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Organizational Drivers and Protective Factors of Teacher Wellbeing and Burnout

Lubega Midlage

Humanities Education Kampala International University Uganda

Email lubega.midlage@kiu.ac.ug

ABSTRACT

Teacher wellbeing and burnout have emerged as critical concerns within contemporary education systems, with significant implications for teacher retention, instructional quality, and student outcomes. This paper examines the organizational drivers that contribute to teacher burnout alongside the protective factors that promote wellbeing. Drawing on frameworks such as the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, the analysis identifies key drivers of burnout, including excessive workload, administrative burdens, unsupportive leadership, and role conflict. These factors increase stress, emotional exhaustion, and disengagement among teachers. Conversely, protective factors such as supportive leadership, availability of resources, professional collaboration, autonomy, and opportunities for professional growth enhance resilience, engagement, and job satisfaction. The study highlights the central role of organizational context in shaping teacher experiences, emphasizing that wellbeing and burnout are not solely individual issues but are deeply embedded in institutional structures and practices. It further underscores the importance of policy and structural interventions, including workload regulation, collaborative cultures, and supportive leadership practices, in fostering sustainable teaching environments. Ultimately, improving teacher wellbeing requires a systemic approach that balances job demands with adequate resources to ensure both teacher retention and educational effectiveness.

Keywords: Teacher Wellbeing, Teacher Burnout, Job Demands–Resources Model, Organizational Culture and Educational Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is widely recognized as an exceptionally demanding profession. It is also identified by many teachers as one of the most rewarding occupations [1]. Nevertheless, reporting of high levels of stress and burnout amongst educators has regularly occurred for decades, foreshadowing the current well-documented global teacher shortage crisis. A report from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, 2022) indicates that nearly 60% of Australian teachers experience work-related stress, with over 25% of early-career teachers planning to leave the profession within the next few years [2]. The Australian Teacher Workforce Data survey highlighted diverse factors contributing to teacher stress, including administrative demands and excessive time spent on compliance and reporting [1]. These resurfacing concerns about teacher wellbeing warrant consideration of their organizational underpinnings, since teachers remain subject to the influences of their leadership, fellow staff, and workplace context [2]. The terms “teacher wellbeing” and “teacher burnout” are commonly used in educational settings. A theory of job burnout outlines specific ways in which these ideas can be elaborated and measured [2]. Wellbeing is characterized as a state in which teachers flourish in their work, are occasionally absorbed or energised by it, and maintain a positive outlook [3]. In contrast, burnout is depicted as the condition of being

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“burned-out,” in which teachers feel mentally and emotionally spent and consider leaving the teaching profession. Many models of teacher wellbeing, stress, and burnout have been developed, but comparatively few have been constructed explicitly from an organizational perspective [3]. Education systems vary widely in their degree of decentralization, decentralization being assumed to reduce the role of administrative burdens on teachers and to increase the range of organizational variables available to influence teacher work [4].

Conceptual Frameworks

Teachers form the backbone of the education system globally. Teaching and learning can never take place without teachers, whether in a formal or informal setting [4]. Most of the teachers show passion towards their profession, but many are facing stress at some stage in their lives and feel burnt out. Burnout among teachers could be damaging to individuals, organizations, governments, and other stakeholders involved in education. Teaching is a stressful occupation with high demand job characteristics [5]. It is a difficult task to arrange many activities, control classrooms, meet multiple students’ needs, and prepare various documents in limited time. Burnout is a chronic emotional response to prolonged interpersonal stressors on the job or in personal life. Burnout includes three dimensions that are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion indicates feelings such as being overextended and fatigued through one’s work [6]. Depersonalization refers to an impersonal response towards recipients of one’s service. Personal accomplishment refers to the feelings of competence and successful achievement in one’s work with people [8]. Organizational drivers of burnout among teachers are workload and time demands, administrative demands and bureaucracy, leadership and organizational culture, and role conflict and autonomy [9]. Workload and time demand typology includes: Preparation time, grading time, Interaction time with students, Interaction time with parents, Interaction time with colleagues, Professional development, Organization and planning, and Paperwork. Teacher burnout may increase when teaching and support hours become less and grade preparation and planning time increases. Extensive principal paperwork, program monitoring/reporting, requested unwanted information, routinely collecting and studying specific reports, and additional directing program supervision drive teacher burnout when teachers feel overloaded with excessive paper works as they are bounded by regulation [10]. Leadership style typologies include: Transformational leadership, Instructional leadership, Transactional leadership, and Bureaucratic leadership. Communication Demand typologies include: Verbal communication with individual staff members, communication with collective group, and daily interaction from others. High workload teachers may desire to interact with colleagues concerning instruction but feel reluctant to participate in committee meetings when the interaction time is rated high [11]. When communication demand remains high and trust atmospheres are low, workload may amplify burnout. Lack of reciprocal communication, mistrust among teachers/administration, and hierarchy barriers favour teacher burnout. Trust/reciprocal communication reduces role ambiguity hence increases trust [4]. Quasi-Empirical theoretical paper on preventive burnout proposes that availability of resourcefulness, encouragement of professional collaboration and community autonomy, and vocational fitness foster resilience against job-stress [5].

