

Balancing Roles and Responsibilities: A Study on Challenges and Strategies of Female English Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the challenges and strategies of female English teachers in East Java, Indonesia, in balancing professional and personal roles within a patriarchal cultural context. Using a phenomenological approach, the research identifies five main challenges: time management difficulties, domestic and family role challenges, psychological burdens, gender-related social pressure, and environmental issues. To address these, teachers employ coping strategies within Lazarus and Folkman's framework, including problem-focused coping (time management, prioritization, seeking support) and emotion-focused coping (emotional support, mindfulness, relaxation, and positive reframing). Findings highlight female teachers' resilience and proactive efforts in navigating dual roles. The study offers insights for educators, institutions, and policymakers to create more supportive, gender-sensitive environments.

Keywords: Female English Teacher, Dual Role, Challenges, Coping Strategies

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a central role in education as agents of social change, character builders, and drivers of learning quality. In the Indonesian EFL context, teachers are expected to demonstrate linguistic and pedagogical competence, apply interactive approaches, and integrate technology in teaching (A. Prayogo, 2022; Azzahra & Nurkamto, 2024). Effective EFL instruction also requires strong communication skills, innovative methodologies, and strategies to foster active student (Achieng, 2023; Tümen Akyıldız & Şahin, 2024)

For female teachers, the responsibilities are more complex. They navigate dual demands as educators and as wives, mothers, and community members. In patriarchal cultures such as Indonesia, societal expectations require them to excel in both domains without compromise (Azizah, 2023). These demands often lead to dual role conflicts, commonly referred to as work–family conflicts, which have been linked to work stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced job satisfaction (Dodanwala & Shrestha, 2021). Such pressures can disrupt lesson planning, delivery of content, and responsiveness to students' needs, potentially affecting teaching quality (Lin, 2024).

Female EFL teachers face additional demands. Besides mastering teaching material, they must maintain English proficiency, adapt to technological developments, and employ communicative teaching methods that require high energy and creativity (Azzahra & Nurkamto, 2024). Many must complete domestic chores before preparing lessons or bring schoolwork home, often sacrificing family time.

Studies from other contexts illustrate similar challenges. (Khorakian, Hashemian, Eslami, & Adibzadeh, 2024) show that role overload affects the work–life balance of female teachers in Iran. (Khadka, 2020) highlights the dilemmas of female English teachers in Nepal balancing professional and family roles. In Indonesian studies, such as (Susilowati, Fratiwi, & Barus, 2024) and (Zaitun

Qamariah, 2024), explore gender equality and cultural expectations, but few specifically examine the lived experiences of female EFL teachers in East Java. Most research either uses quantitative designs or focuses on narrower contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how these teachers manage their dual roles.

This study addresses that gap through a phenomenological approach to explore the authentic experiences of female English teachers in East Java. It seeks to understand the challenges they face in balancing professional and personal roles, and the strategies they develop to maintain this balance. Findings are expected to enrich understanding of female teachers' resilience, provide insights for educators and policymakers, and encourage the creation of more supportive, gender-sensitive educational environments.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Challenges for Female Teachers

Female teachers with dual roles often face various challenges in Balancing Responsibilities and Individual Roles. This section reviews previous research identifying these challenges.

Multiple Roles and Time Management

Time management is one of the most critical challenges for working women, particularly educators. This issue arises from the overlap of professional and domestic responsibilities, which demand time, energy, and attention simultaneously. According to research by (Uddin, 2021), working women experience an extraordinary time burden because they must complete office tasks while fulfilling domestic responsibilities, often at the expense of rest time. In the context of the teaching profession, the boundary between professional and personal life becomes blurred, as teachers frequently bring work home and spend additional time on it outside of working hours. Consequently, time for rest and recovery becomes severely limited. (Sellaheewa & Arachchi, 2023) also emphasize that poor time management can lead to problems at work and in family relationships. Failure to manage time effectively increases the risk of stress and role conflict.

