

AN EVALUATION OF COVID-19 RELATED BURNOUT AMONG ACADEMICS IN UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated COVID-19 related burnout among academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised academic staff from public universities in South-South, Nigeria. Stratified random sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 300 academic staff from three federal and two state owned universities. Three research questions and two hypotheses were used to guide the study. An instrument titled: "Academic Burnout Inventory" (ABI) developed by the researcher was used for the study. Face and content validity was determined by three experts in educational measurement and evaluation. The pilot test involved 50 academics who were not participants in the study. The reliability of the instrument was determined based on test-retest method and a reliability coefficient of 0.71 was obtained. Descriptive statistics was used to answer the research questions while independent sample t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 alpha. Result revealed that COVID-19-related burnout among academics was predominantly driven by systemic challenges, including meeting deadlines for student graduation, lack of remuneration for virtual teaching, and infrastructural deficits such as power outages and poor internet connectivity. Personal factors, like anxiety due to overcrowded home spaces, had minimal impact. No significant differences in burnout levels were found based on gender or professional rank, although nuances in experiences were observed. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions addressing workload management, infrastructure development, and mental health support to mitigate burnout and enhance academic productivity.

Key words: Evaluation, COVID-19, burnout, academic staff, university, south-south, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Burn out is a phenomenon comprising of chronic stress and characterised by depersonalization, emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment (Maczydiowska cited in Amir,2020). Occupation burnout could be seen as an individual's reaction when presented with work demands that are not in tandem to one's mastery and capacity (WHO,2014). The three dimensions of burnout highlighted by Sung (2020) include: feeling of exhaustion or vigour reduction, feeling of negativism or cynicism or an increase in mental distance from work; and decreased professional efficiency. The world was thrown into confusion, fear and uncertainty, when information about the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus was released by the World Health Organization in March, 2020 (WHO,2020). Most nations went into panic mode some came up with conspiracy theories while others lived in denial. Consequently, different strategies were adopted globally to manage the pandemic but one common ground was the lockdown, social distancing, use of nose mask and quarantine of those who were infected. These were short term measures applied to manage the situation while scientists around the world worked assiduously to develop vaccines to check the spread of the virus. This affected the lifestyle and health concerns of people around the world. The sectors most affected by the COVID-19 protocol were the health, economy, education and tourism. In order to sustain the academic calendar due to partial and total lockdown in most countries around the world due to the pandemic, with no cure in sight most higher institutions

resorted to virtual teaching and learning. University education is very tasking not only on the students but on lecturers. These expectations place most academics at risk of burnout. These demands include: teaching workload, supervision of students' projects (thesis or dissertation), assessment of students, supervision of teaching practice (teacher trainees), professional development of medical students (internship), research, publication pressure to meet promotion deadlines, counselling of students, administrative responsibilities (for HODs, Deans, Directors) etc. Shin and Jung (2013) affirmed that there are variations in academic roles and responsibilities across tertiary education system. These responsibilities range from teaching, learning, research, supervision, administration, community engagement and academic citizenship (Meng & Wang, 2018). Researchers have also established that work load contributes to debilitation in academic environment (Bigirimana et al, 2016).

Previous research on burnout among academics show varying levels in terms of rank, gender, age, environment and marital status of academics. Ofoegbu and Nwadiami (2006) found that academics with more teaching experience tend to have less burnout compared to their counterparts who are relatively new in academia. In the same light, Serinkan and Bardarci (2009) found a significant difference in the level of burnout among research assistants, associate professors and professors. This is in tandem with the research of Archibong et al (2010) that academics in junior cadre found career development as a source of burnout. Similarly, the study of Frantz and Smith (2010) revealed that early career academics and appointees experienced higher level of burnout. This is associated with clarity about their tasks in academics. Therefore, academic rank has been found to be a distinct factor that mediate the extent of stress among academics (Safaria et al, 2012). The study of Coleman (2012) reveal that female academics face diverse challenges relating to their private life and work. Similarly, in a study conducted in South Africa, Bezuidenhout and Cilliers (2010) found that factors responsible for burnout among female academics are large class size, increasing job demand and role conflict inherent in the females. Female academics further indicated higher levels of exhaustion which might be related to their emotional demands and multiple engagements (Watts & Robertson, 2011). The research of Shah et al (2014) revealed that burnout among female academics is attributed to administrative components, relationship with peers and work environment. Studies have also shown that female academics experience higher levels of burnout than their male counterparts (Zabrodska et al, 2018). Research has also shown that occupational burnout could also be triggered by changes in the work environment. This is in line with the assertion of Vogel and Feldman (2009) that work environment level of fit anticipate positive work result.

