

Sustaining Commitment Under Constraint: A Qualitative Inquiry into Teacher Well Being and Motivation in Kabugao I District, Apayao, Philippines

Kimberly Ann T. Waclin¹ & Rachelle B. Deo-Ay²

^{1,2}Northeastern College

ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Article history: Published: August 2026 Keywords: Teacher Well-Being Teacher Motivation Rural Education Qualitative Inquiry Kabugao Apayao Philippines	Teacher well-being and work motivation shaped the continuity and quality of instruction, particularly in rural school systems where professional demands intersected with travel constraints, limited services, role accumulation, and close community relationships. This qualitative multiple-case inquiry examined how public-school teachers in Kabugao I District, Schools Division of Apayao, described their occupational well-being, sources of motivation, work-related pressures, protective resources, and intentions to remain in teaching. Eight schools were selected to represent road-accessible and remote-access contexts. Twenty-four teachers participated in semi-structured interviews lasting 51 to 79 minutes. Data were organized through the Framework Method using a hybrid deductive-inductive codebook informed by the OECD teacher well-being framework, self-determination theory, and the Job Demands-Resources framework. Descriptive summaries included frequencies, percentages, interview-duration statistics, theme prevalence, saturation tracking, and Cohen's kappa for independent coding of seven transcripts. Inter-coder agreement was 91.7%, with $\kappa = .83$. Six themes explained the findings: meaning was anchored in learner progress and community service; relational leadership and collegial care functioned as emotional infrastructure; workload fragmentation and compliance pressure depleted energy; geographic and resource limitations spilled into teachers' personal lives; autonomy, mastery, recognition, and career growth renewed motivation; and protective boundaries and collective coping sustained a conditional commitment to remain. Workload-related strain appeared across both access contexts, while travel, connectivity, and resource spillover were more prominent in remote-access schools. The findings indicated that teacher motivation did not depend on incentives alone. It was sustained when teachers experienced purpose, competence, professional discretion, belonging, fair workload distribution, and responsive leadership. A district-level well-being and motivation framework was proposed, emphasizing workload audits, protected collaborative time, accessible psychosocial referral, remote-school support, meaningful recognition, and communication boundaries.

1. Introduction

Teaching required sustained cognitive attention, emotional regulation, relational work, and professional judgment. Teacher well-being therefore extended beyond the absence of illness. The OECD defined occupational well-being through cognitive, subjective, physical and mental, and social dimensions, all of which were shaped by working conditions and linked to engagement, stress, burnout, and willingness to remain in the profession.¹ A systematic review likewise showed that teacher well-being was multidimensional and associated with personal, relational, organizational, and contextual conditions rather than with a single trait or intervention.²

The policy significance of teacher well-being had intensified as education systems confronted shortages, workload expansion, reform demands, and unequal working conditions. UNESCO's global report on teachers emphasized that recruitment and retention depended not only on increasing the number of teachers but also on strengthening professional status, preparation, support, and working environments.³ The ILO-UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers had long established that teachers' working conditions should promote effective learning and allow concentration on professional tasks.⁴ Recent TALIS evidence continued to position workload, professional autonomy, school climate, and occupational well-being as central issues in sustaining the teaching profession.⁵

Motivation was closely related to well-being but could not be reduced to enthusiasm or reward. Self-determination theory distinguished autonomous motivation, in which work was experienced as meaningful and self-endorsed, from controlled motivation driven primarily by pressure or external consequences. Environments that supported autonomy, competence, and relatedness were more likely to sustain internalized motivation and psychological wellness.^{6,7} For teachers, professional discretion, evidence of learner progress, opportunities to develop mastery, and relationships of trust could therefore serve as motivational resources even when work remained demanding.

The Job Demands-Resources framework offered a complementary explanation. Job demands required sustained effort and could produce strain when excessive, while job resources helped teachers achieve goals, reduce the cost of demands, and develop

professionally.⁸ Research among teachers showed that high demands were associated with exhaustion and ill health, whereas resources supported work engagement and organizational commitment.⁹ Longitudinal evidence further indicated that workload, student behavior, leadership, autonomous motivation, and self-efficacy jointly shaped changes in teacher burnout.¹⁰

Empirical studies consistently connected school organization with teacher experience. Learning-oriented school goals, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and lower emotional exhaustion were associated with stronger motivation for teaching.¹¹ Positive school climate and social-emotional support predicted lower stress and stronger teaching efficacy and job satisfaction.¹² Cross-national evidence also showed that school working conditions were important for teacher job satisfaction even after teacher characteristics were considered.¹³ These findings suggested that teacher well-being was not solely an individual responsibility; it was partly produced by the way work was designed, led, distributed, recognized, and supported.

Qualitative evidence added necessary contextual depth. Teachers across Cambodia, Kenya, and Qatar associated well-being with being valued, engaged, purposeful, successful, personally supported, emotionally capable, and embedded in a positive work environment.¹⁴ Rural Chinese teachers similarly described well-being through professional learning, community engagement, social recognition, remuneration, workload, and opportunities for advancement.¹⁵ Such studies demonstrated that common psychological processes were expressed through local institutional and geographic conditions.

