

Moderating Effect of Coping Skills on the Relationship between Occupational Stressors and Job Morale of Technical Teachers in South East Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between work environment stressors and teachers' morale in Technical Colleges in South East Nigeria. Two specific objectives, two research questions and two null hypotheses were stated to guide the study. The study utilized the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 360, comprised of Principals and teachers from public technical college in South-East Nigeria. The sample size was 176 respondents. A two stage sampling procedure was employed for the study. Three instruments were used for the study. The first instrument was developed by the researcher. It was "Teachers Occupational Stress and Morale Questionnaire (TOSMQ)" and the Organizational Constraints Scale (OCS) was an adopted instrument based on the work of Peters and O'Connor (1980). The third instrument, COPE Inventory developed by Carver, et al (1989) was adopted for this study. The instrument Teachers Occupational Stress and Morale Questionnaire, TOSMQ was subjected to a trial test using the Cronbach Alpha method of determining reliability. The instrument was trial tested on 30 respondents who are not part of the sample but are in the study area. The scores obtained from the trial-test was subjected to Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC) alpha analysis. The result gave a value of 0.88 for TOSMQ. Structural equation modelling (SEM) path analysis was used to answer research questions 3-10 and to test all the null hypothesis at .05 level of significance. Findings of the study showed that Findings from the path analysis shows a moderate negative mediating effect of emotion focused coping (EFC) on the relationship between work environment and teachers' morale in technical colleges. There is a significant moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between organisational constraints and teachers' morale. The study recommends that Problem-focused coping will help teacher to deal better with stress work situations, as such, teachers are advised to always improvise and find practical ways to solve work related problems.

Keywords: Coping, Morale, Occupational, Skills, Stress,

Introduction

Stress due to work is mostly a fallout of increasing work volume or complexity. It is also becoming the unintended consequences of expanding students' population and teachers'

roles as well as lagging investment in infrastructure and human development. This is particularly the case for public Technical Colleges and secondary schools across South East Nigeria. Job stress as explained by Elujekwute, *et al.* (2021) is the mental state of employees stirred up by the nature and time of a job situation. Stress could also be stirred up by an amalgamation of job situations perceived by the employee as presenting excessive and divergent demands. Geetha and Giriya (2023) described stress as a response to a challenging demand or event in the environment. It is the human body's nervous reaction to unpleasant and unwanted mental, physical, emotional, social or environmental demands. Therefore, stress is a psychological, physical and emotional reaction resulting from an individual's response to environmental anxiety, conflict, pressure and similar other stimuli that intimidate a person's ability to manage. Stress often creates an excessive pressure or other types of demands on an individual with sometimes, adverse effect on the health of individuals. However, varying schools of thought assert that stress is neither good nor bad, but depends on how it is experienced and responded to. Thus, in some cases, stress is seen as a stimulant or energizer and may appear to be motivating, positive and beneficial. Nonetheless, stress as a phenomenon, should be acknowledged and addressed in various professions, especially, the teaching profession.

Teacher stress is a specific type of occupational stress characterized by unpleasant emotions like tension, frustration, anger, and depression arising from various aspects of teaching. According to Collie and Mansfield (2022), teacher stress encompasses these negative emotional experiences, which can significantly impact teacher well-being and student outcomes. Occupational stress is the capacity to cope with the pressures and demands of a job. It is a mental and physical condition which affects an individual's productivity, effectiveness, personal health and quality of work. The ways in which stress manifests itself are generally referred to in terms of behaviour, physical or psychological outcomes.

Teacher occupational stress refers to the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the demands of the job exceed a teacher's capabilities, resources, or needs. Agyapong *et al.* (2022), opined that occupational stress can lead to burnout and negatively impact teacher well-being. This stress arises from interactions with job tasks that cause changes within teachers, compelling them to deviate from their normal functioning.

Collie and Mansfield (2022) viewed occupational stress as stress arising from work. It often occurs when there is discrepancy between the demands of a job task and the capabilities of the worker at that particular time. Occupational stressors are workplace factors that induce stress in teachers, significantly impacting their well-being and job performance. Teacher stress can significantly impact their overall well-being and job performance. Belizario *et al.* (2024), asserted that job satisfaction and perceived stress are closely linked, with stress affecting teachers' morale and enthusiasm for their work. Morale, in this context, refers to the

professional interest and eagerness that educators exhibit towards achieving individual or group goals in their job situation.

