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The Impact of Educators' Psychological Culture on Professional Self-Realisation during Wartime

Vsevolod Zelenin

sevacello@on-mail.me

Mykhailo Dragomanov State University of Ukraine

Myroslava Sadova

National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine

Iryna Holiiad

Institute of Pedagogy of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine

Ruslan Holiiad

Separate Structural Subdivision Kyiv Vocational College of Urban Economy of V. I. Vernadsky Tavria National University

Alla Fedorenko

Mykhailo Dragomanov State University of Ukraine

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Abstract

This paper aimed to identify the mechanisms through which psychological culture influences academic staff's professional self-realisation via the mediating role of post-traumatic growth. The study involved 212 faculty members from Ukrainian HEIs. The quantitative phase involved the use of standardised instruments to measure psychological culture (Self-Regulation Questionnaire), career adaptability (Career Adapt-Abilities Scale) and post-traumatic growth (Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory). The qualitative stage involved conducting semi-structured interviews designed by the authors. Statistical analysis was carried out using mediation analysis with bootstrapping to assess indirect effects, and non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis test) for intergroup comparisons. A statistically significant direct effect of psychological culture on professional self-realisation was found (beta coefficient 0.42, $p < 0.001$). The mediating mechanism was empirically confirmed: post-traumatic growth mediates this relationship, with an indirect effect of 0.31 (confidence interval: 0.22 to 0.41). Differences in the mediator's functioning were identified by experience: the effect is stronger among expert educators (beta = 0.44) than among novice professionals (beta = 0.19). Psychological culture serves as a fundamental resource that stimulates processes of positive personal transformation in wartime conditions. Professional self-realisation in extreme conditions is facilitated not only by adaptive skills but also by the ability to cognitively process traumatic experiences.

1. Introduction

The global landscape of higher education is currently characterised by increasing dynamism and systemic challenges, requiring a high degree of adaptability among academic staff. In global academic discourse, the professional self-realisation of educators is regarded as a critical factor in the resilience of education systems in conditions of uncertainty [1]. However, the full-scale war in Ukraine has created an unprecedented and extreme context [2]. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, as of early 2024, over 3,900 educational institutions had been damaged or destroyed as a result of the hostilities. Furthermore, over 12% of academic and teaching staff were forced to become IDPs or to leave the country [3]. These figures significantly exceed the statistics for many protracted conflicts of the past decade. By way of comparison, according to the World Bank [4], in some areas of active hostilities in the Middle East, the level of disruption to educational infrastructure reached 25–30%. The UNESCO report confirms that more than 75 million children and young people are disrupted from their education each year due to crises and armed conflicts [5]. Statistical data indicate that the daily professional activities of Ukrainian teachers have become an act of existential resistance and adaptation to conditions of constant threat [6].

Despite the substantial body of research on professional burnout and stress resilience among educators, the mechanisms underpinning their self-realisation amid prolonged military threats remain understudied. There is a clear theoretical contradiction between the destructive impact of war trauma and the high professional productivity of Ukrainian academic staff observed in practice. At the same time, traditional approaches often focus on pathologising the experience of war. Global research on prolonged crises

predominantly describes only external survival strategies. The resource potential of psychological culture as a factor in transforming stress into professional growth is often overlooked here [7].

This study aims to explore the internal mechanisms that enable academic and teaching staff to maintain and develop their professional identity despite disruptions to their familiar living environment. The central question is how an individual's capacity for self-regulation mediates the transition from traumatic experience to positive personal change, which ultimately ensures high career adaptability.

The study aimed to determine the nature of the relationship between the level of psychological culture and the characteristics of educators' professional self-realisation in the context of prolonged martial law. To achieve this aim, three interrelated *research objectives* were formulated:

1. To conduct a theoretical and methodological analysis of contemporary approaches to understanding psychological culture as a resource for educators' personal resilience.

2. To investigate the state of development of the components of psychological culture and the level of professional self-realisation among HEIs' academic staff in wartime conditions.

3. To propose preliminary practical recommendations for the implementation of psychological support programmes aimed at fostering a culture of self-care and professional development among educators.

To examine the proposed topic in greater depth, the following research questions were identified:

Q1. Which structural components of psychological culture are most important for maintaining professional effectiveness during a crisis?

Q2. How might extreme external factors influence one's subjective perception of professional success?

H1: The study hypothesises that a high level of psychological resilience mediates the impact of wartime stressors on professional fulfilment.

