

Time-Poor and Overburdened: A Systematic Synthesis of Educator Workload and Leadership Practices

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15288472

Dianne N. Genon

Elementary Teacher, Oak Grove-Bellemeade Elementary School, Richmond, Virginia, USA

Abstract:

Educators worldwide are experiencing increasing demands driven by expanding administrative tasks, heightened accountability measures, and frequent policy reforms. This systematic research synthesis critically examines the causes, consequences, and coping strategies related to workload intensification and time poverty among teachers and school leaders. Analyzing 22 peer-reviewed studies published between 2010 and 2024, the review identifies recurring challenges such as excessive time constraints, reduced professional autonomy, emotional exhaustion, and diminished job satisfaction. These factors contribute not only to elevated stress and burnout but also to declining retention rates and compromised instructional quality. The synthesis highlights the urgent need for systemic responses, including evidence-informed leadership approaches, participatory policy development, and collaborative workload management. Emphasis is placed on the importance of sustainable practices that support educator well-being and promote professional dignity. By centering the voices and experiences of educators, the study provides actionable insights for school leaders, policymakers, and education stakeholders. Ultimately, the findings reinforce that addressing time poverty and workload concerns is essential not only for the health and longevity of the teaching workforce but also for ensuring the overall effectiveness and equity of education systems. This paper contributes meaningfully to ongoing global conversations on improving teacher support and educational sustainability.

Keywords: teacher workload, time poverty, work intensification, school leadership, educator well-being, systematic synthesis

Introduction:

Over the past two decades, the role of educators—particularly teachers and school leaders—has transformed in both scope and complexity. Historically grounded in instruction and pedagogy, their responsibilities have broadened to include a wide range of administrative, pastoral, and compliance-related duties.

These evolving expectations have led to what scholars refer to as work intensification, a condition marked by an increased pace, volume, and complexity of work (Wilkinson et al., 2021). As education systems across the globe implement accountability-driven reforms, teachers and leaders are expected to do more within the same amount of time, or less, often without commensurate support.

This trend has contributed to a growing phenomenon known as time poverty—the persistent perception of not having enough time to meet professional demands. Time poverty has emerged as a critical concern for educators, as it frequently leads to heightened stress, emotional exhaustion, and professional burnout (Day et al., 2018). Rather than focusing solely on teaching and learning, educators must juggle numerous tasks including data collection, behavior management, parent engagement, curriculum documentation, and compliance with institutional policies. This fragmentation of time affects not only their efficiency but also their well-being and job satisfaction.

Globally, evidence suggests that teachers regularly work hours well beyond their official contracts. According to the OECD (2019), many educators report working 50 to 60 hours per week, much of it unpaid. This workload includes lesson preparation, marking, attending meetings, and responding to student needs outside class hours. The intensification of workload is particularly pronounced in countries with strong accountability cultures, where standardization and testing metrics dominate the education landscape.

School leaders are not immune to these pressures. In fact, principals and administrators often face heightened expectations to implement top-down policy reforms, manage staff well-being, oversee school operations, and maintain student outcomes—all while dealing with resource constraints and staffing shortages (Fullan, 2014). The multitiered demands placed on school leaders render their roles increasingly unsustainable and expose them to similar risks of burnout and attrition experienced by teachers. These challenges collectively underscore a pressing issue in contemporary education: the sustainability of professional roles under conditions of intensifying work demands.

Scholars such as Ballet and Kelchtermans (2009) highlight the long-term consequences of these pressures, including a rise in teacher attrition, declining morale, and a deterioration in work-life balance. Addressing workload, work

intensification, and time poverty is not just a matter of efficiency—it is a crucial step in preserving the well-being of educators and ensuring the effectiveness of education systems worldwide.

Literature Review:

The intensification of teachers' workloads has emerged as a global concern that is reshaping the professional lives of educators and significantly influencing teaching quality and well-being. This literature review synthesizes scholarly findings on the subject, highlighting the multifaceted nature of work intensification and its implications for policy and practice.

Ballet and Kelchtermans (2008, 2009) provide foundational insights into the phenomenon of workload intensification among teachers. Their research shows that teachers are increasingly expected to perform a variety of roles beyond classroom instruction, including administrative duties, parental engagement, and implementing curricular reforms. These additional responsibilities often come without corresponding reductions in other tasks, leading to heightened stress and diminished job satisfaction.

