



Effect of stress on the performance of university academic staff

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Abstract

Stress has become a pervasive trend among academic staff of universities in Nigeria which emanates from excessive workload and pressure. This has led to the deteriorating level of performance among academic staff in the area of teaching, research, and community service. Thus, drawing from person-environment fit theory, this study investigated the effect of job stress on the performance of university academic staff in Kaduna State University. Survey research design was adopted for the study. A sample of 321 academic staff were drawn using Stratified sampling technique from which data were collected through questionnaire. The hypothesis developed for the study was tested using Simple linear regression and Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22 was used for the analysis. The result of the study revealed that stress has a negative significant effect on the performance of academic staff in Kaduna State University. Consequently, the study recommends that university management should find a way of minimizing the occurrence of stress among academic staff in order to solve the problem of declining performance. The study therefore concludes that academic staff are excessively suffering from job stress which negatively affects their performance.

Keywords: Stress, Academic Staff, Performance, Kaduna State University, Teaching, Research, Community service.

Introduction

In recent times, academic staff performance has captured the attention of business researchers, practitioners, scholars as well as

governments across the globe. This is because increased level of academic staff performance is key to ensuring the achievement of the objectives of tertiary institutions. Hence,

academic staff are considered as the most valuable asset in the university. Generally, academic staff performance is seen as the extent to which academic staff effectively discharge their responsibilities of teaching, research, and community service which are considered as their key performance indicators (KPI). However, the performance of academic staff in relation to teaching, research, and community service has been deteriorating due to many factors. One of the most significant predictors of declining performance among academic staff is constant exposure to stress (Wijesooriya, 2023).

Stress is defined by Kazmi et al (2018) as adverse psychological and physical reactions that occur among employees due to their inability to accommodate the demands shouldered on them. Thus, it is the perception of discrepancy between environmental demands and the capacity of an individual to fill these demands (Adebayo, 2022). There have been evidences showing that stress among academic staff of universities is a global phenomenon. For instance, in Australia, 40% of academic staff described their job as stressful as it impairs their level of concentrations, causes sleeplessness, increases risk of illness, and accidents which in turn reduces their level of efficiency and effectiveness (Sonna & Nkechi, 2021). Stress has also been found among academic staff in China (Yang et al, 2021), Malaysia, (Manaf, et al, 2021), United Kingdom, (Wray & Kinman, 2022), Indonesia, (Lestari & Riskiyah, 2021), Egypt (Gabr, Soliman, Allam, & Raouf), and Ghana, (Kodua-Ntim, Akussah, & Adjei, 2021), among others.

In the context of academia in Nigeria, evidences have shown that academic staff are extremely suffering from stress as they work under pressure. For instance, ASUU stated that the union received reports of the increasing number of Nigerian academics that have died or are currently struggling life-threatening ailments due to work-related stress (Suleiman, 2024).

Aminullah and Olojuola (2021) also stressed that Nigerian university academic staff are suffering from high academic workloads including tension while invigilating students as a result of poor accommodation, teaching very large classes, producing students' result within short time, attending to regular meetings, supervising students within limited time, attending to defense, seminars, workshops, continuous writing for publishing among others. Additionally, irregular or partial payment of salaries, inadequate or unavailable resources like conducive classrooms, laboratories, libraries, offices, among others are also identified as unfavorable conditions that make academic staff develop stress (Akah et al, 2022). Specifically, academic staff in Kaduna State University, Kaduna (KASU) suffer from chronic stress as a result of excessive workload such as teaching many classes (diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate), supervising many undergraduate and postgraduate students, invigilating students under tension, irregular payments of salaries, allowances, arrears, among others.

Consequently, Adebayo (2022) observed that academic staff constant exposure to stress lead to unusual or deviant behaviour at work and contributes to poor mental and physical

health, while long term exposure to stress leads to the extreme case of psychological problems. Thus, some of the negative consequences of stress include absenteeism, decreasing commitment, increasing staff turnover, reduced performance, increasing complaints from students, increase in level of mistakes, among others which damage the image of the university. Other negative consequences emanating from stress include poor productivity, poor health, increase in the rate of absenteeism, aggression, among others (Akah et al, 2022). Hence, it is imperative to determine the nexus between stress and the performance of academic staff so that intervention strategies would be identified in order to reverse the trend of declining academic staff performance.