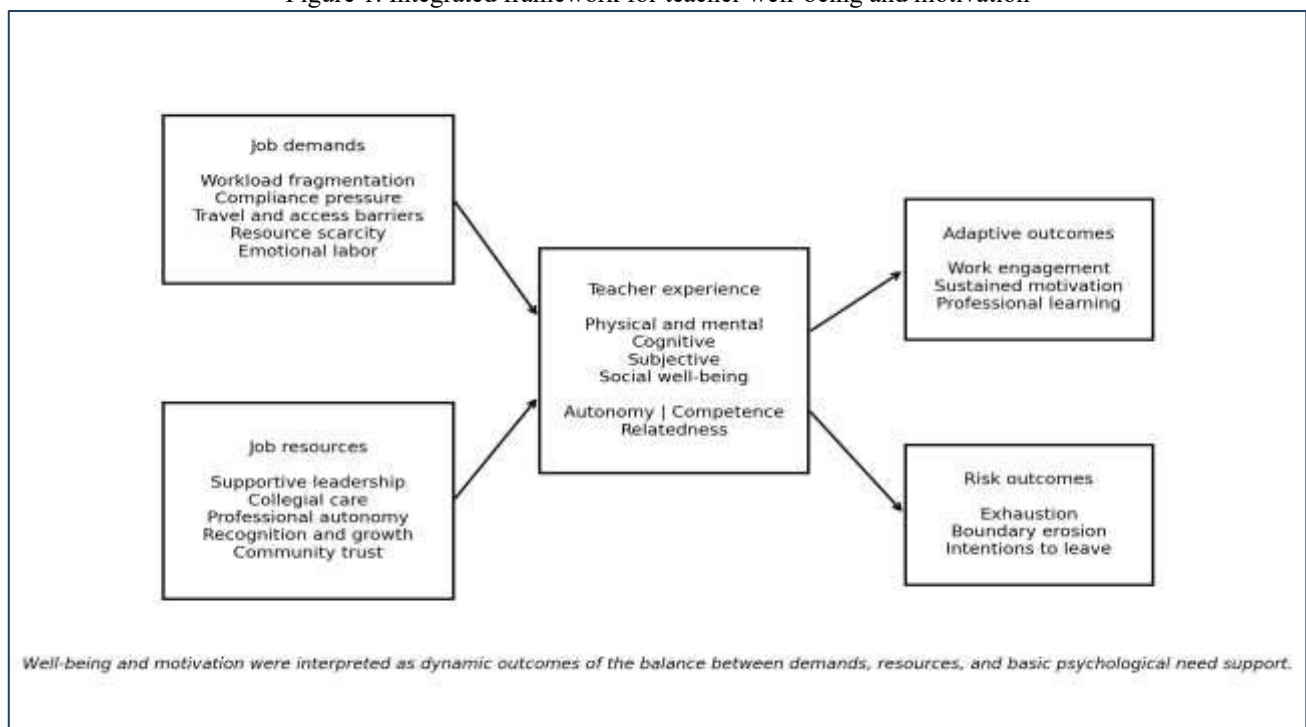
In the Philippines, teacher welfare and professional conditions were addressed through multiple legal and administrative instruments. Republic Act No. 4670 sought to improve the social and economic status, living and working conditions, employment terms, and career prospects of public-school teachers.¹⁶ The Mental Health Act established a national policy for mental health promotion and protection, including institutional responsibilities for programs and support.¹⁷ The Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers located personal growth and professional development within national expectations for teacher quality.¹⁸

Two 2024 DepEd issuances directly responded to workload concerns. DepEd Order No. 002 directed the immediate removal of administrative tasks from public-school teachers so they could focus on teaching and learning.¹⁹ DepEd Order No. 005 rationalized teachers' workload and established provisions for teaching overload, while DepEd Memorandum No. 053 provided implementation guidance intended to improve consistency in application.^{20,21} These policies established an important formal basis, but teacher experience depended on how workload, ancillary assignments, timelines, reporting requirements, and local leadership practices were enacted in schools. Kabugao I District formed part of the Schools Division of Apayao in the Cordillera Administrative Region.²² Kabugao is a municipality in Apayao whose communities are distributed across a mountainous landlocked setting.²³ Within such settings, travel time, telecommunications, weather-related access, school size, staffing patterns, and community expectations may interact with ordinary instructional and administrative demands. These conditions made the district a relevant setting for examining how teachers sustained motivation and protected well-being while fulfilling professional and community roles.

Despite extensive international research, local qualitative evidence on the combined experience of teacher well-being and motivation in Apayao remained limited. Survey scores could estimate levels of stress or satisfaction but could not fully explain how teachers interpreted purpose, negotiated role boundaries, experienced leadership, managed travel and household spillover, or decided whether teaching remained sustainable. This study addressed that gap through a qualitative inquiry designed to identify shared patterns and contrasting experiences across school-access contexts.

1.1 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1. Integrated framework for teacher well-being and motivation



The framework treated well-being and motivation as connected but analytically distinct. Well-being referred to teachers' cognitive functioning, emotional and subjective experience, physical and mental condition, and social relationships. Motivation referred to

the quality and sustainability of reasons for engaging in teaching work. A teacher could remain highly committed to learners while simultaneously experiencing exhaustion, or could report acceptable health while feeling professionally stagnant. The inquiry therefore examined both positive functioning and strain.

Job demands included workload fragmentation, administrative or compliance pressure, emotional labor, difficult travel, resource scarcity, and intrusion of school tasks into personal time. Job resources included supportive leadership, collegial care, professional autonomy, recognition, professional development, community trust, and practical access support. The balance between demands and resources was expected to influence the extent to which autonomy, competence, and relatedness were supported or frustrated. The framework did not presume that rurality was uniformly disadvantageous. Close community relationships could intensify expectations and reduce privacy, yet they could also strengthen belonging, respect, and shared responsibility. Geographic difficulty could increase fatigue and cost, but teachers' identification with local learners could deepen meaning and commitment. The analysis therefore attended to both burdens and resources within the same contextual condition.

1.2 Research Questions

- How did teachers in Kabugao I District describe their occupational well-being?
- What experiences sustained or diminished their motivation to teach?
- How did workload, leadership, collegial relationships, geographic access, resources, professional growth, and community expectations shape well-being and motivation?
- What coping practices and organizational supports helped teachers remain engaged?
- What district- and school-level actions were indicated by the findings?

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative multiple-case inquiry with an interpretive descriptive orientation. Each participating school functioned as a contextual case, while the primary unit of meaning was the teacher's account of occupational well-being and motivation. The design supported comparison across school-access contexts without treating the district as homogeneous. Semi-structured individual interviews were selected because well-being and motivation involved personal interpretations, relational experiences, and institutional processes that required depth and confidentiality. The study followed the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research for interview-based studies.²⁴

2.2 Study Setting

The inquiry was situated in Kabugao I District, Schools Division of Apayao, Cordillera Administrative Region, Philippines. Eight public basic education schools were included to represent variation in road access, travel demands, school size, grade coverage, staffing, and availability of communication and instructional resources. Four schools were categorized as road-accessible and four as remote-access based on ordinary travel conditions reported in the school profiles.

