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**College Students' Perceived Stress and Stress Management:
A Case Study of Students in the English Department, FJCU**

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Taiwanese college students have enjoyed more freedom to do what they like, yet they definitely face various types of stress such as adaptation of higher education, future concerns and so on. After all, they are treated as adults who need to be responsible for themselves. To some extents, these changes in their life styles and responsibilities might cause them to suffer from stress, which is defined as by specialists in the field of holistic medicine “the inability to cope with a perceived (real or imagined) threat to one’s mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, which results in a series of physiological responses and adaptations” (Seaward 5). Moreover, stress is also inevitable; the only way to be free from stress is death, according to Hans Selye’s book *Stress in Health and Disease* (15). We experience more and more stress as we grow older. Indeed, “some stress (eustress) is necessary for health and performance but [...] beyond an optimal amount both will deteriorate as stress increases,” based on Yerkes-Dodson principle (Seaward 9). In other words, there is no denying that moderate stress can enhance our performance, while stress overload can make negative impacts on our health. For instance, “[S]tress has been linked to all that leading causes of death, including heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis and suicide” (Seaward 3). Based on a previous study of John Tung Foundation in 2005, more than 40% of Taiwanese college students often

not only suffered from five major stressors, inclusive of physical health, academic performance, interpersonal relationships, future career development and love relationships, but also had severe depressed emotions in needed of professional assistances. The issue of college students' stress has aroused awareness because students are viewed as society's future investment (Kumaraswamy 135). Moreover, the issue of stress will continue being an important part in college students' lives, even after they graduate from universities. Therefore, this research is aimed at discovering stressors and stress-relief strategies of students in the English Department of Literature and Language at Fu Jen Catholic University in order to offer some suggestions and solutions to both the students and the department.

The questions this study raises:

1. Why do English majors at FJCU feel stressed?
2. How do they deal with stress?

Literature review

Research on human stress can be traced to Hans Selye, who is considered “the father of stress research” (Fink). The term stress, which Selye applies to the human condition, was first mentioned in his book *The Stress of Life* in 1956 (Seaward 4). Later, Hans Selye defines stress as “the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it” in his journal “Stress without Distress” (137). Furthermore, he figures out that stress can be good or bad; however, the body can not distinguish the “the difference between good and bad stress” (Seaward 5). According to Hans Selye's book *Stress in Health and Disease*, “two types of stress effects” including “eustress (from the Greek eu or good—as in euphony, euphoria, eulogy) and distress (from the Latin dis or bad—as in dissonance, disease and dissatisfaction)” (15). In the field of stress studies, most of them have worked on negative effects of stress, or

distress. This paper, likewise, takes the same perspective and, focuses on the stress that leads to distress for English majors at FJCU in order to seek possible solutions.

In the past decade, many studies have been engaged in investigating stress among college students all around the world. For instances, the top three concerns including “academic performance, pressure to succeed and post-graduation plans” are found to be the major stressors of undergraduate students in Franciscan University of Steubenville (Beiter et al. 90). In addition, one study demonstrates that there are gender differences in responses to academic stress: “F[f]emale experienced higher self-imposed stress and more physiological reactions to stressors than males” (Misra and Mckean 44). The study also indicates that freshman and sophomore students experienced higher stressfulness than junior and senior students because of “slightly higher anxiety, lower time management behaviors and leisure activities” (49). After all, “Within[w] a college social system, freshmen and sophomores lack the strong social support networks and have not yet developed the coping mechanism used by juniors and seniors to deal with college stress” (Misra and Mckean 49).

