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# Exploring the Well-Being of Teachers and the Development of Community Building in Macau's Primary and Secondary School

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the well-being of primary and secondary school teachers in Macau and the development of teacher community building within local schools. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with ten teachers from diverse educational backgrounds, a reflexive thematic analysis identified six interrelated themes: (a) long working hours and hidden labor erode wellbeing, (b) lack of structural support, stress managed individually, (c) teacher communities remain formalistic, low collaboration efficacy, (d) opaque decision-making undermines participation and trust, (e) leadership style and empathy shape support and trust, and (f) stability and fairness of systems sustain teacher wellbeing. The findings reveal that teachers' well-being is shaped by the interplay between job demands, institutional support, and relational trust within schools. While personal coping strategies provide temporary relief, structural limitations and formalized teacher communities hinder sustainable development. The study extends the Job Demands–Resources and organizational justice frameworks by situating teacher well-being within the specific sociocultural and institutional context of Macau. It highlights the importance of empathetic leadership, transparent governance, and equitable workload systems for fostering both teacher well-being and community cohesion in Macau educational settings.

**Keywords:** teacher wellbeing; community building; primary and secondary school teacher; Hidden labor; organizational justice

## 1. Introduction

Teachers often find fulfillment, happiness, and value in their profession (Schutz, 2014). However it is difficult to define the well-being that teachers get from their work, in a study by Fox (2021) an attempt was made to refer to a definition of four elements that include psychological and social factors, including teacher efficacy (teachers' beliefs about their ability to teach), teacher disposition (teachers' qualities and characteristics), school connectedness (teacher's relationship with others in the school), job-specific stress (experiences that may become barriers to well-being when disproportionate to the positive elements of teacher well-being). In addition, there are strong links between teacher well-being and manageable stress, support from the community, and personal resources (McCarthy et al., 2019; Ferguson et al., 2017; Jennings et al., 2013) Not only that but the relational and collective selves are closely related to the concept of teacher well-being, which means that teacher well-being is the subjective transformation of teachers through active participation in community interactions, rather than something that happens on the individual teacher (Ahmed, 2004). The teaching profession is inherently challenging and diverse. In the process of realising their self-worth and enhancing their professional competence, teachers

often experience a high sense of personal meaning and achievement. These achievements stem not only from the results of classroom teaching, but also from positive experiences in teamwork, communication within and outside the school, and social recognition (Bao et al., 2011).

Creating communities contributes to the realization of competencies and creates a 'feel-good, functioning' construction of well-being (Huppert and Johnson, 2010). For example, in a community, teachers can improve their teaching practices through knowledge sharing. Engagement and collaboration through supportive leaders and peer motivation contribute to the overall development of the school, helping students to achieve a high-quality education while improving teacher wellbeing and sustainability (Battersby & Verdi, 2015). Research has shown that community building can positively impact teachers through instructional practices, student engagement, and academic achievement (Alzayed & Alabdulkareem, 2021). Specifically, communities can enhance pedagogical knowledge (Gess-Newsome et al., 2019), teacher enthusiasm (Keller et al., 2016), and choice of motivational approaches (Moè & Katz, 2022) which are ways that help teachers to get inspiration and advice and help to improve their professional competence and teaching skills (Huijboom et al., 2021).In the context of educational reform and innovation, building teacher communities has become increasingly important. These communities provide platforms for communication, collaboration, and growth among teachers, enhancing cohesion and sense of belonging. They enable teachers to access rich teaching resources and practical experiences, boosting professional confidence and resilience (Jin, 2011).

Teachers' well-being is positively influenced by collective sharing and shared responsibility, which are key characteristics of teacher-centred professional environments (Zhang, Yin, & Wang, 2020). When community-based professional models are effectively implemented, teachers' sense of collective efficacy can be significantly enhanced (Loughland & Nguyen, 2020). Professional learning communities are often described as "small groups of teachers who come together as a team to help one another improve student learning… [they] share and reflect on their practice" (Sather & Barton, 2006). Consequently, in the process of community building, teachers tend to focus on shared values and common goals aimed at improving student learning. This process emphasizes inquiry-based collaboration, the sharing of professional knowledge and experiences, and reflective practice among teachers (Owen, 2014).

This article will focus on the well-being of primary and secondary school teachers in Macau and the current status and challenges of community development, with the aim of exploring how communities can promote communication and cooperation among teachers to enhance their sense of well-being and career sustainability, thereby achieving a virtuous cycle and sustainable development in the educational ecosystem.

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1. Teacher Wellbeing*

Teacher well-being has received close attention globally in recent decades as it is not only related to teachers, but also students, schools, communities, and societies (Hascher & Waber, 2021), and it can be seen that teacher well-being is affected by multidimensional and multifactorial influences (Collie et al., 2015). Aelterman et al. (2007) define teacher well-being as a positive emotional state that results from harmony between the sum of specific environmental factors and the needs and expectations of individual teachers. This coincides with subjective well-being, which emphasizes high levels of positive affect, low levels of negative affect, and high levels of satisfaction with life, which illustrates the emotional state of well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Dodge et al. (2012) similarly describe both positive and negative elements of well-being, but they translate well-being into a balance between an individual's psychological, social, and balance point between one's resources and challenges. This is depicted in Figure 1.

