Stress and instructors’ efficiency in Ogun State Universities: Implications for Nigerian educational policy

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The Federal Government of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education expressed itself emphatically in Section 8, no. 70 (a) that no educational system is capable of rising above the quality of its teachers and thus, teacher education and teachers’ welfare would be given major emphasis in all educational planning and development. As lofty as this policy-statement sound, it stands far away from praxis. Both teacher education and welfare have left much to be desired. This paper considered the effect of stress on teachers’ efficiency in churning out educationally sound and capable outputs from higher citadels of learning. The population for the study consisted all the public and private universities in Ogun State. Four Universities (two public and two private) were purposely selected as sample based on Nigerian University Commission’s approval, sufficient number of years of establishment and geographical locations. Four questions and six hypotheses were formulated in null form. A questionnaire tagged SATE (Stress and Teachers’ Effectiveness) was used to gather the needed data for the study. Findings from the study revealed that teachers from both universities were working under stress, albeit public universities teachers were more prone to stress than their counterparts in private universities. The implication of this is that the government, policy makers as well as the implementers of the policy have only paid lip services to teachers’ welfare and this, of course, has its negative consequential turn on the system of education in Nigeria.

Key words: Efficiency, policy, stress and management.

INTRODUCTION

It is not uncommon these days; to see teaching personnel in institutions of learning develop strange attitude and cold feet to work, especially in the public institutions (Oguntimehin, 2006). Most often, classes are skipped and when they are not skipped, they are abrupt; evaluations (both formative and summative) are handled carelessly; missing scripts cum missing scores abound; teachers’ role as models, guide or counselors, are no longer the usual parlance. When these happen, the teacher, the students, and infact, all educational resources, suffer. Students’ academic performance and general success in the school system, however, are premised on teachers’ efficiency. The convenience of the teachers’ job is no doubt paramount to their productivity. It is thus necessary to examine the factors that cause occupational stress among teaching personnel and have a comparison of these factors as they feature in government owned and privately owned tertiary institutions. This study will help in heralding a qualitative entrance into the teaching job and also assists in necessary policy formulations cum implementation and thus, help in taking our educational system to an enviable height.

Review of literature

Stress is a complex human problem that has engaged the attention and study of people from the dawn of history. All through history, psychologists, clergymen,
psychiatrists, orthodox and traditional medical practitioners, welfare officials, army commanders and many other people who have interest in human affairs have focused their research attention to what stress involves and how to deal with it. It is interesting to observe that evidence of stress is widespread among military personnel, bank managers, teachers, traders, transporters, government officials and students. Students’ stress, for instance, increases as the period of going through the rigours of project work with class work, or the fear of joining the long queue of the unemployed at the end of their various courses of discipline. Arikewuyo (2004) considers stress as any influence which disturbs the natural equilibrium of the body which includes physical injury, deprivation and all kinds of diseases and emotional disturbances. Cole’s idea (1996) finds agreement with Arikewuyo when he defines stress as the adverse psychological and physical reactions that occur in individuals as a result of their being unable to cope with demands being made on them.

This is why Oguntimehin (2006) opines that stress is the resultant effect of a person being pushed beyond the limit of his or her natural capacity and that even after the cause is removed; the person does not return to his/her previous state. Symonds (1947) when discussing psychological disorder in RAF, views stress as that which happens in him. With Hooke’s law of elasticity, he explains it in a clearer form. This law states that if any strain produced by a given stress should fall within the elastic limit of a material, when the stress is removed, the material will return to its original condition. This is to say that as physical systems have an elastic limit so also people have in-built resistance to stress to a certain limit, but when it becomes unbearable, physiological, psychological and sociological problems may arise.

**Causes of stress**

What brings about stress varies from individual to individual. In order to be stressful, the event must be accompanied by some barriers or stumbling block. The barrier may be real or imagined and may take the form of frustration, threat or conflict. Most common causes of stress include: Life events or changes, frustration, minor annoyance, chronic discomfort, threat and general conflict. Other factors which could cause stress, according to Oguntimehin, are: Conflict of interests, lack of job satisfaction, system demands, unrealistic desire for achievement, inadequate teaching resources, delay in promotion, non-availability of teaching-learning material, overcrowding, non-commensuration of salary with the teaching tasks, Unwholesome attitude of the public towards teachers etc.

**Effects of occupational stress in educational system**

Adepoju (2001) identified the under listed as the effects of occupational stress in educational system:

**Physical disposition**

Stress which persists in individual bodies tends to have a substantial negative influence on physical health or disposition of the teacher.