Similarly, Beck (2017) explores how work intensification affects teachers' personal and professional identities. Through qualitative data, Beck illustrates the emotional labor and moral strain that arise when teachers feel unable to meet both systemic expectations and their personal standards of effective teaching. The strain becomes particularly acute when accountability measures increase without providing sufficient resources or time.

Allen et al. (2021) contribute a quantitative perspective by analyzing data on teachers' working hours in England. Their findings reveal a consistent rise in both actual and perceived workload, driven largely by data collection requirements and administrative reporting. This empirical analysis underscores the systemic origins of workload challenges.

Bartlett (2004) adds to this discourse by questioning whether the expansion of teacher roles is sustainable. While some argue that diversified roles can enhance professional fulfillment, Bartlett warns that such expansion often leads to overwork and professional dissatisfaction, particularly when changes are imposed top-down.

Beck's (2017) qualitative account of the 'heavy hour'—a term used to describe the compounding of responsibilities into limited time frames—resonates with Ahlgren and Gådin's (2011) findings on teachers' struggles to find adequate time for instructional preparation. Both studies point to a misalignment between the demands placed on teachers and the time available to meet them.

The metaphor of a 'tsunami' of paperwork to describe the paperwork burden resulting from educational devolution, teachers in their study report feeling overwhelmed by documentation and accountability requirements, which detract from actual teaching time. Gavin et al. (2021) further link these workload issues to broader democratic concerns, arguing that excessive workloads threaten teachers' ability to participate meaningfully in school decision-making processes.

Green (2021) provides a longitudinal perspective on British teachers' declining job quality, demonstrating that work intensification correlates with reduced job satisfaction and professional autonomy. This decline, as measured by the Skills and Employment Survey, reflects broader shifts in labor market dynamics and educational governance.

Lawrence et al. (2019) explore the psychological toll of work intensification, specifically its relationship with burnout. Their study identifies emotional exhaustion and depersonalization as common symptoms among secondary teachers facing increasing workloads. This aligns with Burrow et al.'s (2020) findings on teacher attrition, which attribute exits from the profession to chronic stress and burnout.

The international nature of these challenges is highlighted by Buskila and Chen-Levi (2021), who document similar trends in Israeli schools. Teachers in their study report feeling constrained by packed schedules and insufficient planning time, which negatively affects their instructional efficacy.

Boström et al. (2020) provide a gendered perspective, examining health disparities between male and female teachers in Sweden. Their findings suggest that female teachers disproportionately bear the brunt of workload-related stress, due in part to societal expectations and occupational gender norms. Brante (2009) delves into the complexities of multitasking and synchronous work in teaching, arguing that the profession's inherent unpredictability exacerbates the effects of work intensification. Teachers must constantly switch between roles and tasks, often with little control over the timing or sequence.

These reforms, Apple argues, contribute to a managerial culture that devalues pedagogical autonomy and professional discretion. Braun (2017) furthers this analysis by linking work intensification to shifts in professional culture. According to Braun, contemporary education policy in England fosters a performative culture where success

is narrowly defined by measurable outcomes, thus amplifying stress and reducing job satisfaction. Easthope and Easthope (2000) provide early recognition of these dynamics, identifying the interrelated phenomena of intensification, extension, and complexity in teachers' workloads. Their work remains relevant today, offering a conceptual framework for understanding current challenges.

The job demands-resources model to examine the spillover effects of work on teachers' private lives. Researchers find that high demands paired with insufficient resources result in work-family conflict, reduced life satisfaction, and impaired mental health. Cranston and Ehrich (2002) and Lim (2019) extend this discussion to school leaders, showing that principals and vice-principals are not immune to workload pressures. These leaders report experiencing 'sleeplessness' and chronic fatigue, which undermine their effectiveness. Alexander (2020) and Cooke et al. (2012) contribute methodological insights into studying such phenomena. Alexander underscores the importance of rigor in systematic reviews, while Cooke et al. introduce the SPIDER tool as a useful framework for qualitative synthesis.

