



STRESS AND TEACHERS' EFFECTIVENESS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



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Abstract

The paper philosophically examined stress and teachers' effectiveness in public secondary schools in Nigeria. Teachers' effectiveness describes the skill, knowledge and competence with which a teacher executes the duties and responsibilities related to his job description. This can be verified using parameters such as their subject matter delivery, examination conduct as well as supervision of class assignment, teaching practice and projects. Such effectiveness however can be affected as a result of stress which comes in different forms. No matter how good a teacher is, if he does not avoid stress, he will certainly have problems at the end of the day. Consequently, the study has been treated under appropriate subheadings such as location and teachers' effectiveness, gender and teachers' effectiveness in public, socio - economic background and teachers' effectiveness as well as level of education and teachers' effectiveness. The human capital theory was used as anchor for the study. It was concluded that government and school administrators need to plan teachers' workload properly, in view of their welfare and performance, in order to get the best from them, which goes a long way in promoting education in the society for sustainable national development. Among the recommendations were that teachers should be assigned to responsibilities based on their qualification and experience, they should be properly remunerated in commensuration to their qualifications, instructional materials should be qualitative and available at all times, there is the need to have more teaching personnel in secondary schools since the available ones are currently inadequate and a periodic teacher performance evaluation is necessary in order to block or eliminate loopholes.

Key Words: Stress, Teacher, Teacher Effectiveness, Secondary Education, National Development

Introduction

The secondary level of education is a major step in students' development process which prepares them for higher education and is attained after their primary education. It is acquired in secondary schools and designed to empower learners toward academic excellence. Essentially,

secondary schools are educational institutions established to facilitate human capital development through quality teaching, proper guidance and community services among others. They help in character building and services to humanity with a responsibility to develop competent, reliable and creative individuals of high moral standards in the society.

According to Onyeizuegbe and Orogbu(2015), secondary schools contribute greatly to the development of any society in every aspect. They help in building individuals for social, economic, technological and political challenges by utilizing the power of teaching to focus on capacities that will enhance human development as well as solve societal problems. They represent a level of education after primary school, where the skills of learners are honed, as they learn different subjects under the guidance of teachers.

In the opinion of Abdullah and Wan (2013), teachers are very essential in secondary education as they help to mould the character of students, disseminate information, transmit knowledge, appraise the environment and facilitate effective teaching and learning process. Likewise, teachers are professionals who help in transforming teaching policies into action as well as make teaching and learning possible. They ensure the growth and development of learners; hence, a nation. They are thus builders whose performance depends on commensurate qualification, experience and preparation. The availability and effectiveness of teachers thus, determine the level of students' performances in schools(Nwangwu, 2015).

Consequently, teachers' effectiveness connotes the skill, knowledge and competence with which a teacher performs the responsibilities related to his job description (Abas et al, 2019). It is the execution of an obligation, implementing one's duties and computing the accomplishment of set goals and objectives. This involves the teacher's role in the dissemination of knowledge and providing guidance and counseling services to the learners.

Teachers' effectiveness can be measured through certain parameters as in their subject matter delivery (such as lesson plan, lesson preparation and teaching method embraced), examination conduct (as in strength of examination paper, examination supervision and result computation) and supervision (as in class assignment, teaching practice and projects) (Isiguzo&Amaeze, 2022). Other areas include selection and application of instructional materials, completing number of period per week and scheme of work, relationship with students and commitment and involvement of other activities that will promote the actualization of school goals. Nevertheless, these ideal parameters and assessments may be affected due to work stress.

Stress is a feeling of tension that is demonstrated both physically and emotionally. It is a major aspect of the challenges towards the mastery of new skills and behavioural patterns (Izuegbu, 2023). The individual experiences emotional, cognitive and physiological mal-functioning as a result. It shows that stress is an adaptive response facilitated by individual characteristics and / or psychological processes, which are consequences of an external action, situation or activity that places special physical and /or psychological demands upon a person.

According to Affah and Khatoon(2012), about one third of teachers perceive their occupation as very stressful. It is clear that teachers can be exposed to a number of sources of stress; which include teaching students who lack motivation, maintaining discipline in the classroom, confronting general time pressures and workload demands. Also included are being exposed to poor working conditions, ambiguity of the teacher's role, poor relationships with colleagues, students, administrators and job insecurity among others. Equally included are teacher's location, gender, socio- economic background and level of education (Duruji et al, 2014).

