Exploring Stress Management Strategies among Agricultural Science Teachers in Abia State, Nigeria

by

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Abstract

This study explores stress management strategies among Agricultural Science teachers in Abia State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Four research questions guided the study while the four null hypotheses formulated were tested at 0.05 level of significance. A sample of 166 teachers was drawn from a population of 545 Agricultural Science Teachers and Principals from public Senior Secondary Schools in Abia state. Questionnaire was used to collect data. It was validated by three experts in Agricultural Education and Psychology from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia state, Nigeria. Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. A coefficient of 0.83 was obtained for all the items in the questionnaire. The researchers and three research assistants administered and retrieved the questionnaire on completion. Data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics. It was found out that inadequate staffing, overworking of lecturers and poor salaries, were common causes of stress; while planning and delivering of instruction, conducting hands-on agricultural activities, among others were occupational tasks that could predispose Agricultural Science teachers to stress. The study also found that stress can decrease students' performance in Agricultural science; and that planning each day activities, building good relationship with colleagues and management were stress management strategies. Findings on hypotheses show that they were no significant difference in the mean ratings of Agricultural Science teachers and Principals on stress management strategies for Agricultural Science teachers in Abia State, Nigeria.It was therefore recommended that Abia State Secondary Education Management Board should organize training on causes, consequences and strategies for mitigating stress to enhance teachers' productivity and well-being.

Keyword: Agricultural Science, Explore, Stress, Stress management, Teachers.

Introduction

Teaching is widely recognized as a highly demanding profession, characterized by extensive workloads and often inadequate support. The job of teaching is anchored on teachers. Teachers are the force that drives the educational system. A teacher teaches a particular subject or subjects in formal institution of learning. Among these subjects is Agricultural Science.

Agricultural Science is an interdisciplinary field that combines elements of biology, chemistry, and ecology to understand and innovate agricultural practices. In Nigeria, it is a senior secondary school subject involving the teaching of agricultural practices, principles, and technologies (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2014). It is also the study of knowledge and techniques required for the production of food, fibre and other goods. Nwosu (2019) observed that Agricultural Science teachers often face unique challenges due to numerous occupational tasks they engage in and these could predispose them to stress. According to Chukwu (2020), the responsibilities of the teacher often include delivering theoretical lessons, supervising practical activities, conducting experiments, and managing school farms or gardens. Teachers integrate hands-on learning with theoretical knowledge. The Agricultural Science teacher plays a key role in preparing future farmers, agricultural scientists, and agribusiness professionals, thus influencing food security and

economic growthin their regions. These activities are time consuming and bound to predispose the teacher to stress.

Experts of various fields- psychology, education, medicine and other related professions have defined stress based on their backgrounds. According to Onuka (2016), stress is the body's reaction to any kind of demand or threat, especially, pressure of work or personal challenges that confront individuals in the cause of performing their work roles. Obikeze (2016), also defined stress as physical or psychological strain or tension generated by physical, emotional, social, economic or occupational circumstances that are difficult to manage. In the context of this study, stress is any factor, situation or circumstance that is capable of destabilizing the Agricultural Science Teacher and reduce his efficiency in Senior Secondary Schools in Abia state.

Stress is commonly caused by a number of factors such as: inadequate staffing, excess workload, poor salaries and allowances (Nwosu, 2019). Tenibiaje (2015) named other causes of stress to include inadequate instructional materials and infrastructure, emotional situations in workplace such as noise, and poor office accommodation. Agricultural Science teachers are also stressed by their numerous occupational tasks. Such tasks, according to Nwosu (2019) are planning and delivering instruction, conducting hands-on agricultural activities, assessing students performances, planning and carrying field trip with students, attending workshop, and managing large class sizes. Also, extracurricular activities such as leading agricultural clubs; administrative tasks such as attending numerous meetings could predispose the teacher to stress (Nweke &Ekwe, 2020).

Stress has a great influence on the productivity of the Agricultural Science teacher. According to Obikeze (2016) occupational stress discourages productivity of Agricultural Science teachers. It contributes to high incidence of burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and ultimately, reduced teaching effectiveness (Alkharabsheh, 2020). Stress may further lead to poor job performance, increased absenteeism from school, complaints and healthcare cost, loss of memory, chronic fatigue, and inability to sleep well, (Chukwu, 2020). Stress cannot be completely avoided; so the way out is stress management.

