

Quality Education in Singapore: Bridging Teacher Leadership with Teacher Wellbeing

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Abstract

Although there is a growing body of research on teachers' wellbeing, research on the relationship between teacher wellbeing and leadership roles in educational contexts is limited. Improved teacher wellbeing encourages teachers to engage in leadership roles, which affects student outcomes. This article discusses the dynamic symbiotic relationship between teacher leadership and teacher wellbeing. It posits that optimizing teacher wellbeing will increase teachers' willingness and ability to take on more formal and informal leadership positions in schools for a sustained period. Utilizing human capital theory to illustrate the importance of investing in teachers' physical, emotional, and cognitive states, this article proposes a "CEP Power-Up" decentralized-intentional approach encompassing four strategies to enhance school-level teacher wellbeing, leading to an uptake of leadership positions in Singapore schools.

Résumé

Bien qu'il existe un nombre croissant de recherches sur le bien-être des enseignants, les études sur la relation entre ce bien-être et les rôles de leadership en milieu éducatif

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sont limitées. Pourtant, l'amélioration du bien-être des enseignants encourage ceux-ci à assumer des rôles de leadership, avec une incidence positive sur les résultats des élèves. Cet article traite de la relation symbiotique dynamique entre le bien-être des enseignants et leur leadership. Il postule que l'optimisation du bien-être des enseignants augmentera leur volonté et leur capacité à assumer davantage de postes de leadership formels et informels dans les écoles pour une période prolongée. Cet article s'appuie sur la théorie du capital humain pour illustrer l'importance d'investir dans les états physiques, émotionnels et cognitifs des enseignants. À ce titre, il propose une approche décentralisée et intentionnelle, « CEP Power-Up », qui comprend quatre stratégies visant à améliorer le bien-être des enseignants au niveau scolaire. Cette approche devrait mener à une plus grande volonté de la part de ceux-ci à assumer des postes de leadership dans les écoles de Singapour.

Keywords / Mots clés : teacher wellbeing, teacher leadership, human capital theory, Singapore / bien-être des enseignants, leadership enseignant, théorie du capital humain, Singapour

Introduction

Teacher wellbeing is critical for teachers' and students' overall educational outcomes. Teachers are regarded as the main pillars of education, as research has consistently shown the close connection between teachers' and students' wellbeing (Briner & Dewberry, 2007; Carroll, York, Fynes-Clinton, Sanders-O'Connor, Flynn, Bower et al., 2021; McCallum, 2021). For instance, teachers struggling with mental health issues can negatively impact student learning. In many countries, the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected individuals' mental health and wellbeing, and this effect was also seen in the education setting, where teachers needed to transition from face-to-face teaching to online teaching and vice versa. Carver-Thomas, Leung, and Burns (2021) found that teacher mental health and workload were huge concerns during the pandemic, resulting in a shortage of teachers in California. In Singapore, it was reported that more than 80 percent of teachers experienced mental stress, and 62 percent of them experienced a decline in their physical health (Ang, 2021). While extensive research on mental health and wellbeing has been conducted before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (such as Li, 2022; Li, Xue, Liu, & Han, 2024; Toms, 2021), it has primarily focused on students. While students' social, emotional, and mental wellbeing are widely discussed, teachers' mental wellbeing has received less attention.

In recent years, mental health in Singapore has gained significant attention and is fast becoming one of the top health concerns (Ganesan, 2023). Given the mounting pressures that teachers face in ensuring accountability in schools (Wang, 2015), public interest in mental wellbeing has also increased. For instance, in Singapore, there were reports of young adults experiencing severe mental stress with symptoms including depression, anxiety, and stress (Teo, 2024). A survey conducted by the Singapore Ministry of Health reported that poor mental health had increased from 13.4 percent in 2020 to 17 percent in 2022, with younger adults aged 18 to 29 having the highest

poor mental health (Goh, 2023). This increased interest has led to the establishment of a new inter-agency task force, known as the Interagency Taskforce on Mental Health and Well-being, to oversee national programs to help Singaporeans tackle and take steps toward maintaining good mental health (Lin, 2021).

In the teaching profession, the demanding and stressful nature of teaching suggests that teachers may experience some forms of mental stress. While help-seeking rates remain low due to barriers such as the stigma associated with mental illness (Chong, Abdin, Vaingankar, Kwok, & Subramaniam, 2012), there has been an increase in the willingness to seek help lately (Goh, 2023). Poor mental health can significantly impact a teacher's ability to perform professional duties, such as planning and delivering engaging lessons and managing classroom behaviour. This extends to teacher's ability to take on leadership roles. More importantly, poor mental health may lead to teachers experiencing burnout, decreasing job satisfaction, and teachers leaving the profession. This article discusses how establishing good teacher wellbeing is critical to their mental health, which is essential for developing sustainable leadership. Proposing a decentralized-intentional "CEP Power-Up" approach, this conceptual article argues that positive teacher wellbeing is one of the fundamental factors for human capital development since it affects teachers' willingness to acquire and enhance their skills and knowledge, thereby increasing their performance and values.

Mental wellness, mental health, and mental wellbeing

We begin by discussing the distinctions between mental wellness, mental health, and mental wellbeing. Mental wellness is a positive state of mental health and refers to how an individual's mind functions at their best interest, which may not be devoid of mental illnesses (Singapore Association for Mental Health, 2018). It is an internal resource facilitating thinking, feeling, connecting, and functioning. Hence, it is a skill and process that individuals can strengthen since it increases their level of mental wellness and can reduce the development of mental illness. Mental wellness consists of social and environmental dimensions, and individuals can actively pursue activities, choices, and lifestyles that promote positive mental health (Global Wellness Institute, n.d.).

