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Equilibrium in the Classroom: A Systematic Review of Strategies for Work-Life Balance among Mathematics Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Creating a work balance between private and professional lives among employees remains daunting. Hence, a lack of equilibrium between work and family can result in stress, anxiety, and poor health, ultimately affecting organizational productivity. A plethora of literature has shown that Mathematics teachers experience more unique stressors at work due to the difficulty of subjects, workload, administrative tasks, and lesson note preparation. As a result, the pressure emanating from the imbalance between private and professional lives negatively impacts Mathematics teachers. The work-life balance has become a critical factor even among job seekers in deciding which job offer to accept. This review examines the factors contributing to the imbalance of work and personal life among mathematics teachers, including job demands, classroom management, and administrative responsibilities. This systematic review identifies the practices and practical strategies to help mathematics teachers manage their workload and achieve a healthy work-life balance. A PRISMA protocol was adopted for this review, while a thorough search of the Scopus bibliographic database was used to identify 99 academic papers. Eleven articles met the inclusion criteria for in-depth analysis. Overall, the paper provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with achieving equilibrium in the classroom and offers practical strategies and recommendations for mathematics teachers struggling to balance their professional and personal lives. Thus, this paper will serve as reference material for Mathematics and STEM teachers in learning coping strategies to create an equilibrium between the classroom and private lives.

Keywords: Work-life balance, Mathematics teachers, Strategies, Stress

1. INTRODUCTION

Work-Life Balance has emerged as a critical area of research in human resource management, education, sociology, and other related disciplines. It has become essential in retaining the best employees and attracting talented individuals to several organizations (Kluczyk, 2013; Quintana et al., 2019; Ramasamy & Renganathan, 2017; Sojka, 2014). Even job seekers decide based on this criterion by weighing if an equilibrium exists between working hours and personal lives before accepting an offer (Tanvi & Fatima, 2012). Work-life balance has become a critical issue among employees, as reported by Hafeez & Akbar (2015) and Subha (2013) that from the work-life balance surveys, more than 60 percent of the participants confirmed that they were unable to find an equilibrium between personal and working lives resulting in making tough choices. The imbalance is attributed to work culture, socioeconomic changes, and tough global competition. Meanwhile, controlling when, where, and how they work increases their effectiveness and job satisfaction (Hafeez & Akbar, 2015).

However, the teaching profession is a time-demanding work that seems stressful and takes a toll on teachers' personal lives and health. This has made it imperative for teachers to balance their private and professional lives to work optimally (Belli, 2016). Evidence has shown that teachers are under pressure in various ways, such as classroom teaching, administration, meeting, daily lesson preparation, and homework assignments. These multiple roles increase workload and cause high-stress levels (Jian et al., 2023; Wang, Zhang, Lambert, Wu, Wen, 2021; Westphal, Kalinowski, Hoferichter, Vock, 2022; Yu, Dong, Wang, An, 2016). Research has shown that many work-life balance studies are directed at organizational or company variables. Even very few studies investigated teachers' work-life balance, while that of Mathematics teachers and other sciences are so scanty (Lazar, Osoian & Ratiu, 2010; Quintana et al., 2019). Available scant studies on science and Mathematics teachers revealed that they experience poor affective well-being due to unique stressors at work, such as the difficulty of the subjects, high level of anxiety, trouble in getting materials to use in teaching, and so on (Karakus et al., 2021). In a study on the extent to which work-life balance interferes with personal lives,

Science, Technology, Engineering, Agriculture, and Mathematics (STEAM) teachers revealed that having so much to do regarding workload and related assignments hinders spending quality time with their families. Thus, school pressure affects family life (Quintana et al., 2019). In a qualitative study by Mujtaba et al. (2013) on factors that led to positive or negative stress among secondary school Mathematics and Science teachers, it was reported that there was more pressure on Mathematics teachers. It was not supported enough by the senior management. In another related study conducted in the Philippines, Quintana et al. (2019) reported that 60 percent of participants who participated in the study who are STEAM teachers confirmed that school tasks often affect their home activities. Hence, low work-life balance can bring about job stress, poor health, and diminished family functioning, leading to low productivity and organizational commitment (Bell, Rajendran, & Theiler, 2012). Against this background, the systematic review of strategies employed in enhancing work-life balance among Mathematics teachers was examined, and conclusions were drawn from the selected studies. The research questions addressed in this study are:

1. What methodologies were adopted for the selected studies on the work-life balance among Mathematics teachers?
2. What are the educational settings of Mathematics teachers in the selected articles?
3. What are the geographical distributions of Mathematics teachers in the selected articles?
4. What is the gender distribution of the participants in the selected articles?
5. What strategies are employed in the thematic areas investigated on the work-life balance among Mathematics teachers?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Search Strategy

Different strategies were used to search articles used in the review. The search activities were guided using keywords such as "Mathematics teacher" and "Work-life balance" in some scientific data based such as Scopus index. A total of 99 articles were found in the data based, and a parsimonious number was arrived at after removing lecture notes, conference papers, dissertations, book chapters, and conference books. Subsequently, the check for duplication in the remaining articles was conducted, and the selection criteria were used to determine the articles that were eventually used for the review. A total of 11 articles survived the exclusion and were used for the review.

2.2 Selection Criteria

The procedure for selecting the articles for the review was in tandem with the PRISMA guideline reported by Moher et al. (2009). The procedure is preceded by outlining the existing empirical literature on the work-life balance of Mathematics teachers. The field of Mathematics moderated the search for relevant articles. Other vital criteria constituting inclusion and exclusion criteria were also considered.

2.3 Inclusion Criteria

The under-listed criteria were considered for the selection of the articles to be included in the review:

- The articles must not be older than 2010
- The article must foster a work-life balance for Mathematics teachers
- It must be an empirical study
- Published in a peer review journals
- Published in the English language

The exclusion criteria for selecting articles to be published should not be in the categories of the dissertation, conference papers, web page, periodical, mere literature review, or any write-up not peer-review or published in a reputable outlet. The outline of the procedure for selecting the articles can be found in Figure 1.

