The Impact of Teacher Well-Being, Joy, and Effectiveness On Student Outcomes and Sustainable Education

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Abstract

This literature review investigates the interrelated concepts of teacher well-being, joy, and effectiveness, focusing on the conditions that contribute to sustainable and fulfilling professional lives for educators. Specifically, it addresses the problem of teacher burnout and explores the psychological and institutional factors that support or hinder teacher flourishing. The guiding question examines how teacher well-being can be supported to enhance both educator effectiveness and student outcomes. Key findings from recent studies highlight that higher teacher well-being contributes to more stable school functioning, while lower well-being is linked to absenteeism, reduced instructional quality, and burnout (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Teachers' self-efficacy has been found to positively predict students' mental health (Pap et al., 2023), and teacher well-being within the school context is associated with students' life satisfaction via school-specific well-being (Zhan et al., 2024). This review synthesizes findings across disciplines and proposes that teacher well-being is not only vital for professional sustainability but also for fostering positive developmental outcomes in students. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of school administrators' supportive behaviors as a critical factor in promoting teacher job satisfaction and subjective well-being.

Keywords: teacher well-being, teacher effectiveness, happy/productive teacher hypothesis, job satisfaction, student achievement

The Impact of Teacher Well-Being, Joy, and Effectiveness

On Student Outcomes and Sustainable Education

This review includes extensive research into the interconnected roles of teacher well-being, teacher effectiveness, and joy in fostering positive learning environments for children. Dr. Bettina Love, who has been instrumental in establishing abolitionist teaching in schools, writes:

> Abolitionist teaching is about… new ways to reach children trying to recover from the educational survival complex, new ways to show dark children they are loved in this world, and new ways to establish an educational system that works for everyone, especially those who are put at the edges of the classroom and society (Love, pp. 88-89).

She then continues, "Some [teachers] will leave the profession mentally, physically, and spiritually depleted, looking for a way to make an impact on education outside the classroom, BUT ALL are working to restore humanity with their eyes on abolishing the educational system as we know it" (Love, p. 90).

The current education system rooted in a survival-based model requires and even demands that teachers serve as both change-makers and nurturers in their classrooms while dealing with the financial burdens, lack of resources, and emotional strain that come with the profession. Thus, this research will explore ways and tools in which teachers can sustain their passion and well-being in the face of these challenges.

However, this is not to say these systematic issues should not be addressed. Fighting these systematically ingrained issues tends to take the joy out of the teaching profession since teachers often feel overwhelmed and disconnected from the very purpose that brought them to the profession—making a change—while doing so. I also recognize that teacher well-being is not

just an individual responsibility but a collective one. Therefore, I'll explore sustainable ways to support our teachers' happiness and well-being.

Context

In terms of my personal connection or context with this specific topic, the Mongolian education system has been facing a teacher shortage for a while now, and fewer and fewer students are choosing to become teaching professionals each year. In a recent survey, the teaching profession has become increasingly unattractive due to low salaries, a lack of resources, and challenging working conditions (Ministry of Education of Mongolia). Many teachers report feeling undervalued and overburdened with large class sizes. An average Mongolian elementary classroom at a public school in the capital city has more than 40 pupils. As a result, societal attitudes toward teaching as a profession lead high school and college-level students to perceive it as less prestigious, less rewarding, and less healthy. It is challenging for teachers to take care of themselves before tending to the students. If we don't focus on the well-being and happiness of our teachers, this shortage will increase more and more in the future, especially in suburban and rural areas.

Importance

Exploring and implementing sustainable approaches, policies, and tools to keep our teachers happy and healthy, both physically and psychologically, is important as these benefit not only the teachers themselves but also their students and the broader community. For example, global theories of student well-being, such as the Prosocial Classroom Model, emphasize how "teachers' well-being and socio-emotional competence are associated with student well-being through (1) the development of supportive teacher-student relationships, (2)

effective classroom management strategies, and (3) the role model of desired social and emotional behavior that the teacher represents for his/her students" (Pap et al., 2023, p. 812).

Furthermore, Sonja Lyubomirsky, a professor and author whose primary focus is on positive emotions, reminds us that happier people are more likely to make a positive contribution to society (Lyubomirsky, 2005). Thich Nhat Hanh, the author of Happy Teachers Change the World, writes, "Our mission as teachers is not to transmit knowledge, but to form human beings, to construct a worthy, beautiful human race, in order to take care of this precious planet" (2017). The research conducted by Nalipay et al. (2024) provided evidence for the quote said by Thich Nhat Hanh. Their results revealed that teacher satisfaction with the teaching profession was positively associated with student life satisfaction and positive affect, and negatively associated with negative affect. Additionally, teacher satisfaction with the work environment was positively related to student positive affect. If we can teach our children to manage emotional experiences in a healthy way by modeling ourselves, they can flourish into compassionate and thoughtful people who positively contribute to society at large.

Teacher caring starts with teachers who care for themselves and are supported by the education system. Teacher caring may differ for individual students, but according to Demetrulias (1994), "[caring] is defined as not merely liking someone, nor as an isolated feeling of concern. It is viewed as an extension of love—agape—and is central to a desire to help another person grow and actualize" (p. 97). In my opinion, this kind of love is only sustainable in the long term when the teacher is loved and healthy and feels content and passionate.

Moskowitz and Dewaele (2021) found that when students perceived their teachers as happy, not only did they have a more positive attitude toward their teachers, but they felt more positive about the content of the class. Keller (2024) writes, "These individual relationships

multiplied and impact the school climate. Likewise, teachers and students were found to identify similar desires and suggestions in how to best create a peaceful and happy school. The wellness of teachers impacts students and vice versa" (p. 17).

Purpose

My purpose in this project is to learn about sustainable ways to stay true to my passion and keep igniting my love for teaching even amid the most challenging times. This is an examination of the research on happy teachers and sustainable ways to keep the passion and well-being flourishing in the teaching profession so that we can better support our community and help our children thrive.

Focal Questions

The paper considers these three questions:

- How do structural conditions in schools contribute to teacher burnout and attrition?
- What kinds of supports sustain teacher well-being and effectiveness?
- Do teacher preparation programs equip educators with the psychological tools for sustained effectiveness?

Review of Literature

This review includes extensive research into the interconnected roles of teacher well-being, teacher effectiveness, and joy in fostering positive learning environments for children. Hanh (2017) writes, "All of us want to help young people to be capable of being happy and of making those around them happy. Our mission as teachers is not just to transmit knowledge, but to form human beings, to construct a worthy, beautiful human race, in order to take care of our precious planet" (p. xvii). It is important in the teaching profession to nurture the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of students, but this cannot be achieved without addressing the

well-being and effectiveness of teachers. Teaching is already emotionally demanding; however, our current education system, based on a survival complex that prioritizes endurance over well-being and compliance over creativity, leaves "some [teachers] mentally, physically, and spiritually depleted, looking for a way to make an impact on education outside the classroom, but all are working to restore humanity with their eyes on abolishing the educational system as we know it" (Love, p. 90). Therefore, it's important to discuss how prioritizing teacher well-being is not just an individual responsibility but a systemic necessity. In this section, I examine the research through three identified themes: (a) students mirror their teachers' well-being, (b) predictors of teacher effectiveness, and (c) school administrators' behaviors as predictors of teachers' well-being.

Students Mirror Their Teachers' Well-Being

In this section, I examine research that explores how students' well-being correlates with that of their teachers. Well-being is broadly defined as how people feel and function both on a personal and social level and how they evaluate their lives as a whole (Jarden & Roache, 2023). Diener (1984) described well-being through self-acceptance, environmental mastery, autonomy, positive relations with others, personal growth, and purpose in life, which can be integrated into three facets: emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Hascher & Waber, 2021). For teachers, well-being is influenced by both internal and external factors, including their sense of workplace autonomy, relationships with students, colleagues, administration and parents, job satisfaction, close relationships with friends and family, perceived workload, emotional labor, stress management, lifestyle, self-esteem, and more (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Gray et al. (2017) conceptualized teacher well-being as a multifaceted mental health construct whose importance was related to school climate, inclusion, and student outcomes.