Drawing from the person-environment fit theory, Clark-Murphy (2010) averred that person-environment approach advanced that for maximum productivity, individuals should be compatible with their environment. This implies that academics cannot achieve desired results professionally if the environment is not conducive.

For Finney et al (2013), work-place burnout usually affects 19% to 30% of employees who are in the entire working population. This infer that there are other factors that may contribute to burnout in the work environment which might not be in the work environment but external. Such factors in the view of Barkhuizen and Rothman (2013) include poor financial status and lack of sleep due to anxiety over uncertainty about the future. Furthermore, the study of Amir (2020) conducted in Uganda revealed that 58% of the academics who were involved in the study had moderate level of burnout while 30% had high levels of burnout. There was also no significant difference in levels of burnout among university academics in Uganda.

Burnout therefore could be referred to as an extreme form of occupational stress. One of the initial steps university administrators took in the heat of the pandemic was to shut down activities on the various campuses in line with the directive of the federal and state governments. The institutions needed to tackle the immediate concerns of teaching, learning, assessment and graduation of students in the midst of the pandemic. Hence they joined the global trend of virtual teaching and learning. This mode of teaching/ learning was not common among academics and

students who were mostly exposed to face-to-face mode. Hence, school closure and impromptu transition to digital education have also created new challenges. The risk of burnout among academics is perceived to have been exacerbated by the pressure of COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, how academics of these institutions contended with the COVID-19 related burnout in the course of teaching and learning virtually is worthy of investigation.

Problem of the Study

Nigerian academics have recorded long period of strike actions based on dissatisfaction with remunerations, work environment and infrastructural development on university campuses. The situation was compounded with the destabilization of the educational system by the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. South-South, Nigeria being the hub of oil exploration and drilling is the destination of most foreign nationals and oil workers. Hence, based on the lockdown imposed on some states by the federal government of Nigeria in March, 2020 the state governments in this region were quick to restrict movements and enforced lock down in an effort to curb the transmission of the virus. This kept many citizens at home for months on end with undue pressure and untold hardship. Consequently, all educational institutions resorted to virtual teaching and learning. The lock down was sudden and most academics were not prepared for virtual teaching, learning, assessment and supervision of students projects/ thesis. Some academics who were not adequately prepared for virtual mode of teaching were compelled by the situation to adapt and improve through online tutorials.

This caused a lot of anxiety and financial pressure on academics who were confronted with the preparation of slides for virtual teaching, could not afford laptops, smart phones, mobile devices and data for their mobile devices. Aside the inadequate preparation on the utilization of virtual tools, other perceived COVID – 19 related concerns faced by academics were on safety, health, fear of being infected/ infection of loved ones, news updates on COVID -19 related deaths, unconducive home environment for virtual teaching/research, limited space at home due to overcrowding by extended family who had relocated from the rural areas due to economic hardship imposed by the lockdown, unexpected financial demands from dependants/extended family, inability to relieve pressure through recreation/ exercise, lack of vacation, meeting deadlines/graduation of students and disruption of academics routine. Furthermore, long tenured professors who delegate some responsibilities under normal circumstances to their secretaries and younger academics could not because everyone was struggling with the challenges of the pandemic. The pandemic also constrained academics to work under unusual conditions at home compared to the serene work environment on campus where there is access to research materials, regular power supply and internet connectivity. Working from home also placed a huge burden on female academics who were also saddled with combining work with domestic chores. Especially, assisting school-age children with their online learning and assessment due to school closure. The lockdown placed a lot of pressure on the mental, psychological and emotional disposition of academics. This may have negatively influenced the productivity of academics due to trepidation. Lack of congruance between meeting ones' expectations and the capacity to fulfil such expectations could culminate in burnout.

