

Research paper

Workplace Experiences of Language Teachers with ADHD

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ABSTRACT

ADHD experience issues related to focus and self-control, task steps and process, task initiation and execution, memory, and emotional and physical responses. An additional three themes include: workplace relationships with colleagues and students, coping mechanisms, and unique skills due to their ADHD. The findings indicate that while language teachers with ADHD experience various obstacles at work, they view their relationships with students positively. Further research is needed to investigate how ADHD might affect interpersonal relationships, classroom language teaching and, ultimately, students' learning.

Keywords: ADHD, language teaching, content analysis

Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that is usually detected in childhood. A meta-analysis by Ayano et al. (2023) reports that 8% of children and adolescents around the world are estimated to be affected. A great number of studies concerning children with ADHD have been published, leading to the implementation of vast support systems for children within family life or at school in the US (Barkley & Benton, 2022).

Despite ADHD often being detected during childhood, traits may persist into adulthood to varying degrees (Barkley & Benton, 2022; Hallowell & Ratey, 2021). Barkley and Benton (2022) emphasise that "ADHD is real. And it's not a condition that affects only kids" (p. 2), but evidence suggests that it is underdiagnosed. In the United States, for example, only 4% of adults have been formally diagnosed with ADHD. Barkley and Benton (2022) attribute this to several factors: ADHD was not widely recognized prior to the 1980s, and during that time there was a popular misconception that ADHD was a myth and that any behavioral trouble could be rectified using coping methods. Nevertheless, many adults today have become aware of mental health issues and have sought treatment to improve the quality of their lives. Despite this increased awareness, more research is still needed to understand how ADHD affects the working lives of adults; an important issue to consider is how teachers with ADHD interact with their students and colleagues, which is the focus of this article.

This article reports on qualitative evidence about the work experiences of language teachers with ADHD and how their experiences may affect their teaching practice. Within the field of language learning, Muir et al. (2021) posit that teachers are important language role models for students. Teachers who disclose their neurodivergence with students may also play a similar role. In addition, in the same way that the autistic participants of Gillespie-Lynch and colleagues (2017) view themselves, teachers with ADHD are also experts in the experience of having ADHD. This means those teachers would be able to recognize students with ADHD who are in need of support. Finally, De Costa (2025) writes "there is a pressing need to pedagogize identity in teacher education. That is, teachers would need to be aware that their identity shapes instruction, and that it is important to consider the

identities of their students” (p. 1). Therefore, we believe research exploring the working lives of language teachers with ADHD is essential to further understand how having a neurodivergent teacher may affect language learning.

We begin the article with an overview of the condition and its effects on work and discuss the theoretical framework we used to explore our findings. We review the literature about how ADHD affects work and relationships and then report on studies conducted with neurodivergent language teachers. After declaring the purpose of the study, we outline the methodology, report our findings, and conclude the article with a discussion of the results, note the limitations, and provide implications of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To start, we will discuss how ADHD impacts workplace tasks and relationships. Then, we will explore the research on the working lives of tertiary teachers in general and present what little is known about language teachers themselves. The literature review was sourced by using our own expertise and prior reading, and also through finding any relevant articles in EBSCO Discovery and Google Scholar using the following search terms: (a) ADHD language teachers; (b) ADHD language teaching; (c) Adult ADHD work; and (d) Adult ADHD workplace.

Overview of ADHD in the workplace

The fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) describes ADHD as the “persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity” affecting the quality of two or more life-settings such as in daily life, at school, or at work. ADHD is a neurological condition in which the neurotransmitters dopamine and norepinephrine are not deployed readily in order for an individual to react to a stimulus and perform, and according to Barkley and Benton (2022), “when these neurotransmitters [...] are not available in the same measure as they are in typical adults, the messages these chemicals are supposed to send don’t get through as they should” (p. 117). This can give rise to executive dysfunction manifesting in potentially problematic ways such as inattention, hyperactivity, unbounded energy, talkativeness, and those that are difficult to detect such as racing thoughts or spacing out. An additional 91 symptoms often seen among adults with ADHD are outlined in Barkley and Benton (2022, pp. 271–276).

