



Organizational stress management strategies used to retain teachers in private secondary schools in Wakiso District, Uganda

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Abstract

Stress if not properly addressed or controlled could have an adverse effect on a person's emotional, physical, and social well-being as well as represent a threat to their health. The aim of this paper was to investigate the organisational stress management strategies used to retain teachers in private secondary schools in Wakiso District, Uganda. The study adopted the cross-sectional survey method of the descriptive design. The target population was 1824 respondents comprising of all the teachers and head teachers from rural and urban schools in District. Wakiso district. A sample size of 317 respondents consisting of 267 teachers, and 50 Headteachers was used in the study. Sample selection of the respondents was by Probability and Non-probability sampling techniques. Questionnaires and interview guide were employed to collect data for this study. In ensuring content validity of the research instrument, the items in the questionnaire were constructed in relation to the literature review of this study. In ensuring content validity, suggestions from educational research experts was sought while reliability was attained through test-retest technique. Data were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively and presented in tables and narrations. The study found out that according to the respondents' change of stress perception (86.7%), removing the stressor (80.7%), communication stress management strategy (70.5%) and controlling the consequences of stress (63.6%) were the most commonly used stress management strategies in private schools in Wakiso District. The paper recommends that school administrators should find better organisational stress management strategies by considering the needs and wants of the teachers in order to retain teachers in their schools.

Keywords: stress management strategies, teacher retention, private schools

1. Introduction

While some work stress is common, excessive stress hinders productivity and has negative effects on both physical and mental health. Success or failure could depend on one's capacity to handle stress (Asiiimwe & Steyn, 2013; Asiiimwe & Steyn 2014; Segal, Smith, & Robinson, 2016) ^[4, 5]. Stress is described as a psychological and physical response to ongoing internal and/or external events that place a strain on a person's capacity for adaptation. If not properly addressed or controlled, it could have an adverse effect on a person's emotional, physical, and social well-being as well as represent a threat to their health. It is an adaptive response to conscious or unconscious stressors (Zaidi, 2015; Asiiimwe & Zuena, 2023; Niyikiza & Asiiimwe, 2023) ^[2].

Stress is defined by the Oxford dictionary (2002), as a state of affairs involving demand on physical and mental energy which can disturb the normal physical and mental health of an individual. Similarly, Chukwuma (2019), Emurungat, Asiiimwe Gaito and Tumwesigye (2022) ^[12] define stress as a physical or emotional reaction to potentially threatening aspects of the environment. Stress is brought about by other excessive demands being made on individuals or reasonable demands being made which individuals are well equipped to cope with. However, Cole and Kelly (2011) describes stress as the adverse psychological and physical reactions that occur in individuals as a result of their being unable

to cope with the demands being made on them. This implies that stress is triggered not by the external problems faced by individuals but by the way they cope or fail to cope with those problems. The effects of stress can lead to reduced employee performance at work, increased sickness absence and even death.

Lazarus and Folkman, (1999), argued that when individuals face a potentially stressful situation they appraise the amount of potential danger as well as their resources for dealing with that danger. Individuals experience stress when the perceived threat exceeds perceived available resources for coping with it. Coping is defined as individuals' effort, cognitive and behavioral, to deal with a stressful situation (Lazarus, 1999; Mugenyi, Matagi, Kobusingye & Asiimwe, 2023) ^[14].

Bratton and Gold (2003), Tumwesigye, Emurungat, Asiimwe, Gaitte, (2022) ^[12] revealed that among the most stressful jobs were teaching, manual laborers and secretarial jobs. In many countries teacher's job is often considered as one of the most stressful professions. In addition to this D'souza (2006), reveals that in order to cope successfully with stress leaders need to recognize stress as a facilitator as well as a barrier to effective leadership. Similarly, in an organization such as a school, administrators would have to accept that stress can either be a facilitator at work and at the same time a barrier.

