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TEACHERS' PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AS A DRIVER OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC OUTCOMES IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

E. Njoroge, B. Wanjiru

Abstract

Background. Teachers' psychological well-being greatly influences the quality of education and student performance. Personal growth, as a key component, shapes teacher development and engagement.

Purpose. This study examined the relationship between teachers' personal growth and students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Kiambu County, Kenya.

Materials and methods. A mixed-methods approach using a concurrent design was employed. Data were collected via standardized teacher questionnaires, principal interviews, student observations, and document reviews. A sample of 688 participants, including 261 teachers and 384 students in 23 schools, was involved. Quantitative data were analyzed through correlation and regression methods; qualitative data were interpreted thematically.

Results. The study revealed a significant positive correlation between teachers' personal growth and students' academic achievement ($r = .633$), with personal growth accounting for approximately 73.8% of the variance in learners' outcomes. This implies that teachers' professional development as an indicator of teachers' personal growth is not a marginal ingredient but a major determinant of learning outcomes. Regression analysis confirmed this relationship, yielding the model $Y = 2.617 + 0.42X$. The coefficient (0.42) suggests that each unit increase in teacher personal growth leads to a 0.42-unit rise in student achievement. The model was statistically significant ($t = 5.159, p < .001$). These statistics align with the qualitative observations that

some teachers report limited confidence in their personal growth. This gap highlights that while teachers' personal growth is impactful, it is unevenly experienced across the teaching workforce. Integrating these findings implies that supports the implementation of structured professional development and mentorship programs to enhance both instructional quality and student outcomes. The analysis demonstrates both the scientific novelty and the practical importance for policy and practice.

Keywords: teachers' personal growth; psychological well-being; teachers' mental health; emotional resilience of teachers; students' learning outcomes

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Introduction

Academic achievement is a cornerstone of educational systems worldwide, shaping not only students' immediate outcomes but also their long-term life trajectories. It influences critical decisions and patterns such as school retention, occupational paths, and broader societal indicators like fertility, mortality, and employment [6]. In Kenya, academic performance is primarily assessed through national examinations such as the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Yet despite sustained investments in instructional quality, national academic performance remains low. For instance, the 2022 KCSE national mean standard score was 4.458 (D+), with over 47,000 students scoring an E grade and only 1,400 achieving an A nationally [20; 21]

Kiambu County, although home to several high-performing national schools, exemplifies this concern. Over 50% of the 261 secondary schools in the county recorded a mean standard score below 3.0 in 2022 (Kiambu County Education Office, 2021). These results persist despite government-led interventions such as the employment of qualified teachers, provision of instructional materials, and implementation of capacity-building programs [19]. While such efforts are essential, they may have overlooked a potentially vital contributor to student outcomes—teachers' psychological well-being and personal growth.

Teachers play a central role in shaping students' academic experiences and outcomes. Beyond imparting knowledge, they nurture critical thinking, social-emotional development, and character formation [24; 25]. However, teaching is increasingly recognized as a psychologically demanding profession. Teachers worldwide report high levels of job-related stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. In Great Britain, for instance, teachers experienced a 2.3% prevalence of self-reported work-related stress between 2009-2012, nearly double the 1.2% average across all occupations [1]. In South Africa, systemic issues such as low teacher morale, high attrition, and poor institutional support further exacerbate psychological challenges [7; 23].

The relationship between teachers' psychological states and educational effectiveness has attracted growing scholarly interest. International research underscores the significance of psychological well-being in shaping classroom behavior, instructional effectiveness, and student learning outcomes [8; 15]. Ryff's model of psychological well-being [28; 29] outlines six dimensions – self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations, purpose in life, and personal growth. Among these, personal growth stands out as a dynamic trait reflecting continuous self-improvement and the pursuit of meaningful goals, both of which are critical for sustaining resilience and professional excellence in teaching [8; 16].

