

Perceived Causes of Job Stress Among Special Educators in Selected Special and Integrated Schools in Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: Efficient and effective performance on any job depend largely on good psychological well being of the workers as well as other factors such as conducive environment, good interpersonal relationship, adequate communication among staff and between staff and management, work load, remuneration and other physical and psychological boosting treatments.

Aim: To examine the perceived causes of job stress among special educators in selected special and integrated schools in the West and North Central parts of Nigeria.

Sample: The sample for the study consisted of fifty (50) special education teachers from 10 special and integrated schools in two geo-political zones of the country.

Method: Surveys were conducted. Four research questions were generated and tested using descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The instrument used for data collection was the adapted Job Stress Inventory by Akinboye (1999).

Results: The results of the research questions tested revealed moderate and extreme stress pattern among special educators.

Conclusion: Based on these findings, it was suggested that there should be immediate review of condition of service, provision of adequate instructional facilities, proactive approach to service delivery, and training and retraining of special educators to meet the immediate needs and challenges of the various special needs of children in the Nigerian society.

Keywords: Job stress, Special educators, Special schools, integrated schools, Nigeria

在尼日利亞一些特殊和融合學校中特殊教育工作者 感受到工作壓力的原因

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摘要

背景: 在工作上有效率和果效的表現，主要取決於工作者的良好心理狀況及其他因素，例如有共鳴的環境、良好人際關係、職員和管理層間的充分溝通、工作負擔、報酬和其他物理及心理促進的治療。

目的: 審查在尼日利亞的西部和中北部一些特殊和融合學校中特殊教育工作者感受到工作壓力的原因。

對象: 研究的對象來自二個省中十所特殊和融合學校的五十位特殊教育老師。

方法: 從四個研究問題著手調查，使用搜集數據的工具是Akinboye(1999)的適應工作壓力問卷，用描述性統計去求得頻率、百分比和標準偏差。

結果: 研究結果顯露特殊教育老師中感受到的工作壓力有溫和及極端的模式。

總結: 根據這些研究結果，建議應該盡快檢討現今的服務條件、供應適當的教學設施、主動提供服務、訓練和再培訓特殊教育工作者，去迎合尼日利亞社會中有特別需要的孩子各種各樣迫切的要求和挑戰。

關鍵詞: 工作壓力、特殊教育工作者、特殊學校、融合學校

Introduction

Background to the Study

Efficient and effective performance on any job depends largely on good psychological well being of the workers. Other factors include conducive environment, good interpersonal relationships, adequate communication among staff, and management and staff, work load, remuneration and a host of other physical and psychological boosting variables. Work becomes very uninteresting and stressful when all or some of the conditions stated above are not in place. Stress constitutes serious work hazard. In actual fact, without stress, complacency of many workers may not be punctured, thereby leading to low productivity and inefficiency, however, a high degree of stress may mar the whole process of performance.

Stress has been defined by different authors in different ways. Borg, Riding and Falzon (1991) defined stress as a physical, emotional or mental reaction resulting from one's response to certain pressures in the environment and how well one can manage those pressures. Onyemerekeya (1996), perceives stress as the reaction or response within an individual that occurs when some kinds of external events threaten him. It should be noted that all events of life present stress at one time or another. This is because stress is an everyday "guest" in the life of everyone. A situation in which one's behaviour is subjected to evaluation by somebody else can be stressful. However, different jobs present different degrees of stress but a high degree of stress impedes performance. Frankly speaking, teaching is among the jobs that are stressful.

Teaching is one of the professions that are highly demanding. It tasks all human domains and demands a lot of effort in order to achieve a definite goal. Therefore meeting the daily learning and behavioural

needs of students make teaching onerous and stressful owing to the divergent individual differences that exist in classroom situations. Hastings and Brown (2002), Nagel and Brown (2003) and Brown and Nagel (2004) are of the opinion that teachers generally experience a higher level of job related stress compared with professionals in other fields. The opinion stated above is corroborated by the findings of Cooper (1988) that teachers experience the highest levels of stress compared to other related disciplines. If teaching, according to these scholars, is stressful, teaching exceptional or special needs individuals could be more stressful owing to the peculiar nature of the learners and their different learning difficulties. A Study by Hastings and Brown (2002) indicated that Special Education teachers have higher levels of anxiety, feel less supported and have lower job satisfaction than their contemporaries. All the factors stated above are stresses and strains to special needs teachers.

