

TEACHER WELLBEING: FINDINGS FROM A SCOPING LITERATURE REVIEW AND CASE STUDIES IN CAMBODIA, KENYA, AND QATAR



Executive Summary

The future of every society in the world depends on teachers. Teachers impact children in a myriad of ways, from teaching the lifelong skill of how to learn, to the practical skills to navigate daily life and to modeling healthy, respectful interactions. With population growth, the number of teachers needed worldwide is expected to increase by 69 million between 2019 and 2030, for a total of 163 million teachers. It is essential to prevent burnout and attrition among teachers in order to sustain enough teachers and allow them time to develop expert teaching skills. It is not enough to merely prevent burnout, however. To optimally teach children, we need teachers with strong wellbeing. Wellbeing is associated with doing well for others, striving, coming up with creative solutions to problems, and socially connecting. Our children need this full effort from teachers.

This report covers two large endeavors. The first endeavor was a scoping literature review of 102 journal articles worldwide on teacher wellbeing for the five-year period of 2016 to 2020. We condensed the study findings on what fosters teacher wellbeing, as well as burnout, and separately detailed our recommendations for promoting teacher wellbeing. We also looked for gaps in the literature. The second endeavor was a set of case studies involving original, in-depth interview data collection with 90 teachers and 16 principals in high-performing schools in Cambodia, Kenya, and Qatar. We further interviewed 11 policymakers. We inferred the underlying processes that promote teacher wellbeing from participant responses about their behaviors and the conditions during their times of strongest wellbeing as teachers.

Teachers' wellbeing experiences are similar around the world. The conditions that teachers, principals, and policymakers attributed to teacher wellbeing were aligned across Cambodia, Kenya, and Qatar. The findings of the literature review highlighted overlapping recommendations across the included studies. At the same time, some differences in teacher wellbeing in the Cambodian, Kenyan, and Qatari case studies were found, such as different foci on physical health, social gatherings, and the needs of expatriate teachers.

From the case studies, seven principles underlying teacher wellbeing emerged. Teachers have strong wellbeing when they:

1. experience being valued and respected as leaders
2. are deeply engaged in their work
3. find meaning and purpose in their work
4. feel successful
5. have their personal, non-work needs met
6. manage their emotions and wellbeing
7. experience a positive, supportive work environment

The studies in the literature review affirmed many of these principles, but there were more studies on positive environments, emotion regulation, and feeling successful (teacher self-efficacy). Of the 102 articles, 55 reported findings from interventions to promote teacher wellbeing. Despite the literature's emphasis on organizational-level work conditions, the interventions tested individual practices that teachers could engage in (mindfulness-based stress reduction practices and emotion management) and interventions to strengthen relationships between teachers and students or colleagues. None of the studies reported on policy-level interventions, and there was a notable absence of studies from Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. No teacher wellbeing studies from the five-year period were found from Cambodia, Kenya, or Qatar.

The good news is that there are many ways to promote teacher wellbeing. Numerous recommendations emerged from the literature review, with more identified in the case studies. It is important to understand that the factors that might prevent burnout can be different from those that might promote wellbeing. In the literature review, for example, burnout was related to teachers feeling marginalized or bullied by other teachers. Principals can prevent marginalization and bullying, but minimizing these problems alone will not necessarily promote wellbeing. Instead, an atmosphere of respect, inclusion, and mutual teacher support is needed to promote wellbeing.

The case studies revealed how deeply embedded teachers are in relationships --with principals, other teachers, students, and parents-- and the degree of emotional work that comes with constant interactions. The interactions between separate actors influence the upstream and downstream interactions; when principals praise teachers, teachers may be more likely to praise students. When students work hard, teachers may be more likely to work hard, as may principals. Yet challenges abound. Throughout the day teachers make countless decisions to maintain their motivation in the face of small and large frustrations. At the same time, the possibility of finding meaning during a day's work is omnipresent. The findings indicated that teachers' need for praise and recognition to maintain their sense of meaning and value in their work was strongly related to their wellbeing. Respect for teachers as leaders with the autonomy accorded to other experts supported wellbeing. Burdensome administrative work, seen as lacking meaning, displaces other work considered meaningful, and may lead to teacher burnout.

Teachers, principals, parents, and national, provincial, and local level education bodies all have important roles in promoting teacher wellbeing. These can be summarized in the following set of recommendations:

Parents can contribute to teacher wellbeing by communicating with their children's teachers and recognizing and praising teachers when deserved. They can prepare their children to behave well at school and respect their teachers, which will make teachers' jobs easier.

Teachers can improve their own wellbeing through deep and meaningful engagement in their work. For example, they can praise students and encourage them to apply for awards and participate in competitions. Teachers can take advantage of professional development opportunities and volunteer to serve in school-wide or district-wide committees. Interacting with other teachers

is important, including sharing what they know with each other and asking for help when needed. Ideally, teachers take care of themselves on a regular basis and reserve some personal or family time for themselves. A number of skills can help teacher wellbeing, including learning how to manage emotions, practicing mindfulness-based stress reduction skills, and keeping the big picture in mind when experiencing frustration or other negative emotions.

Principals play a significant role in promoting teacher wellbeing. They help create a positive work environment and ways for teachers to positively interact with each other. Principals can promote teacher wellbeing by clearly stating the school's goals, fostering a sense of unity, and focusing on promoting good student behavior. They can praise teachers for good work, ask about their wellbeing, and allow them flexibility when reasonable. To minimize teacher burnout, principals can give teachers a large degree of autonomy in the classroom, minimize the amount of administrative and bureaucratic work, and give them school-wide responsibilities.

Education authorities provide professional development for teachers, not only in teaching methods but also in emotional regulation strategies and classroom management. To promote teacher wellbeing, education authorities can create programs to publicly recognize teachers and principals. Meaningful feedback to teachers from inspectors can be helpful. Financial stability and resources to meet personal needs, as well as positive work environments, all promote teacher wellbeing. Reducing administrative work assigned to teachers and revising policies on leave-taking and working hours for more flexibility can lower the possibility of burn out.

Finally, everyone can contribute to teacher wellbeing by showing respect for teachers and letting our past teachers know they matter, especially those who made a difference in our lives. Everyone can support and advocate for incentives for teachers. This shows respect for teachers and boosts their motivation.

It is crucial that we, as a society, collectively work to support our 94 million teachers worldwide. Although there is a growing body of research on teacher wellbeing, there are still gaps, with limited studies in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. This study's two-fold approach was innovative in design and helped surface more focused findings and recommendations for teacher wellbeing in the literature, in addition to more specific insights about promoting teacher wellbeing in three African, Asian, and Middle Eastern contexts. Further studies to address specific gaps in the literature review, as well as more studies examining cultural contexts less well-represented, are needed to gain more insight on how we can fully promote teacher wellbeing globally. The authors strongly encourage stakeholders to help promote and sustain teacher wellbeing by implementing the recommendations that fit their context.

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