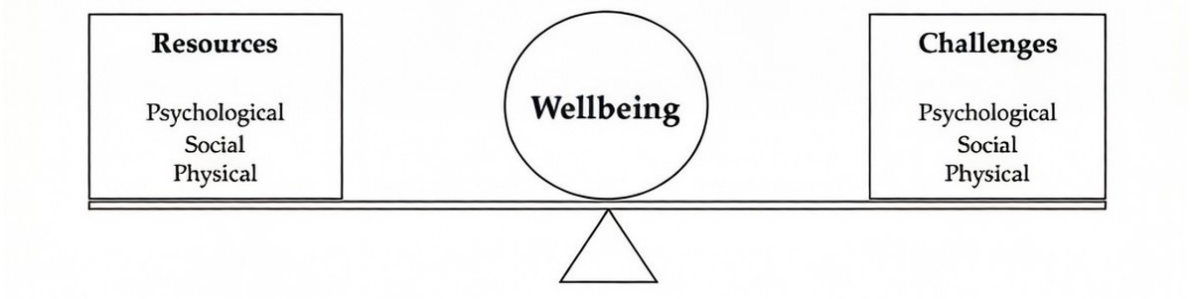


**Figure 1.** Definition of WellBeing (Dodge et al., 2012, 229).

Acton and Glasgow (2015) define teacher well-being in terms of the profession, which they see as the construction of a sense of professional fulfillment, satisfaction, and purpose in working with colleagues and students. Teacher well-being is characterized by teachers feeling positive and functioning effectively in their professional roles and is critical to the overall functioning of the education system. At the same time, teacher well-being is an important consideration, not only for teachers themselves but also for the cooperation with students and schools (Braun et al., 2020). Teacher well-being affects teachers themselves, for example, mentally, emotionally, and physically, and at the same time, it affects students, for example, their well-being, the quality of teaching and learning, and their academic achievement. In addition, teacher well-being can have a profound impact on the teaching force, such as teacher recruitment, turnover, etc. (Vo et al., 2024) Greenier's study uses the broad-and-build theory to explain that teacher well-being has the potential to broaden the range of an individual's feelings and behaviors, which develops an individual's skills and ultimately provides for their mental health as well as their external performance. That is, when a person's psychological needs are met, they are more focused on their goals. Therefore, people who feel fulfilled are more likely to accept job offers and join in leisure activities more often and are more inclined to be innovative and masterful in their work (Greenier, 2021). Hamel and Jaasko-Fisher (2011) defined hidden labour as the often overlooked and undervalued tasks embedded within teachers' professional work in broader organisational contexts. Although teachers devote considerable time and energy to community-building activities, such as collaborating with colleagues and preparing lessons, they also undertake substantial unseen daily work. This includes maintaining relationships with colleagues, students, and parents, as well as managing blurred boundaries between professional responsibilities and personal time.

For early secondary school teachers in Macau, 'being entrusted with important responsibilities at work' and 'working conditions' were two key factors affecting their job satisfaction, and Wong (1985) pointed out that most teachers in Macau generally lacked a sense of job security, a situation that was closely related to the fact that most schools did not offer tenure and the government did not mandate school personnel policies. Wong (1985) pointed out that most teachers in Macau generally lacked a sense of job security, which was closely related to the fact that most schools did not offer tenure and that the government did not mandate school personnel policies. In addition, teachers generally perceived their professional status to be low, mainly in terms of low salary levels, unstable salary structure and lack of government support (Wong, 1985).

Research further suggests that groups of teachers with less teaching experience, higher educational backgrounds, and dissatisfaction with their income are more likely to be affected by job satisfaction. Luk et al. (2010), in a study of teachers in two Macau schools, found that Macau primary and secondary school teachers as a whole experienced 'moderate emotional exhaustion, low levels of dehumanization, and moderate levels of personal In a study of two Macau school teachers, it was found that Macau primary and secondary school teachers as a whole experienced 'moderate emotional exhaustion, low dehumanisation, and moderate personal fulfilment', which implies that the teacher population is suffering from high levels of psychological stress and burnout (Luk et al., 2010). At the same time, IE teachers in Macau need to have a supportive work environment, access to more professional learning opportunities, and help with workload assessment in order not to reach burnout, and 20% of the teachers are prone to emotional exhaustion, which means that although teachers are engaged in their work, they also experience cognitive dissonance as a result of emotional exhaustion (Kuok et al., 2020).

### *2.2. Impact of Community Building on Teachers*

Community building implies a supportive social group in which members feel a sense of belonging and share the same interests, experiences, and goals. Especially in a learning community, its members including students and teachers provide academic and social support to each other (Brown, 2001). Classroom community building in schools refers to the creation of a space where students and teachers share common learning goals and learn through mutual communication and collaboration (Adams & Wilson, 2020). As early as 1969, Larry Cuban (1969) in his paper 'Teachers and Community' referred to the connection between teacher preparation and the local community about values and commitment, while Larry Cuban articulated the beliefs that commitment entails, such as the urgent need for teachers to expand their careers, the recognition of the need for teacher identities to be actively involved in the lives of parents and the community, and the fact that effective teaching is intimately connected to students and their surroundings. Within school settings, teacher communities are often considered to be the most productive collaborative environments to see results because they provide a site for the continuous development of teacher learning that is used to improve professional practice, collective competence, and ongoing development of learning competencies (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001). Lave and Wenger suggest that in the process of community building, there may be a progression to communities of practice and learning communities (1991) Communities of practice are described more as the process by which teachers go about

negotiating and learning from their experiences by engaging with each other and joining forces with outside parties to share their resources in a practical way that needs to draw on aspects of knowledge innovation, partnership and social recognition. Learning communities, on the other hand, are groups of teachers who share and examine themselves through reflection and collaboration. Regardless of the type of community, teachers in a community are influenced by each other and this helps community members feel united in the face of challenges or constraints. Especially if the content of their activities is spontaneous, they develop the ability to learn from each other, as well as stimulate their practical skills (Lieberman & Miller, 2008).

This highlights the important role of teacher communities in promoting the well-being of teachers, especially in an education system such as that of Macau. The Macau primary and secondary education system not only covers basic education proper (i.e., primary and secondary schools), but also integrates in practice two forms of integrated education and special education, which are subsequently collectively referred to as primary and secondary school teachers (Education and Youth Affairs Bureau of the Macau SAR, 2006; Government of the Macau SAR, 1996). Under this system, primary and secondary school teachers are similarly confronted with challenges such as career instability, weak support systems, and lack of social identity. In particular, in the absence of effective teacher community building and support mechanisms, teachers have difficulty in obtaining sustained support for professional collaboration, emotional connection, and career development, which further undermines their sense of well-being and belonging (Hui, Tsui, & Lee, 2019). Therefore, exploring the situation faced by primary and secondary school teachers in Macau from the dimensions of well-being and community building can not only deepen the understanding of the local education ecology, but also help to find realistic paths to enhance teachers' support systems.

## 3. Method

Given that teacher wellbeing is a multidimensional and complex concept, employing qualitative research enables a more in-depth and comprehensive exploration of perspectives (Ozturk, 2023). To gather data most pertinent to this study, we adopted a qualitative research approach utilising semi-structured interviews to gain insights into the wellbeing of primary and secondary school teachers in Macau and the development of community building.

### *3.1. Participants*

This study employed a phased recruitment strategy combined with convenience sampling to invite participants. In the initial phase, four teachers were recruited through the researcher's personal network to provide preliminary insights into the research questions. In the subsequent phase, additional participants were recruited through direct contact in real-world educational settings. Teachers who met the eligibility criteria and voluntarily agreed to participate were included in the final sample.

In total, 10 primary and secondary school teachers from Macau participated in this study, representing diverse teaching backgrounds. Participants were assigned pseudonyms from A to J to ensure anonymity. Participant characteristics are summarized in Table 1. The sample encompassed a wide range of teaching contexts, including primary and secondary education, core and non-core subjects, as well as mainstream and special education. Teaching experience ranged from newly qualified teachers to those with more than ten years of experience.

