



Emotion Regulation and Work– Life Balance Among School Teachers in India: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Teaching is a noble and emotionally demanding profession. Indian school teachers have to deal with a large class size, administrative tasks, assessing students' performance, interacting with students and parents; a few of them even have to commute a long distance with additional domestic duties at the end of the day, leaving them emotionally and physically exhausted and work -life balance (WLB) difficult to sustain. James J. Gross defined Emotion regulation (ER) as "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them and how they experience and express them", and it can be taken as a key personal resource that helps teachers manage workplace demands without exhausting the energy needed for family and personal life. This paper presents a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature examining the relationship between Emotion Regulation and Work-Life Balance among school teachers, with particular attention given to studies set in India and other comparable educational contexts. According to Gross's process model of emotion regulation, the review finds that antecedent-focused strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal, are generally linked to greater wellbeing and work–life balance, whereas response-focused strategies, such as suppression and surface acting, are associated with exhaustion and role conflict. The review finds that while emotion regulation training and supportive school environment can reduce burnout, Emotion Regulation alone does not resolve structural sources of imbalance such as workload and inflexible schedules. This paper discusses implications for teacher training, school policy, and future Indian research.

Keywords: emotion regulation; work-life balance; school teachers; India; teacher burnout; occupational stress, teaching

1. Introduction:

Kirchmeyer (2000) has viewed work–life balance as 'achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains, and to do so require personal resources such as energy, time, and commitment to be well distributed across domains. It is quite often that school teachers find it difficult to maintain this balance as heavy instructional workloads coincide with emotionally demanding interactions with students, parents, and colleagues. In India, large classes, substantial co-curricular and administrative duties, and socio-cultural expectations—

particularly for women teachers to manage domestic duties—add further pressure (Chaudhry & Chhajer, 2023).

Emotion regulation has gained growing research attention as a mechanism that can either protect or destroy teachers' wellbeing. Teaching as a profession requires teachers to have continuous patience, warmth, and composure regardless of the teacher's private emotional state, teachers routinely engage in emotional labour and regulatory effort throughout the school day (Fayda-Kinik & Kirisci-Sarikaya, 2025). How teachers regulate these emotions — through strategies that reshape a situation before it becomes troublesome, or through strategies that merely mask an emotion already felt — appears to have consequences not only for classroom effectiveness but also for the energy and mood teachers carry home, and therefore for their work-life balance (Mulyani et al., 2021).

This relationship is of practical importance, but the evidence linking emotion regulation specifically to work-life balance in the Indian school context remains scattered across studies on burnout, occupational stress, emotional intelligence, and general wellbeing, rather than forming a coherent body of work. This review therefore asks two questions: (1) What does the existing literature say about the relationship between teachers' emotion regulation and their work-life balance? and (2) What is specifically known, or what is reasonably inferable, about this relationship for school teachers in India? The review is purposefully concise, aiming to synthesise the core findings rather than exhaustively catalogue every related study.

2. Methodology:

This review followed a narrative systematic approach suited to a compact synthesis. Academic databases and aggregators (including PubMed/PMC, Frontiers, Springer Link, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar) were searched using the combination of terms "emotion regulation," "work-life balance," "teacher burnout," "emotional labour," "occupational stress," and "India," "school teachers". Those studies were included, which were published from 1998 (the year of Gross' foundation process model) onward, and also if they were peer-reviewed, addressed emotion regulation or closely related constructs (emotional intelligence, emotional labour) in relation to teacher wellbeing, burnout, or work-life balance. Studies conducted with school teachers in India were prioritised; where Indian evidence on a specific sub-theme was limited, comparable studies from other national contexts were included to show patterns that reasonably generalise, and this is clearly marked in the text. Reference lists of retrieved articles were manually searched for additional relevant sources. Because a single reviewer conducted this concise synthesis without a full PRISMA-registered protocol, it should be regarded as a rapid narrative systematic review rather than a formal meta-analysis.

