

Teacher Educators' Strategies for Coping with Work-Related Stress and its Perceived Impact on their Emotional Well-being

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Abstract

This study investigated coping strategies employed by teacher educators to manage work-related stress and its perceived impact on their emotional well-being. The entire academic staff of Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, formed the population of the study. The sample of the study is 421 academic staff of school of Education, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri. The study utilized a descriptive survey design; and a questionnaire titled "Teachers-educator Questionnaire on Perception regarding Lecturers' Work-Related Stress Management Technique and Emotional Well-being" was used for data collection. It has reliability coefficient of 0.79 determined through Cronbach alpha method. The data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation in answering the research questions. The findings revealed, among others, that teacher educators employed a range of coping techniques, including emotional regulation, social support, and effective workload management, to navigate the challenges of their profession. The recommendations include promoting positive coping strategies through workshops, introducing mindfulness practices into professional development programmes, enhancing

institutional support, conducting longitudinal studies for a deeper understanding, and fostering collaborative efforts between educational institutions, professional organizations, and mental health experts.

Keywords: assessment, stress, emotion, coping, strategy

Introduction

Work-related stress among lecturers can be defined as the emotional, psychological, and physical strain resulting from the demands, pressures, and expectations inherent in their professional roles (Kyriacou, 2001). This stress often stems from various sources within the academic environment, leading to distinct types of stressors experienced by lecturers. Lecturers frequently face role ambiguity, where the expectations and responsibilities of their roles are unclear or continuously changing (Smith & Cooper, 2017a). Role conflict occurs when lecturers experience conflicting demands, such as balancing research, teaching, and administrative tasks (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Heavy workloads and tight deadlines are common stressors for lecturers, especially during peak academic periods (Eyo, et al., 2024; Johnson & Hall, 2018a). The pressure to meet academic standards, publish research, and handle administrative tasks contributes significantly to their stress levels. Dealing with challenging students' behaviours, academic misconduct, and diverse learning needs can lead to emotional strain among lecturers (Chang & Davis, 2019a).

These interactions, while rewarding, can also be emotionally taxing. Inadequate support from institutions, lack of resources, and limited professional development opportunities are organizational stressors faced by lecturers (Riley et al., 2017a). These factors contribute to feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction. Emotional labour refers to the effort lecturers invest in managing their emotions and the emotions of others (Chang & Davis, 2019b). Lecturers often suppress their feelings or adopt specific emotions to maintain a positive classroom atmosphere, which can be draining. Precisely, work-related stress for lecturers encompasses a variety of stressors, including role ambiguity, workload pressures, student-related challenges, organizational factors, and emotional labour. Understanding these stressors is essential in the context of exploring lecturers' coping strategies and their subsequent impact on emotional well-being. Addressing these stressors effectively can lead to the development of targeted interventions to support lecturers in managing their stress and fostering a healthier work environment.

Work-related stress among lecturers is a prevalent concern in the academic sector, influencing their overall well-being and job satisfaction. The demanding nature of academic roles often leads to high levels of stress, impacting lecturers' emotional health. Coping with

this stress is essential for their overall well-being, as well as the quality of education they provide to students. Educators, including lecturers, are frequently exposed to various stressors, such as heavy workloads, administrative pressures, and the constant demand for academic excellence (Kyriacou, 2001). These stressors can lead to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and compromised emotional well-being. It is reported that lecturers experiencing chronic stress were more likely to face emotional exhaustion and decreased motivation. Understanding how lecturers cope with work-related stress is crucial for developing effective support systems. Research by Johnson and Hall (2018b) highlights the significance of individual coping strategies, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions based on educators' unique stressors. Moreover, organizational initiatives, including supportive policies and mental health resources, play a vital role in mitigating stress (Riley et al., 2017b).

