

Managing Stress among Lecturers in Polytechnics of South Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper investigated Managing Stress among Lecturers in Polytechnics of South-Eastern Nigeria. It was a descriptive survey. All the 1005 academic staff of the 5 polytechnics in the South-Eastern Nigeria made up of both the population and sample in a purposive sampling technique. A 2-part, 27-item, 4-point scale instrument known as Stress Management Questionnaire (SMQ) was used to generate data for answering 3 research questions. The instrument was validated by a team of experts in the department of Educational Measurement and evaluation, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria and a reliability coefficient of $r = 0.79$ established using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. The instrument was administered by the researchers. Mean was used to answer the research questions. Findings included among other that lack of teaching facilities, poor office accommodation cause stress. It was concluded that stress exist in different dimensions in our polytechnics and recommended that efforts be made to reduce academic strikes to the barest minimum by improving tutorial condition of service.

1. Introduction

Stress according to the Health and safety Executive (2012) is defined as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them. It occurs when a person is confronted with situations he cannot cope with. The Health and Information Publication (2005) see stress as the emotional and physical strain caused by your response to the outside world. For Stoanes, Blaney, Wood and Id

Wilkins (2003) stress is something that cause bodily, mental or emotional strain. Stress is therefore any condition that disturbs or offset the normal working of an individual be it physical, emotional or psychological.

Stress occurs in everyday life; in our homes, at work, in the family, in the market place in fact in all works of life or in all aspects of our life. Stress is part of everyday life and it arises as a result of our relationship with the constantly changing world (Rok, 2011). There is good and bad stress. Stress can be positive or negative. Stress is positive when it comes in moderate amount. Such stress is necessary in stimulating and motivating alertness in order to provide the needed incentive to surmount challenges at the workplace. Such stress then is positive and motivational. In this case, deadlines are met and workers are motivated to achieve set objectives. When stress becomes extreme and persists for a long time, it becomes negative. It can lead to feelings of worry, anxiety, anger, fear, frustration which could have a damaging effect on the individuals' health and lead to poor performance at work. Such health hazards as high blood pressure, heart diseases, stroke, ulcer, body pain, persistent headache or migraine and other illnesses could come as a

result of stress. Prolonged stress leads to burnout which damages the health of the individual.

2. Statement of the Problem

The polytechnics are those institutions that offer National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) to qualified candidates. These institutions offer admission to clientele in various disciplines from various backgrounds. They also run evening and part-time programmes; thus the dearth of manpower in the polytechnic is not an issue to be overlooked. Many lecturers have left for greener pastures with result that those left behind are grossly overworked. WES (2004) identified the causes of dearth of staff as declining attractions of university employment (polytechnics inclusive), rising workload, deteriorating staff and student ratio, destabilizing influence of unionized staff, militancy over salary issue and recently the face-off between Academic staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) over retiring age of professors and polytechnic lecturer respectively

The demand for education has become high with the result that students who could not get admission into the universities have now flooded the polytechnics leading to over population. A number of new courses have now been introduced in the polytechnics especially in the area of computer Science and entrepreneurship. All these place a lot of stress on the lecturers. Gluek see this as changing conditions in the labour market where shortage of certain skilled workers lead to the over working of the few left. Shwind, Das and Wager (2005) note that survivors of work place changes are being asked to work longer hours and do more with limited resources. This is fate of polytechnic teachers.

The craze for paper qualification in Nigeria has led to this increase of student population especially in the polytechnics. This increase equally places a stress on the available facilities in the schools. The lecture rooms are overcrowded and not for proper academic exercise as half of the students cannot hear or pay attention to the lecturers. Uche (2007) in her study of facilities in higher institutions found that the development priorities of universities and polytechnics are not staff and student oriented. Her findings show that basic facilities of recreation and hygiene are lacking in higher institutions hence recommends that the administration of higher institutions should use their initiatives, creative minds and leadership principles to direct more attention where development is needed, most especially as it concerns students and staff development, welfare and environmental hygiene of the campus. The tertiary education is for the all round development of the recipient and when facilities in these institutions are not student-oriented; the aim is defeated, thus creating stress for the lecturers. This low level of physical facility development is a major stress for polytechnic lecturers.

