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A Qualitative Examination of Teachers' Experiences Building Student Resilience in Rural Kenya

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Priscilla Allen

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

A Qualitative Examination of Teachers' Experiences Building Student Resilience in

Rural Kenya

by

Priscilla Allen

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Psychology

Walden University

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Abstract

Students in rural and underresourced school settings often perform poorly due to adversity. This is evident in subcounty schools where challenges such as domestic violence and low socioeconomic status further impact students' academic performance. Researchers have demonstrated that the relationship between students and teachers is instrumental in building resilience and developing social emotional competence. By fostering resilience, teachers can play a crucial role in mitigating these challenges. However, few studies have examined teacher experience in building resilience in students through a qualitative study. Using a generic qualitative descriptive study and grounded in the theory of resilience, semistructured interviews were completed with 12 qualified secondary school teachers with at least one year experience in West Laikipia. Using thematic analysis, the data then revealed key themes: (a) why students need to build resilience, (b) how teachers develop connections with the students, (c) what strategies teachers used, and (d) their need for professional development to support their efforts. Teachers established their relationship with the students through extracurricular activities and offered both parenting and practical support. The mixed day schoolteachers acknowledged the inadequacy of professional development in fostering social emotional competence in their students. Building resilience would bring about positive social change by supporting academic performance, enhancing social-emotional competence and empowering students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Students in rural and under resourced school settings often perform poorly as a consequence of adversity and building resilience may be a way forward in mitigating the effect of adversity (Mwangi et al., 2018) facilitating positive outcomes in such settings. Student resilience is a positive adaptation to situations of stress and adversity (Holdsworth et al., 2018). It has been shown to play a significant role in academic success (Cefai, 2004; Mwangi et al., 2018) and research has shown that resilience can be successfully nurtured through the development of caring relationships between students and teachers (Stride & Cutcher, 2015). If resilience is a key component to student success, understanding how resilience may be developed by teachers in rural school settings is important.

This qualitative study explored teacher experiences in building resilience in secondary students in sub county rural schools in Laikipia, Kenya. This research is important to provide an understanding of current teacher experiences in building resilience and their role in nurturing student resilience. This information may inform in-service training and teacher support to help mitigate adversity in the student body through nurturing academic resilience. This chapter provides introductory information on the topic, the problem, the research question, the conceptual framework, the purpose and significance of the study and the scope of the research.

Background

The Kenyan education system has expanded rapidly since independence in 1963. While Kenya boasts a free comprehensive government based education system, with a goal to unify different ethnicities and build national identity (Ackah, 2019), standards of teaching have plummeted (Lowe & Prout, 2019). A shortage of teachers and resources (Wambugu et al., 2019) exacerbated by questionable teaching practices (Akala, 2021; Koskei & Chepchumba, 2020) are among the causes cited by many. Success in exams remains the prominent benchmark resulting in teachers teaching to the test rather than completing all curriculum elements (Lowe & Prout, 2019). The system of allocating students to secondary school based on location and exam results, means that sub county schools receive the lowest achieving students (Lowe & Prout, 2019; Mwangi et al., 2018). These students are often also facing significant challenges such as poverty, and limited resources at home and at school, and yet some are able to excel in school and beyond due to academic resilience (Mwangi et al., 2018). Understanding what makes some students more resilient than others and what teachers can do to nurture resilience in their student formed the basis of this study.

Academic Resilience

Academic resilience is described as a combination of academic, emotional and behavioral resilience and it plays an important role in a student's ability to thrive, survive or fail (Frisby et al., 2020). Establishing a positive learning environment, by nurturing self-worth, a growth mindset and an internal locus of control may enhance the external

protective factors of building resilience in the classroom (Holdsworth et al., 2018). While building academic resilience involves the student's family, and the community, it is the school's role in establishing strong caring relationships, high expectations, and a positive learning environment that was the focus of this study (Ruiz, 2002).

Kenyan Education

Kenya is at the forefront of African education with literacy rates 20% higher and secondary school enrolment up to 50% higher than other sub Saharan countries (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2019). However, despite this progress and the dramatic increase in enrolments, the quality of the education has plummeted (Lowe & Prout, 2019). Understanding how to nurture academic resilience through the teachers needs to be understood if they are to be appropriately supported through in-service training, yet there is minimal research into examining teacher experiences in building resilience in their students and this study addressed this gap in the literature.

Problem Statement

Students in subcounty rural schools in Kenya may be struggling to succeed on multiple outcomes which may result in low student success and academic achievement. This can be mitigated by building resilience (Mwangi et al., 2018; Zarotti et al., 2020) which is an individual's ability to respond and adapt to adversity (Wadi et al., 2020). Academic resilience enables a student to manage setbacks, stress or pressure in school (Mwangi et al., 2018) and research has shown that resilience can be nurtured through building strong positive relationships between students and teachers (Garcia-Crespo et

al., 2019) establishing the school's role in building resilience (Domitrovitch et al., 2017; Mwangi et al., 2018). The Kenyan system of allocating secondary students based on their primary exam results, means that subcounty schools have the extra burden of low achievers to manage, increasing the burden of adversity and the challenges facing the teachers (Lowe & Prout, 2019). Understanding the experience of teachers in rural Kenya in building resilience in their students; how they go about building resilience and how well supported and prepared they feel could inform teacher in-service training and resource allocation. Yet despite this, there is little to no research into teacher experiences in building resilience in rural Kenya.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of rural secondary teachers in Kenya in building resilience in their student body. Research has shown that resilience can be nurtured and that relationships in schools are an important component of achieving this goal (Frisby et al., 2020; Makila et al., 2017). Establishing the levels of resilience and teacher methods of enhancing resilience, currently found in schools may inform preservice training (Lowe & Prout, 2019). Understanding how teachers see their role in developing resilience in students and how prepared they believe they are for this role may guide how to support teachers through professional development (Lowe & Prout, 2019).

Research Question

How do teachers in rural Kenya describe their experiences building resilience in their students?

Theoretical foundation

Resilience Theory

Resilience is not a set of traits, but a multidimensional process that refers to one's ability to adapt and cope with significant adversity (Wadi et al., 2020). Garmezy and Rodnick (1959) posited that it was the presence of psychosocial resources that enabled one to counteract the negative impact of adversity allowing for positive adaptive behaviours to emerge. Ultimately, the theory posits that resilience is a consequence of an interplay between internal factors such as personality, self-determination, and motivation and external factors such as community, schools, and family. The dynamic process of nurturing students to build resilience in the face of adversity by teachers, lends itself to a social constructivist, or interpretivist framework that will allow the researcher to develop a subjective understanding of teacher experiences in building resilience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The complexity of the resilience theory is supported by the interpretivist framework, ensuring the goal of the researcher is to focus on the teacher's point of view. A qualitative lens and the use of open-ended interviews allows the application of different assumptions to the design framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Assumptions Related to Resilience Theory

Values, beliefs, and assumptions feed the interactive processes and form the baseline of qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Assumptions, collection method and ways of interpretation form the three pillars, described by Mason (2002) as the unifying principles of qualitative research. Mason described assumptions as "how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted" (p.3.) The

ontological assumption of multiple realities, which in this study, includes the different realities for the researcher, the participants, and the readers, enables the teachers' experiences in building resilience in their students to be explored through the actual words of the teachers and reflecting the different perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher was aware that her origins differ from the socioeconomic background of the teachers in the county secondary schools that were the source of the data, and these differences may have influenced how the study was interpreted. The epistemological assumption that one gets as close as possible to the participants, means evidence of the interplay between internal and external influences can best be achieved by individual open-ended interviews with the teachers. Building knowledge and understanding through this individual exposure helped to minimise the objective separateness that may have emerged because of the socioeconomic differences between the researcher and the participants. Finally, the axiological assumption that the value laden nature of the information derived from open-ended interviews, and the acknowledgement of the researcher's different background flavoured the interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further information is available in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study required an understanding of teacher experience in building resilience in their students. As such, establishing their understanding of resilience; exploring their perspective of how informed and prepared they are to support student well-being and examining their experiences of building resilience in their students was necessary to create a meaningful and informed response to the research

question. To provide the rich data necessary to understand teacher experiences in building resilience in their students a comprehensive summary of real-world teacher experiences with the freedom to study the data in its natural state would be appropriate (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As a more interpretive method of data collection and analysis is necessary, a qualitative study that could focus on individual experiences and weave together different assumptions into the framework would result in a valid, but meaningful method of data collection and interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To achieve this, the specific research design was a Generic Qualitative Inquiry (GQI). This study does not match the more traditional qualitative methods, but the GQI allowed one to focus on the actual experience from the teacher's point of view. It enabled the researcher to investigate teacher's subjective reflections on their understanding of resilience, their perspective of how prepared they were and their first-hand experiences in building resilience in their students. The use of such a social constructive or interpretive method of collection meant that individual teacher values were honoured as the central tenets of their experiences were discussed and negotiated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While a phenomenological inquiry may be considered more appropriate, in this study I was not interested in the internal structure of the experiencing itself, that is, the cognitive process of their experience; instead, I was interested in an outward focus of attention on their experiences (Percy et al., 2015). This meant teachers reported on the actual experiences of building resilience rather than the emotions they faced in the process.

Additional detail on the nature and method of the study is provided in Chapter 3.

Definitions

Academic self- efficacy and achievement: A consequence of internal protective factors (Frisby et al., 2020), and result in positive academic achievement.

Adaptation: How students can cope with changing situations by adapting to the complex interplay between the protective internal and external factors (Masten, 2015).

External protective factors: Family, community, and school support (Masten & Tellegen, 2012).

Generic Qualitative Inquiry: A form of qualitative inquiry that allows one to focus on actual experiences and subjective reflections.

In-service training: A common form of training used in Kenya whereby the teachers in employment receive professional development.

Protective factors: Internal or external factors that help mitigate the effect of adversity by promoting resilience. Protective factors help balance risk factors and explain why some can bounce back in the face of adversity.

Resilience: The ability to bounce back in the face of adversity (Garcia-Dia et al., 2013). It is considered to be a dynamic process that can be nurtured through boosting protective factors and mitigating risk factors (Rutter, 1987). Resilience includes biological, psychological, social and cultural factors and varies depending on the domain (Rogers et al., 2020). For the purposes of this study, the focus is on academic resilience (Mwangi et al., 2015) and teacher experience in building it in their students.

Self-determination, motivation and relationships: Internal protective factors, necessary for building resilience (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Subcounty secondary school: The lowest level of government secondary schools, with national, extra county, and county schools receiving the higher achieving students according to their Primary Certificate of Education.

Assumptions

The teachers at the study schools were not all residents in the community, and instead they have been posted here from different counties. The use of open-ended questioning in semistructured interviews will ensure the researcher has to listen carefully to what the teachers say or do in their school setting. Moreover, the ontological assumption means that the different realities of the researcher, the participant and the reader resulted in different perspectives of the data collected (Percy et al., 2015). While this may seem a concern, the different perspectives, and the actual use of words from different teachers helped bring depth to the understanding of teacher experiences. However, although the different realities can be assumed to influence the data, it is not directly evident in the findings, because there was no way to demonstrate how the different realities influenced our interpretation of the teacher experiences (Percy et al., 2015) While open-ended questioning can be considered an appropriate method of data collection in this study, the benefits of a GQI meant that the epistemological assumption of getting as close as possible to the participant was ensured. Time taken to establish a rapport with the teachers and to become immersed in their stories, meant that the knowledge gained from the interviews can be confidently assumed to be the subjective experiences of the individual teachers building resilience in their students. For the interpretation of the data, collected through semi-structured open-ended questioning, to

be relevant and meaningful, it was also important to consider the axiological assumptions that recognised the value laden nature of the information collected. Rather than striving to make the data as impersonal and objective as possible as is often the case in a quantitative study that may focus on the cause and effect of teacher actions; a GQI ensures that the values of the teachers' contributions are recognised and treated individually (Percy et al., 2015). The challenge of interpreting the data collected often meant repeated interviews as one built clarity in the patterns of the teacher's experiences. The influence of cultural or historical norms on how they report the data and how the researcher interpreted it must be acknowledged, even if the effect of culture on the responses cannot be clarified or highlighted. An interpretive researcher may also focus on specific contexts in which the teachers lived and worked so that historical and cultural settings can be addressed thus enabling the researcher to acknowledge that their interpretation was shaped by their own experiences and flowed from their personal, historical, and cultural experiences (Creswell & Proth, 2018; Percy et al., 2015).

Limitations

Data collected through an open-ended naturalist interview style meant that the results can be rich, and the conclusions balanced, credible and accurate (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). However, this was an intensive exercise that was time consuming, and emotions needed to be managed so they did not interfere with the data collection and interpretation (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Participants were well informed regarding expectations of participation and freedom from harm as stipulated by the first code of ethics, but their responses may still have been affected by fear of reprisal, bias, flawed recall, or simple

discomfort (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Ensuring that the participants and the researcher agreed on the definition of resilience minimized the risk of different definitions interfering with the interviews and data collection. Time taken to establish a rapport with the participants and to ensure the researcher remained in an inquiry frame of mind helped minimize possible participant discomfort. The research design would be meaningless, if I did not acknowledge the power I had as the researcher, therefore ensuring an inquiry focus so that I can remain as authentic as possible as I share teachers' experiences can help minimize the effect of my possible biases. (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This meant the cultural and socio-economic differences between me as the researcher and the teachers in the school needed to be acknowledged and addressed through approaches such as the ontological assumption of multiple realities. This helped ensure as balanced a reporting as possible with the actual words and comments of the teachers being presented through different perspectives with a clear understanding of the different realities present (Percy et al., 2015). As a researcher on my own, it was important to remember the power of the researcher and to ensure equity when representing participants experiences. Ravich and Carl (2016) highlighted criticality, reflexivity, collaboration, and rigor as important focuses for a researcher to limit the biases that may influence their data collection and interpretation. Finally, the unique location of the schools as a subcounty school in West Laikipia, may limit the transferability of the data to other contexts.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher experiences in building resilience in their students in a rural subcounty secondary school in Kenya. Students are

allocated to secondary schools based on their results in the Kenya Primary Certificate of Education (KPCE). This results in all the low achieving students being together in the subcounty schools, which therefore have the greatest needs, but generally receive the lowest level of funding from the Ministry of Education (Mwangi et al., 2018). Resilience has been shown to respond to positive relationships in school and to boost academic achievement. This would therefore seem like an affordable way to mitigate low achievement and poor funding in sub county schools. As it was the teachers that were interviewed not the students, the focus was on enlisting 12 teachers in the schools. New teachers, who have not been in the school for one academic year, were not invited to participate, as it may have been considered that they did not know the students well enough. Teachers who did not hold a Bachelor of education degree in two teaching subjects and a minimum grade of C+ in at least 2 subjects, as set out by the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) and over 18 years were not included, as they would not have the knowledge necessary to address the questions. While the students themselves were not interviewed, the resilience theory could be addressed directly to them in a future study, although concerns about the maturity of their vocabulary and life experience may bring into question the validity of the results. However, balancing this study with the opinions of the students themselves would be relevant and interesting.

Finally, the goal of a qualitative study is not to produce findings that can be directly applied to other settings or contexts. As this study produced thick descriptions the reader could make comparisons to other contexts by transferring aspects of the study

design and findings to different contextual factors rather than trying to replicate the design and findings.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to an understanding of teachers' experiences in building resilience in their students in a subcounty rural school in Kenya. The students face challenges in achieving academic success and finding ways to minimize these challenges through the teachers at school may inform in-service training and empower teachers to make a difference. Low socio-economic status is not a problem the school can solve, but through building resilience in the student they may increase the chances of breaking the cycle of poverty. Increasing the depth of understanding of resilience in the school administration and teaching community, may encourage it to become a more prevalent theme throughout the school, positively affecting both the students and the teachers who are focusing on building resilience (Hascher et al., 2021). Resilience has been shown to positively affect student academic performance (Mwangi et al., 2018) and it can be nurtured and developed through positive relationships and boosting protective factors (Wadi et al., 2020). The length of time that students spend in schools mean that it is the perfect place for the focus to be one of building resilience in the student body. Training teachers in how to build resilience in their students may benefit all the students they teach over the years, wherever they move to work. A greater understanding of resilience is also likely to improve their personal mental development and wellbeing meaning they are a positive role model for the students (Hascher et al., 2021). A greater understanding of the power of resilience in the student population may also help guide the development of

resilience in other domains such as the family and the community (Yee Wan & Tsui, 2020). Building the values of resilience in the student population may then ensure a stronger population entering the workplace and mitigate the negative affect of low resilience on health and the economy (Rogers et al., 2020).

Summary

Students in rural subcounty schools may perform in school poorly due to low resilience, and poorly resourced schools. Building resilience in the students may be a positive way forward to mitigate such adversity (Mwangi et al., 2018) as it has been shown that resilience can be successfully nurtured through caring relationships in schools (Stride & Cutcher, 2015). A qualitative study explored the experiences of teachers in building resilience in their students in sub county rural schools in Laikipia, Kenya. Academic performance is key to nation building, but the quality of education in Kenya has plummeted since independence (Lowe & Prout, 2019). Examining how teachers build resilience in their students (Frisby et al., 2020) and therefore support academic performance can inform in-service teacher training and help the teachers understand how to maximize their influence. To understand teacher experience in nurturing resilience in a small subcounty secondary school, I examined teacher experiences through semi structured interviews. The depth of information that was derived from this research design may inform in service training and guide how to develop the necessary skills to build resilience in students. It may help inform teachers current understanding of resilience and how it affects their students; how prepared and informed they currently feel about their role and their experiences in building resilience in their students.

