being underestimated by her students.

*“That’s what we have to build their character.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

She faced this problem by applying character building for students so that they can learn and understand other people’s values. This character-building can help EFL teachers deal with students’ misbehavior as well.

The other form of workplace bullying is being labelled by their students.

*“But sometimes I also wonder what kind of teacher I am. But whatever it is.” (Fira, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

The statement revealed that the teacher tends to avoid the problem by not thinking about it. According to Christian & Obeageli (2019), avoidance is an example of emotion-focused strategies proposed by Lazarus & Folkman in 1984.

*Coping with interpersonal conflict at work.* Based on the analysis, interpersonal conflict at work is involved in the causes of EFL teacher's stress. The coping strategies that we found in this study are in the following narratives from the participants:

*"First of all, I would be disappointed to have a colleague who does not contribute. But in the end, I have to accept it because if she's forced like whatever she will remain like that. Then yeah... I accepted it and I did all the work by myself. [I] Let it be, [and] I don't want to because it just makes me more confused, [and] burdens me as well. I just do it even though at the beginning I surely ask her first if maybe she wants to give me one or two solutions, after that in the end I leave her."* (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)

In the story above she mentioned that she has to accept the circumstances and work alone. She had the tendency to avoid her less-cooperative colleagues who make her more confused about the workload. According to Clipa (2017), avoiding situations or persons who cause stress can be used to deal with it. We also understand that her colleague's attitude in which she did not contribute, is something that she is unable to change. Therefore, the participant tends to accept it. A study conducted by Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón (2013), found that acceptance of problems was listed as an avoidance coping strategy, nevertheless, the results showed a negative psychological well-being. This implies that accepting problems in some cases can be used, however, in long-term situations it can result in negative psychological well-being which Wina has to deal with later.

Moreover, a similar response can be seen below:

*"Just leave the friends you can't share with, that's all. Just find a friend who is nice to chat with, [and] share like that. Indirectly we also choose friends, right?"* (Fira, 2nd interview, 28th June 2023)

*"But for that, we usually overcome it by making the atmosphere with friends more relaxed. We accompany it with a joke first, then we listen to music, [and] relax for a moment, so that our emotions also don't overflow too."* (Fira, 1st interview, 21st June 2023)

The first statement above is indeed similar to what Wina shared previously. She seems to avoid people who are not cooperative. However, it is also mentioned that choosing friends can help teachers minimize future stressful situations due to less cooperative colleagues. In addition, the second statement revealed other interesting strategies to deal with tension among colleagues. In the statement above, the coping strategies include creating jokes or humor and listening to music. Creating jokes or humor is also beneficial for them to bond with other colleagues in stressful situations. This finding is in line with Richards (2012) who suggested that having a good sense of humor is useful to cope with stress at work.

*Coping with emotion.* Emotion in this finding is not discussed as a source of the EFL teacher's stress. Particularly, this is the result of being exposed to those sources of stress which involve workload, and dealing with students' challenges. The analysis reported that one participant in this study experienced overflowing emotions due to their circumstances at work. The following statements below were the strategies that the participant used to deal with her overflowing emotions due to work demands.

*“So first I calm down. I have to cry first because if I cry, I immediately calm down, after that, I listen to the sound of rain. If it's raining, listen to the rain, if it's not raining, I listen to it on my phone, I play it for a long time until I am completely calm, after that, I just start working again.” (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)*

*“As a way to calm down, I usually ride a motorbike to nowhere, basically, I just go.” (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)*

*“...also drink coffee” (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)*

We can see that the way she calms down her emotions due to her workload by crying and listening to the rain. Crying in this context is her emotional discharge to express her negative emotions and release the tension that causes stress. Along the same lines, emotional discharge can be classified as emotion-focused strategies that aim to alter the emotional response to stressful events (Demerouti, 2015).

She also used to drink coffee and take a ride in order to calm down her emotions. This is similar to Fira taking a ride to nowhere is the strategy that she used to deal with boredom at work, however, Wina adopted this strategy to deal with the overflowing emotions due to the workload. From these two activities, we grasped the similarities that taking time to enjoy being outside can be used as a coping strategy. A study from Richards (2012) found similar findings that participants in his study mentioned that their me time activity involves drinking caffeine or coffee, and enjoying a quiet walk-in nature was the coping strategy used by teachers in his study.

Moreover, the participants also experienced an overflowing emotion in dealing with her students. This statement shows how she deals with this problem.

*“At that time, I was emotional and stressed, so I kept quiet.” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

In dealing with students' challenges, especially their misbehavior, she tends to keep quiet when her emotions are overflowing. This can help process and control the emotions that may affect her in doing the work demands.

### ***The Advantages of Using Coping Strategies***

Firstly, the advantages of applying classroom management to deal with students' misbehavior. A participant stated that:

*“Especially the games that students like, so the atmosphere is melting, [and] there is less tension.” (Fira, 1st interview, 21st June 2023)*

In the narration above, using games to manage the classroom situation can be a coping strategy to control the classroom atmosphere so that the teaching-learning process is successfully delivered and minimize tension that can cause stress to both teachers and students. It is stated by Habil and Lifa (2020) that effective classroom management provides a successful learning environment.

Moreover, the other advantages that we found can be seen below:

*“So that if there is a to-do list, the plan is more structured...” (Wina, 1st interview, 13th June 2023)*

In coping with an excessive workload, teachers required certain techniques or strategies to resolve the cause of stress (MacIntyre et al., 2020). This shows that planning by creating a to-do list can help EFL teachers deal with excessive workloads that potentially cause difficulty and confusion in managing which task needs to be completed first. Using a to-do list as a technique to deal with the source of stress by locating their workload, they can handle it.

