
**STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES USED BY LECTURERS IN
PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA.
IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL-4**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the stress management strategies employed by lecturers in private universities in South East Nigeria and their implications for Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). The research adopted a descriptive survey design, with a population of 261 lecturers from 13 accredited private universities. Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample size of 158 lecturers was selected through proportionate stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire validated for content and reliability (Cronbach Alpha ≥ 0.70) and analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and t-test statistics at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that lecturers exhibited low utilisation of self-care strategies, feedback reflection practices, and peer mentoring collaboration, with grand mean scores below the criterion of 2.50. Furthermore, there was no significant difference between male and female lecturers in the adoption of these strategies. The study highlights the adverse implications of limited stress management for lecturer well-being, instructional effectiveness, and overall educational quality, which are critical for achieving SDG 4. Recommendations include the implementation of structured wellness programmes, institutionalization of reflective teaching practices, and the promotion of peer mentoring and collaborative networks to enhance lecturers' coping capacity, professional performance, and the delivery of quality education in private universities.

KEYWORDS: Stress Management, Lecturers, Private Universities, South East Nigeria, SDG 4, Self-Care, Reflective Practice, Peer Mentoring.

INTRODUCTION

University lecturers occupy a critical position in the knowledge economy, functioning as creators of knowledge, facilitators of learning, and drivers of institutional excellence. However, this central role exposes them to persistent and multifaceted stressors, including heavy teaching loads, research expectations, administrative duties, and the constant pressure to meet institutional performance benchmarks (Chukwuemeka, Okonkwo & Njoku, 2023). In private universities in South-East Nigeria, these stressors are often intensified by market-driven performance imperatives, limited infrastructural support, and competitive pressures for accreditation and student satisfaction. Consequently, lecturers frequently experience occupational stress, which, if unaddressed, can compromise their psychological well-being, diminish instructional effectiveness, and reduce scholarly productivity, all of which threaten the quality of higher education delivery.

Stress management encompasses the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural strategies that individuals and institutions adopt to mitigate the adverse effects of occupational stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In academic settings, these strategies range from personal coping mechanisms such as time management, physical exercise, reflective practice, and social support, to institutional interventions including workload planning, mentoring programs, professional counseling, and supportive leadership structures (Usoro & Etuk, 2016; Chukwuemeka et al., 2023). Evidence from Nigerian higher education indicates that lecturers who employ effective stress management strategies report higher levels of job satisfaction, improved professional performance, and greater engagement in teaching and research activities (Akinola, 2022). Conversely, inconsistent access to coping resources and insufficient institutional support can exacerbate stress, leading to burnout, absenteeism, and reduced quality of education delivery.

The significance of effective stress management in academia extends beyond individual well-being and aligns closely with global educational development priorities, particularly Sustainable Development Goal-4 (SDG-4). SDG-4 emphasizes the provision of inclusive, equitable, and quality education while promoting lifelong learning opportunities (United Nations, 2015). Within this framework, the quality of education is fundamentally linked to the effectiveness, motivation, and psychological resilience of teachers and lecturers. Research demonstrates that lecturers' capacity to manage occupational stress not only sustains their professional functioning but also enhances instructional quality, research productivity, and

student learning outcomes which are all essential components of SDG-4 (Ojedokun & Oladejo, 2021). In private universities, where institutional resources and support systems may vary widely, understanding the strategies lecturers adopt to manage stress becomes critical for sustaining teaching quality, promoting scholarly excellence, and ensuring that educational objectives are met.

Despite the recognized importance of stress management for educational quality, empirical studies in Nigeria have largely focused on public universities or generalized academic populations, leaving a significant knowledge gap in private higher education contexts (Akinola, 2022; Chukwuemeka Okonkwo & Njoku, 2023). Furthermore, while research has documented the prevalence of occupational stress and its negative consequences, few studies have examined the practical coping strategies lecturers employ or evaluated their effectiveness in enhancing educational outcomes. This gap is particularly important in light of the rapid expansion of private universities in South-East Nigeria, which now play a pivotal role in national higher education provision.

