



Available Online at EScience Press
International Journal of Education Foundations
ISSN: 3078-7866 (Online), 3078-7858 (Print)
<https://ijef.esciencepress.net>

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Causes of Stress Affecting Teachers' Well-being in Public Secondary Schools in Nzega District-Tabora, Tanzania

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Author's Contributions

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Article History

Received: March 13, 2025; Accepted: April 22, 2025; Published: May 15, 2025.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the causes of stress affecting teachers' well-being in public secondary schools. Recognizing the serious impact of teacher stress on educational outcomes, this research aimed to identify specific stressors and evaluate the effectiveness of existing stress management practices. A mixed-methods approach with a convergent parallel design was employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. The study involved 100 participants, including teachers and school administrators, using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews for data collection. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were reviewed for key themes to capture detailed information. To ensure validity, a pilot test was conducted to refine questionnaire items and test-retest reliability with a score of 0.71 confirmed consistency over time. Ethical standards were upheld throughout the study, with informed consent obtained from all participants and strict confidentiality maintained. Findings revealed that, key stressors included high loan interest rates, inadequate resources, overcrowded classrooms, challenging student behavior, low salaries, and high parental expectations. These factors negatively affected teachers' mental health, job satisfaction, and productivity. Effective stress management practices identified included peer support, counseling services, mindfulness exercises, and fostering self-efficacy, though challenges such as limited resources, insufficient training, lack of collaborative support, and resistance to change were noted as barriers to their implementation. The study recommended strategies to improve teachers' well-being, including flexible work arrangements, reducing administrative burdens, organizing stress management workshops, and enhancing time management. Additionally, regular evaluations of teachers' stress levels and ongoing adjustments to stress management programs were advised to ensure they remained relevant and effective.

Keywords: Teacher stress; well-being; classroom management; financial challenges; work-related stress

INTRODUCTION

The causes of stress affecting teachers' well-being have gained significant attention in recent years, as stress among teachers continues to impact on their overall health and the quality of education they provide. Teacher stress refers to the negative emotions and experiences that arise due to the demanding nature of their profession. These include feelings of tension,

frustration, and anxiety, often resulting from the high expectations and multifaceted challenges associated with their roles (Adams et al., 2022). Understanding the root causes of this stress is crucial for addressing its impact on teachers and the education system at large (Johnson et al., 2022).

Globally, teachers are experiencing increasing levels of stress due to rising demands, inadequate resources,

and expanding administrative responsibilities. The specific causes of stress vary across different regions and educational contexts (Johnson et al., 2022). For instance, in Brazil, despite initiatives to promote mental health and provide stress management training, many teachers grapple with heavy workloads, bureaucratic obstacles, and insufficient resources, often leading to burnout and attrition (Almeida et al., 2021).

In contrast, Finland's education system exemplifies a proactive approach to teacher well-being. Finnish teachers benefit from greater autonomy, a supportive work environment and manageable workloads, which collectively reduce stress and enhance job satisfaction. These factors have helped Finland maintain a stable teaching workforce and achieve remarkable educational outcomes (Smith & Liao, 2021).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the situation is more challenging due to economic difficulties, under-resourced schools, and limited policy support. Research highlights that low salaries, overcrowded classrooms and a lack of professional development opportunities are major contributors to teacher stress in this region (Nguyen & Pham, 2021). For example, in Nigeria, inadequate remuneration and poor working conditions result in high stress and dissatisfaction among teachers (Akanbi et al., 2022). Similarly, in Ghana, overcrowded classrooms and insufficient teaching materials add to the stress burden on educators (Antwi & Osei, 2020). In Uganda, limited education funding exacerbates the lack of essential resources and support, further impacting teachers' mental and emotional well-being (Ssenyonga & Hecker, 2021).