Researchers such as Goldstein in 2015 defined teachers' morale as a sense of satisfaction derived from a combination of personal needs correlated with organizational needs. This implies that morale is interrelated with individual needs and organizational goals. For an individual to have high morale, there should be an alignment of his/her needs and the goals of the organization.

The researcher further identified workplace stressors to include such stressors such as work environment stressors, organisational constraints, mistreatment, role stressors, work overload, student related stress, professional development, work-life balance, time management among others. A work environment encompasses the physical, psychological, and social condition in which an individual operates within a professional setting. Workplace stressors are any factors in the work environment that cause stress and anxiety. Workplace stress is a growing problem that affects employees' health and well-being, as well as organizational productivity. Workplace stress refers to the physical and emotional responses employees experience when job demands exceed their ability to cope (Sabentis, 2024). Workplace stress not only affects employees' mental and physical health but also has negative consequences for organizations. Occupational Stressors like work environment plays a crucial role in shaping teacher stress levels, with poor working conditions and inadequate facilities contributing to increased stress (Khan, *et al.*, 2020).

Organizational constraints are defined as the aspects of the immediate work environment that inhibit the translation of motivation and abilities into effective performance (Shani, *et al.*, 2019). Organizational constraints are work conditions that interfere with an employee's motivation or ability to perform. By definition, organizational constraints interfere with employees' perceived ability to do their jobs, which is obviously problematic. For the teaching profession, some examples of organisational constraints are insufficient information, inadequate equipment as well lack of help from other people. Constraints are hypothesized to limit the maximal level of performance, thus having a stronger effect on workers high in ability and motivation. Organizational constraints have known connections with an array of job attitudes, stress indicators, and other behaviours. Specifically, organizational constraints are moderately associated with lower job satisfaction, lower organizational commitment, higher stress, higher emotional exhaustion, more counterproductive work behaviors (behaviors that are harmful to others or the organization), and higher intentions to quit (Pindek & Spector, 2016). The connection between organizational constraints and actual employee morale is unknown.

Individual workers expectedly, differ in their risk of experiencing stress and in their vulnerability to the adverse effects of occupational stressors. There are other factors and resources that might moderate stressors and morale of workers. Resources that help meet the

pressures and demands faced at work are known as coping skills. Coping skills play a vital role in managing stress and promoting teacher well-being. Coping is defined as the process of mobilizing thoughts and behaviours to manage internal and external stressful situations. Coping is most often used characteristically for conscious and voluntary mobilization of acts (Algorani and Gupta, 2024). The subjection of workers to an occupational stressor produces varying degrees of dealing with stress. This is known as 'coping skills'. Coping skills are a set of relatively stable traits that determine the individual's behaviour in response to stress. They are often consistent over time and across situations (de Boer *et al.*, 2017). Coping skills can be categorized into problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and maladaptive or avoidant coping (Compas *et al.*, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

There are deteriorating work conditions and stressors impacting and shaping the teaching profession. Working under such deplorable conditions, leads to stress which affects the morale of teachers. This could result in lack of commitment to work and the institution. For teachers in technical colleges, whatever affects their morale negatively, has the ability to also negatively influence performance.

All occupations have stressors. While stresses in certain occupations are pronounced, the occupational stresses encountered by technical college teachers while increasing in intensity and frequency are also not pronounced. Occupational stress on technical college teachers if not checked, can lead to attrition, job dissatisfaction, physical as well as biological harm. Evidence of stress in people is reflected especially in their behavioural changes. Stress can affect the quality of life through different aspects such as health and social relationships. Higher mental distress can lead to a lower quality of life. Moreover, stressful life events are associated with a significantly increased risk for mortality, mediated by smoking, type 2-diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. This research hypothesizes that teacher occupational stress might have an effect on teacher morale, an essential psychological component that influences job performance. When the demands of a job become overwhelming and the resources as well as the capacity of individuals are stretched, stress is most likely to set in. The effect of stress among teachers with respect to performance is burnout and decreased job satisfaction, which affects teacher performance and ultimately, student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between Occupational Stressors and technical college teachers' morale and how coping skills moderate that relationship in technical colleges in South East Nigeria. Subsequently, the following specific objectives guided the study:

- i. To establish the moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between work environment stressors and Teachers morale in Technical Colleges in South East Nigeria.
- ii. To establish the moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between organizational constraints and Teachers morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study

- i. What is the moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between work environment stressors and teachers morale in Technical Colleges in South East Nigeria?
- ii. What is the moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between organizational constraints and teachers' morale in Technical Colleges in South East Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested

- i. There is no significant moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between work environment stressors and teachers' morale in Technical Colleges in South East Nigeria
- ii. There is no significant moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between organizational constraints and teachers morale in Technical Colleges in South East Nigeria.

Literature Review

Theory of Stress and Adaption by Hans Selye (1976)

The theory of stress and adaption was propounded by Selye in 1976. The theory stated that a person depends on constraint mediation between environmental demands and adaptive capacities. Various self-regulatory physical and emotional mechanisms are in constant operation, adjusting the body to a changing number and nature of internal and external stressors, agents, or factors causing intensification of stress state. The theory described the physiological adaptive response to stress, and as a physical and emotional state that is always present in human beings. According to Selye, the manifestations of stress are overt and covert, purposeful, initially protective, maintaining equilibrium, productivity and satisfaction to the extent possible. Selye further emphasized that stresses encompasses a number of stimuli which include: eustress, daily hassles and distress. Eustress is the stress that comes with successful adaptation and that is beneficial or promotes emotional development and self-actualization. It is positive stress, an optimum orientation to life's challenges, coupled with the person's ability to regulate life and maintain optimum levels of stress for a growth promoting lifestyle.

The implications of this theory for this study are that, when teachers of Technical Colleges pass through a lot of stress on their job, they become used to it. The uncomfortable or intolerable stress they encounter in performing a task may eventually be perceived as normal routine and they will become used to it. Another implication is that, when a work situation is perceived as threatening to teachers in Technical Colleges, teachers may react in intensity and scope to meet the situation. This may invariably increase their performance even though the work is not pleasurable to them.

Conceptual Framework

Occupational stress can be defined as the emotional and biological responses of an individual to specific stimuli within their work environment, which can lead to physical and psychological problems (Noblet & LaMontagne, 2020). This definition implies that occupational stress can be triggered by multiple factors, including task demands, role expectations, interpersonal interactions, and the overall organizational culture and climate. There are several effects of occupational stress, however, they are not completely negative. If the stress is positive, that is, if the teacher sees the task as inspiring instead of debilitating, the outcomes are often more energy, enthusiasm and motivation. However, the negative effects of stress have been well documented and often causing the most concerns for school administrators and researchers alike.

Employee morale can be defined by a person's job satisfaction and the degree to which the individual receives satisfaction from the job situation (Bhasin, 2018), motivated job-engagement (Verma & Kesari, 2017), feelings of well-being toward the company (Muskita & Kazimoto, 2017), and the emotional connection employees have during their time within a workplace environment based on the risk, policies, and management (Webster, 2018).

Bhasin (2018) remarked that morale is generally referred to as high morale or low morale. Employees who are satisfied with their job and have a positive attitude at work are said to have positive or high employee morale. By-products of high employee morale generally include: willing cooperation, organizational and leadership loyalty, disciplinary compliance, reasonable to high degrees of initiative and job interest respectively, and organizational pride. On the other hand, employees who are dissatisfied and show negative attitudes at work are said to have negative or low employee morale (Muskita and Kazimoto, 2017).

Coping refers to the ways that people respond to and interact with problem situations (Sagar, 2020). Life continuously presents people with circumstances that can affect their physical or psychological well-being. The way they deal with these situations can determine whether they surmount them or suffer a variety of undesirable consequences. The ability of the teacher to adjust self mentally to meet work demands in the face of pressure is known as coping skills. Employers can pull resources, policies and systems all intended to help workers manage stress and ease work conditions. Those are primary and direct measures for stress management.

However, secondary interventions, also referred to as coping, focuses on resources people can use to moderate the risk of workplace related stress. Most of the widely used coping techniques are task strategy, social support, time management, positive attitude, management of problem, improving knowledge, reducing workload, taking problems as opportunity, distractions, better learning among others. All these have been grouped into three categories by stress experts. These are problem focused coping, emotion focused coping and avoidant coping (APA, 2020).