**Table 1.** Participants' Teaching Experience, School Level, and Subjects.

| Teacher | Gender | Experience | Groups | Subjects |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Male | 7 | Primary School | Art Class |
| B | Male | 6 | Secondary School | geography |
| C | Male | 7 | Primary School | Music Class |
| D | Male | 2 | Secondary School | Information Technology (IT) Course |
| E | Male | 12 | Secondary School | Chinese Course |
| F | Male | 6 | Primary School | Mathematics |
| G | Male | 17 | Primary School<br>Secondary School | Physical Education, Music, Religious Studies |
| H | Male | 3 | Primary School | Chinese Language, General Knowledge, Physical Education |
| I | Female | 9 | Primary School | Chinese Language |
| J | Male | 24 | Secondary School | Mathematics, Science, Ethics and Citizenship Education |

### *3.2. Instrument*

This study received ethical approval. All interviewees were invited through random sampling. Interested participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the interview process, and the research team worked with them to arrange specific dates and times for the interviews. Prior to the formal interview, all participants were required to sign an informed consent form.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via video conferencing platforms, according to participants' convenience, with permission obtained for audio recording. Each session lasted approximately 25 min. Following the interview, researchers thanked the participants, summarised key points, offered an opportunity for questions and feedback, and referred individuals to relevant support resources where necessary.

During the data analysis process, the research team engaged in an iterative comparison between newly collected interview data and existing codes and themes. The assessment of thematic saturation was informed by established qualitative research criteria (Guest et al., 2020), whereby saturation was considered to have been reached when no new themes or meaningful conceptual insights emerged from additional data.In the later stages of analysis, newly collected data predominantly reinforced previously identified themes, with minimal variation. This indicated that thematic saturation had been achieved, and the sample size was deemed sufficient to address the research questions.

To safeguard participants' privacy and data security, the research team explicitly assured all participants that any information shared would be treated with strict confidentiality. Each participant was assigned a unique pseudonym, denoted by letters from A to J, for subsequent data collation and analysis. This enabled the identification of individual experiences while ensuring anonymity.

### *3.3. Data Analysis*

This study employed a reflective six-stage thematic analysis approach to systematically examine the accounts of primary and secondary school teachers in Macau regarding their wellbeing and the development of school community building (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Following thorough familiarisation with the interview materials, data were systematically coded at the semantic level within an essentialist/realist framework (Burr, 2003). The analysis focused on teachers' descriptions of their wellbeing status, influencing factors, and experiences of participating in school community development, with particular emphasis on surface-level semantic content. All preliminary codes underwent iterative discussion, review, and refinement to ensure comprehensiveness and accuracy of interpretation. Once coding was completed, all codes were organised and categorised to identify themes reflecting key issues related to teacher wellbeing and community development. Finally, data segments corresponding to each theme were collated and analysed alongside representative quotations to enhance the logical coherence and persuasiveness of the findings (Clarke & Smith, 2015).

Upon completion of the thematic analysis process, the researchers confirmed that all themes and sub-themes had been fully identified and analyzed. No new themes emerged in subsequent cases, indicating that the study had achieved thematic saturation, as required in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2020). In other words, the themes identified within the current sample adequately addressed the research questions, and further data collection was unlikely to yield new conceptual insights.

It is worth noting that when reporting findings, the frequency of occurrence is only specified for a (sub)theme if it was mentioned by a minority of respondents (fewer than half). This strategy helps preserve the depth of qualitative research while also granting interpretative and contextual significance to minority perspectives, rather than evaluating solely on the basis of frequency.

## 4. Result

A reflexive thematic analysis identified six main themes: (a) Long working hours and hidden labor erode wellbeing, (b) Lack of structural support, stress managed individually, (c) Teacher communities remain formalistic, low collaboration efficacy, (d) Opaque decision-making undermines participation and trust, (e) Leadership style and empathy shape support and trust, and (f) Stability and fairness of systems sustain teacher wellbeing. These themes represent the sentiments experienced by primary and secondary school teachers in Macau during their actual work in schools, alongside the realities they face.

On closer examination, these six themes constitute an interconnected system rather than independent factors. Excessive work demands, combined with a lack of institutional support, intensify teachers' stress and reduce both the time and motivation available for participation in school community activities. As a result, communities that are intended to promote collaboration and professional learning gradually become formalistic in nature. Opaque decision-making processes further undermine teachers' trust in school management, leading to more passive

participation or even withdrawal from collective activities, which in turn reinforces the formalisation of community practices. Within this dynamic, leadership style and empathy emerge as critical moderating factors. When leaders provide emotional support and encourage open communication, teachers are more likely to develop trust and actively engage in collaborative practices; conversely, the absence of such support may intensify feelings of organisational alienation. Institutional stability and perceived fairness function as foundational conditions for sustaining teachers' well-being. Taken together, these six themes highlight the complex interplay among organisational structures, leadership practices, and teachers' everyday work experiences in Macau schools.

*Theme 1: Long working hours and hidden labor erode wellbeing*

The pervasive issues of long working hours and hidden labour reported by interviewed teachers significantly undermine their well-being. During the interviews, educators frequently referred to competition-related tasks, administrative responsibilities, and special education duties, illustrating how these demands adversely affect both daily life and physical and mental health.

Competition-related pressures emerged as a central concern. Teacher A, an arts teacher, described the cumulative burden of extended lesson preparation, competition supervision, and duty shifts:

> *"For instance, in the most recent competition, daily lunchtime training sessions plus two class periods dedicated to practice meant I couldn't eat lunch at all."*
>
> *"The Qingming Festival break was originally planned to end on the 6th, but due to the competition, I had to return to Macau early to accompany students."*

Teacher A emphasised that preparing for competitions frequently consumed substantial personal time and holidays, often exceeding the demands of routine lesson planning. Similarly, Teacher D noted that their subject's alignment with the school's competition-oriented strategy imposed persistent additional pressure to cultivate contestants and achieve results. Teacher C likewise observed that even lunch breaks were regularly occupied by work obligations.

Heavy administrative duties further exacerbated the workload. Teacher C enumerated numerous non-teaching assignments, such as organising events, Children's Day talent shows, meetings, and paperwork. Teacher F added that data-intensive administrative work—such as analysing test results and drafting reports—required considerable effort. Combined with a substantial teaching load of 19 lessons per week, this significantly intensified work-related stress. Teacher B described the sudden and cumulative nature of these demands:

> *"Occasionally the headteacher assigns tasks at short notice, yet I am responsible for geography across five year groups, marking assignments, setting examinations, and preparing lessons. Juggling these with the headteacher's additional duties can feel overwhelming at times."*

Teacher I further highlighted that the small size of their school and consequent understaffing concentrated responsibilities on a limited number of teachers, compelling them to sacrifice personal time to complete essential tasks.