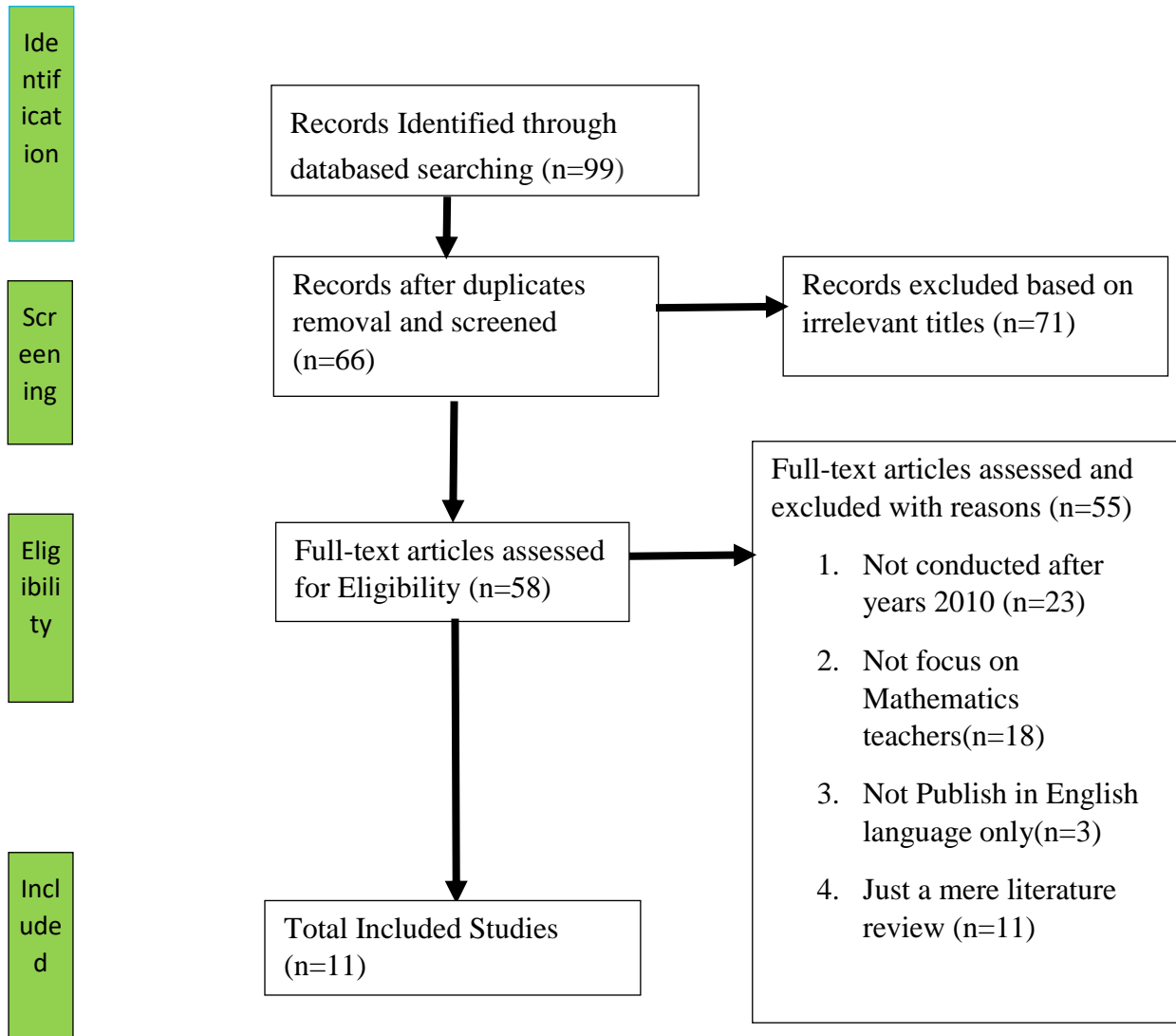


Figure 1:PRISMA Framework Adapted for Study Selection

The figure shows the procedure followed to arrive at the selected articles. The PRISMA framework was adopted and followed; the inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to decide on the articles identified.

2.4 Data Extraction and Analysis Procedures

After the articles had been selected from the record and various indexes, some recurrent thematic areas in the selected articles were fostered as themes in the review. The research questions raised in the review were answered using the information on the themes identified. Some of the themes are settings where the studies in the articles were conducted, the gender of the participants, the research method used, the institution (in terms of education level) where the study was conducted, and the focus of the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Articles' Methodologies and Their Findings on Work-Life Balance

Authors and year	Education setting	Regional Setting	Study Design	Gender consideration	Study Focus	Result
Mujtaba et al. (2013)	Secondary	UK	Qualitative	Both	Stress	Findings demonstrate that teachers with appropriate stress coping mechanisms and access to professional and personal support can produce desirable teaching output.

Mandt (2020)	Primary	Norway	Qualitative	Both	Emotions	The result indicated an emerging identity toward a reform mathematics teacher when analyzing the participants' emotions, well-being, and flourishing.
Jian et al. (2023)	Secondary	China	Quantitative	Both	Well-being and stress	Teachers' well-being is significantly reduced by increasing stress levels.
Patkin&Greenst ei (2020)	Primary	Israel	Quantitative	Female	Anxiety	Teachers' experience of stress is associated with mathematics teaching anxiety.
Fisher & Royster (2016)	Secondary	USA	Mixed Methods	Both	Stress	Teachers found different schools have different inherent stress levels and that, as teachers, they used some resources for reducing stress.
Hafeez & Akbar (2015)	Secondary	Pakistan	Quantitative	Both	Job satisfaction	Findings suggest that work-life balance has little impact on school teachers' job satisfaction.
Banerjee et al. (2021)	Secondary	USA	Qualitative	Female	Expectation and interest	The importance of interest in, and perceived value of, STEM subjects was seen above classroom experience and work-life conflict.
Quintana et al. (2019)	Higher Institution	Philippines	Mixed methods	Both	Well-being and teaching performance	Having so much to do in the class interferes with their personal interests and teachers' performance.
Hwang (2022)	Secondary	USA	Quantitative	Both	Job satisfaction	Mathematics teachers with very low job satisfaction and high stress were less likely to implement dialogic instruction than teachers in other profiles.
Martínez (2019)	Secondary	Mexico	Mixed methods	Both	Emotion	students' behavior in the classroom has an essential impact on teachers' emotional experiences.
Cheng-Lin et al. (2020)	Higher Institution	China	Quantitative	Both	Stress	An adverse effect of stress and job burnout is strengthened by employee agility Leader-Member Change Quality (LMXD).