Stress Management is about taking charge of one's lifestyles and emotions to mitigate the negative consequences of stress. Alkharabasheh (2020), explained stress management as a wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's levels of stress, especially chronic stress, for the purpose of improving everyday functioning. Stress management is also an array of techniques and strategies used to control an individual's stress levels, particularly chronic stress, or burnout (Hakanem, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2006; Nwosu, 2019). Effective stress management aims to enhance an individual's ability to cope with stress, thereby improving mental and physical health. For the Agricultural Science teachers, behavioral techniques to cope with the challenges of stress include developing healthy habits such as relaxation, time management skills, planning each day activities, building good working relationship with collogues, students and school authority (Tenibiaje, 2015); getting sufficient sleep, professional development opportunities for teachers as well as reducing administrative burdens for teachers (Akinyele& Adegoke, 2018).

Teachers in Abia state are no exception to the challenges of stress. This underscores the need for exploring the stressors and coping mechanisms specific to Agricultural Science teachers in Abia state. This entails, discovering the causes of stress, its consequences and how Agricultural Science teachers could manage stress for enhancing their overall effectiveness and well-being. This truism informs the study.

The general purpose of the study is to explore the stress management strategies among Agricultural Science teachers in Abia State,

Nigeria. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are common causes of stress among Agricultural Science Teachers in Abia state?
2. What are the occupational tasks that predispose Agricultural Science Teachers to stress in Abia state?
3. What is the influence of stress on Agricultural Science Teachers' productivity in Abia state?
4. What are the stress management strategies adopted by Agricultural Science Teachers for mitigating stress and enhance in Abia state?

Hypotheses

Hypotheses guided the study as follows: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of Agricultural Science Teachers and Principals of senior secondary schools on:

1. Common causes of stress among Agricultural Science Teachers in Abia state,
2. Occupational tasks that predispose Agricultural Science Teachers to stress in Abia state.
3. Influence of stress on Agricultural science teachers' productivity in Abia state.
4. Stress management strategies adopted by Agricultural Science Teachers for mitigating tress and enhance productivity in Abia state

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The area of the study is Abia State, Nigeria; which is located in South Eastern Nigeria. The state was chosen for the study because of evidence of stress among Agricultural Science teachers in Nigeria generally, and Abia state is no exception. The population of the study was 545, consisting of 298 Agricultural Science Teachers and 247 Principals from a total of 247 public Senior Secondary Schools that cut across 17 LGAs in the three Education Zones of the state namely Aba, Umuahia and Ohafia Education Zones (Secondary Education Management Board (SEMB), 2013, Umuahia). They were selected in order to provide a more targeted insight to the study because of their specific expertise and specialized knowledge in Agricultural Science. Their views and recommendations are more likely to meet the specific needs of Agricultural Science students, which may differ significantly, from the broader teacher's body. The sample size of the study was 166, made up of 94 Agricultural Science teachers and 72 principals from 6 LGAs. The study adopted a multi-stage random sampling technique. First stage involved the use of simple random sampling technique to select two LGAs from each of the three Education Zones of the state; six LGAs were selected. The second stage also involved the selection of 12 schools from each of the six LGAs selected. A total of 72 secondary schools representing 30% of the total school population was selected. Third and last stage involved the selection of 72 principals from the 72 schools selected. Also proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to select 94 Agricultural Science teachers from the 72 schools selected; bringing the sample size to 166 which is 30% of the total population. The sample size of 166 was considered adequate because Nwoga (2010), recommended that even the use of 10% for a population of a few hundred respondents.

Questionnaire was used for data collection. It consists of two sections which focused on personal data of the respondents and specific purposes of the study. The response scale for each questionnaire items are Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UN), Disagree (DA) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with corresponding values 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in Agricultural Education and Psychology from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia state, Nigeria. Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. A coefficient of 0.83 was obtained for all the items in the questionnaire. This was adjudged to be reliable.One hundred and sixty-six (166) copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researchers with the help of three research assistants. Copies properly completed and retrieved were 161, representing 91% rate. Data collected were analyzed using

mean to answer the research questions, while t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. In deciding the cut-off point, any items in research questions 1, 2, 3 and 4, a mean of 2.50 was set as benchmark for decision making. Any item whose mean is greater than or equal to 2.50 was interpreted as Agree, while the mean below 2.50 was regarded as Disagree. In using the t-test to test the null hypotheses, any item where the t-calculated value was less than the table-t, the hypothesis of no significance difference was accepted at P 0.05 level of significance, but if the calculated t was greater than table t, the hypothesis of no significant difference was rejected at P 0.05 level of significance and relevant degrees of freedom.