Very sadly, stress may affect teachers' ability to function effectively, even to the extent of burning out. Other effects of stress on teachers may include reduction in work performance, increasing introversion, inability to manage time or delegate, feeling of alienation and inadequacy, irritability with colleagues, lack of motivation, unwillingness to cooperate, loss of interest for the job, infection and accident proneness and so on (John, 2019). These assumptions have spurred these researchers' curiosity in attempting to unravel the influence of stress on teachers' job effectiveness in secondary schools in Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

Stress

Stress explains or describes a major form of worry caused by difficult situations in one's life or job. It is an individual's complete response to environmental demands and pressure. It is also seen as that strain or tension that comes from adverse or demanding situations. This shows that stress puts some form of pressure on an individual's body to adjust or adapt to a particular way of life in order to cope with situations. It produces a psychological or physical force behind its range of stability, developing a strain in the individual's body and is likely to constitute a threat to him (Kreitner&Klinick, 2014).

Occupational stress construes a condition where occupation related factors interact with the workers to either disrupt or enhance his psychological or physiological condition so that the person's mind and body is forced to deviate from its normal way of functioning. It is the type that arises in the course of discharging one's duties and responsibilities. According to Maduabum (2017), stress is a psychological reaction caused by the perception of aversive situation which can be hazardous to one's health. Teachers work daily with students and are faced with a number of problems. Moreover, they have to perform a lot of work after they reach home such as preparing lesson note, correcting the note books, evaluation of scripts, etc which can cause stress.

The general perception of stress is negative, however, it can be positive sometimes (Nzeneri, 2012). It is said to be positive when it motivates one to execute actions; for instance, when it helps the teachers to be focused during lesson preparation for effective lesson delivery. On the other hand, it is negative when it inflicts mental, physical, emotional and physiological injuries. This could be regarded as being abnormal which is dangerous and can lead one to burnout if not identified and managed early. Stress cannot necessarily be avoided as a result of the dynamic and complex nature of the teaching profession. Likewise, there are different dimensions of stress such as eutress stress, acute stress, episodic acute stress and chronic stress (Usha, 2013). Eutress stress is the type of stress that leads to positive outcomes and connected with great fun and happiness. It is beneficial with a feeling of fulfillment and achievement instead of anxiety and is essentially the kind of positive stress in the sense that it quickens one to work towards the achievement of tasks and their deadlines.

Acute stress is a major type of stress which is very short- lived and can be positive or negative on one's body. According to Okere (2016), for this type of stress, the victim knows why he is stressed as the body relaxes and comes back to normal when the event ceases. The stress at one time may appear to be rewarding and at the other time it may be frustrating. It does not cause severe or permanent damage to the body. On the other hand, episodic acute stress is an acute stress that is milder but runs in one's life causing harm and damage to one's body organs and wellbeing. John (2019) noted that this type of stress is very chaotic, out of control and involves multiple stressful situations faced by the individual. The victims do not know or admit it easily and so it becomes habitual as they resist changing their lifestyle until they experience the severe physical symptoms.

Finally, the chronic stress comes with unrelenting demands and pressure that destroys gradually both the emotional and health system of an individual. It is the most adverse form of stress that seems to be unending and tends to remain based on the situation that has prompted it (Omoniyi, 2013). Some of the situations that cause chronic stress are bad marriages, overwork and traumatic life experiences which could lead to death. Since stress and its consequences are mostly manageable, it is essential for teachers to learn on how to cope with them in order to be proficient in their skills, so that they can achieve the set goals of the educational institutions.

School Location and Teachers' Effectiveness

School location construes where a school is situated, which could be in urban or rural areas. Most urban schools are sited inside town very close to residential houses and are more in number compared to schools in rural areas (Iwuagwu et al, 2016). Hence, schools in the urban areas are more populated in view of staff, students and learning facilities.

Rural schools occupy larger areas of land of which greater parts are not or less developed. Location of rural schools may be far from the community centre making very few teachers to arrive school early and regularly. It is further observed that the quality of education in rural schools is less than that provided in urban areas. Furthermore, rural areas are affected when it comes to teaching staff and facilities as these are more located in urban areas (State Ministry of Education, 2015).

