



Teachers' perceptions of well-being from a psychological perspective

Dida Nur Azizah 

Department of elementary Teacher Education, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya, Indonesia.

*Corresponding Author: didaazizah36@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to describe primary school teachers' perceptions of well-being from a psychological perspective, as well as the factors that influence it. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews with three teachers from a public primary school in Lamongan Regency. Data were analysed using thematic analysis based on Carol Ryff's psychological well-being theory, which consists of six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal growth. The results of the study indicate that teachers have positive perceptions of their psychological well-being, despite facing various challenges in their daily practices. Teachers' perceptions are influenced by internal factors, such as personality, self-efficacy, and stress management, as well as external factors, including the work environment, administrative workload, and policy support. This study underscores the importance of both systemic and personal support in maintaining teachers' well-being, highlighting its significance in ensuring not only optimal learning processes but also contributing to a deeper understanding of factors that sustain educational quality.

Introduction

Teachers' psychological well-being is an important aspect that influences the quality of education and the teaching and learning process in schools. Teachers with high psychological well-being tend to be more capable of performing their roles optimally, building positive relationships with students, and creating a healthy and conducive learning atmosphere (Ryff, 1989; Maslach & Leiter, 1997). In the context of primary education, the role of teachers is not limited to teaching, but also includes educating, guiding, and shaping the character of students (UNESCO, 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Ideally, teachers should receive support from various parties, including their work environment, colleagues, school principals, and education policies that prioritise the well-being of educators. However, the reality on the ground shows that teachers' psychological well-being is still not a priority in education management. Many teachers experience stress due to high workloads, rapid policy changes, excessive administrative demands, and a lack of psychosocial support (Hascher & Waber, 2021; OECD, 2020). This has the potential to reduce the quality of learning and cause long-term negative impacts on both teachers and students.

One of the most widely used models for measuring psychological well-being is Carol Ryff's theory (1989), which includes six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, mastery of the environment, purpose in life, and personal growth. This model provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the psychological condition of individuals, including teachers as key actors in the world of education.

This study aims to describe teachers' perceptions of psychological well-being based on Ryff's six dimensions and to identify internal and external factors that influence their well-being. By focusing on the experiences of teachers in elementary schools, this study is expected to contribute to the

development of policies that are more supportive of teachers' well-being and to create a healthier and more productive work environment.

Literature reviews

Teachers' psychological well-being

Teachers' psychological well-being is an important aspect in creating quality education and supporting student success. Teachers with high psychological well-being tend to have greater work enthusiasm, good social relationships at school, and are better able to cope with pressure in their profession (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Klassen et al., 2010). This well-being includes positive emotional states, a sense of meaning in life, and personal growth.

According to Ryff (1989), psychological well-being is an optimal state of an individual characterised by six dimensions, namely:

1. Self-acceptance, accepting personal strengths and weaknesses,
2. Positive relationships with others, having warm and supportive relationships,
3. Autonomy, being able to regulate oneself and be independent,
4. Mastery of the environment, being able to manage one's life and surroundings,
5. Life purpose, having direction and meaning in life, and
6. Personal Growth, the desire to continue developing and learning.

This model emphasizes that well-being is not merely the absence of psychological distress, but the presence of sustained positive experiences in both personal and professional life. Teachers' well-being is influenced by **internal factors** and **external factors** (Zhou et al., 2024; Luthans et al., 2007). Internal factors include personality, self-efficacy, and stress management skills. Meanwhile, external factors include the work environment, workload, social relationships, and applicable education policies. The Job Demands-Resources Model reinforces that well-being can be improved by minimising job demands and maximising the support and resources available to teachers (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Psychologically well teachers tend to show higher involvement in the teaching and learning process, have better relationships with students, and are able to create a classroom atmosphere that supports learning (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2021). Conversely, job dissatisfaction and prolonged stress can reduce the quality of learning and increase the intention to leave the profession. Thus, teacher well-being needs to be a key concern in education policy and school management, as this study highlights teachers' perceptions and the influencing factors that shape their psychological well-being.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The case examined is the psychological well-being of primary school teachers in Lamongan Regency, focusing on how they perceive their well-being and the internal and external factors that influence it. This approach was chosen because qualitative research is considered appropriate for exploring in depth teachers' perceptions and experiences in their real-life context as educators in primary schools (Creswell, 2014; Moleong, 2016).

