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Article

Beyond the Classroom Walls: A Phenomenological Study on Teachers' Interrelationships, Work-Life Balance, and Sociological Perspectives

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Abstract

This study described the lived experiences of public secondary school teachers in General Trias, Cavite, highlighting how sociology of religion theories frame their professional interrelationships and work–life balance. Drawing from Durkheim's collective conscience, teachers' shared values and solidarity within the school community are vital in sustaining resilience. Weber's notion of vocational calling illuminated how teaching is perceived as both a profession and a moral duty, shaping teachers' commitment despite challenges. Meanwhile, Berger's sacred canopy provides insight into how religious and spiritual frameworks influence meaning-making in balancing personal and professional demands. Guided by the phenomenological approach, the study involved five (5) public secondary school teachers. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically by identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, and clustering these into themes. Results reveal that teachers experience work–life balance as a dynamic and evolving process shaped by workplace conditions, religiously informed values, symbolic meanings, and collective practices. They encountered challenges such as heavy workload, emotional demands of teaching, and difficulty in maintaining boundaries between work and personal life. Despite these challenges, teachers showed resilience by developing coping strategies, seeking support from colleagues and school leaders, and gradually adjusting to the demands of their profession. The study concluded that work–life balance among teachers emerges as a continuous process shaped by sociological and religious dynamics of role negotiation, collective solidarity, and vocational meaning. These findings emphasize the importance of supportive leadership, collaborative school environments, and responsive institutional practices in promoting teacher well-being.

Keywords: *Phenomenology, Sociology of religion, Teachers, Vocational calling, Work–life balance*

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Introduction

Teaching is an increasingly demanding profession, shaped by classroom instruction, administrative responsibilities, emotional labor, and workplace relationships. As school systems continue to evolve, teachers are expected to perform multiple responsibilities that extend beyond teaching, including documentation, school programs, coordination work, and communication with parents and the wider community. These overlapping demands make work–life balance an important concern in discussions of teacher well-being.

Existing studies show that heavy workload, long working hours, stress, and burnout affect teachers' job satisfaction and overall well-being (Pressley, 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). Research also suggests that professional relationships within schools influence how teachers experience and cope with these challenges (Avanzi et al., 2018; Harrison et al., 2025). These findings suggest that work–life balance is shaped not only by the amount of work teachers carry but also by the relational environment in which their work takes place.

In the Philippine public school setting, concerns related to work–life balance are particularly evident among secondary school teachers. Aside from classroom instruction, teachers are often involved in school activities, reports, learner-related concerns, and community responsibilities that may extend beyond official working hours. These realities are further influenced by Filipino cultural values such as bayanihan and pakikisama, which encourage cooperation, shared responsibility, and interpersonal harmony within the workplace. While these values help strengthen collegial relationships and support systems among teachers, they may also contribute to difficulty in refusing additional responsibilities, especially when maintaining good relationships within the school community is highly valued.

These cultural expectations may be explained through Durkheim's concept of collective conscience, referring to the shared beliefs and moral understandings that unite members of a community. (Durkheim, 1995). Within the school setting, teachers are influenced not only by institutional expectations but also by collective values that encourage cooperation, support, and commitment to the group. Such shared values may help teachers remain resilient during difficult situations because they experience a sense of belonging and mutual support within their professional community.

At the same time, Weber's concept of vocational calling helps explain how teachers often view their profession as more than a source of employment (Weber, 2002). Teaching is frequently understood as a meaningful responsibility connected to service, dedication, and moral commitment. Because of this sense of calling, many teachers continue fulfilling their responsibilities despite exhaustion and personal

sacrifices. This perspective helps explain why teachers remain committed to their work even in challenging conditions.

Despite the growing number of studies on teacher workload, stress, burnout, and coping strategies, much of the existing literature has relied on quantitative approaches that focus on measurable outcomes (Pressley, 2021; Pyhältö et al., 2021). While these studies provide valuable information, they do not fully capture how teachers personally experience work–life balance in relation to their professional relationships, shared values, and everyday realities within the school environment. Comparatively less attention has been given to the lived and relational dimensions of teachers' experiences, particularly in locality-based Philippine studies.