Noise is another factor that threatens teaching and learning especially in urban areas. Noise is anything that interferes with teaching and learning process; and is capable of producing influence on students' information processing strategies, feelings of personal control and also one's level of arousal (Chukwuemeka, 2013). It is very difficult to teach in a noisy environment, which could lead to stress on the part of the teachers. A lapse in concentration on the part of the teacher can make him to forget a vital aspect of the study. Teachers generally will excel in less noisy environment compared to noisy ones.

Generally, when considering site as a factor in teaching and learning, the following are considered:

- i. It is easier to teach fewer students than when they are much, due to attention. For instance, it is easier handling 20 students in a classroom compared to when they are 50 in number.
- ii. Learning facilities are very essential. With better learning facilities such as computer and projectors as well as other instructional aids, students learn better and faster. Also, availability of these facilities is a plus; a major advantage which promotes learning. Absence of learning facilities and equipment affect learning (Duruji et al, 2014).
- iii. The level of seriousness in learning is more in urban areas than rural areas. This may be due to limited incentives in rural areas, family challenges, among others.
- iv. Proximity to schools is closer in urban areas than in rural areas. This can make or teachers' attendance, interest and performance.
- v. Noisy environment affects teaching negatively while a serene environment promotes it.
- vi. The quality of teachers is another factor. In most cases, better teachers in terms of qualification, skill and knowledge, are found in urban centres. Only few are posted to rural areas. Sometimes, even the brilliantly qualified teachers who are sent to rural areas refuse such transfers or appointments, leaving rural students to suffer in the process.

It is obvious that location plays a major role in teachers' effectiveness in schools. While closer proximity and less no of students in the classroom may positively enhance teacher's performance and reduce the stress, a far proximity and more students to teach can lead to an unbearable or uncontrollable stress that may affect teacher's performance in the classroom. This further implies that teachers who are faced with distance limitations may have to work harder in order to succeed.

Gender and Teachers' Effectiveness

Gender disparity in the teaching profession has been well documented. Mokolo (2015) stated that female teachers often outnumber male teachers at the primary level, while the opposite is the case at the secondary level. This gender disparity raises questions about the impact of teacher gender on students' performance. Likewise, some research suggests that male and female teachers may employ different teaching styles and classroom management strategies. Stress may however come in based on how much workload they are assigned to.

Likewise, teacher gender can influence students' perceptions and expectations, potentially affecting their learning experiences. Obikeze(2016)noted that female teachers are prevalent at the primary level while male teachers are more at the secondary level. This gender disparity can influence the perceptions and expectations of students, potentially affecting their academic performance.

In their study on teacher effectiveness and gender disparity, Duruji et al (2014) found out that gender was independently effective to manipulate changes in the effectiveness of teachers of English Studies who taught writing in their school. The mean difference shows that female teachers may be more effective in many aspects of the indicators of teacher effectiveness.

Socio- economic Background and Teachers' Effectiveness

Socio- economic background can be observed in the level of affluence of teachers or through their remuneration. Changes in teacher pay are likely to affect education quality through two mechanisms - by influencing the efficiency of the school and by affecting teacher quality (Amadi, 2018). Higher teacher pay may improve the efficiency of schools by reducing teacher turnover. However, a high workload despite incentives may lead to stress.

Ekechukwu and Isiguzo(2019) noted that low level of job satisfaction in teachers is traced to the perceived low salaries paid to them in comparison to the other public sector workers. This may be a pointer to the high incidences of industrial action and unrest in the teaching fraternity. The perception of a skewed remuneration structure which does not favour the teachers in comparison to the other public sector workers cause many teachers to either leave the service before the attainment of their retirement ages or have a lackluster performance at work.

Level of Education and Teachers' Effectiveness

It is well known that the quality and standard of education in any society depends on the quality and standard of the teachers available. Mahatma Gandhi rightly pointed out that *'no country can make any progress without good teachers'*. Consequently, effective education can be achieved through the efforts of well qualified, competent and effective teachers. Depending on the demands of the era, the educational aims and objectives change very rapidly. These demands have a direct influence on the educational system. Every country develops its system of education to meet the challenges of changing times(Ekechukwu, 2016).

Teachers have the great responsibility of making the students competent enough to compete with their counterparts in other countries and to make their society economically independent. To retain the enrolled masses in the classroom, to make education possible, to increase the level of achievement, to tap the potentialities of the students and to improve educational standards remarkably, the teacher should not only be committed and devoted but also competent, exemplary and effective. However, when they are given much work load, it tells on their performance.

