

Exploring Shame in Construction Health and Safety in South Africa

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Abstract

This study examines the role of shame as an emotional and ethical factor influencing health and safety practices in the South African construction industry. Using a literature review methodology, the research synthesises existing studies on emotional responses, construction health and safety, and ethics to analyse how shame impacts professional behaviour and decision-making in the construction industry. The study focuses on the unique challenges of health and safety in South Africa, including high rates of workplace accidents, non-compliance with safety standards, and ethical lapses that compromise worker well-being. Shame often arises when construction professionals fail to uphold health and safety standards, leading to potential reputational damage and emotional distress. This response can act as a driver for improved accountability and adherence to safety protocols, but may also result in defensiveness or avoidance behaviours that hinder progress. The research findings highlight the cultural dimensions of shame in South Africa, where collectivist values and community-focused approaches influence how shame is experienced and addressed. The study also emphasises the critical role of education and training in promoting ethical awareness and emotional intelligence among construction professionals. By addressing shame constructively, the industry can enhance compliance with health and safety regulations, promote worker well-being, and contribute to a culture of ethical responsibility. This study offers insights into leveraging emotional dynamics to improve health and safety outcomes, with implications for policy development and professional practice in the South African construction industry.

Keywords: Shame, Health and Safety, Construction Industry, South Africa, Ethical Accountability

1. Introduction

The construction industry plays a vital role in South Africa's economic development, yet it continues to face significant challenges regarding workplace health and safety compliance (Agumba & Haupt, 2018). Despite regulatory frameworks and professional standards, the sector reports persistently high rates of accidents, injuries, and fatalities compared to other industries in the region (Construction Industry Development Board [cidb], 2023). While technical and procedural aspects of safety management have been extensively studied, the emotional and psychological dimensions that influence safety behaviours remain understudied, particularly in the South African context.

The concept of shame, as a powerful emotional response to perceived failure or transgression, emerges as a critical yet unexplored factor in construction health and safety practices. Shame differs from guilt in that it focuses on the self rather than the behaviour, potentially triggering more profound psychological responses that affect professional decision-making and compliance (Tangney et al., 2019). In the construction industry, where decisions can have life-or-death consequences, understanding the role of shame becomes particularly relevant. South Africa's construction sector operates within a unique cultural and social context, characterised by strong collectivist values and community-oriented perspectives (Emuze & James, 2013; Oyeowbi et al., 2020). These cultural dimensions

significantly influence how shame is experienced, expressed, and managed within professional settings. The intersection of traditional African values with modern construction practices creates a complex environment where emotional responses to safety violations may differ from those observed in Western contexts (Sherratt, & Aboagye-Nimo, 2022). The high prevalence of workplace accidents in South African construction sites often stems from systematic failures in safety protocol implementation. Recent statistics indicate that the construction sector accounts for approximately 12% of all workplace fatalities in the country, despite employing only 8% of the formal workforce (Department of Employment and Labour, 2022). These numbers suggest underlying issues beyond mere technical compliance, pointing to deeper psychological and emotional factors that influence safety-related behaviours and decisions.

Shame can manifest in various ways within the construction industry, from individual responses to safety violations to organisational cultures that either suppress or acknowledge emotional responses to safety failures. Construction professionals may experience shame when their actions or decisions lead to accidents or near-misses, when they fail to maintain safety standards, or when their organisations face public scrutiny for safety lapses. This emotional response can either motivate improved safety practices or lead to defensive behaviours that perpetuate unsafe conditions (McCall & Pruchnicki, 2017). The role of leadership in

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addressing shame within construction organisations cannot be understated. Research indicates that leaders who acknowledge and constructively address emotional responses to safety failures are more successful in building sustainable safety cultures (Asad et al., 2022). However, in South Africa, where hierarchical organisational structures often prevail, addressing emotional aspects of safety management may present unique challenges and opportunities.

