

**Organizational Silence as a Predictor of Job Stress among University Lecturers in  
Benin City**

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**BENIN CITY**

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**A LONG ESSAY WRITTEN IN THE DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS  
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BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION IN THE DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS  
ADMINISTRATION UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, NIGERIA.**

**April, 2026**

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that:

This project work is based on a study undertaken by me in the Department of Business Administration, University of Benin, under the supervision of Dr. A.P. Kadiri.

\_\_\_\_\_  
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**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## CERTIFICATION

We certify that this project was carried out by YAHAYA OSHIOKHA USMAN with the Matriculation Number PG/MGS2415485 and submitted this research work to the Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. It has successfully passed the anti-plagiarism test and does not violate copyright regulations.

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## **DEDICATION**

This project work is dedicated to God Almighty for always being there for me and his continuous guidance and protection throughout my academic programme at the University of Benin and beyond. I also dedicate this project to the USMAN Family.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Firstly, my profound gratitude goes to God Almighty for helping me throughout this project and for giving me the inspiration and strength to complete it.

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I extend my immense appreciation to Professor Shaibu Ibrahim. I am grateful for your support and encouragement. I will never forget your kindness towards me during the course of this program.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my late Father, Al'haji. USMAN ABUBAKAR. It breaks my heart that you are not here today, but rest assured, your son will continue to make you proud. With Allah (GOD) Continue to rest in peace

And to my humble self, I want to appreciate myself for being me.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the association between organisational silence and job stress among lecturers at the University of Benin. It aimed to assess the level of organisational silence, identify its dominant dimensions, and evaluate the extent to which different forms of silence affect lecturers' job-related stress. Using a descriptive and correlational research design, data were obtained from ninety-two (92) lecturers through a structured questionnaire. Organisational silence was assessed across four dimensions—acquiescent, defensive, prosocial, and supervisor silence climate—while job stress was measured in terms of workload-related stress, role conflict and ambiguity, job pressure and anxiety, and inadequate supervisor and peer support.

Descriptive results showed that organisational silence was generally low, with a grand mean of 2.67, whereas job stress was moderate, with an overall mean of 3.08. Prosocial silence ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ) emerged as the most prominent dimension, indicating that lecturers often withheld opinions for constructive reasons such as preserving collegial relationships or promoting workplace harmony. Although acquiescent and defensive silence were less common, they demonstrated stronger links with job stress. Regression analysis ( $R = 0.643$ ,  $R^2 = 0.414$ ,  $F = 15.343$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) revealed that the combined dimensions of organisational silence significantly predicted job stress, with acquiescent silence ( $p = 0.001$ ) and defensive silence ( $p = 0.005$ ) identified as significant contributors.

These findings suggest that silence driven by helplessness or fear of adverse consequences exacerbates lecturers' psychological strain, while prosocial silence does not significantly increase stress levels. The study concludes that organisational environments that limit open communication may intensify job stress among lecturers. Consequently, it recommends that university management foster transparent communication, provide supportive supervision, and implement stress-management strategies to enhance lecturer well-being and maintain organisational effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Organisational silence, job stress, acquiescent silence, defensive silence, prosocial silence, University of Benin.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

The modern academic landscape is a crucible of competing demands, where the traditional roles of teaching, research, and community service are amplified by institutional pressures for global competitiveness. This dynamic has made the profession of university lecturing increasingly stressful, leading to a host of well-documented challenges for the psychological and physical well-being of academic staff (Akhtar, Bano & Arshad, 2017). One insidious yet influential factor contributing to this stress is organizational silence a phenomenon that has garnered increasing attention in organizational behaviour literature for its pervasive negative effects. Organizational silence is the conscious and deliberate decision by employees to withhold valuable information, opinions, or concerns from those in authority, and its presence can signal a deeply rooted cultural problem within an institution (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

The theoretical foundations of organizational silence posit it not as a monolithic concept, but as a multifaceted construct with different underlying motivations. According to the foundational work of Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003), silence can be categorized into three primary forms. Acquiescent silence is a passive and disengaged behavior rooted in resignation, where an employee believes that speaking up is futile and will not lead to any meaningful change. Defensive silence is a more active form of self-preservation, driven by a fear of negative repercussions such as retaliation, career stagnation, or social

ostracism. For lecturers, this might manifest as a reluctance to criticize flawed administrative policies or express concerns about inadequate resources, lest they be perceived as disloyal or insubordinate. The third form, prosocial silence, involves withholding information with an altruistic intent, such as protecting a colleague or the institution's reputation. While this may seem a noble act, it can inadvertently conceal systemic problems, preventing their resolution and thereby contributing to a climate of dysfunction and stress. A crucial, related concept is the supervisor silence climate, which refers to the collective perception among employees that their direct supervisors or leaders are unreceptive to their input (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). This climate serves as a powerful contextual factor that dictates the perceived risk of speaking up.

In the context of Nigerian universities, lecturers face a unique set of stressors that can be both systemic and administrative. As noted in existing literature, challenges such as heavy workloads, large class sizes, insufficient funding for research, and inflexible administrative policies are common sources of stress (Olagunju, 2016). When these job demands are coupled with a culture of organizational silence, the burden on lecturers can become overwhelming. They may feel trapped between the need to voice critical issues that affect their work and the fear of negative consequences. This internal conflict can lead to feelings of powerlessness and emotional exhaustion, which are key components of job stress and burnout. Previous studies within Nigeria have established a link between communication deficits and well-being, but they often treat organizational silence as a single variable rather than a nuanced, multidimensional one.

While research has confirmed a general link between organizational silence and negative employee outcomes, there remains a significant empirical gap in understanding how the distinct forms of silence (acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial) and the supervisor silence climate individually relate to job stress among university lecturers in Nigeria. This study is designed to address this deficit by providing a detailed investigation into these relationships. By focusing on the University of Benin, a prominent federal university, this research offers a case study that can illuminate the dynamics of silence and stress within a representative Nigerian higher education setting. The findings will not only contribute to the academic literature on organizational behavior and occupational health but will also provide practical insights for university administrators on how to cultivate a more psychologically safe and open communication environment. Ultimately, a deeper understanding of these dynamics is essential for improving the overall well-being of academic staff, fostering a more productive academic culture, and ensuring the long-term health of the institution itself.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM**

University lecturers in Nigeria operate within an increasingly challenging and complex environment, characterized by systemic issues that contribute to significant occupational stress. These challenges include heavy workloads, inadequate infrastructure, limited resources for research, and unpredictable administrative policies (Olagunju, 2016; Adeosun, 2018). While these factors are well-documented sources of job stress, a less visible but equally potent stressor lies within the communication dynamics and cultural

climate of the institutions themselves: organizational silence. This phenomenon, where lecturers intentionally withhold critical information, opinions, or concerns, has not been adequately explored as a direct contributor to job stress within the Nigerian academic context, particularly at the University of Benin.

The central problem this study addresses is that a pervasive culture of organizational silence can exacerbate the existing stressors faced by university lecturers, yet the specific ways in which different types of silence contribute to this stress remain unclear. Academic literature has largely established a general link between silence and negative employee outcomes (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005), but has rarely disaggregated silence into its distinct forms to understand their individual effects on job stress. For instance, a lecturer may exhibit acquiescent silence because they feel their voice is irrelevant, leading to a sense of powerlessness and heightened emotional exhaustion. In a hierarchical and bureaucratic setting like a university, this resignation can be a profound source of distress, as it implies a lack of agency and control over one's professional life.

In contrast, defensive silence, driven by the fear of retaliation for speaking up about administrative inefficiencies, lack of resources, or injustices, can create a state of chronic anxiety and psychological distress. Lecturers, who are expected to be critical thinkers and communicators, may find this self-censorship particularly burdensome. The tension between their professional identity and the need for self-preservation can lead to significant cognitive dissonance and stress. Furthermore, prosocial silence, while seemingly benevolent and aimed at protecting a colleague or the institution's reputation,

may inadvertently prevent the resolution of systemic problems. This means lecturers are forced to endure suboptimal conditions that contribute to their stress in the long run. The ethical dilemma of whether to speak up and potentially harm a colleague's career or remain silent and endure a dysfunctional system is a significant source of psychological strain.

The collective perception of a negative supervisor silence climate, where leaders are perceived as unreceptive or even punitive towards employee feedback, can further solidify these feelings of helplessness and fear (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). This climate creates a chilling effect, making it difficult for new ideas to emerge and for existing problems to be addressed. It creates a vicious cycle where silence leads to unresolved problems, which in turn fuels more stress and reinforces the culture of silence. This is particularly problematic in a university setting where innovation and critical discourse are paramount.

Existing studies on job stress among Nigerian academics have typically focused on tangible stressors such as workload, student population, and compensation (Adeosun, 2018; Eze, 2021). While these studies are valuable, they fail to capture the nuanced psychological burden of not being able to voice one's professional and personal concerns. The act of holding back one's voice is, in itself, a form of psychological strain that can amplify the impact of other stressors. The lack of empirical research that specifically examines the relationship between the various dimensions of organizational silence and job stress represents a significant gap in the literature. This gap is particularly evident

within the context of the University of Benin, where specific cultural and hierarchical dynamics may influence how lecturers perceive and respond to silence in their institution. Therefore, this study is designed to address this critical gap by investigating the specific relationships between acquiescent silence, defensive silence, prosocial silence, and supervisor silence climate with job stress among university lecturers at the University of Benin. The absence of such detailed empirical evidence makes it difficult for university administrators and policymakers to develop targeted and effective interventions to mitigate job stress and foster a healthier, more open communication environment. Without a clear understanding of this problem, efforts to improve the well-being and productivity of academic staff will continue to fall short, potentially compromising the quality of education and research at a leading institution.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions to this study are as follows:

- I. What is the relationship between acquiescent silence and job stress among university lecturers at the University of Benin?
- II. What is the relationship between defensive silence and job stress among university lecturers at the University of Benin?
- III. What is the relationship between prosocial silence and job stress among university lecturers at the University of Benin?

IV. What is the relationship between supervisor silence climate and job stress among university lecturers at the University of Benin?

#### **1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The core objectives of the study are to investigate the relationship between organisational silence and stress among university lecturers in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives to this study are:

I. To examine the relationship between acquiescent silence and job stress among university lecturers at the university of Benin

II. To Determine the relationship between defensive silence and job stress among lecturers at the university of Benin

III. To Examine the relationship between prosocial silence and job stress among lecturers at the university of Benin

IV. To ascertain the relationship between the supervisor silence climate and job stress among university lecturers in university of Benin

#### **1.5 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS**

The research hypothesis of the study are:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between acquiescent silence and job stress among university lecturers at the university of Benin

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between defensive silence and job stress among lecturers at the university of Benin

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant relationship between prosocial silence and job stress among lecturers at the university of Benin

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant relationship between supervisor silence climate and job stress among lecturers at the university of Benin

## **1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study is focused on the complex relationship between organizational silence and job stress among university lecturers at the University of Benin, located in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. The research to this single institution to allow for a more focused, contextualized, and comprehensive understanding of the organizational dynamics affecting academic staff in a specific and representative academic environment. By concentrating on a single, well-established public university, this research aims to provide an in-depth case study that can inform institutional policies and practices. The choice of university lecturers as the primary population arises from the demanding and diverse nature of their duties, which often extend beyond traditional teaching to include research, mentorship, curriculum development, and significant administrative responsibilities. These duties, in combination with the institutional climate, expose lecturers to unique stressors that are crucial to investigate for institutional growth and the well-being of its staff.