Case studies allow me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study, in this case the psychological well-being of teachers at a public elementary school in Lamongan Regency. I involved three active teachers as participants, who were selected using purposive sampling. The three participants were selected based on their varying teaching experiences in order to obtain diverse perspectives.

One teacher has 27 years of teaching experience and currently serves as the school principal, another teacher has 19 years of experience as a homeroom teacher, and one participant is a physical education teacher with four years of teaching experience. I used pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities: YK (school principal), LS (sixth-grade teacher), and BW (physical education teacher).

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews that were structured according to Carol Ryff's (1989) six dimensions of psychological well-being. The interview guide contained open-ended questions for each dimension, such as self-acceptance (e.g., "How do you view your strengths

and weaknesses as a teacher?”), positive relationships with others (e.g., “How do you build and maintain relationships with students, colleagues, and parents?”), autonomy (e.g., “In what ways do you feel free to make decisions in your teaching practice?”), environmental mastery (e.g., “How do you adapt to changes in workload, facilities, or policies?”), life purpose (e.g., “What motivates you to continue your work as a teacher?”), and personal growth (e.g., “What efforts do you make to develop yourself professionally and personally?”). The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the school environment with an average duration of 45 minutes for each participant.

All interviews were recorded using audio devices and then transcribed verbatim for analysis. Before the interviews began, I explained the scope of the research and obtained consent from the participants regarding the procedures, including recording. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, I used several techniques, including member checking, in which participants were given the opportunity to review their interview results.

I also conducted direct clarification and compiled contextual descriptions so that the results could be transferred to similar contexts (transferability). My direct involvement in the data collection process was part of the dependability test, while supervision by my supervisor and recording of the research process were carried out as efforts to maintain confirmability (Moleong, 2016).

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1984), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This process began with coding the transcript data, followed by categorising the data based on dimensions of psychological well-being. Subsequently, I linked the findings to theory and previous research to gain a more comprehensive and insightful understanding of the issue under examination.

Findings

This study reveals that primary school teachers have a positive perception of their psychological well-being despite facing complex professional challenges. Based on in-depth interviews with three participants with different backgrounds and teaching experiences, it was found that teachers' psychological well-being can be understood through six dimensions proposed by Carol Ryff (1989), namely self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, mastery of the environment, life purpose, and personal growth.

The dimension of self-acceptance was evident in the teachers' attitudes in recognising their personal and professional strengths and weaknesses. One participant, YK, who is a school principal, showed strong self-reflection on his experiences during his nearly three decades as an educator. He realised that in his process as a teacher and leader, there were challenges and shortcomings, but he admitted that he was able to accept them and use them as learning materials. The same was demonstrated by LS, a sixth-grade teacher, who openly stated that although she felt she did not fully master technology, she accepted these limitations and sought support from her colleagues.

The dimension of positive relationships with others is the most striking aspect of these findings. All three teachers demonstrated strong interpersonal relationships with fellow teachers, students, and even parents. BW, a physical education teacher who is the youngest participant, described how he builds emotional closeness with students from various grade levels, which he believes is very helpful in creating a pleasant learning atmosphere. Harmonious relationships with colleagues also serve as a significant source of social support for the three teachers. These findings reinforce Hascher and Waber's (2021) assertion that healthy interpersonal relationships contribute greatly to teacher well-being.

In terms of autonomy, it was evident that the teachers had a certain degree of freedom in making decisions related to teaching strategies and in dealing with the dynamics of the school environment. YK, as the principal, explained that he had the freedom to set school policies that he believed had a direct impact on the working atmosphere of the teachers. LS and BW also said that they felt trusted by the school leadership to manage their respective classes using approaches that suited the characteristics of their students.