Apart from the many foreign studies of stress in college students, many Taiwanese researchers have devoted their energies to explore causes and effects of stress on Taiwanese undergraduates in the past two decades. In 2006, the research conducted by Chun-Chan Wang and Wan-Yu Pan indicated that academic, family and interpersonal pressure were top three stress factors to college students from 13 public and private universities; moreover, most students used “cognitive adapting” to relieve their stress (Wang and Pan 480). John Tung Foundation’s previous study in 2008 also showed that future career development, financial conditions, studies, physical appearances and family financial issues were top five stressors to Taiwanese college students from 57 universities in Taiwan. According to Yun-Chen Huang and Shu-Hui Lin, the great life stress was employment pressure for Taiwanese college students

from Taichung district, while emotional stress was weighted less (35). A study about college students' life stressors in 2012 was stated that Taiwanese undergraduates mainly suffered from academic and employment pressure (Liu 40). As mentioned above, these researches claim that academic stress, employment pressure and family related stress are three common stressors to Taiwanese college students.

Hypothesis

Based on these studies, my hypothesis is that studies, feelings of time constraints, fears of future and doubts about their majors are main stress factors which make students in FJCU English department stressed out. As for stress management, having hobbies, seeking for helps from family members or friends and swiping their smartphones are top three methods of relieving stress for English majors at FJCU.

Methodology

In order to study causes of stress and stress-coping methods for FJU English majors, this paper uses a quantitative survey and interviews. The survey is conducted with (the method of) convenience sampling; 78 responses come from English majors at FJCU among four year levels filling out the Google survey in the Internet. In the questionnaire, there are four sections including basic information of respondents, the perceived stress scale (PSS) from Dr. Sheldon Cohen, respondents' perception of stressors and stress management methods respectively. In order to ensure the validity and reliability, perceived stress scale (PSS) is used so that it not only carries out an individual's assessment of the stressful situations in their lives but also “tap the degree to which respondents found their lives unpredictable, uncontrollable and overloading” (Ice and James 63). This scale is suitable for respondents who receive senior education of higher education, according to the authors (Ice and James 63). Due to the practical need of the researcher to find enough respondents at the

beginning of the semester while disregarding the preceding month of the Chinese New Year break, the original time setting of PSS, the previous 30 days, is adapted to the last month in the fall semester of 2018. For the rest sections of the survey, respondents are asked to evaluate statement about stressors and methods of managing stress, by selecting from their levels of agreement or disagreement. Options for each statement in the rest parts of the questionnaire are mostly designed by Likert-type items, which is also known as “T[t]he individual items in Likert’s sample scale,” to know “respondents’ attitudes” (Clason and Dormody 31). Since there are some phenomena which the questionnaire can’t deeply discuss or explain, interviews are served as supplements to the results of the survey. After data collections, descriptive analysis will be applied to analyze the results of the survey. In short, since the survey only helps to discern the surface of respondents’ perceptions toward stress, interviews are adopted to get deeper understandings of some FJCU English majors’ stressors and stress management.

[Thesis Statement]?

Results and Analysis

Among 78 Google questionnaire responses, most respondents are sophomore, junior and senior students; furthermore, the majority were female since there are more female students in the English department. Over half of the respondents (60.3%) did not have a double major, minor or program last semester. As for credits, 56.2% respondents handled 16- 20 credits implying that they took 8 to 10 courses each week last semester; hence, they actually did not attend too many courses. For those who had a double major, minor or program, most of them took 16 to 25 credits last semester. Therefore, the academic workload might be a little bit heavy to some extents. After all, it often takes time to complete course tasks in the English department. Apart from the

studies, 52.6 % respondents had a part-time job or/and an internship last semester, while 42.3% had neither. ★(Still wrong)