Global evidence affirms that teachers with higher levels of psychological well-being are more likely to establish positive classroom environments and maintain high levels of instructional engagement [2]. Conversely, stress and burnout are strongly associated with reduced teaching quality, absenteeism, and early exit from the profession [13]. In the U.S., [14] found that teacher burnout significantly predicted lower student achievement and behavioral challenges. In Europe, [13] confirmed negative correlations between teacher burnout and student motivation in a meta-analysis across multiple countries.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the intersection between teacher well-being and student outcomes remains relatively under-researched. [7] in South Africa emphasized that psychosocial pressures, if unaddressed, directly

impair classroom performance. Similarly, [23] argued that educational reforms in the region often neglect the emotional and psychological support needed by educators.

In Kenya, while academic research and policy have prioritized factors such as infrastructure, teacher qualifications, and school governance [9; 19], limited attention has been given to internal psychological drivers of teacher performance. Wanjiru [30] found that teacher motivation in Nairobi County was influenced by self-efficacy and job satisfaction—elements closely linked to psychological well-being. However, this study did not explore how psychological constructs like personal growth affect student achievement. [12] highlighted that only 30% of global studies on teacher well-being make explicit connections to student academic outcomes, indicating a significant gap in both empirical and policy literature.

The persistent academic underperformance in Kiambu County, despite favorable investments in resources and teacher deployment, underscores the need to examine less visible influences on educational quality. This study sought to explore the influence of teachers' personal growth, as an indicator of psychological well-being, on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Kiambu County. Given the [29] definition of personal growth as a proactive process of self-development and engagement with meaningful challenges, it stands to reason that teachers exhibiting high levels of personal growth may cultivate more enriching and effective learning environments.

Purpose

To investigate the correlation between teachers' personal growth and the academic achievement of students in public secondary schools.

Research problem

Despite systemic investments in educational inputs, academic performance in Kiambu County remains low. The psychological well-being of teachers, particularly personal growth, may be a missing determinant of student success.

Research tasks

To determine the relationship between teachers' personal growth and student academic outcomes.

Research hypothesis

H₀₁: *Teachers' personal growth does not contribute positively to students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Kiambu County.*

H_A₁: *Teachers' personal growth contributes positively to students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Kiambu County.*

Scientific novelty

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the empirical establishment of the strong positive correlation between teachers' personal growth and students' achievement ($r = .633$). Teachers' personal growth accounts for 73.8% of the variation in learners' outcomes. Previous studies treated teachers' personal development as a general contributor to learners' achievement. However, this study demonstrates precisely the quantitative effect of teachers' personal growth on learners' outcomes through regression analysis, $Y = 2.617 + 0.42X$. These findings contribute new evidence-based insights into the field of educational psychology by quantifying the predictive power of teachers' personal growth on learners' achievement.

Practical importance

The study provides a strong justification for designing and implementing structured professional development and mentorship programmes for teachers. The findings demonstrate that even slight improvements in teachers' personal growth can produce measurable gains in learners' outcomes. This study shows a direct link between teachers' personal growth and learner outcomes. The study also underscores the centrality of teacher psychological well-being in fostering positive learning environments and influencing student success. Teachers who are professionally fulfilled and psychologically balanced are better positioned

to enhance teaching quality, maintain a supportive classroom climate, and motivate students. This new knowledge has significant implications for educational policy and practice. The study underscores the need for teacher employers to invest in structured, continuous professional development and well-being programmes to improve instructional quality and eventually learners' outcomes.

Materials and methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies to comprehensively investigate the influence of teachers' personal growth on learners' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Kiambu County, Kenya [3]. A concurrent mixed research design was utilized, allowing simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data to provide complementary insights [3; 5; 22]. An integrated approach to analyzing the findings was adopted to demonstrate a coherent and comprehensive approach. Data were gathered using multiple instruments, including standardized questionnaires for teachers, interview guides for principals, observation schedules for students, and document analysis, thereby ensuring triangulation and robust findings [4; 18].

