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Exploring the Impact of Teachers' Workplace Stress on Student Motivation, Teacher-Student Relationships, and Math Achievement

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates the relationship between teacher stress and workload and its effects on students' academic performance in mathematics. A descriptive survey research design was employed to collect quantitative data through surveys. Purposive sampling was used to select participants from both private and public secondary schools in South Africa and Nigeria. A total of 236 mathematics teachers were included based on specific inclusion criteria. The study found that high teacher stress levels and excessive workload can negatively affect instructional quality, reduce student motivation, and create less effective learning environments. In contrast, supportive teaching conditions, such as manageable workloads and effective stress management strategies, improved student mathematics performance. Based on these findings, the study recommends a holistic approach to addressing the impact of teacher stress and workload, emphasizing the importance of supportive environments that prioritize both teacher well-being and student achievement. This study contributes to scholarship by exploring the frequently overlooked relationship between teacher stress, workload, and student academic performance in mathematics within South Africa and Nigeria. In this study, a critical research gap was filled by shifting focus from teacher competence to the impact of teaching conditions on student output. Furthermore, the study presents evidence-based recommendations that advocate for a holistic and systemic approach to improving student achievement by prioritizing teacher well-being. Finally, this study contributes to the fields of educational management and policy by emphasizing the importance of supportive teaching environments as one of the key factors in enhancing student learning outcomes.

Keywords: Stress, Workload, Teachers, Performance, Mathematics

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INTRODUCTION
The role of teachers in shaping students' academic outcomes in recent years has gained significant attention, especially in the mathematics education context. The level of stress and workload experienced by teachers is perceived as a crucial factor influencing teachers' effectiveness. Stress among teachers affects not only their well-being but also the quality of education provided to students, particularly mathematics, which is a subject that requires patience, exactness, and clarity. To understand the dynamics of stress and workload on teachers and their undulating effects on students' academic performance, especially in mathematics, it is therefore important to be inclusive in educational research and policy-making.

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Often, Mathematics is one of the subjects used to judge students' academic progress. A solid and sound foundation in mathematics is essential for a student to be successful in the future. The performance of secondary school students in mathematics in South Africa and Nigeria has notably declined, with teachers' roles in student achievement often emphasised. However, factors, such as teacher stress and workload, which may impact academic outcomes, are frequently overlooked. Mathematics achievement is an effective determinant of both cognitive and non-cognitive student abilities that are major factors in the creation of inequality in education and employment. The significance of mathematics for the future success of students and the immense pressure on schools to increase student achievement make mathematics the ideal subject for identifying the effects of teacher burnout.

With this being the case, schools need to monitor the status of their teachers to ensure that they are not burning out and ineffective, as it has adverse effects on student achievement. This study explores the relationship between teacher burnout due to work stress and workload and student achievement in the subject of mathematics. Owing to the fact that the Ministry of Education, through a quality assurance scheme, has made schools accountable for student achievement, it is important to focus on an area that has direct implications on how student achievement is evaluated by the school.

Teachers and students are the principal assets of the school sector. The quality of the teachers is of utmost importance, as it has been shown that teacher quality is the most important variable in students' achievement, more so than the size of the class or school and the students' socioeconomic status. This, in turn, leads to teacher effectiveness being the pivot point between policies that increase standardization and those that might allow broader system improvement.

The increased emphasis on education within the globalized market has made accountability a leading requirement for many schools in both rural and urban settings. With the quality assurance scheme of the Ministry of Education in Nigeria and the Department of Basic Education in South Africa, schools are obligated to ensure that all students show adequate yearly progress in their studies. This has put a tremendous amount of pressure on schools that are already struggling to meet high standards and expectations.