The burden was especially pronounced in special education and inclusive education contexts. Teacher G explained that at the beginning of each term, substantial tasks had to be completed within extremely constrained timeframes:

> *"We might have only a fortnight to familiarise ourselves with the pupils' circumstances, then must complete Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) within a month."*

Additionally, they faced end-of-term assessments and revisions, producing a relentless cycle of high-intensity work. Teacher H noted that their weekly teaching load reached 29 lessons, in addition to extracurricular tutoring and remedial work requiring considerable hidden labour. Teacher J recalled that during their first six to seven years in special education, the workload frequently exceeded personal capacity, prompting thoughts of transferring to mainstream schools; it took nearly a decade to gradually adapt to the high-pressure environment.

In summary, the accounts of teachers reveal that excessive working hours and hidden labour not only deprive them of rest and personal time but also induce sustained occupational stress and emotional exhaustion. These findings suggest that the erosion of teachers' well-being does not stem from a single factor, but rather from the cumulative and compounding effects of multiple burdens over time. This situation aligns closely with the "high job demands" condition described in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. When job demands continue to

increase without sufficient organisational resources to offset them, teachers are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion and occupational stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

*Theme 2: Lack of structural support, stress managed individually*

Institutional shortcomings in schools with regard to psychological support and emotional regulation mean that educators predominantly depend on personal strategies to manage stress. Interview data reveal that although some schools occasionally provide training or lectures, such initiatives are sporadic, superficial, and limited in effectiveness, offering little relief for teachers facing long-term cumulative pressures.

Teachers primarily draw on personal time and leisure activities to alleviate stress. Teacher A explained that following competitions, they sought relaxation through watching films, social gatherings, or conversations with friends, yet acknowledged the absence of formal psychological support structures:

> *"(Our school) lacks dedicated psychological support rooms or relaxation spaces... There are social workers, but as adults, seeking their assistance feels somewhat peculiar."*

Teacher A further emphasised that emotional connections with students and a strong sense of responsibility serve as intrinsic motivations sustaining teacher commitment. Similarly, Teacher B highlighted the importance of safeguarding mental well-being by establishing clear boundaries:

> *"Previously, working until six or seven was acceptable, but now I leave school matters at the door when I return home. It's vital to separate work from family life."*

Such self-imposed boundaries have become crucial for maintaining psychological equilibrium. Teacher C likewise relied on confiding in family and colleagues, though expressed hope that schools would assume a more proactive role in supporting teachers' stress management.

Some schools have experimented with psychological or lifestyle support mechanisms. Teacher E described the establishment of an "Administrative Support Period", which allowed staff to attend to personal matters, alongside occasional training sessions delivered by social workers or psychology experts to promote work–life balance. In contrast, Teacher F reported that while psychological lectures were occasionally arranged, they were often scheduled during periods of peak exhaustion (e.g., exam marking or weekends), resulting in low participation and limited impact:

> *"Frankly, we feel drained already, yet they still expect us to attend training sessions. It's rather frustrating."*

Teacher G also observed that while schools discouraged staff from taking work home in principle, they simultaneously increased pressure when students' problems proved intractable:

> *"There's little support, more pressure than anything."*

Even when schools provided counsellors or lectures, teachers often found these resources inaccessible or impractical. Teacher I noted that interactions with counsellors tended to remain superficial—"sitting down for a deep conversation feels rather awkward"—and relevant lectures occurred "only once a year". As a result, he continued relying on self-regulation strategies, such as watching videos to ease stress.

Teacher J reported that interpersonal tensions, such as colleagues "snitching", created additional stress. To avoid confrontation, he relocated to classrooms to spend time with students instead. He added that the school adopted a "sweeping things under the carpet" approach, failing to offer substantive support, remarking sarcastically:

> *"There really is no system in place. One can only say our headteacher is too kind."*

Collectively, these accounts demonstrate that schools lack structured mechanisms for supporting teachers' psychological and emotional well-being. Existing initiatives are infrequent, poorly timed, or superficial, compelling teachers to rely on personal coping strategies—such as emotional connections with students, private leisure activities, or self-imposed work–life boundaries—to manage stress. This reliance intensifies individual burdens, underscoring the persistent absence of institutional support systems. From the perspective of the JD-R model, the lack of stable psychological support mechanisms and emotional support resources within schools

indicates a shortage of essential job resources. As a result, when teachers are confronted with high job demands, they lack the necessary support to buffer these pressures, thereby further intensifying stress and emotional exhaustion.

*Theme 3: Teacher communities remain formalistic, low collaboration efficacy*

Teacher communities are widely established within school systems; however, their functioning often remains predominantly formalistic, lacking substantive collaboration and meaningful support. As a result, collaborative effectiveness is limited, constraining their potential to enhance teaching quality and teacher well-being.

Teacher A noted that although schools have instituted "subject group structures", cooperation among teachers remains insufficient, with a visible gap between communication and implementation:

> *"I assign tasks, but whether they heed them is their prerogative. This hardly fulfils the purpose of a teaching community. Macau teachers tend to be quite opinionated; if they disagree with your approach, they will adhere to their own methods."*

In such circumstances, teacher communities operate more as conduits for task distribution rather than genuine collaborative platforms. Teacher B further explained that while the school organises subject group meetings and collaborative teaching initiatives, subject diversity and geographical separation restrict meaningful exchanges:

> *"We hold monthly meetings to discuss teaching progress and compile content into documents stored on the cloud. Yet most of the time, we still operate in silos."*

Teacher C concurred, observing that departmental meetings primarily address teaching progress and administrative matters, with minimal interaction outside formal meetings.

Despite the prevalence of formalism, some schools demonstrate more active community practices. Teacher D described a variety of activities and an inclusive environment for professional exchange:

> *"The school regularly organises lectures and gatherings, arranges peer classroom observations and discussions, fostering an egalitarian and supportive atmosphere."*

Teacher E emphasised that collective lesson planning was particularly valuable for new staff, facilitating rapid familiarisation with school culture, curriculum, and teaching practices:

> *"Especially for newly appointed teachers, collaborative lesson preparation and sharing teaching techniques prove invaluable."*

Teacher F reported that meetings were predominantly oriented toward administrative communication rather than professional exchange:

> *"They mainly involve listening to the headteacher assign duties, with no skill discussions among teachers."*

Teacher G similarly highlighted that the effectiveness of collaboration largely depends on leadership setting clear objectives. Without shared goals, even formally established subject groups struggle to function as genuine teacher communities.