Scientific novelty. This study contributes to the field by examining the role of psychological culture as a tool for mitigating the negative consequences of war in educators' work. The study substantiates the mediating role of post-traumatic growth in the structure of professional self-realisation among HEIs' academic staff during active hostilities. The concept of the substantive content of self-realisation is further developed by analysing adaptive behavioural models in extreme circumstances. The nature of the correlational links between a developed capacity for self-regulation and the maintenance of professional effectiveness under prolonged stress is clarified.

A contemporary perspective on the professional self-realisation of educators involves a combination of humanistic, cognitive-behavioural and resource-based paradigms. In particular, periods of military conflict highlight the need to preserve professional identity despite existential threats and systemic constraints stemming from extreme environmental instability. This is precisely why the study's theoretical foundation is grounded in resource-based crisis management and the principles of

organisational psychology. The use of these paradigms has enabled the present study to substantiate the structure of psychological culture as a personal resource. Thus, the current study integrates disparate approaches into a single mediative model.

The humanistic approach regards the desire for self-realisation as a fundamental characteristic of the individual. In his work, Maslow [8] links the development of a person's full inner potential to the existence of a supportive social environment. However, this view seems somewhat idealistic in the extreme conditions of martial law. The organismic process of value orientations acts as an internal vector that directs the individual towards continuous growth [9]. Despite criticism for being overly subjective, these ideas are consistent with the contemporary concept of positive psychology [10]. In this study, the researchers have adopted a humanistic approach to lay the groundwork for operationalising the dependent variable (professional self-realisation) through indicators of subjectivity and identity. These theories help to recognise the internal motivation for growth, particularly under extreme external conditions. It should be noted that the absolutisation of intrinsic motivation in the theories of Rogers [9] and Maslow [8] may overlook the real destructive influence of the external environment during wartime. However, within the scope of this study, this approach is valuable precisely for its emphasis on the educator's active subjectivity.

The measurable components of self-realisation are elaborated in Ryff's [11] multifactorial model of psychological well-being. According to the expansion theory, positive emotions contribute to the accumulation of resilient personal resources [12]. In the context of war trauma, this mechanism may operate differently due to the dominance of negative affect. The integration of existential and positive psychological perspectives, in turn, allows for a better understanding of personal growth in the face of suffering [13]. A critical examination of Fredrickson's model highlights the risk of excessive optimism, as positive emotions are often short-lived under extreme conditions. Comparing these perspectives with Wong's theory yields a balanced model that acknowledges the inevitability of suffering as a prerequisite for growth.

The crisis conditions of wartime trigger the activation of mechanisms for the subjective assessment and management of stress. The transactional model developed by Lazarus and Folkman [14] describes the process of selecting coping strategies through primary and secondary appraisals of events. The focus of research is shifting from the analysis of pathology to the search for resources through the development of a sense of coherence [15]. Coping, in this context, is viewed as a mediator that mediates the relationship between hope and anxiety during war [16]. At the same time, the transactional model identifies psychological culture as a factor in the primary appraisal of threat. Coping theory justifies the inclusion of coping resources in the mediational framework alongside Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG). Coping theory logically justifies the inclusion of adaptive resources in the proposed mediational framework.

Stressful states are interpreted as consequences of the actual or potential loss of values significant to the individual [17]. Specific coping strategies are capable of differentially modulating the impact of

external threats on levels of personal anxiety in wartime conditions [18]. Within the proposed model, psychological culture serves as a buffer between existential threats and the educators' professional activities. Resource conservation theory justifies the inclusion of psychological culture as an independent variable, thereby allowing for a detailed description of the mechanism by which resources indirectly influence personal resilience. Unlike Lazarus's model, Hobfoll's theory better explains the cumulative effect of military threats through the mechanism of the "spiral of resource loss". In this context, psychological culture serves as a key safeguard against the depletion of the educator's personal capital.

Self-efficacy is a determinant of the transformation of available resources into purposeful action [19]. A high level of belief in one's own ability correlates with achieving professional goals in crises. The dynamics of professional activity are explained by the interaction between job demands and the individual's capabilities [20]. The construct of self-efficacy is used to operationalise coping resources as a mediator. The analysis indicates that the influence of psychological culture is realised through the activation of adaptive behavioural strategies.

Extreme conditions create the prerequisites for the development of PTG as an alternative to destructive states. Specialised diagnostic tools are used to measure positive changes following a traumatic experience [21]. Cognitive processing of experience acts as a psychological mechanism that facilitates personal transformation [22]. In the proposed model, this construct mediates the influence of psychological culture on self-realisation. The empirical indirect effect confirms growth's status as an objective mechanism of adaptation.

