

Leadership as a Mediating Mechanism Between Contextual Pressures and Teacher Well-Being: A Study of International Schools in Jakarta, Indonesia

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigated the interplay between contextual factors and school leadership in influencing teacher well-being in international schools in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative-dominant design with survey data (N=32) serving a supplementary triangulation role, the research examined how intense competition among schools and heightened parental expectations contributed to challenges in educator well-being and burnout. Crucially, it explored the perceived role of school leadership in mediating these pressures. Data collected through semi-structured interviews with five teachers from two International Baccalaureate (IB) schools were analyzed using thematic analysis through the lens of Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and the Socio-Ecological Framework. The findings revealed that while contextual pressures were significant stressors, their impact was not inevitable. School leadership emerged as the critical mediating variable, determining whether external demands overwhelmed teachers or were effectively mitigated. Leadership practices that were proactive, supportive, and empowering—fostering autonomy, providing meaningful professional development, and building collaborative community—were identified as the most effective mechanisms for safeguarding well-being. Conversely, unsupportive or inconsistent leadership exacerbated stress and accelerated burnout. The study concludes that enhancing teacher well-being in high-pressure environments requires deliberate focus on developing leadership capacity, positioning school leadership as the central mediating mechanism for cultivating a resilient, sustainable teaching workforce.

Keywords: *teacher well-being; school leadership; international schools; burnout; Conservation of Resources Theory; Self-Determination Theory; Indonesia*

1. Introduction

1.1 The Broader Context

In Indonesia's vibrant educational landscape, over 116 international schools have emerged as pivotal institutions catering to diverse expatriate and local communities (Database, 2023). These institutions bridge various cultures and aim to provide holistic education. However, amidst this complexity, the well-being of educators often takes a backseat. The influence of leadership on teacher well-being encompasses various concepts, including transformational

leadership, invitational theory, leaders' interactions with faculty, and leadership strategies (Owen, 2016; Yulianti et al., 2021). School leadership encompasses diverse fields, such as educational administration, organisational behaviour, and instructional leadership (Day et al., 2016).

To foster a positive perception of well-being within schools, school leaders must cultivate an understanding of their teams' functioning and their needs and desires (Gonzalez & Perez, 2017; Martinez, 2022). Establishing a positive school climate and environment that promotes faculty members' well-being requires a comprehensive understanding of leadership practices, theories, and the school context (Thomas, 2016; Rodriguez & Smith, 2020).

Indonesia stands as a vibrant tapestry of cultural diversity and rapid economic advancement, which has fostered the proliferation of international schools across the nation. With more than 100 international schools (Database, 2023), these institutions are dedicated to providing high-quality education to a cosmopolitan demographic, including expatriates and local families. Each school strives to create an educational environment that not only meets international standards but also resonates with the unique cultural fabric of Indonesia. However, the rapid expansion of international schools has given rise to numerous challenges that significantly impact the well-being of educators operating within these environments (Alves et al., 2020; Alam, 2022; Benevene et al., 2020; Bardach et al., 2021).

1.2 The Research Problem

Teacher well-being is essential to educational quality, yet it is critically threatened in Indonesia's international schools. These institutions operate within a highly competitive landscape and are subject to exceedingly high parental expectations. These contextual factors create immense pressure on educators, leading to documented issues of stress, job dissatisfaction, and burnout, which subsequently compromise instructional quality and student outcomes.

While the existence of these external pressures is well-documented, a pivotal gap remains in understanding how school leadership actively mediates, exacerbates, or mitigates their impact on teacher well-being. Current research often treats these stressors as inevitable, without critically examining the internal capacity of the school—specifically, its leadership—to manage them. There is a conspicuous lack of research investigating the specific leadership practices and strategies that can buffer teachers from these demands within the unique socio-cultural context of Indonesia.

The absence of effective leadership mediation allows competitive and parental pressures to directly translate into teacher burnout and high turnover. This not only jeopardizes the welfare of educators but also threatens the financial stability and academic reputation of the schools themselves, ultimately undermining the quality of education they aspire to provide. Therefore, the core problem is not merely the presence of contextual challenges, but the lack of a clear understanding of the leadership mechanisms that determine their ultimate impact on educator well-being.

1.3 Research Purpose and Questions

The objective of this study is to comprehensively explore the factors affecting teacher well-being in international schools in Indonesia, with a specific focus on investigating how school leadership mediates the impact of contextual pressures—namely, competition among schools and heightened parental expectations—on educator stress, burnout, and overall well-being.