While the destabilising effect caused by the pandemic on the educational system not only in Nigeria but globally was remarkable. It's impact on academics must be accentuated. The problem of this study therefore is to evaluate COVID-19 related burnout factors among academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study evaluated COVID-19 related burnout factors among academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to determine the:

1. Extent COVID-19 related burnout factors differ among male and female academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria.
2. Extent COVID-19 related burnout factors differ among junior and senior academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria.
3. Aspect of COVID-19 related burnout factors that have the most impact among academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following questions were used to direct the study:

1. To what extent do the COVID-19 related burnout factors differ among male and female academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria?
2. To what extent do the COVID-19 related burnout factors differ among junior and senior academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria?
3. What aspect of COVID-19 related burnout factors have the most impact among academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study:

1. The COVID-19 related burnout factors do not differ significantly among male and female academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria.
2. The COVID-19 related burnout factors do not differ significantly among junior and senior academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study consist all academic staff from three federal and two state owned universities in South – South, Nigeria. Stratified random sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 280 academics from the population. An instrument titled: "Academic Burnout Inventory" (ABI) adapted from Maslach Burnout Inventory (1981) was used for data collection. The inventory has three sections A, B and C. Section A, consist of demographic data of the respondents, while Sections B and C is made up of items in the following dimension of burnout: decreased professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion. Depersonalisation was not considered because the academics involved in this study did not have any physical contact with their colleagues within the period due to the lockdown. The response pattern to the items based on the extent of burnout were: Low (1.00-1.99), Moderate (2.00-2.49) and High (2.50-above). Face and content validity was determined by three experts in educational measurement and evaluation. While test- retest method was utilized to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The pilot test involved 50 academic staff who were not participants in the study. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 and 0.71 was obtained from the two subscales (Section B and C) respectively. While a reliability coefficient of 0.73 was obtained for the entire instrument. Descriptive statistics was used to answer the research questions while independent sample t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.5 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question One

To what extent do the COVID-19 related burnout factors differ among male and female academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the extent COVID -19 burnout factors differ among male and female academics in universities in South- South, Nigeria.

SN	Items	N	Male		Gender		Female	
			Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	
Decreased Professional Efficiency								
1	Limited experience in digital teaching and learning	121	1.85	.56	159	1.86	.60	
2	Extensive workload	121	2.35	.56	159	2.11	.74	
3	Supervision of projects/thesis virtually	121	1.88	.80	159	1.91	.66	
4	Meeting deadlines for graduation of students	121	2.51	.65	159	2.55	.61	
5	Power failure (electricity)	121	2.19	.91	159	2.55	.50	
6	Poor internet connectivity	121	2.32	.64	159	2.38	.59	
7	Deadline in covering of course content	121	2.28	.66	159	2.29	.73	
8	Lack of competence in use of digital tools	121	1.65	.76	159	1.64	.69	
9	Challenges of on-line assessment	121	2.13	.75	159	1.90	.75	
10	Lack of motivation due to uncondusive environment at home	121	2.10	.68	159	1.74	.81	
11	Depersonalization with students	121	1.88	.56	159	1.78	.63	
12	Limited experience in developing digital learning materials	121	2.08	.57	159	2.00	.67	
13	Lack of remuneration for sustaining virtual teaching/learning	121	2.56	.53	159	2.45	.59	
14	Meeting deadline for research/ publication	121	2.26	.51	159	2.18	.69	
	Cluster mean	121	2.15	0.65	159	2.10	0.66	
Emotional Exhaustion								
15	Feeling of lack of accomplishment	121	1.49	.72	159	1.89	.81	
16	Lack of rest	121	2.00	.50	159	2.00	.67	
17	Anxiety due to Lockdown /restriction of movement	121	1.91	.73	159	1.94	.77	
18	Lack of exercise	121	1.93	.82	159	2.06	.70	

19	Concerns about losing loved ones to the COVID-19 virus	121	1.80	.88	159	1.84	.90
20	Anxiety over contacting the virus	121	1.85	.88	159	1.99	.89
21	Anxiety due to overcrowded space at home	121	1.40	.74	159	1.76	.85
22	News on death rates due to the pandemic	121	1.69	.72	159	2.04	.86
23	Financial burden due to lockdown	121	2.29	.69	159	2.35	.81
24	Anxiety due to social distancing	121	1.86	.67	159	2.17	.83
25	Disruption of one's privacy due to presence of extended family	121	1.60	.68	159	1.67	.75
	Cluster mean	121	1.80	0.73	159	1.97	0.80
	Grand Mean	121	1.99	.30	159	2.04	.34