The impact of external stressors on self-realisation depends largely on the level of psychological safety in the environment. According to Edmondson [23], a team's collective belief that the professional environment is safe for taking risks determines the quality of interaction. In practice, studying the experiences of Ukrainian educators using mixed-methods research allows us to identify the specific nature of coping [24]. Separately, academic discourse analyses the characteristics of teaching practice in the context of social instability in Ukraine [6]. A comparison of international standards of psychological safety with the Ukrainian experience indicates the need to review existing protocols for supporting educators. The educator's psychological culture becomes an autonomous factor of safety in conditions where the external environment remains objectively threatening.

The theoretical framework described here brings together various approaches into a coherent model of an educator's professional life. Psychological culture becomes a multi-faceted resource that enables an appropriate assessment of the challenges posed by wartime. Self-efficacy and psychological safety act as mediators between inner potential and successful self-realisation. It is suggested that post-traumatic growth results from the full realisation of a professional's resource potential. Professional self-realisation is viewed as a process of preserving and transforming identity through cognitive reappraisal. The theoretical model presented requires further empirical testing within the Ukrainian education system.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Research Procedure

The study was conducted between 2024 and 2025, covering a period of intensive adaptation of higher education to the conditions of martial law. The procedure comprised three synchronised stages. *During the first stage (2024)*, quantitative and qualitative data were collected in parallel during a single experimental session. Each participant simultaneously generated responses for statistical analysis and narrative transcripts during the interview. This helped to avoid a time lag between the recording of an emotional state and its rational justification. *The second stage (January–May 2025)* involved an independent analysis of the data sets obtained using selected methodologies. Quantitative data were processed using statistical software packages, whilst qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. *During the third stage (June–November 2025)*, the comparable results from the two lines of analysis were integrated and interpreted. Combining the data when formulating conclusions enriched the statistical indicators with deeper context. Comparing quantitative indicators with educators' narratives enabled the verification of the mediative model of psychological culture.

2.2. Sample and Participants

The study population comprises academic and teaching staff at HEIs in Ukraine who are currently residing and working within the country under martial law. To determine the average effect size at a significance level of 0.05 and a power of 0.80, the minimum required sample size was 158 respondents. To compensate for potential loss of contact due to migration or lack of communication, the initial sample size was increased by 25%. Specialists from the Dragomanov Ukrainian State University and the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine were included in the final analysis. The number of study participants was 212 lecturers from the aforementioned higher education institutions (Table 1).

Table 1
Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample (n = 212)

Description	Category	Quantity (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Women's	146	68.9
	Men's	66	31.1
Age	25–35 years old	42	19.8
	36–50 years old	108	51.0
	Over 50 years old	62	29.2
Academic degree	Doctor of Science (DSc)	34	16.0
	PhD / Candidate of Science (PhD)	132	62.3
	No academic degree	46	21.7
Academic title	Professor	28	13.2
	Associate Professor	114	53.8
	No academic title	70	33.0
Work experience	Up to 5 years	24	11.3
	5–15 years	86	40.6
	Over 15 years	102	48.1

Source: compiled by the authors of the study

To conduct a differentiated analysis, the respondents were divided into three groups: "novice professionals" (up to 5 years' experience; n = 24), "experienced professionals" (5–15 years' experience; n = 86) and "expert educators" (over 15 years' experience; n = 102). This clear imbalance is acceptable, as it objectively reflects the actual demographic situation of academic and teaching staff in Ukraine and helps to avoid artificial distortion of the data. The division was conducted to trace how the mediative model operates at different stages of the career path. The use of non-parametric statistics ensures the reliability of the comparison between these groups, regardless of their differing sizes.

To ensure methodological rigour, the following criteria were established for including participants in the sample. The main factor is the existence of a valid employment contract with a Ukrainian HEI and the participant's physical presence in Ukraine over the past year. An important condition is the pursuit of active teaching or research activities in distance, face-to-face or blended formats. Voluntary consent to participate in the study and a willingness to provide detailed answers during the interview were also identified as mandatory criteria. At the same time, exclusion criteria were developed to minimise the influence of extraneous factors on the results. Individuals on extended leave or who had ceased their professional activities for personal reasons were excluded from the analysis. Teachers residing outside

Ukraine at the time of the study were also excluded, as factors beyond the immediate context of military threats shape their experience of professional self-realisation. Questionnaires with a high rate of missing data or signs of mechanically filled-in responses were not considered.

The research was conducted remotely, in accordance with the principles of anonymity and ethical standards of scientific work. Informed consent was obtained from respondents regarding the aim of the research and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without giving a reason. The data collected are stored in an anonymised form, making it impossible to identify specific individuals or organisations.

