

Stress and Academic Staff Effectiveness in Ogun State-Owned Universities, Nigeria

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Abstract

The knowledge of the causes and effects of stress on the academic staff effectiveness and strategies for reducing it at the university level would improve the academic standard. This will invariably have significant positive effects on all other organizations since universities mostly produce the needed high-level manpower. This study investigated the perceived stress factors on the academic staff job in state-owned universities. A proportional random sampling technique of 40% of the academic staff population was adopted to select samples across the faculties/colleges from the two state-owned universities. The instrument based on the Likert-scale and the oral interview were used to collect the data which was further analyzed using descriptive statistics and the student T-test. The study revealed among others that academic staff was under stress because of the uncondusive working environment, very high student population and inadequate physical and material resources. It was, therefore, suggested that the government should be responsive to social and economic responsibilities to achieve sustainable development.

Keywords: academic, effectiveness, state-owned, stress, universities

JEL: M12

Introduction

Every job is prone to stress. The teaching job, in particular, is becoming increasingly stressful because of the daily attendant problems confronting the education industry at all levels in Nigeria. Unlike some of the advanced countries, where academic stress has received reasonable attention because of the relationships between occupational stress and work effectiveness, in Nigeria, the issue of stress associated with the teaching profession is yet to receive the needed attention in our educational institutions, especially, at the tertiary level.

Stress can be individualized in terms of definition. An individual's stress can be another individual's excitement. In other words, stress is tied to an individual's perceptual system. It is seen as a subjective phenomenon but is also objectively defined in terms of physiological measures, and within the social context because the society, to a large extent, prescribes the causes of stress or the conditions that cause stress.

Ejiogu (2006) observed that stress is manifested both psychologically and emotionally. To understand it much better, one has to examine its physiological antecedents as well as medical manifestations and implications. He observed that people in Nigeria, even the enlightened citizens, do not

go to hospitals or visit their private doctors unless they are seriously ill and, above all, most people know very little or are totally ignorant about how their bodies function. He went further to mention five organizational situations that are likely to create role problems and stress in the individual.

1. Responsibility for the work of others reconciling overlapping or conflicting objectives of groups and the organization, groups and the individual and the self and superiors.
2. Innovative function conflicting priorities and different psychological demands between the routine and administrative aspects of the job and the creative side.
3. Integrative or boundary function is a particularly stressful role of the coordinator, link person or outside contact, perhaps due to the lack of control over their demands or resources.
4. Relationship problems difficulties with the boss, subordinates or colleagues. Worrying complication.
5. Career uncertainty if future career prospects become doubtful the uncertainty can quickly become stressful and spread to affect the whole of a person's work.

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When there is stress, you express a conflict of purpose leading to unstable judgments and decision, division of feeling, causing emotions to become uneven and volatile. Not everyone suffers from clinical depression or psychosis, but everyone, at one time or the other is likely to be stressed. Many will find that uncontrolled stress corrodes the joy of existence and brings about a deterioration of mind and body systems. Stress eats up the vitality of teachers and damages the relationship expected to exist between the school and the community.

Literature Review

Occupational stress has drawn the attention of many people, particularly, educators and experts in management because every job has his/her own stress fingerprint. Literature on occupational stress indicated that all professions experience one form of stress or another (Onah, 1995). The stressful nature of teaching as an occupation was attested to by many authorities (Beer & Beer, 1992; Nolan, 1997; Oyedeleji, 1998; Akeredolu & Adeogun, 2001; Udo, 2001; Adepoju, 2001; Ijaiya, 2002; Arikewuyo, 2004; Siyanbola, 2007). Empirical evidence suggests stress as the cankerworm, the monster that brings into our working lives debilitating and annihilating ailments (Ejiogu, 2006).

Wehrich and Koontz (2001) citing Gibson (1985) defined stress as "an adaptive response, mediated by individual differences and/or psychological processes, that is, a consequence of any external (environmental) action, situation, or event that places excessive psychological and/or physical demands on a person. Chan (1998), defined stress as "adverse psychological and physical reactions that occur within the individual as a result of his/her being unable to cope with demands being made on him/her". Stress is the result of a person being pushed beyond the limit of his or her natural capacity. Even after the cause is removed, the person does not return to his/her previous state. Oyedeleji (1998), citing Kyriacou and Sutch (1978), defined teachers' stress as a response syndrome of negative effects (such as anger and depression), usually accompanied by potentially pathogenic, physiological and biochemical changes (such as, increased heart rate) resulting from the aspect of the teacher's job, and the teacher constitutes the threat to his/her self-esteem or well-being and by a coping mechanism activated to reduce the perceived threat.