Research Question 1:What methodologies were adopted for the selected studies on the work-life balance among Mathematics teachers?

Table 2: StudyDesign Methods Employed in Studying Work-Life Balance

Methods	Frequency	Percentage
Quantitative	5	45.45
Qualitative	3	27.27
Mixed methods	3	27.27

Table 2 presents the result of the type of design used in the studies in the selected articles. The result shows that 45.45% of the articles used quantitative methods, while 27.27% used qualitative and mixed methods.

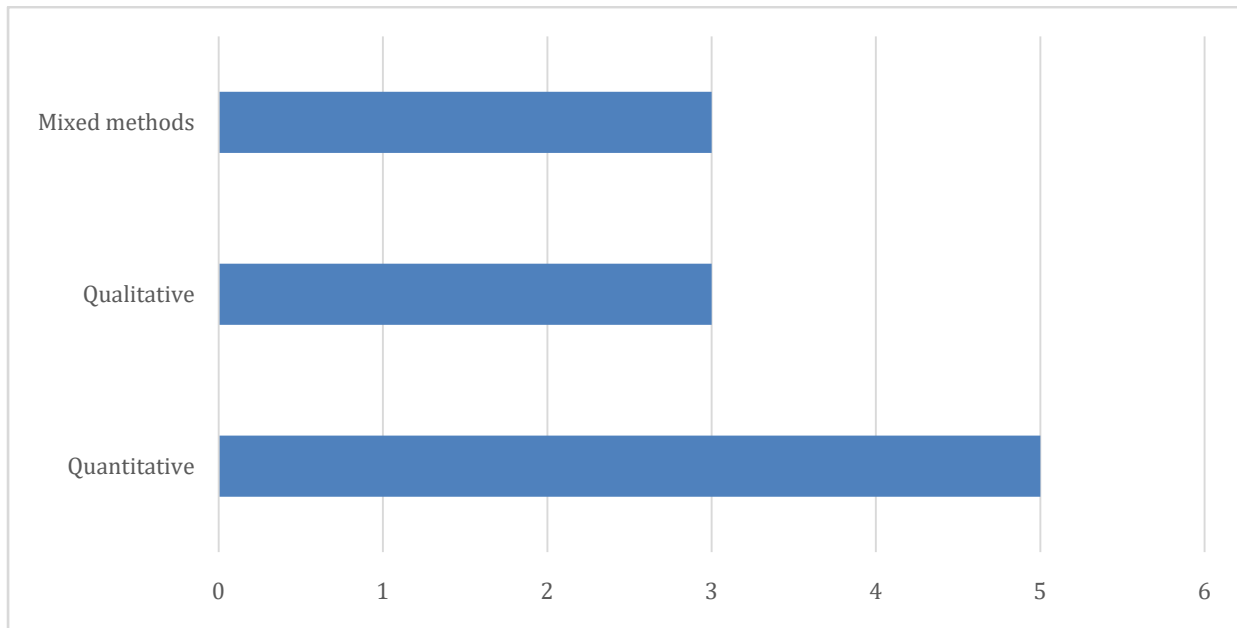


Figure 2: Data Collection Methods Used in the Selected Articles

Figure 2 presents the graphical representation of the common study methods used in the selected articles. The result shows that most studies are quantitative, while an equal proportion are qualitative and mixed methods.

Research Question 2: What are the educational settings of Mathematics teachers in the selected articles?

