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The Influence of Workload on Psychological Well-Being of Teachers in Special Schools and Units in Nyandarua County, Kenya

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The Influence of Workload on Psychological Well-Being of Teachers in Special Schools and Units in Nyandarua County, Kenya

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Abstract

Teachers' Psychological well-being can influence learners' motivation, engagement, and academic achievement, impacting their overall performance and well-being. The Teachers' Service Commission recently noticed an increase in cases of mental health issues among teachers, this scenario called for immediate attention as well as actions to support teachers' mental health. The study goal therefore was to assess workload's influence on teachers' psychological well-being in special schools and units in Nyandarua County, Kenya. The job Demand-Control Model and Six Factor model of psychological well-being informed the study. The study employed a mixed-method approach adopting a convergent parallel design to assess the influence of teachers' workload on the psychological well-being of special needs teachers in special schools and units in Nyandarua County, Kenya. The target population of the study was 52 teachers teaching in both the Special Schools and Special Units in Nyandarua County. The study took a census of all the 52 teachers. Tools for data collection were questionnaires and standardized 18 PWB Ryff tools. The quantitative data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics utilizing a correlation method using SPSS Version 29 while qualitative data was analyzed using thematic content analysis. The researcher ensured that all necessary approval of documents was obtained before data collection. The findings revealed a weak positive relationship with no statistical significance between teacher's workload and psychological well-being ($r=.066$, $p<.640$). However, difficulties were identified, including inadequate lesson planning time and a heavy workload in managing students' diverse needs. These results highlighted the need for improved workload management and supportive measures to enhance teacher well-being, which is essential for effective teaching and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Teachers' workload, psychological well-being, special school, special unit, diverse needs, Nyandarua County, Teachers' Service Commission(TSC)

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1.0 Background

Teachers represent a crucial human resource and serve as the backbone of national education. Dynamic processes characterize teaching sessions in schools today. Constant changes in pedagogy, learning theory, curriculum, and educational objectives present numerous challenges to teachers (Zakaria, A., Don, M., & Yaakob, N. (2021). Therefore, it is essential to prioritize teachers' well-being to ensure their effective performance in their roles. Research indicates that teachers with elevated levels of psychological well-being exhibit higher work engagement, characterized by enthusiasm, involvement, and dedication toward their work (Greenier et al., 2021)

In Nyandarua County, several unique factors influence teachers' Psychological Well-being. The County experiences challenges like a shortage of trained Special Needs Teachers and uneven distribution of resources. As indicated in a report by TSC several special schools in Nyandarua County are understaffed, leading to a higher teacher-student- ratio which increases instructional workload. The rural schools also face a shortage of infrastructure like classrooms and teaching materials, further exacerbating teachers' stress levels. Teacher Service Commission (TSC, 2022)

Psychological well-being encompasses autonomy in thoughts and actions, environmental mastery, a sense of purpose, personal growth, self-acceptance, and positive interpersonal relationships (Ryff & Singer, 2006, 2008). Psychologically healthy school teachers are also very important to the students. Glazzard and Rose (2020) put a lot of focus on the fact that teachers' mental health determines the quality of teaching. This well-being can affect learners' attitudes, participation, as well as their performance, which in turn affects their performance and well-being. Furthermore, psychological health allows teachers to maintain teaching effectiveness and be beneficial to the learners (Rahm & Heise, 2019; Greenier et al., 2021).