"Mental health" and "mental wellbeing" are often used interchangeably. Mental health refers to the current state of mind, whereby there is a lack of distress. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as individuals' state of mental wellbeing that enables them to handle the stresses of life, maximize their abilities to learn and work well, and ultimately contribute to their communities (WHO, 2022), which can fluctuate as they respond to different stressors and circumstances at various points in life. Mental wellbeing refers to having a growth mindset and a positive state of mind that empowers individuals, one that promotes positive education and frames positive framing of our mental health, which focuses on building upon strengths and increasing an individual's capacity (Stoerkel, 2025).

The concept of wellbeing is not new, and despite differing views and definitions emerging since 2000, the idea has gained increasing interest in the development of public policy worldwide (Viac & Fraser, 2020). For example, the WHO connected wellbeing and health as a holistic concept, that is, mental health as a state of wellbe-

ing, explaining it as a complete state of physical, psychological, and social wellbeing that goes beyond the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 2025a). Diener (1984) was among the first researchers to define wellbeing as subjective life satisfaction with positive or adverse effects. Building on this work, Ryff (1989) further expanded the definition to integrate emotional, psychological, and social factors into mental wellbeing. In other words, mental wellbeing is also about how individuals manage their mental state (Ministry of Health Singapore, n.d.). For McCallum and Price (2012), mental wellbeing includes social, emotional, physical, and cognitive dimensions. It is characterized by positive functioning and the overall satisfaction with one's life, which could be influenced by economic, environmental, and social conditions, contributing to the creation of a sense of meaning and the presence of supportive relationships (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). Seligman (2011) summarized that people must fulfil five key pillars to achieve healthy wellbeing. He calls this the PERMA model: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement. A school in Singapore adopted this model, whereby it stresses the importance of feeling positive, establishing authentic connections with others, finding meaning and fulfilment, and securing success and accomplishments in life (Yuhua Secondary School, 2025). Therefore, mental wellbeing can be emotionally driven. Thus, positive wellbeing improves individuals' quality of life and their ability to contribute to societies and communities with meaning and purpose (WHO, 2025b). In summary, wellbeing is described as an individual's personal and professional achievements, satisfaction, purpose, and happiness, which are constructed when collaborating with colleagues and students in a specific working environment (Acton & Glasgow, 2015; Brady & Wilson, 2021). It is subjective, volatile, and highly influenced by the surroundings, as Seligman (2011) posited.

This article argues that for Singapore to leapfrog to the next wave of development, prioritizing teachers' mental wellbeing is essential to strengthen the quality of its human capital to achieve future growth. Emotional factors can drive mental wellbeing, affecting teachers' willingness to take on leadership responsibilities. Since teachers' mental wellbeing relates to teachers' psychological capacity that enables them to thrive "physically, mentally, socially and professionally" (Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2014, p. 501), their mental wellbeing could affect their willingness to take up leadership responsibilities, and this in return could affect the development and the optimization of their human capital. For Singapore, "investing in people is important not just for developing countries, but also for advanced economies pursuing the next bound of development" (Ho, 2025, p. 94). Therefore, investing in teachers' wellbeing should not be overlooked; it is a critical component in developing teachers' psychological resilience, which is needed for human capital development (Trajano, 2022).

Singapore's vision for human capital and mental wellbeing

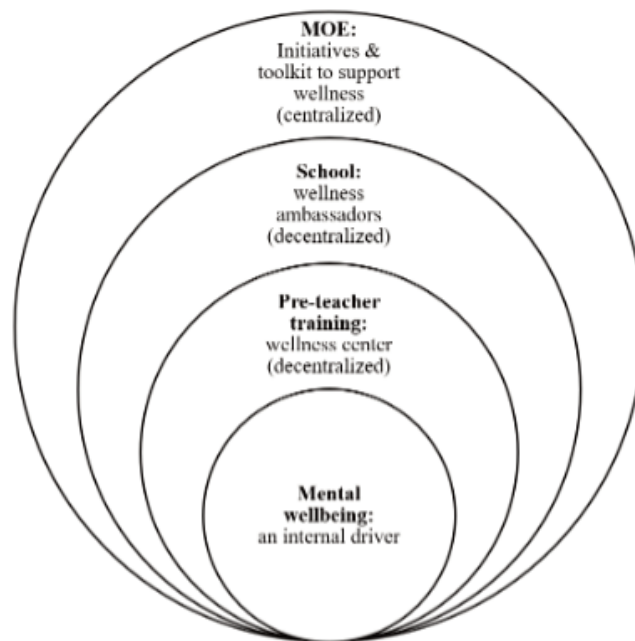
Human capital development plays a significant role in Singapore's economic plans. Singapore, a small country with no natural resources, strongly focuses on developing its human capital. It has an approximate total land area of 734.3 square kilometers (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2025), and thus, its national human resource development aligns closely with its national economic policies. In 2016, Singapore's

education system achieved the highest quality score and ranked number 13 globally in a human capital study (Goh & Choo, 2018).

Adopting a centralized strategy, Singapore's education system and the private organization sector provide the education and training needed to create the country's ideal workforce. In 2024, the estimated expenditure for education is reported to be S\$14.75 billion (Ministry of Finance, 2024). Singapore's education system comprises a unique blend of centralized and decentralized approaches.

Singapore's Ministry of Education (MOE) plays a central role in shaping the educational landscape, operating under a top-down governance model that ensures consistency and alignment with national policies. As a government agency, MOE regulates school operations, determines curriculum frameworks, oversees teacher training, and places increasing emphasis on teachers' mental wellbeing. Recognizing that teacher wellbeing directly impacts student learning outcomes, MOE has implemented various initiatives to reduce stress, foster resilience, and create a supportive work environment for educators. For example, MOE launched the Wellness Ambassador initiative in September 2021 to enhance peer support for teachers' wellbeing (Empowering Educators to Steward Change, n.d.). Under this program, nominated officers undergo specialized training to offer essential peer support to colleagues who seek guidance (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Singapore's centralized and decentralized approaches



At the school level, these wellness ambassadors serve as confidential support figures, providing a listening ear and directing peers to appropriate resources when necessary. To ensure their effectiveness, the ambassadors receive continuous support from MOE Headquarters (MOE HQ) through regular check-ins conducted by school leaders and MOE HQ representatives. Since the press release in 2022, approximately 80 schools would have at least two wellness ambassadors each by the end of the year (Empowering Educators to Steward Change, n.d.). In 2022, school staff wellbeing committees focused on mental wellbeing, integrating structured programs and activities into their wellbeing initiatives. MOE HQ provided a comprehensive toolkit

containing suggested activities and programs and a dedicated mental wellness feature to support this effort. Separately, at the pre-teacher training level, the National Institute of Education (NIE)¹ set up the Wellness Centre, which offers free and confidential counselling services to support students, faculty, and NIE and Nanyang Technological University staff. Additionally, the NIE Wellness Centre provides affordable psychological assessments to the university community and the public.