Pindek *et al.* (2019) studied organizational constraints and performance: an indirect effects model. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from 660 engineers licensed in the state of Florida using a single online survey. Qualitative results showed that the most commonly experienced constraints were from coworkers and organizational rules and procedures. Constraints identified as having a greater detrimental effect on motivation are from the supervisor, and organizational rules and procedures. Quantitative results supported an indirect effects model that includes an indirect path via motivation, and a path via workload, which had a curvilinear component.

Holton *et al.* (2015) investigated employee stress management: An examination of adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies on employee health. They examined how employees cope with work and personal stress, whether their coping strategies are adaptive (protective to health) or maladaptive (detrimental to health), and if the manner in which employees cope with stress influences perceived stress management. In this cross-sectional study, a random sample of 2,500 full-time university non-student employees (that is faculty, salaried professionals, and hourly non-professionals) were surveyed on health related behaviours including stress and coping. Over half of employees surveyed reported effective stress management. Most frequently used adaptive coping strategies were communication with friend/family member and exercise, while most frequently used maladaptive coping strategies were drinking alcohol and eating more than usual. Both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies made significant ($p < 0.05$) contributions to predicting employee's perceived stress management. Only adaptive coping strategies ($B = 0.265$) predicted whether someone would self-identify as effectively managing stress. Use of maladaptive coping strategies decreased likelihood of self-reporting effective stress management.

Pimpong (2023) examined work environmental factors and its impact on employee productivity: the mediating role of employee commitment. The research was a quantitative study. The survey questions utilized in this study were taken from past studies. The research items were positively framed using a five-point Likert scale. In order to further improve the questionnaire items, a pilot test involving 30 employees of Ghana Technology University (GTU) was undertaken. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the pilot data, which confirmed the good factor loadings of the research items. The findings revealed a positive relationship between the workplace environment and employee commitment, suggesting that

employee commitment partially strengthens the impact of the workplace environment on employee performance.

Zhenjing *et al.* (2022) examined the impact of workplace environment on employee task performance under the mediating role of employee commitment and achievement-striving ability. For this purpose, data were collected from the academic staff under a cross-sectional research design, and they were approached through convenience sampling technique. As per recommendations of established sample size criteria, 420 copies of the questionnaires were distributed among the respondents. Data were analysed through structural equation modelling (SEM) by using Smart PLS 3. The SEM was done based on measurement models and structural models. The results indicated that a positive work environment had the power to improve employee performance. Similarly, a positive work environment also improved the employee commitment level and achievement-striving ability significantly.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was employed for the study. The area of the study is south-east Nigeria. The population of the study was 360 which comprised 334 technical college teachers and 26 Principals of the 15 public technical colleges in South-East Nigeria. The sample size was 176 respondents, comprising of 150 technical college teachers and 26 Principals of public technical colleges in South-East Nigeria. A two stage sampling procedure was employed for the study. First, cluster sampling was used to sample each state to make a cluster. Thereafter, proportionate sampling was used to select the respondents for the study from each State. The principals were not sampled as the population was of manageable size.

Three instruments were used for the study. The first instrument was developed by the researcher. It was “Teachers Occupational Stress and Morale Questionnaire (TOSMQ)”. The instrument was designed with a four point rating scale to elicit information from technical college teachers on the types of stress they encounter at work. The instrument options were Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The second instrument, Organizational Constraints Scale (OCS) was an adopted instrument based on the work of Peters and O’Connor (1980), which listed areas of constraints. The third instrument, COPE Inventory developed by Carver, et al (1989) was adopted for this study. The COPE inventory assesses the different ways in which people respond to stress. The Brief-COPE is a 28 item self-report questionnaire designed to measure effective and ineffective ways to cope with a stressful life event.