By examining the stress management strategies of lecturers in private universities, this study situates occupational coping not merely as an individual concern but as a strategic component of institutional capacity building and sustainable educational development. Insight into these strategies could offer a critical guidance for university administrators, policymakers, and educational stakeholders seeking to enhance lecturer well-being, optimize professional performance, and advance quality education in alignment with SDG-4 targets. Ultimately, understanding how lecturers navigate occupational stress could also provide a foundation for interventions that support both human capital development and the broader goals of sustainable, high-quality higher education in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The issue of occupational stress among university lecturers has become increasingly pronounced in contemporary higher education systems, particularly within private universities in South East Nigeria, where institutional demands, performance expectations, and competitive academic environments continue to intensify. Lecturers in these institutions are often confronted with excessive workloads, stringent administrative requirements, pressure to meet research and publication targets, and the need to maintain high teaching standards, all within resource-constrained settings. These stressors, when poorly managed, have been linked to burnout, reduced instructional effectiveness, declining job satisfaction,

and compromised mental health. Despite the critical role lecturers play in achieving quality education, which aligns with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), there is growing concern that the stress experienced by lecturers may undermine their capacity to deliver effective teaching, mentor students adequately, and contribute meaningfully to knowledge production. This situation raises serious questions about the sustainability of educational quality in private universities and the broader implications for national development.

Although stress is an inevitable aspect of academic work, the strategies employed by lecturers to manage stress vary widely and are often influenced by institutional support systems, individual coping mechanisms, and organizational culture. However, there is limited empirical evidence on the specific stress management strategies adopted by lecturers in private universities in South East Nigeria and the extent to which these strategies effectively mitigate the negative consequences of occupational stress. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether existing institutional frameworks adequately support lecturers in managing stress in ways that promote well-being, enhance productivity, and sustain educational quality. The absence of clear, context-specific insights into stress management practices creates a gap in understanding how lecturers can be better supported to align their professional responsibilities with the demands of SDG 4. Therefore, the problem of this study lies in the need to critically examine the stress management strategies utilized by lecturers in private universities in South East Nigeria and to determine their implications for achieving sustainable, inclusive, and quality education.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to ascertain the stress management strategies used by lecturers in private universities in South East Nigeria: An implication for sustainable development goal-4. Specifically, the study sought to determine the;

1. Self-care management strategy for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 in private universities in South East Nigeria.
2. Feedback reflection management strategy for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 in private universities in South East, Nigeria.
3. Peer mentoring collaboration management strategy for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 in private universities in South East, Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

The findings of the study would be of immense benefit to lecturers in private universities in South East Nigeria, as it would provide them with evidence-based insights into effective stress management strategies that can enhance their psychological well-being and professional performance. By identifying practical coping mechanisms, lecturers would be better equipped to manage work-related pressures, reduce burnout, and improve their instructional delivery, thereby fostering a more productive academic environment.

University administrators and proprietors would also benefit from the findings of this study, as it would expose the institutional factors contributing to lecturers' stress and highlight the need for supportive policies and work environments. The findings of the study would guide management in designing staff welfare programmes, flexible work structures, and professional support systems that promote job satisfaction, improve staff retention, and enhance overall institutional effectiveness.

The findings of the study would further be significant to policymakers and educational planners, particularly those concerned with higher education development in Nigeria. It would provide empirical data that can inform policy formulation on staff welfare, workload regulation, and quality assurance in private universities. Such policies are essential for strengthening the education sector and ensuring alignment with global standards for quality education.

Students in private universities would indirectly benefit from findings of the study would, as improved stress management among lecturers is likely to translate into better teaching quality, increased lecturer engagement, and more supportive learning environments. This, in turn, will enhance students' academic experiences, learning outcomes, and overall educational satisfaction.

