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Institutional Stressors and Performance of Academic Staff in Federal Polytechnics in S.E. Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated institutional stressors and performance of academic staff in federal polytechnic in South East, Nigeria. Structured questionnaire was the principal tool used in eliciting information from 315 respondents drawn from the study population. Descriptive statistics and spearman rank correlation were used in the analysis of data. The findings revealed a negative correlation between institutional stressors and performance of academic staff in federal polytechnics of South East Nigeria. However, the rate at which association exists between the two variables – institutional stressors and performance. The study also identified the major institutional stressors as workload, time pressure and poor working conditions. These stressors were ranked, first, second and third respectively. The performance of academic staff as teachers, researchers and administrators determine the quality of the graduates and the contribution they make to the society, the issue of stress management needs urgent consideration.

Keywords: *Institutional stressors, performance, academic staff, South East Nigeria.*

Introduction

The socio-economic development of Nigeria heavily depends on the success of educational institutions that train the nation's scientists and other professionals. These institutions play major roles in providing the knowledge and expertise required by the employees to be successful in their organizations. The performance of academic staff is fundamental to the development of human capital. The quality of knowledge that is generated in institutions of higher learning is critical to national competitiveness.

The changing nature of academic work appears to have led to a considerable increase in job demands without corresponding increase in job resources. Stress is likely to occur when valued resources are inadequate to meet the demands.

WHO (2016) defines work-related stress as the response workers may have when presented with work demands and pressure that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope. Stress is depicted as the antagonistic psychological and physical responses that happen in a person as a consequence of his or her inability to adapt to the demands being made on him or her.

Nnuro (2012) identifies excessive and otherwise unmanageable demands, poor work design, poor management and unsatisfactory working conditions as causes of work-related stress. Job-stress affects not only the employees' but also the organization in both monetary and non-monetary costs. Job stress can be a threat to the organization as far as its works are concerned.

Employee performance at the work place is a major concern for the organization irrespective of all the factors and conditions. Job performance can be viewed as an activity in which an individual is able to accomplish the task assigned to him/her successfully, subject to the normal constraints of reasonable utilization of the available resources. Employees who perceive their jobs as stressful record a decrease in performance characterized by

dissatisfaction, reduced motivation and commitment levels; they also exhibit unwanted behaviours like absenteeism, mistakes, improper decision making, drug use and abuse. The performance of academic staff may be decreased in such a way that the quality of education offered to the students are affected. The resultant effect include complaints from parents and other stakeholders on the status of service delivery in the institutions, frequent strikes, dissatisfied employees, poor performance of the polytechnics in general, and eventually damaging overall image of the educational institutions (Noor and Noor, 2016).

Statement of Problem

Lecturing is a significant profession that all other professions take their roots and nourishment from. Unfortunately in our higher institutions, there are plethora of problems that disrupt the smooth operation of academic activities, affect employee performance and the overall institutional performance. Some of these problems could be attributed to stress. The tasks that polytechnic lecturers are expected to undertake have changed significantly in recent years, and increasingly their work is perceived as stressful as a result of expanding enrollment in the polytechnic without a proportional increase in teachers resource and the fact that all promotions for the academic are determined based on not only teaching but also the outcome of scientific research.

Polytechnic lecturers face problems with the institution which have negative effects on their effectiveness in teaching and learning process. Institutional stressors include rigid institutional policies, heavy workload, poor student behaviour, poor relationships with colleagues, poor working conditions that include diminishing resources and poor physical features of school building and role ambiguity.

With recent escalation in the demand of the job, it is not surprising that academic staff report difficulties in maintaining firm boundaries between the work place and the home as; for many, it appears that the home is the extension of the work place.

The cost of stress is seen in increase in the number of absenteeism, the decline in work performance, the negative attitude of lecturers and premature death. It is against this background that the study was carried out with a view to providing answers, to the highlighted problems.

Objective

To determine the institutional sources of stress and their effect on performance of academic staff in South East, Nigeria.

Research Question

What is the extent of association between institutional stressors and performance of academic staff in Federal Polytechnics in S.E. Nigeria?

Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant association between institutional stressors and performance of academic staff in Federal Polytechnics in South East, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Stress is the product of an imbalance between environmental demands and individual capabilities. Job stress is seen as a physiological state of the individual which is influenced by a wide variety of environmental factors known as stressors. Stress is a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between the person and environment (Omolar, 2008). Stressors can range from catastrophic events to irritating incidents. However, stressors do not elicit a stress response in the individual until the person appraises it as exceeding the available resources. It also allows the possibility that a given level of stress leads to different effects across people, and across time (Dinham, 2004).

Work- related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope (Leka, Griffola and Cox, 2004;WHO,2016).

It is important to understand, that pressure at work by itself cannot be totally avoided in a modern business world and is not necessarily destructive. On the contrary, when a worker is experiencing an adequate and manageable amount of pressure, he or she might feel alert and inspired to do the job and to learn. Nevertheless, the perception of an acceptable amount of pressure is very individual and once the limit is

exceeded the consequences on employees health and performance can be dramatic (WHO, 2016). Several research papers reveal that , the most stressful types of work are the ones where demands and pressures towards the employees are not matching their abilities and knowledge, where workers do not get an opportunity to make choices or have any control, and where support from others is lacking (Leka, Griffola and Cox, 2004, Fako, 2015; Gail and Wary (2013).

Work- related stress is a combination of high levels of job demands and low levels of control over one's job (Rosenthal, and Alter 2012). Work- related stress refers to physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities and resources provided (Jonker, 2016). Dar, Ahmal, Naseem and Khan (2011) states that job stress occurs as a result of a poor person-environment fit.

Institutional stressors arise from the institution and they include workload, (WL), Poor Working Conditions (PWC), Time Pressure (TP), Task of Adaptation to New Technology (TANT), Career Development Task (CDT) and Attending to Students and Colleagues (ASC).

Professional stressors include stressors arising from disruptive students, excessive paper work and limited time frames, complex scheduling, burdensome work load, lack of mobility, environmental pressure; administrative entanglement, and situational factors. Difficulty in carefully defining the duties of academic staff can also be stressful and contribute to a lack of personal accomplishment which diminishes their feeling of success (Gold and Roth (1993).

Technological uncertainty: New innovations such as digital technology, smart boards, internet and computer, teaching aids can make the educators skills obsolete in a very short period of time. The older and seasoned educators are not too comfortable and do not have the know-how to embrace technology and will result in stressful situations for the educators and the learners. (Hellriegel and Slocum, 2004 ; Tytherleigh, Webb, Cooper and Ricketts 2005)

Many studies of work- related stress have shown that there are a variety of organizational factors that are instrumental in causing stress. Such as factors intrinsic to the job, organizational structure and climate, relationships within the organization, the role of the individual in the organization and career development (Sutherland and Cooper, 1988; Brown and Uehara, 2008; Childs and Stoerber ,2012; Adebisi, 2011).

Teaching can be a stressful profession with demands and expectations from parents, students, administrators and colleagues, which are aggravated by work load, changing policies and lack of acknowledgements for accomplishment.

Job performance of employees is the most critical subject which plays an important role in accomplishing organizational performance (Wang, 2015), Job performance can be seen as a set of managerial behaviours that express how employees do their jobs (Alawamlas, 2004). Schormerhorn, Hunt and Osborn, (2005) stated that job performance contains a quality and quantity of results driven from individual or group completion. Ismail , Abdraham and Zainababidin, (2014) described job performance as the ability of individuals to achieve their respective work aims, then meet their expectations, achieve benchmarks or accomplish their organizational goals.

Mathias and Jackson (2000) stated that an individual performance depends on three factors which are; ability to do the work, level of effort and support given that person. The relationship of these factors, widely acknowledged in management literature is that performance (P) is the result of Ability (A)x Effect (E) x support (S), that is ($P = A \times E \times S$) performance is diminished if any of these factors are reduced or absent.

