Balancing Professional Learning and Family Responsibilities: Effectiveness of Learning Networks on Teacher Stress and Well-Being

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Abstract

Objective:

This study probes the effectiveness of Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) in the support offered to teachers in maintaining the balancing act between professional learning and family work, reducing stress, and improving their well-being.

Materials and Method:

The basis for this qualitative study includes an analysis of 17 articles peer reviewed, mentioning the role of PLNs. Of those considered, four address the balance between learning and responsibilities associated with family, four identify stress-reduction factors specific to elements of the PLNs, five assess the effect on well-being in psychological terms, and four assess the emotional support developed by the PLNs.

Results:

PLNs help balance work with family. The benefits include flexible learning, resource sharing, and supportive communities. There is much better job satisfaction, lesser burnout, and a greater general psychological well-being amongst participants. They have found significant levels of emotional support, professional development opportunities, and collaboration with other members within the community, reducing stress factors and fostering teacher resilience.

Conclusion:

This is important to reduce teacher stress since it offers them emotional support and flexible learning environments that enable them to balance professional and family duties. Incorporation of PLNs into education policies may improve the welfare of teachers and durable job holding in the long run. Further research is needed in exploring its long-run impacts and also enforcing emotional support mechanisms in PLNs.

Keywords: *Professional Learning Networks, Teacher Stress, Psychological Well-being,Emotional Support, Teacher Professional Development.*

1. Introduction

The demands of the last two years have really increased on the teachers, which require them to be constantly improving and completing continuous professional development. They also need to balance out the responsibilities in their families. This double burden triggers high levels of stress among educators, affecting the general well-being and job satisfaction of the educators themselves (Friedman, 2000; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Professional learning networks have been proposed as one of the ways of alleviating such pressures. These are interactions where teachers share resources, get emotional support and work together to solve problems arising from common issues according to Wenger (1998). They offer a means of connectivity among teachers while exchanging ideas and gaining feedback within

a helpful environment that triggers reduced stress and improved well-being according to Harris & Jones (2010).

Some recent studies are also concerned with the balance of professional learning and family responsibilities within the effectiveness of learning networks. A further look into how such networks affect teacher stress and well-being can be useful in developing strategies for improving teacher retention, job satisfaction, and mental health (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009).

2. Objectives

a. **To examine how a learning network can support teachers in balancing their professional learning and family responsibilities.**
b. **To identify the basic elements of learning networks that contribute to reducing teacher stress.**
c. **To assess the impact of teacher participation in learning networks on their psychological well-being.**
d. **To evaluate the extent to which learning networks contribute to the emotional reduction of teacher stress.**

3. Statement of the Problem

Hence, the current problem is stated as "Balancing Professional Learning and Family Responsibilities: Effectiveness of Learning Networks on Teacher Stress and Well-being".

4. Research Questions

Based on the above objectives, the current study attempts to address the following research questions.

a. How might a learning network support teachers in balancing their professional learning and family responsibilities?
b. What are the basic learning network elements involved in reducing teacher stress?
c. To what extent do teacher participation in learning networks affect their psychological wellbeing?
d. How much do learning networks contribute emotionally to the overall reduction of teacher stress?

5. Methodology

5.1. Method and Sources of Data:

The study is qualitative and analytical in nature, in which the analysis is based on the already available data from both offline and online sources.

The study reviewed the total number of literatures with 4 studies in **learning network can support teachers in balancing their professional learning and family responsibilities**, 4 studies in **basic elements of learning networks that contribute to reducing teacher stress**, 5 studies in **the impact of teacher participation in learning networks on their psychological well-being**, and 4 studies in learning networks contribute emotionally to the overall reduction of teacher stress.

5.2. Results and Discussion
Results

In this section, the study seeks to answer the following research questions.

5.2.1. How might a learning network support teachers in balancing their professional learning and family responsibilities?

Learning networks can be quite effective in helping teachers balance professional learning with family responsibilities. Here are some key points:

i. **Better Flexibility and Support:** Learning networks, especially online platforms, are very flexible because they allow the professional development of teachers not to interfere with family responsibilities. According to Trust and Horrocks (2016) "online professional learning networks give teachers control over the timing and content of their professional development and make better connections between that and other personally important responsibilities.".

ii. **Relieved Stress via Cooperation:** Learning networks actually facilitate cooperation among teachers, hence relieving them from stress in the form of assisted sharing of resources. It has also been ascertained that cooperative professional learning environments for teachers could reduce stress by stronger feelings of community and sense of shared responsibility (Vescio et al., 2008).

iii. **Enhanced Teacher Welfare:** Teachers involved in articulated learning networks have enhanced job satisfaction and welfare. Such articulated learning networks have facets such as mentoring, peer support, and ultimately, better psychological wellness and balance at work and in personal life (Borko, 2004).

iv. **Work-life integration:** A successful learning network may appropriately integrate professional learning with personal life through asynchronous opportunities to grow. The integration helps teachers take care of the dual responsibilities much more effectively, thus being better as well as fit (Desimone, 2009).