### **Dimensions of Organizational Silence**

The study moves beyond a general understanding of silence by specifically examining four distinct dimensions, as highlighted by existing literature (Morrison & Milliken,

2000; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Each dimension is assessed for its potential link to job stress:

\* **Acquiescent silence:** This refers to a lecturer's passive withholding of opinions or concerns due to feelings of powerlessness or a belief that speaking up will have no impact. This type of silence is typically rooted in resignation, where staff have given up on expecting change or influence.

\* **Defensive silence:** This is a more strategic and self-protective behavior, wherein lecturers choose to remain silent to avoid potential threats, retaliation, or negative consequences. It often reflects a perceived lack of psychological safety, which discourages open communication and risk-taking.

\* **Prosocial silence:** This is the deliberate concealment of facts or viewpoints to maintain peace or protect others. Prosocial silence, in contrast to the other two types, can occasionally serve positive purposes, but it may nevertheless hinder innovation or information exchange, which can create long-term stress.

\* **Supervisor silence climate:** This refers to the collective perception that direct supervisors are not open to receiving feedback or concerns from their subordinates. This climate is a major factor in whether lecturers feel safe enough to speak up, as it establishes the institutional norms for communication.

By isolating these specific dimensions, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how each form of silence contributes to stress, rather than simply confirming a general correlation.

Simultaneously, the study will assess the variable of job stress, which is the dependent variable. Job stress among Nigerian lecturers is a pervasive issue, often linked to factors such as heavy workloads, poor infrastructure, and lack of adequate support (Olagunju, 2016). This study will investigate how organizational silence acts as a psychological and emotional trigger that exacerbates these existing stressors. The research aims to uncover whether certain types of silence have a stronger correlation with stress than others, which can provide a deeper understanding of the psychological burdens faced by academic staff. Knowing the specific link between each dimension of silence and job stress will be crucial for developing targeted interventions. For instance, interventions to address defensive silence might focus on improving psychological safety, while those for acquiescent silence might focus on empowering staff and creating meaningful avenues for their voices to be heard.

In terms of methodology, this study will employ a quantitative research approach. Data will be collected using a structured questionnaire, which will be distributed to a representative sample of full-time lecturers at the University of Benin. This method is well-suited for examining statistical relationships among the defined variables and for testing the hypotheses derived from the research questions. The target population is exclusively full-time lecturers, cutting across various faculties and departments to ensure diversity in responses. The study will not include non-academic staff, part-time lecturers, or postgraduate students, as their employment statuses, institutional roles, and job-related

stressors may differ considerably from those of permanent teaching staff. Furthermore, the study will not be longitudinal in nature; data will be collected at a single point in time, offering a cross-sectional view of the relationships between the variables. This means the findings will represent the situation at the time of data collection and may not capture changes that occur over time. While the findings may have broader implications, they are directly generalizable only to the academic staff at the University of Benin. This study does not aim to test interventions or evaluate performance outcomes, but rather to establish the nature and extent of the relationship between organizational silence and job stress.

Ultimately, by focusing on these specific dimensions within this defined scope, this study intends to provide well-founded insights that can guide institutional policies, encourage open communication, and contribute meaningfully to the broader discussion on organizational health and employee well-being in Nigerian higher education.

### **1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The significance of this study is multifaceted and cannot be overstated. University lecturers are the linchpins of higher education, playing a vital role in shaping the intellectual and professional future of individuals and, by extension, the broader society. Their well-being, therefore, is not merely an internal human resource issue but a crucial determinant of the overall quality of education and the productive capacity of the nation. Existing research has consistently shown that lecturers in Nigerian universities experience high levels of job stress, a condition that can have debilitating effects on their

physical and mental health, job performance, and overall job satisfaction. These findings underscore the urgency of a deeper investigation into the underlying causes of this stress, particularly those that are not immediately obvious.

This study is designed to explore the intricate relationship between organisational silence and job stress among university lecturers in Benin City. It moves beyond a superficial analysis by specifically focusing on four distinct dimensions of silence: acquiescent silence, defensive silence, prosocial silence, and supervisor silence climate. By disaggregating these variables, the study will provide invaluable insights into the specific mechanisms through which organizational silence affects job stress among lecturers. The motivations behind each form of silence are unique, and understanding their differential impacts is the key to developing effective solutions. The stress resulting from a lecturer's fear of speaking up (defensive silence), for instance, is likely to be a different psychological burden from the stress experienced by a lecturer who has simply given up on speaking up (acquiescent silence) due to a sense of powerlessness. This nuanced approach ensures that the research will not just confirm a relationship, but will also explain how and why it exists.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to deliver tangible benefits across several critical areas:

### **1. Improving Employee Well-being**

The most immediate and profound impact of this research will be its potential to inform university administrators on how to develop evidence-based policies and interventions

that promote employee well-being and actively reduce job stress. By identifying which forms of silence are the strongest predictors of stress, the study will empower leaders to move beyond generalized wellness programs and implement targeted strategies. For example, if the findings reveal that defensive silence is a major contributor to stress, administrators can focus on building a culture of psychological safety, implementing anonymous reporting systems, and establishing clear anti-retaliation policies. Conversely, if acquiescent silence is more prevalent, interventions might shift to empowering lecturers by creating meaningful avenues for their voices to be heard, such as through transparent feedback forums or participatory decision-making processes. Such an approach not only mitigates stress but also fosters a more respectful and supportive work environment, which is fundamental to long-term employee health and happiness.

## **2. Enhancing Organisational Performance**

Organisational performance is intrinsically linked to the health and engagement of its employees. When lecturers feel comfortable and safe sharing their opinions, concerns, and innovative ideas, an organization can harness their collective knowledge and creativity. Organisational silence is a significant barrier to change and development because it starves the institution of critical information that could lead to improvement. By mitigating silence, a university can foster improved decision-making, more effective problem-solving, and a more dynamic, responsive academic environment. This, in turn, can lead to enhanced research output, more effective teaching methods, and a more robust institutional reputation. The study will provide the evidence base needed to

convince institutional leaders that fostering a culture of open communication is not a luxury, but a strategic necessity for high performance. This is particularly relevant in the competitive landscape of modern higher education, where a university's success is increasingly tied to its ability to adapt and innovate.

### **3. Increasing Job Satisfaction and Retention**

High levels of job stress and a feeling of being silenced are major contributors to low job satisfaction and burnout. Studies on lecturers in Nigeria, such as one on lecturers in Southwestern Nigeria, have highlighted the prevalence of job stress and the need for interventions to mitigate its effects. By reducing organizational silence and job stress, universities can directly increase job satisfaction among their lecturers. This is crucial for improving retention rates and reducing the high costs associated with recruitment and turnover. A university with a reputation for caring for its staff's well-being is more likely to attract and retain top talent, which is essential for maintaining academic excellence. The findings will provide a roadmap for creating a more fulfilling work environment where lecturers feel valued and their contributions are respected. This also helps to build a stronger sense of loyalty and commitment, which can lead to greater dedication to the university's mission and goals. The study will provide specific data that can be used to justify investments in better support systems and professional development.

### **4. Providing Context-Specific Insights**

The study's focus on the Nigerian university setting, specifically in Benin City, is a significant contribution in itself. While global literature on silence and stress is abundant,

the unique cultural, administrative, and economic challenges of the Nigerian context mean that generalized solutions may not be effective. This study will provide insights that can inform policies and interventions specifically tailored to the local environment, thereby enhancing their relevance and effectiveness. The findings will also contribute to a growing body of literature that seeks to decolonize and diversify organizational behavior research by validating or challenging existing theories within a non-Western context. This research is therefore not merely an academic exercise but a critical step towards improving the very foundation of the Nigerian educational system. By shedding light on how organizational silence contributes to job stress, this research aims to foster a more open, supportive, and healthy academic environment, leading to improved job satisfaction, enhanced institutional performance, and a better quality of education for future generations. It provides the empirical evidence necessary for policymakers and academic unions to champion reforms that address the well-being of academic staff.

### **5. Contribution to Existing Literature**

The study's findings will contribute to the existing body of literature on organizational silence and job stress in several ways. Firstly, it will provide insights into the relationship between different types of organizational silence and job stress among university lecturers, a population that has been under-researched in this specific context. Secondly, it will shed light on the specific mechanisms through which organizational silence affects job stress in the Nigerian university context, providing a more detailed understanding of the causal pathways. This will help to bridge the gap between theory and practice,

providing a solid foundation for future research in this area. By aligning the study's objectives with the identified needs to understand these relationships, this research is positioned to make a lasting and meaningful contribution to both academic discourse and practical institutional management.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter serves as a cornerstone of the present study, embarking on a comprehensive and systematic review of existing academic literature pertinent to the core constructs of organisational silence and job stress. The significance of a robust literature review in scholarly inquiry cannot be overstated, as it provides the essential theoretical and empirical bedrock upon which the current research is firmly anchored (Fink, 2014). By meticulously examining previous studies, theories, and conceptualizations, this chapter aims to establish a clear understanding of the established knowledge base, identify prevailing trends, highlight methodological approaches, and, critically, pinpoint the existing gaps that this research endeavours to address. In the context of investigating "Organisational Silence and Job Stress among University Lecturers in Benin City, Edo State," a thorough review becomes imperative for contextualizing the unique challenges faced within the Nigerian higher education landscape.

The phenomenon of organisational silence, often perceived as the antithesis of organisational voice, represents a critical area of inquiry within organisational behaviour studies. It describes situations where employees deliberately withhold valuable information, ideas, or concerns from management, often due to fear, futility, or a misguided perception of loyalty (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Understanding the nuances of silence its various forms, the underlying reasons for its occurrence, and its profound

implications is fundamental to comprehending the dynamics of an academic institution. When lecturers, who are intellectual leaders and crucial conduits of knowledge, choose to remain silent on issues ranging from administrative inefficiencies to systemic challenges, it can impede institutional growth, innovation, and overall effectiveness. This chapter will delve into the various conceptualizations of organisational silence, exploring its antecedents and consequences as articulated by leading scholars globally.

Parallel to this, job stress remains a pervasive and increasingly recognized issue across professions worldwide, with significant ramifications for individual well-being, productivity, and organisational health (Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001). For university lecturers, the nature of their work often involves a unique blend of demands: teaching, research, community service, administrative duties, and continuous professional development. These multifaceted roles, coupled with often challenging working conditions in developing economies, can create an environment ripe for stress accumulation. The literature review will thoroughly define job stress, explore its theoretical underpinnings, and identify common stressors inherent in the academic profession. Special attention will be paid to how job stress manifests among educators, considering its potential impacts on their physical and psychological health, job satisfaction, and ultimately, their effectiveness in fostering a conducive learning environment for students.

