

Evaluating institutional support systems for teacher well-being and work-life balance in Brunei Darussalam: Policies and practical outcomes

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Abstract: This paper analyzes Brunei Darussalam's education management support system designed for secondary school leaders and teachers to promote their well-being, including work-life balance. Brunei is a collectivist country that emphasizes Islamic beliefs, family, community, and religious commitments. Therefore, balancing work and family life involves managing professional responsibilities while fulfilling cultural and religious obligations. The influence of Brunei's culture and religion on the support system framework warrants further examination. This study addresses this gap by exploring how these values are integrated into the education management support system for secondary school staff. Using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with education management personnel and a review of support programs, the research assesses the effectiveness of the current educational management framework and support initiatives. Findings suggest that teachers' work-life balance is positively associated with supportive leadership practices and that school management significantly impacts teachers' well-being. The study underscores the importance of Islamic principles and cultural norms in balancing professional and personal responsibilities. It also contributes to understanding how educational support management can develop sustainable support systems that enhance teachers' professional experiences and promote healthier work-life balance within Brunei's educational institutions.

Keywords: Educational management, Support structure, Teacher, Work-life balance.

1. Introduction

Work-life balance (WLB) is essential for the psychological, physical, and emotional health of individuals [1]. WLB is especially important for educators as their job responsibilities have a substantial impact on both their personal lives and the quality of education they provide to students. In Brunei Darussalam, these concerns have been made worse by severe workloads, long working hours, and socio-cultural demands rooted in the national ideology of Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB), or Malay Islamic Monarchy. This worldview emphasises religious and communal responsibility while combining Malay cultural values with Islamic principles [2]. Such expectations require an approach to WLB that is consistent with Islamic values, particularly Maqasid Syariah, which serves as the moral and ethical foundation for Brunei's educational system [3].

The growing significance of work-life balance (WLB) in 21st-century educational settings has been extensively highlighted in academic research. Teacher's workloads have been greatly impacted by the integration of digital technologies, which frequently results in technology overload and related stress, affecting their work-life balance (WLB). These challenges have been further affected by disease outbreaks, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced teachers to adjust to remote learning settings and balance more demanding personal and professional lives [4].

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided context for WLB research, as Bruneian educators face new challenges when implementing Home-Based Learning (HBL). Haidi and Hamdan [5] examined Brunei's rules regarding home-based online education during the second wave of COVID-19. Their findings revealed how the abrupt shift to online learning has interrupted traditional classroom instruction, raised workloads, and made it more difficult for instructors to separate their personal and professional lives. To maintain an effective WLB, educators must reassess their knowledge, skills, tasks, and routines considering these multidimensional issues, taking into account the cultural and religious contexts in which they work [6]. However, these changes have impacted their work-life balance as they must adjust to new technologies and approaches to teaching. This advancement has created challenges in distinguishing between professional and personal responsibilities, particularly for parent-teachers who must balance teaching and family obligations [7].

To better understand how educational support systems deal with these problems, this study focuses on secondary school administrators and instructors. This study investigates how institutional policies, and the leadership styles of secondary school administrators and teachers are influenced by Brunei's unique sociocultural and religious context. It specifically investigates how successfully these frameworks assist teachers and school administrators in balancing their personal and professional responsibilities and promoting their well-being. The purpose of this study is to assess how this mechanism and support management may affect academic staff members' communication tactics and work-life balance in secondary schools in Brunei.

By addressing these gaps, this study contributes to increasing understanding of WLB in non-Western, Muslim-majority educational settings. It offers practical ideas for improving leadership styles, institutional policies, and cultural frameworks to promote educator well-being. The notion of the research is meant to inform sustainable educational approaches aligned with Brunei's national ideology and religious principles.

2. Literature Review

Work-life balance (WLB) has become a major concern among the working population in Brunei Darussalam, a country known for its distinct socio-cultural environment, economic success, and active workforce. As data presented at the 20th National Assembly Meeting revealed that health literacy, particularly work-life balance, has emerged as a serious issue affecting societal well-being [8, 9]. Despite the Ministry of Health's goal of "enhancing public well-being and productivity," the Health Literacy Survey results show a paradox: those with greater education levels have poorer health literacy [9]. This disparity between knowledge and behaviour impairs their capacity to prioritise well-being and make calculated choices that promote a balanced lifestyle

Achieving WLB is crucial not just for personal well-being but also for creating a productive workforce [1]. Understanding the cultural, societal, and economic influences on WLB is critical for developing policies that enhance personal fulfilment and professional efficacy [10]. As global technological breakthroughs and changing work patterns blur the distinction between professional and personal duties, organisational frameworks must also change to successfully support employee well-being.

Brunei is a multiethnic country, with Malays comprising the majority, followed by a significant Chinese minority. Approximately 75% of the population is Muslim [11]. This demographic makeup brings different challenges and prospects in terms of work-life balance (WLB). The majority of Bruneians work in the public sector, which accounts for 30.9% of the workforce, with the private sector accounting for the remaining 69.1% [11].

