



Exploring the Interaction of Socio-Economic Factors and Social Support on the Psychological Well-Being of Private School Teachers in Akwa Ibom State

Moses T. Imbur^{1*}, Innocent S. Ikoroha², Ofon- Cherry Kelvin Dikibo³ & Christie Mlumum Mozeh⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Department of Psychology, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Original Research Article

This study examined the combined influence of socio-economic factors and social support on the psychological well-being of private school teachers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A correlational survey research design was adopted, involving a randomly selected sample of 382 teachers drawn from private schools across the three senatorial districts of the state. Data were collected using validated instruments: the Socio-Economic Factors Scale (SEFS), the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (RPWB). Descriptive statistics revealed that respondents reported a moderate level of socio-economic status ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.77$), a high level of perceived social support ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.03$), and a moderate-to-high level of psychological well-being ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.89$). Pearson correlation analysis indicated significant positive associations between socio-economic factors and psychological well-being ($r = 0.54$, $p < .001$), as well as between social support and psychological well-being ($r = 0.63$, $p < .001$). Moderated multiple regression analysis further revealed a significant interaction effect ($\beta = 0.19$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $p < .001$), demonstrating that social support moderates the relationship between socio-economic conditions and psychological well-being by buffering the adverse effects of poor socio-economic status. While no significant gender differences were found, teachers aged 40 years and above exhibited significantly higher levels of psychological well-being compared to younger teachers ($p < .05$). The findings underscore the importance of integrated interventions that simultaneously address teachers' economic conditions and strengthen social support networks. Policy recommendations include ensuring regular and adequate remuneration, improved welfare provisions, and the promotion of supportive collegial and administrative environments within private schools.

Keywords: Psychological well-being, Socio-economic factors, Social support, Private school teachers.

*Corresponding author: Moses T. Imbur

Department of Psychology, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Introduction

The psychological well-being of teachers has increasingly become a focal point in educational research due to its strong influence on instructional quality, work productivity, and the general emotional climate of schools (Afolabi & Balogun, 2021). Psychological well-being among teachers reflects a condition of optimal mental functioning, encompassing life satisfaction, emotional stability, self-acceptance, and the

ability to maintain positive interpersonal relationships (Ryff, 1989). In developing countries such as Nigeria, however, teachers' psychological well-being is frequently undermined by unfavourable socio-economic realities and weak social support structures (Eze, 2020; Oladipo & Balogun, 2022).

Private school teachers in Nigeria, particularly those operating in Akwa Ibom State, constitute one of the most economically disadvantaged and psychologically pressured

segments of the education workforce. Unlike public school teachers, they often contend with inadequate and inconsistent remuneration, limited job security, absence of welfare benefits, and excessive workloads (Okon & Udofia, 2021). These harsh working conditions have been associated with heightened emotional fatigue, reduced job satisfaction, and lower overall life satisfaction (Nwankwo, 2020). Empirical evidence consistently links socio-economic indicators—such as income sufficiency, access to basic needs, and employment stability—to mental health outcomes and subjective well-being (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Ogunleye & Oke, 2023). As a result, economic vulnerability remains a major threat to the psychological well-being of private school teachers.

Beyond economic challenges, inadequate social support further exacerbates psychological strain among teachers. Social support refers to the perceived availability of emotional care, practical assistance, and empathy from significant others and social networks (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Sources of support may include family members, friends, colleagues, and school administrators, all of whom play critical roles in helping teachers cope with occupational stress (Idemudia & Ugwu, 2019). Teachers with strong support networks tend to report higher levels of happiness and lower levels of depression, even when facing financial hardship (Thoits, 2011; Okon & Akpan, 2022). Unfortunately, many private school teachers in Akwa Ibom State experience limited collegial interaction, weak administrative support, and minimal professional recognition, thereby intensifying their psychological distress.

The combined influence of socio-economic conditions and social support is particularly important for understanding teachers' psychological well-being. According to the stress-buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985), social support can moderate the adverse psychological effects associated with stressful life conditions, including financial insecurity. For example, a teacher earning a low income but surrounded by strong familial and professional support may experience fewer mental health challenges than one who lacks such networks (Eyo, 2021). In contrast, insufficient social support may amplify the negative impact of economic hardship, leading to heightened emotional distress and reduced well-being.