In Nigeria and South Africa, the persistent issue of students' failure in mathematics has been a significant concern for parents, teachers, and the broader community.[1] Despite various attempts by scholars to identify solutions to this ongoing challenge, several factors contributing to poor performance in mathematics have been highlighted. These include mathematics anxiety among learners,[2] ineffective teaching methods and inadequate teacher training,[3] overcrowded classrooms,[4] insufficient numbers of qualified mathematics teachers,[5] a lack of teaching aids and instructional materials,[6] frequent teacher transfers,[7] students' socio-economic background,[8] poor curriculum design,[9] and infrastructural decay.[10]

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[1] Awofala Adeneye and Alfred Fatade, "Nigerian Students' Poor Performance in Mathematics: Who Do We Blame?," *Nigerian Online Journal of Educational Sciences and Technology* 5, no. 1 (2023): 80–91; Nomsa Mabena, Patricia Namayammu Mokgosi, and Selina Serole Ramapela, "Factors Contributing to Poor Learner Performance in Mathematics: A Case of Selected Schools in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa," *Problems of Education in the 21st Century* 79, no. 3 (2021): 451.

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[3] Vivian M. Olaseni and Abayomi O Olaseni, "Covid-19 Pandemic: Impact of Socio-Demographic Factors and Parent's Life Orientation on Enforced Learning in Pupils during Lock-down in Nigeria," *Cape Comorin* 2, no. 4 (2020): 34–39.

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[5] Yusuf Suleiman and Araba Hammed, "Perceived Causes of Students' Failure in Mathematics in Kwara State Junior Secondary Schools: Implication for Educational Managers," *International Journal of Educational Studies in Mathematics* 6, no. 1 (2019): 19–33.

[6] Suleiman and Hammed, "Perceived Causes of Students' Failure in Mathematics in Kwara State Junior Secondary Schools: Implication for Educational Managers."

[7] Suleiman and Hammed, "Perceived Causes of Students' Failure in Mathematics in Kwara State Junior Secondary Schools: Implication for Educational Managers."

[8] Suleiman and Hammed, "Perceived Causes of Students' Failure in Mathematics in Kwara State Junior Secondary Schools: Implication for Educational Managers."

[9] Francis Kafata and Serah K Mbetwa, "An Investigation into the Failure Rate in Mathematics and Science at Grade Twelve 12 Examinations and Its Impact to the School of Engineering: A Case Studyof Kitwe District of Zambia," *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research* 5, no. 8 (2016): 71–93.

[10] Adeneye Olarewaju Awofala et al., "Mathematics Productive Disposition as a Correlate of Senior Secondary School Students' Achievement in Mathematics in Nigeria," *International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology* 53, no. 6 (2022): 1326–42.

Despite numerous recommendations aimed at addressing these issues, significant progress in improving students' mathematics performance across African countries, particularly in Nigeria and South Africa, remains limited.

Adeneye and Fatade argue that the responsibility for students' poor performance in mathematics lies with multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, teachers, parents, and students.[11] Furthermore, Awofala et al. found a strong relationship between productive disposition and academic achievement, with positive attitudes of students toward mathematics contributing to 84.3% of the variation in academic performance.[12] However, none of these studies have considered the impact of teachers' stress and excessive workload on the delivery of mathematics instruction.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate how teachers' stress (stemming from student misbehavior, academic performance challenges, and teachers' work conditions) and excessive workload affect students' mathematics performance in both private and public secondary schools in Nigeria and South Africa.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the impact of Teachers' Workplace Stress on Teacher-Student Relationships.
2. To examine the impact of Teachers' Workplace Stress on Students' Academic Motivation.
3. To examine the impact of Teachers' Workplace Stress on Students' Performance in Mathematics.

Research Hypotheses

- H1**:** The stress and workload of teachers indirectly affect students' performance in mathematics through teaching quality and approach.
- H2: Increased stress levels among teachers negatively impact their teaching quality and approach.
- H3: Teaching quality and approach significantly influence students' performance in mathematics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher stress and workload are increasingly recognized as critical factors that influence students' academic performance, particularly in subjects like mathematics. The level of stress experienced by teachers is often directly related to their workload and job demands. The impact of teacher stress on the quality of mathematics instruction is particularly significant. In a study by Smith and Brown stressed teachers were found to often struggle to maintain instructional rigor and clarity, which can result in gaps in students' understanding and performance.[13] This highlights the crucial role that teacher well-being plays in ensuring effective teaching and learning in mathematics.

