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Identifying the Psychological and Social Determinants of Academic Resilience in Adolescents: A Qualitative Exploration

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: *Original Research* **How to cite this article:** 	**Objective:** This study aimed to explore the psychological and social determinants of academic resilience in adolescents. **Methods and Materials:** A qualitative descriptive–exploratory design was employed, using purposive sampling to recruit 21 secondary school students aged 14–18 years from various socio-economic backgrounds and school settings in Kenya. Inclusion criteria required participants to have experienced significant academic challenges while demonstrating persistence and adaptability. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview protocol addressing psychological resources, social support systems, coping strategies, and environmental influences. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached. NVivo 14 software was used to manage and code the data, and thematic analysis was applied to identify core themes and subthemes. **Findings:** Analysis revealed four overarching themes: (1) psychological resources, including positive self-belief, goal orientation, emotional regulation, intrinsic motivation, and adaptability; (2) social support systems, encompassing family encouragement, peer support, teacher mentorship, community involvement, and institutional support; (3) coping strategies and skills, such as problem-solving, time management, help-seeking, stress-relief activities, and resource utilisation; and (4) environmental and contextual factors, including safe learning environments, socio-economic stability, cultural expectations, policy and school structure, exposure to opportunities, technological access, and geographic location. These determinants were found to interact dynamically, fostering sustained engagement and academic persistence. **Conclusion:** Academic resilience among adolescents is a multifaceted construct shaped by the synergy between individual psychological competencies and robust social and environmental supports. ***Keywords:*** *Academic resilience; adolescents; psychological resources; social support; coping strategies*

1. Introduction

Academic resilience has emerged as a pivotal construct in understanding how adolescents navigate and adapt to the challenges inherent in academic life, including socio-economic constraints, family stressors, personal adversities, and institutional demands. Broadly defined, academic resilience refers to the capacity of students to maintain or regain high levels of academic performance despite encountering significant challenges or stressors (Afzali et al., 2024). This capacity is not merely a product of inherent traits but develops through a dynamic interplay of psychological resources, social relationships, and contextual influences. In contemporary educational research, there is increasing recognition that resilience operates within a socio-ecological framework, where individual, familial, peer, and school-related factors collectively shape adaptive outcomes (Ehondor et al., 2025). This perspective aligns with the growing body of evidence suggesting that interventions to strengthen resilience must address both psychological competencies and social systems.

The importance of academic resilience becomes even more pronounced during adolescence, a developmental stage characterised by identity formation, heightened sensitivity to social influences, and increasing academic demands (Auliya & Eva, 2025). The capacity to overcome educational challenges during these years is critical for long-term academic success, mental health, and future life opportunities. Research has demonstrated that resilient adolescents are more likely to exhibit higher engagement, better problem-solving skills, and stronger emotional regulation, all of which contribute to sustained academic achievement (Türk, 2024). Conversely, low resilience is associated with academic disengagement, increased dropout risk, and vulnerability to mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression (Ho et al., 2022).

Multiple psychological variables have been implicated in the development of academic resilience. Self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to execute actions required to achieve specific performance attainments, has been shown to play a central role (Shengyao et al., 2024). Adolescents with high self-efficacy are more likely to persist in the face of obstacles, use adaptive coping strategies, and maintain motivation over time. Positive affect and optimism have similarly been linked to greater resilience, fostering a constructive outlook that facilitates problem-solving and goal attainment (Azpiazu et al., 2024). Emotional intelligence has also been identified as a mediating factor, influencing how students interpret and respond to academic setbacks, and promoting adaptive emotional and cognitive responses (Martínez et al., 2023). Psychological flexibility, the ability to adapt to situational demands while maintaining alignment with personal values and goals, has been found to reduce the negative impact of stress and test anxiety on performance (Türk, 2024).