3. Conceptual Framework:

This review is built upon Gross's (1998) process model, which identifies five emotion-regulation strategies along the emotion-generation timeline: situation selection (refers to approaching or avoiding certain people, places, or objects to regulate emotions), situation modification (refers to changing the external environment to alter its emotional meaning), attentional deployment (refers to changing focus to or away from certain aspects of a situation to influence feelings), cognitive change (altering the thought about a situation to change its emotional resonance, including reappraisal), and response modulation (refers to directly influencing physiological, experimental, or behavioural responding, including

suppression). An important distinction drawn from this model is between antecedent-focused strategies, which intervene before an emotional response has fully unfolded, and response-focused strategies, which act only after the emotion has already been generated (Gross, 2002). Reappraisal – reframing a stressful situation so that it feels less threatening – is antecedent-focused and has consistently been associated with more favourable affective, cognitive, and social outcomes, whereas suppression, a response-focused strategy of masking an already-felt emotion, tends to be associated with greater psychological cost (Gross, 2002). This distinction underlies much of the applied research on teachers, where reappraisal-type strategies are generally associated with better wellbeing and suppression or surface acting is associated with greater exhaustion (Aldrup et al., 2024).

4. Thematic Synthesis of Findings:

4.1 Emotion Regulation and Teacher Wellbeing

A systematic review of primary and secondary education found that most studies examine teacher emotion regulation through either the process model – cognitive reappraisal versus suppression – or the emotional-labour framework – deep versus surface acting. Reported workplace outcomes largely concern leadership and management, organisational climate and support, and classroom interactions (Fayda-Kinik & Kirisci-Sarikaya, 2025). A broader review integrating the process model, coping, emotional labour, and emotional intelligence found that adaptive strategies, such as reappraisal and deep acting, are associated with greater teaching effectiveness and more positive teacher–student relationships, as suppression and surface acting are linked to greater strain (Aldrup et al., 2024). Similarly, among Spanish secondary-school teachers, emotion regulation ability was the single emotional-intelligence facet most strongly and consistently associated with work engagement, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction, more so than other emotional abilities measured (Mérida-López & Extremera, 2020).

4.2 Work-Life Balance Challenges Among Indian School Teachers

Indian-context studies point to a persistent gap between teachers' work demands and their personal-life resources. A cross-sectional study of school teachers in Rajasthan found that psychological wellbeing was shaped by how well teachers managed their personal energy and by their experience of stress, with energy management improving wellbeing partly through reduced stress and greater thriving at work (Chaudhry & Chhajer, 2023). An empirical study found that the COVID-19 transition to online teaching blurred home–school boundaries and created distinct work–life balance challenges for female K–12 teachers in Noida (Rawal, 2021). More broadly, occupational stress among Indian school teachers has been linked to workload, role ambiguity, and inadequate institutional support, compounding the difficulty of sustaining balance between professional and personal domains (Bhatia & Kumar, 2015).

4.3 Gender and the Dual Burden in the Indian Context

As it is common in Indian context, that work-life balance pressures are not evenly distributed between men and women teachers. If a large survey of women faculty is conducted across Indian universities, first-grade colleges, and business schools, it is found that supervisor support and family support were the strongest antecedents of work-life balance, and that WLB in turn shaped broader wellbeing outcomes, underscoring that both workplace and home-domain support systems matter for women educators specifically (Jamunarani & Syed, 2024), according to the study. This aligns with the pattern observed among female K–

12 teachers during pandemic-era remote teaching, where the collapse of physical boundaries between school and home intensified the dual burden of instructional and domestic responsibility (Rawal, 2021). Because teaching is a heavily female-dominated profession at the Indian school level, and also because domestic and caregiving responsibilities continue to fall disproportionately on women in most Indian households, the emotional labour of teaching often compounds rather than substitutes for the emotional labour of managing a household – a dynamic that general, gender-neutral models of teacher stress can understate.

