

The International Language Teachers: An Introspection

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study entitled “The International Language Teachers: An Introspection”, ascertained the personal, professional and social experiences of the International Language Teachers at AMA International University-Bahrain (AMAIU), specifically on their motivations to teach language subjects, their expectations and how these expectations were met, their common adjustments while working in this country, the professional issues that confronted them as language teachers, and the social cost of their teaching in a foreign country. All the fourteen teachers teaching the different languages were the participants of the study. Conducted from December 2011 to May 2012, the findings are as follows: Generally, the teachers were concerned about the empowerment of the students to be globally competitive in their career as a lifelong investment. Only one out of 14 participants had not taught in the country where she came from before teaching at AMAIUB; An international university may be attractive among jobseekers; Teachers expect that university students are better communicators of the English language; Common adjustments include learning the culture of the country to fit the need of the students; Professional issues include the difficulty of the students in understanding the concepts taught, undermining the capacity of the language teachers, and difficulty in transferring skills from common language used to another; and Social cost was common among the participants such as adjusting to the manner of dressing, limited recreational avenue, public display of affection should be done very discretely, not growing old with family, cannot share talent with countrymen, less time for friends, and difficulty adjusting with different nationalities. On the other hand, some participants mentioned that social cost is relative, for working in other countries is a privilege for cultural exchange. Another consider it self-fulfilling and enriching.

Keywords: International language, teachers, introspection

INTRODUCTION

International competence in the use of different languages requires due consideration. This refers to a person’s ability to relate and communicate with other people who speak a different language and live in a different cultural context. This has to do with the role of the native speaker in teaching as his first language, thus, migration is common among different colleges and universities internationally.

This might probably be one of the reasons why people migrate temporarily or permanently. Although international migration has historically been an ever-present phenomenon, the increasingly global character of migration has brought it to the fore as a specific field of study. Economists have tried to understand it through different frameworks, and have become so embroiled in the differences of understanding it that no clear, coherent, and comprehensive theory of migration has been put forth. (<http://family.jrank.org/pages/1170/Migration-Theories-Migration.html>, retrieved December 2011).

This opinion on migration may be supported by the *segmented labor-market theory* (Piore 1979) which argues that First World economies are structured so as to require a certain level of immigration. This theory suggests that developed economies are dualistic: they have a primary market of secure, well-remunerated work and a secondary market of low-wage work. Segmented labor-market theory argues that immigrants are recruited to fill these jobs that are necessary for the overall economy to function but are avoided by the native-born population because of the poor working conditions associated with the secondary labor market. Third, *world-systems theory* (Sassen 1988) argues that international migration is a by-product of global capitalism. Contemporary patterns of international migration tend to be from the periphery (poor nations) to the core (rich nations) because factors associated with industrial development in the First World generated structural economic problems, and thus push factors, in the Third World (<http://family.jrank.org/pages/1170/Migration-Theories-Migration.html>, 2012).

These concepts can be supported by a new research which mentioned about the debilitating education in South Africa. An estimate of around 4,000 teachers from Africa migrates to Taiwan, Thailand, China and Singapore to teach English, while the country is funding the training of teachers who serve in other countries. The shortage of teachers remains a great concern for South Africa. The country has a shortage of mathematics, science and language teachers in both urban and rural public schools. Furthermore, the supply of newly qualified teachers is substantially less than the number of teaching posts that become vacant each year. Factors pulling teachers to other countries were: higher salaries, professional development, travel opportunities, friends and family overseas, and recruitment agency persuasion. On the other hand, there are a number of steps that could be taken to resolve the shortage of teachers in South Africa, as follows: Recruit retired and unemployed subject experts; have a compulsory one-year internship after graduation; make more bursary schemes available for prospective student teachers; eliminate negative perceptions about the teaching profession; and improve teachers' work conditions (<http://www.iol.co.za/the-star/sa-education-hit-hard-by-migration-of-teachers-1.1311577>, 2012). ("<http://www.articlesbase.com/careers-articles/teaching-jobs-in-bahrain-712234.html>, 2012).

With these concepts and realities on migration, many teachers migrate to other countries and teach in colleges and universities that need their expertise as speakers of their respective languages. AMA International University is one of these universities that need teachers who can teach foreign languages as part of the curriculum, hence, this study.

