

# Determinants of Quality Coping and Knowledge Acquisition in Professional Work and Academic Study Systemic Interaction

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examined the factors that influence the quality of professional workers' coping capabilities and knowledge acquisition when they concurrently engage in professional work and academic studies. Using quantitative and systemic analytical approaches, this study evaluated factors that are predictive of professional workers' quality coping techniques and quality knowledge acquisition. Findings revealed that working and studying minimizes interaction with instructors and peers, risking dropout and low knowledge quality. Also, emotion-focused adaptive coping techniques and other emotional-oriented coping mechanisms are used to improve worklife. It is concluded that working and studying leads to minimal academic engagement and negative psychological impacts, which results in poor knowledge acquisition. It also concluded that while professional workers rely on emotion-focused adaptive coping techniques to effectively improve work-life balance, they deem other emotional-oriented coping mechanisms encapsulated by avoidance, personal history, networking, spirituality, fun and relaxation activities, to be ineffective.

**Keywords:** Professional workers, Academic study, Quality knowledge acquisition, Quality coping mechanism, Ghana

## INTRODUCTION

Working and studying have become increasingly common in many countries, particularly among professionals. This trend is also seen among secondary and tertiary education youths (Beerens, Mägi, and Lill, 2011). While professionals have long engaged in academic pursuit, recent years have seen a significant rise in this activity. Thus, professional work is now an integral part of higher education with growing enrolment of professional workers in academic programmes. In Ghana, most universities have Graduate programmes that are designed for professional workers and delivered on weekdays' evenings and/or weekends, using the hybrid system, which enables a "teaching-learning" roll-over between face-to-face and virtual platforms. This situation raises concerns as existing research indicates that combining work with academic responsibilities can negatively impact academic achievement (Sanchez-Gelabert, Figueroa and Elias, 2017).

Furthermore, research shows that working and studying negatively impacts students' education (Lederer et al., 2015), exacerbates their stress levels and mental health challenges (Miller, Danner and Staten, 2008), extends the time they require to complete a programme (Tur-Sinai, Romanov and Zussman, 2017), and increases their risk of dropout (Moulin et al., 2013; Hovdhaugen, 2015). The inherent stress associated with university life can result in depression, anxiety, stress, and inadequate sleep (Petrov, Lichstein and Baldwin, 2014). Due to these challenges, tertiary institutions offer flexible schooling options, as most professional workers want to enhance their professional skills and experiences, and by implication their financial stabilities. The goal is to design educational structures that facilitate higher education acquisition for professional workers without necessitating job resignation or study drop out. Considering the multi-task nature of work-study, coping mechanisms are considered essential (Gustems-Carnicer and Calderon, 2013) for assisting professional workers in managing potential stresses that may arise during academic activities. Therefore, it is important to examine how professional workers handle the challenges of balancing their professional responsibilities and academic studies, and its effect on their knowledge acquisition and work-life balance. This evaluation is essential for assessing the effectiveness of educational instructional designs tailored to this demographic. Thus, this study examines the impact of balancing professional work and academic engagement on students' work-life balance and academic success, providing insights for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. This consideration highlights a substantial knowledge gap in the current literature. The aim of this paper is to examine the factors that influence the quality of professional workers' coping abilities and knowledge acquisition when they concurrently engage in professional work and academic studies. This inquiry is prompted by the observation that engaging simultaneously in work and education can adversely affect work duties and academic pursuits, and negatively impact mental health. These negative impacts can prolong the time needed to complete degrees and heighten the risk of dropout. Therefore, policymakers and administrators of tertiary educational institutions are considering structural redesigns of educational systems to provide flexible schooling options for professional workers. This initiative aims to enable professionals to pursue personal development and enhance their work experience without having to leave their employment. Building on the concept that the self-regulation systems of professional workers are influenced by their personal history, this study addressed the following questions addressed. What techniques do professional workers employ to enhance effective coping in their academic studies? What factors contribute to successful knowledge acquisition by professional workers?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Academic Knowledge Acquisition**

The decision by a professional worker to pursue further education is significant as it prepares the individual for new opportunities and responsibilities in the workplace, which has motivational implications.

