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IN BETWEEN LESSONS AND LIFE: WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS IN SABLAN, BENGUET

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ABSTRACT

Work-life balance has become an important concern among teachers due to increasing professional demands, administrative responsibilities, and personal obligations that affect their well-being and job satisfaction. This study explored the lived experiences of elementary teachers in Sablan, Benguet regarding work-life balance and job satisfaction using a qualitative research design grounded in Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Specifically, the study aimed to uncover the meanings, challenges, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of teachers concerning the interplay between their professional and personal lives. Purposive sampling was utilized in selecting participants who had direct experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed using phenomenological thematic analysis through the process of bracketing and phenomenological reduction. Findings revealed three major themes: struggles in balancing professional and personal responsibilities, coping mechanisms and sources of support in managing work-life balance, and work-life balance as a determinant of job satisfaction and teaching commitment. The study found that teachers experienced stress and exhaustion due to heavy workloads and overlapping responsibilities; however, they demonstrated resilience through time management, family support, collaboration, and personal coping strategies. Furthermore, work-life balance significantly influenced teachers' motivation, emotional well-being, job satisfaction, and commitment to teaching. The study

concludes that teacher wellness and institutional support are essential in sustaining teacher satisfaction and effective educational delivery. The findings may serve as a basis for developing teacher wellness programs and policies promoting sustainable and supportive work environments in rural schools.

KEYWORDS: work-life balance, job satisfaction, transcendental phenomenology, elementary teachers, Sablan Benguet.

INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance has become an important concern among elementary school teachers, especially in rural communities such as Sablan, Benguet. It refers to the ability of teachers to manage their teaching responsibilities while still giving enough time to their family, personal well-being, social activities, and community involvement. Maintaining a healthy balance between work and personal life is essential because it affects teachers' mental health, job satisfaction, motivation, and effectiveness in teaching learners (Wahab & Arazo, 2024). When teachers experience excessive workload and stress, the quality of instruction and learner engagement may also be affected.

Globally, studies have shown that teachers experience increasing pressure due to heavy workloads, administrative tasks, curriculum demands, and responsibilities beyond classroom instruction. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2025), teachers often experience stress and exhaustion because they are expected not only to teach but also to provide emotional support, manage student behavior, and perform numerous non-teaching duties. These challenges contribute to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and declining professional performance (Presley, 2021; Sandmeier et al., 2022). Research also revealed that teachers who experience high levels of stress are more likely to feel dissatisfied with their work and may even consider leaving the profession.

In Asia, teachers similarly face difficulties balancing their professional and personal responsibilities. Studies in countries such as Singapore and China reported that teachers work long hours due to lesson preparation, administrative tasks, extracurricular activities, and student supervision (Yburan & Tantiado, 2025; Li & Albattat, 2025). Rural teachers, in particular, often experience additional challenges such as limited institutional support, lack of resources, and rigid work expectations (Nicer & Faller, 2024). These conditions affect

teachers' well-being, reduce job satisfaction, and may negatively influence the quality of education provided to learners.

In the Philippines, public school teachers also experience difficulties in maintaining work-life balance. Heavy teaching loads, paperwork, school reports, and digital communication demands often extend teachers' responsibilities beyond regular working hours. Abdulpatta et al. (2024) reported that many Filipino public-school teachers experience moderate to low job satisfaction because of work-related stress and insufficient time for personal and family life. These concerns relate to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 on Good Health and Well-Being and SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, which emphasize the importance of healthy working conditions and employee welfare.

This study is anchored on the philosophical foundations of Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, which seeks to describe and understand the essence of human experiences as they are consciously lived. The study aims to explore the lived experiences and meanings attached by elementary teachers in Sablan, Benguet to their work-life balance and job satisfaction, consistent with Husserl's principle of returning "to the things themselves" (*zu den Sachen selbst*), which emphasizes the direct examination of lived realities and conscious experiences.

