

**Work-Life Balance Experiences of Secondary School Mother-Teachers in  
Kazakhstan: A Phenomenological Study**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

in

Educational Leadership: School Education

Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education

April 28, 2025

Word count: 20 432

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## Ethical Approval



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Date: 30th of September, 2024

Dear:

Symbat Amanbay

---

This letter now confirms that your research project titled...

Work-Life Balance Experiences of Mother-Teachers in Kazakhstan

---

has been approved by the Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee of Nazarbayev University.

You may proceed with contacting your preferred research site and commencing your participant recruitment strategy.

Yours sincerely,

Lynne Parmenter, Professor, Graduate School of Education

**On behalf of:**  
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## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the faculty members of the Graduate School of Education at Nazarbayev University. Their dedication, expertise, and encouragement have profoundly shaped my academic journey and contributed significantly to my growth as a researcher and educator.

I am especially indebted to my supervisor, Professor Lynne, whose enduring support, insightful guidance, and motivating words kept me moving forward even during the most challenging times. Her belief in my work gave me the confidence and strength to complete this thesis.

I am deeply thankful to my husband, who has been my steadfast companion not only throughout the thesis writing process but from the very first day I embarked on my journey at Nazarbayev University. His constant encouragement and patience have been invaluable, and I could not have reached this point without him.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my daughter, Mariyam. Throughout the writing of this thesis, she was with me—first within me and later by my side. Her innocent smiles and pure presence brought me immeasurable joy and energy, even during moments of deep exhaustion. Writing this thesis together with her taught me countless lessons about resilience and patience.

To all of you, I extend my heartfelt thanks.

## **Abstract**

### **Work-Life Balance Experiences of Secondary School Mother-Teachers in Kazakhstan:**

#### **A Phenomenological Study**

Balancing professional responsibilities with personal life remains a critical challenge for working mothers, particularly in demanding professions like teaching. In Kazakhstan, where traditional gender norms persist and societal expectations are high, mother-teachers face unique pressures in trying to meet both professional and domestic demands. Despite the central role that women play in Kazakhstan's education system, little is known about their lived experiences. This qualitative study investigates how mother-teachers perceive, experience, and manage their work-life balance. The research aims to understand the nuanced challenges they face, the coping mechanisms they develop, and how these experiences differ between urban and rural environments. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the study explores the influence of five environmental systems—microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem—on the daily lives of mother-teachers. Using a descriptive phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five mother-teachers from various regions of Kazakhstan. Participants were selected to reflect a range of experiences in terms of geographic location, family structure, and teaching background. The interviews revealed that work-life balance is not viewed as a static or universal concept but rather as a dynamic and context-dependent process. Teachers constantly negotiate between their roles, adjusting priorities based on the needs of their children, students, administrators, and extended family members. Participants identified multiple challenges including emotional strain, time pressure, and gendered expectations, but also reported using proactive time management, spousal and family support, and school-level flexibility as coping mechanisms. The study contributes to understanding the

intersection of gender, profession, and culture in Kazakhstan and offers practical implications for education policy and school leadership to better support working mothers in education.

*Keywords:* work-life balance, mother-teachers, Kazakhstan, Bronfenbrenner, qualitative research, phenomenology

## Аңдатпа

### Қазақстандағы орта мектеп мұғалім-аналарының жұмыс пен жеке өмір арасындағы тепе-теңдік тәжірибесі: феноменологиялық зерттеу

Кәсіби міндеттер мен жеке өмір арасындағы тепе-теңдікті сақтау - әсіресе мұғалімдік сияқты талаптары жоғары кәсіптерде қызмет ететін аналар үшін үлкен мәселе.

Қазақстанда дәстүрлі гендерлік нормалар сақталып, қоғам тарапынан қойылатын талаптар жоғары болғандықтан, мұғалім-аналар кәсіби және отбасылық міндеттерін қатар алып жүруде ерекше қысымға ұшырайды. Әйелдердің еліміздің білім беру жүйесіндегі маңызды рөліне қарамастан, олардың күнделікті өмірлік тәжірибесі әлі толық зерттелмеген. Бұл сапалық зерттеу мұғалім-аналардың жұмыс пен жеке өмір тепе-теңдігін қалай қабылдайтынын және басқару тәсілдерін зерттейді. Зерттеу оларда кездесетін күрделі мәселелерін, қолданатын бейімделу механизмдерін және қала мен ауылдағы жағдайлардың айырмашылығын түсінуге бағытталған. Теориялық негіз ретінде Бронфенбреннердің экологиялық жүйелер теориясы алынған, ол мұғалім-аналардың күнделікті өміріне әсер ететін бес жүйені - микрожүйе, мезожүйе, экзожүйе, макрожүйе және хроножүйені қарастырады. Сипаттамалық феноменологиялық әдіс қолданылып, Қазақстанның түрлі аймақтарынан бес мұғалім-анамен жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбаттар жүргізілді. Қатысушылар географиялық орналасуы, отбасылық құрылымы және педагогикалық тәжірибесі тұрғысынан алуан түрлі болатындай таңдалды. Сұхбат нәтижелері көрсеткендей, жұмыс пен жеке өмір арасындағы тепе-теңдік тұрақты немесе әмбебап ұғым емес, керісінше, жағдайға байланысты үнемі өзгеріп отыратын үдеріс болып саналады. Мұғалімдер үнемі өз рөлдері арасында тепе-теңдік орнатуға тырысады, балалардың, оқушылардың, әкімшіліктің және туыстардың қажеттіліктеріне сәйкес басымдықтарды өзгертіп отырады. Қатысушылар эмоционалдық жүктеме, уақыт тапшылығы және гендерлік

күтулер сияқты қиындықтарды атап өтті, сонымен қатар олар уақытты тиімді басқару, жұбайы мен отбасының қолдауы, мектеп тарапынан көрсетілетін икемділік секілді тиімді шешімдерді қолданатынын айтты. Бұл зерттеу Қазақстандағы гендер, кәсіби өмір және мәдениет тоғысының ерекшеліктерін түсінуге үлес қосады және жұмыс істейтін аналарды қолдауға бағытталған білім беру саясаты мен мектеп басшылығына практикалық ұсыныстар ұсынады.

*Кілт сөздер:* жұмыс пен жеке өмір тепе-теңдігі, мұғалім-аналар, Қазақстан, Бронфенбреннер, сапалық зерттеу, феноменология

## Аннотация

### **Опыт совмещения работы и личной жизни матерей-учителей средних школ в Казахстане: феноменологическое исследование**

Совмещение профессиональных обязанностей с личной жизнью остаётся серьёзной проблемой для работающих матерей, особенно в таких требовательных профессиях, как преподавание. В Казахстане, где сохраняются традиционные гендерные нормы и высоки общественные ожидания, матери-учителя средних школ сталкиваются с уникальным давлением, стремясь одновременно выполнять как профессиональные, так и домашние обязанности. Несмотря на ключевую роль женщин в образовательной системе страны, их жизненный опыт изучен недостаточно. Это качественное исследование направлено на изучение того, как матери-учителя воспринимают, проживают и управляют своим балансом между работой и личной жизнью. Цель исследования - понять сложные вызовы, с которыми они сталкиваются, механизмы адаптации, которые они разрабатывают, и различия между их опытом в городской и сельской среде. В качестве теоретической основы используется экологическая теория систем Бронфенбреннера, исследующая влияние пяти систем - микросистемы, мезосистемы, экзосистемы, макросистемы и хронологической системы - на повседневную жизнь матерей-учителей. Применяя дескриптивный феноменологический подход, данные были собраны с помощью полуструктурированных интервью с пятью матерями-учителями из разных регионов Казахстана. Участницы были отобраны таким образом, чтобы отразить широкий спектр опыта с точки зрения географии, семейной структуры и педагогического стажа. Интервью показали, что баланс между работой и личной жизнью не воспринимается как статичное или универсальное явление, а рассматривается как динамический и зависящий от контекста процесс. Учителя постоянно переключаются между ролями,

меня приоритеты в зависимости от потребностей детей, учеников, администрации и родственников. Участницы указали на множество трудностей, включая эмоциональное напряжение, нехватку времени и гендерные ожидания, но также поделились стратегиями преодоления - эффективное управление временем, поддержка со стороны семьи и супруга, гибкость в школе. Исследование способствует более глубокому пониманию пересечения гендера, профессии и культуры в Казахстане и предлагает практические рекомендации для образовательной политики и школьного руководства по поддержке работающих матерей.

*Ключевые слова:* баланс между работой и личной жизнью, матери-учителя, Казахстан, Бронфенбреннер, качественное исследование, феноменология

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a comprehensive background of the study, including an overview of the work-life balance challenges that teachers, particularly those who are mothers, face in their profession. It presents the problem statement, outlining the unique pressures and constraints that teachers in Kazakhstan encounter as they strive to fulfill both their professional responsibilities and their caregiving roles within the family. Furthermore, it outlines the key objectives of this study and the guiding research questions that drove the study. Finally, it underscores the academic and practical significance of this research, highlighting how it contributes to addressing the gaps in existing knowledge on this critical issue facing the teaching profession.