According to research by Muhammad and Baihaqy [2] Brunei's religious and cultural values which are deeply rooted in Islam and shaped by regional customs have a significant impact on the opportunities and challenges associated with attaining work-life balance. Family, community, and religious responsibilities are highly valued in this collectivist culture, which is firmly founded on Islamic principles. This makes pursuing WLB more difficult.

Understanding how these socio-cultural aspects interact is crucial for developing successful WLB policies that can meet the unique demands of Brunei's population [12]. As a result, tailored approaches to organisational and policy development that reflect Brunei's socio-cultural context are required, and efforts to address these challenges are underway, with the government developing its first official work-life balance policy as part of the national Mental Health Action Plan for 2022-2025 [13].

2.1. Work-Life Balance in Brunei

Maintaining a work-life balance is essential for productivity, employee satisfaction, and social harmony [14, 15]. Flexible work schedules have earned global attention as a way of enhancing work-life balance, a priority highlighted by Brunei's National Mental Health Action Plan for 2022-2025. Studies have also shown that flexible policies promote productivity, retention rates, and mental health outcomes [12]. However, discrepancies in work hours between Brunei's governmental and private sectors complicate reaching WLB [12].

In Brunei's collectivist society, teachers frequently have several overlapping tasks that go beyond their classroom duties. These pressures are the result of a convergence of professional expectations, cultural duties, and personal well-being concerns, resulting in a complicated web of obstacles [2, 16]. While digital technologies improve educational delivery, they have also blurred the lines between work and home life, making it more difficult to achieve a healthy work-life balance [15]. This dynamic environment emphasises the significance of well-structured support systems designed to meet these many challenges. Educational management frameworks that recognise the interaction of cultural norms, professional responsibilities, and technology influences might better equip teachers to navigate their duties efficiently while maintaining their well-being [2, 8].

Brunei's initiatives to institutionalise mental health support, as seen by the formation of the Unit Kesejahteraan Pemimpin Sekolah dan Tenaga Pengajar (UKPSTP) in 2021, reflect the country's dedication to improving educator well-being. The unit provides counselling services and support initiatives aimed at fostering healthier working environments for educators. These programs prioritise mental health, which aligns with worldwide trends that identify work-life balance (WLB) as an important component of efficient workforce management.

Despite this progress, there is still a lack of dedicated studies focusing on secondary school academic staff, who frequently face considerable obstacles such as high workloads, long working hours, and cultural expectations. Furthermore, access to mental health treatments is recognised as an important component in the success of support networks. Highlights key barriers among students in Brunei, including financial constraints, limited awareness, and societal biases, which often impede access to mental health facilitation. These challenges are equally pertinent to teachers in the Bruneian context, particularly those in remote or under-resourced schools, where the availability and accessibility of UKPSTP services may be limited.

Addressing these issues requires improving administrative procedures, raising awareness through targeted campaigns, and customising mental health care to the specific requirements of secondary school teachers. Such approaches have the potential to greatly improve the adoption and efficacy of institutional support systems, eventually contributing to enhanced teacher well-being and work-life balance.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased work-life balance issues among teachers globally, particularly in Brunei. The fast shift to remote teaching required instructors to quickly adapt to new technologies and pedagogical practices [17]. According to Allen, et al. [4] during the pandemic, instructors reported higher stress due to the rapid shift in teaching methods and the extra duty of caring for the mental and physical health of pupils while managing their personal lives [5]. In Brunei, where close-knit family and community institutions are deeply embedded in the culture, these challenges were worsened by social expectations for teachers to complete traditional family duties, which added layers of complications to their work-life balance [3, 12].

In response to these issues, research in ASEAN countries, including Brunei, has demonstrated that flexible work hours can boost educators' resilience, decision-making abilities, and job satisfaction [18] underline that organisations that consciously employ WLB programs can reduce conflicts between professional and personal duties, resulting in a more motivated and productive staff. In Brunei, where work-life balance is becoming an element for both the government and educational institutions, successfully implementing WLB initiatives can considerably boost teacher retention and job satisfaction. However, the role of Islamic principles in moulding these experiences has not been adequately investigated given Brunei's strong Islamic cultural foundation, understanding how Maqasid Syariah (the objectives of Islamic law) impacts WLB for teachers could offer valuable insights into developing policies that are culturally relevant and supportive of teacher's needs [18].

2.2. Cultural and Religious Context

Brunei's cultural and religious framework, represented in the national ideology of Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB), plays a critical role in creating societal standards and influencing organisational policies, particularly in education. MIB emphasises the merging of Malay history, Islam, and the monarchy as essential pillars of national identity, which influences both individual and societal behaviour [10]. Islamic principles, notably Maqasid Syariah, provide a comprehensive approach to well-being by emphasising life (*Al-Nafs*), intellect (*Al-Aql*), religion (*Al-Deen*), lineage (*Al-Nasab*), and property (*Al-Mal*) [19]. These ideologies are consistent with Brunei's educational goals, which seek to develop ethically responsible individuals who adhere to the country's Islamic principles and cultural heritage. Brunei's education system, therefore, focuses not just on academic accomplishment but also on generating individuals who contribute to the country's religious and cultural values, ensuring that students grow holistically and comprehensively [20].