Transcendental phenomenology, as introduced in Husserl's seminal work *Ideas* (1913), significantly influenced philosophy, social sciences, education, and the humanities by shifting inquiry from abstract assumptions toward the rigorous examination of lived experiences (Paradowski, 2023). This philosophical orientation provides an appropriate framework for understanding how elementary teachers in Sablan experience and interpret the realities of balancing their professional responsibilities with their personal and family lives. Within this framework, consciousness is considered intentional, meaning that every human experience is directed toward a particular object, situation, or reality. Tassone (2007) explains that transcendental reduction enables researchers to suspend or "bracket" preconceived beliefs and biases in order to uncover the pure essence of participants' experiences. Through this process, meaning and truth emerge from individuals' lived consciousness rather than from external assumptions alone.

Phenomenology is further described by Naubauer (2019) as a research approach that seeks to uncover the essence of a phenomenon by examining it from the perspective of individuals

who have directly experienced it. The approach aims to capture both the content and process of lived experiences. Applying this framework to the present study enables the researcher to understand how elementary teachers in Sablan perceive, interpret, and internalize their experiences related to work-life balance and job satisfaction, and how these experiences shape their well-being and professional fulfillment.

This study specifically adopts Husserl's descriptive transcendental phenomenology, which focuses on describing the essential structures of human experiences through careful and systematic reflection. Husserl emphasized the importance of describing experiences as they appear to consciousness without imposing external interpretations. Guided by this perspective, the researcher seeks to describe the lived experiences of elementary teachers in Sablan, Benguet as they navigate the interplay between teaching responsibilities, family obligations, and personal well-being.

According to Oluka (2025), descriptive phenomenology aims to reveal the essence of experiences by setting aside the researcher's assumptions through the process of bracketing or epoche. Similarly, Sloan and Bowe (2014) stressed that phenomenological inquiry requires researchers to suspend personal biases in order to capture participants' experiences as accurately and authentically as possible. Through this philosophical lens, the study seeks to describe the phenomenon of work-life balance and job satisfaction as genuinely experienced by elementary teachers in Sablan, free from external theoretical impositions.

Furthermore, Shorey and Ng (2022) explained that the goal of descriptive phenomenology is to achieve transcendental subjectivity, wherein researchers continuously reflect on and neutralize their biases throughout the study. Lopez and Willis (2004) likewise emphasized that maintaining an open and reflective stance allows researchers to preserve the authenticity of participants' narratives during data gathering and analysis. This process, known as phenomenological reduction, enables the researcher to uncover the pure essence of teachers' experiences concerning work-life balance and job satisfaction.

In the context of this study, transcendental phenomenology serves as the philosophical foundation for exploring the lived experiences of elementary teachers in Sablan, Benguet. Through phenomenological reduction and bracketing, the researcher seeks to uncover the essential meanings emerging from teachers' experiences as they strive to balance professional duties, community expectations, family responsibilities, and personal well-being. This

philosophical stance ensures that the findings genuinely reflect the teachers' authentic voices and lived realities.

In educational settings, this theoretical orientation is highly relevant because teachers' experiences are shaped by institutional demands, community relationships, cultural expectations, and personal values. Santiago et al. (2020) explained that phenomenological studies aim to understand how individuals interpret and assign meaning to their lived experiences. Likewise, Munhall (2012) and Polit and Beck (2017) noted that phenomenological research focuses on uncovering meanings and values embedded within human experiences rather than testing causal relationships or hypotheses. By situating the present inquiry within a transcendental phenomenological framework, the study aims to understand how elementary teachers in Sablan perceive, interpret, and internalize their work-life balance and job satisfaction experiences within their specific socio-cultural context.