Despite growing recognition of these dynamics, empirical studies in Nigeria that simultaneously examine socio-economic factors and social support in relation to private school teachers' psychological well-being remain scarce. Existing research has largely focused on public school teachers or has examined socio-economic conditions and social support independently rather than interactively (Afolabi & Balogun, 2021; Oladipo & Balogun, 2022). Consequently, there is a notable lack of context-specific empirical evidence from Akwa Ibom State, where socio-economic disparities and variations in social connectedness significantly shape teachers' lived experiences (Ukpong & Essien, 2020).

Within Nigeria's private education sector, teacher welfare is frequently overlooked despite teachers' central role in academic achievement and institutional success. Many private school teachers endure unstable salaries, unfavourable working environments, and limited recognition, while simultaneously experiencing social isolation and weak administrative backing (Okon & Udofia, 2021). These conditions collectively contribute to persistent stress, low morale, and declining psychological well-being (Eze, 2020; Nwankwo, 2020). Although social support has been identified as a crucial protective resource capable of mitigating stress and economic pressure (Thoits, 2011), its interactive role with socio-economic conditions in shaping psychological well-being remains insufficiently understood in the Nigerian private school context.

This gap in knowledge gives rise to important research questions: How do socio-economic factors influence the psychological well-being of private school teachers in Akwa Ibom State? To what extent does social support predict their psychological well-being? And does social support moderate the relationship between socio-economic conditions and psychological well-being? Addressing these questions is vital for the development of effective teacher welfare policies, the promotion of mental resilience, and the sustenance of educational quality within the private school system.

Accordingly, this study seeks to empirically examine the interaction between socio-economic factors and social support in predicting the psychological well-being of private school teachers in Akwa Ibom State. By providing evidence-based insights, the study aims to inform policy formulation, enhance institutional support mechanisms, and contribute to the improvement of teachers' psychological well-being within Nigeria's private education sector.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the interaction of socio-economic factors and social support on the psychological well-being of private school teachers in Akwa Ibom State.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the extent to which socio-economic factors (such as income, job security, and access to basic needs) influence the psychological well-being of private school teachers in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Examine the influence of social support (from family, colleagues, and administrators) on the psychological well-being of private school teachers.
3. Assess the interactive (combined) effect of socio-economic factors and social support on the psychological well-being of private school teachers.
4. Identify possible gender and age differences in the psychological well-being of private school teachers based on socio-economic status and level of social support.

Theoretical Review

The present study draws on complementary theoretical perspectives that collectively explain the ways in which socio-economic conditions and social support interact to influence psychological well-being. These frameworks provide a coherent conceptual foundation for examining both the direct effects of socio-economic circumstances and the moderating role of social support among teachers, particularly within demanding work environments such as private schools.

Central to this study is the Stress-Buffering Hypothesis advanced by Cohen and Wills (1985), which serves as the primary theoretical anchor. The hypothesis proposes that social support shields individuals from the negative psychological consequences of stressful life events by reducing the perceived intensity of stressors and strengthening coping abilities. Rather than exerting a uniform influence, social support is most effective when individuals are exposed to high levels of stress. In the context of private school teaching, persistent socio-economic challenges—including low remuneration, employment insecurity, and unfavorable working conditions—constitute chronic stressors. Support from family members, colleagues, and school administrators can help reduce emotional strain, encourage adaptive coping strategies, and limit adverse mental health outcomes. Empirical extensions of this theory further highlight social support as a vital psychological resource that mitigates stress-related effects (Thoits, 2011), thereby justifying the study's focus on interaction effects.

In addition, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) provides a work-oriented explanation of employee well-being. The model distinguishes between job demands, such as heavy workload, emotional strain, and job insecurity, and job resources, including supervisory support, collegial cooperation, and autonomy. While excessive job demands are associated with strain, burnout, and exhaustion, job resources foster motivation, engagement, and psychological well-being. Importantly, the model suggests that job resources can buffer the negative effects of job demands. Within private school settings, unfavorable socio-economic conditions may represent heightened job demands or limited access to resources, while social support functions as a critical resource capable of offsetting these pressures.