Autonomy is a crucial characteristic of psychological well-being. Individuals high in autonomy possess the ability to assess themselves based on personal values, chart their course irrespective of peer influence, and regulate their behavior internally. Conversely, individuals low in autonomy often worry about others' perceptions, struggle to make independent decisions and depend on external judgments. They are susceptible to peer pressure and may not adhere firmly to their principles. In the aspect of environmental mastery, individuals with a high environmental mastery are characterized by having control of happenings in their environment, they can tap into the opportunities happening in their environment and align their personal needs and values to the situations presented by their immediate environment. Difficulty in managing external activities characterizes individuals low on environmental mastery, as well as feelings of entrapment in their environment, lack of sight of opportunities in their environment, as well as a lack of power over their surroundings. Individuals who exhibit significant personal growth have a sense of ongoing progress, are willing to try new things, and have a sense of reaching their full potential. These individuals see improvements in their lives over time, and changes that occur show more self-knowledge and effectiveness. Individuals who demonstrate poor personal growth are marked by a lack of improvement, boredom and lack of interest in life, stagnation, and a sense of being unable to adopt new attitudes or behaviors in their lives. Individuals with strong positive relations have trusted, satisfying relationships with others, display emotions like empathy and affection to others, and are concerned about other people's wellbeing. They are actively involved in the relationship

dynamics of human beings. Difficulty building relationships characterizes individuals with weak relations with others, who are often isolated and do not care about the welfare and the back and forth involved in human relationships. Individuals with a strong purpose in life have aims and objectives that direct their lives, feel their present and past lives have meaning, and have a sense of significance in their lives. Failure to have goals in life characterizes people with a weak purpose; they lack beliefs that give their lives meaning and lack a sense of direction in their lives. Self-acceptance involves acknowledging the good and evil and positive feelings towards one's past for those with high self-acceptance. Those presenting with low self-acceptance are characterized by dissatisfaction with one's life, not feeling comfortable with one's past life, and wanting to change some personal qualities about themselves (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Teachers' workload is a critical aspect of school climate that can significantly impact teacher performance. Teachers' instructional workload encompasses various tasks such as curriculum organization, preparation of lesson notes, facilitating learners' engagement in curriculum instructions, conducting continuous assessment, and managing the classroom. The measure of teachers' instructional workload directly correlates with factors such as the ratio of teachers to students, the volume of scripts to be marked, and other responsibilities assigned by the school administration. The effectiveness of teachers in achieving educational goals, particularly in terms of academic performance, largely depends on how efficiently they carry out their instructional tasks. Teachers who manage a moderate instructional workload are often considered more effective and efficient compared to those burdened with heavy workloads within the school system (Ayeni & Amanekwe, 2018).

Newton, R., et al. (2022), in the USA conducted a qualitative study to investigate the factors influencing the attrition of Bahamian special educators from public education, with a focus on the influence of job satisfaction on employee retention. The study involved 12 participants and was grounded in Job Satisfaction and Social Cognitive Career Theory, which underscored the impact of experiences on career decisions. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews and analysis was performed using open coding techniques. The findings of the study revealed that Bahamian special educators were leaving the field of special education primarily due to three key factors: (a) Lack of support: Participants cited insufficient support from their supervisors or colleagues as a significant factor contributing to their dissatisfaction with their jobs. (b) Inadequate training: Many educators expressed dissatisfaction with the level of training provided, feeling ill-equipped to effectively meet the needs of their students. (c) Burnout: Burnout emerged as a prevalent issue among participants, with overwhelming workloads and stress leading to feelings of exhaustion and disillusionment.

Creagn et al. (2023) conducted a study that was concerned with teachers and school leaders' experiences of workload and work intensification in Australia. The research indicated that the effects of workload and work intensification negatively impact teachers' health, well-being, and attrition. Further, teachers' capacity to deliver educational priorities that support the learning of all students is undermined by the experience of a heavy workload and heightened work intensification. The paper advances the notion of "time poverty" to explain how workload and work intensification function together in teachers' work. Without a clear understanding of the particular affordances and limitations of conceptualizations of workload and work intensification,

interventions are unlikely to resolve the contemporary and damaging problem of time poverty for teachers.

Olagunju et al. (2020) conducted a study in Nigeria to determine the well-being of special needs teachers. A modified Zarit Burden Interview and a 12-item General Health Questionnaire were used to interview 68 special education instructors. Approximately four out of ten instructors reported experiencing psychological discomfort, which is significantly higher than the rates observed in the general population. A significant burden was frequent in 51.5% of instructors. Profound associations were discovered between interpersonal problems, anxiety, depression, psychological distress, and perceived workload. Higher burden did not protect against psychological distress; longer teaching experience did. These findings demonstrate how important it is to offer psychological support to special education teachers to enhance their work and general well-being.