5.2.2. What are the basic learning network elements involved in reducing teacher stress?

Summary of main elements of learning networks that help to minimize stress:

i. **Supportive community:** This is the base where learners offer a supportive community through which teachers share experiences and resources. This therefore diminishes the chances of being isolated and stressed. It has been discovered that stress related to job is diminished through peer support and collaborative activities (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

ii. **Professional Development Opportunities:** A good learning network provides professional development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of teachers and, therefore, help develop their skills and build their confidence levels by decreasing stress in the profession. Relevance and interactivity have been reported to enhance teacher efficacy and job satisfaction among educators by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017).

iii. **Resource Sharing:** The networks of learning make it possible for resource sharing. Such sharing can reduce the time and effort spent in planning and problem-solving lessons by the teachers and, hence, decreases the level of stress in them. Teachers with access to shared resources experience lower levels of stress and higher job satisfaction (Vescio et al., 2008).

iv. **Flexibility and Autonomy:** Professional learning networks, which are loose in schedules, relieve teacher stress. Networks that allow teachers to learn according to their own pace relieve the stress that is caused by too rigid schedules. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) effective professional development meets a teacher's need, giving them the autonomy to fit in learning into their busy and chaotic schedules, thus permitting better balance with their other responsibilities in well-being.

These factors contribute to stress reduction among teachers by encouraging a helpful environment, providing appropriate professional development and resource sharing, and offering options for flexibility in learning.

5.2.3. To what extent do teacher participation in learning networks affect their psychological wellbeing?

Participation in learning networks could have strong implications for teachers' psychological well-being through their probable emotional support, reduction of stress factors, and offering the teacher possibilities to develop professionally.

i. **Cooperation and Social Contact:** Joining learning networks provides teachers an opportunity to interact and socialize with their fellow members in school, which may consequently reduce feelings of isolation and stress at work. Involvement in such networks enhances the teachers to achieve support systems built on their overall wellbeing and satisfaction in performing their jobs (Vescio et al., 2008).

ii. **Burnout and Job Satisfaction Decrease:** Social support and professional development, through the intermediary impact of learning networks, have been linked to decreased burnout and increased job satisfaction for teachers (Desimone, 2009). As most of these networks provide social support and enable collective learning and solutions to difficulties, much of this teaching-related stress is mitigated (Guskey, 2002).

iii. **Community and Collective Efficacy:** Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) there is evidence to suggest that engagement with learning networks holds promise for teachers' psychological resilience through strengthened feelings of community and collective efficacy. Teachers are likely to be more resilient in facing professional and personal demands when treated collectively with such support (Borko, 2004).

5.2.4. How much do learning networks contribute emotionally to the overall reduction of teacher stress?

Emotional support in the learning networks enlightens understanding through the alleviation of stress in teachers. Some of the learning networks that are characterized by collaborative groups and professional communities offer some kind of structured environment for emotional support to be readily accepted and thus easily integrated. Such learning networks have been said to change the teachers' stress level and their general wellbeing, according to a number of research findings.

i. **Emotional support and its role in learning networks:** Emotional support in the learning networks is commonly achieved through peer relations, mentoring, and shared experiences. Such support would help teachers cope with emotional labor in their profession thereby reducing feelings of isolation and burnout. Teaching professionals who have colleagues and a mentor whom they can approach for support increase their job satisfaction and emotional resilience (Richter et al., 2011).

ii. **Empirical Evidence:** Citing empirical evidence, it can be asserted that emotional support decreases the levels of stress in teachers. For instance, Klassen and Tze (2014) conclude that the higher a teacher's self-efficacy levels may be increased through supportive professional learning communities--the higher will be his job satisfaction and the lower will be his stress levels. Empathy by peers and mentors in these networks alleviates problems in classrooms.

iii. **Mechanisms for Reducing Stress:** Mechanisms through which emotional support contributes to the relief of stress include increased perceived relationship, verification of experience and advice. Emotional support networks often open discussions on issues and help in joint problem-solving and shared coping strategies (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). These interactions will not only help in handling short-term causes of stress but also enable long-term resilience for teachers.

iv. **Practical Implications:** The findings thus underpin the need to include supportive structures of emotional depth within learning networks for teachers. According to this, educational policies and school leadership should add to developing these networks in order to foster teacher well-being. Continuous opportunities for socialization and

interactions with peers and mentors could develop more long-term sustainable stress management strategies for teachers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Discussion

A component- wise results of the studies on4 studies in **learning network can support teachers in balancing their professional learning and family responsibilities**, 4 studies in **basic elements of learning networks that contribute to reducing teacher stress**, 5 studies in **the impact of teacher participation in learning networks on their psychological well-being**, and 4 studies in learning networks contribute emotionally to the overall reduction of teacher stress reviewed above have been discussed as under.

