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Life Beyond the Classroom: Concept of Well-Lived Lives Among Filipino High School Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Defining a well-lived life among educators extends beyond professional accomplishments. For high school teachers in the Philippines, this concept is deeply intertwined with their roles in nurturing young minds and shaping the future amidst systemic challenges. This phenomenological qualitative study delves into understanding the experiences and determinants of a well-lived life for these educators, looking beyond their classroom responsibilities. Six (6) Filipino junior high school teachers from the City of Balanga National High School, representing a range of demographics and experiences, were selected through purposive sampling to participate in semi-structured interviews. Data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), revealing five (5) dichotomous themes: "Service vs. Self," which emphasizes altruism and selflessness alongside autonomy and individuality; "Endurance vs. Exhaustion," highlighting resilience in the face of stress and burnout; "Optimism vs. Obstacles," focusing on maintaining a positive mindset while navigating negative influences; "Clarity vs. Confusion," emphasizing the importance of purpose and direction amidst challenges; and "Spirituality vs. Security," demonstrating the role of faith alongside material concerns. These results suggest that support mechanisms and policies need to be tailored to acknowledge and enhance teachers' holistic well-being beyond the classroom. By creating environments that prioritize mental, emotional, and spiritual health along with professional development, educational institutions can promote sustainable teacher satisfaction and, in turn, enhance educational outcomes nationwide.

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of a well-lived life is a universal aspiration that transcends cultural boundaries. Rooted in positive psychology, this concept encompasses various dimensions such as positive emotions, meaningful engagement, nurturing relationships, accomplishment, and connection to something greater than oneself (Falzon, 2023; Lee & Ahn, 2021; Jankowski *et al.*, 2020; Keyes, 2020). These dimensions form the bedrock of a fulfilling existence, providing individuals with a sense of purpose and satisfaction.

A substantial body of literature suggests that many dimensions are interrelated and together promote a well-lived life. Research indicates that experiencing positive emotions like joy, gratitude, and contentment correlates with higher life satisfaction and overall well-being (Kerry *et al.*, 2023). Similarly, involvement in meaningful activities, whether professional, personal, or relational, fosters a sense of purpose and fulfillment (Kashdan & McKnight, 2023). Furthermore, fostering nurturing relationships, marked by trust, support, and intimacy, significantly contributes to subjective well-being and psychological flourishing (Mertika *et al.*, 2020). Likewise, achieving meaningful goals leads to a sense of competence and self-efficacy, thereby enhancing overall life satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2020). Finally, connecting to something greater, be it through spirituality, community engagement, or a sense of belonging, adds depth and purpose to life

(Haim-Litevsky *et al.*, 2023).

For educators, this quest for a well-lived life takes on added significance. They stand at the forefront of shaping young minds, molding future generations, and thereby, influencing the trajectory of society itself (Granziera *et al.*, 2023). Research indicates that teachers who experience higher levels of well-being are more likely to create positive classroom environments, foster stronger teacher-student relationships, and facilitate enhanced student engagement and academic achievement (Hascher & Waber, 2021). In another research by Zou *et al.* (2023), they found a significant correlation between teacher well-being and student motivation, with students of happier and more fulfilled teachers demonstrating higher levels of intrinsic motivation and academic performance.

Furthermore, there's a growing emphasis on integrating socio-cultural perspectives into the study of educators' well-being. Studies conducted by Zakaria *et al.* (2021) and Ola-a (2022) highlights the unique cultural values and contextual factors that shape the well-being experiences of teachers in diverse cultural settings. Hence, the importance of exploring the well-lived lives of teachers, especially in the Filipino context, cannot be overstated.

Teachers in the Philippines face multifaceted challenges, ranging from resource constraints and overcrowded classrooms to societal expectations and cultural norms (UNESCO, 2023). Additionally, the rapidly evolving educational policies and pedagogical approaches further

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compound the complexities faced by teachers in the country (Grimus, 2020). Despite these challenges, Filipino teachers continue to exhibit resilience and dedication in their vocation, striving to provide quality education amidst adversities (Subosa, 2020). Research in this area is crucial not only for understanding the experiences of Filipino teachers but also for informing policy and practice aimed at enhancing teacher well-being and, by extension, the quality of education in the Philippines. Therefore, this study aims to explore the concept of well-lived lives among Filipino junior high school teachers, seeking to understand how they perceive and experience well-being and fulfillment in both personal and professional lives. By delving into their lived experiences, the study aims to identify factors contributing to their overall well-being and satisfaction, as well as barriers hindering their sense of fulfillment.

This research has the following objectives:

1. Explore the perceptions and determinants of a well-lived life among Filipino high school teachers; and
2. Examine the barriers to achieving a well-lived life among Filipino high school teachers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This qualitative study employs a phenomenological research design to delve into the lived experiences of Filipino high school teachers regarding what they consider a well-lived life. According to Naeem *et al.* (2023), this method enables researchers to uncover the intricate meanings and nuances embedded within the narratives of the participants, facilitating a rich exploration of the phenomenon under investigation.