The present study is further anchored on the theoretical perspectives of Spillover Theory, Conflict Theory, and Boundary Theory. These interconnected frameworks provide a multidimensional understanding of how elementary teachers experience the interaction between their professional and personal lives. Each theory contributes to explaining the complexities surrounding work-life balance and job satisfaction among educators. Spillover Theory, originally proposed by Wilensky (1960) and further elaborated by Parker (1971) and Zedeck (1992, as cited by Khateeb, 2021), posits that emotions, behaviors, and experiences from one domain of life may transfer into another domain, producing either positive or negative outcomes. In the teaching profession, this theory suggests that teachers' experiences at school—such as stress, fulfillment, pressure, or motivation—may influence their family life, relationships, and overall well-being. For elementary teachers in Sablan, whose responsibilities often extend beyond classroom instruction into community involvement and family obligations, this theory provides insight into how work experiences shape their personal lives and vice versa.

Complementing this perspective, Conflict Theory by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) asserts that work and personal life demands often compete for individuals' time, energy, and commitment, leading to role conflict and strain. Teachers who face heavy workloads, administrative tasks, learner concerns, and family responsibilities may experience difficulties fulfilling expectations in both domains simultaneously. This theoretical lens helps explain the

tensions and sacrifices experienced by elementary teachers in balancing their professional obligations with personal and family responsibilities.

Boundary Theory, developed by Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate (2000) and grounded in the work of Nippert-Eng (1996), further explains how individuals create and manage boundaries between work and personal life. According to Allen, Cho, and Meier (2014), boundaries help individuals transition between professional and non-work roles. However, for teachers, these boundaries are often blurred because of after-school responsibilities, digital communication, and community expectations. For elementary teachers in Sablan, where close community relationships are common, maintaining boundaries between work and personal life may become particularly challenging, thereby affecting their perception of job satisfaction and well-being.

Anchored in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, the integration of Spillover Theory, Conflict Theory, and Boundary Theory establishes a coherent philosophical and theoretical framework for examining the lived experiences of elementary teachers in Sablan, Benguet. These frameworks collectively provide affective, structural, and behavioral perspectives in understanding how teachers navigate the interaction between professional and personal roles. Through this alignment, the study seeks to uncover authentic and contextually grounded meanings concerning work-life balance and job satisfaction, while contributing to educational research, teacher wellness initiatives, and policy discussions on sustainable and supportive work environments for teachers. Ultimately, this framework serves as the intellectual foundation for understanding the lived realities of elementary teachers and for identifying ways to support their professional fulfillment and overall well-being.

Within the Cordillera region, elementary teachers in Sablan, Benguet encounter unique challenges shaped by their geographical and socio-cultural environment. Many teachers serve not only as educators but also as active members of the community who participate in school programs, community activities, and family responsibilities simultaneously. Teachers in remote barangays may also face transportation difficulties, limited access to instructional resources, and overlapping duties that contribute to stress and fatigue. Despite the efforts of the Department of Education through policies such as DepEd Order No. 004, s. 2025 on Flexible Work Arrangements and DepEd Memorandum No. 291, s. 2008 limiting teaching hours, many teachers still struggle to maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life.

Although previous studies have explored teacher workload, stress, and job satisfaction, limited research has focused specifically on the lived experiences of elementary teachers in Sablan, Benguet regarding work-life balance. Understanding how these teachers manage their professional and personal responsibilities is important in identifying the challenges they encounter, the coping mechanisms they use, and the support systems they need. Hence, this study seeks to explore and understand the lived experiences of elementary teachers in Sablan, Benguet concerning work-life balance and job satisfaction through a phenomenological approach