Organizational Drivers of Burnout

Job-related stress is a complex construct consisting of pressure, anxiety, and tension leading to decrementation of personnel efficiency, work engagement, motivation, and performance. Such concepts found their utilization in the JDR model which highlights individuals’ positioning within an organization demanding the combination of specific characteristics when assigning individuals to groups [4]. Burnout is determined by the interaction between individuals’ predisposition and the characteristics of the environment, productively underlining the necessity of reducing the demands from the environment, or requiring support to fulfil those demands, as shown in early correlational studies [5]. Moreover, the necessity of focusing exclusively on task and not on process became a driver of not only burnout but also overall teacher effectiveness. School leaders’ and peers’ support, or vice-versa, are anticipated to compensate the lack of task or technical support, fostering the development of impactful activities [6]. Additionally, the concept of Instructional Leadership connects closely here. School leadership affects the instructional activities of individuals and the quality of collaboration within the team, similarly to sound school development plans providing educational employees an overview about the changes and a platform to contribute to those transformational processes [7].

Workload and Time Demands

Organizational drivers of burnout comprise workload and time demands, administrative requirements and bureaucracy, leadership and culture, and role conflict and autonomy [1]. Workload defines teaching and associated activities, such as assessment, planning, and professional duties. Peak periods for high workload include curriculum development, syllabus or unit plan changes, and report writing. An extensive workload can overwhelm teachers and increase burnout risk [1]. Teaching is central to the role of educators, yet teachers often encounter a multitude of other obligations that consume time and attention. These additional demands include administration,

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policy initiatives, curriculum reform, team and committee meetings, extracurricular activities, and supervision of breaks [2]. The growing paperwork burden as a direct result of these extraneous responsibilities compromises educator effectiveness, reduces motivation, and adversely affects morale [3]. Limited administrative requirements are essential to supporting engagement and reducing teacher burnout. Streamlined program evaluation processes, reduced classroom observation verification, simplified non-academically-focused reporting requirements, enhanced teamwork connected to professional development support, and inactive supervisory functions that allow teachers to concentrate on instructional delivery constitute effective measures that significantly alleviate administrative strain and contribute to the overall sustainability of the profession [4]. Bureaucratic procedures and excessive formalities adversely influence motivation, morale, and stress. Excessive requirements or overly detailed frameworks limit discretion and curtail opportunities to assume increased responsibility and proceed with desired actions, thereby undermining perceived autonomy [5]. Continuous, detailed oversight of classroom practices intensifies pressure to conform and diminishes the opportunity for initiative, innovation, and further professional advancement [6].

Administrative Demands and Bureaucracy

A common complaint among teachers has been excessive paperwork and administrative procedures [4]. Teaching requires completion of various paperwork like lesson plans, grading, student progress reports, and other forms of accountability to district mandates like administration reports, curriculum standards, data collection, and assessment assigned by the school or programs, and a variety of permission slips for student field trips [5]. Teachers filling out reports year after year often lose motivation and become demoralized to the point of burnout [4]. Teachers spend more time on paperwork and fewer times on quality educational services for students affecting student motivation, interest, and ultimately, student learning [6]. Being subjected to excessive, tedious paperwork, teachers feel that they have no control over their job, no trust that they are doing their job professionally, and that their work does not make a difference. Teachers retire, switch to another school, or leave the system altogether when they reach this ssstage [5].