A number of reasons have been reported to account for stress among teachers of exceptional children. Fraser (1996), for instance, finds that exceptionalities of a significant degree is a variable affecting the performance of teachers dealing with special needs individuals. This means that severity of disabilities in learners may create tension, emotional imbalance and psychological trauma in the lives of teachers of exceptional children. On the other hand, the less the severity, the better the performance of teachers teaching the exceptional children. Antoniou, Polychroin and Walters (2000) posit that children with high difficulties sometimes exhibit a variety of behaviours which are likely to produce negative effects among their peers and teachers. The frustration that teachers feel whenever they are unable to make reasonable impact on the levels of performance of their students may cause poor motivation and eventual burnout.

Enyia (1996) citing Dirdans and Everly (1979) reports that low self-esteem among teachers especially women, happens to be one of the identifiable factors of stress. This is because people no longer value teaching as a noble profession. Individuals generally prefer going for other better paying jobs that will earn them more dignity and fame, especially in a developing country such as Nigeria. Special needs teachers, suffer extreme psychological trauma because people, especially Nigerians do not understand why a highly talented individual should engage or be involved in teaching exceptional children, especially the disabled individuals. Such societal perceptions and attitudes make some skillful and talented teachers of exceptional children experience stress and eventually abandon the job (Adeniyi, 2007). The assertion above is corroborated by the findings of Antoniou, Polychroin and Walters (2000) saying that teaching children with difficulties is not regarded as a noble professions in Greece. They contend further that this myopic societal perception may lead to frustration and feelings of low self-worth and low morale among teachers of exceptional children. Darling-Hammond (2001) asserts that nearly thirty percent (30%) of newly recruited teachers teaching special needs children leave the profession within a few years compared with general education teachers. The reason for this early exodus is the high degree of stress involved in teaching exceptional children because of societal perception and value placed on teaching.

The issue of this negative feeling has not totally changed in the recent time. In Nigeria, the untoward reaction to people with special needs, their parents and other caregivers (teachers) at the present time especially among the illiterates is very common. Adeniyi (2007), revealing the general beliefs toward persons with disabilities in Nigeria, notes that the age-

long beliefs that the presence of disability in a family is a mark of bad omen and reward of bad deeds of present and past generations. And because of this, many people out disabilities find it difficult to relate to exceptional children. This eventually affects the value placed on their education and their caregivers. This negative attitude may cause psychological trauma and eventual burnout on the part of the teachers of special needs children.

It is noteworthy to state that the roles of special educators in the educational system are both complex and multifaceted. These include: skillful anticipation of students' difficulties, helping in adaptation and accommodation of special needs in the society especially in this era of total inclusion, knowledge of general education curriculum and adaptation to suit the needs of the exceptional children, and assisting in home work as well as adequate linkage between school and home. Such expectation may also constitute stress or burnout to teachers of special needs children.

Nichols and Sosonowsky (2002), list the sources of stress of teachers of exceptional children to include variables such as students' diversity, relative ability and behaviour, students' misconduct, disruption, verbal and physical threats. Other sources mentioned include: unmotivated students, supervision and support, large case loads and class sizes, dissatisfaction, lack of administrative support, role conflict and ambiguity and limited professional development opportunities. It is obvious that the listed factors may constitute stresses there by making the teaching of exceptional students uninteresting and unrewarding.

In addition, since the intention of some individuals is to serve as source of help for the disadvantaged persons in the society, many teachers enter the field of special education with the aspiration of rendering empathetic services. However, the desire to help turns

to frustration because of failure to record outstanding success in improving lives of these exceptional children. Chermis (1980), and Pine, Aronson and Katry (1981) submitted that professionals who are sympathetic, dedicated, idealistic, and people-oriented are vulnerable to excessive stress particularly when they are faced with the multiple problems that students with disabilities present.