**Psychological disposition**

Job stress has impact on mental alertness of individuals. In this respect, it increases peoples’ anxiety, frustration, passivity and aggression as well as depression and suicide.

**Decision making**

To a large extent, job stress impedes effective decision making in schools because when those saddled with the responsibility of making decisions are stressed up, there is likelihood of procrastination and avoidance of making decisions, because of lack of concentration.

**Behavioural disposition**

Changes in behaviour such as loss of appetite, increased alcohol consumption, smoking, sleeplessness, aggression etc.

**Performance level**

Increased turn-over and absenteeism, leading to poor or reduction in performance and productivity.

**Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were drawn for the study:

1. Ho: There is no significant difference in workload of teaching personnel in public universities and private universities.
2. Ho: There is no significant difference in job security of teaching personnel in public universities and private universities.
3. Ho: There is no significant difference in the working environment in public universities and private universities.
4. Ho: There is no significant difference in the remuneration and other motivational incentives given to teaching personnel in public universities and private universities.
5. Ho: There is no significant difference in the leadership roles put in place in public universities and private universities.
The study was carried out among instructors in the Universities enlisted under sampling technique; the method of distribution was purposive.

Research questions

1. Is workload an important variable in teachers’ efficiency in the Universities? Is job security a factor to be considered in efficiency of University teachers? Will teachers’ working environment constitute any hindrance to efficiency? Does remuneration affect the level of efficiency in University teaching?

2. Ho: There is no significant difference in workload of teaching personnel in public universities and private universities. The t-value (3.98) is significant at 0.05 (P < 0.05). This means that there is a significant difference in the workload of private and public universities’ teachers.

3. Ho: There is no significant difference in job security of teaching personnel in public universities and private universities. The t-value (3.635) is significant at 0.05 (P < 0.05). This implies that there is a significant difference in the job security between private and public universities’ teachers.

4. Ho: There is no significant difference in the provision of educational resources between private and public universities. The t-value (10.749) is significant at 0.05 (P < 0.05). This means that there is a significant difference in the provision of educational resources between private and public universities.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from this study reflect that the workload of teachers in private universities is different from their counterparts in public universities. The workload and job responsibilities given to teachers in private universities outweigh what their colleagues in public universities face on daily basis. Such situation ought to create more tension in the former than the latter; but other variables (like good motivation) tend to cushion the weight of associated-stress on the teachers.

Secondly, the researchers found that there was a difference in the working environment of teachers in private universities and teachers in public universities. The environment (classrooms, staff offices and the entire surroundings) of private universities’ teachers was found to be more conducive for teaching-learning interactions. This was complemented with zero-tolerance for distractions from cultic activities, students’ unrest, strike actions or boycotts and other related variances. These variances were, however, found to be heavily present in the public universities. Findings showed that teachers in public universities did not enjoy conducive working environment when compared with their counterparts.
Thirdly, it was found out that there was difference in the job security in both universities. Teachers in public universities were found to enjoy more job security and stability than private universities' teachers. This is not surprising given the fact that most private organizations are owned by one or two or few individuals who could hire and fire at will, due to the number of employees, and more importantly, due to the fact that labour unions are tactically frowned at in such organizations. Hence, employees in such set-up are solely at the mercy of their employers.

Fourthly, there was a significant difference in the remuneration given to teachers in public universities and private universities. Teachers in the latter found their salaries and other benefits compensatory for their efforts into the system. Teachers in the former, on the other hand, found their salaries non-commensurate with their inputs; a situation which made some to remark that they would leave the teaching job as soon as they had better alternatives. This shows how dedicated/committed such teachers would be on the job.

Moreover, it was gathered that educational resources like modern libraries with recent books and journal articles; educational technologies; international network services and class-instructional materials were provided in private universities. These provisions helped the teachers to enjoy their jobs with much ease/convenience, and the students in turn, assimilated and learnt faster. Thus, speeding up the teaching-learning processes. In the public universities, on the other hand, such educational resources were unavailable, and when they were, they were grossly inadequate. This made the job boring, leaving the students victims of circumstances.

