

**Dimensions of Job Stress among Public Secondary
School Principals in Oyo State, Nigeria.**

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Abstract

The study examined the dimensions of job stress among public secondary school principals in Oyo State, Nigeria. It also determined difference in job stress between demographic characteristics of principals (gender and years of experience) and school variables (type of school and location of the school). Descriptive survey design was adopted. The sample was selected through cluster sampling among the 20 ANCOPSS Zones in Oyo State. 100 principals participated out of which 94 questionnaires were found to be useful. Four research hypotheses were formulated and analysed using t-test statistics. The findings of the research revealed that 6.4% of participants reported their job as either not stressful or mildly stressful. 76.6% were of the view that their job was moderately stressful or considerably stressful. 17.0% rated their job to be very stressful or extremely stressful. The results of t-test showed no significant difference in job stress between demographic characteristics and school variables of the participants. The conclusion was that principals are experiencing stress in their job in the same dimensions irrespective of any variables such as gender, years of experience, school type and location of the school.

Keywords: Job stress, principals.

Introduction

The dimensions of job stress among school administrators in Nigeria are a relevant one most especially in this era of educational reforms and accountability. There are multifarious demands placed on principals such as curriculum and instruction functions; staff personnel function; students personnel function; school-community relations;

school-business functions; etc. Fullan & Stiegelbauer (1991) felt that a principal's role is multifaceted and continually changing to include new challenges and demands that require time and precision. There is often lack of time to accomplish and balance all these functions in school. Ricciardi (2000) found that overwhelming job demands and time constraints made job adjustment difficult for new school administrators. Therefore, Fitzgerald (1996) reported that men and women in principalship position work long hours, harassed by pressures from within and without, as they attempt to manage an impossible workload.

Hence, principals are experiencing greater stress as a result of their responsibilities as well as their position at the boundary of the school where they must interact with all the stakeholders of the school. Stress generally occurs where the demands on people are greater than what they can reasonably expect to achieve. Job stress in this context refers to administrative stress by principals of unpleasant emotions such as anger, tension, frustration, depression and nervousness, resulting from their work as principals. It is a psychological and/ or physiological response to threatening or overly demanding situations. General factors that contributed to stress in principals included: human resource management, finances management, management of time, and relationships (Doring, 1993; Campbell & Williamson, 1987; Friedman, 1997). Also, Coleman & Conaway (1984) opined that school principals might experience stress due to interpersonal clashes and conflicts, excessively taxing administrative responsibilities, time constraints, and conflicting role expectations.

Stress is mathematically represented by: $demands > perceived\ resources = stress$.

Stress according to French *et al.* (1976) is referred to any characteristic of the job environment, which poses a threat to the individual, either excessive demands or insufficient supplies to meet his needs. Therefore, stress according to French and his colleagues, is externally induced. In 1976, McGrath cited by Nhundu (1999), explained the three subsystems in any organisation which constantly interact to induce stress in workers

... the physical-technical environment, which provides the context within which the worker carries his/her duties and responsibilities, has several sources of stress which include work overload, task difficulty and task ambiguity. The social-interpersonal subsystem, which defines the social framework within the focal person interacts with superiors, subordinates and peers, is characterized by role ambiguity, role conflict and role overload as potential sources of occupational stress. Finally, the person subsystem which is concerned with personality characteristics, which the worker brings to the workplace, has the potential to moderate the amount of stress a worker can experience and tolerate ... (p. 257).

Also, Cooper & Marshall (1978) argued that stress is directly related to fit between an individual's ability to cope and the conditions of the work environment in which that individual must function. There are four levels of stress. They are:

1. too little--- boredom/ apathy
2. optimum--- energy

3. too much--- fatigue
4. burnout--- exhaustion

Previous researches have been conducted on stress among school administrators. For instance, Nhundu (1999) on 95 Zimbabwean headteachers found that 29.03 percent rated their job as either very stressful or extremely stressful; Borg & Riding (1993) also found that 21.3 percent of school administrators rated their work as either very stressful or extremely stressful; Downton (1987) found 66 percent of life stress experienced by primary school heads was attributed to administrative stress; Tung & Koch (1980) found that female educational administrators experienced significantly less stress than males in the professional work areas of role-based, boundary spacing, and conflict mediating stress. He also found that 75.5 percent of job-related stress was reported by male head teachers and 56.5 percent by female head teachers. Wilson & Otto (1988) found that 36 percent of primary administrators rated their job as either very stressful or extremely stressful.