Teacher H described the persistence of information asymmetry and clique monopolization, leading to blame-shifting and resistance to reform:

> *"Small cliques handle matters internally without consulting others, then shift blame when problems arise."*

Such dynamics undermine school reforms and curriculum coordination. Teacher J echoed these concerns, observing weak intergenerational and cross-departmental interaction, alongside insufficient team building, which contributed to a negative school atmosphere:

> *"A disconnect exists between younger teachers and the headteacher; team building remains a current challenge."*

Although teacher communities are institutionally embedded in Macau's primary and secondary schools, they frequently remain superficial in practice. Collaborative exchanges often lack depth, devolving into the mere transmission of administrative tasks. While a minority of schools demonstrate potential by fostering cooperation through collective lesson planning, community activities, and peer classroom observations, the broader pattern reflects inefficiency and superficiality. Consequently, teacher communities fail to fully realise their intended role in supporting professional development and enhancing teacher well-being.

Several interviewed teachers indicated that staff meetings are often dominated by administrative tasks. This not only reflects the superficial nature of collaborative mechanisms but is also closely associated with the previously identified issues of excessive workload and insufficient institutional support. When teachers are subjected to sustained high work demands, they often lack the time and energy required for meaningful collaboration. As a result, staff meetings—originally intended to support professional development—gradually devolve into mere platforms for task transmission.

*Theme 4: Opaque decision-making undermines participation and trust*

School decision-making and management systems often lack transparency, directly shaping teachers' emotional experiences and professional identity. When decision processes are closed and evaluative criteria remain ambiguous, teachers' sense of involvement and trust diminishes, frequently resulting in low morale and feelings of powerlessness.

Teacher C perceived the school's decision-making as relatively closed, characterised by a "single-minded" or even "dictatorial" model:

> *"The school sometimes pushes through certain things single-mindedly... In my work, I'm just a teacher. You assign me a task, and I carry it out. I don't expect you to share any of the burden."*

He highlighted the absence of opportunities for teachers to voice opinions or participate in discussions, leaving them in a passive role of task execution. This structural exclusion was linked to declining morale and a sense of disempowerment.

Teacher F emphasised that although schools employ evaluations to determine promotions and staffing arrangements, the same mechanism is often used as a tool for redundancies, thereby intensifying insecurity:

> *"When schools wish to reduce teaching numbers, they typically use this [evaluation] avenue to cut personnel."*

In a context of teacher oversupply and strong competition, such opaque evaluative practices amplify anxiety and perceptions of occupational instability.

Teacher H observed that the school lacked clear institutional systems, frequently allocating resources and authority through "family-style management" in which relationships override fairness:

> *"This school has no real system to speak of; it operates like a family business... If you're not close to them, everything tends to go in a more punitive direction."*

He further noted that teachers' professional development and academic pursuits received little encouragement, and at times explicit discouragement:

> *"They'll say, 'Can't you just stop learning so much?'"*

This anti-professional climate not only undermined teachers' motivation for growth but also generated chaotic information flows, conflicting directives between management levels, and stalled reform initiatives.
Teachers also perceived the school's reward and leave systems as opaque and arbitrary, eroding motivation and teamwork:

> *"I don't think there are specific policies; it mainly depends on the relationship between the headteacher, department heads, and teachers."*

Under such non-transparent assessment frameworks, fair evaluation proved elusive. As one teacher explained:

> *"Many teachers expect a 4-point rating but only get 3 points."*

This dynamic fostered widespread frustration, disappointment, and eventual resignation from efforts to contest outcomes.

Teachers widely perceived decision-making processes in their schools as opaque and arbitrary, manifesting through authoritarian practices, unfair assessment mechanisms, favouritism, and disordered communication. These dynamics not only eroded teachers' sense of involvement and trust but also fostered insecurity and professional burnout. The absence of institutionalised, transparent, and equitable decision-making frameworks has thus become a critical barrier to both teacher well-being and sustainable school development. When teachers perceive decision-making processes as lacking transparency or assessment criteria as inconsistent, they are more likely to develop a sense of mistrust, which in turn reduces their willingness to engage in school affairs and community activities.

*Theme 5: Leadership style and empathy shape support and trust*

Interview findings indicate that leadership styles and empathy exert a critical influence on teachers' professional experiences, particularly in shaping whether they feel supported and trusted. Positive leadership approaches enhance teachers' professional pride and well-being, whereas rigid or emotionally detached leadership erodes trust and commitment.

Teacher A emphasised that despite considerable work pressure, the school granted her substantial trust, supporting her in organising activities, expanding external collaborations, and even pursuing academic advancement. This sense of trust and professional autonomy reinforced her occupational pride and sustained motivation:

> *"The school places great trust in my personal development. For instance, whenever I apply for activities, the school supports me... There's no issue with that sense of trust."*

She further highlighted that the subject group leader fostered cohesion, facilitating teamwork and alleviating work-related stress. Teacher B also commended the subject group leader, describing them as youthful, egalitarian, and open-minded, with a willingness to listen and accept feedback:

> *"The leader communicates very effectively... After observing lessons, they discuss teaching methods with me. This support feels truly valuable."*

Such supportive leadership cultivated mutual respect and strengthened trust in communication, thereby enhancing well-being and willingness to collaborate. Teacher D similarly explained that, given his subject leader had once been his teacher, a rapport of mutual understanding facilitated immediate guidance and support when teaching challenges arose. This not only promoted professional growth but also strengthened his sense of belonging in the workplace.

Conversely, several teachers described leadership approaches that weakened trust. Teacher F observed a division between "veteran factions" and "newcomer factions", which limited communication. Department heads, he noted, tended to adopt formalistic modes of communication that lacked emotional resonance:

> *"Communication only occurs when materials are needed; there's little substantive contact otherwise."*

He suggested that leadership should bridge this emotional gap by fostering informal interactions and building rapport, thereby reducing alienation.

Teacher H pointed to a significant disparity between the school's inclusive education philosophy and the practical realities of teaching students with diverse needs. Leadership, he argued, maintained unrealistic expectations:

> *"The school demands a single curriculum to suit all pupils, yet the reality is that pupils vary greatly. This leads to teachers' efforts being met with a lack of understanding and support."*

This disconnect not only undermined teachers' trust in leadership but also left them feeling powerless in practice. Similarly, Teacher J criticised flaws in institutional design, particularly with respect to holiday management and notification systems, which he felt eroded long-term trust and motivation:

> *"Unreasonable holiday arrangements and late notifications create a toxic school atmosphere."*

Leadership style and empathy play a decisive role in shaping teachers' sense of trust and well-being. Supportive leadership fosters professional pride and satisfaction by granting autonomy, building emotional connections, and

facilitating open communication. Conversely, formalistic communication, inconsistencies between leadership philosophy and practice, and inadequate institutional systems undermine trust, foster team alienation, and contribute to deteriorating morale. Leadership not only influences individual teachers' emotional experiences but also shapes trust and collaborative relationships among teachers. Consequently, leadership practices function as a critical bridge linking teachers' well-being with the development of the teaching community.