School and participant identities were replaced with alphanumeric codes. The analysis did not rank schools or identify communities. Contextual information was reported only at a level necessary to explain patterns relevant to teacher well-being and motivation.

2.3 Sampling and Participants

Maximum-variation purposive sampling was used. School cases were selected to capture differences in access and organizational context. Within each school, three teachers were recruited to represent differences in career stage, grade assignment, sex, and additional coordination responsibilities. Eligibility required at least one full school year of service in Kabugao I District and current responsibility for classroom teaching.

Twenty-four teachers participated. The sample size was guided by information power: the study had a focused aim, a specific participant group, an established theoretical framework, in-depth dialogue, and a cross-case analysis strategy.²⁵ Saturation was assessed prospectively rather than by applying a fixed numerical rule. Methodological evidence distinguishes early identification of code categories from the larger sample often needed to understand their dimensions and variation.^{26,27}

Table 1. Distribution of school cases and teacher participants

School-access context	Schools	Teacher participants	Case-selection rationale
Road-accessible	4	12	Shorter routine travel; more stable access to district services and connectivity, with variation in school size
Remote-access	4	12	Longer or less predictable travel; greater exposure to weather, connectivity, and supply constraints
Total	8	24	Three teachers were included from each school case

2.4 Data Collection

Data were gathered through 24 semi-structured interviews. The interview guide contained 12 primary questions and optional probes covering definitions of well-being, energizing and discouraging experiences, workload, leadership, relationships with colleagues and communities, professional autonomy, recognition, development opportunities, coping, work-life boundaries, and intentions to remain in teaching. The guide was reviewed for clarity and alignment with the research questions before use.

Interviews lasted from 51 to 79 minutes, with a median duration of 64 minutes. Interviews were conducted in a private setting and scheduled outside direct instructional time. With permission, conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed. Expressions in Filipino or local language were translated into English during transcription, with attention to preserving meaning rather than literal word order. Field notes documented context, emotional emphasis, pauses, and analytic observations.

Data collection and preliminary analysis proceeded iteratively. Participants were ordered to alternate school-access contexts and career stages so that early code development did not depend on one subgroup. After Interview 15, no new code family or subcode was added. Interviews 16 to 21 deepened dimensions and negative cases, while Interviews 22 to 24 confirmed the stability of the thematic framework.

2.5 Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

The Framework Method was used to organize and compare interview data systematically.²⁸ Analysis proceeded through familiarization, initial coding, codebook development, application of the analytic framework, charting into a participant-by-theme matrix, and interpretation across and within school cases. Initial deductive categories reflected the OECD well-being dimensions, autonomy, competence, relatedness, job demands, and job resources. Inductive coding captured experiences not adequately represented by those categories.

The final analytic framework contained 28 code families and subcodes grouped into six major themes. Theme development required internal coherence, distinction from other themes, sufficient supporting evidence, relevance to the research questions, and representation of exceptions or tensions. Thematic analysis principles guided the movement from coded extracts to explanatory patterns.²⁹ Cross-case matrices were used to examine whether access context, career stage, and coordination responsibilities changed the expression of a theme.

Quantitative summaries were restricted to descriptive functions appropriate for qualitative data. Frequencies and percentages described participant characteristics and indicated how many participants' accounts reflected each theme or selected subtheme. The median and range summarized interview duration. Theme counts were not treated as prevalence estimates for the district and did not determine thematic importance. Inferential significance tests were not applied because the sample was purposive, observations were information-rich accounts rather than probability observations, and the study did not seek population estimation.

Seven transcripts, representing 29.2% of the dataset, were independently coded by two analysts using 12 higher-order code families. Across 84 presence-or-absence coding decisions, the analysts agreed on 77 decisions, producing observed agreement of 91.7%. Cohen's kappa was $\kappa = .83$ after chance agreement was taken into account. The value indicated strong agreement for the shared codebook. Disagreements were discussed, definitions were clarified, and the primary analyst completed the remaining coding. Inter-coder reliability was used as a transparency procedure for team-based codebook analysis, not as a substitute for interpretive judgment.³⁰

Table 2. Inter-coder agreement calculation

Coding outcome	Value
Both analysts applied the code family	38
Both analysts did not apply the code family	39
Analyst A applied; Analyst B did not	4
Analyst B applied; Analyst A did not	3
Total coding decisions	84
Observed agreement	77/84 = 91.7%
Cohen's kappa	$\kappa = .83$

2.6 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

Credibility was supported through maximum variation, iterative questioning, negative-case analysis, and summary reflection with eight participants. Dependability was supported through versioned codebooks, decision logs, and a transparent analytic matrix. Confirmability was strengthened by maintaining reflexive memos that distinguished participant meaning from researcher interpretation. Transferability was supported through contextual description of access conditions and participant variation rather than claims of statistical representativeness.

The trustworthiness strategy followed the principles of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.³¹ Analytic displays and matrices were used to preserve the link between individual accounts, case context, codes, themes, and final interpretations.³²

3. Results

3.1 Participant Characteristics

The 24 participants represented varied career stages, grade assignments, and access contexts. Seventeen participants were female and seven were male. Half worked in road-accessible schools and half in remote-access schools. Seventeen served primarily as classroom teachers, while seven combined classroom teaching with coordination responsibilities. The distribution provided contrasting accounts without implying that demographic categories represented district-wide proportions.