4.4 Linking Emotion Regulation to Work-Life Balance

Few studies directly examine the relationship between emotion regulation and work-life balance, and the available findings are mixed. In a study of special-school teachers, strategies like emotion regulation can aid teachers in controlling the impact of work conditions on the burnout rate, but did not significantly improve work-life balance itself, suggesting that ER buffers certain stressors without resolving the structural time and energy demands that erode balance (Mulyani et al., 2021). By contrast, a study of secondary-school teachers in Zhengzhou, China, found that emotional intelligence served as a moderating factor that mitigates the effects of stress on teachers' performance outcomes, meaning that teachers higher in emotional intelligence were better able to sustain performance under stress, even though family-friendly policies and administrative support, not emotional intelligence alone, were what most directly reduced stress in the first place (Li & Albattat, 2025). Combined together, these studies suggest a consistent pattern: emotion regulation and emotional intelligence act as protective, buffering resources that reduce the psychological cost of imbalance and stress, but they are not substitutes for structural conditions – workload, scheduling flexibility, and institutional support – that determine whether balance is achievable at all.

4.5 Interventions: Training Emotion Regulation and Mindfulness

There is one such study where it was tested whether emotion regulation can be improved through structured training, with implications for whether such training could, in turn, support work-life balance. So, a large randomised controlled trial of a mindfulness-based social-emotional competency programme for elementary school teachers found that, relative to a waitlist control group, participating teachers showed significant increases in mindfulness, emotion regulation, self-efficacy, and wellbeing, alongside reduced burnout symptoms and improved classroom engagement (Carvalho et al., 2021). While, there is no such trial was conducted in India and it did not measure work-life balance directly, however its design offers a template – brief, structured, antecedent-focused regulation training – that Indian teacher-training institutions could adapt and test locally, ideally with work-life balance included as an outcome measure alongside burnout and wellbeing.

5. Discussion:

These points emerge from this synthesis. First, the theoretical distinction between antecedent-focused strategies (such as reappraisal and deep acting) and response-focused strategies (such as suppression or surface acting) appears to hold consistently across teacher populations and across the process-model and emotional-labour traditions: reappraisal-type regulation is associated with better wellbeing, engagement, and effectiveness, while suppression and surface acting are associated with strain (Gross, 2002; Aldrup et al., 2024; Mérida-López & Extremera, 2020). Second, the Indian evidence base, while still limited relative to that on China, Spain, or Pakistan, converges on similar stressors – heavy

workload, blurred boundaries between school and home (intensified during remote teaching), and limited institutional support – as the proximate drivers of poor work-life balance (Chaudhry & Chhajer, 2023; Rawal, 2021; Bhatia & Kumar, 2015).

Third, the Indian literature adds a gender dimension that is less prominent in the China- and Spain-based studies reviewed here: because teaching is dominated by women teachers at the Indian school level and domestic duties continue to fall disproportionately on women, work-life balance interventions that ignore the home-domain support structure (spousal and family support, availability of childcare) are likely to be incomplete for a large share of the teaching workforce (Jamunarani & Syed, 2024). Fourth, and most important for practice, the direct evidence on ER and WLB, indicates that emotion regulation is best understood as a buffer rather than a cure: it helps teachers absorb the emotional cost of a demanding job, but it cannot substitute for adequate staffing, reasonable workload, and supportive school administration (Mulyani et al., 2021; Li & Albattat, 2025). The Conservation of Resources framing helps explain why: regulatory skill conserves a teacher's emotional resources rather than adding new time or staffing resources to the system, so it narrows but does not close the gap created by structural overload.

Taken together, all these points suggest that interventions training teachers in reappraisal, deep acting, or mindfulness-based regulation (Carvalho et al., 2021) are likely to be most effective when paired with, rather than offered instead of, structural reforms to workload, scheduling, and school support systems – and, in the Indian context specifically, when paired with attention to the home-domain support that shapes women teachers' work-life balance in particular.