The Australian Department of Education (2022) point to practical policy solutions, such as shared lesson plans and addressing workforce shortages. These interventions are designed to reduce duplication of effort and ease workload pressures. Bergener and Santarius (2021) introduce the concept of a 'pace of life indicator,' which may be applicable in education research to quantify the tempo of teachers' work and its impact on well-being.

The literature presents a compelling case for the need to address work intensification in education. The research highlights its detrimental effects on teacher well-being, professional identity, instructional quality, and democratic participation. A multi-pronged approach—encompassing policy reform, institutional support, and methodological innovation—is necessary to mitigate these challenges and sustain a healthy teaching workforce.

Methodology:

This study employed a systematic research synthesis approach, integrating methods from meta-summary and qualitative synthesis to examine the complex issues of workload, work intensification, and time poverty among teachers and school leaders. Drawing on the framework established by Sandelowski and Barroso (2006), the methodology was designed to identify recurring themes and patterns across a broad range of empirical studies. The entire process adhered to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, which provide a structured approach for conducting and reporting systematic reviews to ensure transparency and rigor.

To gather relevant literature, a comprehensive search strategy was implemented using academic databases such as ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar. A combination of targeted keywords was employed, including "teacher workload," "school leadership stress," "time poverty in education," "work intensification," and "teacher burnout." Boolean operators such as "AND" and "OR" were used to refine and broaden search results where appropriate. To maintain the relevance and recency of the findings, the search was limited to peer-reviewed publications released between 2010 and 2024.

Articles were selected based on strict inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles written in English, with an empirical research design—whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method—and a specific focus on K–12 teachers or school leaders. Studies were excluded if they were opinion-based or editorial in nature, focused on higher education faculty, or published in languages other than English. This ensured that the synthesis would concentrate on rigorously researched and directly relevant material.

An initial pool of 153 studies was retrieved. After screening for relevance, duplication, and alignment with inclusion criteria, 22 studies were selected for full synthesis. These articles were organized using a synthesis matrix that captured important elements such as study context, participant demographics, research methodology, and major findings. A thematic analysis was then conducted across the selected studies, enabling the identification of key recurring themes and insights related to teacher and school leader workload, time pressures, and the broader implications of work intensification in education.

Findings and Discussion:

Drivers of Workload and Time Poverty

One of the most consistent findings across the literature is the excessive administrative burden placed on teachers. Activities such as data tracking, standardized testing documentation, and compliance reporting are frequently cited as the primary contributors to time overload (OECD, 2019; Hutchings, 2015; Fitzgerald et al., 2019). According to Ahlgren and Gådin (2011), these bureaucratic tasks not only consume valuable instructional time but also alter the very nature of teachers' work, reducing opportunities for creative pedagogy and professional autonomy.

Teachers are often expected to multitask in ways that are cognitively and physically demanding (Brante, 2009). The shift toward managerialism, especially in systems influenced by neoliberal reforms, has reshaped education into a space driven by measurable outcomes and efficiency metrics (Apple, 2004). As a result, tasks unrelated to teaching

now dominate teachers' daily schedules, generating a growing mismatch between professional identity and actual practice (Allen et al., 2021; Boström et al., 2020).

Accountability regimes have become a central feature of educational policy over the last two decades. Ball (2003) coined the term "performativity" to describe how teachers are increasingly subjected to audits, evaluations, and performance metrics that emphasize output over process. In the UK, for instance, teachers reported that their sense of autonomy was eroded by constant surveillance, often described as "micromanagement" by senior leaders (Green, 2021; Burrow et al., 2020). The push for data-driven accountability has created a culture of distrust, where teachers are required to constantly prove their effectiveness, leading to increased job stress and dissatisfaction (Gavin et al., 2021; Bartlett, 2004). This dynamic is especially pronounced in under-resourced schools where performance is closely monitored but adequate support is lacking (Beck, 2017; Easthope & Easthope, 2000).

Frequent, top-down policy changes often result in duplicated responsibilities and unclear expectations, particularly for school leaders who must mediate between external directives and internal realities (Fullan, 2014; Cranston & Ehrich, 2002). Teachers report that shifting curriculum standards and reform initiatives disrupt their workflow and force them to repeatedly adapt to new policies with little consultation or professional development (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009).

