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Navigating Dual Roles: A Qualitative Exploration of Women's Experiences Balancing Career and Family in Teaching Professions

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of women teachers balancing dual roles of professional educator and family caregiver. Despite representing a majority of the global teaching workforce, women continue to face unique challenges in managing career and familial expectations. Using a phenomenological design and semi-structured interviews with eight teachers from school, college, and university levels, this research uncovers five major themes: temporal juggling, emotional labor, identity conflict, support systems, and long-term career implications. Findings reveal that time-based conflicts and emotional exhaustion are pervasive, especially when institutional structures lack flexibility. Teacher's report navigating tightly packed schedules, performing emotional labor in classrooms, and returning home to care-giving responsibilities with little time for self-care. Many participants describe feeling fragmented across roles, yet others develop resilient strategies and integrated identities. The presence or absence of institutional and familial support emerged as a key factor influencing satisfaction and sustainability in dual-role management.

The study is grounded in Carlson's Work-Family Balance Theory, Role Theory, and Feminist Theory, offering a multidimensional lens through which to understand the structural and emotional dimensions of work-family dynamics in education. Implications include the need for gender-sensitive educational policies, flexible institutional frameworks, and deeper awareness of how professional expectations intersect with personal roles. The study contributes to literature on gender, emotional labor, and career development in education, offering insights for both policymakers and educational leaders aiming to support women in teaching professions.

Keywords: Work-Family Balance, Women Educators, Emotional Labor, Qualitative Research, Dual Roles, Teaching Profession

Introduction

The teaching profession has long been associated with high emotional demands, care-giving responsibilities, and unpredictable work schedules. Globally, women constitute a significant majority of the teaching workforce approximately 76% in many education systems (UNESCO, 2022). Despite this numerical dominance, women teachers continue to face systemic and cultural challenges when balancing professional responsibilities with familial and care-giving duties. The dual demands of career and family are not new, but in the teaching profession a field shaped by both emotional labor and high accountability they manifest in unique and often overwhelming ways (Day & Gu, 2019). Work-family balance has become a prominent focus in educational and organizational research over the past two decades. While much of the earlier research

focused on role conflict and burnout, more recent qualitative work explores how educators negotiate their multiple roles over time. In particular, women teachers often find themselves navigating a landscape shaped by gendered societal expectations, institutional inflexibility, and their own aspirations for professional growth and personal fulfillment. Circumstances escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic, which merged personal and work life (Cruz & Mendes, 2021). A number of female educators had to juggle online lessons with looking after children or other dependents, adding to the burden of already demanding roles. Beyond self-care, imbalances between family and work roles give rise to deeper professional issues. The phenomenon of work-family conflict drives employees into burnout, decreases teaching quality, increases intention to leave the organization all highly interrelated as noted by (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). A troubling part is that these spillover effects can greatly affect a student's education experience, the morale and culture of a school, and the ongoing stability of an institution. Moreover, barriers related to one's sex still exist with regard to advancement in leadership positions in education. Demands related to caregiving substantially limit women's ability to pursue higher-level positions and career growth opportunities (Miller 2016). Considering the breadth of these effects, the question of how women teachers balance their career and family responsibilities is one that needs more consideration especially from a qualitative perspective that can illuminate the experiences behind the numbers. This study aims to provide answers by examining how women teachers in different levels of education cope with this stress, what coping mechanisms they employ, what systematized help they receive or lack, and how these factors affect their well-being and professional advancement.