The report on stress and well being among New Zealand principals by Hodgen & Wylie (2005) showed that 40% of participants described their current stress level as high or extremely high. Their findings also revealed that stress levels were higher for principals who were women and there were no marked differences in stress levels related to school characteristics. In 1997, Allison studied 643 public school principals in British Columbia, Canada and reported that stress is a serious concern for these administrators. He also found that principals had seriously considered leaving school administration because they

felt they were under greater stress than other members of their community and they had to cope with scarce or limited resources at their schools. Jaiyeoba & Jibril (2008) conducted a study on sources of occupational stress on 421 school managers in Kano State, Nigeria and their findings showed that, administrative routine, workload, conflicting demands, and roles between work and family were the highest sources of stress. They also reported that 77.5% of the participants reported their job was stressful.

Thus, the intent of this study is to investigate the extent of job stress among public secondary school principals in Oyo State. It is also to determine difference in job stress between demographic characteristics of participants (gender and years of experience) and school variables (type of school and location of the school).

Theoretical Framework

In 1976, McGrath explained a four-stage stress research paradigm in a closed-loop process beginning with situations in the environment perceived by the individual, to which the individual selects the response, resulting in consequences for both the individual and situations, which closes the loop. Expanding on McGrath's foundation, an administrative stress cycle also has four stages. Stage I is concerned with demands, or stressors placed on administrators in the environment. These include excessive meetings, frequent interruptions, confrontations, and other environmental factors. In stage II, it consists of perceptions or interpretation of the stressors by administrators. Those who perceive demands as harmful or demanding will create stress within their lives and approach their work with intensity. The administrator's stress response is stage III of the

cycle. If they perceive the stressors to be harmful, threatening or demanding, they will respond to them physiologically or psychologically. The stage IV is the last stage of the cycle and termed consequences of the response to stress. This is associated with long-term physical, psychological and behavioural negative effects.

In 1984, Gmelch & Swent studied 1855 principals and superintendents and revealed four factors of administrative stress. They are:

1. role-based stress: is perceived from administrators' role-set interactions and beliefs or attitudes about their roles in schools.
2. task based stress: arises from the performance of day-to-day administrative activities, from telephone and staff interruptions, meetings, writing memos and reports, to participating in school activities outside normal working hours.
3. boundary-spanning stress: emanates from external conditions, such as negotiations and gaining public support from school budgets.
4. conflict-mediating stress: arises from the administrator handling conflicts within the school as trying to resolve differences between and among students, resolving parents and school conflicts, and handling student discipline problems.

The basic theoretical construct of stress underlying this research is that stress is the result of participants' interpretation of stimuli and other events in their environment. The focus of this research is on identification (stage I) and perception (stage II) of the stress event based on the four factors of administrative stress postulated by Gmelch & Swent (1984).

Hypotheses for the Study

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho₁: There will be no significant difference in the dimensions of job stress between male and female principals.

Ho₂: There will be no significant difference in the dimensions of stress between junior and senior school principals.

Ho₃: There will be no significant difference in the dimensions of job stress between principals who have 0 to 6 years and above 6 years of experience as principals.

Ho₄: There will be no significant difference in the dimensions of job stress between rural and urban school principals

Method

Sample: The study involved 100 principals from all 937 public secondary schools selected through cluster sampling from the 20 All Nigeria Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS) Zones in Oyo State.

Instrument: The instrument used was a 40-item questionnaire tagged: *Dimensions of Job Stress for Principal Questionnaire* (DJSPQ). The questionnaire was adapted from Payne & Furnham (1987) and Nhundu(1999) instruments. It was however validated by colleagues to suit the present purpose of the research work. There were two sections- Sections A and B. Section A contained the gender, school level, location of school and years of experience of principals. Section B contained instruction for the participants for the rating of the 40 items in the questionnaire. A six-point Likert-type scale (not stressful =1, mildly stressful =2, moderately stressful =3, considerably stressful =4, very stressful

=5, extremely stressful =6) was used for each item. Before administration of questionnaire, it was pilot-tested and its reliability coefficient determined via test-retest method after two weeks interval, was 0.76.

