

**Exploring the Role of School Leaders in Enhancing Staff
Wellbeing for School Improvement: A Case Study in a Private
School in Dubai**

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Exploring the Role of School Leaders in Enhancing Staff Wellbeing for School Improvement: A Case Study in a Private School in Dubai

Abstract

Staff wellbeing has been identified as a crucial factor in improving school performance and student outcomes. However, school leaders often face challenges in promoting staff wellbeing, especially in the fast-paced and demanding environment of private schools in Dubai. There is a need for research that investigates the strategies and approaches used by school leaders to enhance staff wellbeing and how these efforts translate into school improvement. Therefore, this study aims to critically evaluate the effectiveness of the staff wellbeing initiatives implemented by school leaders in a private school in Dubai and their contribution to school improvement. The research consults the Full Range of Leadership Theory (FLRT) to identify which specific leadership approaches are associated with higher levels of employee wellbeing and positive organizational outcomes. The study utilized a qualitative approach to address the research question, two open-ended questionnaires were administered to the school leaders and a sample of twenty teachers to enhance external validity. The research findings emphasize how crucial leadership is for teachers' wellbeing and the success of staff wellbeing programs in schools. Teachers stress the value of leaders who appreciate their ideas and encourage collaboration through shared goals and open communication. A sense of ownership in decision-making has an impact on teacher engagement while being left out leads to emotions. Teachers generally have a view of development, but some are dissatisfied when their wellbeing is low. The speed at which

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changes happen in schools significantly affects teacher wellbeing highlighting the importance of a controlled and gradual approach. The research highlights the need for leadership that considers both staff needs and broader challenges. It also advocates for collaboration, meaningful professional development, and responsive feedback to improve teacher wellbeing and overall school improvement. The study's limitations include contextual specificity and time constraints. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the need for ongoing support and professional development for school leaders to enhance their leadership skills and abilities to effectively promote staff wellbeing. Investing in leadership training programs and creating platforms for sharing best practices can empower school leaders to create positive work environments that foster staff wellbeing, job satisfaction, and, consequently, school improvement. Future studies could expand the scope of research by replicating the study in additional private schools within the UAE. This would allow for an exploration of how the findings may differ or be consistent across diverse contexts.

Keywords: Staff wellbeing, Leadership style, School improvement, Resistance, Enhance performance

1. Introduction

Teachers have the greatest levels of work-related stress and burnout in the world when compared to other professions (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). Teachers' health, self-confidence, self-esteem, and personal relationships suffer because of this high-stress workplace. It can result in feelings of powerlessness, alienation, and a sense that one's work is pointless (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Furthermore, Low confidence, emotional exhaustion, low motivation, poor job satisfaction, and teacher attrition are all associated with high-stress levels (McCarthy et al., 2014). Teacher turnover, associated with low wellbeing marked by stress and burnout (OECD 2019; Travers and Cooper 1993), detrimentally impacts students' academic performance (Wylie and MacDonald 2020,).

The importance of staff wellbeing in boosting school performance and student outcomes has been established. However, school leaders frequently confront problems in fostering staff well-being, particularly in the fast-paced and demanding atmosphere of Dubai's private schools. There is a need for research into the techniques and approaches utilized by school leaders to increase staff well-being, as well as how these efforts translate into school improvement. Creating and advocating for a healthy workplace environment for school personnel is critical due to the enormous influence it has on staff welfare, which in turn influences students' academic, social, and emotional well-being. The negative implications of an unhealthy workplace can be far-reaching, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing and supporting a positive and supportive work environment for all school staff (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014; Roorda et al., 2011). Teacher wellbeing affects not only student wellbeing