The impact of stress on lecturers extends beyond their professional lives. It affects their emotional well-being, which, in turn, influences their interactions with colleagues and students. Teachers may have spent decades with research as their primary activity in a typical academic setting (Amalu et al., 2023; Njoku & Ofoegbu, 2020). As opined by Ngwu and Ofoegbu (2024), mental health is more than mere lack of mental disorder. It is rather more of a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing of an individual.

Furthermore, the emotional well-being of lecturers is intricately linked to the quality of education they provide. Educators experiencing high levels of stress may struggle to maintain enthusiasm in the classroom, affecting students' engagement and learning outcomes. This underscores the urgency of exploring coping strategies and their impact on lecturers' emotional well-being to enhance both their personal lives and the educational experience they deliver. In light of the significance of this issue, this research delved into the coping mechanisms adopted by lecturers to manage work-related stress. By exploring these strategies, this study seeks to uncover their effectiveness in mitigating stress and their perceived impact on lecturers' emotional well-being.

Work-related stress has a profound impact on the emotional well-being of lecturers, influencing their mental health, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life. Understanding these effects is crucial in assessing the effectiveness of coping strategies and interventions. Chronic work-related stress can lead to mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression among lecturers (Avey et al., 2009). The persistent pressure and demands can contribute to emotional exhaustion, reducing emotional well-being significantly. High levels of stress can result in job dissatisfaction and burnout among lecturers (Kyriacou,

2001). Feelings of being overwhelmed and unappreciated diminish emotional well-being, affecting both personal and professional lives. Prolonged exposure to stressors diminishes lecturers' emotional stability and impairs their cognitive abilities, leading to decreased job performance (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotional strain hampers concentration and decision-making, affecting the quality of education provided to students.

Lecturers experiencing work-related stress may struggle with interpersonal relationships, both within the workplace and in their personal lives. Emotional exhaustion can lead to conflicts and strained relationships, further impacting emotional well-being. Prolonged stress can lead to physical health issues, including cardiovascular problems and compromised immune function (Kyriacou, 2001). Physical ailments resulting from stress further contribute to emotional distress. Work-related stress disrupts lecturers' work-life balance, affecting their ability to enjoy personal activities and relaxation (Smith & Cooper, 2017b). The inability to disconnect from work exacerbates emotional strain.

In conclusion, work-related stress profoundly affects the emotional well-being of lecturers, leading to mental health challenges, job dissatisfaction, reduced job performance, interpersonal strain, physical health impacts, and disruptions in work-life balance. These effects underline the critical need for effective coping strategies and institutional support systems, highlighting the importance of exploring lecturers' strategies for coping with work-related stress and their subsequent impact on emotional well-being.

Understanding lecturers' perceptions and strategies for coping with work-related stress is of paramount importance for several reasons, as supported by various studies and scholarly work. According to Maslach and Leiter (2016), understanding employees' stress experiences is crucial for developing targeted interventions that address specific stressors. By recognizing lecturers' perceptions, institutions can tailor support programmes to effectively alleviate stress and create a healthier work environment. Lecturers' perceptions of work-related stress directly impact their job satisfaction levels. By comprehending these perceptions, institutions can identify stressors and implement strategies to enhance lecturers' job satisfaction. Research by Kyriacou (2001) emphasizes the importance of job satisfaction in retaining skilled educators and ensuring their long-term commitment to the profession. Lecturers employ various coping strategies to manage stress, and these strategies can vary widely. Understanding these coping mechanisms enables institutions to tailor support systems. For instance, educators using active coping strategies might benefit from workshops promoting resilience, while those relying on social support might find peer

mentoring programmes effective. Lecturers' stress levels can impact their teaching quality and interactions with students.