In the light of the foregoing, therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the specific sources of stress among teachers of special needs children in Nigeria with focus on the severity or degree and types of exceptionalities, commitment and responsibility to exceptional children. This study becomes imperative as a result of the high degree of stress associated with teaching special needs children and the attendant social and health implication. The outcome of this investigation will help in charting a new course in the education and adjustment of special needs children and their teachers in Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

It is obvious that special education teachers are among the most stressed in the teaching profession. This is due to huge workload, emotional/psychological pressures, especially in dealing with pupils with various degrees of disabilities, and a high level of frustration experienced by teachers. This makes the job highly demanding, with those who can not cope seeking alternative employment and job satisfaction outside the field of teaching exceptional children. This study therefore, attempts to investigate the extent to which these variables, such as gender, degree of disability and types, may cause stress among special educators in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is:

- ◆ To find out the extent to which severity or degree of disabilities (mild, moderate and severe) can lead to stress among special education teachers.
- ◆ To ascertain the types of exceptionalities that can be predictors of job stress.
- ◆ To establish the influence of stress experienced while teaching special needs children on the exodus of professionals from the field of special education.
- ◆ To explore the effect of commitment and responsibility to exceptional children on the teacher teaching the exceptional children.

Research Questions

In view of the purpose presented above, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

- i) Will challenges encountered by special education teachers in the class-room cause stress?
- ii) Can emotional exhaustion of special educators be a source of stress and professional exodus?
- iii) How can the personal accomplishment of the special educators allow for job stress?
- iv) Will the degree of disabilities of special needs children be a cause of stress on their teachers?

Methodology

The design of the study

The study adopts a survey in its approach. This is to be able to reach a considerable number of special educators to provide good representation for the study.

Population

The target population of this study comprised the special education teachers particularly those who are teaching at the integrated schools in two out of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A total number of fifty (50) special educators working in mainstream and special schools in Ibadan, Lagos and Ilorin were randomly selected. These cities are in the Western and North Central parts of Nigeria. Twenty one (21) male teachers (42%) and twenty-nine (29) female teachers (58%) made up of the total sample.

The marital status and teaching experience of the respondents are shown in the demographic data below.

Demographic Data Analysis

Table 1: Gender, Marital Status And Teaching Experience Of The Respondents

Variable	Demographic Categories	F	%
GENDER	Male	21	42
	Female	29	58
	TOTAL	50	100%
MARITAL STATUS	Married	16	32
	Single	34	68
	TOTAL	50	100%
TEACHING EXPERIENCE	1-5 years	21	42
	6-15 years	10	20
	No Response	19	38
	TOTAL	50	100%

The questionnaire was distributed among the respondents through the help of teachers that served as contact points and responses were collected through the same means.

Instrument

Job Stress Inventory (JSI) by Akinboye (1999) was adapted for the purpose of this research. The adapted version developed by the researcher was

1. For examples

	Extreme Stress	Moderate Stress	No Stress	Undecided
Lack of progress in pupils academic achievement can cause				
Lack of relevant facilities and materials such as teaching aids, text books, building, Braille, hearing aids etc can cause				
Continuous responsibilities of teachers can cause				

scrutinized by experts in the field and the reliability of the instrument was determined to be 0.72 which indicate that the instrument is standardized. The instrument was divided into two sections. Part A was on information about personal data while Part B consisted of 15 items with likert type response format ranges from Extreme stress =5, to Undecided = 2.

Method of Data Analysis

The method of analysis employed for this study was descriptive statistic including of frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation.

Results

The results of the analysis are presented in TABLES 2 - 5 below.

Research Question 1: Will challenges encountered by special education teachers cause stress?

Table 2: Challenges Encountered By Special Education Teachers

Items	No Stress	Moderate Stress	Extreme Stress	(\bar{x})–Mean	Std D.
Lack of progress in pupils academic achievement	0.0	29 58.0	21 42.0	2.42	0.50
Heavy workload	5 (10.0)	14 (28.0)	31 (62.0)	2.52	0.68
Lack of materials/facilities	- 0.0	21 (42.0)	29 (58.0)	2.58	0.50
Increase / over population	- (0.0)	10 (20.0)	40 (80.0)	2.80	0.40

Table 2 reveals that lack of pupils progress in class work/academic achievement causes moderate stress (\bar{x} = 2.42 and sd = 0.68), heavy workload causes extreme stress (\bar{x} = 2.52), lack of help -/ assistance in respect of instructional materials from government

causes extreme stress (\bar{x} = 2.58 and sd = 0.50) and increase / over population of students also causes extreme stress (\bar{x} = 2.80 and sd = 0.40).