The relationship between teachers and students is also central to academic outcomes. Lee and Garcia found that teachers under stress may become overly strict or disengaged in their interactions with students, potentially leading to decreased student engagement and a lack of motivation, particularly in subjects like mathematics.[14] The quality of teaching within a school has a long-term impact on students' academic achievement, especially in mathematics. A meta-analysis by Wang et al. concluded that students with lower performance on standardized mathematics exams were often taught by teachers experiencing higher levels of stress, further illustrating the detrimental effects of teacher workload and stress on student outcomes.[15]

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[11] Adeneye and Fatade, "Nigerian Students' Poor Performance in Mathematics: Who Do We Blame?"

[12] Awofala et al., "Mathematics Productive Disposition as a Correlate of Senior Secondary School Students' Achievement in Mathematics in Nigeria."

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[15] Xiaoyu Wang et al., "Understanding Teacher Emotional Exhaustion: Exploring the Role of Teaching Motivation, Perceived Autonomy, and Teacher–Student Relationships," *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (January 8, 2024), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1342598.

The literature surrounding teacher stress highlights its profound impact on both educators and students. According to Robinson et al., student misbehavior in the classroom is a major contributor to elevated stress levels among teachers.[16] Specifically, behaviors such as talking out of turn, disregarding instructions, and engaging in off-task activities disrupt the learning process. These behaviors not only reduce instructional time but also increase teachers' workloads, leading to strain and, ultimately, burnout.[17] Teachers are required to put additional effort into managing such behaviors. This exacerbates feelings of frustration and fatigue.

The connection between teacher stress and student academic performance is significant.Stress levels are further compounded when a teacher's effectiveness is linked directly to student performance, as noted by Al Shauli.[18] This pressure, intensified by the demands of standardized testing, places additional stress on educators and undermines their well-being.[19]

Socioeconomic factors also play a crucial role in teacher stress. Brown et al., suggests that teachers in schools with a high proportion of students from low-income backgrounds often experience increased emotional and academic stress.[20] These stressors are compounded by systemic challenges, as reported by Chang et al., who identified factors such as excessive workload, lack of administrative support, inadequate classroom resources, overcrowded classrooms, poor working conditions, and negative organizational climate as key contributors to teacher burnout.[21]

The overall well-being of teachers is critical to the education system's success, as teachers are the cornerstone of student achievement. Burić and Kim emphasize that teacher well-being influences students' academic outcomes.[22] Hakanen et al. further argue that high levels of stress and excessive workload can lead to burnout, diminishing a teacher's ability to effectively deliver instruction.[23] The Bo also highlights that teacher stress and workload directly impact the quality of instruction, reducing classroom engagement and negatively affecting student performance, particularly in subjects like mathematics.[24]

The literature consistently underscores the multifaceted nature of teacher stress and its detrimental effects on both educators and students. Effective strategies for reducing teacher stress are necessary to improve teachers' and students' overall educational experience.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is theoretically grounded in Lazarus' (1986) Transactional Theory of Stress and Karasek's (1976) Job Demand-Control (JDC) theory. The Transactional Theory posits that stress results from a dynamic transaction between the individual and their environment.[25] This interaction can lead to depletion of the individual's resources, which can threaten their overall well-being. According to this theory, any aspect of the work environment, whether it is a task, an interaction, or a circumstance, can be perceived as a stressor, depending on how the individual assesses the situation.

On the other hand, the Job Demand-Control (JDC) theory, developed by Karasek, suggests that work-related stress stems from the interaction between job demands and the level of control an individual has over their work.[26] High job demands, such as heavy workload, emotional and cognitive

