

**ADMINISTRATORS' MECHANISMS FOR COMBATING OCCUPATIONAL  
STRESS: TOWARDS ENHANCING PRINCIPALS JOB EFFECTIVENESS  
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CALABAR EDUCATION ZONE  
OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*The study investigated effective mechanisms that could be adopted by principals to combat occupational stress in order to enhance their job effectiveness. Correlational research design was adopted for the study. One research question was raised and two hypotheses formulated to guide the study. The population of the study comprised the 46 principals of the 46 secondary schools in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State. The 46 principals formed the sample of the study because the number was manageable. Data for the study was collected using a 45 item researchers' designed questionnaire titled "combating occupational stress for enhancement of principals' job effectiveness questionnaire (COSEPJEQ)" with 0.82 using the Cronbach Alpha. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviation), t-test and multiple regression statistics were used for data analysis. The results revealed 8 effective mechanisms that could be adopted by principals in combating occupational stress. Also, male and female principals did not significantly differ in their opinion on the mechanisms that could be adopted by principals in combating occupational stress. Furthermore, the results also revealed that combating occupational stress through proper time management, scheduling of duties, delegation of duties, maintenance of conducive work environment, maintenance of positive school climate, use of modern ICT facilities, regular health checks and vacationing will enhance principals' job effectiveness. It was recommended among others that government should endeavour to provide all necessary facilities and physical resources needed by principals in public secondary schools.*

**Keywords:** *Mechanisms, Occupational stress, Principles, Job effectiveness*

## **Introduction**

Secondary school administrators otherwise called principals perform a plethora of functions which leads to the attainment of school goals and objectives. The increase demand for quality education and the high expectations placed on schools by parents and other stakeholders is driving principals to exert extra efforts to meet up with standards and expectations. Many schools are however not thriving due to dwindling principals' effectiveness and their inefficiency in managing school resources. Please, link this statement properly with the previous paragraph

Stress is a situational force that acts on a person, creating a feeling of emotional, psychological, physical and mental tension that threatens the person's ability to cope with life challenges. According to Earle (2016), stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances. These adverse or very demanding circumstances are called the stressors. Stressors are those conditions, events or situation that can cause stress on a living organism. For majority of administrators, their major stressors are usually related to their work environment. Generally speaking, the work environment entails all factors and elements that can be found within the wider organization (Nath 2020). For school administrators, their work environment connotes the physical school environment, the school climate and the human elements that populate the school. The physical work environment includes school grounds, offices, classrooms, laboratories and other school physical facilities. The human elements are the teachers, administrative staff, the students and their behavioural patterns in the school. The school climate is referred to as the social atmosphere of the school or learning environment (John 2022). The climate of a school is positive when the social environment is welcoming and promotes communication, interactions and sense of belonging to students, teachers, non-teachers and school administrators. The negative school climate is characterized by tension, conflict and lack of corporation between the human elements in the school. The climate of the school can however be determined by the level of compliance to school rules and regulations by staff and students, cordially of relationships between principals, staff and students as well as between staff and staff or staff and students.

In the process of carrying out their functions, Principals systematically come in contact and interacts with all the elements in the school environment. The Principal is the instructional leader and therefore occupies a strategic position in the school (Uko and Nnaji, 2016). The major tasks performed by principals as are:

- a. Setting available goals and objectives for the schools
- b. Formulating sound policies and plans for achieving school goals and objectives
- c. Procurement of necessary resources needed for school goal attempt
- d. Effective and efficient organization and co-ordination of school resources and activity.
- e. Stimulation of school personnel terminals better performance.
- f. Ensuring security and discipline in the school.
- g. Maintaining of cordial school community relationship
- h. Periodic evaluation of school programmes in accordance with set plans and policies.

The principal deals with a whole lot of paper work and are always occupied with either reading mails, sending out internet memos, or replying to bulk of external mails. They spend greater part of their daily lives in their offices planning, directing, organizing, and coordinating school resources to ensure success (Akib, 2009). Maintaining of school records, attending to visitors, maintaining discipline and overseeing other school activities makes the workload of principals very cumbersome (Ogidi, 2020). Many principals are faced with high workloads that they hardly have time to attend to their personal and family needs. Some school administrators habitually leave their offices very late every day because of high workload (Uko & Nnaji 2015). High workload is one of the reasons for the reported cases of stress among school administrators (Mbali, 2021).

