

STRESS AS A PREDICTOR OF JOB PERFORMANCE OF ACADEMIC STAFF OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated stress as a predictor of job performance of academic staff of universities in South East, Nigeria. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a correlational survey design. The population of this study comprised 3,999 academic staff in Faculties of Education and Social Sciences in ten (10) Federal and State Universities in South East, Nigeria. A sample size of 400 academic staff was drawn from four universities using two-step multistage sampling. The instruments used for data collection were Questionnaires titled: Stress Questionnaire (SQ); and Academic Staff Job Performance Questionnaire (ASJPQ) designed by the researcher. The instruments were face validated; and the reliabilities of the instruments were tested using internal consistency through Cronbach Alpha method, which yielded reliability indices of 0.89 and 0.86. In analyzing the data, linear regression was used to answer research question 1 while Hayes process macro was used to answer questions 2 and 3. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significant level. The findings of the study revealed among others that, there is a significant and very-high predictive power of stress on the job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East, Nigeria. There is a significant and very-high predictive power of stress on the job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East, Nigeria as moderated by gender. Based on the findings, the researcher recommended that, academic staff of universities should make use of relaxation techniques, engage in recreational activities, and adopt a positive perception/view of the stressful situation to improve their job performances.

Keywords: Stress, academic staff, job performance, public universities

Introduction

There is no doubt as it is in the news and social media about academic staff who were unable to complete the content of the scheme of work, collapse in office, die or suddenly fall sick and be away from work for a long time. Ofoegbu and Nwadiani (2016) observed that the demands of the place of work and the ability of the staff to meet those demands may result to stress. This means that stress is responsible for incompetency among the university academics, collapse in office and sudden sickness and death among academic staff. In order to give more students the opportunity to access university education, many universities (if not all) in South East, Nigeria admits much more than their carrying capacity. Considering that most universities in Nigeria are understaffed, this spins-off on the staff of these universities who have to manage much more students than they are supposed to. This implies that the academic staff in universities in South East, Nigeria have to interact with one another, teach, assess and supervise much more students, while keeping eyes on climbing their professional ladder. This no doubt, creates a mental situation that threatens to overwhelm their individual capacity to satisfactorily cope with what is thrown at them – stress.

Thus, the impact of stress on the academic staff as well as the university could decrease employee performance, create much error and poor quality of work, lead to absenteeism due to psychological health problems such as anxiety, emotional disorder, work life imbalance, depression and high staff turnover (Schneider, 2015). Consequently, these could lead to low/poor organizational performance on the side of academic staff of

universities in South East, Nigeria. The students are not left out, as the experience of their lecturers would affect them negatively leading to poor output. There could be uncovered scheme of work, poor performance and poor quality of products (graduates), and this would have a negative impact on the society and the academic staff of the universities in the South East Ofoegbu & Nwadiani, 2016). This investigation therefore, explored stress as a predictor of academic staff job performance in universities in South East, Nigeria; so as to proffer solution to this devastating problem that the academic staff are facing.

An academic staff, also known and referred to as ‘lecturer’ is an employee of a university or any other institution of higher learning, which in Nigeria includes: universities, polytechnics, mono-technics and colleges of education, saddled with the responsibility of teaching and assessing students of that institution. Harvey (2019) referred to an academic staff of universities as lecturers who carry out the academic duties for students’ productivity. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2003) considered every personnel whose primary responsibility includes instruction, research and public service to be an academic staff of universities. These personnel are expected to hold such academic ranks as professors, associate professors, senior lecturers, lecturer I, lecturer II and assistant lecturers.