Hascher and Waber (2021) conducted a systematic review to examine the theoretical background of 98 teacher well-being (TWB) studies and identified five different research fields related to TWB: (1) well-being psychology, (2) positive psychology, (3) psychology of work and organization, (4) teacher well-being with an emphasis on working conditions, and (5) health research which relies on well-being as a part of mental health. One of the interesting findings was that several studies confirmed the negative correlation between aversive work conditions (e.g., job insecurity or role conflict) and TWB; however, small effects were found for individual-related mediator/moderator variables, such as basic need satisfaction, work motivation, and emotion regulation (Hascher & Waber, 2021).

This may suggest that the term well-being should not have a sole focus on positive components that overestimate an individual's positive experiences and overlook how teachers may be concurrently experiencing negative emotions while reporting experiences of positive affect and satisfaction. Therefore, Hascher and Waber (2021) suggested defining TWB as a positive imbalance in which it is not the mere absence of health issues, stress, and burnout symptoms but rather a state in which positive emotions, job satisfaction, and a sense of fulfillment outweigh the challenges and demands of the profession.

However, with the pressure of managing these demands, the teaching profession has seen increasing rates of burnout, attrition (especially among teachers leaving within the first five years), and decreased job satisfaction (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Madigan and Kim (2021) conducted random-effects meta-analyses and reviewed 59 articles measuring burnout, job satisfaction, and teachers' intentions to quit. Attrition is a problem in almost all occupations, but they suggest that teachers may be extreme outliers, leaving the profession at alarming rates compared to other occupations.

To explain this phenomenon, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) remind us that teacher turnover can contribute to labor market imbalances and that teachers in schools with more students from low-income families or students of color are more likely to shift between schools, which can exacerbate hiring difficulties and undermine school improvement efforts. These researchers used a logistical regression model to examine the relationship between teacher turnover and a series of school characteristics, main teaching subjects, and workplace conditions. They drew from survey data administered by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey, and Teacher Follow-up Survey. Their results suggest that predictors of teacher turnover related to teacher characteristics could be teachers' preparation pathway and that those who entered the profession through an alternative certification program were 25% more likely to leave their schools than were full-time teachers who entered through a regular certification program.

Building on these findings, Madigan and Kim (2021) aimed to provide a meta-analytic examination of whether burnout or job satisfaction is more important in predicting teachers' intentions to quit. Teacher burnout is defined in the article as experiences of interpersonal conflict and tiredness both inside and outside of the classroom, while job dissatisfaction is likely to have teachers lacking motivation, deriving less enjoyment, and can result in possible withdrawal from the classroom (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Their findings ultimately suggest that burnout and job satisfaction are highly important in predicting teachers' intentions to quit, which can also be seen in viral resignation letters of teachers (Dunn et al., 2021).

Dunn et al. (2021) analyzed eight teachers' public resignation letters and conducted semi-structured interviews. The interview questions focused on the challenges of the teaching profession, thought processes behind a public resignation, reactions on social media, and life

after leaving teaching. It was found that teachers' experiences in an era of neoliberalism, an economic ideology that favors privatization, competitiveness, and deregulation, could possibly explain teacher attrition. But what happens when teachers decide to stay even when they feel dissatisfied with the profession?

Moskowitz and Dewaele (2021) found that when students perceived their teachers as satisfied and happy at their workplace, not only did they have a more positive attitude toward their teachers, but they felt more positive about the content of the class. They collected data from 129 adult students of ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) enrolled in formal English classes of intermediate to advanced level proficiency. When the participants were asked about their attitudes towards learning English and their perception of their teachers' happiness, it was found student perception of teacher happiness was significantly and positively related to students' overall attitude and motivation toward learning English, as well as students' attitude towards the teacher. Similarly, Keller (2024) reports that these individual student-teacher relationships multiply and impact the school climate and that the wellness of teachers impacts students and vice versa.

The Prosocial Classroom model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) emphasizes the importance of teachers' occupational health and well-being in explaining and maintaining students' well-being (Pap et al., 2023). According to this model, in order to create a classroom environment that is conducive to learning and promotes positive developmental outcomes among students, teachers' social and emotional competence, their well-being, and effective classroom management are important. In other words, emotionally well teachers are better equipped to support their students, maintain positive student-teacher relationships, and provide effective and positive learning environments.

Jennings and Greenberg (2009) mentioned that socially and emotionally competent teachers set the tone of the classroom by developing supportive and encouraging relationships with their students. On the other hand, when teachers do not possess the resources to effectively manage the social and emotional challenges within the particular context of their school and classroom, children show lower levels of on-task behavior and performance. This might be because emotionally exhausted teachers are at risk of experiencing difficulties in maintaining healthy engagement with students and providing the necessary emotional support that fosters student learning and well-being.

This then provokes a "burnout cascade" that may have severe effects on classroom relationships, management, and climate. If that is the case, what do socially and emotionally competent teachers embody? According to Jennings and Greenberg (2009), who reviewed select studies, socially and emotionally competent teachers have high self- and social awareness. It means these teachers know how their emotional expressions affect their interactions with others, especially with children. These teachers know how to manage their emotions and their behaviors and regulate their emotions in healthy ways that facilitate positive classroom outcomes without compromising their health. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) mention that when teachers experience mastery over these social and emotional challenges, teaching brings more fulfillment and job satisfaction, and teachers feel more efficacious in their classrooms.

Because teachers are constantly exposed to emotionally provocative situations and high demands, emotional labor is required to cope with stress and regulate negative emotions. For instance, teachers' emotional negativity is often associated with student misbehaviors (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), and teachers who are not able to cope with stress very well might express a lack of enthusiasm for cultivating positive relationships with their students. This, in turn, affects

not only the teachers' well-being but also their effectiveness in the classroom. Now, if teacher well-being is so closely tied to student outcomes and classroom climate, what does it mean to be an effective teacher? In the next paragraphs, I will explore the qualities that contribute to teacher effectiveness, drawing from research on pedagogy and life satisfaction.

Predictors of Teacher Effectiveness

In this section, I look at research that examines predictors of teacher effectiveness. Yang et al. (2018) investigated the "happy/productive teacher" hypothesis that suggests teachers who experience a high level of happiness and well-being in their work are more likely to be productive and effective in their teaching, and as a result, these teachers tend to have lower turnover intention. The researchers mailed questionnaires and received responses from 272 kindergarten teachers in Taiwan. The segments included in the questionnaire were related to kindergarten teachers' role stress (the tension that teachers feel when they cannot meet their role expectations), subjective well-being, and turnover intention.

They hypothesized (1) that a kindergarten teacher's role stress is positively related to turnover intention, (2) that subjective well-being is a mediator between role stress and turnover intention, and (3) that a kindergarten teacher's subjective well-being is negatively correlated with turnover intention. The results showed that role stress has a positive indirect effect on turnover intention, and the happy/productive teacher hypothesis was supported by the fact that subjective well-being has a negative effect on turnover. The researchers encouraged early childhood education (ECE) teachers to engage in intentional activities such as expressing gratitude, practicing acts of kindness, and savoring life's joys, which are expected to enhance ECE teachers' subjective well-being and thus effectively decrease their turnover intention.

Similarly, Kyriakides et al. (2013) analyzed 167 studies exploring factors of effective teaching and its impact on student achievement. The researchers were curious as to which specific factors, behaviors, and strategies contribute to effective teaching that promotes student learning. The authors used the dynamic model of educational effectiveness as their guiding framework, which examines eight teacher behaviors (orientation, structuring, questioning, teaching modeling, application, the classroom as a learning environment, management of time, and assessment) in the classroom that have the potential to promote student learning. In the studies that the authors selected, the eight teaching factors were included in some and not included in others. Thus, the authors added five more factors.