Procedure: The researcher and two other field assistants administered the questionnaire personally. 5 principals were selected from each ANCOPSS Zone. 100 copies of DJSPQ were given altogether to the participants and returned immediately after completion on the spot. The exercise lasted for a week in which the zones are divided among the three of us. The administration of questionnaire was made easy because the investigator sought the assistance of state executive members of ANCOPSS.

Data Analysis: Data collected were analysed to obtain the participants mean score (\bar{x}) and the corresponding rank for each item in the questionnaire. 94 out of the 100 returned questionnaires were found to be useful for analysis. T-test analyses were computed to determine whether gender, school level, location of school, and years of experience of principals significantly influenced the perceptions of principals concerning job stress at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

H_{01} : There will be no significant difference in the dimensions of job stress between male and female principals. To test this H_{01} , the t-test was computed and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Two-tailed t-test of Difference between Male and Female Principals in the Dimensions of Job Stress at 0.05 level of significance.*

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Degree of Freedom	Standard Error	t-cal	t-crit
Male	136.58	27.44	48	92	6.26	0.11	1.98
Female	137.26	33.10	46				

From table 1, it could be observed that the value of difference between gender of principals is very low since the t-value calculated was 0.11 which is less than the table value $0.11 < 1.98$ therefore, the H_{01} is retained.

H_{02} : There will be no significant difference in the dimensions of job stress between junior and senior school principals. To test this H_{02} , the t-test was computed and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: *Two-tailed t-test of Difference between Junior and Senior School Principals in the Dimensions of Job Stress at 0.05 level of significance.*

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Degree of Freedom	Standard Error	t-cal	t-crit
Junior	136.45	27.48	33	92	6.56	0.11	1.98
Senior	137.16	31.77	61				

From table 2, it could be observed that the value of difference between school level of principals is very low since the t-value calculated was 0.11 which is less than the table value $0.11 < 1.98$ therefore, the H_{02} is retained.

H_{03} : There will be no significant difference in the dimensions of job stress between principals who have 0 to 6 and above 6 years of experience. To test this H_{03} , the t-test was computed and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: *Two-tailed t-test of Difference Principals who have 0 to 6 and above 6 Years of Experience in the Dimensions of Job Stress at 0.05 level of significance.*

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Degree of Freedom	Standard Error	t-cal	t-crit
0 to 6 years	134.91	28.59	33	92	6.55	0.47	1.98
Above 6 years	138.00	31.18	61				

From table 3, it could be observed that the value of difference between years of experience of principals is very low since the t-value calculated was 0.47 which is less than the table value $0.47 < 1.98$ therefore, the H_{03} is retained.

H_{04} : There will be no significant difference in the dimensions of job stress between rural and urban school principals. To test this H_{04} , the t-test was computed and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: *Two-tailed t-test of Difference between Rural and Urban School Principals in the Dimensions of Job Stress at 0.05 level of significance.*

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Degree of Freedom	Standard Error	t-cal	t-crit
Rural	141.85	34.11	40	92	6.27	1.37	1.98
Urban	133.26	26.65	54				

From table 4, it could be observed that the value of difference between location of school is very low since the t-value calculated was 1.37 which is less than the table value $1.37 < 1.98$ therefore, the H_{04} is retained.

Discussion and Conclusions

The essence of this study was to find out the dimensions of job stress among public secondary school principals in Oyo State, Nigeria. Previous study conducted on 421 school managers in Kano State, Nigeria by Jaiyeoba and Jibril (2008) has focused on the sources of job stress and showed that 77.5% reported their job to be stressful. The results of this research in corroborating Jaiyeoba and Jibril (2008) revealed that there was no noticeable difference in the dimensions of job stress between the demographic characteristics of principals (gender and years of experience). Also, it was further proved that there was no significant difference in the dimensions of job stress between the school variables (type of school and location of school).

It is therefore concluded that public secondary school principals are experiencing job stress in the same dimensions. The reasons are that sources of this job stress are related to administrative routines, inability to delegate, conflicting demands from Ministry and workload. Hence, there should be training in time and stress management to all principals during induction programmes to serve as preventive measure. Since external (Ministry) locus of control contributes significantly to job stress, diminishing external and increasing internal locus of control should help alleviate job stress among principals. This is called school-based management system. Thus, a shift in the locus of control should help empower principals to create a supportive and enabling school environment, which minimizes stress and fosters collegial and supportive relationships for themselves and their teachers.

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