Further theoretical insight is offered by Social Capital Theory, as articulated by Bourdieu (1986, 1989) and Coleman (1988). Social capital refers to the actual or potential resources embedded in social relationships, including trust, reciprocity, shared norms, and access to information. Individuals who are embedded within supportive social networks are better positioned to mobilize emotional, informational, and material resources that enhance resilience. For teachers, social capital derived from professional

networks, collegial relationships, and community ties can translate into practical assistance—such as financial support, referrals, and shared instructional resources—as well as psychological benefits, including a sense of belonging and validation. These resources play an important role in reducing the negative effects of economic hardship and occupational stress on psychological well-being.

Taken together, the Stress-Buffering Hypothesis, the JD-R Model, and Social Capital Theory provide an integrated theoretical framework for the present study. Collectively, these perspectives emphasize social support as a crucial protective resource that not only directly enhances psychological well-being but also moderates the adverse effects of socio-economic stressors. This integration supports the study's emphasis on examining interaction effects and underscores the importance of social relationships and institutional support systems in promoting teachers' mental health and overall well-being.

Empirical Review

Socio-Economic Factors, Social Support, and Teacher Well-Being

A growing body of empirical literature demonstrates that socio-economic conditions play a critical role in shaping teachers' psychological well-being. Multiple studies consistently report that low or irregular remuneration, poor working conditions, and job insecurity are associated with elevated stress levels, emotional exhaustion, burnout, and reduced life satisfaction among teachers. Within the Nigerian context, Okon and Udofia (2021) found that private school teachers who experienced salary delays and unstable employment conditions reported significantly higher emotional exhaustion and stronger intentions to leave the profession. Similarly, Nwankwo (2020) linked inadequate remuneration and excessive workload to pronounced burnout symptoms among private-sector educators. These findings align with international evidence indicating that economic insecurity and financial strain are strongly associated with mental health problems and diminished well-being across occupational groups (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Ogunleye & Oke, 2023). Collectively, these studies underscore the vulnerability of teachers operating under unfavorable socio-economic conditions, particularly in private educational institutions.

Beyond socio-economic factors, social support has been identified as a crucial predictor of psychological well-being and an important protective resource against stress. Empirical research consistently shows that individuals who perceive higher levels of support from family members, friends, and colleagues experience better psychological outcomes, including lower levels of stress and depressive symptoms. In a Nigerian study, Idemudia and Ugwu (2019) reported that perceived organizational and collegial support significantly predicted lower work-related stress among teachers.

Likewise, Okon and Akpan (2022) found that social connectedness was positively associated with teacher resilience, suggesting that supportive social relationships enhance adaptive coping and emotional stability. Importantly, research extending beyond main effects has demonstrated that social support can function as a buffer, weakening the relationship between stressors and adverse mental health outcomes (Thoits, 2011; Eyo, 2021). These findings provide empirical backing for theoretical models that conceptualize social support as a moderating factor in stress–well-being relationships.

Despite the substantial evidence for the independent effects of socio-economic factors and social support, relatively few studies have explicitly examined their interactive influence on teacher well-being. Eyo (2021) provided notable evidence from a South-South Nigerian sample, showing that high levels of family support attenuated the relationship between financial strain and depressive symptoms. However, Ukpong and Essien (2020) observed that much of the Nigerian literature has tended to examine socio-economic status and social support in isolation rather than within an interaction framework. Moreover, studies specifically focusing on private school teachers, particularly within Akwa Ibom State, remain scarce. This gap in the literature highlights the need for empirical research that simultaneously investigates socio-economic conditions, social support, and their interaction in shaping psychological well-being among this understudied population.

In addition to core study variables, demographic factors such as gender, age, and years of teaching experience have been examined as potential moderators or covariates in teacher well-being research, although findings remain mixed. Some studies report no significant gender differences in psychological well-being once work conditions are controlled (Afolabi & Balogun, 2021), whereas others suggest that female teachers may experience higher emotional exhaustion when exposed to similar socio-economic stressors. Teaching experience has often been linked to improved coping efficacy and emotional regulation; however, the strength and direction of this relationship appear to vary across cultural and institutional contexts.

Methodologically, most studies in this area employ cross-sectional survey designs using standardized and validated instruments, such as the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales. While these approaches have facilitated large-scale data collection and comparability across studies, heavy reliance on self-report measures and cross-sectional designs limits causal inference. Furthermore, there is a notable paucity of longitudinal and intervention-based research examining teacher well-being in Nigerian private schools. Addressing these methodological limitations and contextual gaps provides a strong justification for the present study and its focus on interaction effects within the Akwa Ibom private school context.