In the workplace, ADHD adversely affects employees as individuals and, by extension, the teams they work with. At the individual level, a person with ADHD might struggle in several areas, including efficient work execution and one-on-one relationships (Fuermaier et al., 2021). Illness associated with stress or burnout from completing daily work tasks may occur (Brattberg, 2006). Further stress may result due to the possible stigma associated with having a neurodevelopmental condition and/or receiving psychiatric treatment should one disclose their condition to their employer (Mueller et al., 2012). Working within teams might prove to be difficult if the individual has problems with time management and completion of tasks (Fuermaier et al., 2021; Hilton et al., 2009). These weaknesses might hamper smooth working relationships with colleagues in general (Adamou et al., 2013). ADHD may also prevent people from building a solid career trajectory and thus seniority and financial stability are never realized (Doshi et al., 2012).

While this medicalized perspective on ADHD is useful because it provides access to treatment and professional support, there is a growing consensus in the literature that overreliance on the DSM-5 minimises and ignores the strengths of individuals with ADHD (Walker, 2021). For example, it has been shown that people with ADHD are excellent at creative problem-solving (White & Shah, 2011) and focusing on things that draw interest (Hupfeld et al., 2019). According to Baer (2015), the propensity to hyperfocus in one area of interest contributes to high levels of expertise. This tendency also surfaces across disciplines, often allowing a person with ADHD to be in situations where their ability to synthesize knowledge in fresh ways is useful. Furthermore, proponents of the neurodiversity paradigm view neurodiversity as a natural expression of human diversity, and any perceived deficits are only deficits due to systemic barriers (Walker, 2021). Thus, for this article, we draw on both the medical model and neurodiversity paradigm to provide insight into the positive and negative aspects of living with ADHD as a teacher, as we believe both perspectives are necessary to fully conceptualize ADHD for language professionals.

Neurodivergent educators in higher education

There are a few studies that focus on educators with disabilities in higher education. Bolt and Penketh (2016) edited an entire volume dedicated to how the ableist narrative promoted by the academy is outdated and should be challenged. Dolan (2023) reports on a case study of tertiary-level academics who suffer silently with invisible impairments, including ADHD. Wood and Happé’s (2023) work relates to the experiences of autistic educators in the UK. Brown et al. (2018) suggest ways academic professional development organizations can support educators with disabilities.

In the field of language teaching, two duoethnographic articles address neurodivergence among teachers: Cuervo-Rodríguez and Castañeda-Trujillo’s (2021) personal account of working with dyslexia and Jones and

Noble's (2023) duoethnography on how their ADHD affects teaching practice serve as an impetus for the research reported in this article. This study is exploratory and provides an in-depth look at the daily experiences of ADHD language teachers on a larger scale.

THE STUDY

Researcher positionality statement

We are members of the ADHD language-teaching community whose voices we hope to amplify with the findings of this article. This positionality allows us access to the greater ADHD population and also enables us to analyze the collected data against our own experiences living and working with ADHD. In our survey of the literature on the working environments of neurodivergent people in general, as well as those with ADHD, we found little information about what our contemporaries deal with at their workplaces. Building on the duoethnography of Jones and Noble (2023), we desire to continue the momentum of awareness-raising with a view to making our workplaces more inclusive and supportive of those with ADHD. We believe that while there are areas in which we may struggle, there are plenty in which we contribute positively with our expertise, inspiring colleagues and acting as role models for the people we teach. To this end, we designed the current study to canvass the greater English language teaching population worldwide and find out more about their realities at work and how they navigate professional relationships. In the words of David Bolt (2015), in the academy, it is through “the very diversity of minds and bodies that we are ultimately unified” (p. 11) and our world is better for it. With this in mind, we aim to provide an emic yet objective examination of the self-reported experiences and feelings of the ADHD language teaching community.

Purpose of the study

The main reason for undertaking this project was that there is simply not enough research on language teachers with ADHD. As expressed very eloquently by Cuervo-Rodriguez and Castañeda-Trujillo (2021) “This lack of information invisibilizes the problem and the population itself, thus creating more barriers” for the teachers (p. 93). Furthermore, research on language teachers with ADHD is important because language is both the medium and object of instruction. Language teaching requires frequent real-time decisions regarding the use of both natural and modified language in order to teach language as it is actually used while also negotiating meaning with learners (Long, 1983), possibly with varying success. These decisions are not only planned prior to lessons, but in real time and in situ as responses to learner language use. Frequent decisions result in greater cognitive load which complicates how an individual with ADHD handles a given situation; there may be extremes of hyperfocus (Ashinoff & Abu-Akel, 2021) and tiredness or overload. Additionally, language teachers may also be living outside their country of birth, and with varying levels of proficiency in the host country's language. Where there is a lack of proficiency in the host country's language, stress and cognitive overload at work may be compounded by the stress of processing an additional language for important life-related administration outside of work (Jones & Noble, 2023).