In the higher institutions, research happens to be an imperative for development. Through research, educational problems are identified and possible solutions are preferred. Apart from publishing for staff promotion, Akudo (2011) observed that the most important instrument for effective leadership training is the development of academic staff. Nwoha, Chukwuma and Ajudeonu (2007) see academic staff development as one of the foremost approaches for achieving efficiency in higher education. This could be done through sponsorship for research, Ihebereme (2011) is of the opinion that research in higher education is an essential tool through which solution to existing problems are addressed, yet higher institution still show declining trend. The global ranking for higher institutions include recreational facilities for students and lecturers, free medical services for staff and their family, conference sponsorship, good housing facilities for staff, research package, oversea trips for conferences, sponsorship for further academic pursuits to mention but a few. These mouth watering packages which used to be the attraction to higher institution teaching are gradually eroding away. This situation has equally contributed in no small measures of creating stress for the academic staff of higher institutions in Nigeria.

Higher institution lecturers all over the world are highly envied even though their pay packet is not too juicy. Despite the poor pay, academics enjoy longer service tenure (65 years in Nigeria) contract opportunity on retirement, light workload and other packages like trip to oversee for study and conferences. These attractions are no longer there. Barkuzien and Rothman (2008) observed that many of these attractions and advantages are being eroded over the past two decades and it comes as a surprise that higher education institutions are now commonly labeled stress factories. The following problems have been associated with stress – work overload, time constraint especially to meet up with deadlines, lack of promotion opportunities, inadequate resource and poor funding.

This paper therefore aims at identifying the major sources of stress for the polytechnic lectures in South Eastern Nigeria, effects of stress on the polytechnic lecturers and the stress relieving packages for polytechnic lecturers in South Eastern Nigeria.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions were raised in the course of the study:

1. What are the sources of stress for polytechnic lecturers in South Eastern Nigeria?
2. What are the effects of stress on the polytechnic lecturers in South Eastern Nigeria?
3. What are the stress relieving packages available to polytechnic lecturers in South Eastern Nigeria

4. Methodology

This paper adopted the descriptive survey approach. In this design, data collected are presented as they are which describes events as they occur. The design was used to determine the extent academic staffs of polytechnics were able to cope with stress in South East Nigerian Polytechnics.

All the 1005 tutorial staff of the 5 polytechnics in the South-East Nigeria made up the population as follows: Abia State Polytechnic – 192, Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu - 205, Imo State Polytechnic – 181, Federal Polytechnic, Oko – 212 and Federal Polytechnic, Uwana – 215 representing 1005. All the 1005 tutorial staff of these polytechnics made up the sample in a purposive sampling technique representing 100%.

A 2-part, 27-item, 4-point scale instrument known as Stress Management Questionnaire (SMQ) was used to generate data for answering 3 research questions. The instrument was validated by a team of experts in the department of Educational Measurement and Evaluation, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, their criticisms were built in to improve the content and face validity of the instrument.

The reliability of the instrument was established using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation that yielded an $r = 0.79$. The instrument was administered by the researchers. Some copies of the instrument were retrieved on the spot and some collected on a later agreed date. Means were used to answer the 3 research questions.

5. Results

5.1 Research question 1: What are the causes of academic stress for Polytechnic lecturers in South-East Nigeria?

Table 1: Causes of academic stress for Polytechnic Lecturers.