The dimension of environmental mastery is also evident in the ability of teachers to adapt to job demands and policy changes. Despite various challenges, such as increased administrative burdens, limited facilities, and long commutes (in BW's case), the participants were able to find ways to continue

performing their duties effectively.

LS admitted that he did not fully understand the technology, but he was still able to organise the learning administration with the support of other teachers. Similar findings were noted by Puspasari et al. (2023), who emphasised that collegial collaboration plays an important role in reducing teachers' challenges in adapting to administrative and technological demands. BW optimised his technological skills to create innovative learning media, which also increased his interaction with students. This is in line with Ozturk et al. (2024), who argue that innovative practices and the use of digital tools can strengthen teachers' sense of competence and well-being.

The life purpose dimension emerged in the intrinsic motivation of teachers to continue making a meaningful contribution to education. YK revealed that being an educator was his calling in life, which he pursued with a spirit of dedication. This resonates with Ryff and Singer's (1996) eudaimonic perspective, which views meaning and purpose in life as central to psychological well-being. LS feels that teaching final-year classes provides a unique sense of satisfaction because she helps determine students' readiness to move on to the next level. This finding echoes the study of McCallum and Price (2016), who highlighted that teachers derive meaning from shaping students' transitions and achievements. BW emphasises that being a young teacher is a form of dedication that also serves as a means to continue learning and growing, which aligns with Hascher and Waber (2021), who point out that continuous personal growth fosters sustained teacher well-being.

Finally, the dimension of personal growth is seen in the enthusiasm of teachers to continue to develop, even in working conditions that are not always ideal. BW, as a new teacher, shows high enthusiasm in learning and adapting to the school environment. He is not only active in teaching but also in documenting school activities through creative content. This reflects the findings of Einav et al. (2024), who showed that engagement in creative and social practices helps teachers manage burnout and maintain well-being. YK and LS also continue to show a desire to participate in training and share experiences, which shows that they have not stopped learning even after many years of service. Similar to Klassen et al. (2010), professional development opportunities contribute significantly to teachers' sense of growth and competence.

In addition to the six dimensions of psychological well-being, this study also found factors that influence teacher well-being, which are categorised into internal and external factors. Internal factors include personality, self-efficacy, and stress management skills. All three participants demonstrated a high level of resilience and self-confidence in carrying out their roles. YK, for example, has stable self-confidence due to his extensive experience, while BW shows high optimism despite being in the early stages of his career. This aligns with the findings of Zhou et al. (2024), who showed through a meta-analysis that self-efficacy is a strong predictor of improved teacher well-being.

Meanwhile, external factors that influence teacher well-being include the work environment, workload, and educational policies. Heavy administrative burdens and frequent policy changes were the main complaints of LS. However, support from colleagues and the principal served as a counterbalance that kept LS feeling comfortable. BW faced challenges related to distance and physical fatigue, but compensation from a supportive work environment helped him continue to perform his duties with enthusiasm.

These findings reinforce the results of a study by Puspasari et al. (2023), which stated that teacher well-being is greatly influenced by the school's organisational structure and the work climate created by the leadership. Overall, the results of this study indicate that teachers' psychological well-being is a complex and dynamic condition, influenced by various personal and contextual factors. The six dimensions proposed by Carol Ryff provide a relevant framework for understanding teachers' perceptions of their well-being, while internal and external factors explain the dynamics underlying these perceptions. These findings underscore the importance of systemic interventions to support teacher well-being, including through educational policies, healthy work environments, and capacity-building initiatives for teachers.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that primary school teachers have a positive perception of their psychological well-being, despite facing complex work challenges. The six dimensions of psychological well-being proposed by Carol Ryff (1989), namely self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal growth, all emerged in the participants' responses, with varying intensity and emphasis depending on each teacher's character and experience.

The dimension of positive relationships with others was the most dominant finding, in line with the research by Hascher and Waber (2021), which showed that social support is one of the strongest predictors of teacher well-being. Warm interactions with students, colleagues, and school principals were a source of positive energy for teachers, strengthening their resilience in facing pressure. This study is also in line with the study by McCallum and Price (2016), which states that a supportive school climate has a significant impact on teacher well-being and performance.

