PERCEIVED TEACHERS' COPING SKILLS INSTRUCTION, SELF-EFFICACY AND STUDENTS' TEST ANXIETY: WHAT RELATIONSHIPS EXIST?

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Abstract: *This study examined the relationship between perceived coping skills instructed by teachers to handle cognitive task difficulties and students' self-efficacy and test anxiety. Two hundred and nineteen secondary school students were used in the study. Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between perceived problem-focused coping skills instructed and students' academic self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, and emotional self-efficacy; a non-significant positive relationship between perceived emotion-focused skills instructed and students' academic self-efficacy, emotional self-efficacy, and a significant positive relationship with social self-efficacy. There were also non-significant positive relationships between perceived seeking-social-support coping skills instructed and students' academic self-efficacy and emotional self-efficacy; a significant positive relationship with social self-efficacy. Findings also showed significant negative relationship between perceived problem-focused coping skills instructed and test anxiety; between emotion-focused skills and students' test anxiety; and a non-significant negative relationship between seeking-social-support coping skills and students' test anxiety. Implications of these findings were highlighted.*

Keywords: *coping skills instruction; self-efficacy; test anxiety; cognitive tasks;*

1-Introduction

Academic activities at all levels have challenges they present to students. From preprimary to the tertiary education level, there have been reported cases of stress associated with academic activities and this might have led to a number of drop-outs especially among those who lack coping strategies that will help them in their bid to succeed academically. Nigeria, for example, is battling with a shocking state of affairs in the drop-out rates among school children (Eke, 2015) and citing Okpala (2013) Eke has noted with sincere disappointment at the secondary school level that 63% of students who are supposed to be in school are out of school. In line with the above, the report of the vision 2020 National Technical Working Group on Education Sector of the Federal Government of Nigeria (2009) has it that the expected enrolment figure for JSS is 9.27 million but the actual is 3.27 million leaving 6 million as unenrolled in JSS. However, the completion rate at the JSS is about 34%. Again, figures show that a high percentage of girls are progressing to JSS than boys (2005: 55% female, 49% male) (see also as cited in Unachukwu, Nwosu & Onyekuru, 2015).With this state of affairs, the dream of achieving the goal of the MDG in 2015 in which all children of school age are supposed not only to be school but also to be retained in school met a brick wall. This made Unachukwu and Nwosu (2015) to recommend that factors affecting access to education of school children in Nigeria and beyond should be re-conceptualized to include psychological determinants since access to education is not foreclosed within the ambit of gaining entrance into the four walls of the classroom but extends to retention and accomplishment of the set objectives.

When cognitive tasks outrun the cognitive resources of students, may be as result of inadequate cognitive tools, academic stress may set in. Redhwan, Sami, Karim, Chan, and Zaleha (2009) are in agreement with the above by noting that stress is not only a phenomenon in the workplace but extends to academic activities in which students are subjected to different kinds of stressors, including but not limited to the presence of the academics with an obligation to succeed, an uncertain future and difficulties in adapting to the system and are therewith faced with social, emotional, physical and family problems which might affect their learning ability and academic performance. What teachers do to keep students going becomes inevitable considering the fact that students have reported that seeking support from the teacher is the principal coping strategy (Murray-Harvey, 1999).

Policymakers have stressed the integration of life skills in school curriculum (Huxley, Freeman & Frydenberg, 2004). Undoubtedly coping skills and intervention strategies for restructuring poor self-referent belief systems (self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-concept, etc) of students occupy strategic position in improving mental health, resilience, motivation, the achievement of students in schools and even the retention of students in school.There is a growing knowledge and conviction that an individual's belief systems affect his functioning which is embedded in the fact that human beings are not just cognitive beings but are also social persons with beliefs that influence his behaviours and choices (Nicolaidou, & Philippou, n.d; Pajares, 1996). Huxley, Freeman and Frydenberg (2004) have emphasized the fact that teachers have a big role to play in the instruction of coping skills. They need to provide support for students' individual needs since peer support may not always be effective (Moir, 2014).