Generally, formal education in Singapore begins at seven years old. After six years of primary school, students will enter secondary school to pursue a four or five-year education. Following that, students are diverted to pre-tertiary education, that is, two-year junior college, three-year pre-university education at the Millennia Institute or any of the five polytechnics, and/or two to three years of technical education at the Institute of Technical Education. Subsequently, male students will serve a two-year compulsory national service before they enter the workforce, university, or other forms of higher education, while female students will either work or continue their studies. As students spend many years in school, teachers are crucial in transmitting values and knowledge and fostering critical and creative thinking and future skills. Teachers are increasingly expected to help students cultivate soft and non-cognitive skills, teach diverse groups of students, and work collaboratively with other teachers; hence, prioritizing teacher wellbeing has become vital. Job satisfaction surveys across countries reported that teachers face high-stress levels due to their highly demanding work and pressurized work environments (Schleicher, 2018). Teachers' wellbeing can seriously impact education, and boosting teachers' human capital is critical to ensure educational quality and the overall success of the education system (Belay, Melese, & Seifu, 2021).

Human capital theory

Policymakers have discussed the importance of enhancing teacher human capital. The link between teachers and human capital is clear because teachers possess knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences that are considered valuable assets for student improvement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Becker introduced the concept of human capital in 1964 to estimate the monetary rate of return for individuals' accumulative abilities, skills, and knowledge developed through formal and informal education, such as on-the-job training, schooling, and other knowledge received through life experiences. Since the concept of human capital is associated with valuable knowledge and skills needed to be developed in individuals, investing in education becomes the key to creating the ideal human capital to provide direct benefits in the form of improvement in performance, productivity, and career advancement (Becker, 1964; Pil & Leana, 2009). Crocker (2006) stressed that education and training are prominent strategies to develop individuals' knowledge and skills. Hence, human capital is tightly linked to the economically valuable knowledge and skills individuals need to grow through education and training (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, 2013). According to Healthfield (2011), employees must advance their personal and organizational skills, knowledge, and ability, and organizations must support this development. Healthfield (2011) further explained that such human capital development requires organizations to provide competency improvement opportu-

nities, such as employee training, career development, and coaching. Mincer (1981) highlighted that human capital activities go beyond simply embodying available knowledge. Instead, it can be an ongoing production of new knowledge to meet societal changes, and if human capital is to be left idle, it deteriorates (Schultz, 1961).

In education, human capital development refers to teachers owning and developing their knowledge and skills, such as improving their subject knowledge, student management, teaching and learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Uba and Chinonyerem (2017) reaffirmed that a school's human capital development provides learning, training, and development opportunities for teachers to improve their individual, team, and school performance. Teachers' human capital development through continuous learning and development is critical to strengthening their professional competencies and human capital (Belay et al., 2021). Furthermore, accumulating human capital among a group of teachers can function as a collective resource that will benefit the schools even though knowledge-related assets reside in the individual teachers. A study by Liu, Chen, Cheng, and Xiao (2023) in a Chinese cultural context found that teacher leaders can support other teachers and improve their sense of efficacy by working collaboratively. More importantly, they found that such support establishes connections, strengthens relatedness between teachers, and enhances teacher wellbeing and satisfaction in their jobs. Teachers will become more productive and innovative when this happens, increasing their job performance and strengthening their human capital.

Teachers' mental wellbeing and its role in human capital theory

Compared with other professions, teachers have a higher tendency to suffer from mental and psychological stress as teaching is psychologically demanding (Scheuch, Haufe, & Seibt, 2015). A teacher's wellbeing is critical for the quality of education and the development of students since teaching is demanding and challenging (Cook, Miller, Fiat, Renshaw, Frye, Joseph, & Decano, 2017). Teachers are expected to build academic competencies and support students in their social and emotional development (Bilz, Fischer, Hoppe-Herfurth, & John, 2022). In Singapore, the high-stakes educational system with a strong emphasis on academic achievement places immense pressure on teachers to deliver results. The demanding nature of the teaching profession, potentially exacerbated by factors such as large class sizes, increasing administrative tasks, emotional demands of engaging with students, and increasing societal pressures and expectations, could further impact mental health among teachers (Tan, 2019). Essentially, the inherent stresses of the teaching profession suggest that teachers may face a high likelihood of challenges to their mental health. For teachers, fear of jeopardizing their careers may further prevent them from getting professional support (Goh & Yip, 2021).

Several research papers offer different frameworks for assessing teachers' wellbeing. For instance, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) proposed a comprehensive framework that defines teachers' occupational wellbeing as a multi-dimensional concept. The OECD framework consists of: 1) policy settings of educational systems, 2) teachers' wellbeing, and 3) inward and outward outcomes (OECD, 2020). Policy settings of educational systems include material con-

ditions, quality standards, distribution and allocation, career structure, and quality of working environment. Inward outcomes refer to stress, burnout, and motivation to leave teaching. Outward outcomes consist of classroom processes and students' wellbeing. Collie, Shapka, Perry, and Martin (2015) proposed a three-dimensional framework: workload (i.e., workload and concomitant related stress), organizational (i.e., teachers' impression of the school leadership and culture toward teachers and teaching), and student interaction wellbeing (i.e., interactions with students).