In general, 65 respondents (83.33%) had moderate or high stress in the last month of last semester (see Table 1.), according to their scores of perceived stress scale (PSS). The two factors of having a part time job and/ or an internship and having a double major, minor, program and a minor and a program do not make significant differences on statistic, based on Professor Yu, who performed examinations of Kruskal-Wallis Test; (@) therefore, the objective estimate of their workload—in terms of extra work from part-time job or an extra academic program-- do not influence respondents' perceived stress scale scores. In other words, no matter whether respondents are busy or not, they can feel stressful. Rather, it is their perceptions of stress and the four major stressors (studies, lack of time, worries about future and self-perception) that are the major factors in their stress levels. The results of PSS are to be expected that participants not only had to prepare for final exams but also dealt with various assignments since it was near the end of the semester; furthermore, many of them (57.7%) also had a part time job or/and internship. To further find out participants' stressors, they were asked to select the level of agreement on each statement of stress factors. In other words, they needed to decide how much they either agree or disagree to each stressor. The level of agreement is scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The overall results presented in Table 2. indicate that studies (89.74%), lacks of time to complete required tasks (85.9%), future concerns (85.9%) are major stressors, since the average scores of these items are closed to or above 4.2 points.

Table 1. Perceived Stress Scale results

Year level	Numbers of	Numbers of	Numbers of high	Average
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	low stress (0-13 sores), n(%)	moderate stress (14-26 scores), n(%)	stress (27-40 scores), n(%)	score of PSS
Freshman	0 (0%)	4 (5.13%)	0 (0%)	20.5
Sophomore	3 (3.85%)	13 (16.67%)	6 (7.69%)	20.95
Junior	4 (5.13%)	16 (20.51%)	8 (10.26%)	22.92
Senior	4 (5.13%)	16 (20.51%)	4 (5.13%)	20.29
Total	11 (14.11%)	49 (62.82%)	18 (23.08%)	21.43

Table 2. Stressors

Stressors	Strongly agree, n (%)	Agree, n (%)	Total, n (%)	Average
Studies	32 (41.03%)	38 (48.72%)	70 (89.74%)	4.28
Lack of time for necessary tasks	29 (37.18%)	38 (48.72%)	67 (85.9%)	4.19
Worries about your future	34 (43.59%)	33 (42.31%)	67 (85.9%)	4.19
Self-expectation	29 (37.18%)	27 (34.62%)	56 (71.79%)	4.02
Doubts about your major	18 (23.08%)	15 (19.23%)	33 (42.31%)	3.1
Pressures from a part-time jobs or an internship	4 (5.13%)	22 (28.21%)	26 (33.33%)	2.79
Health issues	4 (5.13%)	18 (23.08%)	22 (28.21%)	2.78
Family issues	6 (7.69%)	13 (16.67%)	19 (24.36%)	2.64
Financial pressures	4 (5.13%)	14 (17.95%)	18 (23.08%)	2.51
Relationship issues	4 (5.13%)	13 (16.67%)	17 (21.79%)	2.71
Love relationships	7 (8.97%)	8 (10.26%)	15 (19.23%)	2.51

Homesickness	3 (3.85%)	6 (7.69%)	9 (11.54%)	2.03
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Apart from their experience of stress in the last month of last semester and their general perceptions of stressors, respondents were also asked to rate their level of agreement (from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”) with each statement about the stressors. As for the results, it should be noted that 70 out of 78 respondents (89.74%) considered the studies as one of their stressors; moreover, 70 of them (89.7%) agreed academic workload in the English department is stressful (Figure 1.). As shown in Figure 2., there is a positive correlation between the results of studies and academic stress in the English department. The more academic pressure respondents undertook, the higher stress levels of studies resulting from the English department they experienced. It is also worth noting that slight more than half English majors (56.2%) who did not have a minor, double major or a program last semester regarded their studies as a stressor. Along with the high rate of agreement on feeling stressful with academic stress in the English department, another common stressor for 85.8% respondents is lack of time for necessary tasks as well as that nearly 70% respondents indicated that they often don’t have enough time in a day to complete the necessary or required tasks. With the data above, we can reasonably assume that most required tasks for courses in the English department really take students a long time to complete. For instance, English majors spend a lot of time composing essays and comprehending literature work. The other factor for lack of time as a stressor might be whether respondents have a part time job or/and internship. Among the 54 respondents who strongly agree or agree that they don’t have enough time to complete their required tasks in a day, a bit more 50% have a part time job or/and internship.