Crucially, this chapter will not merely address organisational silence and job stress as isolated concepts. A primary objective is to explore the intricate interconnections

between the two variables. It is hypothesized that a culture of organisational silence, where employees feel unable or unwilling to voice their concerns, can itself be a significant source of psychological strain and contribute directly to increased job stress (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Conversely, high levels of job stress might also lead lecturers to withdraw and adopt silent behaviors as a coping mechanism, creating a reinforcing cycle. By synthesizing literature that examines this relationship, the study aims to build a conceptual bridge between these two critical phenomena, particularly as they relate to the experiences of lecturers in a specific geographical context.

Furthermore, this review will incorporate established theoretical frameworks that offer explanatory power for the observed relationships.

## **2.2 MEANING OF JOB STRESS**

The contemporary work environment, particularly within demanding professions such as academia, increasingly highlights the pervasive issue of job stress. While often colloquially understood, the academic conceptualization of job stress is complex, involving an intricate interplay between an individual and their work environment. At its core, job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH], 1999). This definition underscores the transactional nature of stress, suggesting that it arises not merely from high demands, but from an imbalance between demands and an individual's perceived ability to cope.

Further elaborating on this, Cox (1978) conceptualized stress as an individual's cognitive appraisal of an imbalance between environmental demands and their coping resources, leading to a state of discomfort. This highlights the subjective nature of stress, where what might be stressful for one individual may not be for another, largely dependent on their personal resources, coping mechanisms, and interpretation of the situation. More broadly, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2003) defines work-related stress as "the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope." This comprehensive view integrates both the demands placed on the individual and their perceived capacity to meet those demands, emphasizing the potential for adverse health outcomes when this balance is disrupted.

The conceptualization of job stress often distinguishes between stressors, stress, and strain. Stressors are the environmental stimuli or demands that initiate the stress response (e.g., heavy workload, role ambiguity). Stress is the immediate psychological and physiological reaction to these demands, characterized by feelings of tension, anxiety, or increased heart rate. Strain, on the other hand, refers to the long-term, adverse consequences of prolonged or chronic stress, manifesting as physical illnesses (e.g., hypertension, ulcers), psychological disorders (e.g., depression, burnout), or behavioural problems (e.g., absenteeism, substance abuse) (Quick & Quick, 2007). Understanding this tripartite model is crucial for comprehensively analysing job stress within any occupational context.

Several theoretical models provide a framework for understanding the mechanisms through which job stress develops. One influential model is Karasek's (1979) Job Demands-Control (JDC) model, which posits that job strain is highest in situations characterized by high psychological demands combined with low decision latitude (control over one's work). When individuals face high demands but have little autonomy or control over how to meet those demands, stress is likely to ensue. This model was later extended to include social support, becoming the Job Demands-Control-Support (JDCS) model, recognizing that strong social support can buffer the negative effects of high demands and low control (Johnson & Hall, 1988). Another significant framework is Siegrist's (1996) Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model, which suggests that stress arises when there is a mismatch between the effort expended by an employee and the rewards received (e.g., salary, recognition, job security). An imbalance, where high effort is met with low reward, can lead to negative emotional and physiological states, particularly when employees perceive the imbalance as unjust.

For university lecturers in a specific context like Benin City, Edo State, the conceptualization of job stress must account for both universal academic stressors and localized challenges. Lecturers often face a confluence of high demands: extensive teaching loads, pressure to engage in cutting-edge research and publications (the "publish or perish" dilemma), administrative responsibilities, student mentorship, and community service (Ofoegbu & Alugbuo, 2013). These demands are often compounded by insufficient resources, large class sizes, inadequate infrastructure, and sometimes,

delayed or poor remuneration in certain Nigerian university settings (Akinmayowa & Alade, 2016). Furthermore, issues such as unstable power supply, limited access to modern research tools and databases, and the general economic climate can add unique layers of stress, diminishing the perceived control and rewards despite high effort. The constant pressure to meet performance targets in teaching and research, often without commensurate support or recognition, aligns well with the propositions of both the JDCS and ERI models, contributing to significant emotional and psychological burdens on lecturers. Thus, job stress among this demographic is a multifaceted phenomenon rooted in the complex interplay of occupational demands, available resources, and individual perceptions within their unique socio-economic environment.

### **2.3 SOURCES OF JOB STRESS**

Job stress is not a monolithic phenomenon but rather a complex response influenced by a myriad of factors originating from the work environment, organizational culture, interpersonal relationships, and individual characteristics. These factors, often referred to as stressors, can trigger the psychological and physiological reactions associated with job stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Identifying these sources is critical for understanding the genesis of stress within a specific occupational group. Broadly, job stressors can be categorized into several groups, including workload, role demands, interpersonal relationships, career development issues, organizational structure and climate, and work-life imbalance (Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001).

Workload stands as one of the most frequently cited sources of job stress. This can be quantitative, referring to an excessive amount of work that exceeds an individual's capacity within a given timeframe, or qualitative, where the work is too complex or difficult, leading to feelings of inadequacy (French & Caplan, 1972). For university lecturers, particularly in the Nigerian context, the issue of workload is profoundly multifaceted. Lecturers are typically burdened with heavy teaching loads, often managing large class sizes due to increasing student admissions without a proportional increase in faculty staff (Ofoegbu & Alugbuo, 2013). Beyond direct teaching, they are expected to prepare lectures, grade assignments, supervise numerous undergraduate and postgraduate projects, and engage in continuous curriculum development.

Role-related stressors are equally significant. These include role ambiguity, where lecturers may have unclear or conflicting expectations regarding their duties, responsibilities, or performance criteria. Role conflict arises when lecturers face contradictory demands from different sources (e.g., pressure to publish versus heavy teaching duties, or conflicting expectations from university administration versus professional standards). The demands to be excellent researchers, compassionate mentors, engaging teachers, and efficient administrators often create an inherent role conflict that can be highly stressful (Idemobi & Ogbodo, 2015).

Interpersonal relationships within the workplace also constitute a vital source of stress. Poor relationships with colleagues, strained interactions with supervisors, or challenging dynamics with students can significantly elevate stress levels (Adigun & Isiaka, 2014). In

Nigerian universities, hierarchical structures and sometimes less supportive supervisory styles can contribute to a climate where lecturers feel isolated or unsupported, exacerbating the impact of other stressors. Moreover, dealing with student disciplinary issues or academic misconduct can add to the emotional labor and stress experienced by lecturers.

Career development issues present another significant source of stress. This encompasses concerns about job insecurity, lack of opportunities for promotion or professional growth, and feelings of being underutilized or undervalued (Quick & Quick, 2007). In Nigerian public universities, issues such as delayed promotions, perceived unfairness in career progression, and the precarious nature of contract appointments for some academic staff can generate considerable anxiety and stress among lecturers (Akinmayowa & Alade, 2016). The "publish or perish" culture, coupled with often limited access to research grants, modern laboratory facilities, and up-to-date academic resources, adds immense pressure, as research output is a key determinant of promotion and career advancement.

Furthermore, organizational climate and structure play a substantial role. A lack of participation in decision-making, poor communication channels, inadequate support systems, and bureaucratic inefficiencies can be major stressors. In some university settings in Nigeria, issues of governance, transparency, and the perceived lack of concern for staff welfare by management can lead to widespread frustration and stress (Nafei, 2016). Frequent industrial actions, such as strikes by academic staff unions, while often aimed at improving conditions, simultaneously create instability, disrupt academic

calendars, and contribute to job insecurity and financial strain for lecturers. This cycle of disruption impacts not only their professional lives but also their personal well-being.

Finally, work-life imbalance is increasingly recognized as a significant stressor. The demanding nature of the academic profession often blurs the lines between work and personal life. Lecturers often take work home, spending evenings and weekends on grading, research, and lesson preparation. The need to juggle these professional responsibilities with family obligations and personal well-being, especially within the socio-economic context of Benin City, can lead to chronic stress and burnout (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Unreliable public services, such as electricity and internet, further complicate the ability to achieve a healthy work-life balance, forcing lecturers to work in sub-optimal conditions.

In conclusion, the job stress experienced by university lecturers in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, is a complex outcome of high and often conflicting job demands, limited resources, challenging organizational environments, and the inherent pressures of a demanding academic career, all set within a unique local socio-economic context.

#### **2.4. CONSEQUENCES OF JOB STRESS**

The prolonged exposure to job stressors can precipitate a wide array of adverse outcomes, impacting both the individual's well-being and the overall effectiveness of the organization. These consequences manifest across physiological, psychological, and behavioral dimensions, often creating a cycle that can further exacerbate stress if left unaddressed (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). For university lecturers in Benin City,

Edo State, the ramifications of unmanaged job stress extend beyond personal suffering to potentially compromise the quality of education and research.

At the individual level, chronic job stress significantly threatens lecturers' health and well-being. Physiologically, it can lead to a heightened risk of cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, gastrointestinal disorders, headaches, and chronic fatigue (Ganster & Rosen, 2013). The constant activation of the stress response system can also suppress the immune system, making individuals more susceptible to illness. Psychologically, lecturers experiencing high stress may suffer from anxiety, depression, irritability, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). A particularly prevalent outcome is burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism or depersonalization (a detached response towards students and colleagues), and reduced personal efficacy, significantly impairing their ability to perform effectively and empathetically (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Such psychological distress can also manifest as reduced job satisfaction and lower levels of commitment to their profession or institution.

Behaviorally, stressed lecturers might exhibit increased absenteeism, taking more sick days to cope with their ailments, or engage in presenteeism, where they are physically present at work but are unproductive due to fatigue, illness, or mental preoccupation (Akinmayowa & Alade, 2016). This diminished cognitive function can lead to errors in teaching, research, and administrative tasks, potentially affecting student learning outcomes and the integrity of academic work. Furthermore, chronic stress can strain

interpersonal relationships with colleagues, students, and family members, and in severe cases, contribute to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance abuse.

At the organizational level, the collective impact of job stress among lecturers can be detrimental to the university system. High stress levels can translate into reduced overall productivity, a decline in the quality of teaching and research outputs, and decreased innovation (Spector, 2015). Universities may experience higher turnover rates, as stressed lecturers seek opportunities elsewhere or even leave the academic profession, leading to a loss of valuable expertise, increased recruitment costs, and disruption to academic programs. A pervasive climate of stress can also foster low morale, poor collegiality, and a general decline in the organizational culture, affecting the university's ability to attract and retain talent and maintain its reputation for academic excellence in a competitive environment. Ultimately, the cumulative effect of job stress undermines the very mission of higher education within the region.

## **2.5 MEANING OF ORGANISATIONAL SILENCE**

Organisational silence is a critical and multifaceted phenomenon that has gained significant attention in organisational behaviour studies, representing the deliberate withholding of valuable information, ideas, opinions, and concerns by employees from their superiors or colleagues (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Far from being a passive state, silence is often an active decision driven by specific motivations and perceptions of the work environment. It is fundamentally the opposite of organisational voice, where employees feel empowered and safe to express their views for the betterment of the

organisation (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). The conceptualization of silence extends beyond a simple lack of communication to a strategic choice made by individuals to protect themselves from perceived negative repercussions, or out of a belief that their contributions would be futile (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

The academic literature distinguishes between different forms of organisational silence. Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003) propose a tripartite model that includes: (1) Acquiescent silence, a state of passively withholding information due to resignation or a lack of motivation; (2) Prosocial silence, which involves intentionally withholding information to benefit the organisation or a specific colleague, often out of a misguided sense of loyalty; and (3) Defensive silence, which is the most common form, where employees withhold information out of fear of retribution, ridicule, or damage to their career prospects. This typology highlights that silence is not a monolithic concept but can stem from different psychological and environmental drivers.