Empirical Review

Archibong, Basse and Effiong, (2010) conducted a study on Occupational stress sources among university academic staff, in Cross river University of Technology (CRUTECH) and University of Uyo (UNIUYO). Three research questions , three hypotheses and a sample size of 120 were used for the study with the independent t-test statistical analysis employed in testing the hypotheses. Regarding the sources of stress, the study ranked career development as the highest source of stress. It showed that male and female staff perceived stress level differently. They concluded that as long as the identified stress remain unchanged, academic staff will continue to experience stress from these sources.

Oghenetaga, Ejedaforu and Rabi (2014) conducted a comparative study of job stress among teaching staff in higher institutions in Nigeria. The objectives of their study were to determine if a significant difference exist between the level of job stress by federal, state and private institution lecturers in Nigeria, and also to ascertain if a significant difference exist between the impact of job stress on academic staff in private institutions and public institutions in Nigeria. The study adopted causal comparative, research design and Chi-square statistics was used to analyze three hypotheses formulated for the study. The study showed very high job stress in the four institutions. The causes of job stress were identified as workload, fear of being laid off, too much administrative duties, large number of students to supervise, frequent meetings as well as lack of information. The result also showed a significant difference between academic stress in federal, state and private institutions in Nigeria.

Rosemary, Emene, Obike and Obiuto (2014) conducted a study titled Managing Stress among lecturers in Polytechnics in South East Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting 1,005 lecturers. The objectives of the study were to determine the sources, effects and stress relieving packages available to Polytechnic lecturers in South Eastern Nigeria. Three research questions employed for the study were analysed by means t-test statistic(mean and standard deviation). The result identified need to meet up with departmental deadline for script marking and result preparation (3.50), study lecture rooms with poor seating arrangement for students (3.40), exam malpractice (3.90), lack of teaching facilities (3.10) as stressors. The study also identified sponsorship for capacity building workshop, research grant, staff club with recreational facilities and availability of school for staff children as stress relieving packages available in the institution.

Sofie and Stella (2015) studied occupational stress among university lecturers: A case of Zimbabwe. The aim of their study was to explore stress levels, symptoms and common stressors for lecturers in Christian university in Zimbabwe. 36 full time lecturers were involved and three hypotheses used in the study were analysed by means of descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Results showed no significant difference between responses when it comes to gender, age, faculty, as well as work load, meaning that different sub-groups of the respondents were affected by stress in the same manner and they also displayed the same stress symptoms. Among the stressors, the most common stressors were increased workloads, need to hit target/deadlines, and long working hours, as indicated by the mean scores of 2.6667, 2.6250 and 2.9167 respectively. Statistical analysis also revealed that lecturers were heterogeneous in their responses with regard to increased workloads, as shown by a standard deviation of 1.0072. The study recommends that universities should employ adequate lecturers for the smooth running of their programmes as well as for the good welfare of the lecturers.

Liu, Zhou and Zeng, (2010) investigated source of stress among high school chemistry teachers in China, involving a sample size of 101. Descriptive statistics and factor analysis were used to analyse the hypotheses. By means of factors analysis, five factors with eigen values greater than 1 were elicited. The first factor named teaching workload consisted of seven items. With an eigen value of 6.50, it explained 34.22 of the variance. Three items made up the second factor and was named school system. Its eigen value was 2.13 and it explained 11.20 percent of the variance. The third factor consisted of three items, which was named society treatment and demands with an eigen value of 1.41, it explained 7.43 percent of the variance. The fourth factor consisted of three items and was named self-development demands. Its eigen value was 1.23 and its explained 6.48 percent of the variance. The fifth factor was named school hard ware factors, consisted of three items with an eigen value of 1.05, it explained 64.87 percent of the variance.

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Aroosiya and Hussain (2016) investigated the impact of occupational stress on employees performance (with special reference to teaching staff in state universities in Eastern Province of Sri Lanka). The objective of their study were to investigate the impact of occupational stress on employees performance and to determine the major sources of occupational stress experienced by teaching staff in state universities in Sri Lanka. One hypothesis was formulated using deducted approach and the study involved a random sample of 2 state universities. The result of Pearson product moment correlation applied in testing the hypothesis showed a significant negative relationship between perceived degree of occupational stress and perceived degree of employees' performance in the universities. Their study also showed that the major sources of occupational stress experienced by teaching staff are factors intrinsic to the job, home and work pressure, and role in the organization.