Validation of the Instrument

The COPE Inventory is a standardized scale validated by Poulus *et al.* (2020). Spector, *et al* (1998) validated the Organizational Constraints Scale (OCS) and established that it was deemed fit for use for analysis of constraints in organisations that could lead to stress. The

instrument developed by the researcher Teachers Occupational Stress and Morale Questionnaire, TOSMQ) was face validated by three experts from the University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

The instrument Teachers Occupational Stress and Morale Questionnaire, TOSMQ was subjected to a trial test using the Cronbach Alpha method of determining reliability. The instrument was trial tested on 30 respondents who are not part of the sample but are in the study area. The scores obtained from the trial-test was subjected to Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC) alpha analysis. The result gave a value of 0.88 for TOSMQ. Poulus *et al.* (2020) established a Cronbach alpha average alpha of .79 for COPE Inventory. Structural equation modelling (SEM) path analysis was used to answer research questions 3-10 and to test all the null hypothesis at .05 level of significance.

Presentation of Findings

H₀₁: There is no significant moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between work environment stressors and teachers’ morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria?

The analysis first assesses the model fit, that is, how well the proposed model matches the observed data. As seen from the output, the χ^2 -statistic is 11.336 and the degrees of freedom of 4 with the p-value of 0.025, indicating poor model fitting. However, all the alternative model fitting indices are satisfactory, where the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 0.932, the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) is 0.830, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.1 indicating a marginal fit, and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is 0.068, indicating a good fit. These all show that the model has a good fit.

Table 1: Summary of Structural Equation Modelling of Moderating Effect of Coping Skills on the Relationship Between Work Environment Stressors and Teachers’ Morale in Technical Colleges

Regressions:							
		Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(> z)	Std.lv	Std.all
Coping skills ~							
WE	(a)	0.027	0.026	1.029	0.303	0.485	0.535
Morale ~							
WE	(c)	0.185	0.090	2.056	0.040	0.185	0.237
Cpng_skills	(b)	-2.245	1.522	-1.475	0.140	-0.125	-0.145
Variances:							
		Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(> z)	Std.lv	Std.all
.PFC		0.170	0.018	9.315	0.000	0.170	0.982
.EFC		-0.634	1.585	-0.400	0.689	-0.634	-0.421
.AC		0.793	0.084	9.387	0.000	0.793	0.997
.Morale		0.714	0.076	9.331	0.000	0.714	0.960

.Coping_skills	0.002	0.002	0.888	0.374	0.714	0.714
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Source: Researcher's field work, 2025

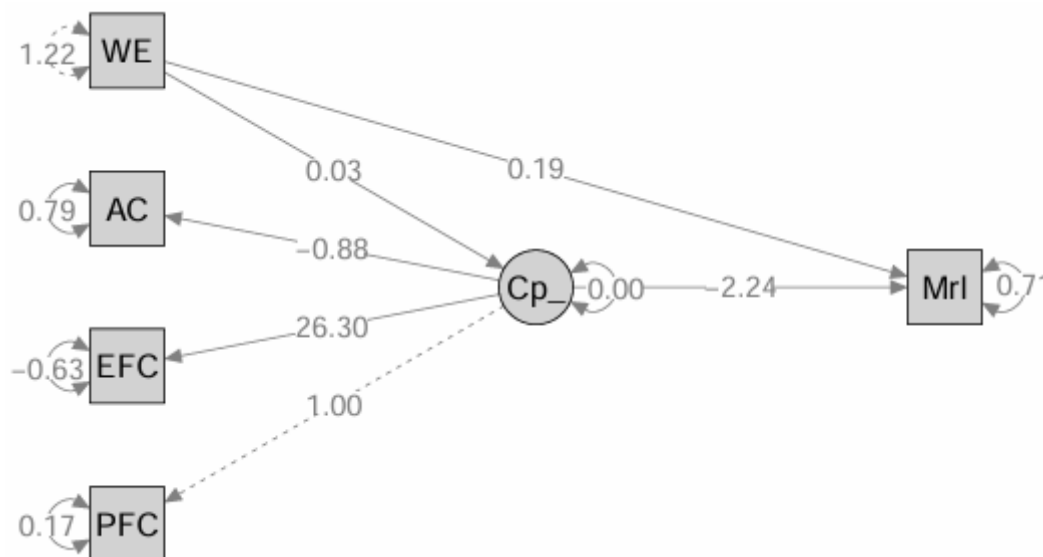


Figure 1: Path Analysis for structural Equation Modelling for Work Environment. Researcher 2025

Table and Figure 1 shows the Path Analysis for structural Equation Modelling of the mediating effect of coping skills on the relationship between work environment and technical college teacher morale. The latent variable is the coping skills (Cp_), WE is work environment, the predictor variable. Technical teacher morale (MrI) is the observed variable, while Problem-focused coping (PFC), Emotion-focused coping (EFC) and Avoidant Coping (AC) are mediating variables of coping skills.