2.3. Diagnostic Tools

The Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ) [25] was used to operationalise educators' psychological culture by measuring their ability to plan and adjust their behaviour under stressful conditions consciously. The use of this instrument enabled a quantitative assessment of the respondents' internal resources for transforming the external challenges of martial law into constructive professional actions. The obtained self-regulation scores served as an empirical basis for analysing how a developed psychological culture contributes to an educator's personal transformation and professional resilience. Cronbach's α is 0.74.

The Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) [21], in its Ukrainian-language adaptation, was selected to measure the study's key mediator. The instrument enables the identification of positive psychological changes occurring within an individual as a result of experiencing the traumatic events of war. The questionnaire (21 items) covers parameters such as the emergence of new opportunities, the strengthening of relationships with others, an awareness of one's own strength, spiritual changes and an increased appreciation of the value of life. The use of the PTGI is critical for testing the hypothesis that war-related stress can be transformed into a resource for development. Cronbach's α was 0.72.

The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) [26], in its adapted version, was used to measure the dependent variable – professional self-realisation. Since in crisis conditions self-realisation manifests primarily through the preservation of professional identity and behavioural flexibility, this instrument is considered the most relevant. The CAAS allows assessment of a teacher's ability to plan constructively for the future, demonstrate control in professional situations, and so on. Cronbach's α is 0.76.

The qualitative component was conducted through semi-structured interviews developed by the study's authors. The interviews comprised eight open-ended questions focusing on the transformation of professional success and motivation in a wartime context. The questions concerned coping strategies, the reassessment of professional values, and the perception of institutional support. The narratives were analysed using thematic analysis to identify key thematic clusters. The interviews were conducted and analysed by a group of researchers from the Pan-European University. To ensure objectivity, coding was conducted by two independent experts from this group. This set of methodologies allows us to move

away from general assessments of mental state in favour of studying the dynamic processes of adaptation.

2.4. Data Analysis

The sample size was calculated using G*Power 3.1. Quantitative analysis was performed using SPSS 29.0. Initial data tabulation and coding were carried out in Microsoft Excel. Due to deviations from normality (according to the Shapiro-Wilk test), the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare independent groups, and the Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare more than two groups. Categorical data were analysed using Pearson's chi-square test. Verification of the mediational model and the statistical significance of indirect effects was carried out via regression modelling using the bootstrapping procedure (5,000 iterations) at a specified 95% confidence interval. The alpha level of significance for all operations was set at $p < 0.05$.

The qualitative analysis was carried out using the thematic analysis method developed by Brown et al. [25]. The procedure involved both reviewing the transcripts and producing a final report. The reliability of the coding was assessed using Cohen's Kappa coefficient. The content categories were visualised by constructing an integrative thematic map.

The reliability of the instruments was assessed using Cronbach's α. Integration and triangulation occurred during the interpretation phase through a side-by-side comparison strategy. The statistical patterns of the mediational model were compared with the narrative data on educators' professional experience using a joint display matrix. The triangulation of methods ensured the mutual validation of conclusions, with qualitative data revealing the underlying context of statistically significant relationships, thereby significantly enhancing the robustness of the results.

3. Results

To assess general trends within the sample, the central tendencies of the main variables were first calculated. The results of the initial analysis are presented as medians and quartiles because the data were non-normally distributed. Table 2 presents the scores for self-regulation (SRQ), post-traumatic growth (PTGI) and career adaptability (CAAS) for the entire sample. The scores are presented separately for each of the three groups identified by length of service.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for the variables under study based on work experience (n = 212)

Variable	Experience group:	n	Me	Q1–Q3
Self-regulation (SRQ)	Novice professionals (up to 5 years)	24	48.0	42.0–54.0
	Experienced professionals (5–15 years)	86	62.5	56.0–69.0
	Expert educators (over 15 years)	102	64.0	58.0–71.0
Post-traumatic growth (PTGI)	Novice professionals (up to 5 years)	24	51.0	45.0–58.0
	Experienced professionals (5–15 years)	86	68.0	61.0–75.0
	Expert educators (over 15 years)	102	74.0	66.0–81.0
Career Adaptability (CAAS)	Novice professionals (up to 5 years)	24	55.0	49.0–62.0
	Experienced professionals (5–15 years)	86	70.5	64.0–77.0
	Expert educators (over 15 years)	102	78.0	71.0–85.0
Note: Me – median, Q1–Q3 – first and third quartiles				

Source: compiled by the authors of the study

The lowest self-regulation scores are observed in the “novice professionals” group (Me = 48.0), whilst the medians in the other two groups are slightly higher. Scores for post-traumatic growth show the opposite trend: the highest values are observed in the “expert educators” group (M = 74.0). Career adaptability shows a gradual increase from the junior group to the senior group, which may indicate the accumulation of professional experience as a resource. Table 3 presents the results of a comparison of the three groups by length of service using non-parametric criteria. Statistical calculations were performed separately for each of the three dependent variables.

