

When Job Demands Become Meaningful: The Moderating Role of Professional Identity on Subjective Well-Being Among Indonesian Teachers

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Abstract

Teachers play a noble role in shaping the nation's future generations through education; however, teachers' subjective well-being remains a critical issue in the education sector. This study aims to examine the effect of job demands on subjective well-being and the moderating role of teacher professional identity. A total of 329 public school teachers participated in this study, selected through a multistage cluster sampling technique. Data were collected using the Job Demands Questionnaire (JDQ), the Indonesian Teacher Professional Identity (ITPI) scale, the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). Data were analyzed using linear regression and Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA). The results indicate that job demands positively and significantly influence teachers' subjective well-being, suggesting that job demands may function as challenge demands that foster meaningful work experiences rather than merely acting as stressors. Teacher professional identity also significantly moderates the relationship between job demands and subjective well-being by weakening the effect of job demands on subjective well-being. These findings highlight the importance of psychological and professional resources in explaining teachers' well-being and contribute to the JD-R literature by demonstrating that job demands do not always reduce well-being, particularly in the Indonesian educational context.

Keywords: Job Demands, Subjective Well Being, Teacher Professional Identity, Moderation

INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a noble role in shaping the nation's future generations through education. This recognition has long been strongly attached to the narrative of teachers as "unsung heroes" in the teaching profession. Therefore, it is important to also pay attention to teachers' well-being. Teachers with better well-being ultimately produce students who are happier and more motivated (Kun & Gadanez, 2022). Economic factors are often associated with teacher well-being. Data from UNICEF in 2024 show that the salaries of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers in Indonesia range only from IDR 100,000 to IDR 300,000, particularly for teachers in remote areas. This salary level is significantly below the minimum wage required to maintain teachers' well-being (UNICEF, 2024).

However, it is also important to note that teacher well-being extends beyond economic factors alone. This is supported by the study of Ortan et al., (2021), which found that well-being is more closely related to cognitive and emotional factors, such as happiness and a sense of purpose, distinguishing it from job satisfaction, which is more pragmatic and centered on the direct exchange between one's skills, rewards, and workplace outcomes.

UNESCO estimates that the world needs 69 million new teachers to achieve the 2030 education targets; however, around 80% of current teachers are planning to leave the profession (Mann & Falecki, 2020).

Research by Kurt et al., (2021) also supports that subjective well-being reflects aspects of teachers' lives that help explain their decision to remain in the profession. Thus, understanding subjective well-being has become increasingly important in the context of educational psychology. Educational research in recent years has begun to pay greater attention to revealing teacher well-being (Maricutoiu et al., 2023; Duckworth et al., 2009). A study by Dreer (2023) shows that teacher well-being, both from qualitative and quantitative studies, has broad impacts on various aspects of education. These findings confirm that teachers' subjective well-being (SWB) affects not only individual teachers themselves but also the overall effectiveness of education. Research by Chen and Tang (2024) shows that teacher well-being strongly influences their work engagement by 65%, meaning that the better the teacher's well-being, the more engaged they are in the classroom.

Furthermore, subjective well-being predicts health behavior after nine years among working-age individuals, indicating that SWB has long-term positive effects on health behavior (Stenlund et al., 2021). Previous studies also provide comparisons with individuals who do not have well-being. Correlations between teacher well-being and depression levels were found in the study by Kidger et al., (2016) where teachers with low well-being tended to experience work stress, job dissatisfaction, and even frequent absenteeism.

Improving teachers' SWB can be achieved by reducing job demands (Ostermeier et al., 2023). The increase in teachers' job demands has become a public issue in recent years, and several efforts, such as reducing administrative tasks, have been made to lessen these demands (Björk et al., 2019). However, research shows that policies designed to improve learning quality have also expanded teachers' roles and responsibilities beyond teaching activities, with 79.1% of teachers reporting that this potentially increases their job demands (Haeri & Afriansyah, 2024). In the 21st-century education era, teachers are not only responsible for delivering subject matter but also for developing students' social and emotional skills, accommodating individual differences, collaborating with other teachers and parents, maintaining high curiosity, and being able to collect, analyze, and utilize classroom data to improve learning quality (Viac & Fraser, 2020).