Methodology

The survey research design was used in the researcher. In this research, both primary and secondary data were used. The population of the study comprised all academic staff of federal polytechnics of South East Nigeria (Federal Polytechnic, Oko, Federal Polytechnic, Nekede and Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Afikpo. From a total population of 1465, a sample of 315 was drawn and 272 copies of questionnaire properly completed was used for the analysis.

Researcher used literature based self developed questionnaire titled Institutional Stressors and Performance Questionnaire (ISAPQ).

Operational measures of variables: Two main variables are included in the proposed research model encompassing institutional stressors and employee performance.

Institutional Stressors

Institutional stressors were operationalized into: Workload (WL), Poor Working Condition (PWC), Time Pressure (TP), Task of Adaptation to new technology (TANT), Committee Meeting/Administrative Role (CMAR), Career development task (CDT), Attending to students and colleagues (ASC)

Employee performance

The perceived degree of employee performance was operationalized into three dimensions such as trait-based information, behavior based information and result based information (Aroosiya and Hussan 2016).

Data Analysis technique

Spearman rank correlation was used in testing the hypothesis.

Table 1:

Ranking of institutional stressors among academic staff in Federal Polytechnics of South East.

Stressors	Mean	Ranking
Task of Adaptation to new technology (TANT)	5.4	4 th
Career development task (CDT)	5.3	5 th
Work load (WL)	6.4	1 st
Attending to students and colleagues (ASC)	4.1	7 th
Time Pressure (TP)	5.6	2 nd
Poor working conditions (PWC)	5.5	3 rd
Committee meeting/Administrative role (CMAR)	4.6	6 th

Source: Researcher's Field Survey.

Table 2: Responses on the extent of work stress among academic staff in Federal Polytechnics in South East Nigeria

S/No	Questions	VHE	HE	NE	LE	VLE	N	Mean	SD
X ₁	To what extent is work load severe in the institutions	26 (9.6%)	57 (21.0%)	24 (8.8%)	105 (38.6%)	60 (22.1%)	272	2.00	1.082
X ₂	The pressure of an adaptation to new technology is challenging to a _____	6 (2.2%)	34 (12.5)	41 (15.1)	77 (28.3)	114 (41.9)	272	1.45	0.967
X ₃	Involvement in other activities such as attending of panels, committees and other meetings are demanding to a _____ extent	3 (1.1%)	54 (19.9%)	64 (23.5%)	66 (24.3%)	85 (31.3%)	272	1.44	1.088
X ₄	Marking and collation of results are challenging owing to population of students to a _____ extent	23 (8.5%)	8.8 (32.4%)	7 (2.6%)	78 (28.7)	76 (27.9%)	272	2.16	1.011
X ₅	Challenges of career development is stressful to a _____ extent	8 (2.9%)	77 (28.3%)	59 (21.7%)	76 (27.9%)	52 (19.1%)	272	1.72	1.177

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey.

Table 2 shows the responses on question items X₁ – X₅ on the extent of work related stress among academic staff in Federal Polytechnics in South East Nigeria. The frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviations of the responses are shown in the table.

Table 3: Responses on performance of academic staff in Federal Polytechnics of South East.

S/No	Questions	SA	A	U	SD	D	N	Mean	SD
X ₂₁	The level of lecturers inculcation of ideas and knowledge on the student is commendable	57 (21.0%)	53 (19.5%)	39 (14.3%)	76 (27.9%)	47 (17.3%)	272	2.15	1.327
X ₂₂	The quality of students produced in the institution is high	33 (12.1%)	78 (28.7%)	20 (7.4%)	89 (32.7%)	52 (19.1%)	272	2.19	1.107
X ₂₃	Lecturers exhibit high cooperation and team work	58 (21.3%)	45 (16.5%)	2 (6.7%)	91 (33.5%)	76 (27.9%)	272	2.30	1.115
X ₂₄	Interpersonal and communicative skills of the academic staff in my institution are high	23 (8.5%)	152 (55.9%)	24 (8.8%)	54 (18.9%)	19 (7.0%)	272	2.48	1.045
X ₂₅	Performance speed of lecturers in my institution is adequate	42 (15.4%)	67 (24.6%)	8 (2.9%)	69 (25.4%)	86 (31.6%)	272	2.18	1.127

Source: Researcher’s computation

Ho: There is no significant association between institutional stressors and performance of academic staff in Federal Polytechnics of South East, Nigeria.