Criterion Mean Range: Low: 1.00 -1.99; Moderate: 2.00- 2.49; High: 2.50 - above

From the result on table 1 based on research question one (Gender differences on Burnout factors): For male academics, the most impactful burnout factor on decreased professional efficiency was "Meeting deadlines for graduation of students" with mean score (M=2.51, SD=0.65) and "Lack of remuneration for sustaining virtual teaching/learning" with a mean score (M=2.56, SD=0.53), while the least impactful on decreased professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion was "Lack of competence in use of digital tools" with mean score (M=1.65, SD=0.76) and "Anxiety due to overcrowded space at home" with a mean score (M=1.40, SD=0.74). Among female academics, the most impactful burnout factor on decreased professional efficiency was "Meeting deadlines for graduation of students" with a mean score (M=2.55, SD=0.53) and "Power failure (electricity)" with mean (M=2.55, SD=0.50) while "Financial burden due to lock-down" with mean score (M=2.34, SD=0.81) moderately impacted emotional exhaustion of female academics. The least impactful factor on decreased professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion was "lack of competence in use of digital tools" with mean score (M=1.64, SD=0.69) and "Anxiety due to overcrowded space at home" with a mean score (M=1.76, SD=0.85). The result further showed that the cluster mean scores on decreased professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion on COVID-19 related burnout factors for male academics are (M=2.15, SD=0.65) and (M=1.80, SD=0.73) respectively. While the cluster mean scores on decreased professional efficiency of female academics was (M=2.10, SD=0.66) and (M=1.97, SD=0.80) respectively. It could be inferred from the cluster mean scores that the COVID-19 related burnout factors moderately decreased professional efficiency and to a low extent impacted the emotional exhaustion of male and female academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. The grand mean for male and female academics was (M=1.99, SD=0.30) and (M=2.04, SD=0.34) respectively. This indicated that the COVID-19 related burnout factors (decreased professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion) to a low extent impacted male academics but moderately impacted female academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Hypotheses One

The COVID-19 related burnout factors do not differ significantly among male and female academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 2: Independent sample t-test analysis on the extent COVID-19 related burnout factors differ among male and female academics in South- South, Nigeria.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	df	t	Sig
Male	121	1.99	0.3048	0.02771	278		0.231
Female	159	2.04	0.33927	0.02691			

The independent t-test analysis result on table 2, showed that with $t(278) =$, $p > 0.231$, the COVID-19 related burnout factors do not differ significant among male and female academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted.

Research Question Two

To what extent do the COVID-19 related burnout factors differ among junior and senior academics in universities South-South, Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation on the extent COVID -19 related burnout factors differ among junior and senior academics in universities in South- South, Nigeria.

SN	Items	Rank					
		Junior Academics			Senior Academics		
		N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Decreased Professional Efficiency							
1	Limited experience in digital teaching and learning	190	1.84	.59	90	1.89	.57
2	Extensive workload	190	2.11	.64	90	2.44	.69
3	Supervision of projects/thesis virtually	190	1.79	.77	90	2.11	.57
4	Meeting deadlines for graduation of students	190	2.58	.59	90	2.44	.69
5	Power failure (electricity)	190	2.42	.75	90	2.33	.67
6	Poor internet connectivity	190	2.32	.65	90	2.44	.50
7	Deadline in covering of course content	190	2.26	.72	90	2.33	.67
8	Lack of competence in use of digital tools	190	1.58	.68	90	1.78	.79
9	Challenges of on-line assessment	190	2.00	.73	90	2.00	.82
10	Lack of motivation due to uncondusive environment at home	190	1.84	.75	90	2.00	.82
11	Depersonalization with students	190	1.74	.64	90	2.00	.47
12	Limited experience in developing digital learning materials	190	1.95	.61	90	2.22	.63