Understanding lecturers' stress perceptions allows institutions to implement stress-reduction strategies, ensuring that educators are emotionally available and positively engaged in their teaching roles. This, in turn, enhances the overall educational experience of students. By comprehending lecturers' stress perceptions and coping strategies, institutions can foster a supportive culture that values employee well-being (Kyriacou, 2001). A positive workplace environment, facilitated through effective stress management, contributes to employee retention, fosters institutional loyalty, and promotes a positive public image, thereby fostering institutional growth and development. In a nutshell, understanding lecturers' perceptions and coping strategies for work-related stress is not only essential for their personal well-being but also critical for creating a supportive, engaging, and productive academic environment that benefits both educators and students. Institutions that prioritize this understanding are better positioned to promote a healthy workplace culture, leading to positive outcomes for all stakeholders involved. In this regard, the researchers investigated teacher educators' strategies for coping with work-related stress and their perception on its impact on their emotional well-being.

Educators, including lecturers, employ various coping strategies to manage the challenges associated with work-related stress. Understanding these strategies is fundamental to comprehending the complex interplay between stress management and emotional well-being in academic settings. Educators often use effective time management techniques to balance their workload efficiently. Prioritizing tasks, setting realistic goals, and organizing schedules help them manage stress by ensuring tasks are completed within manageable time frames. Educators develop emotional regulation skills to handle challenging situations with composure.

Additionally, building resilience and having the ability to bounce back from setbacks, enable lecturers to navigate stressors more effectively.

Educators often rely on social support systems, including colleagues and friends, to share experiences and seek advice. Engaging in supportive relationships helps in venting frustrations and finding emotional relief. Many educators practice mindfulness and relaxation techniques, such as meditation and yoga, to alleviate stress (Chang & Davis, 2019a). These practices promote mental well-being and provide a respite from the demands of their profession. Engaging in professional development activities and stress management

workshops equips educators with coping skills (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). These programmes provide strategies for handling stressors effectively, thus promoting emotional well-being. Educators emphasize maintaining a healthy work-life balance, allocating time for personal activities and hobbies outside of work as essential. Achieving equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal life fosters emotional well-being. In summary, educators, including lecturers, can adopt wide range of coping strategies such as time management, emotional regulation, seeking social support, mindfulness practices, professional development, and promoting work-life balance. These strategies will enable them to navigate work-related stressors effectively.

Several psychological theories provide a framework for understanding how individuals cope with stress. Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984) emphasizes the cognitive appraisal process, where individuals evaluate stressors as threats or challenges and employ coping strategies based on this appraisal. This theory highlights the dynamic nature of coping and its dependence on individuals' perceptions of stressors. In the academic context, coping strategies employed by educators, including lecturers, can be categorized into problem-focused and emotion-focused coping.

Problem-focused coping involves directly addressing the stressor, such as seeking support or time management. Emotion-focused coping focuses on managing emotional responses to stress, like relaxation techniques or seeking social support (Chang & Davis, 2019a). These coping strategies are often intertwined, forming complex adaptive responses to stressors in the academic environment. The interplay between coping strategies and emotional well-being is intricate and multidirectional. Effective coping strategies, such as seeking social support or employing mindfulness techniques, can enhance emotional well-being by reducing stress levels and promoting resilience.

On the other hand, poor coping strategies or a lack of coping mechanisms can lead to emotional exhaustion, exacerbating stress and diminishing overall well-being (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Moreover, individual differences, including personality traits and cognitive appraisal patterns, influence the effectiveness of coping strategies, further shaping the relationship between coping and emotional well-being. In the context of understanding lecturers' strategies for coping with work-related stress and exploring its impact on emotional well-being, these psychological theories and coping models provide a theoretical foundation. Analyzing how lecturers employ coping strategies based on these models and examining the outcomes on their emotional well-being can offer valuable insights into effective interventions and support systems tailored to the academic environment.

Job satisfaction serves as a significant emotional health indicator among lecturers. Higher job satisfaction is linked to lower stress levels and enhanced emotional well-being. Lecturers content with their roles are more likely to employ effective coping strategies, leading to improved emotional health. Prolonged stress can result in various health issues, including cardiovascular problems and compromised immune function, directly impacting lecturers' emotional well-being (Kyriacou, 2001). Monitoring stress-related health issues provides insights into lecturers' overall emotional health. Emotional well-being significantly influences job performance. Lecturers experiencing emotional distress are likely to face challenges in maintaining high-quality teaching, research, and administrative duties, leading to diminished overall job performance (Chang & Davis, 2019b). Positive coping strategies, such as seeking social support, engaging in relaxation techniques, and effective time management, are associated with improved emotional well-being (Riley et al., 2017a). These strategies enhance resilience, reduce stress, and promote emotional health among lecturers.