Resilience is not a set of traits, but a multidimensional process that refers to one's ability to adapt and cope with significant adversity (Wadi et al., 2020). The dynamic process of nurturing students to build resilience in the face of adversity is best studied through a qualitative study and an interpretivist framework that will allow the researcher to establish a subjective understanding of teacher experiences in building resilience (Denzin, & Lincoln. Eds, 2011). A literature review was completed to examine current research into teacher experiences in schools in Kenya and elsewhere. Definitions of resilience were examined and the current situation in Kenyan schools with reference to teacher training and student allocation in secondary school. This is presented below in Chapter two.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Students in rural and under resourced Kenyan secondary school settings face significant challenges that may affect academic performance (Mwangi et al., 2018). Resilience is now accepted to be a dynamic process that overcomes adversity (Rutter, 1987) and academic resilience, which is specific to the learning environment, may be a way forward in mitigating adversity in schools (Mwangi et al., 2018). Kenya currently has a literacy rate of 82.6% (UNESCO UIS, 2019). However, according to UNESCO UIS Fact sheet #46, (2017) 68.8% of students in Kenya complete lower secondary, but only 42.4% of students complete upper secondary, and only 44.3% of students leaving the equivalent of Grade 3 have achieved minimum proficiency level in reading. This is against a background of 1/3rd of youth in Sub Saharan Africa aged 12 – 14 being out of school -which is the highest rate of education exclusion worldwide (UNESCO UIS, 2019) and 88% of school age population not achieving minimal proficiency levels (Knoema, 2021).

Despite Kenya's progress in the dramatic increase in enrolments, the quality of the education has plummeted (Khanani, 2021). Positive academic performance is one of the key goals of schooling and education in general; and as progress of any nation is dependent on the education of their citizens, then positive academic performance should be one of the key goals of the nation (Khanani, 2021). Student perception of teacher support, cooperation, attitude and behavior together with teacher classroom manners and teaching strategies are crucial factors of educational outcome (Muzamil et al., 2022). The

trust that develops in a positive student teacher relationship has been shown to boost resilience, resulting in increased student academic performance (Gouda et al., 2016). This study explored teacher experiences in building resilience in their students. This chapter includes the search strategy, theoretical foundation, and a literature review.

Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature review using the following databases and websites was completed: APA psychinfo, EBSCO, ERIC, ProQuest, Taylor & Francis online, African online journals, Kenya educational research database (KERD), Google Scholar and Thoreau.

Search terms used with each database included: academic resilience, academic performance, Kenya secondary education, Kenyan curriculum development, Kenyan teacher qualification and professional development, resilience theory, resilience in international schools, resilience in the teaching community. I searched for peer reviewed articles, which I organized in an annotated bibliograph format. Keeping this updated and current was difficult but necessary. I found that resilience can have different meanings depending on the situation, and therefore, it was important to remain in the field of psychology and more specifically academic resilience. However, these different definitions also informed my understanding of resilience and its application. It was surprising how many of the studies were quantitative or mixed studies, where even the mixed studies were primarily focused on the quantitative data. Yet, the depth of information derived from semi-structured interviews is what drove me to focus on this study design, as the rich data from this design can inform the way forward in a more

meaningful manner. The amount of research that has focused on resilience in the Kenyan system was surprising, but it was all very similar, usually with a focus on quantitative studies and therefore limited in how they could inform my study. The most surprising discovery was the number of studies examining in-service training and finding that it was not a successful model, yet there doesn't seem to be any move to change the model of delivery. The lack of qualitative studies with real in-depth examination of teacher experiences convinced me that this was the most appropriate design to establish meaningful information that could make a difference and result in genuine growth in the quality of students emerging from the subcounty secondary schools.

Theoretical Foundation

Resilience Theory

The study of resilience first started in the 1950s and 60s with a focus on the negative consequences of adversity. This early research was generally grounded in behavioural theories, greatly influenced by the ideas of Darwin and Freud on natural selection and personality (Masten & Coatsworth, 1995). At that time resilience was considered to be a personality trait that was somewhat fixed and could not be changed or trained (Bonanno & Mancini, 2008). Thus, negative consequences of adversity were conceptualized in terms of mental illness or vulnerability (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016). Later research linked biology and neuroscience to behavioural adaptation, such as seen in children presenting with resilience (Masten & Obradović, 2006). Garmezy (1973), an early pioneer of the power of resilience, focused on psychopathology in children found in stressful situations. He observed the influence of psychosocial resources and how they

appeared to mitigate the negative impact of adversity. By the 1980s this suggestion was becoming more established. Factors such as the cultural context, social relationships and neurobiological processes were now being explored for their relevance alongside personality traits as the basis of protective factors for resilience (Masten & Wright, 2010). However, the focus remained to a large extent on understanding the origins of challenges with mental health (Masten, 2001). Key scholars of resilience such as Garmezy (1983), Murphy and Moriarty (1976), Rutter (1987), and Werner and Smith (1982) then began to focus on the notion of adaptive functioning, and positive adjustment as they observed the different paths of children who were considered at risk due to poverty or trauma, suggesting the influence of coping and adapting skills that went beyond the initial risk and pathological processes (Masten & Barnes, 2018). This collaborative observation led the scholars to adopt the term *resilience* to describe the positive adaptation in the face of adversity. However, with time the definition of resilience, and therefore the meaning of the Resilience Theory has become plagued with a wide variety of definitions of the key concepts. For example, we see it began as a fixed trait that could not be influenced and emerged into the capacity to successfully adapt to adversity. Yet, according to Liew et al., (2018) resilience and resiliency have different meanings as *resiliency* refers to temperament or personality traits associated with adaptability, whereas *resilience* refers to a dynamic developmental process of maintaining positive adaptation or adjustment in the context of substantial threat or adversity (p.2).

Generally, it is now agreed that resilience is considered a dynamic process rather than a fixed personality trait that is outcome-oriented (Wadi et al., 2020). However, as researchers strive for uniformity in the theory, they apply different measures that align with their conceptual definitions of resilience. Yet, as adversity ranges from natural disasters to family and community trauma, so do the attributes of resilience theory. According to Masten and Cicchetti (2016), this complexity increases further when a consensus emerges that resilience is a systems concept.

While a systems concept may seem applicable when applying the theory of resilience to situations such as the environment, economy, transport, or even engineering, it can also be applied to a child's development. This reinforces the understanding that resilience is not a stable trait but instead emerges from the dynamic interaction between a child's age, relationships, home, and other evolving systems in their life (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016). The broadening application of resilience to a range of fields led researchers to agree on a basic definition of resilience that was applicable across domains, with Masten and Barnes (2018) describing resilience as: "the capacity of a system to adapt successfully to significant challenges that threaten the function, viability, or development of that system" (P. 6).

Masten and Cicchetti (2016) went on to define four key principles of the theoretical framework: (a) many systems interacting at different levels drive the function and development of a living system, (b) the capacity and development of a system are always changing, (c) change can cross domains and levels of function as a consequence of the adaptation of the system, and (d) the systems are interdependent. Masten and

Barnes (2018) suggested that a system concept like this can be seen as a road to adaptation. This focus on a journey, with different stages of adaptation, whether positive changes, turning points, or reactions to adversity, leads to different models of recovery, resistance, or growth (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016).

Thus, a child embedded in multiple systems, from the family to the community and the school, and the complex interplay between these systems, means that they depend on and influence each other. The relationships that the child develops between these systems emerge as dynamic interactions that nurture and result in resilience (Masten, 2015). It is this concept of adaptation, and the role of relationships in the nurturing of resilience, which makes this theory relevant to the study, as the student-teacher relationship is key to understanding how teachers nurture resilience in their students.

This idea that resilience is based on adaptation, with a multidimensional response, underpinned research into the impact of adversity and how to mitigate its effects. Werner and Smith (1992), in a longitudinal study in Hawaii started in 1955, explored the long-term influence of poverty and situations such as divorce, alcoholism, and mental illness on the children in the family. They were especially interested in their adaptability, noting that many of them developed serious problems as adolescents but then turned their lives around and became caring and functional adults. The community surrounding the school in this study presents similar challenges of adversity. Thus, understanding how these children were able to succeed and how their systems supported or undermined them can help guide how to increase the likelihood of the students in this school succeeding in spite of such adversity.

Hemson (2018) explored how a group of boys in Durban achieved exceptional educational results despite severe financial, social, and educational constraints. The author highlighted key strategies the students applied, including individual and collective study, taking on tutoring roles, and appropriating resources. The students in this study school are generally low achieving from low socio-economic backgrounds, and the school receives limited resources to support them (Mwangi et al., 2018). The resilience theory, with its focus on mitigating such adversity through adaptation and positive relationships, posits that resilience can be nurtured in schools through teacher-student relationships.

The intention is to explore the teachers' experience in building resilience in their students. Using the foundation of adaptation and the role of relationships, the Resilience Theory will guide the interpretation of the teachers' experience in building resilience in their students. The data derived from this study will add greater depth of understanding to the resilience theory. The depth of knowledge derived from semistructured interviews may add greater understanding to the interplay between the different interdependent systems described and inform the development and understanding of resilience beyond the school and into these other systems.

Therefore, grounded in the resilience theory, this study explored the importance of the teacher-student relationship, supporting their efforts to learn successfully in the face of adversity and to recognize their agency and innovation. It is the school component of this complex system of support and the teachers' role in building resilience in their students that was the focus of this study.

Literature Review

The standards of education in the Kenyan system have plummeted (Lowe & Prout, 2019), yet education is a key goal in nation-building (Hanushek, 2013). Understanding the hurdles that interfere with academic performance (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019) should be the focus for schools. The current system of allocating students to secondary school based on location and exam results means that sub-county schools receive the lowest achieving students (Lowe & Prout, 2019; Mwangi et al., 2018). These students often face significant challenges such as poverty and limited resources at home and at school, yet some are able to excel in school and beyond due to academic resilience (Mwangi et al., 2018). Resilience is a dynamic process that can mitigate the impact of adversity by boosting protective factors and compensating for risk factors. While the family and community are key protective factors (Holdsworth et al., 2018), schools play an important role in nurturing resilience in their students. Understanding what enables some students to be more resilient than others and examining how teachers nurture resilience in their students form the basis of this study. There is currently little information about teacher experience in building resilience in a rural subcounty secondary school in Kenya, and this study attempts to rectify that.

This chapter consists of a review of literature related to the teacher's role in boosting academic performance through building resilience in their students. First, the relevance of academic performance, how it is assessed, and the teacher's role in building academic performance is established. Then the student-teacher relationship is discussed, followed by a discussion on resilience, psychological resilience, and specifically,

academic resilience. Finally, this is applied to the current situation in education in Kenya and teacher experiences in building resilience.

Academic Performance

If positive academic performance is a key indicator of a successful education system, then examining what boosts or interferes with academic achievement could inform how to maximize academic performance. Indeed, Hanushek (2013) evaluated the role of human capital in driving economic growth in developing countries and found that without improving school quality, developing countries would have difficulty improving their long-term economic performance. Hanushek showed that economic growth was closely related to cognitive skills but that simple approaches such as increasing resources did not necessarily improve achievement. Instead, they found that both infrastructure and access are necessary while slowing the pace of expansion so that improving quality is a priority.

Positive academic performance is one of the key goals of schooling, and as the progress of any nation is dependent on the education of its citizens, positive academic performance should be one of the key goals of the nation (Hanushek, 2013). As teachers play a key role in the delivery of learning and consequently influence academic performance, understanding how they approach resilience-building in their students would be beneficial. Finally, education reduces poverty and increases productivity (Barro, 2013), yet as with many countries in the world, standards of education are deteriorating in Kenya (Khanani, 2021; Lowe and Prout, 2019). So, establishing how to arrest the deterioration of academic performance with tools such as academic resilience

could guide professional development, improving the student-teacher relationship and boosting academic performance.

Measuring Academic Performance

As with many countries, in Kenya, the assessment of academic performance is most commonly carried out through assignments and grades as an objective measure (York et al., 2019). York et al. (2019) carried out an analytic literature review to examine the use and meaning of the term ‘academic success’ and found that grades are the most common tool for measuring academic performance. They suggest that academic success is a combination of inputs, environment, persistence, and retention, student learning, and academic achievement. Inputs include family background, academic and social experiences; the environment includes culture, curriculum, and classroom environment, and outcomes include the student’s knowledge, attitude, and behaviors resulting from this combination. This study developed a model of academic success, which they believe gives greater clarity to the definition and includes academic achievement, satisfaction, acquisition of skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of learning outcomes, and career success. According to the authors, this definition means that assessments should look at the specific growth of cognitive ability and learning outcomes, as well as measure persistence and satisfaction to enable educational goals to be considered in assessment designs. The argument is that by integrating the influence of personality, persistence, and competence into assessments, a more meaningful evaluation of academic performance should emerge. This study highlights the limitations of using grades to describe academic

performance and the importance of evaluating the whole student, including levels of resilience.

Mukolwe (2015) analyzed the relationship between exam anxiety, academic performance, and resilience, among other correlates in Kakamega county, Kenya. The study was carried out on 359 form four (final year secondary students) in a rural sub-county school. The data were collected through a questionnaire with subscales on test anxiety, academic procrastination, locus of control, and academic resilience. The author found, among other things, that there was a significant negative correlation between exam anxiety and academic performance and a positive but insignificant correlation between academic resilience and academic performance. Examinations at the end of primary and secondary are the primary assessment tools in Kenya and can have a life-changing impact. This study highlights the presence of exam anxiety and the importance of building resilience in students to mitigate the impact of exam anxiety on academic performance.

The Teacher's Role in Achieving Academic Performance

Central to boosting academic performance is the role of the teacher and their relationship with their students. Understanding both the student and the teacher perspective of the learning environment can inform efforts to mitigate adversity, build resilience, and boost academic performance. As resilience is grounded in this teacher-student relationship, this study focuses on exploring how teachers feel about their experience in building resilience in their students. Cefai (2004) described the development of a seven-item teacher's framework to identify classes characterized by

high levels of student resilience. 22 teachers rated 465 students. They found that a supportive teacher-student relationship, meaningful and engaging curriculum, and active classroom participation will benefit a student struggling with adversity. The teacher framework was broken into three components a) socio-emotional competence, b) autonomy and problem-solving, c) and educational engagement, which Cefai (2004) believed provided a holistic picture of student resilience while the components could also be considered in isolation, so that different levels of resilience can be extrapolated from the results. Cefai (2004) defended the use of teacher perceptions as the source of information, stating that teachers have been shown to be trustworthy sources of information on relationships and behaviors in their classroom despite the risk of factors to their judgment such as the level of tolerance, socio-cultural background, teaching experience, job satisfaction, halo effect, or other school and personal factors. In creating their measurement tool, Cefai (2004) points out the importance of psychosocial processes in the development of competence that are critical to building resilience, highlighting that schools, as "... proactive, inclusive, and health-promoting social systems" can be instrumental in fostering social competence in disadvantaged as well as non-disadvantaged children. Cefai (2004) describes social competence as security in the communication and social skills that children use to engage and develop effective relationships irrespective of the environment. They explain that social-emotional competence allows students to establish and sustain relationships such as with their peers and teachers, to regulate their emotions and adapt their thinking, to recover or bounce back in the face of adversity and therefore, to thrive and succeed academically. Although

Cefai (2004) focuses on primary school children with the assertion that teacher ratings are especially reliable indicators of children's social development and behavior at the primary level, it is still a relevant study to review with its emphasis on using teacher perception as a measurement of student social-emotional competence and resilience.

While the teacher's perspective is the focus of this study, understanding the students' perspective of the learning environment is relevant to examining the teacher's experience in building resilience. Lee (2012) examined the students' perception of the school social environment and student outcomes. The sample of 3748 students in grade 9 and 10 was taken from 147 schools in the U.S. They found that authoritative schools with high levels of demand (academic press) and responsiveness (teacher-student relationship) were generally at an advantage. The student-teacher relationship was important for student behavioral and emotional engagement and student outcomes. They highlighted the importance of student engagement on academic performance and noted that student engagement was a strong indicator of student success irrespective of race, gender, and socio-economic status. This study highlights the role of teachers in promoting academic performance and supports the importance of the student-teacher relationship.

As Cefai (2004) acknowledged, there are limitations to assessing student resilience based only on teacher perception and pointed out that among concerns, personal factors such as self-efficacy may influence a teacher's judgment. In Kenya, Odanga, Raburu, and Aloka, (2015) investigated the influence of gender on teacher's self-efficacy in government secondary schools in Kisumu, Kenya. They described teacher self-efficacy as the confidence to promote student learning and suggest that teacher

confidence will determine levels of effectiveness, innovativeness, and persistence in their work. Their quantitative findings did not show a significant impact of gender on teacher self-efficacy, although qualitative findings were more varied with a greater response showing that gender does influence teacher self-efficacy. Odanga et al. (2015) found that teacher gender had a negative influence on female teacher self-efficacy in co-educational or boys-only schools, while male teachers generally had higher self-efficacy when it came to instruction, and female teachers generally had greater self-efficacy with reference to student engagement and emotional well-being. Thus, female teachers were found to have greater self-efficacy in a girls' school and in student engagement while males had greater self-efficacy in instructional strategies and classroom management. The authors posit that if self-efficacy is indeed important for effective instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management, it is likely that teacher's personal belief in their ability to produce positive academic learning will directly impact student learning and resilience. Exploring teacher experience in building resilience in their students can inform how to best support teacher well-being and self-efficacy so that students can benefit from their relationship with their teacher.

Muzamil et al. (2022) wanted to determine the impact of teachers' classroom manners, teaching strategies, and parents' socioeconomic status on students' academic performance. The sample consisted of 610 secondary school students from government schools in Pakistan, and they used a self-developed scale to identify student perceptions and their link to academic achievement. They found that teachers' behaviors and teaching methods, especially teacher encouragement, had a positive influence on student

performance. They found that teacher motivation and encouragement had a positive impact on student performance in exams, and a sense of kindness and cooperation from teachers was a motivation for students to become more engaged learners, which was reflected in their performance.

The importance of academic performance in promoting long-term economic growth and human success underpins the priority of education as a key government goal. Establishing effective meaningful tools of assessment to ensure a balanced review of academic performance needs to take into consideration traits such as academic achievement, competence, and resilience. Understanding what may interfere with academic performance and the importance of the role of teachers in nurturing student success through building academic performance and academic resilience will result in positive academic achievement throughout the education system, such as the rural subcounty school in this study. Yet, there are currently few studies that have focused on teacher experiences in building resilience as a pathway to supporting academic performance in a rural subcounty Kenyan secondary school.