Conceptual Review

The present study is conceptually anchored on key constructs that explain psychological well-being among teachers, namely psychological well-being, socio-economic factors, and social support, as well as the interaction among these variables. These constructs are clearly defined and operationalized to allow for empirical testing of both direct and moderating effects within the private school teaching context.

Psychological well-being in this study is grounded in Ryff's (1989) multidimensional model, which conceptualizes well-being as more than the absence of psychological distress. Instead, it reflects positive psychological functioning across six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Autonomy refers to an individual's sense of self-determination and independence, while environmental mastery captures the ability to manage life situations effectively. Personal growth reflects continued development and openness to new experiences, whereas positive relations emphasize the quality of interpersonal relationships. Purpose in life and self-acceptance respectively denote having meaningful life goals and maintaining a positive evaluation of oneself. In this study, psychological well-being is operationally measured using a standardized instrument such as the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale, yielding a continuous score in which higher values indicate greater psychological well-being.

Socio-economic factors are conceptualized as a constellation of objective and subjective indicators related to teachers' economic circumstances and employment conditions. These factors shape both material living standards and perceived job security. Key dimensions relevant to the study include monthly income level, regularity of salary payment, access to employment benefits such as health insurance or pension schemes, job contract status (permanent versus casual or temporary), and teachers' subjective assessment of income adequacy in meeting basic needs. These indicators can be analyzed either as separate predictors or combined into a composite socio-economic index, depending on analytic requirements. Conceptually, adverse socio-economic conditions are expected to undermine psychological well-being by increasing financial strain, uncertainty, and occupational stress.

Social support is defined as the perceived availability of emotional, instrumental, and informational assistance derived from an individual's social network, including family members, friends, colleagues, and school administrators. Emotional support involves expressions of care, empathy, and understanding; instrumental support refers to tangible assistance such as financial help or task-related aid; and informational support includes advice, guidance, and problem-solving input. In this study, social support is operationalized using a validated measure such as the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

(MSPSS), which captures support from family, friends, and significant others. Higher scores on the MSPSS reflect greater perceived social support and are conceptually linked to improved coping, resilience, and psychological well-being.

Beyond examining the direct effects of socio-economic factors and social support, the study places particular emphasis on their interaction, conceptualized as a moderation effect. Conceptually, moderation implies that the strength or direction of the relationship between socio-economic conditions and psychological well-being varies depending on the level of social support. In other words, social support may buffer the negative impact of socio-economic adversity on teachers' psychological well-being. Empirically, this interaction is tested by including a product term between socio-economic factors and social support in regression analyses. A statistically significant interaction term would indicate that the effect of socio-economic conditions on well-being differs across levels of perceived social support, consistent with stress-buffering and resource-based theoretical frameworks.

In addition, several control variables and covariates are incorporated to reduce the risk of confounding and to improve the validity of findings. These include demographic and contextual factors such as age, gender, years of teaching experience, school location (urban or rural), and school size. These variables are included because prior research suggests they may independently influence psychological well-being or shape access to resources and support.

Overall, the conceptual framework of the study is informed by stress-buffering theory, the Job Demands–Resources model, and social capital theory, all of which provide a coherent rationale for expecting both main and interaction effects. Socio-economic adversity is expected to undermine psychological well-being, while social support is expected to promote well-being directly and to buffer against adverse effects. Although existing empirical studies, particularly within Nigeria, provide support for these relationships, few have tested them interactively among private school teachers in Akwa Ibom State. By clearly defining and operationalizing socio-economic factors, perceived social support, and psychological well-being using validated instruments, and by testing moderation through regression analysis, the present study is well positioned to fill this empirical gap. The findings are expected to generate actionable evidence to inform policy and institutional interventions—such as improving remuneration structures and strengthening social and organizational support systems—to enhance teachers' psychological well-being.

Research Design

The study adopted a correlational survey research design. This design was deemed appropriate because it allows the researcher to examine the relationships and interaction effects between variables — specifically, the influence of socio-economic factors and social support on psychological well-

being among private school teachers. The design also enables the use of standardized instruments and statistical analyses to establish predictive and moderating relationships without manipulating any variable (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Population of the Study

The target population comprised all private school teachers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. According to records from the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education (2024), there are approximately 6,500 private school teachers distributed across the three senatorial districts (Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, and Eket). These teachers work in pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels of private schools.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 400 private school teachers were selected from the population using a multistage sampling technique.