Research has shown that job demands have negative impacts on teacher well-being. Collie, (2023) and Castro Silva et al., (2023) state that well-being factors are generally negatively related to job demands. This means that the higher the well-being, the lower the job demands, or conversely, the lower the well-being, the higher the job demands. Previous studies even show that teacher well-being is more strongly influenced by job demands than by job resources, because excessive work demands tend to have more destructive effects on well-being compared to the benefits provided by job resources (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

The concept of job demands is described through six indicators that are highly relevant for teachers, namely the physical teaching environment, workload, multiple roles, class composition, disciplinary climate, and performance evaluation (Viac & Fraser, 2020). This is aligned with the regulation of teachers' workload in Law Number 14 of 2005 and the Regulation of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 25 of 2024, which explicitly establish teachers' professional obligations. The explanation above illustrates the normative elements of job demands within the teaching profession. However, how these demands affect teachers depends greatly on how teachers perceive them. In line with this, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018) showed that teachers' perceptions of job demands are related to their well-being, engagement, and intention to remain in the profession, with time pressure being the strongest factor influencing their well-being.

Research on the effect of job demands (JD) on teachers' subjective well-being (SWB) still shows mixed results. High job demands are associated with poor well-being, including increased emotional exhaustion and emotional labor, which can psychologically burden teachers and affect their overall well-being (Mansfield, 2020; Lee, 2019). Ostermeier et al., (2023) also found that increased JD can reduce teacher well-being, confirming that high work demands contribute to stress and fatigue, which ultimately decrease subjective well-being. However, other studies show that the effect of JD is not always significant. For example, Herianti and Andriani (2023) found that JD had no effect on employee well-being. Similarly, Claes et al.,

(2023) revealed that job resources have a stronger relationship with SWB than job demands. These findings indicate that the relationship between JD and teacher well-being is complex and may be influenced by various contextual factors.

These inconsistent findings may be understood through the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework, particularly the distinction between hindrance demands and challenge demands. Job demands are not always experienced as burdens that undermine well-being. Some demands may function as challenge demands, which, although requiring effort and potentially causing strain, also provide opportunities for learning, achievement, and professional growth (Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013; Han et al., 2020; Landy, 2013). In contrast, hindrance demands are work conditions that obstruct goal attainment and are more consistently associated with stress, dissatisfaction, and withdrawal behaviors (Widmer et al., 2012). Thus, the psychological impact of job demands depends not only on the intensity of the demands themselves, but also on how individuals cognitively appraise and interpret these demands within their professional context.

In the teaching profession, demands such as instructional complexity, emotional involvement, and multiple responsibilities may under certain conditions be interpreted as meaningful professional challenges rather than merely as stressors. This perspective helps explain why previous findings regarding the relationship between job demands and well-being remain inconsistent and highlights the importance of examining personal psychological resources that may shape such interpretations.

Even under certain conditions, JD can contribute positively to well-being. Zhang et al., (2022), in their study of social workers in China, found that high job demands being correlated with increased income, allowing well-being to be maintained. Interestingly, there are differences in research findings. Ahmad and Rochimah (2021) stated that low compensation contributes to decreased teacher well-being, which ultimately affects reduced work motivation, causing educational organizations to suffer losses because learning objectives are not optimally achieved. However, although low compensation is generally associated with reduced performance, Rizky et al., (2020) found that the amount of compensation did not significantly affect educators' performance levels. Therefore, addressing the negative impact of job demands requires protective factors that can help teachers cope with work pressure. One factor that has the potential to play an important role in improving teacher well-being is professional identity. Teacher professional identity reflects how teachers perceive themselves in their profession and how strongly they feel connected to educational values and goals (Zhao, 2022).

Individuals with strong professional identity can be protected from the negative effects of job demands. Teachers with strong professional identity are better able to manage work demands through conscious and active efforts to change the way they work, which ultimately ensures their well-being (Zhai et al., 2023). In addition, teachers with strong professional identity tend to be prouder of their profession, have greater resilience to work pressure, and achieve higher career satisfaction (Sun et al., 2022). Individuals with high professional identity tend to view challenges as part of professional development rather than as burdens that hinder their well-being (Ren et al., 2021). Furthermore, the study by Cece et al., (2022) emphasizes that teacher well-being is more influenced by pedagogical factors than merely by subject matter expertise. This indicates that how teachers interpret their roles as educators can affect their overall well-being.