At the same time, Viac and Fraser's (2020) concept of a teacher's occupational wellbeing has four dimensions: cognitive, subjective, physical, mental, and social wellbeing. Here, teachers' wellbeing is associated with the quality of working environments, stress levels, and motivation to stay on the job (OECD, 2020). According to them, cognitive wellbeing refers to teachers' ability to process knowledge, including their self-efficacy and beliefs about their abilities to perform. Subjective wellbeing means teachers' perception of their emotional states and job satisfaction from working. Physical and mental wellbeing refers to physical, emotional, and psychological health. Finally, social wellbeing refers to the quality of the teachers' social connections with the various stakeholders, in this case, the school environment. A teacher's wellbeing is inextricably linked to their ability to take leadership roles since a teacher's mental and emotional state significantly impacts their teaching and leadership capacity. Considering the different viewpoints that describe teachers' wellbeing, this article proposes teachers' wellbeing as a form of quality psychological (Q-Psy) capital that needs to be invested in creating a more potent form of human capital. This article argues that a teacher's wellbeing needs are fundamental to engineering quality capital because they aid in developing the desired human capital. Primarily, Q-Psy capital would facilitate the development of cognitive, subjective, physical, mental, and social wellbeing, that is, input, which will benefit teacher leaders and sustainable leadership development in the broader education system (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Q-Psy capital

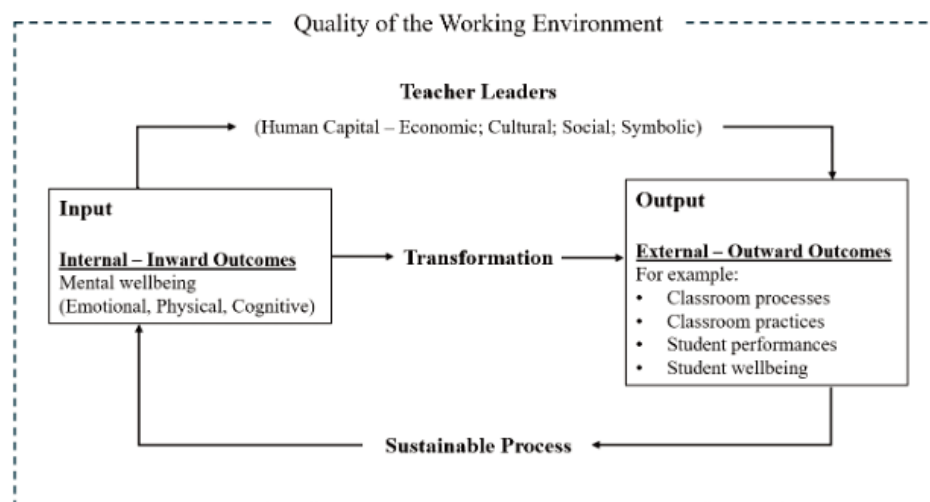


Figure 2 illustrates the importance of the quality of the working environment in facilitating the transformation process of converting the internal psychological input to external outcomes. It highlights how mental wellbeing is a valuable foundational resource that aids in transforming inner psychological capacity into external outcomes, such as teachers' effectiveness, productivity, student outcomes, and willingness to

lead, which affect the overall quality of education. Q-Psy capitals are key inputs that help teachers accumulate the abilities, skills, and knowledge needed to improve their practices and transfer them into performances with economic values. Research by Ghamrawi, Naccache, and Shal (2023) concluded that statistical significance between effective leadership and wellbeing, and inversely, “enhanced wellbeing [,] could foster leadership qualities” (p. 8). Therefore, investing in and prioritizing teacher wellbeing will improve sustainable school outcomes, educational excellence, and the quality of the teacher workforce, which will ultimately help Singapore’s human capital growth.

Teacher leaders and human capital growth

Teachers play a decisive role in school improvement; teacher leaders are centered in instructional leadership since they are co-constructors of education change and play an essential role in translating policies into actions at the ground level (Cherkowski, 2018). Ghamrawi (2011) defined teacher leadership as teachers actively guiding, supporting, and improving educational practices in their schools. A competent teacher sees the value in developing and working with others, including students, parents, and colleagues. They will also actively seek opportunities for professional collaboration within and beyond the school (SingTeach, 2010). Teacher leadership refers to teachers’ ability to undertake leadership roles and responsibilities beyond their classrooms and within educational settings, influencing teaching practices and improving student learning outcomes (Shal & Ghamrawi, 2024). These teacher leaders serve as mentors and coaches, fostering a positive learning environment for their colleagues and students. Over the years, developing teacher leadership has become essential to school and student improvement. Angelle and DeHart (2011) defined teacher leadership to sharing pedagogy and classroom management knowledge with colleagues, taking up leadership opportunities when asked, and going beyond required teaching duties to support students and the school. Teachers are essential in ensuring better student outcomes (Mourshed, Chijioko, & Barber, 2010).

According to Poekert, Alexandrou, and Shannon (2016), teacher leadership is “one approach with empirical evidence demonstrating its viability as a solution for sustaining systemic teacher quality and school improvement efforts” (p. 310). Teachers are at the forefront of educational reforms and change, and teacher leaders can play a critical role in fostering collective efficacy among their colleagues (Harris & Jones, 2019). Hunzicker (2017) highlighted that “conceptions of teacher leadership are trending away from formal titles and positions to embrace a more informal, integrated approach” (p. 1). Collinson (2012) explained that these teacher leaders are “informal leaders who ‘walk ahead’, model learning and innovation, and develop relationships and networks to extend their learning and influence others” (p. 247). Harris and Jones (2019) suggested three key dimensions of teacher leadership: influence, action, and developing pedagogical excellence. As teacher leaders do not carry a role or a formal responsibility, they influence by moving beyond assigned roles through sharing practices and initiating changes. With that, they develop pedagogical excellence in their classrooms and influence others to significantly improve their teaching practices. Teacher leadership encompasses various forms and activities, including mentoring and coaching other teachers, designing, developing, and im-

plementing professional development programs, engaging in research and innovation, and participating in curriculum and assessment development (Shal & Ghamrawi, 2024). Thus, developing and enhancing teacher human capital is important because it informally impacts teaching quality, student outcomes, and school performance, mainly when studies have found that teachers with strong efficacy beliefs will be more inclined to use different teaching methods to enhance learning (Liu, 2013).