Jobs expected of academic staff to perform in universities include: covering of course scheduled, periodic assessment of students, researching with teaching and learning materials, improvisation and use of instructional materials, using researched outcomes to effectuate learning through teaching, giving exercises and assignments to students, marking of exercises and assignments given to students, setting examination questions, marking the examination papers, recording of scores in result sheets, and publishing the results. All these are the expected job performance of academic staff of universities for improved productivity. Performance of these jobs as expected enhances productivity among staff and students. However, academic staff of universities need to perform their respective jobs creditably for improved productivity and school development. Academic staff’s adequate job performance could be a lead-way to productivity and university development. In order to ensure positive job performance in universities, Nwabueze (2011) opined that for academic improvement and global competitiveness, lecturers must develop and create a psychologically non-threatening and non-inhibiting academic climate in the school environment, and at the same time, proffer a cognitively challenging situation to help the students predict the consequences of certain forms and causes of action thereby identifying alternative ways of improving on staff instructional tasks and academic performance of students. Aside the knowledge of job performance among the academic staff of universities, it is also imperative for lecturers to adopt the possible stress coping strategies to demonstrate expert quality in the performance of their jobs for improved university growth and development

Stress is the body’s way of responding to environmental conditions or stimulus called a stressor, which could be seen as a negative condition that has a terrible effect on the mental and physical state of an individual. Irrespective of race, ethnicity, colour, academic or professional background, people all over the world experience stress. Stress could be seen as an unpleasant emotion, distress or depression that disorganizes an individual’s functions and capabilities in a system, which usually affects the state of mind psychologically and physically (Edikpa, Nwabueze and Nwokedi, 2019). It could be an unpleasant emotion such as: tension, frustration, *distress*, anger or depression that alters individual’ performance in an organization. It could be the product of pressure, demand and changes, which is the condition that exist in a person’s environment and often results to a situation called ‘stress’. Stress is referred to as ‘acute’ when it is brief, and specifically emanates from such demands and pressure of a particular situation like deadline, performance or facing difficult challenges or traumatic experiences.

In universities in South East, some academic staff seem to experience a lot of stress in their academic and administrative duties. It is in the news and social media about academic staff that were not able to complete the content of the scheme of work, collapse in office, die or suddenly fall sick and be away from work for a long time. They work very hard from morning till closing time; and this happens virtually every day. There is no denying fact that stress has become an integral part of the job done by academic staff of universities in Southeast, Nigeria. All these activities (such as teaching, research, administrative duties and community service) carried out by academic staff of universities may induce stress in them leading to low productivity and poor performances on their job of teaching in the schools. Shikieri and Musa (2012) who found out that physical, emotional and occupational stress can precipitate stress among academic staff. On the other hand, Ahmed and Ramza (2013)'s concurred that other factors of stress such as: psychological, administrative, creativity and knowledge building stress significantly reduces the performance of individual workers. Awadh, Gichinga and Ahmed (2015) found that job demand was a stress inducer that hindered employee's performance but because stress levels were manageable, it did not affect their performance. Ahmed and Ramzan (2013) also observed that a negative correlation between job stress and job performances, which shows that job stress significantly reduces the performance of an individual. On the other hand, not all stress is in the negative. According to Chandran (2013) there is a positive stress called eustress, usually experienced in moderation and capable of stimulating one's faculties to delve deep into and discover one's true potentials. The author argued that under stress the brain is emotionally and biochemically stimulated to sharpen performance, activate and motivate people into achieving desirable goals.

This stress may come from various sources and in like manner such as psychological, physical, emotional and physiological stressors. For example, the most recent past strike action in the year (2022) saw many academic staff fell sick and had no money to treat themselves and some even died due the psychological stress of non-payment of salaries for seven and half (7,1/2) months the strike action lasted. However, some investigations have been carried out in the time past on this issue of stress. Some work was done on job stress and demographic variables, without considering university academic staff and did not take into consideration gender as moderating variables. Akinmayowa and Kadir (2014) showed that there is no significant difference in the level of stress among academic staff with respect to gender. Calvarese (2015) revealed that there were significant differences between males and females concerning their reactions to stress, with more females experiencing higher levels of depression, frustration, and anxiety than their male counterparts when reacting to stress. Safaria, Othman and Wahab (2018) opined that gender predicted job stress among Jogjakarta academic staff. Again, Sofoluwe, Akinsola and Ogbudinka (2015) concluded that gender has significant relationship with stress and job performance among academic staff in tertiary institutions in Anambra state.