Given these contributing factors, the purpose of this study was to understand how language teachers with ADHD navigate their work tasks and workplace relationships. In the following sections we will detail the methods, report and discuss the findings, acknowledge limitations and discuss implications.

METHODS

Questionnaire

The data presented in this article was gathered as part of a larger study in which we explored ADHD teacher self-efficacy and how they frame their work. The quantitative data and a frame analysis is reported in Jones and Clark (2024). Demographic data was captured, due to the study being exploratory, in case there appeared to be trends by age, nationality/cultural background, or gender. For this article, we focused on the open-ended items which were: How does having ADHD contribute positively to your teaching? How does having ADHD contribute negatively to your teaching? How does having ADHD contribute positively to your work life? How does having ADHD contribute negatively to your work life?

The questionnaire was compiled using Google Forms and then trialed with four colleagues. Upon receiving feedback, it was revised to improve clarity and internal consistency. It was shared by the authors on social media (Mastodon, LinkedIn, Facebook), with interested colleagues encouraged to share it with their contacts.

Participants

As reported in Jones and Clark (2024), participants were recruited by convenience and snowball sampling between December 2022 and February 2023. In total, 60 individuals responded to the questionnaire and were assigned participant numbers for anonymized data analysis. Three were struck from the data set because their responses indicated they were not entirely sure they were qualified to participate. Of the 57 remaining participants, 48 provided qualitative answers. The sample consisted of 26 participants who were self-diagnosed, while 22 reported having received a diagnosis by a medical professional. Regarding our decision to include those with a self-diagnosis in the sample, our rationale is based on the fact that receiving an ADHD diagnosis in Japan (where most participants were likely to be based), as elsewhere, is relatively difficult. Language barriers and the prevailing view that ADHD occurs only in children may make diagnosis elusive. Thus, we view self-diagnosis as a viable reason to be included in this study.

Regarding gender, 31 participants identified as female, 14 as male, and three as non-binary, of which one identified as non-binary/female. The vast majority of participants were based in Japan ($n=37$), with two based in other Asian countries, six in Europe, two in the USA, and one in Africa. The mean age was 43.5 years old, with a range from 27 to 70 years old. Most participants worked in universities (29), although six worked in elementary schools, seven in junior high schools, six in high schools, eight in private language schools, and eight in other settings. Several participants worked in more than one setting. The ethics board of Author 2's institution requires government-provided ethics training, based largely upon case studies and requiring completion of a set of questions related to ethical research, informed consent, and data protection. Upon its completion, research with adult participants is permitted provided informed consent is obtained.

Data analysis

As the goal of this study was to investigate the experiences of language teachers with ADHD, the research falls under the social-constructivist paradigm in which the coding process involved “look(ing) for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8). As such, the textual data gathered from the open-response items were coded using a content analysis method in which not only major themes, but also latent nuances were identified and subsequently quantified. This coding procedure allowed us to understand perspectives across the sample but also unearth any divergences, although the quantification was not done in order to make generalizations to the population but merely to understand whether there was a level of disagreement among participants.

The coding process was iterative, with the first author using the qualitative data analysis program, NVivo for Mac (QSR, 2018) to construct the preliminary codebook for the project. During an initial pass through the data, we used Eclectic Coding (Saldaña, 2016), an exploratory method of data analysis useful for identifying broad themes. During this coding cycle, we noted that issues of executive dysfunction as described by Barkley and Benton (2022) were mentioned by all participants. This provided a partial framework for subsequent examinations of the data set. At this stage, In Vivo Coding was useful to identify specific language that was repeated by a number of participants which was then applied to similar concepts in the remainder of the data using Concept Coding, an analytic coding method which harnesses “the ideas [emphasis in original] suggested by the study” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 120). Once the codebook was finalized, the second author hand-coded the entirety of the data independently. After the first round of coding, the codes generated by both researchers were compared and interrater reliability was calculated to be 80.62%. In subsequent video conferencing meetings, discrepancies were negotiated to form 100% agreement. The results are presented in the findings section of this article.

FINDINGS

Thematic analysis of the data revealed eight main themes. Five themes were related to the types of executive dysfunction Barkley and Benton (2022) describe. These were issues related to: focus and self-control, task steps and process, task initiation and execution, memory, and emotional and physical responses. Three additional themes were identified. The first was related to workplace relationships, the second was related to coping mechanisms and the final theme was concerning unique skills the respondents identified in themselves due to their ADHD. In the following sections, we will report the findings. For brevity, we have used ‘P’ to indicate ‘Participant’.

