



The Contributions of Locus of Control and Decision-Making Competence to Work Stress Experiences among Counsellor Educators in Universities in Anambra State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT:

This study examined the extent to which locus of control and decision making competence could predict work stress among counsellor educators in public universities located in Anambra State. Two research questions were posed, and two null hypotheses tested, using the 0.05 level of significance. The correlational survey research design was used, and the sample comprised of 82 counsellor educators from all public universities in Anambra State. Three instruments were used to collect data: The Locus of Control Scale (LCS), the Decision Making Competence Questionnaire (DMCQ), and the Work Stress Scale (WSS-10). The reliability coefficient alphas determined by Cronbach's alpha statistics were 0.73 for LCS, 0.76 for DMCQ, and 0.88 for WSS. Simple linear regression analysis of the data collected revealed that locus of control was a significant predictor of work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State. On the other hand, decision-making competence was not a significant predictor of work stress among the same counsellor educators. It is therefore recommended that school administrators should encourage counsellor educators in public universities to increase their locus of control in order to reduce work stress. This could be accomplished through organizing training initiatives such as seminars, workshops, or online courses that educate counsellor educators on the implications of locus of control in work stress.

Keywords: Locus of control, Decision-making competence, Work stress, Predictors, Counsellor Educators, Universities

1. Introduction

Stress in the workplace has become a ubiquitous issue, with many believing it to be detrimental to the physical and mental health of those in the teaching profession. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2016), it has been identified as a growing health risk globally, and several studies, such as those of Lasebikan (2016), Alson (2019), and Akuezuiolo and Azuji (2019), have demonstrated that teaching is a highly stressful occupation, not only in Nigeria but also on an international level. This has caused stress to be recognised as one of the main factors that impact the productivity and performance of teachers, particularly those teaching in public universities.

Counsellor educators, those teaching the counsellor education programme in public universities, are particularly prone to work-related stress due to the multiple job demands and pressures they face, which test their skills and knowledge. Moreover, given their key role in helping students reach their full potential and become responsible citizens, in addition to their teaching obligations, the issue of stress among counsellor educators has become an important matter that cannot be ignored.

The teaching profession has become increasingly stressful over the years, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where teachers have become a rare sight. This has become especially difficult for those teaching in public universities, who have to handle an excessive workload, teach both practical and theoretical lessons, deal with a poor school climate, ineffective leadership, inadequate remuneration, and inadequate working conditions, as well as the "publish or perish" phenomenon, which has put every teacher on edge (Osamwonyi, 2016). All these factors have resulted in making the teaching profession more challenging and stressful, particularly for counsellor educators.

Karner and Honing (2021) define teacher stress as an individual's negative emotional response (e.g., anger or depression), accompanied by physiological and biochemical changes (e.g., increased heart rate), to aspects of their job. The perception that the demands made on them pose a threat to their well-being or self-esteem mediates this. Therefore, in the context of this study, the work stress of teachers can be described as their adaptive response to any external stimuli, situation, or event that places physical and/or psychological demands on them, mediated by individual characteristics and/or psychological processes.

Counsellor educators often understand the concepts of stress, which are crucial for a thorough comprehension of the subject. These include stressors or situational demands that cause people to adapt in various ways, leading to physical and/or psychological responses. Such responses may be influenced

by internal and external factors known as locus of control. According to Rotter in Chiang, Fang, and Kaplan (2019), locus of control is a person's perception of how much control they have over their expectations for reinforcement and the outcomes in their lives. People with a high internal locus of control believe that their own efforts determine success or failure while those with an external locus of control believe that external factors, such as luck or fate, are responsible.

Studies conducted by Clark, Jany, and Philippi (2020); Ayodele and Oluwole (2015); Raveendran and Sivaneswaran (2019); Padmanabhan (2021); and Locke (2016) have established that locus of control has a significant impact on stress management and can trigger or reduce negative emotions, particularly in the workplace. As individuals differ in their locus of control, workplace stress will not affect all teachers in the same way due to varying personal, social, and environmental factors that could influence their susceptibility and coping ability.

Stress not only has negative implications for teachers, it could also result in lower student achievement and higher costs for schools and society. For instance, a study in Lagos, Nigeria, revealed that teachers' stress can lead to poor student performance, indiscipline, and increased dropout rates (Katharine, 2014). However, teachers in public universities, such as counsellor educators, who are more positive in their work values, are likely to be more adept at dealing with teaching jobs. Such teachers may have a more optimistic approach to educational tasks and dedicate more time to teaching counselling theories and principles.

In addition, stressors can be classified using different levels of analysis, as Kyriacou (2017) and Schumann (2019) propose. Kyriacou (2017), for instance, differentiates stressors at the personal level (e.g., relationships with colleagues), the school level (e.g., managing class size and workloads), and the system level (e.g., school demands). In some cases, the response to such demands can be helpful and lead to the achievement of specific goals. However, when the demands become too strenuous, as Harvard Health (2020) notes, they can be debilitating and have a detrimental effect on physical and mental health.