However, studies have found that these teacher leaders face numerous challenges when taking up leadership roles. For example, teachers may not welcome such mentoring support as “they see it as an inappropriate intrusion into their instructional space” (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007, p. 9), nor mentors entering their classrooms to protect their autonomy. Consequently, school leaders may scale back their efforts when they encounter such resistance, and therefore, adequate systemic support is needed to help teacher leaders maintain their mental wellbeing. Essentially, the quality of the teacher leader’s working conditions is critical in shaping teacher wellbeing and their willingness to stay in the profession and take up leadership roles.

Psychological capital and quality of the working environment

Figure 2 illustrates the reciprocal relationship between the quality of the working environment and psychological capital. As an organization progresses and seeks sustainable growth, achieving its vision and goals depends on the mental and physical participation of its human resources, as well as effective management. In other words, an employee’s quality of work life becomes essential. In the workplace, individuals can build their psychological capital, commonly known as PsyCap, to boost their performance. Youssef-Morgan (2024) explained that PsyCap is a multidimensional construct comprising four fundamental characteristics: efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Efficacy is an individual’s belief in their abilities, referring to their confidence to take on challenging tasks and willingness to do what it takes to achieve their goals within a given context. Optimism refers to the positive expectations of their perceived ability. Optimistic individuals avoid depression and hopelessness; they expect positive situations and find joy in all conditions. Hope describes individuals’ thinking, which affects their work performance because it motivates their desire for favorable outcomes and helps them persevere to achieve their goals. Finally, resilience refers to individuals’ ability to recover from adversity, failure, or difficult situations and persevere over time (Çavuş & Gökçen, 2015; Youssef-Morgan, 2024).

Nguyen and colleagues (2024) explained that the concept of PsyCap is connected to the different fields of behavioural science, such as attitude and behaviour, and the influence of external and internal factors. External factors, especially the workplace, are ideal for cultivating PsyCap and individual job performance. For example, individuals experiencing high-stress levels in their work environment tend to have a lower level of PsyCap than those working in a workplace with lower stress levels (Newman, Ucbasaran, Zhu, & Hirst, 2014). Jang (2022) found that individuals with high levels of positive PsyCap can better moderate stress and attitude, and exercise long-term commitment to their work in the workplace (Luthans & Jensen, 2005). These individuals are also more optimistic and confident and can problem-

solve when facing work-related challenges (Avery, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011; Newman et al., 2014). They are more effective in their workplace and improve human capital.

Sustainable work environments have garnered much attention and become increasingly important. Studies have found that PsyCap and empowerment could be key indicators of organizational success due to workers' perceptions of themselves and their abilities. Their feelings or views of their capabilities contribute to their organizations, and such psychological resources play an essential part in their work performance (Kariri & Radwan, 2023). For example, Liao, Hu, Chung, and Chen (2017) found that PsyCap and work happiness are positively correlated, which is linked to the environment, specifically the educational setting. In this article, the environment refers to the roles of school leaders and the MOE. These two stakeholders can have a significant impact on teacher wellbeing. According to See, Morris, Gorard, Kototsaki, and Abdi (2020), the school environment is correlated with teacher retention, with school leadership being an essential factor in establishing a positive environment. They confirmed that supportive leaders empower teachers and have a positive impact on their psychological and emotional wellbeing. Similarly, MOE policies can affect teacher wellbeing directly and indirectly. Birkland (2019) defined policy as an action plan agreed upon by a group of people, an organization, or a government to establish a standardized process for achieving a set of goals.

Combining Bourdieu's capitals with "Q-Psy" capital

Based on the previous discussion, this article suggests that Q-Psy can be included with Bourdieu's theory of capital. Bourdieu (1986) was concerned with the dynamics of power and social reproduction in society, which takes the form of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capitals. Economic capital encompasses all material wealth and financial resources owned by individuals or families, including money, inherited income, possessions, property, investments, and savings that enable them to purchase goods and services. Hence, improving teachers' mental wellbeing will likely help them cope with difficulties and challenges, boosting their productivity and economic gains. Social capital consists of social circles, networks, connections, or institutionalized relationships that a person has access to, which are associated with social classes, particularly membership or kinship in a group, that can be leveraged to generate privileges and legitimize social memberships. Here, relationships between teachers, school leaders, and communities would facilitate the development of teachers' professional identity, enhance their resilience, and ultimately improve school performance, as these connections would enable individuals to secure mutual recognition and acquaintances that will allow them to access new opportunities and resources. Cultural capital exists in three forms: institutionalized, such as formal academic qualifications from an institution; objectified, such as collections of artworks, books, and computers; and embodied, in the form of knowledge or long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital also "refers to transmissible parental cultural codes and practices capable of securing a *return* to their holders" (Tzanakis, 2011, p. 77). Likewise, when teachers are given opportunities to acquire desired experiences and qualifications through professional devel-

opment, their cultural capital increases, which is also transmissible to the schools and secures a return for the teachers. Finally, symbolic capital materialized in the form of individual power to transform and mobilize all of their capitals, converting them into social ranking, class position, and so on (Bourdieu, 1986; Chua, Soo, & Kashif, 2024; Joy, Game & Toshniwal, 2020). Thus, teachers with a growth mindset are motivated to convert their various capitals into social advantages.