Review of Related Literature and Studies

English, considered an international language, makes everybody survive and go anywhere. It is considered an international language. Some reasons why it is important includes finding a job, interacting with other people, doing business, taking examinations, doing research, and writing in a foreign language.

Bahrain, located in the Persian Gulf, has a total land area of 210 square miles. Estimated population in 2000 was 634,137 (CIA World Fact book). Arabic is the official language, while English is understood in many places.

Migration is an ever-present phenomenon according to Abdur-Rahim Sayed (2011). It can be studied in general absolute framework or socio-economic conditions. It can also be caused by social and economic transformations due to inequalities in wealth and opportunity, or it can be focused on individual decision-maker which prefers family as the unit of analysis. The dimension can be due to cause and effect.

Generally, migratory flows tend to originate in countries with low equilibrium wages and direct themselves to countries with higher equilibrium wages.

Studies show that international mobility of teachers has gained attention – from developing countries to among developed countries as development partners. These migrations are common from Africa to the United Kingdom. New Zealand and Australia are also the recipients of teacher migrants.

Smith and Ingersoll's (2000) study in Texas examined the high rates of turnover which ranged from \$329 million to \$2.1 million annually. Because of the importance of keeping good teachers, many schools and districts have to establish new teacher induction and mentoring program.

Commonwealth Ministries of Education provides a framework for managing teacher migration to maximize mutual benefits to countries and minimize negative effects. Recent studies however revealed the inadequacy of data about migration needed for planning and policy-making.

Generally, there is a high demand for teaching in Bahrain. Career opportunities are in demand especially among teachers. English is the language of communication between the locals and the expatriates. Furthermore, the national curricula mandate teaching English as a Second Language among public and private schools. Finally, the best part of working in Bahrain is the money one earns without tax.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This qualitative study aimed to look into the personal, professional and social experiences of the International language teachers at AMAIU-Bahrain. Specifically, the following concerns are ascertained:

1. What are the motivations of the International language teachers in teaching at AMAIUB?
2. What are the expectations of these international language teachers about their job, and how are these expectations met?
3. What are the common adjustments of these teachers while working in this country?
4. What professional issues confront them as foreign language teachers in this country?
5. What is the social cost of their teaching in a foreign country?

METHODOLOGY

This study followed a qualitative design. Qualitative research studies investigate the quality of relationship, activities, situations, or materials. In this method, greater emphasis is stressed on holistic descriptions on describing in detail all of what goes on in comparing the effects of a particular treatment or on describing the attitudes or behaviors of people (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003). It takes place in natural settings employing a combination of observations, interviews, and document reviews of academic journals.

In a qualitative study, it is felt that activities can be best understood in the actual setting in which they occur and that human behavior is vastly influenced by the setting in which such behavior takes place. Qualitative data are collected in the form of words or pictures rather than in figures. It does not usually attempt to reduce the data gathered into numerical symbols

but rather seek to portray what is observed and recorded in all its richness. In this research, no data are trivial or unworthy of notice.

Qualitative research is characterized by a belief in understanding that supports the phenomenon studied, the participants' viewpoint, the conduct of inquiry in a way that limits disruption of the natural context of the phenomena of interest, the acknowledged participation of the researcher in the research process, and the reporting of the data in literary style rich with participant commentaries (Carpenter, Streubert and Speziale, 2003).

The participants of this study were the international language teachers who had taught the different languages in the Department of Languages and Literature of AMA-International University-Bahrain during the conduct of the study, from the second trimester, SY 2010-2011 to the second trimester, SY 2011-2012. All the full time and part time faculty of the department were included in the study. For the part timers, only those who could be reached either personally or by email during the conduct of the study were included.

The researcher used the convenient sampling for the selection of respondents.

A researcher-made guide questions which had undergone validation was used in gathering the data. Five teachers expert in the field validated the instrument.

To gather the data, the researcher distributed the questionnaire among the faculty of the Department of Languages and Literature. Questionnaire for the part timers who come to the university only during their class hours in the evening were sent through their Email addresses. Common answers were categorized, summarized and analyzed.

To substantiate the data, a focused group discussion was conducted among the participants.

The data gathered during the interviews were analyzed and evaluated in order to obtain the answers sought by the guide questions.

The questionnaire included parallel guide questions mentioned in the statement of the problem. Each questionnaire, with the attached cover letter, was given personally to the respective participants. The gathered data were then transcribed accordingly.