Education and training emerge as critical components in managing shame's influence on safety practices. Traditional safety training programs typically focus on technical knowledge and procedural compliance, often neglecting the emotional competencies necessary for effective safety management (Wang et al., 2021). Incorporating emotional intelligence and ethical awareness into professional development programs could enhance the industry's capacity to address shame constructively. The relationship between shame and ethical accountability in construction safety presents a complex dynamic. While shame can serve as a natural deterrent to unsafe practices, excessive or mismanaged shame may lead to the concealment of safety issues or resistance to reporting incidents (Daniels & Robertson, 2019). Understanding this dynamic is crucial for developing effective safety management strategies that balance emotional responses with professional responsibilities.

This study examines the intricate relationships between shame, safety practices, and professional behaviour in the South African construction industry. By analysing how shame influences decision-making and compliance with safety regulations, the research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of emotional factors in construction safety management. This understanding is crucial for developing more effective approaches to safety training, policy implementation, and organisational culture development. The findings of this research have significant implications for both practice and policy in the construction industry. By acknowledging and addressing the role of shame in safety behaviours, organisations can develop more effective strategies for promoting compliance and promoting a culture of safety.

Additionally, policymakers can benefit from understanding how emotional factors influence safety outcomes when designing regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms. Through examining shame's role in construction health and safety, this study aims to bridge the gap between emotional responses and practical safety management in the South African construction industry. The insights gained may contribute to developing more holistic approaches to safety management that acknowledge the technical and emotional aspects of workplace safety.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Exploring Shame in Construction Health and Safety in South Africa*

Shame, a deeply personal and emotional response to perceived failures or ethical lapses, significantly impacts professional behaviour and decision-making (Tangney et al., 2007). In the construction industry, where compliance with health and safety standards is critical, shame can arise when lapses result in harm or public scrutiny. South Africa's construction sector faces unique challenges, including high rates of workplace accidents, systemic corruption, and non-compliance with safety protocols. For instance, the Construction Industry Development Board (cidb) reported over 10,000 workplace incidents in a single year, reflecting a pressing need for improved safety practices (cidb, 2009). Understanding how shame influences these dynamics is crucial, as it can either motivate adherence to health and safety standards or create barriers to accountability. This literature review synthesises research to explore the dual role of shame as a driver and barrier to health and safety compliance within South Africa's construction industry. By examining cultural dimensions and educational implications, it aims to provide actionable insights for enhancing ethical accountability and promoting safer practices.

Shame is a complex and multifaceted emotion, deeply tied to ethical and moral considerations, which arises when individuals perceive themselves as failing to meet societal or professional standards (Lewis, 1971). Unlike guilt, which relates to specific actions, shame implicates the self, often triggering feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy (Tangney et al., 2007). In professional settings, shame functions as both an emotional response and a regulatory mechanism, influencing behaviour and decision-making. This dynamic is particularly evident in industries such as construction, where adherence to health and safety standards is critical. In South Africa, the construction industry is marked by high rates of workplace accidents and fatalities, with two workers reportedly dying weekly due to safety lapses (cidb, 2009). These incidents often evoke shame among professionals and organisations, impacting their ability to comply with safety regulations. Shame in this context not only reflects personal failure but also carries reputational and ethical implications, driving individuals and organisations to address safety lapses (Daniels & Robinson, 2019; Mayer et al., 2017).

South Africa's collectivist cultural framework amplifies the significance of shame, linking it to communal values and shared responsibility (Gade, 2012). Professionals in this setting are influenced by personal ethics and societal expectations, which shape how shame is experienced and addressed. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for leveraging

shame constructively to promote compliance with health and safety standards. Additionally, recent research highlights the intersection of shame with structural factors such as corruption and resource constraints, which exacerbate safety challenges in South Africa's construction industry (Kwinika & Marnewick, 2018). These insights underscore the need for a nuanced approach to addressing shame, integrating emotional intelligence, ethical training, and policy reforms to enhance health and safety outcomes.