Social factors are equally critical in shaping resilience. Support from family, peers, teachers, and the broader community provides both emotional reassurance and instrumental resources that buffer against the effects of academic stress (Ehondor et al., 2025). Parental involvement, in particular, has been associated with higher self-efficacy, stronger achievement motivation, and improved psychological resilience (Ramlan & Ahmad, 2023; Zhao & Masnan, 2023). Positive parenting practices create environments that reinforce adaptive behaviours and provide consistent encouragement (Khamsiah & Izzaty, 2024). Peer relationships also play a mediating role; supportive peer networks contribute to a sense of belonging and provide collaborative learning opportunities, while negative peer influences can undermine resilience (Rustham et al., 2022; Shao & Kang, 2022). Teacher mentorship, characterised by emotional support, constructive feedback, and high academic expectations, has been shown to enhance both the emotional and cognitive dimensions of resilience (Uygur et al., 2023).

Resilience is further shaped by broader environmental and contextual factors. School climate, encompassing perceptions of safety, fairness, and support, influences students' willingness to engage and persist academically (Azpiazu et al., 2024). Extracurricular opportunities, flexible school policies, and access to guidance services have been identified as institutional factors that facilitate resilience (Faizullina & Karpova, 2024). Socio-economic stability, access to educational resources, and community-level support systems create the structural conditions under which resilience can thrive (Bhave et al., 2024). In resource-limited contexts, adolescents often rely on community mentorship programs, religious institutions, and peer-led study groups to compensate for deficits in formal educational support (Fahriza et al., 2023).

The relationship between resilience and academic engagement has also received significant attention in recent years. Engagement, characterised by behavioural, emotional, and cognitive investment in learning activities, is both an outcome of resilience and a contributing factor (Yang et al., 2022). Students with higher resilience are better

able to maintain engagement even when confronted with academic challenges, while engagement in turn reinforces the development of adaptive coping mechanisms. Studies have also identified life satisfaction as an important moderator, whereby positive life evaluations enhance the protective effects of resilience against academic stress (Ho et al., 2022).

Mental health considerations are central to the study of resilience. Adolescents experiencing depression, anxiety, or heightened academic stress are at greater risk of disengagement and academic failure (Nguyen, 2023; Putri & Oktaviana, 2024). However, resilience can buffer these effects by promoting adaptive coping, fostering positive relationships, and reinforcing a sense of agency. In some cases, resilience mediates the relationship between environmental stressors and mental health outcomes, reducing the likelihood of severe psychological distress (Rofiqah et al., 2023). Academic competence also plays a mediating role, linking teaching style and perceived instructional quality to resilience outcomes (Afzali et al., 2024). This suggests that instructional practices that enhance academic competence may indirectly strengthen resilience.

The interplay of resilience with motivation and achievement has been highlighted in multiple cultural contexts. In Chinese adolescents with learning difficulties, for example, parental involvement and self-efficacy were found to enhance resilience through increased achievement motivation (Zhao & Masnan, 2023). Similarly, in Malaysian and Indonesian samples, positive parental practices, self-efficacy, and peer support were shown to predict resilience, underscoring the cross-cultural relevance of these factors (Khamsiah & Izzaty, 2024; Ramlan & Ahmad, 2023). Other research has documented the influence of parenting style on both self-efficacy and motivation, which in turn shape resilience (Shengyao et al., 2024).

An emerging area of inquiry involves the role of volunteerism and community engagement in fostering resilience. Adolescents participating in structured volunteer activities report increased self-esteem, social skills, and problem-solving abilities, all of which contribute to resilience in academic contexts (Faizullina & Karpova, 2024). Such activities provide experiential learning opportunities that enhance adaptability and encourage prosocial behaviours, creating positive feedback loops that reinforce academic engagement.

It is also important to recognise the intersection of resilience with gender and socio-cultural norms. Gender differences in resilience have been reported, with some

studies suggesting that females demonstrate higher emotional resilience while males exhibit greater resilience in competitive academic contexts (Martínez et al., 2023; Uygur et al., 2023). Cultural expectations regarding educational success can both motivate and pressure students, influencing the ways in which resilience is expressed (Woods et al., 2023). Furthermore, research in Southeast Asian and African contexts has highlighted the adaptive strategies employed by adolescents in collectivist cultures, where interdependence and social obligation are prominent (Auliya & Eva, 2025; Ehondor et al., 2025).

The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the importance of resilience in educational settings. Remote learning environments placed new demands on self-regulation, time management, and digital literacy, while limiting access to traditional support systems (Rustham et al., 2022). In these circumstances, peer support and digital communities emerged as critical protective factors. Academic resilience in this context was closely tied to technological adaptability and resourcefulness (Shao & Kang, 2022).