Family Roles and Domestic Obligations

For female educators, the challenge of balancing domestic roles with professional obligations remains a significant issue. The dual role of educator and housewife often causes psychological stress and complex role conflicts. According to (Mehmood, 2024), 34.3% of female educators experience stress at work due to their family responsibilities, indicating that domestic obligations can have a negative impact on work performance. A study by (Ali, 2024) found that the majority of respondents experienced work-family conflict, particularly related to child care and caring for elderly family members (64.9%). This situation is particularly challenging as it requires significant energy and focus. (Khadka, 2020) explains that female teachers often face situations that demand the simultaneous fulfillment of professional and domestic responsibilities, such as teaching while caring for children and managing household duties.

Psychological and Emotional Pressures

Professional demands at work, coupled with social expectations to excel in domestic roles, often place women in emotionally exhausting situations. (Penesumbu & Taipale, 2024) state that the dual role of educator and household manager has the potential to trigger prolonged emotional exhaustion. This sentiment is reinforced findings by (Khadka, 2020), which indicate that role imbalance creates extraordinary pressure, making mothers feel unable to be the ideal figure both as workers and as mothers. Additionally, (Asri & Hendriani, 2024) reveal other emotional burdens, such as feelings of guilt for leaving children, anxiety about children's development, and physical exhaustion due to lack of sleep. In the context of education, (Agustin & Diana Rahmasari, 2023) note that increased workloads trigger stress and burnout, particularly due to tight schedules and inadequate rest time.

Gender and Social Expectations

Female teachers face not only professional challenges, but also social burdens stemming from cultural and gender expectations. In societies influenced by patriarchal structures, female teachers are often expected to excel in both the public and domestic spheres simultaneously. According to (Edwards & Oteng, 2019), they are inherently positioned as role models who must

appear professionally competent while also leading ideal domestic lives. This pressure becomes even more complex when linked to professional status, such as being an English teacher, which is seen as a symbol of social status. (Khadka, 2020) also highlights that these challenges do not originate solely from individuals but are also influenced by contextual factors such as community norms and patriarchal household structures, which often limit women's mobility. The pressure to excel in all areas of life can lead to excessive commitment and sacrifice of time for self-care.

Work Environment Challenges

Another major challenge is a demanding and inflexible work environment. This pressure stems from high workloads and institutional structures that often do not accommodate women's needs. A study by (Ali, 2024) found that the majority of respondents (73.5%) reported working overtime or taking work home, and only 42.9% felt they had enough time for personal and family matters. Excessive workloads encompass not only teaching activities but also administration, research, and other institutional tasks. (Logeswari, Sathyapriya, Vijayalakshmi, & Sudha, 2022) state that female educators face significant challenges in managing these various aspects of their work. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of structural support from institutions, such as fair work distribution systems or flexible work policies. (Asri & Hendriani, 2024) add that workplace pressure is also caused by long working hours, high productivity demands, and office political dynamics that may overlook the needs of female workers.

Female Teachers' Strategies for Balancing Roles

The success of female teachers in balancing their dual roles is often influenced by consciously developed coping strategies and support from their surroundings. Lazarus and Folkman divide these strategies into two main categories: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Problem-focused coping is a strategy that focuses on directly resolving or modifying the source of stress. This approach is used when individuals feel that the situation they are facing can be managed or changed. This strategy includes confrontative coping, where individuals face problems directly and assertively, as well as planful problem-solving, which involves in-depth analysis and systematic planning. In addition, female teachers often use seeking social support for instrumental reasons, which involves seeking help, information, or practical advice from others to solve specific problems related to work or domestic responsibilities.

Meanwhile, emotion-focused coping aims to regulate an individual's emotional response to situations that are difficult to control. This strategy is crucial for female teachers when pressure stems from factors that cannot be directly changed. Forms of this strategy include distancing oneself by maintaining emotional distance from the problem, self-control to restrain emotions so they do not affect professionalism, and accepting responsibility as a form of awareness of one's role in the problem faced. In addition, female teachers also often apply positive reappraisal to find positive meaning or opportunities for growth from the challenges they face, as well as seeking social support for emotional reasons to obtain moral support and empathy from colleagues, family, or the community.