In the words of Udo and Ajala (1987), stress is any stimulus that interferes with the biological or physiological equilibrium of an organism. It is a set of circumstances under which an individual cannot respond or perform adequately or can do so only at the cost of excessive wear and tear of his emotional and physical system.

Ijaiya (2002), opined that stress is an environmental problem manifested by a state of disequilibrium in an individual as he responds to the demand made on him. It occurs when he finds that his capabilities and resources "cannot adequately meet the demands imposed on him by the environment. In most circumstances, stress is an unhealthy reaction of a person to a set of situational factors

affecting him or her at any particular time, especially, in a formal organizational environment. French, Rodgers and Cobb (1974) described stress as lack of fit between the needs and abilities of an individual ,on the one hand, and the supplies or demands of the environment, on the other. In other words, stress is often an environmental related phenomenon. The environment within which an individual operates contributes to stress in one way or another. Such environment may be physical, social, political, economic, and/or organizational. In all its ramifications, stress has the unique potential to tax all of a person's physiological, social, mental and nervous response systems. As Mgbor (1995) said, "it is an adaptive response to eternal events or situations which place extreme psychological and physical demands on an individual in its development; stress, first of all, causes arousal; this is followed by a form of resistance, and, finally, exhaustion" (p. 37).

Some writers on stress among whom are Hansen (1986), Kirsten (2000), Williams (2003) agreed that some events statutorily consist of stress among others. The following form is a representative of these stressors: argument or tense movements; disagreements on issues at work; concern over physical health of others; work overload and demands; working about other problems or well-being; financial issues; children disciplinary problems; disagreements over family issues; being late or missing appointments; differences of opinion on values; home overload demands; tension over household chores; and mental issues.

Many variables have influence on personnel's job effectiveness. Some of these variables are the organizational climate, leadership style, personnel's attitude to work, motivation, academic qualification(s), training, etc. This study is concerned about finding out the perceived causes and effects of stress on academic staff in two universities. Based on the above, this study specifically examined the following: what constitutes stress in academic staff activities; the impact of stress on academic activities and the influence of university climate on academic staff effectiveness.

The following hypotheses are raised for the study:

1. H₀ There is no significant difference in the perceived causes of stress between lecturers from OOU and TASUED.
2. H₀ There is no significant difference in the perceived causes of stress between male and female lecturers in OOU and TASUED.
3. H₁ There is significant difference in the effect of stress between OOU and TASUED
4. H₁ There is significant-difference in the effect of stress between male and female lecturers in OOU and TASUED.

Methodology

Ex-post facto design was used to carry out this study. The target population for this study consisted of all teaching (academic) staff of two State-owned universities in Ogun State

Olabisi Onabanjo University (O.O.U), Ago-Iwoye and Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUED), Ijebu-Ode.

Proportional random sampling technique was used to select the lecturers in both universities, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Proportional Random Sampling of 40%

Faculty/ College T	ASUED	OOU	
Education	104	42	88
Humanities (Arts)	83	33	107
Management Sciences	21	09	71
Social Science	50	20	57
Natural Sciences	61	25	127
	319	129	180

Using proportional sample technique of 40%; 129 and 180 lecturers from TASUED and O.O.U respectively, totaling 309 participants in the study.

Results Findings

Table 2. Frequency, Percentages and Descriptive Statistics of the Responses to the Items of the Questionnaire