Three research questions guide this investigation:

- How do contextual factors—specifically competition among international schools and high parental expectations—shape teachers' experiences of well-being and burnout in Indonesia?
- What is the perceived role of school leadership in influencing teacher well-being, and how do leadership practices interact with the pressures of competition and parental expectations?
- What leadership strategies and support mechanisms do teachers identify as most effective in mitigating the negative effects of contextual pressures on their well-being?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study makes a distinct and original contribution by bridging two critical but often separate conversations in educational research: one on the contextual stressors in international schools, and another on the influence of educational leadership. While substantial research exists on teacher well-being globally, and the unique challenges in Indonesian international schools are increasingly noted (Alves et al., 2020), few studies explicitly position school leadership as the central mediating variable between these challenges and teacher outcomes.

The significance of this study is multifaceted. For teachers, it aims to empower educators by equipping them with the knowledge necessary to navigate challenges more effectively and adopt healthier coping strategies. For school administrators, it provides understanding of the systemic factors contributing to teacher burnout, enabling targeted interventions that improve teacher satisfaction and retention (Tanu, 2018). For policymakers, the findings can inform policies aimed at supporting teacher well-being, including workload management strategies, professional development programs focused on stress management, and initiatives that promote work-life balance (Alam, 2022; Mushtaq & Khan, 2019). On an academic level, this study contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge regarding teacher well-being within the context of international schools, an area that remains relatively underexplored (Alves et al., 2020; Saeidipour et al., 2021).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teacher Well-Being in International Schools

The well-being of teachers in international schools is a multifaceted concept shaped by a wide array of global, cultural, and organizational factors. Teachers in these settings encounter unique challenges as they navigate the demands of teaching in diverse, transnational environments. The well-being of international school teachers is affected by a complex interplay of individual, interpersonal, and systemic factors, including global mobility, cultural adaptation, diversity and inclusion, professional identity and community, and organizational support.

Global mobility is a central feature of the experience of teachers in international schools, as many educators relocate from their home countries to work abroad. This transition entails not only logistical adjustments but also significant emotional and psychological challenges. Teachers in international settings often need to adjust to new cultural norms, languages, and socio-political contexts, all of which can have a profound impact on their well-being (Tran & Gomes, 2017). The process of adaptation can lead to feelings of disconnection and isolation, especially if teachers struggle to establish meaningful connections within their new communities.

Cultural adaptation is another significant factor affecting teachers' well-being in international schools. These educators often work with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, necessitating that they adopt flexible and inclusive pedagogical approaches. Effective cultural adaptation requires not only awareness of cultural differences but also the ability to respond to them sensitively and appropriately (Gay, 2018). Teachers in international schools frequently face the challenge of managing classrooms where students have varying levels of language proficiency, different cultural expectations around learning, and unique educational needs.

Professional identity and community are essential for teachers' well-being. In the close-knit environment of international schools, teachers often form strong bonds with colleagues and students, fostering a sense of professional identity that transcends national boundaries. This sense of belonging and identity can be a protective factor for teachers' well-being, offering essential social support and opportunities for collaboration (Gray et al., 2021). The transient nature of international school communities, however, poses emotional challenges. Teachers in these settings frequently have to say goodbye to colleagues and students and face the uncertainty of forming new relationships as others come and go.

Organizational support is a critical factor in promoting teacher well-being in international schools. Schools that prioritize teacher wellness often invest in resources such as professional development opportunities, mental health support, and work-life balance initiatives. Effective leadership that values transparency and fosters open communication can create a positive school climate where teachers feel respected and valued. Research has shown that when teachers perceive strong support from their school leadership, they are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction, greater engagement, and lower levels of burnout (Richards et al., 2020).

2.2 The Mediating Role of School Leadership

Educational leadership is not a monolithic concept but encompasses various styles and functions that directly impact faculty morale and well-being (Day et al., 2016). Transformational leadership, which inspires and motivates through a shared vision, has been linked to higher levels of teacher commitment and job satisfaction (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Similarly, instructional leadership, focused on the quality of teaching and learning, and the principles of invitational leadership, which intentionally creates a welcoming and supportive professional environment, are critical for teacher success (Owen, 2016).

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model provides a powerful lens to conceptualize leadership. Supportive leadership acts as a critical job resource that can buffer the negative effects of high job demands, such as workload and parental pressure (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). When leaders provide clear communication, meaningful professional development, and autonomy, they help meet teachers' core psychological needs as outlined by Self-Determination Theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Conversely, leadership that is perceived as unsupportive, top-down, or inconsistent constitutes a significant demand in itself and can lead to resource loss, accelerating the path to burnout as explained by Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989).

