



**THE ROLE OF COPING ABILITY ON PERCEIVED JOB-RELATED STRESS OF
MALE AND FEMALE TEACHERS IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN
AKURE, NIGERIA**

By

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Abstract

The negativity associated with the extreme experience of job-related stress most often reflects as poor work efficiency and effectiveness. This has overtime made the job roles of secondary school teachers cumbersome with gender variations in the forms of such stressors. The study thus examined the extent to which coping ability influence job-related stress among male and female secondary school teachers separately. Two hundred and thirty secondary school teachers (Male-120, female-110; Mean age- 38.87, SD- 8.60) responded to the research instrument containing the Maslach Burnout Inventory (α .71) and Coping Inventory (α .70). Two hypotheses were tested and the results indicated that both male and female teachers experienced a similar level of job-related stress. However, the extent to which coping ability predicted job-related stress among male teachers ($R=.46$, $R^2=.22$, $\beta= -.46$, $t= -5.68$, $p< .01$) was higher compared to that of female teachers ($R= .24$, $R^2= .06$, $\beta= -.24$, $t= -2.55$, $p< .05$). The understanding of this gender variance serves as a pathway for the structuring of teaching proficiency enhancement programmes. This would involve behavioural modification plans for the benefit of improving female secondary school teachers' ability to cope and manage teaching-related stress.

Keywords: Job-related stress, coping ability, gender, teachers

Introduction

From time immemorial, teachers have been playing important roles in the society and they have been accorded great respect based on their influence and impact in educational development and societal growth (Akhlag et al., 2010; Akindutire & Ekundayo, 2012; Eze, 2019). However, it is saddening that the end products of a quality teacher which is found in the students, seems to tilt in a negative direction in recent times (Ihebom & Uko, 2020; Olorunsola, 2020). This is evident in the poor academic performances, poor moral development, devalues of the education standard, and increase in negative vices among adolescents and youths (Aparse & Yawe, 2019).

The quality of a good teacher is observed in their academic products. This quality could be affected by the physical and psychological strain experienced by the teachers (Anna, 2001). Theoretical perspectives proved that the level of an individual's performance is subjective to the level of hindrance stress exposed to at the place of work (Amah, 2014; Tufail et al., 2019). This means that the performance of teachers in the effective and efficient dispensation of their duties in teaching and impacting knowledge could be devalued when the teachers are faced with physical and mental difficulties at work (Fitzgerald, 2008; Johnson et al., 2005; Kieschke & Schaarschmidt, 2008). Secondary schools teaching is not left out of these, considering the effort required in managing children in such age categories where the instinct to explore seems high with growing desires. This makes the stressful nature of the teaching job an organizational and societal problem rather than an individual problem (Whitehead, 2001).

Stress refers to any environmental, organizational and individual or internal demands, which require the individual to readjust the usual behaviour pattern (Jayashree, 2008). It is an adaptive response to situations perceived as challenging or threatening to the wellbeing of an employee in the workplace (Afolabi & Imohonde, 2002). Stress could also be explained as an occurrence or confronting situation whereby an employee is overwhelmed and cannot cope (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003).

Several factors and work-related features had engulfed the research literature and educational management sectors intending to enhance secondary school teachers' efficiency through the control of job-related stress attached to the teaching profession. In the process of dispensing the job roles, teachers are faced with several challenges which could elicit stress. This includes the tutoring of unmotivated students, maintaining and sustaining discipline within the

four corners of the classroom, role conflict/ ambiguity, a demanding workload, lack of autonomy, poor working conditions, frequent changes in the environment as a result of a work transfer, being constantly examined and evaluated by others (both external and internal examiners), mismatch with colleagues, over-demanding administrators, overcrowded classroom and poor working environment (Kyriacou, 2001). Consequently, these teachers face difficulties with their health and well-being, and the outcomes could be behavioural (such as aggression, cynicism and absenteeism), physical (such as headaches, heart disease, gastronomical problems, and high blood pressure) and psychological (such as frustrations, depression and anxiety). Whichever form the stress seems to affect the teachers, they all reflect negatively in their job dispositions, therefore eliciting the need to effectively manage the stress experienced by teachers in schools.

Job Demand Resource model explained that stressor and stress-related situations, especially when they are hindrance related could be controlled and managed via the availability of resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Dulagil, 2012). These are inclusive of both external and internally related resources. The external has to do with physical and environmental resources, while internal has to do with personal resources. Since most of the sources of the stressors experienced by secondary school teachers are associated with external related factors, it will be achievable to focus on understanding how these teachers could utilize their personal resources for the management and sustenance of their work roles while reducing stress. In addition, effective application of personal resources could create an opportunity for growth and development if the employees involve sees it as challenging with the right coping resources (Cicognani, 2011).