Figure 1.

身為英文系學生，你覺得課業是... As an English major, academic workload is...

78 則回應

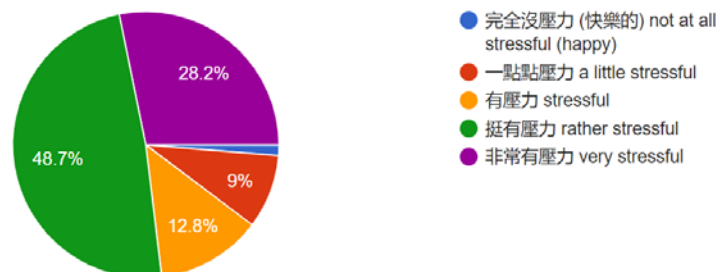
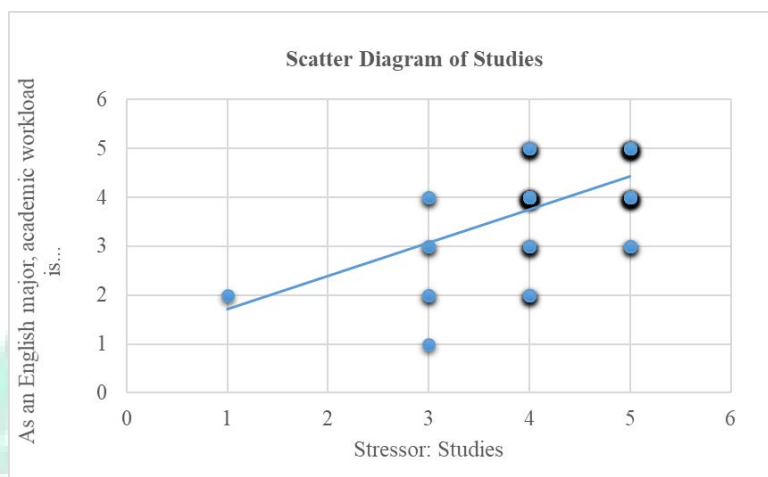


Figure 2. Scatter diagram of Studies



From the data above, a notable result is that none of the English majors from sophomore to senior year-level in this study thought that studies in the English department is not at all stressful. In fact, 29.7% respondents from the target three year-levels think that studying in the English department is very stressful. Surprisingly, studies is still a major stressor for 22 out of 24 senior respondents (83.33%); moreover, even a senior who only took fewer than 10 credits last semester regarded studies as a cause of stress.

Along with respondents' stressors of studies and lack of time, worrying about future is another common stressor for English majors in this study. 67 respondents (85.9%) revealed that they had worries about their future (see Table 2.). In fact, the results show a positive correlation between the statistics of future concerns and future preparations for graduations as an English major (see Figure 3.). Hence, as respondents felt more future concerns, they also had more worries about preparations for the future after their graduation from the English department (see Table 3.). Nearly 99% participants felt that preparing for their future after graduations as English majors made them feel stressful. As well as feeling stress about their future, respondents at the rate of 96.2% indicated that trying to connect their majors with their future career made them suffer from stress. These statistics partially reflected

that most FJU English majors might feel lost for their future life including their future careers.