Theme 1: Focus and self-control

Difficulty with maintaining focus was a main theme that was identified, with 29 of the 48 respondents (60.42%) indicating some struggle with distraction especially while teaching. Participant 22 remarked that they “get distracted easily during the lessons: sometimes we start doing an activity and end up doing something completely different.” Participant 21 echoed this sentiment explaining, “Because of my distraction, I’m more likely to jump around in the

lesson, change my mind as I'm explaining". Inconsistency was also mentioned by four participants, one of whom attributed this to a "compulsion to improvise" (P38). Two respondents (P18 and P27) mentioned that questions from students about grammar caused their lessons to "get stuck in the weeds" (P27). Three respondents remarked that they had trouble focusing on students when they spoke, and in fact, interrupted students more than usual when ideas occurred to them. Outside of the classroom, some participants lamented a loss of focus on correcting student work or completing long-term projects such as writing research papers. One participant (P32) said inability to focus contributed to unfinished tasks and said, "I sometimes switch things mid-task and so I will not realize something is not actually done."

In addition to distraction, 23 respondents (47.92%) reported problems with conceptualizing time or experiencing "time-blindness". Participants mentioned they "lose track of time" (e.g., P14), or that it's "an issue" (P41). One participant said they were "awful" at time management (P32). Lesson pacing is a theme that emerged with one participant saying, "my pacing is always interesting. I'm keenly aware of how long students have been doing something and I try never to let them get bored" (P36). Lessons that are fast-paced are "engaging" (P22). This suggests that time is a major factor in teachers' work, yet this is not reported by all participants.

Despite these challenges, 16 participants (33.33%) mentioned their keen ability to hyperfocus on tasks. In the classroom, an example of hyperfocusing is a teacher who shares a topic that they find interesting with students, which results in students also becoming excited (P29). Another participant acknowledges the negative side of hyperfocusing when delivering input: "I can overwhelm learners easily, rather than drip-feed info as needed" (P55). For many participants, this ability surfaces during the planning stages. One participant (P1) wrote "I really like to find accurate data, images, and real-life examples for my classes, and this leads to hyperfocusing on the prep stage", but the same participant alluded to the downside of this as it can contribute to overpreparation and increased busyness. Another participant (P50) acknowledged the negative side of hyperfocusing on work and lamented that it leaves little personal time, which has led to a nervous breakdown in the past. Concerning administrative work, some participants found deadlines helped them hyperfocus on the task to finish. One participant (P32) explained, "I can also hyperfocus if I really have to get some things done, and sometimes I can do a lot or a very good job on something in a short amount of time." Another participant (P8) said, "I get these productive cycles where I am able to concentrate and work at certain times of the year."

Theme 2: Task steps and processes

A second theme concerning problems with task steps and processes was identified with 29 participants (60.42%) mentioning problems with materials organization and 30 participants (62.50%) writing about issues with completing processes. In terms of organization, several participants mentioned the collection and management of materials to be an essential part of their teaching process. Participant 2 elaborated: "In terms of organization, I keep every file and every piece of paper, and I keep everything related to teaching highly organised, but everything else is chaos." This high attention to systematizing materials often does not transfer to the participants' workspaces, with both Participant 32 and Participant 41 lamenting their workspaces as "messy".

Once in the classroom, several respondents described 'scattered' lesson plans (P5, P27) in which activity steps don't flow in a logical manner. Several participants pointed out that giving instructions proved to be a struggle. Participant 2 explains,

I do think I cause problems for students by leaping from A to Z. I have to really talk myself through a task in advance to make sure that my instructions are clear, and if I'm not careful, the instructions and warm-up can take over from the main activity.

This sentiment was echoed by Participant 29 and Participant 48. This disorganization might also occur during the execution of a task, with Participant 29 counteracting any diversions by keeping to a strict schedule and "not[ing] what things I can cut if necessary if I happen to run over or go off on a tangent."