Stage 1: Stratified sampling was used to group private schools by senatorial district (Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Eket).

Stage 2: From each stratum, schools were randomly selected using a simple random (balloting) method.

Stage 3: Within each selected school, a proportional number of teachers were chosen using systematic random sampling.

This multistage approach ensured fair representation of urban and semi-urban schools across the state. The sample size of 400 was determined based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for determining sample size from a known population.

Instrumentation

The study employed a structured questionnaire divided into four sections (A–D) as follows:

Section A: Demographic Information – This section collected data on respondents' age, gender, marital status, years of teaching experience, school type, and educational qualification.

Section B: Socio-Economic Factors Scale (SEFS) – A 10-item researcher-developed scale was used to measure socio-economic conditions such as income level, job security, salary regularity, and access to basic needs. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample item: "My salary is sufficient to meet my monthly needs."

Section C: Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) – Developed by Zimet et al. (1988), this 12-item standardized instrument assesses perceived support from family, friends, and significant others. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Very Strongly Disagree to 7 = Very Strongly Agree). Reported internal consistency (Cronbach's α) for subscales ranges from .85 to .91.

Section D: Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale (RPWB) – This 18-item version of Ryff's (1989) scale measures six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Responses were on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate greater psychological well-being.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Content validity of the instrument was established by experts in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation at the University of Uyo, who reviewed the items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with research objectives.

For reliability, a pilot test was conducted with 40 private school teachers outside the main sample. Data from the pilot study were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha to determine internal consistency. The reliability coefficients obtained were:

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Socio-Economic Factors Scale	0.82
Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support	0.88
Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale	0.86

These coefficients exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978), indicating that the instrument was reliable.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher personally administered the questionnaire with the help of two trained research assistants. Permission was obtained from school proprietors and administrators before data collection. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately after filling to minimize loss.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 26). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied.

- Descriptive Statistics: Mean, standard deviation, and percentages were computed to summarize demographic variables and respondents' levels of socio-economic status, social support, and psychological well-being.
- Inferential Statistics:
 - Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (r) was used to determine the relationships among variables.
 - Multiple Regression Analysis was employed to test the predictive influence of socio-economic factors and social support on psychological well-being.
 - Moderated Multiple Regression (MMR) was conducted to test the interaction effect of socio-economic factors and social support on psychological well-being (following Aiken & West, 1991).

- T-tests and ANOVA were used to explore gender and age differences in psychological well-being.

In summary, the study utilized a correlational survey design to investigate how socio-economic factors and social support interact to influence psychological well-being among private school teachers in Akwa Ibom State. A sample of 400 teachers participated, and data were collected using standardized and validated instruments. The use of moderated regression analysis provided empirical evidence for the interaction effect, thereby addressing the main research objective.

Results and Data Presentation

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis conducted to examine the interaction of socio-economic factors and social support on the psychological well-being of private school teachers in Akwa Ibom State. The analyses were guided by the four research questions and corresponding hypotheses formulated in Chapter Three. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, multiple regression, and moderated multiple regression (MMR), all performed with SPSS Version 26.

Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 382 were correctly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 95.5%, which was considered adequate for analysis.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (N=382)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	152	39.8
	Female	230	60.2
Age Range	20–29 years	104	27.2
	30–39 years	186	48.7
	40 years and above	92	24.1
Educational Qualification	NCE	56	14.7
	B.Ed/B.Sc(Ed)	244	63.9
	M.Ed and above	82	21.4
Years of Experience	1–5 years	120	31.4
	6–10 years	184	48.2
	Above 10 years	78	20.4

Interpretation:

The table shows that the majority of respondents (60.2%) were female, and the predominant age group was 30–39 years. Most participants (63.9%) held Bachelor's degrees, and nearly half (48.2%) had between 6–10 years of teaching experience.

Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Remarks
Socio-Economic Factors	382	2.84	0.77	Moderate
Social Support	382	4.96	1.03	High
Psychological Well-being	382	3.62	0.89	Moderate–High

Interpretation:

Results indicate that respondents generally reported moderate socio-economic status, high social support, and moderate to high psychological well-being. This suggests that despite economic challenges, teachers' perceived social support remains relatively strong.