Strong self-efficacy belief can help an individual cope in challenging situation while on the other hand one who possesses better coping skills can equally adapt to very challenging situations. This will invariably affect the anxiety in an individual since text anxiety has to do, in a way, with cognitive appraisal of a situation considered threatening, or perceived inadequate skills/competences to handle a situation. For this threatening situation to be effectively handled, the individual requires coping strategies that are appropriate.   A student, by implication, who has stronger self-efficacy and better coping skills may be able to handle testing situations in a more relaxed manner. However, these skills can be improved on. Students (low achievers) have reported that teachers teach them coping skills to handle cognitive tasks (Unachukwu, Nwosu, & Onyekuru, 2015). When students are taught strategies to handle difficulties encountered in cognitive tasks, their self-efficacy in handling academic issues may increase; hence reducing their test anxiety. Recent developments in the educational setting have reiterated the need to emphasize life skills including interventions on coping skills for successful academic adventure even among gifted children (Simon, nd) because they are not immuned against stressful academic situations. In line with the above, Moore's (2006) findings have pointed out the need for school interventions to reduce test anxiety, and assisting students in developing the thought processes that give them a sense of control over the events in their life, in particular, their academic performance. The Nigerian government has stressed the need for personal development and life skills pointing out the fact that it will help students cope with contemporary development. However, the drop-out rate among Nigerian students at the secondary school level may suggest that they do not cope with school tasks. There have been reported cases of poor performances in public examinations (Owolabi, 2012). To help these students do well in school, there is the need for intervention programmes on coping skills to be mounted for them. This can equally be stressed when research brings to the fore how coping taught by teachers especially when it gets to do with cognitive tasks are related to other psychological constructs that influence students' academic achievement. There are several empirical studies on coping skills of students and researchers have correlated them with other psychological dispositions of students, however little attempt has been made to investigate the relationship existing among

coping skills taught by teachers to handle cognitive tasks difficulties and such psychological dispositions. Previous research works have centred on coping skills possessed by an individual for an intervention to be mounted. What is apparently lacking in literature, especially in the Nigerian setting, are adequate studies correlating these psychological dispositions and the coping skills acquired after they might have been taught to students. It is important to determine if these learnt coping skills will impact on or relate to these variables. What this work intends to do is to correlate students' perception of 'learnt coping skills' taught perhaps by a more experienced individual (the teacher) with such psychological variables as test anxiety and self-efficacy. This study will contribute to knowledge by looking at students' perceived teachers' coping skills instruction as it has to do with cognitive tasks and correlate them with their self-efficacy and text anxiety. The following were hypothesized:

a.   The different sub-scales of coping skills perceived as taught by teachers do not significantly correlate with the sub-scales of students' self-efficacy.

b.   The different sub-scales of coping skills perceived as taught by teachers do not significantly correlate with their test anxiety.

2-Coping strategies

Kazemi & Kohandel (2015) see coping as cognitive and behavioral efforts geared towards managing internal and external forces that are considered stressful which may outweigh one's resources. Coping refers to the way a person handles his responses to everyday situations which may include appropriate and/or inappropriate behaviours (Lyrakos, 2012). Kazemi & Kohandel (2015) noted that coping strategies of each person are the unique ways of dealing with issues and problems in his life. Taking into consideration individual differences, there are bound to be countless ways individuals cope with stress. However, experts have pointed out broad classes into which coping strategies could be grouped. These strategies are divided into three: problem-focused coping strategy; emotion focused coping strategy and avoidance coping strategy (Kazemi & Kohandel, 2015). Passer and Smith (2007) on their part noted that coping strategies can be grouped into three broad classes as problem-focused coping strategies, emotion-focused strategies and seeking-social-support coping strategies, while Frydenberg and Lewis (1999) in Boon (2009) proposed three coping strategies: solving the problem, reference to others, and non-productive coping. Although little variances could be seen in the categories as stated above, there seem to be a kind of agreement in two major classes. Problem-focused coping strategies attempt to confront and directly deal with the demands of the situation or to change the situation and constitute ways on which the actions that must be done to reduce a threatening situation is calculated which include searching for more information about the problem, changing the structure of problem from cognitive point and prioritizing some steps to address the issue; emotion-focused coping strategies attempt to manage the emotional responses that emanate from stressful events and seeking-social-support coping strategies demand turning to others for assistance and emotional support in times of stress (Kazemi & Kohandel, 2015;Passer & Smith, 2007).