*Theme 6: Stability and fairness of systems sustain teacher wellbeing*

Teachers widely acknowledged that the stability and fairness of institutional frameworks constitute essential pillars for sustained commitment and professional fulfilment. Across the interviews, educators consistently emphasised that job security and equitable resource allocation serve as key mechanisms for mitigating occupational uncertainty, thereby reinforcing professional security and fostering a sense of belonging.

Teacher A candidly observed that despite demanding workloads, teaching remains relatively stable compared to post-pandemic employment uncertainties, largely owing to promotion mechanisms based primarily on seniority:

> *"After experiencing the pandemic, I feel this job is particularly good—there's no risk of sudden unemployment... Teaching in Macau is still relatively relaxed and stable."*

Teacher D similarly recognised the school's overall stability, though he noted that greater transparency in the operationalisation of assessment systems would be beneficial:

> *"Annual evaluations are conducted, and while not overly demanding, the criteria remain vague. Greater clarity in the rules would be beneficial."*

For Teacher G, trust derived from both the stability of the institutional system and the professional autonomy afforded. He emphasised that the school respected teachers' development rights, avoided arbitrary workload increases or redundancies, and actively supported further training:

> *"The school did not impose additional pressure during my training period, which instilled a strong sense of trust."*

Teacher E highlighted that responsibilities were distributed equitably, preventing any single individual from being disproportionately burdened:

> *"It never happens that one or two colleagues are responsible for too many projects while others aren't involved. The division of labour is quite equitable, and every teacher has opportunities for development."*

Teacher I praised the principal's transparent governance, noting that open communication about school finances fostered trust, even when salaries lagged behind other institutions:

> *"The principal clearly explains how school funds are allocated. While salaries aren't as high as other schools, the system is fair, so I trust it."*

Despite these strengths, several teachers underscored systemic issues that undermined their sense of security and fairness. Teacher B pointed to salary and benefits disparities compared to other schools, with the absence of festive benefits symbolising inequity. Teacher C was more critical, describing some schools in Macau as operating "like corporations", where teachers worked under short-term contracts renewed annually or biennially, eroding long-term stability:

> *"Schools are like companies... positions aren't secure, contracts must be renewed every year."*

Such practices, compounded by burdensome administrative procedures and complex reimbursement processes, intensified psychological strain. Teacher F further stressed inequities across subject areas, noting that core subject teachers endured heavier demands yet received insufficient remuneration:

> *"Core subject teachers face greater pressure and demands, yet inadequate remuneration and compensation exacerbate their sense of burnout."*

Teachers consistently identified stability and fairness as central to sustaining well-being. Stable systems and seniority-based promotion mechanisms enhanced job security, while transparent governance and equitable workload distribution fostered trust and motivation. Nevertheless, persistent challenges—including contractual employment, salary disparities across schools, and subject-based inequities—pose significant risks to long-term teacher well-being and professional commitment. Institutional stability and fairness not only directly influence teachers' sense of job security but also provide a foundational basis for trust and a culture of collaboration within schools.

## 5. Discussion

This study primarily examines the wellbeing of primary and secondary school teachers in Macau alongside the development of teacher communities. Through reflective thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, we identified six key themes: (a) Long working hours and hidden labor erode wellbeing, (b) Lack of structural support, stress managed individually, (c) Teacher communities remain formalistic, low collaboration efficacy, (d) Opaque decision-making undermines participation and trust, (e) Leadership style and empathy shape support and trust, and (f) Stability and fairness of systems sustain teacher wellbeing. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the interplay among work demands, organisational resources, leadership practices, and institutional arrangements collectively shapes teachers' experiences of well-being. Moreover, these factors do not operate in isolation but instead constitute an interconnected organisational system.

The findings of this study align closely with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Both job resources and job demands influence teachers' well-being. When job demands—such as workload, role conflicts, and administrative tasks—are not balanced by sufficient resources, they lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Interviews with teachers in Macau revealed significant amounts of 'hidden labour,' including various administrative paperwork, competition-related tasks, and additional responsibilities beyond teaching. These demands consume substantial time and emotional energy, leaving teachers with insufficient space for recovery and perpetuating a vicious cycle. Although teachers attempt coping strategies such as leisure activities or setting personal boundaries, these serve only as short-term compensations and fail to address structural issues(Yu, 2023). When organisational systems and resource provision are inadequate, a severe imbalance between work demands and resources inevitably leads to energy depletion. This imbalance becomes particularly pronounced when organisational systems fail to provide adequate resources, making burnout almost inevitable. Bakker and Demerouti (2007) note that practitioners enduring prolonged high work demands without compensatory resources—such as time management flexibility, managerial support, professional development opportunities, or psychological services—are especially susceptible to burnout. Within the school context, teachers' responsibilities extend far beyond classroom instruction to encompass administrative duties, competition coaching, and home-school communication. These additional obligations often receive neither institutional recognition nor structured support, thereby accelerating the depletion of teachers' time and emotional resources. Maslach, Scheffler and Wright (2001) similarly observed that occupational burnout reflects a chronic mismatch between the individual and their work environment, with 'work overload' and 'resource depletion' constituting two core risk factors. When schools lack flexible workload arrangements (such as equitable course allocation and transparent performance evaluations) and stable psychological support systems, teachers often resort to self-regulation or informal peer support to cope with stress. While such individualised strategies may alleviate tension in the short term, they struggle to counteract the persistent attrition caused by structural deficiencies. The findings of this study align with Schaufeli and Taris (2014) "s perspective that the combination of high-intensity work demands and limited resources not only undermines teachers" physical and mental wellbeing but also erodes their professional commitment and teaching quality. Consequently, teacher burnout should not be viewed as a deficiency in individual capability or willpower, but rather as a systemic consequence of organisational-level imbalances in resource provision.

The findings of this study corroborate Dodge's (2012) dynamic equilibrium model of well-being. This model emphasises that well-being constitutes a balanced experience arising from the interaction between individuals and their environment, reflecting people's capacity to maintain psychological stability through resource regulation and stress management within constantly shifting work and life contexts. The interviewed teachers consistently mentioned that they perpetually pursued this "balance" in their work: on the one hand, multiple tasks such as teaching, administrative duties, and emotional labour continually accumulated; on the other, the resources they could rely upon—such as emotional support from colleagues, individual resilience, or occasional organisational assistance—were relatively limited and insufficient to provide adequate support. When work demands steadily increased without a corresponding replenishment of resources, this fragile equilibrium became easily disrupted, leading to fluctuations or even declines in well-being.