When constructively addressed, shame can serve as a motivator for accountability and reform. Research suggests that public scrutiny following safety lapses often drives organisations to implement stricter safety measures and enhance compliance (Ali et al., 2024). For example, the Tongaat Mall collapse in 2013, attributed to structural failures, led to increased regulatory scrutiny and safety reforms in South Africa (Kwinika & Marnewick, 2018). Leadership plays a pivotal role in channelling shame into positive outcomes. Leaders who acknowledge organisational failures and foster a culture of accountability can harness shame constructively to promote a proactive safety culture (Daniels & Robinson, 2019; Yazdi, 2025). In South Africa, initiatives such as the Green Building Council's safety guidelines have encouraged ethical practices and fostered industry-wide improvements. Conversely, shame can act as a barrier to compliance when it leads to defensiveness or avoidance. Excessive shame, particularly when unresolved, can result in individuals concealing mistakes or resisting safety interventions out of fear of reputational damage (Tangney et al., 2007). This dynamic is evident in South Africa's construction industry, where systemic challenges such as corruption exacerbate the negative impacts of shame (CIDB, 2009). The Tongaat Mall collapse highlights how unaddressed shame can hinder accountability. Investigations revealed attempts to deflect blame rather than address systemic issues, delaying meaningful reforms (Kwinika & Marnewick, 2018). Such behaviours perpetuate unsafe practices and undermine efforts to improve health and safety standards.

South Africa's cultural framework significantly shapes how shame is experienced and managed in professional contexts, including the construction industry. Central to South African cultural identity is the philosophy of Ubuntu, which emphasises community, interconnectedness, and shared responsibility (Gade, 2012). In this context, shame is often perceived as not just an individual failure but a collective shortcoming, where the actions of one can reflect on an entire group or community. This cultural orientation can drive collective efforts to address health and safety lapses, as the well-being of the group is prioritised over individual accountability (Chasi, 2014). However, this collectivist perspective can also create barriers to openly addressing safety failures. Admitting to mistakes or

ethical breaches may result in stigma, ostracism, or damage to an individual's social standing within their professional or personal community (Bilal, et al., (2021). Such dynamics may lead professionals to conceal errors, perpetuating unsafe practices rather than addressing them transparently.

Additionally, South Africa's history of apartheid and systemic inequalities continues to influence workplace dynamics. Structural inequities in the construction sector often exacerbate feelings of vulnerability among workers, amplifying the emotional impact of shame when safety standards are compromised (cidb, 2009). Understanding these cultural and historical nuances is essential for designing interventions that address shame constructively, encouraging both individual and collective accountability while respecting cultural values. By integrating cultural sensitivity into health and safety policies, organisations can create environments where shame is managed constructively, fostering a culture of learning and improvement.

Addressing the role of shame in safety practices requires incorporating emotional intelligence and ethical reasoning into construction education. Case-based learning that explores psychological barriers, ethical dilemmas, and safety failures can prepare professionals to navigate these challenges effectively (Lingard & Turner, 2017). For instance, incorporating emotional intelligence training into health and safety curricula has been shown to enhance resilience and ethical decision-making in high-risk professions (Iyanda et al., 2024). In South Africa, training institutions have begun emphasising ethical accountability in their programs. However, there remains a need for targeted interventions that address the cultural and emotional dimensions of shame, ensuring that professionals are equipped to manage these dynamics constructively.