Some schools lack conducive offices for their principals and teachers. Udum (2020) found that many school administrators in public schools stay inhabitable offices with poor facilities. Administrators' offices in some schools lack facilities such as fans, air conditioners, good desk and chairs (Mark, 2020). Some Principals lack stationeries, photocopiers, computers and other modern information and communication technology equipment in their offices. Anam (2023) lamented that some Principals still perform many tasks manually instead of using modern ICT facilities that facilitate tasks. The stress level of school administrators is steadily rising due to poor condition of work (Elijah, 2020). Trying to perform tasks without the necessary tools is a big challenge that results to stress and frustration (Drogba, 2021).

The behavior of teachers and students is another hurdle that school administrators have to contend with. Eken (2012) noted that some teachers are very uncooperative, unsupportive and incorrigible. Some teachers can resist change when the change do not favour them while some also avoid responsibilities and prefer to play truancy. A closed or negative school climate can potentially frustrate the efforts of the school management. The absence of cordial interpersonal relations with the management and staff can limit the level of

productivity of both staff and administrators and also cause them stress (Judge, 2003). Students' non-conformity to school regulations and their involvement in other negative behaviours could contribute to principals' stress (Nnaji, Ofem, Anashie, & Bassey 2023). A school with negative reputation of for students' indiscipline, poor academic achievement, examination malpractice and other deviant behaviors could be a source of worry, stress and frustration to school administrators. The failure to meet the expectations of stakeholders in quality and standard could be a source of nightmare and psychological burden on school Administrators (Nnaji, Uko and Nwafor, 2015).

Stress has become prevalent among people from all works of life and across different professions and industries. Mara (2020) noted that stress is fast becoming a public health issue that needs urgent attention. Men and women, old and the young suffer from stress (Malik 2023) The good thing is that various strategy abound for alleviating or managing stress (Trift, 2022). Individuals can cure themselves of stress without needing to get the services of the physician or psychologist if they are well informed and guided (Diya, 2021). Malama (2021) stated that the strategies for dealing with stress is to eliminate the stressors or find effective ways of moderating the solution of the stressors. This implies that school administrators can also save themselves from stress and stressors if they can develop an effective mechanism.

Understanding time scheduling principles, time management and job delegation can save people from stress and make them more productive (Mara, 2020). Managers with too much work load can avoid stress by delegating responsibilities to subordinates (Judge 2003). Managers with relevant technical skills can easily achieve results with less stress (Ajaba, 2003).

### **Statement of the problem**

Principals' job can be summarized as ensuring that educational goals and objectives are achieved through the effective and efficient organization and coordination of school resources. However, Principals seem to be failing in their duties especially in secondary schools in Calabar Educational Zone. The poor academic performance of students and the poor attitude of teachers to work are evidences that the administrators are less effective. Teachers are not always properly supervised by their principals while some of the principals also complain of stress and burdensome workloads. The study is therefore poised to explore the various mechanisms that can be adopted by principals to combat stress in order to become more effective in the discharge of their duties.

## **Research Question**

1. What effective mechanisms could be adopted by school administrators to combat occupational stress.

## **.Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference in the opinion of male and female Principals on the mechanisms that could be adopted by school administrators to combat occupational stress.
1. Combating occupational stress through time management, work scheduling, delegation of duties, conducive work environment, maintenance of school climate, use of modern ICT facilities, regular hospital checkups, and vacationing will not significantly enhance principals job effectiveness.

## **Methodology**

The research design that was adopted for this study was the correlational design. The population of the study comprised all Principals in the 46 secondary schools in Calabar education zone of Cross River State. The 46 principals also formed the sample of the study because the population was manageable. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Combating Occupational Stress and Principals Effectiveness Questionnaire” (COSPEQ). The instrument was divided into two sections, A and B. Section A contained information on the mechanisms that could be adopted by school administrators in combating occupational stress. Section B contained 45 items that measured the relationship between the sub variables of the independent variables (mechanisms of combating stress) and the dependent variable (principals job effectiveness). Each of the subscale was measured with 5 items on a four-point scale of strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was face validated by two experts in test and measurement in University of Calabar. the reliability of the instrument using Cronbach Alpha was 0.82. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the questions while independent t-test and multiple regression analysis were used to test the hypothesis at .05 level of significance.

## **Results**

### **Research question 1**

1. What effective mechanisms could be adopted by school administrators to combat occupational stress

Table 1: effective mechanism that could be adopted by school administrators to combat occupational stress.