These were then analyzed based on the guide questions purposively constructed for this study. Answers, classified according to the commonality of thought, were treated accordingly.

As to the veracity of the data, triangulation was done by interviewing the immediate heads of the participants, observing them, and comparing their answers in the guide questions. To further substantiate the data, the participants were gathered for a focused group discussion

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the gathered data with their corresponding analysis and interpretations.

Coming from diverse background, these language teachers came from New Zealand, Egypt, Algeria, Pakistan, India, Jordan, Russia and Philippines. Generally, the participants had taught language courses in the country where they came from. These language courses include English, Arabic, French, Russian, Spanish and English.

Motivations as a Language Teacher

There are several motivations that propelled the participants as a language teacher. The most essential is the idea that teaching is a lifelong engagement. It is a channel through which other people may learn and thereby be a catalyst of change. A New Zealander says, "To

empower the students to be able to communicate across global borders.” Other motivating factors include for further experience and development, the opportunity to know students of different backgrounds where the teacher and students both learn from each other, the travel opportunities as a language teacher, and financial support for their family.

The participants in this study, as a language teacher, have one common goal: empowerment of the students to be globally competitive. Less is focused on their personal concerns. Teaching is really a lifelong engagement.

This result may coincide with Ornstein’s (1983) motive for teaching as follows: teaching has several motives: love of children, desire to impart knowledge, interest and excitement about teaching, and desire to perform a valuable service to society.

Ornstein’s view envelopes the teachers’ common desire for their students: for a teacher to leave a mark on the students.

Teaching Experience in Different Countries

Most of the participants in this study had taught language subjects in their respective countries and some in other countries before opportunity came for them at AMAIUB. These countries include USA, New Zealand, South Korea, Egypt, Algeria, India and Indian School in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, USA, South Korea, and Philippines.

Since most of the teachers have doctorate degrees, it follows that they are seasoned mentors in their own specific field, experience wise.

AMAIUB is the Choice

Many of the participants mentioned similar answers such as to gain more experience for their professional growth in a multicultural environment since this is an International University; Poses new challenges on their profession and gives opportunities to widen their horizon; Other answers include the following: to continue to live and work in the Middle East since she is presently residing in the island after teaching in one institute; others mentioned by coincidence. AMAIUB, being an International University, maybe attractive among jobseekers, for one reason or another. To experience teaching in a diverse culture is a nosebleed, but challenging.

Expectations as a Language Teacher

Generally, the participants’ concern is to be able to make a contribution (however small) in the lives of the students; specifically to have impact on the students’ learning by helping them to communicate effectively in English, preparing them for their mainstream courses. Actually, university students just need extra effort to learn and study their lessons well, as a self-reawakening, with teachers using novel pedagogical techniques to reinforce learning. Using laboratory speech facilities outside of their class hours to practice their communication skills may also substantiate regular speech laboratory classes. Furthermore, for languages other than English, teachers just hope students will appreciate the basic courses for their future use, especially when they work and travel abroad.

Other expectations include more challenging classroom management and teaching to tap student potentials with support from the administration and more training for teachers to enrich their experiences along with conducting of researches related to their specific field of expertise.

How are These Expectations Met?

Expectations are met little by little with the support of the university such as the use of speech laboratory for speech classes; exposure to professors who are native speakers of the English language; and trainings and workshops related to instruction. Others say teaching students with diverse culture is challenging - much remain to be done, though they were able to handle them well.

Difficulties Encountered

One of the most pressing difficulties encountered by the language teachers is the students' difficulty in using the English language – their inability to express their thoughts and feelings both in speaking and in writing. It is also difficult to teach them grammar, communication, correct spelling and pronunciation. They have less stock of vocabulary due to language barriers. These deficiencies may have led to their lack of self-confidence. Another participant believes exposure to the speakers of English (native or non-native) is very valuable to the students.

Classroom management due to students' attitude is another difficulty for language teachers. These include tardiness, lack of interest and exam-related problem.

The volume of paperwork required for coordinators to keep files intact eats up much of the teachers' time.

Management of Difficulties Encountered

Language teachers have varied answers on the management of their difficulties. The participants familiarize with the Bahraini culture to help students cope with their needs and be resourceful by simplifying the lesson to fit the level and help them develop their self-confidence. One participant has this to say: "Management of the problems cited is difficult; however, as part of my responsibility as a teacher, I try my best to deal with the problem through dialogue with the students concerned." This means using strong, personal level motivations, practical approach in teaching.