### **1.2 Background of the Study**

Teaching is a highly feminized profession in Kazakhstan, with women comprising 76% of the teaching workforce (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019). Many of these women are also mothers, juggling dual roles as educators and primary caregivers. This dual responsibility makes work-life balance a critical concern. Research indicates that teachers in Kazakhstan already face difficult working conditions—they are underpaid, overburdened, and undervalued (Kopeyeva, 2019). This challenge is often amplified for women, particularly mothers, who navigate the multifaceted roles of educator, caregiver, and homemaker.

Research indicates that female teachers, particularly those with young children, frequently experience greater stress and burnout than their male colleagues (Heeralal, 2014). They often feel pressured to perform exceptionally in the classroom while also managing household duties and supporting their children's growth (Kuzhabekova, 2019).

This juggling act can result in stress, fatigue, and feelings of overwhelm, which can adversely affect their well-being and potentially their job performance.

Kazakhstan's education system is experiencing a period of extensive reform, impacting various aspects of education and presenting challenges for educators (Ruby & Sarinzhipov, 2014). Major reforms include the introduction of the renewed curriculum, developed under the State Program for Education and Science Development 2016–2019, which aims to align educational practices with international standards (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan [MoES RK], 2016). It emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy, and has required teachers to adapt their pedagogical approaches significantly (MoES RK, 2016). The language policy is also undergoing transformation following the Trilingual Education Roadmap 2015–2020, which promotes a more balanced use of Kazakh and Russian, as well as the strengthening of English, thus demanding bilingual or even trilingual proficiency from educators (Tastanbekova, 2018). Additionally, assessment reforms, initiated with the launch of the National Testing and Monitoring System in 2017, are introducing standardized assessments to gauge student progress and evaluate school performance (National Center for Educational Quality Assessment, 2022). These changes, while positive in the long run, place additional burdens on teachers who are already grappling with existing workloads and responsibilities. The successful implementation of these reforms hinges on providing adequate support and resources to educators, enabling them to navigate this period of transition effectively. Teachers are expected to not only deliver high-quality instruction but also engage in continuous professional development, research, and community outreach (Tastanbekova, 2018).

This demanding workload can adversely impact teachers' performance and their ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance, especially for teachers with children.

Therefore, understanding their experiences becomes paramount. This study aimed to contribute valuable insights to inform policy and practice within the Kazakh education system, ultimately fostering a more supportive and sustainable environment for this vital segment of the teaching workforce.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

As individuals juggling dual roles, mother-teachers are responsible for both supporting their families and providing quality education to their students. Despite this demanding nature of the teaching profession and its impact on work-life balance, current educational reforms in Kazakhstan, for example the Law on the Status of Teachers (MoES RK, 2019), do not adequately address the specific needs of this demographic. This lack of support and resources can negatively impact the well-being and professional efficacy of secondary school mother-teachers, potentially hindering the effectiveness of educational reforms.

The increasing demands placed on mother-teachers in Kazakhstan, coupled with societal expectations of women and mothers, create significant challenges for them to achieve a healthy work-life balance (Kabylova, 2022). This imbalance can lead to stress, burnout, and reduced job satisfaction, ultimately impacting the quality of education and the well-being of both teachers and students.

While work-life balance challenges among teachers are widely acknowledged, there is limited research exploring the unique experiences of secondary school mother-teachers in the specific cultural context of Kazakhstan. This lack of understanding hinders the development of culturally sensitive and effective support systems tailored to their needs. Hence, this research examined the experiences of mother-teachers, and the findings were beneficial in informing and shaping the policies.

### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the experiences of mother-teachers in maintaining a work-life balance. Additionally, this study analyzed the challenges faced by the participants in their dual roles as teachers and parents and examined the differences between these experiences in urban and rural settings. The work-life balance of mother-teachers is influenced by various contextual factors, such as school policies, societal expectations, and family dynamics. This study also considered these contextual factors and how they shaped and impacted the lived experiences of these women.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The research questions of this study were as follows:

1. How do secondary school mother-teachers understand the concept of work-life balance?
2. What specific challenges do mother teachers face in managing their dual roles?
3. What coping strategies do secondary school mother-teachers use to manage work-life balance?
4. How do the experiences of secondary school mother-teachers differ in urban and rural socio-cultural contexts?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study makes a valuable contribution by addressing a critical gap in the existing literature on work-life balance, particularly within the cultural and educational context of Kazakhstan. While extensive research on this topic has been conducted in Western settings (Chandra, 2012; Le et al., 2020), there remains a notable lack of understanding regarding the unique work-life balance challenges faced by teachers, especially those who are also mothers, in Central Asian countries. This research directly

addresses this understudied area by examining the specific experiences and perspectives of mother-teachers in Kazakhstan. In doing so, the study not only confirms existing concepts but also demonstrates their relevance within a Central Asian context.

In addition to its theoretical contributions, this study offers important practical insights. Recent reforms and policies in Kazakhstan, including the Law on the Status of Teachers (MoES RK, 2019), have overlooked the work-life balance needs of mother-teachers. Although the law aimed to elevate the social standing of the teaching profession through financial incentives and cultural shifts, it fell short of introducing work-family-friendly policies. This omission is particularly significant given that women comprise more than three-quarters of the teaching workforce in Kazakhstan (OECD, 2019). Failing to address the specific challenges faced by mother-teachers, who often bear a disproportionate share of childcare and household responsibilities, can exacerbate stress and burnout among this group. By deepening understanding of these challenges, this research advocates for policies that better support the work-life balance of Kazakhstani mother-teachers. The findings offer actionable insights for policymakers and school administrators in developing practices that enhance teacher well-being and professional effectiveness.

Moreover, improving teachers' work-life balance has the potential to positively impact the broader educational environment, as teachers who experience greater balance are better equipped to meet students' academic and emotional needs.

Overall, this study has the potential to influence a wide range of areas—from educational policy and school practices to academic discourse—ultimately contributing to the well-being and professional efficacy of mother-teachers and the quality of education they provide.

## **1.7 Summary**

In conclusion, this chapter examined the work-life balance challenges faced by mother teachers in Kazakhstan and highlighted the lack of support in current educational reforms. It outlined the study's purpose and introduced the guiding research questions. The chapter also emphasized the study's significance in informing policies that improve teacher well-being.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the foundational elements were outlined, including background information, the problem statement, study objectives, research questions, and the significance of the research. This chapter reviews existing literature on work-life balance to establish a foundational understanding of its key concepts and theoretical underpinnings. First, the chapter explores various definitions of “work-life balance,” acknowledging the diverse perspectives and interpretations surrounding this concept. Recognizing the study's focus on Kazakhstan, the subsequent section examines work-life balance within the context of collectivist cultures, highlighting the cultural nuances that might influence its understanding and application.

Given the research questions’ emphasis on the urban-rural dimension, a dedicated section will analyze existing literature on the differences in work-life balance experiences between urban and rural settings. This analysis will provide valuable insights into the potential disparities and unique challenges faced by individuals in different geographical locations.

The chapter then delves into the specific work-related and personal/family-related factors that contribute to or hinder work-life balance. By examining these factors, the review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of work-life balance and its influencing elements.

Finally, the chapter concludes by presenting the theoretical framework that will guide the study. This framework will synthesize the insights gleaned from the literature review and provide a structured lens through which to investigate work-life balance among Kazakh secondary school mother-teachers.

## 2.2 Work-Life Balance Defined

The term “work-life balance” does not have a universally agreed-upon definition or application. Achieving work-life balance is not merely about dividing time equally between work and personal life but rather about aligning involvement and finding fulfillment across various domains. It is a multifaceted concept that centers on effectively managing the demands of one's professional life alongside other essential aspects of life, such as personal pursuits, family responsibilities, and community engagement (Imtiaz & Hossain, 2019). This concept has garnered significant attention, particularly concerning women, who often face greater societal expectations and challenges in balancing multiple roles (Martinez et al., 2013).

The concept of balance itself presents challenges and is often difficult to define. While some researchers favor broad concepts like “equilibrium” or “harmony,” others focus on the “fit” between demands and resources (Koubova & Buchko, 2013). Some define it as the absence of conflict or presence of enrichment between work and family (Buffardi et al., 1999; Clark, 2001). Greenhaus et al. (2003) propose that work-life balance is achieved when “a person's professional performance and satisfaction, as well as family duties, [are] consistent with their life priorities.” (p. 174). This perspective emphasizes both enjoyment and achievement in both work and home life, without conflict.

Guest (2002) offers a subjective definition, arguing that work-life balance is determined by an individual's subjective feelings and emotions. In this view, individuals assess their own balance based on their beliefs and feelings.

With awareness of the various dimensions offered in the different definitions, this study adopted Guest's subjective definition of work-life balance, acknowledging the individual and contextual nature of this concept. By focusing on individual perceptions and experiences, this research gained a deeper understanding of how Kazakh secondary

school mother-teachers navigate the complexities of work-life demands within their specific cultural and societal context.

### **2.3 The Complexities of Work-life balance in Asian Cultures**

The existing research on work-life balance has tended to focus on Western countries, particularly those with Anglo-Saxon or Western European cultural backgrounds. In contrast, the perspectives on work and life in Eastern countries, especially in Asia, differ significantly from the views prevalent in the West (Chandra, 2012). This is due to the distinct differences in cultural traditions, family structures, and societal institutions between these two contexts.