Performance is improved when a productive work atmosphere is established with a viable agenda, innovative pursuits, advantageous tactics, and shared ideals (Fohunda, 2013). To encourage employee creativity toward shared objectives and goals, teamwork is essential. Since the task at hand necessitates a wider range of knowledge, judgment, and opinion, teams do better at work than individuals do. The benefit of a collaborative method is significant advancement in fields that call for innovative problem-solving, high levels of adaptability, and operational management (Fohunda, 2013; Maila & Asiimwe, 2024) ^[23].

According to Peretomode, (2012) there are many reasons why organizations should take account of stress and do something about it. That is: organizations have the social responsibility to provide a good quality work life, excessive stress causes illness, stress can result in ability to cope with the demands of the job which of cause create more stress and excessive stress can reduce employee's effectiveness and the organizations performance. The researcher point of view is that Stress Management Strategies is how an individual manages or copes with stress either by himself or through other people. However, this paper basically looked at how organizations help their workers to manage or cope with their stress while focusing at teachers in private secondary schools in Uganda-Wakiso district, Uganda.

2.0 Related Literature

Bewell, Yakubu, Owotunse, and Ojih's (2014) investigation on work-related stress and its effects on productivity and organizational performance among Nigerian workers. It was determined that the concepts of work-induced stress and employees' efficacy and productivity were mostly detachable using employees of the Nigerian Television Authority and the Nigerian Immigration Services as the sample. According to a study by Soltani, Hajatpour, Khorram, and Nejati (2013) on the impact of role ambiguity on workers' job stress, there is statistically significant evidence that work-family conflict is exacerbated by role ambiguity (p-value = 62.40). Moreover, the correlation between role ambiguity and occupational

stress was 1.83. On the other hand, while the substantial value was negative, the impact of role conflict on work-family conflict was not great. Role conflict was therefore found to have an impact on occupational stress (p-value = 2.35). Lastly, a p-value of .93 was used to determine the significance of the influence of work-family conflict on job stress. The current paper investigated organizational stress management strategies used by schools to retain teachers and improve on their productivity in private secondary schools in Wakiso District, Uganda.

2.1 Types of organisational stress management strategies

In order to curb stress, there are a variety of stress management strategies that can be used by organizations which include removing the stressor, withdrawing from the stressor, changing stress perceptions, carrying out employee assistance programs and offering guidance and counseling services

a) Remove the Stressor

Some writers have argued that the only way to manage stress effectively is by removing the stressors that cause unnecessary tension and job burnout. Okumbe (2001), asserts that "some severe work-related stress could be solved through job rotation, transfers or simply organisational separation. Similarly, McShane and Glinow (2003), Kayindu, Asiimwe and Nakiyingi (2020) ^[15] are of the view that research has found that one of the most powerful ways to remove workplace stress is to empower employees so that they have more control over their work and work environment. He adds that workplace bullying can be minimized through clear guidelines for behavior and feedback to those who violate those standards. Bullying in this case could be a common occurrence in private schools whereby it is believed that the boss is always right and will therefore not be willing to listen to teachers who might have committed a simple mistake.

Bratton and Gold (2003) point that improving job and organisational design as an action to reduce workplace stress. Armstrong (2004) agrees with McShane and Glinow and Bratton and Gold (2003) by stating that stress can be managed by clarifying for employees their roles in the organization, reducing the danger of role ambiguity and giving people more autonomy within a defined structure to manage their responsibilities. Ivancovich (2007) further emphasizes that one of the most powerful ways to remove workplace stressors is to empower employees so that they have more control of their work and work environment. He adds that role related stressors can be minimized by electing and assigning employees to positions that match their competence. Torrington, (2008) also observes that reorganization of work may include changes that could be grouped as organisational development such as job rotation and autonomous work groups.