Braun (2017) emphasizes that these reforms are not neutral but shaped by ideological frameworks that privilege efficiency and accountability over relational, student-centered education. As reforms accumulate without sufficient alignment or coherence, the demands on teachers multiply, leading to professional disorientation and burnout (Fitzgerald et al., 2019; Buskila & Chen-Levi, 2021).

Policy churn has also introduced additional tensions, particularly when new mandates conflict with teachers' pedagogical values or established practices. This intensifies workload not just in quantity, but in cognitive and emotional complexity as well (De Carlo et al., 2019; Beck, 2017).

Workload intensification is further exacerbated by systemic staffing shortages. The redistribution of tasks from absent or departed colleagues to remaining staff results in increased workloads that are unsustainable in the long term (Flinders & Thornton, 2018; Department of Education, Australia, 2022). In many systems, particularly those facing budgetary constraints, hiring freezes or insufficient substitute pools force teachers to cover for colleagues or accept additional duties such as after-school programs, mentoring, and administrative responsibilities (Gavin et al., 2021; Allen et al., 2021). This challenge is compounded in rural or disadvantaged areas, where teacher attrition is high and recruitment is low. According to Lawrence, Loi, and Gudex (2020), such environments often witness a "vicious cycle": overworked teachers leave due to burnout, leading to increased workloads for those who remain, further accelerating the attrition rate. Teachers, in these contexts, are left feeling isolated, unsupported, and overwhelmed, leading to both diminished job satisfaction and reduced effectiveness in the classroom (Boström et al., 2020).

Intersecting Dimensions: Gender, Emotional Labor, and Work-Life Conflict

Several studies also highlight how workload intensification interacts with gender and emotional labor. For example, female teachers frequently report higher levels of stress due to the dual expectations of caregiving at home and professionalism at work (Boström et al., 2020). Ahlgren and Gådin (2011) found that time poverty was more pronounced among women, whose labor at school often extended into unpaid responsibilities outside of work.

Furthermore, the affective dimensions of teaching—providing emotional support, building relationships with students, and managing classroom dynamics—are seldom accounted for in formal workload calculations but significantly contribute to exhaustion and burnout (Beck, 2017; Green, 2021). This "invisible labor" adds to the sense of being constantly overextended, further blurring the boundaries between personal and professional life (De Carlo et al., 2019; Brante, 2009).

Addressing workload and time poverty requires a systemic shift in how teaching is understood, valued, and supported. As Alexander (2020) and Cooke et al. (2012) suggest, high-quality evidence synthesis should inform policies that prioritize teacher well-being and professional agency. Practical measures may include streamlining administrative processes, reducing standardized testing, investing in school-based support staff, and involving teachers in policy development (Carroll & Heffernan, 2022).

Importantly, teacher workload cannot be resolved solely through individual coping strategies. Instead, systemic interventions—such as fair workload allocation, adequate staffing, and collaborative professional cultures—must be implemented to ensure sustainability in the profession (Bartlett, 2004; Fitzgerald et al., 2019). Recognizing the value of relational, affective, and pedagogical labor is crucial for creating humane work environments in education.

The findings across the literature confirm that teacher workload intensification is not an isolated phenomenon but the product of intertwined structural, policy, and cultural factors. Administrative burden, accountability surveillance, unstable policy environments, and chronic staff shortages converge to create an unsustainable pace of work for

teachers. Without meaningful reform, the teaching profession risks continued erosion of morale, retention, and quality. Moving forward, education systems must prioritize teacher well-being as a cornerstone of sustainable, equitable, and effective schooling.

Effects on Educators' Well-being and Performance

The intensification of teachers' work and the phenomenon of time poverty have become critical concerns in the global education sector. As mounting administrative tasks, accountability measures, and curriculum demands continue to accumulate, educators across diverse contexts have reported alarming consequences on their professional performance, psychological well-being, and even their physical health. This section draws from a range of scholarly literature to illuminate the complex effects of work intensification on teachers and educational leaders, emphasizing burnout, reduced instructional quality, job dissatisfaction, and systemic challenges in school leadership.