The authors selected studies conducted and published from 1980 to 2010; the selected studies should include explicit and valid measures of student achievement (e.g., cognitive, affective, or psychomotor outcomes of schooling); and, last but not least, the studies should include measures of specific teaching factors and the methods to measure each factor.

The results or findings of this article can be organized into two parts: (a) validation of the dynamic model of educational effectiveness and (b) moderating effects. The factors included in the dynamic model had a moderate association with student learning outcomes, while the factors not included in the model had a weaker association with student outcomes. The authors also mention that the meta-analysis showed factors related to direct instruction (e.g., management of time, structuring) and constructivism (e.g., orientation, modeling) to both contribute to student outcomes. This requires educators to pursue an integrated approach, incorporating factors from both direct and constructivist instructional perspectives. Thirdly, the authors found that self-regulation might be a natural extension of the dynamic model because this factor helps students apply approaches learned in class and gradually become independent learners.

The above articles suggest that internal and external factors influence teacher effectiveness, including subjective well-being, job satisfaction, and instructional strategies. However, the question of whether student achievement is always dependent on teacher effectiveness is worth looking into. Stronge et al. (2011) conducted a two-phased study examining effective versus less effective teachers' classroom practices based on student achievement scores in reading and mathematics. In the first phase of the study, the researchers used hierarchical linear modeling on 307 fifth-grade teachers, which was used to estimate the growth of all students and examine the relationship between teacher effectiveness and student achievement gains (two years of student test scores in reading and math in three public school districts in a state located in the southeastern United States). In other words, phase 1 focused on answering the question: To what degree do teachers have a positive, measurable effect on student achievement? The second phase of the study focused on a cross-case analysis of selected 17 top- and 15 bottom-quartile teachers from Phase 1 to answer the following question: How do teaching practices differ between effective and less effective teachers?

To illustrate the differences between the high- and low-performing teacher groups), the researchers provided a representation of 15 teacher effectiveness dimensions. The results of the study show that the differences in student achievement in mathematics and reading for effective teachers and less effective teachers were more than 30 percentile points.

Next, two dimensions related to personal qualities (e.g., fairness) showed a significant difference between effective and less effective teachers. For example, top-quartile teachers scored higher in fairness, respect, and having positive relationships with students. The researchers also found that top-quartile teachers had fewer classroom disruptions, better classroom management skills, and better relationships with their students compared to the

bottom-quartile teachers. However, the authors mention that differences in personalities and dispositions of students can explain the differences found among the teachers. However, they also mention that students cannot be wholly responsible for the differences; therefore, teacher effectiveness could vary from classroom to classroom.

These findings suggest that while instructional strategies and classroom management skills contribute to teacher effectiveness, personal attributes and psychological characteristics also play a significant role. Stronge et al. (2011) demonstrated that effective teachers not only foster higher student achievement but also cultivate stronger relationships with students through fairness, respect, and classroom management. However, effectiveness is not solely a function of pedagogical methods—it is also influenced by teachers' internal dispositions and beliefs. Building on this idea, Bardach et al. (2021) conducted an integrative review and examined how teachers' psychological characteristics play for teacher effectiveness. Specifically, the authors explored the relationship between teachers' psychological characteristics (e.g., motivation and personality) and teacher outcomes, such as teacher effectiveness, teachers' well-being, retention, and interpersonal relations with students, parents, principals, and colleagues.

The authors reviewed and analyzed 24 articles across three databases using 10 criteria, such as the article's focus, sample, aim, research design of synthesized studies, and more. The results of the study include eight identified psychological characteristics of teachers, which are: self-efficacy, causal attributions, expectations, personality, enthusiasm, emotional intelligence, emotional labor, and mindfulness. Furthermore, the researchers summarized and discussed the findings separately for each psychological characteristic.

First of all, among the characteristics, self-efficacy was found to be the most commonly synthesized motivational factor. Per Bandura's (1997) definition, self-efficacy for teachers is

defined as an individual's belief in their capabilities to perform specific teaching tasks at a specified level of quality in a specified situation (Bardach et al., 2021, p. 278). Across many studies, it was found that teachers with high self-efficacy (on three dimensions: instructional practices, classroom management, and student engagement) tend to have better teacher outcomes, such as well-being and interpersonal relations. They also observed that teachers' expectations and causal attributions are important, with effort-based attributions being more beneficial for the students' improvement.

To explore the role of self-efficacy as a positive predictor of teacher effectiveness, Eghtesadi and Jeddi (2018) investigated the effect of 100 Iranian English language teachers' critical thinking and self-efficacy beliefs on their teacher effectiveness as evaluated by their 600 students and which quality is a better predictor of teachers' pedagogical success from their student's point of view. Since critical thinking and self-efficacy have been widely recognized in the recent literature on teacher education, the authors decided to explore the relationship between the teachers' critical thinking abilities, their self-efficacy, and their pedagogical success as evaluated by their students to find out which of these two can better predict teachers' pedagogical success.

To investigate teachers' critical thinking, the authors employed a Persian version of the "Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal Form (1980)," which includes 80 items and five subsets. To evaluate self-efficacy, the researchers utilized the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), which included 24 items assessed along a 9-point Likert scale measuring three components of teachers' self-efficacy: efficacy for instructional strategies, classroom management, and students' engagement. They also

administered the Characteristics of Successful Iranian EFL Teachers Questionnaire designed by Moafian and Pishghadam (2009) to the students.

They found that although teachers' self-efficacy and critical thinking are both significantly correlated with their pedagogical success, only self-efficacy is shown to be the significant and better predictor of teachers' pedagogical success. Specifically, among the components of self-efficacy, efficacy for instructional strategies is shown to be the best predictor from the point of view of the students.

It is also interesting to examine changes in teacher efficacy during the early years of teaching. Hoy et al. (2005) explored changes in teacher efficacy from entry into a teacher preparation program through the induction year. They also tried to investigate the factors in the first years of teaching that might be related to changes in efficacy.

This study is a longitudinal exploration that assessed the efficacy of 53 prospective and novice teachers who were members of the 1997-1998 elementary education Master's of Education cohort. The researchers used multiple quantitative assessments of efficacy, such as Gibson and Dembo's Teacher Efficacy Scale, Bandura's assessment of Instructional Efficacy, and a program-specific measure of efficacy. Three phases of data collection were conducted: (a) during the first quarter of teacher preparation and before most course work had been completed; (b) at the end of the preparation program; and (c) at the end of the first year of actual teaching.

The findings inform that general teaching efficacy rose during student teaching; however, it fell in the first year of actual teaching. According to the authors, the reason for this is that prospective teachers, in the study, were in a year-long internship, meaning their immersion into teaching was gradual until they assumed responsibility for their own class the following year. In other words, when the support was withdrawn, teacher efficacy fell.

It was also found that prospective and novice teachers often underestimate the complexity of the teaching task and their ability to manage many agendas at the same time. So, this study is important to my research question as it provides evidence for how other factors that are not controlled by the teacher aid teacher performance. This illustrates the need to map relationships between specific school characteristics/support and teachers' sense of efficacy.

In another study on early-career teacher effectiveness and attrition, Henry et al. (2011) explored the development of teachers' effectiveness during their first five years of teaching and contrasted the effectiveness of teachers who stayed after five years with those who left. The study used data from North Carolina Public School teachers in their first five years of teaching who have been linked to their students' data. Then, the authors implemented a value-added modeling approach with hierarchical linear models.

Findings show that the effectiveness of teachers who stay at least five years flattens after a third year of teaching; teachers who left after one year were less effective than teachers who persisted beyond their first year of teaching; teachers who stay for at least five years are significantly more effective in their third and fourth years than teachers who depart after each of these years.

This brings the question of how much teacher certification can tell us about teacher effectiveness. Elaborating on this point, Kane et al. (2008) explored whether teacher certification/qualification makes a difference in student academic achievement. Federal and state governments have measured and regulated teacher quality with ex-ante (before) certification requirements. Therefore, it is important to study whether teacher effectiveness greatly differs between certified, uncertified, internationally hired, and alternatively certified teachers.