The findings of the study would contribute to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by highlighting the critical link between lecturers' well-being and educational quality. It would also serve as a valuable reference material for researchers and scholars interested in stress management, higher education administration, and sustainable development, thereby adding to the existing body of knowledge and stimulating further research in related areas.

Finally, researchers and scholars would significantly benefit from the findings of the study as it would contribute to the existing body of knowledge on occupational stress management within the context of higher education, particularly in private universities in South East Nigeria where empirical studies are still limited. The study would provide relevant literature, conceptual clarifications, and empirical findings that can serve as a foundation for further investigations. It would also help researchers to identify gaps in knowledge, refine research problems, and develop more robust studies in areas such as lecturer well-being, institutional effectiveness, and quality education.

Scope of the Study

The study was delimited to the stress management strategies used by lecturers in private universities in South East Nigeria: An implication for sustainable development goal-4. The content scope of the study covered the extent lecturers use self-care management strategy, feedback reflection management strategy and peer mentoring collaboration management strategy as stress management strategies in private universities. The subject scope of the study was male and female lecturers.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. What is the self-care management strategy used by lecturers for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 in private universities in South East Nigeria?
2. What is the feedback reflection management strategy used by lecturers for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 in private universities in South East, Nigeria?
3. What is the peer mentoring collaboration management strategy used by lecturers for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 in private universities in South East, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female lecturers on the self-care management strategy used by lecturers for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 in private universities in South East Nigeria.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female lecturers on the feedback reflection management strategy used by lecturers for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 in private universities in South East, Nigeria.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female lecturers on the peer mentoring collaboration management used by lecturers for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 in private universities in South East, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the stress management strategies used by lecturers in private universities in South East Nigeria and their implications for Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). The choice of the descriptive survey design was because it enables the researcher to collect data from a large population and describe existing conditions, practices, and relationships without manipulating any variables. The design also allows for the systematic collection of quantitative data on lecturers' experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies regarding occupational stress within their natural work environments. The area of the study comprised the five states in South East Nigeria, namely Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. These states host a number of licensed private universities that operate under diverse administrative structures but share similar challenges related to academic workload, performance expectations, and institutional pressures.

The population of the study consisted of 261 lecturers in 13 accredited private universities within the South East geopolitical zone. The sample size for the study was determined using Taro Yamane formula which yielded a sample size of 158 lecturers which were used for the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Stress Management Strategies Questionnaire for Lecturers (SMSQL)." The questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on relevant literature and consisted of two sections. Section A elicited demographic information such as gender, academic rank, and years of experience, while Section B contained items on stress management strategies, including workload management, emotional regulation, social support, time management, and institutional support systems. The items were structured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation to ensure clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the items.

The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study conducted outside the study area but within a similar context. Data collected from the pilot test were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha statistics to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. A reliability

coefficient of 0.70 and above was considered acceptable for the study, indicating that the instrument was reliable for data collection. Data collection was carried out by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants. Copies of the questionnaire were administered directly to the respondents in their respective institutions to ensure a high response rate. The respondents were given adequate time to complete the instrument, and confidentiality of their responses was assured to encourage honest and unbiased responses.

The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used as the benchmark for decision-making, where any mean score equal to or above 2.50 was accepted, while those below were rejected. The findings from the analysis were used to draw conclusions and make recommendations on effective stress management strategies and their implications for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 in private universities in South East Nigeria.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected for the study on stress management strategies used by lecturers in private universities in South East Nigeria and their implications for Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). The data were analyzed in line with the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while t-test statistics were used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used for decision-making.

Research Question One: What is the self-care management strategy used by lecturers for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 in private universities in South East Nigeria?

Table 4.1: Mean Ratings on Self-Care Management Strategies.