In countries with a majority of Muslims, such as Brunei, cultural and religious beliefs significantly influence the meaning and application of Work-Life Balance (WLB) frameworks. Al-Thani [6] asserts that WLB is viewed in Islamic nations as a social obligation that transcends personal interests and is linked to social cohesion and religious expression. Work-life balance is seen as both a personal issue and a way to conform with Islamic teachings, especially those that emphasise moderation and balance in all facets of life, in Brunei, where the majority of educators are Muslims [10]. This alignment is also present in Bruneian educators' professional lives, where their responsibilities are in line with their religious commitments. As work-life balance gets entwined with religious and cultural ideals, this framework also influences the coping methods and support systems that are accessible to individuals.

Although Maqasid Syariah has a big impact on public policy and governance, little is known about how it might be used in educational management. Although Islamic principles have been extensively researched in the context of governance [19] less is known about how they affect education, especially when it comes to hybrid teaching methods. According to Hassan and Zulkifli [18] teachers in Brunei's secondary schools are under growing pressure to include Islamic values like Maslahah (public interest) and Hifz al-'Aql (intellect preservation) into their lesson plans. These guidelines help teachers strike a balance between cultural norms and pedagogical requirements, making sure that instructional strategies complement Islamic values and educational objectives [18]. Similar to this, school administrators in Brunei, who function within a collectivist and religious framework, need to use guidance techniques that encourage cooperation and support among themselves.

2.3. Education Context in Brunei

In Brunei's secondary schools, teacher well-being directly impacts both educational and economic development by shaping future generations. However, educators in Brunei face significant challenges in maintaining a healthy work-life balance (WLB) due to heavy workloads, long hours, and the societal and cultural expectations placed upon them [2]. In Brunei's secondary schools, teacher well-being directly impacts both educational and economic development by shaping future generations. As Brunei continues

to emphasise the importance of education in its development plans, addressing WLB challenges is crucial to ensuring the long-term success of the sector [21].

According to Sudin [20] Brunei's educational policies are made to be in line with the country's cultural values as well as Islamic teachings, creating a community that promotes the professional and personal well-being of educators. The government's dedication to improving teacher well-being is demonstrated by programs like as the Unit Kesejahteraan Pemimpin Sekolah dan Tenaga Pengajar (UKPSTP). The UKPSTP focuses on supporting teachers' mental health, recognising that a healthy, well-balanced staff is critical for sustaining a strong educational system capable of nurturing the next generation of leaders and professionals [18].

To meet the changing demands of the education sector, educators must make significant modifications to their professional practices and management strategies. According to Allen, et al. [4] teachers in contemporary educational settings must reconsider their roles to address new issues and use creative approaches that promote their well-being while carrying out their job responsibilities. This shift in Brunei entails incorporating the country's cultural and religious values into regular educational procedures, in addition to daily teaching practices. This adaptation is necessary because cultural expectations frequently interact with professional tasks, necessitating Bruneian educators to combine social duties with instructional responsibilities. For instance, teachers may feel a deep sense of duty to their students, families, and the broader community, which can sometimes lead to additional stress as they try to maintain a balance between work, religious practices, and personal life [22].

This study attempts to fill gaps in our understanding of teacher well-being in Brunei's education sector by investigating the cultural, organisational, and policy variables that impact work-life balance. The results of this study will be crucial in forming plans to improve teacher well-being as Brunei keeps education as a top priority for the country's growth. The study specifically seeks to shed light on the function of supporting policies, effective leadership techniques, and the incorporation of religious and cultural values into educational frameworks. These revelations will help create a more robust and efficient educational system that supports the country's objectives of social stability and high standards of education.

3. Methodology

This qualitative study uses semi-structured interviews and theme analysis to investigate how Brunei's educational management frameworks promote work-life balance (WLB) and teacher well-being. Given Brunei's distinctive socio-cultural and religious context, where national educational objectives intersect with Islamic principles and cultural norms, this study is particularly well-suited to examines the complexity of WLB. The confluence of educational legislation, societal expectations, and religious beliefs creates a unique framework within which teachers navigate their professional and personal lives. As a result, this research adds to a better understanding of the intricacies of WLB in a culturally and religiously diverse distinct setting such as Brunei, where national policies intersect with Islamic principles and cultural norms.

The study centres on an in-depth interview with the Head of the Unit Kesejahteraan Pemimpin Sekolah dan Tenaga Pengajar (UKPSTP), also known as the Head of the Educational Support Unit, who is referred to as Participant X to maintain anonymity. Participant X, a senior policy administrator with over 15 years of educational administration experience, is responsible for coordinating the strategic planning and implementation of well-being initiatives for teachers in Brunei. One of their duties is to create frameworks that tackle the challenges of attaining work-life balance. Participant X's role would be ideal to provide vital insights into the theoretical framework of these policies and the obstacles experienced during their implementation.