13	Lack of remuneration for sustaining virtual teaching/learning	190	2.47	.50	90	2.56	.69
14	Meeting deadline for research/publication	190	2.21	.62	90	2.22	.63
	Cluster mean	190	2.08	0.66	90	2.20	0.66
	Emotional Exhaustion						
15	Feeling of lack of accomplishment	190	1.68	.80	90	1.78	.79
16	Lack of rest	190	2.05	.51	90	1.89	.74
17	Anxiety due to Lockdown /restriction of movement	190	1.84	.75	90	2.11	.74
18	Lack of exercise	190	2.00	.80	90	2.00	.67
19	Concerns about losing loved ones to the COVID-19 virus	190	1.79	.90	90	1.89	.88
20	Anxiety over contacting the virus	190	1.89	.85	90	2.00	.95
21	Anxiety due to overcrowded space at home	190	1.63	.81	90	1.56	.84
22	News on death rates due to the pandemic	190	1.84	.81	90	2.00	.82
23	Financial burden due to lockdown	190	2.26	.79	90	2.44	.69
24	Anxiety due to social distancing	190	2.00	.80	90	2.11	.74
25	Disruption of ones' privacy due to presence of extended family	190	1.63	.74	90	1.67	.67
	Cluster mean	190	1.87	0.78	90	1.95	0.78
	Grand Mean	190	1.99	.32	90	2.09	.32

Criterion Mean Range: Low: 1.00 -1.99; Moderate: 2.00- 2.49; High: 2.50 - above

From the result on table 3 based on research question two (Rank Differences on Burnout factors): For junior academics, the most impactful burnout factor on decreased professional efficiency was "Meeting deadlines for graduation of students" with mean score (M =2.58, SD = 0.59) while the least impactful on decreased professional efficiency was "Lack of competence in use of digital tools" with mean score (M=1.58, SD= 0.68); on emotional exhaustion: "Anxiety due to overcrowded space at home" with a mean score (M=1.63, SD= 0.81) and "Disruption of ones' privacy due to the presence of extended family" with mean score (M=1.63, SD=0.74). The COVID-19 related burnout factors that moderately impacted decreased professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion of junior academics were: "Lack of remuneration for sustaining virtual teaching and learning"; "Power failure (electricity); "Poor internet connectivity"; "Deadline in covering of course content"; "Meeting deadline for research publication"; "Extensive workload"; "Challenges of online assessment"; " Financial burden due to lockdown"; "Lack of rest"; "Lack of exercise"; and "Anxiety due to social distancing" with mean scores {M=2.47, SD=0.50; M=2.42, SD= 0.75; M=2.32, SD=0.65; M=2.26, SD=0.72; M=2.21, SD=0.62; M=2.11, SD=0.64; M=2.00,

SD=0.73; M=2.26, M=0.79; M=2.05, SD=0.51; M=2.00, SD=0.80; and M= 2.00; SD= 0.80} respectively.

Among senior academics, only one COVID-19 related burnout factor: "Lack of remuneration for sustaining teaching/ learning" with a mean score (M=2.56, SD=0.69), was most impactful on decreased professional efficiency. The least impactful factors on decreased professional efficiency was "lack of competence in use of digital tools" with mean score (M=1.78, M=0.79) and "limited experience in digital teaching and learning" with a mean score (M=1.86, M=0.57). While the other factors were moderately impactful. Furthermore, the least impactful COVID-19 related factors on emotional exhaustion of senior academics were: "feeling of lack of accomplishment"; "lack of rest"; "concerns about losing loved ones to the COVID-19 virus"; "anxiety due to overcrowded space at home"; and "disruption of ones' privacy due to presence of extended family" with mean scores {M=1.78, M=0.79; M=1.89, M=0.74; M=1.89, SD=0.88; M=1.56, M=0.84; and M=1.67, SD=0.67} respectively.

However, the other factors moderately impacted emotional exhaustion of senior academics. The result further showed that the cluster mean scores on decreased professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion on COVID-19 related burnout factors for junior academics are (M=2.08, SD=0.66) and (M=1.87, SD=0.78) respectively. While the cluster mean scores of factors on decreased professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion of senior academics was (M=2.20, SD=0.66) and (M=1.95, SD=0.78) respectively. It could be inferred from the cluster mean scores that the COVID-19 related burnout factors moderately impacted professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion of junior and senior academics. However, to a low extent impacted the professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion of junior and senior academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. The grand mean for junior and senior academics was (M=1.99, SD=0.32) and (M=2.09, SD=0.32) respectively. This indicated that the COVID-19 related burnout factors (decreased professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion) to a low extent impacted junior academics but moderately impacted senior academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Hypotheses Two

The COVID-19 related burnout factors do not differ significantly among junior and senior academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis on the extent COVID-19 related burnout factors differ among junior and senior academics in South- South, Nigeria.