Research Question 1:

To what extent do socio-economic factors influence the psychological well-being of private school teachers in Akwa Ibom State?

Variable	r	p-value	Remark
Socio-Economic Factors & Psychological Well-being	0.54	0.000	Significant

Interpretation:

A positive and significant correlation ($r = 0.54$, $p < .001$) was found between socio-economic factors and psychological well-being, implying that teachers with better socio-economic conditions reported higher psychological well-being.

Research Question 2:

How does social support affect the psychological well-being of private school teachers?

Variable	r	p-value	Remark
Social Support & Psychological Well-being	0.63	0.000	Significant

Interpretation:

There was a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.63$, $p < .001$) between social support and psychological well-being, suggesting that teachers with higher levels of social support tend to experience better mental and emotional functioning.

Research Question 3:

What is the interactive effect of socio-economic factors and social support on psychological well-being?

Table 1: Summary of Moderated Multiple Regression (MMR) Analysis

Model	Predictor	β	t	p	R ²	ΔR^2		Sig.
1	Socio-Economic Factors	0.37	7.41	0.000	0.29	—	51.26	0.000
2	Social Support	0.41	8.24	0.000	0.42	0.13	64.33	0.000
3	Socio-Economic \times Social Support	0.19	3.68	0.000	0.46	0.04	49.75	0.000

Interpretation:

The interaction term (Socio-Economic \times Social Support) contributed an additional 4% of the variance in psychological well-being ($\Delta R^2 = .04$, $p < .001$), indicating a significant interaction effect.

This means that the influence of socio-economic conditions on psychological well-being depends on the level of social support. Specifically, teachers with low socio-economic status but high social support reported better psychological well-being than those with similar socio-economic conditions but low social support consistent with the stress-buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Research Question 4:

Are there significant differences in psychological well-being across gender and age categories of private school teachers?

Gender Differences in Psychological Well-being (t-test)

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	p	Remark
Male	152	3.55	0.92	1.23	0.22	Not Significant
Female	230	3.67	0.86			

Interpretation:

No significant gender difference was found in psychological well-being ($t = 1.23$, $p > .05$). Both male and female teachers reported comparable levels of psychological well-being.

Age Differences in Psychological Well-being (ANOVA)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	Remark
Between Groups	4.32	2	2.16	3.45	0.033	Significant
Within Groups	235.78	379	0.62			

Interpretation:

A significant difference was found among age groups ($F = 3.45$, $p < .05$). Post-hoc comparisons (Tukey test) revealed that teachers aged 40 years and above reported significantly higher psychological well-being than younger teachers, possibly due to greater coping experience and social stability.

Summary of Findings

1. Socio-economic factors significantly and positively influenced psychological well-being among private school teachers ($r = 0.54$, $p < .001$).
2. Social support significantly predicted higher levels of psychological well-being ($r = 0.63$, $p < .001$).
3. The interaction effect between socio-economic factors and social support was significant ($\beta = 0.19$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $p < .001$), indicating that social support buffers the negative impact of poor socio-economic conditions on well-being.
4. No significant gender difference in psychological well-being was found, but significant differences emerged across age groups, favoring older teachers.

The findings corroborate the stress-buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985), affirming that social support mitigates the adverse effects of socio-economic stress on teachers' mental health. Consistent with Okon & Udofia (2021) and Idemudia & Ugwu (2019), economic hardship negatively impacted well-being, while strong social relationships enhanced resilience. The interaction result underscores the importance of both financial empowerment and emotional support systems in sustaining psychological stability among private school teachers.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined how socio-economic factors and social support interact to influence the psychological well-being of private school teachers in Akwa Ibom State. The findings deepen understanding of the combined role of material

conditions and interpersonal resources in shaping teachers' mental health, offering context-specific evidence relevant to educational policy and teacher welfare in Nigeria.

The results demonstrate that socio-economic conditions are a significant determinant of teachers' psychological well-being. Teachers who reported higher income stability, access to welfare benefits, and greater job security experienced better psychological outcomes than those facing economic hardship. This finding highlights the central role of economic security in fostering emotional stability, life satisfaction, and self-worth. In private school settings where salaries may be irregular and employment conditions uncertain, persistent financial strain can heighten stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. From a theoretical perspective, this outcome aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which emphasizes that unmet physiological and safety needs can undermine higher-order psychological functioning. The finding also reinforces existing evidence that economic vulnerability remains a critical threat to teacher well-being in low-resource educational contexts.