Despite the efforts of past studies on the link between stress and performance across various industries, most of these studies hold unto the multi-dimensional perspective of stress. Thus, focusing on the multi-dimensional perspective of stress may not give a clear focus on the core effect of the construct on performance. Thus, this study fills this identified gap by using the uni-dimensional perspective of stress in relations to performance. The uni-dimensional perspective will allow for parsimony, clarity in measurement, and ensures focus on the core effects of the construct on performance. Hence, the current study seeks to determine the effect of stress on the academic staff level of performance in KASU. The study will provide significant contribution to the management of universities and the National University Commission (NUC) on how best to implement strategies aimed at minimizing stress among academic staff of universities.

Literature Review

Concept of Stress

The origin of stress is from the context of biology which was employed in the 1930s by Hans Selye who was an endocrinologist. Thus, the concept of stress has been viewed by different scholars who see the concept according to their individual understanding. For instance, Leka et al (2015) defined stress as harm that can be physical and emotional which occurs when demands of the job exceed the capabilities of the workers, their resources or their need. As put by Michie (2015), stress was seen as a pressure that oozes from the environment but it was seen later as strain from the individual. In the opinion of Bennett (1994), stress is the aggregate of symptoms (physical and psychological) that emanates from difficulties suffered or experienced by a person when making an attempt to adapt to an environment. From the foregoing, Daniel (2019) noted that when the situation of the environment presents a demand that threatens to exceed the capabilities and resources of a person, the potential for stress exists. Thus, the university environment has become a very stressful place where academic staff suffer from high demands such as teaching loads, excessive paper works, research, publication, pressure, and increased work demands (Amir, 2020).

However, in this study, we defined stress as an academic staff physical and emotional harm that emanates from the inability to cope with demands of the work situation. Therefore, stress emanates from misfit between the demands of the work and the capabilities or needs of the academic staff.

Concept of Performance

Employee performance is critical for organizations because it provides information on whether or not their employees are progressing or regressing, in terms of their contributions to overall organizational objectives. It therefore denotes the accomplishment of individuals in their work roles, reflecting the effort they invest to acquire meaningful tasks, engage with their responsibilities, and collaborate with supportive colleagues or employers (Donohoe, 2019). As Hamzah and Matkhairuddin (2023) put, employee performance is a reflection of how effectively workers carry out their designated job duties. In the university context, academic staff performance is vital for the achievement of the goals of tertiary education. The performance of academic staff is assessed through their capacity to effectively discharge their responsibilities in form of teaching, research, and community service. As Ogunode et al, (2020) put, academic staff's primary duties include teaching at different levels, conducting research, engaging with scholarly communities, supervising students, and contributing to curriculum development. Their responsibilities in teaching includes delivering lectures, supervising projects, and evaluating assessments. In research, they conduct investigations, present findings, and publish results, contributing to academic discourse. And lastly in relations to community service, they engage in leadership roles, committee memberships, and advisory positions across various domains. Therefore, members of the academic staff are indispensable figures in the achievement of the objectives of the university as they oversee

teaching, research, and other academic functions.

However, in this study, academic staff performance is seen as the capacity of academic staff to effectively discharge their teaching responsibilities, research, and community service.

Empirical Review

Several empirical studies were carried out aimed at determining the nexus between stress and performance. For instance, Oyewole and Agbesanya (2024) conducted a correlational study on job stress and the performance of academic staff in South West Nigerian Colleges of Education. The population of the study comprised of 600 academic staff and 60 HODs. A significant relationship was established between stress and performance in the study. The in-built weakness of the study is that purposive sampling design was used in the third stage of the sampling which make the study not free from bias.

Oladimeji, Odefunsho, Akaje (2023) used NECO, Illorin, Kwara state to investigate the link between job stress and staff performance. A total of 96 staff were the population of the study and the census design was adopted. The study established a significant relationship between stress and performance, the strategies for managing stress and performance was as well found to be significant. However, the weakness of this study is that the population is small and NECO is not the right context for the study.

Adebayo (2022) investigated the nexus between work-induced stress and performance among the lecturers of the University of Illorin. 115 academic staff of

University of Illorin constituted the sample for the study from which data were collected. The findings revealed that role ambiguity, extension in the hours of work, and working conditions have a significant relationship with performance but insignificant relationship between excess workload and performance. The loophole of this study is that only academic staff from three faculties of the university were used. Thus, the sample size is small which may affect the result of the study. Akah et al (2022) used two public universities in Calabar Metropolis to study the link between occupational stress and the performance of lecturers. Faculty of Education of the university was used and 150 sample of academic staff were drawn through systematic sampling design. The study findings revealed that remuneration has significant effect, workload was insignificant, and provision of institutional amenities has also an insignificant effect on academic staff performance.