3-Coping and test anxiety

The testing environment in schools as well as the whole gamut of the learning-testing cycle has a way of eliciting a kind of challenge that may lead to anxiety in students. It is the opinion of Harries and Coy (2003) that one of the most threatening events that causes anxiety in students is testing, and they defined test anxiety as an extreme fear of performing poorly in an examination. It is composed of cognitive, affective and behavioural components (Harries & Coy, 2003). Cassady (2004) has pointed out that process-oriented conceptualizations of test anxiety as against the more traditional or classical orientation enable researchers to take

an all-inclusive posture in capturing more contextual information relevant to understand the relationship between test anxiety and assessment, and these provide more accurate explanations for the thoughts and patterns of behavior observed during the three phases in the learning–testing cycle. Inadequate and inability to employ efficient study skills and metacognitive skills have been linked to test anxiety at the preparatory levels of the learning-testing of students (Cassady, 2004). Cassady also noted that 'the impact of test anxiety during the test reflection phase is generally driven through attributional biases that lead to future test-related perceptions and behaviours' (p.573). This has the tendency of clamping down on the self-efficacy, where there is negative impact, of the students in the sense that one's own assessment of past performance and verbal persuasions and conviction of possession of relevant skills in certain areas are vital sources through which one's self-efficacy are built (Siegle & McCoach, 2007; Zulkosky, 2009).

4-Coping and self-efficacy

Research has found active coping and planning to predict self-efficacy (Devonport & Lane, 2003/2004) indicating the fact that an individual with higher self-efficacy can cope by facing challenges headlong; self-efficacy and the ability to articulate coping responses as important personality characteristics that distinguished resilient youths from the maladaptive youths (Hamill, nd); academic self-efficacy positively correlating with positive reinterpretation and growth, acceptance and planning (Khan, 2013); levels of stress are significantly negatively correlated with the positive ways of coping, the levels of social support, self-esteem and university satisfaction level of stress positively correlated with the negative ways of coping (Lyrakos, 2012).

5-Method
6-Design

The study adopted the correlational descriptive research design since the researchers are interested in determining the extent the variables are related and without the intention of manipulating any of the variables.

7-Participants

he respondents comprised of 219 senior secondary school students in SS II in Nigeria, specifically in Onitsha north educational zone of Anambra State, Nigeria. Onitsha is one of the hubbubs of trading centres in Nigerian, and there have been reported cases of high dropout rate in secondary schools as they tend to join businesses. The researcher chose this area to see the association between perceived coping skills instruction and students test anxiety and self-efficacy of secondary school students. Their mean age is 15.5. There are three local government areas in this city. The researchers distributed 231 copies of the questionnaire to students but only 219 were used for analysis because some respondents did not complete the questionnaire.

8-Sampling

The researchers utilized simple random sampling technique in selecting five secondary schools from the Metropolitan City and then the students who gave their consent to the study after being sensitized by their teachers who served as research assistants were used.

9-Instrument

Three instruments were used in this study for the collection of data. The instrument used to ascertain the coping skills instruction in secondary schools is a 20-item questionnaire tagged 'Teachers' Coping Skills Instruction for Enhancing Cognitive Tasks Questionnaire' which was developed and used by Unachukwu, Nwosu and Onyekuru (2015) specifically for low achievers. It comprised two sections; section A sought to ascertain the bio-data of the respondents while section B consisted of 20 items. It was structured using the 4-point scale of

strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. There were three sub-scales of the questionnaire namely, problem-focused coping skill instruction, emotion-focused coping skills instruction and seeking-social-support coping instruction. It contains such items as: "When I find myself not coping with school work my teachers encourage me to make a plan for my work", "When I face challenging tasks my teachers tell me to avoid thinking I can't handle the situation", "Teachers tell me to ask my peers questions when I find it difficult to cope with my study" for the three sub-categories respectively.