Specifically, this study adopted Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as its guiding framework, following the methodological approach outlined by Smith and Nizza (2022). IPA aligns perfectly with qualitative psychology's core principle of delving

into individual experiences and how participants make sense of them within their specific contexts. Unlike quantitative methods seeking generalizable results, IPA prioritizes understanding the unique perspectives of each participant through an idiographic focus (Emery & Anderman, 2020). Moreover, embracing the concept of the double hermeneutic, IPA acknowledges the researcher's role in interpreting how participants perceive their experiences. This creates a reciprocal process of meaning-making (Barton, 2020).

Research Participants

The participants for this study were selected using a purposive sampling method, specifically designed to target individuals who met the predetermined criteria essential for the research objectives (Campbell *et al.*, 2020). Inclusion criteria for participation encompassed Filipino citizenship and ethnicity, full-time employment as junior high school teachers in the City of Balanga National High School, a minimum of five years of teaching experience in junior high school, age 25 and above, fluency in either English or Filipino, willingness to engage in an in-depth interview, and a Fulfilled Life Scale (FLS) score of 80 or above — indicating a high level of life fulfillment. Exclusion criteria included holding administrative or non-teaching positions and having a close association with the research team to mitigate potential biases.

To note, there is an equal representation of both genders and spanning different life stages: early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood. This intentional selection aimed to ensure diversity among participants and capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives regarding the concept of well-lived lives among Filipino junior high school teachers. Each participant's unique background and experiences contribute to the richness and depth of the data collected, allowing for a comprehensive exploration

Table 1: Robotfoto of Participants

Selections	Age (Group)	Sex	Years in Teaching	Marital Status	Current Position	Religion	Monthly Income	FLS Score
Teacher 1	36 (Early)	Male	14	Single	Master Teacher I	Roman Catholic	₱ 48,000	87
Teacher 2	48 (Middle)	Male	12	Married	Teacher I	Roman Catholic	₱ 29,000	80
Teacher 3	53 (Late)	Male	31	Single	Teacher I	Roman Catholic	₱ 25,000	91
Teacher 4	34 (Early)	Female	10	Single	Teacher III	Roman Catholic	₱ 33,000	89
Teacher 5	41 (Middle)	Female	17	Single	Master Teacher III	Iglesia ni Cristo	₱ 40,000	100
Teacher 6	55 (Late)	Female	14	Separated	Teacher III	Latter Day Saint	₱ 33,093	93

Research Instruments

This study employed three key instruments: the robotfoto, the Fulfilled Life Scale (FLS), and a semi-structured interview guide. The robotfoto collected demographic information to provide a contextual background for

each participant. To assess the extent of well-lived lives experienced by the participants, the Fulfilled Life Scale (FLS) was used as a screening tool; participants needed to score 80 or above to be included in the study. Developed by Baumann and Ruch (2022), the FLS evaluates both

cognitive and affective dimensions of life fulfillment. Finally, an expert-validated semi-structured interview guide facilitated in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences of well-being and fulfillment, using open-ended questions to capture detailed qualitative data.

Data Gathering Procedure

Participants were carefully selected to include a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. The study included six participants from City of Balanga National High School: one male and one female aged 20-33 (early adults), one male and one female aged 34-46 (middle adults), and one male and one female aged 47-60 (late adults).

They were provided informed consent before completing the Fulfilled Life Scale (FLS) as a screening measure to judiciously assess their eligibility for the study. Those scoring 80 or above out of 100 were deemed eligible and subsequently contacted for participation. From the pool of eligible candidates, six participants were selected based on qualification, availability and willingness to engage in 45-60 minutes semi-structured interviews. These interviews, conducted the following day, were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and fidelity of data. Guided by a set of semi-structured questions, participants shared their perceptions and experiences regarding well-lived lives as Filipino junior high school teachers. Upon completion of data gathering, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, allowing for a detailed analysis through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This process facilitated the identification of common themes and patterns within the participants' narratives. After collecting and analysing the data, the research team returned to the research locale to express gratitude and present tokens of appreciation to the participants for their essential contributions to the study. Furthermore, during this visit, the researchers presented the research findings to the school administration and other key stakeholders. This interaction provided a better understanding of the research findings and their potential consequences for educational practices and policies.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were presented with detailed information regarding the objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study. They were also given the opportunity to ask questions and clarify any concerns before voluntarily agreeing to participate. Moreover, participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any repercussions. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained

throughout the research process to safeguard the privacy of the participants. Moreso, the researchers reduce harm by being sensitive to the personal and emotional nature of conversations, allowing participants to skip questions or withdraw if they feel uncomfortable, as suggested by Smith (2024). Following the data collection phase, participants were debriefed to address any potential discomforts or uncertainties they may have experienced during their involvement. They were encouraged to provide feedback and express any concerns, ensuring that their well-being remained a paramount consideration throughout the study.