Despite the growing literature, there remain important gaps in understanding the psychological and social determinants of academic resilience within diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts. Much of the existing research has been conducted in high-income countries, with less emphasis on regions such as sub-Saharan Africa where adolescents often face unique structural challenges. Furthermore, while quantitative studies have identified key variables associated with resilience, qualitative explorations are needed to capture the lived experiences and nuanced strategies employed by adolescents to navigate academic adversity. Such qualitative insights can inform more culturally responsive interventions, ensuring that resilience-building strategies are grounded in the realities of the target populations (Auliya & Eva, 2025; Ehondor et al., 2025; Shengyao et al., 2024).

In response to these gaps, the present study seeks to qualitatively explore the psychological and social determinants of academic resilience among adolescents, focusing on their subjective experiences, adaptive strategies, and support systems.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design using a descriptive–exploratory approach to investigate the

psychological and social determinants of academic resilience in adolescents. The focus was on capturing participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of resilience in the context of academic challenges. Purposive sampling was used to select information-rich participants who could provide deep insight into the phenomenon under study. The study involved 21 adolescents from various secondary schools in Kenya, representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds, genders, and school types to ensure maximum variation in perspectives. Inclusion criteria were: being between the ages of 14 and 18 years, currently enrolled in school, and having experienced significant academic challenges yet demonstrated the ability to recover or adapt. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent (as well as parental consent for minors) was obtained prior to data collection. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning no new themes or insights emerged from subsequent interviews.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, which allowed for both consistency in addressing key research questions and flexibility to explore emerging themes. An interview guide was developed based on the study objectives and a review of relevant literature, covering topics such as coping strategies, support systems, motivation, and barriers to academic resilience. Interviews were conducted in English, the primary medium of instruction in Kenyan schools, and lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in a quiet and private setting within the school premises or other mutually agreed locations to ensure comfort and confidentiality. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded, and field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual details.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, allowing for systematic identification, organization, and interpretation of patterns across the dataset. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were cross-checked against recordings for accuracy. NVivo software version 14 was used to facilitate data management, coding, and theme development. The analysis process involved initial open coding to identify meaningful units, followed by axial coding to group related codes into categories, and selective coding to refine and integrate these categories into overarching themes. Constant comparison was used throughout the process to ensure that themes remained grounded in the data. Memos were written during analysis to capture emerging insights, researcher reflections, and possible relationships between themes. The trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining a detailed audit trail of decisions made during the research process.

3. Findings and Results

The study included 21 adolescent participants drawn from secondary schools in Kenya, with ages ranging from 14 to 18 years (M = 16.1). The sample comprised 12 females (57.1%) and 9 males (42.9%), representing both urban (n = 13, 61.9%) and rural (n = 8, 38.1%) school settings. Participants were distributed across educational levels, with 6 students (28.6%) in Form 1, 5 students (23.8%) in Form 2, 5 students (23.8%) in Form 3, and 5 students (23.8%) in Form 4. In terms of socio-economic background, 8 participants (38.1%) reported coming from low-income households, 9 (42.9%) from middle-income households, and 4 (19.0%) from higher-income households. All participants met the inclusion criteria of having experienced significant academic challenges yet demonstrated persistence and adaptability, which were central to the exploration of academic resilience in this study.

Table 1

Main Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts on Psychological and Social Determinants of Academic Resilience in Adolescents

Category (Main Theme)	Subcategory	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Psychological Resources	Positive Self-Belief	Confidence in abilities; Self-affirmations; Perseverance in challenges; Rejecting negative labels; Maintaining hope
	Goal Orientation	Clear academic goals; Long-term vision; Short-term achievement milestones; Self-monitoring of progress; Adjusting goals when needed
	Emotional Regulation	Stress management techniques; Reframing negative events; Breathing and relaxation; Avoiding emotional outbursts; Seeking emotional balance