Conversely, negative coping strategies, such as substance abuse or avoidance behaviours, are linked to emotional distress and decreased emotional well-being (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Lecturers resorting to these strategies may experience heightened stress levels, leading to emotional turmoil and impaired job performance. In the context of understanding lecturers' strategies for coping with work-related stress and exploring its impact on emotional well-being, examining these emotional health indicators and the correlation between coping strategies and emotional well-being provides a comprehensive view. Effective coping strategies lead to positive emotional health indicators, whereas negative coping mechanisms contribute to emotional distress, influencing lecturers' overall emotional well-being and job performance.

Though extensive research has been conducted on work-related stress among educators, including lecturers, there are notable gaps in the existing literature that warrant further exploration in the context of understanding lecturers' coping strategies and their impact on emotional well-being. Existing studies often emphasize the prevalence and effects of work-related stress but provide limited insights into specific coping strategies adopted by lecturers. Understanding the diverse range of coping mechanisms employed by lecturers is essential for tailoring effective interventions. Most research in this area is cross-sectional, providing snapshots of stress levels and coping strategies at specific points in time. Most of the works do not relate lecturers' emotional well-being and its relation to their work-related stress. It is on this note that the researchers investigated teacher educators' strategies in

coping with work related stress and their perception on its impact on their emotional wellbeing.

Research questions

1. How do teacher educators engage in stress management in order to cope with work-related stress?
2. What are the common stress management strategies adopted by teacher-educators to cope with work-related stress?
3. What is teacher educators' perception on the impact of work-related stress management strategies on their emotional well-being?

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used for the study. The study was carried out in School of Education, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri with a population of 421 academic staff. The entire academic staff of School of Education Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education was used as sample because the population is small.

Instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Teacher-educators' Questionnaire on Perception regarding Lecturers' work-related Stress Management Strategies and Emotional Wellbeing (TQPLEW)". This is a 33 -item questionnaire designed by the researchers. The instrument has four parts. Part one sought for demographic information of the respondents; part two sought information to determine the perception of teacher educators on engaging stress management technique in order to cope with work-related stress, part three sought information to determine the common stress management technique teacher educators employ in order to cope with work-related stress, while part four sought information to determine the teacher educators' perception on the impact of work-related stress management technique on their emotional well-being. The items had four response categories of strongly agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) with scoring 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

The instrument was face validated by three experts in the Department of Educational Psychology, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri. Their contributions gave rise to the final instrument used for the study. The instrument was subjected to trial testing using Cronbach Alpha to determine its internal consistency using thirty-six lecturers outside the study population. The reliability of TQPLEW was 0.79. The instrument was administered to the respondents with the help of two trained research assistants which ensured 100% return. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the

research questions. The decision rule was that any mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted otherwise it was rejected. The value of 2.50 was considered as a benchmark for decision making.

Presentation of results

Research question 1: How do teacher educators engage in stress management in order to cope with work-related stress?

Table 1: Teacher educators’ perception on stress management techniques in coping with work-related stress

S/N	Item Statement		SD	Remarks
1	I practice emotional regulation techniques to handle challenging situations at work.	3.54	0.61	Accepted
2	I seek social support from colleagues and friends to cope with work-related stress.	3.61	0.68	Accepted
3	I engage in mindfulness and relaxation practices (such as meditation or yoga) to alleviate stress.	2.21	0.40	Rejected
4	I actively participate in stress management workshops.	2.10	0.39	Rejected
5	I maintain a healthy work-life balance by allocating time for personal activities and hobbies outside of work.	3.65	0.71	Accepted
6	I believe that my coping strategies positively impact my emotional well-being.	3.41	0.58	Accepted
7	I think that institutional support systems, such as counselling services, are effective in helping me cope with work-related stress.	3.52	0.52	Accepted
8	I feel that my job satisfaction is influenced by my ability to cope with work-related stress.	3.21	0.45	Accepted
9	I effectively manage my workload by prioritizing tasks and setting realistic goals	3.57	0.65	Accepted
10	I believe that understanding lecturers' coping strategies is essential for creating a supportive work environment.	3.45	0.35	Accepted
	Average mean	3.127		

