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The Relationship Between Self-Regulation and Psychological Well-Being Among School Teachers



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This study aimed to examine the relationship between self-regulation and psychological well-being among secondary school teachers in the Seberang Perai Selatan district of Penang, Malaysia. The research was motivated by growing concerns over the declining psychological well-being of teachers due to excessive workload, administrative pressure, and emotional exhaustion, which have implications for education quality and early retirement rates. A total of 54 teachers were selected as respondents using a systematic sampling method. The instruments used in this study were the Teacher Self-Regulation Scale (TSRS) and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB). Findings revealed that teachers generally demonstrated a good level of self-regulation, while most reported a moderate level of psychological well-being. Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between self-regulation and psychological well-being ($r = .566$, $p < .001$). These results support previous findings that highlight the importance of self-regulation in promoting emotional and professional well-being among teachers. The study recommends the implementation of structured interventions focused on self-regulation development and psychosocial support within teacher professional training to ensure mental well-being and the sustainability of the teaching profession.

Keywords: self-regulation, psychological well-being, teachers, professional development, Malaysian education

Psychological well-being among teachers is a critical element influencing both the effectiveness of the teaching profession and the overall quality of the education system. Low levels of psychological well-being may impair interpersonal relationships, reduce instructional quality, and increase the intention to leave the profession (Kee Pau et al., 2022). This concern is further heightened by the increasing rate of early retirement among teachers, which has been identified as a critical issue with significant implications for human resource management in education.

A range of organisational challenges has been identified as major contributors to the decline in teachers' psychological well-being. Commonly reported factors include excessive workload, administrative pressure, and dissatisfaction with school management. Omar et al. (2020) found that more than 70% of teachers spend more time on administrative duties than on their core role as educators. Such duties include completing data forms, preparing reports, implementing filing systems, and undergoing continuous monitoring by school administrators and the District Education Office (Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah, PPD). These conditions contribute to mental and emotional fatigue and reduce the time and energy that should be allocated to the effective planning of teaching and learning activities.

Burnout or emotional exhaustion has been identified as a primary manifestation of chronic occupational stress among teachers. Maslach and Leiter (2016) define burnout as a condition characterised by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment. In the educational context, burnout directly impacts teachers' ability to build positive relationships with students, maintain teaching motivation, and make rational decisions. Furthermore, burnout is associated with mental health problems such as stress and anxiety, which indirectly affect teachers' job performance and overall well-being (Kee Pau et al., 2022). Reports from the Ministry of Education Malaysia (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, KPM) indicate a rising trend in voluntary retirement applications among teachers, further contributing to the shortage of teaching staff in schools. This situation places additional pressure on remaining teachers and creates a cycle of work-related stress that is difficult to break without comprehensive intervention (Ming, 2024).

In this regard, psychological well-being and self-regulation are recognised as two complementary components that enable teachers to perform their responsibilities effectively and resiliently. Ryff (1989) defines psychological well-being as a state in which individuals function optimally across various dimensions of life, including emotional, social, and professional aspects. In education, this encompasses the ability to maintain emotional balance, experience job satisfaction, and remain resilient to work-related pressures and demands (Kok et al., 2021). Teachers with high psychological well-being are more likely to engage positively with students, make effective

instructional decisions, and maintain their commitment to the profession (Ryff, 1989).

Aligned with this, self-regulation serves as a key mechanism supporting psychological well-being. Self-regulation refers to an individual's capacity to manage emotions, behaviours, and thoughts to achieve personal and professional goals (Zimmerman, 2000). Teachers with strong self-regulation skills are better able to adapt to changes, manage occupational stress, and sustain intrinsic motivation, thereby strengthening their psychological well-being. Baharuddin and Ismail (2023) found that teachers with higher levels of self-regulation are more likely to maintain positive psychological well-being, as they can manage stress effectively and prevent burnout. Similarly, teachers with high self-regulation tend to exhibit lower burnout levels and demonstrate higher quality interactions with students (Tsigilis et al., 2021).

Recent studies show that teachers with strong self-regulation skills are capable of planning lessons more systematically, managing time and tasks more efficiently, and adapting teaching strategies to meet students' needs. These abilities also enable teachers to set clear instructional goals, conduct self-monitoring to assess teaching effectiveness, and engage in reflection based on feedback for continuous improvement (Capa-Aydin et al., 2017; Panadero et al., 2024). In this context, self-regulation not only enhances instructional effectiveness but also contributes to teachers' psychological well-being. Zhou et al. (2024) found that individual factors such as self-motivation and psychological capital (which includes self-confidence, optimism, and emotional resilience) play a significant role in supporting teachers' well-being. Teachers with higher psychological capital are less likely to leave the profession and are more committed to their responsibilities.