Table 3: Education Settings of Teachers in Selected Articles

Settings	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	2	18.17
Secondary	7	63.63
Tertiary	2	18.17

Table 3 presents the result of the number of selected articles based on the school setting the study was conducted. It could be observed that 18.17% of the articles foster studies conducted in primary schools, 63.63% in the secondary school setting, and 18.17% in higher education settings. It could be seen that the majority of the studies in the articles were conducted at the secondary school level.

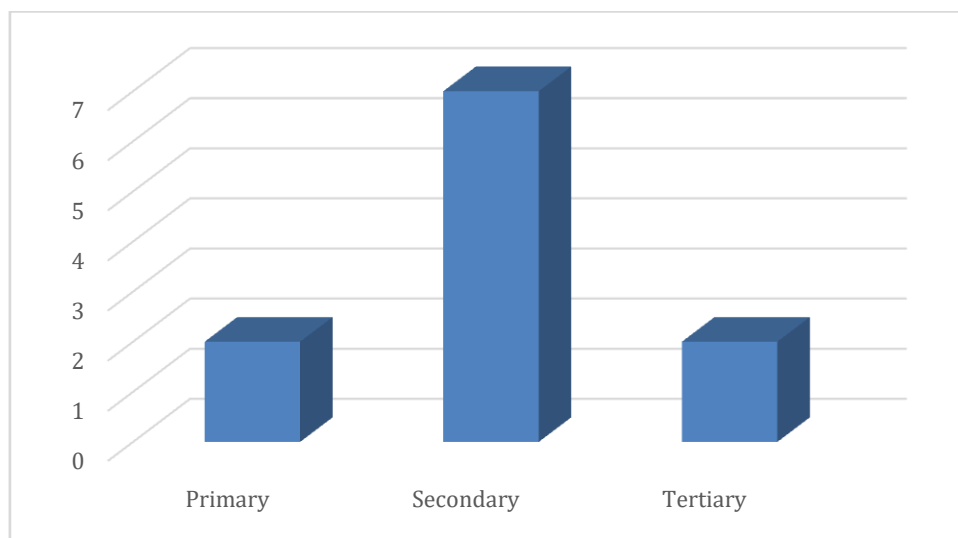


Figure 3: Education Settings Where the Studies in Selected Articles Were Conducted

Figure 3 shows the education settings where the studies in the selected articles were conducted. The pictorial representation shows that an equal proportion of the articles reported were conducted at the primary and tertiary institutions level, while the proportion of studies reported for secondary school schools is more than other levels of education.

Research Question 3: What are the geographical distributions of Mathematics teachers in the selected articles?

Table 4: Geographical Settings of Teachers in the Selected Articles

Geographical Settings	Frequency	Percentage
China	2	18.17
Israel	1	9.09
Norway	1	9.09
Pakistan	1	9.09
Philippines	1	9.09
USA	3	27.27
UK	1	9.09
Mexico	1	9.09

Table 4 presents the result of the geographical setting where the studies in the selected articles were conducted. The result shows that 27.27% of the studies were conducted in the United States, 18.17% in China, and 9.09% in other countries. The graphical illustration of the setting where the studies in the selected articles were conducted is represented in Figure 2.