Amelisa et al. (2022) sought to understand how special education teachers in Namibia felt about their work and their intention to leave the field about their job demands, resource characteristics, and work capabilities. 200 instructors from seven different regions of Namibia were included in the convenience sample. Questionnaires including the Capability Set for Work, Job Demands-Resources, Work Engagement, and Intention to Leave were distributed. The resourceful job, demanding work, poor job, and rich job are the four job demands-resources profiles that were found using latent profile analysis. The ability to employ information and skills was adversely correlated with an undesirable job, but the development of new knowledge and abilities, involvement in significant decision-making, fostering and maintaining connections, and goal-setting were all positively correlated with resourceful and wealthy jobs. There was a negative correlation between five out of the seven competencies and job experience. A significant portion of the variance in work engagement and a moderate portion of the variance in leave intention were predicted by positions that were resourceful and wealthy as well as by the competency set. High emotional expectations, coupled with overload and lack of resources interfere with teachers' functioning.

Nyamugoro et al. (2023) conducted a study investigating the correlation between workload and job satisfaction with supervisors among public high school teachers in Kiambu County, Kenya. The study aimed to answer the question: What is the relationship between workload and job satisfaction with supervisors in public schools in Kiambu County? The theoretical framework was grounded in two theories: the Demand resource theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor theory. A descriptive survey design was employed, targeting a population of 4,447 teachers teaching in Kiambu public secondary schools. Data were collected using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique, with a sample size of 367 teachers selected. Workload questionnaires and a standardized job satisfaction survey (JSS) for educators were utilized for data collection. These tools were piloted in Murang'a County to establish their validity and reliability. The hypothesis was tested using Multinomial logistic regression analysis, and data were descriptively analyzed using percentages and frequency tables, with presentation done through tables.

The study revealed a positive correlation between workload and job satisfaction with supervisors, indicating that supervisors provided perceived sufficient support, leading to teacher satisfaction with their work. Most teachers across various workload categories expressed satisfaction with the support received from supervisors, while only a minority showed less satisfaction. Job satisfaction

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was attributed to the adequate support provided to teachers, enabling them to manage their workload effectively. This study underscores the critical role of a supportive work environment in mitigating the negative impact of workload on teachers' psychological well-being and performance.

Mureithi, M., & Wachira, F. (2023), conducted a study to investigate teachers' workload in rural Kenyan Counties and found a strong correlation between excessive workload and reduced job satisfaction, lower students' performance, and higher attrition rates. Similarly, Chege et al. (2023) discovered that teachers in rural areas often experience limited peer support, professional isolation, and insufficient access to resources and all these factors negatively affect the teacher's Psychological Well-being.

While the reviewed studies provide valuable insight into the relationship between workload, job satisfaction, and Psychological Well-being, gaps remain, particularly in understanding the dynamics in the context of Special Needs Education in rural African settings. Most of the studies focus on general education or urban environments, leaving unique challenges faced by teachers such as limited access to specialized training, insufficient teaching resources, and the burden of catering to diverse learning needs in understaffed schools in rural Counties like Nyandarua underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on the intersection of workload, teaching experience, and Psychological Well-being.

The study's objective was to assess the influence of teachers' workload on the psychological well-being of teachers in special education settings in Nyandarua County, Kenya. Specifically, it sought to investigate the influence of teaching experiences on the psychological well-being of teachers in special schools and units in Nyandarua County, Kenya.