Coping ability is the tendency to utilise behavioural and cognitive efforts in the management of stressful situations. Theoretical postulations associate coping strategies with stress management (Onion theory – Altman & Taylor, 1973) and this was such that the higher the ability of an individual to cope with situations, the less likely for the individual to experience stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). However, the ability to cope differs across individuals and this explains the variances in the ability of individuals to manage stressful situation. The teaching profession is not left out of this ideological reasoning. There is the likelihood that the experience of stress by teachers could be factored on their ability to cope. Among the personal construct that could determine the strength of teachers' coping ability in stress management is their gender.

Teaching profession had been mostly associated with the female gender. A reason had been that the female is culturally perceived as the one that is mostly involved with the child's training while providing guidance and monitoring their daily activities. However a lot of males are also found in this field, but the role has been mostly ascribed to the feminine (Asuquo & Akpan-Idiok, 2020; Lantara, 2015) and this could determine the perception of teachers. Those that accept it as part of what they should do would find it easy to develop coping strategies, while those that felt teaching is not a defining role for them may less likely adopt required coping strategies. An objective explanation for this ideology is required through scientific substantiated research and this is the aim of the present study.

There have been notable differences in the experience of stress among workers based on their sex (Alhija, 2015; Goh et al., 2011). The equivocal outcomes on sex differences in job-related stress could be attributed to individual personal and personality differences, social and environmental or cultural factors attached to gender, and the content of the job itself. There is the notion that males and females are likely to be exposed to different stressors (Matud, 2004; McDonough & Walters, 2001; Oman & King, 2000) and this sex differences moderate the relationship between the stressors and the appraisal of stressors and coping (Matud, 2004). In an instance where the organisation climate seems unfavourable, female employees reported higher stress level compared to males, while males seem to report higher stress level in organisations dominated by females, or in situations where social and family supports are high (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2005; Lee & Cho, 2016). The present of social and family support help reduce the level of stress experienced by females because some of the attributed duties in homes and for children would be handled by such support. Indirectly, there tend to be little impact of such support on males, thus maintaining their stress statuesque. The present research, therefore, seeks to understand the influence of secondary school teachers' coping ability on their experience of job stress with consideration for sex differences.

Literature Review

A lot of researches had been carried out on coping and stress across several work situations and cultural context. The relevant aspect of the highly related studies will be reviewed with the intent of improving the research area.

Researching on gender differences in stress level, Umar (2019) tested the differences between male and female secondary school students' academic stress level in Kaduna State, Nigeria. It was noted that male students reported a higher level of academic stress compared to their male counterparts. Although, while reviewing the association between academic stress and coping strategies, there was no quantitative analysis of this effect. Also, there was a watery explanation for the observed findings, thus indicating the necessity to research more on gender differences in stress and stressor among Nigerian samples. This should be with the aid of relevant instrument that had undergone rigorous psychometric evaluation.

Goh et al.'s (2011) research with 258 workers from various profession showed that the experience of stress and coping by male workers differs from that of female workers. This was explained based on the pathways. For instance, female experience stress based on their perception of the work situation as a threat, while males, it is their assessment of the availability of resources that will determine if it will lead to, or be perceived as stress. Rivera-Torres et al. (2013) supported the opinion that there is gender difference in stress and coping ability when they found that stressors differ among males compared to females. For men, the quantitative demands create stress while among female samples, it was both quantitative and qualitative demands. Therefore the application of stress management strategies in designing effective policies for a worker will be best done gender-wise (Rivera-Torres et al., 2013).

Among undergraduate students' sample (767 students), gender differences were observed for certain forms of coping strategies (Martinez et al., 2019). For support seeking coping, females showed higher level compared to males, while males displayed a higher level of meaning-focused coping. It is presumed that there is a tendency for stronger or even varying responses among working adults when coping strategies is compared on the bases of gender. Some adults are expected to add marital, family and work responsibilities to the daily activities they are engaged with, thus compounding their possible experience of stress and how they would intend to manage it.

Marie (2015) investigated work-related stress among second-level teachers in Ireland, using a total sample of 42 teachers. Observation shows that females experienced higher levels of work-related job stress than male participants. It was also found that females were more likely to use coping methods than their male counterpart. On the relationship between stress and coping ability, it was revealed that job-related stress predicted coping ability among teachers.