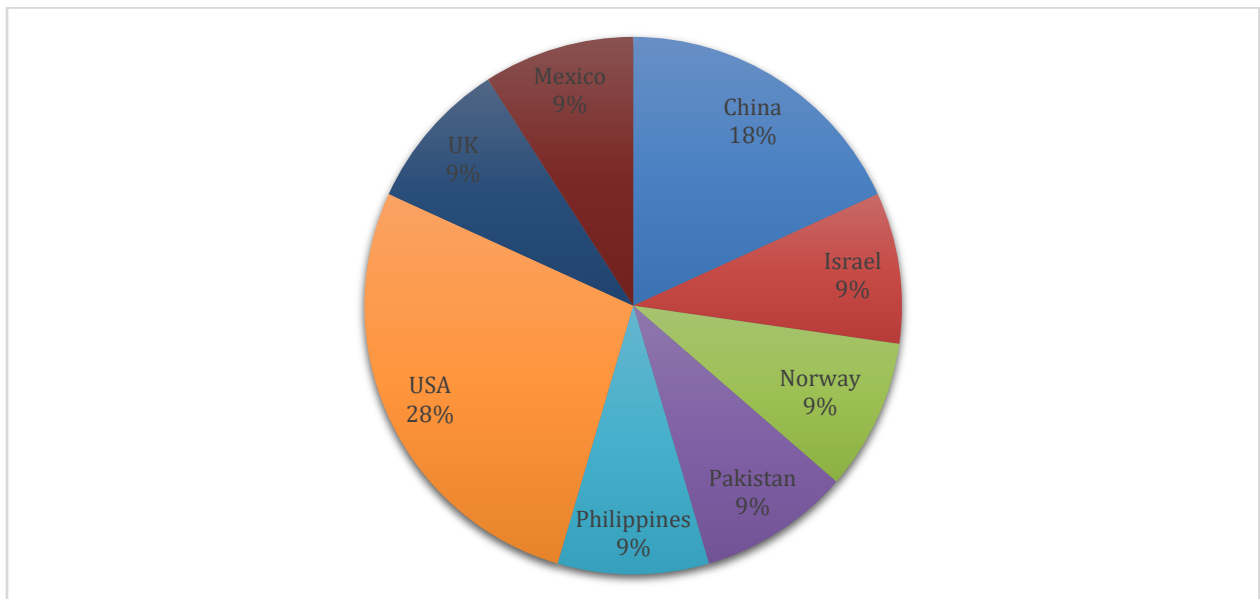


Figure 4: Geographical Setting of the Studies in the Selected Articles

The pictorial representation in Figure 2 shows that most of the studies in the selected articles were conducted in the USA, followed by China and other countries.

Research Question 4: What is the gender distribution of the participants in the selected articles?

Table 5: Gender Distributions of the Participants in the Selected Articles

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	0	0.0
Female	2	18.18
Both	9	81.81

Table 5 shows the result of the analysis conducted to know whether most studies on mathematics teachers' work-life balance are feminine or masculine. The result revealed that 18.81% of the studies were conducted on both genders, while 18.18% were conducted on female teachers.

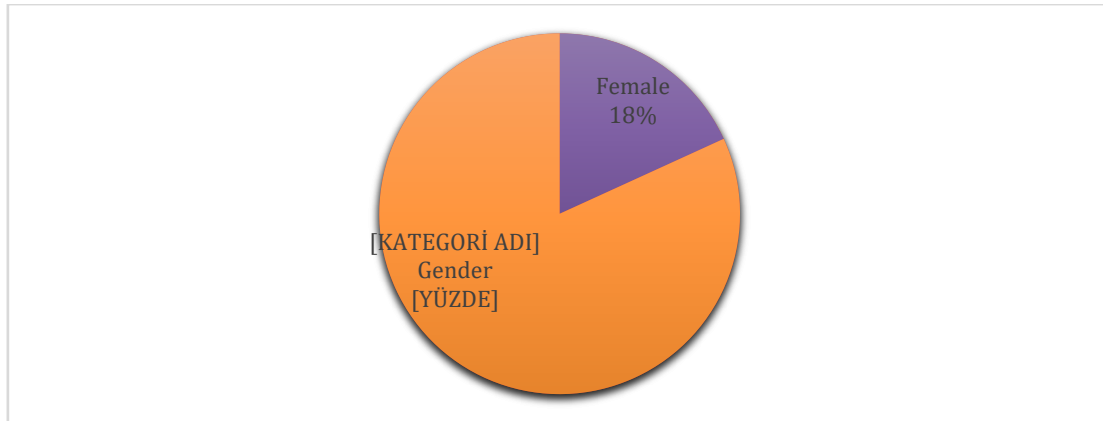


Figure 5: Participants of the Studies in the Selected Articles by Gender

Figure 5 shows the result of the pictorial representation of studies conducted on mathematics teachers' work-life balance based on gender. It could be observed that a more significant proportion of the study was conducted on both genders; 18% focused on females, while no known study was male-focused. The result indicates a dearth of studies investigating male mathematics teachers' work-life balances.

Research Question 5: What strategies are employed in the thematic areas investigated on the work-life balance among Mathematics teachers?