	Intrinsic Motivation	Love for learning; Curiosity; Interest in school subjects; Self-driven study habits; Sense of accomplishment
	Adaptability	Willingness to change strategies; Openness to new ideas; Adjusting to curriculum changes; Coping with unexpected setbacks
2. Social Support Systems	Family Encouragement	Parental motivation; Sibling role models; Home study support; Moral encouragement; Celebrating academic success
	Peer Support	Study groups; Sharing notes; Encouragement among friends; Peer tutoring; Emotional solidarity during exams
	Teacher Mentorship	Personalized guidance; Academic feedback; Recognition of effort; Motivational talks; Extra academic assistance
	Community Involvement	Religious groups' encouragement; Local mentorship programs; Community scholarships; Safe study spaces
	Role Models	Successful alumni influence; Public figures promoting education; Mentorship from professionals
	Institutional Support	School counselling services; Academic clubs; Recognition awards; Teacher-parent meetings
3. Coping Strategies and Skills	Problem-Solving Skills	Identifying academic obstacles; Breaking down tasks; Using available resources; Creative solutions to learning problems
	Time Management	Daily study schedules; Prioritizing subjects; Avoiding procrastination; Balancing academics and leisure
	Help-Seeking Behavior	Consulting teachers; Asking peers for explanations; Approaching counsellors; Using online learning resources
	Stress-Relief Activities	Sports participation; Music or art engagement; Mindfulness practices; Taking study breaks
	Academic Resource Utilization	Library use; Digital learning platforms; Past exam papers; Educational apps
	Self-Monitoring	Keeping academic journals; Checking syllabus coverage; Tracking test performance
4. Environmental and Contextual Factors	Safe Learning Environment	Quiet study spaces; Minimal distractions; Safe school surroundings; Access to electricity/internet
	Socio-Economic Stability	Availability of school fees; Access to learning materials; Stable home environment; Adequate nutrition
	Cultural Expectations	Value placed on education; Community respect for scholars; Academic success as family pride
	Policy and School Structure	Supportive school rules; Flexible timetables; Adequate teacher–student ratio; Extracurricular opportunities
	Exposure to Opportunities	Participation in academic competitions; Access to educational trips; Career guidance programs
	Technological Access	Personal devices for study; Reliable internet; Educational software; Online tutoring platforms
	Geographic Location	Proximity to school; Access to libraries; Exposure to urban learning facilities

Theme 1: Psychological Resources

Positive Self-Belief emerged as a critical driver of academic resilience. Many participants described confidence in their abilities as the foundation for persisting in the face of academic setbacks. They often engaged in self-affirmations, persevered through challenges, and rejected negative labels imposed by peers or teachers. As one participant stated, *"Even when I fail a paper, I tell myself this is just a step, not the end. I know I can improve."* Maintaining hope and believing in their capacity to achieve academic goals allowed them to reframe failure as a temporary hurdle rather than a defining characteristic.

Goal Orientation was consistently linked to resilience, with adolescents emphasizing the importance of having clear academic goals supported by both long-term visions and short-term milestones. Several participants reported self-monitoring their progress and adjusting goals when necessary. One student shared, *"I always write down what I want to achieve each term. If I see I'm not meeting it, I find*

a new way to get there." Such proactive goal setting and adjustment helped them stay focused despite fluctuating academic conditions.

Emotional Regulation was another essential subcategory, where participants reported using stress management techniques, reframing negative events, and practicing relaxation to maintain composure. Avoiding emotional outbursts and striving for emotional balance were strategies repeatedly cited. A respondent noted, *"When I feel like crying over my grades, I breathe, calm down, and then think of what to do next instead of just giving up."* This emotional self-management prevented prolonged discouragement.

Intrinsic Motivation fueled persistent engagement with learning. Participants described a genuine love for learning, curiosity, and the personal satisfaction they gained from studying. As one student reflected, *"I read even when no one tells me to, because I like discovering new things."* This self-driven engagement often translated into consistent study

habits and sustained interest in academic tasks, independent of external pressures.

Adaptability emerged as the ability to adjust strategies and remain open to new ideas when faced with changing academic environments. Participants mentioned coping with curriculum changes, shifting learning methods, and finding new approaches to problem-solving. One adolescent expressed, *"When our school changed the syllabus, I didn't complain. I just found YouTube videos to help me understand."* Such flexibility was instrumental in navigating uncertainty.