2.0 Research Methodology

The study employed a mixed-method approach adopting a convergent parallel design. This approach involves the researcher combining quantitative and qualitative data. The convergent parallel design offers a more comprehensive understanding of the research issue by combining quantitative and qualitative data. This method gathers quantitative information such as statistical correlations and more in-depth insights from individual experiences and narratives, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' psychological well-being. When using this design, the researcher usually gathers both types of data simultaneously and the two results are combined during the interpretation stage after each was analyzed independently. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study's target population was teachers in special schools and special units in Nyandarua County, Kenya. In Nyandarua County there are five (5) special schools. Among them 2 special schools are for Mentally Handicapped Learners (MH), One with Hearing Impairment (HI), one for Physically Impairment (PI), and one for Cerebral Palsy (CP). The number of teachers in the five special schools is 36. There are twelve (12) special units in Nyandarua County all with learners with Multiple Disabilities (MD) mixed with a total of 16 teachers. The researcher therefore took a census of the 52 teachers teaching in these special schools and special units. Creswell and Creswell (2023) state that the census involves collecting data from the entire population if the population is small.

The instruments that were used in the study were questionnaires which had questions designed by the researcher as per the objectives and standardized 18 Psychological Well-being tool by Carol Ryff. A questionnaire allows researchers to collect both qualitative and quantitative data efficiently. Quantitative data is measured using structured questionnaires consisting of closed-ended questions where respondents select responses from a predetermined list, while qualitative data is measured using unstructured questions that provide respondents with the opportunity to express their opinions and feelings in their own words (Khan, 2008). Face-to-face administration of the questionnaire was employed by the researcher to ensure data collection was conducted effectively.

Piloting was done in a Special School in Nakuru County which had learners with the same characteristics as those in Nyandarua County. According to Connelly (2008), a sample size of 10 to 30 participants is considered ideal for a pilot study. The researcher conducted a pilot study involving 15 which was the total population of the teachers teaching in a special school in Nakuru County. The pilot study aimed to test the questionnaire and assess its effectiveness in gathering the necessary information. The instrument was considered valid and reliable based on the $r=.742$ Cronbach's alpha coefficient results.

There was a challenge in the teacher's availability especially those who were managing heavy workloads. To address this, the researcher arranged flexible data collection sessions including after school hours. There was a potential for social desirability bias, where participants would respond, they deemed valuable. This was mitigated by emphasizing the confidentiality of responses and ensuring a non-judgmental environment during data collection.

Quantitative data collected underwent analysis utilizing descriptive statistical techniques and inferential statistical analysis, particularly correlation analysis to identify relationships between workload, teaching experience, and Psychological Well-being. For qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns in participant's open-ended responses. Data integration occurred during the interpretation phase, where qualitative findings were used to contextualize and explain quantitative results, for instance, statistical correlations between workload and psychological well-being were enriched by teacher's narratives detailing their lived experiences, providing a holistic understanding of the findings.

All necessary approval documents were obtained by the researcher from the School of Graduate Studies, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, and relevant Kenyan government agencies, including the National Council for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI), which operates under the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology. Subsequently, permission was sought from the Ministries of Interior and National Government Coordination and Education, headteachers, and teachers to conduct the study. At the school level permission was sought from headteachers and teachers. Before data collection permission to use the standardized Ryff psychological tool was sought from the author. In addition to obtaining necessary approvals, the researcher upheld the respondents' right to privacy by safeguarding their identity and confidentiality. Respondents were assured that their personal information would remain confidential and would not be disclosed without their explicit consent for any purpose other than academic research. Moreover, informed consent was obtained from all respondents. They were

provided with detailed information about the research objectives, methods, and potential uses of the data. Respondents were allowed to ask clarifying questions before agreeing to participate, and their agreement was documented in writing.