In Tanzania, while several government initiatives aim to improve teacher well-being, the education system still faces significant financial constraints. These challenges lead to unstable working conditions, limited resources, and inadequate support systems for teachers, contributing to heightened stress levels (Kinyota & Kavenuke, 2019). This study focuses on examining the specific causes of stress affecting teachers in public secondary schools in Nzega District, Tabora Region. By examining work-related stressors, financial pressures, and classroom management challenges, this research seeks to shed light on how these factors affect teachers' well-being and propose solutions to mitigate their effects. This study was guided by the following study objectives, i. To identify specific work-related factors that contribute to teacher stress; ii. To Assess How Financial Issues Affect Teachers' Well-Being in Public Secondary School in Nzega District, and iii. To Examine

the Effect of Classroom Management Challenges On Teachers Wellbeing in Public Secondary Schools in Nzega District.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

This study was guided by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in the 1980s, offers a theoretical foundation for understanding the underlying causes of stress among teachers. According to SDT, individuals possess fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and when these needs are not adequately met, their motivation and well-being diminish, leading to elevated levels of stress (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In educational settings, SDT underscores the importance of work environments that support these psychological needs; otherwise, teachers may experience significant stress and reduced job satisfaction, which adversely impacts their overall well-being and effectiveness (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

By highlighting autonomy, competence, and relatedness as central needs, SDT offers valuable insights into the causes of stress affecting teachers' well-being. This study applies SDT to identify these stressors within educational contexts, aiming to develop recommendations for alleviating teacher stress by fostering work environments that fulfill these fundamental psychological needs and interventions (Standage et al., 2017).

Empirical Review

Causes of stress affecting teachers' well-being

Conteh et al. (2024) looked at stress among Italian teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, identifying poor working conditions, lack of administrative support and job insecurity as key contributors to stress. This implies that Tanzanian teachers especially Nzega may face similar difficulties, especially with limited administrative and infrastructural support, which makes further research into these areas essential.

Vaishalee (2021) further emphasizes the role of classroom dynamics in teacher stress, demonstrating that Indian educators managing overcrowded classes of 60 to 70 students struggled to provide individualized attention, a situation that resonates with the Tanzanian context. This limitation in personalized teaching due to resource scarcity highlights the urgent need for research into how such constraints exacerbate stress among teachers in Tanzania particularly Nzega district. In a broader examination of work-life balance,

Danilewitz (2017) concluded that Canadian teachers experience significant stress due to the competing demands of professional and personal responsibilities. This sentiment was echoed in the findings of Alimatu et al. (2021), who identified low pay and insufficient resources as major stressors for special education teachers in Ghana. Given the parallels in educational challenges, these findings may not be applicable to Tanzanian context especially Nzega district, necessitating localized research to uncover the specific challenges they face.

McKee and Gallagher (2019) found that teachers in the United Kingdom experienced stress due to the lack of adequate support systems, such as mentorship and peer collaboration. These supportive networks were essential for providing emotional and psychological resources that helped teachers manage their responsibilities effectively. When such structures were missing, teachers often felt isolated, undervalued and overwhelmed, leading to increased stress and decreased job satisfaction. This sense of disconnection not only exacerbated their stress but also negatively impacted on their overall well-being and resilience.

Additionally, the work of Olive et al. (2021) on Kenyan teachers revealed that financial pressures and limited career advancement opportunities significantly contribute to teacher stress. Such economic realities are likely mirrored, where local economic conditions may exacerbate existing pressures on teachers.

UNESCO (2022) similarly noted that Tanzanian teachers receive inadequate salaries compared to the cost of living, leading to added financial stress. Further, Ngirwa (2020) explored stress among Tanzanian teachers, during times of educational reform, linking job insecurity and ambiguous policy communication to increased anxiety. Thus, this study builds on the identified reviewed and gaps on identifying specific stressors affecting teachers well-being in public secondary schools in Nzega district, with the goal of proposing practical strategies for creating a more supportive teaching environment for teachers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach with a convergent parallel design to assess the causes of stress affecting teachers' well-being in public secondary schools in Nzega District, Tanzania. This design allowed for simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teachers'

stress. The target population included teachers from various public secondary schools, offering a range of perspectives on stress factors and their effects on well-being. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure that the sample represented different demographic and professional groups among teachers. Data were collected through two primary instruments: questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire, structured with a Likert scale, captured quantitative data on the levels and causes of stress, while the interviews provided qualitative insights into teachers' personal experiences and perspectives on stress-related challenges. This combination enabled the research to triangulate data and strengthen the findings.