Table 3
Results of a comparative analysis of groups based on work experience

Variable	H (df = 2)	p
Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ)	28.45	< 0.001
Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI)	42.17	< 0.001
Career Adapt-Ability Scale (CAAS)	51.83	< 0.001
Source: created by the authors		

Statistically significant differences between the groups were found on all three scales, as confirmed by the Kruskal–Wallis H-test ($p < 0.001$ in all cases). The highest H-value was observed for the career adaptability scale ($H = 51.83$), suggesting the most pronounced intergroup differences for this indicator. For the self-regulation scale, the H-value is comparatively low ($H = 28.45$) but exceeds the critical value.

To test the hypothesis regarding the mediating role of post-traumatic growth between psychological culture and professional self-realisation, regression modelling with bootstrapping was performed. Figure 1 illustrates the resulting model, showing the standardised regression coefficients. The analysis was conducted separately for the entire sample without dividing it into groups.

The direct effect of psychological culture on professional self-realisation is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$). At the same time, the inclusion of a mediator (post-traumatic growth) reduces this direct effect to $\beta = 0.18$ ($p = 0.032$). The indirect effect via post-traumatic growth is $\beta = 0.31$ (95% CI [0.22; 0.41]), confirming partial mediation. Next, the moderating effect of length of service on the identified relationships was tested. The results of this analysis are summarised in Table 4, which presents the indirect effects separately for each of the three groups.

Table 4
Indirect effects of mediation based on work experience (bootstrapping, 5,000 iterations)

Group by experience	Indirect effect (β)	SE	95% CI (lower limit)	95% CI (upper limit)
Novice professionals (up to 5 years)	0.19	0.07	0.06	0.33
Experienced professionals (5–15 years)	0.33	0.06	0.22	0.45
Expert educators (over 15 years)	0.44	0.05	0.34	0.54
Source: created by the authors				

The indirect effect is strongest in the “expert educators” group ($\beta = 0.44$), suggesting that the mediating role of post-traumatic growth increases with work experience. In the “novice professionals” group, the indirect effect is also significant, though its magnitude is noticeably smaller ($\beta = 0.19$). For the

“experienced professionals” group, an intermediate value was obtained (β = 0.33), confirming a gradual trend towards increased mediation.

To gain a deeper understanding of the transformation of professional success in wartime, a thematic analysis of semi-structured interview data was conducted. The Cohen’s Kappa coefficient between two independent coders was 0.84, indicating a high level of agreement. Figure 2 presents a thematic map constructed based on the results of the qualitative analysis of the interviews. The central element of the map is the phenomenon of “rethinking professional success”. Arrows indicate the directions of influence between the identified themes.

The study participants describe a shift in focus from external achievements (publications, titles) to internal criteria for success (maintaining connections with students, emotional support). The key mechanism behind this transformation is “growth through overcoming”, which correlates with quantitative PTGI indicators. At the same time, the theme of “resource depletion” was identified among some respondents, which has no direct counterpart in the quantitative data.

Table 5 presents a matrix of combined findings that brings together quantitative and qualitative data. The left-hand column contains statistical patterns identified through regression analysis. The right-hand column lists relevant themes from the interviews that illustrate or supplement these patterns.

Table 5
Joint display matrix for the integration of quantitative and qualitative data

Quantitative pattern	**Qualitative illustration (interview theme)**
A significant indirect effect of PTG in the “expert educators” group (β = 0.44)	“I’ve come to appreciate every day at work; it’s not just a job, it’s a mission”
The lowest PTG scores in the “novice professionals” group (Me = 51.0)	“It is hard to think about growth when there are sirens every day. I am just surviving”.
No difference between groups in terms of self-regulation (Experienced vs Experts)	“Experienced colleagues cope better, but the younger ones have a core strength too”
Source: created by the authors	

Narratives qualitatively corroborate the statistically confirmed mediating role of post-traumatic growth concerning a “re-evaluation of values” and the “emergence of new meanings”. Discrepancies are observed in the “novice professionals” group, where quantitative indicators of mediation are weaker; however, in interviews, representatives of this group demonstrate the greatest reflectiveness regarding transformation. This may be evidence of hidden mechanisms not captured by the selected scales.