Problem Statement

While many existing studies adopt a quantitative orientation, providing broad generalizations, they often fail to capture the emotional and contextual nuances that guide women's decision-making in everyday work-family negotiations (Cinamon & Rich, 2002; Shockley et al., 2017). Additionally, limited research explores how institutional policies, social norms, and personal agency intersect to shape work-family dynamics, particularly in South Asian educational settings (Rai & Ruwanpura, 2015). Few studies adopt an intersectional approach or analyze variations across different career and family stages, which are crucial in understanding the evolving nature of role strain (Collins & Bilge, 2016). This gap in qualitative exploration hinders the development of support mechanisms that truly reflect the needs of female educators. Without insights into their lived experiences, educational institutions risk reinforcing inequitable structures that impact teacher well-being, retention, and student outcomes (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Miller, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in a three-part theoretical framework incorporating: Carlson et al.'s (2009) Work-Family Balance Theory, Kahn et al. (1964) Role Theory, Acker, (1992) Feminist Theory to deeply explore how women teachers experience and navigate dual roles in their professional and personal lives. Carlson's theory positions work-family balance not merely as the absence of conflict but as the presence of harmony, flexibility, and role enrichment. It emphasizes that individuals are not passive recipients of work and family demands; instead, they negotiate and balance demands using available resources, coping mechanisms, and strategic planning (Carlson, Grzywacz, & Zivnuska, 2009). This theory is especially relevant to teachers, who must often reconfigure their schedules, emotional availability, and time management skills to adapt to competing demands. Role Theory, introduced by Kahn et al. (1964), explores how individuals manage multiple role expectations across social contexts. Within the teaching profession, women are not only educators but also mothers, spouses, caregivers, and community members. This multiplicity often leads to role strain, role conflict, or even role spillover, where stress in one domain disrupts functioning in another. The third pillar is Feminist Theory, which offers a critical lens to examine how societal norms and institutional structures disproportionately burden women. This framework highlights that the challenges faced by women teachers are not merely individual but are embedded in broader systems of gendered expectations, policy

negligence, and cultural stereotypes (Acker, 1992). Feminist theory encourages the analysis of power, privilege, and structural inequality, making it especially valuable in education research where gender roles are deeply entrenched. The integration of these three frameworks allows this study to explore not just what women experience, but why these experiences unfold as they do and how they might be addressed both personally and institutionally.

Research Questions

1. How do women in the teaching profession experience the challenges of balancing career and family responsibilities?
2. How do societal expectations and institutional practices shape their ability to maintain work-family balance?
3. What strategies or coping mechanisms do they employ to manage dual roles?
4. What implications do these experiences have for their professional growth, personal well-being, and career trajectories?

Research Objectives

1. To explore the lived experiences of women teachers managing dual career and family roles.
2. To identify the primary challenges, they face in maintaining work-family balance.
3. To examine the coping strategies and support mechanisms they use.
4. To analyze how institutional and societal expectations influence their decisions and well-being.

Delimitations and Limitations

This research is limited to female teachers with care giving responsibilities across three education levels: school, college, and university. The geographic and cultural context is assumed to be reflective of South Asian or similar developing contexts where traditional gender roles are still prevalent.

Being qualitative, the study does not aim for generalization but instead seeks to provide in-depth, context-rich insights. Limitations include: Potential researcher bias in interpreting narratives, Focus on female teachers only (excluding male or gender-diverse perspectives) Despite these limitations, the study offers a valuable exploratory framework that can inform both practice and further empirical investigation. Participant's profiles given in appendix A.

Literature Review

Introduction to Work-Family Balance in Teaching

Work-family balance has emerged as a vital concern in contemporary educational research, especially concerning women educators. With women making up the majority of the global teaching workforce (UNESCO, 2022), their experiences in managing the dual demands of career and family have received increasing scholarly attention. However, the unique dynamics of the teaching profession including emotional labor, irregular schedules, and caregiving responsibilities complicate traditional understandings of work-family balance (Crespi & González, 2021). The literature review presents a thematic synthesis of existing literature to contextualize this study's focus on the lived experiences of women teachers navigating dual roles.