Data Analysis

To ensure accurate and in-depth analysis, all interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then meticulously analyzed using a bottom-up approach, wherein codes and themes were derived directly from the data rather than imposing pre-existing theories (Loubere, 2017). This involved a rigorous process of reviewing and coding transcripts to identify recurring patterns and themes that captured the essence of participants' experiences and how they attributed meaning to them. Subsequently, these themes were organized into higher-order, superordinate categories to provide a comprehensive understanding of their well-lived lives.

Reflexivity is central to IPA research (Peddle, 2021). Hence, the researchers acknowledged and addressed any potential biases or preconceptions that could influence data interpretation. The analysis's credibility was strengthened by spending prolonged time with the pool of research participants. Transparency is also ensured throughout the research process, which included providing contextual details (refer to Table 1) regarding the participants and the research methodology. Additionally, cross-validation and an independent audit were employed to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, methodologies that are supported by Lamb *et al.* (2021).

Results

Following the analysis, the researchers identified six superordinate themes, each with two contrasting subordinate themes, along with associated keywords and issues, as presented in Table 2. These themes are not just about positive versus negative contrasts; they represent the balance of complex and often conflicting forces that teachers navigate daily in their pursuit of a fulfilling professional and personal life. This dichotomy underscores the challenges teachers face and the resilience required to navigate them effectively.

Table 2: Themes Emerged

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes	Keywords and Issues
1. Service vs. Self	1.1. Being Altruistic and Selfless	Helping others, service, altruism, selflessness.
	1.2. Exercising Autonomy and Individuality	Work-life balance, self-care, fulfillment, choice.

2. Endurance vs. Exhaustion	2.1. Being Resilient and Persistent	Resilience, determination, persistence, faith.
	2.2. Experiencing Stress and Burnout	Burnout, stress, exhaustion, hidden struggles.
3. Optimism vs. Obstacles	3.1. Having a Positive Mindset and Attitude	Positivity, gratitude, optimism, resilience.
	3.2. Facing Negative Influences and Barriers	Enduring hardships, poverty, lack of motivation, lack of support
4. Clarity vs. Confusion	4.1. Setting Purpose and Achieving Goals	Purpose, goals, mission, motivation
	4.2. Losing Purpose and Direction	Disillusionment, lack of direction, complacency, reflection.
5. Spirituality vs. Security	5.1. Practicing Faith and Spirituality	Faith, spirituality, belief, divine guidance.
	5.2. Handling Practical and Material Needs	Financial stability, material success, provision, necessities.

Service Vs. Self

Filipino high school teachers perceive a well-lived life as a balance between altruism and self-care. While they find fulfillment to be of service to others and impacting students' lives positively, they also recognize the need to prioritize their self and well-being.

Being Altruistic and Selfless

This theme encompasses codes related to the tendency of Filipino teachers to prioritize the welfare of others over their own interests, embodying acts of kindness and generosity towards students, colleagues, and communities. Teachers often see their role as extending beyond academics, impacting students' lives positively through guidance and support. As articulated by some of the teachers:

“Nagiging makabuluhan ang buhay ng isang tao... kung hindi lang sarili ang iniisip. Nagiging makabuluhan siya kung nagiging makabuluhan din tayo sa ibang tao.” (A person's life becomes meaningful... if they don't only think of themselves. It becomes meaningful when we also become meaningful to others.) —Teacher 4

“Ang pangunahing role ng isang guro ay hindi lamang magturo ng aralin na nasa libro. Kun'di para ma-inspire ang mga bata. Mahalaga na maging inspirasyon ka sa kanila.” (The primary role of a teacher is not just to teach lessons found in books. Rather, it is to inspire children. It's important to be an inspiration to them.) —Teacher 1

“Palagi akong babalik sa mga bata na mas kailangan ako. Kahit sa simpleng bagay natutulungan ko sila. Nakikita ko ang malaking growth nila at proud ako na naging bahagi ako no'n.” (I always remind myself that I am needed more by the children. Even in simple things, I am able to help them. I see their significant growth, and I am proud to have been a part of that.) —Teacher 5

Exercising Autonomy and Individuality

This theme focuses on the importance of expressing the importance of autonomy in their teaching practices, while possessing their unique identities and decisions in life. This theme reflects the idea that to effectively care for others,

teachers must also prioritize their health and happiness. It includes efforts to maintain mental and physical health and pursue personal goals and interests, which contribute to overall life satisfaction and fulfillment. As expressed by several teachers:

“Iniisip ko kung paano na ‘yan kapag nagretiro ako, hahanapin ko talaga ang pagtuturo kasi ‘yun ang buhay ko at masaya ako.” (I'm thinking about how it will be when I retire, I will really seek teaching because that is my life and I am happy.) —Teacher 3