For university lecturers in Benin City, this conceptualization is particularly relevant. Silence may manifest when lecturers refrain from raising concerns about inadequate infrastructure, administrative inefficiencies, or unfair promotion policies, not out of apathy, but out of a fear of being labelled as a troublemaker or receiving a negative performance appraisal (Idemobi & Ogbodo, 2015). They may also adopt prosocial silence, choosing not to criticize a colleague to maintain a harmonious work environment, even if it compromises academic standards. Consequently, understanding organisational silence requires a deep dive into the unique power dynamics, communication channels,

and cultural norms that shape the academic environment in Nigerian institutions. The deliberate nature of this silence and its varied forms underscore its profound implications for institutional health, employee well-being, and ultimately, the quality of education provided.

## **2.6. DIMENSIONS OF ORGANISATIONAL SILENCE**

The concept of organisational silence is not a singular, uniform behaviour but rather a complex phenomenon with distinct dimensions that reveal the underlying motivations and contexts for its occurrence. A foundational and widely cited model by Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003) delineates three primary dimensions, or types, of silence, each driven by a unique psychological state. Understanding these dimensions is crucial for accurately diagnosing the reasons behind a lack of employee voice.

The first dimension is acquiescent silence. This type of silence is characterised by a passive withholding of information and ideas, driven by a feeling of resignation or a lack of motivation. Employees who engage in acquiescent silence often believe that their input will not be valued or that their efforts to speak up will not lead to any meaningful change (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). For university lecturers, this might manifest as not contributing to discussions on curriculum reform because they feel previous suggestions were ignored, leading to a state of learned helplessness. This dimension is less about fear and more about a perceived futility of voice.

The second dimension is defensive silence. This is arguably the most pervasive and studied form of silence, rooted in a fear of negative consequences. Employees choose to remain silent to protect themselves from punishment, ridicule, damage to their careers, or other forms of retribution (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). The fear is a powerful motivator, leading individuals to self-censor even when they possess valuable information or crucial insights. Among lecturers in a specific context like Benin City, this could involve a fear of being overlooked for promotion or a being subjected to victimisation by university administration if they raise concerns about institutional policies or resource allocation.

The third dimension is prosocial silence. This type of silence is distinct from the others as it is not driven by fear or resignation, but rather by an altruistic or cooperative motive to benefit the organisation or its members (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003). An employee might withhold information to protect a colleague, a supervisor, or the organisation's reputation. For instance, a lecturer might choose not to report a minor procedural error by a colleague to maintain workplace harmony, or they may refrain from publicly critiquing a university policy to avoid damaging the institution's public image. While seemingly well-intentioned, this dimension of silence can still prevent critical issues from being addressed and resolved. These three dimensions collectively provide a robust framework for analysing the complex motivations behind why university lecturers in Benin City may choose to withhold their voice.

### **2.6.1. ACQUIESCENT SILENCE**

Acquiescent silence is a distinct dimension of organisational silence, characterized by a passive withholding of ideas, opinions, and information. It is not driven by fear of retaliation, but rather by a sense of resignation and a belief that speaking up will be futile or make no difference (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). This type of silence is rooted in an employee's cognitive appraisal of their environment, where they perceive a lack of responsiveness from management or believe their contributions will be undervalued and ignored. It is a state of learned helplessness, where past experiences of unheeded feedback have led the individual to conclude that voicing their opinion is pointless (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003).

This dimension contrasts sharply with defensive silence, which is motivated by a conscious fear of negative consequences. Acquiescent silence, instead, stems from a lack of motivation or a feeling of low psychological safety regarding the impact of one's voice. For university lecturers in Benin City, this might be evident when they refrain from participating in departmental meetings to discuss curriculum updates or administrative issues. A lecturer might hold innovative ideas on improving student engagement but choose to remain silent because they believe the existing bureaucratic structure is too rigid and resistant to change. They may feel that previous suggestions they or their colleagues made were never acted upon, leading to a conclusion that expending energy on new ideas is a waste of time. This passive disengagement, while seemingly less confrontational than other forms of silence, is particularly insidious as it

stifles creativity and prevents the flow of knowledge that is vital for institutional growth and academic excellence. It ultimately represents a silent withdrawal of commitment from the organisation's mission.

### **2.6.2. DEFENSIVE SILENCE**

Defensive silence is arguably the most common and damaging dimension of organisational silence. It is defined as the intentional withholding of work-related ideas, information, or opinions based on a conscious fear of negative consequences (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). This type of silence is a self-protective behaviour, a strategic choice made by an employee to avoid potential harm to themselves or their career. The fear can stem from a variety of sources, including retribution from a superior, ridicule from colleagues, damage to one's reputation, or being labelled as a "troublemaker" (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Unlike acquiescent silence, which is rooted in resignation, defensive silence is an active and deliberate decision driven by a powerful survival instinct within the workplace.

The perception of psychological safety or the lack thereof is a critical antecedent to defensive silence. When employees perceive that the environment is hostile or that voicing concerns is risky, they are far more likely to engage in self-censorship (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). For university lecturers in Benin City, defensive silence could manifest in several ways. For example, a lecturer might remain silent during a departmental meeting about the opaque criteria used for promotion or resource allocation

because they fear being professionally victimized or overlooked for future opportunities by those in authority. Similarly, a lecturer might choose not to report unethical conduct by a superior to avoid being a target of unfair performance appraisals or having their research proposals blocked. This self-preservation mechanism ultimately prevents crucial issues from being addressed, erodes trust in leadership, and can create a pervasive climate of fear that undermines collegiality and institutional effectiveness.

### **2.6.3. PROSOCIAL SILENCE**

Prosocial silence is a distinct and often misunderstood dimension of organisational silence. Unlike defensive silence, which is driven by fear, or acquiescent silence, which stems from a sense of futility, prosocial silence is the intentional withholding of ideas, information, or concerns with the aim of benefiting the organisation or its members (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). It is an altruistic or cooperative behaviour rooted in a desire to protect the image of the organisation, maintain harmonious relationships with colleagues, or avoid causing offense or discomfort. The motivation is not self-preservation, but rather a perceived loyalty or concern for the well-being of others (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

While prosocial silence may seem positive on the surface, it can be just as detrimental to an organisation as other forms of silence. By withholding information, individuals may prevent the identification of critical problems, hinder innovation, and allow dysfunctional practices to continue unchecked. For university lecturers in Benin City, prosocial silence

might occur when a lecturer chooses not to report a colleague's minor ethical breach or unprofessional behaviour to a department head in order to avoid creating workplace friction. Similarly, a lecturer might refrain from publicly criticising a university-wide policy on student admissions, even if they know it is flawed, to maintain the institution's public image and avoid internal conflict. This form of silence, while well-intentioned, ultimately compromises transparency and can create a culture where critical feedback is suppressed in favour of superficial harmony.

## **2.7. CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF ORGANISATIONAL SILENCE**

In the unique and often challenging context of Nigerian universities, including those in Benin City, the phenomenon of organisational silence where academic staff intentionally withhold valuable ideas, concerns, or feedback is not merely a passive state but an active choice that significantly amplifies job stress among lecturers. This section delves into the specific causes of this silence and explores its profound consequences, particularly the intricate link to increased job stress.

### **Causes of Organisational Silence**

The antecedents of organisational silence are multifaceted, stemming from the interplay between leadership styles, institutional culture, and individual perceptions.

•**Fear of negative repercussions and damaged relationships** is a dominant cause of silence. Lecturers, like other employees, are highly sensitive to the potential for retribution from superiors or damaged relationships with peers. Fapohunda (2016), in a study of lecturers in Lagos universities, found that academic staff frequently withhold

their concerns to avoid being labelled as a "troublemaker" or to prevent harming their relationships with administrators and colleagues. This fear-driven silence, often termed defensive silence (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), is a self-protective mechanism where individuals choose to remain silent to safeguard their professional standing, career progression, or even their job security. In a system where administrative decisions can be perceived as arbitrary, the risk of speaking up is often deemed too high.

- **Highly hierarchical culture and perceived power imbalances** stifle open communication. The literature on employee silence consistently underscores that staff in subordinate positions often hesitate to speak up to senior academic or administrative figures (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). This dynamic is particularly pronounced when peers also remain silent, a phenomenon known as collective silence. In a university, junior lecturers may be reluctant to challenge a departmental head or dean, even on crucial issues, for fear of violating an unwritten norm of deference. This top-down communication structure, where feedback from the bottom is neither expected nor rewarded, contributes to an environment where silence becomes the norm.

- **Perceived injustice in organisational processes** erodes trust and encourages silence. When lecturers believe that decision-making regarding promotions, resource allocation, or performance evaluations is unclear or biased, their trust in the system diminishes (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). A lack of recognition for their efforts or a feeling of being unfairly treated can lead to acquiescent silence, where they withdraw from speaking out because they believe voicing their concerns will yield no improvement. This is a state of

learned helplessness where past experiences of unheeded feedback have led them to conclude that their voice is futile.

•**Employees may strategically withhold input** to protect their own emotional and psychological resources. According to theoretical models such as the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect their resources, which include energy and psychological well-being. When the work environment is unsupportive or threatening, individuals may choose silence as a way to avoid resource depletion, preserving their energy rather than expending it on what they perceive to be a lost cause. This rational calculation contributes to silence in environments marked by heavy workloads, poor work-life balance, and a lack of collegial support (Ezema-Kalu, 202?).

Fifth, low organisational belonging or emotional commitment can lead to a form of disregardful silence. When lecturers feel a lack of connection to their institution or their colleagues, their motivation to contribute to the university's well-being diminishes. As Ezema-Kalu's (202?) work on Nigerian lecturers highlights, broader psychosocial factors such as a heavy workload and poor work-life balance can undermine a lecturer's sense of belonging, making them less willing to voice concerns they feel are not their responsibility to solve.

## **Consequences of Organisational Silence**

The consequences of Organisational Silence are:

•**Emotional Exhaustion and Burnout** — This emerge as rapid consequences when lecturers suppress issues and concerns. Fapohunda's (2016) study documented a significant relationship between silence and emotional exhaustion, job dissatisfaction, and apathy among academic staff. The constant effort of self-censoring and withholding feedback on stressors such as an unmanageable workload or administrative inefficiencies requires significant emotional labor, which can quickly lead to a state of emotional depletion. This, in turn, is a core component of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

•**Increased Job Dissatisfaction and Reduced Motivation** — When lecturers' grievances and feedback remain unaddressed, their intrinsic motivation to engage in teaching, research, and service tasks corrodes. This disengagement, a behavioural manifestation of stress, can lead to a decline in professional pride and a pervasive sense of frustration with the institution.

Psychological strain and poorer well-being are direct outcomes. The work-stress literature on Nigerian tertiary institutions details how excessive workloads, role ambiguity, and conflict contribute to anxiety, depression, and physical ailments (Akinmayowa & Alade, 2016). This is exacerbated by a culture of silence, where lecturers cannot voice their stressors or seek support, forcing them to internalize their problems. The inability to communicate their needs and feelings openly acts as a powerful psychological strain.