Understanding the dynamics of work-life balance within the Asian context, particularly in regions like Kazakhstan and Central Asia, requires a nuanced understanding of the cultural landscape. As Powell et al. (2009) argue, key concepts in work-life literature are deeply intertwined with a country's cultural values. These values, in turn, significantly influence the development and implementation of work-life policies and practices (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017), making individual experiences of work-life balance highly sensitive to the cultural context (Le et al., 2020).

This cultural embeddedness of work-life balance necessitates caution when interpreting research findings. Directly applying findings from Western research, often grounded in individualistic cultural values, to populations characterized by significant cultural and contextual differences, such as Kazakhstan, can be misleading. (Liu & Cheng, 2015).

The study by Haar et al., (2014) across diverse cultural backgrounds demonstrated that in individualistic societies, higher degrees of work-life balance were more strongly and positively associated with increased job and life satisfaction. Conversely, in collectivist cultures where employment is frequently viewed as a means to support and

advance one's family, the tensions between professional and personal responsibilities are perceived as an inevitable consequence of ensuring the family's financial stability (Lu, Cooper, et al., 2010), and are thus experienced as less detrimental by individuals. Consequently, the notion of work-life balance may be less relevant within these collectivist cultural contexts (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018). This highlights the need for research on work-life balance in collectivist cultures, especially for women who face added pressures in balancing work and family due to traditional gender roles and societal expectations.

According to Chandra's study (2012) which aimed to compare perspectives and approaches to work-life balance between Eastern and Western cultures, distinct differences exist, particularly between Asian and Western countries. Based on semi-structured interviews with 100 HR executives, this study revealed a strong association between work-life balance and gender roles in Asian countries. Traditional gender norms, where family is prioritized for women and work for men, heavily influence work-life balance perceptions. Consequently, women often bear the primary responsibility for household duties, even when engaged in full-time employment (Chandra, 2012). This traditional division of labor, where women are expected to manage both demanding careers and the majority of household responsibilities, creates a significant imbalance and negatively impacts the work-life balance of mother-teachers.

In conclusion, work-life balance is heavily influenced by cultural contexts, with significant differences between Western and Eastern perspectives. Applying Western research to non-Western cultures, like Kazakhstan, can be problematic due to differing values and social structures. In collectivist societies, traditional gender roles place a greater burden on women, creating unique challenges for mother-teachers. This underscores the need for culturally sensitive approaches to understanding and addressing work-life balance in non-Western contexts.

## 2.4 An Urban-Rural Comparison

Shifting our focus from a primarily cultural lens to a geographical one, it is also crucial to consider how location, specifically the urban-rural divide, influences the work-life experiences of mother-teachers. Given the demanding nature of the teaching profession, it is perhaps unsurprising that stress and burnout are prevalent issues among educators worldwide. Indeed, numerous studies have documented high levels of stress and burnout among school teachers globally (Cox & Brockley, 1984; Tokar & Feitler, 1986). However, while research often points to elevated stress levels among urban teachers, the experience of stress can differ significantly between urban and rural settings due to unique contextual factors.

Rural schools, while potentially offering a less demanding learning environment (Ballou & Podgursky, 1995), present unique challenges for teachers in the context of Kazakhstan. These may include limited access to resources, the expectation of living within extended family structures, and the social pressures inherent in smaller, close-knit communities. Conversely, Kazakhstan's urban teachers might face pressures from demanding parents, a highly competitive educational landscape, and the lack of a close-knit community environment.

According to the study by Tajik et al. (2022) exploring education quality in rural Kazakhstani schools, teachers face significant workload challenges. Rural teachers must fulfill various responsibilities beyond teaching, such as working extra hours, supervising classes, attending parent-teacher meetings, publishing in journals, and completing administrative tasks. Many teachers in rural settings are also required to teach multiple shifts due to overcrowded schools (Tajik et al., 2022), which further complicates the work-life balance, especially for those who have children.

Therefore, comparing urban and rural experiences is essential, as significant disparities exist between them, not only in Kazakhstan but also globally.

## **2.5 Work-Related Features**

Achieving a satisfactory work-life balance for mother teachers hinges on various work-related factors. These encompass work demands, organizational culture, peer support, the working environment, and the presence of family-friendly policies or work-life practices within the organization (Guest, 2002). Such elements collectively shape the extent to which mother teachers can balance their professional responsibilities with personal life commitments.

Organizational support is a crucial factor for mother teachers in achieving work-life balance. This was demonstrated in a study by Agha et al. (2017), which focused on work-life balance and job satisfaction among teachers in higher education in Oman, with 625 participants. The study found that when employers prioritize staff well-being, it positively influences staff perceptions of work-life balance policies, such as flexibility and family-friendly benefits. As a result, this leads to increased job satisfaction among employees, ultimately fostering a more favorable work-life balance.

Tekin and Demirkasimoglu (2023) investigated another critical factor impacting teachers' work-life balance: workload. Through their quantitative study involving 379 teachers in Ankara, Turkey, they found significant correlation between workload perceptions and work-life balance. Specifically, as the teachers' workload increased, their ability to maintain a satisfactory work-life balance diminished.

The presence of family-friendly policies and practices within the organization is another crucial factor that impacts work-life balance. Agarwal and Nelson (2018) have found that the availability of flexible work arrangements, paid family leave, and other supportive measures can significantly improve teachers' ability to manage their

professional and personal responsibilities. Their quantitative study involving 203 working mothers in India found that the existence of such policies not only enhanced the participants' work-life balance but also led to increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

In conclusion, understanding and addressing various work-related variables, including organizational support, workload management, and the presence of family-friendly policies, are integral to promoting a conducive environment for teachers to achieve a harmonious work-life balance, which is doubly important for those who are also mothers.

## **2.6 Personal and Family-Related Features**

Balancing work and personal life is influenced by a range of personal and family-related factors, such as age, gender, marital status, age of children, childcare responsibilities, and individual personality traits (Lockwood, 2003). For mother teachers, particularly, managing childcare duties and receiving family support are crucial aspects of evaluating work-life balance.

Xu (2012), in a qualitative study involving 10 international working mothers, emphasized the crucial role of family support in enhancing well-being and work-life balance. Specifically, the study showed that support from husbands significantly alleviates stress for working women. Similarly, Ferguson et al. (2012) found in their research with 270 job incumbents that social support from both partners and coworkers contributed to an improved work-family balance, positively influencing satisfaction levels in both work and family domains.

In a study by Eddieson Astodello Pasay-an et al. (2014) with 75 nurse educators in the Philippines, the impact of childcare responsibilities on work-life balance was evident. The study underscored how the demands of childcare often encroach on personal leisure

time, leading to an imbalance between personal and professional spheres. The insights from Meyers & Gornick (2005) regarding the significance of childcare as a major challenge for working mothers are indeed compelling. The desire of forty percent of full-time working women with young children to reduce their working hours, as emphasized by Nordenmark (2004), reinforces the critical need for better integration of work and family responsibilities.

Sahana and Bagali (2015) demonstrated the detrimental effects of work-life imbalance among working mothers in India on their children's health, emphasizing the interconnectedness between the work-life balance of mother teachers and their children.

In conclusion, the findings of the studies reviewed here suggest that achieving a harmonious balance between work and personal life is a multifaceted endeavor influenced by various personal and family-related factors. For mother teachers, navigating childcare responsibilities and receiving adequate family support is pivotal in fostering a sense of balance. Ultimately, fostering an environment that supports work-life balance through family-friendly policies and social support mechanisms is crucial in enabling mother teachers to thrive both personally and professionally. By acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges faced by this demographic, organizations could cultivate a culture of inclusivity and support that benefits employees and their families alike. This study aimed to contribute to this important discourse and provide insights that can inform policy and practice in the educational sector in Kazakhstan.

## **2.7 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical foundation of this research is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST), which offers a multidimensional perspective on the interaction between individual experiences and broader socio-cultural contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). While Bello and Tanko's (2020) comprehensive review explored 18 different work-

life balance theories, including Segmentation Theory (Piotrkowski, 1979), Compensation Theory (Lambert, 1990), and Spillover Theory (Staines, 1980), they emphasized that no single theory is universally applicable and the choice of theory in work-life balance studies depends on the study's framework, variables, or perspectives.

Among the various theories, Bronfenbrenner's EST stood out as a particularly suitable framework for this study. Its holistic approach, which examines the dynamic interaction between individuals and their environments—from the immediate family unit to broader societal influences—aligned well with the research aim of exploring how mother teachers in Kazakhstani secondary schools navigate and experience the complexities of work-life balance.

EST posits that an individual's development is shaped by five interconnected systems. This study employed all five: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

The microsystem encompasses the immediate environments where individuals directly interact, such as family and school. For mother teachers, their microsystem includes interactions within their families, where cultural expectations regarding gender roles and responsibilities may impact their ability to balance work and home duties. Additionally, interactions within the school environment, including relationships with colleagues and students, can influence their professional well-being and job satisfaction.