To determine the self-efficacy of students the self-efficacy questionnaire for children (SEQ-C) developed by Muris (2001) for secondary school students was used to measure students' academic self-efficacy. The brief survey questionnaire contains 24 items of 8 items for the three sub-scales of academic self-efficacy, social self-efficacy and emotional self-efficacy. It is structured on 5 point scale of 'not at all' to 'very well'. A total self-efficacy score can be obtained by summing across all items. Determining the reliability of the questionnaire among Nigerian respondents, the Cronbache Alpha was used for the internal consistencies and the reliability coefficients for academic self-efficacy were 0.703, social self-efficacy was 0.75 and the emotional self-efficacy 0.77.

To determine the test anxiety of students, the test Anxiety Inventory (TAI) developed by Spielberger (1980) and validated in Nigeria by Oladimeji (2005) was used to ascertain the test anxiety scores of students. The inventory was designed for secondary school students and undergraduates, and consists of 20 items which are short, self-descriptive statements with four-point rating scale ranging from 1 for "almost never" to 4 for "almost always". The TAI used had been validated. Oladimeji (2005) said that different forms of validation such as concurrent, discriminate, constraint and convergent validity were determined when it was used on Nigerian students. Oladimeji (2005) noted that the Pearson Product Moment statistical technique was used to correlate the test-retest scores under the non-examination condition. The coefficients of reliability obtained were: 0.73, 0.79, and 0.56 for TAI-W, TAI-E and TAI-T respectively, significant at $p<0.01$, one tailed, df-98.For the test anxiety inventory, the items were scored with the four-point rating scale ranging from 1 for "almost never" to 4 for "almost always" except item number one which was scored in reverse order.

10-Procedure

The consent of the school authorities was sought and a brief was held with the research assistants who are five regular teachers in the schools sampled. They were told that the exercise was specifically for research purposes and was geared towards ascertaining how the coping skills taught by them is related to students' self-efficacy and test anxiety; thereafter they consented and agreed to help in distributing the questionnaire to the students. The consent of the students was sought and their teachers explained to them about the study. Two hundred and thirty-one students gave were then simple randomly sampled for the study. The teachers were told to monitor the filling in of the questionnaire and collect the copies which the researchers collected from them. They were given the whole day to fill in the questionnaire which the third researcher collected the next day from the teachers.

11-Results

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics on perceived coping skills instruction, test anxiety and self-efficacy of students*

	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation
Problem-focused coping skills	219	2.79	.635
Emotion-focused coping skills	219	3.26	.684
Seeking-social-support coping skills	219	2.31	.580

Test anxiety	219	3.23	.503
Academic self-efficacy	219	3.56	.822
Social self-efficacy	219	3.48	.905
Emotional self-efficacy	219	3.27	.789

The above table shows the descriptive analysis of the perceived coping skills instruction, test anxiety and self-efficacy. The table shows that students test anxiety is high with the mean score of 3.23. Students' academic self-efficacy, social and emotional self-efficacies have mean scores of 3.56, 3.48 and 3.27 respectively. It also shows that in coping skills instruction, problem-focused coping skills instruction has a mean score of 2.79, emotion-focused coping skills instruction has mean score of 3.26, and the seeking-social-support coping skills instruction has a mean score of 2.31.

Table 2: *Correlational matrix of perceived coping skills instruction and students' self-efficacy*

		Academic self-efficacy	Social self-efficacy	Emotion self-efficacy
Problem-focused coping skills	Pearson Correlation	.145[*]	.246[**]	.202[**]
	Sig. (one-tailed)	.031	.000	.000
	N	219	219	219
Emotion-focused skills	Pearson Correlation	.032	.159[*]	.112
	Sig. (one-tailed)	.633	.019	.097
	N	219	219	219
Seeking-social-support coping skills	Pearson Correlation	.080	.208[**]	.132
	Sig. (one-tailed)	.236	.002	.051
	N	219	219	219