•**Reduced Performance Quality and Creativity**-- A study from the University of Ibadan found that job stress and work-family conflict negatively predicted lecturers' creativity and performance. Making matters worse, a silent climate deprives institutions of potentially constructive ideas and feedback to improve teaching methodologies and learning environments, thereby hindering innovation (Akinmayowa & Alade, 2016).

•**Diminished Institutional Effectiveness and Innovation**— Silence suppresses upward input, preventing the early detection of structural or pedagogical problems. In polytechnic libraries in South-West Nigeria, organisational silence, together with poor leadership and uncondusive environments, was linked to low institutional effectiveness (Nafei, 2016). When the people on the frontlines, the lecturers, cannot communicate what is not working, the institution's ability to reform and adapt is severely compromised.

Higher turnover and absenteeism are more likely when silence breeds alienation. Extended dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion, if unvoiced and unresolved, can provoke absenteeism or even a departure from the institution. This leads to a loss of valuable expertise and contributes to the ongoing challenge of brain drain within the Nigerian higher education sector.

## **2.8. THEORIES OF ORGANISATIONAL SILENCE AND STRESS**

The conceptualisation of organisational silence is largely rooted in psychological and social theories that seek to explain why individuals withhold information. The most influential framework is the Model of Organisational Silence proposed by Morrison and Milliken (2000). This theory posits that a collective silence is created and sustained by a

shared fear of negative repercussions, a phenomenon they call "the managerial cognition of silence." According to this model, managers often hold a set of implicit assumptions, such as the belief that employees are self-interested or that dissent is insubordination. These assumptions lead managers to take a defensive approach to employee voice, which in turn leads employees to anticipate punishment and, consequently, choose to remain silent. This theory provides a powerful explanation for defensive silence in hierarchical structures, like those often found in Nigerian universities, where junior lecturers might fear reprisal from senior faculty or administrators.

Another foundational theory is the Exit, Voice, and Loyalty (EVL) model (Hirschman, 1970). This model suggests that when employees are dissatisfied with their organisation, they have three primary responses: "exit" (leaving the organisation), "voice" (speaking up to change the situation), or "loyalty" (remaining in the organisation and hoping for change). Organisational silence, in this context, can be viewed as an alternative to "voice." Lecturers who are loyal to their institution but are unable to voice their concerns might adopt a silent posture. When combined with a lack of viable "exit" options due to job market conditions, this can create a state of internalised frustration that contributes to stress.

Furthermore, the Spiral of Silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), originally developed for public opinion, can be applied to organisations. It suggests that individuals are less likely to voice their opinions if they perceive themselves to be in the minority, for fear of social isolation. When a few key individuals remain silent, it creates a false perception

that the majority agrees with the status quo, which in turn causes others to also remain silent, leading to a reinforcing "spiral" of silence. In a university setting, this can prevent a group of lecturers from speaking out against a problematic policy if they believe they are alone in their concerns, even if that is not the case.

### **Theories of Job Stress**

Job stress research is dominated by models that explore the interaction between the individual and their work environment. One of the most widely cited is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Karasek, 1979). This theory posits that job strain is highest in situations characterized by high psychological demands combined with low decision latitude (control over one's work). When lecturers face intense demand such as heavy teaching loads, pressure to publish, and administrative tasks but have little control over their work methods or schedule, they are likely to experience significant stress. The model was later expanded to include social support, becoming the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model, which recognizes that supportive relationships with colleagues and supervisors can buffer the negative effects of high demands and low control (Johnson & Hall, 1988).

A second key framework is the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model (Siegrist, 1996). Rooted in social exchange theory, this model argues that job stress arises from a mismatch between the effort an employee expends and the rewards they receive in return. These rewards are not just monetary; they also include esteem, job security, and career opportunities. When lecturers put in long hours and great effort in teaching, research, and

mentorship but perceive that the rewards are inadequate, unfair, or delayed, a state of emotional distress and stress is created. This model is highly relevant to the Nigerian context where issues of poor remuneration and delayed promotions can create a profound sense of effort-reward imbalance

.Finally, the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) offers a meta-theory of stress, suggesting that stress occurs when individuals face a threat of resource loss, the actual loss of resources, or a failure to gain resources after investing them. Resources are anything an individual values, from energy and time to social support and job security. A culture of organisational silence directly contributes to resource loss by creating an environment where individuals must expend emotional energy to suppress their voice, and lose potential resources like a supportive relationship with management.

### **Linking the Theories**

These theories are not isolated but are deeply interconnected. A lack of psychological safety (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), a cause of organisational silence, directly translates to a lack of social support and control in the JDR model. Similarly, the futility that underpins acquiescent silence is a clear manifestation of a failure to gain resources after investment, a key tenet of COR theory. The job stress resulting from an effort-reward imbalance (Siegrist, 1996) can also be a powerful motivator for defensive silence, as lecturers might withhold voice to avoid jeopardizing the minimal rewards they do receive. Thus, the theories of silence and stress can be used to build a robust conceptual

bridge, arguing that a culture of silence is both a cause and a consequence of the stressful experiences of university lecturers.

### **2.8.1. CONSERVATION OF RESOURCES (COR) THEORY**

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, developed by Stevan E. Hobfoll (1989, 2001), offers a framework for understanding human motivation and stress. The theory posits that individuals are motivated to protect their existing resources and to acquire new ones. Resources are defined broadly as anything that individuals value, including objects, personal characteristics, conditions, and energies. Examples of resources include a stable job, high self-esteem, a good marriage, and time.

The core tenet of the COR theory is that stress occurs when individuals face a threat of resource loss, experience an actual loss of resources, or fail to gain resources after investing them. This "loss spiral" is a key concept, suggesting that an initial loss can lead to subsequent losses, as individuals who have fewer resources are more vulnerable to future losses. Conversely, a "gain spiral" can also occur, where individuals with more resources are better equipped to acquire even more.

In the context of the relationship between organizational silence and job stress among university lecturers, the COR theory can be applied as follows:

- **Organizational Silence as a Threat to Resources:** When lecturers feel unable to voice their opinions or concerns due to fear of negative repercussions, it can be perceived as a threat to their resources. For instance, speaking up could jeopardize their job security (object resource), their professional reputation (personal characteristic), or their

relationships with colleagues and superiors (condition). This perceived threat of resource loss can trigger a stress response.

- **Job Stress as a Result of Resource Loss:** Job stress can be seen as a direct consequence of a resource loss spiral. For example, a lecturer who is silenced might feel a loss of control and autonomy (a key energy resource). This loss can lead to reduced job satisfaction and motivation, which in turn can lead to a decline in their teaching performance (a loss of a personal characteristic resource). This cascading effect of resource loss fuels job stress.

- **Silenced Lecturers' Inability to Acquire Resources:** Organisational silence can prevent lecturers from acquiring new resources. For instance, a lecturer who is unable to contribute innovative ideas or raise concerns about inadequate research funding might miss opportunities for promotion or professional development (gaining new object and condition resources). The failure to acquire these resources, despite their investment of effort and time, can also be a significant source of stress.

In essence, the COR theory provides a powerful lens through which to analyze how the organizational climate of silence creates a stressful environment for lecturers. It highlights how the fear of losing resources, the actual loss of resources, and the inability to gain resources contribute to the psychological and physiological strain that defines job stress.

### **2.8.2. JOB DEMANDS-RESOURCES (JD-R) MODEL**

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, developed by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001), offers a robust framework for understanding the causes of job-related stress and burnout. This model posits that all job characteristics can be classified into two broad categories: job demands and job resources.

Job demands are the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are associated with certain physiological and psychological costs. These demands are not inherently negative; however, when they are excessive or exceed an employee's capacity, they can lead to exhaustion, stress, and burnout. For university lecturers in Benin City, these demands might include a heavy teaching load, pressure to publish research, administrative duties, and managing student expectations. The JD-R model suggests that high job demands can initiate a "health impairment process," leading to negative outcomes like chronic stress and emotional exhaustion.

Conversely, job resources are the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that are instrumental in achieving work goals, reducing job demands and their associated costs, and stimulating personal growth and development. These resources can buffer the negative effects of job demands and foster a "motivational process" that leads to engagement, job satisfaction, and improved performance. For lecturers, job resources could be autonomy, social support from colleagues and management, opportunities for professional development, and constructive performance feedback.

The central tenet of the JD-R model is that job strain and stress arise from an imbalance between high job demands and a lack of sufficient job resources. While high demands can lead to burnout, job resources act as a protective factor, helping employees cope with demanding work environments. For instance, a university lecturer dealing with a high teaching load (demand) might experience less stress if they have strong social support (resource) and a sense of control over their work (resource).

Organizational silence, in the context of the JD-R model, can be viewed as a significant lack of job resources, particularly social support and autonomy. When lecturers are unable to voice their concerns or opinions, they are deprived of a crucial resource for coping with their job demands. This deprivation exacerbates the negative impact of high job demands, making them more susceptible to job stress and burnout. Thus, the JD-R model provides a compelling theoretical basis for understanding how organizational silence directly contributes to increased job stress among university lecturers.

### **2.8.3. TRANSACTIONAL MODEL OF STRESS**

The transactional model of stress and coping, developed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984), offers a person-centered perspective on stress. Unlike models that view stress as a direct response to an external event, the transactional model emphasizes the subjective and dynamic interaction between an individual and their environment. Stress, in this framework, is not a property of the situation itself but a result of a person's cognitive appraisal of that situation.

The model outlines two key stages of appraisal:

•**Primary Appraisal:** When an individual encounters a potential stressor, they first evaluate its significance. They ask themselves, "Is this a threat to my well-being?" This appraisal can lead to one of three outcomes:

Irrelevant: The situation is deemed to have no personal significance.

Benign-positive: The situation is perceived as positive or neutral.

Stressful: The situation is appraised as a threat, a harm/loss, or a challenge. A threat anticipates future harm, a harm/loss has already occurred, and a challenge presents an opportunity for growth despite potential risks.

•**Secondary Appraisal:** If a situation is appraised as stressful, the individual then engages in secondary appraisal. This involves evaluating their available resources and coping options. The question here is, "What can I do about this?" This stage assesses an individual's perceived ability to manage or overcome the stressor. An individual with a high sense of self-efficacy and strong social support may feel more equipped to cope than someone who perceives themselves as having limited resources.

Following these appraisals, an individual selects and applies coping strategies, which can be either problem-focused (aimed at changing the stressful situation) or emotion-focused (aimed at managing the emotional response to the stressor).

In the context of organizational silence and job stress among university lecturers in Benin City, the transactional model is particularly relevant. Organizational silence acts as a potent stressor, but its impact is not uniform. For a lecturer, being silenced might be appraised as a significant threat to their professional identity, career progression, and

autonomy (primary appraisal). Their subsequent stress level would then depend on their secondary appraisal, that is, their perceived ability to cope. If they feel they have no recourse or support, their stress will be high. The transactional model highlights that interventions to reduce stress should not only focus on changing the external stressor (organizational silence) but also on equipping individuals with better coping resources and changing their cognitive appraisals.