Guided by this gap, the present study explores the lived experiences of public secondary school teachers in General Trias, Cavite. Using a phenomenological approach, the study examines how teachers experience work–life balance as shaped by professional interrelationships, workplace conditions, and culturally influenced values. Rather than viewing work–life balance as a fixed condition or purely individual concern, the study approaches it as an ongoing process shaped by relationships, shared expectations, emotional demands, and the realities of public school teaching.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological design to explore how public secondary school teachers experience work–life balance within the context of their professional interrelationships. The study was guided by Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological framework, which focuses on understanding and describing lived experiences as perceived by individuals while setting aside the researcher's prior assumptions. The design was chosen because it allowed deeper understanding of how teachers interpret their daily experiences, relationships, responsibilities, and personal realities within the school environment.

Phenomenology was appropriate because it allowed participants to describe practical challenges of work–life balance, as well as the values, meanings, and personal commitments attached to their profession. In the context of this study, teachers' experiences were understood as shaped not only by institutional demands but also by shared cultural values, moral responsibilities, and relational support systems that influence how they navigate professional and personal life.

Co-Researchers

Five (5) public secondary school teachers from General Trias, Cavite participated in the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling

based on their ability to provide meaningful insights into the phenomenon being explored.

To ensure sufficient professional experience, participants were required to have at least three (3) years of teaching experience in the public secondary school system. The participants represented different stages of their teaching careers in order to capture varied experiences related to work–life balance and professional relationships. All participants were actively teaching during the conduct of the study, allowing the data to reflect actual experiences within the public school setting.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted either face-to-face or online depending on participant availability and convenience. This method allowed participants to freely describe their experiences while giving the researcher enough flexibility to explore relevant ideas that emerged during the conversation.

The interviews lasted approximately 45–75 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Open-ended questions were used to encourage participants to express their experiences, struggles, coping practices, and reflections in their own words. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

To ensure credibility and accuracy, interview transcripts were returned to the participants for validation. Data collection continued until saturation was reached, meaning no new significant insights emerged from subsequent interviews. Pseudonyms and password-protected files were used to maintain confidentiality and protect participants' identities.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological method. The analysis began through bracketing, where the researcher consciously identified and reflected on personal assumptions before and during the interpretation process. Reflective journaling was used throughout the study to help the researcher remain aware of possible biases while staying grounded in the participants' lived experiences.

Reflective journaling also allowed moral, cultural, and value-oriented dimensions in participants' narratives to surface naturally during analysis. Rather than imposing interpretations, the researcher remained open to how participants described meaning, responsibility, support, commitment, and personal beliefs within their experiences of teaching and work–life balance.

Interview transcripts were reviewed repeatedly to identify significant statements related to the phenomenon under study. These statements were then grouped into meaning units by removing repetitive and unrelated responses. From these clustered meanings, themes were developed to represent shared patterns across participants' experiences.

Textural descriptions were constructed to describe what the participants experienced, while structural descriptions explained how these experiences occurred

within their particular context. These descriptions were then synthesized to capture the overall essence of teachers' lived experiences of work–life balance within the context of their professional interrelationships.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Emergent Themes from the Lived Experiences of Public Secondary School Teachers on Professional Interrelationships and Work–Life Balance

Verbatim Excerpt	Key Meaning	Description	Theme
"Yung sistema mismo… sabay-sabay ang gawain… minsan hindi malinaw ang communication." (CR1) ("It's really the system… tasks come all at once… sometimes communication is unclear.")	System and communication create stress	Work–life balance is influenced by communication, leadership, and relationships within the school environment.	Relational Influence on Work–Life Balance
"Mas okay kapag supportive ang principal… gumagaan ang trabaho." *(CR5)* *("It's better when the principal is supportive… the workload feels lighter.")*	Leadership support eases workload		
"Ang school parang family… nagtutulungan kami." *(CR2)* *("The school feels like a family… we help each other.")*	Collegial relationships strengthen support and resilience		
"May mga kasama ako na tumutulong sa akin nung nahihirapan ako." *(CR3)* *("There were colleagues who helped me when I was struggling.")*	Support systems help manage emotional and professional stress		