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Results obtained from table 3 showed a significant positive relationship between problem-focused coping skills instruction and students' academic self-efficacy, $r = .145$, $n = 219$, $p< .031$, students' social self-efficacy, $r = . 246$, $n = 219$, $p = .000$, and emotional self-efficacy, $r = .202$, $n = 219$, $p = .000$. There was a non-significant positive relationship between emotion-focused skills instruction and students' academic self-efficacy, $r = -.154$, $n = 219$, $p = .023$, a significant positive relationship between emotion-focused coping skills instruction and social self-efficacy, $r = .159$, $n = 219$, $p = .019$; a non-significant positive relationship between emotion-focused coping skills and emotional self-efficacy, $r = .112$, $n = 219$, $p = .097$.Between seeking-social-support coping skills instruction and students' academic self-efficacy, there was a non-significant positive relationship, $r = .080$, $n = 219$, $p = .236$; significant positive relationship between seeking-social-support coping skills and social self-efficacy, $r = .208$, $n = 219$, $p = .002$; and a non-significant positive relationship between seeking-social-support coping skills and emotional self-efficacy, $r = .132$, $n = 219$, $p = .051$.

Table 3:*Correlation matrix of perceived coping skills instruction and students' test anxiety*

		Test anxiety
Problem-focused coping skills	Pearson Correlation	-.200[**]
	Sig. (one-tailed)	.003
	N	219
Emotion-focused skills	Pearson Correlation	-.154[*]
	Sig. (one-tailed)	.023
	N	219
Seeking-social-support coping skills	Pearson Correlation	-.126
	Sig. (one-tailed)	.063
	N	219

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Using Pearson's Moment Correlation coefficient to analyze the data, results obtained showed a significant negative relationship between problem-focused coping skills taught by teachers and test anxiety, $r =$.-200, $n = 219$, $p< .05$. There was also a significant negative relationship between emotion-focused skills and students' test anxiety, $r = -.154$, $n = 219$, $p = .023$. Between seeking-social-support coping skills and students' test anxiety there was a non-significant negative relationship, $r = -126$, $n = 219$, $p = .063$.

12-Discussion

The present study investigated perceived teachers' coping skills instruction for cognitive tasks difficulties and its relationship with students' self-efficacy and test anxiety. From the descriptive statistics, it was found that students to an extent agreed that their teachers teach them coping skills that would enable them handle cognitive task difficulties. This is in agreement with the findings of Unachukwu, Nwosu and Onyekuru (2015) in which it was ascertained that low achievers agreed that their teachers taught them coping skills with which to handle cognitive task difficulties. What differs here is the weight given to each of the sub-categories in the teaching of coping skills. In Unachukwu et al, teachers were perceived to teach their students more of direct-action (problem-focused) coping skills, followed by seeking-social-support coping skills. The emotion-focused coping skills were not stressed so much. However, in the present study, teachers were perceived to stress more of emotion-focused coping skills than the rest of the other two. This may be as a result of the fact that the low-achievers and high achievers were not separated from the presents study and this may suggest that teachers in instructing coping skills for difficult task may take into consideration students' individual competences and needs. Students had strong self-efficacy scores in the subscales under study and it was also shown that they had high test anxiety. The high test anxiety may be as a result of high premium placed on examinations in Nigeria.

In ascertaining the relationship existing between perceived teachers' coping skills instructed and students' self-efficacy, relevant analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between perceived problem-focused coping skills instructed and students' academic self-efficacy, $r = .145$, students' social self-efficacy, $r = . 246$, and emotional self-efficacy, $r = .202$. Research has found active coping and planning to predict self-efficacy (Devonport & Lane, 2003/2004); and academic self-efficacy positively correlating with positive reinterpretation and growth, acceptance and planning (Khan, 2013). What this implies is that teaching students problem-focused coping skills in which there is an attempt to confront and directly deal with the demands of the situation or to change the situation and constitute ways on which the actions that must be done to reduce a threatening situation is calculated is significantly associated with the three subscales of self-efficacy. One's belief in his ability to handle academic matters being related to the extent one is equipped with

problem-focused coping skills may be as a result of the fact that such skills involve searching for more information about a problem, tackling the problem headlong and strategizing steps that will be used to solve the problem. This, in no doubt, will equip the learner with a level of confidence to confront cognitive difficulties. Problem-focused coping skill instruction being related to social self-efficacy and emotional self-efficacy might have also resulted in the confidence that may emanate from such skills since there is always a problem to solve in social interactions, and emotional problems demands productive steps to handle. This is in agreement with Kazemi and Kohandel's (2015) study in which it was found that there is a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and its three sub-scales with problem solving coping strategy.