To ensure validity, the instruments underwent content and construct validity checks, supported by a pilot study to confirm clarity and relevance. Reliability was further established through consistent application and expert review. Data analysis involved statistical methods for questionnaire responses, while thematic analysis was applied to interview data, facilitating a cohesive interpretation of findings from both sources. Ethical considerations were upheld by securing informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and creating an environment that encouraged honest and open participation. These practices underscored the study's commitment to ethical research and participant well-being.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Specific Work-related Factors that Contribute to Teacher Stress

A sample of 86 teachers were asked to respond to specific work-related factors that contribute to teacher stress using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree) and 5 (strongly Agree) in Table 3.1.

Results from Table 1 indicate that Lack of support from school administrators emerged as a significant stress factor. According to the data, 11.6% of teachers strongly disagreed, and 23.3% disagreed that administrative support was lacking, 4.7% remained neutral. However, 27.9% agreed and 32.6.7% strongly agreed that insufficient administrative support was a pressing issue. This was contrary to one of the interviewees who recommended the opposing opinions:

We regularly implement strategies to support teachers such as organizing workshops on classroom management and providing counselling when they

face difficulties. We also encourage open communication so that teachers can reach out for assistance whenever needed (Interviewee E, July 2024).

This contrast point to an important view indicates a room for improvement for both teachers and administrators so that they can meet the wellbeing of teachers for academic success.

Furthermore, the data shows that 11.6% strongly disagreed, 18.7% disagreed, and 7.0%

were neutral about resource availability, but the majority of 34.9% agreeing and 27.9 strongly agreeing that resource insufficiency as a challenge. One interviewee responded that:

The lack of resources remains a significant stressor, suggesting an urgent need for policies that ensure adequate material support in schools. This would enable teachers to devote more time and energy to quality instruction (Interviewee B, July 2024).

Table 1. Teachers' professional development and students' academic performance.

No.	Item	1		2		3		4		5	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Lack of administrative support	10	11.6	20	23.3	4	4.7	24	27.9	28	32.6
2	Insufficient of teaching resources	10	11.6	16	18.6	6	7.0	30	34.9	24	27.9
3	Much work in school	3	3.4	6	6.8	12	13.6	30	34.1	33	37.5

Key: SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree.

Source: Field Survey (2024)

This situation resonates with findings by Vaishalee (2021), who highlighted that Indian teacher working in large classrooms with limited resources struggle to provide individualized support. In Nzega context, teachers face similar resource limitations, making it challenging to address students' individual needs effectively.

Also, much work in school was highlighted as a significant stressor, with 3.4% strongly disagreeing, 6.8% disagreeing, and 13.6% neutral, 34.1% agree and strongly agree 37.5%. Excessive work in school was a significant stressor for 71.6% of teachers, with 34.1% agreeing and 37.5% strongly agreeing. One interviewee responded that:

Teachers struggle to balance lesson planning, grading, and administrative tasks, often sacrificing personal time and rest, which contributes to burnout and job dissatisfaction (Interviewee E, July 2024).

This aligns with Alimatu et al. (2021), who observed similar challenges in Ghana, where teachers report high stress due to excessive workload, making it difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance. In our study, teachers experience a similar struggle, and effective workload management practices would likely have a significant positive impact on teachers' mental health and job satisfaction.

The findings of this objective align with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) that guides the study,

which emphasizes autonomy, competence and relatedness as vital for teacher well-being. The financial burdens of high loan interest rates and low salaries restrict teachers' autonomy, making them feel constrained in their professional and personal lives. This lack of control can lead to diminished confidence, as these stressors hinder their ability to perform effectively in their roles.

Financial Issues Affecting Teachers' Well-Being

Analysis of responses from the survey, as presented in Table 2, indicates that 45.5% of teachers agreed, and 29.5% strongly agreed that high interest rates are a significant financial burden, resulting in 75.0% of participants recognizing this issue as a major concern. By contrast, only 3.4% strongly disagreed, and 11.4% disagreed, while 8.0% remained neutral on the matter. Moreover, interview data corroborates the survey findings, as Interviewee C emphasized:

High interest rates on teachers' loans make it hard for them to pay back the money they loaned. This causes stress, which always makes it harder for them to do their job well.

This implies that high loan interest rates add to teachers' financial strain, thereby adversely affecting their emotional resilience, focus, and effectiveness in the classroom.

In addition to high loan interest rates, 44.3% of teachers agreed, and 38.6% strongly agreed that their current salary is insufficient to meet basic needs, resulting in a

total of 75.6% of respondents experiencing financial strain due to inadequate income. Only a small portion 2.3%, strongly disagreed, and 6.8% disagreed, while 5.7% remained neutral. These results suggest that many teachers face considerable difficulty managing their daily expenses, as their salaries often fall short of covering fundamental costs related to housing, healthcare, and family responsibilities.