The result of the spearman rank correlation test is presented in table 4.

Table 4: Correlations

		Performance of academic staff	Institutional stressors
Spearman's rho	TBP	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.521
		N	272
	WRSAS	Correlation Coefficient	-.033
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.521

The result in table 4 shows that there is a negative correlation between institutional stressors and performance of academic staff in Federal Polytechnics of South East, Nigeria.

Thus we reject and accept H_0 that there is no significant association between institutional stressors and performance of academic staff.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study agree with Sofie and Stella (2015) whose study showed the most common stressors to be long working hours (2.9167), increased workload (2.667) and the need to meet target/deadlines (2.6250). However, the result of Moaz, Syed, Moindduin and Suhail (2016) study show that only workload and role conflict have statistically significant effect on job performance, while role ambiguity does not have statistically significant effect.

The result from the regression analysis of the hypothesis shows that work related stress has a negative and significant impact on the result- based performance. This implies the rejection of H_0 and the acceptance of H_A . This also provides answer to the second objective and research question that work- related stress exerts a significant impact on result -based performance. Previous researches on work stress did not focus on such dimensions of performance like result- based performance.

The result of this study is similar to that conducted by Liu, Zhou and Zeng (2010). Using factors analysis, five factors with eigen value greater than 1 were elicited. Workload with an eigen value of 6.501 explained 34.218% of the variance. The second factor named school system with an eigen value of 2.128 explained 11.2% of the variance. The third factor named society treatment and demands with an eigen value of 1.412 explained 7.433 percent of the variance. The fourth factor named self development demands with an eigen value of 1.231 explained 6.481% of the variance while the last factor school hard ware facilities with an eigen value of 1.051 explained 5.539 percent of the variance. In their study the five factors explained 64.87% of the variance.

5.2 Conclusion

The high stress level experienced by Polytechnic lecturers is capable of increasing risks of health problems .Lecturers who perceive their jobs as stressful record a decrease in performance that impacts significantly on students ,institutions and the nation at large . The performance of academic staff may be decreased in such a way that the quality of education offered to students are affected. The resultant effects are complaints from parents, employers and other stakeholders on the status of service delivery, thereby damaging overall image of the institution.

Since the performance of academic staff as teachers, researchers and administrators determine the quality of the graduates and the contributions they make to the society, the issue of stress management needs urgent consideration.

Based on the findings of this study, if the issue of stress management is not given the attention it desires ,the health and performance of the lecturers would be jeopardized .However the commitment of educational stakeholders towards the welfare of academic staff will reduce work- related stress. The resultant effect would be improvement in the quality of education and the provision of talented and competent work force in the country.

5.3 Recommendations

1. The management of the Polytechnics need to reduce the excess work load by engaging within available resources more lecturers either on full or part time.
2. Stable and conducive working conditions need to be provided by management to motivate lecturers to put in their best and also to reduce stress. This will go a long way to reducing work related stress and improving result- based performance.
3. Functional well equipped counseling centres need to be established in all Federal Polytechnics in South East. Competent counsellors may not be able to change the external environment of the lecturers,they may be able to change their internal environments (attitudes to situations). This may be achieved through counselling strategies focused on cognitive restructuring and behaviour modification therapies.

4. The academic calendar needs to be regularized in order to enable the academic staff to embark on leave. This would enable them return to duty post more refreshed and also impact on the quality of teaching, the level of motivation and efficiency at their respective work places.
5. The management of the Polytechnics need to develop organizational policies that give individuals more control over their work activities, develop support systems, shared goals and directions. In this regard, older lecturers should find ways of delegating their jobs to younger assistants in order to reduce the effect of stress. They should also find ways of adapting to changing priorities and demands.

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