#### **2.8.4. EFFORT-REWARD IMBALANCE (ERI) MODEL:**

The Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model, originally developed by Siegrist (1996), offers a powerful sociological and psychosocial framework for examining work-related stress. This model is highly relevant to understanding the professional challenges faced by university lecturers in Benin City, particularly when their work environment is characterized by organizational silence. The core tenet of the ERI model is that a sustained imbalance between the high efforts expended by an employee and the low rewards received in return constitutes a significant source of chronic stress, with detrimental effects on health and well-being.

The model is structured around three key components. The first is effort, which encapsulates the demands and obligations placed on the employee. For university lecturers, this includes a demanding combination of teaching large classes, conducting rigorous research for publication, engaging in administrative duties, and supervising students. The intrinsic effort, or overcommitment, is a personality trait in which individuals exhibit an exaggerated sense of responsibility and an inability to detach from

work, thus intensifying the perceived effort (Siegrist, 2012). The second component is reward, which is categorized into three main types: monetary compensation (salary), career prospects (promotion and job security), and socio-emotional rewards (esteem, respect, and appreciation). When these rewards are not perceived as commensurate with the effort invested, an imbalance occurs.

In the context of organizational silence, the ERI model's predictions are particularly pronounced. Organizational silence, defined as the collective withholding of information about problems or ideas from those in authority, directly attacks the socio-emotional reward component. When lecturers are unable to voice their concerns, contribute to decision-making, or offer critical feedback without fear of negative consequences, their need for esteem and professional recognition is profoundly unmet. This lack of a reciprocal, trusting relationship with management means their considerable intellectual and professional efforts are essentially met with a deficit of respect and acknowledgment. The feeling of being undervalued and unheard serves as a potent stressor, even if other rewards like salary are considered adequate.

This persistent state of disequilibrium, where the high extrinsic and intrinsic efforts of a lecturer are met with a low reward of professional esteem, can result in severe job stress. The lecturer may feel a sense of profound injustice, which can lead to psychological distress, burnout, and a heightened vulnerability to both physical and mental health issues (Siegrist & Li, 2016). Therefore, organizational silence can be understood not just as a communication problem but as a direct mechanism for creating a stressful effort-reward

imbalance among university lecturers, with significant implications for their personal health and the overall productivity of their institution.

### **2.8.5. SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY (SET)**

Social Exchange Theory (SET), a foundational sociological and psychological framework, provides a compelling explanation for the relationship between organisational silence and job stress among university lecturers. Originally developed by Homans (1958, 1961) and later refined by Emerson and Blau, SET posits that human interactions are rooted in a cost-benefit analysis. Individuals engage in relationships and exchanges as long as the perceived rewards outweigh the costs. In an organisational context, this theory helps to illuminate why employees, such as university lecturers in Benin City, choose to withhold their voice and how this decision can lead to heightened job stress

The core of SET in the workplace lies in the concept of reciprocity. Lecturers weigh the potential emotional, social, and professional rewards of speaking up against the anticipated costs. If a lecturer perceives that voicing concerns about heavy workloads, inadequate resources, or administrative issues will be ignored, dismissed, or even punished (e.g., through reprimand or ostracism), the cost of speaking up becomes too high. The absence of a reciprocal, positive response from the institution erodes their willingness to engage, leading them to choose silence as a protective mechanism. This aligns with SET's principle that relationships are sustained only when benefits are balanced or exceed costs (Homans, 1961; Blau, 1964).

Furthermore, SET's concepts of comparison level (CL) and comparison level for alternatives (CLalt) are particularly relevant. Lecturers compare their current professional exchange—their input of teaching, research, and service against institutional outputs like recognition, promotion, and support—with what they feel they deserve (CL). When institutional rewards fall short of these expectations, it creates a sense of dissatisfaction. The choice to remain silent, despite this dissatisfaction, is often linked to the comparison level for alternatives (CLalt) the perceived availability of other viable job opportunities. If academic openings are limited, lecturers may feel trapped, leading to acquiescent silence and a build-up of unaddressed stress. This internalised stress, arising from the gap between expectation and reality, contributes significantly to burnout and emotional fatigue.

The psychological contract, an implicit agreement between an employee and their employer, is another crucial element. When universities fail to uphold their end of this contract for example, by not providing timely feedback or equitable treatment lecturers perceive a breach in the social exchange. This perception of being undervalued or disrespected can lead to various forms of silence, including acquiescent (resigned) and defensive (fear-driven) silence. This disengagement further escalates job stress, as the lecturer internalises their feelings of injustice and emotional exhaustion.

Although direct studies applying SET to this specific context are limited, related research in Nigerian academia provides empirical support for these dynamics. Studies on private

Nigerian universities, for instance, have shown that reciprocal relationships, such as those involving professional development and teamwork, significantly influence job satisfaction (Ogbeide, 2017). Another study at the University of Ibadan found that perceived organisational support, a key component of a reciprocal exchange, mediated the negative effects of job stress on creativity (Okikiade, 2019). These findings underscore that a supportive, reciprocal climate reduces stress and encourages a more engaged workforce.

In conclusion, SET offers a robust theoretical framework for understanding the complex interplay between organisational silence and job stress among university lecturers in Benin City. When the institutional cost-benefit calculus is unfavourable marked by low reciprocity, minimal support, and a breach of psychological contracts lecturers rationally opt for silence. This restrained voice, in turn, amplifies job stress as unresolved issues and declining morale erode mental health and a sense of professional efficacy. Enhancing reciprocal exchanges through meaningful feedback, procedural fairness, and a supportive climate can therefore be a crucial strategy for stimulating voice, reducing stress, and improving overall outcomes for both the lecturers and the institution.

#### **2.8.6. ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT THEORY (OST):**

Organisational Support Theory (OST), a prominent framework developed by Eisenberger and his colleagues, offers a compelling explanation for the relationship between job stress, organisational silence, and the employee-organisation relationship. The core of OST is the concept of Perceived Organisational Support (POS) the degree to which

employees believe their organisation values their contributions and genuinely cares about their well-being. According to the theory, when employees perceive strong POS, they develop a sense of obligation to reciprocate, which manifests as increased commitment, job satisfaction, and a willingness to engage constructively. For university lecturers, particularly in challenging environments like Benin City, understanding POS is crucial for explaining their professional behaviours.

In many Nigerian universities, including those in Edo State, lecturers operate under conditions of heavy workloads, limited resources, weak infrastructure, and often, insufficient administrative support. Under these circumstances, OST predicts that low POS will undermine morale and encourage organisational silence. Lecturers' silence is often a rational and self-protective response; they may perceive that speaking up about issues will not yield any positive change and could even lead to negative consequences like reprimand or ostracism. The cost-benefit calculus, therefore, favours silence, which is seen as the safer option.

**OST identifies several key components that shape POS:**

**Fair Treatment and Procedural Justice:** When institutional processes for promotions, performance evaluations, and resource allocation are transparent and equitable, lecturers infer high POS. Conversely, opaque or unfair procedures erode trust and signal to lecturers that their contributions are not valued, leading to disengagement and silence.

**Supervisory and Managerial Support:** The behaviour of immediate supervisors and departmental heads is a critical indicator of organisational support. In environments with

absentee or unapproachable leadership, lecturers feel a lack of care and support, which degrades POS and stifles their willingness to voice concerns.

**Recognition and Assistance:** Acknowledging lecturers' achievements in teaching or research and providing timely assistance when needed are tangible signs of support. When lecturers' efforts go unnoticed or their requests for help are ignored, they perceive a lack of organisational care and may withdraw their professional input

The tenets of OST are strongly supported by empirical studies conducted within the Nigerian context. Research has shown a significant positive association between POS and job-related well-being among Nigerian university lecturers, indicating that perceived support is vital for mental health and satisfaction. A study in Lagos also found that POS was inversely related to job stress, suggesting that even moderate increases in support can significantly reduce stress levels. Furthermore, POS has been shown to enhance employee creativity, while high job stress predicts a decrease in it underscoring that a supportive environment is essential for innovation and positive professional outcomes.

OST provides a clear explanation for the prevalence of organisational silence in universities in Edo State. When POS is low, lecturers feel less emotionally and psychologically invested in their institution. They believe their voice will not be reciprocated and may even lead to retaliation. Consequently, silence becomes a coping mechanism for an unsupportive environment. This sustained silence, however, amplifies job stress as unresolved grievances and declining morale contribute to emotional

exhaustion, reduced motivation, and a diminished sense of professional efficacy. Improving POS through fair processes, visible managerial support, and meaningful recognition can counteract this cycle, fostering a climate where lecturers feel safe to speak up, thereby reducing stress and improving overall institutional effectiveness.

### **2.8.7. COGNITIVE APPRAISAL THEORY:**

Cognitive Appraisal Theory, primarily developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), provides a robust framework for understanding how individuals perceive and respond to stress. The theory posits that stress is not an inherent property of an event but rather the outcome of an individual's subjective evaluation, or "cognitive appraisal," of that event. This process unfolds in two stages: primary appraisal, where an event is evaluated as a threat, harm/loss, challenge, or irrelevant to one's well-being; and secondary appraisal, where the individual assesses their available coping resources to meet the demands of the situation. This transactional model is exceptionally relevant for explaining the job stress and organisational silence among university lecturers in Benin City, Edo State.

Lecturers in this environment face numerous job demands, including heavy workloads, role ambiguity, inadequate infrastructure, and constant pressure to meet promotion criteria. The primary appraisal stage is critical here. For some lecturers, these demands may be appraised as threats to their career progression, physical health, or mental well-being, leading to anxiety and emotional exhaustion. For others, these same demands might be appraised as challenges opportunities for personal and professional growth. The difference in these appraisals fundamentally shapes their emotional and behavioural

responses. A threat appraisal is more likely to trigger a stress response, while a challenge appraisal, if coupled with a belief in one's ability to cope, can be motivating.

This leads to the secondary appraisal stage, where lecturers evaluate their coping resources. They ask themselves if they have the necessary skills, autonomy, and support to manage the demands they face. In many Nigerian universities, formal support structures such as mental health services, mentorship programs, and transparent administrative processes are often weak or non-existent. When lecturers perceive a lack of control or insufficient coping resources, they are more likely to resort to emotion-focused coping strategies, such as withdrawal or silence, rather than problem-focused ones like voicing concerns or negotiating workload adjustments. Organisational silence, in this context, is a direct coping response to a negative appraisal.

The decision to remain silent is often rooted in a cognitive appraisal of the act of speaking up as ineffective or risky. If lecturers have a history of their feedback being ignored or, worse, met with punishment, they will appraise the act of voicing concerns as more stressful and threatening than remaining silent. Over time, this appraisal reinforces silence as a default coping mechanism, perpetuating a cycle of institutional inertia and personal strain. Empirical studies support this mechanism; for instance, research on teachers in Portugal found that those who appraised work-family conflict as a threat experienced significantly higher burnout, regardless of other factors. This suggests that a lecturer's interpretation of institutional conditions is a powerful determinant of whether they experience burnout or remain resilient.