Empirically, studies consistently show that leadership is a primary determinant of school climate. Leaders who foster trust, collaboration, and recognition create a resilient environment where teachers feel valued and supported, even amidst external challenges (Richards et al., 2020). They can act as a "circuit breaker" between parental demands and teachers by establishing clear communication protocols and managing expectations. They can reframe competitive pressures into a collective, supportive mission rather than a source of individual anxiety.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by an integrated theoretical framework comprising four complementary theories:

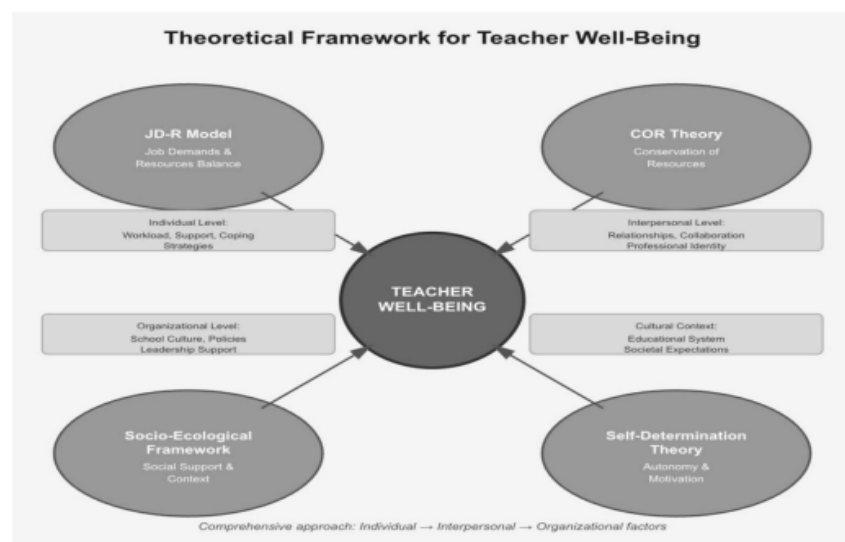
Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) provides insight into how individuals seek to acquire, retain, and protect resources they value. These resources may be material (e.g., salary), social (e.g., support from colleagues), or psychological (e.g., self-esteem). COR theory posits that stress arises when individuals perceive a threat to their resources or experience an actual resource loss. In educational settings, this can help explain why teachers feel stress or burnout when their valued resources, such as professional autonomy or social support, are lacking.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) posits that individuals have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Meeting these needs is essential for intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. SDT suggests that school environments that nurture these three needs are likely to foster well-being and intrinsic motivation among teachers. Interventions that enhance teachers' autonomy, support their professional growth, and build strong social connections can lead to sustained improvements in well-being and job performance.

The Socio-Ecological Framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) emphasizes that individual well-being is influenced by multiple levels of interacting factors: intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community, and societal. This framework provides a holistic approach for examining teacher well-being by considering how interactions across various levels shape educators' experiences.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) divides work-related factors into two primary categories: job demands and job resources. Job demands are the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of work that require sustained effort. Job resources are aspects of the job that help individuals achieve their work goals, reduce job demands, and foster personal development. The JD-R model suggests that a balance between job demands and job resources is essential for promoting well-being.

Figure 2.0: Theoretical Framework for Teacher Well-Being (adapted from Hobfoll, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017)