Similarly, in a research conducted by Fadia (2014), among 425 Israeli school teachers, gender exerts a significant effect on workload indicating that women experience higher levels of stress due to workload compared to men. However, Fadia (2014) made summation that stress predicted coping ability of teachers.

Focusing on teachers in Nigeria, Nwimo and Onwunaka (2015) investigated the level of stress among secondary school teachers in Ebonyi State. Findings revealed through the sampled 614 teachers, that secondary school teachers experienced a high level of stress. The observed forms of stress are physical stress, mental stress, emotional stress and social stress. Comparing the level of stress across gender it was noted that male teachers reported a higher level of stress compared to female teachers (Nwimo & Onwunaka, 2015).

In another study, Alhija (2015) tested the role of personal and job characteristics on teachers stress and coping. It was reported that female teachers experienced a higher level of stress and this was due to their workload compared to that of their male counterparts. In regards to coping strategies, female teachers also displayed higher levels of behavioural change, social support and distancing as a way of coping with stressful situations compared to the male teachers. The differences in gender roles, cultural and social norms were perceived reasons for the noted variations in gender (Alhija, 2015). In a similar vein, it was noted that the study did not consider the relationship between stress and coping strategies among teachers. The present study seeks explanation on gender differences for both sex, while also observing the association between coping strategy and job stress.

Utilising samples (308) from Edo State, Nigeria, Iyore (2018) examined the effect of stressor on coping strategies among secondary school teachers. It was found that work stress was a major challenge facing the teaching profession and most of the coping strategies employed were emotional focused (Iyore, 2018). Further observation on teachers' stressful experience revealed that stress affects the teaching effectiveness of teachers and these cut across different work and classroom related activities (Ekundayo & Kolawole, 2013). Moreso, Ekundayo and Kolawole, (2013) noticed that teachers utilised cognitive and emotional focused coping strategies to manage stressful situations at work.

In a contrary opinion, Shoaga et al. (2015) conducted a study on job burnout, job stress and coping strategies among early childhood education teachers in Ogun State. Utilising 150 participants, their findings revealed that there were no gender differences among job burnout, job

stress and coping strategies of early childhood education teachers. This explained the relationship of these variables with gender, however, the study did not consider the form of relationship that exists among the variables (for instance, job stress and coping strategies).

Researching among lecturers, Olaitan et al. (2014) tested the association between coping strategies and occupational stress. Coping strategies were operationalized and limited to exercise, proper work time scheduling, and student-lecturer interaction. They found a positive association between coping strategies and occupational stress such that adequate exercise, proper work time scheduling, and well-structured student-lecturer interaction reduces the experience of occupational stress among lecturers. Although, this finding support claims on the relevance of coping strategies on stress management among teachers in Nigeria, the identified coping strategies are not essentially those that are psychologically applied. Also, the structure of the questionnaire and items measuring the variables involved were not considered to define measures for construct separately, thereby limiting the statistical tools that could be applied and increasing chances of having a biased outcome. This also reduced the tendency of generalizing the research outcome.

The reviewed works of literature had indicated equivocal outcomes in the experience of stress and utilization of coping strategies by male and female secondary school teachers. These variances could be attributed partly to the changing in gender role within society. Also, little effort had been made to clarify the association between coping ability and job stress separately for male and female secondary school teachers since the adopted coping strategies could differ. The present research hopes to address all these shortcomings with previous studies.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant gender difference in the perceived job-related stress of secondary school teachers
2. Coping ability will significantly predict perceived job-related stress of male and female secondary school teachers at different levels.

Methods

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted in this study; this was because the research data were gathered within a single time frame and the data were sourced from both private and

public secondary schools. The study made use of some selected secondary schools in Akure, which is the capital city of Ondo State, Nigeria. This was purposively due to the commercialized nature of Akure in the state and the perception that teachers experiencing teaching challenges would be largely represented. With over 288 public (government-owned) secondary schools and above 300 private secondary schools located in Akure metropolis, 10 schools each were randomly selected from both private and public secondary schools for the research purpose. The numbers of teachers with each of the selected schools differ with a sum of 327 in the public schools and 185 in private schools. This resulted in a teacher's population of 512 from the selected schools. With the aid of Cochran sample size formula (Cocran, 1963), a sample size of 220 was indicated. However, to enhance the generalization of the findings, the sample size was increased to 300 teachers. Proportionate sampling technique was further adopted to select teachers from private (36.1%) and public (63.9%) schools. Based on this, 192 and 108 questionnaires were administered to public and private secondary schools teachers respectively with further proportionate distribution across the sampled schools based on the numbers of teachers in each school.