3.0 Results

Demographically, data was collected from 52 participants. 60% of the participants were female while the remaining 40% were males. UNESCO (2018) reported that globally, women represented 94% of teachers in pre-primary, 66% in primary, 54% in secondary, and 43% in tertiary education. Therefore, female teachers display a great percentage, which could also be why females represented a greater number than males in the study. Those who were interviewed were all above the age of 26 years while the majority 40.38% of the participants were in the age bracket of 36 - 45 years followed by 25% of the participants in the age bracket 46-55 years, 23% over 55 years while the least was of age bracket 26- 35 years old. From the findings teachers above 36 years were the majority, this may have happened because special education often requires specialized training, and therefore, teachers who have been in the field longer may have had more opportunities for professional growth and further training in special education. 50% of the participants had reached diploma level, 38.5% had reached degree level, 3.8% had attained master's level, 3.8 % had gone up to P1 level while the remaining 3.8% were untrained. The findings indicate that the diploma level was the highest, and elderly teachers were the majority likely trained in special education when diploma qualifications were standard. In contrast, younger teachers are more likely to hold degree-level qualifications due to more recent educational requirements. The findings also indicated that 65.4% of the total number of participants had worked for more than eleven years, 23.1% had six to ten years of working experience, 3.8% had experience of three to five years and the remaining 7.7 % had worked for less than two years. The findings suggest that teachers with extensive experience may have entered the profession when the field of special education was less developed, leading them to stay in the same positions for longer periods, this may also reflect a lack of new entrants into the field, possibly due to barriers such as low recruitment in special education.

Descriptive statistics on the influence of workload on teachers' psychological well-being were presented in Table 1

Table 1: Influence of Workload on Teachers' Psychological Well-Being

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Number of Lessons	52	1	5	3.67	1.167
Enough time to prepare lessons	52	1	5	2.81	1.221
Meaningful feedback	52	1	5	3.44	1.074
Confident in meeting the diverse needs of student	52	1	5	3.48	.980

Manageable workload	52	1	5	2.98	1.163
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Table 1 presents quantitative data. Results in teacher workload show that those contented with the number of lessons per week had the highest score (mean = 3.67) followed by having confidence in meeting the diverse needs of students (mean= 3.48), Providing meaningful feedback (mean= 3.44), manageable and reasonable workload (mean = 2.98) and the lowest was recorded by adequacy of having enough time to prepare the lessons (mean = 2.81). These results indicate there are issues of insufficient preparation time and difficulty in managing workload because it takes more time to create individualized lesson plans and differentiated instruction to meet a wide range of students' needs and abilities.

According to the teachers' effective work management is essential for general well-being and job satisfaction in the teaching profession. Teaching can be improved and made more manageable by prioritizing planning and developing a thorough work plan. Remedial education for students helps meet specific needs and makes sure that every student gets the support they need. Effective time management is crucial for teachers. By creating and following a personal timetable, they can better balance their workload and experience less overload. Throughout this process, keeping a positive mindset strengthens resilience and increases job satisfaction. A respondent shared the following,

In SNE every learner has diverse needs which are never the same as others. For example, when teaching 16 learners you are handling 16 different learners within one classroom with 16 different instructional methods within the lesson which sometimes gives the teacher stress, and if one is not careful one might ignore some Learners. [Respondent questionnaire 27, 4th July, 2024]

Table 2: Correlations between Workload and Teachers' Psychological Well-being

		TW	PSW
TW	Pearson Correlation	1	.066
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.640
	N	52	52

Table 2 shows the results of the correlation between the Teacher's workload and the psychological well-being of teachers. The findings revealed that there was a slight positive relationship with no statistical significance ($r=.066$, $p<.640$). Though correlation was not statistically significant, qualitative responses suggested nuanced dynamics. Factors such as teacher's resilience, support systems and workload distribution would likely mediate this relationship, warranting further investigation.

4.0 Discussion

The findings indicated that teachers' attitudes toward their workload were divided, although some were contented with the number of lessons, others were stressed about not having enough time for preparation. The Demand-Control Model states that an imbalance between teacher's perceived high demands (such as a heavy workload) and poor control (such as little time for preparation) may lead to stress and negatively affect teachers' psychological well-being.

Satisfaction with the number of lessons they teach per week displays a degree of happiness with the teaching load, which corresponds with the findings of Odisa (2022), who discovered that workload had less of an effect on job satisfaction in Nairobi County. The high level of pleasure, however, might be in contrast with research from Mangâ et al. (2021), which demonstrated that workload and work intensification harmed performance and well-being.