However, research on the role of professional identity as a moderator in the relationship between job demands and teachers' subjective well-being is still limited. Previous studies have mostly examined the direct relationship between job demands and well-being without considering factors that may moderate these negative effects (Novaes et al., 2018; Onyishi et al., 2018). Furthermore, previous research has examined other moderator variables, such as managerial support, in the relationship between job demands and well-being (Yunus et al., 2023). This study aims to examine the moderating role of teacher professional identity in the relationship between job demands and subjective well-being. The hypothesis is that teacher professional identity moderates the relationship between job demands and subjective well-being.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational design with Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) to examine the effect of Job Demands on Subjective Well-Being and the moderating role of Teachers' Professional Identity. The participants in this study were public school teachers from elementary to senior high school levels in Palembang, Indonesia. Palembang was selected due to its accessibility and the observed variation in teachers' well-being across schools.

Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency of Palembang, the population of public school teachers in 2024/2025 was approximately 11,554 teachers. Therefore, a multistage cluster sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, several districts were selected to represent different areas of Palembang. In the second stage, schools from elementary, junior high, and senior high school levels were selected based on accessibility and representation. Each educational level consisted of approximately 10 schools. In the final stage, teachers who voluntarily agreed to participate were recruited from the selected schools.

The minimum sample size referred to Fowler's (2014) sampling size recommendation with a tolerated sampling error of $\pm 6\%$, which suggested a minimum of 300 participants. Prior to the main analysis, respondent fit analysis was conducted using the Rasch measurement model. Responses with outfit Mean Square (MNSQ) values greater than 2.00 were categorized as misfitting responses and excluded from further analysis, as such values indicate substantial distortion or unexpected response patterns in Rasch measurement (Linacre, 2002). After the screening process, 329 valid responses were retained for further analysis.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Table

| <i>Category</i> | <i>Group</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 58 | 17,6% |
| | Female | 271 | 82,4% |
| Employment Status | PNS | 94 | 28,6% |
| | P3K | 226 | 68,7% |
| | Honorary | 9 | 2,7% |
| Teaching Experience | <3 years | 78 | 23,7% |
| | 5 – 7 years | 83 | 25,2% |
| | 8 – 10 years | 30 | 9,1% |
| | >10 years | 138 | 41,9% |
| Teaching Level | Elementary | 97 | 29,5% |
| | Junior | 105 | 31,9% |
| | Senior | 127 | 38,6% |
| | | 329 | 100% |

All instruments were adapted into Indonesian through forward translation, expert content validation, backward translation, and readability testing. The pilot test using the Rasch model indicated that all items met acceptable fit criteria. Job Demands Questionnaire (JDQ) from Bakker (2014) with A total of 23 items from the Work Pressure dimension, Cognitive Demands, Emotional Demands, Role Conflict and Hassles. The reliability coefficient after adapted using cronbach alpha is 0,90. Indonesian Teacher Professional Identity (ITPI) developed by Khoirunnisa et al., (2026) with high reliability 0,91 after adaptes, and consists of 37 items from teacher as a subject expert, teacher as a pedagogical expert, and teacher as a didactical expert. Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) by Diener et al., (2009) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) by Diener et al., (1985) consists of total 17 items with reliability after adaptation of 0.67 and 0.87, respectively.

Prior to hypothesis testing, classical assumption tests were conducted, including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests. Normality testing was conducted using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test on the regression residuals. The results showed an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.017 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the residuals were not normally distributed statistically. However, assessment of normality was not based solely on statistical testing, but also supported by graphical analysis through the Normal P–P Plot (Mishra et al., 2019).

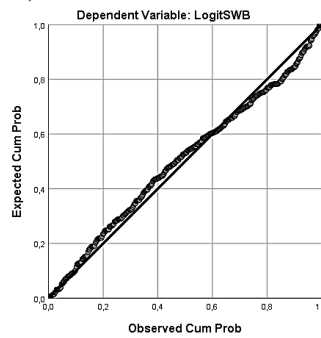


Figure 1. P- Plot

The P–P Plot demonstrated that the residual points tended to follow and spread around the diagonal line, indicating that the residual distribution remained approximately normal (Mishra et al., 2019). Therefore, although the assumption of normality was not fully met statistically, the initial correlation analysis was conducted using the nonparametric Spearman’s rho test as an alternative approach for non-normal data (Abbott, 2011; Bishara & Hittner, 2012; Suherman et al., 2025). Meanwhile, regression and Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) were still considered appropriate because the residual distribution showed acceptable graphical normality and the sample size was relatively large ($N = 329$).

Furthermore, multicollinearity testing was conducted by examining the Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values based on the criteria proposed by Ghazali (2016).

