

Chapter 5

Teacher Stress During the Career Transition of Students With ASD

ABSTRACT

This study examined teacher stress during the career transition of students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), focusing on role overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was used to explore the teachers' stress and demographic variables that predicted stress. The sample included 140 teachers in both the public and the private secondary schools. The results showed that role overload was the major cause of stress. This study found that teachers experienced moderately levels of stress across all dimensions. Teachers indicated that role overload was their major source of stress, indicating that teachers consistently felt devastated by the magnitude and pace of transition responsibilities. Role ambiguity and role conflict were also reported as factors that contribute to teachers' stressful experiences, but at a lower level.

BACKGROUND

Teacher stress is the physical, emotional, and psychological pressure which teachers experience due to overwhelming occupational demands and which often arouses negative affective responses such as anger, frustration or depression caused by work-related happenings. Teacher stress prevalence in Nigeria differs in studies. However, it constantly indicates high prevalence (between 13.8 per cent. and 72.2 per cent) with respect to location, school type, and measurement instruments (Asa & Lasebikan, 2016; Opara, 2024). One of the important indicators is psychological distress, which impacts 38.1 per cent of all secondary school teachers, including

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42.7 per cent in the rural and 33.6 per cent in the urban regions (Obimakinde et al., 2022). There are other reports of 32.9% prevalence of psychological problems in Enugu state (Ozoemena et al., 2021), and up to 60.2% distress in recent assessments (Dhungana et al., 2025).

Teacher stress is an important issue that has far-reaching implications for educators and their psychological well-being, teaching efficacy, teaching performance, and commitment to their teaching profession (Asa & Lasebikan, 2016). Available literature has proven that stress is linked to emotional exhaustion, low levels of personal accomplishment, and decision-making impairment (Ozoemena et al., 2021). Chronic stress that teachers experience is responsible for the low quality of support that students with autism spectrum disorders (SASD) receive, which has long-term implications since a successful career transition (CT) for SASD relies on sustained guidance and teachers' involvement (Cappe et al., 2025; Wong et al., 2017). The stress experienced by teachers often manifests from their coordinated efforts that extend beyond the classroom, which are required to promote SASD's CT. Teachers assisting SASD during CT encounter significant psychological and occupational stress as a result of high expectations from society (Nuske et al., 2019). This situation contributes to rising stress within the teaching profession, especially in educational systems with a weak support system and high demand for inclusive education (Vázquez-Cano & Holgueras-González, 2019; Maphal, 2014).

In Southeast Nigeria, teachers experience significant challenges in assisting SASD as they navigate the CT from school to work environments. The region's education system has experienced numerous pressures over the past decade, motivated by population growth, infrastructural constraints, growing inclusive education mandates, and increasing expectations for school accountability (Onyishi et al., 2025; Akanaeme et al., 2021). The scarcity of structured transition frameworks, the deficiency of trained personnel, and systemic resource limitations place considerable pressure on teachers who must consider responsibilities outside traditional academic instruction (Olagunju et al., 2021; Akanaeme et al., 2021). The demand to provide curriculum material in schools lacking adequate resources leads to emotional weariness and a sense of professional ineffectiveness. Teachers of SASD in Nigeria confront an additional burden of stress because these students need individualised instruction and support, functional skills, and special structured preparation for adulthood. The combined effects of systemic weaknesses and autism-associated needs create a heightened risk of stress during transition activities (Akande, 2024; Okpaka & Ajayi, 2025).

Career transition is a necessary developmental stage for SASD, greatly affecting their future opportunities in employment, vocational programmes, tertiary education, apprenticeships, and community contribution (Ayala, 2023; Dipeolu et al., 2015). In Nigeria, students with disabilities frequently confront substantial barriers at the CT stage as a result of limited inclusive institutions for neurodivergent youth, scarcity

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