Role Theory and Work-Family Conflict

Role theory has provided a foundational lens to understand how individuals navigate multiple, often competing, expectations within their professional and personal lives (Kahn et al., 1964). For women teachers, the simultaneous demands of being an educator and caregiver can lead to role conflict and role overload (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). These conflicts manifest when the demands of one role interfere with the ability to fulfill responsibilities in another a phenomenon well documented among mothers who teach (Cinamon &

Rich, 2010). Research indicates that women in education frequently report emotional strain from managing parallel expectations particularly in cultures where traditional gender roles persist (Lyness & Judiesch, 2014). Women may be praised for their care-giving nature in the classroom but penalized for needing flexibility to manage their families, creating an institutional double bind (Borman & Dowling, 2008). This aligns with role theory's assertion that stress arises not just from multiple roles, but from incompatible expectations attached to those roles.

Emotional Labor and Gendered Expectations in Teaching

Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labor the management of emotion as part of one's professional role has been widely applied in education studies. Teachers are not only expected to educate but also to nurture, counsel, and emotionally support students, which adds an invisible layer of care-giving work (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). For women teachers, who are often caregivers at home as well, the result is a form of dual care-giving exhaustion. This emotional intensity is not always acknowledged in educational policies or institutional support structures. Research shows that women teachers experience higher emotional exhaustion and burnout rates, particularly those balancing young children and full-time teaching (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Emotional labor at school often spills over into home life, leading to emotional dissonance and reduced quality of personal relationships (Brackett et al., 2010).

Institutional Policy and Structural Barriers

While some institutions have made strides in offering family-friendly policies, research shows that supportive environments for working mothers in education remain inconsistent. In a cross-national study, Kossek and Lautsch (2012) found that flexible scheduling, job-sharing, and parental leave policies were often underutilized or unavailable in public education settings. Where such policies existed, they were more often accessed by women, reinforcing gendered divisions of labor rather than challenging them (Lewis & Humbert, 2010). Institutional culture often plays a bigger role than official policy. Even when policies exist on paper, women teachers report feeling guilty or disloyal when using them, due to unspoken norms about dedication and productivity (Coryell, Wagner, Clark, & Stuessy, 2013). Leadership expectations frequently conflict with caregiving duties, forcing many women to opt out of advancement or reduce work hours during critical career-building periods.

Feminist Perspectives on Work-Life Inequity

Feminist theory offers a structural critique of the issues outlined above, framing the work-family dilemma not as a personal issue, but as a systemic gender equity problem. Acker's (1992) theory of gendered organizations posits those educational institutions, despite appearing gender-neutral operate on assumptions of the "ideal worker" as someone fully devoted to their job, without caregiving responsibilities. This model inherently disadvantages women, especially those with children. Contemporary feminist scholars emphasize that institutional reforms must go beyond accommodating women's needs. They must challenge gendered assumptions about leadership, time use, and professional identity (Blackmore, 2011). Research has shown that the motherhood penalty is real: women with children are perceived as less committed, while fathers are perceived as more stable and loyal employees (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004). This dynamic influences how women educators are evaluated, promoted, and retained.

Crisis Periods and COVID-19's Impact on Work-Family Balance

The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented disruption to the traditional boundaries between home and work. Teachers, especially women, found themselves navigating online teaching, home schooling, and increased domestic duties often simultaneously (Power, 2020). Recent research by O'Reilly and Green (2021) revealed that many female educators experienced a dramatic increase in mental load, describing their days as

"nonstop switching" between identities. For untenured faculty and early-career teachers, the pandemic amplified vulnerabilities. Women with young children were disproportionately likely to scale back on professional development or pause leadership pursuits (Collins et al., 2021). The pandemic made visible the fragility of work-family systems, especially in professions like teaching that were not designed with caregivers in mind.