There is need to investigate stress among academic staff of universities. It is important to note that there are differences in stress among male and female academic staff of which female staff may seem to undergo stress than their male counterparts. This probably could be that, female lecturers are faced with family duties with school responsibilities resulting in stress, which must be managed to improve their performance functions in schools. But male lecturers can easily cope with stress in school organizations as their attentions are focused on better ways to deliver instructions in the schools and go about their research development. All these can put a whole lot of problems and stress on the academic staff, which may eventually affect the growth and development of the school.

In universities in South East, some academic staff seem to experience a lot of stress in their academic and administrative duties. Academic staff who were not able to complete the

content of the scheme of work, collapse in office, die or suddenly fall sick and be away from work for along time. They work very hard from morning till closing time; and this happens virtually every day. There is no denying fact that stress has become an integral part of the job done by academic staff of universities in Southeast, Nigeria. All these activities (such as teaching, research, administrative duties and community service) carried out by academic staff of universities may induce stress in them leading to low productivity and poor performances in their job of teaching in the school which leads to student's massive failure in examinations. This stress may come from various sources and in like manner such as psychological, physical, emotional and physiological stressors. However, some investigations have been carried out in the time past on this issue of stress. Some work were done on job stress and demographic variables, without considering the type of stressors, some that considered it did not work on university academic staff. It is in this light that, the study was set up to investigate stress as a predictor of academic staff job performance in universities in South East Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study was to investigate stress as a predictor of academic staff job performance in public universities in South East, Nigeria. Hence, the specific objectives were to:

1. ascertain the predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East, Nigeria.
2. find out the predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East, Nigeria as moderated by gender.

Research Questions

The following two research questions guided this study.

1. What is the predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East, Nigeria?
2. What is the predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East, Nigeria as moderated by gender?

Hypotheses

The following two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- H01:** Stress has no significant predictive power on job performance of academic staff in public universities of Southeast, Nigeria.
- H02:** Stress has no significant predictive power on job performance of academic staff in public universities of Southeast, Nigeria as moderated by gender.

Methods

This study adopted a correlational survey research design. Nworgu (2015) posited that, a correlational research design is the research design that measures the relationship between two or more factors to determine or estimate the extent to which the values for the factors are related. The study was conducted in the South East, Nigeria. The region is made up of five states – Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states, each of which is home to several public universities. The population of this study was made up of all the 3,999 academic staff in Faculties of Education and Social Sciences in ten (10) Federal and State Universities in South East, Nigeria. There are 656 staff from University of Nigeria Nsukka, 422 staff from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, 446 staff from Michael Okpara University Umudike, 314 staff from Federal University of Technology Owerri, 340 from Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike. Others are 410 from Abia State University Uturu, 415 from Enugu State University of Technology Agbani, 397 staff from Imo State University, 304 from Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Uli, and 295 from Ebonyi State University

Abakiliki. (Source: Universities Academic Planning Units' Reports, 2024). Out of the 3,999 total population of the academic staff, 2,287 were male and 1,712 were female.

A sample size of four hundred (400) academic staff was drawn from the total population of 3,999. Two-step multistage sampling procedure was used. At the first stage, simple random sampling technique was used to sample two federal universities (University of Nigeria Nsukka and Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka), and two state universities (Imo State University and Ebonyi State University) respectively. At the second stage, proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to draw one hundred (100) staff from each university. However, these made up the sample size of four hundred (400) staff of which 220 were male staff and 180 were female staff. The instruments used for data collection were Questionnaire titled: Stress Questionnaire (SQ); and Academic Staff Job Performance Questionnaire (ASJPQ) designed by the researcher. The instruments had a total of 43 items, SQ having 28 items and ASJPQ has 15 items. The SQ had two sections, 'sections A and B'. Section A elicited demographic information of the respondents. Section B contains questionnaire items to measure the stress. The SQ had one cluster. The second instrument ASJPQ was designed to ascertain the Academic Staff Job Performance. The ASJPQ had one cluster. A total number of 400 instruments were administered to the respondents and 360 were collected. The instruments were structured on a four point Likert Scale with response options of strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