These include more job market flexibility, better service conditions, and improved retirement packages (Tetteh and Attiogbe, 2019). This demonstrates various professionals' engagement in working and studying for different reasons. For those from low-income backgrounds, the primary motivation is often financial necessity. For those from more stable economic situations, the motives vary from gaining early access to professional work environments to utilizing spare time productively. The rise in working students correlates with increased needs of individuals seeking higher education and increased access to universities (Holmegaard, Madsen and Ulriksen, 2017). Other factors include greater employment competition, and changes within the market itself (Callender, 2008). Uncertainty regarding post-graduation employment also drives students to seek jobs while still in school (Hall, 2010). Combining professional work with academic studies strategically aids in transitioning to the workforce after graduation (Robotham, 2013). Though it offers benefits like work experience, it risks extended hours that can lead to school dropout (Landstedt et al., 2017; Lessky and Unger, 2023). Additionally, student employment causes issues such as difficulty in meeting university requirements (Humphrey, 2006), higher dropout risks (Bozick, 2007), fatigue, time constraints, and less recreation time (Curtis and Williams, 2002). Working and studying also reduces study time, harming academic performance (Tetteh and Attiogbe, 2019). This indicates that finding time for studies due to work commitments is a major challenge, and professional workers pursuing higher education do not receive adequate support from their employers. The literature is inconclusive on whether balancing professional work and higher education harms academic performance. Global efforts prevail to innovate teaching methods to foster independent learning, crucial for professional workers' knowledge acquisition. Such independent learning principles are embedded in several instructional approaches to enhance the mental development of values, attitudes, knowledge acquisition and skills, which are manifestations professional workers' higher academic achievement for responsible and appropriate decisions-making and actions (Sanda, 2023).

### **Coping Techniques for Academic Studies**

Coping refers to the thoughts and behaviors individuals use to manage the internal and external demands of stressful events (Folkman, 2010). Stress and coping theory is a framework for studying psychological stress. The theory suggests that stress is contextual, involving an interaction between the individual and the environment, and it is a process that changes over time (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Therefore, stress is a situation appraised by the individual as personally significant and as having demands that exceed their resources for coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Two types of coping are outlined by the stress and coping theory (Folkman, 2010). The first type is the problem-focused coping, which involves addressing the problem causing distress using techniques such as information gathering and decision making (Folkman, 2010). The second

type is emotion-focused coping, which involves regulating negative emotions using techniques such as distancing, seeking emotional support, and escape-avoidance (Folkman, 2010). Folkman (2010), referred to a third type of coping, as 'meaning-focused coping' which help regulates positive emotions. Unlike emotion-focused coping, which regulates negative emotions, meaning-focused coping involves technique like goal revision and reordering priorities based on deeply held values (Folkman, 2010). These coping techniques often work together; regulating anxiety (emotion-focused) enables decision-making (problem-focused), which is guided by reviewing values and goals (meaning-focused). Coping is crucial in stress management and involves addressing stressful events (Folkman, 2010; Gustems-Carnicer and Calderon, 2013). University students use mechanisms like time management, social support, positive reappraisal, and recreation to reduce stress (Rayle and Chung, 2008). Folkman (2010) identified three additional coping techniques as follows: emotion-focused (using methods like humor, friendship, or escape-avoidance), problem-focused (gathering information, seeking advice, solving problems), and meaning-focused (keeping a positive mindset). Emotional support from relations helps students share challenges (Kahn and Garrison, 2009). Recreation activities reduce academic stress by fulfilling personal needs (Balduf, 2009). Spirituality helps individuals cope with stress through religion and spiritual practices (Wachholtz and Sambamoorthi, 2011).