Intersectionality: Class, Culture, and Family Structures

While gender plays a central role in shaping work-family dynamics, intersectionality theory urges us to consider how multiple identities such as class, ethnicity, marital status, and culture interact to influence women's experiences. In developing contexts, family support systems such as grandparents or domestic help may mitigate challenges, while in others, lack of state support exacerbates them (Chopra, 2018). Single mothers, teachers in rural areas, and those from marginalized ethnic groups often face compounded barriers in accessing institutional support. In a South Asian study, Farooq and Habib (2020) found that female educators from low-income backgrounds were more likely to be judged harshly for "failing" at either role. Moreover, access to flexible work policies was often reserved for more privileged segments within the system, further reinforcing inequality.

Career Progression and the Motherhood Penalty

Numerous studies have documented how family responsibilities impact long-term career development. Women who take maternity leave, request reduced hours, or decline promotions during child-rearing years often face slowed advancement, lower pay, and fewer leadership opportunities (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007). This phenomenon, referred to as the motherhood penalty, creates cumulative disadvantages that persist even after children are grown. In education, where leadership roles require visibility and time commitment outside classroom hours, many women educators feel forced to choose between motherhood and career ambition. A longitudinal study by Shakeshaft et al. (2015) found that women leaders in education were more likely to delay having children or choose not to have them altogether in order to succeed. The trade-off is often described as painful, isolating, and unjust but systemic rather than individual.

Coping Strategies and Resilience

Despite these challenges, women educators have demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. Research highlights a range of coping mechanisms: time blocking, co-parenting routines, support groups, and reliance on informal networks of peers and mentors (Martínez, 2020). Teachers also report finding creative ways to merge roles such as involving their children in classroom planning or integrating family life into lesson content. Institutional mentorship programs and peer-led communities have been found to significantly reduce feelings of isolation and guilt. When supported, women report greater job satisfaction, stronger identities, and better work-family integration (Edwards & Bexley, 2022). Thus, resilience is not simply individual strength it's often socially and structurally enabled.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite extensive research on work-family balance, existing literature still lacks focus on underrepresented regions like South Asia, where gender and family dynamics are shaped by strong cultural norms. Most studies are centered in Western or high-income urban contexts. Additionally, little attention has been paid to how women define success and satisfaction in their dual roles, or how these views evolve over their life course. This study contributes to closing that gap by providing qualitative insights from South Asian women educators through first-hand interviews.

Conclusion of Literature Review

The literature overwhelmingly confirms that women in the teaching profession face intricate and often conflicting demands from both career and family. The intersection of gender, emotion, institutional culture, and policy creates a web of expectations that many must navigate daily. While coping strategies and resilience are evident, systemic reforms are required to create sustainable work-family environments in education. This study responds to multiple gaps: it uses a qualitative, phenomenological lens; incorporates genuine narratives; and highlights diverse teaching levels and life stages. The insights generated aim to inform more empathetic policy-making, institutional reform, and practical support structures for women navigating dual roles in teaching.

Research Methodology

This study follows a qualitative, phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of women in teaching professions as they navigate dual roles of career and family. A qualitative approach is appropriate due to the subjective, emotional, and deeply contextual nature of the inquiry. Phenomenology, in particular, allows the researcher to focus on participants' inner experiences and perceptions emphasizing meaning over measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study employed online semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of participants to explore their lived experiences. This method ensured flexibility, accessibility, and depth, particularly given participants' professional and family commitments. This approach maintains fidelity to qualitative exploration while acknowledging practical constraints. The goal is to understand how women experience role conflict, develop coping strategies, and perceive institutional and societal influences.

Population & Sampling

The study includes 8 participants representing three educational levels primary/elementary, secondary/high school, and higher education (colleges and universities). The sample reflects diversity in marital status, caregiving responsibilities, age, and career stage. This purposive sampling ensures inclusion of voices that reflect a wide range of challenges and strategies in work-family balance.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews include sections on career-family balance, coping strategies, societal expectations, institutional support, and long-term impact. Open-ended, reflective questions were designed to align with the four research questions. Each interview lasted approximately 30/45 minutes, was transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis method:

Familiarization: Reading and re-reading transcripts.