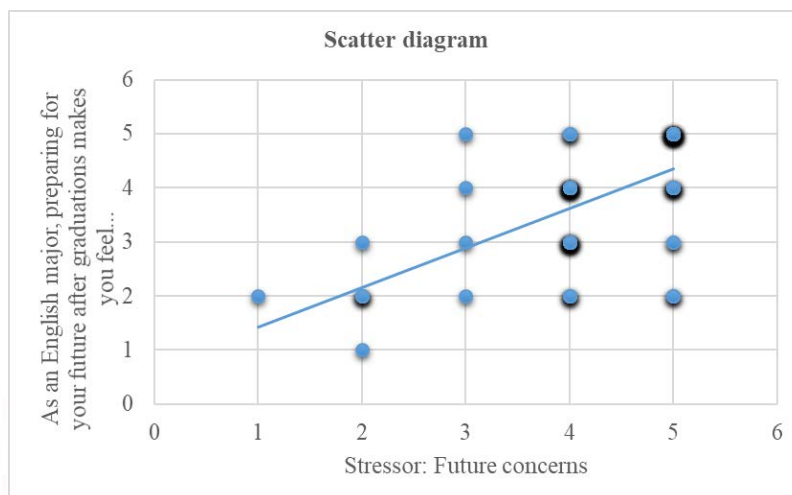
Table 2. Levels of agreement with on future concerns as a type of stressors

Year level	5= Strongly agree	4= Agree	3= Neither agree nor disagree	2= Disagree	1= Strongly disagree	Average
Sophomore	9	10	2	1	0	4.22
Junior	15	9	1	3	0	4.28
Senior	9	11	1	2	1	4.04

Table 3. As an English major, preparing your future after graduations make you feel...

Year level	5= Very stressful	4= Rather stressful	3= Stressful	2= A little stressful	1= Not at all stressful (happy)	Average
Sophomore	6	8	5	3	0	3.77
Junior	12	4	7	4	1	3.78
Senior	7	8	3	6	0	3.66

Figure 3. Scatter diagram of future concerns



As for their methods of relieving stress, hobbies were considered as the most popular way to alleviate their stress, while seeking for medical or professional helps was a non-mainstream stress relief method for the majority English majors. It is surprising to find out that many respondents replied on sleeping and eating to relieve their stress levels. However, a limitation of this research is that we can't really know whether they properly manage stress by using these three ways. For instance, we did not know whether they binge eat or oversleep. As a matter of fact, none of the four stress relief methods is absolutely bad or good, helpful or useless. It all depends on how they use it and how they reconfigure and later absorb their stress.

Since the sample sizes of sophomore, junior and senior respondents are close to each other which there are over 20 students respectively, this study compares these three year levels' results of perceived stress scale (PSS) scores. Particularly, junior respondents' average score of PSS is the highest among the three target year levels, which is 22.92 (see Table 1.). This outcome might be attributed to two factors, including studies and future concerns. According to the survey results, junior's average score of their stress levels of academic workload in the English department is the highest among three year levels (see Table 4.), for junior respondents probably have the greatest academic pressure such as arduous tasks of writing research papers

and so on. In addition, the responses show that juniors' average score of their agreements on future concerns as a stressor is also the highest among the target three year levels (see Table 2.), which might be attributed to their upcoming graduations within less than 2 years.

Table 4. As an English major, academic workload is ...

Year level	5= Very stressful	4= Rather stressful	3= Stressful	2= A little stressful	1= Not at all stressful (happy)	Average score
Sophomore	6	13	1	2	0	4.04
Junior	9	12	5	2	0	4.66
Senior	7	10	4	3	0	3.87

Interviews

Even though the survey results can show some findings of respondents' perceptions of stress and stress management, interviews can collect some participants' individualized opinions and feelings that the survey results can not further clarify. Therefore, the interviews were made to inquire into reasons of academic stress, future concern pressure and methods of relieving stress. In this research, there are two female interviewees from junior year-level. Interviewee 1 is more optimistic than interviewee 2. On the whole, it is worth noting that the two interviewees not only agreed on studies as their stressor but also considered that academic workload in the English department is very stressful despite a gap between their PSS total scores, which were respectively 16 (interviewee 1) and 37 (interviewee 2). Despite the fact that there are two individual cases, some of their viewpoints are similar.