The researchers used six years of panel data on students and teachers to evaluate the teacher performance of newly hired teachers in the New York City public schools. To measure teacher effectiveness, they considered math and reading test scores, class-level variables (e.g., class size), and school-level variables (e.g., average class size in the school). Alternative teacher certification in NYC includes the New York City Teaching Fellows Program, the Peace Core Fellows Program, and Teaching Opportunity Program Scholars.

The researchers found little difference in the average academic achievement impacts of certified, uncertified, and alternatively certified teachers. It suggests that districts should use performance on the job rather than initial certification status to improve teacher effectiveness. But how do they actually measure teacher effectiveness?

Sandilos et al. (2019) analyzed convergent and predictive validity of widely used measures of effective teaching practices across elementary and middle school grades and content areas (English language arts and mathematics), which were included in the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project funded by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. These measures are the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), the Framework for Teaching (FFT), and the Tripod Student Perceptions Scale.

The study analyzed 234 elementary teachers and 832 secondary teachers who participated in year 2 of the MET project. To measure the convergent validity across the measures, the researchers conducted Pearson correlations in SPSS to find relations between the measures. Furthermore, they conducted regression analyses and a priori power analyses.

The findings show us that convergent validity between the measures was stronger in middle school grades than in elementary grades. Moreover, student ratings should not be used as a source of evaluation for teacher effectiveness, especially in elementary grades as the students

may be not aware of what teacher effectiveness is. But they can offer helpful information for teacher self-reflection.

It was also found that a teacher's instructional quality is viewed as a fixed and stable construct by school administrators, which does not encourage teachers and administrators to incorporate feedback constantly and grow as professionals. Similarly, Slater et al. (2011) investigated the variation in measurements of teacher effectiveness in England. The research was inspired by how differentiating the separate contributions of schools, teachers, classes, peers and pupils themselves needs rich and fully disaggregate data. Based on the data set, they asked if teacher effectiveness would really matter among many other variables that might help the student academically succeed or not.

The researchers used exam results for 7,305 pupils and 740 teachers who taught these children from 1999-2002 at state secondary schools. The schools also provided prior test scores in all three exam subjects, which allowed the researchers to explore the impact of the teacher on pupil progress or value-added.

The findings inform us that any of the few observable teacher characteristics, such as gender, age, experience, and education, play statistically significant roles in explaining teacher effectiveness, other than very low levels of experience showing a negative effect. Furthermore, teachers do matter because it was shown that having a one-standard deviation better teacher raises the test score by 27% of a standard deviation. Interestingly, it was mentioned that the same student bringing the same skills and experiences from their home can systematically score significantly different marks in different subjects given different teacher quality.

To conclude this part of the literature review, Duckworth et al. (2009) conducted a major study on positive predictors of teacher effectiveness. This study investigated the role of positive

psychological traits in predicting teacher effectiveness. Traditional indicators of teacher quality, such as certification and education level, explain little variance in teacher performance, prompting the need to explore alternative predictors. The study focused on three key traits: grit, life satisfaction, and optimistic explanatory style.

The study followed 290 novice teachers from the Teach for America (TFA) program, which usually employs freshly graduated college students with limited formal teaching experience and places them in under-resourced public schools across the United States. At the beginning of the school year, these 290 teachers completed measures assessing grit, life satisfaction, and optimistic explanatory style. And at the end of the year, teacher effectiveness was evaluated based on the academic gains of their students.

In the study, one of the key traits, grit, was defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals, and it has been shown to predict accomplishment in challenging circumstances. Life satisfaction is the cognitive component of subjective well-being, and it reflects contentment with one's current life situation. Duckworth et al. (2009) hypothesized that children may be drawn to and engaged by teachers who are higher in life satisfaction, whose energy and positive attitude can shift the set point of mood for the entire classroom. Finally, an optimistic explanatory style was chosen as a key trait because when confronted with adversity, optimists are less likely to reduce effort, more likely to perceive contingencies between their actions and outcomes, and more likely to maintain a subjective sense of well-being (Duckworth et al., 2009).

The findings suggest that all these three traits independently predicted teacher effectiveness; however, when analyzed together, only grit and life satisfaction remained significant predictors. Teachers with higher grit were 31% more likely to outperform less gritty peers. Teachers with higher life satisfaction were 43% more likely to be effective.

Similar to the previous studies discussed in this literature review, this study also implies that positive traits like grit and life satisfaction should be considered in teacher recruitment and professional development because strategies to support teacher well-being may improve effectiveness and retention. In the next section, I will explore the relationship between school administrators' supportive behaviors and teachers' job satisfaction and subjective well-being.

School Administrators' Behaviors as Predictors of Teachers' Well-Being

This section focuses on the research on how teacher well-being, effectiveness, and happiness contribute to fostering positive learning environments. An essential factor influencing these elements is the role of school administrators and their supportive behaviors. Ertürk (2021) utilized a correlational survey model and analyzed responses from 289 primary school teachers in Turkey to explore how school administrators' supportive behaviors influence teachers' job satisfaction and subjective well-being. The research employed three scales: the Principal Support Scale, the Teaching Satisfaction Scale, and the Teacher Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire.

They found that there was a strong correlation between emotional support from administrators and teacher well-being. Specifically, principal support significantly predicted teachers' job satisfaction and well-being. The results showed that school administrators' support, especially in the informational dimension, and teachers' job satisfaction have a significant positive correlation. Informational support includes professional feedback and career guidance, and it had a higher correlation with teacher job satisfaction than instrumental support, which refers to workload management and other resources. It suggests that school administrators should actively provide emotional, instrumental, and informational support to enhance teacher retention and well-being.

According to organizational support theory, when an organization contributes to its employees and cares about their well-being, it increases employees' emotional commitment to the organization (Tosun & Bostancı, 2024). In educational settings, Kelly (2024) investigated how perceived administrative support influences teacher burnout. The study aimed to determine whether administrative support could buffer the effects of teacher stress on burnout levels. They developed and tested the validation of the Perceived Administrative Support Scale (PASS) and employed 120 teachers from various school levels to examine teacher burnout and its predictors using the PASS, Teacher Burnout Scale, and Teacher Stress Inventory.

The results show that perceived administrative support did not significantly moderate burnout levels, meaning that while support was present, it was not enough to counteract teachers' high-stress levels, which led to teacher burnout. Furthermore, factors such as school climate, relational trust, and mentorship opportunities were linked to lower burnout rates, but administrative support alone was not a sufficient protective factor. These findings contribute to the broader discussion on teacher retention, stress management, and the need for systemic educational reforms to improve workplace conditions.

Schonfeld (2001) wrote an article on stress in first-year women teachers and the context of social support and coping. They conducted a short-term longitudinal study employing 184 newly appointed women teachers in 2001 and measured special effects for different types of social support. The findings suggest that support from non-work sources was directly related to future improved symptom levels and self-esteem, while supervisor and colleague support was directly related to future job satisfaction.

School administrators play a key role in shaping teachers' experiences at work, from job satisfaction to overall well-being. Research consistently shows that when teachers feel supported,

especially through emotional and informational guidance, they are more likely to stay in the profession and thrive. A principal who actively provides constructive feedback and career guidance and fosters a collaborative school culture can make a real difference in a teacher's day-to-day experience. However, as Kelly (2024) pointed out, administrative support alone isn't always enough to prevent burnout, which suggests that stress in teaching is a much bigger, systemic issue. Workload management, school climate, and mentorship opportunities all factor into whether teachers feel overwhelmed or empowered in their roles.

Summary

This literature review highlights the critical role of teacher well-being, effectiveness, and joy in creating positive learning environments and improving student outcomes. Teachers are not just educators; they are emotional and social pillars for their students. Their well-being directly impacts classroom dynamics, student engagement, and academic success. However, the teaching profession faces significant challenges, including high stress, burnout, and attrition, often worsened by systemic issues like inadequate resources, heavy workloads, and lack of support.