Generating Initial Codes: Identifying repeated patterns, tensions, coping actions.

Searching for Themes: Grouping codes into larger thematic categories.

Reviewing Themes: Refining categories and eliminating overlaps.

Defining and Naming Themes: Finalizing the five major themes and subthemes.

Producing the Report: Integrating thematic insights with literature and theory.

Ethical Findings

The analysis of participant interviews revealed five overarching themes that encapsulate the lived experiences of women teachers balancing dual roles of career and family. These themes reflect both recurring challenges and adaptive strategies observed across diverse teaching contexts.

Theme 1: Temporal Juggling and Schedule Management

Temporal juggling means managing several tasks at once, often switching attention back and forth and It is common in modern, fast-paced work environments where workers are subjected to pressure from multiple clients or coworkers simultaneously. While it can provide flexibility in dynamic environments, it often leads to lower productivity and longer total completion times compared to focused, sequential work. It applies to both managing work-family conflicts (e.g., shift workers trying to maintain home life) and managing project portfolios by CEOs. Whether the schedule management is the systematic process of estimating time requirements, scheduling tasks, and checking progress to meet deadlines. Schedule management has some key components such as: Planning: Defining tasks and assigning them to specific time slots. Prioritizing: Distinguishing between urgent and important tasks. Structuring: Creating temporal structures such as routines, calendars, and deadlines. In situations where demand exceeds available time, workers must juggle visits or tasks, which can, unfortunately, undermine the quality of care or output. Temporal juggling is a common, often reactive approach to managing high volume, whereas schedule management is a proactive, strategic approach to controlling time to improve efficiency and reduce burnout.

All participants reported intense time-based conflict as a primary stressor. Teaching, with its structured hours and unstructured after-hours tasks (grading, planning, emails), conflicted sharply with care-giving demands.

“Evenings blur into lesson plans while my kids ask for bedtime stories. I’m in two worlds at once.” P1

Participants described layered schedules involving drop-offs, homework support, and household duties squeezed between lesson planning and grading. Some adapted using strict routines, while others described ongoing feelings of guilt and fatigue.

“Parent-teacher meetings always clash with my daughter’s school events.” P4

This theme confirms previous literature identifying time as the most limited resource in work-family balance (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Women reported having to constantly switch between their teacher role and caregiver role, often within the same hour. This led to exhaustion and time fragmentation. The unpredictability of both roles made scheduling extremely stressful. This supports prior findings that women experience “time-based conflict” due to overlapping role demands (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Theme 2: Emotional Labor and Care Work

Emotional Labor often called the invisible work in personal life, including cognitive loads like mental to-do lists, scheduling, and empathy. care work involves unpaid, private-life efforts managing emotions and household logistics, such as childcare, planning, and maintaining relationships.

Participants noted that both home and school roles required emotional attentiveness and empathy, leading to emotional fatigue.

“I have to listen to both my students’ problems and my son’s emotions. Who listens to me?”
P2

Teachers described feeling emotionally depleted after work, which affected their availability at home.

“I end up snapping at my own kids after a rough day in class.” P7

This theme reinforces Hochschild’s (1983) emotional labor concept, with compounded demands in both personal and professional spheres.

Participants shared how managing classroom behavior and student emotions left them emotionally drained. This affected their ability to be present with family, echoing Hochschild’s (1983) theory of emotional labor. The pressure to remain composed at work often meant they had little emotional energy left at home.

Theme 3: Identity Conflict and Role Integration

Identity conflict is the experience of perceiving incompatibilities between aspects of one's identity content that call into question the individual's ability to meet the identity standard of at least one of these identities can significantly impact individuals' work experiences. As individuals navigate experiences of identity conflict at work, managers and organizations also grapple with how to support employees' multiple identities while mitigating the primarily negative outcomes of identity conflict. Understanding the role of identity is part of understanding the complexity of a conflict. We must make identity issues part of our analysis in order to envision a better future. The way we deal with identity conflicts depends upon our theory of change. Role integration is a holistic view of managing personal and professional life.