Participant X was chosen for this study because of their major influence in establishing teacher support systems, as well as their capacity to bridge the gap between policy goals and school-level implementation. Their extensive professional background and interactions with school administrators and teachers offer a thorough grasp of institutional priorities. This allows for a thorough examination of

how well-being concepts correspond to the realities that educators face, as well as the extent to which policy objectives result in measurable outcomes. This data is gathered through an in-depth interview method, which promotes an open flow of ideas, resulting in the development of unexpected themes and rich qualitative data. However, the researcher's presence may introduce bias, which will be mitigated through reflexive practices and consistent questioning.

The in-depth interview approach was chosen for its flexibility, allowing for an in-depth review of participant perspectives while maintaining consistency across data collection [23]. Data was gathered for 60–90 minutes in a professional environment to guarantee participant comfort and attentiveness. This approach is well-suited to qualitative research because it facilitates an open-ended conversation that invites participants to discuss themes on their terms while keeping the research questions important to the discussion.

Data from in-depth interviews is analysed using thematic analysis. This approach is recognised in qualitative research for its ability to identify, assess, and interpret repeated patterns or themes within qualitative data, resulting in interpretative knowledge of participant replies [24]. This method goes beyond basic description, delivering a thorough analysis that captures the intricate details of the research issue. The study employs a rigorous and sequential approach to identifying patterns emerging from the data, assuring rigour and depth. The analysis follows a systematic and phased approach to ensure rigour and depth in identifying themes that emerge from the data. First, data familiarisation was achieved by transcribing interviews to ensure accuracy and repeatedly reviewing transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. Initial coding was also conducted using ATLAS.Ti software to generate initial codes addressing key aspects of work-life balance. This process organizes the data into meaningful units, laying the foundation for identifying patterns in subsequent steps. The themes were found by refining codes into more comprehensive categories that represent significant findings after the first coding for coherence, ensuring alignment with the research data.

Finally, themes are clearly defined and named to convey meaningful insights. By focusing on the head of UKPSTP and using thematic analysis to interpret the data and systematic approach, the study are able generate a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between institutional support, and the work-life balance of secondary school academic staff in Brunei Darussalam and offer in-depth insights into how educational management frameworks in Brunei align with national and cultural values to support secondary school teachers in balancing their professional and personal lives.

4. Results

This study explores the support systems available for secondary school leaders and teachers in Brunei Darussalam, with a particular focus on how these structures influence work-life balance and well-being. The findings are organised into key themes derived from thematic data analysis: Preventive and Supportive Initiatives, Cultural and Religious Integration, Work Life Balance Challenges, Work Life-Balance vs Life-Work Balance and Integration and Adaptation Challenges. These themes highlight the interplay of leadership approaches, institutional policies, and socio-cultural influences influencing educators' professional and personal lives. Each theme focuses on distinct parts of the educational support system, highlighting both strengths and needs for development. The subsequent sections discuss and demonstrate leadership and policy frameworks' crucial role in improving teacher well-being, emphasising the significance of matching these programs with Brunei's collectivist ethos and Islamic ideals.

4.1. Preventive and Supportive Initiatives

The head of UKPSTP emphasised that the unit's key tasks include providing counselling and preventative programs to improve teachers' mental health and general well-being. ROPES (Reach Out for Professional Educators Support) is a program meant to promote professional development and self-care practices for teachers. However, supportive leadership practices have emerged as a pivotal factor in promoting teacher well-being and fostering a positive work environment within Brunei's secondary

schools. Participants X emphasised the significance of emotionally intelligent leadership, including open communication, empathy, and collaborative strategies, in addressing the multifaceted needs of teachers. For instance, one Participant X, articulated,

“You need to have a strategy on the process, and work together. And then you become a better person”,

The statements above emphasise the significance of strategic and collaborative approaches to leadership. Principals and Heads of Departments (HODs) who used these strategies were seen as more effective at fostering an environment that promotes both professional development and personal well-being.

Table 1.
UKPSTP Preventive and Supportive Initiatives.

Initiative	Description	Key Insights from the Head of UKPSTP
Counselling Services	Individualised support for mental health and mental well-being.	“Listening is already part of therapy. Sometimes, teachers just need someone to listen.”
ROPES Program	Workshops integrate self-care and resilience training.	“ROPES symbolizes guidance, like a rope pulling them in the right direction”
Mental Health Awareness	Talks and workshops on mental health and resilience.	“We address topics like mental health crises and workplace toxicity based on current needs.”

Table 1. Summarises UKPSTP's preventative and supportive measures to address teacher well-being concerns. These programs represent the unit's holistic approach, which combines professional growth and personal well-being assistance. Participant X's insights highlight the relevance of these activities in creating a supportive work environment and aligning with Brunei's educational and cultural values. Notably, programs like ROPES serve as a guiding framework for instructors, whereas counselling services give rapid, personalised support. This chart demonstrates the scope and depth of the UKPSTP's commitment to improving teacher work-life balance and well-being.