Research shows that teacher well-being is shaped by both internal factors, such as self-efficacy and emotional resilience, and external factors, like supportive school environments and positive relationships with administrators. Higher well-being is linked to greater job satisfaction, lower turnover, and better student outcomes. On the other hand, poor well-being leads to burnout, absenteeism, and reduced effectiveness, which negatively affects schools and students.

School administrators play a crucial role in shaping teachers' experiences. Emotional, informational, and practical support from administrators can significantly boost teachers' job satisfaction and well-being. However, administrative support alone isn't enough to address the deep-rooted stressors in the profession. Improving teacher well-being requires systemic changes,

such as reducing workloads, fostering collaborative school cultures, and providing mentorship opportunities.

The review also emphasizes the strong connection between teacher well-being and effectiveness. Teachers who find joy and fulfillment in their work are more likely to be effective, creating positive and engaging learning environments. Traits like grit, life satisfaction, and emotional intelligence are key predictors of teacher effectiveness and resilience, suggesting these qualities should be prioritized in recruitment and professional development.

In conclusion, supporting teacher well-being is not just an individual responsibility but a systemic necessity. Schools and policymakers must recognize that investing in teachers is investing in students. By addressing the systemic challenges that undermine teacher well-being and effectiveness, we can create sustainable and fulfilling teaching and learning environments. Future research should focus on innovative strategies to enhance teacher well-being, with an emphasis on systemic reforms and the role of school leadership. Ultimately, supporting teachers is essential for the future of education. In the next section, I present an action plan grounded in the research findings outlined above.

Action Plan for Teacher Well-Being and Effectiveness

My research investigates the role of teacher well-being in teacher effectiveness and in promoting positive learning environments and long-term sustainability in K-12 education. Primary themes within my literature review include teacher well-being, predictors of teacher effectiveness, emphasis on the Prosocial Classroom Model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), and the role of school administrators. The action plan tables below outline my recommendations based on these themes.

These themes are reflected in my experience at Evergreen Valley Elementary (a pseudonym), a public K-5 school in a semi-suburban district in Washington State serving approximately 400 students. While the school is staffed by committed educators, ongoing structural challenges undercut their capacity to sustain the work. One commonly cited issue is the overuse of mandatory meetings, many of which are scheduled during planning time or after school, often without a clear connection to instructional needs. These meetings displace essential tasks like lesson planning, assessment, and collaboration, contributing to chronic overload.

Teacher Well-Being and Student Outcomes

Teacher well-being is a foundational component of effective teaching and student success. Research suggests that well-being is not just the absence of stress but the presence of emotional fulfillment, autonomy, and professional satisfaction (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction contribute significantly to burnout, while emotionally supported teachers are more likely to remain in the profession and cultivate better learning environments (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Pap et al., 2023). Table 1 summarizes the findings from my literature review alongside current observations of school practices and targeted recommendations for improving teacher well-being.

Table 1

Teacher Well-Being

What the research says…	What my school does…	What I recommend…
Teacher well-being is a multifaceted construct that includes emotional, psychological, and social dimensions and is deeply influenced by both personal and structural factors (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Gray et al., 2017; Jarden &	Teacher well-being is not systematically addressed at my school. Occasional potlucks, wellness newsletters, or appreciation gestures are offered, but these efforts are often reactive and inconsistent. There is no formal system to	I recommend that the school adopt a proactive and institutional approach to supporting teacher well-being. This includes anonymous quarterly surveys on emotional health and workload concerns, followed by feedback meetings where

Roache, 2023). Well-being should not be defined by the absence of burnout alone, but rather by the presence of joy, job satisfaction, and emotional fulfillment that outweigh professional challenges. When teachers experience persistent stress, especially from job insecurity, emotional labor, or lack of autonomy, they become more vulnerable to burnout and disconnection from their work (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Teacher well-being is not only a personal concern but a critical factor for organizational health, affecting retention, performance, and school climate.	monitor teacher stress levels, and conversations about burnout typically occur only after a crisis or resignation. Staff meetings focus on logistics, not emotional or mental well-being. Emotional labor is expected but rarely acknowledged or supported.	findings are addressed collaboratively. I also recommend integrating well-being into professional development—such as workshops on boundary-setting, emotion regulation, or compassion fatigue—and providing dedicated time during the work week for self-care, collaborative reflection, or peer support circles. These actions affirm that well-being is not a luxury, but essential to the sustainability and effectiveness of the school.
Research consistently shows that teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction are leading contributors to attrition, particularly among early-career teachers (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Dunn et al., 2021). Teachers who are unsupported in navigating heavy workloads, shifting expectations, or interpersonal conflicts are more likely to leave the profession altogether. The problem is especially acute in schools that serve low-income communities and students of color, where turnover further destabilizes student support systems.	At my school, staff turnover—particularly among younger teachers—has been normalized. While exit surveys may occur, little is done to track patterns or intervene early. Some new teachers report feeling overwhelmed by unrealistic expectations and unclear boundaries between personal and professional time. While they are offered mentors, these relationships are often informal and inconsistent. There is no follow-up to ensure ongoing support. .	I recommend that schools conduct longitudinal tracking of early-career teachers to better understand who is leaving and why. Structured induction programs should extend beyond the first semester, offering second-year support, coaching cycles, and small cohort check-ins. Additionally, school leaders should review workloads across grade levels and adjust duties based on teacher feedback. Reducing unnecessary administrative tasks and giving teachers more autonomy over their schedules could significantly reduce burnout and increase job satisfaction. .

The emotional state of teachers influences students' academic and emotional development (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021; Keller, 2024; Pap et al., 2023; Zhan et al., 2024). When students perceive their teachers as joyful, respected, and supported, they report more motivation, stronger relationships, and higher life satisfaction. The teacher-student relationship is reciprocal: emotionally depleted teachers often find it harder to maintain engagement and presence in the classroom, which can lead to a "burnout cascade" that impacts students and overall classroom climate (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).	While student wellness is prioritized at my school through SEL programs and guidance services, teacher wellness is not viewed with the same urgency. There are few opportunities for staff to build positive emotional connections with each other or with school leaders. Classroom observations focus primarily on instructional technique, not emotional tone or relationship-building. Students may notice teacher stress but have little space to process or understand these dynamics.	I recommend creating intentional opportunities for relational culture-building among staff, such as peer mentorships, inter-grade team-building, and community circles that allow teachers to share emotional highs and lows. School leaders should also model vulnerability and transparency around emotional well-being and recognize emotional labor in teacher evaluations—not as a performance issue but as a human one. Finally, integrate teacher and student SEL by planning shared wellness initiatives (e.g., gratitude projects, mental health awareness weeks) that reflect the mutual importance of adult and child well-being in the learning environment.

Predictors of Teacher Effectiveness

Multiple studies suggest that effectiveness is closely tied to teachers' psychological states, including their self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, enthusiasm, and personal well-being (Bardach et al., 2021; Duckworth et al., 2009). Teachers who report greater life satisfaction, grit, and professional joy are more likely to remain in the profession and foster engaging, supportive learning environments. The "happy/productive teacher" hypothesis proposed by Yang et al. (2018) was supported by findings that subjective well-being significantly reduces turnover intention. Meanwhile, Kyriakides et al. (2013) demonstrated that effective instruction requires a balanced integration of both direct and constructivist strategies, indicating that no single teaching method guarantees effectiveness—rather, flexibility and professional judgment are key. Teacher self-efficacy in particular has been shown to predict positive outcomes across multiple domains,

from instructional quality to student engagement (Bardach et al., 2021; Eghtesadi & Jeddi, 2018).