S/N	Statement	Agree F	%	Disagree F	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	The academic quality of present undergraduate students is very poor	277	89.6	32	10.4	4.964	1.04851 Agree
2	The number of the students is too high to cope with	283	91.6	26	8.4	5.090	1.09820 Agree
3	The lackadaisical attitude of most students to academic works is worrisome	309	100	-	-	5.317	73617 Agree
4	The university library is devoid of current journals and textbooks	243	78.6	66	21.4	4.731	1.38722 Agree
5	The instructional materials to enhance teaching/learning activities are grossly inadequate	269	87.1	40	12.9	4.857	1.23495 Agree
6	I rarely have time to write articles for publication	89	28.8	220	71.2	2.838	1.23495 Disagree
7	The computation of students results is burdensome	280	90.6	29	9.4	4.909	1.04674 Agree
8	The students' projects supervision is interesting	199	64.4	110	35.6	3.822	1.55965 Agree
9	The number of courses allocated to me are too many to cope with	198	64.1	111	35.9	3.508	1.18873 Agree
10	My remuneration is not satisfactory	251	81.2	58	18.8	4.566	1.11933 Agree
11	My superior always over burden me with courses to teach on their behalf	114	36.9	195	63.1	3.148	1.50880 Disagree
12	Being saddled with administrative work affect my teaching role negatively	162	52.4	147	47.6	3.938	1.45476 Agree
13	The requirements for promotion is too high	206	66.7	103	33.3	4.129	1.45476 Agree
14	I seldom meet the deadline for the submission of scores for graded scripts	93	30.1	216	69.9	3.229	1.32803 Disagree
15	The "publish or perish" slogan is worrisome	231	74.8	78	25.2	4.488	1.3367 Agree
16	I enjoy research activities	27	8.7	282	91.3	2.097	1.03367 Agree
17	The inability to get feedback on the papers sent out for publications is demoralizing	267	86.4	42	13.6	4.666	1.25184 Agree
18	The teaching activities do not give enough room for research work	229	74.1	80	25.9	4.330	1.23836 Agree
19	The university management support academic pursuits (training and development)	131	42.4	178	57.6	3.440	1.69811 Disagree
20	The academic works does not give me chance for recreational activities	223	72.2	86	27.8	4.077	1.13980 Agree

Research Instrument

A questionnaire, divided into three sections, A, B & C was used to gather information. Section A contains the demographic data inventory, Section B presents items relating to stress and its influence on job performance, Section C solicits for suggestions on how to reduce stress at workplace. The data collected were analysed in order to test the hypotheses. Statistical tools used to analyze the data were frequency, percentages, descriptive statistics and students' t-test. The level of significance was $\alpha = 0.05$.

19	The university management support academic pursuits (training and development)	131	42.4	178	57.6	3.440	1.69811	Disagree
20	The academic works does not give me chance for recreational activities	223	72.2	86	27.8	4.077	1.13980	Agree
21	Most of the time at workplace, I feel tense and jittery	123	39.8	186	60.2	3.339	1.47415	Disagree
22	My office is not conducive for academic activities	281	90.9	28	9.1	5.223	1.09839	Agree
23	I am finding it difficult to cope with academic rigors	131	42.4	178	57.6	3.495	1.22108	Disagree
24	I will resign my appointment as soon as I get less demanding job	77	24.9	232	75.1	2.877	1.24750	Disagree
25	The insecurity created by cult activities disturbs me psychologically	201	65.0	108	35.0	3.841	1.00523	Agree
26	Combining higher degree with teaching is stressful	228	73.8	81	26.2	4.187	1.12975	Agree

The result in Table 2 revealed that 277 (89.6%) of the respondents agreed that the academic quality of present undergraduate students is very poor. However, 32 (10.4%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Also, 283 (91.6%) of the respondents agreed that the number of the students is too high to cope with while 26 (8.4%) of the respondent disagreed to the statement. All respondents agreed (100%) that the lackadaisical attitude of most students to academic works is worrisome. Two hundred and forty-three (243) of the respondents agreed that the university library is devoid of current journals and textbooks but 66 (21.4%) disagreed to the statement. In addition, 269 (87.1%) of the respondents agreed that the instructional materials to enhance teaching/learning activities are grossly inadequate. However, 40 (12.9%) of the respondents disagreed to the statement. Furthermore, a lesser population of the respondent 93 (30.1%) agreed that they seldom meet deadlines for the submission of scores for graded scripts while others 216 (69.9%) disagreed to the statement. Two hundred and twenty nine (74.1%) of the respondents agreed that the teaching activities do not give enough room for research work while 80 (25.9%) of the respondents disagreed. Also, 223 (72.2%) of the respondents agreed that the academic work does not give them a chance for recreational activities. On the other hand, 86 (27.8%) disagreed to the statement.

Hypotheses Testing

There is no significant difference in the perceived causes of stress between lecturers from O.O.U and TASUED.