Table 2. Multicollinearity Test

| Model | Collinearity Statistics | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| | Tolerance | VIF |
| (Constant) | | |
| JobDemands | ,924 | 1,083 |
| Teacher Professional Identity | ,863 | 1,159 |

The results showed tolerance values of 0.924 for Job Demands and 0.863 for Teacher Professional Identity, both exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.10. In addition, the VIF values were 1.083 and 1.159, respectively, which were below the maximum acceptable limit of 10. These findings indicate that no multicollinearity problem was present in the regression model.

Heteroscedasticity testing was also performed using scatterplot analysis following the guidelines of Field (2024) and Ghazali (2018).

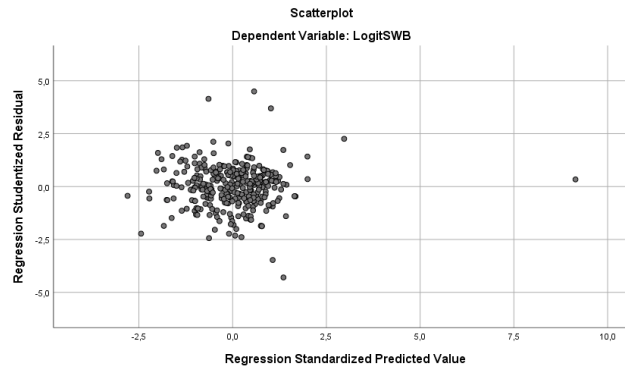


Figure 2. Scatter Plot

The scatterplot showed that the residual points were randomly distributed above and below zero on the Y-axis without forming any specific pattern. This indicates that heteroscedasticity was not detected and that the assumption of homoscedasticity was fulfilled.

Data analysis was conducted using simple linear regression to examine the effect of job demands on subjective well-being, as well as the effect of teacher professional identity on subjective well-being. In addition, Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) was performed to test the moderating role of teacher professional identity in the relationship between job demands and subjective well-being. The scale to be used has also been tested for validity and reliability before use. Data processed with IBM SPSS Statistics 26 for Windows software.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Table 2. Model Result

| Model | Variabel | B | β | t | Sig. | R | R Square |
|---------|----------------------------|---------|---------|--------|--------|-------|----------|
| Model 1 | (Constant) | -18,903 | | -5,477 | 0,000* | 0,356 | 0,126 |
| | Tuntutan Kerja (X) | 0,249 | 0,356 | 6,878 | 0,000* | | |
| Model 2 | (Constant) | -34,368 | | -7,389 | 0,000* | 0,428 | 0,184 |
| | Tuntutan Kerja (X) | 0,292 | 0,417 | 8,068 | 0,000* | | |
| | Identitas Professional (Z) | 0,082 | 0,247 | 4,780 | 0,000* | | |
| Model 3 | (Constant) | -27,175 | | -4,649 | 0,000* | 0,440 | 0,194 |
| | Tuntutan Kerja (X) | 0,388 | 0,553 | 6,508 | 0,000* | | |
| | Identitas Professional (Z) | 0,042 | 0,125 | 1,573 | 0,117 | | |
| | Interaksi (X x Z) | 0,000 | -0,228 | -2,016 | 0,045* | | |

In Model 1, the regression analysis showed that job demands had a positive and significant effect on subjective well-being ($B = 0.249$; $\beta = 0.356$; $t = 6.878$; $p < 0.05$), with a coefficient of determination of 0.126. This indicates that job demands explained 12.6% of the variance in subjective well-being.

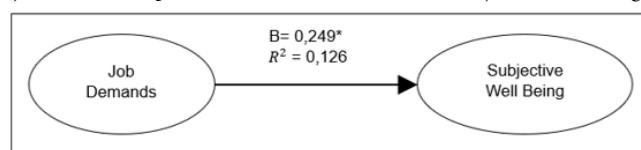


Figure 3. Model 1

In Model 2, teacher professional identity was included in the regression equation. The results indicated that both job demands ($B = 0.292$; $\beta = 0.417$; $t = 8.068$; $p < 0.05$) and teacher professional identity ($B = 0.082$; $\beta = 0.247$; $t = 4.780$; $p < 0.05$) had significant positive effects on subjective well-being. The coefficient of determination increased to 0.184, meaning that both predictors jointly explained 18.4% of the variance in subjective well-being.