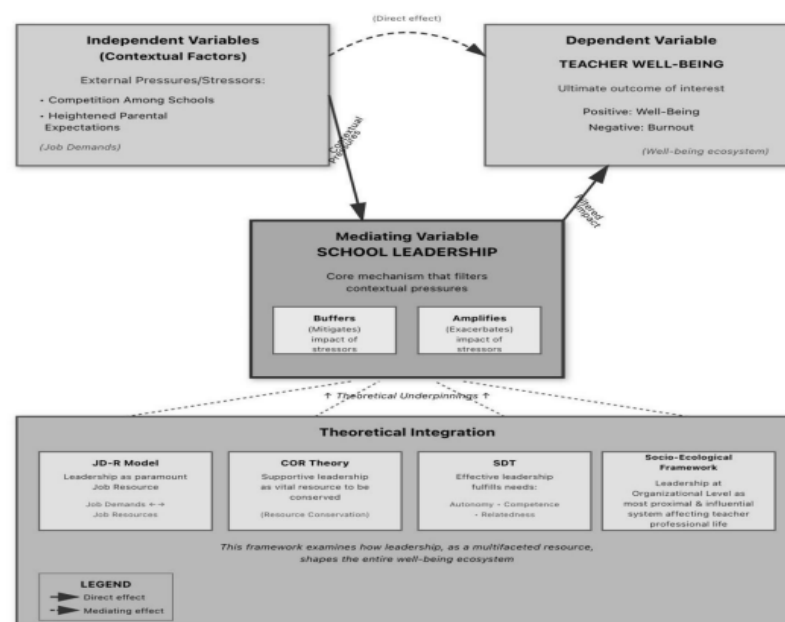
2.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study establishes a model for understanding the dynamics of teacher well-being in Indonesia's international schools. Central to this framework is the positioning of **School Leadership** as the pivotal mediating variable that intervenes between external pressures and teacher outcomes. Specifically, the model identifies two primary Contextual Factors as independent variables: the intense **Competition Among Schools** and **Heightened Parental Expectations**. These factors represent significant external stressors that exert pressure on the educational environment.

Conversely, the dependent variable of ultimate concern is **Teacher Well-Being**, which includes its negative correlate, burnout. However, this framework posits that the relationship

between contextual pressures and teacher well-being is not direct. Instead, **School Leadership** functions as the core mediating mechanism through which these external factors are filtered. In other words, leadership practices can either buffer (thereby mitigating) or amplify (thereby exacerbating) the impact of competitive and parental pressures on educators.

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework of the Study Design



3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative approach was selected to explore the varied experiences and perceptions of participants concerning teacher well-being in international schools. This method allows for an in-depth examination of complex social phenomena, particularly those related to human emotions, interpersonal relationships, and individual experiences, which quantitative methods often fail to fully capture. Teacher well-being, a multi-dimensional construct influenced by a range of personal, professional, and cultural factors, is especially well-suited for qualitative inquiry.

This qualitative inquiry is grounded in an interpretivist/constructivist research paradigm, informed by a social constructivist ontology which posits that reality is socially constructed, and a subjectivist epistemology which holds that knowledge is best developed through an

understanding of the subjective meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The study adopts a **qualitative-dominant design (QUAL-quant)**. The core inquiry is qualitative, grounded in an interpretivist paradigm and focused on understanding teachers' lived experiences through semi-structured interviews. The survey data serves a supplementary role, providing descriptive statistics that contextualize and triangulate the qualitative findings. This is not a full mixed-methods design with integrated quantitative analysis; rather, the survey functions as a supportive tool to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative interpretations.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The study targeted educators from two private International Baccalaureate (IB) schools located in Jakarta. Participants were recruited from a "job-alike" event that gathered approximately 70 educators from the two schools. Around 32 individuals expressed interest in participating in the study, reflecting engagement and willingness to share their experiences.

For in-depth interviews, a **purposive sampling** technique was employed. Participants for interviews were selected based on their roles, willingness to share their experiences, and ability to provide relevant insights into factors influencing well-being. The final sample included 5 participants (4 females, 1 male) from the two schools, ensuring a balance of roles and backgrounds. Two teachers worked in lower secondary while three worked in upper secondary. Data saturation was determined when interviews with the fifth participant yielded no new codes related to the core themes of leadership mediation and well-being, consistent with Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's (2006) guidance that saturation in homogeneous qualitative samples often occurs within 6-12 interviews.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Two primary instruments were employed: a survey and semi-structured interviews.

The survey instrument was designed to gather demographic information and general trends related to teachers' perceptions of their well-being. The survey included demographic questions and Likert-scale items to capture teachers' perceptions of their job satisfaction, stress levels, and work-life balance. Crucially, and in alignment with the study's Conceptual Framework, the survey contained dedicated sections to assess school leadership. Specific scaled items required teachers to rate their leadership's effectiveness in key areas theoretically linked to buffering stress, such as providing trust, constructive feedback, and resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Semi-structured interviews were employed to explore teachers' personal experiences in greater depth. The interview protocol was explicitly designed around the research questions, with leadership as a central theme. The open-ended questions were crafted to explore the factors influencing teachers' mental health, with a consistent focus on the role of leadership in shaping those factors. For example, participants were asked directly to describe how school leadership helped them handle pressures from competition and parents, and to recall specific instances where leadership actions impacted their well-being.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a rigorous process of coding and theme development to uncover the various factors influencing educators' experiences, with a specific focus on the role of school leadership. **Thematic analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017) was employed to systematically identify and categorize recurring patterns or themes in the interview data.