Stress develops when the perceived environmental demands are greater than an individual's regulatory capacity (Karasek, 2019). Stress can emerge rapidly or gradually due to cognitive assessments of situations and potential consequences, depending on how individuals appraise the balance between resources and demands. Stress can be seen as either challenging or threatening, which can have different effects on cognition. Therefore, individual features such as decision-making competence and social orientation may influence the individual's perception of stress.

Decision-making competence is a construct that is associated with performance and exhaustion in work-life settings (Ceschi, Demerouti, Sartori, & Weller, 2017). According to Parker, Bruine de Bruin, Fischhoff, and Weller (2017), it is an individual's tendency to follow normative rational principles in decision-making. Additionally, Santos-Ruiz et al. (2012) reported that those with higher decision-making ability showed significantly lower levels of cortisol before and after a stressful situation. Decision-making competence, therefore, not only involves choice but also the processes associated with making a decision. Furthermore, Alson (2019) stated that decision-making competence can be affected by the dynamics of the environment due to the uncertainty present in such situations.

Counsellor educators in universities, as decision-makers, must take temporal changes into account in order to create a balance between the cost of action and the risk of not taking action (Shields, Lam, Trainor, & Yonelinas, 2016). This is due to the stressors that they face, such as teaching complex theories, managing multiple classes, and developing innovative learning experiences. Additionally, the lack of resources in many universities creates an environment that is not ideal for teaching, leading to feelings of isolation and decreased job satisfaction (Chambers, 2019).

Studies conducted by Bruine de Bruin, Parker, and Fischhoff (2007) and Dewberry, Juanchich, and Narendran (2013) suggest that successful decision-making is dependent on cognitive abilities and that decision-making competence has an effect on real-life outcomes. Moreover, Shields et al. (2016) found that acute stress can affect decision-making competence and performance results, although the relationship between decision-making competence and work stress was not explored in the study.

Counsellor educators often feel unsupported by their universities, lacking the mentorship and guidance needed to develop professionally and provide quality education. This lack of support can lead to feelings of burnout, which can ultimately affect students' learning (Chambers, 2019). To address these unique stressors and challenges, universities must provide access to professional development and mentorship opportunities, adequate resources for teaching, and adequate compensation for counsellor educators. While some in-service programmes, such as sponsoring teachers for in-service training and organising seminars, workshops, conferences, and symposia on educational matters, have been organised by the government, not much has been done to address the issue of stress experienced by university counsellor educators in Anambra State. This lack of support is concerning and requires further study.

Statement of the Problem

Counsellor educators in public universities in Nigeria seem to be experiencing high levels of stress due to increased workload, high job demands, student misbehaviour, poor working conditions, poor relationships at work, role conflict, role ambiguity, a lack of complete autonomy, poor school ethos, and decreasing developmental opportunities. These can have a detrimental effect on their health and well-being, potentially leading to teacher burnout, job dissatisfaction, and poor performance. Despite a wealth of research on the causes, influences, and effects of stress on teachers in Nigeria, there is a dearth of studies exploring the role of locus of control and decision-making competences as predictors of work stress among counsellor educators. The few related studies that are available have been conducted outside of Nigeria, leaving a gap in the literature that this study seeks to fill. This study therefore aims to investigate the effects of locus of control and decision-making competences on work stress among counsellor education teachers in public universities in Anambra State..

2. Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine locus of control and decision-making competence as predictors of work stress among counsellor education teachers in public universities in Anambra State. Specifically, the study examined:

1. The extent to which locus of control predicts Work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State
2. The extent to which decision-making competence predicts Work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent does locus of control predict Work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State?
2. To what extent does decision-making competence predict Work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

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

1. Locus of control is not a significant predictor of Work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State.
2. Decision-making competence is not a significant predictor of Work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State.

3. Methodology

Anambra State was the location of the study, which employed a correlational survey research design. According to Nworgu (2015), this type of design is used to determine the relationship between two or more variables, as well as the direction and extent of that relationship.

4. Sampling design

For this study, a population of 82 counsellor educators in all the public universities in Anambra State was used, with no sampling needed due to its manageability. Three research instruments were utilised to obtain data. The Locus of Control Scale contained 16 work-related items, and the respondents responded on a four-point scale from 'strongly Agree' to 'strongly Disagree'. Internally- and externally-worded items were equally present. A higher score on the LCS implied externality, which was in accordance with Rotter's (1966) measure. The Decision Making Competence Questionnaire (DMCQ) encompassed 15 items that measured the decisional self-esteem and decision-making styles of the participants and were measured on a 4-point rating scale ranging from always to never. The Work Stress Scale (WSS) was utilised to assess the stress levels of young people and adults aged 12 and above. The scale measured the degree to which an individual perceived life to be unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloading in the past month. Respondents were asked how often they felt the same way, and the scale was measured on a 4-point scale from 'Never' to 'Always'.