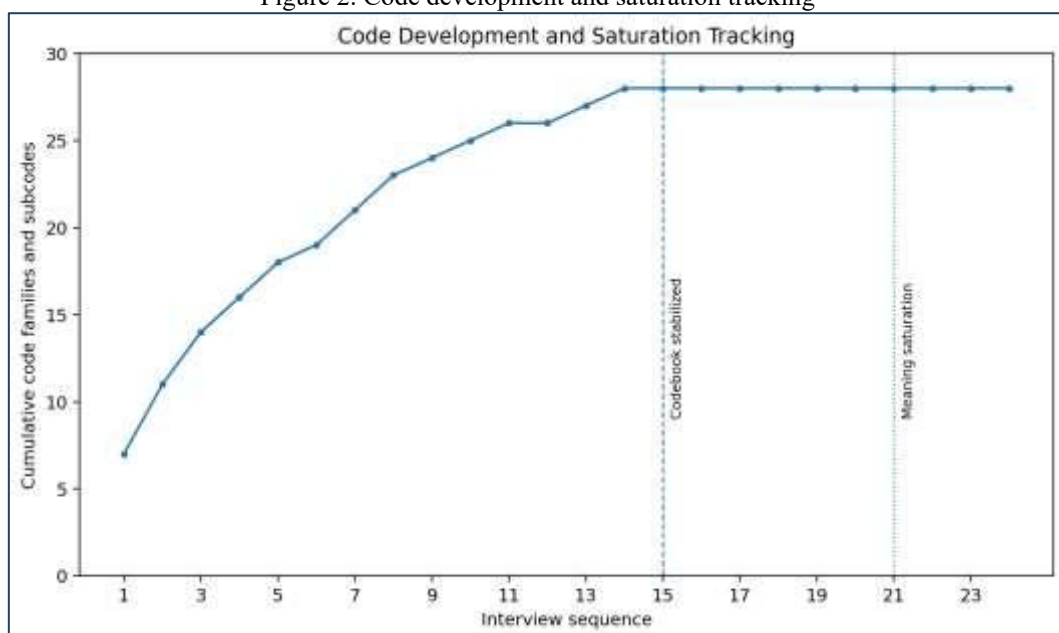
Table 3. Participant profile (n = 24)

Characteristic	Category	f	%
Sex	Female	17	70.8
	Male	7	29.2
Age group	25-34	6	25.0
	35-44	8	33.3
	45-54	7	29.2
	55 and above	3	12.5
Years in teaching	1-5	4	16.7
	6-10	6	25.0
	11-20	8	33.3
	21 and above	6	25.0
School-access context	Road-accessible	12	50.0
	Remote-access	12	50.0
Primary teaching band	Kindergarten-Grade 3	7	29.2
	Grades 4-6	8	33.3
	Junior high school	6	25.0
	Secondary/ALS assignment	3	12.5
Work role	Classroom teacher	17	70.8
	Teacher-coordinator	7	29.2

3.2 Saturation and Thematic Structure

Code development was rapid in the first six interviews, when 19 of the final 28 code families and subcodes were identified. Nine additional codes were added through Interview 14. The codebook remained unchanged from Interview 15 onward. Later interviews contributed variation, causal explanations, exceptions, and relationships among categories. Meaning saturation was reached by Interview 21; the final three interviews confirmed the framework without adding a new dimension.

Figure 2. Code development and saturation tracking



Note. The vertical dashed line marks codebook stabilization after Interview 15. The dotted line marks the point at which later interviews no longer added a new dimension to the major themes.

Table 4. Development of the analytic framework by interview sequence

Interview sequence	New codes	Cumulative codes	Analytic contribution
1-6	19	19	Core demands, relational resources, purpose, fatigue, access, and coping were established
7-12	7	26	Recognition, professional growth, boundary erosion, and community reciprocity were differentiated
13-15	2	28	Conditional commitment and inequitable role distribution were clarified
16-18	0	28	Negative cases and differences by school access were deepened
19-21	0	28	Relationships among themes reached meaning saturation
22-24	0	28	The framework was confirmed without an additional dimension

Six themes explained the interaction of teacher well-being and motivation. Theme prevalence indicated the distribution of supporting accounts but did not function as a ranking. Workload and compliance strain appeared in 23 of 24 accounts, while meaning in learner progress and community service appeared in 22. Relational leadership and collegial care, geographic and resource spillover, professional growth and recognition, and protective coping also appeared across multiple cases.