Theme 2: Social Support Systems

Family Encouragement was repeatedly described as a primary source of strength. Adolescents reported receiving moral support, parental motivation, sibling role modelling, and home-based academic assistance. Celebrations of small achievements further reinforced their confidence. *"When I passed maths, my parents bought me a small cake. It made me want to work harder,"* one participant recounted.

Peer Support played a vital role in maintaining resilience, with participants highlighting the value of study groups, note-sharing, and mutual encouragement. Some engaged in peer tutoring, while others drew emotional strength from friends during exam periods. A student stated, *"When I don't understand a topic, my friend explains it without making me feel stupid."*

Teacher Mentorship was identified as a strong protective factor. Personalized guidance, constructive feedback, and motivational talks from teachers encouraged persistence. Several participants described teachers who offered extra lessons or recognised their efforts in public, which boosted their morale. One noted, *"My teacher told me, 'You have potential,' and it changed how I saw myself."*

Community Involvement contributed to resilience through local mentorship programs, religious group encouragement, and community scholarships. Having safe study spaces within the community also reduced academic disruption. A participant shared, *"Our church has a library where we can study quietly after school."*

Role Models inspired adolescents by showing what was possible. Successful alumni, respected public figures, and professionals who valued education provided motivation. One student explained, *"When I see someone from our village become a doctor, I know it can happen for me too."*

Institutional Support from schools — such as counselling services, academic clubs, awards, and teacher-parent meetings — strengthened resilience. *"The debate club helped me speak with confidence, and that confidence also helped in my exams,"* a participant observed.

Theme 3: Coping Strategies and Skills

Problem-Solving Skills were essential for overcoming learning obstacles. Students described breaking down complex tasks, using available resources, and finding creative solutions. *"If I can't understand a topic, I look for three different explanations until one makes sense,"* one participant explained.

Time Management helped adolescents balance academics and personal life. They developed daily study schedules, prioritized subjects, and actively avoided procrastination. One student remarked, *"I read at night when it's quiet, and I finish assignments before the weekend."*

Help-Seeking Behavior involved actively consulting teachers, peers, or counsellors for clarification, and sometimes using online resources. A participant noted, *"I don't sit with confusion; I ask until I understand."*

Stress-Relief Activities like sports, art, and mindfulness were key in preventing burnout. One adolescent said, *"After football practice, my mind is fresh for studying."*

Academic Resource Utilization meant actively engaging with libraries, digital platforms, past papers, and educational apps. As one participant put it, *"Past papers help me see the pattern of questions, so I prepare better."*

Self-Monitoring was reported through keeping academic journals, tracking syllabus coverage, and monitoring test performance. *"I check my marks every month and see if I'm improving,"* a respondent stated.

Theme 4: Environmental and Contextual Factors

Safe Learning Environment was seen as fundamental for concentration. Participants valued quiet spaces, minimal distractions, and safe surroundings. One mentioned, *"At home, I have a corner where no one disturbs me."*

Socio-Economic Stability ensured access to fees, materials, and proper nutrition. A student explained, *"When my fees are paid on time, I can focus on reading, not worrying."*

Cultural Expectations were a double-edged influence, but often acted as a motivator, with academic success tied to family pride and community respect. *"In my family, education is like a crown. If you have it, you are respected,"* one participant said.

Policy and School Structure — including supportive rules, flexible timetables, and adequate staffing — influenced resilience positively. *"Our school gives extra classes before exams, and that helps a lot,"* a student remarked.

Exposure to Opportunities through competitions, educational trips, and career guidance expanded motivation. One participant noted, *"Going to a science fair made me want to study harder."*

Technological Access provided study efficiency through personal devices, reliable internet, and learning software. A respondent said, *"When I can search online, I learn more than what's in the textbook."*

Geographic Location affected access to learning facilities, with proximity to schools and libraries seen as a major advantage. One student shared, *"Living near school means I don't waste time walking long distances."*

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the psychological and social determinants of academic resilience in adolescents are multidimensional, with interrelated factors spanning individual resources, interpersonal relationships, coping strategies, and broader environmental conditions. Thematic analysis revealed four primary domains—psychological resources, social support systems, coping strategies and skills, and environmental/contextual factors—that collectively underpin adolescents' ability to maintain or restore academic functioning in the face of adversity. Within these domains, key subthemes included positive self-belief, goal orientation, emotional regulation, intrinsic motivation, adaptability, family and peer support, teacher mentorship, problem-solving, time management, safe learning environments, and socio-economic stability. These results underscore that resilience is not a static personality trait but a dynamic process shaped by the interaction of personal competencies and contextual supports (Afzali et al., 2024; Ehondor et al., 2025).