However, research by Hoy et al. (2005) reveals that self-efficacy often declines after student teaching, especially when institutional support is withdrawn—highlighting the importance of a school's role in sustaining and strengthening teacher confidence. Collectively, these findings show that effectiveness cannot be reduced to student test scores or performance checklists alone; it is an outcome of both pedagogical knowledge and psychological well-being. Table 2 offers specific recommendations based on these findings, connecting evidence-based research with school-level practices that support a more sustainable and human-centered understanding of effective teaching.

Table 2

Teacher Effectiveness

What the research says…	What my school does…	What I recommend…
Subjective well-being and job satisfaction are strongly predictive of teacher effectiveness and retention. Yang et al. (2018) validated the "happy/productive teacher" hypothesis, showing that subjective well-being mediated the relationship between role stress and turnover intention. Similarly, Madigan and Kim (2021), through a meta-analysis of 59 studies, found that both burnout and job dissatisfaction significantly predict teachers' intentions to quit. Duckworth et al. (2009) also found that grit and life satisfaction were strong predictors of effectiveness, especially in under-resourced contexts. Together, these	At my school, teacher effectiveness is typically framed through student performance data, classroom observations, and administrative evaluations. The psychological states of teachers—such as happiness, stress levels, or life satisfaction—are not formally tracked or discussed as part of what makes a teacher "effective." Emotional exhaustion is normalized and rarely addressed in professional development or coaching.	I recommend that schools adopt a more holistic understanding of effectiveness that includes well-being indicators. Teacher goal-setting and evaluation should include space to reflect on fulfillment and purpose. Leaders should integrate wellness inventories, strengths-based assessments (e.g., grit scale), and collaborative reflection circles as part of ongoing professional development. These tools should be used not to assess performance, but to support it.

findings suggest that positive psychological states—particularly well-being and life satisfaction—enhance teachers' capacity to perform well and remain in the profession.		
Both instructional strategies and psychological traits shape teacher effectiveness. Kyriakides et al. (2013) found that teaching quality depends on the integration of both direct instruction (e.g., time management, structuring) and constructivist approaches (e.g., orientation, modeling). Meanwhile, Bardach et al. (2021), through an integrative review of 24 studies, identified eight psychological traits—especially self-efficacy, enthusiasm, and emotional intelligence—as strong predictors of teacher success, including classroom engagement and relationships with students. These two studies, when considered together, highlight that effective teaching requires both technical skill and emotional competence.	Current PD at my school tends to focus heavily on pacing guides and content delivery. Instructional quality is treated as a fixed characteristic and is not often discussed as something that develops alongside teacher identity or emotional intelligence. Coaching typically focuses on observable behaviors, with less emphasis on internal disposition or emotional awareness.	I recommend expanding PD to integrate training on psychological traits—particularly emotional intelligence, empathy, and confidence—as part of instructional development. This could include SEL-based teacher workshops, modeling lessons that include real-time emotional reflection, and peer dialogue around growth-oriented feedback. Leaders should also encourage teachers to blend both direct and student-centered strategies through supported experimentation and shared planning.
Self-efficacy is one of the most consistently supported predictors of teacher effectiveness. Bardach et al. (2021) found that self-efficacy (instructional practices, classroom management, and student engagement) is positively correlated with both teacher well-being and positive student outcomes. Eghtesadi and Jeddi (2018) found that, when rated by students, self-efficacy was a better predictor	New teachers at my school receive some mentorship during their first semester, but it quickly fades. There is little follow-up in the second year when workload and expectations increase. Teachers rarely have space to discuss their own beliefs in their teaching capacity, and self-efficacy is not cultivated through the structure of PD or coaching.	I recommend that schools provide long-term mentoring for early-career teachers that continues through the second and third years. Mentoring should include structured opportunities for teachers to reflect on and build their sense of self-efficacy through feedback, dialogue, and supported risk-taking. Professional development should also incorporate self-efficacy theory and offer

of pedagogical success than critical thinking. However, Hoy et al. (2005) found that teacher efficacy tends to decline in the first year of full-time teaching when institutional support is withdrawn. This suggests that while self-efficacy matters, it is highly susceptible to external conditions like workload, support, and environment.		tools to help teachers track growth in their confidence across classroom tasks.

Administrative Support and Systemic Conditions

While teacher well-being and effectiveness are often framed as individual traits or responsibilities, research underscores the structural nature of these outcomes—particularly the role of school leadership. Emotional, informational, and instrumental support from administrators significantly predict teacher well-being and job satisfaction (Ertürk, 2021). However, support alone is insufficient to counter the systemic challenges that teachers face. Kelly (2024) found that even when administrative support is present, burnout remains high unless broader factors—such as school climate, trust, and relational dynamics—are addressed.

Organizational support theory (Tosun & Bostancı, 2024) reinforces this by suggesting that when educators perceive their institution as valuing their well-being, their emotional commitment increases. Additionally, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) highlight how workplace instability—often shaped by leadership decisions and policy—leads to higher attrition in schools serving marginalized communities. These findings suggest that leadership must go beyond surface-level appreciation and engage in sustained, systemic practices that foster emotional sustainability, professional trust, and shared responsibility. Table 3 outlines evidence-based actions that school leaders can take to move from isolated interventions to sustained structural support.

Table 3

Administrative Support

What the research says…	What my school does…	What I recommend…
Principal support—especially emotional and informational—has a strong positive relationship with teacher job satisfaction and well-being (Ertürk, 2021). Informational support, such as clear communication, ongoing feedback, and professional guidance, is more predictive of satisfaction than logistical or resource-based support alone. When administrators recognize teachers as professionals and offer regular guidance, it contributes to teachers' long-term investment in the profession (Tosun & Bostancı, 2024).	Feedback at my school is often centered on performance evaluations and instructional compliance. While some administrators are supportive, there is little consistency in how feedback is delivered. There is no formalized structure for regular check-ins or non-evaluative conversations about professional growth.	I recommend administrators schedule regular, non-evaluative check-ins with teachers focused on listening, reflection, and growth. These conversations should separate performance from well-being and create space for honest dialogue about workload, goals, and needs. Administrators should be trained in relational leadership practices and given time to engage deeply with their staff, not just manage compliance..
Administrative support alone does not prevent burnout. Kelly (2024) found that even in schools with supportive leadership, high levels of burnout persisted if systemic issues like toxic climate and relational mistrust were not addressed. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) show that teachers in schools serving students from low-income or racially marginalized communities are more likely to leave, suggesting that institutional context and leadership practices disproportionately impact teacher retention.	My school conducts climate surveys inconsistently, and when they are administered, the findings are rarely discussed openly or used to inform policy. Trust between staff and leadership varies depending on the administrator. Some decisions feel top-down, and many teachers express hesitation about whether their feedback will lead to change.	I recommend implementing regular, anonymous climate surveys that include questions on trust, autonomy, and support. Results should be shared transparently, with time dedicated to collaborative sense-making and next steps. School leaders should work alongside staff to co-create norms around communication, decision-making, and shared ownership of school culture.
Emotional labor is a significant part of the teaching profession, and its effects are intensified	Formal mentorship at my school is limited to first-year teachers and varies	I recommend expanding mentoring programs beyond year one and ensuring

when teachers lack supportive environments. While individual factors like self-efficacy matter, their development depends heavily on the presence of institutional support, including mentoring, peer networks, and protected time for collaboration (Hoy et al., 2005; Bardach et al., 2021). Without these, teachers may experience a decline in confidence, especially early in their careers.	significantly in quality depending on the mentor's availability. There is little protected time for peer collaboration, and informal support networks depend on social dynamics rather than being institutionally encouraged.	protected time for peer collaboration. These systems should be monitored and supported by leadership to ensure they are consistent and meaningful. Administrators should also create systems where peer support, emotional processing, and collective problem-solving are built into the school week—not left to chance or after hours.