Several participants shared how they felt split between their professional and maternal identities, struggling to merge or balance them.

"I'm either a 'bad mom' or a 'bad teacher' depending on the day." P3

Others described learning to integrate roles over time, sometimes by involving children in lesson planning or by mentally reframing the value of both roles.

"Now I see both roles as who I am not enemies, but parts of the same mission." P6

Some women felt torn between their "teacher self" and "mother self," leading to inner conflict. However, others described moments of identity integration using teaching skills at home or parenting lessons in the classroom. This aligns with role theory, where multiple role expectations can conflict or harmonize (Kahn et al., 1964).

Theme 4: Support Systems and Institutional Context

Support system is a formal or informal networks and resources that provide assistance and encouragement to individuals facing mental health issues or other challenges. In the cultural setting the combined formal and informal networks, structures, policies, and cultural settings that provide assistance, resources, and rules to enable individuals or organizations to function effectively, achieve goals, and overcome challenges. Institutional context is defined by a variety of features that influence organizations, including political, legal, cultural, and financial boundaries, which can affect their quality assurance arrangements.

A key differentiated in participant experiences was the presence or absence of supportive systems both personal and institutional.

"My dean gave me flexible hours it changed everything." P6

"We're expected to act like we don't have families." P8

Supportive colleagues, flexible schedules, and understanding leadership were cited as **critical** enablers of balance. Participants without such support described feeling isolated and overwhelmed.

Teachers who had family help, peer support, or understanding leadership experienced less stress. Those without these supports reported greater emotional and physical strain. This echoes Kossek & Lautsch's (2012) findings that supportive environments reduce role stress.

Theme 5: Long-Term Career Implications and Life Satisfaction

Long term career implication is the broader, long-term contentment with your entire professional trajectory. It encompasses your growth, your alignment of personal goals with achievements, and a pervasive sense of purpose and fulfillment over many years, perhaps even decades. It's the feeling that your professional journey, as a whole, is meaningful and aligns with who you are. While job satisfaction is important, career satisfaction is the deeper, more enduring state that contributes most significantly to lifelong well-being. You might have

a bad day at a satisfying job, or even leave a good job for a better career opportunity. The impact of career satisfaction extends far beyond your office or workspace. It creates a powerful ripple effect that touches every facet of your life.

Participants described how work-family balance decisions affected their career paths, including delays or refusals of leadership roles, pauses in professional development, or emotional disengagement.

“I skipped PhD chances twice family couldn’t adjust.” P4

Despite challenges, many women expressed pride and peace in their dual roles, while others voiced regret or frustration over missed opportunities.

“I’m proud of my family, but still wonder ‘what if?’” P6

Several participants noted that their careers slowed or were delayed due to family duties. Some had to refuse promotions or additional certifications. These experiences reflect what feminist scholars describe as the “motherhood penalty” in career advancement (Acker, 1992; Blackmore, 2011).

Conclusion of Themes

Together, these themes show that women teachers’ experiences of dual roles are deeply shaped by time demands, emotional labor, identity negotiation, and structural supports. While some find strategies to adapt, many face limitations due to institutional rigidity and societal expectations. The study emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive reforms in educational policy and leadership.

Discussion

This study explored how women in teaching professions experience the demands of balancing professional and family roles. The thematic findings reflect not only personal coping strategies but also deeper systemic tensions.

The theme of temporal juggling echoes long-standing findings on time scarcity as a core conflict in work-family studies (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). However, this study adds nuance by highlighting how teachers manage unpredictability not just volume of time demands.