The overall average mean for all the items was calculated to be 3.127, indicating a generally positive perception of stress management techniques among the surveyed teacher educators.

Research question 2: What are the common stress management strategies adopted by teacher-educators to cope with work-related stress?

Table 2: Common stress management techniques adopted by teacher-educators to cope with work-related stress

S/N	Item Statement		SD	Remarks
Effective Workload Management:				
1	I am able to prioritize tasks and manage my workload efficiently.	3.29	0.41	Accepted
2	I effectively set realistic goals to handle my work responsibilities.	3.61	0.58	Accepted
3	I find it challenging to manage my workload effectively.	3.10	0.39	Accepted
4	I often feel overwhelmed by the tasks I need to complete.	3.52	0.52	Accepted
Emotional Regulation Techniques:				
5	I practice techniques to regulate my emotions during challenging situations at work.	2.58	0.36	Accepted
6	I am skilled at managing my emotions in stressful work scenarios.	2.28	0.38	Rejected
7	I struggle to control my emotions when faced with work-related stressors.	3.00	0.52	Accepted
8	I rarely employ emotional regulation techniques in stressful situations.	3.15	0.35	Accepted
Social Support Seeking:				
09	I feel comfortable discussing my work-related stress with others.	3.26	0.48	Accepted
10	I prefer dealing with work-related stress on my own without seeking support.	2.05	0.15	Rejected
Mindfulness Practices:				
11	I regularly engage in mindfulness practices like meditation or yoga to alleviate stress.	2.21	0.35	Rejected
12	Mindfulness practices help me relax and cope with work-related stress.	2.15	0.26	Rejected
13	I have never tried mindfulness practices to manage my stress.	2.51	0.32	Accepted
	Average mean	2.85		

Table 2 provides an overview of the common stress management techniques employed by teacher educators to cope with work-related stress. Each category (Effective Workload Management, Emotional Regulation Techniques, Social Support Seeking, and Mindfulness Practices) includes specific item statements rated on a scale. The average mean response across all items in Table 2 is 2.85, indicating that teacher educators, on average, employ these stress management techniques to a moderate extent.

Research question 3: What is teacher educators’ perception on the impact of work-related stress management strategies on their emotional well-being?

Table 3: Teacher educators’ perception on the impact of work-related stress management technique on their emotional well-being

S/N	Item Statement		SD	Remarks
1	Lecturers' coping strategies significantly contribute to their emotional well-being.	3.51	0.62	Accepted
2	Effective time management techniques positively influence lecturers' emotional well-being by reducing stress.	3.59	0.65	Accepted
3	Lecturers who prioritize a healthy work-life balance experience better emotional well-being.	3.36	0.62	Accepted
4	Engaging in mindfulness practices, such as meditation or yoga, enhances lecturers' emotional well-being.	3.12	0.36	Accepted
5	Social support from colleagues and friends significantly contributes to lecturers' emotional relief and well-being.	3.51	0.45	Accepted
6	Lecturers' emotional well-being is negatively affected by poor coping mechanisms like substance abuse or avoidance behaviours.	3.56	0.57	Accepted
7	Institutional support systems, such as counselling services and mental health initiatives, play a vital role in enhancing lecturers' emotional well-being.	3.58	0.67	Accepted
8	Lecturers who experience high job satisfaction levels are more likely to employ effective coping strategies, leading to improved emotional well-being.	3.52	0.65	Accepted
9	Educators' emotional well-being significantly influences their job performance, including teaching quality and administrative duties.	3.61	0.62	Accepted