Resilience

Resilience is a person's ability to cope with adversity positively and effectively (Wadi et al., 2020). It is key to maintaining good mental and physical wellbeing through the ability to adapt to significant adversity. Resilience can be nurtured through buffering internal protective factors such as personality, self-determination, and motivation and external protective factors such as community, school, and family (Garcia-Dia et al., 2013). Garcia-Dia et al. (2013) found that boosting these protective factors is a more

effective approach than focusing on mitigating risk factors such as poverty, domestic violence, and mental health challenges, which supports the intention of this study to examine teacher experience in building resilience. While the theory of resilience can be applied to a range of situations, the focus in this study is academic resilience, which is derived from psychological and developmental resilience. As academic resilience is grounded in the caring relationship between the student and the teacher, leading to positive adaptation and improved academic performance (Stride & Cutcher, 2015), building resilience can mitigate the impact of adversity and boost academic performance despite the challenges faced by students in a rural subcounty secondary school in Kenya.

Definitions of Resilience

Resilience presents with a broad range of definitions depending on the field of focus. However, there are some common attributes that can be applied to a range of situations, including academic resilience. Masten and Tellegen (2012) posit that, in order to define resilience, it is important to measure adaptive behaviors in two key domains: the nature and severity of the risk or adversity, and the individual or contextual differences so that one can understand the variations in the adaptation patterns and the quality of the resilience. Maddi (2016) suggest that the definition of resilience is associated with the relationship between hardiness and adaptation while Taylor (2013) argues that the definition of resilience needs to be considered from a developmental perspective as well as an ecological perspective. Windle (2011) analyzes the concept of resilience from different perspectives to inform a range of definitions appropriate for policy, practice, and research.

Through a systematic review, concept analysis, and face-to-face consultations, Windle (2011) identified antecedents, defining attributes, and consequences of resilience and their impact on health and wellbeing. She found that much of the research has been embedded in developmental psychology and studies focusing on children and adolescents. Windle (2011) argues that while these are rich and informative, the approach to defining resilience has not been methodical. For example, Windle (2011) points out that Gillespie, Chaboyer, and Wallis, (2007) present self-efficacy, hope, and coping as defining attributes of resilience, while Dyer and McGuinness (1996) posit that a sense of self, determination, and pro-social attitude are defining attributes of resilience. These are quite different attributes, and Windle (2011) points out that there is no clarity on why they were chosen as opposed to constructs such as self-esteem or emotional competence. Windle (2011) presents a methodical argument that focuses on the role of developmental psychology, biology, and psychiatry, environmental perspectives, and personal characteristics. She outlined the layers of individual, family, neighborhood, and social resources and assets that facilitate resilience. Windle (2011) established the importance of antecedents, defining attributes, and consequences of resilience, but she also identified three necessary requirements for resilience: the necessity of significant risk or adversity, the presence of assets or resources to offset the effects of this adversity, and positive adaptation to avoid a negative outcome. Understanding the complex interplay between these layers can help understand how teachers are building resilience in their students and how they can be supported to continue to do so.

Garcia-Dia et al. (2013) systematically analyze the concept of resilience through an integrated review of the literature. The authors clarify the historical perspectives of the concept of resilience, outlining the journey of such pioneers as Garmezy (1973) whose early work on schizophrenia and competence is considered to play a foundational role in the study of resilience and Werner and Smith (1992) and their longitudinal study based in Hawaii. In defining the attributes of resilience, they suggest that despite changes in terminology depending on the concept or discipline, the themes of resilience remain the same: Rebounding, which is a common theme that describes the ability to bounce back after adversity; Determination, which allows individuals to believe they can overcome adversity; Social Support, which highlights the importance of at least one significant positive relationship; and Self-efficacy, which is the belief in one's own ability to overcome adversity. Garcia-Dia et al. (2013) describe resilience as a dynamic process that can be influenced by environment, external factors, and personality. Environmental influences, such as a positive relationship with a teacher in school, is an example of an external protective factor that can lead to resilience and forms the basis of this study into examining how teachers can build resilience in their students.

Wadi et al. (2020) reviewed the common characteristics of resilience across a validated resilience scale. They proposed a guide to the development of resilience in education, health, and assessment among other fields. They described resilience as an individual's ability to manage and adapt to significant adversity while maintaining positive mental and physical wellbeing. The resulting integrated resilience model establishes the relationship between four emerging themes based on two internal

conditions: control and growth; two external conditions: involvement and resourceful; and two continuums (past and present) conceptualizing the relationship between the four emerging resilience themes. Therefore, strength in the internal present state will show composure and strength in a stressful situation, and strength in the internal future state will show the potential for growth and the potential to bounce back despite adversity. Strength in the external present state will show commitment to deal with adversity while strength in the external future state will present as effective problem-solving skills in the face of adversity. Using an integrated model such as this to inform the three main perspectives of resilience—trait, process, and outcomes—could help teachers support the development of resilience in their students, as well as help the researcher examine how they are building resilience in their students.

Rogers et al., (2020) proposed that mapping resilience values against worldviews can help evaluate if resilience thinking is inclusive. They suggest that this approach would demonstrate the diversity of resilience(s). While this study is in reference to resilience in policy, this focus on values and diversity is also relevant to the classroom environment and would help understand how to approach the examination of teacher efforts to build resilience in their students as resilience may therefore be molded by the context of the situation and the values attached. Rogers et al., (2020) describe resilience as flexible and dynamic, growing and transforming based on the nature of different values that influence it. They suggest that how these value systems, that are at the individual or community level, interact and are connected can inform the true value and impact of resilience. Thus, the resilience required by the teacher to persist in spite of

challenges to inspire their students to learn may be different from the resilience a student may require to persist at problem-solving in school in spite of the challenges in their path. This variation in resilience based on context means that resilience can be domain-specific, suggesting different aspects of resilience are prominent in different domains (Jowkar, Kojuri, Kohoulat, & Hayat, 2014). Exploring how context influences the definition of resilience may be important for teachers to understand how they can influence their students.

Psychological and Developmental Resilience

Psychological resilience is a consequence of a dynamic psychological process that starts with an individual being exposed to either sustained adversity or a traumatic event followed by a set of characteristics that interact with protective mechanisms, resulting in positive adaptation (Graber, Pichon, & Carabine 2015). The study of psychological resilience grew through research into children at risk for mental health and the impact of environmental adversity and genetic vulnerability (Garmezy, 1973). The desire to understand how these early influences impacted or created the pathway for disorders to emerge became a focus in developmental psychopathology as researchers such as Garmezy and Rodnick (1959); Masten (1994); and Werner and Smith (1992) tried to make sense of the large variations in life course development.

Southwick and Charney (2012), in their study of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, examined current literature and suggested that the neuroplastic nature of the brain meant that life experiences can make changes in the brain, but that there is a time-limited window of enhanced neuroplasticity. Thus, they posit that

targeting protective factors in this crucial developmental period could have a significant impact on the future quality of resilience. They highlighted the enormous impact that developmental risk and protective factors have on brain development and shaping neural circuits responsible for regulating responses to stress and adversity. However, they also pointed out that while overwhelming stress during infancy and childhood can cause exaggerated emotional and behavioral responses even into adulthood, mild to moderate stressors that are controlled can have a more positive effect with children developing an adaptive response to stress that means they become more resilient and manage future adversity and stressors more effectively. They highlight the importance of positive emotion, optimism, loving caretakers, and sturdy role models as well as cognitive flexibility, social support, and self-efficacy as among the important psychosocial factors necessary for resilience. It is this focus on loving caretakers, sturdy role models, and cognitive flexibility that is relevant to this study examining the experiences of teachers building resilience in their students.

Masten and Tellegen (2012), through their work on the Project Competence Longitudinal Study (PCLS) initiated by Garmezy and others in the late 1970s, focused on resilience and developmental psychopathology. The PCLS included a) a normative community group from urban schools b) a cohort of children with transposition of great arteries and c) a small cohort of children with physical disabilities but placed in mainstream classes. It was based in Minnesota and started as a focus on risk studies with a desire to understand children at risk for mental health problems but grew into several interrelated studies aimed at understanding ‘stress resistance’ through cross collaboration

with several early resilience scientists. The PCLS focused on competence as a key indicator of adaptation as they believed that adaptive systems played a powerful role. Through a series of studies over the twenty-year period of the study, this and much more was explored. One of the fundamental findings of this study by Masten & Tellegen (2012) was that these adaptive systems explained much of the capacity for resilience. This study focused on understanding adaptation, by identifying patterns of resilience, competence without major adversity, and maladaptive paths. They found that achievements in developmental tasks were rooted in childhood and adolescence and that young people with resilience were consistently found to have high-quality relationships with parents and adults, as well as good cognitive and social-emotional skills. More specifically, they were able to show that resilience often emerged in childhood and endured through to adulthood. Masten and Tellegen (2012) found that competence is a key indicator for adaptation and so they looked at individual differences in adaptation in the context of adversity such as a stressful situation. They were searching for clues to protective processes that help understand how some children overcome adversity by manifesting competence at home and school. Establishing how some children overcome adversity more effectively than others can help inform how teachers can build resilience in their students.

Graber et al. (2015) investigated insights into contemporary psychological resilience research. They highlighted how experiences of coping with trauma varied according to age, culture, and socioeconomic status. The authors found that positive psychological adaptation emerges over time, usually as a consequence of an interaction

between protective mechanisms such as relationships, coping skills, culture, and neurobiology. They noted that prior adversity may indeed be an antecedent that boosts the response to later trauma because change and adaptation are always possible (Graber et al., 2015). So, despite adversity being a possible risk factor, it can also help nurture protective factors. However, while it is important to develop protective factors, awareness of risk factors that may undermine the development of resilience is also necessary. These may include challenges such as low birth weight which will impact developmental progress, as well as life events that build risk such as poverty, limited resources such as nutrition, clothing, or housing (Murphy, 1965). Therefore, developing psychosocial skills and supporting key relationships, or a mutually supportive network which is cognizant of the risk factors and strengths may influence physiological functioning and behavior. Thus, community, school, and home all play a key role in protecting against adversity and other risk factors, through caring relationships, encouragement, and high expectations, and when combined with internal protective factors such as personal skills, attitudes, beliefs, and values this relationship can lead to protective processes of cooperation, communication, empathy, goal orientation, self-efficacy, and self-awareness, meaning that resilience is enhanced (Graber et al., 2015). If age, culture, and socioeconomic status are relevant to coping with trauma, then understanding this can guide teachers in how to build resilience and also help the researcher understand how to examine teacher efforts in building resilience in their students.

Cerit and Şimşek (2021) suggest that psychological resilience is important for adolescents to cope with the increased cognitive development and emotional intensity

during this important developmental period. Cerit and Şimşek (2021) completed an experimental study to explore the effect of seven weekly interventions based on social skill training on 70 students in high school in Turkey with a focus on adolescent psychological resilience and emotional intelligence. They found that while the improved levels of psychological resilience and emotional intelligence were not significant immediately after the intervention, a later follow-up demonstrated significantly increased optimism and communication in the intervention group. They suggest that while the increased resilience when tested post-intervention was not significant, the impact of the intervention was measurable a month later, with greater optimism, communication, and emotional intelligence. They posit that these results support the assertion that resilience can be improved and that a targeted intervention to build social skills in adolescents will help them cope with problems as adults, adapt to adversity and in turn raise more resilient children in the future. They also suggest that enriched education programs with interactive techniques such as creative drama would help students improve levels of resilience. This understanding can inform how to establish if teachers are building resilience in their students and to guide what could work as an intervention or approach.

Academic resilience

How students succeed in school in spite of adverse conditions and maintain a positive vision for their future can be described as academic resilience (García Crespo, Alonso, & Muniz, 2019). Academic challenges such as conflict, loneliness, stress, workload or mental health can result in the ability to thrive, survive or fail and the consequence is a positive experience of resilience and hope or a negative experience of

failure (Carton & Goodboy, 2015). Academic resilience will enable a student to maintain a high level of motivation and performance, and therefore increased academic achievement. Relationships in the classroom, whether between peers or with the teacher, are shown to be key in inspiring academic resilience (Frisby et al., 2020). This reinforces the idea that teachers can help nurture the three key components; developing and maintaining perspective, maintaining health and support from peers that are suggested by Holdsworth et al. (2018) as fundamental to developing resilience through lived experiences and education. To this end, working to build academic resilience in the student body can effectively raise academic performance and student success (Frisby et al., 2020) and how teachers perceive resilience in their students can guide how to nurture and develop resilience. The role of schools in developing resilience through positive adaptability, caring relationships, and building risk competence (Stride & Cutcher, 2015) despite the influence of external stresses such as poverty, alcoholism, or poor resources means that teachers are central to building resilience in their students. However, the focus on developing internal protective factors, such as emotional regulation, adaptive thinking, and emotional competence, often diminishes as a priority as students progress through school. As academic performance has been associated with these internal protective factors, examining the teacher's role in nurturing resilience in their students can guide how they can proactively enhance academic performance.

Stride and Cutcher (2015) investigated the role of caring relationships as a key protective factor in the visual arts classroom through an intuitive and rational inquiry. Five teachers, who all had secondary school experience in teaching visual arts, were

recruited through purposive sampling from four different schools, and data were collected through interviews. The authors found that a caring relationship between teachers and their students is an important protective factor in promoting resilience and positive adaptability. They also found that the visual arts proved to be successful in promoting resilience and positive adaptation, which they described as essential tools for successfully navigating this complex world. The authors focused on three key factors that they suggest promote resilience; high self-expectation, caring and connected relationships, and opportunity for participation and contribution. They highlighted the importance of getting the timing right and having enough one-on-one time with the student. They also found that storytelling was effective in connecting with the students through building relationships, and that empathy was important, especially where teacher intuition enabled them to manage the increasing need for empathetic responses. Further, the teachers considered that risk competence was an important part of building resilience, with one describing it as a foundation of resilience. Ultimately, as the authors have shown the effective relationship between visual arts and resilience, which has been established as instrumental in building academic performance, they suggest this reinforces their belief that creative thinking should be considered equal in status to logical thinking in schools. Applying these findings to the process of examining teacher experiences in building resilience can help guide the approach to the semi-structured interviews in this study.

Silyvier and Nyandusi (2015) investigated teacher perceptions of factors affecting their competence in developing resilience in vulnerable primary aged children (5 years to 12 years). The data was collected through questionnaires from a randomized sample of

108 teachers. This study showed that teachers considered experience pertinent to dealing with vulnerable children and to have a significant effect on teacher competence in building resilience. They also found that gender was relevant to teachers' competence in building resilience in their students and suggested that trained and experienced female teachers should be the ones to focus on building resilience in their students. The findings of this study underpin the need to explore similar teacher perceptions in secondary teachers as proposed by this study and the reference to the impact of gender on building resilience can inform the semi-structured interviews planned for this study.

Liebenberg, Theron, Sanders, Munford, van Rensburg, Rothmann and Ungar, (2015) review how student experiences of staff and school contexts, moderated contextual risks and facilitated resilience processes in schools in marginalized communities in Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa. The findings confirm the important role that schools play in moderating the relationship between resilience and communities or family risk. They also championed the ways in which teachers are able to scaffold resilience resources through the quality of the relationships they build with their students. All the schools took part in the Pathways to Resilience study and two important factors that emerged were that vulnerable children do better at schools where teachers build strong positive relationships with them and that these interactional factors are within direct control of the school. It also found that schools become a key site to compensate for missing resilience resources in the community and finally that it is possible in the school context for protective resources such as respect and empowerment to be enhanced through these relationships between teachers and students. This study

reinforces and informs the importance of the teacher-student relationship in building resilience that is the key focus of this study.

Beltman, Mansfield and Harris (2016) completed an exploratory qualitative study to examine the roles of school psychologists in supporting or enabling teacher resilience. They found that while teacher resilience is associated with positive student outcomes, it also plays an important role in teacher retention and well-being. Their findings showed that school psychologists directly and indirectly supported teacher resilience despite the perception that their main role was to work with individual students. This study highlights the importance of supporting teacher resilience. The ability to retain teachers who maintain a positive commitment, engagement, and motivation, especially in a challenging school environment, will result in resilient teachers who are able to build resilience in their students. They also found that when administration enables teachers to engage in autonomy, teachers' enthusiasm and persistence increase. Positive relationships with colleagues are likely to emerge, which in turn will benefit the students in their care. This emphasis on building resilience in the teachers so they are able to build resilience in their students through positive engagement and commitment can help guide the interview focus in this study to understand the level of resilience in the teachers themselves.

Mwangi, et al. (2018) explore the relationship between the type of secondary school (boarding, day, or mixed) in Kenya, and academic resilience. The study involved a randomly selected sample of 390 third-year secondary students drawn from the different categories of schools. Data were collected using a demographic form and a resilience scale. They found that girls in boarding school, boys in day school, or mixed day schools

were all significantly more resilient and had a higher academic performance than the boys' boarding schools. The authors also concluded that effective resilience requires a combination of both internal and external protective factors and that both factors predict academic resilience with internal protective factors having a higher predictive value than external factors underscoring the need to establish teacher success in building resilience in their students. As Mwangi et al. (2018) suggest, the type of school should not be considered peripheral to academic achievement and the impact of the quota system of allocating students to secondary schools based on their Primary Certificate of Education results should not be underestimated; this can inform the approach to the semi-structured interviews with the teachers when examining their experiences in building resilience in their students.

Holdsworth et al. (2018) examined how resilience can be developed in university by looking at it from the perspective of the students. Through semi-structured interviews, this study involving 38 undergraduate students showed that resilience can indeed be developed through lived experience and education. Three key components of resilience emerged: a) developing and maintaining perspective through self-reflection, experience, and goal setting, b) maintaining physical and mental health, and c) support from peers, friends, and family. They suggest that students with effective coping mechanisms supported by protective factors will thrive in stressful situations due to resilience. They found that students define resilience as enduring, bouncing back, managing, adapting, and focusing.