Generally, findings from the study showed that teachers in private universities were less prone to stress than teachers in public universities. Although the findings reflect that the private teachers were saddled with more workloads and lesser job security, they however had better working environment; better remuneration and provision of educational resources as compensation for the imbalance. The teachers in public universities had job security and lesser workloads compared with their counterparts, but these were not appreciated given the kind of remuneration, bad/unconducive working environment and lack of educational resources in the public universities. This situation, however, makes the public universities less desirable to work in when compared with the private set-up. This means that people are more concerned with their pockets and their working environment. If these are provided, people may care less about the burden of job put on them. At least, this might be a fairer option. It is, however, imperative to make sure that teachers’ interests (at both levels) are preserved so that the set goals and objectives of education could be achieved. This should be done because stressful working conditions of teachers no doubt contribute seriously to the falling standards of education. If necessary steps are taken, the standard of education is bound to improve and there will be a better performance on the part of the teachers, and better academic achievement on the part of the students.

**Implications of the findings**

The implications of this study include the following: The problem of inefficiency and non-productivity may persist if teachers continually face stress arising from ill motivation. The public universities may be less desirable to work in given the nature of remuneration, availability of educational resources and the nature of the working environment in comparison with private establishments. Outputs from public universities will be worse off than the private universities'. This is commonsensical given the fact that the public teachers who face more stress may not contribute what it takes to churn out intellectual giants, thus giving chances for their counterparts in private universities to be better off. Such a situation would definitely result in some imbalances, which may have great consequential implications on the system, and on the society. Many professionals and well-experienced teachers (especially in the public universities) may decide to leave the profession for other carriers where there are less stress; and this of course could lead to a continuous fall in standards. To guard against such situations, stress must be sufficiently managed in the universities.

**Implications for the policy**

What the findings from this study portend for the policy is not far-fetched. The pointers are that the major variables which cause stress in teachers (e.g. motivation, training, etc) have only been given mouthed considerations in the policy. For practical instantiations, the variables are laterally pinpointed below as reflected in the policy –

**Motivation**

Motivation could be defined or expressed in terms of tentative processes geared towards arousing peoples' enthusiasm, skills and abilities in a conscious plan to match some set organizational goals/objectives with peoples' needs. It could be conveniently said that the policy makers realized the relationship between teachers' motivation and their efficiency, a reason why the first goal of Teacher Education in the policy was to – "produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system" (NPE: Section 8, Subsection 71a). Note here that motivation preceded efficiency; it is only a motivated teacher that could emerge as an efficient or conscientious worker. This means that if what is on display in our educational
system is inefficiency, the reason is simply because teachers are poorly motivated, and this means that this section of the policy had not been fully implemented. The policy does not even state the modalities for the realization of this important goal of teacher education. All it did was to state a goal, not how to achieve it.

Training

Training is a form of education or instruction given to people to get them well tutored on their choice of occupation. It is an important variable in job efficiency and productivity. It equally minimizes wastes and frivolities, thus reducing stress tendencies to some level. The educational policy realized the import training has on teachers’ efficiency and that was why it stated that “all teachers in tertiary institutions shall be required to undergo training in methods and techniques of teaching” (Section 8, subsection 61). To demonstrate its seriousness in words, it further re-echoed in the same section, subsection 71 that “all teachers in educational institutions shall be professionally trained. Teacher education programmes shall be structured to equip teachers for the effective performance of their duties” (underlined for emphasis). Hitherto, the policy had stated in the same section, that training and re-training of teachers shall be pursued through “access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF)” (Subsection 60f). It could be interesting finding out how many of such funds are made available to teachers/teachers-in-training. Agonies of teachers/students-teachers who wish to engage in further training but are incapacitated for lack of fund and permission, rent the air. If the government realizes the role training and re-training bear on teachers’ efficiency, then practical steps should be taken towards making training funds provided and readily available.

Promotion

Promotion is another factor in stress management. If teachers are well and deservedly/duly promoted, encouragement will set in and job stress thus reduced. What the policy makers/implementers need is to make sure they are alive to the policy statement that “promotion opportunity shall be created to allow for professional growth at each level” (Section 8, Subsection 76). This could be done through sensitizing the Nigerian Universities Commission to her duty of constant monitoring of each university in the country, ensuring that no teacher is unduly denied of deserved promotion, amidst other things; after all, the “success of any system of education is hinged on proper planning, efficient administration.” (Section 12, subsection 103).

It could be said with stout confidence, then, that if the stress variables identified in this research are given spirited attention in policy implementation, it would naturally be easy to achieve the goals of tertiary education, especially in the public universities. These goals are laudable and worth realizing. They are: (a) To contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training; (b) To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society; (c) To develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments; (d) To acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society; (e) To promote and encourage scholarship and community service; (f) To forge and cement national unity; and (g) To promote national unity and international understanding and interaction. (NPE: 30)

REFERENCES
