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## ADMINISTRATIVE STRATEGIES TO REDUCE STRESS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHING

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### ABSTRACT

*Primary education is the first recognised tier of education in Nigeria. The pupils admitted into Primary School are between the ages of 6 - 12 years. On a face value, one may be tempted to believe that the teaching of these little ones will be very pleasant and stress free. Only the primary school teacher or anyone interested in their affairs can actually discern the stressful condition in primary school teaching. This stress has continually hampered the performance of primary school teachers. Many, even those trained for this level of education, dread the practice.*

*Stressful lives have debilitating effects on people's performance generally, and can lead to dreadful disease that can kill or render the victims useless if they remain alive. Stress reduction in Primary School teaching is, therefore, of paramount importance if we are to curb falling standard of education in Nigeria.*

*This write up is designed to discuss administrative strategies to reduce stress in the teaching of Primary School pupils.*

### STRESS DEFINED:

According to Lazarus (1966), stress is a generalized non-specific response of the body to any demand made on it. Selye (1974) views stress as physical and psychological reactions of the body to demanding stimulus events. Denga and

Ekpo (1994) regard stress in terms of occupational strain, job stress, work tension borne out of job demands.

Stress can be regarded as a change in the physical and mental balance of an individual due to work pressure that may affect the individual's self-esteem.

### SOURCES OF STRESS FOR THE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

The major sources of stress for the primary school teacher are not far fetched. In the first place teachers live outside the school compound. This exerts stress on them as they have to wake up, tidy up their houses and travel several meters or kilometers before they get to their school. Frequently they arrive just before assembly. This does not give them enough time to look into the state of the physical compound before classes begin.

The primary school pupil is too immature to be on his own. Even the prefects are not matured enough to be able to organise others to clean up their premises. It is the teacher who organises the pupils for the daily sweeping and cleaning up of the compound. The current practice where teachers are not living on the compound hampers this progress. The teacher, in trying to meet up his personal demands, tends to rush in his house, and rush to school for morning duty. This is hazardous and stressful. For according to Ekpo (1993), too much physical activity such as running, working and dancing can result in stress.

The next source of stress for the teacher arises from his teaching load. The already stressed teacher from trekking a long distance to school, running around with the pupils for morning duty now enters the class for the day's teaching. Out of the 8 lesson periods of teaching, the teacher is required to teach at least 7 periods. He alone does the teaching, the marking and the class control. At times the number of pupils in the class are more than 50. The teacher, thus, teaches without assignments for fear of marking. Even if he gives the assignment, he does not mark it. At times the teacher involves the tiny pupils in marking, thus muddling up everything. In an attempt to give assignment, and mark important subjects, he skips the teaching of other subjects with the result that only a few subjects are taught on such days. All these are efforts to combat the stress that has already build up in the teacher. The pupils are not taught what they are supposed to learn. The cumulative effect of this is that the term's scheme of work is not ever completed.

Thirdly, stress in the teacher results from inadequate lesson preparation. An effective teaching is a result of a well planned lesson. In planning the lesson, the teacher is expected to do a lot of reading, gather materials from different sources, arrange them in a manner that will be appreciated and understood easily by the pupils. Each lesson preparation, thus, needs a lot of time. For a teacher handling up to 7 subjects a day, enough time cannot be used for the preparation of each lesson. The stressed teacher cannot prepare his lesson well with the result that his lesson will not be well delivered. The teacher who should write full notes of lesson per subject now writes only few full notes because he handles too many subjects a day. This results in poor teaching and lowering of standards of education. The

head teacher would be pressurizing the teacher who cannot submit well prepared notes. This too adds to the stress experienced by the primary school teacher in Nigeria.