Olwoch (2011) advises that in order for staff to be retained flexible working rules should be adopted otherwise workers will migrate to an organization whose benefit package and schedules help them to meet the demands of their lives. This implies that in the case of the teaching profession allowing part time working could enable flexibility in the teaching profession. The researcher is of the view that removing the stressor could help to retain the teaching staff but at the same time it is not cost effective in cases where the stressor is part of the job. However, removing the stressor can be used

successfully as a Stress Management Strategy when it involves the employees and employers. This is because the employers have to be consulted to help the affected employees.

b) Withdraw from the Stressor

Removing the stressors may be the ideal solution, but that option is not feasible. According to McShane and Glinow (2003) permanent withdrawal occurs when employees are transferred to jobs that better fit their competence and values but temporary withdrawal strategies is the most frequent way that employees manage their stress by allowing employees to temporarily escape from the hassles of work. In relation to that Armstrong (2004) adds that employees should be placed properly while taking care to place people in jobs that are within their capabilities

Ivancevich, (2007) agrees with McShane and Glinow by observing that an alternative strategy is to permanently remove employees from the stressor or temporarily remove employees from the stressors. Some of the ways that can make employees to be withdrawn from stressors include career development. Torrington, (2008), and Armstrong, (2004), observe that providing career development for staff helps them to learn new skills and advance their career thus improving employee retention. The researcher is of the view that as much as withdrawing employees from stressful jobs temporarily is helpful, a permanent way of helping staff to manage their stress could be more appropriate. Therefore, there was need for this study to find out if head teachers and teachers who are stressing others because of poor administration could be withdrawn by either demoting or removing them from the school system.

c) Change of stress perception

Employees often experience different levels of stress in the same situation because they perceive it differently. Chaplain (2001) is of the view that teachers read reports that teaching is stressful and start believing it and thus normal upsets that are part of most jobs become mislabeled as chronic stressors and a vicious circle begins that results in a higher incidence of self-reported stress. This implies that some teachers end up believing that teaching is a stressful job which latter impacts on their performance at work Therefore in such a case there is need for change of the stress perception to help such teachers to cope with their duties.

On the contrary McShane and Glinow (2003) argue that positive self-talk can potentially change stress perceptions by increasing our self-efficacy and by helping us to have a more optimistic outlook. Armstrong (2004) suggests that dialogue should take place between managers and individuals about their problems and ambitions. In line with that D'souza (2006) explains that if people act positively then they will become positive in life. This implies that people cannot always think their way into acting positively but they can act their way into thinking positively. However, Ivancevich (2007) says that this strategy involves strengthening our self-efficacy and self-esteem so that job challenges are not perceived as threatening.

The researcher is of the view that if teachers' self-esteem and self-efficacy could be strengthened through stress management strategies challenges in the teaching profession could be reduced and teachers would not be stressed. At the same time change of the stress perception will only start with the teachers themselves who have to appreciate the fact that

stress can either have a positive or a negative effect in their job performance.

d) Employee's assistance programs

Various authors have agreed on the use of employee's assistance programs as a means of managing stress. According to Ivancevich (2007), Asmmaa, Sofia, Kibuuka, and Asiimwe (2024) employee assistance programs are designed to deal with a wide range of stress related problems, both at work and non-work related, including behavioral and emotional difficulties. Similarly, Bratton and Gold (2003) revealed that Human Resource Departments currently are advised to establish links with external voluntary organizations to develop Employee assistance programs in order for employees to seek voluntary help or to seek advice. D'souza (2006), emphasizes that Employee's assistance programs can help employees cope with their stress because it enables organizations to get help from external resources which increases the understanding of interdependency needs within the organization.

Kreitner and Kinicki (2007), observed that Employee assistance programs help employees to resolve personal problems that affect their productivity. Employee assistance programs are typically funded by organizations or unions. Armstrong (2007), suggests that organizations such as schools should provide employees assistance programs for their employees. However, Torrington (2008), explains that sometimes employees were very skeptical about visiting the occupational health workers as they saw it as the first step in termination of their employment instead of the Employee assistance programs helping their workers.

The researcher is of the view that as much as Employee assistance programs could be considered as helpful there could be a challenge of the costs which could hinder schools from adopting it as a stress management strategy especially when there is need of organizations or external resources to be used.