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD	DECISION
1.	Time management	3.08	0.82	Accepted
2.	Scheduling of books	2.92	0.67	Accepted
3.	Delegation of duties	3.08	0.77	Accepted
4.	Conducive work environment	3.01	0.68	Accepted
5.	Conference attendance	2.05	0.75	Rejected
6.	Maintenance of positive school climate	3.03	0.86	Accepted
7.	Use of modern ICT facility	3.11	0.80	Accepted
8.	Regular hospital checkups	3.20	0.77	Accepted
9.	Vacationing	3.00	0.62	Accepted
	<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>2.94</b>		

Table 1 above revealed that items 1,2,3,4,6,7,8 and 9 obtained high mean scores above the decision rule of 2.50.. This implies that school administrators agreed that proper time management, scheduling of tasks, delegation of duties, maintaining conducive work environment, maintenance school climate, use of modern ICT facilities, regular health checks and vacationing are effective mechanisms that could be adopted by school administrators to compact occupational stress. Item 5 with a mean score below the decision rule was however not accepted by school administrators as effective mechanism for combating occupational stress.

### Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the opinion of male and female principals on the mechanisms that could be adopted by school administrators to combat occupational stress.

Table 2

Independent t-test analysis of the opinion of male and female principals on effective mechanisms that could be adopted by school administrators in compacting occupational stress.

Respondents	N	X	SD	DF	t-cal	t-crit.	Prob	Decision
Male principal	25	3.02	0.33	44		2.05	.05	Ho accepted
Female principal	21	0.31						

Table 2 showed that t-calculated of 1.10 is less than t-critical of 2.05. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This implies that there is no significant different in the opinion of male and female principals on the mechanisms that could be adopted by school administrators in combating occupational stress

## Hypothesis 2

Combating occupational stress through proper time management, scheduling, of duties, delegation of duties, maintenance of conducive work environment, maintenance of positive school climate, use of modern ICT facilities, regular health checks and vacationing will not significantly enhance principals' job effectiveness.

### Table 3

Multiple regression analysis of administrators' mechanisms for combating occupational stress as variables that will significantly enhance principal effectiveness

Source of variation	Sum of samples	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	73.31	4	16.421	62.01	.006
Residual	11.62	42	.400		
Total	84.93				
	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficients		
	B	Std.error	Beta	T	Sig
(Constraint)	9.12	.52		20.31	
Proper time management	1.81	.14	.78	4.32	
Scheduling of duties	1.52	.15	.48	5.11	
Delegation of duties	1.61	.16	.65	3.42	
Conducive work environment	1.73	.25	.74	4.20	
Positive school climate	1.77	.19	.77	4.33	
Modern ICT facilities	1.28	.21	.77	4.33	
Regular health checks	1.52	.24	.50	3.10	
Vacationing	1.65	.27	.38	3.22	
a. Dependent variables: Principals job effectiveness					
R	.969				
R square	.80				
Adjusted R Square	.81				
Std. Error of the estimate	.56				

P<.05; df4,83, Critical F = 2.45

Table 3 showed that the calculated f-ratio is 62.01 with significant value of .000. the calculated f-ratio is seen to be greater than t-critical f-ratio and the obtained significant value less than .05 level of significance used in the study ( $p < .05$ ). With these results, the null hypothesis was rejected based on the joint influence of the eight indication of independent variable in predicting dependent variable. This means that the mechanism for combating occupational stress proper time management, scheduling of duties, delegation of conducive work environment, cordial school climate and use of modern ICT facilities the significant variables that will enhance principals job effectiveness. The multiple R which is the correlation coefficient of the independent variables and the dependent variables is .96 indicating high and positive correlation between the eight mechanisms of the independent variables and the dependent variable.

The coefficient of determination (R square) which explains the power of the independent variables in predicting the dependent variable is .80. This showed that up to 80% of the variables in principals' job effectiveness is jointly explained by the eight mechanisms of combating occupational stress.

The standardized regression coefficient (Beta) and t-values were used to determine the extent to which each predictor variable contributes to the variation explained in the dependent variables. At .05 level of significance, the eight mechanisms were found to be significant. The higher the coefficient, the more effective the combating occupational stress. Using the eight elements has in enhancing purposes job effectiveness.

Proper time management had significant t values of 4.32 ( $p < .05$ ) with beta value of .78 indicating about 78 percent contribution of the variable to the variation in the dependent variable. Scheduling of duties had significant t-value of 5.11 ( $p < .05$ ) with beta value of .48 indicating about 48 percent contribution, delegation of duties had significant t-value of 3.42 ( $p < .05$ ) with beta value of .65 indicating about 65 percent contribution, conducive work environment has significant t-value of 4.20 with beta value of .74 indicating about 74 percent contribution. Cordial school climate has significant t-value of 5.16 ( $p < .05$ ) with beta value of .68 indicating 68 percent contribution, use of modern ICT facilities has significant t-value of 4.33 with beta value of .77 indicating 77 percent contribution, regular health checks has significant t-value of 3.10 ( $p < .05$ ) with Beta value of .50 indicating 50 percent contribution, vacating has significant t-value of 3.22 ( $p < .05$ ) Beta value of .38 indicating 38 percent contribution. Assessing the level of controlling of each of the predictor variables, the variables observed in the dependent variable with use of weight of Beta, proper time management has highest contribution followed by use of