Over time, researchers in this part of the world have been silent on the reluctant nature of societal members towards responding willingly and truthfully to researches. There is the perception that the research does not benefit them directly and thus, not necessary to put time into the process. This has always been a challenge for data collection for research work since most of the researches are self-sponsored. As a result of this factor, the convenience sampling technique was utilised in distributing the questionnaires to teachers within each school. This was accomplished with the aid of two research assistants trained by the researcher with orientation on the purpose, intention and procedures involved for the success of the research. From the 300 administered questionnaires, 248 were retrieved, while 230 (147- public; 83- private) were duly completed and found valid for the research purpose, thus amounting to 76.7% response rate.

Instrument

Job-related stress was measured with the 22-item Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et al. 1996). The scale was designed to measure a heightened level of stress (burnout syndrome) comprising of 3 components. These are emotional exhaustion (9 items), dehumanization (5 items), and reduced personal accomplishment (8 items). The author explained the instrument

based on the sub-sections which are the three components, however, the overall score could be used to explain workers overall manifestation of burnout syndrome (Ogungbamila, 2013; Omoluabi, 1987). MBI was rated on a 6-point scale (1= a few times a year to 6= every day). Sample items were: “I feel used up at the end of the day’s work” (emotional exhaustion), “I have become more callous towards people since I took up this work” (dehumanization), and “I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my patients or customers” (reduced personal accomplishment). The Cronbach’s alpha obtained for the instrument ranged between .71 and .90 for the subscales. In Nigeria, Ogungbamila (2013) reported a Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of .81 for the scale, while the present research found a reliability Chronbach’s alpha coefficient value of .71. High score from the mean and above reflected heightened high-stress level, while a low score reflected a low level of heightened stress.

Coping ability was measured with Carver et al. (1989) 53 items coping inventory structured to access coping strategies adopted by individuals in response to stress. The instrument had 14 discreet subsections, while the summation of all the subsections indicates an overall measure of coping strategies. The scale was rated on a 4-point Likert scale with 1=Never to 4=Always. Sample items include; ‘I focus on dealing with this problem and if necessary let other things slide a little’ and ‘I try to see it in a different light to make it seem more positive’. Carver et al. (1989) found a Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient ranging between .45 and .92 for the subsections. In the present study, a reliability coefficient of .70 was found for the overall scale. The mean score was the bases for interpreting the scale and scores from the mean and above indicated adequate coping strategy, while scores below meant otherwise.

Correlation analysis (Pearson Product Moment Correlation) was conducted to examine the associations among the study variables gender-wise, the t-independent test was conducted to compare male and female teachers’ job-related stress, while linear regression was carried out to test for the prediction level of job-related stress by coping ability among male and female teachers’ samples separately.

Results

Table 1:
Correlation Matrix showing the Relationship among the Study Variables

Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age		1	.51**	.85**	-.54**	.17	-.10
2. Marital Status		.67**	1	.39**	-.34**	.06	-.12
3. Length of Service		.79**	.55**	1	-.49**	.12	-.05
4. Type of School		-.51**	-.43**	-.41**	1	-.066	.07
5. Coping Ability		.36**	.14	.31**	-.14	1	-.24*
6. Job-related Stress		-.21*	-.20*	-.25**	.30**	-.46**	1
Male (120)	Mean	39.52	-	8.38	-	139.49	65.17
	SD	8.34	-	5.73	-	15.98	18.55
Female (110)	Mean	38.16	-	8.33	-	141.67	64.80
	SD	8.85	-	6.23	-	19.39	15.17

Note: **p < .01, * p < .05

Marital Status was coded, Single=1, Married=2; Type of School was coded, Public=1, Private=2
Results for male teachers are below the diagonal and for *female* teachers are above the diagonal.

Other socio-demographic characteristics of the participants were obtained and added in the correlation analysis. This will provide general knowledge of the association between the socio-demographics and the major variables within the study. Besides, such knowledge will create a background for the understanding of the associations that could require control to avert a biased outcome. Testing the relationships among the study variables on a gender-wise form, coping ability among male teachers had a negative relationship with job-related stress [$r(118) = -.46$, $p < .01$]. Within the socio-demographics, age [$r(118) = -.21$, $p < .05$] and length of service [$r(118) = -.25$, $p < .01$] had negative relationships with job-related stress of male teachers. For marital status, single male teachers reported higher job-related stress compared to married male teachers [$r(118) = -.20$, $p < .05$]. On the type of school, there was a significant association such that private school male teachers reported higher job-related stress compared to those in public schools [$r(118) = .30$, $p < .01$]. It was only age [$r(118) = .36$, $p < .01$] and length of service [$r(118) = .31$, $p < .01$] that revealed a significant positive relationship with coping ability of male teachers.