Summary

The three core themes explored in this action plan—teacher well-being, teacher effectiveness, and administrator support—are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Research shows that teacher well-being is essential to the sustainability of both classroom environments and the profession at large. When teachers feel emotionally fulfilled, valued, and supported, they are more likely to cultivate thriving learning spaces and remain in the field long-term. Likewise, teacher effectiveness cannot be meaningfully assessed without accounting for subjective well-being, professional autonomy, and psychological resilience. Effective teaching arises not only from instructional technique but also from emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and institutional care. Crucially, schools cannot place the burden of well-being and effectiveness solely on the shoulders of individual teachers. Administrative behaviors and systemic conditions shape whether teachers experience their work as empowering or depleting. This includes how feedback is delivered, whether trust is nurtured, and how school leaders respond to staff needs and concerns.

The action plan tables above outline a range of research-based strategies schools can adopt to create more emotionally supportive, professionally satisfying, and pedagogically

effective environments for teachers. These strategies emphasize not only what teachers should do, but what systems must do to sustain them. In the next section, I will reflect on the feasibility, potential challenges, and broader implications of implementing these recommendations within real-world school contexts.

Discussion

The guiding question for this project was: "How does teacher well-being affect teacher effectiveness and student outcomes in K-12 schools?" The literature review showed that teacher well-being significantly impacts not only teacher effectiveness but also student achievement, classroom climate, and overall school functioning. Key themes included burnout and attrition, the role of leadership, the influence of school context, and the importance of psychological resources like self-efficacy and emotional competence.

In this discussion, I will interpret these findings to address the guiding question. I will also address related questions that emerged during the research, including: "What factors contribute to teacher burnout?", "What school-level supports improve teacher well-being?", and "How do international approaches to teacher well-being differ from U.S. practices?" Finally, I will discuss implications for practice, future research, limitations, and offer concluding thoughts.

Discussion of Findings

I will begin this discussion with details on teacher burnout and attrition. Rather than framing burnout as a personal failing, the discussion reframes it as a structural condition that reflects broader dysfunctions in how schools are organized. Secondly, in the subsection on school-level supports, I focus on how the immediate work environment, particularly the role of leadership, peer relationships, and organizational culture of a school, can either buffer against or intensify teacher stress. This section will answer the question from rationale, the misalignment

between what new teachers are trained for and what the profession demands of them. For example, fewer teacher preparation programs equip teachers with the tools to navigate the emotional labor of teaching. In the fourth and fifth subsections, implementation challenges and international comparisons, I discuss how "symbolic" interventions fail to address underlying structural stressors. By international comparisons, I bring comparative perspectives and draw on models from countries such as Finland and Japan. The following subsections, outcomes for schools and students, and implications for teachers, schools, and districts, argue the connection between emotionally supported teachers and stronger instructional quality or effectiveness and outline recommendations that educators, school leaders, and policymakers can take to create conditions where teacher well-being is protected and prioritized.

Burnout as a Structural Feature of the Teaching Profession

In this subsection, I will attempt to answer the first question, "How has burnout become a structural feature of the teaching profession?" from the rationale based on the research and my experiences. To understand how teacher well-being impacts effectiveness and student outcomes, it is essential to begin with the most visible consequence of poor well-being: burnout and attrition. One of the most consistent findings in the literature is that burnout remains a significant challenge in K-12 teaching. Defined by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, burnout contributes directly to high turnover rates, declining instructional quality, and reduced student achievement (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Pap et al., 2023). Teacher attrition is particularly pronounced in the early years of teaching. Henry et al. (2011) found that as many as 30–50% of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years. The causes are multifaceted, including excessive workload, lack of autonomy, poor administrative support, and insufficient professional development.

Notably, the literature suggests that burnout is not just the result of individual weakness or lack of resilience but is rooted in systemic problems embedded in school culture and policy (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). When teachers are expected to continuously absorb institutional pressures without reciprocal care or structural support, burnout becomes not an exception, but an inevitable outcome of the profession as it is currently structured. In my professional observation, the schools I have worked with often approach burnout as an individual problem, offering one-off wellness workshops or stress management tips. However, without addressing workload, planning time, and professional trust, such approaches are unlikely to produce lasting change.

Supports that Sustain Teacher Well-Being and Effectiveness

In this subsection, I answer the second question of the rationale, "What kinds of supports sustain teacher well-being and effectiveness?" In other words, I examine the institutional and relational factors that contribute to or hinder teacher well-being, with a focus on leadership, school climate, and embedded support systems. In exploring how teacher well-being shapes teacher effectiveness, this section discusses the role of school-level supports that either protect or erode teacher well-being. Leadership and school climate emerged as critical determinants of teacher well-being. Ertürk (2021) found that emotional and instructional support from administrators improved teacher job satisfaction and reduced burnout. Leadership that fosters relational trust, shared decision-making, and professional autonomy creates conditions in which teachers feel valued and effective (Kelly, 2024).

However, the literature warns that leadership support alone is insufficient. Kelly (2024) showed that teachers in schools with strong principal support but poor district policies or overwhelming accountability demands still reported high stress levels. Effective interventions require alignment across school, district, and policy levels. Similarly, Ertürk (2021) found that

without broader institutional backing, even emotionally supportive leadership could not fully mitigate the effects of systemic pressures.

Schoolwide initiatives that embed teacher well-being into professional culture, such as peer mentoring, collaborative planning time, and supportive supervision, are associated with better outcomes (Stronge et al., 2011; Hoy et al., 2005). However, implementation is uneven, and many schools struggle to move beyond surface-level interventions.

At the elementary school where I've been working, I've seen how much of a difference strong relational support makes. Teachers feel more encouraged and confident when school leaders listen to their concerns, recognize their efforts, and give space for collaboration. We have some good supports in place, like team meetings and regular emotional check-ins, but we also face some of the same challenges as many schools—tight schedules, limited staff, and high expectations. These experiences show how important it is to have both emotional and practical support systems in place, not just from school leaders, but also from the district level and beyond.

Gaps in Psychological Training in Teacher Preparation

This subsection examines, the third question from the rationale, "Do teacher preparation programs equip educators with the psychological tools for sustained effectiveness?" Teacher self-efficacy, grit, and emotional competence were identified as key psychological resources supporting well-being and effectiveness (Duckworth et al., 2009; Bardach et al., 2021). Teachers with high self-efficacy believe they can positively influence student learning, which buffers against stress and promotes engagement. Emotional competence, including the ability to regulate emotions and build positive relationships, is similarly protective.

Yet, teacher preparation programs often focus primarily on instructional skills and content knowledge, overlooking these foundational psychological capacities. This gap suggests an opportunity for teacher education and professional development programs to address emotional intelligence and resilience explicitly.

In my experience as a student in a partially online teacher preparation program, I gained strong skills in instructional planning, special education strategies, and educational theory. The program was well-structured and flexible, which helped me grow in my own learning style. However, I noticed that topics like managing teacher stress, building long-term resilience, or even handling emotional fatigue were not a big part of the curriculum. Much of what I learned about protecting my mental and emotional well-being came from real-life experiences, especially during student teaching and not formal training. I believe all teacher prep programs, including the program I attended, could benefit from integrating more psychological training that helps future educators stay grounded, emotionally aware, and strong in the face of challenges.

International Comparisons

To understand how teacher well-being can be better supported, this subsection adopts a comparative perspective and examines international models that have successfully connected teacher satisfaction with positive student outcomes. International comparisons offer valuable insights into how national policy, school culture, and public attitudes toward educators can shape teacher experiences.

In Finland, teachers benefited from high levels of professional autonomy, reduced instructional hours, and strong societal respect for the teaching profession (Kyriakides et al., 2013). Teacher education was rigorous and research-based, with all teachers required to hold a master's degree. These conditions contributed to low burnout rates, high job satisfaction, and

strong student performance. Finland's approach emphasized trust over control, which allowed educators to make instructional decisions without being weighed down by micromanagement or excessive standardized testing.

In Singapore, teacher well-being was supported through a structured, centralized education system that prioritizes continuous professional learning. New teachers were assigned experienced mentors, and there were clear career progression pathways supported by regular training and evaluation. The alignment between policy and practice ensured that teachers felt supported both professionally and emotionally, contributing to consistently high educational outcomes (OECD, 2018).