Based on Bourdieu's theory of capitals, this article argues that these "physical" capitals are possessed by individuals not only to determine their positions and social behaviours in society but also to impose complex effects on these capitals and social wellbeing. As shown in Figure 2, this external investment has a significant correlation with individuals' mental wellbeing. For example, studies such as those by Lin, Lu, Guo, and Liu (2019) have found that individuals with greater economic resources tend to maintain healthier lifestyles. They also found that individuals with supportive social networks are more likely to participate in healthier behaviours (Suzuki, Sasayama, Nishimura, Yamaji, Ota, Saito, & Yoneoka, 2025). Similarly, those with more cultural capital tend to engage in more advantageous health-related behaviours (Doblytė, 2019; Xu & Jiang, 2020). As pointed out by Schneider-Kamp (2020), personal disposable resources can impact the construction of individual health. Hence, the various capitals possessed by individuals not only influence their physical health but also their inner health.

Following this line of thought, teacher human capital includes PsyCap, a by-product of the forms of capital, which then reinforces the acquisition of various capitals since "Mental health is an intrinsic component of overall health" (Gautam, Jain, Chaudhary, Gautam, Gaur, & Grover, 2024, p. 231), and a prerequisite for optimizing human capital. To ensure the sustainability of this psychologically empowered human capital, the condition of the environment and its effects on teachers become critical. The concept of "environmental quality" refers to the overall condition or state of the natural environment that affects the wellbeing of organisms in that ecosystem, including the quality of air, water, soil, biodiversity, and climate of that specific environment. Human and natural factors play a crucial role in influencing this quality. Using this environmental quality concept, it is clear that the overall school environment's quality can affect the wellbeing of teachers and their PsyCap, which impacts their willingness and ability to take up leadership responsibilities, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3 demonstrates that the concepts of teacher wellbeing and teacher leadership are interconnected and can be conditioned by the quality of the school environment. Fosco, Rutten, and Schussler (2023) explained that teacher leadership is vital in school operations and can positively affect teacher wellbeing. As depicted in Figure 3, teacher wellbeing drives teacher leadership, reinforcing teacher wellbeing and improving the school's quality. This article posits that the link between teacher wellbeing

Figure 3: The inter-relationship between teacher wellbeing and teacher leadership



and leadership is reciprocal. Ghamrawi et al. (2023) studied these two concepts and confirmed they “form an interdependent symbiosis, each nurturing the other in a harmonious cycle” (p. 8). Positive teacher wellbeing supports teacher leadership, and teacher leadership, in turn, enhances teacher wellbeing. When this happens, teacher productivity improves, which in turn enhances student outcomes and school quality.

Why teacher leadership and wellbeing? Positive teacher wellbeing is a key driver of leadership willingness as it is strongly linked to teachers’ desire to take on leadership roles in school. Research on teacher leadership found that teacher leaders can be overwhelmed with leadership work, such as engaging in difficult conversations with colleagues (Baecher, 2012; Cherkowski, 2018). In addition, studies have shown that teacher efficacy belief is a powerful predictor of teaching effectiveness. In other words, when teachers are physically, emotionally, and psychologically well, they positively impact their students’ learning outcomes (SingTeach, 2016). Similarly, when teachers are mentally well, they are more likely to step into leadership positions to drive positive change and contribute to the overall effectiveness of teaching and learning in school, since they are more motivated and confident in their perceived abilities (Ghamrawi et al., 2023). They are also more likely to be more productive and effective in their work. When they assume leadership roles, they may gain greater satisfaction, develop new competencies, and experience professional growth (Cherkowski, 2018), which encourages them to take on more leadership responsibilities.

Ghamrawi (2010, 2011) defined teacher leadership as teachers in their communities playing an active and influential role in guiding, shaping, and improving educational outcomes. Harris and Jones (2019) pointed out that teacher leaders are co-constructors of innovative changes and professional development among their colleagues. According to them, there are three key dimensions of teacher leadership. Teachers:

1. Influence rather than having a formal role or responsibility,
2. Act on changes by sharing practices, and
3. Develop pedagogical excellence in and out of their classrooms.

On top of that, the findings from the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP), a joint initiative between the Ontario Teachers’ Federation (OTF) and the Ontario MOE support experienced teachers to pursue self-directed advanced professional development, concluded that:

teacher leaders will do amazing things; they will initiate, innovate, implement and share a wide range of projects which can develop collaborative professional learning, improve practice and support student learning; they will experience success in tangible outcomes — such as changes in professional practice for instruction and assessment — and also importantly in the sometimes immeasurable benefits of being empowered, enabled and valued; they will navigate personal, interpersonal and practical challenges as their leadership is tested and grows; they will learn how to collaborate and share to spread knowledge student learning and sustain improvements in practices; and they will demonstrate the professional, educational and

financial value of self-directed, teacher-led innovative and effective practices. (Campbell, Liebermann, & Yashkina, 2013, p. 6)

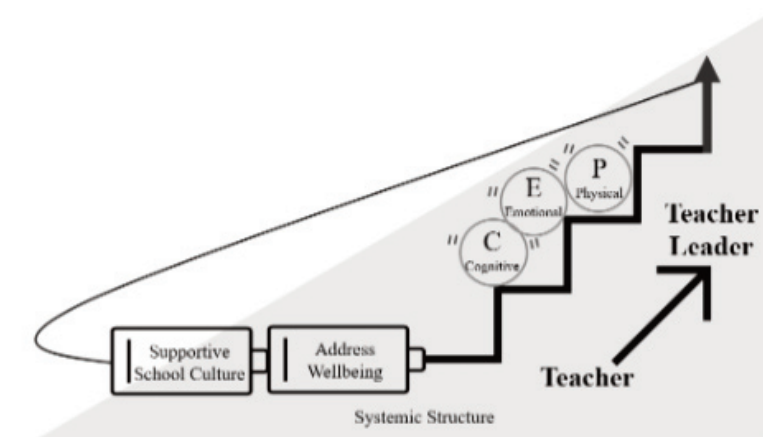
Thus, teacher leaders are essential in exploring new ideas, translating them into effective practices, and, more importantly, leading others in this transformative process. However, any formal or informal leadership role will require teachers to invest additional time and effort. These roles often come with challenges, such as managing conflicts, leading change, and attending numerous meetings. Nevertheless, with improved teacher quality and student learning, human capital will be enhanced when teachers and students develop skills, knowledge, and competencies.