Similarly, Sonna and Nkechi (2021) examined the link between stress on the performance of lecturers Federal Universities of the Southern region in Nigeria. The sample of the study constitute lecturers who were 324 in the 5 federal universities in the region. The findings revealed that management support positively affects student-lecturer relationships, work-home interface affects lecture's organizing skills, and lecturers work knowledge is not affected by work overload. The weakness of the study is that it suffers from lack of focus on the key KPIs of academic staff performance in universities. Abraham and Olumide (2019) used public universities in Ogun state to examine the nexus between job stress and job performance

among lecturers. Descriptive design was utilized for the study and 300 academic staff were selected as sample for the study. It was established in the study that stress has a significant effect on academic staff performance. The weakness of the study is that it used a self-designed instrument for the study which may not be a valid measure. Hence, the findings of the study may be misleading.

In another empirical effort, Yousefi and Abdullah (2019) examined the effect of organizational stressors on academic staff performance. 209 lecturers of the university were sampled and data were collected from them. Analysis was done using PLS-SEM. The study revealed that role ambiguity as well as role conflict negatively affect academic performance staff while workload was found to be insignificant.

Underpinning Theory

Person-Environment Fit Theory

The current study is based on the platform of the Person-Environment Fit Theory (P-E Fit) which adequately explains the nexus between stress and performance. This theory was championed by French and colleagues (1974). As Cooman and Vleugels (2022) put, P-E Fit is defined as the compatibility that occurs when there is match between the characteristics of the work and the environment upon which the employees work. Thus, person's motivation, behaviour, as well as their physical health is largely affected by the fit between the person and the environment. Cooman and Vleugels (2022) also added that a suitable match between a person and the environment ensures or

facilitate effective functioning with the environment, however, where there is misfit, a person may be exposed to maladjustment which then leads to tension on the side of the person as well as the environment. For instance, in the side of the person, it leads to stress and dissatisfaction while it creates tension like absenteeism and reduced performance on the side of the environment.

According to the theory, stress emanates when there is lack of harmony between the ability, skills, resources of the individual and the demands of the environment (Kinuthia, Wambua, & Kiiru, 2022). Thus, the mismatch between demands and the abilities of individual's leads to defense and coping mechanisms which in turn affects the objective and subjective representations of the environment (Edwards, Caplan, & Harrison, 1998). Basically, the misfit according to Coopman and Vleugels (2022) takes 3 forms. The first form is when the environmental demands exceed one's abilities. Secondly, where the environment consistently fails to satisfy the needs of the worker. Lastly, is the combination of the two.

In the context of this study, it can be deduced that mismatch exists between the demands shouldered on academic staff and their abilities to respond. Thus, university system in Nigeria places high demands on academic staff such as teaching loads, excessive paper works, research, publication, pressure, and increased work demands (Goga, Bashir, & Aliyu, 2023). The stressful nature of the academic environment has also been reaffirmed by the Academic Staff Union of Universities [ASUU], where it appeals to the Federal Government to hire more academic

staff because of the rise in the number of deaths among lecturers in the public institutions due to excessive academic work and urges institutions to constantly ascertain the health conditions of their staff (Atoyebi, 2018). Similarly, the National Universities Commission (NUC) in its latest bulletin disclosed that one hundred thousand academic staff are attending to 2.1 million students in the Nigerian universities, urging the Federal Government to lift universities from the employment embargo (Sahara reporters, 2022).

This clearly shows that existing lecturers are overburdened by excessive workloads which shows misfit between the academic staff and the university working environment. Thus, excessive workload creates tension among academic staff that leads to stress and dissatisfaction which in turn leads to absenteeism and reduced performance (Cooman and Vleugels, 2022).

Methodology

The study adopts survey research design and quantitative method to investigate the effect of stress on the performance of academic staff. The population of the study comprises the academic staff of Kaduna State University, Kaduna. The total number of the staff is 933 (KASU Registry, 2024). The study utilized the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table and arrived at 269 minimum sample size. However, to minimize the rate of non-response, 40% was added (Salkind, 2007), which brings the sample size to 377. Stratified sampling design was used to distribute the questionnaire proportionately to the respondents. A total of 327 questionnaires were recovered, upon

inspection of the retrieved questionnaires, 6 were removed as most questions were found to be unengaged. Thus, 321 questionnaires were retained for further analysis.