Leadership and Organizational Culture

Teacher wellbeing emerges as a critical factor impacting the quality of educational systems globally and influences education worker retention and turnover [5]. At the same time, teacher burnout has reached detrimental levels in numerous regions and, despite active efforts to mitigate its effects, often persists. Managers and policymakers seeking to enhance teacher wellbeing thus require a comprehensive understanding of organizational drivers and protective factors influencing teacher wellbeing and burnout [6]. Organizational structure and processes constitute the first conceptual driver guiding the analysis, drawing on theories of job demands–resources, organizational justice, and self-determination to elucidate links among key constructs. These organizational drivers align with the Job Demands–Resources model [7]. In educational settings, system-level workload and time demands, administrative demands and bureaucracy, leadership and organizational culture, role conflict and autonomy emerge as core indicators of burnout risk. Theory predicts that heightened job demands elevate the likelihood of burnout and corresponding disengagement from work and intention to leave the profession [5]. Consequently, these organizational factors warrant attention as root causes of teacher burnout. Leadership and organizational culture constitute a primary driver of teacher wellbeing because both directly influence crucial organizational processes and shape teachers' perceptions of school demands [4]. Effective leadership is foundational to establishing supportive school environments, sustaining teachers' commitment, and reinforcing teachers' belief that they can achieve desired educational outcomes. Leadership practice directly affects organizational culture [3], which encompasses shared values and norms influencing personnel behavior and can enhance wellbeing and mitigate burnout in educational workplaces. Leadership and culture exert substantial influence on teachers' day-to-day experiences and sustain the wellbeing of remaining teachers after turnover, thereby shaping overall workforce stability [2]. Leadership and culture comprise secondary aspects of the broader organizational structure and processes driver; nevertheless, the widespread acknowledgment of teacher leadership as a distinct facet of school leadership warrants discrete consideration [3]. Teacher autonomy and involvement in school decision-making aligned with professional norms and collective interests foster workplace wellbeing, efficacy, and retention by enhancing agency and social support. Conversely, limited participation in decisions impacting practice, coupled with excessive and inflexible demands especially toward the end of contracts harms morale, wellbeing, and retention [2].

Role Conflict and Autonomy

Organizational drivers of burnout include role conflict and autonomy, with indicators from role clarity, decision-making scope, and values alignment. Role conflict arises from managing multiple, incompatible demands [6]. Teachers must balance competing priorities such as classroom instruction, student discipline, family engagement, and compliance with directives [5]. Role clarity stipulates the explicitness of these demands, while the

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specifications of dispensing authority denote autonomy [5]. Autonomy signifies the discretion to make professional decisions [7]. Decision-making scope encompasses choices about curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and student grouping. Values alignment, the degree to which teaching activities resonate with personal and professional convictions, further shapes the teacher experience. Strong alignment promotes satisfaction, meaning, and motivation and fosters a professional identity, while misalignment generates tension, switching costs, disengagement, and ultimately burnout [8]. Teachers' professional values frame their expectations for decision-making latitude; their education typically emphasizes criteria such as student engagement, growth, and learning. Activities perceived as mandatory due solely to institutional purpose render the teaching role transient rather than an end in itself [9]. The absence of opportunities for valued activities constricts teachers' operational space, undermining feelings of self-initiated agency and custodianship, and elevating strain [10].

Protective Factors for Wellbeing

Organizational context shapes teacher wellbeing and burnout through interplay of drivers and protective factors [2]. Burnout is a chronic response to emotional stress, characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and diminished personal accomplishment. Wellbeing comprises positive emotions, engagement, and coping with demands. Organizationally driven exposure to adverse factors influences both burnout and wellbeing; hence, analysis of supportive factors can be synthesized to discern a protective constellation [3]. Driver-protective distinctions align with the Job Demands-Resources (JDR) model of wellbeing. In this framework, exposure to demand dimensions depletes reserves and enhances stress [4]. The proposed associated indicators for schools include workload, administrative burden, leadership culture, and role clarity. Under the JDR paradigm, resilience and wellbeing are enhanced via access to supportive resources, promoting coping and engagement. Analysis reveals four widely cited resource dimensions linked to teacher resilience and agency: availability of teaching materials and supportive leadership, professional development focused on pedagogy, opportunities for teamwork and mentorship, and work-design practices that alleviate excess burdens [8]. Availability of resources and supportive leadership mitigate strain, particularly under technocratic pressures. Governmental policies push for standardized testing, while centralized systems impose extensive reporting requirements that erode discretion and violate professional norms. Longitudinal analyses show that the presence of adequate teaching resources, including materials, staffing, and training—retains resilience through high-demand periods. Supportive leadership correlates positively with wellbeing, promoting engagement through five key practices: valuing faculty input, encouraging risk-taking, assisting with student behavior, and providing feedback for professional growth [9].