The analysis process began with familiarization with the interview transcripts. The next step involved coding the interview transcripts. Coding followed a **hybrid approach**: inductive coding captured emergent patterns directly from participant responses, while deductive coding applied a priori codes derived from the Conceptual Framework (e.g., 'Leadership Mediation', 'Parental Pressure', 'Resource Buffering'). Initial codes were then refined into more specific themes. The process of reviewing and refining themes was iterative, ensuring that the identified themes accurately reflected the participants' experiences. **Member checking** was used to validate the findings, involving sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm that the identified themes resonated with their lived experiences (Birt et al., 2016).

Quantitative frequencies from the survey were integrated to corroborate or contrast the qualitative themes, enhancing the validity of interpretation through triangulation.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before any data collection began. Participants were given an information sheet outlining the purpose of the research, the types of data to be collected, the potential risks and benefits of participating, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study by anonymizing participant identities in all reports, publications, and presentations. All data collected, including interview transcripts and survey responses, were stored securely in password-protected files and were only accessible to the research team.

Participants' autonomy was respected throughout the research process, including their right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any negative consequences. Every effort was made to minimize any potential discomfort or harm during the data collection process. The interviews were conducted in a respectful, empathetic, and nonjudgmental manner.

4. Findings

4.1 Overview of Thematic Structure

Three overarching themes emerged from the analysis:

Theme 1: The Double-Edged Sword of Pressure - external and internal demands that simultaneously motivate and strain teachers.

Theme 2: The Centrality of Leadership and Support Systems - the mediating influence of leadership and organizational climate on well-being.

Theme 3: Teacher Agency and Coping Mechanisms - personal resilience, adaptation, and strategies used to maintain equilibrium.

Figure 4.1: Thematic Map illustrating the interrelationships among the three main themes affecting teacher well-being in international schools in Indonesia. Pressure (Theme 1), Leadership and Support (Theme 2), and Teacher Agency (Theme 3) interact dynamically, influencing overall well-being outcomes.

4.2 Theme 1: The Double-Edged Sword of Pressure

This theme captures the paradoxical role of pressure within teachers' professional lives. While certain demands—academic excellence, parental engagement, and school reputation—can enhance motivation and performance, their excess leads to strain, fatigue, and emotional depletion (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Three categories emerged: workload and work-life imbalance, parental expectations, and school competition and academic drive.

Workload and Work-Life Imbalance. Teachers consistently identified heavy workload as the most critical factor undermining well-being. The survey revealed that 59% of respondents reported symptoms consistent with burnout, while a majority cited workload as their primary stressor. Frequent deadlines, extensive marking, lesson planning, and administrative reporting extended far beyond contracted hours.

"If work is not done in school, it is done at home. When work is taken home, it reduces time for family or self-care." (Teacher B)

"Finding balance and setting boundaries would mean lowering the quality of the job. I usually work on weekends." (Teacher E)

These quotations illustrate that teachers experience an ongoing conflict between professional commitment and personal restoration. Interviewees repeatedly described the erosion of personal time, reporting that the academic calendar, assessment cycles, and co-curricular demands left little room for recovery. Several mentioned late-night preparation and weekend grading sessions.

"During peak periods, I sacrifice sleep, and lack of rest affects the next day's performance." (Teacher C)

Table 4.1: Survey Responses on Workload and Burnout Symptoms (N=32)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Hours worked beyond school per week	0-5 hours	7	22
	6-10 hours	11	34
	11 hours or more	14	44
Experienced stress due to workload	Never / Rarely	5	16
	Sometimes	8	25
	Often / Always	19	59
Reported symptoms of teacher burnout	Yes	19	59
	No	13	41
Perceived work-life balance satisfaction	Satisfied / Highly Satisfied	10	31
	Neutral / Dissatisfied	22	69

Parental Expectations. Parental expectations surfaced as another significant external pressure. A majority of survey respondents rated parental expectations as high, and over half reported facing unrealistic or excessive demands. Teachers described parents as increasingly assertive and performance-oriented, sometimes questioning grades, teaching methods, or disciplinary decisions.