The role of psychological resources emerged prominently in the data, with positive self-belief and self-efficacy standing out as central to persistence in challenging academic contexts. This aligns with prior evidence indicating that self-efficacy not only predicts persistence but also moderates the relationship between stress and academic performance (Shao & Kang, 2022; Shengyao et al., 2024). Participants who demonstrated strong self-belief were more likely to engage in adaptive goal-setting, adjust strategies when obstacles arose, and sustain intrinsic motivation. This is consistent with findings that intrinsic motivation and goal orientation enhance resilience by fostering self-determined engagement in learning (Azpiazu et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2022). Emotional regulation, also identified in the present study, reflects the capacity to manage negative affect and reframe challenges constructively—an aspect that has been linked to both higher resilience and improved academic engagement in adolescents (Türk, 2024).

The emphasis on adaptability as a subtheme complements existing literature suggesting that psychological flexibility buffers against the detrimental effects of stressors such as test anxiety and curriculum changes (Türk, 2024). Adolescents who adapted their study approaches in response to shifting academic demands were better able to maintain performance. This resonates with the moderated mediation model proposed by (Ho et al., 2022), which found that flexibility in coping mediates the relationship between resilience and academic stress, particularly when life satisfaction is high.

Social support systems were another cornerstone of academic resilience identified in this study. Family encouragement emerged as the most frequently cited form of support, corroborating prior findings that parental involvement strengthens resilience via enhanced self-efficacy and achievement motivation (Ramlan & Ahmad, 2023; Zhao & Masnan, 2023). Adolescents who received consistent moral and academic support from family members described feeling more capable of facing academic challenges. Similarly, peer support, particularly through study groups and shared learning resources, provided emotional and cognitive reinforcement. This is in line with the work of (Rustham et al., 2022) and (Rofiqah et al., 2023), who documented the protective role of peer social networks in fostering resilience during periods of academic disruption, such as online learning environments.

Teacher mentorship, as identified in the findings, plays a dual role by providing both instructional guidance and emotional encouragement. The recognition of effort, personalised feedback, and extra academic assistance reported by participants mirrors the findings of (Uygur et al., 2023), which showed that teacher support significantly predicts academic resilience when combined with academic and social self-efficacy. The broader category of community involvement, including religious institutions and local mentorship programs, reflects the socio-cultural dimension of resilience, where collectivist norms and communal resources contribute to adolescents' coping strategies (Auliya & Eva, 2025; Ehondor et al., 2025).

Coping strategies and skills identified in this study—such as problem-solving, time management, and help-seeking behaviour—are consistent with prior research highlighting the role of self-regulated learning in resilience (Fahriza et al.,

2023). Participants described breaking down complex academic tasks, consulting peers or teachers for clarification, and using available resources such as libraries and online platforms. These strategies mirror findings by (Afzali et al., 2024) that academic competence mediates the link between teaching style and resilience, suggesting that skill-based interventions could bolster resilience indirectly by improving competence. Stress-relief activities, including sports and creative arts, also featured prominently and align with research indicating that extracurricular engagement enhances well-being and buffers against academic burnout (Faizullina & Karpova, 2024).

Environmental and contextual factors were equally influential. Safe and conducive learning environments were essential for concentration and sustained engagement, echoing previous findings that supportive school climates predict higher levels of resilience and positive affect (Azpiazu et al., 2024). Socio-economic stability emerged as a determinant by ensuring access to school fees, learning materials, and adequate nutrition, which aligns with evidence from (Bhave et al., 2024) that material resources serve as a foundation for the effective application of personal and social coping strategies. The significance of cultural expectations, observed in this study, parallels observations by (Woods et al., 2023) and (Martínez et al., 2023) that community and family values around education can act as both motivators and sources of pressure.