Teachers who felt they didn't have enough time for lesson planning reflected the problem of "time poverty" that Creagn et al. (2023) addressed as well as the negative impact that inadequate preparation time has on teachers' psychological well-being. The discontent is consistent with research by Newton et al. (2022), who noted that overwhelming workloads and insufficient support contribute to burnout. Most of the teachers expressed confidence in their ability to fulfill the varied needs of their students. Contrary to Newton et al. (2022), who found a connection between burnout and emotions of inefficacy and insufficient training and support.

Ryff's concept of autonomy can be connected to teachers' ability to manage their workload effectively. Teachers who feel they have control over their lessons and can make independent decisions about how to manage their time and responsibilities are likely to experience higher levels of autonomy. However, teachers in the study who expressed frustration about the lack of time for lesson preparation may feel a lack of autonomy, as they are unable to fully control their work environment or workload. This sense of being overwhelmed and not in control can undermine their psychological well-being.

Teachers' confidence in meeting the diverse needs of their students suggests some degree of personal growth, as they are continuously developing their skills to cater to the varied requirements of learners. However, the pressure to meet multiple needs within a single lesson without sufficient preparation time could stifle this growth, leading to stress and burnout. If teachers are unable to reflect on their practice or improve their teaching strategies due to overwhelming workload demands, it may negatively impact their sense of personal growth and professional fulfillment.

The study's findings also indicated that many teachers expressed confidence in their ability to meet the needs of their students, which suggests that they find purpose in their work. Special education teachers often have a strong sense of mission, as they work with students who require specialized attention. However, the pressure of managing excessive workloads and feeling a lack of time to prepare lessons might challenge teachers' ability to see the value of their work, leading to feelings of inefficacy. If teachers cannot fulfill their perceived purpose due to workload-related stress, this could undermine their psychological well-being and sense of life purpose.

By identifying workload as a central concern, the study underscores the need for targeted intervention including, increased training and professional development to enhance teacher's

ability to manage diverse needs. Administrative support to allocate reasonable workloads and improve planning time. Psychological support systems to address burnout and promote well-being.

5.0 Implication

Research findings on the psychological well-being of teachers in special education can contribute to efforts aimed at improving teacher retention rates and have a significant implication for educational equity in Kenya. Ensuring the psychological well-being of Special Needs Education teachers is essential for creating inclusive learning environments that encourage teachers to remain in their profession and where learners with disabilities can thrive. By understanding the specific challenges teachers face and the support systems needed to promote their well-being, policymakers can prioritize resource allocation to workload management initiatives, professional development, and mental health support services. School administrators to implement teacher-friendly workload management practices. Addressing the challenges highlighted in the study, Kenya can make significant strides in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

6.0 Conclusion

The study aimed to assess workload's influence on teachers' psychological well-being in special education settings in Nyandarua County, Kenya, highlighting the complex relationship between teaching workload and teacher well-being. Based on the findings, the study concluded that teachers expressed satisfaction with the number of lessons taught each week and their capacity to accommodate a wide range of student needs. On the other hand, difficulties were identified, including inadequate time for lesson planning and handling heavy workloads. A slight positive association was found between workload and psychological well-being. The slightly significant correlation between workload and teachers' psychological well-being suggests that the relationship between workload and well-being is complex and may vary according to individual teachers' ability to manage their workload. While some teachers may cope effectively with heavy workloads, others may experience stress and burnout due to poor workload management or inadequate institutional support. This variability emphasizes the need for personalized interventions aimed at improving workload management and increasing teacher support.

In light of these findings, it is recommended:

- I. Policymakers should look for measures to lessen excessive workloads and allot enough time for lesson preparation to address the workload challenges.
- II. The TSC should make investments in professional development that promotes dynamic and individualized methods of instruction that can promote job satisfaction and teachers' psychological well-being.
- III. The MOE may fund programs that can assess teachers' psychological state regularly, put feedback systems in place to address new issues, and continuously enhance the learning environment.

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