Symptoms of Stress and Teacher Effectiveness

Obikeze(2016) noted that stress can result in excessive high blood pressure and hypertension, rapid heartbeat and diseases, heightened anxiety, depression and anger, lack of concentration, sleep disorder, eating disorders, and inability to rest. The fact is that when a teacher is stressed, his performance tends to decrease. Excessive stress reduces the proficiency of teachers and their ability to achieve maximum result. If it increases to a breaking point, the employee may break down and become too ill to work, is tired, quits or refuses to work in order not to face more stressful situation and circumstances.

Equally, some of the symptoms according to Ekechukwu and Isiguzo(2019) include intellectual problem (memory loss, difficulty in taking decisions, lack of concentration), the physical symptoms (sleep disturbances, fatigue and high blood pressure, etc), behavioural symptoms (sleeplessness, eating disorder, isolation, overreacting and neglecting responsibilities) and emotional symptoms (depression, restlessness and anxiety, anger, lack of confidence, etc). Other symptoms of stress include headache, backache, stiff- neck, digestive problems and spasms, aggression in speech, self- doubt, constant fatigue, palpitation of the heart, lack of concentration, lack of sleep, loss of appetite, negative self-talk, among others(Saqib&Rehman, 2018),

This shows that excessive stress on the teacher can cause not only behavioural changes of emotional distress, anxiety, fear and so on but has a lot of implications on the general life, health, and productivity level of the victim. The effects of stress on teachers are of serious concern. Stress has so much implication on the health of victims because it can make one fall ill. Most of the health related problems such as hypertension, diabetes, gastrointestinal disorder, catarrh and alzheimer could be the aftermath of stress (Ijenwa, 2018). With this, it is certain that every teacher experiences various degrees of stress but when it becomes excessive, it seriously impacts on their mental disposition and wellbeing.

Management of Stress and Teacher Effectiveness

Stress management involves a variety of methods and treatments used for controlling the level of stress individuals pass through, for the purpose of improving day - to - day activities. For teachers to succeed in managing their stressful condition, they need to create an organisational climate whereby individuals involved in the teaching learning process or learning environment would work co-operatively towards the attainment of set organisational goals. Thus, the process of stress management provides a number of ways to manage teacher's stressors and stress. In addition, the use of coping strategies and the solicitation of the help and services of guidance counsellors could be useful. This would balance the stability of teachers in the teaching-learning process to enhance maximum job performance (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017).

With so much consideration on the nature of stress and the individual concerned, the following stress management modalities could be adopted to address teacher's stressors and/or stress on the job: Firstly, 'planning ahead' is an important way of managing stress. When the teacher plans his activities ahead of time, it helps in managing and avoiding stressors that cause stress in the body. This would go a long way to make the teacher not to hurry or module up so many activities together. In the view of Mohammed (2018), planning ahead is noted as a crucial aspect of stress management. This is because when a teacher plans and organizes for a new day, develop weekly schedule which include time for teaching, grading, meetings and other obligations, this action plan would enable him to deal with the various outcomes of events that may cause one to feel stressed out. It will also reduce the frequent harassment of the teachers by the school administrators.

Secondly, 'control of negative thought' can be another management modality for stress. Atiatobe and Izuchi (2021) described this strategy as 'reframing', a condition where teachers should concentrate on the positive rather than the negative. It is apparent that negative thoughts such as self-doubt, criticism and expectation of failure can badly affect the teacher's self-confidence, constrain performance level and induce stress. Sometimes, the negative thoughts may lure teachers to isolate themselves from others, become easily agitated, temperamental to the extent of forcing out insulting words from the victims. These loose words may serve as an insult to the receiver and at the same time, lead the victim to a stressful condition (Adamu, 2011). In a situation that the teacher suppresses his negative thoughts by avoiding those things that upset him and trying to see the good in every situation for positive thoughts, there would be the control of any form of stress in his life.

Thirdly, 'getting back in control' is another stress management modality that can reduce stress among teachers (Aftah&Khatoon, 2012). This type of method enables individuals to get back and take control of their lives. With this, one is able to avoid 'lack of control' which is a major cause of stress. Teachers who feel stressed at the smallest problems are usually overwhelmed by their daily responsibilities while those who feel less stressed even with excess workload feel more in control of their lives. This could be achieved by the teacher organising the workplace to control the time and work and also learning additional skills to tackle any problem at hand.