The mesosystem represents the connections between various microsystem components. For example, support or conflict at home often influenced teachers' emotional states at school, while professional stressors shaped their family interactions. These interdependencies highlighted how balance or imbalance emerged through the dynamics between these interconnected environments.

The exosystem consists of settings that indirectly affect the individual, even though the person may not be actively involved in them. In the study, mother teachers were influenced by factors such as urban/rural contexts, the availability (or lack) of local childcare services, and decisions made by regional or school-level education authorities. These external factors impacted their ability to fulfill both family and professional responsibilities, even when they had no direct control over them.

The macrosystem encompasses broader cultural and societal influences and norms. In Kazakhstan, cultural expectations regarding women's roles, especially as daughters-in-law, significantly impact mother teachers' work-life balance. Societal pressure to fulfill traditional gender roles within the family while excelling in their careers created tensions for mother teachers. Additionally, cultural norms surrounding childcare and support systems influence how they navigate their professional and personal responsibilities.

The chronosystem captures changes over time, including life transitions and broader socio-political shifts. In this study, the participants' experiences evolved across different life stages—such as pregnancy, childbirth, or children starting school—which required constant adjustment in their work-life balance strategies. Moreover, changes in educational reforms in Kazakhstan also shaped how mother teachers managed their roles over time.

Overall, this framework enabled a contextualized understanding of the work-life balance experiences of secondary school mother-teachers in Kazakhstan. By applying five levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, the study illustrated how individual experiences were shaped by immediate interactions, interrelated environments, institutional influences, cultural norms, and changes across time. This theoretical lens supported a nuanced and layered analysis of the everyday realities these women faced in balancing professional and family life.

## **2.8 Summary**

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the literature on work-life balance, highlighting its relevance to the teaching profession and the importance of considering cultural context. The review established the multifaceted nature of work-life balance, emphasizing the influence of individual perceptions, societal expectations, and institutional support systems. Furthermore, the chapter explored the unique challenges faced by teachers in different contexts, particularly the contrasting stressors experienced by those in urban versus rural settings. By synthesizing these key themes, this chapter lays the groundwork for a nuanced and context-specific investigation into the work-life balance experiences of Kazakh secondary school mother-teachers.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter offered an overview of the subject, exploring work-life balance and emphasizing key insights from existing scholarly research. This chapter outlines the methodological approach that was employed in the study that aims to gain a nuanced understanding of the work-life balance experiences of Kazakh secondary school mother-teachers, specifically examining the potential differences between urban and rural contexts. It details the research design, providing a rationale for the chosen approach. The chapter then describes the participant selection process, outlining the characteristics and sampling methods, data collection instruments and analysis techniques. Finally, it addresses ethical considerations related to participant recruitment, informed consent, and data privacy.

### **3.2 Research Design**

This study adopted a qualitative approach to understand the intricate and subjective experiences of mother-teachers as they navigate work-life balance. Unlike quantitative measures, which can often overlook the subtleties of personal experiences, qualitative research allows for a rich, in-depth exploration of how individuals perceive and experience phenomena in their daily lives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach aligned with the core objective of the study which was to explore the lived experiences of work-life balance among mother-teachers. By focusing on the participants' perspectives, this qualitative research captured the nuanced realities and complexities of balancing professional and personal responsibilities, providing a comprehensive understanding that quantifiable data could not have offered.

One of the fundamental research designs in qualitative methodology is phenomenology. This approach delves into how people perceive, experience, and make

sense of a specific phenomenon, seeking to understand the shared feelings, perspectives, and interpretations within a group (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; van Manen, 2007). It allows for a thorough examination of the “lived experiences of individuals and how they have both subjective experiences of the phenomenon and objective experiences of something in common with other people” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.124). In this study, the “phenomenon” being explored was the “work-life balance” of mother teachers in Kazakhstan.

Phenomenological philosophy encompasses distinct approaches, including the descriptive phenomenology of Husserl and the interpretive-hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger. This study employed the descriptive phenomenological approach which aimed to understand the essence of lived experiences, in contrast to the interpretive-hermeneutic approach focused on the interpretive meaning of such experiences (Lavery, 2003).

A cornerstone of Husserl's method is the practice of bracketing. It is the process where the researcher consciously identifies and sets aside any personal biases, assumptions, or pre-existing knowledge that could color the research process (Gearing, 2004). This bracketing process helps prevent the researcher's own perspectives from influencing the data collection and analysis, thereby preserving the objectivity and validity of the investigation (Englander, 2012). Therefore, I tried to adopt a stance of methodological neutrality. This approach enabled the authentic voices of mother-teachers to come through, revealing the unique challenges they encountered and the strategies they used to maintain balance. It also allowed me to better understand their lived realities without letting my own preconceptions interfere.

### 3.3 Sampling and Participants

Since this research focused on the experiences of mother-teachers regarding their ability to maintain work-life balance, participants needed to meet specific criteria rather than being chosen randomly (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, I used a non-probability purposive sampling strategy, which involved deliberately selecting individuals who had relevant characteristics aligned with the research questions. This approach was focused on gaining in-depth insights from participants rather than generalizing results (Cohen et al., 2017).

The selection process prioritized diversity of experience within the participant group. I aimed to ensure representation across various factors identified as significant through the literature review and theoretical framework, including years of experience as a mother-teacher, the number and ages of children, and living arrangements (specifically, residing with parents-in-law). This deliberate selection sought to capture a wide spectrum of experiences and perspectives, enriching the data and providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Initially, I contacted several urban and rural schools to distribute invitation letters to mother-teachers; however, only one school responded, and only one mother-teacher expressed willingness to participate voluntarily. Consequently, I revised the recruitment strategy by asking gatekeepers, who were acquaintances, to assist in distributing information about the study. This information included my contact details, allowing interested mother-teachers to contact me directly.

From those who expressed interest, I carefully selected participants based on the aforementioned criteria. Ultimately, five participants were selected (Table 1), ensuring that the sample included individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences relevant to the study's objectives.

**Table 1***Demographic Information of Participants*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>School Context</b>	<b>Years of Teaching Experience</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Lived with In-laws</b>
Z	Urban	30 years	2	7 years
K	Urban	10 years	2	5 years
B	Rural	28 years	6	28 years
M	Rural	30 years	4	10 years
N	Urban and Rural	15 years	2	3 years

**3.4 Data Collection Tools**

This study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. This approach offered a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of Kazakh secondary school mother-teachers as they navigated the complexities of work-life balance. Three compelling reasons supported the choice of semi-structured interviews for this research.

Firstly, qualitative and phenomenological research fundamentally relies on interviews as the primary method for accessing participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Englander, 2012). In phenomenology, the goal is to explore the meaning individuals ascribe to their experiences, and interviews provide the most direct route to these meanings. Thus, using interviews aligned naturally with the study's phenomenological orientation.

Moreover, this approach moved beyond mere data extraction, allowing participants to “speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings” (Berg, 2007, p. 96). Emphasizing participant voice—the mother-teachers in this study—was crucial for understanding the unique challenges and triumphs they faced.

Thirdly, unlike structured interviews, the semi-structured format allowed for flexibility during the interview process (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014). This approach enabled me to ask follow-up questions to clarify ambiguous responses and gather detailed information from the mother-teachers (Gray, 2004; Wilson et al., 2016), leading to a more thorough understanding of the work-life balance phenomenon. Moreover, while a predetermined set of open-ended questions ensured consistency across interviews and addressed the core research questions, the semi-structured format allowed for a natural conversational flow and the exploration of participant-driven insights (Creswell, 2013). This flexibility enabled participants to introduce new perspectives or experiences that the researcher may not have anticipated, leading to a deeper understanding of the topic and uncovering nuances that structured questions alone might have missed. These insights revealed unique viewpoints, challenged assumptions, and contributed to a more comprehensive and authentic representation of the participants' lived experiences.

To refine the interview protocol and ensure clarity and relevance, two pilot interviews were conducted with individuals who met the study's participant criteria. Data from these pilot interviews were not included in the final analysis. All interviews were conducted in the participants' native language (Kazakh) to facilitate comfort and encourage open expression, and were subsequently transcribed for analysis.

### **3.5 Data Collection Procedure**

Before collecting data, I prepared all necessary instruments and designed protocols, including interview questions, invitation letters, and informed consent forms. To ensure clarity, relevance, and adherence to ethical standards, these tools underwent rigorous review and refinement. Following Creswell's (2014) systematic, multi-step approach, the data collection process maintained both rigor and ethical integrity, enabling the efficient and thorough gathering of rich qualitative data.

Initially, after obtaining ethical approval from the Graduate School of Education Institutional Research Ethics Committee (GSE IREC), I contacted principals and vice-principals of approximately 20 urban and rural schools via email to request permission to distribute invitation letters to mother-teachers. However, the process did not unfold as initially planned: only one school responded, and among the teachers at that site, only one mother-teacher expressed willingness to participate voluntarily.

Given this limited response, I adapted my recruitment strategy. I asked gatekeepers, who were acquaintances, to assist in distributing information about my study to potential participants. This information included a description of the study's purpose, ethical assurances, and my contact details, allowing interested mother-teachers to reach out to me directly.