Furthermore, interview insights reinforce this notion, with one interviewee remarking:

Our salaries don't reflect the effort and commitment required in our profession; even after years of experience, the pay barely covers the basics, let alone allows for any savings (Interviewee D, July 2024).

Table 2. Teachers responses on financial issues affecting teachers' well-being (n=86).

No.	Item	1		2		3		4		5	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Teachers' Loans	3	3.4	10	11.4	7	8.0	40	45.5	26	29.5
2	Low salary	2	2.3	6	6.8	5	5.7	39	44.3	34	38.6
3	Lack of financial support programs	10	11.4	7	8.0	3	3.4	42	48.8	24	28.0

Source: Field Data (2024)

These insufficient salaries often drive teachers to take on additional work to supplement their earnings, detracting from their time and energy dedicated to classroom preparation and professional development. As a result, the low salary levels not only foster a sense of being undervalued but also contribute to burnout, adversely affecting teachers' morale, engagement and long-term commitment to the profession. Finally, the absence of financial support programs further exacerbates teachers' financial insecurity. According to the findings, 48.8% of teachers agreed, and 28.0% strongly agreed that there is a lack of accessible financial support mechanisms, only 8.0% disagreed, and 11.4% strongly disagreed, with 3.4% remained neutral. This finding highlights a notable gap in the financial support programs available to teachers, leaving them without resources for unexpected financial needs other than resorting to high-interest loans. Interview comments provide further insights into the adverse effects of this deficiency, as one interviewee explained:

There is no system in place for teachers to get help in times of financial need, other than taking high-interest loans. If we had access to emergency funds or savings programs, it would reduce a lot of the financial stress we face (Interviewee A, July 2024).

These findings are contrary with the view of Collins and Thompson (2021) who found that limited access to professional growth opportunities hindered teachers' career progression and skill enhancement. This stagnation led to frustration and reduced job satisfaction, as teachers felt constrained in their ability

to advance and evolve in their careers. In this regard the lack of professional development and structured financial support add stress and anxiety to teachers which inevitably affect their focus, motivation and overall effectiveness in the classroom.

Classroom Management Challenges Affecting Teachers' Well-being

Table 3 presents teachers' perceptions of overcrowded classrooms, showing that 8.1% strongly disagree, 10.4% disagree, 7.0% remain neutral, 41.9% agree, and 35.5% strongly agree. Overall, 73.9% of teachers consider overcrowded classrooms a significant stressor. Interviewee B emphasized:

When there are too many students in one classroom, it's stressful for teachers. It becomes difficult for teachers to give enough attention to each student or to keep the class quiet and controlled. Teachers often feel bad because of the noise, bad behaviour, and lack of space, which makes teaching harder. Additionally, managing a large group of students often means more behavioural issues and administrative tasks. The lack of space also hinders effective teaching strategies and limits the resources available, compounding the stress teachers face (Interviewee B, July 2024).

These findings are contrary with McKee & Gallagher (2019) who found that teachers in the United Kingdom experienced heightened levels of stress due to the lack of adequate support systems, such as mentorship and peer collaboration. This implies that if there is a support systems overcrowded classrooms can easily be managed while the missing of these systems make

teachers feel isolated, undervalued and overwhelmed, leading to increased stress and decreased job satisfaction. Generally, the data remarks that teachers are experiencing a significant amount of stress due to an overwhelming workload and systemic issues.

Addressing these issues might require a multifaceted approach, including reviewing staffing levels, reducing administrative burdens and providing more support to help manage classroom sizes and expectations.

Table 3. Teachers Responses on classroom management challenges affecting Teachers' Well-Being (n=86).