[16] Luz E Robinson et al., "Teachers, Stress, and the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Analysis," *School Mental Health* 15, no. 1 (2023): 78–89.
[17] Robinson et al., "Teachers, Stress, and the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Analysis."
[18] Ali Sulaiman Talib Al Shuaili, "The Relationship between Schoolwork Stress and Teachers' Job Satisfaction: A Study in the Context of Omani Schools," *International Journal of Future Multidisciplinary Research* 6, no. 5 (2024): 1–15.
[19] David A Jobes, *Managing Suicidal Risk: A Collaborative Approach* (Guilford Publications, 2023).
[20] Michael Kingsley Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Univ of California Press, 2023).
[21] Ching-Yi Chang et al., "Facilitating Nursing and Health Education by Incorporating ChatGPT into Learning Designs," *Educational Technology & Society* 27, no. 1 (2024): 215–30.
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[23] J. J. Hakanen, A. B. Bakker, and E. Demerouti, " How Job Demands Impact Teachers' Well-Being and Educational Outcomes: A Multilevel Study," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 115, no. 3 (2023): 421–33.
[24] Nang Sagawah Win Bo, "OECD Digital Education Outlook 2023: Towards an Effective Education Ecosystem," *Hungarian Educational Research Journal* 15, no. 2 (2025): 284–89.
[25] Robert A Karasek Jr, "Job Demands, Job Decision Latitude, and Mental Strain: Implications for Job Redesign," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1979, 285–308.
[26] Karasek Jr, "Job Demands, Job Decision Latitude, and Mental Strain: Implications for Job Redesign."

stressors, interpersonal conflicts, and poor management practices, may contribute to stress, particularly when workers feel little control over these demands. The balance between job demands and control determines the level of stress experienced and its subsequent impact on employee well-being and performance.

Both theories are critical to this study, as they provide a framework for understanding how stress, stemming from various environmental and work-related factors, directly influences staff performance and well-being. By examining these theories, this study aims to explore the intricate relationship between stressors in the work environment and their effects on employees' health and productivity.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a descriptive survey research design with a quantitative data collection approach. The primary focus of the study was to explore the relationship between socio-demographic factors, teacher stress, workload, and their impact on students' performance in Mathematics. The study specifically examined how various dimensions of stress and workload, including time pressure, administrative support, and personal stress levels, affect teachers' ability to deliver effective instruction, which in turn influences student outcomes in Mathematics.

The descriptive survey method was selected for its ability to capture a comprehensive snapshot of the experiences and perceptions of the target population—teachers and students—through structured questionnaires. This approach allowed for identifying and quantifying the key factors influencing academic performance, thus providing valuable insights into how teacher-related stress and workload variables may mediate student achievement in Mathematics.

By collecting data on socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., age, years of experience, teaching environment) alongside detailed information on stress and workload, the study aimed to describe and analyze the significant factors impacting students' performance in Mathematics, drawing meaningful correlations between teacher-related stress and student outcomes.

Population and Sampling

The study population comprised senior secondary school teachers from Nigeria and South Africa. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 236 secondary schools teachers in both countries. This sampling approach was chosen because these teachers were considered to have the relevant information required for the study, as they are responsible for teaching mathematics in the selected schools. A structured questionnaire, which included a consent form, was developed for data collection. Respondents were encouraged to complete and share the survey with colleagues who met the inclusion criteria.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Teachers' Stress and Workload on Students' Academic Performance in Mathematics Questionnaire" (TSWSAP), which was developed by the investigator and validated by experts in the Faculty of Education. The questionnaire consists of three sections. The first section gathers socio-demographic information from participants, including sex, age, religion, parents' socio-economic status, family structure, and family status. The second section assesses the impact of teachers' stress on students' academic performance in mathematics, while the third section explores the impact of teachers' workload on students' academic performance in the subject. The responses to the questionnaire are provided on a 5-point Likert scale, with scores ranging from 1 to 5, resulting in a total score range of 1 to 25. Lower scores reflect a lower impact on students' academic performance in mathematics, whereas higher scores indicate a greater impact. This study confirmed the scale's reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the SPSS package (version 27) for the quantitative data. The analyzed data are related to the three research objectives in the early paragraph. The retrieved data were

analyzed using cross-tabulation prevalence estimate analysis, and multiple linear regression was presented.