5. Statistical design

The questionnaire was administered directly to the respondents. Simple linear regression analysis was used to analyse the collected data in order to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses.

6. Results

Research Question 1

To what extent does locus of control predict work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State?

Table 1: Regression Analysis on the Extent Locus of Control Predict Work Stress among Counsellor educators in Public Universities in Anambra State

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	R Square Change	Beta	% added
0.424	0.180	0.172	0.180	0.424	42.4

Table 1 show that the locus of control has a beta of 0.424. This indicates that locus of control contributes 42.4 percent of work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State.

Research Question 2

To what extent does decision-making competence predict Work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State?

Table 2: Regression Analysis on the Extent Decision-making Competence Predict Work Stress among Counsellor educators in Public Universities in Anambra State

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	R Square Change	Beta	% added
0.012	0.000	-0.009	0.000	-0.012	1.2

In Table 2 shows that social orientation has a beta of -0.012. This indicates that decision-making competence contributes 1.2 percent to work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State.

Null Hypothesis 1

Locus of control is not a significant predictor of Work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State.

Table 3: Regression Analysis on Locus of Control as a Significant Predictor of Work Stress among Counsellor educators in Public Universities in Anambra State

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	R Square Change	Beta	%add	Cal. t.	df	Pvalue	Remark
0.424	0.180	0.172	0.180	0.424	42.4	4.803	105	0.000	S

S = Significant

Table 3 reveals that at 105 df and a 0.05 level of significance, the calculated t is 4.803 with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, and the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, locus of control is a significant predictor of work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State.

Null Hypothesis 2

Decision-making competence is not a significant predictor of Work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State.

Table 4: Regression Analysis on Decision-Making Competence as a Significant Predictor of Work Stress among Counsellor educators in Public Universities in Anambra State

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	R Square Change	Beta	%add	Cal. t.	df	Pvalue	Remark
0.012	0.000	-0.009	-0.009	-0.012	-1.2	-0.126	105	0.900	NS

NS = Not Significant

Table 4 reveals that at 105 df and a 0.05 level of significance, the calculated t is -0.126 with a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is greater than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, decision-making competence is not a significant predictor of work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State.

7. Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that locus of control was a significant factor in the work stress of counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State, contributing 42.4 percent to the overall stress levels. This finding was consistent with previous research, as studies conducted by Ayodele and Oluwole (2015), Raveendran and Sivanewaran (2019), Padmanabhan (2021), and Locke (2016) all showed that individuals with an external locus of control are more likely to experience higher levels of work stress than those with an internal locus of control. This suggests that an individual's locus of control is a major factor in their work-related stress levels. To further support this finding, the research conducted by Ayodele and Oluwole (2015) investigated the impact of locus of control on work stress levels among counsellor educators in public universities in Nigeria. The results of the study indicated that those with an internal locus of control experienced lower levels of work stress than those with an external locus of control. This further suggests that locus of control is indeed a significant predictor of work stress.

The findings of the study showed that decision-making competence contributed 1.2 percent to work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State. However, the findings also revealed that decision-making competence was not a significant predictor of work stress for

counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State. This suggests that other factors may have a greater impact on work stress levels. The finding is in line with Bovol'ar and Orosova (2015) who's revealed a low relationship between decision-making styles and work stress, suggesting that decision-making competence may not be as influential in determining work stress levels as other factors

It is important to note that even a small amount of stress can have a significant impact on an individual's wellbeing. The decision-making process can be difficult and stressful, and the ability to make sound decisions can help reduce the amount of stress associated with it. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of decision-making on stress levels. In addition to decision-making competence, it is important to consider other factors that may influence an individual's stress levels. These include workload, job satisfaction, job security, and work-life balance. All of these can have a significant impact on the amount of stress an individual experiences. Therefore, it is important to take all the factors into account when assessing an individual's work stress levels.

8. Conclusions

The results of the study indicate that locus of control is a major factor in predicting work stress among counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State, however, decision-making competence does not appear to be a significant predictor of work stress.

9. Implications of the Study

The findings of the study indicate that locus of control, decision-making competence, and work stress is interconnected for counsellor educators in public universities in Anambra State. This connection has important implications for counsellor educators in the area. It implies that by paying closer attention to their locus of control and decision-making competence, counsellors and educators can potentially reduce their work stress levels. Therefore, counsellor educators in Anambra State should be encouraged to consider ways to improve both their locus of control and decision-making competence in order to reduce their stress levels.

10. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. To reduce stress in the workplace, universities should equip counsellor educators with the necessary resources to build their locus of control and decision-making competence.
2. Administrators should put in place training initiatives such as workshops, seminars, or online courses to help counsellor educators understand the implications of locus of control on work stress and be more proactive in their decision-making processes. By empowering clients to make informed decisions and take ownership of their choices, counsellors and educators can lessen work-related stress..

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