Despite the beneficial implications of these leadership approaches, discrepancies in policy implementation across schools highlighted major obstacles. The participant emphasised that the lack of a standardised framework provided in each school for well-being assistance has resulted in inequities in access to professional development opportunities and wellness activities. These discrepancies hampered efforts to assure fair support for educators and, in some circumstances, contributed to disparities in work satisfaction and performance. To overcome these gaps, the UKPSTP emphasised the necessity for a universally applicable framework that reflects Brunei's cultural and religious values. Policies that include Maqasid Syariah principles may balance professional and personal life, improving overall learning outcomes.

This study concludes that developing a universally applicable paradigm for teacher well-being assistance is crucial to overcoming these differences. Policies that prioritise professional development while including culturally and religiously aligned values, such as Maqasid Syariah, can help educators balance their professional and personal lives. By standardising these support measures, schools may create an environment that not only promotes teacher well-being but also adheres to Brunei's collectivist and Islamic values, thereby improving overall educational quality.

4.2. Cultural and Religious Integration

The incorporation of Maqasid Syariah concepts into Brunei's educational support systems has been found to greatly improve cultural relevance and overall efficacy. Insights from Participant X, the head of UKPSTP, highlight how these principles correspond to with educators' personal and professional beliefs, emphasising the necessity of comprehensive support systems that integrate educational management and religious principles. The Preservation of Life (*Al-Nafs*) is a fundamental component of this integration, and it is implemented through wellness programs and counselling services aimed at addressing the psychological and emotional challenges that educators experience. Programs such as Talian Sejahtera were regarded as useful tools in this respect, providing instructors with an opportunity

for professional and emotional support. Furthermore, the Preservation of Religion (*Al-Deen*), an essential element of Maqasid Syariah, was effectively incorporated into the educational setting via flexible work schedules that suited religious activities such as prayer times. This allows teachers to fulfil both their spiritual and professional obligations.

Participant X stated,

"Life-work balance is about starting with life first—spirituality and well-being—then work follows naturally."

This perspective emphasises the importance of religious practices in attaining a balanced work-life dynamic and creating a supportive workplace environment. Participant X stated that teachers valued these adjustments as they enabled them to keep spiritual commitments while juggling professional duties. For example, Participant X shared, as one teacher reported.

"Flexible time for prayers helps me stay spiritually connected while meeting my work obligations"

This sentiment reflects the deep connection between religious practices and daily work-life balance, demonstrating how the integration of cultural and religious considerations can contribute to a supportive work environment. These culturally and religiously aligned practices demonstrate how UKPSTP's initiatives resonate with the collectivist ethos of Brunei's society. By integrating Maqasid Syariah principles into educational frameworks, UKPSTP not only addresses the immediate well-being needs of educators but also reinforces a sense of alignment with their spiritual and cultural identities.

Additionally, the study found that the head of UKPSTP frequently emphasised a metaphor, the symbol of the "rope," to represent guidance and support. This metaphor aims to signify the nurturing of teachers' professional development but also embodied a sense of holistic care that is aligned with Islamic teachings. The use of such culturally appropriate symbols was aimed at fostering a sense of trust and collaboration among school leaders and teachers, thereby reinforcing a positive, supportive school community.

Incorporating Islamic principles into the education management framework could effectively strengthens the cultural relevance of the support structures and provides a sense of alignment with the broader values of Brunei's collectivist society. This alignment, as evidenced by the feedback of the participants, proves vital in promoting a work-life balance that respects both the professional demands and personal, spiritual obligations of educators.

4.3. *Work Life Balance Challenges*

Work-life balance (WLB) has been seen as an important aspect of maintaining employee well-being and productivity, especially in the educational sector workforce [1]. In addition to that the evolving nature of education, along with cultural expectations and increasing technological demands, presents challenges for Brunei educators. According to Participant X, the head of UKPSTP, these issues are heavily affected by both administrative rules and technical dependency, as well as personal factors such as cultural and familial obligations.

This section explores the key challenges impacting teachers's WLB, as articulated by Participant X, highlighting three main areas: Digital Connectivity - "Always-On" Culture, Family and Cultural Familial Obligations, and Mental Health Concerns. These challenges reflect the broader realities of teaching in Brunei and underscore the critical role of tailored support systems in addressing these issues.

Table 2.
Challenges Impacting Teacher Work-Life Balance.

Challenge	Description	Quote from Participant X
Digital Connectivity – “Always-On Culture”	Difficulty disconnecting from work	“Teachers feel obligated to reply to emails and messages at odd hours, which adds unnecessary pressure.”
Family and Cultural Obligations	Balancing extended family and work roles	“Family always comes first, but it adds stress with work.”
Mental Health Concerns	Anxiety and stress from professional pressures	“We’ve created tools, but teachers need to use them more.”

Table 2 summarises the challenges that teachers encounter in managing their professional and personal lives. Participant X noted these issues, which show the interaction of systemic pressures, societal expectations, and individual mental health concerns. The table underscores the pervasive impact of digital connectivity on teachers’s ability to disconnect from work, the dual responsibilities imposed by Brunei’s collectivist culture, and the ongoing mental health challenges exacerbated by professional demands. By providing concrete examples and direct quotes, the table offers a comprehensive overview of the barriers to achieving work-life balance in Brunei’s educational sector.