In addition, sharing with others that EFL teachers in this study used as coping strategies to deal with work stressors can be beneficial to help them receive additional information that they need to handle the workload.

*“By sharing with other I was given a solution, so it reduced my stress.” (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)*

An existing study mentioned seeking information, guidance, and support from others are examples of coping strategies. From these strategies, receiving a helpful suggestion or action is the advantage of sharing concerns with others that can be implemented to resolve the sources of stress (Kyriacou, 2001).

Furthermore, the participants agreed that the coping strategies that they used resulted in positive outcomes for them. Those strategies were effective in helping them deal with stress at work.

*“So, these strategies have helped me to reduce stress and emotions, so I can work better” (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)*

*“Yes, it helps. Especially when we meet with friends, [we] share stories, [we] share experiences, [and we] keep sharing that helps us relieve our minds, [and] our burden.” (Fira, 2nd interview, 28th June 2023)*

The statements above indicate that the advantages of using coping strategies include lessening the perceived stress at work and making an individual feel happy when she can resolve the sources of stress at work.

### ***The Challenges of Using Coping Strategies***

Despite the advantages that they received of using coping strategies, they also experienced challenges of using those strategies. The biggest challenge that they perceived in using coping strategies was lack of time, especially time for themselves, due to their abundant responsibilities at school which made them spend more time completing the work demands. Thus, this causes difficulty in using coping strategies.

*“Well sometimes if it was the worst possible time for me, I couldn't ride my motorcycle. So, the obstacle was, there was no time.” (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)*

When teachers feel they do not have enough time for themselves, they cannot manage to use behaviors that they usually do to cope with stress. Whereas having enough me-time can help

teachers deal with tension that can cause stress at work (Richards, 2012). Therefore, school as the institutional environment is a key to overcoming this challenge by providing teachers with a supportive workplace condition (Rizqi, 2017).

The other challenges that participants in this study revealed are shown in the narrations below.

*“Then again, when there were a lot of people at home [and] I was stressed. Thus, I listen to the sound of rain but if it's noisy at home, it's like an obstacle, right? the sound of rain doesn't work and I'm still stressed” (Wina, 2nd interview, 21st June 2023)*

*“The condition is how we can keep up with the news, [and] keep up with the era, especially now in the IT era. Whether we like it or not, we are forced to know. If we miss out on that, surely we will have trouble dealing with students.” (Fira, 2nd interview, 28th June 2023)*

The first statement implies that an uncondusive environment can hinder teachers to focus on what they do. Therefore, if they exist in such an environment, they potentially cannot use coping strategies optimally. Moreover, the second statement shows that EFL teachers perceived the expectation to adapt, adjust, and continue providing communicative language teaching by utilizing online resources for their teaching (MacIntyre, et al., 2020). From the statement, we understand that keeping up with technological development is the form of utilizing online resources that MacIntyre, et al. (2020) mentioned above. This expectation, however, results in challenges that EFL teachers have to encounter to use classroom management as the coping strategies to deal with students' challenges which contribute to stress at work.

### ***Factors Contributing to Cope with Stress at Work***

The last discussion in this chapter is about factors that contribute to coping with stress at work. EFL teachers in our study confessed the same experience that colleagues and family play a big role in coping with stress. This can be seen from the narrative below:

*“For me, besides friends who can discuss, family is included as well. If our family, especially in a healthy condition, automatically supports us to work. And then friends who can be invited to share it.” (Fira, 2nd interview, 28th June 2023)*

Similar results have been reported by other authors who relate that when social support exists, teachers can receive helpful suggestions or actions from a colleague that can be implemented to resolve the sources of stress (Kyriacou, 2001). Furthermore, he explained that sharing matters or engaging with colleagues in some social activity can effectively contribute to dissolving feelings of stress (Kyriacou, 2001).

### **CONCLUSION**

Indonesian EFL teachers perceived that they experienced stress at work due to their responsibilities at school. The findings revealed eight sources of stress that Indonesian EFL teachers in this study experienced. Those sources include: workload and time pressures; dealing with students; additional administrative work; excessive workload and working hours at school; the

implementation of workplace management policy; a personal conflict at work; interpersonal conflict at work; and boredom at work. In the discussion, the coping strategies that they commonly used to deal with those sources of stress at work involved five areas of coping: work demands, boredom at work, interpersonal conflict at work, personal conflict at work, and emotion. The strategies in each area were varied ranging from personal behaviors to the most commonly used ones. The findings show that these strategies resulted in positive outcomes for them specifically in dealing with stress and resolving the feeling of stress. Moreover, EFL teachers in our study experienced the advantages and challenges of using coping strategies, and there was a factor that contributed to coping with stress at work which is the social support from colleagues and family.

Notwithstanding, this study holds several drawbacks and limitations. The EFL teachers' experiences in this study could not represent the overall experiences of the total residents of Indonesian EFL teachers, therefore the result of this study could not be generalized. Future research involving larger participants should be conducted to see a broader scope. Moreover, this research focuses on sources of stress, coping strategies, and EFL teachers' experiences of using those coping strategies, hence it is worthy to observe the relation among those phenomena and teachers' resilience and wellbeing. Regarding the issue being studied in this research, it is notable for EFL teachers to understand and recognize the roots of their stress before jumping on the coping behaviors. The awareness of this issue can help them utilize coping strategies optimally. Further, school institutions should have taken their role to help teachers deal with issues professionally by providing a positive and supportive working environment. Thus, EFL teachers can perform better as professional educators.

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