Counseling at work takes place when an individual uses a set of techniques and skills to help counseling an employee with problems to help the employee to cope up with his /her emotions (Newton *et al*; 2002) Counseling seeks to improve the employee's mental health and wellbeing since it helps employees to cope with problems. According to Cole (2003), counseling stress management should be a joint activity in which a person seeking help support or advice in dealing with personal problems (a client) shares his/her dilemma with a trained helper (a counselor). Therefore, counseling should be a two-way participation by the client and the counselor and should not be left only for the management to enforce. Okumbe (2004), adds that counseling programs can be instituted by organizations whereby counselor's subject stressed workers to counseling therapy. Ivancevich (2008) are of the view that counseling should be provided by Employee Assistance Programs and if they are unable to help, employees should be referred to community-based professionals. In line with this writer, Torrington (2008) adds that stress counseling is increasingly being provided and if this is offered as part of an employee assistance program it can reduce the liability in stress related injury cases.

The Institute of Personal Development (2008) also acknowledges that organizations need to provide professional counseling facilities for employees. Therefore, all organizations need a professional counseling manager who is trained in counseling techniques. The researchers are of the

view that Employee assistance programs could be useful when there is cooperation from both the employer and the employee. These programs could also be compromised with incase there is no confidentiality between the employer and the employee.

e) Social Support stress management strategy

Social support is a stress moderator and it mitigates the level of stress. Newstron *et al.*, (2004) puts it forward that social support is the network of helpful activities, interaction and relationship that provides an employee with the satisfaction of important needs. There are four types of support: instrument, international, evaluative and emotional. The social support may come from supervisor, co-worker, friends or family. Its focus may be on either task or social exchange and my even take the form of games, jokes or teasing. It is the network of activities and relationships that provide an employee with desired social satisfaction. Its source may be supervisor, co- workers, friends and family. When employees have at least one person from whom they can receive social support they will experience lower levels of stress for example supervisor's support.

In a study carried out by Chaplain (2001) among headteachers, he explains that some headteachers find it particularly rewarding to access support from other headteachers colleagues than junior teachers .He also notes that some teachers who 'shared the vision' for the school could be trusted to manage school duties which enabled them to get social support. Birungi (2003), asserts that co-worker related problems have a direct relationship to lower role conflict at work. Mshane and Glinow (2003) observed that social support helps employees by improving their perception of feeling valued and worthy which reduces new employees stress because co- workers are helped to face threatening situations. Ivancevich *et al.*, (2008), state that when an experienced employee helps a trainee to learn a job it is effective as a stress moderator because it buffers the negative impact of stressors. They add that social support has been found to reduce stress among employed individuals ranging from unskilled workers to highly trained professionals. The teaching profession is a job that continuously needs career development, therefore Ivancevich *et al.*, (2008) view is relevant because there are new up comings which teachers have to learn in the profession, every other day which may require teachers to get help from their fellow teachers who are more knowledgeable.

William (2002) suggests that the best approach to help employers to manage stress is to train them to be more resilient to stress before it occurs. This approach is traced on a theory on individual extension such as personality and coping style as more important in predicting stress than certain job conditions in ourselves (Birungi, 2003). In line with this Kreitner and Kinicki (2007) agree with Mcshane and Glinow (2003), by pointing out four types of social support as esteem support, informational support, emotional support and social companionship.

The researchers view is that it as much as there are various types of stress management it may be hard for schools to use all the organisational Stress Management Strategies but school authorities should be in position to identify what types of stress management Strategies can be used to suit different types of secondary schools. For instance, the Stress Management Strategies that are used in rural private schools will be quite different from those used in urban private

schools. This is because life in the urban areas is more challenging and costly because of the rising costs of living.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey method of the descriptive design. Descriptive design enabled the researcher to collect information from a cross-section of a given population. The cross-sectional survey design was used as it is the most commonly used research method in social research and results from such a survey method are easily extrapolated to the entire population. Besides, this method was time saving and less costly for the researcher because the study population was big and the researcher was meeting all the costs. This design enabled the researcher to examine the current situation with respect to stress management strategies and retention of teachers focusing on teachers' perception towards stress management strategies and types of stress management strategies used in private school. Furthermore, the cross-sectional survey method was used to enable the researcher to collect data from the different categories of the sample population, which was representative of the total population of the teachers.