Although conducted in a university setting rather than a secondary school, there are still parallels to be drawn between this study and the proposed study as students recognize the importance of a positive open relationship with instructors as necessary for students to take risks and make mistakes. They emphasized the significance of instructor feedback as a means of nurturing resilience, in situations where they have underachieved or need to develop confidence in understanding tasks. They report that the style of teacher interaction was highly important and when personal and constructive feedback was given, it was usually shown to nurture resilience. If university students benefit from clear empathetic face-to-face communication, it is reasonable to assume that secondary students would also benefit. This student perspective can help understand how to approach the semi-structured interviews with the teachers when examining how they build resilience in their students.

Mirza and Arif (2018) designed an intervention program aimed at fostering academic resilience in 9th and 10th grade secondary students at risk of failing in a public school in Lahore district, India and then evaluated its effectiveness. The study showed that the students made significant gains in resilience overall as well as each protective factor over the period of three months. Their study demonstrated that a program for building resilience through collaboration with a specially trained teacher achieved significant progress in fostering resilience in their students. Establishing the effectiveness of teachers building resilience in their students reinforces the relevance of examining how teachers build resilience in their students through semi structured interviews as proposed in this study.

Drosinos (2019) examined teacher perceptions of student academic resilience through investigating the characteristics of behaviors associated with student academic resilience. Through a random sampling of public-school elementary teachers, in-person, semi-structured interviews were completed, and the results were coded and categorized. The author found that teachers perceive resilience as an interaction between student attitude, student action and reaction. Relevant attitudes included confidence, persistence, motivation, independence as well as risk taking, a growth mindset and grit. Student action included resourcefulness, flexibility, problem solving and awareness. Student reactions included frustration, avoidance, peer support, and asking for help. Many of these traits, such as persistence, resourcefulness, problem-solving, and awareness, are related to competence. Flexibility is associated with adaptive thinking, which has repeatedly been linked to resilience, reinforcing the importance of these traits in building resilience. While frustration may be surprising when associated with academic resilience, if it happens during the learning process because of a positive learning approach, it can result in persistence or a solution-driven focus that will support task completion and success and therefore academic resilience.

Drosinos (2019) also discovered that teacher perception, instruction, and reciprocal relationships all contribute to fostering academic resilience. She noted that relationships emerged as a consistent theme throughout the interviews with teachers reinforcing the importance of positive relationships with their students. Although this study focused on elementary teachers rather than secondary teachers, the emphasis on

examining teacher perceptions through semi-structured interviews, along with the focus on competence and adaptation for building resilience, is relevant to this study.

Wills and Hofmeyr (2019) used a resilience framework to describe characteristics of students from South African schools who performed above expectations despite low socio economic (SES) status. The data was collected from a project called “Leadership for Literacy” in the poorest 60% of schools in rural South Africa over one academic year in 2017. They noted that educational outcomes and socioeconomic status (SES) has been strongly linked in a range of countries and across different education systems. Yet, they found persistent evidence of some students with low SES outperforming their peers and that academic resilience presented with one of the highest correlations between academic performance and poverty. This is a similar situation to the subcounty school in this proposed study with low SES backgrounds prevalent in the student body making this a relevant study to review.

Frisby et al. (2020) explore classroom relationships as sources of academic resilience and hope. As the incidence of students reporting loneliness or dropping out of college increases the authors wanted to understand what inspired some students to be more resilient than others. They found that the psychological need for relatedness in the classroom is fulfilled by relational and student resources, especially peer connectedness. Indeed, while relations with the instructor are important, the social support that results from peer relationships was critical. While they observed that previous research into rhetorical and relational goals prioritized instructor behavior rather than peer support as a more valuable source for meeting relational needs, Frisby et al. (2020) suggest their study

supports the need for instructors to build a strong positive classroom community and to teach social support behaviors designed to nurture resilience in their students. This focus on building a positive classroom environment can guide how teachers can build resilience in their students as intended in this study and therefore inform the semi-structured interviews for data collection.

In summary, adversity due to issues such as low SES, alcoholism and poor resources means students may be facing significant challenges for meeting academic success but academic resilience has been shown to mitigate the impact of adversity (Frisby et al., 2020), and teachers can build resilience in their student body through strategies and tactics such as adaptation, and socio emotional competence. Examining how teachers-built resilience in their students through their relationships and enabled them to support their students' academic performance, boost resilience and overcome adversity.

Kenyan Education System

Kenya stands at the forefront of African education boasting literacy rates 20 % higher and secondary school enrolment up to 50% greater than other sub Saharan countries (UNESCO, IUS, 2017) Despite this progress and the significant increase in enrolments, the quality of the education has witnessed a decline (Khanani, 2021).

Mocheche, and Bosire (2017) investigated the influence of self-esteem on job satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Kisii Central Sub-County, Kenya. The sample comprising 306 teachers from various secondary school categories in Kisii (National, extra county, county, sub-county) represented both genders. Twelve secondary

school principals from the same region provided qualitative data. Through questionnaires, self-esteem scales, and interviews, a weak but positive correlation between self-esteem and job satisfaction emerged. Teachers reported feelings of anxiety, linked to low self-esteem, while principals expressed a lack of societal respect. While the proposed study focuses on examining teacher experiences in building resilience in students, understanding teacher mindsets can guide the approach to semi-structured interviews. Challenges in the Kenyan education system include overcrowding, low SES, and health issues like AIDS. The authors identified the fundamental problem of low-quality teaching practices. Ineffective pre-service and in-service programs hindered the development of pedagogical skills, with poor content knowledge as a significant concern. Notably, the declining social status of teachers and education not being the first choice for the majority of students were highlighted. The four recommendations arising from the review emphasize addressing teacher identity, involving head teachers in training, recognizing diverse in-service needs, and incorporating African learning modes. The authors recommend a focus on understanding teacher needs, experiences, self-esteem, well-being, and job satisfaction, as crucial to building resilience in students.

Resilience in education thrives in an environment grounded in self-control (Brown, 2015), as seen in a student-centered classroom. However, this description doesn't align with the current teaching practices in Kenya, where secondary schools remain heavily teacher-centered (Lowe & Prout, 2019). Strategies and tactics relevant to building resilience may not be prevalent in the current Kenyan education system. Examining how

teachers nurture resilience in students despite a teacher-centered approach can shed light on effective tactics.

So, if academic performance is fundamental to Kenya's economic development and teachers are pivotal to delivering quality education. If resilience is instrumental in boosting academic performance through positive student teacher relationships, adaptive thinking, and social emotional competence, then how do teachers describe their experience in building resilience in their students and how prepared and supported do they feel for this task? To understand what strategies and tactics they used; semi structured interviews were conducted.

Summary

Academic performance is fundamental to Kenya's economic development, yet the quality of education in Kenya has plummeted as numbers in schools have risen. Students in sub county rural schools in Kenya may perform poorly as a consequence of academic performance (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019), but building academic resilience can mitigate the impact of such adversity (Mwangi et al., 2018). Resilience, defined as the ability to bounce back in the face of adversity, has been shown to play a significant role in academic success(Cefai, 2004; Mwangi et al., 2018).

While the Kenyan education system has expanded since independence in 1963, with a free government-based education system aiming to integrate different ethnicities and build a national identity (Wosyanju, 2009; Ackah,2019), standards of education have dropped (Ngware, 2013,Khanani, 2021, Lowe & Prout, 2019) This drop is attributed in part to a shortage of teachers and resources (Mukudi, 2004; Wambugu, Stutchbury, &

Dickie, 2019). Exams remain the benchmark and students are allocated to different schools based on their results, meaning that subcounty schools receive the lowest achieving students(Lowe & Prout, 2019). Students in a rural subcounty school are often also facing significant challenges such as poverty and limited resources both at school and at home. However, some of these students succeed due to their academic resilience. A positive learning environment and teacher relationships with their students are important components in building academic resilience in their students (Frisby et al., 2020). Teachers can help students bounce back in the face of adversity through building resilience, yet there is little research into whether teachers are building resilience in their students in a rural subcounty school and what methods they are using. Exploring how teachers can build resilience in their students in a rural subcounty Kenyan school, is therefore the focus of this study.

As this study centres on teacher subjective reflections on their experiences in building resilience in their students, a Generic Qualitative Inquiry will be conducted using semi structured interviews. This approach will enable the researcher to focus on the actual experience from the teacher's point of view. More information on the methodology is presented in Chapter three.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teacher experiences in building resilience in their students in rural subcounty secondary schools in Kenya. The study adopts a generic qualitative study.

This chapter is dedicated to the research method applied in this inquiry. I employed a semi structured interview process with a descriptive qualitative approach. In the sections of this chapter, I discuss my research design and rationale including the role I played in the research process. I provide an overview of my participant recruitment and data collection and analysis. I address trustworthiness issues such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally I describe the ethical procedures followed to adhere to the IRB principle of do no harm (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

Research Design and Rationale

The research question is: How do teachers in rural Kenya describe their experiences building resilience in their students?

The central concept of this study was to understand how teachers describe their experiences in building resilience in secondary students. I aimed to comprehend teacher experiences in building resilience using a semistructured interview process that provided rich data with a broad range of opinions, ideas and reflections of teacher experiences lending itself to a GQI (Percy et al., 2015) while maintaining descriptive validity and accurate accounting in order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility (Sandelowski, 2000).

The use of semi structured interviews to collect data aligns with a GQDS as it created an opportunity to elicit experiences, narratives, histories, stories, and explanations from the interviewees (Percy et al., 2015). Utilizing a responsive interviewing style enabled me to establish a non-confrontational atmosphere, encouraging openness and honesty in responses. This facilitated exploring different perspectives and allowed flexibility in questioning, adapting to emerging themes or the need to refocus on the broader question (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Role of Researcher

As the sole researcher in this study I acknowledge that the researcher is considered the primary instrument for data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) . Written agreements were obtained from the participating teachers, outlining expectations, and providing basic background information. During the interviews, I functioned as a participant/observer, maintaining a friendly and nonconfrontational tone. The pattern of questioning was flexible, designed to tap into the experiences of the teacher (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

My role included the following tasks:

1. Recruited the teachers in the secondary rural schools selected for the study. A group of 12 teachers from the sub county secondary schools in West Laikipia agreed to participate.
2. Established the purpose of the study, described the data collection format, and explained their privacy rights, before inviting them to sign up to participate.

3. Established a general understanding of resilience prior to the individual interviews through a group introduction session with all teachers although more specific information about resilience was left open for discussion in the interviews.

4. Met individually with all the teachers who signed up as interested to explain the study and to go through the consent form, so they understood the procedure, expectations, and withdrawal options.

5. Established an appropriate venue for the interviews, whether at the school, at my office, depending on the teacher's preference.

6. Developed a rapport with the teachers at the beginning of each interview and confirmed they understood the purpose of the study before starting.

7. Conducted and recorded semi-structured interviews through previously prepared open-ended questions and probes ready for one-hour interviews completed independently in a quiet and private venue.

8. Transcribed the interviews and familiarised myself with the information.

9. Carried out thematic analysis and coding.

I did not have a prior relationship with any of the teachers at the schools other than meeting the principals and deputy principals for permission to carry out the study at the schools. I do not believe the study carried any known threat to the teachers who took part in the study. There was no direct incentive offered to the teachers to take part and as I have no relationship with the schools or the teachers, there was no risk of bias in the analysis of the data and there was no apparent conflict of interest.

The challenge of cultural, socioeconomic, and ethnic differences between myself and the teachers was addressed by establishing rapport based on respect and trust (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). I maintained key characteristics supporting inclusive collaboration: respect, active listening, and authenticity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

An anticipated challenge was teachers' unfamiliarity with the concept of resilience. Careful questioning and elaboration were employed to establish an understanding of resilience without influencing their interpretation of actions.

Methodology

This section explains the logic behind participant selection, instrumentation, recruitment procedures, data collection and data analysis plans, issues of trustworthiness and credibility.

Participant Selection Logic

Population

The qualitative study aims to explore the experiences of rural secondary teachers in Kenya in building resilience in their student body. Kenyan students are assigned to secondary school based on their performance in the KCPE exam with those scoring the lowest scores attending the subcounty schools in their district the primary focus of this study. To form a participant group, 12 teachers were invited from the secondary sub-county school population in West Laikipia county. The teachers were initially presented with the study during a whole group session on building resilience. Subsequently, each teacher contacted me individually to arrange a meeting for a detailed explanation of the study and the consent form (see Appendix B). The consent form assured them the

freedom to withdraw at any point. Eligibility questions were also included in the form, and ultimately, 12 teachers were recruited from subcounty schools in West Laikipia. Given the qualitative nature of this GDQS study employing semi-structured interviews, a smaller number of participants was deemed acceptable to gather rich, in-depth data on teacher experiences (Percy et al., 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Sampling Strategy

A purposeful sample of 12 secondary school teachers was intentionally selected from three subcounty secondary schools in West Laikipia county. This homogenous purposeful sample aimed to provide contextually rich data aligned with the study's specific goals (Percy et al., 2015). The teachers were selected for their unique position in subcounty secondary schools in West Laikipia to address the research question about their experiences in building resilience in students. This approach can be characterized as strategic purposeful sampling (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As this is a qualitative study, the use of random probability sampling, common in quantitative studies, was not applicable as the goal was not to generalize the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The only criteria for inclusion were possessing a teaching qualification and having at least one year of teaching experience in a Kenyan secondary school. No other criteria such as subject specialty, age, gender, or ethnic background were considered as the study focused solely on exploring descriptions of teacher experiences in building resilience in students.

Data Saturation

Data saturation, the point at which no new themes emerge, was considered achieved when adequate data existed to answer the research question. According to

Ravitch and Carl (2016), it is crucial for a lone researcher to consult colleagues or committee members to confirm when saturation is reached. In the context of a GDQS, the emphasis is on the depth of data rather than volume. Therefore, the focus was not on the number of teachers included but, on the information, derived through interviews. A small group of highly informed teachers can provide rich information about building resilience in their students, aligning with the study's goal (Percy et al., 2015). The study design involved one-hour interviews with each teacher, transcribed immediately by the researcher, and initial themes collated as data was collected. While the option of follow-up interviews was available, it was deemed unnecessary as data saturation was confirmed when no new themes emerged (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Instrumentation

Garnezy and Rodnick (1959) proposed that psychosocial resources enabled one to counteract the negative impact of adversity allowing the emergence of positive adaptive behaviours such as resilience. As clarified by Garcia-Dia et al. (2013) resilience is an interplay between internal factors such as personality and external factors such as teachers in school. It was this dynamic interaction between student and teacher that guided this study on teacher experiences in building student resilience.

Data Collection Method

To establish a meaningful understanding of this relationship rich data was necessary. Therefore, the primary tool for data collection was semi-structured one-on-one interviews using a guide (Appendix A) and followed up by probing questions. This guide was developed by the researcher, based on knowledge derived from the literature review

on academic resilience, the Kenyan school environment and grounded in the framework of resilience. Previous studies have highlighted the role of self-esteem and teacher motivation on student success (Muzamil et al., 2022) while Holdsworth et al. (2018) emphasized the effect of self-reflection and mental wellbeing on the development of resilience. The interview questions were designed to understand the journey that Kenyan teachers in subcounty rural schools have followed, including their training, social acceptance in the community, and their perception of the meaning of resilience.

Interview Style

Semistructured interviews grounded in a naturalistic responsive style, enabled the collection of in depth, detailed information that was nuanced and rich in thematic material (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). For this to happen, it was crucial to establish a rapport, ensuring the environment was a safe and positive. The differences in social status between the researcher and the teachers were carefully managed, to foster an open conversational interview where they felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Trustworthiness or validity in a qualitative study is considered incompatible with some qualitative researchers and challenging to achieve by others (Creswell & Miller, 2000). However, it does not mean one should not attempt to ensure as high a level of credibility or rigor as possible (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transactional validity seeks as high a level of accuracy and consensus as possible by carefully revisiting the facts, feelings, emotions, or experiences repeatedly to ensure accuracy. The importance of thick

descriptions, with attention to the data and the participant ensured greater accuracy. Although it required a prolonged period in the field, it contributed to a higher trustworthiness, and by extension, greater validity in the study (Cho & Trent, 2006).

Procedures For Recruitment Participation and Data Collection

Approval for participation was obtained from the schools in the immediate vicinity of West Laikipia. Data was collected from 12 secondary teachers at three subcounty secondary schools in West Laikipia, Kenya. The procedure began with a whole group presentation at each school, initiating an open discussion group about logistics, expectations, and the study. Participant expectations, including the length and format of interviews, were clearly outlined during this presentation. Participation was voluntary with clear permission to withdraw or exclude data from the final analysis. Teachers were provided with contact details and invited to make contact. All communication and subsequent interviews were confidential, and all data anonymised.

Data Collection Method

Individual interviews were conducted using a guide (Appendix C). While questions were approached in a predetermined order, a flexible guide based on a responsive conversational approach was employed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Interviews lasted up to one hour, were recorded unobtrusively, and transcribed for subsequent review examination and analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transcription was assisted by speech to text technology, with careful proofreading to account for potential inaccuracies due to accents. Transcriptions of interviews are more reliable than interview notes and are considered a key component of rigorous data

collection and analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As the act of transcription can be considered part of the data analysis and a form of interpretation, the transcripts were verbatim where possible to help include the mood, tone and emotions reflected by the teacher to the transcript (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Data Analysis Plan

The analysis followed the six phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) supported by coding techniques suggested by Saldana (2016) and Percy et al. (2015). The focus was on examining teacher experiences in building resilience in their students:

1. Verbatim transcription by the researcher
2. Familiarization through immersion in the data until themes and observations emerged.
3. Initial coding of emergent ideas capturing conceptual ideas by looking for patterns such as similarities, differences, frequency, sequences, or causation (Saldana, 2016). He also encouraged a focus on cues such as anomalies, paradoxes and bigger picture social schemes. The importance of allowing the action of coding to help pinpoint themes and to recognise the cyclical nature of coding highlighted and reinforced the understanding that these steps of analysis were ongoing and involved circling back many times during the process of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. Use of coding to search for meaningful themes and patterns. Clarke and Braun (2013) describe the codes as the ‘bricks and tiles’ and the themes as the ‘walls and roof panels’ in a house.
5. Reviewing and refining themes , merging, collapsing, or disregarding as needed (Percy et al., 2015).
6. Defining and naming themes.
7. Writing up the analysis to create a persuasive story based on the context of the data.