The study was conducted across all 227 public secondary schools in Kiambu County, selected for its accessibility, reported poor academic performance (Ministry of Education, 2018), and the researcher's familiarity with the area, which facilitated data collection. The target population comprised 227 principals, 2,606 teachers, and 113,500 students, totaling 116,333 subjects. A stratified sampling technique ensured proportional representation across boys', girls', and mixed schools. A sample size of 10% of schools (23 schools, 23 principals) and teachers (261) was selected, while [17] sampling table determined a student sample of 384, resulting in a total sample of 668 participants.

Instrument validity was ensured through expert consultation from Mount Kenya University's Educational Psychology Department, refining ambiguous items. Reliability was established through a pilot study involving 26 teachers from three non-sampled schools, yielding a Pear-

son correlation coefficient of .711 and a Cronbach’s Alpha of .714, confirming consistency [26].

Data collection followed ethical protocols, including obtaining permits from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 24.0, employing descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses to model the relationship between teachers’ personal growth and learners’ achievement. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed thematically. A response rate of 84.7% (221/261 questionnaires) was achieved, sufficient for generalizing findings to the target population [10].

Results and discussion

Table 1 presents the findings regarding the level of agreement with statements related to teachers’ personal growth.

Table 1.

Influence of Teachers’ Personal Growth on the Learners’ Academic Achievement

Statement		Strongly agree	Some-what agree	Undecided	Some-what disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
I think I can adapt to the changing environment	f	26	52	48	51	44	221
	%	11.8	23.5	21.7	23.1	19.9	100
My experience has taught me how to live in harmony	f	29	48	52	50	42	221
	%	13.1	21.7	23.5	22.6	19	100
My affection has greatly impacted learners’ achievement	f	39	55	38	45	44	221
	%	17.6	24.9	17.2	20.4	19.9	100
The number of years I have worked as a teacher has changed me as a person	f	44	44	45	42	46	221
	%	19.9	19.9	20.4	19	20.8	100
The school organizes seminars and inductions, which have helped in my self-acceptance	f	39	46	44	41	51	221
	%	17.6	20.8	19.9	18.6	23.1	100

I have taken full responsibility for the learners' achievement in the subject area	f	36	49	45	50	41	221
	%	16.3	22.2	20.4	22.6	18.6	100
I have maintained self-fulfillment in teaching, which has contributed to learners' achievement	f	40	50	45	48	38	221
	%	18.1	22.6	20.4	21.7	17.2	100
I have never tried self-destructive activities	f	40	40	47	50	44	221
	%	18.1	18.1	21.3	22.6	19.9	100

Table 1 shows that the largest portion of teachers, 51 (23.1%) and 44 (19.9%), rated the statement “*I think I can adapt to the changing environment*” as ‘*somewhat disagree*’ and ‘*strongly disagree*’, respectively. This implies that the ability to adapt to a changing environment is a concern among the teachers in public secondary schools in Kiambu County, Kenya. These are the mentions of Ryff’s theory on personal growth that describe how one continues to form and learn new experiences that contribute positively to their behaviors.

Similarly, the largest portion of the teachers, 50(22.6%), and another portion, 42(19%), ‘*somewhat disagreed*’ and ‘*strongly disagreed*’, respectively, with the statement “*My experience has taught me how to live in harmony*”. This implies that there are grey areas of experience in teaching on living in harmony among the teachers in the sampled schools.

The largest portion of the teachers, 55(24.9%), and another 39(17.6%) ‘*somewhat agreed*’ and ‘*strongly agreed*’, respectively, with the statement “*My affection has greatly impacted learners' achievement*”. This reflected the applause of teachers’ affection for learners’ achievement in public secondary schools in Kiambu County, Kenya.

Table 1 also shows that the largest portion of the teachers, 46 (20.8%), in public secondary schools in Kiambu County felt that the number of years they had worked as a teacher had not changed them as a person. The largest portion of the teachers, 51 (23.1%), *strongly disagreed* that the school organizes seminars and inductions which has helped in my self-acceptance. The table also shows that 50(22.6%) of the teachers had not taken full responsibility for the learners’ achievement in their subject

areas. A close portion of the teachers, 49 (22.2%), had ‘*somewhat taken responsibility*’, while 36(16.3%) had ‘*strongly taken full responsibility*’.