In the Benin City university context, a combination of role overload, unclear expectations, and poor administrative responsiveness heightens threat appraisals. Without perceived coping potential due to scarce resources or low support lecturers resort to silence, which manifests as emotional exhaustion and disengagement. The consequences of such threat-driven appraisals are far-reaching, including diminished teaching quality, reduced research productivity, and a higher risk of turnover. Conversely, when institutions foster an environment where lecturers can appraise stressors as manageable challenges and perceive adequate support, they are more likely to engage in problem-focused coping and constructive communication. Therefore, to mitigate silence and stress, universities should implement policies that reframe demands as manageable challenges, build lecturers' coping resources, and create safe channels for communication.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory offers a powerful lens through which to understand how university lecturers evaluate stress and choose coping strategies, including organisational silence, in the face of systemic job stress. Threat appraisals coupled with low perceived coping resources foster withdrawal and silence, while challenge appraisals with sufficient support enable voice. To mitigate silence and stress in Benin City universities, institutional policies should aim to reframe demands as manageable challenges, build lecturers' coping resources, and create channels for safe upward communication.

## **2.9. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The complex relationship between organizational silence and job stress among university lecturers in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, can be comprehensively understood through an integrated theoretical framework. This framework synthesizes several complementary models, each providing a unique yet interconnected lens on the psychological, structural, and social factors that contribute to a culture of suppressed voice and chronic stress. By combining the Transactional Model of Stress and Cognitive Appraisal Theory, Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model, the Effort–Reward Imbalance (ERI) Model, and Social Exchange and Organizational Support Theories, a robust explanation for this phenomenon is achieved.

At the core of understanding job stress is the Transactional Model of Stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), a framework that emphasizes the psychological processes of Cognitive Appraisal. This model posits that stress is not an inherent property of an event but rather an outcome of a dynamic interaction between the individual and their environment. The process begins with primary appraisal, where an individual evaluates a situation as either benign, irrelevant, or stressful. A university lecturer facing an overwhelming workload or a lack of administrative support would likely appraise these conditions as stressful. This is followed by secondary appraisal, where the individual evaluates their ability to cope with the stressor. In a perceived unsupportive and punitive environment, a lecturer may appraise their ability to cope by speaking up as inadequate or futile, leading them to search for alternative coping mechanisms.

One of the most powerful explanations for the choice of coping is provided by Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). This theory asserts that individuals strive to acquire, retain, and protect their resources psychological (e.g., self-efficacy), social (e.g., support), and material (e.g., time, income). Stress arises when these resources are threatened, lost, or when an individual invests resources without a proportional gain. In the context of university lecturers, voicing concerns is not only a form of coping but an investment of resources. When lecturers have experienced prior instances where their voice was ignored or punished, they learn that speaking up threatens their resources. Therefore, silence becomes a strategic, albeit maladaptive, coping mechanism to conserve limited resources and avoid further loss, directly linking silence to heightened stress.

These individual-level psychological processes are heavily influenced by the work environment's structural conditions, as explained by the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2016) and the Effort–Reward Imbalance (ERI) Model (Siegrist, 1996). The JD-R model distinguishes between job demands (e.g., heavy teaching loads, research pressure) and job resources (e.g., autonomy, colleague support). The model predicts that when demands are high and resources are low, lecturers are prone to emotional exhaustion and burnout. The ERI model complements this by focusing on the balance between high effort and low rewards (e.g., salary, recognition, job security). In many academic settings in Benin City, lecturers exert substantial effort

with minimal rewards and limited resources. These structural imbalances create a chronic state of stress, making lecturers less likely to expend the energy required to speak up, thus reinforcing organizational silence.

The social and relational context of the workplace is captured by Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) and Organizational Support Theory (OST) (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). SET posits that employee-employer relationships are based on a norm of reciprocity. Lecturers will voice their concerns only when they believe the university will reciprocate with a fair response and genuine support. OST extends this by focusing on Perceived Organizational Support (POS), which is the belief that the organization values their well-being and contributions. When POS is low as is often the case in institutions with poor feedback systems and unclear promotion criteria lecturers view the social contract as broken. They perceive their voice as unrewarded and unsafe, leading them to withdraw from the exchange by remaining silent. This lack of perceived support is a significant stressor in itself and directly contributes to feelings of isolation and disillusionment.

In synthesis, this integrated framework provides a multi-level explanation for the problem. The structural imbalances highlighted by the JD-R and ERI models create an environment rife with demands and deficient in resources and rewards. This environment triggers lecturers' cognitive appraisal, as per the Transactional Model, causing them to perceive a threat to their resources, as explained by COR Theory. The absence of a reciprocal social exchange and low Perceived Organizational Support then confirms their

belief that speaking up is a high-risk, low-reward endeavor. Consequently, silence becomes a rational coping mechanism, which in turn reinforces the underlying issues and perpetuates a cycle of chronic job stress. This framework effectively links institutional culture, individual psychology, and social dynamics to illuminate the complex and detrimental relationship between organizational silence and job stress among university lecturers in Benin City.

## **2.10. EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON ORGANISATIONAL SILENCE AND JOB STRESS**

While empirical literature directly linking organizational silence and job stress among university lecturers in Benin City is sparse, a substantial body of research across Nigeria and from international contexts offers valuable insight into this critical relationship. These studies provide the evidence base for how silence and stress manifest in higher education, highlighting a consistent pattern of detrimental outcomes for both academic staff and their institutions.

Research on job stress among Nigerian academics has consistently revealed a high prevalence of work-related strain. A study conducted at Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Anambra State by Chukwuemeka *et al.* (2022) found that lecturers reporting elevated levels of stress were significantly impacted in terms of their quality of life and coping mechanisms. The study identified key stressors such as role overload, work–family conflict, and inadequate institutional support as significant contributors to stress, irrespective of academic rank or years of service. Furthermore, an earlier assessment by

Ofoegbu and Nwadiani (2006) across Nigerian universities identified major stressors including heavy workload, student-related pressures, research demands, and administrative hassles. Both studies concluded that these demanding conditions are strongly correlated with heightened anxiety and diminished job satisfaction among academic staff.

The link between organizational silence and institutional dysfunction is also well-documented in the Nigerian context. A study of public tertiary educational institutions in Lagos State, for example, examined how organizational silence and presenteeism (the act of working while ill) adversely impacted staff productivity and well-being (Ibrahim & Okon, 2021). The researchers found that silence prevented staff from reporting unmanageable workload challenges or personal health concerns, forcing many to work in sub-optimal conditions. This culture of silence, combined with presenteeism, was found to undermine both individual well-being and institutional effectiveness. Similarly, research on polytechnic staff in Southwest Nigeria has shown that silent work climates, particularly those with rigid leadership styles, are linked to reduced job satisfaction and productivity, suggesting that the suppression of voice stifles innovation and engagement among employees.

International evidence further strengthens the empirical link between silence and stress. A study on expatriate employees, for instance, found a significant association between organizational silence, higher job stress, and lower organizational commitment (Al-

Mamari & Al-Dahri, 2022). This research highlights how the act of withholding one's opinions, especially in highly constrained work environments, functions as a psychological strain that contributes to emotional exhaustion and intentions to leave the organization. Similarly, a study of nursing staff in Egypt found that organizational silence mediated the relationship between workplace ostracism and procrastination behaviours (El-Sayed & Salem, 2020). While in a different sector, this finding reflects a core principle: silence driven by a sense of exclusion and powerlessness harms well-being and leads to disengagement, a phenomenon directly transferable to the academic setting.

Synthesizing these empirical findings provides a clear picture applicable to university lecturers in Benin City. First, lecturers in the region likely experience similar occupational stressors as their counterparts nationwide; heavy student loads, bottlenecks in the promotion process, weak infrastructure, and a lack of social support. Second, if the institutional culture in Benin City universities mirrors that found in other Nigerian studies, a climate of silence is likely prevalent, where staff opt to withhold feedback out of fear of negative outcomes or a belief that their voice is pointless. Finally, and most critically, this silence itself becomes a significant stressor. The empirical evidence suggests that as grievances go unaddressed and support remains elusive, lecturers experience a debilitating stress-silence cycle. Without effective feedback loops, the well-being of the individual deteriorates, which, in turn, impacts overall institutional performance and vitality.

In conclusion, empirical research from both national and international contexts consistently shows that organizational silence is a strong correlate of job stress and its associated negative outcomes, including reduced productivity, low morale, and turnover intentions. For university lecturers in Benin City, these dynamics are highly relevant. Breaking this cycle requires a deliberate shift towards fostering a culture of voice, where supportive leadership and robust feedback systems are established to value and respond to staff input, thereby relieving job stress and enhancing institutional effectiveness.

#### **2.10.1. RESEARCH GAPS**

**Limited Empirical Data on the Specific Population:** Existing studies on job stress and organizational silence often focus on general populations or sectors outside of academia. Research specifically examining university lecturers in Benin City is scarce. This geographical and professional specificity is crucial because the unique socio-cultural and institutional environment of Nigerian universities likely influences both the manifestation and impact of these phenomena. Factors such as a hierarchical power structure, limited resources, and the unique pressure to perform in a developing nation context may shape how lecturers experience and respond to job stress and organizational silence.

**Lack of Causal and Correlational Analysis:** While a general assumption exists that organizational silence contributes to job stress, and vice versa, there is a lack of rigorous empirical research that establishes a clear causal or correlational relationship between the two within the specified population. Many studies are qualitative or descriptive, failing to use quantitative methods to determine the strength and direction of the relationship.

Understanding whether organizational silence is a precursor to increased job stress or a consequence of it is a critical gap that needs to be addressed through a well-designed study.

**Exploring Mediating and Moderating Variables:** The relationship between organizational silence and job stress is likely not a simple one-to-one interaction. Several variables could mediate or moderate this relationship. For instance, the type of leadership style (e.g., transformational vs. autocratic), the level of social support from colleagues and management, and individual personality traits like resilience or locus of control could all play a significant role. Research is needed to explore how these factors influence the dynamics between organizational silence and job stress, providing a more nuanced understanding of the issue.

**Investigating the Mechanisms of Silence and Stress:** Research has not sufficiently explored the specific mechanisms through which organizational silence leads to or is influenced by job stress in the academic environment. For example, what specific stressors (e.g., administrative overload, student-related issues, pressure to publish) are most likely to induce silence? Conversely, how does the act of being silent (e.g., the feeling of being unheard, the fear of retribution) itself become a significant source of stress? Unpacking these mechanisms is essential for developing effective interventions.

**Focus on Intervention and Mitigation Strategies:** The majority of existing research is diagnostic, focusing on identifying the presence of organizational silence and job stress. There is a notable gap in studies that propose and test specific interventions or mitigation

strategies tailored to the unique challenges of university lecturers in Benin City. Future research should not only identify the problem but also explore practical solutions, such as workshops on effective communication, leadership training, or the establishment of clear, safe channels for feedback.

In conclusion, the research gaps identified above highlight the need for a more comprehensive and context-specific investigation into the relationship between organizational silence and job stress among university lecturers in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. Addressing these gaps through rigorous empirical research will not only contribute valuable knowledge to the fields of organizational psychology and occupational health but also provide a critical foundation for developing targeted and effective strategies to improve the well-being and productivity of academic staff in the region.

## **2.11. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

This conceptual framework is designed to illustrate the hypothesized relationships between organizational silence and job stress among university lecturers in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. It posits that organizational silence the collective withholding of valuable information, concerns, and opinions is a significant contributor to job stress. The framework goes beyond a simple linear relationship by incorporating key mediating and moderating variables that are expected to influence the magnitude and nature of this relationship. This model is grounded in several well-established theoretical frameworks,

including the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, and the Transactional Model of Stress.