Once willing participants contacted me, I provided them with the invitation letter (Appendix B) and a demographic survey link (Appendix C). Based on the survey responses, a purposive sample of five teachers was selected, ensuring a range of perspectives and experiences. Selected participants reviewed and signed an informed consent form (Appendix D), which outlined the study's objectives, procedures, confidentiality measures, and participants' rights, including their ability to withdraw from the study at any point before data analysis began without providing a reason.

Subsequently, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant. Interviews were conducted online and were video-recorded with participants' permission.

In conclusion, this data collection process ensured a systematic and ethically responsible approach to exploring the work-life balance experiences of urban and rural mother-teachers in Kazakhstan. By adapting recruitment strategies when necessary and prioritizing ethical safeguards, the study achieved a rich and credible dataset, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the research topic.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Analyzing qualitative data means carefully examining and interpreting interview transcripts to understand both what is clearly said and what is implied in the experiences of mother-teachers (Maxwell, 2013). The main goal is to find and describe common themes or patterns that appear throughout the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

For this study, I followed Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step process, which is a well-known method often used in descriptive phenomenology. The first step was familiarization, where I read each transcript several times to fully understand the stories shared by the participants. During this step, I also practiced reflective bracketing—making a conscious effort to put aside my own thoughts and feelings that could influence the analysis. This helped me stay focused on the participants' perspectives (Englander, 2012).

The second step, identifying significant statements, involved pulling out important phrases and sentences from the transcripts that related directly to work-life balance. In the third step, formulating meanings, I interpreted what these statements meant, making sure to stay true to the original context and the participants' intended meaning.

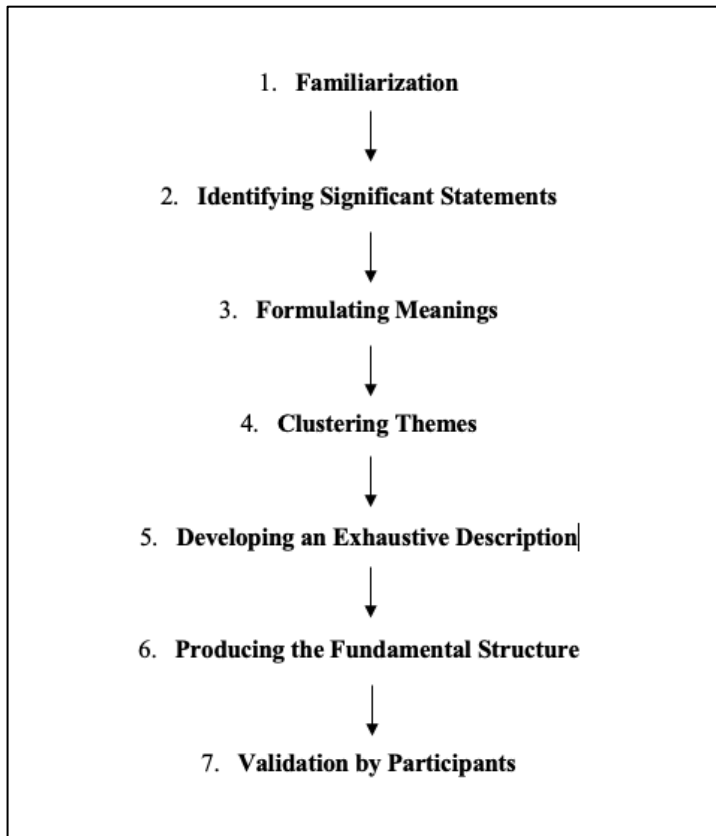
Next, I moved on to clustering themes. In this step, I grouped the meanings into categories based on similarities in the participants' experiences. These categories were then organized into broader themes to give a clear structure to the findings.

After the themes were set, I created an in-depth description by explaining the themes in detail. This provided a fuller picture of how mother-teachers understand and experience work-life balance. I also linked these themes to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

Finally, I reviewed and edited the description, removing anything repetitive, clearing up confusing parts, and refining the language to make sure the final version was accurate and easy to understand.

### **Figure 1**

*Steps of Colaizzi's Descriptive Phenomenological Data Analysis*



### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

Ignoring ethical responsibilities could have seriously affected the quality of this study and potentially caused harm to participants (Bryman, 2012). That is why I, as the researcher, carefully considered how the research might impact the participants and did my best to protect their dignity and well-being at every stage (Cohen et al., 2017). Since the study focused on the work-life balance of secondary school mother-teachers, some participants shared personal and sensitive information about their lives. Because of this, it was very important to ensure a high level of confidentiality and respect throughout the

research process. Keeping participants' rights and welfare safe was a key part of the study's integrity.

Firstly, taking part in the study was completely voluntary. Before starting, I asked all participants to give informed consent. This process included a clear explanation of the purpose of the research, how it would be carried out, any possible risks, and the potential benefits. This helped participants decide whether they wanted to be involved. They were also told they could skip any question or stop taking part at any time if they felt uncomfortable.

Secondly, I ensured that participants' identities remained confidential. I used pseudonyms for participants to make sure their real names were not used anywhere. While it is not always possible to guarantee complete confidentiality in qualitative research, I took all reasonable steps to protect their identities. I avoided sharing any details in the final thesis that could reveal who the participants were or cause any problems for them or their colleagues. All data collected during the study were used only for research purposes. All digital files were stored on a password-protected laptop until the analysis was finished.

Thirdly, I worked to reduce any possible risks to participants. Any risks that I could foresee were clearly explained during the consent process. Because the topic involved personal experiences with balancing work and family life, I designed the interview process to be as respectful and supportive as possible. The entire study was carried out in a way that protected the privacy and dignity of everyone involved.

In conclusion, this research followed the NU GSE Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research. Ethical principles were taken seriously at every step, especially when it came to protecting participants' rights, privacy, and well-being. Even though full confidentiality is always a challenge in qualitative research, I did everything I could to protect participants' privacy. By treating sensitive information carefully and respecting

participants' choices, the study was able to provide meaningful insights into the lives of mother-teachers in Kazakhstan.

### **3.8 Summary**

In conclusion, this chapter has detailed the methodological approach for the study, outlining the research design and providing a rationale for the selected approach. The chapter covered participant selection, including the characteristics and sampling methods, as well as data collection instruments and analysis techniques. Additionally, it addressed ethical considerations related to participant recruitment, informed consent, and data privacy.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the work-life balance experiences of mother teachers in Kazakhstan, focusing on the challenges they face and the coping strategies they employ. This chapter presents the key findings of the study obtained from five semi-structured interviews with mother-teachers from both rural and urban schools. The themes that emerged from the data are categorized under the five levels of Bronfenbrenner's theory:

1. **Microsystem:** The immediate challenges and support systems within the home and workplace.
2. **Mesosystem:** The interaction between work and family life, including workplace flexibility and emotional spillover.
3. **Exosystem:** Indirect influences such as government policies and school administration.
4. **Macrosystem:** The broader societal and cultural expectations shaping mother teachers' roles.
5. **Chronosystem:** How work-life balance evolves over different life stages.

These categories offer a comprehensive understanding into the interconnected factors that shape mother teachers' work-life balance. Each has been further subdivided into themes, which have been analyzed and interpreted. Moreover, direct quotations from participants were used to vividly illustrate their lived experiences, providing insights into the complexities of their professional and personal realms.

### 4.2 Microsystem: Immediate Environment of Mother Teachers

The intricate interplay between home, work, and personal relationships fundamentally shapes a teacher's work-life balance. According to participants' responses

three key themes emerged: 1) Balancing Teaching and Parenting; 2) The impact of living with in-laws; and 3) Time-management and Balance.

#### ***4.2.1. Balancing Teaching and Parenting***

From the interview data, it is evident that nearly all participants are committed to maintaining a harmonious work-life balance, yet the strategies and experiences differ considerably. Some teachers conveyed an optimistic outlook regarding their ability to integrate professional duties with family responsibilities. For instance, Participant K confidently remarked, “I manage to do everything—my family, my work... Teachers can effectively manage everything and handle it appropriately” suggesting that the dual demands of teaching and parenting can be met successfully. Similarly, Participant Z highlighted the engaging nature of teaching by stating, “after working with the children, you forget all your tiredness,” which implies that her family and professional lives merge seamlessly. She further noted that occasional imbalances are acceptable in a profession characterized by both high and low moments, as challenges with students, colleagues, or administrators tend to be temporary. “Teaching is a profession where the fun and the stress go hand in hand,” she observed, underscoring that these fleeting challenges contribute to the unique allure of the teaching career.

In contrast, rural teachers present a more complex picture, emphasizing the persistent difficulties they face in balancing work and personal life. Participant B, the rural educator, described the balance between professional and personal obligations as “fundamentally very challenging,” while another (Participant Z) expressed a recurring sense that, despite their best efforts, “something is always missing.” A common thread in these accounts is the profound impact of parental responsibilities; several teachers expressed guilt over not spending sufficient quality time with their own children. Participant B noted, “As teachers, we often cannot spend much time with our own children

because we are too busy caring for and educating other people's children.” This constant juggling act leads to emotional exhaustion, especially as teachers frequently work beyond official hours to prepare lessons, grade assignments, and attend meetings, leaving little time for their own children and family care.