Ethical Consideration

Before the commencement of fieldwork in this study, ethical approval was obtained from the Ministry of Education of Nigeria and the Research Committee of South Africa. The approval was to determine zero or minimal harm to the study participants. The informed consent forms were made available to all participants, noting the study's impending risks and benefits. The following principles of ethics were well observed because the study involves human beings.[27] Informed consent was obtained through letters from students through the school Principals and Teachers to take part in the study. The informed consent letter entails a brief introduction of the researchers, the purpose of the study, participants' rights to withdraw, the interests of participants, privacy, and anonymity. Sensitive questions that could provoke hostility among participants and researchers were avoided. The informed consent form was detached for the potential participants to their parents, while the detailed informed assent form was attached at the beginning of the questionnaire. Both consent and assent forms were prerequisites to continue in the survey. Therefore, the individuals who returned both the consent and assent forms were the individuals who participated in the study. The data collection was initiated in August 2023 and closed in October 2023.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Table 1 Shows the multifaceted impact of Teachers' Workplace Stress on Teacher-Student Relationships, Students; Academic Motivation, and Mathematics Performance

Model		R	R^2	F	sig	95% Cl
1	Teacher-Student Relations hips	0.18	0.03	07.60	< 0.01	0.70 - 0.42
2	Students' Academic Motiv ation	0.25	0.06	15.13	< 0.01	0.31 - 0.95
3	Math's Performance	0.01	0.00	0.01	> 0.05	0.77 - 0.87

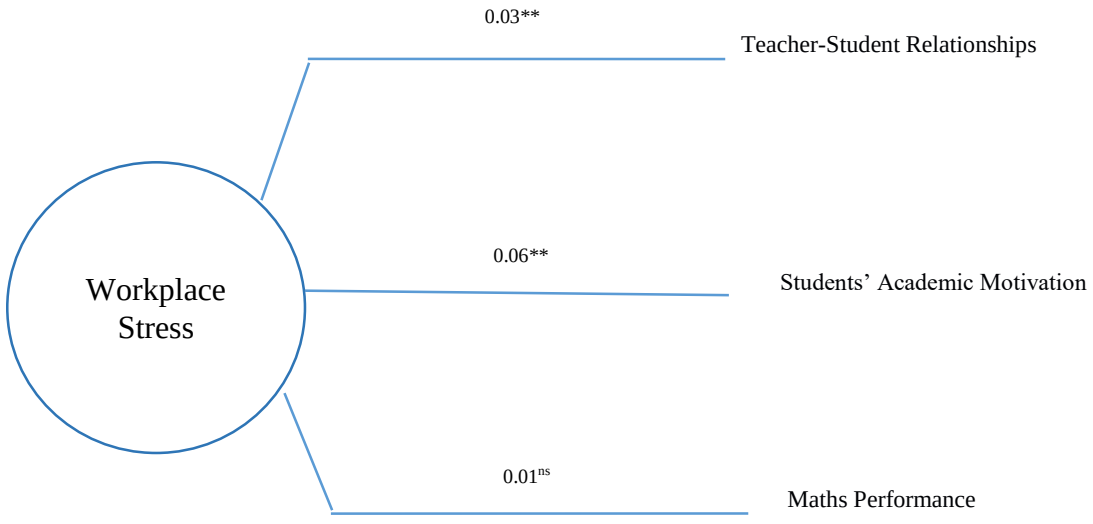

Figure 1: Showing the Prediction Models of the impact of Teachers' Workplace Stress on Teacher-Student Relationships, Students; Academic Motivation, and Mathematics Performance

The simple linear regression analysis presented in Table 1 indicates that workplace stress significantly affects Teacher-Student Relationships ($R^2 = 0.03$; $F = 7.60$; $p < 0.01$). In other words, 3%

[27] Barry Simon, *Real Analysis* (American Mathematical Soc., 2015).

of the variance in Teacher-Student Relationships can be attributed to teachers' workplace stress. This finding supports the first hypothesis of the study, which proposed that teachers' workplace stress would significantly influence Teacher-Student Relationships. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Table 1 also reveals that teachers' workplace stress significantly impacts students' academic motivation ($R^2 = 0.06$; $F = 15.13$; $p < 0.01$). This suggests that teachers' workplace stress explains 6% of the variance in students' academic motivation. This finding aligns with the study's second hypothesis, stating that teachers' workplace stress significantly influences students' academic motivation. Consequently, Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