but also student engagement, achievement, sense of belonging, and overall flourishing (Hattie & Yates, 2014). Although it is well known that teacher wellbeing is in decline, much of the previous rather than studying techniques to increase overall health, research has focused on individual teachers' ability to manage stress and burnout (Roffey, 2012). It is critical to remember that teacher wellbeing is a common concern for educational organizations, communities, and society at large, not just individual teachers. Addressing teacher wellbeing necessitates a broader viewpoint and an all-encompassing approach that extends beyond individual coping mechanisms (Roffey, 2012). Teacher wellbeing is influenced by elements such as a healthy internal environment, school culture, and positive connections with coworkers (Teacher Wellbeing Research Report, 2019). Furthermore, teachers who are at ease in their responsibilities, have autonomy in the classroom, are trusted to be accountable, and have positive connections with administrators are more likely to have improved teacher wellbeing and work performance (Chen, 2014). Buskila and Chen Levi (2020) demonstrated that when teachers perceive their school principals as attentive to their needs and proactive in preventing issues, teachers are more likely to contribute significantly, resulting in overall benefits for the school.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Many countries have developed purposeful educational policies and initiatives in recent years to improve student achievement and modify the broader schooling process (Fullan, 2009). School leaders play an important role in school improvement and must train teachers' teaching strategies and practices that are strongly linked to student accomplishment and overall school progress (Lambert, 2003); therefore administrators

want their staff to perform at their best (Ellett & Teddle, 2003). Establishing a positive school climate through a leadership team that fosters 'professional growth, control, autonomy, meaningful communication, and decision-making opportunities' is crucial for promoting and sustaining the wellbeing of school staff (Greany & Earley, 2021). School leaders bear the essential responsibility of shaping the tone and behavioral expectations within the school community.

The quality and character of school life are determined by the school environment, which includes collective individual experiences, norms, goals, values, interpersonal connections, teaching and learning techniques, and organizational structures (Cohen et al., 2009). It is influenced by the policies, procedures, and practices that are in place at the school. Teachers, as a significant pillar of the school atmosphere, have a direct impact on their students' learning results, and their health and wellbeing are important factors in this regard (Perikkou, Kougioufa, & Yannakoulia, 2013). Teachers' perceived health and well-being, as well as their level of burnout, may be influenced by the school climate. Understanding and critically evaluating the effectiveness of staff wellbeing initiatives implemented by school leaders in a private school in Dubai and their contribution to school improvement is essential for identifying areas for improvement and developing plans to improve school performance.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) established the Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB) to assess the quality of the city's private schools. These evaluations, which provide scores ranging from poor to acceptable, good to very good, and

exceptional, have served as the primary indicator of each school's teaching and learning quality (KHDA, 2009). Several significant elements influenced the decision to conduct an exploration of the effectiveness of staff wellbeing initiatives implemented by school leaders in a private school in Dubai. For starters, school administrators, parents, educators, and other stakeholders are closely monitoring the inspection process and reports, and researchers in charge of overseeing school ratings and improvement have identified a valuable opportunity for study and examination. Furthermore, close observation has revealed that there are significant issues in supporting the school's effective and supportive staff welfare needs. Despite the existence of guidelines describing acceptable policies and services for employees, it is clear that some employees experience challenges. This discovery has motivated me to pursue additional research to get a complete grasp of these challenges and their underlying causes, as well as to provide possible solutions.

1.3 Research Questions

This study seeks to identify the effectiveness of staff wellbeing initiatives principals implement towards school improvement in a private school in Dubai. The study is focused on understanding school leaders' and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of staff wellbeing initiatives principals implement and identifying the school leadership practices that have the greatest impact on driving school improvement, specifically in terms of staff wellbeing strategies. The main aim of the study will be achieved by answering the following key research question:

- To what extent are staff wellbeing initiatives implemented by principals effective towards school improvement in a private school in Dubai?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Previous studies have primarily focused on finding the negative characteristics or deficiencies that contribute to teacher discontent and wellbeing issues (Hattie & Yates, 2014). There has been little research into tactics and practices that promote teacher wellbeing in the workplace. Furthermore, while research has been conducted in several countries, there has been a dearth of research specifically evaluating the educational environment in the UAE. The purpose of this study is to fill a vacuum in the literature by focusing on the UAE context, which has its distinct educational setting, and to provide insights into enhancing teacher wellbeing in this specific context.

The importance of school leaders in creating a healthy work environment and improving employee wellbeing is becoming more widely recognized (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). This study seeks to add to existing information by studying how school leaders might increase staff wellbeing to support overall school improvement. The UAE's Vision 2021, which strives to establish an informed and empowered society via education (KHDA, 2019), emphasizes the importance of this study. The findings of this research can enhance educational policies and practices that line with the UAE's vision for educational excellence by examining the role of school leaders in promoting employee wellness.

2. Review of literature

2.1 Conceptual Framework

In relation to the research's objectives, several terms are used.