Resource Availability and Supportive Leadership

Teachers in high-stress environments express increased dissatisfaction. Various factors contribute to administrative support: visible and approachable management, shared responsibility, ample professional development, and tailored resources especially vital in high-stakes situations [12]. Teaching involves an array of responsibilities, including instructional planning, assessment design, and student attendance; the intensity and quantity of these tasks shape burnout risk. Intensified duties are accompanied by the burden of seeking alternative employment [13]. Work-related strain is notably pronounced in education. Insufficient control over substantial workloads is linked to heightened stress levels [14]. Inadequate planning allowance during the school day impedes timely execution, contributing to overflow beyond scheduled hours and diminishing personal time. Inadequate dissemination of roles, coupled with overt commitment to many initiatives, further compounds this challenge [9].

Professional Collaboration and Community

Teachers who collaborate with colleagues report lower levels of stress and greater resilience to job-related challenges [10]. Professional collaboration is defined as teachers working together with a common focus on students, exchanging information about students or teaching practices, and utilising collegial expertise to improve their own teaching [11]. Collaboration can take various forms, including working in teams that share students, collaborating outside the classroom, discussing pedagogy with colleagues assigned to different subjects, and participating in mentoring or coaching. Communities of practice can also support reflection on practice, assist with difficult problems, and enhance teacher commitment to the profession. These opportunities are often formalised into an organisational framework, such as professional learning communities, curriculum development, or school improvement teams [9]. Shared ownership of student learning and student-oriented approaches to practice are associated with greater resilience to job-related challenges, while a focus on pedagogy per se is not. Increased collaboration related to student learning also enhances teachers' professional commitment. Consequently, professional community that emphasises a common focus on teaching and student learning mitigates stress and enhances resilience [8]. This finding holds regardless of the specific form of collaboration, whether it occurs within a formal framework or outside the classroom, whether the focus is on pedagogy or subject matter, and

whether the actor is a mentee or mentor [7]. Rather than formal structures, the crucial feature is the joint responsibility for student learning and the sharing of pedagogical approaches [6].

Autonomy, Meaning, and Professional Mastery

Teaching acts as a principal worker role in school systems around the world. Schools are expected to promote student cognitive, social, and emotional development [11]. Teacher responsibilities include working with students before, during, and after class. Work to fulfil expectations inevitably emerges and increases the pressure to meet demands, often leading to prolonged working hours [12]. Work engagement has emerged as a new perspective on teachers' work role. Some teachers lose commitment to students and work in schools and seek early retirement if possible. Many do not consider returning to education after changing occupations. Autonomy can be defined as discretion in job tasks, decisions, behaviours, and schedules [13]. Teachers may engage in work roles that have little professional meaning, do not fulfil their vision, and focus on following prescribed practice. During the early pandemic, some teacher candidates reported that they had no engagement with or personal meaning from teaching. Mastery works can be defined as professional growth opportunities to develop knowledge, pedagogical skills, teaching processes, and professional thinking [14]. Teachers face a range of learning difficulties when entering classrooms and aspire to master general pedagogical knowledge, subject-specific pedagogy, classroom management, teaching evaluation, and curriculum development. Some individuals treat teachers as low-level employees rather than knowledgeable professionals [15].

Policy and Structural Supports

Implementing structural support policies demonstrates formal commitment to teacher wellbeing: clearly articulated Human Resources policies, overall workload limits, and adequate provisions for paid and unpaid leave establish realistic expectations for teachers and increase accountability for their wellbeing [9]. A significant workload apportioned to tasks other than teaching or subject preparation raises burnout risk, while specific restrictions on the overall workload limit the number of hours devoted to administrative work, marking a critical precondition for a sustainable work-life balance [10]. Training stipulating the conditions under which sabbaticals or unpaid leave are granted and regular organisational audits prioritise teacher wellbeing and signal a commitment to scrutiny [12].