Results

Table1:Mean Responses and t-test Results of Respondents on Common Causes of Stress among Agricultural Science Teachers in Abia State (n=161)

SN	Causes of Stress	$\bar{X}_1$	SD_1	$\bar{X}_2$	SD_2	$\bar{X}_g$	t-	Remarks
	Teachers are stressed due to:							
1	Inadequate staffing.	3.12	0.67	3.16	0.62	3.14	0.71	Agree/NS
2	Overworking of teachers, including teaching large classes.	3.35	0.80	3.43	0.82	3.40	0.42	Agree/NS
3	Poor salaries.	3.88	0.56	3.66	0.73	3.64	0.31	Agree/NS
4	Inadequate teaching materials and infrastructure.	3.73	0.75	3.84	0.54	3.50	0.12	Agree/NS
5	Emotional situations in workplace e. g. noise and road traffic.	3.83	0.54	3. 14	0.72	3.78	0.52	Agree/NS
6	Absence of technical support.	3.67	0.63	3.33	0.78	3.65	0.72	Agree/NS
7	Excessive administrative tasks, including attendance to meeting.	3.42	0.43	3.72	0.67	3.48	0.56	Agree/NS
8	Absence of laboratory.	3.77	0.77	3.71	0.69	3.75	0.56	Agree/NS
9	Continued use of traditional tool on the farm.	3.75	0.66	3.55	0.55	3.68	0.75	Agree/NS
10	Poor attitudes of students to farm practicals.	3.68	0.66	3.76	0.70	3.72	0.68	Agree/NS

$\bar{X}_1$=Mean of Teachers; $SD_{1=}$ standard deviation of Teachers;$X_{2=}$ Mean of Principal;SD_2 =Standard deviation of Principal;$_{Xg}$ =Grand means of Teachers and Principals; t= t-tab Value=2.02.

Table 1 reveals that all the 10 items obtained mean scores that are above the cut-off point, $X \geq 3.00$. This means that the 10 items are causes of stress among Agricultural Science Teachers in Abia State. The Table also reveals that all the 10 items have t-calculated values less than t-table value of 2.02 (two tail). This means that there was no significant difference in the mean responses of Agricultural Science teachers for each of the 10 causes of stress. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference for the two groups of respondents was accepted on the 10 items at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 2: Mean Responses and t-test Results of Respondents on Occupational Tasks that predispose Agricultural Science Teachers to Stress in Abia State (n=161).

SN	Occupational tasks of teachers	$\bar{X}_1$	SD_1	$\bar{X}_2$	SD_2	$\bar{X}_g$	t-tab	Remarks
	Occupational tasks that could predispose teachers to stress include:							
1	Planning and delivering instructions.	4.12	0.48	4.51	0.62	3.79	0.57	Agree/NS
2	Conducting hands-on agricultural activities.	3.87	0.73	3.74	0.63	3.83	3.73	Agree/NS
3	Assessing students' performance.	4.21	0.68	3.42	0.60	3.13	0.42	Agree/NS
4	Planning and carrying out field trips with students.	3.41	0.64	3.40	0.50	3.31	0.45	Agree/NS
5	Attending workshops and training.	3.38	0.71	3.26	0.76	3.32	0.37	Agree/NS
6	Administrative duties such as attending to meetings.	3.41	0.80	3.36	0.61	3.28	0.78	Agree/NS
7	Overseeing students school farm operations.	3.30	0.55	3.50	0.57	3.40	0.65	Agree/NS
8	Procuring and maintaining teaching materials.	3.62	0.60	3.58	0.68	3.60	0.94	Agree/NS
9	Extracurricular activities such as leading agricultural clubs and events	3.40	0.82	3.30	0.86	3.35	0.27	Agree/NS

$\bar{X}_1$=Mean of Teachers; SD_1= standard deviation of Teachers;$\bar{X}_2$= Mean of Principal;SD_2 =Standard deviation of Principal;$\bar{X}_g$ =Grand means of Teachers and Principals; t= t-Value=2.02

Table 2 indicated that the nine items obtained mean scores that are above the cut-off point, $X \geq 3.00$. This means that the 9 occupational tasks predispose Agricultural Science teachers to stress in Abia state. The Table also reveals that the nine items have t-calculated values less than t-table value of 2.02 (two tail). This means that there was no significant difference in the mean responses of Agricultural Science teachers and principals for each of the 9 occupational tasks. This means that there was no significant difference in the mean responses of Agricultural Science teachers and principals for each of the nine occupational tasks. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference for the two groups of respondents was accepted on the nine items at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 3: Mean Responses and t-test Results of Respondents on Influence of Stress on Agricultural Science Teachers' Productivity in Abia State (161).