## METHODOLOGY

The study is guided by the quantitative method of perceptual evaluation in which units of measurement and measurement procedures that permit the comparison of different elements of activity are required (Bedny and Karwowski, 2007; Sanda, Johansson, Johansson, and Abrahamsson, 2014). This allow work situations to be evaluated both experimentally and theoretically (Bedny & Karwowski, 2007; Sanda et al., 2014). Additionally, expert judgments, using a five-point scale, can be applied to subjectively assess employees' perceptions of their work situations (Sanda, 2022). Therefore, the quantified philosophical approach was used to obtain the study participants' subjective evaluations of how the structural hybridization of teaching-learning platforms affected their mental modes and systemic in their pedagogical process of quality knowledge acquisition. Data was collected from 575 professional graduate students using a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire included a synopsis that explained the study purpose. The study variables' measurement scales were developed from extensive literature review and responses for all the items were rated using a five-point Likert scale. Principal component analysis was used to determine factors that predict professional workers' quality academic knowledge acquisition and coping techniques. Following Schumacker and Lomax (2004), a factor loading of 0.70 or higher was used as the benchmark for a factor predictive acceptability.

## RESULTS

### Demographic Analysis of the Study Participants

The analysis of the study participants' gender showed that, out of the 575 respondents, 227 (39.50%) were males and 348 (60.50%) were females. The distribution of the respondents' professional work experiences are as follow; 21(3.70%) < 1 year; 1 year  $\geq$  55(9.60%) < 2 years; 2 years  $\geq$  69(12%) < 3 years; 3 years  $\geq$  71(12.30%) < 4 years; and 4 years  $\geq$  359 (62.40%). The distribution indicates that majority of the professional workers in this study have been employed for more than 3 years and are pursuing higher business education to improve their knowledge, skills, and managerial decision-making competencies.

### Factor Analysis of the Study Variables

To answer the study questions "What factors contribute to successful knowledge acquisition by professional workers, and what technique do professional workers employ to enhance effective coping in their academic studies?", the factors that predict effective knowledge acquisition and coping techniques for academic studies of professional workers were determined. In this stead, principal component analysis was conducted for each variable. Firstly, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test statistics was conducted to establish whether it is appropriate to factor analyze the variables. The estimated KMO value for professional workers' quality knowledge acquisition is 0.82 and that for coping techniques is 0.84. The estimated chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) value from the Bartlett's test for the quality knowledge acquisition is:  $\chi^2 = 1318$  ( $p = 0.00$ ), while that for coping techniques is  $\chi^2 = 1722$  ( $p = 0.00$ ), and both are highly significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). The Analytic output from both the KMO and the Bartlett's tests show that it is appropriate to factor analyze the two tested variables. Thus, factors analysis, using the principal component approach, was performed to identify the factors predictive of the professional workers' quality of knowledge acquisition and quality coping techniques.

### Factor Analysis of Academic Knowledge Acquisition

The factor loadings/regression values ( $r$ ) for factors predictive of the professional workers' quality academic knowledge acquisition is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:** Factor loadings for quality academic knowledge acquisition.

Academic Knowledge Acquisition <i>Working and Studying.....</i>	Factor Loadings	
	C1	C2
Causes my absenteeism in class	0.73	0.15
Constraints my engagement with lecturers and peers in the academic process	0.76	0.17
Increases the probability of my withdrawal from the program	0.77	0.06

Continued

**Table 1:** Continued

Academic Knowledge Acquisition <i>Working and Studying.....</i>	Factor Loadings	
	C1	C2
Causes me to feel tired during lectures	0.06	0.86
Reduces the time I devote for recreation	0.13	0.82
Negatively impacts my academic success as I am likely to fail a course due to poor knowledge acquisition	0.70	0.23
Is a time-consuming combination which makes me become ill, leading to the low quality of my knowledge acquisition	0.51	0.51
Is a time-consuming combination which increases my likelihood of sleeping problems after class, leading to the low quality of my knowledge acquisition	0.44	0.54