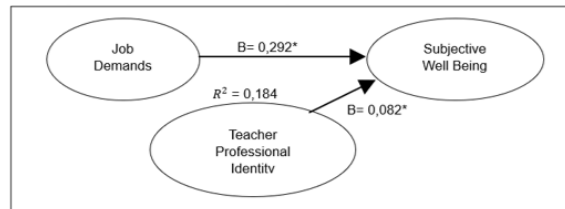


Figure 4. Model 2

In Model 3, the interaction term between job demands and teacher professional identity was entered to test the moderating effect. The analysis showed that the interaction between job demands and teacher professional identity significantly affected subjective well-being ($B = 0.000$; $\beta = -0.228$; $t = -2.016$; $p < 0.05$), indicating the presence of a moderating effect. The negative standardized coefficient ($\beta = -0.228$) indicates that teacher professional identity weakens the positive relationship between job demands and subjective well-being.

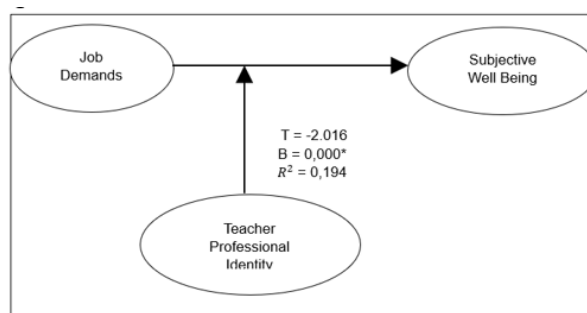


Figure 5. Model 3

The R^2 value of 0.194 indicates that the model explains a relatively small proportion of variance in subjective well-being. This suggests that subjective well-being is a complex construct influenced by multiple psychological and contextual factors beyond job demands and teacher professional identity, such as emotional regulation, organizational support, and individual coping strategies.

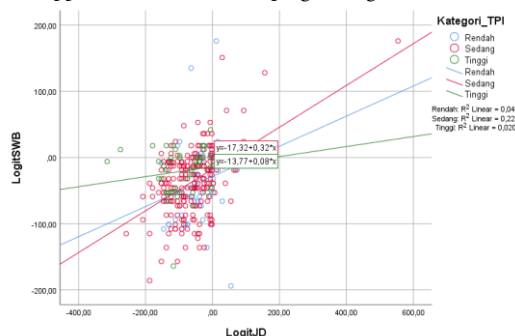


Figure 6. Interaction Plot

Based on Figure 5, the horizontal axis (X) represents job demands, while the vertical axis (Y) represents subjective well-being. The figure presents three regression lines corresponding to different levels of teacher professional identity, namely low (blue line), medium (red line), and high (green line). The slope of

the regression lines differs across these groups, indicating variation in the relationship between job demands and subjective well-being depending on the level of teacher professional identity.

Specifically, the high professional identity group (green line) shows a relatively flatter slope with the equation $y = -13.77 + 0.08x$ and a low coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.020$). In contrast, the medium identity group (red line) exhibits a steeper slope with the equation $y = -17.32 + 0.32x$ and higher explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.221$), while the low identity group (blue line) shows a similarly stronger slope pattern. Overall, these differences indicate that the relationship between job demands and subjective well-being tends to be weaker among teachers with higher professional identity and stronger among those with lower professional identity. This pattern is consistent with the moderated regression results, suggesting that teacher professional identity functions as a moderating variable that weakens the relationship between job demands and subjective well-being.

Discussion

This study found that job demands have a positive effect on subjective well-being. Demerouti and Bakker (2011) explain that job demands are work aspects requiring sustained physical and psychological effort that may generate certain costs. However, some job demands such as high workload, time pressure, and responsibility can be classified as challenge stressors because they have the potential to support individual growth and achievement. In this condition, job demands are not only perceived as pressure but also as meaningful and valuable work experiences.

Arnold B Bakker and Sanz-vergel (2013); as well as Arnold B Bakker and Demerouti (2014) emphasize that the effects of job demands may function as challenges depending on the work context, because without challenges, work engagement and performance may decline. Thus, job demands can act as a stimulus that enhances engagement and achievement in work settings. In this regard, Tummers and Bakker (2021) also demonstrate that contextual factors such as working conditions and leadership may influence how job demands affect engagement and well-being. This strengthens the view that job demands operate in a dynamic rather than linear manner. Empirical evidence from Omariba, Sr et al. (2024) also supports this finding, showing that increases in job demands may be followed by increases in subjective well-being, particularly among individuals who are able to interpret job demands as meaningful challenges.