"Nag-uusap kami sa GC… doon namin nalalabas yung stress." *(CR4)* *("We talk in our group chat… that's where we release our stress.")*	Communication serves as emotional support	Teaching involves emotional labor shaped by service, resilience, and professional commitment.	Emotional Demands of Teaching
"Nag-aadjust ako, nag-aadjust din sila… we meet halfway." *(CR5)* *("I adjust, and they adjust too… we meet halfway.")*	Mutual adjustment strengthens professional relationships		
"Kahit paiyak na… tuloy pa rin sa pagtuturo." *(CR3)* *("Even when I feel like crying… I still continue teaching.")*	Resilience through emotional labor		
"Disregard lahat ng pinag dadaanan ko pag nasa school." *(CR3)* *("I disregard everything I'm going through when I'm at school.")*	Personal concerns are set aside in service of teaching		
"Medyo driven by emotion ang sagot ko." *(CR1)* *("My response is somewhat driven by emotion.")*	Emotional strain influences responses and interactions		
"Nakakapagod… lalo na pag sabay-sabay ang responsibilities." *(CR5)* *("It's exhausting… especially when responsibilities come all at once.")*	Emotional labor emerges from overlapping responsibilities		

"Nakakapagod na… kaya nga magre-retire na ako." *(CR2)* *("It's already exhausting… that's why I'm about to retire.")*	Long-term emotional demands affect sustainability in teaching		
"Nasa depression stage ako before." *(CR3)* *("I was in a stage of depression before.")*	Emotional vulnerability exists within professional responsibility		
"Pag sa school, school… pag sa bahay, bahay." *(CR2)* *("When I'm at school, it's school… when I'm at home, it's home.")*	Teachers attempt to separate professional and personal roles	Work–life balance involves continuous negotiation between work responsibilities and personal life.	Managing Work–Life Boundaries
"Ang bahay parang extension ng school." *(CR5)* *("The home feels like an extension of school.")*	Work responsibilities extend into personal space		
"Ayoko mag-uwi ng trabaho… ginagawa ko na lahat sa school." *(CR4)* *("I don't want to bring work home… I finish everything at school.")*	Intentional boundary-setting protects personal well-being		
"Minsan hindi na natatapos… hanggang gabi may ginagawa pa rin." *(CR3)* *("Sometimes it never gets finished… I'm still working until night.")*	Professional demands continue beyond school hours		

"After certain hour hindi na ako sumasagot." *(CR5)* *("After a certain hour, I no longer respond.")*	Setting limits protects personal time		
"Ayoko maging toxic sa bahay." *(CR4)* *("I don't want to become toxic at home.")*	Teachers protect emotional well-being within the family		
"Mahirap tumanggi… dahil sa pakikisama." *(CR4)* *("It's hard to refuse… because of pakikisama.")*	Cultural expectations influence professional decisions	Filipino values shape workplace relationships, support systems, and professional responsibilities	Cultural Influences on Work and Relationships
"Bayanihan… nagtutulungan talaga kami." *(CR2)* *("Bayanihan… we really help each other.")*	Cooperation strengthens collegial support		
"Dahil sa pakikisama, tinatanggap mo kahit dagdag trabaho." *(CR3)* *("Because of pakikisama, you accept even additional work.")*	Shared cultural values may increase pressure to accept responsibilities		
"Tumutulong din ako sa iba… ganun talaga." *(CR5)* *("I also help others… that's just how it is.")*	Helping others becomes a normalized practice		
"Dahil tumulong ako before, bumalik din sa akin." *(CR3)* *("Because I helped before, it came back to me.")*	Reciprocity strengthens workplace relationships		