On the part of the head teacher, lack of full time assistant headmasters, constitute stress for them. The deputy headmaster currently are combining teaching with administrative duties. This is stressful. The deputy headmaster who is already over stressed due to his overcrowded teaching periods in the class is also required to assist the headmaster in running the school. He helps in computing the result, handling of staff and students discipline, conducting examination and any other duties as may be assigned by the headmaster. The headmaster who has no clerical assistant also depends on his deputy to do the clerical jobs in the school. This results in stress for the deputy when he (the deputy) tries to combine his classroom teaching with these duties, and stress for the head teacher when the deputy cannot cope with these jobs. As a result of these administrative duties, he (the deputy) cannot be very effective in his lesson preparation. Consequently, his classroom teaching is also ineffective resulting in half-baked pupils.

The school is an up shoot of the society. Changes in the society also affects the school. The present rough and unruly behaviour of the society has permeated the fabrics of the school resulting in rough and undesirable behaviour in pupils. The fighting, stealing, insulting and rough behaviour of the pupils lead to stress for the teacher. The pupils exhibit their undisciplined behaviour even in the classroom. While teaching is going on, the pupils may start fighting with the result that the teacher will use his energy in trying to separate the fight. The teacher also spends extra time to settle the case to avoid a future occurrence. A case of stealing reported in the class will lead to investigation and searching. At times, the very pupil the teacher is helping may turn round to insult the teacher. All these adds to making the teacher really stressed. The teacher, thus, uses his energy to discipline the students. Those teachers who cannot cope with the stress simply abandon the pupils to do what ever they like.

#### **STRATEGIES TO REDUCE STRESS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHING**

A careful examination of the causes of stress for teachers in primary schools provides a clue for stress reduction strategies. Removal of the source of stress gives appropriate stress management technique. Where the source cannot be removed, a strategy for ensuring that the stress is shared among more than one teacher provides adequate coping strategy for the situation. Therefore in this section, administrative strategies are suggested to the government, head teachers, proprietors of schools and other agencies responsible for the running of primary schools on ways to reduce stress which presently burden teachers in our primary schools.

Teachers should be given accommodation inside the school premises. This will enable the teachers to go to school in time and help in organising the pupils for morning duties since the pupils cannot organise themselves due to their ages. This will also help the teachers not to waste their energy in trekking long distances to

school. Thus the stress felt by the teacher before entering the class is reduced.

Secondly, two teachers should be made to handle one class so as to share the stress that one teacher would have had. While one teacher is teaching, the other will be marking what he has already taught and given assignment. In this way, the 7 or 8 subjects a day will be taught in rotation. Teachers will also be able to give and mark assignments. The mere presence of two teachers in the class will reduce the unruly behaviour of the pupils since they know that they can easily be seen by any of the teachers. The teacher that was marking will resume teaching with new vigour. He is not stressed therefore he will do effective teaching, the pupils will also assimilate what has been taught. These teachers will also be able to prepare their lessons well and write full lesson notes since they are teaching 3 to 4 lessons a day.

Since the deputy headmasters are combining their classroom teaching with administrative duties, it is suggested that clerical staff be sent to primary schools to reduce the administrative duties of those deputies. When this is done only very few administrative duties will be given to the deputy headmaster.

Guidance counselors should also be sent to primary schools to guide the pupils. This will help the pupils to drop some of the bad tendencies they develop in the process of their growing up. The pupils should not be overcrowded in our classrooms. A teacher-student ratio of 1:30 stipulated by National Policy on Education (1981) should be adhered to. This will enable the teacher to give individual attention to the students. The teacher will also be able to control his class effectively. Proper infra-structure should be given to the teachers so as to reduce the stress of teaching. The teacher should be made to be comfortable in his classroom which is his office. Shabby class room brings about stress and ineffective teaching. Good tables, good chairs, adequate ventilation, and good physical plant should be assured for the teacher. Dilapidated buildings and poor environment cause stress for the teacher and results in lowering of standard of education. Thus, the school buildings should be well taken care of, the surroundings kept neat for effective teaching and learning.

#### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has discussed in detail how stressful it is now to teach in the Nigerian Primary School system. It has highlighted the causes of stress and it has also proffered solutions by discussing management techniques for administrators towards reducing stress on the primary school teacher. It is believed that when the recommendations of this paper are implemented, teaching in the primary school will cease to be a night mare as may be considered by many today as a result of the stress experienced.

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