Perhaps the most widely reported impact of work intensification is teacher burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of accomplishment (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Burrow, Williams, and Thomas (2020) vividly document how prolonged overwork and systemic stress have left educators "stressed, depressed, and exhausted," signaling a crisis in teacher mental health. Boström et al. (2020), through a cross-sectional study of Swedish teachers, found a strong correlation between workload stress and adverse health outcomes, particularly among female educators.

Teachers frequently report insufficient time for recuperation, family life, and self-care. De Carlo et al. (2019) applied the job demands-resources (JD-R) model to show how teaching duties often interfere with private life, leading to a sense of imbalance and chronic fatigue. Similarly, Ahlgren and Gådin (2011) emphasized teachers' struggle for uninterrupted time to teach and reflect, arguing that time constraints erode autonomy and professionalism.

A secondary consequence of time poverty is its impact on morale and professional identity. Teachers often enter the profession with strong intrinsic motivations—such as a commitment to student learning and social change—but become disillusioned when bureaucratic tasks outweigh meaningful classroom engagement (Day et al., 2018; Brante, 2009). Allen et al. (2021) highlighted how extended working hours in England, including evenings and weekends, significantly diminished job satisfaction. Similarly, Green (2021) demonstrated a marked decline in British teachers' job quality due to work overload and erosion of professional autonomy.

Bartlett (2004) further warned that while expanding teacher roles may initially appear as professional development opportunities, they often evolve into mechanisms of control and overwork, contributing to disempowerment. The intensification of teacher labor, driven by neoliberal educational reforms, risks transforming educators into mere technicians (Apple, 2004), disconnected from the critical, reflective dimensions of teaching.

Time poverty does not only affect teachers—it affects students. Teachers overwhelmed by excessive paperwork and non-teaching responsibilities have less time for instructional planning, individualized feedback, and student engagement (Wilkinson et al., 2021; Fitzgerald et al., 2019). Buskila and Chen-Levi (2021), in their study of Israeli educators, found that intense teaching schedules reduce teachers' capacity to innovate or adapt instruction to diverse learner needs. Cranston and Ehrich (2002) noted that even school principals are affected, often working long hours to meet managerial expectations, thereby neglecting their instructional leadership role. According to Gavin et al. (2021), these administrative burdens pose a threat not only to teaching quality but also to educational democracy itself, by sidelining pedagogical decision-making and teacher agency.

Carroll and Heffernan (2022) raised concerns about the resulting "learning lottery," where inconsistent lesson planning due to teacher burnout leads to unequal student experiences. This is especially problematic in disadvantaged schools, where teacher turnover and fatigue are already high.

Modern teaching increasingly demands multitasking—juggling lesson planning, grading, classroom management, parental communication, and data reporting, often simultaneously. Brante (2009) described teaching as a form of "synchronous work," wherein multiple time-sensitive tasks converge at once, leaving little room for reflection or pedagogical innovation. Beck (2017) likened this to "the weight of a heavy hour," describing how the unpredictability and emotional labor of teaching can overwhelm even the most experienced educators.

Easthope and Easthope (2000) also drew attention to the complexity and extension of teachers' work, noting that expectations now extend far beyond the classroom to encompass duties traditionally fulfilled by other professionals or family members. These include counseling students, managing social services referrals, and ensuring compliance with institutional protocols.

Educational leaders, including principals and department heads, are not immune to these pressures. As instructional and managerial demands collide, many leaders experience role strain and decision fatigue, leading to reduced innovation and professional burnout (Ng, 2019). Byrne and Theakston (2015) showed that leadership roles under pressure often lead to early attrition, not unlike trends seen among classroom teachers.

Cranston and Ehrich (2002) observed that sleeplessness and emotional stress among principals were becoming normalized, exacerbated by expectations of being “always available.” Meanwhile, policy-driven intensification, as analyzed by Braun (2017), has led to new forms of surveillance and accountability that limit leaders’ capacity to support teacher autonomy and school-based innovations.