Measurement and Evaluation

Measurement of teacher wellbeing and burnout requires precise identification of indicators, appropriate selection of assessment instruments, and establishment of practical, policy-relevant monitoring protocols [10]. Proposals are accordingly outlined below, focusing on instruments suited to the prevailing theoretical frameworks and facilitating evaluation of the broader organizational context, implemented interventions, and progress over time [2]. Two content aggregations are especially pertinent [17]. The first comprises widely adopted teacher-reported scales measuring prevalent burnout, general engagement, and specific job satisfaction. The second encompasses indicators reflecting retention risk and simulated engagement trajectories [16]. These aggregations permit prediction of similar aggregated outcomes based on established model-based processes, thus directly relating wellbeing to educational quality and policy attention [15]. Evaluation of implemented measures necessitates identification of intervention types, implementation status, and policy intention. Candidate measures correspond neatly to the main documented interventions. Each measure manifests an input-process-output routine, permitting description of ongoing preparation or prospective action, while the practice history at larger temporal scales remains relevant to eventual guidance and support for prospective implementation [14].

Metrics of Wellbeing and Burnout

Organizational context shapes teacher wellbeing and burnout in systematic ways. Recent insights guide the discussion toward concrete causal pathways, encouraging targeted investigation and action [1]. Wellbeing encompasses personal fulfilment and the ability to flourish. Burnout reflects an erosion of pedagogical accomplishment and emotional engagement with students. Such complementary endpoints facilitate measurement and comparison [2]. The Job Demands-Resources model describes reciprocal influence between demands and resources, and specifies positive effects of wellbeing and engagement on educational quality [3]. Organizational justice and support for wellbeing may enhance job resources, while high workload can increase demands [2]. Stress and strain emerge from misalignment with professional norms and values, while organizational culture conveys shared beliefs between leadership and teaching staff that influence every aspect of work [8].

Intervention Evaluation Methods

Intervention evaluation relies on well-established experimental and quasiexperimental designs alongside emerging realist approaches, variably nested within a broad evaluative framework [1]. Experimental designs encompass randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and, in indirectly treated interventions, the Randomized Encouragement Design (RED) [5]. RCTs balance groups on observed and, under certain conditions, unobserved characteristics,

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controlling confounding bias; REDs introduce randomization to receipt of encouragement or nonadoption and support concurrent analysis of treated and untreated units [4]. Quasi-experimental techniques comprise regression discontinuity, difference-in-differences, synthetic control, interrupted time series, and coarsened exact matching [8]. Large intervention datasets exploring a contrasting framework [14] indicate that evaluation designs must match a broader spectrum of criteria to capture nuanced complexity across intricate educational ecosystems. Multiple established approaches harness these criteria under diverse measurement regimes applied by health and education researchers and span varying contextual interpretations and theoretical constructs [7]. The Requirements-Functions-Change Interrelationship model (RFCI) and the survey-based Hierarchy of Actions, Interactions, and Outcomes typify two such suites, both extending beyond conventional evaluation indicators toward a refined articulation of systemic affordance [6]. Intervention studies addressing teacher wellbeing among academic personnel resonate with systems-informed consideration throughout this document. Limited high-quality evidence, substantial intervention heterogeneity, challenge impact predictions, and high-level implications remain accordingly [6]. Organizational interventions nevertheless warrant examination within research contexts anchored to established frameworks, such as the MRC Complex Interventions Framework and deployment condensed into cluster-randomized controlled trial designs [4].

Implications for Practice

Organizational context shapes teacher wellbeing and burnout systematically and at scale, yet these realities receive scant attention in educational governance and policy reform [4]. Evidence confirms the need for system-level action on the organizational drivers of teacher wellbeing and burnout, and theory clarifies how those drivers operate [5]. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework offers a compelling, parsimonious model of the determinants of employee wellbeing broadly. For teachers, the sources of demand drivers and resource provision are mostly organizational in nature, and the JD-R model identifies workload, administrative burden, leadership, and role clarity as key demand drivers while highlighting resource availability, professional collaboration, and autonomy as the most important protective factors [6]. Organizational culture and leadership frameworks also illuminate critical aspects of the teacher experience. These analyses point to the pervasive role of micropolitics in educational settings [7]. Within the JD-R framework, leadership quality and organizational culture potentially influence demand drivers, perceptions of demands, and the availability of resources, while the micropolitics approach focuses solely on the interactions among different employees and ignores any systemic sense of the organization [8].