1. Teacher wellbeing

According to McCallum et al. (2017), the concept of wellbeing has been difficult to define in the literature, particularly regarding teachers. There is a wide variation in definitions of teacher well-being, and there is a lack of defined and uniform definitions. McCallum and Price (2016) acknowledge this variety in their study on teacher wellbeing and give a wide definition that incorporates the complexities of wellbeing:

Wellbeing is a comprehensive and dynamic notion that takes beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities, and circumstances of individuals, families, and communities over time. It has positive characteristics and is unique to each individual, providing them with a feeling of uniqueness that should be cherished.

Viac and Fraser (2020) focus their research on teacher wellbeing as a work-related notion. They describe occupational wellbeing in teachers as the way they perceive and respond to the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social situations related to their work and profession.

2. School leadership

School leadership includes both management and administrative decisions and behaviors carried out by the school governing body to improve students' achievement while taking their needs and wishes into account (Sergiovanni, 2009).

Sergiovanni (1996) defines school leadership as "pedagogical actions taken by principals or teachers to provide guidance, protection, and direction to students." These practices are intended to promote student development and academic advancement. Accountability is stressed as a critical component in ensuring student progress and performance as principals

are instructional leaders, managers, and instructors' motivators. They are critical in directing and supporting teachers in their teaching practices, managing school operations, and inspiring and empowering the school community to strive for educational achievement. (El Turk, 2017).

3. School Improvement

Gordon (2016) defines school improvement as "a deliberate and organized process of educational change aimed at improving learners' outcomes." It entails a school's constant progress toward fulfilling its educational goals. Effective teaching and learning practices, a positive and supportive school environment, equitable learning opportunities, a well-defined and focused mission, strong school-home relationships, and systematic monitoring of students' progress are all important components of school improvement. These factors all work together to identify and promote school improvement (Bush, 2007). School improvement refers to the actions and activities that schools do to acquire and maintain desirable features (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2009; Crowther, Andrews, Morgan, & Neill, 2012; Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001). Teacher development programs, organizational reforms, and the implementation of initiatives to build a healthy school climate are examples of such efforts (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2009; Crowther et al., 2012; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001).

2.2 Key Theories

Leadership and diverse leadership styles have been thoroughly researched, with past studies proving a clear link between leadership styles and varied results. Studies have found a link between leadership styles and effectiveness (Sadeghi & Pihie, 2012), efficacy (Jung

& Sosik, 2002), and wellbeing (Nielsen & Daniel, 2012; Renehan, 2007). The paradigm of 'Multifactor Leadership' (Bass & Avolio, 1994, 2004) is a prominent leadership model that is frequently referred to as 'full-scale leadership.' It defines three types of leadership styles: transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire.

Transformational leadership is often associated with positive characteristics such as motivation, emotional connection, and a sense of efficacy. This leadership style has a significant impact on organizational performance and other results (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Idealized influence or charm, intellectual stimulation, and personalized consideration are key features of the transformational style. It is distinguished by mutual admiration, a common vision, and an atmosphere that fosters the creative flow of ideas.

Transactional leadership operates as a form of social exchange between leaders and followers (Bass & Avolio, 1993). It is characterized by obtaining compliance through the use of rewards and punishments. This leadership style focuses on supervising, organizing, and individual as well as group performance. Leaders closely monitor followers' work and ensure adherence to prescribed paths.

On one hand, a laissez-faire leadership style is described as a lack of taking responsibility and avoiding decision-making (Luthans, 2005; Robbins, Judge & Sanghi, 2007). It can be seen as a failure to fulfill managerial responsibilities (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1998). This leadership style is often associated with negative connotations and is sometimes referred to as Kurfi (2009) describes an avoidant or non-leadership approach. According to research, the laissez-faire leadership style is less effective than transformational and transactional leadership styles (Goodnight, 2004). According to Avolio (1999), the laissez-

laissez-faire style is weak, ineffective, and extremely unsatisfying for followers. However, on the other hand, some empirical research suggests a positive outcome of laissez-faire leadership in subordinates' innovation propensity because it may facilitate an environment where innovation can occur (e.g. Ryan and Tipu, 2013).