"Mas motivated kapag may recognition." *(CR5)* *("I feel more motivated when there is recognition.")*	Recognition strengthens motivation and morale	Leadership, fairness, and institutional support influence teachers' motivation and sustainability in the profession.	Impact of Leadership and Recognition
"Kapag walang recognition… nakakababa ng gana." *(CR1)* *("When there is no recognition… it lowers motivation.")*	Lack of appreciation affects morale and motivation		
"Mas okay yung leadership ngayon… fair na." *(CR2)* *("The leadership now is better… it is fair.")*	Fair leadership improves workplace experience		
"Na-appreciate kami… kahit simple lang." *(CR3)* *("We are appreciated… even in simple ways.")*	Simple forms of appreciation positively affect teacher		
"Hindi na kailangan ng recognition… ang kailangan ko lang, pagpahingahin niyo ko" (CR1) ("I don't need recognition… what I need is to be allowed to rest.")	Rest and recovery are valued alongside recognition		
"May mentoring and recognition activities." *(CR4)* *("There are mentoring and recognition activities.")*	Structured support systems contribute to encouragement and motivation		

Schematic/Eidetic Insights of the Study

From the lived experiences of the co-researchers, several deeper insights emerged regarding the nature of work–life balance among public secondary school teachers.

First, work–life balance was not experienced as an individual concern alone. The participants' narratives consistently showed that relationships within the school environment strongly influenced how they managed stress, responsibilities, and emotional challenges. Supportive colleagues, approachable school leaders, and open communication created a sense of shared responsibility that helped teachers cope with professional demands. In contrast, unclear systems and weak communication increased pressure and emotional strain. These experiences suggest that work–life balance is relational in character and shaped by the quality of workplace interactions and support systems.

Second, the findings revealed that teaching involves emotional labor as much as practical responsibility. Participants described continuing their responsibilities despite emotional exhaustion, overlapping tasks, and personal struggles. Their experiences reflected resilience grounded in commitment, service, and responsibility toward their learners and profession. Emotional strain was not experienced simply as fatigue, but as part of the deeper emotional demands attached to caring for students and fulfilling professional expectations.

Third, boundaries between work and personal life were continuously negotiated. Some participants intentionally created limits between work and home life, while others experienced difficulty maintaining these boundaries because responsibilities frequently extended beyond school hours. These experiences show that work–life balance is not a fixed separation of roles, but an ongoing process of adjustment shaped by institutional expectations, personal realities, and professional obligations.

Fourth, Filipino cultural values strongly influenced how teachers experienced work and relationships within the school community. Values such as *bayanihan* and *pakikisama* strengthened collegial support, cooperation, and reciprocity among teachers. At the same time, these shared cultural expectations sometimes created pressure to accept additional responsibilities in order to maintain harmonious relationships. These experiences reflect how shared values influence both workplace relationships and teachers' responses to professional demands.

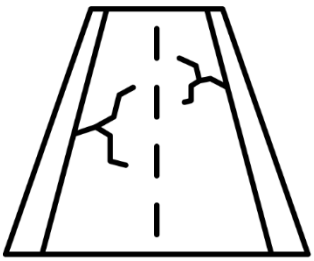
Lastly, the participants' narratives suggest that teachers often draw meaning and stability from personal beliefs, shared values, family support, and faith-oriented perspectives during emotionally demanding situations. For some participants, these frameworks provided comfort, motivation, and a sense of purpose despite the pressures of teaching. In this sense, coping with stress was not limited to practical strategies alone, but also involved deeper forms of meaning-making that helped teachers sustain commitment and emotional resilience. These experiences reflect how

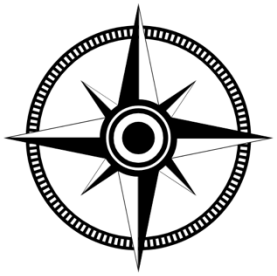
individuals rely on shared beliefs, moral values, and supportive relationships to maintain stability amid professional challenges.

Taken together, these eidetic insights show that teachers experience work–life balance as a dynamic and evolving process shaped by relationships, emotional labor, cultural values, institutional conditions, and personal meaning within the realities of public-school teaching.