Despite the growing recognition of emotional factors in workplace ethics, research on shame's impact on health and safety practices in South Africa's construction sector remains limited. Key gaps include a lack of longitudinal studies on shame-driven interventions and limited exploration of how gender, socio-economic status, and organisational culture shape experiences of shame. Comparative studies between South Africa and other developing nations could also provide valuable insights into the role of cultural context in shaping these dynamics. Future research should focus on interdisciplinary approaches that integrate psychology, ethics, and construction management to address these gaps effectively. Shame is a powerful emotional and ethical factor influencing health and safety practices in South Africa's construction industry. When constructively managed, it can drive accountability and compliance with safety protocols. However, if left unaddressed, shame can lead to defensiveness and resistance, undermining efforts to improve safety

outcomes. By recognising the cultural dimensions of shame and integrating emotional intelligence into education and training, the industry can foster a culture of ethical responsibility and enhance overall safety performance.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a literature review methodology to explore the role of shame as an emotional and ethical factor influencing health and safety practices in the South African construction industry. A literature review approach is well-suited for synthesising knowledge from diverse fields, identifying trends, and highlighting gaps in the existing research (Snyder, 2019). The methodology integrates interdisciplinary perspectives, including emotional psychology, construction management, and cultural studies, to understand the topic. The review systematically retrieved peer-reviewed articles, academic books, and credible industry reports from established databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Keywords such as “shame in construction,” “health and safety in South Africa,” “ethical accountability,” “emotional dynamics in workplace ethics,” and “cultural influences on workplace behaviour” guided the search. Articles published between 2005 and 2023 were prioritised to ensure a balance between foundational theories and recent developments in the field. Specific inclusion criteria included:

- Empirical or theoretical studies addressing shame in professional or ethical contexts.
- Research on health and safety practices within the construction industry, particularly in South Africa.
- Studies examining the intersection of culture, emotion, and professional behaviour.
- Additionally, South African construction industry reports, such as those from the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB), were included to provide regional context and relevance.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify and categorise key themes across the selected studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis focused on three core areas: shame as a driver for health and safety improvements, exploring how shame motivates professionals and organisations to adhere to ethical and safety standards; shame as a barrier to compliance, examining the negative impacts of shame, such as avoidance behaviours and resistance to accountability; and the cultural dimensions of shame in South Africa, investigating the influence of collectivist values and Ubuntu philosophy on the experience and expression of shame. Each theme was further analysed for its implications on education, policy development, and professional practices in South Africa. Several steps

were implemented to ensure the methodological robustness and credibility of the review. Articles were screened for relevance, methodological rigour, and citation frequency. Multiple databases were utilised to reduce selection bias and capture diverse perspectives. Additionally, findings were cross-referenced with regional reports and industry guidelines to ensure alignment with the realities of the South African construction industry.

While the literature review methodology provides a synthesis of existing knowledge, it is inherently limited by the availability of published research. Specific gaps in empirical studies on shame in South Africa’s construction sector necessitate reliance on broader interdisciplinary insights. Future research is recommended to address these gaps through primary data collection and regional studies. This methodology enables a nuanced and contextually grounded exploration of shame in South Africa’s construction industry. By synthesising interdisciplinary insights and regional data, the study contributes to understanding emotional and ethical dynamics in professional health and safety practices. The approach aligns with the study’s objective to provide actionable recommendations for policy, education, and industry practices.

4. Findings

The findings of this study, derived from a literature review and thematic analysis, reveal critical insights into the role of shame as an emotional and ethical factor in shaping health and safety practices within South Africa’s construction industry. These findings are organised around three central themes: shame as a driver for improvement, shame as a barrier to compliance, and the cultural dimensions of shame.

4.1. *Shame as a Driver for Health and Safety Improvements*

Shame emerged as a powerful motivator for improving health and safety standards when constructively addressed. The literature indicates that incidents of publicised safety failures often trigger a collective sense of accountability within organisations, prompting corrective actions. For example, the aftermath of the Tongaat Mall collapse in 2013 saw increased regulatory scrutiny and organisational efforts to comply with safety protocols (Kwinika & Marnewick, 2018). Shame experienced by professionals due to such high-profile failures motivated efforts to restore personal and organisational integrity. Leadership plays a pivotal role in leveraging shame positively. Supportive leaders who acknowledge safety lapses without punitive measures foster environments conducive to learning and improvement (Yazdi, 2025). Such leadership encourages open dialogue about safety challenges, reinforcing a culture of ethical accountability. These findings suggest that shame, when managed

appropriately, can catalyse embedding safety-oriented practices in organisational culture.

