



Influence of combined programmes on the stress level of academic staff of University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated influence of combined programmes on the stress level of academic staff of University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Ex-post facto research design was used in this study. A sample size of 161 academic staff from the Faculty of Education University of Port Harcourt was used. Two research questions and hypotheses were answered and tested respectively. The instrument used for data collection is titled: Stress Index Scale (SIS) developed by the researcher. The SIS was composed of two sections. Section A elicited data on gender and rank of academic staff while section B comprised of 20 items relating to the stress level of academic staff. The reliability coefficient of 0.74 was established using Cronbach alpha. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested with t-test of independence at 0.05 Alpha levels. The result of the study showed that there was significant influence of combined programmes on the stress level of male and female lecturers, junior and senior lecturers. It was recommended that social support at the home front should be provided to female lecturers. Again, the University authority should consider reverting these two programmes to the original pattern to enable the lecturers have a more convenient work schedule.

Keywords: combined programmes, stress, academic staff

Introduction

University education is of great essence to all individuals. It is a very vital tool that is used in the contemporary world to succeed. It is used to mitigate most of the life challenges. It makes us strong mentally, socially, intellectually by increasing our knowledge level and technical skills. Highly educated people become responsible for a better future and development of a country. According to Egbule and Benson (2017) [6], education is the greatest enterprise man has ever invested, not only to solve his immediate problems but also a powerful weapon for leaping into the unknown. Nowadays, there are many ways to enhance the education level. People can study through the regular or distance learning programme. The faculty of education runs programmes ranging from certificate programme, regular first degree programme, sandwich or Post NCE programme, post graduate diploma in education program, full time post graduate programme to sandwich post graduate programme. The academic staffs are involved in these programmes which have specific periods and modus operandi. The full time students are expected to finish their programmes before the Post NCE or sandwich students resume. However, to the surprise of the researcher, these two programmes have been running concurrently for the past five years with the same lecturers moving from one campus and learning centre to the other to carry out their teaching functions.

The sandwich programme is a Non-NUC programme of study conducted outside the regular system of study by institutions of higher learning. This programme usually takes place

during the secondary and primary schools long vacation. In Nigeria, students on sandwich programme are not full-time students of their respective universities because majority of the participants are employees in various ministries and private sectors (Ogunsanmi, 2016) [16].

Most of the participants in this programme are teachers who wish to upgrade their academic qualification from the National Certificate of Education (NCE) to Bachelor Degree in Education (B.Ed) or from B.Ed to Master Degree in Education (M.Ed). The programme is designed to make students stay in school for at least three months within which they are taught and examined.

Stress is an imbalance between the demands of a situation and the resources available to deal with these demands (Oyekola, 2016) [18]. He opined that this traditional definition seems to have found a consensus of support because it recognizes that stress emerges from the relationship between the person and the environment and it focuses on the process between the two. Once an individual is not able to handle the demands of a situation or circumstance, stress ensues. According to Kazmi, Anjad and Khan in Oyekola (2016) [18], stress is defined as the psychological and physical strain that results when the resources of the individual are not sufficient to cope with the demands and pressures of the situation. Stress can be positive or negative. Stress is positive when the situation gives an individual an opportunity to gain something. It could act as a motivation to make a person aim for peak performance. Stress can also be negative when a person faces some challenges be it social, physical, organizational and emotional.

Among the causes of stress is occupational demands, work overload, poor working conditions, organizational changes etc. combining full time programmes for certificate, first degree, post graduate with the sandwich programme for post NCE and post graduate is a huge work overload capable of arousing stress among the academic staff. Studies have shown that the experiences of stress increase negative evaluations and decrease positive evaluations. It has significant negative influence on the psychological wellbeing, affects various aspects of human functioning; it may directly cause physical illness through changes in autonomic nervous functioning (Kiecolt-Glaser, McGuire, Robles and Glaser, 2002) ^[10]. However, social perspective of stress response have noted that different people experiencing similar life condition are not necessarily affected in the same manner.

A review of literature shows that stress and gender are related (Safaria, Othman and Wahab, 2012) ^[20]. While some studies found significant relationship between stress and gender, others however failed to establish any relationship between them. For instance, studies by Boyd and Wylie (1994) ^[4], and Okebukola and Jegede (1989) ^[15] found that female lecturers experienced more stress on the job than their male counterparts. In contrast, Borg and Riding (1991), Aftab and Khatoon (2012) ^[1] found that male teachers reported more stress than their female counterparts. Mondal, Shrestha and Bhaila (2011) ^[12] found that male academics experience more psychological and physical stress than their female counterparts. However, Ofoegbu and Nwadiani (2006) ^[14] found no significant difference in the level of stress experienced by both male and female lecturers. Igho (1996) ^[8] asserted from his research that variables like sex, age, etc. are not important determinants in differences among his subjects in terms of the assessment of stress. Ikeme (1988) ^[9] and Ahanonu (1998) ^[2] findings lend credence to Igho's conclusion. They found that both male and female workers experienced the same degree of job-related stress. Uzoeshi and Stanford (2001) ^[22] equally found that both male and female nurses perceived the same level of stress.