This finding further illustrates that teachers' well-being is not a static psychological state but a dynamic process contingent upon contextual support and institutional conditions. As Dodge et al. (2012) noted, when challenges exceed an individual's mobilisable resources, well-being diminishes until a new equilibrium is re-established. This perspective aligns with Headey and Wearing's (1989) theory of 'dynamic equilibrium,' which emphasises the continuous fluctuation and rebalancing of subjective well-being between resources and stressors. Within the context of primary and secondary education in Macau, this dynamic process is particularly evident: teachers frequently oscillate between high workloads and limited resources, temporarily restoring equilibrium through emotional regulation, self-management, or peer support. However, as these regulatory mechanisms lack institutionalised support, their effects are typically transient and fragile. Consequently, enhancing teacher wellbeing hinges not only on strengthening individual psychological resilience but also on optimising organisational structures and increasing sustainable supportive resources. This enables educators to maintain relative psychological and professional equilibrium amidst fluctuating work pressures.

From a regional perspective, the findings of this study demonstrate notable similarities with research on teacher well-being in Asia and China, while also revealing certain contextual distinctions. Studies in mainland China and other East Asian contexts indicate that teachers commonly experience heavy workloads, increasing administrative responsibilities, and a strong emphasis on examination and performance outcomes, including the continuous expansion of duties beyond classroom teaching (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012; Yin, 2015). The phenomenon of "hidden labour" reported by teachers in Macau in this study is highly consistent with this trend, suggesting that within Chinese cultural contexts, the teaching profession is often associated with multiple role expectations extending beyond formal instructional responsibilities. Existing research suggests that teachers in Asian contexts tend to rely more on individual coping strategies, emotional regulation, and informal support networks when dealing with stress, while institutionalised psychological support remains relatively limited (Hargreaves, 1998; Yin & Lee, 2012). The findings of this study, in which teachers primarily relied on self-regulation and communication with family members or colleagues to manage stress, further support this pattern. Research on Learning Communities in China and East Asia indicates that, in the absence of protected time, trust, and authentic participation, teacher communities are likely to become formalistic in nature (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012; Qian & Walker, 2013). This study provides additional evidence from the Macau context, suggesting that the formalisation of teacher communities is not an isolated phenomenon but reflects a broader regional pattern. The study also finds that teachers in Macau place particular emphasis on institutional stability and fairness. This may be associated with the diversity of school operators and variations in employment systems in Macau, which may heighten teachers' sensitivity to organisational fairness and job security.

This study highlights that teacher communities are not sufficiently valued in practical settings. Although most schools in Macau have established formal teacher communities or collaborative groups, many interviewed teachers reported that these communities are often perceived more as appendages to administrative procedures or routine formalities, rather than genuine platforms for exchange that facilitate teaching reflection, professional growth, and practical improvement. During interviews, several teachers mentioned that so-called 'subject group' meetings frequently serve to assign tasks, relay directives, or report on work, rather than facilitating genuine in-depth dialogue and collaborative inquiry among teachers regarding classroom teaching, pedagogical innovation, or textbook utilisation.

This situation reveals a practical disconnect from Wenger's (1998) theory of 'communities of practice.' Wenger posits that genuine communities of practice require not only a shared domain but also collective learning and knowledge construction through mutual engagement and shared repertoires (Wenger, 1998). In educational contexts, this implies that teacher communities should centre on shared concerns such as 'teaching challenges' and 'student learning', with members mutually supporting and learning through reflective dialogue, lesson study sharing, and pedagogical experimentation. The vitality of such communities further depends on sustained interaction, a foundation of trust, and organisational support. In practice, however, without guaranteed community time, professional facilitators or coordinators, accountability mechanisms, and outcomes feedback systems, the community risks devolving into an administrative tool divorced from teachers' genuine needs. Stoll noted in their PLC research that without stable membership, shared identity, reflective dialogue, and collective accountability, teacher communities struggle to fulfil their roles in capacity building and continuous improvement (Stoll et al., 2006). Moreover, effective PLCs require members' sense of ownership, a climate of trust, structured support (such as dedicated time, facilitation, and feedback mechanisms), and sustained collaborative activities (Schaap et al., 2018). It is precisely the absence of these essential elements that renders teacher communities incapable of alleviating teaching pressures, potentially transforming them into additional time burdens or formalistic obligations.

The theme of decision-making opacity aligns closely with organisational justice theory (Colquitt et al., 2001). This theoretical lens emphasises that employees' perceptions of fairness in organisational procedures, resource

distribution, and interpersonal exchanges profoundly shape their motivation, trust, and organisational commitment. Across interviews, teachers in Macau consistently described inconsistencies and a lack of transparency surrounding performance appraisal, promotion criteria, and workload allocation. Such deficits in both procedural and informational justice gradually erode trust in school management and weaken teachers' sense of agency within institutional decision-making. When evaluative mechanisms are ambiguous or unpredictable, teachers frequently report psychological insecurity and role ambiguity, conditions that compromise well-being and engagement at work (Greenberg, 2011; Niehoff & Moorman, 1993). The findings of this study confirm this dynamic: perceptions of unfair or opaque decision-making correlate with heightened emotional exhaustion, organisational detachment, and declining teacher commitment among teachers.

Leadership style, meanwhile, emerges as a pivotal moderating influence on teacher well-being. Leaders who act with empathy, communicate transparently, and provide sustained support foster a relational climate of trust between staff and administration, strengthening both psychological safety and a sense of belonging. By contrast, leadership models grounded in hierarchical control or authoritarian command tend to intensify teachers' anxiety and helplessness, reinforcing negative cycles of occupational stress (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Harris, 2013). Research on distributed leadership suggests that devolving authority and promoting shared decision-making not only enhances institutional collaboration but also increases teachers' autonomy and professional fulfilment. Complementarily, empathetic leadership has been shown to elevate well-being and engagement by recognising and responding to the emotional realities of teaching work (Boyatzis et al., 2013). Taken together, these perspectives indicate that leadership practices serve as a critical conduit linking teachers' psychological well-being with the broader development of school communities. Fostering a leadership culture grounded in trust, openness, and mutual respect is therefore essential—not merely to enhance individual fulfilment, but to sustain the collective vitality and long-term growth of educational organisations.

The study extends existing research in several important ways. By incorporating "hidden labour" into the domain of job demands, this study enhances the explanatory power of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model within educational contexts. Compared with previous studies that have primarily focused on classroom teaching and formal administrative tasks, this study highlights the significant impact of hidden labour—such as competition coaching, special education documentation, and emotional support—on teachers' resource depletion. Furthermore, by integrating organisational justice theory with the functioning of teacher communities, this study demonstrates that opaque or unfair institutional arrangements not only affect teachers' emotional experiences and trust but also undermine their willingness to engage in collaborative practices, thereby contributing to the formalisation of teacher communities. Finally, the study proposes a bidirectional relationship between teacher well-being and the development of teacher communities. While teacher communities serve as important sources of professional and emotional resources, teachers' well-being, in turn, influences their willingness to participate in these communities, ultimately shaping their effective functioning.