The implementation of these two types of strategies is reinforced by practical support from family and institutional environments. Awareness of balancing domestic obligations and professional responsibilities reflects strategic awareness in setting daily priorities (Rivera, 2024), as demonstrated by (Febrianto, Megasari, & Mas'udah, 2022), who found that 67.6% of female teachers chose to complete domestic chores before starting teaching activities, and involved their partners in childcare and household tasks. Additionally, a supportive work environment also plays a crucial role. (Logeswari et al., 2022) show that institutional support, such as flexible work policies or fair task distribution, positively contributes to work-life balance. Emotional well-being training, such as mindfulness, has also proven effective in reducing teachers' stress levels.

Ultimately, female teachers' experiences in managing various responsibilities not only help maintain role balance but can also be transformative. (Khadka, 2020) shows that this process can foster economic independence, boost self-confidence, and transform challenges into opportunities for self-development and strengthening professional values. Thus, effective coping strategies,

supported by family and institutional environments, form a crucial foundation for female teachers in navigating the complexities of their dual roles.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach. This method was chosen to gain a deep and holistic understanding of the lived experiences of female English teachers as they balance their dual roles, focusing on the meaning they assign to these experiences rather than numerical generalizations (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Research Participants

The study was conducted in East Java, and participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Ten female English teachers were chosen based on criteria designed to provide diverse perspectives, including varied marital statuses, teaching experiences, and additional professional roles. The participants taught at levels ranging from elementary school to university, were aged between 23 and 40, and had teaching experience from 6 months to 17 years. To protect participant privacy, pseudonyms were used throughout the study.

Table 1. Participant Information

Pseudonym	Age	Institution Level	Marital Status	Children	Teaching Experiences	Additional Roles
MD	24	Elementary School	Married	1	4	Coordinator of TPQ
HM	25	Elementary School	Married	1	6	-
QA	26	Senior High School (SMA)	Married	-	2	Curriculum staff
IY	28	Islamic Junior High School and Islamic Senior High School	Unmarried	-	5	Head of Student Affairs
DS	40	Senior high school	Married	2	17	Teacher on Duty
RR	30	Madrasah Ibtidaiyah	Married	2	2	Homeroom Teacher
SN	38	Senior High School	Married	2	11	Scout Leader
DK	36	College	Married	-	11	Administrative Position
MT	23	Junior High School	Unmarried	-	6 months	English Course Tutor
MS	40	Islamic Junior High School	Married	3	11	Coordinator english

The primary data collection technique was semi-structured interviews. To accommodate the participants' comfort and conditions, interviews were conducted through various media, including Zoom, face-to-face meetings, and WhatsApp (voice notes and written messages). This flexibility was deemed appropriate for a phenomenological study, as the focus is on the depth of experience rather than the technical form of interaction. All interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the six-stage thematic analysis model developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

RESULT & DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of the data revealed two overarching themes that directly address the research questions: (1) the challenges female English teachers face in balancing professional and personal roles, and (2) the strategic coping mechanisms they employ to maintain these balance.

Theme 1: The Cycle of Pressure: Interconnected Challenges in Balancing Roles

The findings indicate that participants navigate a complex web of five interrelated challenges. These challenges do not exist in isolation but rather create a "cycle of pressure," where the presence of one challenge often exacerbates another, culminating in a significant burden on their well-being and professional efficacy.

The most universally expressed challenge was time management. Participants consistently struggled to allocate their time effectively between their demanding careers and family responsibilities. This was poignantly expressed by HM, who identified her primary difficulty as "how to divide my time effectively between my work as a teacher and my family." This constant struggle forced difficult decisions, with RR often having to choose "whether to prioritize work first or prioritize family first." This finding resonates with research by (Uddin, 2021), which highlights the substantial time burden placed on working women due to the overlapping nature of their roles. Consequently, this time scarcity directly depleted participants' focus and energy, as noted by DS: "...the biggest challenge I experience is usually focus and energy..." This corroborates the findings of (Sellahewa & Arachchi, 2023), who established a clear link between poor time management and negative impacts on both professional performance and personal relationships.