However, the analysis further shows that teachers' workplace stress does not significantly impact students' mathematics performance ($R^2 = 0.01$; $F = 0.01$; $p > 0.05$). Since this result is inconsistent with the third hypothesis, which posited that teachers' workplace stress would significantly affect students' academic performance, Hypothesis 3 is rejected.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that workplace stress significantly affects teacher-student relationships. In more precise words, teachers' workplace stress contributed to a 3% variance observed in determining Teacher-Student Relationships; this finding is consistent with the study's hypothesis, which stated that 'teachers' workplace stress will significantly influence Teacher-Student Relationships' and, therefore, the stated hypothesis 1 is accepted. This study also supports the findings of Al Shuaili, who posited that stress and burnout greatly influence teachers' working attitudes and relationships with students.[28]

This study further revealed that teachers' workplace stress significantly impacts students' academic motivation; that is, Teachers' workplace stress contributed to a 6% variance observed in students' academic motivation. These findings are consistent with the study's hypothesis 2, which stated that 'teachers' Workplace Stress will significantly influence Students' Academic Motivation'; therefore, the stated hypothesis 2 is accepted. These findings are in line with the findings of Wang et al. and Muhonen et al., which opine that teachers' state of mind determines his/her attitude towards curriculum delivery, which in turn influences students' attitudes and interest to learn.[29]

Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed that teachers' workplace stress does not significantly impact students' mathematics performance. The findings are inconsistent with study hypothesis three, which stated that 'teachers' Workplace Stress will significantly influence students' academic performance. Therefore, hypothesis three is rejected. This finding opposes the findings of Hakanen et al., which stated that Teachers' stress leads to burnout and contributes to students' poor performance.[30]

Discussion Summary

This study found that teachers' workplace stress significantly impacts teacher-student relationships and students' academic motivation. Specifically, stress explained 3% of the variance in teacher-student relationships and 6% in students' academic motivation, supporting the study's hypotheses. These findings are consistent with previous research . However, the study also revealed that teacher stress does not significantly affect students' mathematics performance, contradicting the third hypothesis and opposing the findings of Hakanen et al.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, schools and educational institutions implement strategies are recommended to reduce teacher workplace stress. This could include providing professional development, mental health

[28] Al Shuaili, "The Relationship between Schoolwork Stress and Teachers' Job Satisfaction: A Study in the Context of Omani Schools."

[29] Johnson, "Understanding Teacher Burnout: The Role of Workload and Stress Factors"; X. Wang et al., " Understanding Teacher Emotional Exhaustion: Exploring the Role of Teaching Motivation, Perceived Autonomy, and Teacher–Student Relationships," *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (2024): 1342598; Heli Muhonen et al., "Educational Dialogue and Teacher Occupational Stress in Relation to Student Math Performance," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 68, no. 3 (2024): 539–57.

[30] Hakanen, Bakker, and Demerouti, " How Job Demands Impact Teachers' Well-Being and Educational Outcomes: A Multilevel Study."

support, and a more supportive work environment. Addressing teacher stress can improve teacher-student relationships and improve students' academic motivation. Additionally, further research is needed to explore the potential impact of teacher stress on student performance, particularly in specific subjects like mathematics, to develop targeted interventions.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn from the study is that teachers' workplace stress has a notable impact on teacher-student relationships and students' academic motivation, supporting the initial hypotheses in these areas. However, the study also suggests that teachers' stress does not significantly affect students' mathematics performance, indicating that the relationship between teacher stress and student academic performance may be more complex or context-dependent. These findings highlight the importance of addressing teacher stress to improve both interpersonal dynamics and student motivation, though its effect on academic performance requires further investigation.

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Dr. Themba Saziwa is the Head of the Department of Adult and Education Foundations in the Faculty of Education at Walter Sisulu University. He holds a Doctor of Education (DEd) in Mathematics Education, a Master of Education (MEd) in Education Management and Policy, and a College Higher Education Diploma (CHED) specializing in Mathematics and Biology School Teaching. His research interests span Mathematics Education, Education Management, and Metacognition, with a focus on enhancing educational practices and deepening scholarly insight. Through his leadership and research, Dr. Saziwa continues to make significant contributions to the advancement of education.