## 6. Conclusions

This study focused on primary and secondary school teachers in Macau, examining the interplay between teacher well-being and school community building. Through a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews, six closely related themes were identified: (a) long working hours and hidden labor erode well-being, (b) lack of structural support leaves stress to be managed individually, (c) teacher communities remain formalistic with low collaboration efficacy, (d) opaque decision-making undermines participation and trust, (e) leadership style and empathy shape support and trust, and (f) stability and fairness of systems sustain teacher well-being. Taken together, these findings offer a picture of teachers' professional lives marked by dedication, pressure, and the continuous search for balance.

First, the accounts show that teachers' well-being is steadily worn down by excessive workloads and by what many described as "hidden labor"—the invisible and unacknowledged parts of their job such as competition preparation, administrative paperwork, and special education documentation. These tasks expand far beyond classroom teaching and often consume evenings, weekends, and holidays. The erosion of well-being here seems less about individual weakness than about structural overload.

Second, schools in Macau appear to offer limited institutional support for stress management or psychological care. Most teachers rely on personal strategies—talking with friends, spending time with family, or drawing emotional energy from students. These coping efforts are meaningful but fragile; they cannot substitute for organizational care or policy-level interventions. The absence of regular, structured support leaves many teachers feeling that well-being is a private responsibility rather than a shared concern.

Third, while teacher communities exist in almost every school, they rarely function as genuine spaces for collaboration. Meetings are often dominated by administrative tasks and reporting, with little time for shared reflection or professional exchange. Without protected time, facilitation, or clear purpose, such communities struggle to build real collegial trust. What was meant to support teachers' growth sometimes becomes another obligation.

Fourth, the interviews revealed that decision-making in schools is often opaque and top-down. Teachers described unclear evaluation criteria, inconsistent promotion practices, and a sense that "connections" can matter more than fairness. This lack of transparency weakens participation and trust, eroding teachers' motivation to engage in school initiatives. Over time, this undermines not only morale but also the cooperative culture that schools depend on.

Fifth, leadership style emerged as a decisive factor. When leaders communicate openly, show empathy, and trust teachers' professional judgment, they create an atmosphere where teachers feel respected and supported. Conversely, when leadership is distant or overly hierarchical, teachers report frustration, alienation, and emotional fatigue. Many teachers emphasized that empathy and fairness in leadership make a tangible difference in how they experience their daily work.

Finally, stability and fairness within the institutional system form the backbone of sustainable teacher well-being. Transparent evaluation procedures, equitable workload distribution, and consistent employment conditions give teachers a sense of security and belonging. In contrast, short-term contracts, unclear pay structures, and perceived favoritism generate anxiety and weaken long-term commitment to the profession.

Overall, this study suggests that teacher well-being in Macau is not an individual matter but a systemic one, shaped by the interaction between organizational demands, institutional fairness, and human relationships at work. Improving teachers' well-being therefore requires more than encouraging personal resilience—it requires schools and policymakers to address the conditions that cause strain in the first place. Reducing hidden labor, providing structured support, building authentic teacher communities, ensuring transparent governance, cultivating empathetic leadership, and safeguarding fairness and stability are not isolated goals; they are interdependent foundations of a healthier and more sustainable education system.

### *6.1. Implications for Practice*

Based on the findings of this study, practical implications can be drawn at three levels—school, policy and the teaching community—to promote the enhancement of teachers' well-being and the effective development of the school community.

(1) School level

At the school level, there is a need to re-examine issues surrounding teachers' workloads and hidden labour, reduce unnecessary administrative tasks, and allocate responsibilities for competition coaching, paperwork and additional service duties in a more equitable manner. Furthermore, the scheduling of lessons, duties and assessments should be conducted in a more transparent manner. At the same time, schools need to establish more regular and accessible psychological support mechanisms, rather than relying solely on sporadic lectures or tokenistic training; this could include setting aside fixed periods for teacher support, providing emotional support resources, or implementing more feasible work-life balance arrangements. The development of the teaching community should shift from 'administrative meetings' to 'professional learning communities', providing teachers with protected time for collaboration, opportunities for cross-disciplinary exchange, and spaces for peer observation and reflective dialogue, thereby truly transforming these communities into platforms for professional growth and emotional support.

(2) Policy Level

At the policy level, education authorities should further refine systems for assessing teachers' workloads, career security and welfare support, with particular emphasis on providing clearer institutional recognition and compensation for invisible labour, special educational needs-related duties and ancillary tasks. Schools should be encouraged to establish fairer and more transparent performance appraisal and promotion mechanisms to reduce career-related anxiety stemming from ambiguous evaluations, unequal resource allocation and unstable employment. For an education system such as Macau's, which features a diverse range of school providers, establishing a more consistent framework for safeguarding teachers' rights is of significant importance for enhancing the overall well-being of the teaching profession.

(3) Community Level

At the community level, schools should be encouraged to transition from a 'nominal teaching community' to a 'substantive professional learning community'. This implies that teachers should not merely carry out routine

tasks, but should engage in sustained collaboration centred on teaching challenges, student development and curriculum improvement. Schools and communities can enhance trust, a sense of belonging and collaborative effectiveness among teachers through mentoring schemes, peer support, group reflection, cross-year-group collaboration and support networks for novice teachers. Only when the teaching community truly becomes a space for resource sharing, exchange of experiences and emotional support can community building effectively promote teacher well-being.

### *6.2. Limitations of the Study and Future Research*

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample size was relatively small, comprising interviews with only 10 primary and secondary school teachers in Macau. Although thematic saturation was achieved during the research process, the findings may not fully capture the diversity of teachers' experiences across the broader Macau context. Participant recruitment relied partly on the researcher's personal network and on-site contacts; consequently, the sample may have been influenced by participants' accessibility and willingness to participate, which may introduce potential selection bias.

Future research could be expanded in several directions. The representativeness of findings could be enhanced by increasing the sample size and including a wider range of school types and teacher groups. Mixed-methods approach could be adopted, integrating multiple data sources such as questionnaires, classroom observation, and document analysis to provide a more comprehensive understanding. Cross-regional comparative studies could be conducted to examine differences in teacher well-being and community development across diverse educational systems and cultural contexts. Finally, future research could develop and empirically test a theoretical framework of the interaction between teacher well-being and community engagement, thereby deepening our understanding of its dynamic mechanisms.

## Author Contributions

M.G.: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, writing—original draft preparation; B.O.: writing—review and editing; P.S.: supervision. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

Ethical approval for this study has been submitted to the Ethics Committee of City University of Macau. All participants provided informed consent, and their confidentiality and anonymity were ensured.

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

## Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are not publicly available due to privacy, as they contain identifiable information from interview participants.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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