The results also indicate that strong teacher professional identity enables individuals to interpret their work more positively. Individuals with high professional identity tend to perceive challenges as part of professional development rather than as burdens that hinder their well-being (Ren et al., 2021). This is consistent with Yu et al., (2025) who found that teacher professional identity functions as a job resource that helps teachers cope with stress more effectively, enhances professional development, and increases work engagement. Furthermore, Zhai et al., (2025) in a study involving 2,090 teachers, found that professional identity is positively associated with workplace well-being. Teachers with strong professional identity tend to have pride in their profession and achieve self-development and self-actualization through their work (Zhao, 2022). Similarly, Toubassi et al., (2022), argue that well-developed professional identity enhances individuals' meaning-making processes regarding their work, making job challenges appear valuable and worth facing.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that teacher professional identity moderates the relationship between job demands and subjective well-being. The negative interaction effect indicates that the higher the professional identity, the weaker the effect of job demands on subjective well-being. This finding is consistent with the buffering effect concept in stress literature, which suggests that individual characteristics can weaken the negative impact of job demands on psychological outcomes (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992). This can be explained by the fact that professional identity serves as a cognitive framework shaping how individuals interpret their work, such that job demands are not always perceived as burdens but can be reinterpreted as part of professional growth (Richter et al., 2021).

This result is also supported by evidence showing that strong professional identity is associated with higher work engagement and lower burnout risk (Lin et al., 2022), as well as higher motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment (Fathi et al., 2023). In the context of teachers, professional identity has also been shown to moderate the negative effects of working hours and income perception on job satisfaction, where teachers with higher professional identity still report higher satisfaction despite unfavorable working conditions (Tang, 2019).

The findings of this study provide important theoretical and practical implications for educational psychology, particularly in understanding teacher well-being. First, the positive relationship between job demands and subjective well-being indicates that job demands should not always be viewed as negative stressors. Under certain conditions, job demands may function as challenge stressors that stimulate professional growth, work engagement, and a sense of accomplishment. This finding supports the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model by emphasizing that the effects of job demands depend on how teachers cognitively interpret their work demands. Second, the moderating role of Teachers’ Professional Identity highlights the importance of internal psychological resources in maintaining teacher well-being. Professional identity serves as a protective factor that helps teachers reinterpret work demands as meaningful professional responsibilities rather than psychological burdens. This suggests that improving teacher well-being should not focus solely on reducing workload, but also on strengthening teachers’ sense of purpose, professional commitment, and identity within the teaching profession. Practically, schools and educational policymakers should pay greater attention to programs that support the development of teachers’ professional identity. Professional development programs, mentoring systems, reflective teaching practices, peer support communities, and recognition of teachers’ professional contributions may strengthen teachers’ resilience and well-being. In addition, institutional policies should create a balance between job demands and available resources through supportive leadership, fair workload distribution, administrative simplification, and emotional support systems.

Despite the theoretical and practical contributions of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, the study is limited to teachers within a specific context, which restricts the generalizability of the results to other educational levels or broader populations across different regions. Second, the cross-sectional design only captures relationships among variables at a single point in time, thereby limiting the ability to draw causal inferences or examine changes over time in job demands, professional identity, and subjective well-being.

In addition, the use of self-report questionnaires may introduce subjective bias in respondents’ answers, including potential common method bias, as all variables were measured using the same data source. Furthermore, this study only focuses on job demands, subjective well-being, and teacher professional identity, without incorporating other potentially relevant factors such as social support, organizational climate, or leadership, which may also contribute to teacher well-being. Finally, the quantitative approach employed in this study limits the depth of understanding regarding teachers’ lived experiences, particularly in how they personally interpret job demands and construct their professional identity in daily practice.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between job demands, teacher professional identity, and subjective well-being using the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework. The findings indicate that job demands are positively associated with subjective well-being, while teacher professional identity plays a significant moderating role in this relationship. Beyond confirming existing theoretical assumptions, this study contributes to the literature by highlighting that job demands may function not only as stressors but also as context-dependent challenge demands that can enhance subjective well-being when interpreted through strong

professional identity. This extends the JD-R framework by emphasizing the role of identity-based cognitive appraisal in shaping the psychological outcomes of job demands, particularly within the educational context.

Practically, the findings suggest that improving teacher well-being should not rely solely on reducing workload, but also on strengthening professional identity as a psychological resource. Schools and policymakers are encouraged to support teacher development through mentoring, reflective practice, and institutional recognition that reinforce professional meaning and commitment. Finally, future research is recommended to further explore this model using longitudinal designs, multi-source data, and cross-cultural comparisons to better understand how contextual and psychological factors interact in shaping teacher well-being.

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