"Parents expect their kids will always exceed expectations in terms of grades. Some parents request several meetings to pressure the teacher with questions on how can their children improve grades." (Teacher B)

"Sometimes parents want to get responses via messages to teacher in an urgent fashion even if the matter is not very urgent. The teacher feels pressured by parents who contact her outside school hours. If there is no replies, the parents may provide negative feedback in school surveys." (Teacher E)

School Competition and Academic Drive. The competitive ethos of international schooling emerged as a pervasive contextual stressor. A majority of survey respondents perceived competition among international schools as "Moderate," "High," or "Very High." Academic standards was the most frequently cited domain of competition, followed by extracurricular achievements.

"Leadership expects teachers to deliver high grades. Admin at times gives short, demanding and unrealistic deadlines in order to boost students grades and make the school more competitive when compared to other schools." (Teacher B)

"The attempts to increase student numbers, adds extra hours of work by requiring teachers to prepare more things and add programmes to keep students and parents interested." (Teacher E)

Table 4.2: Perceived Competition Levels and Effects on Teachers (N=32)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Perceived competition among international schools	Very Low / Low	3	9
	Moderate	10	31
	High	12	38

	Very High	7	22
Reported impact of competition on teaching practice	Adaptation of methods	14	44
	Higher expectations	10	31
	Improved motivation	6	19
	Increased stress	2	6
Leadership's approach to competition (themes)	Adds pressure / Constant comparison	8 mentions	—
	Uses it to motivate / Healthy competition	6 mentions	—
	Minimal focus / Balanced approach	5 mentions	—
	Strategic planning / Focus on strengths	4 mentions	—

4.3 Theme 2: The Centrality of Leadership and Support Systems

Theme 2 underscores the pivotal role of leadership and institutional support in mediating external pressures. Leadership behaviour strongly shaped how teachers interpreted and coped with stressors. Supportive leaders provided affirmation, clear communication, and realistic expectations, while inconsistent or authoritarian approaches amplified strain. Three categories were evident: leadership efficacy and style, formal well-being programmes, and informal peer and personal support.

Leadership Efficacy and Style. Leadership emerged as the single most influential determinant of teacher well-being. The survey data contained numerous open-ended responses where principals, coordinators, or department heads were mentioned as either sources of support or contributors to stress.

"Things changed radically in the past two years as one of the leaders is not supportive, creates false narratives and provides misleading information to the top management... there is no real support from school admin at the moment." (Teacher A)

"Any initiatives the school leadership has taken has posed more stress instead of relieving." (Teacher B)

"The new director listens, accepts feedback and provides channels for teachers to express their ideas and concerns. The teacher feels really supported." (Teacher E)

"Leadership is very kind and approachable." (Teacher D)

Formal Well-Being Programs. A majority of teachers confirmed that their school offered some form of well-being programme, yet the perceived effectiveness varied significantly. Teachers often expressed ambivalence toward such initiatives.

"This year there was a trip out of town for team building. It was on a Saturday, which is a rest day instead of having it during a workday. Teachers don't have time to meet." (Teacher A)

"Access to the counselors is provided to teachers... There are meetings and well-being workshops. Not much has been done in this regard." (Teacher B)

Table 4.3: Presence and Perceived Effectiveness of Formal Well-Being Programmes (N=32)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%) / Statistic
School has formal well-being programme	Yes	19	59
	No	13	41
Perceived effectiveness of programme	Mean score (1=Very Ineffective; 5=Very Effective)	—	3.2

Informal Peer and Personal Support. Given inconsistencies in formal provisions, teachers relied heavily on informal networks. Survey responses showed "mindfulness practices" and "exercise" as the most common personal coping strategies. Qualitative accounts confirmed the centrality of peer relationships.

"I have a best friend in school with whom I discuss my issues." (Teacher C)

"Supportive, trustworthy colleagues make all the difference." (Teacher B)

4.4 Theme 3: Teacher Agency and Coping Mechanisms

The third theme foregrounds teacher agency—the capacity to act intentionally to preserve well-being despite structural pressures. Teachers expressed both vulnerability and resilience, demonstrating adaptive behaviours that enabled professional continuity. Two categories were identified: adaptation and innovation in teaching, and personal well-being strategies and suggested improvements.

Adaptation and Innovation in Teaching. Survey responses indicated that teachers often transformed competitive pressure into professional growth: a plurality reported adapting teaching methods as a key impact of competition. Teachers described an ongoing process of reflection and experimentation with pedagogy to maintain student engagement.

"I push myself to innovate every year instead of repeating old materials, even though it's time-consuming." (Teacher C)

"Competition forces us to refine pedagogy and stay current." (Teacher A, paraphrased)

Personal Well-Being Strategies and Suggested Improvements. Teachers articulated a clear awareness of what would enhance their well-being. The interview data revealed a range of practical and low-cost interventions suggested by participants.