S/N	Items	Mean (\bar{X})	SD	Decision
1	I engage in regular physical exercise to manage stress	2.10	0.84	Disagreed
2	I maintain a balanced diet to enhance my well-being	2.21	0.79	Disagreed
3	I practice adequate rest and sleep despite workload	2.05	0.88	Disagreed
4	I engage in relaxation techniques (meditation,	2.18	0.81	Disagreed

	recreation)			
5	I manage my time effectively to reduce stress	2.30	0.76	Disagreed
	Grand Mean and standard deviation	2.17		Low Utilisation

The results in Table 1 show that all items had mean scores below the criterion mean of 2.50. The grand mean of 2.17 indicates that lecturers in private universities in South East Nigeria exhibit low utilisation of self-care management strategies for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4.

Research Question Two: What is the feedback reflection management strategy used by lecturers for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 in private universities in South East Nigeria?

Table 4.2: Mean Ratings on Feedback Reflection Management Strategies.

S/N	Items	Mean (\bar{X})	SD	Decision
6	I reflect on students' feedback to improve teaching	2.28	0.83	Disagreed
7	I seek feedback from colleagues on my teaching	2.15	0.80	Disagreed
8	I use self-evaluation techniques regularly	2.20	0.78	Disagreed
9	I adjust my teaching methods based on reflection	2.32	0.75	Disagreed
10	I document my teaching experiences for improvement	2.11	0.82	Disagreed
	Grand Mean and standard deviation	2.21		Low Utilisation

From the Table 2, the data shows that all the items recorded mean scores below 2.50, with a grand mean of 2.21. This indicates that feedback reflection management strategies are poorly utilised by lecturers in private universities in South East Nigeria.

Research Question Three: What is the peer mentoring collaboration management strategy used by lecturers for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 in private universities in South East Nigeria?

Table 4.3: Mean Ratings on Peer Mentoring Collaboration Strategies.

S/N	Items	Mean (\bar{X})	SD	Decision
11	I collaborate with colleagues to manage academic stress	2.25	0.77	Disagreed
12	I participate in peer mentoring programmes	2.08	0.85	Disagreed
13	I share teaching experiences with colleagues	2.34	0.73	Disagreed
14	I receive emotional support from colleagues	2.19	0.80	Disagreed

15	I engage in team-based problem solving	2.27	0.76	Disagreed
	Grand Mean and standard deviation	2.23		Low Utilisation

The results in **Table 3** show that all items had mean scores below the benchmark of 2.50. The grand mean of 2.23 indicates that lecturers demonstrate low utilisation of peer mentoring and collaboration strategies.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female lecturers on self-care management strategies.

Table 4: t-test Analysis of Male and Female Lecturers on Self-Care Strategies.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male	82	2.19	0.81	0.84	1.96	Not Significant
Female	76	2.15	0.78			

Since t-cal (0.84) is less than t-crit (1.96), the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant difference between male and female lecturers on self-care management strategy used by lecturers for SDGs-4 in private universities in South East Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female lecturers on feedback reflection strategies.

Table 5: T-Test Analysis of Feedback Reflection Strategies.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male	82	2.23	0.79	0.76	1.96	Not Significant
Female	76	2.19	0.77			

Since t-cal (0.76) is less than t-crit (1.96), the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant difference between male and female lecturers on feedback reflection strategies used by lecturers for SDGs-4 in private universities in South East Nigeria.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female lecturers on peer mentoring collaboration strategies.

Table 6: T-test Analysis of Peer Mentoring Strategies.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male	82	2.26	0.75	0.69	1.96	Not Significant
Female	76	2.21	0.78			

Since $t\text{-cal}$ (0.69) is less than $t\text{-crit}$ (1.96), the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant difference between male and female lecturers on peer mentoring collaboration strategies used by lecturers for SDGs-4 in private universities in South East Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that lecturers in private universities in South East Nigeria exhibit low utilisation of self-care management strategies, as evidenced by the grand mean score below the acceptable benchmark. This suggests that lecturers rarely engage in practices such as regular exercise, adequate rest, relaxation techniques, and effective time management. This finding aligns with the position of Chukwuemeka, Okonkwo and Njoku (2023), who reported that university lecturers in Nigeria often neglect personal well-being due to excessive workload and institutional pressure, thereby increasing their vulnerability to stress-related burnout. Similarly, Ofoegbu and Nwadiani (2022) found that inadequate self-care practices among lecturers negatively affect their teaching effectiveness and overall job satisfaction. However, this finding contradicts the study by Adeyemi (2021), which indicated a moderate level of self-care among lecturers in some private institutions, suggesting that institutional differences may influence lecturers' ability to adopt healthy coping strategies. The implication of this disparity is that while some universities may provide supportive environments, many still lack adequate structures to promote lecturers' well-being.