This approach allowed for repeated refinement and revision of themes ensuring they accurately reflectd the data (Percy et al., 2015). The consideration of discrepant cases enhanced the complexity and meaningfulness of the interpretation. These cases challenged preconceived notions, tested themes, and provided alternative explanations, contributing to a nuanced and thorough analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, sometimes described as validity is key to a qualitative design if the study is to be considered credible. Considering the complexity of a qualitative study, a systematic, methodological process is important as a basis of validity. Validity is how the researcher shows that their findings truly reflect the participants’ experiences. It is how the researcher ensures credibility and rigor in the study There are a number of approaches to ensuring trustworthiness, and to mitigating any threats to trustworthiness these include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability(Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Credibility

This is like the idea of internal validity in quantitative reasoning. In a qualitative study it is testing that meaningful deductions can be drawn from the research design, instruments, and data. In this study the design involved individual semi-structured interviews with teachers in a rural subcounty secondary school. A semi structured interview is an appropriate way to examine the complexity of their real-life experiences. By interviewing 12 teachers, these multiple data sources provided a rich complementary source of data and through careful semi-structured interviews, ensuring that data saturation was established. The use of coding and thematic analysis ensured I understood and engaged with patterns in the data that helped me make sense of the data challenging my assumptions and biases. This was also challenged by the participants, who engaged with and questioned the examiner through the semi structured interviews ensuring as close to an accurate description of teacher experiences as possible (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability is possible because care was taken to provide clear description of the research design, methodology and methods of analysis so that others could replicate the study should they wish. The thick description derived from the semi structured interviews give the reader clear context which can ensure that others can authentically contextualise the study and the findings in order to compare and relate to their study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A thick description means the locale, interviewees and actions

are presented in a detailed description. However, the study is very specific to this population so care should be taken with transferring the findings to other contexts.

Dependability

I have established dependability by setting out why the method of data collection is appropriate to the research question and study design. I consulted with my committee to ensure the research design, research question, and methodology are aligned and I showed that I have considered limitations to the design and addressed them to limit their impact on the data analysis. Dependability was further established through data saturation. Potential biases or limitations were acknowledged during the data collection as discussed, however, the teachers readily engaged with the examiner, with no apparent impact from the socio economic or cultural difference between us.

Confirmability

To establish confirmability, I challenged my agenda in this study, checking for subjectivity and positionality and how these affected the interpretation of the data. I addressed possible biases through reflexivity so that they didn't interfere with the interviews and the analysis of the data. Reflexivity was applied throughout the research process, especially during data collection and analysis which helped mitigate the impact of personal identity, assumptions, positionality and subjectivity on reporting of data.(Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also made sure that there was an adequate audit trail of records to allow others to determine if conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations are supported by the study and can be traced to their sources.

Descriptive Validity

As the sole researcher I ensured audios were deidentified before transcription. A comprehensive verbatim transcription with pauses and intervals noted was completed. However, culturally constant affirmation through grunts or murmurs are expected, to show that you are still listening. These interfered with the flow of the conversation when transcribed and therefore not all of them entered the transcription. No follow up interviews or conversations necessary.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical standards for this study were comprehensively established and approval received by the Institutional Review Board. As soon as this proposal and IRB approval were received a research license was acquired from the National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation (NASCOSTI).

This study adhered to the ethical code of *do no harm* with an emphasis on respect of persons by focusing on confidentiality and anonymity of the teachers who took part through ensuring no identifying data was shared (Fisher, 2016). Care was taken to explain the study and the data collection format before all the teachers taking part were asked to voluntarily complete a form giving informed consent to participate in the study, confirming they understood their identity will be protected, and that they will have the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any point. Even though this was not a vulnerable population, care was still taken to ensure they understood the focus of the study, the topic of the focus and their participation. Respect of the participants also meant making sure that any risks to their wellbeing are evaluated and addressed (Fisher, 2016).

As I am not employed by the county government I have no influence over the employment of the teachers, neither do I have a relationship or role to play in the schools themselves. I do not know the county education director other than through arranging this study, therefore I pose no threat to the teachers' employment status through this study. Data from the study will remain with me and no information will be shared without the knowledge and consent of the participant.

Confidentiality was addressed further through extracting the names of any participants from the report and protecting the names and contacts of the participants. Care was taken to ensure that even anonymised information does not in any way show the identification of any of the teachers. Audio recordings, written materials, correspondence, and documents will be kept exclusively for access by myself. All this data will then be kept in a locked storage facility and destroyed after 5 years.

As children are not part of the study, any direct reference to children was not expected, but in cases where, by chance, a particular child was named or referred to, these references were redacted from the transcription and analysis.

A rapport was established with the teachers, ensuring an open and respectful conversation style for the interviews. As a teacher with over thirty years of experience, I already had a respect for the profession and the challenges they face. As a member of the community for the last four years, I hope I am accepted by them despite the difference in our ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic status. Therefore respect, and care to minimise bias remained a priority.

Summary

This study is a generic qualitative study with a descriptive qualitative approach. The participants of the study are 12 qualified secondary teachers from three rural secondary schools, with at least one year of teaching experience. The study's focus was to explore how the teacher's build resilience in their students.

A generic qualitative descriptive study allowed for the collection of data with a thick description that clearly established the situation, and engagement of the participants. Semi structured interviews, with a naturalistic responsive style were the main source of data collection and analysis was through coding and a six-phase approach to thematic analysis.

Trustworthiness was established using thick descriptions, data saturation through multiple sources of data, with comprehensive audit trails and member checks established for dependability and transferability.

Finally, the study was grounded in the ethical code of *do no harm* with an emphasis on respect. The participants were fully informed about the reason for the study, their participant expectations including privacy rights and their option to withdraw at any point.

The results of this study are presented in chapter 4. Chapter 4 also includes further discussion on data collection including a review of the setting and background to the schools. The approach to analysis and the results at each step are shared to establish the pathway to the final themes and analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This qualitative study aimed to explore teacher experiences in building resilience in their students in rural Kenya. The research question was:

How do teachers in rural Kenya describe their experiences building resilience in their students?

To answer this question, I used a generic qualitative design using a semi structured interview guide to provide rich data covering a broad range of ideas, opinions, and reflections of teacher's experiences. I then analyzed the data through Braun and Clark's (2012) six phases of thematic analysis, supported by coding techniques suggested by Saldana (2016) and Percy et al. (2015). Chapter 4 includes a detailed description of the study, the setting, and participants' demographics as well as an overview of data collection and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness and the results. Chapter 5 then concludes with a summary of key findings related to the research question and a transition to chapter 5.

Setting

The interviews took place either at school or at the researcher's office depending on participants preference. Each interview was individual with no one else present, and time was taken to establish rapport, make sure the participant understood the purpose of the interview and that it would be recorded. Only two of the participants chose to meet at school, the others all chose to come to my office. All the participants had been in employment at the school for at least one year and all were secure regarding their

employment plans and expectations for the rest of the academic year with none of them expressing dissatisfaction or a desire to move schools or change their employment status. All the teachers mentioned the disadvantage of being a subcounty mixed day school rather than a boarding school, as this resulted in less funding from the government, putting greater pressure on them to support children from their own pocket. However, they all reported that the administration helped as much as it was able to.

Demographics

I conducted the study with twelve participants. This meant turning other teachers away who had contacted me with a desire to participate. One teacher came from the school furthest away, five from the school closest to a small urban center nearby and six teachers from the school closest to my home. All the teachers had at least one year of experience, in fact the range of teaching experience was from one year to 15 years. All the teachers were employed as subject teachers with the humanities, math and the science departments all represented. Some had extra academic duties such as head of department, dean of studies, discipline or guidance and counselling departments. All of them had extra duties such as running a club, training a sport or as form teacher.

Data Collection

Once Walden's IRB approval (approval # 06-02-23-0761330) was received three schools in the catchment area were visited and the staff introduced to the study. Within a week of the visits 12 requests to participate were received and confirmed and in fact further inquiries were then politely declined with promises that if an opportunity to join arose I would contact them. The interest in the project and the enthusiasm with which it

was received was surprising. To recruit the full number of teachers in such a short time, and to turn others away was unexpected but encouraging. Arranging the interviews was a smooth process and was completed in a few weeks.

Appointments were booked with all save two teachers preferring to come to my office. These two instead were interviewed at school in a private office. Using the semistructured interview guide with probing questions, all the interviews were completed and recorded through my phone and back up computer recording. Before starting the interview, each participant reviewed and signed the consent form, and I reminded them the focus of my study. The phone and computer were placed on the table between the teacher and myself and a brief recording test was carried out at the beginning of each session. The one-time interviews ranged from 35 minutes to one hour ending with the opportunity for them to ask me any questions. All of them simply asked when the study would be completed and how I would share the results. They all expressed an interest in future training that may emerge from the study. All the interviews were completed without any problems. Recordings were clear and saved onto the computer in a password protected digital folder. The advantage of most of the interviews happening in my office was secure WIFI, and no interruptions or interference. However, the two interviews that took place at school, were equally successful, with no problems with recording and saving the interviews, and no interruptions or unexpected interference. All the teachers were paid their \$10 equivalent as promised after the interview, together with a small jar of homegrown honey as a thankyou gift. Two teachers assured me that they would have taken part even without the incentive, but as I didn't ask this question, I do not know the

opinion of the others. The data collection went without incident, happened far more quickly than I could have hoped and was a more positive optimistic exercise than I had anticipated.

Data Analysis

For this study, I analyzed the data using the six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) and coding techniques suggested by Saldana (2016) and Percy et al. (2015). The first step was a verbatim transcription of the interview by the researcher. This took some time to complete but was also a good way to begin familiarizing myself with the contents. While observations and themes began to emerge, I persisted with simply transcribing first. This took time due to some of the accents, which needed several attempts of listening carefully to decipher. Culturally, Kenyans will constantly respond with brief affirmative noises, throughout the conversation, to let you know they are still listening. While a responsive conversational approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2011) was the focus, and the intention was to transcribe the interviews verbatim, to help include mode, tone and emotions reflected by the teacher (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The high number of affirmative noises made the transcription very difficult to follow, therefore these were excluded, but not forgotten, to allow the conversation thread to emerge clearly.

The second step is familiarization of the data through an immersion in the information till it becomes familiar and themes and observations begin to emerge. Each participant transcript was repeatedly reviewed and highlighted using color coding. This initial coding established the following themes that were present under each participant;

poverty, lack of role model, lack of support, domestic violence, being a foster parent, being a role model, trust and confidentiality, practical support, protection, providing other role models, engaging in an extra-curricular activity with the students, discipline, engaged, humor, formal- informal interactions, preparedness, lack of training, personal experience, collaboration, communication, attitude, teamwork, foundation. Coding these themes by participant, established that saturation was reached, and confirmed that the themes were evident in the different schools. Coding every data item within the participant transcript also allowed me to pinpoint crossover behaviours that may emerge from the different interactions. However, it also made the transcripts very difficult to work with and the participant transcripts ended up looking muddled and confusing. This needed to be addressed in the next step.

The third step involves initial coding of these important emergent themes to capture overarching conceptual ideas. Coding requires looking for patterns such as similarities, differences, frequency, sequences, or causation (Saldana, 2016). The importance of allowing the action of coding to help pinpoint themes and to recognise the cyclical nature of coding is highlighted and reinforces the understanding that these steps of analysis are ongoing and may circle back many times during the process of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Looking at the data through this lens, and with the need to bring clarity to the data, the codes were allocated to locations; home, subject classroom, extra curricular activities, staffroom. It was clear that the different locations were crucial to the type of interaction, so collating the themes by category instead of participant, helped bring clarity to the data and ensured anonymity of the participants as no quote or

comment would be attributed to an individual. Initially, patterns of similarity were collected and collated, together with causation and frequency (Saldana, 2016), but eventually the themes distilled down into the categories, given, showing the pathway to building resilience and the impact of location on the teacher experiences.

The fourth step is using this coding approach to search for meaningful themes and patterns in the data that are relevant to the research question. Clarke and Braun (2013) described the codes as the ‘bricks and tiles’ and the themes as the ‘walls and roof panels’ in a house.

The data was then reviewed repeatedly with the research question in mind, so that only data that was relevant to teacher experiences in building resilience was retained. Eventually, the following categories emerged: student background, extracurricular interactive opportunities, teacher experiences and interactions, professional development opportunities. The challenges in the student background helped me to understand why they needed to build resilience in the first place; pinpointing different behaviours in different locations enabled me understand how the teachers developed relationships with the students that lead to helping them build resilience. Understanding what strategies they applied helped establish how they went about helping the students build resilience, and finally exploring the professional development helped me to understand how supported and prepared the teachers felt for the task of building resilience. With the blocks of data now collected based on location, it was easier to see themes that crossed over and changed between locations as well as how the influence of an interaction in one location impacted the interaction in a different location. Now within each location, interaction

directly with the student, observation of the student, and interaction with peers began to emerge as threads through the fabric of the experience. The understanding that emerged from one location , was seen to influence interaction and analysis of behaviours in different locations.

The fifth step involves reviewing the themes and checking that they work with the coded extracts and the whole data set as well as tell a compelling story about the data and the research question. This stage may result in themes being merged, collapsed or discarded (Percy et al., 2015). This step allowed the coded data and emergent ideas to consolidate and simplify as patterns emerged and blended. Similarities that were not apparent before the third step took place emerged and their relevance established. At this point, I found it possible to combine codes, condense themes or dismiss data that was not relevant to the research question. For example, codes such as communication were relevant to more than one category but with a different presentation in each location. The impact of locations again emerged as a key influence on teacher experiences, but now, it was possible to also see how patterns of behaviour crossed the barriers of location and changed in the process.

The sixth step involves these themes being defined and named so that the identity of the theme is established and a concise name emerges. The importance of the location on the interaction remained a key aspect of the theme; however, the threads that emerged within the locations and crossed between them, now grew in strength and clarity, flavoured by their causation and impact. However, now the emergent idea could take control of the theme, with the influence of the location reflected in the experience. Now

the themes had moved away from location, it was possible to reorder the themes to create a better sequence.

The final step involves weaving together the narrative to create a persuasive story based on the context of the data to show the themes that emerged about teacher experiences in building resilience in their students. Percy et al. (2015) described this as synthesizing the data collected to answer the research question for the study. In the end, all the participants contributed in one way or another to all the main themes with clarity in the relevance of the category to the research question making a cohesive story about teacher experiences in building resilience in their students. By presenting the information by category rather than participant or school, it was possible to maintain anonymity for the teachers.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The study's validity was rigorously upheld using Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-phase approach, supplemented by coding techniques recommended by Saldana (2016) and Percy et al. (2015). Incorporating teachers' actual voices minimized bias, ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Credibility

Data saturation was achieved as no new themes emerged through the data analysis of the teacher interviews and multiple sources of data provided a rich source of data. Coding and thematic analysis mean that the patterns in the data were used to establish the themes, make sense of the data, and challenge any bias or assumptions that may emerge. The semi-structured interview format meant that the teachers engaged in meaningful

dialogue so as close to an accurate description of teacher experiences as possible was achieved (Ravitch & Carl, 2016)

Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability

Care was taken to provide a clear description of the research design, methodology and methods of data analysis, so that others can replicate the study. The semistructured interviews produced thick descriptions of teacher experiences providing the reader with clear context so others can authentically contextualise the study and findings should they wish to compare their study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The method of data collection was relevant to this study design, and research question. Saturation was established through the analysis as themes were represented by all the teachers, with minimal variation and no outliers emerged to be discounted or absorbed into the themes derived. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and quotes were checked against the transcriptions for veracity. Concerns about subjectivity and possible biases were acknowledged before the data was collected and considered throughout the analysis. However, the connection and rapport were easy to build with all the teachers and no awkwardness was observed or expressed by any of the teachers. Reflexivity was applied throughout the process, limiting the impact of personal identity, assumptions, positionality, or subjectivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). All the teachers responded openly to our discussions, connections were made between teaching experiences and the discussions were free flowing and engaged, limiting bias and assumptions. This made data analysis easier, especially as the themes were compiled so that the identity of the individual teachers was safeguarded, and bias based on individuals was limited.

Results

In this study I interviewed 12 secondary teachers using a semi structured interview guide focusing on answering the research question: to explore teacher experiences in building resilience in their students in rural subcounty secondary schools in Kenya. The final coding and categories are presented in Table 1 using themes and codes.

Table 1
Research Question, Themes, and Codes

Research Question	Theme	Codes
Teacher experience in building resilience in their students	Why the students need to build Resilience	Home challenges
	How the teachers connect with the students	Home, subject class, extra-curricular class, outings, staff room
	What does it take to succeed in school and how the teachers help? How prepared the teachers feel for this role	Engaging with students in extras, communication; practical support, role models, staffroom & admin; Pre-service, in-service, self-financed, outcome

A comparison of the catchment area of the three schools despite their proximity to each other highlights important similarities and differences between them. School A is 11km from School C. and School B is almost exactly halfway between the two. School A is situated in a small village settlement and is the closest of the three schools to the local town. School B is situated in a neighborhood of subsistence farmers with a small center about 2 km away and within walking distance through the homesteads. School C is the oldest of the three schools, is also situated among small holders with a center nearby, but the properties are generally larger with better fertility and greater protection from

elephant damage so economically, they are more secure. However, as one teacher explained,

The parents within the communities here only rely economically on maize, which is yearly they don't have varieties of activities that they can do to convert to income... when the weather does not perform...the students drop out and go to town for work.

While the schools all draw from a surrounding area of subsistence farmers, School A has more students living in the small center nearby. Despite the proximity of the main town in West Laikipia just 15 km away, only 5 students of a class of about 40 had visited and none had travelled to Nairobi the capital city. School B is the newest of the three schools and was started in 2012. Before this the students had to travel further to school A or C meaning a walk of up to 7 or 8 km to school and home every day. School C differs as a higher proportion of the students are living with their grandparents while their parents are away working in one of the urban centers. School B is reported to have 60% single parents at the school. Despite these differences, the challenges faced by the students were similar in all three schools.