Underlying many of these challenges is a systemic issue—an education policy climate that prioritizes efficiency, data, and accountability at the expense of pedagogical depth and human well-being. Apple (2004) critiques how neoliberal reforms have commodified education, turning schools into productivity units and educators into data managers. Gavin et al. (2021) describe this as a “tsunami of paperwork,” and Fitzgerald et al. (2019) report that under devolved governance models, teachers are increasingly overwhelmed by ever-shifting policy priorities and compliance demands. The Department of Education in Australia (2022) recognizes this, attributing part of the national teacher shortage crisis to burnout and the unattractiveness of the teaching profession under current workload conditions.

Bergener and Santarius (2021) argue that contemporary life, including work in schools, is characterized by “acceleration”—a relentless increase in pace and expectations. Without intentional slowing down and restructuring of educational priorities, both teacher well-being and instructional quality will continue to suffer.

While the challenges are considerable, several scholars advocate for reforms that prioritize teacher well-being. Alexander (2020) emphasizes the importance of high-quality evidence and context-sensitive solutions to inform workload policy. Cooke, Smith, and Booth (2012) propose using qualitative synthesis tools such as SPIDER to center teacher experiences in research and reform design.

A return to shared planning time, reduced administrative load, and collaborative professional development—rooted in teacher voice and autonomy—may serve as a foundation for restoring both morale and instructional effectiveness. As Bartlett (2004) notes, reforms that expand teacher roles should be approached cautiously and with adequate support structures.

Mitigation Strategies

To address the mounting pressures and workload intensification experienced by educators, a growing body of literature has identified several effective mitigation strategies. These approaches focus on redistributing responsibilities, creating collaborative environments, advocating for policy reforms, and restructuring how time and tasks are managed within schools. Such interventions aim to promote well-being, retain teaching staff, and enhance teaching and learning outcomes.

One key strategy highlighted in the literature is distributed leadership, which involves delegating leadership responsibilities among staff to reduce the burden placed solely on school principals. Harris (2013) emphasized the value of empowering middle leaders to take on instructional and administrative responsibilities, fostering a shared sense of ownership and easing managerial overload. Cranston and Ehrich (2002) observed that school leaders, particularly principals, often face excessive demands on their time, resulting in stress and burnout. By promoting distributed leadership structures, schools can create more balanced workloads and enhance decision-making efficiency. This approach has also been linked to greater job satisfaction among both school leaders and teachers, as leadership is shared rather than concentrated.

Another significant reform involves rethinking how teachers' time is structured throughout the school day and school year. Time-related pressures—such as teaching schedules, administrative duties, and extracurricular commitments—have long been a source of dissatisfaction and stress among teachers (Allen et al., 2021; Ahlgren & Gådin, 2011). Structural reforms that allocate protected planning time, reduce administrative burdens, and streamline lesson preparation have been shown to positively impact teacher morale and retention (OECD, 2019). Ballet and Kelchtermans (2009) noted that intensification, or the process of doing more in the same or less time, creates unsustainable conditions for educators. Therefore, policy reforms aimed at safeguarding time for core instructional tasks are crucial for sustainable practice.

The implementation of shared lesson plans and collective resource banks has also been proposed as a method for alleviating the lesson planning “lottery” (Carroll & Heffernan, 2022). When teachers are not expected to design every lesson from scratch, they are better able to focus on delivering high-quality instruction and supporting student needs.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) represent another promising mitigation strategy. These collaborative structures bring teachers together to engage in continuous dialogue, co-develop curriculum materials, and reflect on practice. Stoll et al. (2006) found that PLCs fostered a culture of shared responsibility, reduced professional isolation, and encouraged innovation. In such communities, teachers support each other in managing workload challenges while improving pedagogical strategies. Beck (2017) argued that collegial support is particularly vital in contexts of work intensification, where isolation can exacerbate stress and burnout.

PLCs also offer a mechanism for mentoring new teachers, who often feel overwhelmed by competing demands (Bartlett, 2004). By promoting collaboration over competition, PLCs cultivate environments in which collective efficacy thrives. Research by Buskila and Chen-Levi (2021) in Israeli schools revealed that when teachers engage in cooperative efforts, their sense of professional agency and resilience increases.