SN	Influence of Stress among Agricultural Science teachers	$\bar{X}_1$	SD_1	$\bar{X}_2$	SD_2	$\bar{X}_g$	t-tab	Remarks
	Stress can lead to:							
1	Decreased students' performance because in Agricultural Science.	3.30	0.70	3.26	0.70	3.32	0.37	Agree/NS
2	Health problems may lead to increased absenteeism.	3.20	0.60	3.36	068	3.28	0.78	Agree/NS
3	Loss of memory loss, which negatively affect teaching quality.	3.21	0.51	3.50	0.50	3.25	0.41	Agree/NS
4	Emotional distress diminishes teacher's productivity.	3.62	0.74	3.68	0.51	3.60	0.72	Agree/NS
5	Decrease job satisfaction leading to low productivity.	3.16	0.52	3.28	0.48	3.21	0.66	Agree/NS
6	Poor time management, affecting instructional delivery and classroom management.	3.40	0.83	3.37	0.64	3.82	0.43	Agree/NS
7	Decreased creativity and innovation in teaching methods.	3.15	0.78	3.13	0.61	3.16	0.58	Agree/NS
8	Low morale which decreases teacher's productivity.	3.42	0.67	3.62	0.66	3.51	0.45	Agree/NS

$\bar{X}_1$=Mean of Teachers; SD_1= standard deviation of Teachers;$\bar{X}_2$= Mean of Principal;SD_2 =Standard deviation of Principal;$\bar{X}_g$ =Grand means of Teachers and Principals; t= t-Value=2.02.

Table 3 shows that all the eight items obtained mean scores that are above the cut-off point, X ≥ 3.00. This means that the eight items are allinfluence of stress on Agricultural Science teachers' productivity in Abia state. The Table also reveals that all the eight items have t-calculated values less than t-table value of 2.02 (two tail). This means that there was no significant difference in the mean responses of Agricultural Science teachers and principals for each of the eight factors influencing stress in Abia state. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference for the two groups of respondents was accepted on the eight items at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 4: **Mean Responses and t-test Results of Respondents on Stress Management Strategies Adopted by Agricultural Science Teachers for Mitigating Stress and Enhance Productivity in Abia State (161)**

SN	Stress management strategies for mitigating stress and enhance productivity	$\bar{X}_1$	SD_1	$\bar{X}_2$	SD_2	$\bar{X}_g$	t-	Remarks
	Stress management strategies include:							
1	Planning each day activities.	3. 45	0.84	3.35	0.54	3.40	0.65	Agree/NS
2	Building good relationship with colleagues, students and management.	3.18	0.70	3.30	078	3.24	0.43	Agree/NS
3	Implementing effective management strategies.	3.23	0.52	326	0.64	3.25	0.70	Agree/NS
4	Regular participation in professional development.	2.83	0.77	3.32	0.67	3.07	0.71	Agree/NS
5	Finding time every day for relaxation.	2.94	0.61	2.98	0.56	3.96	0.46	Agree/NS
6	Schools can organize stress management programmes such as games.	3.40	0.74	3.52	0.84	3.46	0.97	Agree/NS
7	Finding ways to reduce much noise.	3.22	0.45	3.34	0.36	3.33	0.73	Agree/NS
8	Taking a vacation.	3.35	0.80	3.45	0. 63	3.40	0.43	Agree/NS

$\bar{X}_1$=Mean of Teachers; SD_1= standard deviation of Teachers;$\bar{X}_2$= Mean of Principal;SD_2 =Standard deviation of Principal;$\bar{X}_g$ =Grand means of Teachers and Principals; t= t-Value

Table 4 revealedthat all the nine items obtained mean scores that are above the cut-off point, X ≥ 3.00. This means that the nine items are allfamily-related strategies for reducing excessive use of Smartphone among Agricultural Education students in universities in Abia State. The Table also reveals that all the nine items had p-value that ranged 0.45 to 0.73 which were greater than the alpha-value of 0.05. This means that there was no significant difference in the mean responses of lecturers and students of Agricultural Education for each of the nine family related strategies. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference for the two groups of respondents was accepted on the nine items at 0.05 level of significance.