Inadequate planning for teaching was also a strong theme. The word "scattered" was used by Participant 5 to describe their planning and work process. Even when provided with or using a set lesson plan, two participants reported having trouble following the steps (P9 and P10). Two participants lamented that trouble planning contributed to negative feelings such as anxiety (P37) and stress (P30). Poor planning is not always a negative experience for some. For example, Participant 22 does not rely on prior planning at all but instead completes preparation in the minutes before a lesson begins. They describe their experience as a positive one and explain:

I can say that I am a good teacher: students tell me every day, current and previous employers have always praised my performance, etc. However, I do not plan my lessons. At all. Ten minutes before the lesson, I start panicking, decide the activities I'm going to use, and find material. (P22)

Theme 3: Task initiation and execution

The (in)ability to begin and complete tasks was also mentioned frequently. Nineteen participants (39.58%) reported problems with procrastination and an inability to start a task. Uninteresting and tedious tasks, especially related to administrative duties such as paperwork or student assessment, were mentioned most frequently. Participant 4 described their experience, saying, “I am terrible about grading and giving written feedback. Every semester I tell myself I will stay on top of it better this semester. And every semester I am scrambling to finish grading at the end of the semester.” Complicated tasks proved to be a problem for Participant 60, who said, “I avoid doing activities involving lots of organisation because I get confused.” For Participant 24, perfectionism contributed to their inability to begin planning lessons. Difficulty starting tasks carried over into other areas of work such as professional development, with Participant 8 writing, “I sometimes cannot bring myself to conduct research or submit proposals [to publications or conferences].”

Just as tasks are sometimes difficult for participants to begin, they are also difficult to complete. Twelve people (25.00%) mentioned having trouble following through with a task. “It’s so hard to get stuff done on time. Deadlines are stressful, even if it’s for routine work, which I ultimately enjoy, like planning the next lesson” (P47). Participants mentioned working through the night up until deadlines (P26), or, as in the case of Participant 42, failing to follow through altogether due to waning motivation when nearing the end of a task.

Transitioning between tasks was also mentioned by three respondents (6.25%). Two (P34, P40) believe multitasking or doing tasks in “parallel” as Participant 34 describes, helps them complete tasks quickly and efficiently, while Participant 40 has difficulty switching from one to another. They explain, “My ADHD slows me down during transitions in my lesson because switching tasks within the lesson can take a minute to “buffer” in my brain, and I have trouble filling that space.”

Theme 4: Memory

Regarding memory, we found many respondents (20, 41.67%) mentioned problems remembering materials or steps in a process. Forgetfulness sometimes surfaced on the micro level with participants forgetting a myriad of things including physical objects or materials needed for lessons (e.g., work bag, computer cords) or intangible things such as deadlines, timetable changes, and passwords. While teaching, memory is an issue for some; Participant 38 wrote: “I cannot be consistent with rules, schedules about quiz [sic] or assignments. I forget or just come up with new ideas randomly.” This was echoed by Participant 10, who explained,

I struggle with memory and inattention. I sometimes feel as though I am forced to approach every lesson plan and class with a "blank slate" because I cannot access or process information in either the past or the present moment.

Similarly, three participants (6.25%) had trouble accessing short-term memory to complete detailed work and were frustrated by errors even after proofreading.

Theme 5: Emotional and physical responses

Within this theme, it was found that many respondents felt that having ADHD contributed to emotional responses regarding their work. Some respondents reported a general binary feeling of simply feeling “on” (P1, P37) or “off” (P37), but most explained how ADHD might affect their emotional status in detail. More than half of the participants ($n=28$, 58.33%) commented on negative feelings, with anxiety, stress, overwhelm, and self-consciousness being mentioned frequently. Some participants mentioned an extreme workload as being a contributing factor to task avoidance or a complete shutdown. Indeed, Participant 8 remarked, “I feel overwhelmed most of the time, and the anxiety I feel can be almost too crippling at times.” Participant 50 was an extreme case who mentioned a possibility of a “nervous breakdown”. These feelings were also directed inward, with several respondents reporting low self-image. Participant 32 explained, “Honestly, [ADHD is] really affecting my motivation, my sense of community, my confidence, and my mental health.” Participant 51 described their long-term feeling, and stated “Feeling ‘damaged’ has been something I have had to deal with my whole life. It has not been pleasant.” It is unclear from the data if these emotions are expressed outwardly, but two mentioned hiding or “masking” their true feelings (P1, P10). Participant 29 explains their experience:

Sometimes there is a brain fog that I just can't push through some days, and it makes it a struggle to keep myself focused, much less my students. A teacher mask helps with most of these issues, but having to adapt last minute on those days and try to keep the kids engaged and then feeling like I haven't taught them anything because I could only give them busy work, is hard to push past.

On the other hand, 22 participants (45.83%) reported having positive feelings toward their work, especially with regard to their life in the classroom, such as having high energy, enthusiasm, motivation, and curiosity.

Participant 38 wrote, “I am kind, considerate, fun, energetic, lively and carefree.” Participant 12 wrote, “I think I am very motivated and motivating.” These positive feelings make their work life enjoyable according to several participants (e.g., P19, P36, P50).