4.2. *Shame as a Barrier to Compliance*

Conversely, shame can act as a significant barrier to compliance with health and safety standards. The review highlights instances where excessive or unresolved shame leads to defensive behaviours, denial, or concealment of errors. For instance, the initial investigation into the Tongaat Mall collapse revealed attempts by stakeholders to deflect blame, undermining efforts to identify root causes and implement systemic reforms (cidb, 2009; Kwinika & Marnewick, 2018). Fear of reputational damage and punitive consequences discourages transparency, particularly in smaller construction firms where resources for compliance are limited (Tangney et al., 2007). This behaviour perpetuates unsafe practices and hampers efforts to build trust and accountability within the industry. These findings underscore the importance of addressing shame constructively to prevent it from obstructing health and safety improvements.

4.3. *Cultural Dimensions of Shame in South Africa*

The collectivist cultural framework in South Africa, deeply rooted in the philosophy of Ubuntu, profoundly influences how shame is experienced and managed. The literature shows that shame is often perceived as a communal failure rather than an individual shortcoming, prompting collective responses to address health and safety issues (Gade, 2012). For example, when safety violations occur, organisations and teams often come together to implement corrective measures, reflecting shared responsibility. However, this cultural orientation also creates challenges. Professionals may fear stigmatisation or loss of standing within their community, leading to reluctance in admitting mistakes or reporting violations (Bilal et al., 2021). Additionally, the historical and systemic inequities in South Africa's construction sector amplify feelings of vulnerability, particularly among marginalised workers, intensifying the emotional impact of shame (cidb, 2009). The findings highlight the need for culturally sensitive interventions that align with South Africa's collectivist values while promoting transparency and accountability. Policies and training programs that emphasise collective learning and shared responsibility can help mitigate the negative impacts of shame.

4.4. *Education and Training Implications*

The role of education and training in addressing shame constructively emerged as a critical finding. The literature underscores the need for integrating emotional intelligence and ethical training into construction education to help professionals navigate the complexities of shame. Programs that incorporate case-based learning and emphasise collective problem-

solving are particularly effective in fostering resilience and ethical accountability (Lingard & Turner, 2017).

While South African institutions have made progress in incorporating health and safety modules, there is limited emphasis on the emotional and cultural dimensions of shame. Addressing this gap through targeted training initiatives can equip professionals with the tools to manage shame constructively, enhancing compliance and improving overall safety outcomes. These findings illuminate the dual role of shame as both a motivator and a barrier to health and safety compliance in South Africa's construction industry. They emphasise the critical influence of cultural dimensions and leadership in shaping how shame is experienced and addressed. By fostering supportive environments, integrating cultural sensitivity, and enhancing educational frameworks, the construction sector can leverage shame constructively to drive ethical accountability and safer practices.

5. *Implications of the Findings*

The findings of this study provide several critical implications for theory, policy, and practice in the South African construction industry and offer broader insights into managing shame as an emotional and ethical factor in professional settings.

The dual role of shame, as both a driver and barrier, underscores its complexity as an emotional and ethical construct. Within the South African context, the findings extend the literature by highlighting how collectivist cultural values, such as Ubuntu, shape the experience and management of shame. This contributes to global discussions on moral emotions in professional behaviour by offering a culturally specific perspective (Gade, 2012). Future theoretical models of workplace ethics and safety compliance should incorporate cultural dimensions and consider the communal aspects of shame, particularly in contexts where collective accountability is a dominant value. The findings have direct implications for health and safety policies in South Africa. Current approaches often focus on punitive measures to enforce compliance, which may inadvertently exacerbate the negative impacts of shame. Instead, policies should integrate mechanisms that constructively address shame, such as fostering open communication, promoting restorative justice practices, and encouraging collective problem-solving. By aligning with South Africa's collectivist cultural values, such policies can mitigate defensive behaviours and encourage transparency, leading to sustained improvements in health and safety outcomes (cidb, 2009). At the organisational level, the study highlights the critical role of leadership in managing shame constructively. When leaders cultivate a supportive environment where accountability is encouraged without punishment, shame can become a powerful driver of ethical behavior and improved safety practices.