Rank	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	df	t	Sig
Junior Academics	190	1.9895	0.32212	0.02337	278		0.117
Senior Academics	90	2.0889	0.32278	0.03402			

The independent t-test result, $t(278) = , p > 0 .117$ on table 4 showed that there is no significant difference in the extent of COVID-19 related burnout factors among junior and senior academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. Since the significant value of 0.117 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Research Question three

What aspect of COVID-19 related burnout factors have the most impact among academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 5: Mean and standard deviation on the aspect of COVID -19 related burnout factors most impactful among academics in universities in South- South, Nigeria.

SN	Items	N	Mean	StD
1	Limited experience in digital teaching and learning	280	1.86	.58
2	Extensive workload	280	2.21	.68
3	Supervision of projects/thesis virtually	280	1.89	.73
4	Meeting deadlines for graduation of students	280	2.54	.63
5	Power failure (electricity)	280	2.39	.73
6	Poor internet connectivity	280	2.36	.61
7	Deadline in covering of course content	280	2.29	.70
8	Lack of competence in use of digital tools	280	1.64	.72
9	Challenges of on-line assessment	280	2.00	.76
10	Lack of motivation due to uncondusive environment at home	280	1.89	.77
11	Depersonalization with students	280	1.82	.60
12	Limited experience in developing digital learning materials	280	2.04	.63
13	Lack of remuneration for sustaining virtual teaching/learning	280	2.50	.57
14	Meeting deadline for research/ publication	280	2.21	.62
	Cluster Mean	280	2.12	0.67
	Emotional Exhaustion			
15	Feeling of lack of accomplishment	280	1.71	.80
16	Lack of rest	280	2.00	.60
17	Anxiety due to Lockdown /restriction of movement	280	1.93	.75
18	Lack of exercise	280	2.00	.76
19	Concerns about losing loved ones to the COVID-19 virus	280	1.82	.89
20	Anxiety over contacting the virus	280	1.93	.89
21	Anxiety due to overcrowded space at home	280	1.61	.82
22	News on death rates due to the pandemic	280	1.89	.82
23	Financial burden due to lockdown	280	2.32	.76
24	Anxiety due to social distancing	280	2.04	.78
25	Disruption of one privacy due to presence of extended family	280	1.64	.72

Cluster mean	280	1.90	0.78
Grand mean	280	2.02	.33

Criterion Mean Range: Low: 1.0 -1.9; Moderate: 2.0- 2.49; High: 2.50 - above

The result presented on table 5 revealed that the most impactful COVID-19-related burnout factors among academics were "Meeting deadlines for graduation of students" with mean score (M=2.54, SD = 0.63) and "Lack of remuneration for sustaining virtual teaching/learning" with mean score (M=2.50, SD=0.57) while the factor with the lowest impact was "Anxiety due to overcrowded space at home" with a mean score (M=1.61, SD=0.82). The overall grand mean was (M=2.02, SD=0.33) indicating moderate burnout level among academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The result from research question one and the corresponding null hypothesis revealed that for male academics, the most impactful burnout related factor was lack of remuneration for sustaining virtual teaching/learning. The finding reflects the impact of financial status on burnout of male academics. Which is in line with an aspect of the findings of Barkhuizen and Rothman (2013), that poor financial status and lack of sleep due to anxiety over uncertainty about the future could result in burnout. While for female academics it was power failure (electricity). The result affirmed that unconducive environment affected the productivity of the female academics. This result is testament to the assertion made by Clack-Murphy (2010), that person-environment approach advanced that for maximum productivity, individuals should be compatible with their environment. The least impactful for male and female academics was lack of digital tools and anxiety due to overcrowded space at home. The result also showed that besides the most and least impactful COVID-19 related factors all other factors moderately impacted male and female academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. Furthermore, meeting deadline for graduation of students was the most impactful COVID-19 related burnout factor on decreased professional efficiency for male and female academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. This is in tandem with the findings of Bigirimana et al (2016) who established that workload contributes to debilitation in academic environment.

The grand mean for male and female academics also indicated that the COVID-19 related burnout factors to a low extent impacted male academics but moderately impacted female academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. This confirms the findings of Watts and Robertson (2011) that female academics indicated higher levels of exhaustion which might be related to their emotional demands and multiple engagements. The findings of the study further revealed that the COVID-19 related burnout factors do not differ significantly among male and female academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. This finding is contrary to that of Zebrodska et al (2018) who found that female academics experienced higher levels of burnout than their male counterparts.