Table 2. Symbolic Representations of Co-Researchers' Work–Life Balance in the Context of Professional Interrelationships

Co-researchers	*Symbols*	*Meaning*
Co-researcher 1	The Scale 	The scale represents the continuous balancing between professional demands and personal well-being. Co-Researcher 1 described the experience as a constant adjustment shaped by workload, communication concerns, and institutional expectations. The uneven weight of responsibilities reflects how balance is not fixed but continuously negotiated within everyday teaching realities.
Co-researcher 2	The Anchor 	The anchor symbolizes stability developed through experience, family support, personal values, and faith. Co-Researcher 2's experiences showed how resilience is strengthened over time through acceptance of responsibilities and emotional grounding.

		Despite challenges within the profession, the participant remained steady through support systems and a strong sense of purpose.
Co-researcher 3	The Bridge 	The bridge represents the connection between multiple personal and professional roles. As a teacher, coordinator, and single parent, Co-Researcher 3 constantly moved between responsibilities while maintaining commitment to both work and family life. The symbol reflects emotional labor, resilience, and the ability to navigate overlapping responsibilities despite personal struggles.
Co-researcher 4	The Boundary Line 	The boundary line symbolizes intentional efforts to create separation between work and personal life. Co-Researcher 4 emphasized protecting personal time by completing responsibilities within school hours whenever possible. However, the experience also revealed that these boundaries are not always stable,

		especially when professional demands extend into the home environment.
Co-researcher 5	The Compass 	The compass represents direction guided by priorities, personal values, and professional responsibility. Co-Researcher 5 described work–life balance not as equal distribution of time, but as maintaining focus on what is most important. The symbol reflects purposeful decision-making, leadership responsibility, and the search for stability amid professional demands.

To further illustrate the interconnected nature of the themes identified in this study, a symbolic representation is presented.

The image of the scale represents the dynamic and ongoing process of balancing professional responsibilities and personal well-being. This balance continuously shifts depending on workload, emotional labor, workplace relationships, and institutional expectations. Rather than representing a stable condition, the scale reflects the constant adjustments teachers make in responding to the realities of their profession.

This central idea is further understood through the related symbolic meanings reflected in the participants' experiences. The anchor represents stability developed through support systems, shared values, personal beliefs, and experience. The bridge reflects the connection between multiple responsibilities and the emotional labor involved in fulfilling these roles. The boundary line signifies the effort to establish limits between work and personal life, even when these boundaries are challenged by professional expectations. The compass represents direction guided by commitment, purpose, and personal priorities despite workplace pressures.

Together, these symbols show that teachers' work–life balance is not fixed or uniform. Instead, it is shaped by relationships, emotional labor, cultural values, institutional conditions, and personal meaning attached to teaching and professional responsibility.

Framework

Figure 1 presents the framework illustrating how teachers' work–life balance is shaped by both personal and professional dimensions.