Also revealed in the analysis is a non-significant positive relationship between emotion-focused skills instruction and students' academic self-efficacy, $r = -.154$, a significant positive relationship between emotion-focused coping skills instruction and social self-efficacy, $r = .159$, and a non-significant positive relationship between emotion-focused coping skills and emotional self-efficacy, $r = .112$. This result which could not relate significantly with academic self-efficacy and emotional self-efficacy is likely to be expected since it appears to be the least effective among the coping skills components. In fact if not carefully examine many may see it as one of the avoidance coping strategies. But because the researchers set out to see the productive coping skills taught students by their teachers (and because teachers are not likely to teach unproductive coping skills), the items here were structured to reflect the productive coping skills (Passer & Smith, 2007). Typically, avoidance coping skills have correlated negatively with self-efficacy (Kazemi & Kohandel, 2015). This contradicts the findings here since emotion-focused skills taught had to do with productive skills involved in the management of emotional responses that emanate from stressful events (Passer & Smith, 2007). Emotion-focused skills only correlated with social self-efficacy which may have resulted from the fact that social interactions demand emotional competencies.

Furthermore, between seeking-social-support coping skills instruction and students' academic self-efficacy, there was a non-significant positive relationship, $r = .080$; significant positive relationship between seeking-social-support coping skills and social self-efficacy, $r = .208$; and a non-significant positive relationship between seeking-social-support coping skills and emotional self-efficacy, $r = .132$. Seeking-social-support coping skills had no significant relationship with academic self-efficacy which may have resulted from the fact that it takes a lot of one looking inwards to ascertain his/her own abilities in a more accurate manner than reliance on what others have to say or what one could get from others though social persuasion is one of the sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994; 2000). Also seeking-social-support coping skills could not significantly correlate with emotional self-efficacy but significantly correlated with social self-efficacy.

Using Pearson's Moment Correlation coefficient to analyze the data, results obtained showed a significant negative relationship between direct-action coping skills taught by teachers and test anxiety, $r = -.200$, $n = 219$, $p < .05$. There was also a significant negative relationship between emotion-focused skills and students' test anxiety, $r = -.154$, $n = 219$, $p = .023$. Between seeking-social-support coping skills and students' test anxiety there was a non-significant negative relationship, $r = -.126$, $n = 219$, $p = .063$. Negative correlation between perceived coping skills instructed reveals that one with high coping skill to tackle cognitive task difficulties may likely have lower test anxiety level. Instructing students coping skills will likely reduce their anxiety levels. This agrees with Simon's (nd) finding in an action research that teaching students coping strategies can reduce their test anxiety. The result from his study indicated that post assessment results on the TAI show that the overall levels of anxiety decreased in the sample population. On average, the sample improved 15.6

points, or a26% improvement. Teachers teaching embedding coping skills in handling difficult cognitive tasks can in a way reduce their test anxiety.

Conclusion
      This study has made a considerable contribution to knowledge given the fact that it has established the relationship existing between perceived instructed coping skills and students' self-efficacy and test anxiety. This has shown that students' self-efficacy may be related to the repertoire of coping skills they might have been taught and teachers may be in a better position to teach these students more productive coping skills to handle cognitive tasks. Building and improving students' confidence to handle cognitive task difficulties will likely help to reduce dropout rates in the country. What is more interesting, is the negative correlation existing between the perceived taught coping skills by the teachers and students' test anxiety. There is the need for teachers to teach students the skills they need to acquire to handle cognitive task difficulty.

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