The path analysis also shows a coefficient value of -0.63 for emotion focused coping (EFC), indicating that as emotion focused coping increases by a unit, teachers' morale reduces by 0.63. This indicates a negative effect of EFC on the relationship between work environment and technical teachers' morale. The standardized coefficient value (std.all) is -0.421, indicating that there is moderate negative mediating effect of EFC on the relationship between work environment and teachers' morale. An observed coefficient value of 0.17 for Problem-focused coping (PFC), indicating that as problem focused coping increases by a unit, technical teachers' morale also increases by 0.17. The standardized coefficient value (std.all) is 0.982, indicating that there is strong effect of PFC on the relationship between work environment and technical teachers' morale. An observed coefficient value of 0.79 for Avoidant coping (AC), indicates that as avoidant coping increases by a unit, teachers' morale also increases by 0.79. The standardized coefficient value (std.all) is 0.997, indicating that there is strong effect of avoidant coping (AC) on the relationship between work environment and teachers' morale in technical colleges.

The result of the structural equation modelling reveals that for the indirect path, that is, effect of coping strategies on morale is negative and not significant with a z-statistics of .869 at $p > .05$.³⁸⁵ The total effect, that is, when considering work environment and coping skills, is positive and significant with a z-statistics of 2.146 at $p < .05$.⁰³² Thus, there is a significant moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between work environment stressors and technical teachers' morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria. When coping skills are treated individually, the result shows that problem focused coping and avoidant coping skills have probability values .001 respectively, thus, significantly moderate the relationship between work environment stressors and teachers' morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria. However, emotion focused coping has no significant moderating effect on the relationship between work environment stressors and teachers' morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria.

H₀₂: There is no significant moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between organizational constraints and teachers' morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria?

Table 2: Summary of Structural Equation Modelling of Moderating Effect of Coping Skills on the Relationship Between Organizational Constraints and Teachers' Morale in Technical Colleges

Regressions:							
		Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(> z)	Std.lv	Std.all
Coping skills ~							
OC	(a)	0.023	0.021	1.086	0.277	0.444	0.559
Morale ~							
OC	(c)	0.345	0.120	2.885	0.004	0.345	0.504
Coping skills	(b)	-5.110	2.784	-1.835	0.066	-0.259	-0.301

Variances:							
		Estimate	Std. Err	z-value	P(> z)	Std.lv	Std. all
.PFC		0.171	0.018	9.357	0.000	0.171	0.985
.EFC		-0.702	1.401	-0.501	0.616	-0.702	-0.466
.AC		0.791	0.084	9.390	0.000	0.791	0.995

Model Test User Model:

Test statistic	12.074
Degrees of freedom	4
P-value (Chi-square)	0.017

CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI
0.950	0.10	0.070	0.875

Source: Researcher's field work, 2025

The goodness-of-fit test statistics are displayed in Table 3. The Chi-square test statistic is significant at 0.05, which suggest that the model fitting is only acceptable. Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.1 and since it is greater than 0.05, it indicates a poor fit. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 0.950, the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) is 0.875 respectively, both indicating a good model fit. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is 0.070, indicating a good fit. This implies that the model is a good fit and the analysis can be run.