Discussion of Findings

The result in Table 1 reveals common causes of stress among Agricultural Science teachers in Abia State, Nigeria. They include: inadequate staffing, overworking of teachers, including teaching large class, poor salaries, inadequate teaching materials and infrastructure, emotional situation in workplace e.g., noise, absence of technical support, excessive administrative task, including attending to meetings, among others. These findings agree with the submissions of Nwosu (2019) who named: inadequate staffing, excess workload, poor salaries, among others as causes of tress among Agricultural Science teachers. The results are also in agreement with Tenibiaje (2015) who mentioned emotional situations in workplace such as noise and road traffic as factors that can trigger off stress among teachers.

The results in Table 2 show occupational tasks that predispose Agricultural Science teachers to stress in Abia state. They include planning and delivering instructions, conducting hands-on agricultural activities, assessing students' performance, planning and carrying out field trips with students, attending training

workshops, and administrative duties including attending meetings. These findings are in consonant with the comment of Nwosu (2019) that Agricultural Science teachers often face unique challenges due to numerous occupational tasks they engage in. The result also concurs with Nweke and Ekwe, (2020), that administrative duties and extracurricular activities add to the Agricultural Science teachers' stress.

Table 3 revealed influence of stress on Agricultural science teachers' productivity in Abia state. They are Decreased students' performance, because stressed teachers may not perform at their best, health problems such as hypertension and headache, which leads to increased absenteeism from school, reduced cognitive functions such as memory loss, decrease job satisfaction leading to low productivity. These findings agree with the views of Obikeze (2016), that who that when stressed up, Agricultural Science teachers suffer health problems which leads to increased absenteeism from classes. The findings also agree withObikeze (2016) who said that occupational stress discourages productivity of Agricultural Science teachers.

Stress has a great influence on the productivity of the Agricultural Science teacher. According to Obikeze (2016) occupational stress discourages productivity of Agricultural Science teachers. It contributes to high incidence of burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and ultimately, reduced teaching effectiveness (Alkharabsheh, 2020). Stress may further lead to poor job performance, increased absenteeism from school, complaints and healthcare cost, loss of memory, chronic fatigue, and inability to sleep well, (Chukwu, 2020). Stress cannot be completely avoided; so the way out is stress management.

Table 4 shows stress management strategies adopted by Agricultural Science teachers for mitigating stress and enhance productivity in Abia state. They are planning each day's activities, regular participation in professional development, finding time every day for relaxation andfinding ways to reduce much noise, among others.These findings agree with Tenibiaje (2015), who recommended relaxation, planning each day's activities, among others as techniques for coping with the challenges of stress. The results are also in consonant Adeniyi (2020) who outlined other stress management strategies to include getting sufficient sleep and reducing administrative burdens.

It was also found out that there was no significant difference between the mean responses of Agricultural Science teachers and Principals on causes of stress, occupational tasks that predispose Agricultural Science Teachers to stress, influence of stress on Agricultural Science teachers' productivity and stress management strategies adopted by Agricultural Science teachers for mitigating stress and enhance productivity in Abia state.

Conclusion

This study established that Agricultural Science teachers in Abia State often face significant stressors, including heavy workloads, inadequate resources, and administrative pressures. To cope with these challenges, teachers employ various strategies such as practicing effective time management, and engaging in professional development activities. Despite these efforts, the prevalence of stress and its impact on teaching effectiveness and job satisfaction remain a matter of concern. The study underscores the critical need for targeted interventions and support systems to help teachers manage stress more effectively. By addressing the identified stressors and promoting effective coping mechanisms, educational stakeholders can enhance teacher well-being and improve educational outcomes of students.

This study is significant for several reasons: By identifying effective stress management strategies, the study can contribute to improving the mental and emotional health of Agricultural Science teachers, leading to increased job satisfaction and reduced burnout. Teachers who manage stress effectively are better able to engage students and deliver high-quality education, which can lead to improved student performance and interest in agricultural science.

This study adds to the growing body of literature on teacher stress and stress management, particularly in the context of Agricultural Science education in Nigeria. It has provided information specifically on Agricultural Science teachers' strategies for coping with their job stress in Abia State, thus providing a localized perspective on stress management in this critical educational field.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. School administrators should reduce administrative burden on teachers by reducing class size and providing support staff to handle non-teaching tasks.
2. Establishing formal peer support programmes can provide teachers with opportunities to share experiences, seek advice, and offer mutual support. Such programmes can foster a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation.
3. Regular and comprehensive professional development programmes should be organized for Agricultural Science teachers on both subject-specific skills and general stress management techniques**.**
4. Schools should provide professional counselors to help teachers develop personalized stress management plans and provide support during times of high stress.

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