As a teacher, proper time management is the best solution. Other answers include: follow the university policies; just do what a teacher is supposed to do –give suggestions, voice opinions; try to keep paper activities on hand; and ask help from the immediate heads.

Professional Issues That Confronted Foreign Language Teachers

Only a few participants have professional issues. Some issues are as follows: The students understand the concept but do not have the vocabulary or English knowledge to express their responses well; In Bahrain, there are a few local professional trainings for language teachers; and the language level (in English) of the students is low when it comes to writing, etc.; and undermining the capacity of the language teachers.

Social Cost of Migrating and Teaching In a Foreign Country

Social cost is quite high as it includes limited social activities due to cultural and religious restrictions. Manner of dressing has to be a little uptight. Also, there are only a few recreational avenues, and if there are, these have restrictions on its own. One has to be extra careful in behaving in public. Manner of dressing and public display of affection need to be done very, very discreetly; Others mentioned not being able to grow old with his family, not being able to share his talents and abilities with his countrymen who need them more, and offer his services to his country; less time for friends; no time for family; No time for

socialized exploration; family problem; and difficulty adjusting with different nationalities and their culture.

On the other hand, some share the plus factor instead of the social cost, such that teaching in this country strengthens his social responsibility; it is also a self-reawakening. One language teacher has this to say: “I enjoy the cultural exchange. Since I don’t have a family, I do not experience the same social cost as a parent living in another land. In fact, it is very enriching.”

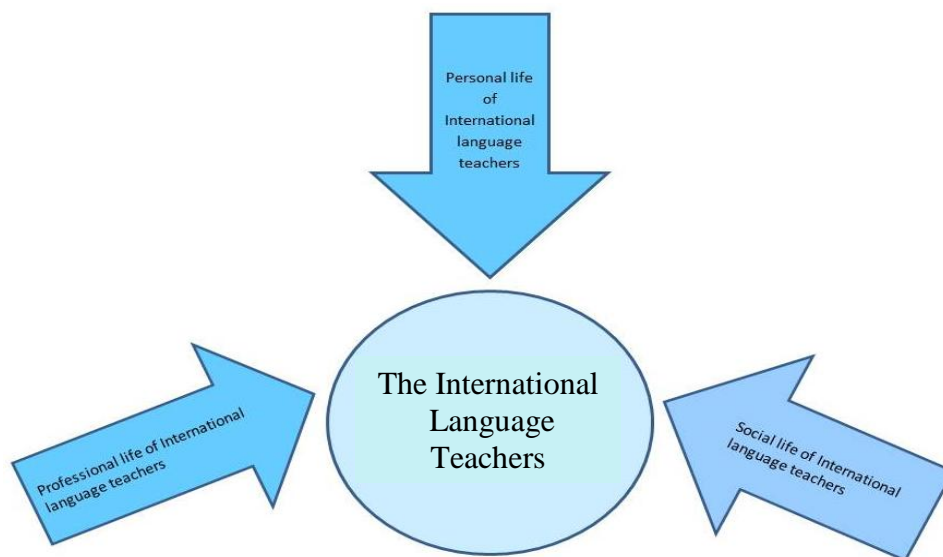


Figure 1. The International language teachers’ overall concern – personally, professionally and socially, regardless of their nationality and language taught, is empowerment of the students to be globally competitive in their career as a lifelong investment. Love of teaching is embedded in every teacher’s heart, leaving a significant mark on the students.

Mini Theory: The “Iceberg Theory”

Floating in the water, the iceberg has a significant portion whose bulk is submerged underwater is heavier, invisible to the surface viewers. A small evident part of something largely hidden remains to be seen and discovered. Only 1/7 or 1/8 of an iceberg can be seen above water. The rest is hidden below the surface.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iceberg#Etymology>)

Comparing this iceberg to the participants of this study, one who has a wider perspective of the migrant teachers, armed with expertise in their respective field and seasoned with years of experience and wisdom, had to migrate to other countries, live and blend with the culture much different from their personal orientation, and teach students coming from a diverse culture. There seems to be a hidden cause, though teachers may honestly say they care to empower the students as their profession dictates.