Figure 3. Descriptive prevalence of the six major themes

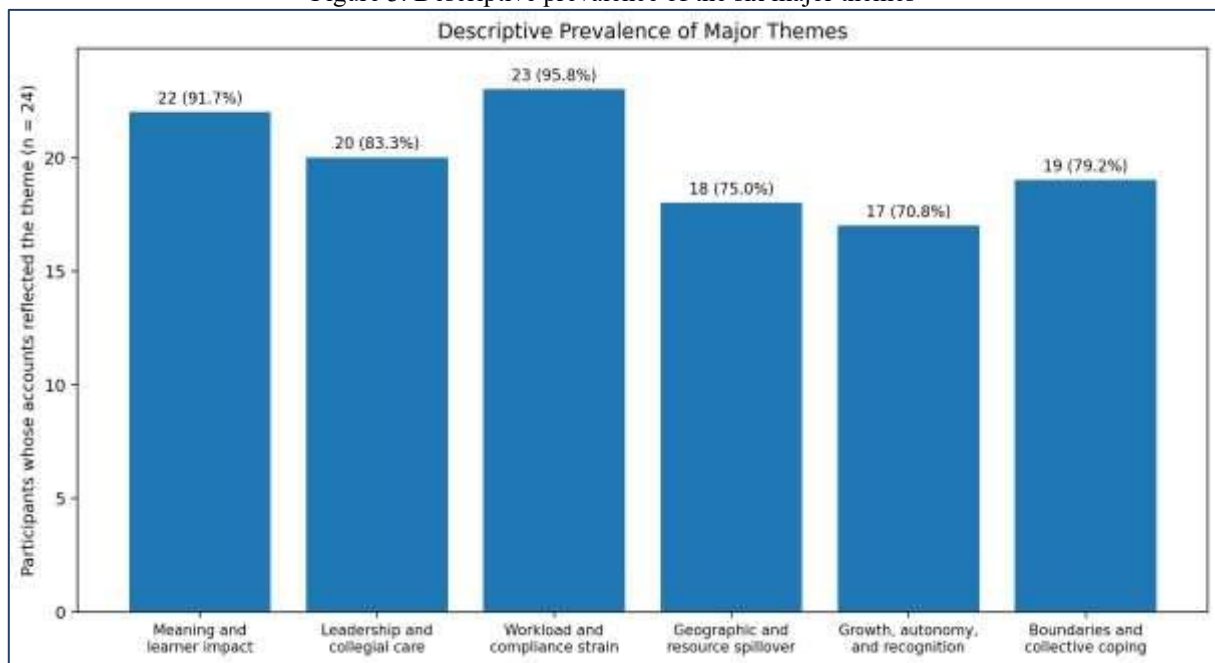


Table 5. Major themes, prevalence, and central interpretation

Theme	f	%	Central interpretation
1. Meaning in learner progress and community service	22	91.7	Purpose and visible learner growth sustained commitment even when other conditions were difficult.
2. Relational leadership and collegial care	20	83.3	Responsive leaders and trusted colleagues served as practical and emotional resources.
3. Workload fragmentation and compliance pressure	23	95.8	Multiple roles, urgent reports, and after-hours demands depleted energy and reduced focus.
4. Geographic and resource spillover	18	75.0	Travel, connectivity, supply gaps, and weather-related disruption transferred costs to teachers and households.
5. Autonomy, mastery, recognition, and growth	17	70.8	Professional discretion, competence, development, and credible recognition renewed motivation.
6. Protective boundaries and collective coping	19	79.2	Teachers used peer support, prioritization, faith, family, and boundaries, but commitment remained conditional for some.

3.3 Theme 1: Meaning Was Anchored in Learner Progress and Community Service

Teachers most frequently described motivation through the consequences of their work for learners. Progress in reading, attendance, confidence, behavior, or family engagement provided evidence that effort mattered. This experience strengthened both subjective well-being and professional competence. Motivation was therefore tied less to the abstract status of teaching than to visible movement in a learner who had previously struggled.

Purpose was especially salient when teachers viewed themselves as one of the few stable public-service professionals regularly present in a community. Teaching included instructional work but also guidance, communication with families, referral, and coordination during disruption. This expanded role was experienced as meaningful when expectations remained manageable and community relationships were reciprocal.

Learner progress also protected motivation during periods of fatigue. Teachers described difficult weeks in which paperwork, travel, or personal obligations reduced energy, yet a learner's achievement restored a sense of efficacy. The effect was not permanent; rather, purpose acted as a renewable resource that helped teachers reconnect daily tasks to a larger professional identity.

"When a child who used to avoid reading finally volunteered, I felt that the long preparation had a reason. That moment carried me through the rest of the week." (P07, Grades 4-6)

"Here, the teacher is not only inside the classroom. Families ask for guidance because they know we are present. It can be heavy, but it also reminds me why I stayed." (P14, teacher-coordinator, remote-access school)

The theme contained a tension between service and self-sacrifice. Teachers valued being dependable, but several accounts showed that a strong service identity made it difficult to decline additional work. Meaning could therefore sustain motivation while simultaneously making teachers vulnerable to overextension. Well-being depended on whether service was supported by realistic structures rather than treated as unlimited personal availability.

Two participants expressed weaker connection to purpose during periods when repeated non-instructional demands prevented them from observing learner progress. Their accounts indicated that motivation decreased not because they had rejected teaching, but because the workday had become detached from the activity they valued most. This negative case linked purpose directly to protected instructional time.

3.4 Theme 2: Relational Leadership and Collegial Care Functioned as Emotional Infrastructure

Leadership affected well-being through ordinary interactions rather than through formal wellness activities alone. Teachers valued leaders who explained priorities, distributed assignments transparently, protected staff from unnecessary duplication, listened before deciding, and responded calmly to mistakes. Such practices reduced uncertainty and helped teachers interpret demands as manageable and fair.

Collegial relationships were equally important. Teachers exchanged lesson materials, covered urgent responsibilities, traveled together, shared information about deadlines, and checked on colleagues experiencing family or health difficulties. In small or remote schools, this support often compensated for limited formal services. The staff room functioned as a place for technical problem solving and emotional regulation.

Relatedness did not mean the absence of conflict. Participants described tension when the same dependable teachers repeatedly received additional assignments, when information arrived late, or when criticism occurred publicly. These experiences weakened trust because the problem was interpreted not only as workload but also as lack of respect. Supportive leadership restored motivation when it acknowledged effort and corrected the distribution of responsibility.

"Our head does not remove every problem, but she tells us which one is first and which can wait. That reduces the panic because we know the direction." (P03, teacher-coordinator)

"When the signal is weak, one teacher downloads the files and shares them with everyone. We survive because no one keeps the solution only for himself." (P20, remote-access school)

Four participants reported that leadership support was inconsistent. Their accounts described unclear expectations, last-minute instructions, and limited consultation. These teachers remained motivated by learners and colleagues, but their emotional energy was spent anticipating changes and protecting themselves from blame. The finding showed that relational safety influenced cognitive well-being by affecting concentration and decision confidence.

Participants preferred practical leadership support over symbolic wellness messages. They viewed scheduling discipline, fair assignment, respectful communication, and follow-through as more credible than one-time stress-management activities that left the underlying workload unchanged. Well-being was consequently embedded in management practice.

3.5 Theme 3: Workload Fragmentation and Compliance Pressure Depleted Energy

Workload strain appeared in 23 accounts and was the most widely distributed theme. Teachers differentiated heavy teaching from fragmented work. A demanding class remained professionally meaningful, while simultaneous deadlines, repeated data requests, overlapping programs, coordination roles, and abrupt revisions created a sense of never completing a task. Fragmentation impaired concentration and extended work into evenings and weekends.

Participants described a cycle in which urgent compliance reduced preparation time, weaker preparation increased worry, and worry slowed completion of subsequent tasks. The cognitive dimension of well-being was therefore affected by interruptions and task switching, not only by total hours. Teachers reported forgetting small details, rereading instructions, and feeling unable to give full attention to either learners or reports.

Coordination responsibilities intensified the problem when role expectations were not matched with time, staffing, or relief from other assignments. Seven teacher-coordinators described pride in contributing to school programs, but most also reported that coordination work was completed after teaching hours. Motivation declined when additional responsibility became invisible labor or when outputs were requested without sufficient notice.