In general, the two interviewees, though experiencing different levels of stress,

provided similar reasons for academic pressure in the FJCU English department, which result from heavy workload and frustrations. Assignments in the English department are so difficult that it takes them a lot of time and efforts to complete. For instance, writing research reports or research paper requires many tasks because English majors have to not only find sources but also consolidate information to compose their papers. Likewise, the Western Civilization course does not simply cover the English version of western culture history. Students are also asked to analyze art works especially for paintings which most of them are quite unfamiliar with. These factors place burdens on students, while they also have to cope with their other time-consuming assignments simultaneously. Another example provided by interviewee 2 is that learning linguistics might be challengeable for English majors because linguistics belongs to the study of scientific field. Most English majors are bad at science. After all, studying linguistics is different from learning literature. In general, FJCU English majors have to deal with workload of interdisciplinary learning, which leads to heavy workload. For instance, in order to pass these courses, students should not only prepare for exams but also do many time-consuming assignments such as papers and so on.

Another common reason that these two interviewees consider academic workload from the English department as a stressor is that they often experience frustrations on their studies. For instance, they often think that they do not do well on assignments compared to their classmates. Moreover, they get frustrated since they have to spend a lot of time and efforts on these assignments.

(@) ① Out of place: you are here discussing their similar viewpoints, right?
 ② [¶] unity: are you dealing with “general reasons perceived by interviewee 2” or interviewee 2’s stress factors?] On top of two interviewees’ shared viewpoints on academic pressure in the FJCU English department, other possible reasons why many

respondents viewed studies as their stressors were provided by interviewee 2, who had high stress level on PSS. Some English majors might gradually find that their future career developments have nothing to do with their bachelor degrees during their college years; however, due to fears of postponing graduations and so on, they cannot help but continue majoring in the English department. On the other hand, according to interviewee 2 whose future career will not be related to her major, she considers having a minor which will be helpful in preparing for her future job. However, with the heavy workload from the English department, she would be overwhelmed with studies if she had a minor. As a matter of fact, this case might be possible, while every English major can handle a different amount of pressure. It depends on students' abilities of dealing with stress. Yet, there is no denying that an English major who has a minor will be under great academic pressure if he or she wants to graduate on time. After all, the workload from the English department is heavy and time-consuming. (@) (If you define stress as "distress" here, this contradicts your interpretation of the correlation between extra work and stress.) On the other hand, in spite of the fact that she does not have strong passions for all courses in the English department, she still has great interests in some courses in the English department. Yet, she feels stressed out because of self-expectation; she does not want to do poorly on tasks from her favorite courses.

As for the stressor of lack of time for necessary tasks, the two interviewees indicated that there are still other things besides their studies such as hobbies, extracurricular activities and so on that they want to engage in. For instance, interviewee 2 has personal training to prepare for her future career which is non major related. Not only does interviewee 1 exercise but also has a part time job. However, with the limited time of every day, they are worried that they can not ensure they do everything well. Therefore, they often have feelings of lacking time in a day for

necessary tasks.

Other than the two interviewees' similar thoughts of stressors from lacking time, their opinions of stress resulting from future concerns also shared similarities and slight differences. [collocation]★

For similarities, both of interviewees think that most English majors face concerns of their future because they can work in various fields; however, this situation might pose a dilemma for English majors. (awk S) For example, they might not know what types of jobs they want to do. Moreover, when it comes to choosing job unrelated to their bachelor degrees, English majors with great English language skills might be at a disadvantage in the employment market when competing against those who major in other departments but also have good English proficiency. Even if English majors choose to do jobs directly related to English language and literature degrees, they might earn lower salaries. For instance, interviewee 1 has passion for becoming a cram school English teacher. However, she thought that the salary of that job is too low to afford the living expenses in Taipei. Therefore, she feels worried about her future.