Theme 1: Why the Students Need to Build Resilience

All the teachers ($n = 12$) consistently reported challenges such as poverty, hunger, insufficient resources such as power to study at night, and dysfunctional families. In this patriarchal society, the absence of parental support for education remains a constant issue. For example, a student, when asked about lateness, explained “Dad came home while I was out, so I couldn’t pick my uniform.” Another teacher highlighted the impact

of poor parental support “A student who was not given proper support, such a student, once he reaches this level, you know the secondary school level, the knowledge we try to teach is advanced and such a student struggles.”

The lack of a complete family unit to support the student was repeatedly highlighted ($N = 8$), one teacher explained,

Most of the students here are from single parent families. Almost 60% of them are from single parents. So it happens that their grandparents are here, so those parents send their children to the grandparents while they continue working in urban areas. So that one has really affected these kids. Because the grandparents are not able to manage the discipline and behavior of the student. Often the grandparents use these students as a source of free labor and income.

Another teacher shared a story about a girl he helped as a form teacher,

... sometimes she goes short of uniform, sometimes they go short of school fees, they don't have. We come in and we try to contribute ourselves amongst the teachers, so that we can pay the girls school fees. So, we come in on hand we take the student, we don't want the student to go back to the village. Sometimes there are so many other challenges in the village. We make sure the student is retained in class. That is our student, we want to make sure they succeed.

As a teacher explained, “a boy lives with his mother in one room. This is hard for him.”

One teacher described a different challenge at home, “We've had cases where students have sick parents totally immobile. They must take care of the parents, cook, bathe them, and so on...” The teachers described the importance of the school lunch program for

many of the students. When asked if those that may get extra at the end of the day were bullied one response was “You know this is not a boarding school, it is a day school, so these students know the background of the students.”

And another,

There are students who are from able families so even the food that is provided to them is not a big deal. So, we have communities here that getting a meal is really a big problem and it is not easy for our students who just come and request for an extra meal. If you see a student coming to be considered for an extra meal it means he has an issue.

Another teacher explained,

Most of the students are understanding but not always... the cooks know who really needs because they come from around here... we don't discriminate or embarrass the students.

Finding money for fees is a constant battle expressed by all the teachers. One teacher explained how he helped one student, “...there was a girl, I was able to secure a bursary of 5,000/- and it is going to clear a certain balance of her fees that girl is so happy. I saw a big change, in the way she used to look at school.”

A further persistent challenge highlighted by all the teachers (n=12) from the three schools was the negative impact of illiterate parents or grandparents who did not value education and in fact saw it as a drain on their resources especially as the students were not available to do their share of herding the livestock or tending the land. As one teacher explained,

When the student with the torn trousers, no buttons no what and what, so that is an issue for the parent but if you allow your student to just leave home looking like that it means the parent doesn't care.

Another teacher shared the experience of calling a boy's father for fees. "So, I called the dad and he said, uh, how much is the fee balance? I told him 17,000. And he said, tell the boy to look for the same amount I will contribute a little bit." In fact, after that call, the father would not take the teacher's calls and never helped with the fees. Sometimes the parents collude with the student to keep them out of school, "...some girls are just being married off." The lack of parental support was repeatedly expressed with some students attending the school from form one to form four and the parents never visiting to find out how the student was doing, who were their teachers or what concerns they may have. In fact, several examples were given where parents actively tried to stop their student from attending school despite it being the law that they attend to the end of secondary school. One teacher described a student's challenges,

...her parents were separated. It's a girl who comes from a home where the mother is a drunkard and drinks almost on a daily basis. So, the girl has to actually take care of her younger siblings, two of them and still come to school.

Sometimes it may be that she doesn't even know the whereabouts of the mother.

Another student who was doing very well in form two started coming to school late and unkempt. After some days, her form teacher followed up, "We came to learn that the mother didn't want her to study. So, she had been kicked out of the house. She had been sleeping under a tree for like three days" she reported that the mother had refused

the girl entry into the home because she was annoyed by her putting so much time and effort into studying when she wanted her to help look after her siblings and around the house. In this case, the local chief was involved and eventually the student was taken in by another family nearby until she completed form 4. The teacher told me more about the story, “We found that the father had left the home to marry another, and the mother was taking this out on the daughter.” The mother was reprimanded by the chief and warned against taking any further action against her daughter. Consistent stories ($n = 12$) of alcoholism, domestic abuse, hunger, and poverty emerged and failure to pay for the lunch program, frequently resulted in students missing school.

As one teacher explained,

We do have challenges of early pregnancy, some do exams as young mothers, others drop out of school. They (the parents) believe that once the child is grown up and able to earn, they just go away. That’s why you find a lot of drunkenness, and disorderly drug abuse, because of early child neglect by the parents.

One teacher talked about some boys who came from a far and looked after themselves while at school.

These students actually live alone, they rent their own rooms ... even the best student in form three. The parents live in Tana River which is about 1000km from here. On weekends he goes looking for casual jobs. He pays his school fees and he still he takes the same same class.

If the students are going to overcome these challenges and persist in school, they will need to build resilience to survive.

Theme 2: How the Teachers Connect with the Students

Teachers are employed based on the subject they are qualified to teach; however, they are all expected to contribute in other ways to the school. Some are selected to be a form teacher, others coach sports or take a club such as scouts or drama. Others are allocated to provide guidance and counselling, or to be part of the discipline committee. Some are in extra roles that do not necessarily create an opportunity to interact with the students, such as head of department, dean of studies or the exam officer, but they all reported, at some point in their career to have taken part in extra activities and in fact only a few ($n=2$) were not in such a role at the time of this study. All the teachers, ($n=12$) reported that it was during this time with the student in extra-curricular activities that they connected with the student and built a rapport. The opportunity to get close to their students and establish a relationship with them was consistently reported to take place outside formal classes. Indeed, most of the teachers ($n = 9$) explained that they do not get to know the students so well in their subject lessons where they must present as formal, disciplined and in charge. Instead, the teachers ($n = 12$) consistently explained that it was their extra-curricular activities that allowed them to establish a positive relationship with the students. As one sports teacher explained, “We change for sport like them, play with them, run with them, lower yourself to their level and connect on the field.” They explained that the active involvement helps the student know you on a different level. “It bridges a gap and helps establish greater respect in the class.” As one teacher explained, “You gain a better perspective of the student and then you know their level of understanding.” And another, “The students may fear the teacher until they get to know

them in an extracurricular activity making it easier to relate in class.” They also pointed out that not only did the extracurricular activities help both the student and the teacher get to know each other better, but they also helped the students to succeed. Further, the students were able to open with the social informal interactions outside the classroom and found it easier to relate in class and finally the opportunity to interact with students from different forms. Ultimately the ability to “... become friendly, positive and engaging in extra-curricular activities meant they can carry this to the classroom, and they will then learn better.”

A strongly held belief that reinforced this teacher student relationship was the understanding that they had to step into the role of a parent especially where no positive parenting was taking place. The role of form or class teacher was particularly one that they considered important to be a foster parent to the student. As one teacher said, “we have some students who are neglected by the parents, you have to do something, even if it’s going into your pocket to give some coin or asking administration to help.” Another explained, “if a student comes to school dirty, as a teacher what do you do? But as a parent you give them some soap and send them to get clean.” This initiative increased the link between home and school for example, a student who had started leaving home on a Saturday saying she was going to school, but instead going into the local center where she was hanging out with the young men and getting into trouble. The form teacher, working with the parent, and the neighbors were able to bring her back to attending school and she completed her form four. All the teachers ($n = 12$) repeatedly referenced their role as a parent. A high number of students would appear to owe the completion of

their studies to a committed form teacher. An orphan who was living with her aunt and struggling with coming to terms with the loss of her parents, was saved from committing suicide at school by her form teacher and she was then seconded to a local mission who provides counselling support.

Theme 3: What Does it Take to Succeed in School and How the Teachers Help

Teacher understanding of resilience was variable, but there was generally a clear sense of what it meant and many examples of students showing resilience were shared. The range of responses included a focus on attitude, motivation, self-discipline, student wellbeing and emotional stability. For example, one teacher said “it’s about attitude, being ready and eager to be helped. Another teacher said “...if the attitude is good towards the subject and the teacher, I have seen a positive improvement.” Another suggests that “success depends on the state of their mind.” highlighting the importance of emotional wellbeing. A teacher explains “for a student to succeed academically, they must first be mentally well.” Another added “Mental wellness comes from the environment and wellbeing is directly involved with student success.” One teacher posits that, “... it is a motivation to get out of poverty and lift themselves away from the poverty of their parents. Another agreed, saying “some students value education because their parents have none.” A practical aspect that was brought up by some teachers (n=3) was the importance of the foundation. If their entry into the school was secure, then they had a good foundation as one teacher explained, “...the student needs proper primary preparation. They learn the culture of hard work based on that environment and gain their resilience from there.” One teacher took this further and suggested that “...self-

discipline is the motivator for student performance, having a passion for learning and always being in touch with the teacher.” In fact, the importance of turning up to school regularly, engaging with the teacher both inside the classroom and after school was consistently referenced. The positive impact of taking part in discussion, maybe taking a leadership role in group work and the engagement of the teacher was expressed. As one teacher explained “It’s like building a house, as the builder you do all the work, the house doesn’t build itself” which reinforced a consistent feeling by all the teachers (n=12) that it was up to them to make sure the student stepped up to the plate. One teacher said “there is a correlation between teacher effort and student interest. 80% is from emotional wellbeing and guidance.” The opinion seemed to be that it was up to the teacher to “make sure the student isn’t drawn back by setbacks.” This reference to teacher involvement, highlights the importance of the teacher student relationship and the strategies the teachers applied.

The need to be a role model was also brought up repeatedly, sharing personal experiences. As one teacher said, “... we have walked in their shoes; somehow as a teacher you have to step out of those shoes of being a teacher and be a parent.” And another comment “Most of us came from very far and we have overcome the same challenges.”

A strategy implemented by one school, took the concept of being a parent a step further and every student was allocated to a ‘family’ on joining the school. The teacher in charge of that family took the role of the parent and paid particular attention to their families throughout their time at the school. This arrangement meant that at family

meetings, students from different forms interacted and could support each other. This close connection meant the teachers felt they could pick up the student who has a problem, as one said, “We pick up the student who is uncomfortable in her space and we need to know what is behind their derailing.” Or “The student who is asleep in your class and may never come to you for help unless you intervene as the parent.” Another teacher explained the importance of being open and accessible, making sure the student feels they can come and talk to you if they have a challenge. “If they can ask you for some advice, they can overcome the challenges they face.” As another said, “We want the student understanding you are trying to help and be aware of their mental health and social life.” Several teachers (N=10) highlighted the importance of checking on your students. “Make a point of calling on them or meeting them.” And “I have to follow them even outside the classroom, check on the students who don’t attend school, (or) start behaving weirdly, I have to find out why.” But a key addition to this need to follow up and engage with the students was the importance of confidentiality “... so they know if they talk to you, it won’t go further.” Fundamentally, the strategies the teachers used to nurture their relationship with the students involved practical, financial, personal support.

Practical support, beyond helping their students with a piece of soap, some food or help with fees, finding a bursary, or ensuring their home life was safe may involve encouraging the students to be proactive and solve their own challenges. By encouraging them to start a small project such as keeping chickens, or growing tree seedlings, they could raise money for their own fees and avoid relying on their parents. As one teacher explained, “...some they don't stay at home, they don't stay idle, they can keep even a

chicken and maybe when the time comes, they can sell the chicken for school fees.” Or as another said, “they could adopt ways of surviving or generating income to support them they can plant trees they can rear animals that can produce.” While another suggested, “We have to support, they can even bring firewood if they have trees, to support because entirely what to pay is what keeps them at home.” As one teacher pointed out ‘... like for example, most of them are now absent because they are not able to pay 3000/- which is just four hens and you have paid for the whole term, but they are not able to start some projects that can support themselves.” Unfortunately, there is a downside to the students earning their own money and that was the risk that they may lose interest in school and prefer instead to drop out altogether. One teacher said sadly that all the boda-boda (a motor bike taxi) riders at the junction were his students. This risk was highlighted by another teacher when talking about caring for their family and being mindful of their needs, for as they said “...if one tomato is rotten, they may all turn rotten if left together.” While presenting as a role model was a consistent strategy used in all the schools, they also went further and reached out to past students, or other role models in the community who can come and tutor them or talk to them about their opportunities. The reason for this was explained by one teacher, “We use past students as mentors, because they have nobody to model learning at home. We help them meet learners who have succeeded despite challenges at home.” The strategy of school outings and visits from past students had several roles. It exposes them to other students as one teacher said “...so they see how serious they are. First there may be culture shock, but

with time they start to contribute and be motivated.” School outings could also reduce boredom and motivate the students to try harder and persist.

The difference in teacher presentation in the subject and extra-curricular classes was interesting and despite discussion, they (n=10) persistently insisted that it was important to be somewhat distant in the subject classes. As one teacher explained “In class I have to be in control, to exercise my authority because if I behave like – see me as your friend, as your sister, they will not take their studies seriously and they will joke around.” Yet they also agreed that if you had a good relationship with the student, then you had their respect. If not, then you may have trouble correcting them. As one teacher explained “It takes respect and understanding each other by bringing them close, trying to understand what is affecting them, advising them showing them the importance of working hard to achieve.” Perhaps the following comment shows that change is starting to come into teaching styles; “A positive but firm relationship as a teacher encourages them to be curious to learn and even ask questions.” A few teachers (n=4) talked about using group work and topics as a teaching style, but the difference between how they engaged in extracurricular activities and subject activities was stark and the teachers maintained that the different approaches was necessary for learning to take place. Thus, despite the consistency of the teachers expressing the importance of their engagement outside the formal classroom and the development of rapport during those periods, very few of the teachers (n=2) allowed it to influence how they taught in the subject lessons, believing the importance of formality in this situation to be necessary.

All the schools reported having teachers employed who had the extra responsibility of providing guidance and counselling. The range of experience and qualification was varied. One teacher was placed in the guidance and counselling unit because she had found some sponsors to help children in the school. This high level of empathy and engagement was considered enough for her to provide this service. Another teacher had personally financed extra courses for counselling and several of them (n=6) had benefited from a series of workshops offered by an NGO over a short period of time. However, it remained an extra role rather than a primary role. Several teachers expressed frustration at the lack of time to engage properly and support students. As one explained,

This is the guidance and counselling room, but this term I have not stepped foot in it because time is a problem. I have extra lessons, at 4.20 I find students waiting, we will meet in the office, or outside. I just will squeeze some time for one or two, but to follow a student in detail it is becoming difficult.

The staff room was consistently described as an area of support. All the teachers maintained that they could go to their colleagues for ideas, or guidance. As one said “I am happy to share concerns with the staff, they can help me, and we will get a solution. However, they did acknowledge that it depended on the individual. As one said,

It depends on the individual personality, for some they are happy to just be a teacher. Unless you are a class teacher you can't all be involved in the matters unless your personality, your attitude towards teaching is different – if you have it in you to engage further.

They did talk about how they can collaborate and work together, but it was acknowledged that their performance was often judged by their results which can cause difficulties. One teacher commented,

When my grades were better than others there was negative energy, but I kept persisting. Now the attitude has changed, and the students are still performing well. Some teachers asked about how I did it and we talked about group work and giving students topics to study.

One other key factor regarding the three schools is that despite their differences, they were all mixed day subcounty schools. Repeatedly, this fact was used to explain how difficult their job was due to a limited financial support from the government and a low social stigma. All the teachers (n=12) consistently alluded to the disadvantage of being a day school rather than a boarding school. The benefits of a boarding school were many, some helping the student directly by distancing them from the poverty and challenges back home, providing them with lights to study at night and ensuring they were not expected to complete other tasks such as caring for siblings or parents, bringing in the cattle at night or milking them before leaving for school in the morning. Further, it would seem the boarding schools were able to access greater funds from the government or local county meaning they were better resourced. The challenge of keeping the students in school was repeatedly raised in fact one comment summarizes it “One of our main challenges, before we even help them develop is keeping them in school.” This extra stigma attached to day schools was suggested by one teacher to further undermine student determination to persist at their efforts to complete secondary school suggesting that

“when they compared themselves to students from boarding, they saw their school negatively and were not proud.” Boarding schools were not the only example of a different school experience. One teacher described the different parental approach in the neighboring county where parents remained responsible for their children until they had completed secondary school, were more invested in their children’s studies and showed a greater level of support for the school. Understandably the lack of parent support was keenly felt by all the teachers but the challenges of engaging with the family and community were also closely linked to communication and language barriers.

Although the predominant culture represented in the three schools is Kikuyu, by law teaching in Secondary schools is in English. Kiswahili, the second national language is also allowed, although generally only outside the classroom. One school had a rule that Monday to Thursday you spoke English, but on Friday you were allowed to speak in Kiswahili. The vernacular (Kikuyu) was not allowed at all. However, all the teachers expressed challenges with this. Especially when speaking with the parents or guardians, many of whom did not speak English or Kiswahili, so they had to resort to the vernacular if communication was to be achieved. The teachers all admitted speaking to the students in Kiswahili and occasionally the vernacular when the need arose. This included helping them to understand a concept in class, as well as solving a problem that may have arisen. One teacher, who was not Kikuyu professed to feel disadvantaged when it came to communicating with the parents or guardians due to the need to use an intermediary to translate into the vernacular. Consistently the teachers linked effective communication to being able to connect with the student. As one teacher explained,

If the challenge with the student is very deep, you have to shift from official and move to something that you can link to them more deeply. That is the vernacular – you will eliminate the gaps including the teacher attitude.