"The problem is not one big task. It is five small urgent tasks arriving while you are teaching. At the end of the day, everything is started but nothing feels finished." (P11, teacher-coordinator)

"I can prepare a lesson even when I am tired because I know its purpose. What drains me is repeating the same information in different forms with different deadlines." (P18, remote-access school)

After-hours messaging further blurred work boundaries. Participants accepted genuine emergencies but questioned routine instructions sent late at night with an expectation of immediate response. The phone became both an essential communication resource and a source of anticipatory stress. Some teachers checked messages repeatedly because weak connectivity could cause them to miss an instruction and appear noncompliant.

Teachers recognized the intent of national workload reforms, but they evaluated policy through daily implementation. Removal of administrative tasks was meaningful only when responsibilities were not reassigned informally or replaced by new reporting layers. Participants' accounts supported the distinction between policy issuance and enacted workload. Fair implementation required a visible inventory of teaching, teaching-related, ancillary, and coordination tasks.

One participant did not identify workload as a primary source of strain. This teacher worked in a context with stable routines, shared responsibilities, and clear weekly planning. The negative case indicated that workload volume was not sufficient to explain well-being; predictability, control, and distribution changed how demands were experienced.

3.6 Theme 4: Geographic and Resource Limitations Spilled into Personal Life

Geographic and resource constraints were reported by 18 participants and by every participant from remote-access schools. Travel time, road condition, weather, transportation availability, weak connectivity, power interruption, and delayed supplies increased the effort required to perform ordinary tasks. These constraints rarely appeared as isolated inconveniences; they interacted with deadlines, family responsibilities, and personal expenses.

Teachers frequently absorbed institutional gaps. They used personal mobile data, printed materials outside the school, contributed small supplies, charged devices in alternative locations, or traveled to obtain signal. These actions protected learning continuity but transferred cost and risk to the individual. Participants did not always describe the expenditure as resentment; many viewed it as necessary service. Strain emerged when personal contribution became expected and recurrent.

Travel created physical and cognitive fatigue. Teachers described arriving early to account for unpredictable conditions and remaining concerned about the return trip during bad weather. The workday therefore began before arrival and continued after departure. For those with caregiving responsibilities, travel reduced recovery time and intensified guilt about limited presence at home.

"Sometimes the report is simple, but sending it is the difficult part. You look for signal, wait, and try again. The task follows you even after you leave school." (P22, remote-access school)

"I budget for my family and for the classroom at the same time. A small amount today does not look serious, but when it happens every week it becomes part of the burden." (P09, road-accessible school)

Community closeness operated in two directions. Teachers appreciated trust, local knowledge, and family cooperation. At the same time, living near learners reduced separation between professional and private roles. Requests could arrive at home, during community activities, or through personal social media. Teachers rarely wanted to reject families, but they needed clearer norms for routine concerns and genuine emergencies.

Road-accessible participants also reported resource spillover, although less consistently. Their concerns focused on classroom materials, internet cost, and program expenses rather than travel uncertainty. The cross-case pattern indicated that resource limitation was district-wide in form but more cumulative in remote-access contexts.

3.7 Theme 5: Autonomy, Mastery, Recognition, and Growth Renewed Motivation

Teachers described motivation as stronger when they could exercise professional judgment within clear expectations. Autonomy involved adapting examples to local experience, pacing instruction according to learners' needs, selecting workable strategies, and contributing to school decisions. It did not mean freedom from standards. Participants valued standards when leaders explained the purpose and allowed teachers to determine context-appropriate implementation.

Competence grew through successful practice, coaching, peer observation, and professional development that addressed real classroom problems. Participants distinguished useful development from attendance-based training. They were motivated by opportunities that improved instruction, produced a tangible skill, or opened a career pathway. Repetitive sessions or programs disconnected from classroom needs were experienced as additional compliance.

Recognition mattered when it was credible, specific, and equitable. Teachers valued simple acknowledgment from leaders, parents, learners, and colleagues. Recognition was weakened when awards appeared unrelated to actual contribution or when the same visible roles received attention while routine classroom labor remained unnoticed. Motivation increased when recognition confirmed professional value rather than creating competition.

"I feel trusted when I can adjust the lesson to what the children understand, not when I simply follow a form. The result should still be clear, but the way can fit the class." (P16, remote-access school)

"A certificate is appreciated, but the stronger recognition is when the head knows what you solved and gives you a chance to grow from it." (P08, teacher-coordinator)

Career advancement was both motivating and stressful. Participants wanted promotion and graduate study, yet they associated advancement with documentation, limited opportunities, financial cost, and uncertainty about whether additional qualifications would be recognized. Early- and mid-career teachers expressed particular interest in mentoring and transparent pathways.

Seven participants did not emphasize professional growth as a current resource. Their accounts were shaped by fatigue, family demands, or a perception that opportunities were difficult to access. This contrast suggested that development supported motivation only when teachers had sufficient time, financial feasibility, and confidence that the opportunity was relevant.

3.8 Theme 6: Protective Boundaries and Collective Coping Sustained Conditional Commitment

Teachers used multiple coping practices: prioritizing essential tasks, sharing work with colleagues, preparing materials in batches, limiting unnecessary perfection, seeking family support, engaging in prayer or faith practice, resting when possible, and separating urgent from non-urgent communication. Coping was most effective when it was collective and supported by school norms. Individual strategies were less effective when deadlines or role expectations remained uncontrolled.

Boundary-making emerged as a learned professional skill. Several experienced teachers reported that they had become more selective about accepting tasks, more deliberate in scheduling, and more willing to ask for clarification. Early-career teachers were less comfortable refusing assignments because they feared being judged as uncooperative. Mentoring therefore influenced not only instructional competence but also sustainable participation in school work.

Fifteen participants mentioned conditions under which they had considered transfer, early retirement, or leaving teaching. These statements did not constitute immediate resignation plans. They reflected a conditional commitment: teachers wanted to remain when the work continued to offer meaning, belonging, fairness, and growth, but questioned sustainability when strain became chronic and family life was repeatedly displaced.