Measurement of Variables

Academic staff performance was measured using 8 adapted items developed by Moeller (2009). The instrument is a self-report measure of academic staff performance and the items are scored on a 5 Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. To measure stress, the study used the

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) which was developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983). The scale has 14 items design to assess how individuals perceive the situation as stressful within the past month. The scale is also anchored on 5 Likert Scale as the scale for performance.

Results

Simple linear regression was used to test the hypothesis for the study which stated that: H_{01} : Stress does not have significant effect on academic staff performance in KASU

Table 1: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.637 ^a	.406	.404	.34194

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stress

The R-Squared (R^2) explains the extent to which stress explains the academic staff performance in the model. As can be seen from Table 1, the R^2 value is 0.406. This

shows that variation in academic staff performance is explained by stress by 40.6%. Thus, the remaining 59.4% may be explained by other variables not captured in the model.

Table 2: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	25.502	1	25.502	218.106	.000 ^b
	Residual	37.299	319	.117		
	Total	62.801	320			

a. Dependent Variable: AcademicStaffPerformance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Stress

The significance of the model is provided by Table 2. The table shows a P-value of 0.000 which is less than 5% significance level. This

therefore confirms that stress has a significant effect on academic staff performance.

Table 3: Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.720	.183		3.944	.000

	Stress		-.625		.042		-.637		-14.768		.000
a. Dependent Variable: Academic Staff Performance											

The result of the simple linear regression model is presented in Table 3. A null hypothesis was developed stating that stress does not have significant effect on the performance of academic staff in KASU. Hence, stress was found to have a negative significant effect on performance (β -0.625) at a P-value of 0.000 which is less than the 5% significance level. This implies that increase in stress among academic staff decreases their level of performance. Thus, this gives adequate justification to reject the null hypothesis. Additionally, beta value of -0.625 indicates that a unit increase in stress decreases academic staff performance by 62.5%.

Discussion of Findings

The growing trend of academic staff's susceptibility to stress and its attending consequences on their level of performance reinforces the need for this study. Thus, drawing from Person-Environment Fit theory, this paper examines the effect of stress on the performance of academic staff of KASU. The result revealed that stress has a negative significant effect on the performance of academic staff in KASU. This implies that constant exposure to stress by academic staff leads to decline in their performance level. The finding supports the P-E Fit theory which established that a suitable match between a person and the environment ensures or facilitate effective functioning with the environment, however, where there is misfit, a person may be exposed to maladjustment which then heralds tension on the side of the

person as well as the environment. For instance, in the side of the person, it leads to stress and dissatisfaction while it creates tension like absenteeism and reduced performance on the side of the environment (Cooman and Vleugels, 2022). Hence, stress emanates when lack of harmony exists between the ability, skills, resources of the individual, and the demands of the environment (Kinuthia, Wambua, & Kiiru, 2022).

There is no gainsaying that academic staff all over the world especially in Nigeria suffer from excessive workload (Goga et al, 2023). Additionally, the work life of academic staff in Nigerian universities has been herculean. As Obinna-Akakuru, Njoku, Agunanne, Okata, and Onwujaliri(2022) noted, academic staff in Nigeria deal with overcrowded classes, poor working conditions, outdated laboratory facilities for research, among others. This finding is in tandem with previous findings of Oyewole and Agbesanya (2024), Oladimeji, Odefunsho, Akaje (2023), Adebayo (2022), Abraham and Olumide (2019), Yousefi and Abdullah (2019), among others who also found significant effect of stress on performance. Thus, stress has become the dominant psychological problem in today's working environment like that of the academia. This leads to negative outcomes among employees like restlessness, discomfort, and unpleasantness, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, among others

Conclusion and Recommendation

The current study established a negative significant effect of stress on academic staff performance. Hence, the study concludes that stress among academic staff is prevalent and it casts negative consequences on their performance. It is as well counterproductive for academic staff productivity and must be minimized in order to achieve high level of performance. Based on the finding and conclusion, the study recommends that university management should find a way of minimizing the occurrence of stress among academic staff so that the problem of declining performance would be addressed. This can be done through hiring more academic staff to lessen workload among existing staff, provision of conducive offices and lecture halls, organizing seminars and workshops on stress management, among others.

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