Achieving work-life balance (WLB) has proven to be a continuous struggle for Brunei teachers, especially given the pressures of an “always-on” digital society. The head of UKPSTP cited increased usage of digital communication technologies as a serious problem for Brunei teachers. The lines separating personal and professional life have become blurred due to the ongoing assumption that one must reply to emails and messages about one’s job, even when official hours have passed.

Participant X explained:

“Teachers feel obligated to reply to emails and messages at odd hours, which adds unnecessary pressure.”

This problem is especially noticeable in Brunei’s educational setting because of the increased need for distant communication in recent years. Although digital technologies are essential for contemporary educational practices, they also make it harder to distinguish between work and personal life. For teachers, this constant connectedness increases stress and adds to an imbalance that interferes with personal well-being.

Another challenge identified by Participant X is the impact of Brunei’s culture, which places a strong value on extended family obligations. Cultural standards in Brunei are strongly rooted in extended family duties, which can put additional pressure on educators who must balance work and family obligations. Teachers frequently find themselves juggling two responsibilities: satisfying professional standards and fulfilling family expectations.

Participant X elaborated,

“In our culture, family always comes first, but this can create additional stress when paired with work commitments.”

The relationship between professional responsibilities and cultural expectations highlights the need for more adaptable and flexible support structures that are suited to Brunei’s particular social norms. Participants underlined how crucial it is to have regulations that take into account both professional responsibilities and Brunei’s social and cultural realities. As Participant X remarked,

“You get the life first, and then you are able to work properly”

“We’ve created these tools, but it’s up to the teachers to use them consistently.”

(Participant X)

The head stressed that teachers commonly face feelings of inadequacy and stress as a result of balancing their responsibilities. Initiatives such as Talian Sejahtera have been critical in providing support; nevertheless, Participant X emphasised that participation in such programs must increase for maximum benefit. This reflects that the dual duty, with both the institution and individuals contributing to the success of support structures. This research emphasises the psychological load that many educators face, which stems not just from the duties of teaching but also from internal barriers

connected to their professional identity and personal goals. These recurring challenges highlight the importance of specialised, data-driven assistance systems. According to the report, treating teachers' mental health requires a comprehensive strategy that considers individual needs and problems.

As participant X noted,

"Our actions are based on data-driven approaches... we see how these things can help them from the data that we collect."

This statement emphasises the need to incorporate data collecting and analysis into support systems to ensure that interventions are relevant and successful in meeting the distinctive needs of teachers. Adapting to new systems and tasks posed major challenges for teachers. Participant X also commented,

"The teacher's integration is part of the new bank... but I can't actually blame them."

(Participant X)

This statement emphasises the difficulty of adapting to change, as well as the importance of empathic and tailored interventions to help transitions go more smoothly. Furthermore, strategic planning was emphasised as a way to close these gaps and build teacher resilience. By linking organisational aims to individual growth, the study's findings highlight the crucial need for more adaptable and comprehensive policies that promote Brunei teachers' professional and personal well-being. By combining both technology and cultural factors into the support framework, the institution itself may play a critical role in establishing an atmosphere in which teachers can not only meet professional obligations but also preserve their mental health and well-being.

4.4. Work Life-Balance vs Life-Work Balance

In this study, the participants, who is a key figure in Brunei's educational management system, emphasised a substantial shift in viewpoint from the traditional idea of "work-life balance" to a more holistic terms called "life-work balance." The shift reflects the rising realisation that personal well-being must be prioritised to ensure good work performance.

Participant X stated,

"For me, life-work balance. Because you need to be, you get your life together first, and then you can work correctly."

"At the end of the day, you are obliged to look after your own self."

This reinforces the notion that life contentment and personal health are critical to professional success. These responses reveal the importance of prioritizing personal well-being as a foundation for professional productivity and suggest that an imbalance in life can ultimately hinder work performance. The importance of self-awareness and ongoing personal growth was emphasised throughout the sessions. Participants emphasised that life is a constant learning experience that requires active strategising in order to preserve balance.

Participant X noted,

"You need to have a strategy on the process, work together. And then you become a better person. Not just becoming a perfect person, a better person. There is no such thing as a perfect person."

This perspective shows a growth-oriented attitude and mindset, in which the goal is not perfection but rather continual personal and organisational growth. In this sense, strategising is crucial for both individual and organisational progress. Participants X also noted that unlocking one's full potential often requires external triggers, as articulated by the participant;

"To unleash your potential at all requires triggers. That's why open up the Pandora Box."

This statement highlights the necessity of both self-reflection and external factors in facilitating growth, both for individuals and organisations. The importance of support mechanisms for teachers has also emerged as a key theme in the interviews. Programs like Talian Sejahtera were identified as essential resources for supporting teacher well-being. These initiatives provide opportunities for teachers to access assistance, whether through direct counselling or simply by having a space where they can be heard.

Participant X shared,

"Talian dan Sejahtera is the way people can contact us... another way for teachers to give across to them that we give assistance to them."

"We already created something, but it's up to the person, the teachers themselves, to use quite a good tool."