The importance of good communication with the students was repeatedly highlighted, with one teacher saying “Class explanation may be in Swahili even in an English lesson to make them understand the concept. You get closer when you use the local language. When you only use English there is a distance.” Repeatedly teachers explained that although they were meant to only use English in subject lessons, it was not always possible. As one teacher explained, “Communication makes you approachable, so we try to help our students engage.” Good communication is important to ask questions and show understanding. They explained that “We develop the positive relationship through Kiswahili mainly. Kiswahili is for more social interaction because they don’t have much (English)”

The importance of nonverbal communication was further highlighted, especially because of the challenges they have with fluency in a spoken language allowed in school. A teacher explained “You can tell a student is hiding something when they are uncomfortable” they went on to explain that this was especially important when many students shied away from communicating. Another teacher explained,

Sometimes you may find the students doesn’t understand you – it is about their body language portraying a message... for most of them, their English is not good enough to explain what is wrong. Even the Swahili they are using is not good Swahili.

Communication and understanding your students were consistently portrayed as a big part of developing success in the students, yet they all consistently reported that social emotional competence and student wellbeing were not included in teacher training.

Theme 4: How Prepared the Teachers Feel for this Role

Although more recent qualifying teachers (n=3) did acknowledge some training, such as a unit on guidance, this was simply an introduction and did little to prepare them for “the real thing”. One teacher explained their challenges,

It is very wrong we didn't have more training. You know you have these stammerers. We are trained to expect an answer immediately or I might think the student is being arrogant. If I misunderstood the student with a stammer, I might affect his self-esteem.

The lack of preparation was mentioned by all the teachers (n=12) as one said, “It was a shock for me at first especially if you have not been raised in such an environment.” And another explained “What you are taught in university is very different to what you find on the ground.” And one said that even when it was included, it was not adequate. “One unit called guidance and counselling which did not take into consideration where I would be. The unit did not mould me better to cope.”

However, several (n=5) commented that knowledge must be coupled with experience as not all theory is applicable in the real world. Yet, they all acknowledged that understanding how to support student wellbeing would help their teaching role. As one said, “If I understood better, how to support student wellbeing, it would improve my role as a teacher.” And another, “Even if it is nothing to do with your subject, it is helping

you grow as a teacher and to understand student wellbeing.” They also recognised that it would not only help them be better teachers but be a better person. As one teacher explained, “I have a family so learning this not only helps in the workplace, but in the home and in the community.” Inservice training was reported to be inconsistent across all the schools and when it happened, the focus was generally on subject matter not emotional wellbeing. One teacher explained the problem was often financial, she was keen to learn, but when she found a course, “it was too expensive, so I passed on it.” However, the need for training was consistently expressed by all the teachers. As one explained, “These students come to you with a lot of challenges, you also fall for their problems, and it affects you because you don’t know how to help. If I know how to go about it it would be very useful.” Another explained “Sometimes you find your hands are full. It would make it easy if someone trained me how to handle such cases. It would definitely improve my role as a teacher.” One teacher pointed out,

I must be aware of their mental health and their social life. I think it is important to learn how to deal with such cases. Even if it is nothing to do with your subject it is helping you grow as a teacher and to understand student wellbeing.

One teacher blamed the government for the poor in-service training explaining “in this country, they politicize education. Each government that comes by tries to change the way they want the learning system to go.” Another teacher went on to explain that in-service training is often driven by the problems that arise. Thus, when there were riots and examples of students burning down their schools, the in-service that was offered was

about managing behaviours and discipline. Perhaps not the focus that would reduce the frustration held by the students who burned the schools down in the first place.

Summary

Chapter 4 included an overview of the data collection and analysis process, evidence of trustworthiness, and results. The research question is.

How do teachers in rural Kenya describe their experiences building resilience in their students?

The analysis of the 12 interviews, was initially grounded in their location: subject lessons, form teacher, extra's such as clubs, religions and sport and the staffroom (professional development). Emerging ideas grew from this and transcended the boundaries around the locations, allowing the themes to grow across the locations and establish the key main ideas of why the students need to build resilience, how the teachers connect with the students, what does it take to succeed in school and how the teachers help and finally how well prepared do the teacher feel for the task.

Challenges in the home were acknowledged to be greater in a day school than boarding school, with poverty, single parenting and living with grandparents, impacting the school's efforts to ensure success for the students. Despite challenges at home and school, several students rose above and connected with the school for help so they could stay in school, which was often successful and showed the success of the teachers' efforts. The relationship the students developed with the teacher in the extracurricular activities, positively influenced their relationship inside and outside the class. The teachers found that attitude, motivation, self-discipline, and hard work were part of what

helped students succeed and acknowledged that their relationship with their students was also equally important.

The positive energy that accompanied all the interviews was refreshing and somewhat surprising after the negative research I had read about teaching as a profession and its loss of standing in the community. These teachers were all committed and engaged with their job. There was a passion with all of them I did not expect to experience. Their role as teachers was a positive one for all of them. One teacher shared a story about his plans to be a lawyer until he experienced a known local thief who was released because they had a good lawyer. This turned his mind to the memory of a teacher who had changed his life and set him on the path of gaining good grades and graduating well. He realised that being a lawyer may involve going against what he believed was right and instead recognised the benefit of making a difference in a student's life. Many years later and he has no regrets.

All the teachers except two were currently engaged with some form of extracurricular activity, but not all of them were form teachers, although they had been in the past, so could draw on that experience. Therefore, as all the teachers had experience meeting with the students both in the classroom and in other venues meant that the comparison between subject lessons and extracurricular sessions was therefore experienced by all the teachers. All the teachers were qualified and had experience of both preservice and in-service training. All the teachers had experienced resilience in their students and could discuss how they had helped the students, therefore overall, there were no discrepant cases in my study.

Chapter 5 includes the findings and interpretations, and their relation to the framework in this study and the literature.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore teachers' experiences in building resilience in their students. Resilience is important to mitigate the impact of challenges such as poverty (Frisby et al., 2020; Mwangi et al., 2018), and to help students strive for a positive academic performance that is a key indicator of a successful education system (Hanushek, 2013); for, as Barro (2013) pointed out, education reduces poverty and increases productivity. The study is based on semi-structured interviews of twelve secondary school teachers who currently work in one of three mixed day subcounty secondary schools chosen for the study in West Laikipia, Kenya.

Previous literature had focused on quantitative studies of resilience (Mukolwe, 2015; Mwangi et al., 2018; Silyvier & Nandusi, 2015) teacher engagement (Beltman et al., 2016; Odanga et al., 2015), or teacher competence in developing resilience (Drosinos, 2019; Silyvier & Nandusi, 2015). Little or no studies were based on a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews. This convinced me that a qualitative study that was based on in-depth examination of teacher experiences in building resilience in their students was the most appropriate design to establish a meaningful understanding of teacher experiences and inform appropriate future professional development.

I conducted this study to explore teacher experiences so that their insights could influence future professional development to support the growth of resilience in students. Findings in this study included both positive and negative experiences as collected from

participant experiences, although they were predominantly positive and practical.

Administration was generally portrayed in a positive light and none of the participants were critical or negative about their experiences in the schools. This was different from the impression implied by prior research (Mocheche & Bosire, 2017), which suggested a generally low morale in secondary schools. The key negatives included low support or engagement by parents, low financial or physical support by the government agencies and poor professional development opportunities. These are discussed further in this chapter.

This chapter explains the interpretations of the findings based on the themes connected to the research question. I discuss the limitations of the study and recommendations derived from the analysis of the data collected during the interviews. The Implications, including possible positive social change, are provided.

Interpretations of the Findings

In this section I interpret the findings and compare them to the findings in current literature as discussed in Chapter 2. The themes in the findings are: (a) why students need to build resilience, (b) how the teachers connect with the students, (c) what does it take to succeed and how do the teachers help, and (d) how prepared the teachers feel for this role. This chapter includes comparisons to the literature and the theoretical framework used to develop and guide this study.

The research question: How do teachers in rural Kenya describe their experiences building resilience in their students? informs the connections between the findings in this study and prior literature. It focuses on teacher experiences in building resilience in

students in a sub-county rural school in Kenya. The resiliency theory provided the theoretical framework for the study and helps explain why we must help students build resilience.

Resilience

Resilience is described as a dynamic process that overcomes adversity (Rutter, 1987). This evolved from an earlier belief that it was a fixed personality trait that is outcome oriented (Wadi et al., 2020) and allows the development of an idea that resilience is a systems concept and the understanding that it emerges from the interaction between a child's age, relationships, home, and other evolving systems (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016). Masten and Cicchetti went on to define the four key principles of the theoretical framework: (a) many systems interacting at different levels drive the function and development of a living system, (b) the capacity and development of a system are always changing, (c) change can cross domains and levels of function because of the adaptation of the , and (d) the systems are interdependent. The idea was that a focus on this journey would lead to different models of recovery, resistance, or growth (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016). This suggested that a child immersed in the multiple systems of family, community, and school and the interplay between the systems could result in resilience depending on the effect of the different stages of adaptation.

In this study the focus was on the relationship between the student and their teachers to understand if they were able to mitigate the negative impact of adversity to an extent that resilience and academic success resulted. Werner and Smith (1992) in a longitudinal study in Hawaii started in 1955 were especially interested in adaptability and

how this helped students turn their lives around. While this study focused on secondary students, and therefore it is not possible to comment on whether some of the students who were failing as adolescents turned their lives around becoming functioning adults, it was still possible to see evidence of adaptability within the four years of secondary school. For example, a strong student who had been a leader in her year group and was described as determined and focused. Unfortunately, she fell pregnant and had to drop out of school, but later as she prepared to return, it was her relationship with her form teacher who helped her prepare for facing her friends and managing the possible criticism that she had not lived up to her own leadership expectations. A frank discussion about what she may face, and a reminder that her teacher was there to support and guide her. This student adapted to the situation, supported by her teacher, and worked hard, passing her leaving school certificate.

Sadly, not all the students were able to adapt to the situation and one teacher spoke about meeting a student many years later, who regretted ignoring the teacher's efforts and warnings of what lay ahead if he didn't finish school, instead, dropping out and remaining an unskilled laborer. Perhaps, it is because this teacher was not able to engage all the systems to support this student that he failed. One other student was brought back to school with the collaboration of the family and the community to break her habit of lying that she was going to school, when in fact she was going into the local town to hang out with the older boys. Without the interaction of the family, community, and school systems, it is unlikely this story would have ended in the success it did. This was one of several stories shared that support the findings of Liebenberg, et al. (2015)

whose study confirmed the important role that schools play in moderating the relationship between resilience and communities or families at risk.

Education in Kenya

While Kenya can be praised for the comparative success of their education system in the East African region (Unesco, IUS, 2017) this study took place against a background of plummeting standards (Khanani, 2021; Lowe & Prout, 2019), despite the evidence that education is a key goal in nation building (Hanushek, 2013). It was the understanding that academic performance, as a key indicator of educational success was an important target that inspired this journey into resilience and its role in arresting the decline in performance through the relationship between teachers and students.

The literature emphasized the negative impact of the current practice for allocating students and resources to schools (Lowe & Prout, 2019; Mwangi et al., 2018) and the significant challenges of poverty, illiteracy, and limited resources on academic performance (Graber et al. 2015). Indeed, these key factors were repeatedly raised by the teachers in all three schools as critical challenges they faced. Mwangi et al., (2018) when comparing the relationship between the type of school and academic resilience, suggested that the type of school should not be considered peripheral to academic achievement. Surprisingly, however, they also found that girls in boarding school, boys in day school or mixed school all had a greater resilience than boys in boarding schools. Which differs from the opinion of the teachers in these three mixed day schools that their schools had greater adversity and challenges that may undermine building resilience in their students and that this was evident, they said, when they met other schools at inter school events

where the boarding school students presented as generally more confident with greater academic performance and more resilience.

Despite highlighting the disadvantage of selection based on primary school results, resulting in most KCPE graduates being admitted to sub-county secondary schools, and pointing out that these schools are poorly equipped and staffed, Mwangi, et al. (2018) reported type of school not level of school, therefore it is not clear if they include national, extra-county, county and sub-county level schools or just one level of school. Comparing this quantitative study by Mwangi et al. (2018) to this qualitative study may have its limitations, but it would have been more relevant if they reported resilience across the level of school as well as type.

Although this study is looking at teacher experiences rather than measuring student resilience, the findings seem counter to the observations of the teachers in this study, who considered boarding schools to have an advantage over the day schools, especially considering boarding access to 24-hour power, space to study, and distance from home challenges such as poverty and poor parenting. Does this mean that it was the reduction in adversity, such as the challenges in the home environment, that limited the growth of resilience in the boys in boarding schools?

Cerit and Simsek (2021) highlighted the importance of resilience to support the emotional intensity of adolescence, which suggests that if secondary schools are not building resilience, whether in a boarding or day school, then the students are at greater risk from adversity and the challenges of adolescence. Cerit and Simsek (2021) found the students had greater optimism, communication, and emotional intelligence a month after

their intervention. These are skills that are difficult to develop without professional development to guide and skills that had a limited focus by the teachers in this study or apparently no focus in any professional development.

The teachers all assumed that extra resources and this distance from the home environment helped boarding school students perform better. However, perhaps the achievements in the day schools highlight the success of some of the teacher strategies put in place such as the family system, and the use of form teachers to follow up absenteeism or other challenges. Indeed, one teacher described how they were able to succeed at an interschool competition through careful preparation and guidance by the teacher. Therefore, while it is acknowledged that communication and emotional intelligence are necessary skills that need to be developed, even practical and limited emotional support can help. As Liebenberg, et al. (2015) pointed out, schools can become a key site to compensate for missing resilience resources in the community.

How the Teachers Connect with the Students

Stride and Cutcher (2015), when investigating the role of caring relationships highlighted three key factors that promote resilience; high self-expectation, caring and connected relationships, and empathy. This raises concerns when considering the extent of lack of parenting as a constant reported by all three schools in this study, despite their different catchment areas.

Parent social emotional competence was pinpointed by Muzamil et al. (2022) as important for developing protective factors in the home, yet this was found to be lacking, meaning that instead the teachers need to fill the role of developing protective factors

through positive relationships with the students. This resulted in a need to 'parent' the students and was a persistent theme through all three schools. Indeed, one of the key tools the teachers used across all three schools and irrespective of the subject or form they taught was the role of parenting. They described the importance of practical support such as materials or financial support, but also emotional support, such as noticing when something was wrong and providing the emotional and practical support to rectify the problem.

This focus on parenting was not discussed in any of the literature found, and yet it was seen in this study to be a key tool for the teachers to use. This seems to be the closest the teachers came to developing social emotional competence in their students which is one of the three components that Cefai (2004) described in the teacher framework of those classes with high resilience: (a) social emotional competence, (b) autonomy and problem , and (c) educational management. The teacher student relationship was described by Cefai (2004) to be meaningful and crucial to building resilience.

The teacher student relationship was repeatedly expressed by the teachers in this study as the key to successfully supporting the students although having enough one on one time with the students was a challenge, despite its importance (Stride & Cutcher, 2015). When they did not have a relationship with the students, for example because they did not teach them, they found counselling more challenging and less effective. This meant they would often have to find another teacher with a better connection with the

student to try and help. However, the teachers acknowledged that this was not always possible.

This study found that other than the parenting efforts of the teachers, practical assistance was probably the most predominant form of support in developing the student teacher relationship, while communication was sometimes a barrier that they needed to circumvent by resorting to Kiswahili or even the vernacular. Indeed, beyond effective communication the benefits of social emotional competence especially helping students to regulate their emotions and adapt their thinking would be useful tools for teacher parenting efforts, learning and social development. Cefai (2004) highlighted the importance of the school as instrumental in promoting social systems to foster social competence and the lack of focus on these skills suggests that an opportunity is being lost to build social emotional competence that Cefai (2004) describes as key to developing effective relationships.

Exploring the role of the teacher student relationship in building resilience further, in this study the teachers all found they built their relationship with the students in the extra-curricular opportunities rather than in subject lessons where they felt the need to maintain a distant, disciplined approach. While the teachers recognized the importance of their informal relationship with students in extra-curricular activities, they need help connecting with the students through the subject lessons, and increasing their educational management, through enhanced pedagogical techniques so that the teacher student relationship is developed and enhanced in the subject lessons as well as extra-curricular opportunities.

Frisby et al. (2020) referenced the importance of peer relationships, teachers building a strong positive classroom community and teaching social support behaviors to nurture resilience, yet, consciously teaching social emotional behaviors was not evident in this study. A strict disciplined environment was taught in university as appropriate for the core subject lessons, and their development of student relationships happened through personal experience rather than pedagogical training outside subject lessons. This reinforces the lack of current practice in developing a positive learning environment as key to success. The teachers all appear to be following instinct and in a few cases the benefits of private training when working with the emotional development of students.

Holdsworth et al. (2018) describe three pillars that help the student develop effective coping mechanisms when building resilience, a) developing and maintaining perspective through self-reflection, experience, and goal setting b) maintaining physical and mental health and c) support from peers, friends, and families. As there was minimal evidence of the first step happening at the secondary schools in this study, this would suggest a possible focus for professional development so the teachers can learn how to encourage the students to use skills such as journaling as a self-reflection tool. The teachers all stated they were open to further training and were all involved in nurturing students beyond the classroom, so understanding how to develop and maintain perspective, and support mental health through professional development would help the teachers feel better informed. While they are able to refer students for serious mental health issue such as suicide and death, it is the day-to-day support of mental health that needs the teachers to be better prepared.

Communication was highlighted by the teachers in this study as a tool they used in building student relationships. Holdsworth et al. (2018) also emphasized the importance of teacher feedback for nurturing resilience, which resonates with the teachers' observations in this study that effective communication with the students was important yet challenging due to working in multiple languages. While the focus on the use of English is understood, the teachers in this study found that it limited effective communication as the students' grasp of English was not usually sufficient for complex emotional discussion. Communication at a practical level is different from the ability to explore and guide students at the social emotional level. Teachers in this study all agreed with the challenges in communication – especially those who did not have the local vernacular to resort to in certain situations such as engaging with the parents and grandparents or guardians. This suggests that teaching effective social emotional communication would be a further goal for professional development for the teachers.