The findings of the study based on research question two and the corresponding hypothesis revealed that only one COVID-19 related burnout factor: meeting deadline for students' graduation was the most impactful on decreased professional efficiency of junior academics.

This outcome was not surprising considering that universities in South-South, Nigeria, are experiencing a surge in have a high number of student enrolment but the increase is not accompanied by a proportionate rise in academic staff. This finding is in agreement with the assertion of Bigirimana et al (2016) that workload contributes to burnout among academics. While lack of competence in the use of digital tools and anxiety due to overcrowded space at home were the least impactful on decreased professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion of junior

academics. This result could be adduced to the support obtained by academics on use of digital tool from their tech-savvy children who are available due to the COVID-19 lockdown. The low impact of the crowded space at home could also be attributed to the traditional nature of Nigerians in terms of the extended family system. Hence, the number of individuals in the home was second nature and had low impact on the emotional exhaustion of junior and senior academics.

For senior academics, the results showed that the only most impactful COVID-19 related burnout factor on decreased professional efficiency was lack of remuneration for sustain virtual teaching /learning. While the least impactful was lack of competence in use of digital tools and limited experience in digital teaching/learning. Furthermore, the least impactful COVID- 19 related burnout factors on emotional exhaustion were feeling of lack of accomplishment, lack of rest, concerns about losing loved ones to the COVID-19 virus, anxiety due to overcrowded space at home and disruption of ones' privacy due to presence of extended family. Aside the aforementioned', the other COVID-19 related burnout factors moderately impacted decreased professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion of junior and senior academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. The findings are contrary to the by the study of Ofoegbu and Nwadiami (2006) who found that academics with more teaching experience tend to have less burnout compared to their relatively new academia,

The findings based on the cluster mean scores revealed a low and moderate impact of the COVID-19 related burnout factors on junior and senior academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. The grand mean scores also indicated that the COVID-19 related burnout factors on decreased professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion to a low extent impacted junior academics but moderately impacted senior academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. This finding does not agree with that of Frantz and Smith (2010) which revealed that early academics and appointees experience higher level of burnout. The result further revealed that the COVID-19 related burnout factors do not differ significantly among junior and senior academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. The findings of the present study also disagree with that of Serinkan and Bardarci (2009), who found a significant difference in the level of burnout among research assistants, associate professors and professors.

The findings of the study based on research question three revealed that the aspects of COVID-19 related burnout factors that are most impactful among academics was meeting deadlines for graduation of students and lack of remuneration for sustaining virtual teaching /learning. While anxiety due to overcrowded space at home was the least impactful. The grand mean indicated moderate COVID-19 related burnout level among academics in universities in South-South, Nigeria. The findings of this study are in line with a study conducted in Uganda by Amir (2020) who found that 58% of the academics involved in the study had moderate level of burnout while 30% had high level of burnout. There was also no significant difference in the levels of burnout among academics involved in his study conducted in Uganda.

CONCLUSION

The most significant contributor to the COVID-19 related burnout (decreased professional efficiency and emotional exhaustion) based on gender and rank of academics in universities is South- South, Nigeria, was the pressure of meeting deadlines for student graduation, reflecting the intense workload and high expectations placed on academics during the pandemic. This challenge was compounded by inadequate remuneration for sustaining virtual teaching and learning, alongside infrastructural issues such as power outages and poor internet connectivity. Personal factors, like anxiety due to overcrowded home spaces, had minimal impact. No significant differences in burnout levels were found based on gender or professional rank, although nuances in experiences were observed. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions

addressing workload management, infrastructure development, and mental health support to mitigate burnout and enhance academic productivity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Mandatory post-COVID-19 training on digital teaching and learning resources should be organized by the management of educational institutions for academics.
2. Government at the federal and state level should ameliorate the financial burden of virtual teaching /learning suffered by academics during the pandemic with remuneration.
3. The private and public sector should support the educational institutions by procuring digital resources and sponsorship of training of academics on utilization of digital tools.
4. Government should employ more academics in order to tackle burnout due to the burden of workload based on high enrolment of students.
5. Long tenure academics should shade their workload by teaching fewer undergraduate level courses and concentrate more on post graduate programmes.
6. Educational institutions should partner with the private sector in the training/ retraining of academics on digital tools for teaching and learning.

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