

Community School Participation and Teacher Wellbeing in Japan: A Qualitative Exploration Through the Job Demands-Resources Model

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Abstract

Background and Purpose

Teacher wellbeing (TWB) has emerged as a critical policy concern worldwide. Systematic reviews (Hascher & Waber, 2021) and meta-analyses (Kim et al., 2024) have identified workplace relationships and organizational factors as key TWB predictors, yet the influence of institutional governance structures remains underexplored. In Japan, the rapid expansion of Community Schools (CS) since the 2017 Local Education Administration Act revision—reaching over 20,000 schools (58.7%) by 2023—has fundamentally reshaped teachers' work environments by requiring engagement in school management council deliberations, community coordination, and local resource integration. However, CS research has predominantly examined effects on students and communities (Sato, 2016), with limited attention to teachers' professional lives. This study qualitatively explores how CS participation shapes teacher wellbeing, drawing on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001). Three research questions guided the inquiry: How do teachers experience CS participation as a job resource (RQ1) and as a job demand (RQ2)? How do these experiences differ across career stages (RQ3)?

Theoretical Framework

The JD-R model posits that job resources activate a motivational process leading to engagement, while job demands trigger health impairment leading to burnout (Hakanen et al., 2006). Crawford et al. (2010) distinguished "challenge demands" from "hindrance demands," suggesting that the same job characteristic may function differently by context. This study adopted the JD-R framework as a sensitizing concept, complemented by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 teachers from five CS-designated schools in Prefecture A, Japan. Schools were theoretically sampled to ensure variation in coordinator deployment (full-time, part-time, absent) and deliberation quality. Teachers were

purposively sampled across early-career (< 5 years, n = 5), mid-career (5–15 years, n = 6), and veteran (> 15 years, n = 5) stages. Interviews averaged 60 minutes and were analyzed using SCAT (Otani, 2019), a four-step qualitative coding procedure. Trustworthiness was ensured through peer debriefing, member checking, and an audit trail.

Findings

Analysis of 87 theoretical constructs revealed that CS participation constitutes an ambivalent experience. Four job resource categories were identified: (C1) rediscovery of professional meaning through social recognition, (C2) expansion of educational practice through community resources, (C3) collaborative reflection through deliberation, and (C4) alleviation of isolation through community relationships. Three job demand categories emerged: (C5) concentration of coordination tasks on teachers, (C6) asymmetry of expectations, and (C7) pressure for visible outcomes.

This ambivalence was moderated by coordinator effectiveness and deliberation quality at the school level, and by career stage at the individual level. Early-career teachers experienced CS participation primarily as fulfilling relatedness needs (C1, C4). Mid-career teachers reported the strongest burden across C5–C7, reflecting their structural position as "middle leaders" bearing peak organizational responsibilities. Veteran teachers demonstrated an integrative pattern, leveraging CS activities for professional deepening (C2, C3). Three pathways connecting CS participation to educational practice were also identified: community resource incorporation, student understanding through deliberation, and motivation enhancement through recognition.

Significance

This study provides the first qualitative application of the JD-R model to the Japanese CS system. It reveals that the ambivalent nature of CS participation is rooted in the dual institutional structure of legally mandated governance and voluntary collaboration. It identifies coordinator effectiveness and deliberation quality as buffering conditions, extending the JD-R buffering hypothesis (Granziera et al., 2021) to Japanese education. It also articulates how career stage moderates CS experience, complementing quantitative findings (Isowa & Imaida, 2022). Practical implications include prioritizing coordinator deployment, managing mid-career teacher workload, and emphasizing deliberation quality over quantitative CS expansion.

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