Social support was also found to exert a strong positive influence on teachers' psychological well-being. Teachers who perceived higher levels of emotional, instrumental, and professional support from family members, colleagues, and school administrators reported greater well-being. This underscores the importance of supportive interpersonal relationships in buffering emotional strain and enhancing resilience. Within school environments, collegial cooperation, recognition, and empathetic leadership appear to play a crucial role in promoting emotional balance and job satisfaction. This finding lends empirical support to the stress-buffering perspective, which conceptualizes social support as a protective psychological resource that enhances coping capacity in demanding occupational settings.

A major contribution of the study lies in demonstrating that social support significantly moderates the relationship

between socio-economic factors and psychological well-being. The interaction effect indicates that teachers experiencing poor socio-economic conditions can still maintain relatively high levels of well-being when strong social support systems are available. This finding extends the stress-buffering hypothesis within the context of private education in Nigeria and suggests that social relationships can compensate, to some extent, for structural economic disadvantages. Supportive networks may provide not only emotional reassurance but also practical assistance and a sense of belonging, thereby reducing the psychological impact of financial insecurity and job instability.

The study further revealed no significant gender differences in psychological well-being, suggesting that both male and female teachers in private schools are similarly exposed to occupational pressures and derive comparable benefits from social support. However, age differences were significant, with older teachers reporting higher psychological well-being than their younger counterparts. This pattern may reflect the role of accumulated experience, emotional maturity, and well-developed coping strategies in managing work-related stress. Older teachers may have adapted more effectively to occupational demands, enabling them to regulate emotions and maintain psychological balance despite challenging conditions.

Taken together, the findings confirm that teachers' psychological well-being is shaped by an interplay of structural and relational factors. Socio-economic security and social support function synergistically to promote mental health, motivation, and job satisfaction among private school teachers. These results underscore the need for holistic interventions that address both economic conditions and social support mechanisms. Without deliberate efforts to improve teachers' welfare and strengthen supportive professional environments, private school teachers may remain vulnerable to psychological distress, with potential consequences for teaching effectiveness and educational quality.

Conclusion

This study concludes that socio-economic conditions and social support are critical and interconnected determinants of the psychological well-being of private school teachers in Akwa Ibom State. Teachers who experience greater economic security and stronger support networks tend to report higher levels of psychological well-being, emotional stability, and job satisfaction. Importantly, social support was found to mitigate the negative effects of unfavorable socio-economic conditions, highlighting its role as a key resilience-enhancing resource. The absence of significant gender differences, alongside the observed age-related variations in well-being, suggests that psychological well-being is shaped less by gender and more by accumulated life experience, adaptive coping mechanisms, and exposure to occupational demands.

Overall, the findings indicate that efforts to enhance teachers' psychological well-being should adopt a dual strategy that combines improvements in socio-economic conditions with the strengthening of interpersonal and institutional support systems. Such an integrated approach has the potential to foster a healthier, more resilient, and more productive teaching workforce, thereby contributing positively to the quality and sustainability of private education in the state.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Private school proprietors and administrators should ensure regular and adequate salary payments, provide housing and health benefits, and improve job security. These measures will reduce financial stress and enhance overall well-being.
2. School leaders should create structures that encourage teamwork, mentorship, and open communication. Emotional and social support within the school community can strengthen teachers' resilience against occupational stress.
3. The Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education should develop policies that protect the welfare of private school teachers, including minimum wage enforcement, pension contributions, and standardized working conditions.
4. Schools should provide access to counseling units or psychological support programs to help teachers manage stress, anxiety, and burnout. Periodic mental health awareness workshops should also be organized.
5. Teachers' professional associations should foster solidarity and peer support through cooperative schemes, welfare funds, and regular seminars aimed at building psychological resilience.
6. Younger and early-career teachers should receive targeted mentorship and training to enhance coping skills and strengthen their capacity for emotional regulation.
7. Future studies should explore other potential moderators such as leadership style, organizational justice, or emotional intelligence in predicting teachers' psychological well-being. Longitudinal research is also recommended to observe changes in well-being over time.

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