Table 3. *Independent t-test Analysis of Differences in the Perceived Causes of Stress between Lecturers from O.O.U and TASUED*

	Institution	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Mean difference	Df	T cal	T cal	P
Causes of stress	OOU	180	96.0833	10.05560					>.05
	TASUED	129	94.4574	12.41346	1.62597	307	1.272	1.960	

The results in Table 3 revealed that there is significant difference in the perceived causes of stress ($t_{cal} = 1.272 < t_{cri} - 1.960$; $df = 307$; $p < .05$). The hypothesis which stated

that there is no significant difference in the perceived causes of stress between lecturers in OOU and TASUED was accepted by this finding. This implies that lecturers from both universities perceived the causes of stress similarly.

Hypotheses 2: There is no significant difference in the perceived causes of stress between male and female lecturers in OOU and TASUED.

Table 4: *Independent t-test Analysis of Differences in the Perceived Causes of Stress between Male and Female Lecturers*

Institution	Gender	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Mean Difference	Df	t _{cal}	t _{cri}	P
OOU	Male	130	96.9231	10.53574					
	Female	50	93.9000	8.25919	3.02308	178	1.824	1.960	>.05
TASUED	Male	68	95.8971	11.30465					
	Female	61	92.8525	13.45590	3.04460	127	1.396	1.960	>.05
Total	Male	198	96.5707	10.78834					
Total	Female	111	93.3243	11.37634	3.24638	307	2.488	1.960	<.05

The results in Table 4 indicated that there is no significant difference in the perceived causes of stress between male and female lecturers in OOU ($t_{cal} = 1.824 < t_{cri} = 1.960$; $df = 178$; $p > .05$) and TASUED ($t_{cal} = 1.396 < t_{cri} = 1.960$; $df = 127$; $p > .05$). But a significant difference was observed for the total ($t_{cal} = 2.488 > t_{cri} = 1.960$; $df = 307$; $p < .05$). The hypothesis of no significant difference in the perceived causes of stress between male and female lecturers in OOU and TASUED was accepted for the two institutions but rejected for the combination of lecturers in both institutions. Male lecturers generally perceived the causes of stress higher than their female counterparts. However, no differences occurred in two institutions.

Hypotheses 3: There is significant difference in the effects of stress between OOU and TASUED lecturers.

Table 5. *Independent t-test Analysis of Differences in the Perceived Effects of Stress between OOU and TASUED Lecturers*

	Institution	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	Df	t _{cal}	t _{cri}	P
Effects of stress	OOU	180	9.51679	2.93024					
	TASUED	129	9.9845	3.51556	4.6783	307	1.272	1.960	>.05

The results in Table 5 revealed that there is no significant difference in the perceived effects of stress between OOU and TASUED lecturers ($t_{cal} = 1.272 < t_{cri} = 1.960$; $df = 307$; $p > .05$). The null hypothesis was, therefore, accepted by this finding, implying that lecturers in both universities are unanimous in their perception of the effects of stress.

Hypotheses 4: There is no significant difference in the perceived effects of stress between male and female lecturers in OOU and TASUED lecturers.

Table 6. Independent T-test Analysis of Differences in the Perceived Effects of Stress Between OOU and TASUED Lecturers

Institution	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	Df	t _{cal}	t _{cri}	P
OOU	Male	130	9.0462	2.84172	1.69385	178	3.587	1.960	>.05
	Female	50	10.7400	2.8706					
TASUED	Male	68	10.3235	3.38760	.71697	127	1.158	1.960	>.05
	Female	61	9.6066	3.64362					
Total	Male	198	9.4848	3.09204	.63227	307	1.676	1.960	>.05
	Female	111	10.1171	3.33504					

The results in Table 6 above indicated that there is significant difference in the perceived effects of stress between male and female lecturers in OOU ($t_{cal} = 3.587 < t_{cri} = 1.960$; $df = 178$; $p < .05$) but not significant for TASUED ($t_{cal} = 1.158 < t_{cri} = 1.960$; $df = 127$; $p > .05$) and total ($t_{cal} = 1.676 < t_{cri} = 1.960$; $df = 307$; $p > .05$). The hypothesis of no significant difference in the perceived effects of stress between male and female lecturers in OOU and TASUED was rejected for the OOU but accepted for TASUED. In effect, male and female lecturers generally perceived the effects of stress similarly.