Overall, the findings show that while all participants strive for work-life balance, their experiences differ depending on their contexts. Urban teachers tended to express optimism and adaptability, whereas rural teachers highlighted ongoing struggles, emotional exhaustion, and feelings of guilt.

#### ***4.2.2 The Impact of Living With In-Laws***

Living with in-laws has a significant impact on the work-life balance of mother teachers, shaping their daily routines, emotional well-being, and professional responsibilities. In Kazakh culture, there is a well-known stereotype of the “*kelin-ene*” conflict, referring to the traditional tensions between a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law. This cultural narrative suggests that cohabitation with in-laws is often accompanied by inevitable conflicts, where differing expectations and traditional roles can lead to friction. For many women, the mere thought of living with their in-laws evokes concerns about constant disputes and a struggle for autonomy.

However, the participants' experiences reveal a more nuanced reality. While some mother-teachers found their in-laws to be a crucial source of support—helping with childcare and household duties that eased the pressures of their professional lives—others experienced additional burdens and restrictions. In these cases, the presence of in-laws sometimes meant more oversight and interference in personal decisions, thereby increasing stress and complicating the already challenging balance between work and family.

For some mother teachers, living with in-laws provided practical and emotional support, easing the demands of both motherhood and a teaching career. Participant Z, for

example, described how her mother-in-law's understanding of the teaching profession allowed her to advance in her career: "When I was offered a leadership position, I first asked my mother-in-law... She supported me, and thanks to that, I was able to manage everything." She further explained that her mother-in-law was actively involved in childcare, attending parent-teacher meetings and assisting with the children's studies, which allowed her to concentrate on her work responsibilities. Similarly, teacher M highlighted her father-in-law's significant influence by stating, "My father-in-law worked as a teacher for 53 years, so he understood... (my condition and supported)." This demonstrates that the support from in-laws often extends well beyond the household, impacting school-related duties as well.

However, for other participants, co-residing with in-laws brought increased responsibilities, social expectations, and restricted autonomy. Participant B, for instance, described how she constantly felt rushed, stating, "When I lived with my in-laws, I was always in a hurry." This feeling of urgency may come from her need to please both her family and her workplace, as failing to do so could result in negative consequences from either side. At work, she risked receiving punishment from the administration for not fulfilling her professional duties. At home, she feared wordy remarks from her in-laws for failing to prepare meals or keep the house clean. These dual pressures created a constant state of tension, affecting her emotional well-being and leaving her with little control over her time. Participant K similarly highlighted the lack of personal space and the pressure to fulfill additional family obligations: "Living with in-laws comes with different responsibilities... There are always guests, and you must host them. But when you live separately, you have more time for yourself, for work, and for your own social life." This perspective highlights how in-law co-residence introduced additional household labor and limited opportunities for professional networking or personal well-being. The demands of

traditional Kazakh family structures, in which hosting guests is a cultural expectation, may have contributed to these pressures, particularly for women, whose caregiving roles often extend beyond immediate family members.

For some mother teachers, co-residence with in-laws offered no support at all. Participant N's experience sharply contrasts with those who benefited from family assistance. She stated, "She would say, 'Your job is your problem.'" This response may stem from cultural norms that traditionally expect a woman to remain at home; if she chooses to work instead, she is seen as solely responsible for managing both her professional and domestic duties. In this context, responsibilities are rigidly divided, leaving Participant N to handle work and household tasks on her own. The lack of family support in such cases appears to amplify work-life conflicts, making it significantly more challenging to balance a teaching career with the demands of motherhood.

Interestingly, many of the participants who once lived with their in-laws later moved into separate households. While their current living arrangements gave them greater independence, their reflections on past experiences revealed lingering emotional distress. For example, Participants B and K, who had previously expressed feeling overwhelmed, showed visible disappointment and frustration when recalling their years of co-residence. This suggests that even after gaining autonomy, the emotional burden of those experiences had not entirely faded. During the interviews, participants' tone of voice, pauses, and facial expressions further indicated unresolved feelings of exhaustion and stress, reinforcing the idea that microsystemic influences extend beyond the immediate living situation and continue shaping one's perception of work-life balance over time.

#### ***4.2.3. Time Management and Balance***

The importance of time management emerged as another key theme. Teachers who were able to effectively organize their schedules and prioritize tasks found it easier to cope

with the demands of both work and home. Participant N reflected on this by stating, “Allocating time for both work and family is essential. Therefore, effective time management is necessary.” She further explained, “If I fail to complete household chores within the scheduled time, then my sense of harmony is disrupted.” This insight illustrates that for mother-teachers, managing time is not just about efficiency—it is fundamental to maintaining emotional balance. Participant M reinforced this perspective by asserting that establishing a daily schedule is key to ensuring smooth operations across her responsibilities. In essence, a well-organized timetable not only boosts self-efficacy but also plays a vital role in reducing role conflict, ultimately helping teachers navigate the complex interplay between their professional and personal lives.

Although Participant K did not explicitly mention the importance of time management, her narrative offers valuable insight into effective strategies for managing role conflicts too. She described a system in which she confined her teaching responsibilities to the morning until midday, thereby reserving her afternoons for personal tasks and family commitments. When asked how she managed to implement such a schedule, she explained that having influence and authority in her school was key. This position allowed her to negotiate with the head of her department to adjust her schedule accordingly. While this option may not be available to every educator, it represents a commendable approach to balancing professional and personal roles.

Another participant (Participant B) provided a strong example of proactive self-care by dedicating one to two hours each morning to activities focused on self-development or physical fitness. This routine not only illustrates the importance of prioritizing personal well-being but also creates a clear division between work and personal time. By structuring the day in this way, the participant minimizes the overlap

between professional and personal responsibilities, thereby reducing stress and enhancing overall well-being.

Together, these strategies emphasize that thoughtful time management is crucial for mitigating the challenges of role conflicts. Although the specific approaches may vary depending on individual circumstances and available resources, all of them demonstrate a commitment to maintaining balance. By structuring their days, mother teachers can better negotiate the persistent tensions between professional obligations and family life.

### **4.3 Mesosystem: Interactions Between Work and Family Life**

Within the mesosystem, the dynamic interplay between school administration, colleagues, and family interactions plays a crucial role in shaping mother teachers' ability to balance work and family responsibilities. Four key themes emerged from these interconnections according to the data: administrative support, spousal assistance, the emotional spillover from work to home and the prioritization between them.

#### ***4.3.1. Workplace Flexibility and Administrative Support***

Several participants described how flexible scheduling and supportive administration foster an environment where urgent family matters can be managed without severe professional repercussions. For example, Participant B explained, "...in such cases, I contact the deputy principal, explain the situation, and they understand. They let me leave the class if necessary." This account highlights a broader culture of support, where administrators not only recognize the challenges of balancing dual roles but also actively accommodate personal needs. Additionally, support among colleagues plays a vital role. As Participant M noted, "Yes, in our school, for example, when a situation arises, we receive support from our colleagues." The way teachers confidently express that they receive such support is particularly encouraging. When teachers know that both their

supervisors and peers are understanding, they experience reduced work-related stress and feel more empowered to address family priorities.

Another teacher's narrative illustrates that while flexibility is available for addressing pressing family situations, it comes with an implicit caveat: teachers must have earned a solid reputation through hard work and proven competence. Participant K described how, during urgent family circumstances, teachers would coordinate with the deputy principal—sometimes in consultation with the principal or supportive colleagues—to adjust their schedules. However, she emphasized that such accommodations are often contingent on one's reputation and work ethic, saying, "...but for that, you have to be reputable and then work hard." This observation suggests an underlying expectation: educators who have consistently demonstrated commitment and competence are more likely to receive the support they need. This system of support creates a positive feedback loop between teacher performance and workplace flexibility. When teachers see that their hard work and proven competence lead to tangible benefits, they are likely to be even more motivated to maintain high standards. This reciprocal dynamic reinforces trust between teachers and administrators, as the flexibility granted not only acknowledges past performance but also serves as an investment in future productivity and job satisfaction. In this way, the mesosystem fosters a culture where performance and support are mutually reinforcing, ultimately enhancing both individual well-being and the overall effectiveness of the educational environment.

Moreover, Participant Z provided further insight into how scheduling flexibility is operationalized in everyday practice: "When my children were going to kindergarten, in order to pick them up I left school one hour or half an hour earlier, because I informed the HR department." This adjustment demonstrates a proactive approach to balancing personal

responsibilities with work duties, emphasizing that timely communication with administrative bodies is key to making such flexibility possible.

Another teacher, drawing on her experience working in both rural and urban settings, offered an interesting comparison regarding the level of support teachers receive. She (Participant N) noted that in rural areas, the shortage of teachers often results in a more supportive and collaborative environment. This may be because the limited staffing necessitates greater mutual assistance among educators. Additionally, it should be noted that the rural schools tend to foster a strong sense of community and interdependence, which makes it easier for teachers to receive timely support when personal or professional challenges arise. Participant N's unique perspective underscores how contextual differences can shape the nature of institutional and collegial support in education.