The use of triangulation confirmed the internal validity of the identified mediating model. The statistically significant indirect effect of post-traumatic growth (β = 0.31) is fully consistent with the identified theme of “re-evaluation of values” in the respondents’ narratives. The alignment of quantitative indicators with qualitative illustrations in the matrix of joint results indicates a high degree of reliability of the empirical

data. In particular, the quantitative increase in adaptability within the “Experts” group is directly corroborated by professional accounts of shifts in life priorities.

In conclusion, the empirical data demonstrate a statistically significant mediating role of post-traumatic growth in the relationship between psychological culture and professional self-fulfilment among educators. It has been established that the intensity of this mechanism correlates with the respondents’ professional experience: in the group of experienced specialists, the mediating function of growth is most clearly expressed. Thus, a developed psychological culture acts as a predictor of constructive strategies for professional behaviour; however, the full realisation of this potential is determined by accumulated experience in overcoming professional crises.

4. Discussion

The results obtained allow us, with caution, to suggest partial mediation in the relationship between psychological culture and educators’ professional self-realisation. Here, post-traumatic growth (PTG) may play a key role as a mediating factor. That is, a statistically significant reduction in the direct effect of the independent variable following the introduction of the mediator, whilst maintaining the model’s overall significance, points to the dual functional nature of psychological culture. In the study, it acted as a direct instrumental resource for professional activity and simultaneously served as a cognitive basis for the transformation of traumatic experience. This configuration is consistent with the updated provisions of the Job Demands and Resources (JD-R) and Conservation of Resources (COR) theories, as outlined by Demerouti [27]. According to this paradigm, personal resources not only counteract extreme environmental demands but also initiate the formation of “resource caravans”, which ensure proactive adaptation in conditions of systemic crisis.

The high level of psychological culture observed in the “expert educators” group is consistent with the findings of Nadyukova and Frenzel [24]. In their study, the researchers also noted a predominance of adaptive coping strategies characteristic of Ukrainian teachers with extensive experience (over 15 years). The results are also corroborated by the work of Banit and Merzliakova [28], where self-regulation and reflection, as fundamental components of psychological culture, are identified as a priority strategy for resilience. At the same time, it is worth mentioning Pavlyk’s [29] work on the deterioration of educators’ psychological health in wartime conditions. The findings allow us to refine these data by accounting for the identified moderating effect of professional experience. It can be assumed that experience-based differentiation reflects the older generation of teachers’ ability to maintain high resourcefulness under cumulative stress. This pattern can be explained by the variability in mental health indicators across levels of work experience.

The mediating role of PTG identified in this study is corroborated by recent research by Tedeschi et al. [30, 31], who view growth as a strategic pathway to organisational well-being. Maitlis [32] emphasises that PTG in an organisational context is determined by the presence of stable internal resources. However, given the caveats raised by Infurna et al. [33] regarding the limitations of cross-sectional

studies, the observed indirect effect (β = 0.31) should be interpreted with caution – as an indicator of the intensive mobilisation of coping resources. A differentiated analysis of the model, in turn, revealed a significant strengthening of mediation among experienced teachers (β = 0.44) compared to novices (β = 0.19). Within the framework of the JD-R theory in crisis conditions [34], this can be explained by accumulated resource potential, which acts as a medium for the actualisation of PTG. The data presented are partially at odds with the results of Li [35], in which self-efficacy merely reduced burnout levels without fostering growth. This discrepancy can be explained by the specific nature of the military context, which creates boundary conditions for the manifestation of the post-traumatic growth phenomenon.

The results of the qualitative analysis point to a certain axiological transformation in professional self-realisation, driven by a shift in priorities towards internal criteria. It is possible to draw a parallel between these findings and the argument advanced by Polovko and Glotov [36] regarding the role of war in the reconceptualisation of identity. A humanistic shift in the value system is also observed in the work of Tsiuniak et al. [37]. The experiences of teachers in Mosul [38] suggest that such changes may be reversible. This points to the advisability of further longitudinal monitoring of the Ukrainian sample to refine the identified trends.

The study's quantitative data did not provide statistically significant support for the "resource depletion" theme identified in the interviews. The phenomenon described bears certain parallels to the concept of vicarious growth among members of support professions [39]. Teachers are likely subject to similar psychological mechanisms when working with traumatised groups. Contextual differences in professional practice necessitate a cautious approach to extrapolating such comparisons.

Certain discrepancies between the findings of Budnyk and Sajdak-Burska [40] and those of the present study may be attributed to differences in the practical experience of practising teachers and students. The established psychological culture of experienced professionals serves as an additional resource in crises. Existing concepts, in particular "psychological capital" [41], reveal only certain aspects of the phenomenon under study. The proposed study complements the academic discourse by integrating the reflective and value-based dimensions of professional life.

