

Chapter 8

AI-Assisted Teacher Wellness: Theory and Practice

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ABSTRACT

The Canadian and American teaching profession is known to be stressful, leading to burnout and other mental health issues for teachers. This chapter proposes an AI-assisted teacher wellness theory (AI TeachWell) and a supporting product/feedback/learning (PFL) framework for increased teacher well-being through the strategic use of AI chatbot technology. The theory emphasizes the use of resources that offset the demands of teaching, the importance of reducing cognitive load, and the increase of autonomy, efficacy, and relatedness. This chapter highlights the reasons that have led to increased teacher workloads, such as demands on teacher performance, administrative tasks, and professional development. It also highlights the effects of a lack of resources, time, and self-efficacy on teacher stress and burnout. The chapter concludes by offering innovative and proactive solutions for teachers to prioritize their health while fostering engaging and effective learning environments for their students, as well as the future implications of this theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching is considered one of the most stressful professions, with high levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion reported among educators (Zhang, et al., 2017). In fact, in America, a 2022 Rand study found teachers are twice as likely to experience burnout than other working adults (Steiner et al., 2022). This phenomenon is not only seen in the USA, but north of the border as well. According to a study by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2019), 87% of Canadian teachers reported that their job is stressful, with 54% experiencing high levels of stress on a daily basis. In the United States, the National Education Association (2018) reported that 45% of teachers reported high daily stress, which is comparable to that of emergency room doctors. It is reported nearly 900,000 or one-third of American teachers are considering leaving the profession after the current school year citing low pay, unmanageable workloads, and declining mental health (Bryant et al., 2023). It is clear teachers

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experience high levels of job-related stress, and this stress can lead to physical health problems and negative impacts on psychological well-being, including high levels of depression, anxiety, and other stress-related illnesses (Zhang et al., 2018; NIOSH, 2015). Teacher well-being is not only important to individual teachers but is positively associated with student academic achievement and engagement, teacher retention, and overall positive learning and working environments for all students and educational workers (Bettencourt et al., 2019; Learning Policy Institute, 2021). The scope of this chapter is to center the educator and focus on teacher well-being, where increased student achievement is one of many positive outcomes.

This chapter proposes an AI-Assisted Teacher Wellness Theory (AI-TeachWell) and a supporting Product/Feedback/Learning (PFL) Framework for increased teacher well-being through AI chatbot technology. This theory emphasizes the use of resources that offset the demands of teaching, the importance of reducing cognitive load, and the increase of motivation and engagement.

2. SITUATING MYSELF

As an experienced Canadian educator with over a decade of teaching in both K-12 public and higher education settings, I have witnessed and experienced firsthand the challenges teachers face in balancing workload while providing meaningful support to their students. Additionally, my previous research and Doctorate in Education focused on enhancing 21st-century learning and leadership to benefit both teachers and students. This has led me to explore the intersection of education and technology, particularly how AI chatbots can support teacher well-being. Through my research, I hope to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the importance of teacher well-being and provide technology-driven, innovative, and proactive solutions for educators to prioritize their own health while fostering engaging and effective learning environments for their students.

3. CURRENT TRENDS IN TEACHER WELLNESS

With the K-12 teaching profession claiming the number one spot in America's highest levels of burnout in 2023 (Peck, 2023) to Canadian teachers accessing sick days at a record number, it is clear our teachers are not okay (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2018a; Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013). According to the President of the Montgomery County Education Association (2021), teachers in her county are "demoralized, exhausted, and desperate for relief". With these statistics, it is not surprising teachers are leaving the profession in droves. The working conditions and well-being of teachers have initiated what some call "The Great Resignation" with districts across America heavily understaffed and overworked (Walker, 2021). The factors leading teachers to burnout are complex and, in addition to working conditions, include increased pressure and scrutiny from community, district, and government, chronically low pay, and increasing safety concerns (Peck, 2023; Wilson, 2021). While all of these factors are important to discuss, teacher workload is a common denominator that can be supported through AI technologies.

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