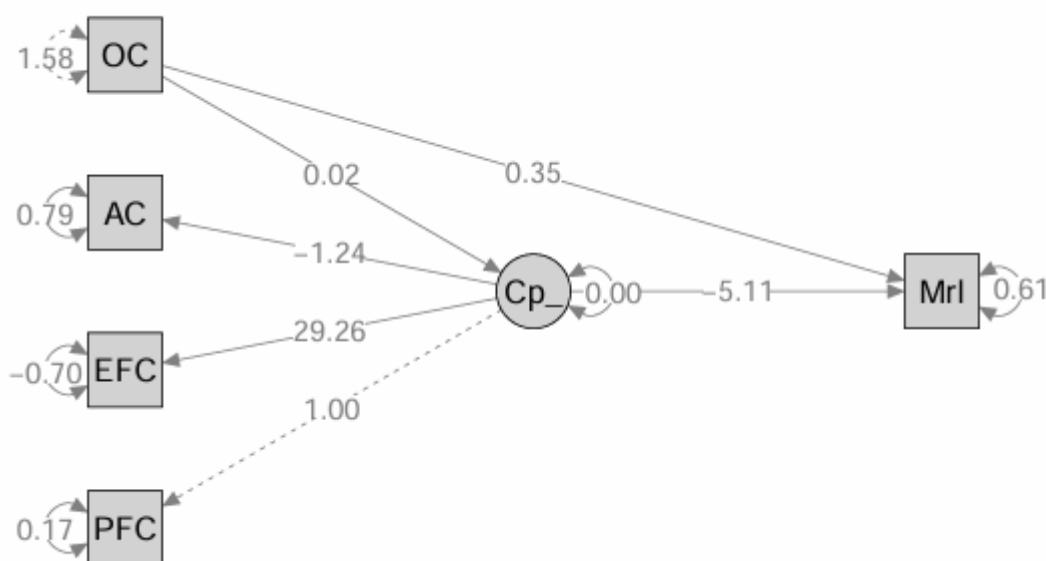


Figure 2: Path Analysis for structural Equation Modelling for Organizational Constraint

Table 2 and Figure 2 present the summary of the structural equation modelling (SEM) path analysis using r-studio. In considering the moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between organizational constraints and teachers’ morale, the result shows a coefficient of -0.702 for emotion focussed coping. This indicates that a unit increase in emotion focussed coping results in a 0.702 unit decrease in teachers’ morale indirectly through its effect on coping skills. The standardized indirect effect (Std.all) is -0.466, which indicates a moderate negative effect of emotion focussed coping on the relationship between organizational constraints and technical teachers’ morale.

An observed coefficient value of 0.79 for Avoidant coping (AC), indicates that as avoidant coping increases by a unit, teachers’ morale also increases by 0.79. The standardized coefficient value (std.all) is 0.995, indicating that there is strong positive effect of avoidant coping (AC) on the relationship between organizational constraints and technical teachers’ morale.

An observed coefficient value of 0.17 for Problem-focussed coping (PFC), indicates that as problem focused coping increases by a unit, teachers' morale also increases by 0.17. The standardized coefficient value (std.all) is 0.985, indicating that there is strong positive effect of PFC on the relationship between organizational constraints and technical teachers' morale. The result shows the direct and indirect effects. The relationship between organizational constraints on morale is indicated by the coefficient 0.35. This shows that as organizational constraints increase by a unit, morale increases marginally by 0.35. This shows a low positive relationship between organizational constraints and morale. The path also shows the indirect effect of coping skills on morale. This shows a coefficient of -5.11, indicating that coping skills has a strong negative effect on the relationship between organizational constraints and teachers' morale in technical colleges.

The result of the structural equation modelling reveals that the indirect path, that is, effect of coping strategies on morale is negative and not significant with a z-statistics of 1.041 at $p > .05$.²⁹⁸ The total effect, that is, when considering organisational constraints and coping skills, is positive and significant with a z-statistics of 4.723 at $p < .05$.⁰⁰¹ Thus, there is a significant moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between organisational constraints and teachers' morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria. When coping skills are treated individually, the result shows that problem focused coping (PFC) and avoidant coping (AC) have probability values .001 respectively, thus, significantly moderate the relationship between organisational constraints and teachers' morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria. However, emotion focused coping has no significant moderating effect on the relationship between organisational constraints and teachers' morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the path analysis shows a moderate negative mediating effect of emotion focused coping (EFC) on the relationship between work environment and teachers' morale in technical colleges. The result shows that problem focused coping (PFC) has a strong positive moderating effect of PFC on the relationship between work environment and teachers' morale. Also, avoidant coping (AC) has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between work environment and teachers' morale.