"I learned that saying yes to everything does not make me a better teacher. I now ask what is urgent, what is mine, and what can be shared." (P03, teacher-coordinator)

"I still want to teach here, but I also ask how long my family can adjust to the schedule. Staying depends on whether the system also protects the teacher." (P19, remote-access school)

Commitment was strongest among teachers who combined learner-centered purpose with supportive leadership and reliable peer relationships. It was weakest when workload, travel, and resource costs accumulated without recognition or control. This pattern showed that retention was not explained by a single dissatisfaction. It emerged from the cumulative balance between meaning and depletion. Participants proposed organizational responses rather than purely personal wellness activities. They requested coordinated calendars, clear communication windows, fair task inventories, protected collaborative time, access-sensitive deadlines, practical travel or connectivity support, referral pathways, and leaders who treated well-being as part of operational quality. Their proposals connected coping to work design.

3.9 Cross-Case Comparison by School-Access Context

The two access contexts shared the core thematic structure, particularly purpose, workload strain, and reliance on relationships. Differences appeared in the form and accumulation of demands. Remote-access participants more consistently described travel uncertainty, connectivity barriers, delayed supplies, personal expenditure, and reduced recovery time. Road-accessible participants more often emphasized program density, rapid communication, and the expectation that tasks could be completed immediately because services were available.

Table 6. Descriptive cross-case distribution of selected themes and subthemes

Theme or subtheme	Road-accessible	Remote-access	Interpretation
Meaning in learner progress and service	11/12	11/12	Purpose was similarly prominent across contexts.
Relational leadership and collegial care	11/12	9/12	Both contexts relied on relationships; remote schools reported greater dependence on peer problem solving.
Workload fragmentation and compliance pressure	11/12	12/12	Strain was district-wide and not limited to remote schools.
Geographic and resource spillover	6/12	12/12	Travel, signal, supply, and household-cost effects were universal in remote-access accounts.
Autonomy, mastery, recognition, and growth	10/12	7/12	Remote participants more often described access and time barriers to development.
Protective boundaries and collective coping	10/12	9/12	Coping was common in both contexts.
Transfer, retirement, or exit considered	5/12	10/12	Retention concern appeared more often where demands accumulated across travel, resources, and family time.

Note. Counts are descriptive and were not subjected to significance testing. Differences may reflect case selection, participant variation, and the meaning of access within each school.

3.10 Integrated Explanatory Pattern

The themes formed an explanatory pattern in which purpose initiated motivation, but organizational and contextual conditions determined whether that motivation remained sustainable. Learner progress and community service gave teaching meaning. Leadership, colleagues, autonomy, competence, recognition, and development converted meaning into renewable professional energy. Workload fragmentation, compliance pressure, access constraints, and personal resource spillover consumed that energy.

Well-being deteriorated when demands were cumulative, unpredictable, and difficult to control. Motivation persisted longer when teachers could see learner impact, influence how work was performed, trust colleagues and leaders, and recover outside work. The same teacher could therefore express commitment and exhaustion in the same account. This coexistence was not contradictory; it represented sustained professional purpose under insufficient protection.

The central finding was that teacher well-being and motivation were operational outcomes. They were produced through calendars, task allocation, communication practices, access support, leadership behavior, professional learning, and community boundaries. Personal coping mattered, but it could not permanently compensate for recurring design problems.

4. Discussion

4.1 Well-Being Was Multidimensional and Contextual

The findings supported the OECD view that teacher well-being involved cognitive, subjective, physical and mental, and social dimensions.¹ Participants described concentration difficulties under fragmented workload, emotional renewal through learner progress, physical fatigue from travel, and social protection through leaders and colleagues. No single dimension adequately represented their experience.

The results also reinforced systematic-review evidence that teacher well-being was shaped by interacting individual and contextual factors.² Teachers did not describe a stable state of being either well or unwell. They moved between fulfillment and depletion depending on the week, task sequence, learner response, family situation, access condition, and quality of support. Well-being was therefore dynamic and relational.

The rural setting intensified the importance of context. Similar to qualitative findings among rural teachers elsewhere, remuneration and material conditions were only part of the experience; professional learning, social status, community engagement, and recognition also mattered.¹⁵ Kabugao I participants described community embeddedness as both a source of meaning and a challenge to privacy. Rurality contained resources and demands simultaneously.

4.2 Motivation Depended on Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness

The motivation findings were consistent with self-determination theory. Autonomy was reflected in professional discretion and participation in decisions. Competence was reflected in learner progress, useful development, and successful problem solving. Relatedness was reflected in collegial care, supportive leadership, and community trust. When these needs were supported, demanding work remained more likely to be internalized as meaningful.^{6,7}

Controlled pressure appeared in accounts of urgent compliance, fear of blame, unequal assignment, and continuous availability. Such pressures produced activity but not necessarily sustainable motivation. Teachers completed tasks because they were responsible professionals, yet completion was accompanied by resentment, cognitive overload, or reduced instructional focus. This distinction explained why high compliance could coexist with declining well-being.

The findings paralleled research showing that school learning goals, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion were related to motivation for teaching.¹¹ Teachers wanted their work to remain centered on learner growth. When reporting and coordination displaced that goal, motivation weakened because effort no longer felt connected to the professional purpose that justified it.

4.3 Demands and Resources Explained the Coexistence of Commitment and Exhaustion

The Job Demands-Resources framework explained why teachers could be committed and exhausted at the same time. High demands consumed energy, while job resources supported goal achievement and engagement.^{8,9} In Kabugao I, meaning and collegiality often prevented disengagement, but they did not remove the physiological and cognitive cost of workload, travel, and after-hours communication. Longitudinal research has shown that changes in workload, disruptive conditions, leadership, autonomous motivation, and efficacy predicted changes in teacher burnout.¹⁰ The present qualitative findings clarified the mechanisms behind those relationships. Workload became harmful when fragmented and unpredictable; leadership became protective when it established priorities and fair distribution; efficacy was renewed through visible learner progress; and autonomous motivation was supported when teachers retained professional judgment.