As for the interviewees' different perspectives on future concerns as a stressor, it seems that the current hard skill courses have some limitations of coping with students' needs for their future careers or major specializations; therefore, many students in the English department considered future concern as their stressors. (What are the differences?) (@)According to one of the interviewees (which one?), she mentioned that the hard skills that English majors cultivate during their bachelor degrees might not make them specialized ★ in a related field. After all, the courses aimed to develop hard skills mostly teach students the basic knowledge. For example, even though students take the intensive translation courses in the English department, the progress of their translation skills are limited. If an FJCU English graduate applies for

a translator job, he or she might not have competence against a candidate who not only graduates from the department of Applied Foreign Languages but also specializes in translations. Moreover, both the interviewee and her classmates in the English department thought that there are not many courses of hard skills. Also, students are allowed to take these types of courses when they become junior and senior students. However, these courses often have a quota on students. Last but not least, according to one of interviewees, it is expected that students in the FJCU English department are often occupied with their heavy studies. In other words, they might be exhausted by academic pressure so that they have no extra efforts or much time to think about their future.

Since the survey results only show some popular approaches of stress management, interviewees were inquired about their viewpoints on two common stress relief methods in the interviews. To them, eating is a frequently used methods relieving stress; however, it turns out that they overeat. What's worse, not only do they put on much weight but also have a sense of inferiority due to their physical appearances. In other words, overeating increases their stress levels. As for the use of smartphone for stress management, they sometimes rely on their smartphones by browsing social media to relieve stress. However, they notice that swiping their smartphone on social medias makes them feel a sense of dissatisfaction, inferiority and anxiety, when they see most people present the best of themselves or the best part of their lives. Fortunately, both of interviewees noticed the counter effects that these two stress relief methods bring to them.

Conclusion

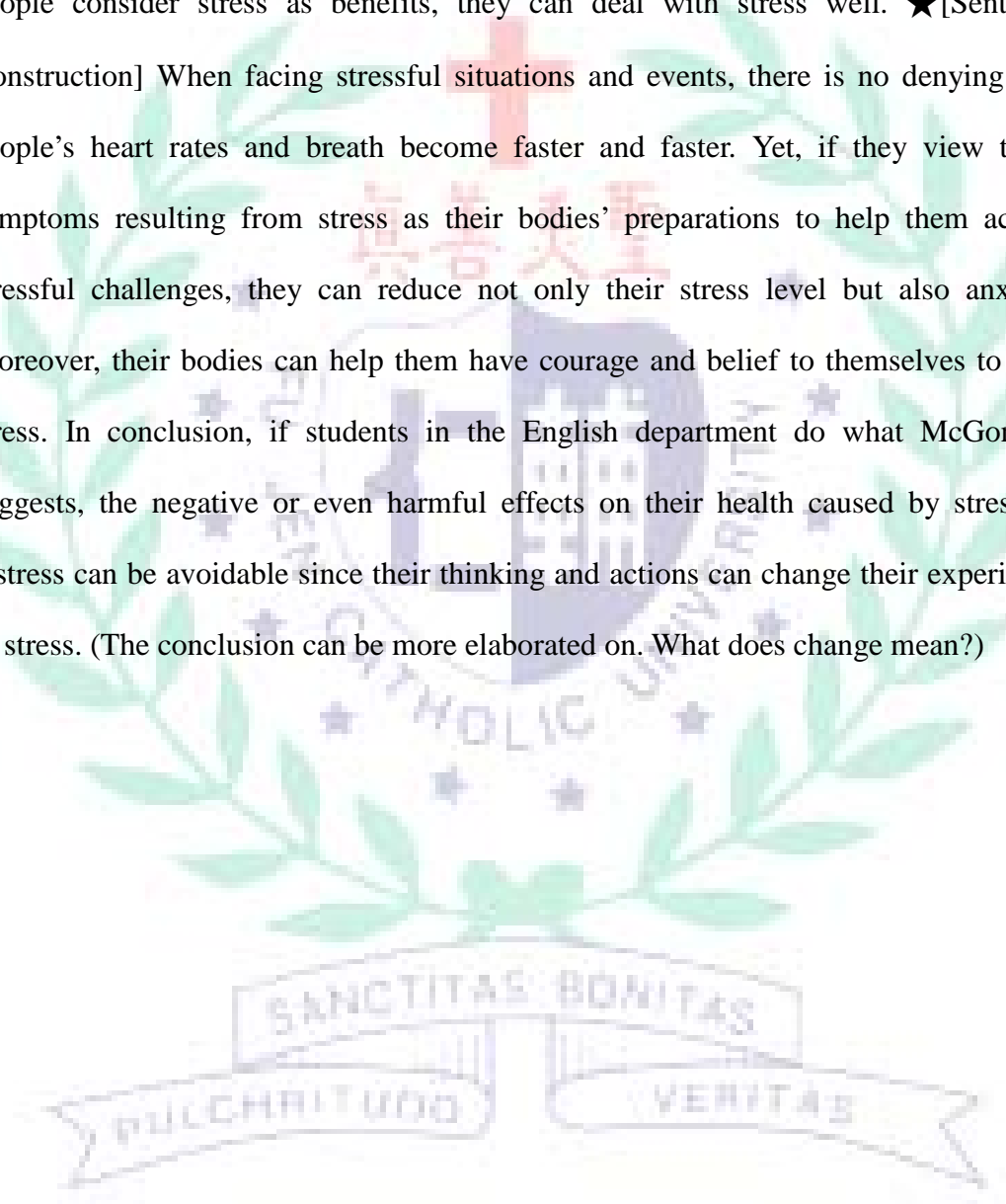
In conclusion, this research indicates that most students in the English department, FJCU, experienced moderate or high stress in the last month of the Fall