Discussion

This study revealed that the lecturers in both institutions i.e., Olanbisi Onabanjo University and Tai Solarin University of Education perceived the causes of stress similarly, as indicated in Tables 2 and 3. The findings are complementary to those of Gmelch (1998); Onifade (2000); Arikewuyo (2004); Coopers (2001). In those studies, it was revealed that excessive workload, long working hours, disruptive pupils behaviour/high incident of students behaviour, lack of materials, resources and equipment, extremely large classes, negative school climate and inability to effectively manage students' behavior are the main causes of stress among public institutions in Nigeria.

There is concrete evidence that teaching is one of the most stressful professions. In a survey assessing the stress levels of various jobs by the Health and Safety Executive, teaching came out top. The report published in 2000 accounts to (Moore, 2000) "the scale of occupational stress showing the impact of demographic factors and the type of job". It found that 41.5% of teachers reported themselves 'highly stressed', while 58.5% came into a 'low stressed' category. In a similar research by the main teachers' union, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) confirms this information. A survey in 1999 found 36% of teachers felt the effects of stress all or most of the time.

Academic and its related activities leading to stress have also been recognized in law courts. In 1999, a secondary school teacher, Muriel Benson won £ 47,000 as a compensation for stress. It was reported that the NUT has backed more than 90 cases where teachers have compensation for stress. Action was taken by the NUT on behalf of a teacher who will never be able to work again through mental distress, while another is unable to drive any distance through the effects of stress. According to the spokesperson for Teacher Support Line, one teacher frequently talks about working 50 or 60 hour weeks, week in, week out working a lot at home and at weekends. They find it hard to wind down, relax and recuperate. People cannot do that continually without having effects. A similar submission was given from most of the sample for the study during the oral interview with them; this is also reflected in Table 2.

In the two institutions (OOU and TASUED) under study, most lecturers complained of the inability to go on their annual leave because of the continued teaching activities. During week days, they are always occupied by full-time students (Monday-Friday) while part time students come at weekends (Friday-Sunday). Such a situation would be a great barrier to recreation. Item 20 on Table 2 "the academic work does not give me change for recreational activities" refers to the fact that out of 309 respondents, 223 (72.2%) agreed to the statement. Arikewuyo (2004), citing Bucher (1985), stated that recreational activities will promote total health, physical, emotional, mental and social as well, provide avenues for achieving a more abundant personal and family life. Similarly, Adesanya and Ogunleye (1996) opined that sports and relaxation pursuits are antidote to stress.

Besides academic stress, some of the respondents stated that the environment in Nigeria is very stressful. Stress is caused by political crises, insecurity of life and job, bad roads, erratic electric supply and transportation problems. This submission corroborates Onifade (2000) who discovered that civil servants in Kwara state, Nigeria do experience stress. The causes of stress were traced to unreliability and inadequacy of social amenities, among others.

With regards to the effects of stress (Table 5), lecturers in universities are unanimous in their perception of the effects of stress. However, there is a significant difference in the perceived effects of stress between male and female lecturers in OOU, which negates Onifade (2000) study that gender has no significant effect on burn out/stress, his discovery is in agreement with the TASUED lecturers' responses which revealed that there is no significant difference in the perceived effects stress between male and female lecturers.

Conclusion

Stress is obviously a complex phenomenon. It can emanate from diverse factors or sources.

Most of such factors are basically job-related still, a good number of extra organizational factors are related to

stress in one way or another. It was observed that no man can do without a little bit of stress, because, it is obviously part of our life. It is fundamental to human existence. However, an individual's stress can be another individual's excitement.

When stress comes in moderate doses, and an individual is able to demonstrate the ability to cope with it successfully, it could be helpful to him/her in some ways, just as training does to an athlete. An individual teacher can improve the ability to handle stress.

Recommendations

Knowing the causes and effects of stress is not enough. One should also know how to manage it. Series of tips on managing stress abound but one can try his/her own stress management strategy. There are also international, national (public and private) organizations which can provide valuable advice on a variety of stress-related problems.

The management of each tertiary institution in Nigeria should always make sure that individual lecturers enjoy annual leave so as to recreate. Investigation revealed that employees' recreational programmes reduce absenteeism, increase performance and productivity, minimize stress and increase job satisfaction. Admission of students into programmes should not exceed available physical, material and human resources. The university climate should be conducive to teaching, learning and researching.

On his/her part each teaching personnel should always

1. Plan and prioritize
2. Be a good time manager
3. Recognize stress within self and not wait until one is stressed
4. Be enthusiastic about what to do
5. Identify stress factors and not go outside one's comfort zone
6. Set realistic goals
7. Stay healthy (body and environment).

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