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenological approach to explore and describe the lived experiences of 12 elementary teachers in Sablan, Benguet regarding work-life balance and job satisfaction. The participants of the study consisted of purposively selected public elementary school teachers who had direct experiences balancing professional responsibilities and personal life demands. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews to allow participants to freely express their experiences, perceptions, and reflections. The study utilized purposive sampling to ensure that participants possessed rich and relevant experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation. Interview data were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using phenomenological thematic analysis guided by Husserlian principles of epoche or bracketing to suspend the researcher's biases and preconceived assumptions. Through phenomenological reduction, significant statements were identified, clustered into themes, and synthesized to uncover the essences and meanings of teachers' lived experiences concerning work-life balance and job satisfaction. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and respect for participants' rights were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the discussion of the findings derived from the lived experiences of elementary teachers in Sablan, Benguet regarding work-life balance and job satisfaction. Using Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenological approach, the study sought to uncover the meanings and essences attached by teachers to their experiences as they navigated the demands of their professional and personal lives. Through phenomenological analysis, significant statements and shared experiences were clustered into emergent themes

that reflected the realities, struggles, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of teachers concerning work-life balance and job satisfaction. The discussion integrates participants' narratives with existing literature and relevant theoretical frameworks, particularly Spillover Theory, Conflict Theory, and Boundary Theory, to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon within the context of rural elementary education in Sablan, Benguet.

Struggles in Balancing Professional and Personal Responsibilities

The findings revealed that elementary teachers in Sablan, Benguet experienced persistent difficulties in balancing their professional duties and personal responsibilities. Participants described how teaching workloads, lesson preparation, paperwork, school-related activities, and community obligations consumed significant portions of their time, leaving limited opportunities for rest, family interaction, and self-care. Many teachers also expressed feelings of stress, fatigue, and emotional exhaustion due to overlapping expectations from the school and the community. In rural contexts such as Sablan, teachers often perform multiple roles beyond classroom instruction, which intensifies the challenge of maintaining work-life balance. These findings imply that excessive workloads and role expectations may negatively affect teachers' well-being, instructional effectiveness, and long-term commitment to the profession. The results corroborate the studies of Presley (2021), Sandmeier et al. (2022), and OECD (2025), which emphasized that increasing workloads and administrative demands contribute to teacher stress, burnout, and declining job satisfaction. Similarly, Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) Conflict Theory supports the idea that competing demands between work and personal life create tension and strain among professionals, particularly educators.

Moreover, the findings suggest that the realities faced by elementary teachers in Sablan are not solely professional concerns but also socio-cultural and environmental realities shaped by rural educational settings. Teachers in remote communities often experience blurred boundaries between their work and personal lives because they are expected to participate actively in community affairs while simultaneously fulfilling instructional responsibilities. This situation creates continuous emotional and psychological pressure that may gradually diminish teachers' morale and effectiveness if left unaddressed. Hence, there is a need for educational leaders and policymakers to strengthen teacher welfare programs, reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, and create more sustainable support systems that prioritize teachers' mental health and overall well-being.

Coping Mechanisms and Sources of Support in Managing Work-Life Balance

The study further revealed that elementary teachers developed various coping mechanisms and relied on support systems to manage the demands of teaching and personal life. Participants highlighted the importance of time management, prioritization of tasks, collaboration with colleagues, family support, spiritual practices, and maintaining positive relationships within the school community. Some teachers also emphasized resilience and adaptability as essential qualities in overcoming work-related stress and maintaining emotional stability. Despite challenges, these coping strategies helped teachers sustain their responsibilities and preserve a sense of balance in their lives. The findings imply that institutional and social support systems play a vital role in promoting teacher wellness and resilience, particularly in geographically and socially demanding educational environments. These findings are supported by Wang et al. (2023), who noted that supportive work environments and flexible practices enhance teachers' ability to manage responsibilities and improve job satisfaction. Likewise, Boundary Theory by Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate (2000) explains that individuals create personal and behavioral boundaries to effectively transition between work and non-work roles, helping reduce stress and role conflict.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of fostering a supportive and collaborative school culture that values teacher well-being alongside instructional performance. Teachers who felt emotionally supported by school heads, colleagues, and family members demonstrated greater resilience and a more positive outlook toward their profession despite work pressures. The findings also indicate that personal coping mechanisms alone may not be sufficient unless complemented by institutional interventions and understanding leadership practices. This highlights the need for schools to establish wellness initiatives, peer support systems, and professional development programs that equip teachers with practical stress management and work-life balance strategies, ultimately contributing to healthier and more productive educational environments.