2.3 Related Studies

The increasing demands and external pressures on the teaching profession, commonly referred to as "intensification," have adverse effects on various aspects. These effects include a negative impact on classroom creativity, the development of staff relationships, and the personal lives of educators (Apple, 1986). This intensification of the teaching profession hinders teachers' ability to foster creative and innovative approaches in the classroom, impedes the formation of strong relationships among staff members, and encroaches upon educators' personal lives and wellbeing. Addressing these consequences is crucial to ensure a supportive and sustainable teaching environment.

The teaching profession has its own set of stresses, which are significant because of the link between teacher wellbeing and students' mental health and wellbeing (Harding et al., 2019). Furthermore, teacher stress relates to burnout and high turnover rates, both of which cost school districts money (NACDD, 2018). Teaching unmotivated students, managing classroom discipline, handling large class sizes, managing a demanding workload, adapting to frequent changes, navigating evaluation processes, maintaining relationships with colleagues and administrators, and working in suboptimal conditions are all sources of stress for teachers (Nasser-Abu Alhija, 2015). According to a study conducted by Chan, Chen, and Chong (2010), teacher stress is a widespread problem that affects educators all

around the world, rather than being isolated to a single region.

According to Harding et al. (2019), the mental health of instructors has a direct impact on the mental health of students. When instructors have high levels of health and well-being, it is linked to the wellbeing of their students. Furthermore, student wellbeing has been linked to academic outcomes (Kidger et al., 2016). Although there is a substantial volume of research on themes such as teacher depression, stress, and burnout, there is a lack of studies addressing the elements that contribute to teachers' flourishing. Rather than focusing just on why teachers leave the profession, Day (2008) asks scholars to study why the vast majority of teachers can maintain their enthusiasm and dedication to their work. Employees who demonstrate high levels of energy, excitement, and resilience in their work exhibit positive work engagement, which has a substantial impact on staff welfare. These engaged people are deeply committed to their work and find fulfillment and absorption in their tasks. They also display the capacity to manage the obstacles and demands of their profession effectively (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Certain organizational variables, such as being involved in school decision-making and receiving positive feedback and recognition, have been shown in research to play an important role in improving work satisfaction, staff health, and resilience (Gu & Day, 2013; Konu, Viitanen, & Lintonen, 2010). Low job control or limited autonomy, on the other hand, can have a negative impact on staff mental wellbeing and are highly connected with depression (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999). Cefai and Cavioni (2014) presented staff wellbeing metrics, including emotional wellbeing indicators that assess a school's support for staff social and emotional needs. These indicators are intended to give a complete evaluation tool for assessing overall staff wellbeing in a school setting, assisting employees in identifying strengths and areas

for growth that may affect their personal health (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014).

According to Williams (2017), the success of a school is greatly dependent on the principal's leadership. The principal plays an important role in determining the direction of the school and ensuring the success of its personnel by offering unbiased leadership and assistance. According to various research, school leaders have an essential role in encouraging transformation (Bennett et al., 2007; Fullan, 2006; Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Groo-tenboer et al., 2019; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Harris et al., 2019; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Schneider & Somers, 2006; Stoll & Kools, 2017). They have the power to influence the school's direction, allocate resources, and serve as role models for staff engagement and implementation habits. These measures have an impact not only on short-term implementation goals but also on the long-term sustainability of school reform programs.

Teacher perceptions serve as a valuable tool for assessing the effectiveness of leadership and the overall school culture. School improvement is typically measured across three main dimensions: academic performance, learning environment, and efficiency, as identified by Eastern Kentucky University (2008). These dimensions align with the nine Standards that encompass various aspects of school improvement:

1. Curriculum: The school develops and implements a rigorous and aligned curriculum.
2. Evaluation/Assessment: Multiple strategies are used to continuously monitor and modify instruction to meet student needs.
3. Instruction: Effective and research-based practices are employed to actively engage students and improve academic performance.

4. **School Culture:** The school fosters a conducive learning community and supports a climate of performance excellence.
5. **Student, Family, and Community Support Program/Services:** Collaboration with families and community groups is undertaken to address barriers to learning and meet student needs.
6. **Professional Development:** Staff are given research-based professional development opportunities to help them improve their teaching and learning.
7. **Leadership:** Instructional decisions focus on supporting teaching and learning, establishing high-performance expectations, creating a learning culture, and developing leadership capacity.
8. **Organization of School:** The school maximizes available resources to support high student and staff performance.
9. **Establishing the School's Vision, Mission, and Beliefs:** A comprehensive school improvement plan is created, implemented, and evaluated with the goal of establishing a clear purpose, direction, and action plan centered on teaching and learning (KDE, 2008).