Organizational silence is the core independent variable in this framework. It is conceptualized as a multi-faceted construct, not merely the absence of voice. Drawing on the work of Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003), silence is understood through its motivations:

**Acquiescent silence:** Arising from a sense of resignation or futility; the belief that speaking up will not change anything.

**Defensive silence:** Stemming from a fear of negative consequences, such as punishment, ridicule, or damage to one's career.

**Prosocial silence:** Motivated by a desire to protect the organization, colleagues, or one's superior, often by withholding critical feedback.

The conceptual framework suggests that these different types of silence, particularly acquiescent and defensive silence, act as a demand on lecturers, consuming psychological resources and preventing them from addressing the very issues causing stress.

Job stress is the primary dependent variable. In this context, job stress is a multifaceted psychological and physiological response to job demands and resources that lecturers perceive as a threat or challenge (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It can manifest in various ways, including:

**Physiological symptoms:** Headaches, fatigue, or changes in appetite.

**Psychological symptoms:** Anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, and burnout.

**Behavioral outcomes:** Decreased job performance, absenteeism, and cynicism towards the job.

### **The Core Relationship: Silence and Stress**

The central proposition of this framework is that organizational silence is positively related to job stress. Drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), lecturers who engage in silence are effectively losing a critical resource: their voice and sense of control. This resource loss creates a state of psychological strain, which is a key component of job stress.

Furthermore, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001) provides a lens through which to understand this relationship. In this model, high job demands (e.g., heavy workload, research pressure) and a lack of job resources (e.g., social support, autonomy) lead to stress. A climate of organizational silence can be seen as a lack of a crucial resource a channel for effective communication and problem-solving thereby exacerbating the negative impact of other job demands.

The relationship between organizational silence and job stress is not direct but is mediated and moderated by several factors:

### **Mediating Variables:**

**Psychological Strain:** This framework posits that organizational silence leads to feelings of powerlessness and emotional exhaustion, which in turn cause job stress. The act of withholding one's true thoughts can be a mentally taxing process, serving as a direct mechanism (a mediator) through which silence contributes to stress.

**Perceived Organizational Support (POS):** Lecturers who perceive their institution as unsupportive are more likely to engage in silence (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). This lack of support can also be a direct cause of stress. Therefore, POS can mediate the relationship, as organizational silence is both a symptom of low POS and a contributor to the stress caused by it.

**Fear of Negative Consequences:** According to the Transactional Model of Stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the fear of punishment or ridicule for speaking up is a primary appraisal of threat. This fear, a direct result of a climate of silence, acts as a mediator by turning the silent environment into a significant stressor.

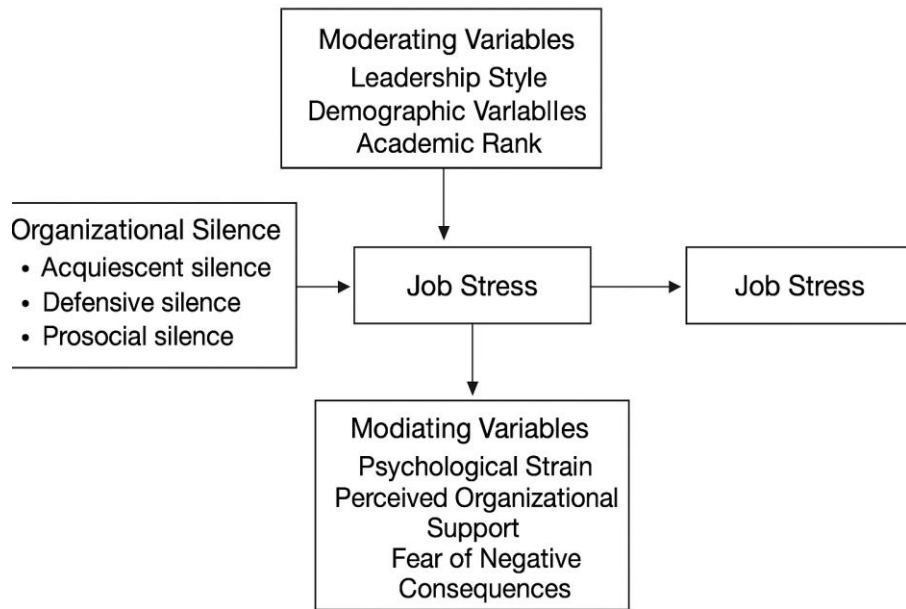
**Moderating Variables:**

**Leadership Style:** The type of leadership a lecturer experiences can moderate the silence-stress link. An autocratic or unsupportive leadership style may strengthen the relationship, as it creates an environment where silence is seen as the safest option. Conversely, a transformational or supportive leadership style may weaken the relationship by fostering an atmosphere of psychological safety and encouraging voice, thereby mitigating stress (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

**Demographic Variables:** The framework suggests that the strength of the silence-stress relationship may differ across demographic groups. For instance, younger lecturers or those with less experience might be more susceptible to defensive silence due to a greater fear of reprisal, leading to higher levels of stress.

**Academic Rank:** A lecturer's rank (e.g., assistant lecturer vs. professor) may moderate the relationship. Senior lecturers might feel more empowered to speak up and thus be less affected by a silent culture, whereas junior lecturers might feel more constrained, leading to a stronger link between silence and stress.

This conceptual framework provides a comprehensive model for investigating the complex relationship between organizational silence and job stress among university lecturers in Benin City. It moves beyond a simple correlation by incorporating key theoretical perspectives and identifying crucial mediating and moderating variables. By adopting this framework, future research can not only confirm the existence of this relationship in the local context but also provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and factors that influence it. The findings will be invaluable for developing targeted interventions aimed at promoting a more open communication climate and improving the overall well-being of academic staff.



*Source: Researcher's Construct (2025).*

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE, AND LIMITATIONS**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In today's academic landscape, university lecturers are faced with growing complexities in their professional roles, stemming from increased expectations in teaching, research output, student mentorship, and administrative obligations. These rising demands, when combined with inadequate institutional support, have made higher education an increasingly stressful occupational domain, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. One psychological construct that has recently gained traction for its covert yet

profound influence on employee well-being is organizational silence. This refers to the intentional decision of employees to withhold information, feedback, or concerns due to fear, futility, or loyalty (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

In Nigeria, the higher education sector continues to grapple with systemic issues such as underfunding, bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of transparency in promotions, and leadership styles that discourage upward communication. Within this context, lecturers often refrain from expressing genuine concerns about institutional shortcomings, which may include inadequate resources, unfair practices, or administrative mismanagement. While prior studies have examined traditional sources of job stress—such as workload, poor infrastructure, and limited career progression opportunities (Ofoegbu & Alugbuo, 2013; Adeosun, 2018)—there remains a paucity of empirical evidence exploring the psychological toll exerted by organizational silence. The phenomenon is particularly problematic when embedded in a supervisor silence climate, where leaders are perceived as unapproachable or dismissive of feedback, further reinforcing a culture of silence and disengagement.

This study focuses on lecturers in Benin City, Edo State, as a microcosm of the broader Nigerian academic environment. The aim is to explore how various forms of organizational silence—acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial—contribute to job stress among university lecturers. By doing so, the study addresses a critical gap in both organizational behavior and occupational health research within the African context.

Understanding the link between organizational silence and job stress is particularly relevant given the essential role lecturers play in national development through knowledge production, student development, and social transformation. When lecturers are chronically stressed and silenced, their capacity to innovate, engage, and deliver quality education is significantly impaired. Therefore, uncovering these underlying stressors can inform evidence-based strategies to improve institutional policies, promote open communication, and safeguard the mental well-being of academic professionals.

In essence, this research situates organizational silence not merely as a byproduct of institutional culture but as a direct contributor to job-related stress. By focusing on university lecturers in Benin City, the study offers contextualized insights into how silence operates within Nigerian academia and how it can be strategically addressed to enhance productivity, job satisfaction, and institutional health.

### **3.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

This study investigated the relationship between organizational silence and job stress among university lecturers in Benin City, Nigeria. The findings reveal that organizational silence is a significant but often overlooked predictor of job stress in academic settings. The three dimensions of silence—acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial—were found to contribute uniquely to stress experiences among lecturers.

- Acquiescent silence, stemming from feelings of futility, was linked to emotional exhaustion and low morale.

- Defensive silence, motivated by fear of repercussions, contributed to anxiety and psychological strain.
- Prosocial silence, although seemingly well-intentioned, masked systemic issues and led to prolonged stress due to unresolved challenges.

Additionally, the supervisor silence climate—the shared perception that supervisors are unreceptive to feedback—emerged as a powerful contextual factor reinforcing silence behaviors and compounding stress levels. These findings underscore how a culture of silence in academic institutions, particularly within the hierarchical and bureaucratic structure of Nigerian universities, suppresses open communication and fosters a psychologically unsafe work environment.

### **3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

In light of the findings, several practical recommendations are proposed to mitigate job stress and reduce organizational silence among university lecturers:

1. **Promote Psychological Safety:** Institutions must foster environments where lecturers feel safe to express concerns without fear of retribution. Leadership training programs should emphasize openness, empathy, and active listening.
2. **Strengthen Communication Channels:** Universities should establish formal and confidential feedback mechanisms—such as anonymous suggestion systems and staff forums—to ensure employee voices are heard.

3. **Supportive Leadership Development:** Invest in leadership that values transparency and dialogue. Heads of departments and senior administrators should be trained in inclusive management practices that reduce supervisor silence climates.
4. **Enhance HR Practices:** Implement fair promotion and appraisal systems to reduce defensiveness and resignation. Creating clear role expectations and reducing excessive workload can minimize stress triggers.
5. **Encourage Research on Organizational Culture:** Institutions should regularly assess internal communication and cultural dynamics to proactively identify and address emerging stressors.

### **3.4 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

This study contributes significantly to organizational behavior and occupational health literature by:

- Providing a multidimensional perspective on organizational silence, emphasizing its various forms and their distinct psychological impacts.
- Contextualizing silence within Nigerian higher education, offering localized insights that enrich the predominantly Western-centric discourse on employee voice and stress.

- Introducing the concept of supervisor silence climate into the African academic context, highlighting its relevance in hierarchical institutions.
- Demonstrating the interconnectedness between silence behaviors and job stress, which may inform interventions aimed at improving academic staff well-being and institutional effectiveness.

### **3.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations:

- **Geographical Scope:** The study was limited to lecturers in Benin City, which may restrict the generalizability of findings to other parts of Nigeria or Sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Self-Reported Data:** Reliance on self-administered questionnaires may introduce bias due to social desirability or underreporting of sensitive information.
- **Cross-Sectional Design:** The study's design precludes causal inferences, limiting the ability to determine the directionality of relationships between silence and stress.

### **6.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

To build on the current study, future research should consider:

- Longitudinal studies to examine causal links and track how silence and stress evolve over time in academic settings.

- Comparative studies across multiple Nigerian universities or between public and private institutions to enhance generalizability.
- Mixed-method approaches that incorporate interviews or focus groups to gain richer, more nuanced insights into the lived experiences of organizational silence.
- Exploring the role of institutional culture and leadership styles in moderating the relationship between silence and stress.

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