modern ICT facilities, conducive work environment, cordial school climate, delegation of duties, regular health checks, scheduling of duties, and lastly vacationing. The results lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis based on the relative or individual (mechanism for combating occupational stress) to the prediction of the dependent variable enhancing principal job effectiveness meaning it is accepted that there is significant relative contribution of each of the eight mechanism for combating occupational stress to the achievement of principals' job effectiveness.

### **Discussion of findings**

The result from research questions indicated eight effective mechanisms that could be adopted by school administrators in combating occupational stress. By implication this result suggests that by properly managing time, scheduling of duties, delegation of duties, maintaining a conducive work environment, maintaining a conducive school climate, use of modern ICT facilities, regular health checks and taking vacations are effective mechanisms that school administrators can deploy to combat occupational stress. The reason for the rejection of periodic conference attendance as a mechanism is based on the assumption that conference attendance may be another stressful activity which may require presenting of papers, travelling and payment of conference participation fees which may even add to a principals' stress. This finding is however in line with Trift (2022) who stated that many strategies abound for alleviating or managing stress. The finding also agrees with Mara (2020) who stated that Understanding time scheduling principles, time management and job delegation can save people from stress and make them more productive. The finding is also in line with Ajaba (2003) who stated that managers with relevant technical skills can easily achieve results with less stress. This finding also corroborates Gandoke (2020) who asserted that work environment characterized by conducive offices relieve stress in the workers and when principals have conducive offices equipped with fans, air conditioners, toilets, adequate stationeries, computers, internet and regular electricity supply, their work environment becomes conducive not to produce stress.

Result of hypothesis one revealed that male and female principals do not significantly differ in their opinion on the effective mechanism that could be deployed by principals to combat occupational stress. This result show that both male and female school administrators are affected by hostile work environment. No one regardless of gender is immune to stressful conditions of work. This finding is in tandem with Mara (2020) who noted that men, women, the old and the young suffer from stress. This shows why both male and female principals didn't differ in their opinions.

Result of hypothesis two holds that there is significant positive relationship between combating occupational stress through proper time management, scheduling of tasks, delegation of duties, maintaining conducive work environment, maintaining positive school climate, use of modern ICT facilities, regular health checks, vacationing and enhancement of principals' job effectiveness. Deploying these mechanisms is a sure way for principals to alleviate occupational stress and improve their job effectiveness. Principals who are not stressed up will show absolute commitment, focus and professionalism in his duties. This finding corroborates Diya (2021) who stated that managers who perform their duties under conducive work conditions always achieve excellence. This finding is also in line with Okon and Nnaji (2014) who noted that administrators are more proactive and effective when the resources for gathering information and discharging other duties are available and assessable. The use of computers and other modern ICT resources will help fasten and ease off workload for principals. Availability of office equipment and stationeries will also enable principals perform their jobs without hitches. This finding is agreement with Mara (2020) who remarked that understanding the principles of time management, delegation and scheduling can serve administrators from stress and make them more productive. This implies that smartly allocating time and planning for every activity will help principals avoid stress and increase their effectiveness. By delegating duties to teachers and other non-teaching staff, principals can also successfully focus on other matters. The finding aligns with Pasore (2020) who stated that by understanding oneself in terms of strength, weaknesses and knowing when to take a break or see a physician is important to avoid stressful conditions that may hinder productivity at work. Principals should therefore endeavour to always go for regular health checks and should not fail to take some time off work to relax and rejuvenate. These will greatly enhance their level of effectiveness.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, there are effective mechanisms that could be adopted by school administrators to combat occupational stress, combating occupational stress through the adoption of effective mechanisms will significantly enhance principals' job effectiveness. The findings of this study leads to the conclusion that principals' will become highly effective in their jobs if they can combat occupational stress by deploying the mechanisms of proper time management, scheduling of tasks, delegation of duties, maintaining conducive work environment, creating positive school climate, use of modern ICT resources, regular health checks and vacationing.

## Recommendations

1. Government should endeavour to provide and equip public secondary schools with required facilities
2. Principals should endeavour to create harmonious working relationships with all staff and students in the school
3. Principals should always endeavour to delegate duties to teachers and non-teachers.

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