No.	Item	1		2		3		4		5	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Teachers' Loans	3	3.4	10	11.4	7	8.0	40	45.5	26	29.5
2	Low salary	2	2.3	6	6.8	5	5.7	39	44.3	34	38.6
3	Lack of financial support programs	10	11.4	7	8.0	3	3.4	42	48.8	24	28.0

Source: Field Data (2024)

Moreover, student behaviour was reported as a major source of stress for teachers, with 5.7% strongly disagreeing, 9.1% disagreeing, 5.7% neutral, 48.9% agreeing and 26.3% strongly agreeing. This indicates that 75.2% of teachers identify students' behaviour as a significant source of stress, with 48.9% agreeing and 26.3% strongly agreeing. These findings align with Collie et al. (2012) who found similar results in their study in Canada, where students' misbehaviour was identified as a significant factor contributing to teacher stress. The behaviours contributing to teacher stress include disruptive actions such as talking out of turn, making loud noises, aggressive conduct like bullying and physical altercations, persistent non-compliance with rules, and a lack of engagement in lessons. These issues arise when students resist authority, exhibit challenging behaviours due to external factors, or frequently engage in absenteeism and tardiness.

The interviewee supported this from a different viewpoint; she narrated:

Although student behaviour is a factor, I believe the root of this problem lies in a lack of consistent discipline policies and inadequate communication between schools and parents. In schools where discipline is enforced uniformly and there is strong parental involvement, the stress related to student behaviour is significantly reduced. (Interviewee H, August 2024).

This statement broadens the understanding of student behaviour as a stressor. It underscores the importance of systemic approaches, such as clear school policies, consistent discipline and parental engagement, in alleviating the stress associated with classroom disruptions. By establishing better communication channels between teachers, administrators and

parents, a more supportive environment can be created. This perspective also reinforces the role of leadership in implementing structured behavioural management systems, thereby reducing teacher stress and fostering a more conducive learning atmosphere which promotes teachers' well-being.

The data further reveals that Parental expectations were another stressor, with 12.8% strongly disagreeing, 9.3% disagreeing, 5.8% neutral, 37.2% agreeing and 34.8% strongly agreeing. This shows that managing parental expectations is a notable source of stress. Parental expectations always cause significant stress for teachers by putting pressure on them to meet high demands for their students' performance and behaviour. This leads to an increased workload, conflicts with parents, and stress from trying to achieve quick results. Teachers might also feel unsupported if parents' expectations don't align with the reality of their classroom work, adding to their overall stress and affecting their relationship with students.

This is in contrast with some interviewees who argued that parental involvement is essential, and not all forms of expectations are detrimental. Interviewee commented:

In schools where parents have high expectations but also actively support the learning process, teachers often perform better and report lower stress levels. The issue arises not from expectations themselves but from the lack of collaborative support. Teachers need parents as partners, not critics. Where that partnership exists, the pressure becomes motivation, rather than stress (Interviewee I, August 2024).

This observation suggests that positive, constructive relationships between teachers and parents can lead to shared responsibility in student development, thereby

reducing stress. Encouraging parental involvement through school-led initiatives and building collaborative partnerships may enhance teachers' well-being. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory's emphasis on relatedness when teachers feel supported and connected with parents, it boosts their sense of well-being and reduces stress.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the causes of stress affecting teachers' well-being in public secondary schools. Findings revealed that teachers face several significant stressors in their work environment, including high loan rates, inadequate resources, overcrowded classrooms, challenging student behaviours, low salaries, and high parental expectations. These factors combine to create a demanding work environment that impacts teachers' mental and emotional health, reduces job satisfaction, and negatively affects their overall well-being. These stressors underscore the need for targeted interventions to improve teachers' working conditions and foster a more sustainable approach to their well-being.

To address these challenges, the study recommends that school leaders conduct regular surveys and in-depth interviews to better understand teachers' specific stress factors, including workload, administrative support, classroom conditions, and financial challenges. This information can guide the development of targeted solutions that directly address the unique stressors. Financial and resource support, such as offering favourable loan terms, increased resource allocation, and subsidies for essential classroom materials, should be prioritized to ease teachers' financial burdens. Managing workloads and classroom conditions is also critical; improving student-teacher ratios and providing additional support in classroom management could help mitigate stress associated with overcrowded classrooms and challenging student behaviour.

Additionally, fostering a supportive relationship with parents through clearer communication channels can help align expectations and ease the stress teachers feel from parental demands. To further support teachers, schools should offer professional development workshops and training on stress management techniques, equipping teachers with skills to handle the psychological pressures of their roles and enhancing their resilience and well-being. By addressing these stressors, education stakeholders

have to foster a more supportive work environment, promoting teachers' well-being and enhancing their capacity to perform effectively in their roles.

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