Fourthly, 'relaxation' is another option for stress control in the life of the teacher. In recent times, many teachers teach throughout the day. Some even at nights engage in tutorials in order to make more money. This poor time management can cause prolonged muscle tension which can impede healthy condition of an individual. However, getting a teacher involved in progressive relaxation may reduce his fatigue and improve his job output. The use of break or recreation is common but could be very effective as it allows one to relax and ward off stress (Cheatle, 2011).

In addition, the 'identification of factors that cause individual's stressor' is another essential modality. When one identifies his problems, they are almost solved. Teachers should endeavour to identify those habits / factors that are responsible for their stressors such as lack of exercise, not sleeping well and so on. When they are able to do this, it would pave way for practical and effective stress reduction plan. Moreover, teachers can avoid stress by taking regular holidays, doing something different such as watching films, meditating and praying, having healthy diets, gardening, talking about your feelings among others (Denga, 2015).



Theoretical Review

Human Capital Theory by Adams Smith (1776), Developed by Gary Becker (1964)

The human capital theory was introduced by Adams Smith in 1776 and later developed by Gary Becker in 1964. It states that an individual's capacity to perform various tasks is dependent on the skills and knowledge inbuilt in him and external forces such as education, training and incentives which help to enhance his qualities. The theory explains the combination of competencies, social, knowledge and personal attributes embedded in an intrinsic measure of economic value and views people as economic units who are essential in an economy.

One of the themes / concepts of human capital theory is that investments in people can be measured dependent on the economic value that they are able to contribute to the society. In every society, there is the need for growth; thus, human capital theory establishes that there is a significant association between the growth in the stock of a nation's human resources and the growth of national output. It is therefore important that societies which want to attain a specific level of socio-economic manpower resources, invest in their human resources. This shows that educational systems should have the right type of manpower (equipped teachers) in the right proportion, quantity and time for effective teaching which goes a long way in developing students..

In relation to present study, the theory assumes that competences of teachers are best utilised if they are free of stress, in order for them to deliver their best during teaching. This proposal of human capital theory observes that human resources are invaluable assets to a society that tends to enhance its productive capacity, which follows that human capital (teachers) forms the materials that enable all other resources to survive and can only function when teachers are properly utilized without much work load.

This theory further relates to the proper management of teachers' needs which will help motivate them to serve as a tool in achieving education goals and objectives including students' academic performance in secondary schools. Consequently, human resources (teachers) will be effective when school administrators, educators, government and other education stakeholders harness teachers' qualities properly for teaching effective in secondary schools; which will help in ensuring quality outputs and a better society.

Conclusion

Teacher effectiveness in secondary schools these days is increasingly being threatened as a result of work stress. On daily bases, they are exposed to a number of sources of stress; which include teaching students who lack motivation, maintaining discipline in the classroom, confronting general time pressures and workload demands. They are equally exposed to poor working conditions, ambiguity of the teacher's role, poor relationships with colleagues, students, administrators and job insecurity. Their location, gender, socio- economic background and level of education are also included which may be inimical to their class performance. Unfortunately, stress may affect teachers' ability to function effectively, even to the extent of burning out. They could also experience reduction in work performance, increasing introversion, inability to manage time or delegate, feeling of alienation and inadequacy, irritability with colleagues, lack of motivation, unwillingness to cooperate, loss of interest for the job, infection and accident proneness and so on. It is imperative thus, that government and school administrators plan teachers' workload properly, in view of their welfare and performance in order to get the best from them which goes a long way in promoting education in the society for sustainable national development.

Recommendations

The following are hereby recommended:

1. Teachers should be given workload they can handle.
2. Teachers should be assigned to responsibilities based on their qualification and experience.
3. Teachers should be properly remunerated in commensuration to their qualifications.
4. Periodic in – service training in secondary schools is essential for teachers' development.
5. Teachers should have time for relaxation and their wellbeing.
6. There should be adequate infrastructure in schools such as adequate and conducive classrooms, ICT facilities, good laboratories, etc that will make teaching and learning more interesting.
7. Bonuses and allowances will be helpful.
8. Instructional materials should be qualitative and available at all times.
9. There is the need to have more teaching personnel in our secondary schools since the available ones are currently inadequate.
10. A periodic teacher performance evaluation is necessary in order to block or eliminate loopholes.

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