The theoretical framework outlined in Demerouti [42] allows the findings to be characterised as an instance of the "resource pathways" mechanism. Psychological culture serves as a fundamental personal resource which, during wartime, not only prevents professional breakdown but also drives positive transformation. A combination of threats to life, displacement and the destruction of the educational environment determines the specificity of the wartime context. It is precisely these factors that activate latent resource mechanisms, which require further study to inform the development of professional support programmes for educators.

The results obtained confirm the proposed hypothesis (H1). The mediating role of psychological culture in the process by which war-related stress affects professional self-realisation has been statistically demonstrated. This mechanism ensures the adoption of constructive behavioural strategies in extreme

conditions. The reduction in the direct effect of stressors when post-traumatic growth is included confirms the model's high predictive power.

The practical value of the findings lies in the development of specialised training programmes designed to strengthen the personal resources of higher education lecturers. The data can be incorporated into the work of university psychological services to develop individual support pathways. The use of the "resource pathways" concept will enable a shift in the focus of professional training towards psychological resilience and adaptability. Monitoring growth indicators will serve as a tool to assess the effectiveness of support programmes in the educational environment.

4.1. Restrictions

Despite methodological consistency, the present study is subject to certain limitations due to its predominant cross-sectional design. The approach adopted in this study allows only for the recording of the current state of psychological indicators, without tracking their dynamics over time. Therefore, it should be noted that the sample size and its regional specificity do not provide grounds for fully extrapolating the results to all educators in Ukraine. Furthermore, the use of self-report methods may introduce subjectivity into respondents' answers due to social desirability bias and an internal reluctance to acknowledge one's own problems. As a separate limitation that may affect the interpretation of the results, the uneven distribution of participants by gender and teaching specialisation should be noted. Further research in this area requires the involvement of control groups from regions with varying levels of hostility.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are appropriate for most individuals interested in this research topic. Educational institutions should implement systematic programmes to monitor teachers' psychological well-being and identify signs of burnout at an early stage. The organisation of supervision groups will enable experienced teachers to share strategies for professional resilience with junior staff. It is considered advisable to conduct training sessions on the development of psychological culture, with an emphasis on reflective and value-based components. Psychological services need to focus on facilitating processes of post-traumatic growth through group-based approaches. The development of methodological guidelines on the cognitive processing of difficult experiences will help to strengthen educators' personal resources.

5. Conclusions

A statistically significant direct effect of psychological culture on career adaptability has been established (beta coefficient = 0.42, $p < 0.001$). The results indicate that the inclusion of the mediator of post-traumatic growth reduces this effect, suggesting partial mediation with an indirect effect of 0.31 and a confidence interval from 0.22 to 0.41. Significant intergroup differences were found across all indicators by work experience (significance level < 0.001); in particular, the mediating role of growth

increases with experience: from 0.19 among novice professionals to 0.44 among experts. Qualitative analysis revealed an axiological shift in educators' perceptions of professional success at Ukrainian HEIs. A shift in focus was also observed, from external attributes such as academic titles and publications to internal criteria, notably maintaining contact with students and providing empathetic support. The findings can be put into practice in several ways. The identified patterns lay the groundwork for improving diagnostic tools for assessing educators' psychological resilience. The proposed methodological guidelines are considered useful for the development and implementation of comprehensive psychological support programmes in the educational environment. The use of the described approaches may help minimise manifestations of professional burnout and preserve the mental health of specialists. The research materials are considered suitable for inclusion in professional development programmes for academic and teaching staff. Among the structural components of psychological culture, the reflective and emotional-value components proved to be the most significant for maintaining professional effectiveness during a crisis, whilst the cognitive and behavioural components play a supporting role. Prospects for further research lie in deepening the study of the model's dynamic aspects. It is considered appropriate to conduct longitudinal studies to verify the duration of the identified mediating effects once the security situation has stabilised. A promising area of research, identified during the interviews, is the study of resource exhaustion, which requires deeper quantitative operationalisation.

Declarations

Data availability

The data will be available with the corresponding author and will be made available upon request via email.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Ethics Committee of Mykhailo Dragomanov State University of Ukraine (Kyiv, Ukraine), Certificate No. 105-2026, ethical approval date: 15/06/2026.

Consent to publish

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. Prior to participation, each subject was provided with a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate and signed a written informed consent form.