“Even though pinipilit nila ako (mag-masteral), ininvest ko yung time ko hindi para mag-aral ng masteral. Ininvest ko yung time sa ibang pagkakataon which is sa tingin ko mas pinakinabangan ko.” (Even though they are pressuring me (to pursue a master's), I invested my time not to study for a master's. I invested my time in other opportunities which I think benefited me more.) —Teacher 2

“Iniisip ko sana na meron akong pamilya... may asawa, may mga anak... minsan dumadating ako sa point na nalulungkot. Pero, lumilipas din yung panahon na ‘yon kasi feeling ko naman kahit wala... andiyan yung family ko, mga kaibigan ko, mga estudyante ko.” (I hoped that I will have a family... a spouse, children... sometimes I reach a point of sadness. But, that feeling also passes because I feel that even without them... my family, friends, and students are there.) —Teacher 5

Endurance Vs. Exhaustion

Teachers demonstrate resilience and endurance in their profession, viewing challenges as opportunities for growth. However, they also experience significant stress and exhaustion due to heavy workloads and high expectations, highlighting the need for effective coping strategies and support systems to achieve well-lived life.

Being Resilient and Persistent

This theme captures the teachers' ability to endure and thrive despite challenges. It underscores the determination and strength required to remain dedicated to teaching in the face of various obstacles, showcasing the teachers' commitment to their students and their profession. As

noted by participants:

“Kung ikaw ay talagang desididong maging maayos ang buhay mo, katulad ko... Nanggaling kami sa hirap. Kaya nagpursige ako.” (If you are truly determined to improve your life, like me... We came from hardship. That’s why I persevered.) —Teacher 3

“Natututo ka ring mag-plano eh. Paano next year, ano kaya ang susunod na gagawin? May learning naman din sa challenges para maging makabuluhan ang buhay.” (You’re also learning to plan. What about next year, what will you do next? There’s also learning from challenges to make life meaningful.) —Teacher 4

“Habang tumatagal pala, humahaba na rin ang pasensya mo... ako na lang ang lumalabas ng room para hindi ko mailabas yung galit ko sa mga estudyante.” (It seems that one’s patience is growing over time... I’m the one who leaves the room now so I don’t release my anger on the students.) —Teacher 6

Experiencing Stress and Burnout

This theme addresses the negative aspects of the teaching profession, revealing the high-pressure environment teachers often face. This theme highlights the emotional and physical toll of teaching, including long hours, high expectations, and the emotional burden of student needs. It emphasizes the need for support systems and strategies to manage and mitigate stress to maintain teachers’ well-being and effectiveness. As highlighted by teachers:

“Minsan may time na nai-stress ka sa mga bagay. Minsan nadadamay pati yung life mo.” (Sometimes there are times when you get stressed about things. Sometimes even your life gets affected.) —Teacher 6

“Napagod ako ngayon buong taon. Stress na stress ako sa kanila. Kasi sila yung section na nagsama-sama yung absenteeism... nasasayang ang effort mo.” (I’m exhausted this whole year. I’m very stressed because of them. They’re the section where absenteeism is rampant... your efforts go to waste.) —Teacher 4

“May mga times na nakapagod ang trabaho. Pero kailangan kong pumasok... dahil may mga estudyante ako.” (There are times when the job gets tiring. But I need to go to work... because I have students.) —Teacher 5

Optimism Vs. Obstacles

Maintaining an optimistic mindset and attitude is crucial for teachers, helping them navigate difficulties and find meaning in their work. Nonetheless, they face negative influences and obstacles such as lack of support and systemic issues that can hinder their well-being and motivation.

Having a Positive Mindset and Attitude

This theme centers on maintaining an optimistic outlook despite challenges. This theme demonstrates that teachers who focus on positivity and gratitude are better equipped to handle stress and find joy in their daily lives, reinforcing the importance of mental and emotional well-being. As mentioned by some educators:

“Attitude... ang magdadala sa kanya doon (sa makabuluhang buhay). Kahit mahirap ka, pero if you have a positive attitude, and you are a hard worker, ma-achieve mo rin ang gusto mo.” (Attitude... will lead him there (to a meaningful life). Even if you are facing hardships, but if you have a positive attitude and you are a hard worker, you will achieve what you want.) —Teacher 2

“Kailangan laging positive tayo, para hindi natin maramdaman na walang kabuluhan yung buhay mo dito sa mundo.” (We always need to stay positive, so we don’t feel like our life here in this world is meaningless) —Teacher 6

“Kailangan positibo ka lang. Lahat ng problema matatapos din... iisipin ko rin, hindi lang ako yung gan’tong may problema. Meron ding mga adviser na ganu’n ang problema.” (You just need to stay positive. All problems will eventually end... I also think, I’m not the only one facing such problems. There are advisers who have similar issues.) —Teacher 4

Facing Negative Influences and Barriers

This theme captures the external and internal factors that hinder teachers’ well-being and success. This theme emphasizes the need to address these barriers to support teachers in their professional and personal lives, ensuring they can thrive and achieve a well-lived life. As told by participants:

“May epekto ang kahirapan sa buhay ng tao. Kasi pag mahirap ka, hindi ka na nakapag-aral. Kapag hindi ka na nakapag-aral, syempre isipin mo nalang, mag-pamilya ka nalang o mag-asawa ka nalang. Lalong nagiging mahirap ang buhay.” (Poverty has an impact on people’s lives. Because if you are poor, you can’t afford to study. If you can’t study anymore, you might just think of starting a family or getting married. Life becomes even harder.) —Teacher 4

“Mahirap na malagay sa ganu’ng sitwasyon... yung mga taong wasted na... kasi may bisyo. Yung kahit na mas marami sana silang magagawa... may mas maganda sana silang kinabukasan, pero hindi nila yun nagawa.” (It’s difficult to be in that kind of situation... those people who have wasted their lives... because of vices. Even though they could have done more... they could have had a better future, but they didn’t do it.) —Teacher 5

“Sa totoo lang, kahit may gawin ka o wala, mayroon at mayroong masasabi ang ibang tao tungkol sa iyo. Iyan ang natutunan ko habang nagtatrabaho. Gawin mo man ang tama o mali, may sasabihin sila.” (Honestly, whether you do something or not, other people will always have something to say about you. That’s what I’ve learned while working. Whether you do right or wrong, they will have something to say.) —Teacher 1

Clarity Vs. Confusion

Having a clear sense of purpose and well-defined goals contributes to teachers’ sense of a well-lived life. Conversely, periods of confusion and loss of direction can lead to disillusionment and decreased job satisfaction,

emphasizing the importance of professional guidance and goal setting.

Setting Purpose and Achieving Goals

This theme reflects the teachers' sense of direction and motivation in their careers. This theme shows that having clear goals and a sense of mission is vital for teachers to find satisfaction and drive in their profession. It underscores the fulfillment derived from contributing to student growth and societal betterment through education. As explained by teachers:

"Kapag mayroong layunin ang isang tao, alam niya kung ano ang tutunguhin niya sa buhay. Ang layunin ay nagbibigay ng direksyon kung saan tayo papunta." (When a person has a goal, they know where they are headed in life. Goals provide direction towards our destination.) —Teacher 5

"May makabuluhang pamumuhay s'ya kasi alam n'ya 'yung direksyon ng pupuntahan." (Her life is meaningful because she knows the direction she's heading.) —Teacher 3

"Naniniwala pa rin ako na kahit na hindi maayos ang pinanggalingan, tayo pa rin ay may karapatang pumili kung anong landas ang tatahakin natin para maging makabuluhan ang buhay." (I still believe that despite our imperfect beginnings, we still have the right to choose the path that will make our lives meaningful.) —Teacher 4

Losing Purpose and Direction

This theme captures moments when teachers struggle to find meaning in their work. This theme is significant as it addresses the periods when teachers may feel disconnected from their professional identity and goals, emphasizing the importance of support and reflection to rediscover their passion and direction. As conveyed by educators:

"Manghihinayang ka lang sa mga ganong tao. Bakit satisfied na sila sa buhay nilang gano'n? Parang walang ambition." (You'll just feel sorry for those kinds of people. Why are they satisfied with that kind of life? It's like they have no ambition.) —Teacher 6

"Malaking factor yung sinasabi ng magulang sa anak, lalo na kung hindi sila naga-guide ng maayos. Kaya para sa akin, yung pinagmulan ng bata ang nagiging dahilan kung bakit hindi sila nagiging makabuluhan ang buhay." (What parents tell their children is a major factor, especially if they are not guiding them properly. That's why, for me, the upbringing of a child becomes the reason why their lives don't become meaningful.) —Teacher 4

"Kung wala siyang goal, para lang yung... kung saan ka na lang ayain. S'yempre, 'di mo alam kung anong daan ang tatahakin mo kasi 'di mo naman alam kung saan ka pupunta... ang tendency, maligaw." (If he doesn't have a goal, it's like... you're just invited anywhere. Of course, you don't know which path to take because you don't know where you're going... the tendency is to get lost.) —Teacher 5

Spirituality Vs. Security

Spirituality plays a huge role in teachers' lives, providing strength and purpose. At the same time, practical concerns such as financial stability and tangible needs are essential for their overall sense of security and life satisfaction. Balancing these aspects is vital for their holistic well-being.