Canada presented another model, particularly in provinces like Ontario and British Columbia, where teacher preparation included training in equity, inclusive education, and mental health. There was also a strong emphasis on professional collaboration and well-being. Some school districts offered wellness grants and embedded mental health days for staff, demonstrating a proactive approach to sustaining teacher morale (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014).

In Japan, while teachers face long worked hours, there was a deep cultural emphasis on collective responsibility, student relationships, and school community. Teachers were respected public figures, and schools often supported collaboration through regular "lesson study" cycles, where teachers reflected and improved on lessons together. This sense of collegiality and professional growth opportunities helped reduce feelings of isolation and supports job satisfaction (Takahashi & McDougal, 2016).

In contrast, U.S. teachers have often faced a combination of high-stakes accountability measures, limited planning time, large class sizes, and relatively low societal respect. These

conditions have contributed to chronic stress and high attrition rates, particularly in under-resourced schools. The pressure to perform under rigid testing and evaluation systems has limited autonomy and hampers creative, student-centered instruction.

These global contrasts suggest that efforts to improve teacher well-being in the U.S. must go beyond school-level reforms. Systemic change is needed—particularly in areas like teacher autonomy, manageable workloads, and respect for the profession. Policymakers should closely examine how national structures around accountability, funding, and professional development either support or hinder teacher wellness and effectiveness.

Implications for Teachers, Schools, and Districts

For teachers, the findings emphasize the importance of developing emotional self-awareness, stress management skills, and a strong sense of professional efficacy. Teacher preparation programs should incorporate training on emotional competence, resilience, and relational skills alongside instructional strategies. But also, I once sat in on a district “self-care” seminar where teachers were given coloring books and lavender tea bags, but were expected to return to grading within the hour. One teacher whispered to me, “I don’t need tea. I need someone to help cover lunch duty so I can breathe.” Emotional self-awareness and stress management can’t thrive in environments that demand constant sacrifice. True well-being isn’t about isolated acts of self-care—it’s about being able to do your job without breaking yourself in the process. Programs that build resilience must go hand-in-hand with systems that honor teachers' time, humanity, and limits. Without that, even the most emotionally competent educator will burn out.

In terms of recommendations that I can make with the current knowledge that I have, seeking out co-teaching models or informal collaboration with trusted colleagues can provide

both professional insight and emotional support. Teachers can also negotiate (which should be the reality in the first place) protected time during the school day, especially when informal norms do not allow for flexibility. For schools, prioritizing teacher well-being requires structural changes. Administrators should provide time for collaboration, reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, and create systems for meaningful teacher input into decision-making. Professional development should address both instructional and emotional capacities.

At the district level, policy changes are needed to support sustainable teaching careers. This includes improving compensation, reducing class sizes, providing robust induction programs for new teachers, and investing in ongoing professional learning. District leaders must also ensure that well-being initiatives are not just symbolic but are supported with time, resources, and accountability.

Implications for Future Research

Future research should explore which specific interventions are most effective for improving teacher well-being. While many schools have introduced programs such as mindfulness training, peer coaching, or wellness workshops, there is little systematic evidence comparing their long-term impacts. Research that examines not just whether these programs work, but *how* and *why* they work, will help schools allocate resources more effectively. Longitudinal studies are urgently needed to track how teacher well-being evolves over the course of a career. For example, how do the needs of early-career teachers differ from those of veteran educators? How does well-being shift during major career transitions, such as moving into leadership roles or navigating policy changes? Tracking these trajectories would provide important insights for targeted support.

Qualitative research, such as interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic studies, can offer rich insight into teachers' lived experiences, particularly around how school culture, leadership styles, and peer relationships shape well-being. These methods can uncover "hidden stressors" or subtle forms of support that surveys and quantitative measures may miss. Comparative international research can also play a crucial role. By studying countries with high teacher satisfaction and low burnout, we can identify policy-level drivers of well-being and explore how they might be adapted to U.S. contexts. For example, what lessons can we learn from Finland's emphasis on teacher autonomy or Japan's collaborative professional culture? Importantly, more attention should be given to the experiences of marginalized teachers, including teachers of color, LGBTQ+ teachers, teachers with disabilities, and those working in under-resourced schools. These educators often face additional layers of stress and discrimination that shape their well-being in unique ways. Future research must examine how intersecting identities affect access to support, resilience, and job satisfaction, as well as how interventions can be designed to promote equity and inclusion.

Future studies could focus on designing and evaluating teacher well-being interventions tailored to specific school contexts, such as high-poverty urban schools, rural districts, or schools serving multilingual learners. Rather than generalized wellness programs, research should investigate what types of support are most effective in different educational and socio-political environments. While some literature addresses teacher demographics, more research is needed on how intersecting identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, disability, and immigration status, shape teachers' experiences of well-being and burnout.

Limitations

Although this literature review provides a grounded synthesis of research on teacher well-being, several limitations remain. While inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined, the review did not follow a formalized systematic review protocol. For example, although efforts were made to prioritize peer-reviewed, scholarly sources relevant to K-12 education, there was no uniform restriction on publication dates or journal impact factors. As a result, the sample includes a range of sources, starting with older foundational theories such as Diener (1984), which is the earliest, followed by Bandura (1997), and then more recent empirical studies conducted between 2000 and 2025. This wide timespan may influence the consistency and applicability of the findings, as educational practices and contexts have evolved significantly over the past four decades.

In addition, while search terms and conceptual categories, such as "teacher well-being," "teacher effectiveness," and "student well-being," were used to locate sources, they were not documented in a reproducible manner. This limits the transparency of the search process and introduces a degree of selection bias, as the review reflects articles most visible or accessible within the databases used, rather than an exhaustive survey of all possible studies.

Furthermore, international comparisons were used selectively to illustrate particular points, rather than being included through a comprehensive cross-national methodology. This means that while international examples (e.g., Finland, Japan) are compelling, they cannot be generalized across all global contexts.

Finally, my own positionality shaped the interpretation of the findings. As a researcher with a deep interest in teacher well-being and educational improvement, I approached the literature with a bias toward highlighting emotional and relational aspects of teaching. While this perspective allowed for a focused and passionate analysis, it may have led to underrepresenting policy, curriculum, or economic dimensions of teacher effectiveness.

Conclusion

Supporting teacher well-being is not a peripheral concern. It is central to our educational systems' health, sustainability, and moral integrity. The evidence is clear: when teachers thrive, students flourish, classrooms come alive, and schools become places not just of instruction, but of belonging and growth. Teacher well-being is the foundation on which effective, equitable, and inspiring education is built.

Addressing burnout, improving leadership, and creating supportive professional cultures are no longer optional; they are urgent necessities. Short-term fixes will not be enough. Instead, schools, districts, and policymakers must work together to enact systemic change that recognizes teachers as whole people, not just deliverers of curriculum. This means rethinking how we structure teachers' time, how we support their professional development, and how we value their voices in shaping school and district decisions.

As we face the challenges of post-pandemic recovery, rising accountability demands, and growing concerns over teacher shortages, the need to center teacher well-being has never been more pressing. But there is also an opportunity in this moment: to reimagine our schools as places where teachers are not simply surviving, but flourishing. By investing in teacher well-being, we invest not just in a workforce but in the future of our students, our communities, and our democracy. It is time to move beyond rhetoric and take meaningful, sustained action to support the people who make learning possible.

In the literature review, I explored the following themes in the research, identified best practices, and made recommendations: (1) the critical link between teacher well-being and student outcomes; (2) predictors of teacher effectiveness that extend beyond instructional methods to include emotional and psychological traits; and (3) the role of school leaders and

institutional structures in sustaining teachers. Through a synthesis of empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and international models, the evidence consistently demonstrates that the emotional well-being of teachers is a crucial component of educational success.

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