This demonstrates the support system's proactive role in facilitating communication between the organisation and instructors. Furthermore, the importance of listening as a therapeutic technique was highlighted. This demonstrates how simple acts of listening may be a valuable support tool in improving teachers' emotional and mental well-being. However, the efficiency of these support tools relied on active participation from the instructors themselves. While support systems are in place, their performance is ultimately dependent on teachers' willingness to use the resources available. This again emphasises the shared responsibilities of the organisation and teachers in ensuring the efficacy of support programs.

Looking ahead, Participants X noted that work is still going on to refine support structures based on new insights from data collected. The upcoming research will concentrate on using qualitative methodologies to delve deeper into the issues of teacher well-being and the efficacy of existing initiatives.

As participant X mentioned,

"There is an ongoing effort to narrow down data from preliminary findings to uncover deeper insights into teacher well-being."

This demonstrates a commitment to constantly improving the support system and addressing gaps in present techniques. Future efforts will continue to prioritise ethical issues and long-term alignment with the broader goal for the education system.

4.5. Integration and Adaptation Challenges

According to the interview with the head of UKPSTP, teachers continue to face substantial challenges in integrating new systems and adapting to changing demands. Despite the presence of various programs aimed at making this transition easier, many instructors still find it difficult. A prominent concern raised throughout the interview was the difficulties instructors had in adjusting to new techniques and systems. The teacher's resistance to change was mostly due to a lack of planned and ongoing assistance throughout transitions. This struggle can be reduced by more thorough, empathic techniques that emphasise reducing the transition time. The participants emphasise the necessity of addressing the human side of change, as instructors may require not only practical assistance but also emotional and psychological support to successfully navigate this transition. Furthermore, strategic planning and data-driven decision-making were highlighted as critical components for closing the gap in teacher support. The head of UKPSTP emphasised the significance of coordinating organisational objectives with individual teacher development. This alignment is essential for developing teacher resilience and adaptation in the face of change.

As Participant X stated;

"Our actions are based on data-driven... see how these things can help them from the data that we collect,"

Emphasising the importance of evidence-based techniques in supporting teachers. By utilising data, educational support management may gain a better understanding of teacher's expectations and transition support mechanisms appropriately, ensuring that they receive personalised interventions that encourage effective integration and adaptability.

Finally, the integration and adaptation challenges that teachers encounter require a diverse approach. While the implementation of new systems and expectations is expected, supporting teachers with organised, empathetic interventions and data-driven strategies can help to smooth the transition. This complete support system not only boosts teacher resilience but also helps to strengthen the educational ecosystem, allowing teachers to thrive in an ever-changing education setting.

Ultimately, the study's findings highlight the critical importance of educational support management in promoting a good work-life balance among Brunei school administrators and teachers.

A successful framework requires a conceptual change towards prioritising life above work, self-awareness and strategising, and effective support structures. The combination of Islamic principles and cultural norms, notably Maqasid Syariah values, The Preservation of Life (*Al-Nafs*) and the Preservation of Religion (*Al-Deen*), provides a unique framework for balancing professional and personal duties, as well as significant insights into creating long-term, sustainable support structures. The findings imply that addressing teacher issues requires a data-driven, empathic, and strategic approach, eventually encouraging a better and more balanced work-life dynamic.

5. Discussion

The findings from this study highlight the multifaceted challenges faced by teachers in achieving a sustainable work-life balance (WLB) while maintaining mental well-being in Brunei's unique sociocultural and religious context. The insights provided by the head of the Unit Kesejahteraan Pemimpin Sekolah dan Tenaga Pengajar (UKPSTP) reveal critical themes that contribute to the discourse on teacher well-being.

A recurring theme in the studies was teachers' struggle to balance personal growth and professional obligations. Teachers must align their efforts to better themselves with the goals of the organisation, which calls for cooperation and strategic planning. This is consistent with bin [25] findings that successful teacher development frameworks emphasise organised assistance for navigating multiple duties.

As Participant X stated, *"You need to have a strategy on the process, work together, and then you become a better person,"* highlighting the need for a collaborative approach. These strategies are also consistent with Ahmad, et al. [8] who highlighted cooperation and organisational support as crucial for promoting teacher growth and well-being.

The data also show a new direction in perceptions of WLB, which has been reframed as "life-work balance." This viewpoint sees personal well-being as essential to professional efficiency. Participant X stated, *"You get the life first, and then you can work properly,"* mirroring current requests for human-centred workplace practices [26]. This method argues for incorporating well-being into the heart of professional life, reflecting [15] claim that prioritising personal health boosts productivity and job happiness.

Support networks like the Talian Sejahtera have been regarded as critical in addressing teacher well-being. However, its effectiveness is dependent on active participation by teachers. According to the participant, *"We already created something, but it's up to the person, the teachers themselves, to use it quite well too."* This finding is also consistent with Balcombe and De Leo [27] and OECD [28] who claimed that the success of digital platforms for well-being is dependent on user engagement and motivation. The study emphasises the need to develop a culture of proactive engagement with such tools to treat mental health concerns and increase resilience.