In a study carried out to investigate the level of stress in selected universities in the Southern part of Nigeria, Omoniyi and Ogunsanmi (2012) ^[17] found the level of stress between married and single lecturers do differ significantly; with lecturers that are single experiencing more stress than their married counterparts. Van Zyl and Pietersen (1999) ^[23] posit that married female academics are more likely to report more stress due to the fact that they have to perform the dual roles of both a professional career woman and that of a supportive house wife simultaneously. Ofoegbu and Nwadiani (2006) ^[14] however found no significant difference in the level of stress between married and single academics in public universities in Nigeria. Furthermore, Dua (1994) ^[5] posited that older academics would likely experience less stress as compared to the younger ones due to the fact that they might consider themselves to have reached the pinnacle of their career. This belief might tempt them to believe that there is very little or nothing left to achieve in the system. However, Paulse (2004) ^[19] found that younger academics would experience less stress than their older ones due to the absent of family responsibilities. Study by Sager (1990) ^[21] found that the ability to cope with stress would increase with age. This

finding is consistent with Akbar and Akter (2011) ^[3] who found that as the age of an academic staff increases, he or she tends to experience less stress. This is consistent with Theorell and Karasek (1996) who found a positive relationship between the ages of university teachers and their level of stress.

Studies revealed that conflicting findings exist on stress between younger and older academics of universities. While some studies found that younger academics experience more stress than their older counterparts and vice versa; others however failed to establish any relationship in the level of stress between younger and older university academics (Dua, 1994; Paulse, 2004). ^{[5][19]} In justifying why younger academics might experience more stress than their older counterparts, Ofoegbu and Nwadiani (2006) ^[14] stated that the younger ones might experience high level of stress as they try to adjust to the academic environment. This is in contrast to their older colleagues who might have fully adapted to the system over the years. Furthermore, Dua (1994) ^[5] posited that older academics would likely experience less stress as compared to the younger ones due to the fact that they might consider themselves to have reached the pinnacle of their career. This belief might tempt them to believe that there is very little or nothing left to achieve in the system.

Studies show that teaching experience may contribute significantly to the level of stress among academic staff in universities. In particular, empirical evidence seems to suggest that academic staff with less teaching experience would report more stress than those with more teaching experience (Ofoegbu & Nwadiani, 2006; Okebukola & Jegede, 1989; Winefield & Jarret, 2001). ^{[14][15][24]} Ofoegbu and Nwadiani (2006) ^[14] further explained that lecturers with more teaching experience might have adapted to the system over time which might explain why they tend to experience less stress as compared to the younger ones who are relatively new in the system. Moreover, academics with more teaching experience might have reached the pinnacle of their career (Dua, 1994) ^[5]. In contrary, study by Hanif (2004) ^[7] found that academics with more teaching experience would report more stress than those with less teaching experience.

Academic rank has been found to be a key factor that mediates the experience of stress in university academics. Study by Dua (1994) ^[5] found that individuals employed at higher ranks are likely to be less susceptible to the experience of stress than those employed at lower job ranks. Several reasons could account for less stress among individuals with higher job ranks than those with lower job ranks. Safaria *et al.* (2012) ^[20] pointed out that employees who feel poorly remunerated (which may be due to their job rank in the organization) were likely to be more prone to work stress. Turning to the university environment, academics with higher academic ranks are more likely to experience less job pressure as well as work-related stress than those with lower academic ranks. The reason being that academics with higher rank may leverage on the power their position bestows on them by delegating responsibilities (i.e. course advising, invigilating of examinations, marking of examination scripts and undergraduate project supervisions) they perceived to be tedious to junior colleagues. In support of this, Kirkcaldy and Furnham (1999) ^[11] found that as employees progress toward higher job ranks, they tend to resort to delegating

responsibilities among their subordinates in order to cope with work-related stress.

Since, the inception of this new pattern of running these programmes, the researcher has not seen any work that investigated these variables. It is in the vein that the she intends to study the influence of combined programmes on the stress level of academic staff of the University of Port Harcourt: Implications for counselling.

Scope of the study

This study is delimited to the University of Port Harcourt since it seems to be the only university that operates this kind of calendar arrangement. The dependent variable is stress level while the independent variables are gender and rank.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to find out the influence of combined programmes on the stress level of academic staff in University of Port Harcourt. Specifically, it intends to:

1. Examine the influence of combined programmes (full time and Sandwich) on stress level of male and female lecturers in University of Port Harcourt.
2. Ascertain the influence of combined programmes (full time and Sandwich) on the stress level of senior and junior lecturers in University of Port Harcourt.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do combined programmes (full time and sandwich) influence the stress level of male and female lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt.
2. To what extent do combined programmes (full time and sandwich) influence the stress level of senior and junior lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level.