Table 6: Strategies Employed in the Thematic Areas Investigated on the work-life balance

Authors & year	Stress	Emotion	Anxiety	Well-being	Performance	Job Satisfaction
Mujtaba et al. (2013)	√					
Mandt (2020)		√				
Jian et al. (2023)	√					
Patkin & Greenstei (2020)			√			
Fisher & Royster (2016)	√					
Hafeez & Akbar (2015)						√
Banerjee et al. (2021)					√	
Quintana et al. (2019)				√	√	
Hwang (2022)						√
Martínez (2019)		√				
Cheng-Lin et al. (2020)	√					

Table 6 presents the result of the analysis conducted on the selected articles on the thematic areas investigated alongside the work-life balance of mathematics teachers. The result revealed that six themes, namely: Stress, Anxiety, Performance, Emotion, Job satisfaction, and Well-being, were investigated. The findings and discussions on the six themes were presented as follows:

3.5.1 Work-Life Balance and Stress among Mathematics Teachers

The analysis of the selected articles shows that four articles foster studies on the work-life balance of Mathematics teachers and stress. For instance, Mujtaba et al. (2013) reported that teachers with appropriate stress-coping mechanisms and access to professional and personal support could produce desirable teaching output. Also, Jian et al. (2023) reported that enhancing teachers' well-being significantly reduced stress levels. More so, Fisher & Royster (2016) submitted that different schools have different inherent stress levels and that as teachers, they used several mechanisms for reducing stress, while Cheng-Lin et al. (2020) reported that the adverse effect of stress and job burnout is strengthened by both employee agility and Leader-Member Change Quality (LMCQ). The result of the review indicates that stress is the central thematic area in the analysis of Mathematics teachers' work-life balance.

3.5.2 Work-life Balance and the Emotion of Mathematics Teachers

The analysis of the selected articles shows that only two out of eleven articles foster themes of work-life balance and emotions of Mathematics teachers. Among their findings is an emerging identity towards a reformed mathematics teacher when analyzing the participants' emotions, well-being, and flourishing (Mandt, 2020). Another result also revealed that students' behavior in the classroom has an essential impact on teachers' emotional experiences (Martínez-Sierra et al., 2019). This indicated that for effective reform in the teaching of mathematics to be achieved, factors influencing mathematics teachers' emotions must be considered.

3.5.3 Work-life Balance and Job Satisfaction of Mathematics Teachers

The reviewed articles show two of eleven reported findings on mathematics teachers' work-life balance and job satisfaction. It could be observed that the result on mathematics teachers' work-life balance and job satisfaction is mixed. Among the findings reported was that schools' work-life balance had no impact on teacher's job satisfaction (Hafeez & Akbar, 2015) and that Mathematics teachers with very low job satisfaction and high stress were less likely to implement dialogic instruction compared to teachers in other profiles (Hwang, 2022). Therefore, it could be concluded that the influence of work-life balance on mathematics teachers' job satisfaction is not absolute.

3.5.4 Work-life Balance, Teachers' Well-being and Performance

Based on the result of the review, it could be observed that only one selected article fosters a theme on the mathematic teachers' well-being while two articles are on teachers' performance. It was reported that Teachers' well-being was significantly reduced by increasing stress levels (Jian et al., 2023). This shows that increasing level of stress reduces the well-being of mathematics teachers. However, Quintana et al. (2019) submitted that having so much to do in the class interferes with their personal interests and teachers' performance. This is an indication that teachers' well-being and performance covary but could be retard by stressors.

3.5.5 Work-life Balance, Mathematics Teachers' Anxiety and Interest

From Table 1, it could be observed that only one article fosters mathematics teachers' anxiety and their interest in teaching, respectively. The two studies were conducted on female teachers, indicating that anxiety and interest of female mathematics teachers are important areas when investigating the work-life balance. Among the result was that teachers' experience of stress is associated with mathematics teaching anxiety (Patkin & Greenstein, 2020). It was also reported that the importance of interest in and perceived value of STEM subjects was seen above classroom experience and work-life conflict. This implies that mathematics teachers' interest in mathematics will overcome all possible obstacles associated with work-life balance and classroom duties (Banerjee, 2021).

4. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Striking a sense of balance between an individual's work and personal life has become a dilemma among employees (Hafeez & Akbar, 2015; Varatharaj and Vedanta, 2012). Hence, searching for equilibrium remains daunting because if employees can balance work and family life, it will enhance organizational productivity and job satisfaction (Varatharaj and Vedanta, 2012). Work-life balance seems more important in teaching than in other professions because teaching is the heart and fulcrum of education that nurtures the young into active and valuable citizens (Hafeez & Akbar, 2015; Parma & Reddy, 2014). However, long hours of working, workload, administrative tasks, subject-designing, and lesson note preparation tend to keep teachers under pressure, which further creates an imbalance between private and professional life (Hafeez & Akbar, 2015; Nadeem & Abbas, 2009) while the work-life balance of Mathematics teachers is more complicated due to unique stressors at work such as the difficulty of the subject, high level of anxiety, trouble in getting materials to use in teaching and so on (Karakus et al., 2021).

This systematic review evaluates the effectiveness of practices/strategies employed in enhancing work-life balance among Mathematics teachers. Of the 99 studies identified, 11 studies met the predetermined inclusion criteria. The findings provide critical insight into strategies employed by Mathematics teachers in mitigating stress induced by an imbalance in private and professional lives. It was established that access to professional and personal support was identified as a necessary strategy that acted as a stress-coping mechanism and produced desirable teaching output (Mujtaba et al., 2013). In the same vein, Jian et al. (2023) and Fisher & Royster (2016) as well reported that schools employed coping mechanism strategies that significantly reduced stress levels and enhanced teachers' well-being which included reducing Mathematics teachers' workload moderately, provision of adequate technical support needs, creating teachers' sense of professional identity and catering for teachers' mental health well-being. Other mitigating strategies for stress and job burnout reported by Cheng-Lin et al. (2020) are employee agility and Leader-Member Change Quality (LMCQ). A conclusion could be drawn that stress is a central thematic area that arises from the Mathematics teachers' work-life balance analysis.

Moreso, it could be gleaned from the two selected articles that emotion is an important thematic area that influences Mathematics teachers' work-life balance. Hence, it could be deduced that factors influencing mathematics teachers' emotions must be considered and catered for to achieve effective reform in mathematics teaching. Such a factor is students' classroom behavior, which impacts teachers' emotional experiences (Martínez-Sierra et al., 2019). The analysis further shows that two out of eleven articles foster themes on work-life balance and job satisfaction of Mathematics teachers. Thus, it could be concluded that the influence of work-life balance on mathematics teachers' job satisfaction is not absolute (Hafeez & Akbar, 2015; Hwang, 2022).

Furthermore, an article that fosters a theme on Mathematics teachers' well-being reported that increasing stress levels reduce the well-being of mathematics teachers (Jian et al., 2023), while Quintana et al. (2019) added that high workload impacts teachers' performance. The conclusion could be drawn that stressors negatively affect teachers' well-being and performance. Another related theme that emanated from the selected articles is work-life balance and Mathematics teachers' anxiety and interest. The result shows that teachers' experience of stress is associated with mathematics teaching anxiety (Patkin & Greenstein, 2020), while mathematics teachers' interest in the subject will overcome all possible obstacles associated with work-life balance and classroom situations (Banerjee, 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

We reviewed articles on work-life balance strategies among Mathematics teachers. Finding equilibrium between science and mathematics teachers' private and professional lives has become a great concern due to excessive workload and other academic tasks, which induce stress and anxiety. The selected articles revealed some coping mechanism strategies, including moderately reducing Mathematics teachers' workload, providing adequate technical support needs, creating teachers' sense of professional identity, and catering for teachers' mental health and well-being. Hence, the conclusion could be drawn from the selected studies that themes such as stress, anxiety, emotion, interest, performance, well-being, and job satisfaction influence the work-life balance of Mathematics teachers. This review has contributed to the body of knowledge and could be extended to STEM to understand STEM teachers' work-life balance.

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Competing interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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