10	Lecturers who engage in emotional regulation and resilience-building practices cope better with work-related stress, leading to enhanced emotional well-being.	3.50	0.52	Accepted
	Average mean	3.546		

Table 3, presents teacher educators' perceptions regarding the impact of various stress management strategies on their emotional well-being. Each item statement represents a different coping strategy. The table provides the mean and standard deviation (SD) for each statement. The average mean response across all items in Table 3 is 3.546, suggesting that teacher educators, on average, perceive these stress management techniques to have a positive impact on their emotional well-being.

Discussion of the findings

The study delves into the perceptions of teacher educators regarding the effectiveness of stress management techniques in coping with work-related stress and their impact on emotional well-being. The findings from Tables 1, 2, and 3 shed light on the varied strategies employed by teacher educators, and their perceived impact on emotional well-being. The study affirms that teacher educators employ emotional regulation techniques and seek social support to cope with work-related stress. These findings align with existing research (Chang & Davis, 2019b), indicating the importance of emotional regulation and social support networks in managing stress among teacher educators. Effective workload management, including task prioritization and goal setting, emerges as a key coping strategy.

The study also reveals that teacher educators perceive positive coping strategies, such as effective time management, social support, and emotional regulation, to significantly contribute to their emotional well-being. Similar studies have emphasized the significance of time management and goal setting in reducing stress and enhancing productivity among educators. These findings echo previous research emphasizing the role of positive coping mechanisms in enhancing emotional health.

In addition, the study indicates that job satisfaction is intertwined with coping strategies and emotional well-being. This aligns with existing literature highlighting the reciprocal relationship between job satisfaction, coping strategies, and emotional well-being among educators. Though, the study suggests that mindfulness practices are not widely adopted among teacher educators, existing research (Chang & Davis, 2019b) advocates for the benefits of mindfulness techniques in reducing stress. The divergence highlights a potential

area for intervention and training programmes. Institutions could consider providing mindfulness workshops to introduce educators to these beneficial practices. Teacher educators perceive institutional support systems, including counselling services, as vital for enhancing emotional well-being. This emphasizes the role of institutions in fostering a supportive environment. Recognizing the importance of such support, institutions should invest in mental health initiatives and counselling services to bolster educators' emotional well-being (Chang & Davis, 2019b).

Conclusion

This paper investigates the coping strategies employed by teacher educators to manage work-related stress and explores their impact on emotional well-being. The study reveals that teacher educators utilize various coping techniques, including emotional regulation, social support, and effective workload management to navigate stressors in their professional lives. These coping strategies are perceived to positively influence their emotional well-being and job satisfaction. The findings align with existing literature, emphasizing the significance of positive coping mechanisms and institutional support in enhancing educators' emotional health.

Recommendations

1) Tertiary institutions should organize workshops and training sessions to promote positive coping strategies such as emotional regulation, effective time management, and social support networks. Encouraging educators to adopt these strategies can enhance their emotional well-being and job satisfaction.

2) Tertiary institutions should consider incorporating mindfulness workshops into professional development programmes. Educators could benefit from learning and practicing mindfulness techniques to manage stress more effectively.

3) Tertiary institutions play a crucial role in supporting educators' emotional well-being. It is imperative for educational institutions to invest in mental health initiatives, counselling services, and peer support programmes. Accessible and confidential avenues for seeking emotional support can significantly contribute to teacher educators' overall well-being.

4) Further research conducted on longitudinal studies could offer a deeper understanding of the long-term impact of coping strategies on educators' emotional well-being. Tracking changes in coping mechanisms and emotional health over time can provide valuable data for developing targeted interventions.

5) Collaboration between educational institutions, professional organizations, and mental health experts can foster a holistic approach to supporting educators. By pooling

resources and expertise, these entities can create comprehensive programmes addressing the multifaceted aspects of educators' well-being, including stress management and emotional health.

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