Mental health challenges, notably anxiety, surfaced as a major concern in the study. Teachers reported high levels of stress and expectations, which cause anxiety in both their personal and professional lives. As demonstrated in the results, the participant stated, *"The higher percentage we address is anxiety issues."* This is consistent with recent reports from Brunei's Ministry of Health, which demonstrate an increase in work-related stress and anxiety among educators, exacerbated by pressure to reach academic and administrative targets [29]. This also underlines the issue's complexities, as anxiety is connected to both environmental and personal psychological causes.

According to the findings, overcoming these difficulties needs tailored, empathic support systems that take into account both systemic and individual elements in teacher well-being. This is consistent with Bin Haji Mail, et al. [22] findings on the connection between occupational stress and anxiety in educational settings. Addressing these issues involves comprehensive treatments that take into account both systemic influences and individual psychological considerations.

Furthermore, the study emphasises the difficulties that instructors encounter while transitioning to new responsibilities and demands, which are sometimes caused by a lack of support throughout changes.

In the findings, Participant X commented, "*The teacher's integration is part of the new bank... but I can't blame them.*" This is consistent with Ahmad, et al. [8] research, which emphasises the significance of organised assistance throughout professional transitions to lessen resistance to change. Empathetic and data-driven approaches can help to smooth out adjustments, which aligns with the broader field of organisational change management.

The use of Maqasid Syariah principles creates a distinctive framework for addressing work-life balance and teacher well-being. These principles, particularly Al-Nafs (the self) and Al-Deen (faith), are proven in the findings through the alignment of UKPSTP's activities with Maqasid Syariah principles, illustrating how these Islamic values are operationalised to increase teacher well-being. For example, Sulaiman, et al. [30] created a work-life balance model based on Maqasid Syariah to ensure the social well-being of academics in Malaysian public institutions. The concept prioritises the preservation of life, faith, and intelligence, combining spiritual, emotional, and professional components to provide a unified support system. These wellness programs based on Al-Nafs principles promote self-care and resilience, while flexible schedules connected with Al-Deen principles guarantee that educators may perform their spiritual commitments without jeopardising their job responsibilities [30].

The insights offered by Participant X, who emphasises how such initiatives allow instructors to navigate challenges and view them as opportunities for growth, support the transformative potential of Maqasid Syariah in educational environments. As a result, they could offer a comprehensive approach to teacher assistance that not only meets practical demands but also reinforces spiritual and cultural values [30]. This incorporation of Islamic values into teachers' work provides a more profound and culturally appropriate approach to juggling personal and professional obligations, which is consistent with research indicating the beneficial effects of culturally appropriate interventions on wellbeing [10].

In summary, the results highlight the significance of taking a more comprehensive approach to work-life balance for teachers and the need for policies that actively address institutional pressures and encourage proactive use of available support systems, emphasising the significance of customising well-being efforts to Brunei's distinct sociocultural and professional context. The change towards prioritising personal well-being as a basis for professional success, along with the significance of strategic planning and sympathetic support systems, creates a beneficial framework for helping Brunei teachers. Future policies and practices should incorporate these findings, enabling a healthy workplace that prioritises both professional development and personal well-being. Furthermore, the incorporation of Maqasid Syariah provides a culturally appropriate approach for helping teachers, which might be broadened and developed in future studies. Addressing teacher challenges through data-driven initiatives and ensuring teachers' proactive participation with support networks like *Talian Sejahtera* will be critical in establishing a sustainable, balanced work-life dynamic.

6. Conclusion

The study highlights the challenges Bruneian educators have in striking a work-life balance, as well as the significance of support networks, cultural norms, leadership, and policy in influencing teachers' well-being. Schools can give more thorough and culturally relevant support to teachers by integrating educational activities into Maqasid Syariah principles, particularly in Brunei. The move towards prioritising human well-being, together with strong leadership and support structures, provides a road to increased teacher fulfilment and performance. However, the heterogeneity in policy implementation and the requirement for increased teacher involvement with accessible support systems indicate that more effort is required to guarantee that these measures are consistently used and successful. Moving forward, educational authorities must continue to improve their efforts to help teachers produce environments that foster both professional excellence and personal fulfilment.

Several limitations must be mentioned despite the insightful data that was collected. The use of just one interview with the head of UKPSTP may not fully represent the range of viewpoints held by other Bruneian educators or educational leaders. Additionally, because the study only looked at one unit (UKPSTP), its conclusions might not apply fully to other organisational units or organisations. A

bigger sample of educators and administrators should be included in future research to increase the findings' external validity and generalisability. Additionally, the study did not look at how interventions like Talian Sejahtera affected teachers' well-being over the long run, which might lead to future research on the long-term impacts of such programs.

Further study should look at the implementation and results of policies aimed at improving teacher well-being throughout Brunei's regions and educational levels. Furthermore, studying how cultural and religious beliefs influence work-life balancing tactics in other nations with a majority of Muslims may offer comparative perspectives and advance a broader international knowledge of these concerns.

Institutional Review Board Statement:

Ethical approval was obtained from the Universiti Teknologi Brunei Ethics Committee. All participants provided informed consent.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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