What is next? A power-up approach to teacher wellbeing and teacher leadership

A report by the Singapore Counselling Centre, ACC Institute of Human Services (2021) on the mental health of teachers in Singapore illustrated the mental health challenges teachers face in Singapore, particularly in light of COVID-19, and examined the factors contributing to stress and the impact on teachers' personal and professional life. It reported that high workload, a lack of work-life balance, student and parental expectations, and systemic issues contribute significantly to teachers' stress, impacting their personal wellbeing and professional effectiveness. It highlighted that barriers to seeking help from mental health professionals and supervisors exist (Singapore Counselling Centre, 2021). The report reflected that despite this centralized-decentralized approach to supporting teacher wellbeing, teachers are still suffering from emotional exhaustion, risking depression and not seeking professional help, inevitably resulting in a significant impact on teacher leadership.

Despite the various promotions on the importance of overall wellbeing by different government bodies, the authors argue this is a deficit approach, whereby the focus is on addressing mental health challenges through interventions, counselling, and, in some cases, medications, resulting in perpetuating mental health stigma. For example, Tan, Shahwan, Goh, Ong, Wei, Verma et al. (2020) found that the fear of being perceived as incompetent at work may prevent people from seeking help. Several participants in the study also indicated that people who have mental illness tend to be ostracized or looked down on in Singapore, which could also result in bringing shame to their families. Therefore, shifting from a deficit to a strength-based approach is es-

Figure 4: CEP Power-Up approach

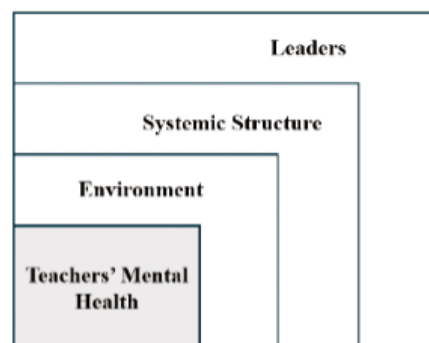


essential to increase teacher leadership and boost Singapore’s human capital. The authors propose a “CEP Power-Up” approach that requires a more decentralized-intentional strategy at the school level to reinforce teacher wellbeing (see Figure 4).

The CEP Power-Up approach, as proposed in Figure 4, advocates for a more decentralized and intentional strategy at the school level to enhance teacher wellbeing. While the centralized-decentralized model provides structural support, focusing on addressing challenges and stressors rather than empowering teachers holistically, the CEP Power-Up approach shifts the focus toward strengthening teachers’ cognitive, emotional, and physical (CEP) capacities, reinforcing a more proactive and empowerment-driven model. Although the Singapore government has adopted a more remote supervisory steering model, giving schools greater autonomy, this must be accompanied by intentional school-level structural support led by the MOE. As shown in Figure 4, when teachers are energized and synergized, they move up toward leadership responsibilities. When CEP wellbeing increases, leadership capacity increases. This model’s core focus emphasizes strengthening schools’ support structure, such as improving school culture, addressing wellbeing, and creating a systematic structure of support by the MOE. This article emphasizes that school (decentralized) + MOE (intentional) partnerships would supply the energy needed to move toward teacher leadership. A teacher’s cognitive, emotional, and physical wellbeing are interconnected at the heart of the model. They are essential to empower teachers to manage stress, maintain motivation, and enhance their resilience in their professional roles.

This article proposes four strategies to consider when implementing intentional support layers since teachers face high expectations, emotional demands from various stakeholders, and possible social stigma and discrimination if they seek help for being mentally unwell. Currently, programs and systems are in place to promote teachers’ wellbeing, including wellness ambassadors, staff wellbeing committees, a wellbeing toolkit, wellness centres, and external collaborations. These initiatives to promote wellbeing are building human capital because positive wellbeing is one of the key psychological resources that increases teachers’ capacity to cope with adversity and master their environments (Gautam et al., 2024). When this happens, their productivity and workplace performance increase (Kun & Gadancz, 2022). When good leaders care for teachers’ wellbeing, it increases teachers’ willingness to take up leadership roles. As summarized in Figure 5, the four elements of the decentralized-intentional approach are teachers’ mental health, their working environment, the school’s systemic structure, and school leaders, which combined promote human capital growth.

Figure 5: The four strategies for the decentralized-intentional approach



Addressing wellbeing goes beyond recognizing challenges and emphasizing what is lacking or problematic. It implies weaknesses, often associated with negative stereotypes, such as burnout, stress, and mental breakdown. Here, addressing inner wellbeing focuses on empowering teachers by implementing proactive strategies for building resilience, enhancing wellbeing, and thriving in challenging times. Such reframing of languages around wellbeing would shift the focus from a deficit to a strength-based approach. Addressing mental wellbeing directly through strength-based approaches at the school level can help teachers sustain their cognitive, emotional, and physical health. The CEP Power-Up approach could be used to reframe mindsets, serving as a “booster” for all stakeholders when examining the wellbeing of teachers. It is essential to adopt a decentralized-intentional approach because improving mental wellbeing should be concentrated, targeted, and contextualized in the school context, as different schools could experience different stress points. More importantly, this approach could further enhance confidence, collaboration, and relationships within that school, which is essential for teachers to assume informal leadership positions and contribute to the school’s decision-making and overall developmental processes. This approach stresses the vital need to localize practices based on school and teacher needs so that teachers feel empowered and valued (Fosco et al., 2023).