Practicing Faith and Spirituality

This theme highlights the role of spiritual beliefs in shaping teachers' lives and careers. This theme indicates that many teachers draw on their faith to navigate challenges and find meaning in their work, viewing their profession as a calling and a way to live out their spiritual values. As shared by some participants:

"Ganoon kami eh. Laging nasa simbahan, at kapag hindi makapunta, nanonood kami online ng mga misa... Naniniwala ako na dapat lagi si Lord ang una bago ang lahat. Kasi ano pa ang mga tagumpay mo kung wala Siya?" (That's how we are. We're always in church, and when we can't go, we watch masses online... I believe that the Lord should always come first before anything else. Because what are your successes without Him?) —Teacher 3

"Kahit mahirap ang buhay, lagi akong nagdadasal na bigyan ako ng bagong umaga at bagong lakas." (Even though life is difficult, I always pray to be given a new morning and new strength.) —Teacher 5

"Yung definition ko para doon ay kung nailagay mo lahat ng buhay mo sa Diyos. Kasi walang kabuluhan ang buhay kung hindi mo Siya uunahin." (My definition for that is if you've placed your whole life in God. Because life is meaningless if you don't prioritize Him.) —Teacher 6

Handling Practical and Material Concerns

This theme addresses the security of financial and material aspects of teachers' lives; highlighting the practical realities teachers face, such as ensuring financial security for themselves and their families, which is crucial for their overall sense of tangible stability and contentment. As reported by some teachers:

"Yung nagawa ko na lahat ng gusto ko sa buhay, yung naibigay ko na lahat ng gusto ng magulang ko. Yung, 'Oh, stable na kami.'" (I've done everything I wanted in life, I've given my parents everything they wanted. 'Oh, we're stable now.') —Teacher 1

"I have my own house, my own car... I have my savings... masasabi ko na I lived a well life." (I have my own house, my own car... I have savings... I can say I lived a well life.) —Teacher 2

"Nagbibigay din ako ng pangangailangan sa pamilya ko. Kasi as a single parent, meron ako isang anak, ako talaga lahat (nagpoprovide)." (I also provide for my family's needs. Because as a single parent with one child, I'm the one who provides everything.) —Teacher 6

Simulacrum

A simulacrum is an image or representation of someone or

something that often presents a superficial likeness without capturing the essence of the original (Oxford, 2020). The simulacrum in the context of this study can be likened to an open book, a tool teachers often use in the classroom. It serves as a symbolic representation of the primary findings and contrasting themes observed. With its covers displaying contrasting imagery, the front cover (what people often see) symbolizes themes such as service, endurance, optimism, clarity and spirituality, representing the aspirational aspects of a “well-lived life.” Meanwhile, the back cover (what people do not often see) reveals words like exhaustion, obstacles, and confusion, symbolizing the challenges and obstacles that teachers encounter in their pursuit of fulfillment. The spine of the book prominently bears the phrase “well-lived life,” signifying the central focus of the study. Just like an open book that offers insights, the simulacrum provides a condensed yet meaningful snapshot of the experiences of Filipino high school teachers’ well-lived lives.

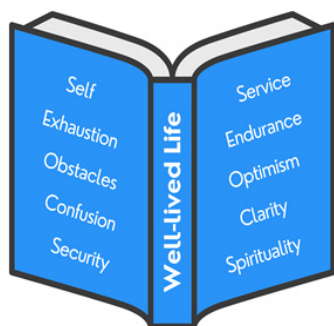


Figure 1: Simulacrum of Themes Emerged

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the concept of a well-lived life among Filipino high school teachers. After rigorous analysis of data, the findings revealed six themes that encapsulate the dichotomous forces shaping teachers’ perceptions, experiences, and determinants of a well-lived life.

First, Filipino high school teachers embody the ideal of service. Deeply invested in their students’ success and the betterment of their communities, they exemplify altruism (Santiago, 2023). This commitment extends far beyond just teaching. Their narratives reveal how they take on the roles of mentors, guides, and even surrogate family, as similarly perceived by Banderlipe (2022). It only proves their profound impact, shaping not just academic achievements but also fostering personal growth and resilience in their students. By prioritizing both academic development and community well-being, these teachers transcend their professional duties. They become significant contributors to society, shaping future generations equipped with both knowledge and compassion.

However, this dedication to service must be balanced with self-care. Research emphasizes the importance of self-care practices to prevent burnout in educators (Barrozo, *et al.* 2023). The teachers’ stories further emphasize the importance of work-life balance and pursuing personal

goals alongside professional achievements, as supported by research Manlongat, *et al.*, (2021). Aside from taking care of one’s self, individuality is also observed. As Teacher 1 poignantly states, “‘I’m not sure who should interpret your life as meaningful or not, other people who see it or you”, highlighting the subjective nature of fulfillment and the importance of individual perception. This perspective aligns with self-determination theory, which emphasizes autonomy as crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation and overall well-being (Guo, 2023). Second, the theme “Endurance vs. Exhaustion” highlights teachers’ resilience and determination in overcoming challenges. Their narratives reveal how personal adversity fuels their strength, enabling them to navigate professional obstacles. For example, one teacher stresses the importance of learning from mistakes and maintaining a strong work ethic (Teacher 2), while another underscores perseverance despite personal hardships (Teacher 3). These insights align with existing research on teacher resilience, emphasizing the role of intrinsic motivation and personal resolve in achieving meaningful life (Nwoko *et al.*, 2023). Filipino culture’s emphasis on family and community support also plays a crucial role in sustaining teachers through tough times (Go *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the Philippines’ demanding educational landscape fosters adaptability and resourcefulness among educators, who view setbacks as opportunities for growth and prioritize their students’ well-being amidst adversity (Cimene *et al.*, 2023).