"He would suggest more opportunities to collaborate, more transparency from the administration, open dialogue between different stakeholders and more resources. Teachers will be happy if they can express themselves openly." (Teacher A)

"Creating more flexibility in the workload will make teachers feel better. School leaders could provide a more peaceful atmosphere." (Teacher B)

"Cooking club, traveling club. Clubs for teachers." (Teacher C)

"Simple box to write how the person is feeling... the leaders can read the papers so they can have a better understanding of how teachers are feeling." (Teacher D)

Table 4.4: Desired Supports and Improvement Suggestions by Teachers (N=32)

Suggested Intervention	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
More transparent communication	6	19

Greater teacher autonomy	5	16
Manageable workload	4	13
Leadership advocacy (e.g., with parents)	4	13
More consistent feedback & support	4	13
Peer-support / sharing groups	2	6
Anonymous well-being feedback box	1	3

4.5 Cross-Thematic Interpretation

Figure 4.2: Socio-Ecological Model of Teacher Well-Being in International Schools (Adapted from Sansom, 2022; Inspired by Sallis, Owen, & Fisher, 2008)

Synthesising the three overarching themes reveals that teacher well-being operates within a multi-level system of influence:

- **Policy Context Level:** Curriculum demands and parental expectations create foundational pressures (Theme 1).
- **School Leadership Level:** Policies and well-being programmes implemented by school leadership determine how broader contextual pressures are filtered and managed (Theme 2).
- **Peer Relationships Level:** Support networks and team collaboration provide emotional support and practical assistance (Themes 2 and 3).
- **Teacher Agency Level:** Personal resilience and coping skills reflect individual capacity to maintain well-being through pedagogical adaptation, self-care practices, and boundary-setting (Theme 3).

The hierarchical structure illustrates how broader contextual factors create conditions that are then mediated by organizational leadership, supported by peer networks, and ultimately managed through individual agencies.

5. Discussion

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The investigation systematically addressed three central research questions. Firstly, in response to RQ1, the data unequivocally pinpointed a triad of intense pressures: pervasive workload and work-life imbalance, elevated and often unrealistic parental expectations, and the relentless drive of institutional competition. These factors manifested as emotional exhaustion, systematically extended working hours, and a chronic erosion of boundaries between professional and personal lives.

Secondly, addressing RQ2, the findings powerfully confirmed the core proposition of the Conceptual Framework. Leadership emerged not as one factor among many, but as the pivotal mediating mechanism that determines how external pressures are experienced. Teachers navigating these pressures demonstrated remarkable resilience, primarily leveraging

personal agency and informal peer support. Crucially, this reliance on personal and informal resources was often a direct response to the perceived ineffectiveness or absence of robust, formal institutional support structures.

Thirdly, RQ3 queried the support mechanisms teachers identified as most effective. Their collective voice called for leadership actions and resources that were structural, relational, and addressed root causes. The most desired interventions—transparent communication, manageable workloads, and consistent leadership advocacy—stand in stark contrast to one-off, tokenistic wellness events.

5.2 Discussion in Relation to Theory and the Conceptual Framework

The empirical findings provide robust validation for the integrated Conceptual Framework, positioning School Leadership as the pivotal mediating variable between external contextual factors and Teacher Well-Being.

Leadership as the Mediating Mechanism. The central proposition of the CF was that the path from external pressures to teacher wellbeing is not direct but is fundamentally shaped by school leadership. The findings overwhelmingly confirm this. The data revealed that the same contextual pressures led to starkly different wellbeing outcomes based entirely on the quality of leadership mediation. Where leadership was perceived as supportive, competition was described as a "Healthy competition" or an "Opportunity," and parental pressures were met with "Good systems in place." Conversely, under unsupportive leadership, identical pressures were described as "Adds more pressure," "Constant comparison," and left teachers feeling "on our own." This dichotomy provides direct empirical support for the CF's core structure.

Leadership as the Job Resource. The findings animate the JD-R and COR theories. From a JD-R perspective, the demands of workload, competition, and parents consistently threatened to deplete teachers' energy. Supportive leadership—acting as a key resource—provided the necessary buffer. Examples such as a department head who "adjusts deadlines when workload is high" or a principal who "supported me when a parent demanded unfair grade changes" are clear instances of a job resource actively counterbalancing job demands.