The prominence of emotional labor confirms Hochschild’s theory but also expands on it by showing how teachers’ emotional depletion in the classroom directly limits emotional engagement at home. This dual role intensity contributes to stress, guilt, and potential burnout (Brackett et al., 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). The discussion of identity fragmentation aligns with role theory (Kahn et al., 1964), where conflicting expectations create internal conflict. Yet, some participants displayed impressive **identity integration**, suggesting that resilience can emerge over time when teachers receive appropriate support and develop personal strategies.

Support systems stood out as a major moderator of experience. Teachers with access to family help, flexible leadership, or peer mentorship reported less stress and greater satisfaction. This aligns with Kossek & Lautsch’s (2012) assertion that supportive environments buffer role strain.

The findings on career impact resonate with feminist theory critiques of gendered professional norms (Acker, 1992; Blackmore, 2011). Women in this study actively navigated trade-offs, and some paid the "motherhood penalty" in slowed career advancement or deferred ambitions a structural, not personal, issue.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of women teachers balancing the dual roles of career and family. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, it identified five central themes: temporal juggling, emotional labor, identity conflict, support systems, and long-term career impact. These findings reflect the multifaceted nature of work-family navigation, shaped by both personal strategies and institutional conditions. Participants described constant negotiation between professional and personal obligations, often at the cost of self-care or career progression. The emotional and time-related demands of teaching mirrored and sometimes

clashed with their roles at home. While some teachers developed integrated identities and resilient routines, others expressed feelings of guilt, fragmentation, or regret. The critical role of institutional support was evident: when schools provided flexibility and understanding, women were more able to thrive in both domains. Without it, stress and dissatisfaction often prevailed.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on gender, education, and work-life balance by contextualizing these issues within teaching a profession deeply shaped by care and emotional labor. It reinforces calls for education systems to develop gender-sensitive policies that not only recognize, but proactively support, dual-role demands.

Future research could benefit from longitudinal approaches that follow teachers across different life stages, and from intersectional analyses that examine how factors like class, marital status, and culture intersect with gender in shaping these experiences. Ultimately, addressing work-family challenges in teaching is not only a matter of personal well-being it is vital for institutional sustainability, gender equity, and educational quality.

Recommendations

Educational institutions should adopt a more supportive and inclusive approach to address the challenges faced by women teachers balancing professional and family roles. This includes introducing flexible work arrangements such as adjusted schedules and hybrid teaching options, along with implementing gender-sensitive policies like extended maternity leave and childcare support. Leadership training is essential to foster empathy and understanding among administrators, while institutions should also strengthen peer support networks and mentoring opportunities to reduce emotional burden. Providing access to mental health and well-being programs can further help teachers manage stress resulting from emotional labor. Additionally, there is a need to redefine the traditional notion of the “ideal teacher” by recognizing personal responsibilities and promoting a healthier work–life balance. Equal opportunities for career advancement must be ensured so that women are not disadvantaged due to caregiving roles. At the policy level, integrating work–family balance into educational frameworks is crucial for long-term change. Finally, future research should focus on larger and more diverse samples, include comparative perspectives, and adopt longitudinal and intersectional approaches to better understand evolving experiences over time.

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Appendix A

Participant Profiles (8 Total)

Participant ID	Teaching Level	Age	Marital/ Family Status	Teaching Experience	Notable Context
P1	Primary School	32	Married, 2 young children	8 years	Balancing early childhood needs and parental involvement
P2	Secondary School	41	Single mother of 1 teenager	15 years	Managing work-life solo with limited support
P3	University	38	Married, no children	12 years	Prioritizing career with external caregiving for parents
P4	Secondary School	45	Married, 3 children	20 years	Feels burnout from school leadership and parenting
P5	Primary School	29	Married, expecting first child	5 years	Anxious about upcoming role conflict
P6	University	51	Divorced, children grown	25 years	Reflects on long-term trade-offs and career choices
P7	Secondary School	35	Married, 1 child	10 years	Struggles with institutional support
P8	College	40	Married, 2 children	17 years	Active in union efforts for gender equity policies