Research Question 2: Can emotional exhaustion of special educator be a source of stress

Table 3: Emotional Exhaustion And Stress To Special Educators

Items	No Stress	Moderate Stress	Extreme Stress	(\bar{x})–Mean	Std D.
Effect of personal life can cause stress e.g. physical or emotional exhaustion	5 (10.0)	35 (70.0)	5 (10.0)	1.80	0.76
Assessment of job from head teacher can cause stress	25 (50.0)	15 (30.0)	5 (10.0)	1.40	0.81
Integration of students/pupils can cause stress	16 (32.0)	24 (48.0)	10 (20.0)	1.88	0.72
Continuous responsibility for pupils can cause	15 (30.0)	30 (60.0)	5 (10.0)	1.80	0.61

Table 3 reveals that effect of personal life of the teachers cause moderate stress ($\bar{x} = 1.80$ and $sd = 0.76$), assessment of job from head-teacher causes no stress ($\bar{x} = 1.40$ and $sd = 0.81$); integration of students/pupils causes moderate stress ($\bar{x} = 1.88$ and

$sd = 0.72$) and continuous responsibility for pupils causes moderate stress ($\bar{x} = 1.80$ and $sd = 0.61$).

Research Question 3: Can personal accomplishment cause stress on special educators?

Table 4: Personal Accomplishment And Special Educator Stress

Items	No Stress	Moderate Stress	Extreme Stress	(x) –Mean	Std D.
Respect from society / societal attitudes	10 (20.0)	35 (70.0)	5 (10.0)	1.70	0.67
Responsibility for pupils can cause	5 (10.0)	45 (90.0)	0 (0.0)	1.90	0.30
Level of education	20 (40.0)	30 (60.0)	0 (0.0)	1.60	0.49
Marital status of the teacher	6 (12.0)	35 (70.0)	5 (10.0)	1.82	0.72

Table 4 reveals that societal attitudes/respect can cause stress ($\bar{x} = 1.70$ and $sd = 0.67$) but responsibility for pupils ($\bar{x} = 1.90$ and $sd = 0.30$), level of education ($\bar{x} = 1.60$ and $sd = 0.49$) and marital status of teacher

($\bar{x} = 1.82$ and $sd = 0.72$) can cause moderate stress.

Research Question 4: Will the degree of disability of the special needs children be a cause of stress on their teachers?

Table 5: Degree Of Disability And Special Educators

Items	No Stress	Moderate Stress	Extreme Stress	(x) –Mean	Std D.
Special needs children with more than one disability can cause	0 (0.0)	5 (10.0)	45 (90.0)	2.90	0.30
Severe disability can create a problem for the teacher	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	50 (100.0)	3.00	0.0
Facing / confronting difficult / severe pupils can cause	0 (0.0)	30 (60.0)	20 (40.0)	2.40	0.49
Low degree of disability can cause	20 (40.0)	25 (50.0)	5 (10.0)	1.70	0.65

Table 5 reveal that special needs learners with more than one disability can cause extreme stress ($\bar{x} = 2.90$ and $sd = 0.30$), learners with severe disability can create problem for the teacher and can cause extreme stress ($\bar{x} = 3.00$ and $sd = 0.00$) and facing/confronting

pupils with special need can cause moderate stress ($\bar{x} = 2.40$ and $sd = 0.49$). All these show that the degree and nature of disabilities of the special need children can cause stress on their teachers.

Discussion

The analysis of the outcome of data revealed that stress or burn-out among special educators is caused by several factors as follows:

Lack of progress achieved on the part of the students and teachers, workload of the teachers, lack of help or assistance, in respect of numbers of special educators available and increase or over population of students especially in mainstream schools.

Lack of progress is generally connected with trauma suffered by the special needs individuals. Low cognitive advancement of some special needs children like the hearing impaired, multiple disabilities, emotionally disturbed, among others directly account for the limited progress in their studies. When teachers see little or no progress in student learning, psychological trauma develops and eventually leads to stress. This outcome is in line with the views of Hasting and Brown (2002) who reports that special teachers face high level of anxiety as a result of their pupils' progress.

Workload, over population and lack of assistance, which, can be summed up as conducive working conditions, are the key factors militating against high performance of teachers. This finding is confirmed by Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979) as quoted by Antoniou (2000) that condition of work seems to provide stress factors which most strongly contribute to job dissatisfaction and burnout among workers. Also, Borg et al (1991), Travers and Cooper (1996), Guglidmic and Tatro (1998) hold similar views by asserting that high teacher-pupil ratio, limited progress of pupils and high workload are contributory to burnout on the part of special needs teachers. However, teachers in special schools whose pupils have similar conditions may experience less stress compared to their counterparts in integrated settings

because they are faced with such conditions for a long period of time. As a result, they are able to adjust adequately. Furthermore, less student population in special schools has also accounted for less stress faced by their teachers.