Notably, exposure to opportunities such as academic competitions, educational trips, and career guidance was reported to foster motivation and broaden aspirations. This finding supports the notion advanced by (Faizullina & Karpova, 2024) that engagement in non-academic developmental activities enhances adaptability and long-term goal orientation. Access to technology and digital learning tools, cited by participants as facilitating independent study and supplementary learning, reflects broader post-pandemic trends emphasising technological literacy as a resilience factor (Rustham et al., 2022; Shao & Kang, 2022).

The interplay between these determinants highlights that academic resilience is best understood as an emergent property of multi-layered systems. The results of this study support the socio-ecological model of resilience, where individual capacities are embedded within and shaped by relational, institutional, and cultural contexts (Auliya & Eva, 2025; Ehondor et al., 2025). This model underscores the need for interventions that target not only individual skill development but also the strengthening of supportive networks and enabling environments.

A point of convergence with prior literature is the reciprocal relationship between resilience and academic engagement. Consistent with (Yang et al., 2022) and (Ho et al., 2022), the present study found that resilient students maintained higher engagement levels, and that active engagement further reinforced resilience through the acquisition of coping skills and the deepening of social connections. Furthermore, the gender dynamics observed—where female participants reported greater emotional coping strategies while males emphasised problem-focused coping—mirror the gender differences in resilience patterns documented by (Martínez et al., 2023) and (Uygur et al., 2023).

In addition, the findings resonate with cross-cultural research emphasising the universality of certain resilience determinants, such as self-efficacy, social support, and adaptability, while also illustrating context-specific influences shaped by cultural norms and resource availability (Khamsiah & Izzaty, 2024; Shengyao et al., 2024; Zhao & Masnan, 2023). This reinforces the importance of culturally tailored resilience-building programs that account for local values, socio-economic conditions, and institutional structures.

While the thematic patterns observed in this study align closely with existing theoretical and empirical work, the qualitative approach provided rich narrative data that illuminate the lived experiences behind the statistical associations often reported in resilience research. By foregrounding adolescents' voices, this study offers a nuanced understanding of how resilience is enacted in daily academic life and how psychological and social determinants interact dynamically in the Kenyan context.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of purposive sampling with a relatively small sample size of 21 participants limits the generalisability of the findings beyond the specific context studied. The sample was drawn exclusively from Kenyan secondary school students, which means that cultural and structural factors unique to this setting may not be representative of other regions. Second, reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, where participants may have portrayed themselves in a more favourable light, particularly

given the positive connotations associated with resilience. Third, although efforts were made to ensure diversity in socio-economic and school-type representation, other demographic variables such as ethnicity, disability status, and academic track were not systematically balanced. Finally, the cross-sectional design of the study precludes conclusions about causality or the long-term stability of the resilience factors identified.

Future research could address these limitations by employing larger and more diverse samples across multiple cultural and socio-economic contexts, thereby enabling cross-cultural comparisons of resilience determinants. Longitudinal designs would be valuable in tracking the development and maintenance of academic resilience over time, as well as in identifying potential critical periods for intervention. Mixed-methods approaches could also be employed to integrate the depth of qualitative insights with the generalisability of quantitative findings. Furthermore, experimental and quasi-experimental studies could evaluate the efficacy of targeted resilience-building programs, examining how specific interventions influence both psychological resources and social support systems. Given the increasing role of technology in education, future studies might also explore how digital literacy, online learning environments, and access to educational technologies interact with resilience processes in diverse settings.

The findings of this study have several practical implications for educators, school administrators, and policymakers. Programs aimed at fostering academic resilience should adopt a holistic approach that strengthens both internal competencies, such as self-efficacy, goal-setting, and emotional regulation, and external supports, including family engagement, peer mentoring, and teacher guidance. Schools could implement mentorship schemes that pair students with supportive adults, provide structured peer learning opportunities, and create safe, resource-rich environments conducive to study. Community organisations and policymakers should collaborate to reduce socio-economic barriers by ensuring access to educational materials, nutritional support, and extracurricular opportunities. Teacher training programs could incorporate modules on resilience-informed pedagogy, equipping educators to identify at-risk students and provide targeted support. Finally, integrating resilience education into the curriculum—through life skills programs, social-emotional learning, and problem-solving activities—could help institutionalise resilience as a core educational outcome.

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