Theme 6: Workplace relationships

Within this theme, two sub-themes emerged, one regarding relationships with students (36, 75.00%) and a second regarding relationships with colleagues (29, 60.42%). Concerning students, several participants mentioned meeting student needs in general as an important pillar of their teaching approach (e.g., P7, P22). Respondents expressed compassion and sympathy for students of low ability and regularly differentiated materials or methods to help them. One explained, “I have an eye for pitfalls in which students might get lost due to unclear goals within an activity, and I try to build activities that every student feels they can at least partially succeed at.” (P10). For some, their flexible teaching approach came about as a reaction to their own weaknesses currently (P21, P49) or as a child (P7, P42). Participant 8 is transparent about their own mental health struggles and believes it is an asset to forming positive relationships with students. They explained, “I also feel that because I am open about my depression and ADHD, the students feel more at ease with me and they also share their stories with me, in a way I feel they trust me more”. Participant 42 believes their teaching style evolved due to negative past experiences as a student. They explained, “Having had negative experiences as a child due to issues with my undiagnosed ADHD, it drives me to be understanding and more patient with my students who struggle”.

While in general participants deemed having ADHD to be an asset when engaging with students, responses were mixed regarding colleagues. Participants mentioned having diverse interests as being a way to forge relationships with colleagues (e.g., P14, P17). For example, Participant 30 wrote they can “have thousands of ideas per minute and can infect others with passion.” However, some respondents felt having ADHD was a handicap in some interpersonal situations. Two participants reported engaging in public disagreements with colleagues (P1, P18) while some (P12, P19) reported a general feeling of awkwardness or an inability to form strong relationships with others in the workplace. Two reported that they avoid their colleagues altogether (P37, P49).

Theme 7: Coping strategies

Twenty-three participants (47.92%) described coping mechanisms they use to counteract any trouble brought on by ADHD symptoms. Using strategies, making systems, task-switching, and overplanning were the top four strategies mentioned. Most frequently, respondents reported using some kind of strategy but did not elaborate. However, some specific strategies used include using bullet journals to manage tasks (P55), posting announcements on the institution’s learning management system to remind themselves and students of what was covered in a lesson (P21) and reusing past lesson plans and materials (P23). Several participants have developed systems to manage workflow. For example, Participant 24 reported making lesson plan templates to streamline the planning process. A third coping strategy was also identified: task-switching. Some participants reported purposefully alternating between tasks to maintain motivation and interest both for themselves and their students (e.g., P29, P34). Finally, overplanning was often used to quell anxiety throughout the semester, both before classes commence and in the midst of the term.

Theme 8: Unique skills

There was a strong theme of pride regarding unique tasks these respondents felt they excelled at or executed better than their neurotypical colleagues (30, 62.50%). Creativity was mentioned by the majority of participants. Participant 40 reported that they can “create lesson plans that are eye-catching and easy to follow. My ADHD also helps with spontaneous inspiration, which aids me during lesson activities.” Participant 25 reported an affinity for materials gathering and creation, which they report “brings richness to my classes!” Participant 23 echoes this sentiment and explained they are able to generate variations for a given activity very easily. A second sub-theme that emerged was a keen ability to solve problems and improve existing materials or systems. For example, Participant 21 said, “I can quickly think of innovative ways to solve problems and don’t feel shy to share them”. In addition, several participants felt they had a high propensity for detail-oriented work. Participant 29 explained, “I always write down the time schedule for the day or lesson, and also note what things I can cut if necessary if I happen to run over, or go off on a tangent”. Participant 40 reported they notice and keep track of details concerning students’ personalities and language learning progress. Finally, a few participants described an innate ability to synthesize information in a unique way. For example, Participant 2 believes they can analyze a situation from a variety of perspectives. They also believe they can “integrate materials into an overarching system”. Both Participant 5 and Participant 7 believe they make connections between ideas that other people do not.

DISCUSSION

At work, the participants in this study struggled with various aspects of executive dysfunction, such as trouble with focus and self-control, teaching materials and lesson organization, task initiation and execution, memory, and trouble regulating emotional responses, especially those of a negative variety that affect the daily tasks of lesson planning, delivery, and out-of-class marking and administrative work. These findings align with the symptoms mentioned in the DSM-5 (2013) and the work of Barkley and Benton (2022) and others.

Difficulties with maintaining positive social relationships were prevalent in our sample just as Fuermaier et al. (2021) found in their study. However, this difficulty was limited to relationships with colleagues rather than with students. In contrast, interactions with students were framed positively and prioritized, with great effort dedicated to cultivating supportive learning environments for all students, especially those who may have learning differences and manage ADHD.