From the results of female samples, the association between coping ability and job-related stress was negatively significant [$r(108) = -.24$, $p < .05$]. This implied that job-related

stress increases with decreased in coping ability among secondary school teachers. However, none of the considered socio-demographics had a significant relationship with neither the coping ability of female teachers nor the job-related stress of female teachers in Ondo State.

To ascertain the difference between male and female teachers perception of job-related stress t independent test was conducted.

Table 2:
Summary of Independent t-test Showing Gender Differences in Job-related Stress

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Job-related Stress	Male	120	65.17	18.54	228	.16	> .05
	Female	110	64.80	15.17			

It was indicated in Table 2 that the result went contrary to hypothesis 1. Male teachers (M=65.17; SD= 18.54) do not significantly differ from female teachers (M=64.80; SD= 15.17) when compared on their perception of job-related stress [$t(228) = .16, p > .05$].

Table 3:
Simple Linear Regression Showing Coping Ability Predicting Job-related Stress of Male and Female Teachers

Predictor	Gender	β	t	R	R ²	df	F
Coping Ability	Male	-.46	-5.68**	.46	.22	1, 119	32.30**
	Female	-.24	-2.55*	.24	.06	1, 109	6.504*

Note: **p < .01, * p < .05, N-Male= 120, N-Female= 110

The result among male samples revealed that job-related stress decreases with increase in coping ability of male teachers ($\beta = -.46, t = -5.68, p < .01$) and this was such that coping ability contributed 22% variance to the total variance observed in job-related stress among male teachers ($R = .46, R^2 = .22$). It was also indicated in Table 3 that coping ability predicted job related stress negatively with a significant variance of 6% ($R = .24, R^2 = .06, \beta = -.24, t = -2.55, p < .05$) among the females. The result implied that the impact of coping ability among male teachers was stronger compared to that of female teachers. This confirmed hypothesis 2.

Discussion

The research investigated the impact of coping ability in perceived job-related stress of male and female teachers in selected secondary schools in Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria. The result in Table 2 revealed that there was no significant gender difference in job-related stress. This was contrary to the findings of earlier related researches (Alhija, 2015; Goh et al., 2011; Marie, 2015; Martinez et al., 2019) and one major reason for such is the extent in which both males and females get involved in both work and family demands to meet up with economic and societal responsibility while catering for the home. The societal hardship has thus aggravated both the stressor for male and that of female teachers, thereby making both gender experience job-related stress at similar level.

Testing the extent at which coping ability predicted the perception of job-related stress, it was observed that male teachers' ability to cope contributed about 22% variance to changes in job-related stress, while just 6% was observed among females. This implied that even though the coping ability of both male and female teachers influenced and decreased their experience of stress, the effectiveness of the ability is higher for male teachers than their female counterparts. This is an aspect with little or no research, and the possible reason for this outcome could be around classroom management. Since both genders had a similar coping ability, the application of this ability through the availability of strategies for coping could further determine its impacts on job stress reduction. Based on works literature, males apply more of problem coping strategies, while females focus more on emotional coping strategies. The channeling of coping ability on problem focus would build on classroom management thus creating possible ways for reducing the stressor around the job. Teachers' deal with human exhibiting behaviours that could be managed, thus opting for management technique/ skill that would resolve classroom related stressors will be better than focusing on emotional ways to resolve such problems.

Conclusion

The effort to understand the influence of coping ability on perceived job-related stress of teachers by virtue of their gender has shown that both genders (male and female) in the secondary school teaching profession have similar form of coping ability and also both genders perceived their job-related stress at a similar level. It was deduced that coping ability predicted perceived job-related stress among both genders. Therefore, incorporating on-the-job training

involving coping enhancing skills for secondary school teachers would help increase their wellbeing and reduce job-related stress among them. However, the extent to which coping ability predicted job-related stress was found to be stronger among male teachers than the female teachers; this paves way for further research on the moderating role of gender in the relationship between the type of coping strategies and perceived job-related stress. The understanding of the specific forms of coping styles adopted by male teachers and the possibility of replicating or improving that aspect among female teachers could improve the impact of coping on stress management. Limiting this present research is the statistical technique and non-consideration of the dimensions of coping strategies and that of job-related stress. Further studies could adopt tools like ‘Structural Equation Model- SEM’ that could analyse all the variables and subdivisions involved and also explain their interactions. Lastly, the cultural and urban location of the sampled respondents limits the tendency to generalize the research findings.

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