The influence of a school principal on overall school progress is mostly mediated through school culture, which in turn has a direct impact on students' academic achievement (Watson, 2001). As a result, Fink and Resnick (2001) believe that it is the school leader's obligation to build a welcoming and inclusive culture that promotes effective teaching and learning. Gerrard and Farrell (2013) underline the need for principals to understand the current school culture before implementing any planned changes. Principals' perceptions of the desired culture, as frontline leaders in the educational system, play a critical role in

determining the success or failure of efforts aimed at improving teaching and learning.

According to Leithwood and Sun (2012), school improvement requires leaders to apply a wide range of techniques. They expand on this claim by offering a "practice-specific" definition of effective school leadership. This entails the implementation and accumulation of numerous techniques and activities that are consistent with organizational, personal, and task-centered values. They discovered that these leadership techniques, which they call "layering," require combining and accumulating appropriate combinations of strategies and behaviors within certain situations and over time (Day and colleagues, 2011).

Teachers face higher levels of work-related stress, burnout, and poorer mental health compared to the general population and other working adults (Whitaker et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2005). Research suggests that teachers may experience even higher levels of job-related stress when compared to other employed adults (Steiner & Woo, 2021). These findings emphasize the unique challenges and pressures faced by teachers in their professional roles, highlighting the need to address and mitigate these factors to support their overall wellbeing.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A case study methodology was used in this study as an investigation of the complex relationship between school leadership practices, staff wellness, and school improvement in a private school in Dubai. The study was inspired by a genuine concern for the wellbeing of educators as well as an awareness of the potential cascading consequences on students' educational experiences and outcomes. To acquire their viewpoints, both school officials

and instructors were included. The research was largely concerned with the collecting and analysis of qualitative data. Case studies are widely used to analyze cause-and-effect relationships, such as how leadership practices promote teacher welfare in this study (Yin, 2009). The study intended to investigate individual teachers' experiences and subjective meanings within the school context from an interpretivist/social constructivist approach (Creswell, 2014).

The sample size for qualitative data collection was established based on theoretical and practical considerations, including time constraints and available resources (Robinson, 2014). A small sample size of 22 participants which included 2 school leaders and 20 teachers from different phases was acceptable given the small-scale nature of the study and the proposed thematic analysis, which requires time for data familiarization and coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The school was chosen using a purposive sampling approach, which is frequent in qualitative research investigations (Stratton, 2021). The study wanted to evaluate the role of leaders beyond the principal and explore how various leaders impact teachers' wellbeing, hence the sample included two school leaders to get insights into their efforts in supporting teacher wellbeing. An open-ended questionnaire consisting of 9 questions was used to collect teachers' thoughts on their wellbeing and the elements that influence it. A second questionnaire was distributed to the school management to inquire about the practices put in place to support teacher wellbeing.

3.2 Data Analysis

A Google form was used to develop and disseminate a questionnaire to all 22 participants at a private school in Dubai for this study. The researcher's role was to learn about the

practices and factors that influence instructors' wellbeing. This was accomplished through a survey provided to teachers and discussions with school leadership to learn about their goals for boosting staff wellbeing. Obtaining the participants' consent was critical to achieve an ethical and legally compliant study (Connelly, 2014). To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the instructors and leaders involved, ethical considerations were taken into account, ensuring their anonymity. Before participating in the study, all participants were provided detailed information on the study's goals and objectives. They were properly informed about the questionnaire's objective and were given the option to withdraw from the study (Connelly, 2014).

A pilot study was carried out to assess the efficacy of the research tool and to improve its components and methods (Yin, 2009). Braun and Clarke (2006) provided the guidelines for thematic analysis. The transcripts and participant notes were imported into NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. The researcher separately coded the qualitative data and utilized it to discover emergent themes. To give more analytical codes, the initial descriptive codes were revised and integrated three times (Gibbs, 2007). The codes were then sorted into broader themes by the researchers, with three themes emerging that explicitly addressed the role of leaders in teacher wellbeing.