Participants mentioned various coping strategies they use to mitigate any disruptive effects of ADHD. This is to be expected as by adulthood it can be surmised that a person with ADHD has had repeated opportunities to exercise and hone personalized responses to situations in which disruptive symptoms occur. However, when reflecting on their work, many participants alluded to extreme levels of preparation for lessons. In some cases, these efforts affected their mental and physical wellbeing, resulting in overwork or mental breakdowns. While burnout (Brattberg, 2006) was not mentioned specifically, it would not be surprising if some participants reached this state. In contrast, at the same time, there was a strong theme of pride in which divergent thinking was mentioned as a unique skill. Like White and Shah (2006), most participants believed their ADHD made them more creative. Some noted their ability to offer alternative perspectives and solve problems while adjusting lesson plans to student needs or time limitations.

Overall, the questionnaire responses provide a detailed account of how ADHD affects the working lives of a sample of 48 language teachers. The data shows that at least for the teachers in this sample, ADHD affects the work process in both negative and positive ways but most individuals employ mechanisms to cope. The participants are conscientious in their work and seek to provide the best possible outcomes for their students. Studies such as this one are important in raising awareness about ADHD. We hope it provides insight into the experiences of neurodivergent faculty and leads to positive organizational change in which all faculty, especially those who have ADHD, are supported in their professional endeavors. After all, if language teachers with ADHD are better understood, then the profession can better accommodate language learners with ADHD.

Limitations

There are several limitations that make our findings ungeneralizable to the larger ADHD language educator population. First, our participant pool was limited by the shallow reach of convenience and snowball sampling methods. The survey was posted on various social media platforms but garnered only those who are connected to us online. This probably also contributed to the fact that most of the teachers who responded work at the tertiary level, just as we do. A further limitation is that ADHD frequently co-occurs with other neurotypes such as dyslexia and autism (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Although we felt broadening the scope would shift the focus away from the perceived effects of ADHD and therefore consciously chose to omit them, we believe that the findings of this study can inform efforts to create inclusive workplaces for all. Furthermore, we have not conducted a comparison of our findings with a sample of neurotypical or non-ADHD teachers. The general literature on teachers and teaching may be considered as neurotypical by default and therefore our study may be considered an addition to the existing literature, providing voices from a marginalized or even invisible section of the teaching community. Finally, given the nature of qualitative data analysis, the findings are based on our interpretations. While we aimed to represent the data accurately in the way the participants reported, and cross-check our evaluations, other researchers could conceivably come to different conclusions with the same data.

Implications

In conclusion, this study provided preliminary data regarding how teachers with ADHD approach teaching and workplace relationships. Eight themes were identified and probed to reveal specific instances of how ADHD affects their daily working lives. Further exploratory inquiry utilizing narrative approaches such as diary studies or interviews could reveal more insights and at minimum raise awareness about ADHD and also contribute to its normalization.

Above all, the teachers participating in the study expressed not only negative but positive experiences in the workplace in much the same way neurotypical individuals do. With this article, we are drawing attention to the lived experiences of language teachers with ADHD, highlighting nuanced differences, because of the invisibility of the neurotype in the workplace and the lack of explicit accommodations made for those teachers. Further

research into the workplace experiences of language teachers in other settings could build on the tentative findings above and reveal specific instances of how ADHD affects teaching practice.

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Ethical Statement

The authors were permitted to undertake this study with informed consent of the adult participants in accordance with Japanese law and institutional guidelines.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Author Contributions

Both authors contributed to the writing of the article and the conceptualization of the study. MJ led the qualitative analysis and GC assisted.

AI Disclosure

Neither author used LLMs or machine learning tools in the preparation, analysis or writing of this article.

Data Availability Statement

Data is protected due to privacy concerns.

Biographical Sketch

Gretchen Clark holds an MA in TEFL/TESL from the University of Birmingham and is pursuing a Doctor of Education with Johns Hopkins University. She teaches English at Ritsumeikan University, Japan. She is a member of the Japan Association for Language Teaching's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, and she believes in creating professional spaces for people to support one another.

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APPENDIX: FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

We (Marc Jones and Gretchen Clark) would like to ask for your help answering the following questionnaire "ADHD in Language Teachers". This is not a test so there are no "right" or "wrong" answers and you don't have to provide personally identifying information. Please answer honestly, as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation. Thank you very much for your help.

Please note: if you are using a phone to answer the questionnaire you may need to scroll right to see all answer options.