S/n	Causes of Academic Stress for Polytechnic Lecturers	\bar{x}	Remarks
1.	Lack of teaching facilities.	3.10	Accept
2.	Poorly equipped laboratories and technical workshop.	2.90	Accept
3.	Overstretched class enrolment leading to overwork.	2.90	Accept
4.	Need to meet up with departmental deadline for script marking & results preparation.	3.50	Accept
5.	Poor office accommodation.	3.20	Accept
6.	Study Lecture rooms with poor seating arrangement for student.	3.40	Accept
7.	The issues of brain drain.	2.80	Accept
8.	Lack of funds to conduct research.	2.65	Accept
9.	Incessant strike due to poor remuneration.	2.50	Accept
10.	Examination malpractice.	3.90	Accept
		3.10	

Data in table 1, indicate that lack of teaching facilities recorded 3.10, while poorly equipped laboratory / technical workshop had 2.90. Overstretched class enrolment 2.90. Need to meet-up with departmental deadline pooled 3.50, while poor office accommodation generated 3.20. Stuffy lecture rooms with poor seating arrangement for students 3.40. The issue of brain drain, made a mean of 2.80. Lack of funds to conduct research 2.65. Incessant strike and examination malpractice 3.90, 3.10 respectively.

From the foregoing analysis, the answers to Research question 1 are:

1. Lack of teaching facilities
2. Poorly equipped laboratories / technical workshop,
3. Overstocked class enrolment,
4. Need to meet up with departmental deadlines,
5. Poor office accommodation,

6. Stuffy lecture rooms with poor seating arrangement,
7. Brain drain and lack of funds to conduct research,
8. Incessant strike and examination malpractice.

5.2 Research Question 2: What are the effects of academic stress among tutorial staff of South-East Polytechnic?

S/n	Stress Relieving Packages Available to Polytechnic tutorial staff	\bar{x}	Remarks
1.	Smoking, alcoholism, drug abuse	3.45	Accept
2.	High blood pressure / stroke	3.10	Accept
3.	Impaired work performance	3.30	Accept
4.	Absenteeism and truancy	3.40	Accept
5.	Brain drain	3.20	Accept
6	Impaired research	3.20	Accept
7.	Inability to meet-up with deadlines	2.90	Accept
	Grand Total	3.22	

Results of data in table 3 clearly indicate that smoking, alcoholism and drug abuse generated 3.45; while high blood pressure / stroke scored 3.10. Impaired work performances; absenteeism and truancy polled 3.30 and 3.40 respectively. Brain drain and impaired research came together at a mean of 3.20 each. Inability to meet-up with departmental deadlines made a mean of 2.90.

Thus, the answers to the research question 3 are:

1. Smoking, alcoholism and drug abuse
2. High blood pressure / stroke
3. Impaired work performance
4. Absenteeism and truancy
5. Brain drain, impaired research
6. Inability to meet-up with departmental deadlines

5.3 Research Question 3: What stress relieving packages are available to Polytechnic Tutorial staff in the South East, Nigeria?

Table 3: Stress relieving packages available to polytechnic tutorial staff in South-East Nigeria.

S/n	Stress Relieving Packages Available to Polytechnic tutorial staff	\bar{x}	Remarks
1.	Good medical facilities.	2.10	Reject
2.	Tutorial staff contract offer.	2.40	Reject
3.	Good tutorial staff accommodation.	2.31	Reject
4.	Staff club with recreational facilities.	2.50	Accept
5.	Sponsorship for study leave abroad.	2.35	Reject
6	Research grant.	2.75	Accept
7.	Sponsorship for capacity building workshop	3.15	Accept
8.	Good office accommodation with comfortable furnishing.	2.45	Reject
9.	Availability of school for staff children.	2.65	Accept
10.	Available of computers with Internet facilities.	2.35	Reject
	Grand Total	2.50	

Table 2 shows that good medical facilities scored 2.10. Tutorial staff contract offer after retirement made a mean of 2.40 while good tutorial staff accommodation pooled 2.31. Staff club with recreational facilities generated 2.50. Sponsorship for study leave abroad 2.35. Research grant 2.75. Sponsorship for capacity building workshop 3.15. Good office accommodation with comfortable furnishing 2.45. Availability of staff school for staff children 2.65. Availability of computer with Internet facilities 2.35.