Yet, previous research still points to the high levels of stress and burnout prevalent among Filipino teachers (Gomez, 2022). In our interviews, they expressed overwhelming pressure to meet familial expectations and prove themselves professionally, often leading to feelings of exhaustion and stress. This aligns with existing literature suggesting that educators worldwide encounter significant stressors, impacting their well-being and job satisfaction (Carroll *et al.*, 2022). Recent studies posit that societal expectations and economic pressures are among the common stressors for educators (Adom, 2020). In the context of the Philippines, where respect for educators is high but financial compensation and support are often inadequate (Abayon, 2024), teachers navigate a challenging landscape that affects their mental and emotional well-being. In the same point, the cultural value placed on education and the role of teachers as community pillars also contribute to heightened expectations and responsibilities, influencing their stress levels (Suttles, 2024).

Third, many teachers assert that they maintain an optimistic outlook even amidst obstacles. This resonates with research on the role of positivity in promoting well-being (Ekman & Simon, 2021). Positive emotions have been linked to improved psychological well-being, better coping strategies during stressful situations, and enhanced physical health outcomes. Research by Gallesopo (2021) suggests that optimism among Filipino educators serves as a coping mechanism in response to systemic challenges

within the education system, such as limited resources and bureaucratic constraints. By maintaining a positive outlook, teachers can mitigate stress and maintain morale, which is crucial for their effectiveness in the classroom. This perspective goes beyond optimism as a personal trait. It highlights its role as a strategic response to external pressures, reflecting broader research on the adaptive benefits of optimism in professional settings (Baker *et al.*, 2021).

Nonetheless, the study support the finding of solution for the systemic challenges confronting teachers, such as inadequate funding and overwhelming administrative duties, which require comprehensive support for resolution. Research emphasizes how these obstacles, including insufficient resources and excessive work demands, impede a teachers' ability to find fulfillment in their careers (Magallanes *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, these administrative burdens not only compromise the quality of education but also disrupt teachers' work-life balance. Not to mention, societal norms and expectations often undervalue the teaching profession, and may lead to disparities in recognition and compensation (Rocque *et al.*, 2020). Addressing these challenges necessitates policy reforms and community advocacy to elevate education as a societal priority, moving beyond mere optimism to concrete action (Caratiquit & Caratiquit, 2022).

Fourth, teachers find profound purpose and clarity in their work through witnessing their students' growth and achievements. This experience not only validates their efforts but also strengthens their dedication to education as a transformative force (Lu, 2021). Research indicates that educators who view their work as purposeful tend to have higher job satisfaction and resilience (Melesse & Belay, 2020). Participants expressed that this clarity guides their work and gives it meaning and fulfillment. One teacher noted, "Having a purpose helps a person know where they are headed in life," echoing literature on the motivational benefits of goal setting (Ortan *et al.*, 2021). Another emphasized resilience in facing challenges, saying, "You learn from them. What will I do next year? There's learning in challenges to make life meaningful." This perspective aligns with studies linking goal pursuit to adaptive coping (Hascher *et al.*, 2023).

Be that as it may, periods of disillusionment or uncertainty can arise, which aligns with research emphasizing the importance of a clear purpose for life satisfaction (Madigan & Kim, 2021). As noted by Teacher 6, there is lamentation over those satisfied with life without ambition, reflecting societal pressures and personal reflections on lacking direction. These insights resonate with literature on vocational identity and job satisfaction among Filipino educators (Dela Rosa, 2023), highlighting potential stress and reduced motivation without clear goals. Educational institutions can support teachers by helping them articulate personal and professional aspirations, fostering a conducive environment for career fulfillment and sustained commitment (Shankar & Nayaken, 2020). Cultivating purpose not only benefits teachers but also

enhances classroom dynamics and student outcomes, a consideration for policymakers (Stoloff *et al.*, 2020).

Lastly, in discussing "Practicing Faith and Spirituality" among Filipino high school teachers, it's clear their deep religious beliefs significantly influence their view of a fulfilling life. While spirituality's role in educators' lives is less explored in other cultures (King & Boyatzis, 2020), our findings highlight its importance in the Filipino context. Participants emphasize that faith grounds them spiritually and guides their teaching careers. They prioritize religious practices like regular church attendance and prayer for resilience in facing professional challenges. This commitment to faith shapes their values and actions, providing purpose and fulfillment in their roles (White, 2020). Research also suggests that such spiritual dedication enhances job satisfaction and emotional well-being, reinforcing their dedication to students and community (Kim *et al.*, 2021). This underscores how faith sustains teachers emotionally and informs their sense of fulfillment in teaching.