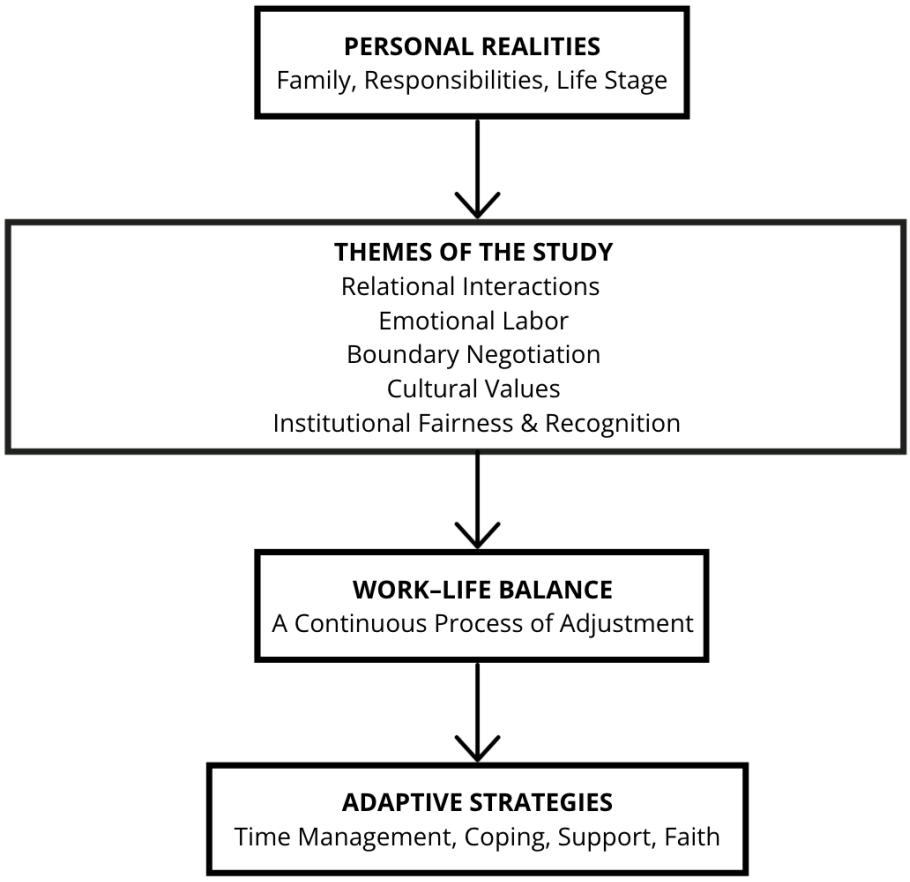


Figure 1. Essence of the Lived Experiences of Public Secondary School Teachers on Professional Interrelationships and Work–Life Balance.

At the top of the framework are teachers' personal realities, which include family responsibilities, life stage, emotional experiences, personal beliefs, and individual circumstances. These realities influence how teachers interpret and respond to the demands of their profession.

At the center are the major themes that emerged from the lived experiences of the co-researchers. These include relational interactions, emotional labor, boundary negotiation, cultural values, and institutional fairness and recognition. These themes represent the core conditions that shape teachers' daily experiences within the school environment.

These interconnected experiences contribute to teachers' work–life balance, which emerged not as a fixed state, but as a continuous process of adjustment between professional responsibilities and personal well-being. Teachers constantly negotiate emotional demands, workplace expectations, and personal realities while attempting to maintain stability in both personal and professional life.

The framework also highlights the adaptive strategies teachers develop in response to these challenges. These include time management, coping practices, collegial support, family support, personal values, and faith-oriented perspectives that provide meaning, resilience, and emotional grounding during difficult situations.

Overall, the framework shows that teachers' work–life balance is a dynamic and relational process shaped by institutional conditions, workplace relationships, emotional labor, cultural values, and personal meaning within the realities of public school teaching.

The findings of this study show that teachers' work–life balance is shaped not only by workload and institutional demands, but also by relationships, shared values, emotional labor, and personal meaning attached to teaching. The participants' lived experiences suggest that balancing professional and personal responsibilities is not merely an individual task. Rather, it is influenced by the social environment of the school, the expectations attached to the teaching profession, and the values teachers carry into their work and relationships.

One of the strongest findings of the study is the importance of collegial relationships and shared support systems in helping teachers manage professional demands. Participants frequently described their schools as spaces where cooperation, communication, and mutual support lessen the emotional and practical difficulties of teaching. Experiences of bayanihan, reciprocity, and collective adjustment among colleagues reflect Durkheim's concept of collective conscience, in which shared beliefs and moral expectations maintain solidarity within a community (Durkheim, 1995). In the context of the school environment, these shared values strengthen teachers' sense of belonging and emotional support, especially during stressful situations. However, the findings also show that these same expectations may create pressure when teachers feel obligated to accept additional work in order to preserve harmonious relationships within the workplace.