Autonomy and control over the environment were also found in various forms. Teachers who have the freedom to manage learning strategies and deal with school dynamics show more stable levels of well-being. This is reinforced by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, which states that freedom in decision-making is an important psychological resource (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Even among teachers with limited technology, such as LS, the ability to adapt and receive support from colleagues still showed sufficient mastery of the environment. Meanwhile, the dimensions of life purpose and personal growth emerged from the teachers' deep reflections on the meaning of their profession.

Teachers who feel they have a clear vision in educating children demonstrate more stable well-being, as reported by YK and LS. This aligns with the eudemonistic approach proposed by Ryff and Singer (1996), where well-being does not stem solely from feelings of happiness but from the presence of meaning, life direction, and self-development. Factors influencing teacher well-being are also divided into internal and external factors. Internal factors such as self-efficacy and stress management ability are the primary determinants of how teachers respond to work-related pressures. This is in line with the findings of Zhou et al. (2024) and Klassen et al. (2010), who stated that teachers with high self-efficacy are better able to maintain emotional balance and cope with job demands. On the other hand, external factors such as administrative burdens, educational policies, and physical conditions (such as school distance) are sources of stress that can reduce teacher well-being.

However, a supportive work environment can reduce the negative impact of these factors, as explained in the social support theory by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). This can be seen in BW, who despite physical challenges, still feels comfortable because he receives support from colleagues and feels appreciated by students. Interestingly, psychological well-being is not only possessed by senior teachers. BW, as a new teacher, showed strong indicators of well-being, particularly in terms of personal growth. This shows that age or length of service is not the only indicator of psychological well-being. Well-being can grow and develop when teachers receive social support, have internal motivation, and feel valued within the school community. This study provides new insights that teacher well-being cannot be viewed in a linear or one-dimensional manner.

Experience, social context, and organisational structure also influence teachers' perceptions and realities of well-being. These findings align with Ozturk et al.'s (2024) perspective that teacher well-being must be understood holistically, considering emotional, professional, and contextual aspects simultaneously. Thus, the results of this study contribute to the development of understanding regarding teacher well-being in the context of primary education. In addition to emphasising the importance of psychological well-being as the foundation of teacher performance, this study also opens opportunities for formulating school-based intervention strategies to create a healthy work environment that supports the overall well-being of educators.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that primary school teachers have a positive perception of their psychological well-being. This perception is reflected in the six dimensions proposed by Carol Ryff (1989), namely self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Although each participant had different backgrounds and teaching experiences, all of them demonstrated awareness and efforts to maintain psychological stability while carrying out their profession. Warmth in social relationships, belief in their

role as educators, and motivation to continue developing were dominant factors in shaping teachers' well-being.

Additionally, this study revealed that teachers' psychological well-being is not only influenced by internal factors such as self-efficacy, personality, and stress management but also by external factors such as the work environment, workload, and educational policies. The combination of personal strengths and support from the surrounding environment is key to maintaining teachers' psychological balance. These findings emphasise that teacher well-being is a complex and multidimensional condition that must be understood in a broader social and professional context.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that schools and education policymakers pay more attention to factors that can support teacher well-being. First, it is important for schools to create a supportive and collaborative work environment so that teachers feel valued and supported in carrying out their duties. Second, there is a need for regular training and mentoring that not only emphasises professional competence but also strengthens teachers' psychological aspects. Third, excessive administrative burdens need to be evaluated so that they do not become obstacles for teachers in carrying out the learning process optimally. Fourth, educational policy approaches need to consider the actual conditions in the field and involve the voices of teachers as the main implementers of education.

These recommendations are expected to serve as a foundation for policymakers and education managers in designing interventions and policies that support teachers' psychological well-being in a sustainable manner. With well-being ensured, teachers will be better able to create effective and meaningful learning processes and contribute to the development of intelligent and character-driven generations.

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