semester, 2018. English majors tend to have their hobbies, sleep and eat to relieve their stress. According to the results of this study, some suggestions for both students and the English department are provided.

As for suggestions for students, it is important for them to figure out some methods of alleviating stress. After all, they will continue to encounter different types of stress for life. Furthermore, students can also make the best use of FJCU instructional evaluation platform to reflect on their high stress levels if they think that the workload of the course is too heavy to undertake. In this way, these feedbacks can help the department when planning curriculum. Last but not least, they can use “time projection imagery” when feeling stressful (Palmer and Cooper 85). (good idea) For instance, students can picture themselves in the future and think about whether the current challenge will be still stressful or not. Even if they still imagine a negative future, they can picture themselves to achieve their goals in the future (85).

On the other hand, the department can hold workshops about time management for students, since a study demonstrated that time management can lower academic stress (Misra and Mckean 49). Additionally, a workable solution might be that the English department can release surveys to investigate students’ perceived stress levels about their courses and workload for an entire semester. It would be better to ensure that academic workload is reasonable for students to have sufficient time for the completion of required tasks. Therefore, the department and students can achieve a balance to ensure that the workload is manageable. Last but not least, it would be great that the department can offer more courses on their professional skills as well as assistance with career guidance for students. (The last two are good suggestions, and I’m not sure about the first. Julie arranged one on stress release at the department meeting, and it seems that the students did not pay attention on the spot.)

The aforementioned suggestions focus on stress reduction and relief because we treat stress as an obstacle in our life; however, another novel suggestion for dealing with stress is that students can try to view stress as a positive force in their life rather than having negative thinking about stress. (good) According to Kelly McGonigal, if people consider stress as benefits, they can deal with stress well. ★[Sentence Construction] When facing stressful situations and events, there is no denying that people's heart rates and breath become faster and faster. Yet, if they view these symptoms resulting from stress as their bodies' preparations to help them accept stressful challenges, they can reduce not only their stress level but also anxiety. Moreover, their bodies can help them have courage and belief to themselves to face stress. In conclusion, if students in the English department do what McGonigal suggests, the negative or even harmful effects on their health caused by stress as distress can be avoidable since their thinking and actions can change their experience of stress. (The conclusion can be more elaborated on. What does change mean?)



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