Iceberg is a large mass that has been broken from a polar glacier. Broken from a polar glacier... Where could people be broken from? Could there be something heavier than what introspection results had to offer from the personal, professional and social life of these teachers from different countries? Personally, they left behind their beloved family, sacrificing the growing up of their children through the years, leaving the upbringing to the significant others whose concern is not as genuine as that of the presence of a parent.

Furthermore, social concerns mentioned so many angles, paving the way to understanding that back home, so much remains to be discovered personally, professionally and socially.

Limitation of this research recommends a follow up study to cater to the depth of the big mass of iceberg down below the surface of who these respondents really are.

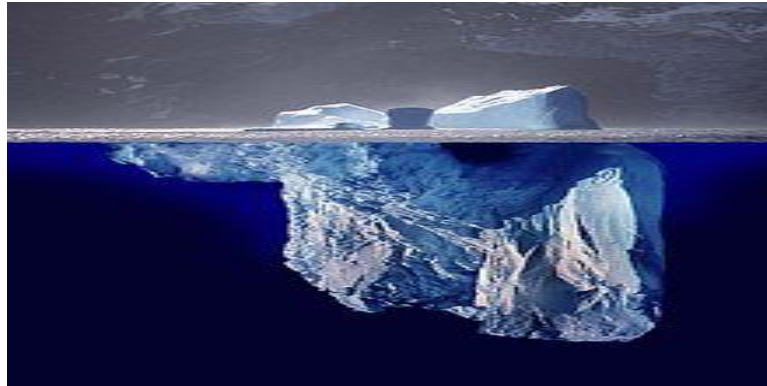


Figure 2. The Iceberg

Source: <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/File:Iceberg.jpg>

The Focused Group Discussion

To substantiate the data, the researcher gathered the participants by groups to get more information and to follow-up what has been written in the questionnaire. This was done instead of gathering them all because of the peculiarity of the schedule of the different language teachers. Some have morning classes only while some come only in the evening. Some part timers have one or two classes only. Follow up of what has not been thoroughly tackled by the respondents during the gathering of data in the questionnaire was substantiated during the discussion.

To hide the identity of the respondents for ethical considerations, they were labeled accordingly. Participant A mentions that since she has lived in the island for some years and she has no family of her own, her social cost is a plus factor. She enjoys the cultural exchange. As observed, this Caucasian-looking teacher is very dedicated to her work, follows policies, and teaches the language diligently. Participant C mentions the reality that students, generally coming from developed countries, undermine the teachers who come from the third world countries. For Respondent E, coming to this country came as a surprise for him. He just thought of teaching in any Middle East country. He was surprised when an opportunity came for him, thus, he included Bahrain as one among the repertoire of countries he had taught the past years.

Missing home is mentioned by Participant G. Social cost as one may say, means sacrificing time with friends, no time for family, for social exploration, though he honestly confide that he enjoys teaching students from diverse cultures. This was observed when he was already adjusted to the environment. Participant F, an Egyptian, confirmed this observation. He appreciates how Filipinos deal with them. He likes the atmosphere in the administration and the faculty, regardless of nationality.

Participant B opines that for a change, she applied to teach a language which is her native tongue. Being a Russian, she is very articulate, with plus factor – her artistic skill which she incorporates in her lessons. Though she noticed the difficulty of the students in learning the language, she was able to encourage them, and while she notices that the students are trying their best to learn because of her motivation, she was fulfilled.

Table 1. Distribution of the Participants

<i>Nationality</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Egyptian	1	7.14
Pakistani	1	7.14
Algerian	1	7.14
Indian	1	7.14
Russian	1	7.14
New Zealand	1	7.14
Filipino	8	57.14
Total	14	100%

Of the 13 teachers, 1 (7.14%) is an Egyptian - teaches Arabic; 1 (7.14%) a Pakistani - teaches English; 1 (7.14) Algerian – teaches French; 1 (7.14) Indian – teaches English; 1 (7.14%) is a Russian – teaches Russian; and 8 (57.14%) are Filipinos – teach English and Spanish languages. Generally, the participants had taught language courses in the country where they came from.

For the focused group discussion, answers among the items included in the questionnaire were clarified from the participants.

