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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EFFECT OF ECONOMIC STRESS ON LECTURER'S COMMITMENT TO ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES IN THE POST COVID-19 CLASSROOM

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Abstract

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic created a considerable impact on the educational system of every society. The prolonged movement restriction had made a significant gap in the academic calendar and caused an unprecedented relapse in learning. More so, the economic impact of the pandemic prompted a change in the socio-economic lifestyle of many people. In particular, the economic stress associated with the coronavirus could be having a devastating impact on teaching and learning in academia. Thus, the present study examined economic stress as a determinant of the lecturer's commitment to academic activities in the post-Covid-19 classroom. A convenience sample of one hundred and two respondents pooled from three public tertiary institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria, participated in the survey. They completed a self-report measure of the economic stress scale and lecturer commitment questionnaire. The simple regression analysis performed on the data demonstrated that economic stress positively predicted the lecturer's commitment to academic activities. Precisely, the finding revealed that economic stress explained 63.7% of the variation in lecturers' commitment to educational activities.

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Introduction:-

The recent outbreak of the deadly coronavirus impacted every segment of contemporary society. The containment measures for the spread of the pandemic, such as the limitations on movement, economic activities, social and educational activities, have significantly affected the spending pattern of the government and individuals. Perhaps, the consequences of the pandemic are implicated in many aspects, psychological, social, and economic (Bostan et al., 2020), and an unprecedented negative impact on the current and prospects of households, businesses, and the macro-economy (Chronopoulos et al., 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic stressed the importance of understanding the sources of vulnerabilities that can lead to a financial crisis (Onofrei et al., 2021). The prolonged movement restriction involved simultaneous interruptions in supplying and demanding in an interconnected business world. Nonetheless, the disease led to a decline in supply and productivity, including layoffs, loss of income, and worsening economic prospects. Literature abounds that underscored the economic, social, and health implications of the covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria (see., Adiyoh et al., 2020; Ajibo, 2020; Akande & Akande, 2020; Aladejebi, 2020; Aribisala, & Oluwadamilare, 2020; Briggs & Kattey, 2020; Ilesanmi et al., 2021; Ilesanmi & Afolabi, 2020; Imanche et al., 2020; Jelilov et al., 2020; Mogaji, 2020; Ohia et al., 2020; Otache, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic created a massive disruption in education in human history (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Nevertheless, while the pandemic disrupted academic activities, the overall

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economic consequences of the outbreak could be negatively impacting teachers' contribution to effective learning across the educational landscape.

Conceivably, issues relating to the personal economy are linked to stress among many individuals regardless of status. Economic instability produced by the pandemic can increase overspending and financial stress. Economic stress reflects the feeling of stress due to the current state of one's finances and economic uncertainties. Economic stress is a global phenomenon and has been widely discussed in the literature (e.g., Choi & Kim, 2014; Davig & Hakkio, 2010; Goel, 2014; Jeong Kim, 2020; Kitara & Karlsson, 2020; Neppi et al., 2016; Pollack et al., 2012; Probst et al., 2018). Perhaps, it has been recognized as a critical threat to the well-being and performance of workers, especially during times of global economic crisis (Sanchez-Gomez et al., 2021). The trend poses significant negative implications, especially for an adult with family responsibilities and potential stressors for employees. It entails objective and subjective components reflecting the employment and income dimensions of the worker-earner role.

Similarly, numerous authors have emphasized the association between economic stress and the quality of individual, marital, and family well-being (Fonseca et al., 2016; Zurlo et al., 2014), and the feelings of scarcity or threat due to uncertainty or inability to meet basic needs and provide security (Bartholomae & Fox, 2017), including increased levels of anger, hostility, depression, anxiety, somatic complaints, poor physical health, and lack of commitment to a job (Drentea & Reynolds, 2012). Thus, the overall effect of economic distress relative to work commitment has an enormous impact in academia.

An essential component of the higher education system of any society is lecturing. The role of the lecturers in the objective of higher education is a significant determinant of the efficiency and sustainability of education. Lecturer's commitment to teaching is abstracted as a psychological link between lecturers and their teaching. Thus, it is conceptualized in this study as the overall dedication to lectures, including regular classes, efficient communication with students, unbiased grading, and uncorrupt practice. The echoes over lecturers' willingness to employ their effort to teach effectively are subject to various factors, including financial confidence. Thus, the economic crisis occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic, which is implicated in delayed wages, inflation, and high expenditure, could be affecting the motivation and commitment of academic lecturers to teach. Perhaps, it could lead to financial extortions and related irregularities in academia.

Evidence suggests that employee commitment has a significant impact on employee performance (Alansaari et al., 2019; Berberoglu, 2018; Đorđević et al., 2020; Hakim, 2015; Khan et al., 2014; Nwachukwu et al., 2018; Paramita et al., 2020; Setiono et al., 2019; Simatupang & Saroyeni, 2018). Indeed, improving the level of lecturers' commitment has been the primary goal of higher learning for the past decades, especially when effective learning has been linked to the instructor's motivation and pedagogical competence. While the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic may have affected the financial status of many lecturers, it is essential to investigate its effect on the commitment to teaching. Thus, the current study intends to examine economic stress as a factor that could predict a lecturer's commitment to teaching in the post-covid-19 classroom.