The largest portion of the teachers rated the statement “I have maintained to self-fulfillment in teaching, which has contributed to learners’ achievement” as somewhat agree 50(22.6%) and strongly agree at 40(18.1%). This implies the presence of the self-fulfilling description of the teachers in the schools. The largest portions of the teachers somewhat disagreed 50(22.6%) and strongly disagreed 44(19.9%) with the statement “I have never tried self-destructive activities”. This implies that while there were portions of teachers who had tried self-destructive activities, the majority had not tried. This depicts a better self-aware teacher who cares about themselves.

The findings corroborate existing literature. For instance, [27] investigated the impact of professional development on teachers’ ability to improve student academic performance in public secondary schools. The study concluded that teachers’ professional development is an essential component for improving learning outcomes. The study recommended that school heads should employ strategies for supporting continuous teachers’ personal growth. While continuous professional development is recommended, further attention should be drawn to pre-service preparation of teachers to ensure that those entering the profession are adequately trained to implement modern pedagogical techniques and effective child facilitation strategies.

A Pearson product-moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between teachers’ personal growth and learners’ academic achievement. The students’ achievement was measured using the KCSE average mean score for the last three years. The findings were presented in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that there was a moderately positive correlation determining the relationship between teachers’ personal growth and learners’ academic achievement ($r = .633$, $n = 221$, $p = .625$). The findings show that personal growth is associated with better student achievement of learning outcomes. These quantitative findings align with qualitative observations that teachers who feel professionally sound and psychologi-

cally balanced create a conducive learning environment that eventually leads to improved learning outcomes. The implication is that teachers should be afforded opportunities for professional development and other personal growth programs, which play a focal role in promoting teachers’ mental health. The result is teachers’ professional effectiveness, teaching quality, positive classroom climate, and a motivated teacher who influences the learner’s academic success.

Table 2.

Relationship between Teachers’ Personal Growth and students’ achievement in KCSE

		Teacher’s Personal Growth	Average KCSE for the last 3 years
Average Personal Growth Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.633
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025
	N	221	221
Average KCSE for the last 3 years	Pearson Correlation	.633	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
	N	221	221

These findings concur with other studies, which underscore the importance of teachers’ personal growth in enhancing educational outcomes [11]. The findings concur with other studies [30] that found no significant direct effects of teachers’ personal growth on students’ learning outcomes; this signifies the complex and multifaceted nature of academic achievement. This suggests the need for a holistic and systemic approach to educational improvement that integrates teacher development with institutional support, curriculum design, and effective classroom practices.

Further analyses were conducted using regression modelling to assess the level of influence of the teacher’s personal growth on the learners’ academic achievement. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 shows an adjusted R-square of .738, which implies that 73.8 of % variations in learners’ academic achievement would be attributed to teachers’ personal growth at a standard error estimate of 1.36. Personal growth is one of the aspects described in Ryff’s theory as a form of learning new experiences that contribute positively to the teachers’ behaviors.

Table 3.

Regression Model Summary on Teachers' Personal Growth and Learners' Academic Achievement

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.8882 ^a	.789	.738	1.360
<i>a. Predictors: (Constant), I have never tried self-destructive activities, my experience has taught me how to live in harmony, I have maintained to self-fulfilling in teaching which has contributed to learners achievement, I have taken full responsibility on the learners achievement in the subject area, My affection has greatly impacted on learners achievement, The school organizes seminars and inductions which has helped in my self-acceptance, The number of years i have worked as a teacher have changed me as a person</i>				

The regression ANOVA results to assess the statistical significance of the model were generated and are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