Lee (2012) found that schools with high levels of demand in the form of academic pressure and responsiveness, such as the teacher student relationship were generally at an advantage. Yet, due to the system of allocation, the sub county schools only receive the lowest performing students. In fact, in this study, this challenge was highlighted by teachers from all three schools who bemoaned the lack of role models for their students. They also pointed out that the lack of role models was not only in the school, but also in the home where high levels of illiteracy often resulted in a low support for education.

This lack of interest in the school and their child's progress was shocking to some of the teachers who were not from the region, and it was raised by three of them for

comparison with other counties or levels of schools. Repeatedly, the lack of a role model in the home was raised as a major challenge for the school and the idea of a greater range of students being accepted into the schools to broaden the level of ability was posited by more than one teacher. However, others worried about managing a broader range of ability than they already have, certainly without greater professional development and resources in the classroom, to develop skills in differentiation and inclusion this would not be possible.

One aspect that did not stand out among the teachers interviewed was the difference in gender roles. While it is acknowledged that Kenya is a strongly patriarchal society, supporting Odanga et al. (2015)'s findings that gender did indeed have a negative influence on female teacher self-efficacy and that this varied depending on the teacher role; there was no evidence from the teachers interviewed about gender barriers or feelings of being disadvantaged by gender. Both male and female teachers were involved in counselling, extra-curricular activities, and different opportunities to engage with the students. Both genders were involved in directly supporting students and there was no reference to challenges with gender by any of the teachers. In fact, all 12 teachers reported security in their positions, with evidence of positive self-efficacy and wellbeing.

The positive attitude of the teachers in this study was contrary to reports that teachers standing in society had diminished (Mocheche & Bosire, 2017) and that people only went into teaching because they couldn't get into another university course (Lowe & Prout, 2019). In fact, one teacher on this study described how he had intentionally changed from following a career as a lawyer to becoming a teacher. As no teacher

expressed a desire to change careers, the positive passionate involvement by the teachers suggests that they were all committed to their careers. However, this does not mean they didn't feel inadequately trained or supported through in-service training, which confirmed Lowe and Prout (2019)'s findings on the lack of effective pre-service and in-service training.

While it is acknowledged that this was a very small sample, it was still encouraging to encounter the persistent positive self-efficacy in these teachers. Their apparent success in building resilience, reflects the supposition put forward by Garcia-Dia et al.(2013) that boosting resilience through buffering internal protective factors and external protective factors is more effective than mitigating risk factors such as domestic violence and mental health challenges in achieving academic performance and wellbeing. However, the importance of the extracurricular activities for engaging with the students and the insistence of a formal disciplined and distance teaching style in the subject classroom perhaps highlights the need for appropriate effective professional development, to support the teachers' efforts to connect with the students within their classroom as well as outside.

What does it Take to Succeed

The importance of teacher self-efficacy, self-awareness and communication as highlighted by Graber et al. (2015) were well presented by the teacher experiences. Repeatedly they spoke about the importance of being a role model, of communicating with parents, the community, and other teachers regarding the wellbeing of students. Indeed, the challenges with communication and the understanding of its importance were

persistent across all schools. In the situation found in these subcounty schools, their adaptability and persistence in finding solutions was impressive.

As Beltman, Mansfield, and Harris (2016) found, while teacher resilience was associated with positive student outcomes, it also plays an important role in retention and well-being. The teachers in this study all presented with a positive outlook and enthusiasm. This is important for positive peer relationships which will further benefit the students in their care. If the teachers are resilient, they will be better placed to empower students and build resilience. Their ability to go above and beyond their role for the wellbeing of the students has been instrumental in keeping several students in school. This growth mindset, and level of self-efficacy is crucial for the success of such schools. However, their need to access their own (limited) resources, to support these students should not be the solution and while the administration was repeatedly reported to do what they could to support students, it was clear that more help was needed to meet the needs of these schools. As these subcounty schools received the lowest achieving students, they should get the highest level of support.

Mirza and Arif (2018) showed how a program for building resilience presented by a special trained teacher showed significant progress. Reinforcing the need for targeted professional development. Frisby et al. (2020)'s found that building a strong positive classroom community and teaching social support helps to build a positive classroom environment. However, despite all the evidence in the literature and the affirmations by the teachers in this study about the importance of the student teacher relationship.

Building social emotional competence, effective emotional communication and social support were not skills addressed in any professional development.

How prepared the teachers feel for the role

The final theme referenced the preparedness of the teachers for their role in building resilience. This was uniformly negative across all schools, but the acknowledgement of poor preparation for building resilience was not presented as a complaint, rather as a fact. While it was acknowledged by the newer teachers, that they received some training in the support of emotional wellbeing, this was described as basic and theoretical. None of the teachers described training in building social emotional competence, emotional intelligence, establishing a reflective student-centered classroom (Frisby et al., 2020) or enabling a greater locus of control.

Lowe and Prout (2019) reported on the poor professional development in Kenya, despite the acknowledged importance of academic performance in nation building (Hanushek, 2013). One teacher referred to the politicization of education in Kenya. Several acknowledged the lack of in-service training, reporting that it was inconsistent, inadequate, and often reactive in nature, relating it to an observed event such as the increase in secondary students burning down their schools, or an increase in teenage pregnancies. When not responding directly to a situation such as this, the in-service training was reported to predominantly be subject based rather than focusing on social emotional competence or mental wellbeing.

The desire for effective professional development was consistent across all the schools. It is therefore not surprising that Mocheche and Bosire (2017) reported feelings

of anxiety and low self-esteem in their study, linking this, like Lowe and Prout (2019) to issues such as low-quality teacher training. In their opinion the declining social status of teachers is not unsurprising. Professional development aimed at training teachers how to nurture social emotional competence rather than simply focusing on subject matter is necessary to build resilience in the students and the teachers alike.

A focus on pedagogical skills such as classroom management, and creating a positive active learning classroom, with an understanding of differentiation and inclusion, will help the teachers manage the range of abilities they have and possibly prepare them for a broader range should it happen. Targeted guidance on how to develop emotional communication, self-reflection and an improved locus of control would empower the students and encourage them to look for their own solutions rather than relying on others to step in. If students had greater resilience and were taught how to self-advocate more effectively, the story of the student turned out by her mother may have been very different with the student better able to find a solution immediately rather than spend nearly a week sleeping outside before someone else intervened with a solution.

Despite the negative picture drawn from the literature, the positive energy, self-efficacy and feeling of empowerment that emanated from the teachers from all the schools was encouraging and left me feeling optimistic, if only an appropriate model of professional development can be instigated. However, despite clear evidence of this need (Khanani, 2021; Lowe & Prout, 2019) further exacerbated by a shortage of resources and teachers Bui political will remains misdirected.

In summary, student resilience is a positive adaptation to situations of stress and adversity (Holdsworth et al., 2018) and has been shown to play a significant role in student success (Mwangi et al., 2018). Resilience is also described as a student's ability to thrive, survive, or fail (Frisby et al., 2020). If resilience is the consequence of a positive interplay between internal factors such as personality, self-determination, or motivation and external factors such as community, family, and schools, then the role of the teacher in creating the opportunity for this positive interplay is reinforced by the findings of this study.

The teachers in this study have worked hard to maximize their relationship with the students despite limited resources. They have stepped into the shoes of the parents to guide the students with a range of tools, and practical intervention. Through the relationships they develop in extra-curricular activities, they were able to share stories of success, built through communication, empathy, and practical interaction.

However, consistent evidence of a lack of training and preparedness on top of poorly resourced schools threatens to undermine the positive impact of enthusiastic and resilient teachers.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teacher's experiences with building resilience in their students in rural Kenya. While there is always the risk of participants being affected by a fear of reprisal, bias, flawed recall, or discomfort, I feel that this was minimized through establishing a rapport and safe space for the interviews as well as care with transcription and anonymization of the data. Again, I am aware of the

power I have as the researcher, therefore I remained as authentic as possible when sharing the teachers' experiences, to minimize my possible biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This includes being as balanced as possible when presenting the different perspectives by using the actual words of the teachers to present the different realities (Percy et al., 2015). Finally, the unique location of the schools may limit the transferability of the data to other contexts.

Recommendations

This study provided insights into secondary teachers' experiences in building resilience in their students in rural Kenya. It will help fill a gap in the literature about teacher's perceptions of resilience and their students. However, this is one small study and further qualitative studies in the different schools such as boarding, county, urban and different level schools would provide an opportunity to present more teacher perspectives and experiences and inform possible professional development and curriculum expansion.

Gathering experiences from the different school situations in Kenya could bring into question the appropriateness of the current practice of allocating students based on their single aggregated primary school result. As Mwangi et al. (2018) pointed out there is a difference in resilience in type of school, whether boarding, mixed or day. They also referred to, but didn't include in their findings, the different levels of school having an impact. Therefore, it may be relevant to consider a study that looks at not only the type but also level of school when exploring student academic success and resilience. It is acknowledged that there are plans for a new curriculum to be introduced into secondary

schools in the future and the new curriculum that is currently being rolled out in primary has a competency-based curriculum which should allow the system to move away from a single aggregated primary school result. This study could inform the focus and importance of professional development both in the primary schools and ahead of introducing the new curriculum into secondary school.

Ultimately this study could balance the current focus of professional development from a subject focus to include the importance of social emotional competence and mental wellbeing for both students and teachers. Once, these fundamental competencies are established, academic learning will be more successful. They are also life skills that go beyond schooling and will support students as they enter the workplace and adulthood.

Implications

The findings of this study could lead to positive social change for both teachers and students as these insights may influence decisions made at the national level that would stem the decline in the quality of education in this country (Lowe & Prout, 2019) and start to build a balanced curriculum that included effective development of social emotional competence. In time these skills would permeate through into the community bringing social competence and change. Recently, social emotional learning is meant to be implemented in the new curriculum, but the current lack of effective professional development is negatively impacting implementation as is highlighted in this report. The importance of rectifying this and focusing on appropriate professional development cannot be underestimated.

Breaking the cycle of poverty through education and lifting academic performance has been shown to result in long term economic growth (Hanushek, 2013; Khanani, 2021), and social success through improved resilience, social emotional competence, and wellbeing. Resilience is a positive adaptation in the face of adversity (Masten & Barnes, 2018) and as such it is a crucial tool in the journey of lifting poverty and bringing about social change.

Using the family, community, and school systems as protective factors to build resilience and bring change through adaptation was proposed by Masten and Cicchetti, (2016) as a way towards recovery and growth in a society. This study examined teacher experiences in building resilience in their students. The numerous challenges they faced at home presented as significant adversity for them to manage. Thus, mitigating the impact of a parent's low socioeconomic status on students (Muzamil et al. 2022) through nurturing positive relationships with their teachers and building resilience, and emotional wellbeing, will result in greater family socioeconomic status.

Several of the teachers commented on the lack of parental support for education, but if they can nurture the students' so that they lift their academic performance, and are able to self-advocate, they will be better placed to support their families and communities in the future. The cycle of poverty and illiteracy in the community can only be broken through education. Not only academic performance but improved social emotional competence (Cefai, 2004), mental wellbeing and awareness. As students graduate with greater skills, they can broaden the economic scope of the community, bringing in diversity and social responsibility positively benefiting the whole community. As they in

turn become parents, they will have a greater respect and understanding of the benefits of education and will hopefully support their children through school, encouraging positive academic performance. Further, with their greater awareness of the importance of education, they can advocate for the school in their community and use their vote to support positive change in the resources and professional development received. This, in turn, will raise the social standing of the teacher in the community. Greater support for the teachers in the community will in turn build their resilience, and wellbeing, encouraging them to remain in the profession and encouraging others to join.

As Hanushek (2013) highlighted, economic growth is closely related to cognitive skills, but to achieve this, infrastructure, access, and improved quality are necessary. Put another way, Barro (2013) explained that education reduces poverty and increases productivity, resulting in positive social change. Attracting more teachers to the profession should lift standing and quality, especially if they are supported in demands for improved pre-service and in-service training and resources.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teacher experience in building resilience in their students in rural Kenya. This study was developed to be grounded in teacher perceptions of their experiences, filling a gap in the literature, which generally only includes quantitative studies. This study has highlighted the importance of building resilience in students as an effective way of building social emotional competence and wellbeing.

This study was based on twelve secondary school teachers who were interviewed to understand their experience in building resilience in their students. The data from the interviews was collected, transcribed, and analysed with the emergence of four key themes that answered the research question posited in this study. The results highlighted the challenges the students face at home and how this impacts their performance at school. Student teacher relationships were shown to be important in building resilience in the students, but teacher intervention relied primarily on practical and financial support with limited opportunity and training to build social emotional competence, mental wellness, or self-efficacy in their students. All the teachers reported challenges of low resources, a lack of role models and minimal support from the home. However, while their intervention may be described as minimal due to a lack of time and training, the effort and intentions of the teachers meant that many students had benefited from their commitment to their roles.

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Appendix A: Semi Structured Interview Guide

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- *Focus* – asking broad orienting questions first, detailed more specific questions later.
- Ask questions in a sequence that makes clear their connection.

Probes are all possible but not necessarily used.

- *Attention probes*- nonverbal facial expressions, postures to encourage them to expand or elaborate – looking up from notes, signalling them to slow down as you want to get it all down, verbal utterances, - uhuh, ok, I hadn't thought of that perspective ...
- *Steering probes*: 'could you go back'...
- *Confirmation probes*: repeat or summarize what you heard, then agrees, or modifies their answer.
- *Clarification probe*: Can you run that by me again – I didn't follow that...
- *Slant probe*: understanding the general perspective of the participant in a nonconfrontational manner.

Interview question: How long have you been a teacher and how long have you been here at Limunga Secondary school? What are your experiences working here?

- Probe: Are you teaching the grade and subject that you want to teach?
What would you like to change in your current position if anything?

- Probe: Do you feel you can speak to someone here about concerns you may have at work?
- Probe: What do you think the school could do differently to help?

Interview question: Do you have responsibilities outside the regular teaching role?

Are these a positive experience or not?

- Probe: Do you see this as an opportunity to get to know your students better?
- Probe: Do you think this is an opportunity for the student to get to know you better?
- Probe: Do you think these extra-curricular roles help or hinder your classroom teaching?

Interview question: Moving onto your teaching role, what do think are the key aspects of student success?

- Probe: Is student wellbeing one of them?
- Probe: Is there an aspect of student wellbeing that you feel interferes with their academic success?
- Probe: Can you think of a student who surprises you with their success despite challenges?

- Probe: What do you think are the greatest challenges that this student is facing?
- Probe: Can you think what it is that helps them succeed despite hardship?
- Probe: Do you think there is something you can do to help support their success?
- Probe: Do you think this is something you can do to help others also be more successful despite challenges?

Interview question: Academic resilience can be described as the ability to manage stress, setbacks, and pressure at school. Do you think this explains some of your student successes and if so, do you think you can help students develop resilience?

- Probe: How do you think this presents in your students? Is it easy to recognise?
- Probe: Do you think students can develop resilience and do you think you have a role in helping?
- Probe: What do you think you could do to help nurture resilience in your students?
- Probe: Who do you think is best placed to help build resilience in the students?

Interview question: Thinking back to your preservice training, was there any focus on supporting student wellbeing?

- Probe: Is this important for you to know? Why/ why not
- Probe: Has supporting student wellbeing been a focus of Inservice training since you started teaching?
- Probe: Do you think it is your role to be involved with managing student wellbeing?
- Probe: Does it interest you to know about how to support student wellbeing?
- Probe: Do you think that understanding how to support student wellbeing would improve your role as a (subject) teacher?

Interview questions: Academic resilience is also described as a positive adaptation to stress. Do you see this in some of your students and is it important?

- Probe: How do you think some students adapt to the situation?
- Probe: Why does this help them be successful?
- Probe: How do you think you can help others learn to adapt and be more resilient?

Interview question: Would you say you have a positive relationship with your students?

- Probe Why do you think that is not necessary/ appropriate?
- Probe: What do you consider the most important aspect of the teacher student relationship?
- Probe: Why do you think the Aspect of your relationship you have with your students is important.

Interview question: The relationship you have with your student has been shown to be important for building resilience. Therefore, is knowing your student's background important to understand how to help them?

- Probe: So, you think that (academic guidance/ emotional support) is as important/ more important than... why is that?
- Prompt: What can you do to nurture and develop this relationship?

Interview question: meaningful and engaging curriculum with active classroom participation is described as helpful for students struggling with adversity. How easy is this to achieve in your classroom?

- Probe: What could the school do to help support your efforts here?
- Probe: What kind of professional development be most helpful to you?

- Probe: What resources do you think would be helpful?

Interview question: How do you think a student's ability to manage their emotions helps them to be more successful in class?

- Probe: Is managing emotion more important than focusing or is it the same thing?
- Probe: What does managing emotions look like in the classroom?
- Probe: Would you think it is relevant to your role to work with a student to build their ability to manage their emotions?
- Probe: Would you feel equipped to support a students' emotional wellbeing or do you not think it is your role to get involved?

Interview question: How important is being effective at engaging with the other people, whether it is other students or the teacher?

- Probe: What does this look like in the classroom?
- Probe: How is this relevant and does this help the student be more successful?
- Probe: Do you feel you have been prepared to recognise and support this skill in your students?

Interview question: Thinking back to our discussion about preservice training.

How well prepared do you feel as a teacher when it comes to supporting student mental wellbeing and what form of in-service training for supporting mental wellbeing have you received?

- Probe: If you have received in-service training, how effective or relevant was it?
- Probe: Did you feel you were taught strategies that would work in the classroom?
- Probe: How relevant do you think this topic is to the classroom, or does it interfere with more important tasks

Interview question: So, we have talked about the effect of resilience and professional development, to support resilience, what is your experience in building resilience in your students?

- Probe: So, what sort of strategies do you feel you have established as being effective?
- Probe: So, if you don't haven't received any guidance for supporting mental wellbeing, do you feel this should be a priority or do you think there are more important topics for in-service training?

- Probe: If you haven't received any guidance, do you feel you have developed your own approach to building resilience? What does it entail?
- Probe: Are you taught any specific strategies for building emotional competence or regulation in training? Have you developed or researched any strategies that you apply yourself?