Using Schumacker and Lomax (2004) benchmark of  $r \geq 0.70$  for factor predictiveness, it is observable from Table 1 above that, from the eight factors tested, the following six factors constrained the professional workers' academic knowledge acquisition: (i) studying while working causes me to miss class ( $r = 0.73$ ); (ii) studying while working constraints my engagement with lecturers and peers in the academic process ( $r = 0.76$ ); (iii) studying while working increases my risk of dropping out ( $r = 0.77$ ); (iv) studying while working negatively impacts my academic success because it increases the risk of me failing courses due to poor knowledge acquisition ( $r = 0.70$ ); (v) studying while working makes me tired during lectures ( $r = 0.86$ ); and (vi) studying while working cuts into my recreation time ( $r = 0.82$ ). Though, the factor loadings of two factors were below the benchmark of  $r \geq 0.70$  for factor predictiveness, they could be interpreted as not limiting effective knowledge acquisition for professional workers in their academic pursuit: (i) working and studying is a time-consuming combination which makes become ill, leading to the low quality of my knowledge acquisition ( $r = 0.51$ ); and (ii) working and studying is a time-consuming combination which increases my likelihood of sleeping problems after class, leading to the low quality of my knowledge acquisition ( $r = 0.54$ ).

### Factor Analysis of Coping Techniques For Academic Study

The factor loadings/regression values ( $r$ ) for factors predictive of the professional workers' quality coping techniques for academic studies is presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2:** Factor loadings for quality coping techniques for academic studies.

Coping Technique <i>In Combining My Professional Work and Studies</i>	Factor Loadings	
	C1	C2
I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique such as distancing, to maintain quality and balanced worklife.	0.52	0.03

Continued

**Table 2:** Continued

Coping Technique <i>In Combining My Professional Work and Studies</i>	Factor Loadings	
	C1	C2
I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique such as humor, to maintain quality and balanced worklife.	0.48	0.26
I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique, such as seeking social support, to maintain quality and balanced worklife.	0.62	0.17
I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique, such as seeking advice, to maintain quality and balanced worklife.	0.70	0.10
I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique such as drawing on previous experience, to maintain quality and balanced worklife.	0.61	0.12
I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique such as recreation activities, to maintain quality and balanced worklife.	0.22	0.60
I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique such as physical activity, to maintain quality and balanced worklife.	0.16	0.79
I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique such as progressive muscle relaxation, to maintain quality and balanced worklife.	0.14	0.84
I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique such as progressive stretching exercises, to maintain quality and balanced worklife.	0.14	0.84
I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique such as emotional support, to maintain quality and balanced worklife.	0.70	0.19
I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique such as spirituality, to maintain quality and balanced worklife.	0.57	0.14

Using Schumacker and Lomax (2004) benchmark of  $r \geq 0.70$  for factor predictiveness, it is observable from Table 2 above that, from the eleven factors tested, the following five factors constrained the professional workers' academic knowledge acquisition: (i) in balancing my professional work and studies, I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique, such as seeking advice to balance my worklife ( $r = 0.70$ ); and (ii) in balancing my professional work and studies, I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique, such as emotional support to balance my worklife ( $r = 0.70$ ); (iii) in balancing my professional work and studies, I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique such as physical activity to balance my worklife ( $r = 0.79$ ); (iv) in balancing my professional work and studies, I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique, such as progressive muscle relaxation to balance my worklife ( $r = 0.84$ ); and (v) in balancing my professional work and studies, I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique, such as progressive stretching exercises to balance my worklife ( $r = 0.84$ ). On the contrary, though the factor loadings of the six remaining factors were below the benchmark of  $r \geq 0.70$  for factor predictiveness, the converse of their

interpretative senses rather situates them as not effective coping technique to enable professional workers balance their worklife when working and studying: (i) in balancing my professional work and studies, I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique, such as distancing to balance my worklife ( $r = 0.52$ ); (ii) in balancing my professional work and studies, I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique such as humor to balance my worklife ( $r = 0.48$ ); (iii) in balancing my professional work and studies, I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique, such as seeking social support to balance my worklife ( $r = 0.62$ ); (iv) in balancing my professional work and studies, I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique, such as drawing on previous experience to balance my worklife ( $r = 0.61$ ); (v) in balancing my professional work and studies, I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique, such as recreation activities to balance my worklife ( $r = 0.60$ ); and (vi) in balancing my professional work and studies, I use emotion-focused adaptive coping technique, such as spirituality to balance my worklife ( $r = 0.57$ ).