The findings also reveal that teaching involves emotional labor beyond the completion of professional tasks. Participants described continuing their responsibilities despite exhaustion, emotional strain, and personal struggles. Their experiences reflect resilience grounded in commitment, care, and responsibility toward their learners and profession. This supports Weber's idea of vocational calling, which views work not only as a source of employment but also as a meaningful duty connected to service and moral commitment (Weber, 2002). Many participants continued fulfilling their responsibilities even under emotionally difficult conditions because they attached deeper meaning to their role as teachers. At the same time, the findings suggest that vocational dedication should not normalize excessive workload or emotional exhaustion within the profession.

Another important finding of the study is the way teachers negotiate the boundaries between work and personal life. Some participants intentionally separated work from home life, while others experienced difficulty maintaining these boundaries because responsibilities extended beyond school hours. These experiences

suggest that work–life balance is not a stable condition, but a continuous process of adjustment influenced by institutional expectations, personal realities, and emotional responsibilities. The findings also show that teachers actively develop coping practices to protect their emotional well-being and maintain stability within their personal lives.

The participants' narratives further suggest that personal beliefs, family support, shared values, and faith-oriented perspectives provide meaning during emotionally demanding situations. For some participants, these frameworks became sources of comfort, motivation, and emotional grounding while coping with stress and professional pressure. Berger's concept of the sacred canopy helps explain how individuals draw from shared beliefs and systems of meaning in order to maintain stability during challenging experiences (Berger, 1967). In this study, participants did not rely solely on practical coping strategies. They also interpreted their experiences through personal values, relationships, and meaningful sources of support that helped sustain resilience and commitment within the profession.

The findings also highlight the role of values in shaping teachers' daily experiences and professional relationships. Values such as cooperation, fairness, responsibility, resilience, and care were not only expressed in participants' statements but were also reflected in their actions and interactions within the school community. In this sense, values education extends beyond classroom instruction because these values are continuously practiced and experienced in teachers' everyday professional lives. The study therefore suggests that work–life balance is not only a practical concern, but also a lived expression of values shaped through relationships, responsibilities, and institutional culture.

Lastly, the findings emphasize the importance of fair and supportive institutional practices in sustaining teacher well-being. Participants valued recognition, open communication, realistic expectations, and opportunities for rest and recovery. While appreciation and collegial support positively influenced motivation, the participants also emphasized that emotional and physical rest remain necessary for long-term sustainability in the profession. These findings suggest that institutional support should move beyond symbolic recognition and focus on creating healthier working conditions that genuinely support teachers' well-being.

Taken together, the findings suggest that teachers' work–life balance is shaped by interconnected relational, emotional, cultural, and meaning-oriented experiences. Through the perspectives of Durkheim, Weber, and Berger, the study highlights how solidarity, vocational commitment, shared values, and meaning-making frameworks influence how teachers understand and manage the realities of their professional and personal lives.

Conclusion

This study shows that work–life balance among public secondary school teachers is shaped by workload, institutional demands, professional relationships,

shared values, emotional labor, and personal meaning attached to teaching. Participants' experiences reveal that teaching extends beyond technical responsibilities and involves continuous emotional commitment, adjustment, and resilience within the realities of public-school life.

The findings suggest that teaching is experienced as both professional labor and a meaningful vocation grounded in service, responsibility, and commitment to learners. Collegial support shared cultural values, personal beliefs, and faith-oriented perspectives help teachers cope with stress and sustain dedication despite professional challenges. These experiences highlight how meaning-making, solidarity, and relational support shape teachers' well-being within the school environment.

The study emphasizes that teacher well-being should not rely solely on personal resilience or sacrifice. Sustainable work–life balance requires fair institutional practices, realistic expectations, supportive workplace relationships, and opportunities for rest and recovery. School leadership and educational institutions play a crucial role in creating conditions that genuinely support teachers' long-term well-being.

Lastly, the study highlights the importance of values education within classroom instruction, professional practice, and institutional culture. Values such as cooperation, fairness, empathy, responsibility, and resilience are reflected in the participants' lived experiences and relationships within the school community. These findings suggest the need for educational policies and leadership practices that promote supportive, humane, and values-driven school environments for teachers.

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