Beyond individual school-level strategies, broader policy advocacy efforts have also played a role in addressing teacher workload issues. Educators and teacher unions that engage in collective bargaining and political lobbying have been successful in influencing workload-related policies (Flinders & Thornton, 2018). For instance, in Australia, widespread reports of teacher stress and burnout prompted national reviews and consultations aimed at reducing paperwork and clarifying role expectations (Fitzgerald et al., 2019; Gavin et al., 2021). Unions have also advocated for the hiring of support staff to handle non-instructional tasks, thereby freeing teachers to concentrate on teaching.

Apple (2004) critiques how neoliberal and accountability-driven reforms often increase teacher workload through metrics, testing, and surveillance. Thus, policy advocacy also involves resisting reforms that add unnecessary bureaucratic layers without improving educational quality. Instead, unions and advocacy groups often push for policies that promote teacher autonomy and professionalism.

Interventions that promote better work-life balance are also essential. De Carlo et al. (2019) applied the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model to show how high job demands interfere with teachers' personal lives, contributing to stress and attrition. Providing access to mental health resources, flexible work arrangements, and wellness programs can mitigate these effects. Boström et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of healthy work environments, particularly for female educators who often face additional pressures related to care responsibilities outside of school.

Furthermore, the growing recognition of the "pace of life" (Bergener & Santarius, 2021) suggests that modern schools need to reassess the tempo at which educational activities occur. Slowing down institutional rhythms by integrating mindfulness, breaks, and realistic pacing could counteract the cultural norms of acceleration that drive overwork in the profession.

Mitigating teacher workload and work intensification requires a multi-faceted, systemic approach. Strategies like distributed leadership, protected time for planning, professional learning communities, and policy advocacy do not merely reduce stress—they also strengthen teacher effectiveness, motivation, and student achievement. As emphasized by Green (2021), declining job quality is a serious concern for the future of the profession. Therefore, these mitigation efforts must be prioritized not only to support educators but to uphold the integrity and sustainability of public education systems worldwide.

Conclusion:

This systematic synthesis underscores the pressing need for comprehensive educational reform that meaningfully responds to the lived realities of educators, particularly concerning workload intensification and chronic time poverty. Across the studies reviewed, a consistent pattern emerges: teachers are experiencing increasing demands on their time and energy without proportional increases in support, autonomy, or professional recognition. These conditions not only compromise teacher well-being and job satisfaction but also have ripple effects on instructional quality, student outcomes, and the overall functionality of educational systems.

The findings reveal that current models of school leadership and organizational management often fall short in acknowledging the multifaceted pressures teachers face daily. The prevailing top-down management styles and accountability-driven cultures frequently neglect the voices and experiences of educators, further exacerbating stress and burnout. In contrast, leadership models rooted in collaboration, empathy, and research-based practices show promise in fostering healthier and more productive school environments. This suggests a critical need to reimagine leadership as a shared, responsive process that values teacher input and prioritizes holistic support structures.

Additionally, the evidence points to the importance of designing policies that are not only data-driven but also co-created with stakeholders—including teachers, school leaders, policymakers, and community members. Collaborative policymaking ensures that reforms are grounded in classroom realities and tailored to the unique needs of diverse learning communities. This participatory approach helps bridge the gap between policy intention and practice, increasing the likelihood of successful implementation and long-term sustainability.

Central to this reform agenda is the imperative to uphold and restore the professional dignity of educators. Teachers must be recognized not only as implementers of policy but as critical thinkers, innovators, and agents of change in their own right. Providing opportunities for ongoing professional development, creating manageable workloads, and fostering a culture of trust and mutual respect are essential components of this vision. When educators are supported in this way, they are more likely to engage deeply with their work, maintain high levels of motivation, and build stronger relationships with students.

The well-being of teachers and the effectiveness of educational systems are inextricably linked. By investing in the health, autonomy, and professional growth of educators, school systems can cultivate environments where both teaching and learning thrive. This requires more than isolated interventions—it demands a systemic shift toward sustainable work practices, inclusive leadership, and human-centered policies.

The call for reform is not merely a response to current challenges but a proactive step toward building resilient, equitable, and future-ready education systems. Attending to the well-being and professional dignity of educators is not only a moral imperative but a strategic necessity. As education continues to evolve in response to global and local pressures, placing teachers at the center of reform efforts is essential for the long-term success of schools and the learners they serve.

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