Collectively, these findings reveal that workplace support—characterized by flexible scheduling, understanding administration, and collaborative colleagues—plays a pivotal role in alleviating the tension between professional demands and family responsibilities.

#### ***4.3.2. Family and Spouse Support***

All the participants emphasized that family support is essential for managing work-life balance. They rely on their husbands, older children, and extended family members for help with childcare and household duties, acknowledging that without such assistance, balancing professional and personal responsibilities would be far more challenging. “Of course, I could not handle everything alone. My older children, especially my daughter, help a lot,” mentioned Participant B, explaining how this support eases her workload. Another teacher reflected on the benefit of her mother-in-law's involvement in supervising her children's schoolwork, which allowed her to concentrate more fully on her teaching responsibilities.

In addition to support from children and extended family, many participants highlighted the vital role of spousal support. One teacher noted that she never struggled to manage her personal life or care for her young children while working because her husband was always there to help (Participant Z). She explained that his unwavering support ensured she faced no difficulties, as he consistently demonstrated great understanding regarding her obligations. Another teacher observed that a strong, communicative relationship with one's husband is essential for overcoming challenges. She believed that "if a mother-teacher can reach a mutual understanding with her partner, all difficulties can be surmounted" (Participant K), emphasizing that the support of the husband is paramount for any teacher with a family

An especially noteworthy case involved a teacher whose husband transitioned to freelance work so he could care for their children while she was at home. She explained that he not only spends quality time playing with the children but also handles household chores when she is unwell, significantly easing the strain of balancing her work and home responsibilities. Considering the traditional mindset of Kazakh people, this scenario is both particularly intriguing and truly commendable.

In conclusion, the narratives clearly demonstrate that robust family support—particularly from spouses—is a key factor in easing the challenges of work-life balance. The various accounts underscore how assistance with childcare, household duties, and emotional backing from family members creates an environment in which mother teachers can thrive professionally while maintaining a stable and supportive home life.

#### ***4.3.3. Emotional Spillover from Work to Home***

The emotional burden of teaching often carries over into home life. Stress from student behavior, administrative demands, and workload affects mother teachers' well-being and their ability to focus on family time. Many mother teachers find it difficult to

mentally separate work and home responsibilities, leading to increased fatigue and burnout. Emotional spillover is particularly significant for teachers handling difficult students or those experiencing pressure from school administration.

Emotional spillover from work to home emerged as a critical challenge for mother teachers, revealing how the strains of the classroom extend far beyond school hours and infiltrate personal life. Participant N confessed that “Initially, it was emotionally very difficult. I used to bring my emotions home,” underscoring the challenge of the intense demands of teaching. This sentiment reflects the reality that the pressures and emotional labor required in the classroom often follow educators into their personal spaces, making it difficult to switch off and achieve relaxation. For many mother teachers, the early years of their careers—and motherhood—are particularly testing, as the cumulative stress of managing both roles can lead to significant emotional exhaustion.

Further complicating this dynamic is the extra responsibility of serving not only as a subject teacher but also as a class supervisor. Although this additional role may not directly contribute to emotional spillover, it does bring work into the home environment. For instance, Participant Z described how, after school hours, she must continuously attend to parents' messages on WhatsApp and remain readily available. This ongoing engagement means that even after the formal school day ends, work-related demands intrude into her personal time, leaving little room for true relaxation and recovery. Consequently, this may disrupt family dynamics too, as the constant connectivity and work-related stress reduce the quality time available for nurturing relationships and meeting family needs. Ultimately, this intrusion of work responsibilities into home life intensifies stress and makes it significantly more challenging for mother teachers to maintain a balanced and harmonious lifestyle.

Overall, these experiences illustrate that the spillover from work to home is not merely an incidental consequence but a significant factor affecting the well-being of mother teachers.

#### ***4.3.4 Work vs. Family Prioritization***

Taking all these aforementioned themes into account, another key topic that emerged is the prioritization of responsibilities. Teachers' narratives do not offer a one-dimensional perspective; rather, they highlight diverse strategies and shifting priorities influenced by contextual pressures, personal values, and the inherent demands of teaching. When asked to choose between work and family in situations where urgent issues arise in both realms simultaneously, teachers' responses varied.

For instance, Participant M explained, "... work is in the first place; if there are thirty children in front of you, each with thirty different characters, we must prioritize them." The rationale behind her statement may be rooted in the profound sense of responsibility teachers feel toward their students. In the teaching profession, the teacher is accountable for managing a wide range of duties—for example, ensuring the well-being and education of students, addressing administrative requirements, communicating effectively with parents, and upholding both personal and professional values. Ultimately, the prioritization of responsibilities reflects the complex balancing act teachers perform daily, underscoring their commitment to meeting professional obligations while striving to maintain work-life balance.

In contrast, Participant N remarked that she "used to choose work before, but now [she] chooses [her] family," highlighting a significant shift in her priorities over time. This change illustrates an evolving understanding of personal needs and the realization that long-term professional success is deeply intertwined with family well-being. As circumstances evolve—whether due to growing family responsibilities or a heightened

awareness of one's own limits—the need to readjust priorities becomes evident. She further explained that her decision to prioritize family resulted in misunderstandings and conflicts with school administration, which could even have led to her leaving work. Fortunately, these issues were eventually resolved. Her experience underscores her firm commitment to her choice, even though such decisions can create professional challenges. Ultimately, her story reveals that while choosing family over work may present potential short-term setbacks, it is an essential step toward achieving a more balanced and sustainable work-life integration.

A further aspect of this balancing act is highlighted by Participant K, who stressed the importance of self-care by stating, “A woman should always first love herself.” She proudly shared that she makes herself a priority, describing in detail her regular fitness and self-care routines. With her children already at school, she has structured her schedule to finish her work by midday, demonstrating a clear work-life balance. This insight implies that self-prioritization is seen as essential for managing both professional and family responsibilities. By maintaining personal well-being, teachers may be better equipped to handle the pressures of their dual roles, suggesting that self-care serves as a critical buffer against burnout and emotional fatigue.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that prioritizing work and family within the mesosystem is a dynamic, context-dependent process. These varied approaches underscore that achieving a balanced work-life is an ongoing journey, continually influenced by changing circumstances and core personal values.

#### **4.4 Exosystem: Indirect Influences on Work-Life Balance**

The exosystem includes external factors that indirectly influence mother-teachers' work-life balance, even though they may not be directly involved with them on a daily basis. This chapter explores how broader systems, such as government policies and school-

level regulations, affect the daily experiences of mother-teachers. It also examines rural-urban disparities, highlighting how the environment and available resources shape the opportunities and challenges these teachers face. Together, these external influences create important conditions that either support or complicate the pursuit of work-life balance.

#### ***4.4.1. Government and School Policies for Working Mothers***

In Kazakhstan, government policies are designed to support working mothers, offering measures such as 56 days of paid maternity leave, a monthly social allowance until the child reaches 1.5 years of age, and the option for non-paid leave until the child turns three. Mother-teachers acknowledge these supports, with one noting, “Currently, the government provides various benefits for mothers with many children and those with infants. Maternity leave is available.” (Participant Z). Additionally, pregnant women and parents of children under three are allowed to work part-time—a policy particularly utilized by teachers who, due to financial pressures, often return to work sooner than they would like; one participant revealed she had to resume work after just one year because of financial necessity. This financial strain is further exacerbated by the emotional challenge of being at school while constantly worrying about their children at home, which detracts from their professional focus.

Consequently, one teacher proposed that extending the monthly social allowance until the child turns three could help mothers remain with their children for a longer period, thereby easing the stress associated with an early return to work. However, the implementation of such a policy may be complicated by the current shortage of teachers, which can make it difficult for the government to balance workforce needs with enhanced family support measures. Nevertheless, finding solutions to these challenges is essential to improve the work-life balance for mother-teachers and ensure that their well-being is adequately supported both economically and emotionally.

#### ***4.4.2. Rural-Urban Disparities***

Teachers' experiences reveal a complex picture of working conditions that differ notably between urban and rural settings, each presenting its own challenges and opportunities. In urban schools, some teachers emphasize that the educational system is uniformly applied regardless of location, suggesting that work-life balance might be similar in both contexts. For example, Participant K stated, "I do not see any distinct difference. Essentially, rural schools also share the same educational system common to all of us. A teacher is a teacher wherever they are." Participant Z added, "Now I think that with everything developed, we are in an era of advanced information technology... whether it is a rural school or an urban school, the requirements are the same now." These remarks indicate that technological advances and standardized curricula are seen as equalizers, implying that professional demands do not vary significantly between urban and rural settings. However, this perspective may overlook the hidden domestic challenges that rural teachers face, which significantly impact their work-life balance.

In contrast, rural mother-teachers provide a more nuanced and practical account of their daily realities. Participant B explained, "In apartment buildings, there is convenience. In the countryside, we live in ground houses. We spend a lot of our time heating our homes, which consumes a significant portion of our time." Another observed, "During the winter evenings, we repeatedly have to heat our homes to keep them warm. That itself takes time; for example, we have to take our child to kindergarten ourselves since there is no organized transportation like in the city." Furthermore, the responsibility of caring for domestic animals adds yet another layer to these challenges. These candid observations highlight that, while the educational framework may be identical, the infrastructural and domestic demands in rural areas impose additional burdens.