The studies that measure emotion regulation and work-life balance together in India, using the same sample and validated instruments are scarce and it is a notable gap. Most of the Indian studies until now examine stress, burnout, or general wellbeing, with emotion regulation treated implicitly (through constructs like energy management) rather than measured directly using established instruments such as the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003). Future Indian research would benefit from studies that measure both constructs namely emotion regulation and work-life balance explicitly, that compare government and private-school teachers, and also examine gender and marital/caregiving status as moderators, given the dual-burden pattern.

6. Practical Implication:

6.1 For Teacher Training Institutions

Pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes could embed brief, structured emotion regulation training modelled on reappraisal and deep-acting techniques, following the format tested by Carvalho et al. (2021), to help teachers manage classroom stress more adaptively before it accumulates into strain carried home.

6.2 For the School Administrators

The evidence reviewed suggests that reducing structural stressors – through manageable class sizes, reduced non-teaching administrative workload, predictable scheduling, and visible supervisor support – will do more to protect work-life balance than emotion regulation training offered on its own (Li & Albattat, 2025; Jamunarani & Syed, 2024). Administrators should treat regulation training as a complement to, not a substitute for, workload management.

6.3 For Policymakers

The studies reviewed here support integrating psychological wellbeing support and administrative-support mechanisms into school quality frameworks rather than treating teacher wellbeing as solely an individual responsibility. Given the gendered pattern of the dual burden, policy measures such as predictable working hours, childcare-friendly scheduling, and protections against non-teaching duty overload are likely to have a disproportionately positive effect on women teachers' work-life balance.

7. Directions for Future Research:

- Conduct India-specific studies that measure emotion regulation (e.g., via the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire) and work-life balance in the same sample, rather than inferring the relationship from separate stress or wellbeing measures.
- Compare government and private-school teachers, and urban and rural teachers, given documented differences in resourcing and administrative support between these settings.
- Test whether structured, reappraisal- or mindfulness-based emotion regulation training (following designs such as Carvalho et al., 2021) improves work-life balance specifically, not only burnout or wellbeing, in Indian school samples.
- Examine gender, marital status, and caregiving responsibilities as moderators of the ER-WLB relationship, building on the dual-burden pattern identified in Jamunarani & Syed (2024) and Rawal (2021).
- Use longitudinal or diary-based designs to capture how emotion regulation effort accumulates or depletes across a school day and spills over into the home domain, which the cross-sectional designs dominating this literature cannot establish.

8. Limitations:

This concise, single-reviewer narrative synthesis used a targeted set of studies rather than the exhaustive, dual-coded approach of a PRISMA-registered systematic review. Because direct India-based evidence on the ER-WLB relationship remains limited, several conclusions rely on studies from other national contexts (China, Spain, Pakistan) that may not fully generalise to Indian schooling, which differs in class size, resourcing, and socio-cultural expectations.

9. Conclusion:

Emotion regulation is a meaningful, evidence-supported resource for teacher wellbeing, and antecedent-focused strategies such as reappraisal and deep acting are consistently linked to better outcomes than suppression or surface acting, across both the process-model and emotional-labour traditions. However, the limited direct evidence on emotion regulation and work-life balance suggests that regulation skills buffer the psychological cost of a demanding job without resolving the structural workload and support deficits that most directly threaten Indian teachers' work-life balance. In the Indian context, this structural picture is further shaped by gender: as domestic responsibilities continue to fall disproportionately on women, and because teaching is a female-dominated profession at the school level, work-life balance solutions that address only classroom-level stressors are likely to be incomplete. A combined approach – strengthening teachers' regulatory skills through structured training, addressing workload, scheduling, and institutional support at the school level, and attending to home-domain support structures for women teachers

specifically – offers the most promising path to improving both the wellbeing and the work-life balance of school teachers in India.

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