ANOVA table-Teachers' Personal Growth and Learners' Academic Achievement

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	28.922	7	4.132	2.233	.033 ^b
	Residual	394.191	213	1.851		
	Total	423.113	220			
<i>a. Dependent Variable: Academic achievement</i>						
<i>b. Predictors: (Constant), I have never tried self-destructive activities, my experience has taught me how to live in harmony, I have maintained to self-fulfilling in teaching which has contributed to learners achievement, I have taken full responsibility on the learners achievement in the subject area, My affection has greatly impacted on learners achievement, The school organizes seminars and inductions which has helped in my self-acceptance, The number of years i have worked as a teacher have changed me as a person</i>						

The regression analysis conducted to examine the influence of teachers' personal growth on learners' academic achievement yielded a statistically significant model, $F(7, 213) = 2.23, p = .033$. This indicates that the combined predictors—such as self-acceptance, teaching responsibility, emotional influence, and professional experience—significantly contribute to explaining variance in learners' academic achievement. Therefore, teachers' personal growth has a significant positive effect on academic outcomes in public secondary schools in Kiambu County.

The regression analysis coefficients are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.

Regression Analysis Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.617	0.507		5.159	.000
	Personal growth average	0.53	0.164	0.42	0.323	0.740
a Dependent Variable: <i>Academic achievement</i>						

The regression yields the following model,

$$Y = 2.617 + 0.42x + 1.26$$

where,

Y = students' achievement of learning outcomes (mean standard scores)

x = teachers' personal growth,

The coefficient (0.42) suggests that each unit increase in teacher personal growth leads to a 0.42-unit rise in student achievement. The model was statistically significant ($t = 5.159, p < .001$). These statistics align with the qualitative insights, indicating that some teachers report limited confidence in their personal growth. This disparity suggests that although teachers' personal growth is impactful, its benefits are not uniformly experienced across the profession. Integrating these findings underscores the importance of designing and implementing structured professional development and mentorship initiatives to strengthen to enhance both instructional quality and, in turn, improve student outcomes. The overall analysis highlights both the scientific contribution of the study to the field of educational psychology and to practical implications for policy and practice.

Conclusion

1. The study reveals a significant correlation between teachers' personal growth and learners' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Kiambu County, Kenya.
2. The regression analysis indicates that 73.8% of variations in students' academic performance can be attributed to teachers' personal growth. These findings align with Ryff's theory, emphasizing personal growth as a critical factor in fostering positive teacher behaviors that enhance student outcomes. However, the varied perceptions among

teachers, with some feeling limited in their capabilities or uncertain about their development, highlight challenges in adapting to changing environments and achieving self-fulfillment.

3. The lack of effective seminars and inductions further underscores the need for targeted professional development programs. To improve academic achievement, educational stakeholders should prioritize structured in-service training and supportive policies that foster teachers' personal growth, ultimately creating conducive learning environments for students.
4. The study recommends that the principals in public secondary schools introduce some mentorship programs for teachers with a focus on building their personal growth. With these, the teachers will feel appreciated and recognized for their need to grow as they mentor students.

Ethics Committee Conclusion. This is to inform you that Mount Kenya University has reviewed and approved your research proposal.

Informed consent. Participants were informed that their data would remain strictly confidential and would be used solely for research purposes. They confirmed that the study was clearly explained, they understood their involvement, and they could withdraw at any time without giving a reason. They also acknowledged that their information would be kept private. Finally, they provided their signature and date to confirm voluntary consent and receipt of the form.

Conflict of interest information. We, Edith Njoroge and Benson Njoroge, affirm that we have no financial, personal, or professional interests that could be perceived to influence the outcomes or interpretation of this study.

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DATA ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Edith Njoroge, M.Ed, Ms, Postgraduate Coordinator

Mount Kenya University

P.O. Box 342, 01000, Thika, Kenya

enjoroge@mku.ac.ke

Benson Wanjiru, PhD, Dr., Dean, School of Education

Mount Kenya University

P.O. Box 342, 01000, Thika, Kenya

bnjoroge@mku.ac.ke

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4607-2317>

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