Work-Life Balance as a Determinant of Job Satisfaction and Teaching Commitment

The findings also showed that teachers viewed work-life balance as closely connected to their job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment to teaching. Participants shared that when they experienced balance between work and personal life, they felt more motivated, emotionally healthy, productive, and fulfilled in their profession. Conversely, prolonged imbalance led to stress, reduced enthusiasm, and emotional exhaustion, which affected their performance and

personal well-being. Teachers emphasized that supportive school leadership, manageable workloads, and understanding family relationships contributed positively to their satisfaction and dedication to their work. These findings imply that promoting teacher well-being and work-life balance is essential not only for individual welfare but also for sustaining quality education and teacher retention in schools. The findings corroborate the studies of Abdulpatta et al. (2024), UNESCO (2024), and Wong et al. (2017), which emphasized that work-related stress and imbalance significantly affect teachers' job satisfaction, well-being, and professional performance. Furthermore, Spillover Theory by Wilensky (1960) supports the findings by explaining that experiences from one life domain, whether positive or negative, inevitably influence other domains, shaping teachers' overall sense of satisfaction and well-being.

Additionally, the findings reveal that work-life balance serves as a significant factor influencing teachers' sense of purpose and professional sustainability within the teaching profession. Teachers who experienced healthier balance demonstrated stronger commitment, greater enthusiasm in classroom instruction, and more positive interactions with learners and colleagues. On the other hand, prolonged imbalance increased the risk of burnout, disengagement, and intentions to leave the profession. These findings emphasize that teacher wellness is directly connected to the overall quality of education delivered in schools. Consequently, educational institutions must recognize work-life balance not merely as a personal concern but as an organizational and educational priority that significantly impacts teacher retention, instructional effectiveness, and learner outcomes.

The discussion of the findings revealed that the lived experiences of elementary teachers in Sablan, Benguet are shaped by the complex interaction between professional responsibilities, personal obligations, and community expectations. Despite experiencing stress, workload pressures, and role conflicts, teachers demonstrated resilience and adaptability through various coping strategies and support systems that enabled them to sustain their commitment to the profession. The findings further emphasized that work-life balance significantly influences teachers' job satisfaction, emotional well-being, motivation, and professional fulfillment. Anchored on transcendental phenomenology and supported by Spillover Theory, Conflict Theory, and Boundary Theory, the study illuminated the essential meanings teachers attach to balancing their personal and professional lives. Ultimately, the discussion highlights the importance of strengthening teacher wellness initiatives, institutional support

mechanisms, and sustainable educational practices that promote both teacher well-being and quality education in rural school communities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concluded that elementary teachers in Sablan, Benguet experience significant challenges in balancing their professional responsibilities and personal lives due to increasing workloads, administrative demands, and community expectations. Despite these difficulties, teachers demonstrated resilience through various coping mechanisms and support systems that helped them sustain their well-being and commitment to the teaching profession. Furthermore, the findings revealed that work-life balance plays a crucial role in shaping teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, emotional wellness, and professional dedication. When teachers experience a healthier balance between work and personal life, they become more productive, fulfilled, and committed to delivering quality education. Overall, the study highlighted that teacher well-being is essential not only for personal welfare but also for sustaining effective teaching and positive educational outcomes in rural school communities.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions, it is recommended that school administrators and educational policymakers strengthen teacher wellness and support programs by reducing unnecessary administrative tasks, promoting manageable workloads, and implementing initiatives that support mental health and work-life balance among teachers. Schools may also establish professional support systems, wellness activities, and stress management programs that encourage collaboration, resilience, and emotional well-being among educators. Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged to practice healthy coping mechanisms and boundary-setting strategies to maintain balance between their professional and personal responsibilities. Future researchers may also conduct similar studies in other rural and urban educational settings to further explore the diverse experiences of teachers regarding work-life balance and job satisfaction.

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