The study also found that feedback reflection management strategies are poorly utilised by lecturers. This indicates that lecturers do not consistently engage in reflective practices such as evaluating their teaching, seeking feedback from students and colleagues, or adjusting instructional strategies based on reflection. This finding is consistent with Eze and Nwoye (2024), who observed that reflective teaching practices are not yet deeply embedded in many Nigerian universities due to time constraints and lack of institutional encouragement. In the same vein, Okafor and Ubah (2023) reported that lecturers often prioritize content delivery over reflective improvement, thereby limiting opportunities for pedagogical growth. On the contrary, international studies such as that of Schön (2017) emphasize that reflective practice is central to professional competence and instructional effectiveness. The low utilisation observed in this study therefore highlights a significant gap in professional development practices among lecturers in the study area.

Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed that peer mentoring and collaboration strategies are also poorly utilised among lecturers. This suggests limited engagement in collaborative activities such as sharing experiences, participating in mentoring programmes, and providing mutual emotional or professional support. This finding corroborates the study by Nwankwo and Ugwu (2022), which reported weak collegial relationships and limited mentoring structures in private universities in Nigeria. Similarly, Ekanem (2023) noted that competitive academic environments often discourage collaboration, thereby isolating lecturers and increasing stress levels. However, this finding disagrees with the work of Johnson and Johnson (2020), who found that collaborative cultures in academic institutions significantly enhance staff well-being and productivity. The divergence suggests that while collaboration is recognized globally as beneficial, its practical implementation remains limited in the Nigerian private university context.

Interestingly, the study found no significant difference between male and female lecturers in their utilisation of stress management strategies. This implies that both genders experience similar levels of stress and adopt comparable coping mechanisms. This finding is in agreement with Obi and Chiamaka (2022), who found no gender-based variation in stress management among university lecturers. However, it contradicts Afolabi (2021), who reported that female lecturers tend to adopt more emotional coping strategies than their male counterparts. The lack of significant difference in this study may suggest that institutional pressures overshadow gender differences in stress experiences.

Implications of the Findings

1. The low utilisation of stress management strategies among lecturers implies a potential decline in teaching effectiveness, which may hinder the achievement of quality education, a core target of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4).
2. Poor engagement in feedback reflection and peer collaboration suggests limited professional growth and innovation in teaching practices, thereby affecting the overall quality of higher education delivery.
3. The absence of gender differences indicates that stress is a systemic issue affecting all lecturers, implying the need for institution-wide interventions rather than gender-specific strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. University management should develop and implement structured wellness programmes that promote self-care practices such as work-life balance, stress reduction workshops, and flexible scheduling for lecturers.
2. Institutions should institutionalize reflective teaching practices by organizing regular training, feedback systems, and professional development programmes that encourage lecturers to evaluate and improve their teaching methods.
3. Private universities should promote a collaborative academic culture by establishing peer mentoring programmes, team-based teaching approaches, and support networks to enhance collegial relationships and reduce stress.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that lecturers in private universities in South East Nigeria demonstrate low utilisation of self-care, feedback reflection, and peer mentoring strategies for managing stress, despite the critical role these strategies play in enhancing teaching effectiveness and achieving quality education. The findings highlight a systemic challenge within the academic environment that requires urgent institutional attention. Addressing these gaps through structured support systems, professional development initiatives, and collaborative practices is essential for improving lecturers' well-being and ensuring the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

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