## DISCUSSION

As it was established in the analyses, the combination of work and academic studies resulted in professional workers engaging in absenteeism in class, which situation negatively resulted in their minimal engagement with their academic instructors and classmates. Such a situation can have psychological implication, which in this case appeared to be the tendency of professional workers to drop out of their academic programmes due to their development of the negative mindset of course failures, credited to the low-quality knowledge acquisition. This finding aligns with the argument by Landstedt et al. (2017) and Lessky and Unger (2023) to the effect that despite the benefits of working and studying, extended working hours can cause professional workers to stop to their academic studies early. This, therefore, characterizes the challenge faced by the professional workers in their abilities to multi-task which results in a scenario of activity incompatibility, with the effectiveness of their academic activity being compromised. Additionally, the notion of tiredness during academic lessons, which is credited to minimal recreation characterizes the challenge faced by the professional workers in their abilities to have adequate rest from work before transiting to their studies, which results in a scenario of activity tiredness and ineffectiveness, which compromised the effectiveness of their academic knowledge acquisition. This finding aligns with Tetteh and Attiogbe's (2019) observation that combining professional work and studies can result in less study time, with negative consequences on academic performance. Though it is established that the professional workers engagement in work and study could be a time-consuming combination, which can make them to become ill and/or develop sleeping problems, the results established that these happenings do not necessarily lower the effectiveness of knowledge they desire to acquire.

Regarding the measure of quality of coping when professional workers combine work and academic studies, it is manifest that they seek advice and



emotional support which they utilize as emotion-focused adaptive coping technique to improve their worklife balance. This shows that the professional workers engage in emotional counselling to help them to improve their worklife balance so as to enable them to cope with the demand of combining professional work and academic studies. It is evident from the results that the professional workers seek to strengthen their emotions by engaging in physical exercising and activities, including muscle relaxation and progressive stretching exercises, to help to improve their worklife balance so as to enable them to cope with the demand of combining professional work and academic studies. It was also manifest from the results that professional workers find emotional-oriented coping mechanisms encapsulated by avoidance, personal history, networking, spirituality, fun and relaxation activities as ineffective technique to help enhance their capabilities to cope with the demand of working and studying on their worklife balance. This finding contrast Curtis and Williams' (2002) argument that reduced recreation time leads to negative academic performance, since the professional workers engagement in fun activities did not serve as quality coping strategy to enable their quality knowledge acquisition. Similarly, the findings in consonance with Folkman (2010), showed that emotion-focused coping technique, such as distancing, which regulate negative emotions differ qualitatively from meaning-focused coping. The ineffectiveness of the avoidance, personal history, networking, and spirituality coping techniques is indicative that the professional workers did not find them effective enough to help them to cope and decrease the stress that comes with their academic studies (Balduf, 2009; Wachholtz and Sambamoorthi, 2011). The implication is that professional workers do not effectively engage in meaning-focused coping (Folkman, 2010), which would have seen them view the efficacy of their held values and beliefs (personal experiences/history and spirituality) as quality coping techniques for enhancing their academic goals, strengths gained from work-study life experiences, and reordering professional work and academic studies priorities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study has established that the effectiveness of professional workers knowledge acquisition and coping techniques when engaged in both professional work and academic studies are influenced by various factors. It is concluded that working and studying resulted in professional workers engaging in absenteeism in class, which situation negatively resulted in their minimal engagement with their academic instructors and classmates, leading to negative psychological consequences that lend to their dropping out of academic programmes due to low-quality knowledge acquisition. Additionally, working and studying is a time-consuming combination, and by not having adequate rest from work, professionals experience activity tiredness and learning inefficiency which lowers the effectiveness of their academic knowledge acquisition. Furthermore, to effectively cope with the demand of working and studying, professional workers use emotion-focused adaptive coping techniques to help improve their worklife balance.

Conversely, their use of emotional-oriented coping mechanisms encapsulated by avoidance, personal history, networking, spirituality, fun and relaxation activities are ineffective in helping them cope with the demand of working and studying.

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