Draft copies of the instruments were face validated by three specialists, two from Educational Foundations and one from Science Education, all from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The researcher gave the specialists copies of the drafted instruments to assess the suitability of the language, adequacy and relevance of the items in addressing the research questions, bearing in mind the purpose of the study. The corrections made by the experts were taken into consideration in producing the final questionnaire to be used for data collection. In order to ensure the reliability of the instruments, twenty copies of the questionnaire were used to determine the internal consistency through Cronbach Alpha method on twenty academic staff in University of Port Harcourt, Rivers state. Ten copies of each questionnaire were given to ten lecturers in the Faculty of Education and as well, ten copies of each questionnaire were given to ten lecturers in the Faculty of Social Science. Thereafter, the internal consistencies of the instruments were determined at 0.84 and 0.86 respectively. The researchers collected a letter of identification from her Head of Department (HOD) which she presented to the university authorities and academic staff of the sampled universities before distribution of the copies of the questionnaire. The researcher distributed the four hundred (400) copies of questionnaire to the respondents with the help of four (4) research assistants. These research assistants were adequately briefed on how to distribute the questionnaire to the respondents and answer any question that the respondents may ask. In doing so, direct delivery technique was used to ensure high return rate of the instruments. This equally helped in the quick administration and collection of the questionnaire. At the end of the period, almost all the copies of the instruments were retrieved and used for data analysis. Regression was used for research questions 1 and Multiple regression was used for research question 2. H01 was tested using regression ANOVA. H02 was tested using Hayes process macro. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One: What is the predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria?

Table 1: Linear regression analysis of predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	-.609 ^a	.370	.369	18.13442

(R²) = Coefficient of Determination

The result in Table 1 shows that the correlation coefficient between stress and job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria is -.609. The result implies that there exists a negativehigh relationship between stress and job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria. The result also revealed that the coefficient of determination (R²) associated with the correlation coefficient of -.609 was .370. The coefficient of determination (R²) of .370 indicates that stress predicts or accounts for up to 37% of job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria. This is an indication that 63% of the variation in job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria is attributed to other factors other than stress.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria.

Table 2: Regression analysis of significant predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	77018.716	1	77018.716	234.201	.000 ^b
	Residual	130885.194	398	328.857		
	Total	207903.910	399			

The result in Table 2 shows that F-ratio of 234.201 with associated exact probability value of .000 was obtained. This probability value of .000 was compared with 0.05 set as level of significance for testing the hypothesis and it was found to be significant because 0.00 is less than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis of no significant predictive power was rejected. The researcher therefore, concludes that there is a significant predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria.

Research Question Two: What is the predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria as moderated by gender?

Table 3: Analysis of moderation of gender on the predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria

Gender	N	R	R-sq	MSE	F	P
Male	220	-.649	.422	354.6623	140.1303	.000
Female	180	-.353	.125			

Result in Table 3 shows the analysis of the moderating role of gender on the predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria. The result revealed that a correlation coefficient (r) of -.649 and -.353were obtained for male and femaleacademic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria. This implies that there exists a negative highand moderate relationship between stress and job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria as moderated by gender. The analysis further revealed that a coefficient of determination (R²) associated with the correlation coefficient of -.649 and -.353were .422 and .125 respectively given a different of .297. This implies that gender moderated 29.7% predictive power ofstress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria in favour of the male academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria as moderated by gender.