Furthermore, the findings vividly illustrate COR Theory's concept of "resource caravans" through the mediating role of leadership. A supportive leader does not merely act as a single resource; they become a "caravan passageway" that enables the acquisition and protection of other crucial resources. When Teacher E reported that new leadership "listens, accepts feedback, and provides channels," this leadership resource fostered subsequent gains in resources of psychological safety, professional autonomy, and collaborative support. Conversely, when leadership "criticized my teaching publicly" or "changed policies without teacher input," it directly eroded resources of respect, trust, and motivation.

The SDT Pathway to Wellbeing. The data offers extensive evidence of SDT pathways in action. The expressed desire for "Greater teacher autonomy" and frustration with a lack of "transparent communication" reflect a thwarted Autonomy need. The negative impact of "short, unrealistic deadlines" on morale and the positive impact of "consistent feedback" demonstrate how leadership builds or undermines teachers' sense of Competence. The stark contrast between feelings of isolation under poor leadership and the sense of belonging fostered by "kind and approachable" leaders highlights the critical role of leadership in satisfying the need for Relatedness.

Ecosystem within the Socio-Ecological Context. The findings validate the CF's use of the Socio-Ecological Framework. The data confirms that the Macrosystem/Exosystem (competition, parental expectations) creates the overarching climate of pressure. However, its impact is processed and translated into daily reality within the Organizational Level—the mesosystem where leadership operates. The data demonstrates that this organizational level is the most proximal and powerful system influencing a teacher's professional life.

5.3 Implications

Theoretical Implications. This study makes three distinct theoretical contributions. First, it refines Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory by demonstrating how supportive leadership acts as a 'resource caravan passageway'—a concept describing how a single critical resource (leadership) enables the acquisition and protection of other resources (autonomy, peer support, psychological safety). Second, it extends Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by showing how leadership satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness operates specifically within high-pressure international school contexts. Third, it advances the Socio-Ecological Framework by positioning leadership as the critical mesosystem link between macro-level pressures and micro-level teacher outcomes.

Practical Implications. For school leadership development, there is an urgent imperative for leadership training to incorporate a core, non-negotiable focus on "Wellbeing Leadership." This involves cultivating competencies in empathetic communication, proactive resource protection, and the deliberate creation of a school culture characterized by psychological safety and trust.

Schools must shift from implementing sporadic, generic wellbeing programmes to embedding wellbeing into the very fabric of school operations and policy. This requires a participatory approach, co-designing initiatives with teachers, ensuring they are scheduled within contracted hours, and focusing on improving the core work environment itself rather than merely offering coping mechanisms for a flawed environment.

For policy formulation, schools need to develop, communicate, and consistently enforce clear, humane policies covering digital communication (e.g., no email expectations after 6pm), workload management (e.g., caps on meeting times), and constructive parental engagement protocols.

Impact on Stakeholders. For school leaders, the findings provide a clear mandate that their leadership style is the most significant variable under their direct control that impacts teacher retention, morale, and professional effectiveness. For teachers, the findings validate their lived experiences and empower them to articulate their needs more effectively. For parents, understanding the link between certain demands and teacher burnout can foster a more collaborative home-school partnership. For policymakers and accrediting bodies, the findings present a compelling argument for including teacher wellbeing and supportive leadership practices as explicit standards within school accreditation frameworks.

5.4 Limitations

This study has several limitations. The contextual and methodological specificity means findings are deeply contextualized within two private IB schools in Jakarta, limiting

transferability. The sample characteristics present limitations, as recruitment from a "job-alike" event may have introduced selection bias. The study relies entirely on self-reported data, susceptible to social desirability and recall biases. The study was designed to capture the essential voice of teachers but lacks multi-perspective data from school leadership, board members, and parents.

5.5 Recommendations

For School Leadership and Policy: Implement "Protected Time" policies mandating at least one afternoon per week free from meetings and administrative tasks. Develop and enact a "School Wellbeing Charter" co-created by teachers, support staff, and leadership, outlining collective commitments regarding communication boundaries and realistic timelines. Institute regular, structured wellbeing check-ins focused on workload, well-being, and support needs. Audit and strategically revise formal wellbeing programmes, prioritizing initiatives integrated into the school day and developed with teacher input.

For Future Research: Conduct a longitudinal cohort study to understand the evolution of teacher wellbeing and long-term impact of interventions. Undertake a multi-stakeholder, comparative study including perspectives of school leaders, board members, and parents. Investigate cross-cultural and cross-contextual dynamics through comparative studies between Indonesia and other regions.