Policy Implications

Organizational context matters. Teacher wellbeing and burnout cannot be fully understood without reference to school and system conditions [11]. Evidence demonstrates that drivers of workload, administrative demands, school culture, role clarity, greater support and related factors influence teachers' experience of work stress and fulfilment [4]. Core arguments, definitions and scholarly stakes are outlined in the preceding sections [12]. Teacher wellbeing encompasses health, engagement, job satisfaction, motivation and other positive dimensions of educational work; burnout denotes exhaustion, cynicism, disengagement and other negative aspects of work experience [15]. While wellbeing and burnout are two distinct constructs, it is useful to track both: high levels of wellbeing signal low levels of burnout, and vice versa. To provide a basis for measurement, then, wellbeing is defined as energy, motivation and satisfaction in the role, and burnout as emotional exhaustion, cynicism and reduced competence. Specifying all three obtainments thus yields a more nuanced understanding of how organisational context shapes teacher experience, and highlights the importance of collecting relevant data at school and system levels [11].

Future Research Directions

Teacher wellbeing emerges as a pressing concern, amplified by growing recognition of its influence on teaching quality and student learning [12]. In this light, further inquiry into the configuration of organizational context, particularly focal drivers of wellbeing and burnout, would contribute significantly to scholarly and applied knowledge on educational staff support. Additional theoretical ties to models characterizing organizational culture and leadership warrant investigation, particularly regarding potential links to teachers' stress and resilience. Empirical study could further clarify how job demands and resources shape educational professionals' wellbeing and burnout in various contexts [13]. Expanding the exploration of policy and structural supports would enhance understanding of how these elements mitigate strain and bolster engagement, while accounting for the underpinning frameworks guiding the analysis [14]. Attention to early career teachers could yield insights into their distinctive, evolving challenges, linking initial preparation to subsequent development needs and institutional engagement [15]. Theoretical development could map construct and outcome connections articulated in the Job Demands-Resources model onto educational settings, potentially generating valuable empirical investigation [16]. Systematic elaboration of the interplay between workload, time, effectiveness, support, belonging, and the

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broader teaching ecosystem would provide an additional avenue for research on this high-stakes theme [17]. Targeted study of the sustainability of proposed mechanisms amidst contemporary teaching conditions would refine prediction of wellbeing trajectories, while examination of organizational justice and its experiential implications for educational professionals would complement and deepen existing knowledge [18, 19].

CONCLUSION

Teacher wellbeing and burnout are profoundly shaped by organizational conditions within educational systems. The evidence demonstrates that excessive workload, administrative complexity, unsupportive leadership, and role ambiguity are key drivers of burnout, contributing to emotional exhaustion, reduced professional efficacy, and increased attrition. These challenges are not isolated but are embedded within broader institutional and policy frameworks that define teachers' daily experiences. At the same time, the presence of strong protective factors can significantly mitigate these risks. Supportive and responsive leadership, access to adequate teaching resources, opportunities for meaningful collaboration, and enhanced professional autonomy play a crucial role in fostering resilience and sustaining teacher engagement. These factors not only improve individual wellbeing but also contribute to a more stable and effective educational workforce. The Job Demands–Resources framework provides a valuable lens for understanding this dynamic interplay, highlighting the need to balance high job demands with sufficient organizational support. Importantly, interventions aimed at improving teacher wellbeing must move beyond individual-level coping strategies and instead focus on systemic reforms. Policies that regulate workload, reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, strengthen school leadership, and promote collaborative professional cultures are essential. In conclusion, addressing teacher wellbeing and burnout requires a comprehensive, organization-wide approach that prioritizes sustainable working conditions and professional fulfilment. By aligning institutional structures with the needs of teachers, education systems can enhance teacher retention, improve instructional quality, and ultimately achieve better educational outcomes.

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