Research question two stated that, "Can emotional exhaustion of special educators be a source of stress to them?" The key probing inventories revealed that personal life, integration of students (special and non-special needs) and continuous responsibility for pupils can cause moderate stress with the following mean scores: $x = 1.80$, $x = 1.88$ and $x = 1.80$. However, assessment of job by head teacher revealed no stress factor.

Effect of personal life, level of education, number of children, economic condition and societal attitudes coupled with career demands can also be major predictors of stress among special educators. Furthermore, integration of students and continuous responsibility for students lead to stress. It is a known fact that coping with students without disability may sometimes portend stress not to talk of an inclusive setting where special needs pupils are mixed with the regular students. The different needs and conditions may wear teachers out, more especially when the population is too large for reasonable accommodation by specialized teachers. Nevertheless, teachers in special schools whose pupils have similar conditions experience less stress compared to their counterparts in integrated settings because they are faced with similar conditions for a long period of time and because of this they are able to adjust adequately. Invariably, less population in special schools may also account for less stress faced by their teachers.

Research question three (3) stated that "how can the personal accomplishment of the special educators allow for job satisfaction? Indicators like marital

status, job responsibility, level of education indicated extreme and moderate level of stress. This outcome confirms Adeniji (2001)'s assertion that there is a level of relationship between job satisfaction and marital status of teachers (be it special educators and non-special educators). Antonio et al (2000) also opine that job responsibility and workload may be adjudged to be the key factors causing stress among special educators because of limited number of available specialists. Adeniyi (2000) reports that the value placed on teaching profession especially teachers of special needs children may lead to burn-out especially in Nigeria.

The fourth research question stated that "Will the degree of disabilities of special need children be a cause of stress on their teachers?" The results revealed that special needs children with more than a single disability can cause stress, severe disability can create problem for the teachers. Also facing or confronting pupils with severe disabilities can cause moderate and severe stress condition on the part of teachers handling them. The reason for this can be adduced to extra energy; thinking and motivation that the teachers of special needs children would want to invest on special needs children to see that they achieve definite goals. Galloway (1985) presents similar views that children with special needs often create additional pressure for teachers. The stressful effects of teaching pupils with different special needs coupled with multiple disabilities are also reported to be stress factors in Lukner (1989), Fraser (1996) and Ware (1996).

From the findings above, it is obvious that special educators face a lot of stresses in the course of discharging their professional duties. They are also more prone to burnout as a result. The effect of job burnout on special educators therefore calls

for serious concern and immediate response from appropriate authorities.

In view of this, the following recommendations are put forward for urgent action.

- ◆ There should be immediate review of conditions of service as this will motivate teachers of special needs children and increase their physical and psychological satisfaction regarding their jobs.
- ◆ Provision of basic facilities for schools both special and conventional should be done, especially now that the world all over is clamouring for inclusive education (Universal Basic Education in Nigeria's context), such as school building, instructional media and appropriate text books that can help special needs children to develop their full potentials.
- ◆ The government should be more serious and responsive to the issue of special needs children. The era of lip service and ordinary legislation without action should be a thing of the past. Therefore, past and current policies as regarding special education should be promptly implemented.
- ◆ Training and retraining of teachers of special needs children should be done regularly to keep them abreast of the current trends in special education and to meet societal demands as well as holistic needs of special needs children (physical, psychological, medical and intellectual.)
- ◆ Societal perception of disabilities should be redirected by demystifying conditions surrounding disabilities through re-orientation and adequate awareness. This will reduce the stigma placed on special needs children and their caregivers now that the world is moving towards normalization.

Conclusion

It is a basic fact that job satisfaction facilitates high productivity and this is a function of many needs of life. To teachers and especially teachers of special educational needs students, stress of various degrees and kinds is a limiting factor to efficient job performance and productivity.

To motivate these teachers and to curb the attrition rate on the job, adequate measures must be put in place to reduce the level of stress confronting teachers of special needs children.

Limitation to the Study

The success of any research work depends largely on many factors. In this study, number of constraints were encountered during the distribution of questionnaires among the participants. These range from non-cooperation to delay response to the questionnaire distributed. This attitudinal constraint, to a large extent affects the outcome of the research.

Further research with larger demographic coverage should be done on this issue to allow for the use of inferential statistics for generalization of the outcome of results.

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