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Figures

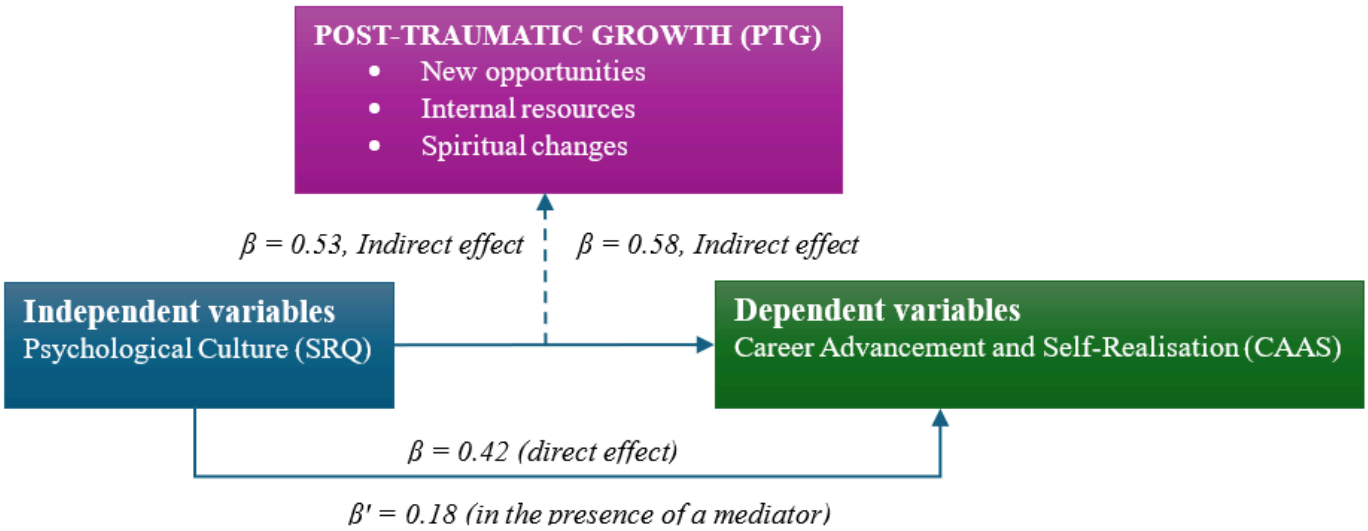


Figure 1

A mediational model of the influence of psychological culture on professional self-realisation through post-traumatic growth

Note: The coefficients next to the arrows (β = 0.53 and β = 0.58) are path coefficients for direct relationships. The indirect mediation effect (SRQ → PTG → CAAS) is β = 0.31, 95% CI [0.22; 0.41]. All coefficients shown are standardised and statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

Source: created by the authors

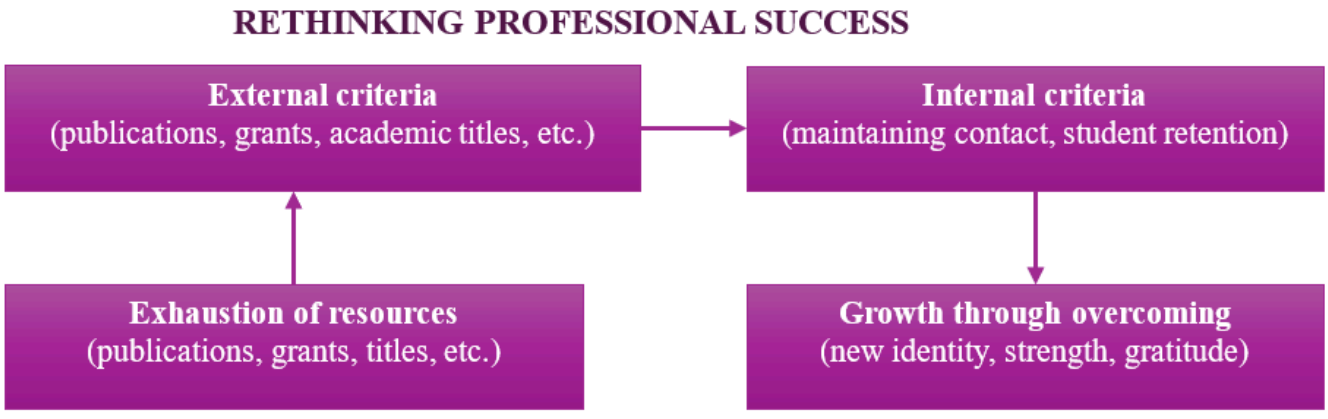


Figure 2

Concept map of qualitative analysis: the transformation of professional success in wartime

Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of a thematic analysis