The result in Table 3 was also used to test hypothesis three. The result in the Table shows that F-ratio of 140.1303 with associated exact probability value of .000 was obtained. This probability value was compared with 0.05 set as level of significance for testing the hypothesis and it was found to be significant since the probability value of .000 is less than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis of no predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria as moderated by gender was rejected. The researcher therefore, concludes that gender significantly moderates the predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria.

Discussion

The findings revealed that there is a very-high predictive power of stress on the job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East, Nigeria. This is because many of respondents agreed on all the items as factors that induce them to stress. The findings on physical and occupational stress are in agreement with Shikieri and Musa (2012) who found out that physical, emotional and occupational stress can precipitate stress among academic staff. On the other hand, Ahmed and Ramza (2013)'s study concurred that other factors of stress such as: psychological, administrative, creativity and knowledge building stress significantly reduces the performance of individual workers. The result showed negative correlation between stress and job performance. The researcher therefore, concludes that there is a significant predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in Southeast, Nigeria. This simply means that, academic staff of universities experience stress while doing their work, and such stressors include: psychological, emotional, physical, occupational, administrative, knowledge building and creativity stressors. The null hypothesis of no significant predictive power was rejected. This means that there is a significant predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in Southeast, Nigeria.

The findings showed that stress increases tiredness among academic staff in classroom instructions, induces health-related issues among academic staff which affect their performance functions in school activities, creates misunderstanding among staff thereby affecting their job performance, stress increases aggressiveness among staff which affects their research output. Stress makes staff unable to concentrate on their academic activities, makes them have difficulty in thinking logically on academic related activities, makes them have difficulty in seminar presentations, makes them experience serious physical problems that may affect their performances in laboratory practicals, and induces weaknesses in conducting examinations. In line with the findings, Awadh, Gichinga and Ahmed (2015) found that job demand was a stress inducer that hindered employee's performance but because stress levels were manageable, it did not affect their performance. Ahmed and Ramzan (2013) found a negative correlation between job stress and job performances, which shows that job stress significantly reduces the performance of an individual. On the other hand, not all stress is in the negative. According to Chandran (2013) there is a positive stress called eustress, usually experienced in moderation and capable of stimulating one's faculties to delve deep into and discover one's true potentials. The author argued that under stress the brain is emotionally and biochemically stimulated to sharpen performance, activate and motivate people into achieving desirable goals. It is noteworthy that many of the respondents agreeing on the items lends credence to the Person – Environment fit theory of stress propounded by French, Rogers and Cobb (1974), which says that when there is a mismatch or discrepancy between the expectations of a worker and what he actually gets from his work

environment, stress is most likely to occur. This further substantiate the fact that these stress factors have in them the whole gamut of the stresses experienced by the academic staff of public universities in Southeast, Nigeria.

The findings also revealed that, there is predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in Southeast, Nigeria as moderated by gender. The test of hypothesis showed that, there is a significant predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in Southeast, Nigeria as moderated by gender. The researcher therefore, concludes that gender significantly moderates the predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in Southeast, Nigeria. Akinmayowa and Kadiri (2014) showed that there is no significant difference in the level of stress among academic staff with respect to gender. In line with the findings, Calvarese (2015) revealed that there were significant differences between males and females concerning their reactions to stress, with more females experiencing higher levels of depression, frustration, and anxiety than their male counterparts when reacting to stress. In the study conducted by Safaria, Othman and Wahab (2018) on gender and work stress, the result showed that gender predicted job stress among Jogjakarta academic staff. Again, Sofoluwe, Akinsola and Ogbudinka (2015) investigated the relationship between gender, stress and job performance among academic staff in tertiary institutions in Anambra state.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Stress negatively and significantly predicts 37% of job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria. Gender significantly moderated 29.7% predictive power of stress on job performance of academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria in favour of the male academic staff of public universities in South East Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made.

1. There should be stress management seminars and workshops organized by Ministry of Education for health workers, guidance counselors, stress management experts and social workers.
2. There should be more employment of academic staff especially Ph.D holders by the Government to ameliorate the excessive work load on academic staff especially the administrators among them.

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