Moreover, Liu and Du (2024) reported that interventions based on mindfulness and emotional regulation can enhance psychological capital, which in turn helps teachers cope with work stress, reduce burnout, and improve the quality of their professional lives. Therefore, teacher professional development should emphasise comprehensive psychosocial support, including self-regulation training, mindfulness practices, and continuous efforts to strengthen internal psychological resources. Such initiatives can ensure teachers remain resilient and function optimally in challenging work environments.

In conclusion, teachers' psychological well-being is a crucial element in ensuring the sustainability and quality of the teaching profession. High workload, organisational pressures, and prolonged emotional exhaustion have been shown to impair teachers' ability to perform effectively, thereby increasing the risk of burnout and early retirement intentions. Nevertheless, self-regulation and the enhancement of internal psychological resources, such as psychological capital, can play a pivotal role in reinforcing teachers' emotional resilience. Therefore, a concerted effort from relevant stakeholders, particularly the Ministry of Education Malaysia, is required to implement structured and ongoing interventions that support teachers' mental well-being. These should include self-regulation training, self-awareness programs such as mindfulness, and the development of motivation and emotional resilience. This approach not only improves the quality of teachers' professional lives but also ensures the long-term sustainability of the national education system.

Method

Participants

This study involved respondents consisting of secondary school teachers in the district of Seberang Perai Selatan, Penang. The study population comprised teachers who were actively serving in government schools in the area. A total of 54 teachers were selected as the study sample using a systematic sampling method. This approach enabled the orderly selection of samples and reduced bias, while saving time in the data collection process.

Research Instrument

The study employed a questionnaire as the primary instrument to obtain data from the respondents. The researcher chose a questionnaire because it is an effective method for systematically collecting quantitative data. It is also easy for respondents to answer and is suitable for studies involving large populations that require data collection within a short time frame. The questionnaire was developed based on the study objectives and adapted from previous validated and reliable instruments. Several items were modified to suit the current research context; however, the core principles and structure were retained to facilitate comparison with previous studies.

The questionnaire comprised three sections: Section A, Section B, and Section C. Section A focused on respondents' demographic information, including gender, teaching experience, and educational level. Section B contained items measuring teachers' self-regulation using the Teacher Self-Regulatory Scale (TSRS) developed by Capa-Aydin et al. (2009). This instrument is based on Barry Zimmerman's self-regulation theory and consists of 40 items using a 6-point Likert scale. The theory encompasses three interrelated components: cognitive regulation, motivational regulation, and behavioural regulation. Section C measured psychological well-being using the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) developed by Carol Ryff in 1989. This instrument contains 18 items designed to assess psychological well-being

across six key dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. It uses a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree; 7 = strongly disagree).

Before conducting the main study, a pilot study was carried out on a small-scale sample to evaluate the appropriateness, validity, and reliability of the questionnaire. This involved 20 teachers from both primary and secondary schools. The analysis results showed that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the self-regulation instrument was 0.825, while the psychological well-being instrument yielded 0.865. These values indicate a high level of reliability, confirming that the instruments were suitable for the actual study.

Results

The findings indicate that the demographic analysis of respondents recorded a total of 54 participants, all of them were school teachers. Of this total, 15 respondents (27.8%) were male, while 39 respondents (72.2%) were female.

As shown in Table 1, the majority of teachers were aged 46 years and above (n = 24; 44.4%), followed by those aged 36–40 years (n = 13; 24.1%). Teachers aged 41–45 years comprised 18.5% (n = 10) of the respondents, while those aged 25–30 years accounted for 9.3% (n = 5). The smallest group was teachers aged 31–35 years, making up 3.7% (n = 2).

Regarding teaching experience, the largest group had 16–20 years of experience (n = 25; 46.3%), followed by those with 11–15 years of experience (n = 9; 16.7%). Teachers with 1–5 years and 6–10 years of teaching experience each represented 9.3% (n = 5) of the sample. In terms of educational level, the majority held a bachelor's degree (n = 47; 87%), while a smaller proportion held a master's degree (n = 7; 13%).

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

		Frequency (n)	**Percentage** (%)
Gender	Male	15	27.8%
	Female	39	72.2%
Age	25 – 30 years	5	9.3%
	31 – 35 years	2	3.7%
	36 – 40 years	13	24.1%
	41 – 45 years	10	18.5%
	Above 46 years	24	44.4%
Teaching Experience	1 – 5 years	5	9.3%
	6 – 10 years	5	9.3%
	11-15 years	9	16.7%
	16 – 20 years	10	18.5%
	More than 20 years	25	46.3%
Educational Level	Bachelor's degree	47	87.0%
	Master's degree	7	13.0%
	Total	**54**	**100.0**%

N = 54

Level of Teachers' Self-Regulation

For the findings on teachers' level of self-regulation, the data in Table 2 show that all 54 teachers (100.0%) recorded a high level of self-regulation. This indicates that all teachers in the study possess strong capabilities in managing their self-regulation effectively.