The target population of this study was all the teachers and head teachers from rural and urban schools to ensure experiences of the broad population were included. Those beyond 20 km of an urban area were considered as rural private secondary schools in Wakiso –District. Wakiso district has a total of 1,824 teachers (Ministry of education and Sports -2004). The teachers and headteachers were targeted for the study because they are concerned with the teaching of students in private secondary schools and thus they are able to indicate the effect of stress management strategies on retention in their schools. The sample size of 317 consisted of 267 teachers, and 50 Headteachers who were selected randomly from private secondary schools in Wakiso district.

The determination of sample size was based on guidelines given by Morgan and Kriecjie (1970). Morgan and Krejcie determination of sample size was ideal for this study because it was representative of the total population to be studied. According to Morgan and Krejcie table, there are given sample sizes(s) for the given population sizes (N). Basing on the Morgan and Krejcie table, the sample size studied which is 304 respondents was representative enough.

Sample selection of the respondents was by Probability and Non-probability sampling techniques. The samples were got by the use of purposive sampling to select the headteachers from each of the 20 private secondary schools. This method was used because the researcher's judgment was useful to ascertain that the sample of the headteachers was representative of the target population. In selecting the sample from each school, simple random sampling technique was employed. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents especially teachers and Head teachers in order to collect focused information which was useful.

Questionnaires and interview guide were employed to collect data for this study. Questionnaires were appropriate because some of the data that was collected was quantitative in nature and based on individual perceptions, which could not be observed but could be better tapped through self-reports. Similarly, questionnaires were used because they have the ability to solicit information from several respondents within a short time. Interview guides were used to get information from headteachers who acted as key informants about their

views concerning teachers' retention in private secondary schools. This method was preferred because of its flexibility and ability to provide new ideas on the subject.

In ensuring content validity of the research instrument, the items in the questionnaire were constructed in relation to the literature review of this study. In ensuring content validity, suggestions from educational research experts was sought to establish whether the questionnaire would truly measure what it aimed to measure. In order to achieve this, the researcher consulted research experts several times to ensure that the questionnaire that was used was valid. Suggestions from the experts were integrated in designing the final questionnaire that was used for the data collection.

In ensuring reliability of the instrument, a Test-retest method for reliability was used to examine the reliability of the questionnaire on teachers' retention, using the Pearson product moment correlation statistics. The test retest method for reliability was used to enable correlation of scores from the two instruments by obtaining a coefficient of stability which had a minimum of 0.6. In both tests, the results were the same, a confirmation that they were reliable.

Data were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitative data was descriptively analyzed by examining the content of the data through identifying the distinctive categories that emerged from the data. Qualitative data analysis was used to help the researcher to analyze data which was in words. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics included frequencies and percentages. Quantitative data analysis enabled the researcher to analyze data which were in numbers in order to have meaningful conclusions.

4.0 Results

The aim of this paper was to establish the organisational stress management strategies used to retain teachers in private secondary schools in Wakiso District, Uganda. Thus, a research question was formulated and it stated that; what are the types of stress management strategies that are commonly used to retain teachers by private secondary schools in Wakiso District? Teachers were requested indicate in the questionnaire the strategies mostly used in their schools. Their responses were tabulated in frequencies and percentages and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The type of organisational stress management strategies commonly used in private secondary schools in Wakiso District

Organisational Stress management strategies	Frequencies	Percentages
Change of stress perception	264	86.7
Removing the stressor	246	80.7
Communication stress management strategy	214	70.5
Controlling the consequences of stress	194	63.6
Improving decision making	182	59.8
Social support	173	56.7
Teacher assistance programmes	169	55.6

From Table 1, the respondents listed the types of Stress Management Strategies commonly used to retain teachers in private secondary schools in Wakiso district as Change of Stress perception, 264 (86.65%), Removing the stressor 246 (80.75%), communication stress management strategy with 214 (70.5%) control the consequences of stress 194 (63.6%), Decision making stress management strategy 182 (53.9%),

Social support stress management strategy 173 (56.7%) and teacher assistance program strategies 169 (55.6%). The answer of the second research question revealed that Change of stress perception which had 86.65% and removing the stressor which had 80.75% followed by Communication stress management strategy 214 (70.5%) were taken to be the most commonly used stress management strategies as shown by the response from the participants.