The negative case of a participant who did not identify workload as a primary stressor was theoretically important. Stable routines and shared responsibility changed the meaning of a demanding job. The finding suggested that workload reduction should include predictability, coordination, and control rather than relying only on counting tasks.

4.4 Leadership and School Climate Were Core Well-Being Interventions

Participants viewed respectful communication, fair task assignment, scheduling discipline, and protection from duplication as direct well-being supports. This aligned with evidence that positive school climate and social-emotional conditions predicted lower stress and stronger job satisfaction and efficacy.¹² It also aligned with international evidence that school working conditions were central to teacher job satisfaction.¹³

Leadership support was effective because it altered both demands and resources. A clear priority reduced cognitive demand; consultation increased autonomy; fair distribution supported justice and belonging; acknowledgment strengthened competence and value; and calm problem solving reduced emotional threat. These mechanisms were more continuous than one-time wellness activities.

The cross-cultural qualitative study by Huynh and colleagues similarly identified being valued, purposeful, successful, personally supported, and situated in a positive environment as central to teacher well-being.¹⁴ The Kabugao I findings added that in remote-access contexts, leadership also mediated access by coordinating signal-dependent submissions, transport, supply acquisition, and external communication.

4.5 Philippine Policy Alignment Required Local Work-Design Translation

Republic Act No. 4670 established a durable policy commitment to improving teachers' living and working conditions.¹⁶ The Mental Health Act expanded the policy basis for institutional promotion and protection of mental health.¹⁷ The PPST recognized personal growth and professional development as part of teacher quality.¹⁸ These instruments supported a view of teacher welfare as an educational-system responsibility rather than an optional benefit.

DepEd Order No. 002 and DepEd Order No. 005 addressed two recurring themes in the interviews: administrative task transfer and workload rationalization.^{19,20} DepEd Memorandum No. 053 clarified implementation and overload procedures.²¹ Participants' accounts suggested that policy success depended on school-level translation. A task could disappear formally yet remain informally assigned, or a new template could recreate the same burden under a different name.

Policy monitoring should therefore examine enacted workload. A school-level inventory should document actual teaching time, teaching-related work, ancillary tasks, coordination assignments, report frequency, after-hours expectations, and temporary program demands. The purpose would not be to eliminate professional contribution but to ensure that tasks were necessary, fairly distributed, scheduled, and supported.

National and division policies should also be interpreted through access conditions. A uniform deadline may produce unequal effort when connectivity and travel differ. Equity did not require lower standards for remote schools; it required realistic implementation support so that the same standard did not transfer hidden costs to individual teachers.

4.6 Implications for Teacher Retention and Learning Continuity

Fifteen participants had considered transfer, retirement, or leaving under certain conditions. The finding should not be interpreted as a district attrition rate. It indicated that retention decisions were discussed through accumulated demands, family impact, recognition, growth, and fairness. International policy likewise links teacher support and working conditions to recruitment and retention.^{3,5}

Teacher well-being also affected learning continuity. Exhausted teachers could remain present yet have reduced concentration, preparation time, patience, or willingness to assume additional innovation. Conversely, supported teachers were more able to collaborate, adapt, and remain engaged. The outward consequence of well-being therefore extended to classroom processes and institutional resilience, as proposed in the OECD framework.¹

Workplace mental-health guidance recommends organizational interventions that address psychosocial risks rather than relying only on individual stress management.³³ For Kabugao I, organizational interventions included workload design, supportive supervision, practical access measures, communication norms, and referral pathways. Individual coping remained useful but should not carry the full burden of prevention.

4.7 Proposed District Framework for Teacher Well-Being and Motivation

The findings supported a six-part district framework. The actions were designed to strengthen work organization, psychological need support, access equity, and early assistance. They were not clinical treatment measures and did not replace professional mental-health services.

Table 7. Proposed Kabugao I Teacher Well-Being and Motivation Framework

Component	Core actions	Primary leads	Monitoring indicators
1. Workload visibility and fairness	Conduct quarterly inventories of teaching, teaching-related, ancillary, coordination, and temporary program tasks; rebalance assignments.	School heads; district supervisors	Reduced duplication; documented redistribution; fewer urgent overlapping deadlines
2. Protected professional focus	Establish coordinated calendars, protected collaborative planning time, and minimum notice standards for routine submissions.	District and school leadership	More predictable workflow; protected lesson preparation; improved task completion
3. Relational leadership practice	Use consultation, priority setting, respectful feedback, recognition, and private problem solving as routine supervision standards.	School heads; master teachers	Higher staff trust; fewer public-conflict reports; improved follow-through
4. Access-equity support	Provide access-sensitive deadlines, connectivity options, travel coordination, printing support, and supply planning for remote schools.	Division, district, school, LGU partners	Lower personal expenditure; fewer failed submissions; reduced travel burden
5. Growth and recognition pathways	Link mentoring, relevant development, research collaboration, graduate study support, and transparent promotion guidance to teacher needs.	District HRD; school leaders	Increased participation in relevant development; clearer career plans
6. Boundary and psychosocial support	Define communication windows, emergency exceptions, confidential referral, peer-support protocols, and return-to-work support.	Division wellness focal persons; schools	Lower after-hours intrusion; documented referral access; earlier support seeking

5. Conclusion

Teachers in Kabugao I District sustained motivation primarily through learner progress, professional purpose, collegial solidarity, and community service. Their well-being was strengthened when leadership provided clarity, fairness, consultation, recognition, and practical support. It was weakened when work became fragmented, urgent, repetitive, difficult to control, and inseparable from personal time.

Geographic and resource constraints intensified effort by adding travel uncertainty, connectivity barriers, personal expenditure, and reduced recovery time. These conditions did not erase commitment, but they made commitment more costly. Teachers' accounts showed that professional dedication should not be treated as an unlimited substitute for organizational support.

The study concluded that teacher well-being and motivation were products of work design as much as personal resilience. Sustainable improvement required visible workload governance, protected instructional focus, relational leadership, access-equity measures, meaningful development and recognition, communication boundaries, and confidential psychosocial support. Protecting teachers' capacity to teach was inseparable from protecting learning continuity.

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