Table 2

	Frequency (n)	**Percentage (%)**	**Cumulative Percentage**
High	54	100.0%	100.0%
Total	54	100.0%	
Total overall mean score			3.00

Level of Teachers' Psychological Well-Being

The next findings concern the level of teachers' psychological well-being. The data in Table 3 show that 52 teachers (96.3%) recorded a moderate level, while only 2 teachers (3.7%) recorded a high level of psychological well-being.

Table 3

	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage
Low level	0	0	0
Moderate level	52	96.3%	96.3%
High level	2	3.7%	100.0%
Total	54	100.0%	
Total overall mean score			2.03

Correlation Between Self-Regulation and Teachers' Psychological Well-Being

As shown in Table 4, the results of the Pearson correlation analysis indicated a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between self-regulation and psychological well-being among teachers ($r = .566$, $p < .001$). This suggests that the higher a teacher's level of self-regulation, the higher their level of psychological well-being.

Table 4

		Self-regulation	Psychological well-being
Self-regulation	Pearson Correlation	1	.566*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	54	54
Psychological Well-Being	Pearson Correlation	.566**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	54	54

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

Based on the results of the Pearson correlation analysis, this study found a significant positive relationship between self-regulation and psychological well-being among teachers ($r = .566$, $p < .05$). This result indicates that teachers with a high level of self-regulation tend to achieve a better level of psychological well-being. These findings support previous work by Zimmerman (2000), who emphasized that self-regulation plays an important role in individual self-efficacy, particularly in managing stress, controlling emotions, and adapting to workplace demands.

Consistent with this finding, Briganti and Cohen (2023) reported that teachers with a high level of self-regulation demonstrated better psychological flourishing, including job satisfaction and emotional stability. Furthermore, a global meta-analysis by Zhou, Slemp, and Vella-Brodrick (2024) confirmed that self-regulation is among the key factors influencing teachers' well-being across different cultural contexts and education systems. At the local level, Kamaruddin and Jamil (2021) also found that teachers who were skilled in controlling emotions and regulating their own responses scored higher in psychological well-being compared to their less-skilled counterparts. Collectively, these findings strengthen the current study's results, demonstrating strong consistency with the existing literature.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be explained through Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which posits that self-regulated behavior can fulfill basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are met, individuals tend to achieve optimal well-being. In the teaching profession, the ability to manage emotions, set personal goals, and adapt to changes and work pressures is an essential aspect of supporting such well-being. This finding also aligns with Ryff's (1989) Model of Psychological Well-Being, which emphasizes dimensions such as environmental mastery, personal growth, and autonomy as key components of psychological well-being. Teachers who can maintain emotional balance and a sense of control over their daily work are more likely to sustain positive psychological stability.

From a practical standpoint, this study suggests that various forms of intervention should be implemented to enhance teachers' self-regulation skills. Training programs in stress management, the development of self-awareness, and the provision of structured and ongoing emotional support can positively impact their psychological well-being. Therefore, school administrators and education policymakers are encouraged to implement proactive, evidence-based intervention strategies as part of teacher well-being initiatives at the school level. Such approaches not only strengthen teachers' emotional resilience but also have the potential to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The research employed a quantitative design with sampling limited to teachers

in urban areas, meaning that the findings are only applicable to the study's context and may not represent the entire teacher population. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ a mixed-methods approach to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding, including insights into teachers' subjective experiences of practicing self-regulation in their professional lives.

Conclusion

This study was conducted with the primary aim of identifying the relationship between self-regulation and psychological well-being among teachers. A review of the literature indicated that some teachers face challenges in controlling emotions, managing work-related stress, and adapting behaviors to meet the demands of the school environment. Inability in these areas may undermine psychological well-being, reduce teaching quality, strain interpersonal relationships at work, and increase the risk of emotional exhaustion and the intention to leave the teaching profession.

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between self-regulation and psychological well-being. This has important implications, as teachers with a high level of self-regulation tend to achieve better psychological well-being. These findings directly reinforce the need to emphasize the development of self-regulation skills among educators to support their mental and emotional well-being.

Overall, psychological well-being serves as a key indicator of a teacher's professional quality of life, while self-regulation acts as an essential support mechanism that helps sustain such well-being. Teachers who can effectively manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are not only better equipped to handle daily work challenges but are also more capable of creating a positive learning environment that supports students' holistic development.

Therefore, self-regulation should be given serious attention and strengthened through various initiatives such as self-management training, administrative support, and professional interventions grounded in positive psychology approaches. In conclusion, self-regulation and psychological well-being are two interrelated elements that complement each other in empowering teacher professionalism and ensuring the sustainability of the teaching profession in the long term.

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