This scarcity of time was often a direct consequence of the immense pressure from domestic and family roles. The clash between professional obligations and urgent family matters, such as a sick child, was a significant source of conflict and stress. As DS explained, "...when the child is sick or at home there is an urgent need... so that certainly interferes with my activities as a teacher at school." This situation exemplifies the work-family conflict commonly found among female educators with significant caregiving duties (Ali, 2024). Participants felt, as described by (Khadka, 2020), "caught between two demands." This dilemma was keenly felt by HM, who faced the immense pressure of a sick child during a school project deadline, and by SN, a mother in a long-distance relationship who described an overwhelming conflict between her duties as a mother and a teacher.

The persistent conflict between professional duties and domestic responsibilities invariably took a significant psychological and emotional toll. The cumulative weight of these roles led to mental fatigue, burnout, and pervasive feelings of guilt. MS candidly admitted, "I feel tired, bored, and even want to give up sometimes," an expression of emotional exhaustion consistent with research on teacher burnout by (Penesumbu & Taipale, 2024). Furthermore, Guilt is also a strong emotional theme in this study. SN's confusion when her child complained about her absence from school and RR's concern about leaving her sick child reflect Finding by (Asri & Hendriani, 2024) that "guilt" is the main impact felt by working mothers. Furthermore, this study shows how thoughts about work often carry over into the home, as described by SN. This phenomenon supports analysis of (Khadka, 2020) that role imbalance ultimately disrupts focus and creativity due to constantly divided thoughts.

Compounding these internal burdens were external social pressures and gender expectations. Participants reported being judged against traditional societal norms regarding women's roles. For instance, both SN and IY recounted receiving negative comments from society for returning home late from work, an experience that affirms (Khadka, 2020) assertion that such challenges are deeply influenced by community norms and patriarchal structures. Moreover, participants felt the immense weight of society's expectation to simultaneously embody the ideals of a "perfect" teacher and a "perfect" mother. DS articulated this pressure, stating that "society's expectations are too high," while MD observed, "As women, we are often expected to manage multiple roles at once..." This supports the findings of (Edwards & Oteng, 2019), who noted that female teachers are often positioned as ideal role models in both the public and private spheres.

Finally, the work environment itself, rather than offering respite, frequently intensified these challenges. Excessive workloads and a lack of institutional support were primary contributors to the cycle of pressure. IY described a situation of structural inadequacy where she was the sole person responsible for student affairs, a role typically managed by a team in other schools: "But for me here, there is only one person in the student affairs department." This lack of structural support is a critical challenge highlighted by (Logeswari et al., 2022). The institutional demand to work on

weekends, also experienced by IY, further eroded personal time and aligns with data from (Ali, 2024) showing that many teachers are required to work significant overtime. Together, these interconnected challenges from time constraints and family duties to psychological stress, social judgment, and unsupportive work environments create a layered and formidable burden for female English teachers.

Theme 2: Strategies for Managing Dual Roles

Despite the significant challenges described, the participants were not passive in the face of adversity. On the contrary, they demonstrated remarkable resilience and agency, actively developing a range of strategies to manage their complex realities. These coping mechanisms can be effectively understood through the theoretical lens of (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which distinguishes between problem-focused coping (addressing the stressor itself) and emotion-focused coping (regulating the emotional response to the stressor).

The most fundamental strategy employed was a direct, problem-focused approach centered on time and priority management. This aligns with the "Planful Problem-Solving" sub-strategy, where participants actively sought to control the source of their stress. They developed structured systems, such as organizing tasks based on urgency (DS), creating daily to-do lists to maintain focus (SN), preparing backup teaching plans for emergencies (QA), and intentionally setting clear boundaries between work and personal time (RR). These deliberate actions reflect a high degree of "strategic awareness" (Rivera, 2024), enabling them to navigate conflicting demands with greater effectiveness and a sense of control.