Relationship at a Glance

Sl. N	Variables under Study	Number of Articles	Positive	Negative
1	**Learning network can support teachers in balancing their professional learning and family responsibilities.**	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	Nil
2.	**Basic elements of learning networks that contribute to reducing teacher stress.**	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	Nil
3.	**Impact of teacher participation in learning networks on their psychological well-being.**	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	Nil
4.	Learning networks contribute emotionally to the overall reduction of teacher stress.	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	Nil

a) **Learning network can support teachers in balancing their professional learning and family responsibilities.**

Relating the concept of Learning network effect in reducing teacher stress in balancing their professional learning and family responsibilities, 4 studies were reviewed and all the studies (100%) found positive in the field of education.

i.   Trust and Horrocks (2016): With online learning networks, teachers can "balance work and private life.

ii. Vescio et al. (2008): Shared responsibility and community support offered through cooperative professional learning in networks decreases anxiety.

iii. Borko (2004): The conceptualization of learning networks that include mentoring along with peer support facilitates enhanced teacher welfare and psychological well-being.

iv. Desimone (2009): Network opportunities for asynchronous learning may allow professional development and personal life to fit more seamlessly together.

b) **Basic elements of learning networks that contribute to reducing teacher stress.**

Altogether 4 studies on the professional learning networks impact teacher well-beingwere reviewed, all (100%) indicating the positive impact.

i.   Ingersoll and Smith (2003) with supportive community in learning networks, the stress that falls in through peer collaboration can be minimized.

ii. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) the availability of professional development opportunities through networks boosts confidence and satisfaction at work- and, ultimately, reduces stress.

iii. As noted by Vescio et al. (2008) resource sharing in networks reduces stress since it saves time and effort in planning.

iv. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) flexibility and autonomy in learning networks helps reduce stress by allowing teachers the autonomy to learn at their own space.

c) **Impact of teacher participation in learning networks on their psychological well-being.**

Under this variable, a total of 5 studies were reviewed and all these 5 studies (100%) indicated a positive and significant in explaining the link of network support to teacher retention in the profession.

i. Vescio et al. (2008) learning networks can benefit teachers' better well-being by surmounting isolation feelings.

ii. Desimone (2009) connecting teacher professional development and social support in learning networks to lessened burnout and increased job satisfaction.

iii. Guskey (2002): showing that collective learning diminishes strain-related issues.

iv. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) supported of the concept that community and collective efficacy strengthen psychological resilience, which leads to benefiting well-being.

v. Borko (2004) showed how professional learning communities help create collective problem solving and shared responsibility to improve the teacher balance of professional demands with personal well-being.

d) **Learning networks contribute emotionally to the overall reduction of teacher stress**.

All the 4 studies (100%) were found positive and significant in the components of learning networks most, reduce stress.

i. Richter et al. (2011) used networking, peers, and mentors to improve general job satisfaction and emotional well-being on the job.

ii. Klassen and Tze (2014)claiming that support from learning networks increases self-confidence, job satisfaction and decreases stress.

iii. Brouwers and Tomic (2000) stress was stated in positive terms highlighting that people who face similar challenges at work develop similar ways of handling the pressure and people develop friendship circles at work.

iv. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012): agreed, for promoting emotional support structures within learning networks for stress control and teachers' welfare.

5. Conclusion

Some analyses reveal from existing literature that Professional Learning Networks dramatically reduce the levels of teacher stress and help them with overall well-being. Such PLNs offer flexible, supportive environments and are able to help teachers cope with both demands of professional learning and family responsibilities. Some critical aspects are supportive communities, professional development, resource sharing, and flexibility. Membership of such networks is associated with high levels of psychological well-being, low levels of burnout, and greater job satisfaction. Emotional supportiveness within the PLNs reduces stress and builds resilience: it is thus essential to introduce such networks into the professional development agenda of teachers and education policies.

6. Recommendations

a. **Enhance PLN Accessibility:** Online flexible PLNs should be better developed and promoted to accommodate teachers' hectic schedules and heavy commitments by avoiding over-spillover of professional learning on family life.

b. **Improve Emotional Support Structures:** There should be better structures of emotional support mechanisms in PLNs, which include peer mentoring and opportunities for collaborative problem solving as sources for enhancing resilience and job satisfaction in teachers.

c. **Focus on Resource Sharing:** Suggest and support resource sharing among members of the PLNs so as to lighten the burden of planning, reduce stress, and hence increase job satisfaction among the teachers.

d. **Policy Integration:** Advocate integration of PLNs into educational policies and teacher development programs so as to assure further blossoming of teachers' professional growth and personal well-being.

e. **Further Research:** The longitudinal effects of PLNs on teacher stress and well-being need to be traced within a long-term study, and the specific ways emotional support reduces stress should be determined.

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