In addition to seeking spirituality, the importance of financial and material well-being is also evidenced to be imperative in having a well-lived life. Aligned with previous research, the role of economic security in overall life satisfaction is evident (Toropova *et al.*, 2021). The statements highlight their pursuit of economic security through tangible achievements such as homeownership, savings, and providing for their families. This perspective resonates with broader cultural values where practicality and material success are intertwined with personal fulfillment and societal expectations. Studies underscore that economic stability enhances overall life satisfaction by reducing stress and enabling individuals to meet their basic needs and long-term goals (Cheng *et al.*, 2020). Teacher 2's assertion about the peace derived from possessing material necessities underscores how financial security contributes to their sense of well-being (Wang & Zhang, 2021). These insights asserts how both spiritual fulfillment and economic stability play roles in achieving holistic satisfaction in life.

The findings of this study emphasize that a well-lived life for Filipino high school teachers is shaped by a balance between service, resilience, optimism, purpose, faith, and financial stability. While previous research highlights the significance of altruism and purpose in teaching, this study reveals a nuanced interplay between personal fulfillment and systemic challenges. It confirms existing literature on teacher resilience and motivation while shedding light on the role of spirituality and economic security as integral components of well-being. These insights suggest that a well-lived life in the teaching profession extends beyond passion for education—it necessitates structural support and societal recognition. Future research may explore how these factors interact over time and across different educational contexts.

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted in this study, as

they may impact the extent to which its findings can be generalized and applied. Firstly, the small sample size of six participants limits the generalizability of the results to a broader population of Filipino junior high school teachers. While qualitative research like interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) prioritizes depth, future studies should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample to enhance external validity.

Secondly, the use of purposive sampling introduces potential selection bias. By targeting participants who met specific criteria, valuable perspectives from teachers who do not fit these criteria or declined participation may have been overlooked. This could restrict the comprehensiveness and inclusivity of the study's findings. This limitation is noted by Lakens (2022), who emphasizes the importance of diverse samples in capturing a wider range of experiences and perspectives among Filipino high school teachers nationwide.

Thirdly, the subjective nature of IPA entails that researchers' interpretations of participants' narratives may introduce biases. Despite efforts to maintain objectivity, researchers' backgrounds and perspectives could influence the analysis and identification of themes, impacting the study's reliability.

Lastly, the study's time allotted and context within specific educational settings in the Philippines may limit the transferability of findings to other contexts or periods. Socio-political changes, educational reforms, or regional variations not explicitly addressed may affect teachers' perceptions of life differently (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Plus, the cultural specificity of the study, rooted in Filipino values and norms, may limit its applicability to other cultural settings, highlighted in Kalman's study (2022).

Recommendations

Towards solutions, this study recommends expanding participant diversity and using mixed-methods approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a well-lived life among Filipino teachers. Future research should include standardized scales on well-being, job satisfaction, and career longevity. Additionally, we suggest developing a specific scale to measure a well-lived life in educators, providing a structured framework for assessment. Comparative studies across cultures can further explore how societal factors shape teachers' perceptions, offering insights for targeted interventions.

Beyond expanding research methodologies, these findings have direct applications in developing programs that enhance teachers' work-life balance. Schools and educational institutions can use these insights to design initiatives that promote well-being, such as structured mentoring programs, flexible workload arrangements, and dedicated spaces for mental health support. Implementing resilience-building activities, peer support groups, and recognition programs can foster a culture that values teacher well-being, ultimately improving retention and job satisfaction.

Most importantly, these findings have significant implications for educational policy and practice. Administrators should take a balanced approach to supporting teacher well-being. This includes addressing challenges like stress and burnout while also promoting resilience, optimism, and self-care. Schools can implement programs that foster resilience and optimism, such as workshops on stress management and self-care resources. Additionally, creating a supportive school culture that acknowledges and addresses systemic obstacles is crucial. This could involve establishing collaborative working environments or providing opportunities for teacher leadership.

After all, the well-being of teachers extends far beyond the individual. Research shows a strong correlation between positive classroom environments and effective teaching – both fostered by well-being – and improved student learning outcomes. By supporting teachers, we not only invest in their well-being but also create a ripple effect that benefits the students they inspire. Teachers who embody resilience, optimism, and a strong sense of purpose can serve as powerful role models for their students, fostering the development of these same qualities that are crucial for their success in life.

CONCLUSIONS

The study explores the concept of a well-lived life among Filipino high school teachers, revealing six contrasting themes: altruism vs. self-care, endurance vs. exhaustion, optimism vs. obstacles, clarity vs. confusion, spirituality vs. security, and practical/material concerns. The findings underscore the importance of resilience, a positive outlook, clear purpose, and spiritual beliefs in shaping teachers' lives and careers. However, they also highlight the challenges teachers face, such as stress, burnout, systemic obstacles, and financial concerns. The study suggests that educational policies and practices should balance addressing these challenges with promoting resilience, optimism, and self-care. By understanding and addressing these diverse determinants, we can better support teachers' holistic well-being, allowing them to thrive both within and beyond the classroom.

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