4. Findings

The results presented in this section are associated with the impact of staff wellbeing initiatives implemented by principals on school improvement in a private school in Dubai and three primary themes emerged from teachers' evaluations of leadership actions and their perceptions of the effectiveness of wellbeing programs:

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- Leaders who pay attention to and value teachers' advice and viewpoints.
- Leaders promote and organize opportunities for professional development.
- Teachers provide leaders with useful feedback on modifications or improvements.

The following findings are derived from the questionnaires to aid in the collection of data on teachers' wellbeing. Responses that constantly show discontent or high levels of stress may indicate a lack of wellbeing while high wellbeing teachers tend to express high levels of job satisfaction.

1. Leaders who pay attention to and value teachers' advice and viewpoints.

Teachers shared their thoughts on the role of school leaders in the creation and implementation of staff wellbeing measures for school improvement. They discussed how leaders interact with teachers and whether they believe there is a need for more teacher input and collaboration in this area. Teachers A and B expressed that the level of ownership the school leaders give them in decision-making impacts their willingness to engage in collaborative work *"Create a truly shared vision and goals, Develop a sense of community, Identify group norms, Use discussion and dialogue, Work through conflict."*

To encourage enhanced teacher engagement and collaboration in the development and implementation of staff wellbeing measures, school leaders must establish a shared vision and goals that teachers can fully support. Teachers are more inclined to invest in collaborative initiatives when they feel a sense of ownership in the process. Creating a strong sense of community within the school environment improves collaboration by making instructors feel linked and supported by their peers. Identifying and establishing group norms contributes to the establishment of expectations and rules for effective

collaboration. Leaders should promote open debate and dialogue by providing a forum for teachers to voice their ideas, concerns, and points of view.

Teachers C and D expressed their deep dissatisfaction with the lack of teacher participation and the lack of importance given to their viewpoints in decision-making processes, which has resulted in a diminished sense of wellbeing *"Give priority to the teachers' opinions. Do not treat them like they are just here at school to work, Leaders do involve teachers in various development sessions; however, it is done in a bureaucratic detailed manner with some leaders which limits the teacher's input and collaboration. I strongly believe there is room for improvement if the teacher is allowed to operate "outside of the box".* Teachers may experience a variety of negative emotions and impressions as a result of their exclusion from decision-making. They may feel unappreciated, insulted, or detached from the educational environment. It can leave them feeling powerless and frustrated since their skills and insights are not taken into account or acknowledged. Furthermore, instructors may feel unmotivated and disengaged, as if they are merely observers rather than active participants in the school's growth.

2. Leaders promote and organize opportunities for professional development.

Overall, teachers expressed positive views about professional development, recognizing its value in their learning and the sense of accomplishment that comes with improving and refining their teaching practice. The high wellbeing teachers, in particular, highlighted the role of leaders in facilitating their professional development. They acknowledged the support and enablement provided by leaders, which contributed to their growth and success in their teaching careers. As an example, teachers E and F described engaging in the

professional development opportunities provided by the school. *“While the impact of staff wellbeing strategies on collaboration, teamwork, and professional growth may vary depending on the specific strategies implemented and the school context, these practices have the potential to create a supportive and collaborative environment that enhances professional growth opportunities for teachers. When teachers feel supported, valued, and motivated, they are more likely to engage in collaborative efforts, contribute to a positive school culture, and pursue ongoing professional development”* and *“Professional Development opportunities, There was a time when the school management held different sessions at the same time and in every room there's a program based on your need and request and it's your choice to attend one of the different sessions and that has played a major role and impacted my effectiveness as a teacher”*. Teachers with low wellbeing, on the other hand, usually cited negative aspects of the school's professional development. They raised several problems and flaws in the school's approach to their professional development and learning opportunities. These teachers were frequently disappointed, unfulfilled, and disheartened by the professional development opportunities available to them. As a result, many teachers felt frustrated and disillusioned, which contributed to their general low wellbeing in the school environment.

3. Teachers provide leaders with useful feedback on modifications or improvements.

While most teachers acknowledged the presence of numerous changes taking place in the school, including updates in standards and requirements by KHDA (Knowledge and Human Development Authority), the low wellbeing teachers in the study perceived these changes as overwhelming, implying that an excessive amount of change was taking place.