1. There is no significant influence of combined programmes on the stress level of male and female lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt.
2. There is no significant influence of combined programmes on the stress level of senior and junior

Lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt.

Methodology

The study adopted an ex post facto design. According to Nwankwo (2016, p. 79-80) [13], ‘ex-post facto design involves collecting and analyzing data about some variables retrospectively or about variables which are already in place without manipulating any of them, in order to find out how some of them influence or are related to other variables’. The present study is an ex-post facto design because the researcher investigated the influence of combined programmes on the stress level of academic staff without manipulating them. The population consisted of all the academic staff from the Faculty of Education which is the only Faculty that runs the sandwich programme. A total number of 161 academic staff was selected for the study through purposive sampling technique. A self-designed questionnaire tagged: “Stress Index Scale” (SIS) was used to generate responses. The SIS is made up of two sections, A and B. Section A which is the bio-data, elicited information on gender and rank of academic staff. Section B comprised of 20 items, which generated responses on the stress level of academic staff. The instrument was validated by three experts in the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling. The reliability coefficient of 0.74 was gotten through Cronbach Alpha. All copies of the questionnaire were responded to and returned giving a 100% return rate. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while independent t-test was used to test the hypotheses. All data were subjected to analysis by Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does combined programmes (full-time and sandwich) influence the stress level of male and female lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt?

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant influence of combined programmes (full-time and sandwich) on the stress level of male and female lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt.

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation and t-test analysis of influence of combined programme (full-time and sandwich) on the stress level of male and female lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt

Gender	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	Cal-t	Crit-t	Remark
Male Lecturers	92	5.98	1.24	159	9.227	1.960	Sig.
Female Lecturers	69	9.93	3.39				

Table 1 shows that the stress level of female lecturers (9.93) is found to be higher than that of the male lecturers (5.98) of the University of Port Harcourt. More so, the result shows that the calculated t-value of 9.227 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 level of probability. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is retained. This implies that there is significant influence of combined programmes (full-time and sandwich) on the stress level of male and female lecturers of University of Port

Harcourt.

Research Question 2: To what extent does combined programmes (full-time and sandwich) influence the stress level of senior and junior lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt?

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant influence of combined programmes (full-time and sandwich) on the stress level of senior and junior lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt.

Table 2: Mean, standard deviation and t-test analysis of influence of combined programme (full-time and sandwich) on the stress level of senior and junior lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt

Rank	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	Cal-t	Crit-t	Remark
Senior	91	2.99	1.18	159	13.826	1.960	Sig.
Junior	70	7.63	2.61				

Table 2 shows that the stress level of junior lecturers (7.63) is found to be higher than the stress level of senior lecturers (2.99) of the University of Port Harcourt. The result further shows that the calculated t-value of 13.826 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 level of probability. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is retained. This implies that there is significant influence of combined programmes (full-time and sandwich) on the stress level of male and female lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt.

Discussion of findings

Analysis of data on hypothesis one revealed that the calculated t-value was found to be less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 level of probability. Hence, null hypothesis one was rejected while the alternative hypothesis was retained. This implies that there is significant influence of combined programmes (full-time and sandwich) on the stress level of male and female lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt. It was further revealed that the stress level of female lecturers was rated higher than that of their male counterparts. This finding is much expected considering the dual role played by female lecturers, first as wives/mothers, and second as academic staff with enormous tasks of teaching, marking, supervision, etc. This may have influenced the outcome of this study. This present finding agrees with the findings of Boyd and Wylie (1994)^[4], and Okebukola and Jegede (1989)^[15], but contradicts the findings of Ikeme (1988)^[9] and Ahanonu (1998)^[2].

More so, independent t-test analysis of data on hypothesis two showed that the calculated t-value was found to be less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 level of probability. Hence, null hypothesis two was rejected while the alternative hypothesis was retained. This implies that there is significant influence of combined programmes (full-time and sandwich) on the stress level of male and female lecturers of University of Port Harcourt. Result further indicated that the stress level of junior lecturers was found to be higher than the stress level of senior lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt. The fact that senior lecturers delegate some of their responsibilities to the junior lecturers may be responsible for this present finding. There is every tendency that the stress level of junior lecturers will increase if they are delegated by the senior lecturers to perform some of their official responsibilities on their behalf. This present finding lends credence to Kirkcaldy and Furnham (1999)^[11], and Dua (1994)^[5].

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. There is need for social support at the home front to enable the female lectures cope with their academic

workload at the period of this combined programme.

2. Female lecturers should be encouraged by their male counterpart, they should lend a helping hand to them, if they are paired to teach any course.
3. There is need to create awareness of stress among the teaching staff and encourage them to seek for counselling.
4. Finally, the university authority should consider reverting these two programmes to the original pattern to enable the lecturers have a more convenient work schedule.

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