Beyond individual planning, participants heavily relied on social and environmental support, a strategy that served a dual function, encompassing both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. For instrumental, problem-focused support, participants like DH and RR would "always discuss every problem with my husband" to collaboratively find practical solutions. This underscores the critical importance of spousal involvement in mitigating work-family conflict, a finding consistent with (Febrianto et al., 2022). Simultaneously, these relationships provided crucial emotion-focused support. Confiding in husbands, trusted friends, and supportive colleagues became a primary method for alleviating stress and feeling validated. The therapeutic value of being heard was highlighted by SN, who stated, "...just being listened to and talking... that's healing in my opinion..." A positive work environment, including support from school principals, was also cited as a vital source of strength and resilience.

In addition to seeking external support, participants cultivated a range of internal emotional self-regulation strategies. These emotion-focused techniques fall under the "Self-Control" sub-strategy of Lazarus and Folkman's framework. For example, SN practiced yoga and meditation to "go back to yourself, so it's not... not out of control later," while DS utilized mindfulness, taking a deep breath to become "fully present in the classroom" even when facing personal difficulties. This conscious effort to manage emotional expression was also seen in MT, who worked to remain professional and positive in front of her students regardless of her personal feelings. These self-regulation practices are consistent with research by (Logeswari et al., 2022), who found that mindfulness techniques can effectively reduce stress among educators.

For many participants, spiritual coping emerged as a powerful and deeply personal form of emotional self-regulation. In the Indonesian context, turning to religious practice was a central mechanism for finding calmness and balance. This included reading the Qur'an (MT), performing dhikr or remembrance of God (DS), or seeking tranquility in the school's prayer room (IY). MT articulated the significance of this strategy perfectly: "...the best way to stay sane and balanced is to continue to maintain a good relationship with God." This spiritual dimension provided an essential anchor, allowing them to manage overwhelming emotions and maintain psychological equilibrium.

Finally, participants employed two other key emotion-focused strategies, engaging in relaxation activities and practicing positive reframing. The first, which aligns with the "Escape-Avoidance" strategy, involved temporarily disengaging from stressors through personalized leisure activities. These acts of self-care, though simple, were highly effective. They included taking walks or shopping (MD, HM), enjoying a cup of coffee (IY), eating out with family (RR, QA), or scrolling through TikTok for light entertainment (DH). These activities served to refresh their minds and

restore their energy. The second, more cognitively advanced strategy was "Positive Reappraisal," where participants actively changed their perspective to find positive meaning in their struggles. DH, for instance, reframed her dual role not as a burden but as an experience that cultivated empathy and resilience. DS used high societal expectations as "motivation to continue learning," while others like MD and MR consciously recalled their foundational passion for teaching when feeling overwhelmed. This ability to cognitively transform a negative experience into a source of growth supports the findings of (Khadka, 2020), who noted that navigating such challenges can ultimately foster greater independence and self-confidence.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that female English teachers in East Java face multidimensional and interconnected challenges as they balance their professional and personal lives. These challenges span five key areas: time management difficulties, domestic and family role challenges, psychological burdens, gender-related social pressure, and environmental issues. These pressures do not exist in isolation but often create a compounding "cycle of pressure" that intensifies the burden on these educators. However, amidst these pressures, the participants demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptive capacity. They actively developed and employed a variety of coping strategies that can be categorized into problem-focused and emotion-focused approaches. Problem-focused strategies included meticulous time management, setting priorities, and seeking practical support from partners and colleagues. Emotion-focused strategies involved managing their emotional responses through spiritual practices, seeking emotional support, regulating their emotions through mindfulness and self-control, and, most significantly, using positive reframing to find meaning and motivation in their demanding roles. Ultimately, this research highlights that female English teachers in Indonesia are not passive recipients of pressure but are active, resilient agents who strategically navigate the complexities of their dual roles.

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