Establishing a holistic and supportive school culture where teacher wellbeing is viewed as a long-term investment. Wellbeing initiatives, such as wellness breaks and self-care leave, should be considered as strategies to enhance teacher wellbeing. Like designing an athlete’s diet plan to ensure a balanced meal and optimize performance, upgrading teachers’ wellbeing could include helping them personalize and customize their wellbeing plan to have a balanced intake of CEP support to optimize their teaching performances and leadership capacity. Like human capital development, which requires continuous investment, teacher wellbeing is a gradual process that necessitates long-term investment and must adapt to the changing school environment. This ongoing investment in wellbeing, in turn, is essential for human capital growth and the development of other forms of capital. Extended holidays, white space,² and professional development funding exist, but teachers need reduced workloads, adequate breaks, and adequate transit time. The MOE or school leaders should endorse the creation of a holistic and supportive school culture. For example, teachers’ workload must be managed to counter overworking and burnout, such as not staying in school for more than eight working hours a day. Non-academic activities can be subcontracted to non-teachers, counselors or teachers who have chosen to oversee non-curriculum duties. Similar to the position of vice-principal (administration) overseeing all non-curriculum areas, this group of teachers could be given fewer teaching duties and instead be deployed to look after non-curriculum areas.

An overall supportive systemic structure that ensures school policies, leadership approaches, and grievance mechanisms align with teacher wellbeing priorities. Strong systemic structures will ensure that policies, leadership approaches, and institutional mechanisms align with teacher wellbeing priorities and support mechanisms, such as establishing a well-defined feedback mechanism on school policies or the environment. An anonymous reporting system, already in place by the MOE for teachers,

will create a safe space for them to voice concerns about workplace conditions, allowing for policy refinement at the school level. It will benefit teachers by developing the different forms of capitals and enhancing their overall economic values.

Finally, **leadership as a catalyst** is critical in shaping school culture, setting priorities, and driving teacher support initiatives, particularly school and MOE leadership. At the top of the support culture, school and MOE leadership are paramount in shaping school culture, setting priorities, and driving teacher wellbeing initiatives. Effective leadership at the school level can inspire, support, and empower teachers. School leaders can bolster teachers' mental wellbeing through the following:

- a. Prioritize wellbeing as a component of the leadership philosophy, and leaders can be trained in workplace empathy and mental first aid to support both teacher wellbeing and their own self-care.
- b. Allocate resources to wellbeing policies to strengthen teacher wellbeing programs, regularly review wellbeing policies, and adjust policies based on teachers' feedback and evolving workplace dynamics.
- c. Lead by example from school leaders by modelling healthy work-life balance, avoiding unrealistic expectations, and encouraging open discussion about stress management and mental health.

Effective leadership at the school level is the driving force behind the successful execution of all teacher wellbeing strategies, as it directly affects teachers' psychological ownership of their jobs, school, and, ultimately, the quality of the school environment (Ye, Shang, Shafait, & Xu, 2022). School leaders have more autonomy and are better positioned to understand contextualized challenges in a centralized-decentralized system, allowing them to tailor their support and resources better. Furthermore, they have regular and direct interactions with teachers; hence, they can provide intentional and timely intervention and promote a positive teacher environment.

Conclusion

The CEP Power-Up approach is closely aligned with the human capital theory (HCT), emphasizing teachers' development, empowerment, and wellbeing as valuable assets in the Singapore education system. Human capital theory posits that investment in individuals' knowledge, skills, and wellbeing leads to greater productivity and societal benefits. By prioritizing teacher wellbeing at multiple levels, such as supportive school culture, structured wellbeing initiatives, systemic alignment, and strong leadership, this framework ensures that teachers remain mentally resilient, physically healthy, and cognitively engaged, enhancing their ability to deliver high-quality education. From the HCT perspective, teachers are employees. Therefore, long-term investments in their cognitive, emotional, and physical wellbeing will have a direct impact on student learning outcomes, innovation in pedagogy, and overall educational effectiveness. When teachers experience burnout, stress, and systemic challenges, their teaching ability is significantly compromised. Thus, investing in teachers' mental wellbeing is not just a moral imperative but an economic and strategic necessity. Furthermore, the centralized-decentralized support model within the CEP Power-Up approach reflects the need for a balanced policy framework that ensures macro-level consistency while allowing for micro-level flexibility.

By decentralizing teacher empowerment initiatives such as peer wellness programs, mental health coaching, and workload management strategies, schools foster an environment where teachers can continuously grow, adapt, and innovate, ultimately enhancing the human capital of the education sector. Leadership is paramount in sustaining human capital investment by fostering a positive school culture, implementing systemic wellbeing measures, and ensuring professional development opportunities aligned with teachers' evolving needs. Without strong leadership, wellbeing policies remain ineffective, and the broader investment in teacher human capital is weakened. In conclusion, the CEP Power-Up approach ensures that Singapore's teachers (or teachers worldwide) are supported and actively strengthened, leading to higher job satisfaction, lower attrition rates, and improved educational outcomes. A well-supported teaching workforce ultimately translates into a more skilled, motivated, and productive education sector, reinforcing commitment to sustained economic growth and social progress through quality education. Singapore's centralized-decentralized education system is viable for introducing the CEP Power-Up approach. The Ministry should lead the CEP Power-Up approach to show their commitment to empowering the teachers that their wellbeing is of top priority, and schools can adopt this approach to promote wellbeing at the school level, creating a ripple effect to promote wellness for the teachers intentionally. This approach can be adapted and transferred to different education systems internationally. Some, if not all, of the four strategies in Figure 5 are already practiced in Singapore schools. However, there is still room to foster a strength-based approach to teachers' wellbeing to promote teacher leadership.

Notes

1. The National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore, an autonomous institute within Nanyang Technological University (NTU), is the national teacher education institute.
2. White space refers to time set aside for teachers to do group discussions and collaborative work.

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