The corresponding hypothesis test shows that there is a significant moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between work environment stressors and teachers' morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria. The result shows that problem focused coping and avoidant coping skills significantly moderate the relationship between work environment stressors and teachers' morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria. However, emotion focused coping has no significant moderating effect on the relationship between work

environment stressors and teachers' morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria. The result shows that coping skills has a strong negative effect on teachers' morale in technical colleges. This implies that as coping skills increases, teachers' morale reduces. Teachers get strained when they exert coping skills to meet job tasks and requirements. While this may get the job done, it leaves this feeling of exhaustion that may dampen morale. Teachers' practice of emotion focused coping negatively impacts on the work environment and morale. As the challenge is rationalized through emotion focused coping, it also incapacitates teachers from taking action based on their psychological adjustment. This finding is corroborated by Zhenjing *et al.* (2022) whose results indicated that a positive work environment had the power to improve employee performance. Similarly, a positive work environment also improved the employee commitment level and achievement-striving ability significantly. Employee commitment is directly linked to morale. Both employee commitment and achievement-striving ability also improved employee performance. While in the case of mediation, it had also been observed that workplace environment triggered employee commitment and employee achievement-striving ability which further improved employee performance.

The findings further agree with Pimpong (2023) whose findings revealed that there is a positive correlation between the work environment and commitment. Further analysis established that employee commitment partially strengthens the impact of the work environment on employee performance, so also would coping skills. The findings were also supported by Chang *et al.* (2006) who found significant correlations between stressors and physical and mental health. further analysis revealed that the best coping predictors of mental health were escape-avoidance, distancing, and self-control. Self-control falls under emotion focused coping.

The result of analysis reveals that there is a moderate negative effect of emotion focused coping on the relationship between organizational constraints and teachers' morale. It was also observed that there is strong positive effect of avoidant coping (AC) on the relationship between organizational constraints and technical teachers' morale.

The result showed that there is strong positive effect of Problem-focused coping (PFC) on the relationship between organizational constraints and teachers' morale. The path analysis further revealed the indirect effect of coping skills on morale. This showed that coping skills has a strong negative effect on teachers' morale. The hypothesis test confirms that there is a significant moderating effect of coping skills on the relationship between organisational constraints and teachers' morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria. Further analysis showed that emotion focused coping has no significant moderating effect on the relationship between organisational constraints and teachers' morale in technical colleges in South East Nigeria. The practice of problem focused coping increasing teachers' morale. PFC is a positive response to stress through the practice of innovative means of solving work and task related

problems. A successful accomplishment of the task using PFC often elicits positive feelings of achievement, which in turn, influences morale positively. Avoidant coping on the other hand is a laiser-faire response that may not affect morale nor require extra effort by the individual. Avoiding the task entirely and its associated challenges, does not affect morale, but can help maintain stability to the individual, which may also help maintain morale or fight demoralization. Again, coping skills showed a negative mediating effect on the relationship between organizational constraints and morale. The practice of coping skills helps teachers adjust to work demands, but can also heighten personal burnout and exhaustion. This can lead to lowered morale even when the job was successfully accomplished. This finding is corroborated by Holton, *et al.* (2015) who found that increasing the availability of resources in the workplace to facilitate the use of adaptive coping strategies is necessary for successful stress management and, ultimately, healthier employees. This finding is in tandem with Pindek *et al.* (2019) who identified constraints as having a greater detrimental effect on motivation are from the supervisor, and organizational rules and procedures. Quantitative results supported an indirect effects model that includes an indirect path via motivation, and a path via workload, which had a curvilinear component.

Conclusion

The study concludes that coping skills has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between occupational stressors and morale of technical college teachers. The outcome of the study is that while coping skills may help technical college teachers manage work conditions and occupational stress, it may not necessarily make them feel good or improve their morale. Where coping skills are involved, it does not always lead to heightened morale, but optimum job performance. The goal of coping skills is to perform tasks.

Recommendations

It is recommended based on the findings and conclusions of this study that:

- i. Problem-focused coping will help teacher to deal better with stress work situations, as such, teachers are advised to always improvise and find practical ways to solve work related problems.
- ii. Principals and state technical schools board should provide training for teachers on occupational stress management and coping skills. This is essential to help them develop self-efficacy, skills in managing stressful work condition and better prepare them for the emerging work environment.
- iii. Technical college teachers are admonished to apply different coping skills in the performance of their role responsibilities, as it helps in role stressors.
- iv. School administrators should help to reduce organizational constraints that introduce stress into the work environment and negatively affect teacher morale.

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