(Yadzi, 2025). Training programs for construction managers should emphasise emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and strategies for creating psychologically safe environments.

The findings emphasise the need for integrating emotional and ethical training into construction education in South Africa. While existing programs address technical aspects of health and safety, there is a gap in preparing professionals to navigate the emotional complexities of shame. Incorporating case-based learning, role-playing scenarios, and discussions on cultural dimensions of ethics can help professionals better manage shame and foster resilience in high-stakes environments (Lyanda et al., 2024). South Africa's unique cultural and historical context offers valuable lessons for other developing countries with similar socio-economic and cultural frameworks. The emphasis on collective accountability and shared responsibility can serve as a model for addressing shame in other collectivist cultures.

Furthermore, the systemic challenges faced by South Africa's construction industry, such as resource constraints and historical inequities, highlight the importance of culturally tailored interventions to improve health and safety outcomes globally. Finally, these findings highlight gaps in the broader literature that future research can address. Comparative studies across different geographic and cultural contexts can deepen understanding of how shame operates in various professional settings. Longitudinal research is also needed to evaluate the long-term impacts of interventions that leverage shame constructively. Such studies would further refine strategies for integrating emotional and ethical dimensions into health and safety practices worldwide. The study provides actionable insights for improving health and safety practices in the construction industry. Constructively addressing shame through culturally sensitive policies, leadership practices, and education can not only enhance compliance but also contribute to a broader culture of ethical accountability and resilience in professional settings. These implications extend beyond South Africa, offering lessons for other regions grappling with similar challenges in health and safety management.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the role of shame as an emotional and ethical factor influencing health and safety practices in the South African construction industry. The findings demonstrate that shame serves a dual function: it can motivate positive change by driving accountability and adherence to safety standards. However, it can also act as a barrier when it leads to defensiveness and avoidance. South Africa's collectivist cultural context, deeply influenced by Ubuntu, amplifies these dynamics, framing shame as

both an individual and communal concern. The study underscores the critical role of leadership, education, and policy in managing shame constructively to enhance health and safety outcomes. Despite progress in addressing health and safety challenges, systemic issues such as corruption, resource constraints, and inequities remain pervasive in South Africa's construction industry. Addressing these challenges requires an integrative approach that considers the emotional, cultural, and ethical dimensions of professional behaviour. By fostering environments emphasising transparency, shared accountability, and continuous learning, the construction industry can better navigate the complexities of shame and its impact on health and safety compliance.

Based on the findings and implications of this study, several key recommendations can be proposed to enhance health and safety practices in South Africa's construction industry. First, there is a need to shift from punitive to restorative approaches to addressing health and safety violations. Policies should prioritise the promotion of accountability through constructive dialogue, corrective actions, and support mechanisms while also integrating cultural sensitivity into frameworks that align with South Africa's collectivist values and the philosophy of Ubuntu. Leadership training is essential, equipping leaders in the construction industry with skills in emotional intelligence and cultural competence to manage shame constructively within their teams. Leaders should adopt transparent and supportive approaches to addressing safety lapses, promoting a culture of openness and continuous improvement.