Purpose of the study

This questionnaire is part of a research study exploring the experiences of language teachers with Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). You will be asked questions about if and when you have had a formal diagnosis, and how ADHD affects your teaching practice and professional relationships. The final section of the questionnaire asks you to evaluate your self-efficacy with regard to your workplace tasks. Demographic questions will also be asked. In total, the questionnaire will take 15-20 minutes to complete.

Who is eligible to participate?

In order to participate in this study you must currently be a language teacher.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, without prejudice. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you withdraw before submitting the questionnaire, none of your answers will be recorded. You may withdraw by closing your browser window.

Privacy and Confidentiality

The answers you provide in this questionnaire are anonymous and you will not be identified. Your personal data will not be collected, unless you choose to sit for an interview with one of the researchers. The final item of the questionnaire asks you if you would be willing to do so and you will be asked to enter your name and your email address. The data collected with this questionnaire will be stored in a password protected computer. No email addresses are captured unless volunteered. We strongly recommend, for privacy concerns, that you do not answer this questionnaire while logged in to a work-based Google account. Some employers may monitor staff communications.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Author 2

1. Do you have or suspect you have ADHD?
2. As of 1st January 2023, how old are you?
3. What is your gender?
4. In which country were you raised?
5. In which country do you live/work?
6. What is your teaching context?
7. How are you employed?

8. How well do you speak the main language(s) of the country you live in?
9. How literate are you in the main language(s) of the country you live in?
10. Have you had a formal diagnosis of ADHD?
11. In which country were you diagnosed with ADHD?
12. When were you diagnosed? (Approximate year)
13. What was your experience of diagnosis like?
14. How long have you known or suspected you might have ADHD? (Approximately)
15. Please rate the following statements according to your belief.
 - a. ADHD affects my planning for classes.
 - b. ADHD affects the activities I intend to use.
 - c. ADHD affects the materials (web, apps, documents, devices, realia) I intend to use.
 - d. If you have anything further to add about lesson preparation, please leave a comment.
16. Please rate the following statements according to your belief.
 - a. ADHD affects how I deliver teacher input, such as vocabulary or grammar instruction.
 - b. ADHD affects how I give task instructions.
 - c. ADHD affects how I provide feedback to students
 - d. ADHD affects how I facilitate student-to-student interaction.
 - e. ADHD affects how I facilitate review of previous teaching.
 - f. ADHD affects how I motivate students.
 - g. ADHD affects how I keep students focused on tasks.
 - h. ADHD affects the pacing of my lessons.
 - i. ADHD affects how I use visual tools such as slides and/or whiteboards.]
 - j. ADHD affects my use of reminders such as pop-up notifications or timers.
 - k. ADHD affects how I assess learning during class (feedback, taking notes on performance).
 - l. ADHD affects my assessment of learning outside of class (for example, marking, feedback, submitting grades).
 - m. If you have anything further to add about teaching, instruction, and/or assessment please leave a comment.
17. Please choose the value that best reflects your belief. (No minimum/maximum number of choices.)
 - ADHD affects my relationships with colleagues.
 - ADHD affects my relationships with students.
18. In this part, please indicate the degree to which you disclose your ADHD at work.
 - a. Do you tell your students you (suspect you) have ADHD? Yes/No
 - b. Do you tell your colleagues you (suspect you) have ADHD? Yes/No
 - c. Do you tell your employers you (suspect you) have ADHD? Yes/No
19. Choose the value that best matches your beliefs about your abilities in general.
 - a. Express my views freely on language teaching matters.
 - b. Get the instructional materials and equipment I need.
 - c. Keep students on task.
 - d. Increase students' memory of what they have been taught in previous lessons.
 - e. Motivate students who show low interest in lesson activities.
 - f. Get students to work well together.
 - g. Create a welcoming classroom environment.
 - h. Increase students' motivation to attend lessons.
 - i. Help students to trust me as their teacher.
 - j. Help students to believe they can achieve success in language learning.
20. How does ADHD contribute positively to your teaching?
21. How does ADHD contribute negatively to your teaching?
22. How does ADHD contribute positively to your work life?
23. How does ADHD contribute negatively to your work life?
24. Please write any other comments about your ADHD and how it affects your teaching life both in and outside the classroom.

Finally, would you consider participating in a follow-up interview on Zoom with either researcher, Marc Jones or Gretchen Clark? If so, indicate who you prefer and please provide your name and email address here so we can contact you to arrange a time. Thank you for taking time to complete our questionnaire.