Thus, the answers to research question 2 are:

1. Staff club with recreational facilities
2. Research grant
3. Sponsorship for capacity building workshop and

4. Availability of school for staff children

6. Summary of Findings

From the data analyzed, the following findings were made:

- A. The major sources of academic stress are:
 - i. Lack of teaching facilities,
 - ii. Poorly equipped laboratory / technical workshop
 - iii. Overstretched class enrolment
 - iv. Need to meet-up with departmental deadlines.
 - v. Poor office accommodation
 - vi. Stuffy lectures rooms with poor seating arrangement.
 - vii. Lack of funds to conduct research
 - viii. Incessant strike and examination malpractice
- B. Effects of Academic Stress among tutorial staff of polytechnics include:
 - i. Smoking, alcoholism and drug abuse
 - ii. High blood pressure / stroke
 - iii. Impaired work performance
 - iv. Absenteeism and truancy
 - v. Brain drain, impaired research
 - vi. Inability to meet-up with departmental deadlines
- C. Stress relieving packages available to polytechnics tutorial staff includes:
 - i. Staff club with recreational facilities
 - ii. Research grant
 - iii. Sponsorship for capacity building workshop
 - iv. Availability of school for staff children

7. Discussion of Results

Findings indicate among other that overstretched class enrolment leading to overwork can cause stress and fatigue. This is in line with the findings of Orluwane (2013), Ingiarson, Kleinhenz, Beavis, Berwick, Carthy and Willkeinson (2005) who supported that almost all teachers described their workload as heavy and that at certain peak periods when their work load exceeded their capacity to manage, their teaching effectiveness and efficiencies are negatively affected due to stress associated with workload. In support of the above, Egu (2013) observed that the biggest cause of stress is teacher workload. This author added that when teachers are made to teach too many students, mark their scripts, stress sets in making them unable to meet-up deadlines, their effectiveness become questionable.

Results reveal that good tutorial accommodation, staff club with recreational facilities can relieve stress. This is in keeping with the work of Ihua-Jonathan (2013) who noted that proactive stress relieving methods could be adopted. According to him, this includes maintenance of a healthy physical state through regular exercise, a nutritional diet and the acceptance of social support from the employers. Additionally, Joseph (2004) advised that the work environment should be controlled and modified to repel stress.

Findings show that stress is dangerous to health and capable of causing high blood pressure and stroke. This agreed with the proposition of Egu (2013) who found that when frustrations give rise to stress, delayed handling can deteriorate into something very serious like stroke or diabetes which of cause may threaten life.

8. Conclusions

Stress exists in different dimensions among the academic staff of polytechnics in the South East Nigeria. The causes and sources of stress range from a lot of issues such as overstretched school enrolment leading to lecturers handling large classes and unable to meet-up with deadlines, poor office accommodation and stuffy lecture rooms, lack of funds to conduct research and so on.

Stress could be remedied through the provision of good medical facilities, good tutorial staff accommodation, research grant among others. Effective management of stress could lead to improved productivity on the part of tutorial staff of South East Nigeria Polytechnics

9. Recommendations

1. Efforts should be made to reduce academic strikes to the barest minimum by the improvement of tutorial staff condition of service this will help mitigate stress.
2. Enough funds should be made available for research. This will enable tutorial staff expand the frontiers of knowledge.
3. The issue of brain drain should be greatly reduced to further reduce the workload of staff. This will greatly reduce stress.
4. There should be staff club with recreational facilities. This will help keep put body and soul together.
5. Efforts should be made to provide good medical scheme with improved facilities to the academic staff and their families.
6. Tutorial staff should be provided with adequate accommodation.
7. Good office accommodation with comfortable furnishing should be provided to academic staff. This will provide good relaxation after the office hours.

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