FINDINGS

1. As to motivation, generally, the participants of this study were concerned about the empowerment of the students to be globally competitive in their career as a lifelong investment. This concept is supported by Ornstein's view that love of teaching and commitment to teaching are embedded in every teacher's heart. This leaves a mark on the students. A Russian teacher opines that teaching a foreign language among international students is a pleasure, especially when students appreciate it.
2. For professional growth, teachers opt to teach in an international university to enrich their experience among students with diverse cultural backgrounds, blending harmony to their expertise which eventually widens their horizon. Some just wanted to try another job, because an opportunity came, she being a native speaker of another language.

A repertoire of a teacher's experience decides one to remain teaching in this university for years.

Other expectations mentioned were for teachers to freely manage teaching to enrich their experiences, coupled with administrative support, alongside with conducting of researches, giving them opportunities for paper presentation in other countries. This concern was also addressed with the conduct of instruction-related seminars provided by the university among the faculty.

3. AMAIUB is the choice. Being an international university maybe attractive among jobseekers, especially for those with doctorate degrees.

University students are expected to be better communicators of the English language, considering that they are already in the tertiary level. Teaching students from a diverse culture is difficult to handle, although the teachers were able to cope with the difficulty.

Students lack competency in speaking and in writing. They have difficulty in pronouncing English words and they lack vocabulary. This might be a carryover of the peculiarity of their language, which can be attributed to their system of writing and the production of sound. Russian and Spanish languages are too foreign for them.

The subject coordinator's role in keeping the files intact is a plus factor. Keeping of records and organizing documents ready for use when needed lessens the teachers' burden.

4. Professional issues are varied as follows: difficulty of students in understanding the concepts due to lack of vocabulary. Very low language proficiency level; lack of professional trainings for teachers; undermining the capacity of the language teachers. Students' inability to use better English and lack of vocabulary maybe due to language barrier, and their motivation for academic endeavor.
5. Social cost is relative among all participants. The following are the common answers: Manner of dressing, limited recreational avenue, public display of affection, not growing old with family, can't share talent with their countrymen, less time for friends, no time for family, no time for social exploration, family problem, and difficulty adjusting with different nationalities.

Only one participant answered social cost is relative. It is a plus factor. It is self-fulfilling and enriching".

CONCLUSIONS

Love of teaching still reigns in every teacher's heart, across cultures. Dedication to teaching is unsurpassable. Enabling students to pursue multiple and complementary achievement in terms of language learning positively affect them interpersonally and intra personally. Student empowerment is a fluid and fragile phenomenon to which the teacher can contribute.

Armed with knowledge and skills, these teachers have vicarious experiences they can hand down to their students. Mostly armed with doctorate degrees and coming from different orientations from their respective universities, these teachers could prove their worth.

The name International University is attractive among jobseekers. AMA International University is one of these. Enriching one's experience in a prestigious university is an opportunity to not only observe a different culture but also to work in it. Working gives one a more realistic picture of a different culture than just simply studying it.

Teaching English in another country can be a pleasant change from the constancy of a teacher's life and also a way to explore a career in teaching. Colleagues can be a source of friendships. One can also broaden the knowledge of his own culture.

Students enrolled in an international university in a tertiary level should have been honed in their English language communications skills; however, much needs to be improved in the way the students use the language. Since this is so, students need further reinforcement especially in their conversational English.

To brush up the students' skills, the university provided the speech laboratory for students to practice their skills while at the same time enjoys the benefit technology can provide. Teachers' skills, especially the native speaker's teaching his own language are a plus factor.

Language teachers had to exert extra effort teaching a foreign language to students coming from diverse cultures. The students' system of writing added to the malady. This poses a

challenge to the teachers, though expectations were not fully met. Teachers cannot undo teaching overnight; though much has been done, still much remain to be done.

Lack of self-confidence is very common especially among women. Their culture may have greatly influenced them. On the other hand, many of these women are already aware that times have changed, and that women should also be empowered, if not to be at par with the role men play, they are indispensable in their own right.

The thorny issue among teachers is time management. This is one of the causes of stress. There is always more than enough to be done. Endless paper works, etc.

Teachers, through the years of experience, may have learned the art of time management that fits them. If they have not done this yet, they may not have stayed this long in their profession.

Teaching as a profession is an occupation which performs a crucial social function. To accomplish this function, it requires a considerable degree of skill to enhance student learning. A wide range of professional issues may confront a teacher, but these concerns may be embedded in their profession, such that issues can be resolved in due time.

Social cost is relative. It has a negative impact to some, probably because of the time constraint for them to do the maximum output; however, for those who took it positively, social cost turned out to be a plus factor.

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