Hypothesis:

Economic stress is a positive predictor of a lecturer's commitment to academic activities in the post-covid-19 classroom.

Method:-

The research adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The participants included one hundred and two academic staff of public tertiary institutions in the Enugu state of Nigeria. The participants comprising males and females with ages ranging from 36 to 58 years ($M=36.1$, $SD=4.3$) were conveniently sampled from different faculties in the institutions. They were approached between August and October 2021 and urged to participate in the study. Nevertheless, the selection criteria were minimum of one year of professional experience and one year in the current institution. However, the respondents had a mean of six years' experience in their field and approximately over five years in their existing institutions. Academic qualifications and institutional positions were not considered for the current research.

Instruments

The Economic Stress Scale (ESS), adapted from the Family Economic Strain Scale developed by (Hilton & Devall, 1997), measures the perceived economic stress. The measure is a 15-item Linkert-type scale scored on a 5-point scale. A reliability coefficient of 0.87 was recorded for the instrument following a pilot study. A higher score indicates higher economic stress.

Lecturer's commitment was measured using a developed instrument based on a review of relevant literature. The instrument was designed to ascertain the respondent's commitment to various domains (consistency to lecture, communication, grading, and demands). The Linkert form scale contains 17 items scored in a 5-point range. Perhaps, a higher score indicates a higher commitment. A coefficient alpha value of .71 was obtained for the instrument.

Result:-

A linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive role of economic stress on a lecturer's commitment to teaching. The study revealed that economic stress statistically significantly predicted lecturer's commitment to teaching at $F(1,100), 467.74, P<.000$, with an adjusted R^2 of 637.

Table 1:- Table shows the simple regression analysis conducted to determine the effect of economic stress on lecturer's commitment.

	95% CI for B			SEB	β	R^2	t	Sig
	B	LL	UL					
Constant	1.84	1.78	1.93	.033			66.69	.000
Economic Stress	-.74	-.83	-.66	.044	-.740	.637	-16.74	.000

Note. B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = Confident Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit; SEB = Standardized error of the coefficient; β = Standardized coefficient; R^2 = Coefficient of determination. * $P<.000$.

Discussion:-

The primary objective of the present study was to explore the role of economic stress on the lecturer's commitment to teaching in the post-Covid-19 classroom. At the same time, the lecturer's commitment was viewed as eagerness and motivation to teaching activities, as previously stated in the text. Thus, the study assumed that the perceived economic stress would significantly account for the variation in the lecturer's commitments to teaching in the post-Covid-19 classroom. A simple regression analysis was conducted on the data, and a statistically significant effect of economic stress on the lecturer's commitment was established $F(1,100), 467.74, P<.000$. The adjusted R^2 indicated that economic stress contributed 63.7% of the variance in the lecturer's commitment to pedagogy in the post-Covid-19 classroom. The result of the study corroborates previous research that established a positive association between financial stress and work commitment (Wielers & van der Meer, 2021) and Absenteeism (Kim & Garman, 2003). Perhaps, the study results suggest that economic stress following the Covid-19 pandemic may have provided a pathway that leads to poor commitment in academia. It is probable that lecturers with a basic income in these times of economic distress more often would turn to other avenues that produce a desirable outcome, such that the teaching responsibility and ethics are jeopardized. The expectation thus is that the introduction of a different income channel will cause a decline in intrinsic work motivation. Still, the probable consequence is also an increase in negative teaching attitudes, poor classroom communication, increased biased grading, and corruption. Mullainathan (2013) revealed that problems of financial insufficiency are associated with diminished cognitive capacities. Thus, it has the potential to alter an individual's commitment to responsibility.

Limitations, strengths, and future directions

This study encountered a particular limitation that needed to be stated. For instance, the small sample size posed a barrier to the current study's generalizability. Besides, the study's data was solely self-report, thereby raising the issue of common method variance. This study contributes to the literature by revealing economic stress as a vital factor in an academic work commitment, thus broadening our knowledge of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education in Nigeria. Moreover, to the best of our information, no study has attempted to examine the role of economic

stress on the lecturer's commitment to teaching in the Nigerian context. Thus, justifying the present investigation. Future researchers should utilize data from more comprehensive sources and establish a cause-effect relationship.

Conclusion:-

This study was focused on assessing the impact of economic stress on a lecturer's commitment to teaching in the post-Covid-19 classroom. Indeed, the result supported our expectation that economic stress would significantly predict a lecturer's commitment to education. Therefore, it is concluded that economic stress is an essential determinant of the lecturer's commitment to teaching in the post-Covid-19 classroom. Thus, the study recommends that lecturers be exposed to financial management training to enhance their financial management in times of economic difficulties.

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