Additionally, education and training programs for construction professionals should incorporate emotional and ethical dimensions, including modules on managing shame, fostering resilience, and addressing ethical dilemmas. Case-based learning and role-playing exercises can further simulate real-world scenarios, preparing professionals to navigate challenges effectively. At the organisational level, mechanisms such as anonymous reporting systems and restorative justice practices should be established to address safety violations without fear of stigma or reprisal. Encouraging collective problem-solving and team-based accountability will also align interventions with cultural values, fostering collaborative approaches to safety. Finally, research and evaluation efforts should focus on conducting longitudinal studies to assess the effectiveness of interventions aimed at managing shame and improving compliance. Comparative research across regions would provide insights into how shame and cultural dynamics influence safety practices globally. At the same time, further investigation into the intersection of gender, socio-economic status, and organisational culture could deepen understanding of shame's role in the construction industry. These recommendations

collectively aim to create an environment that constructively addresses shame, enhances accountability, and improves health and safety outcomes.

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Developing a Safety Competence Evaluation Framework for Artisans in the Nigerian Construction Industry

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Abstract

The construction industry is recognised worldwide as one of the most dangerous industries related to accidents, especially in developing countries. This is because the artisans, who play a crucial role in construction activities, have inadequate safety competencies, thereby contributing significantly to these unsatisfactory safety outcomes. However, despite considerable efforts to improve the safety competencies of construction artisans, initiatives aimed at evaluating safety-related competencies remain limited. Consequently, this research aims to address this deficiency by developing a safety competence assessment framework specifically for artisans in the Nigerian construction industry. A cross-sectional survey approach was used to gather data from 470 safety managers and supervisors, followed by exploratory factor analysis to identify factors influencing safety competence regarding knowledge and practical skills. The findings emphasise the complex nature of safety competence, providing insights into practical safety skills, decision-making, and the interpersonal and communication dimensions of safety competence. In addition, the framework presents a visual-based method for assessing competencies across the corresponding dimensions. The framework must be tailored to enhance safety outcomes on construction sites. Consequently, the study offers theoretical insights for improving artisan training, which would ultimately reduce the incidence of accidents, along with practical applications that would benefit safety managers significantly.

Keywords: Artisans, Competence Evaluation Framework, Construction Industry, Safety, Safety Competence

1. Introduction

The construction industry, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria, is characterised by high rates of accidents due to poor safety performance, often arising from the incompetence of artisans (Ojo et al., 2025; Adebowale & Agumba, 2023; Williams, 2019). Artisans play a crucial role on construction sites, and their safety awareness directly influences safety performance (Boakye et al., 2023; Yap & Lee, 2020). Despite regulatory efforts and safety training programs, there remains an absence of frameworks to gauge the safety competence of artisans (Zou & Sunindijo, 2021). Existing studies have primarily focused on the managerial level, ignoring the organisational safety commitments of artisans, who are most exposed to on-site hazards (Sherratt & Aboagye-Nimo, 2022; Danso, 2022).

Prior assessment tools frequently ignore the educational and contextual realities of artisans, resulting in little or no effectiveness (Siabi, 2022; Tremblay & Badri, 2018). This raises important questions: What are the main elements for developing a safety competence assessment framework for Nigerian artisans? Which indicators best reflect their competence for improving safety performance? This study addresses these gaps by developing a framework for artisans in the Nigerian construction industry. Distinct from generic frameworks, this framework offers practical tools for safety managers to assess the

readiness of artisans for safe work, to reduce accidents, and to improve safety outcomes, specifically in developing nations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The construction industry has been widely recognised as one of the most hazardous industries globally, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. The high number of accidents and fatalities in this industry can be attributed to various factors, including inadequate safety training and competencies among artisans (Antonioni & Agrafioti, 2023). Artisans who are pivotal in executing construction tasks often lack the necessary safety skills and knowledge, contributing to adverse safety outcomes (Hasanzadeh et al., 2017). Consequently, the need for a framework to evaluate and improve the safety competencies of these artisans has become increasingly urgent. This literature review examines relevant research on safety competencies in the construction industry, focusing on the Nigerian context, and highlights the gaps that the proposed framework seeks to address.

2.2. Understanding Safety Competence in Construction

Safety competence refers to the knowledge, skills, and behaviours necessary to execute construction tasks safely (Rahman et al., 2022; Liang, 2019). It includes

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