In addition to data obtained through Questionnaires, Interviews with headteachers was carried out whereby Headteachers were asked how they handle teacher's stressful situations in order to retain them and which ones were commonly used? Data gathered showed that various stress management strategies were used in secondary schools to help teachers remain in their schools. Respondents mentioned various types of stress management strategies that were used to retain teachers in their private secondary schools. Most headteachers mentioned emotional support as one of the stress management strategies which were commonly used by headteachers as a way of retaining teachers in their private secondary schools. Majority of the headteachers said that their schools helped their teachers by buying coffins or contributing money for burial of teachers who had lost close family members. One respondent informed the interviewer that,

"Last month I lost my mother and all the staff came for her burial. This term two members of staff lost their mothers and the teachers were transported to their homes by the school to go and bury."

However, majority of the respondents showed that private schools rarely give support for drunkard teachers. But at the same time all headteachers showed that sick teachers are allowed to get health support from the school sick bay although the health support was not inclusive of the teachers' family members as it is in other private organizations. Most teachers explained to the headteachers that catering for the health of all staff member's families was costly.

Communication with teachers was the second stress management strategy which was emphasized by headteachers as being used in their private secondary schools. Communication stress management strategy was explained to be used in such a way that headteachers could talk to teachers whenever a problem arose and information could be passed throughout to all teachers.

Control of the consequences of stress was the third stress management strategy explained by headteachers as being used for managing stress among teachers. Most headteachers said they usually encouraged teachers to do physical exercises at school and having good health habits which were being promoted through having extracurricular activities promoted in the school and balanced diet meal for teachers. The researcher noted through observation that in well-established private secondary schools teachers relaxation and meditation was promoted by having a television, computer and low music in the staffroom. The researcher noted through observation that teachers who were free or were waiting for their lessons were able to relax by managing their work stress through watching television listening to music and using computers.

From the findings of this study it was found out that four organisational stress management strategies that is change of stress perceptions, removal of the stressors, communication and social support are commonly used in private secondary schools in Wakiso district. It was also found out that that

administrators communicated well with teachers while issues concerning particular teachers were communicated timely to concerned teachers implying that administrators were more prompt in communicating to teacher maybe because they wanted their demands to be met.

Respecting teachers' self-esteem was also found to be one of the strategies of stress management commonly used by private secondary schools in Wakiso district. Other strategies that were commonly used to manage teacher stress and hence enhance teacher retention were timely communication, encouragement of teachers to participate in co-curricular activities that promote physical and mental health, encouraging positive behavior and talks among teachers, provision of medical services to staff members and provision of guidance and counseling services to teachers who have problems originating from work environment at school. These findings were in line with Okumbe (2001) who asserted that "some severe work related stress could be solved through job rotation, transfers or simply organisational separation and Armstrong (2004) who agreed with Okumbe by elaborating that stress can be managed by clarifying employees roles in the organization, reducing the danger of role ambiguity and giving people more autonomy within a defined structure to manage their responsibilities.

These research findings were also in line with a related work done by Ivancovich (2007) who found out that one of the most powerful ways to remove workplace stressors is to empower employees such as teachers so that they have more control of their work and work environment. He added that role related stressors can be minimized by electing and assigning employees to positions that match their competence. This was in agreement with these research findings whereby the researcher found out that removing the stressor was among the most commonly used stress management strategies in private secondary schools in Wakiso District.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The research findings found out that the organisational stress management strategies commonly used were removing the stressor, change of stress perception, communication and social support organisational stress management strategies. The paper recommends that school administrators should find better organisational stress management strategies by considering the needs and wants of the teachers in order to retain teachers in their schools. There is need for better strategies which suit teachers needs because the current strategies have shown that teachers are still leaving the private secondary schools.

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