These teachers raised worries about the increased workload caused by these changes, emphasizing the need for additional time to adapt to and become acquainted with new initiatives before moving on to the next. They believed that the rapid speed of change was harmful to their well-being, producing stress, burnout, and a constant sensation of being overwhelmed. These teachers wished for a more controllable and gradual approach to change implementation that would allow them to properly adjust and integrate new techniques into their classroom routines. Teachers G and H stated that *"While staff wellbeing strategies implemented by school leaders are often assumed to contribute positively to overall school improvement, there are several reasons why this may not always be the case. Leaders need to ensure a balanced approach that addresses the broader aspects of school improvement and considers the specific needs of staff members to create a truly effective and supportive educational environment"* and *"The effectiveness of staff wellbeing strategies can be limited by systemic issues within the school. If the strategies are implemented within a broader context of high workload, limited resources, and bureaucratic constraints, their impact may be overshadowed by these larger challenges. Teachers may still feel overwhelmed and stressed despite the presence of wellbeing initiatives"*.

A few teachers saw the changes and the direction of the school as positive and comforting. They saw these changes as evidence of the school's commitment to improving teacher wellbeing, and they considered that the successful implementation of wellbeing methods had a good impact on their motivation. These instructors believed that the school's emphasis on wellbeing provided them with the support and resources they needed to

prosper professionally. They found the adjustments stimulating, inspiring them to always improve their practice and contribute to overall school improvement initiatives. These instructors admired the school's proactive commitment to wellness and recognized the advantages it provided for their personal development and job fulfillment. An example of such a response was *"Chill-out Days organized by the school gave a space for teachers for more communication and socialization."* Consequently, there was smoother coordination and integration between subjects, and *"bonuses for the "good" rating that the school achieved were good initiatives by the school. I strongly believe that it has impacted the staff positively in terms of changing the mood and atmosphere."*

5. Discussion

Individuals have diverse preferences for how they prefer to be recognized, and their perception of being valued is influenced by whether a leader's behavior matches their preferences, according to Hamstra et al. (2014). As a result, leaders must choose the best type of acknowledgment for each individual. Teachers in the research felt appreciated when leaders listened to their thoughts and ideas. Teacher voice is critical for empowering teachers to influence their work, boost self-efficacy, and encourage team growth (Murphy and Louis, 2018). However, several low-wellbeing instructors avoided providing feedback to leaders because they believed their thoughts would be ignored. They also emphasized leaders' lack of comprehension of the effort they put into their work, which increased frustration. Empathy, as proposed by Goleman et al. (2002), can effectively promote pleasant feelings in instructors and bring out their best. The main lesson from this study is that teachers feel valued when they are listened to and understood, thus leaders must

actively listen and demonstrate empathy to effectively connect with teachers.

Staff in the workplace can lead strategic and operational decisions that improve the wellbeing of students and staff, resulting in school improvement. However, the success of such practices depends on the principal's genuine understanding and commitment to prioritizing wellbeing as a crucial aspect of school improvement. While existing literature emphasizes the importance of wellbeing in education and its impact on various school-related factors, it offers limited guidance on how to promote wellbeing comprehensively within a whole-school context to achieve better outcomes. This indicates a gap between the need for wellbeing implementation and the empirical guidance provided by scholarly research. Without clear guidance, the development of effective approaches to promote wellbeing may be hindered, leading to fragmented efforts that undervalue wellbeing as a contributor to sustainable school improvement. Therefore, it is essential to avoid narrow interpretations of wellbeing and adopt comprehensive strategies that address the wellbeing of both staff and students, thus maximizing the effectiveness of wellbeing as a school improvement priority (Harwood & Allan, 2014; Koh & Askill-Williams, 2021; Lester & Cross, 2015; Marques et al., 2011; Powell & Graham, 2017; Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2014; Spratt, 2016; Thomas et al., 2016).

6. Conclusion and future recommendations

Future research should focus on developing a comprehensive model of wellbeing in schools through larger-scale studies. Key areas to explore include the causal relationship between wellbeing and academic development, successful schools prioritizing wellbeing, nurturing leadership styles, and the benefits of intentional wellbeing promotion. A comparative

comparison of similar studies in the same environment is recommended to best conclude with generalized successful school leadership methods for school improvement. Prioritizing wellbeing in schools is crucial for comprehensive school improvement, going beyond a narrow focus on academic outcomes and requiring commitment, effort, and coordination between researchers and educational systems. (McNeven, Main, and McKay, 2023)

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