A teacher with experience in both settings offered a balanced view:

Working in the village is easier because in the city, commuting from one end to the other can be very challenging. Moreover, the kindergarten might be located far away. But in rural areas, everything is close together. Even if there is no bus, the distance is manageable. It is easier to take the child along, and local residents are understanding – for instance, you can leave your child with a neighbor (Participant N).

Additionally, another rural teacher shared that she can return home during lunchtime to complete small tasks because she lives near the school, which provides a degree of flexibility.

These varied testimonies underscore that the impact of location on a mother-teachers' work-life balance is highly individualized. While the educational system in Kazakhstan is designed to be uniform, the real-world experiences of mother-teachers are far from homogeneous. Both urban and rural settings offer distinct advantages and disadvantages, shaping distinct experiences for mother-teachers.

#### **4.5 Macrosystem: Cultural and Societal Norms**

The macrosystem reflects the broader cultural values, traditions, and social expectations that shape mother-teachers' work-life balance in important ways. This chapter examines how deep-rooted gender roles and cultural norms influence their experiences both at work and at home. Specifically, it explores the impact of gender and cultural expectations, as well as the unique pressures related to daughter-in-law responsibilities.

##### ***4.5.1. Gender and Cultural Expectations***

In the macrosystem, cultural and gender expectations play a critical role in shaping the experiences of mother-teachers. Societal norms often dictate that women should effortlessly balance professional duties with domestic responsibilities, and they may face criticism when choosing to prioritize their careers. However, the data reveal that these

expectations are not uniformly experienced. Participant B, who is a rural teacher, stated, “In our family and among our relatives, there is no expectation that women must stay at home. After maternity leave, my husband encourages me to return to work.” Another rural teacher shared, “I did not experience such things; there was never an idea that I cannot work as a woman,... or anything similar.” (Participant M). These candid remarks indicate that, while the broader cultural context may impose significant gendered expectations, the lived reality for some rural mother-teachers is mediated by strong familial support and progressive attitudes.

This data underscores that cultural expectations are not monolithic. Even in rural settings—often stereotyped as more traditional—individual family dynamics can challenge prevailing norms, enabling women to pursue professional ambitions without the stigma of neglecting domestic responsibilities. However, the coexistence of these supportive attitudes with pervasive societal pressures also suggests that mother-teachers may still encounter conflicting demands, as the wider community might continue to value the traditional role of women as primary caretakers. The fact that both insights come from rural participants highlights that within the same geographical context, there can be significant variation in cultural practices. This variability reflects a broader, complex interplay where cultural norms and family-level negotiations shape the work-life balance of mother-teachers in unique, individualized ways.

#### ***4.5.2. Daughter In-Law Responsibilities***

Daughter-in-law responsibilities have a significant impact on the work-life balance of mother-teachers. As noted in the microsystem analysis, living with in-laws introduces additional obligations that extend well beyond the nuclear family. Participant B candidly remarked, “Living with my in-laws has a huge impact; it is a big responsibility too.” This statement reflects a common reality for many women in this context: the extra household

duties and expectations that come with residing with extended family members. Such responsibilities often compound the challenges of balancing professional and personal life, leaving mother-teachers with less time and energy to devote to their teaching careers. The added burden can increase stress levels and reduce the capacity for self-care, ultimately affecting both work performance and overall family well-being. Recognizing these daughter-in-law responsibilities is crucial in understanding the broader cultural factors that shape the work-life dynamics of mother-teachers.

#### **4.6. Chronosystem: Changes Over Time**

The chronosystem captures how changes over time influence mother-teachers' work-life balance, reflecting both personal and societal developments. This chapter looks at two key areas where time-related changes were especially important: the age of children and shifts in government or school policies. Understanding these dynamics highlights the importance of time in shaping work-life balance experiences.

##### ***4.6.1. Age of Children***

The age of children emerges as a pivotal factor in shaping the work-life balance for mother-teachers, with distinct experiences based on whether their children are young or older. For those with young children, the challenges are considerably greater. Participant M noted, "When my children were little, it was definitely harder. There was no kindergarten, so sometimes I had to leave them alone at home, locking the door while I ran to teach my classes." Another teacher echoed this sentiment, stating, "Once the children grow older, of course, things get easier. But when they are little, it is extremely difficult." (Participant Z). These accounts vividly illustrate the physical and emotional strain of managing classroom responsibilities while attending to the intensive care young children require.

In addition to these challenges, the daily routines of mother-teachers with young children often lead to frequent delays at work. Participant N reflects on this, stating, “The times when you need to drop them off at kindergarten force you to arrive late at work. Arriving late creates the impression of a lack of responsibility.” She explains that such delays significantly affect the emotional state of teachers, adding to the stress of balancing professional and personal obligations.

In contrast, as children grow older, the dynamics shift significantly. Older children tend to become more independent and can even help with household duties as Participant B mentioned—such as caring for younger siblings, managing school-related tasks, or accompanying them to and from school. This increased self-reliance not only reduces the workload for mother-teachers but also helps create a more manageable balance between professional and personal obligations.

Furthermore, current policies offer some relief by allowing mother-teachers with children under three to work part-time. While this measure is beneficial, it underscores the reality that the greatest challenges occur when children are very young - when the demands on a mother's time and energy are at their highest.

Overall, the data indicate that the age of children plays a decisive role in the work-life balance of mother-teachers. When children are young, the constant need for attention and care intensifies stress and disrupts professional engagement. As children mature, their growing independence provides mother-teachers with critical respite, enabling them to more effectively manage the dual demands of work and home life.

#### ***4.6.2 Changes in Policy***

Policy changes have significantly redefined the role of mother-teachers by removing additional community-related duties that once blurred the boundaries between professional and personal life. Prior to the enactment of the Law on the Status of Teachers

(MoES RK, 2019) mother-teachers were burdened with numerous extra responsibilities unrelated to direct classroom teaching. Participant K recalled, "... at that time, we took turns patrolling on the streets, cleaning, and were sent to various events." These extra duties not only extended the school day but also interfered with family time, leading to conflicts at home. As another teacher noted, "When we were engaged in various community tasks, I would come home late...my partner would not understand that, which would lead to conflicts."

The introduction of the law curtailed these additional social activities, allowing mother-teachers to work within more predictable hours and focus on their primary teaching responsibilities. This policy change has played a crucial role in enhancing work-life balance by reducing the need for prolonged workdays and mitigating the strain on family relationships. The reduction in non-teaching tasks has enabled mother-teachers to better allocate time and energy to both their professional duties and their home life, resulting in fewer domestic conflicts and an overall improvement in personal well-being.

#### **4.7 Summary**

The findings reveal that mother-teachers' work-life balance is shaped by a complex web of factors across all ecological levels. A consistent pattern is the tension between societal expectations and individual agency. While participants strive to fulfill both professional and domestic roles, their ability to do so often depends on support systems—especially spouses, in-laws, and school leadership.

Across both rural and urban contexts, teachers highlighted the emotional toll of juggling roles, often intensified by cultural norms around caregiving. Yet, many also showed resilience by developing personal strategies like time management, self-care, and boundary-setting. The data also showed how power and status (e.g., school seniority, family dynamics) can influence access to flexibility and support.

Over time, participants described an evolving sense of balance—not because demands lessened, but because they adapted, developed coping mechanisms, or redefined their priorities. This suggests that work-life balance is less about achieving perfect harmony and more about ongoing negotiation and adjustment within shifting environments.

Taken together, these findings illustrate that work-life balance is not a fixed outcome, but an ongoing process shaped by intersecting systems. The voices of mother-teachers reveal a daily choreography of prioritization, compromise, and perseverance, offering valuable insight into the lived realities behind the policy debates and social expectations. Their experiences highlight not only the challenges of dual roles but also the agency and creativity with which they navigate them.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the guiding research questions and the broader literature. Drawing on the voices of five secondary school mother-teachers in Kazakhstan, the chapter reflects on the complex, evolving, and often deeply personal nature of work-life balance. Rather than offering a single definition or path to balance, the findings show how participants interpret and negotiate work-life balance in ways that reflect their values, life stages, family dynamics, and professional responsibilities. The discussion is structured around each of the four research questions, linking the findings to existing scholarship and situating them within the socio-cultural context of Kazakhstan.

### 5.2 Understanding of Work-Life Balance

**RQ1: How do secondary school mother-teachers understand the concept of work-life balance?**

This question aimed to explore how secondary school mother-teachers in Kazakhstan define and perceive work-life balance. Understanding their subjective interpretations was essential to contextualizing how they evaluate their own ability to manage competing responsibilities. The findings suggest that their understanding is not based on idealized or fixed standards, but on emotional, relational, and cultural realities that shift over time. Their views align with Guest's (2002) subjective definition, which emphasizes individual perception rather than external criteria.

#### *5.2.1 Emotional Perspective*

Most participants described work-life balance not as a perfect division of time, but as an inner sense of emotional harmony and coping. For them, balance was achieved when they were able to manage both work and family obligations without emotional breakdown.

Feeling “in control” or “handling everything” was seen as a sign of balance—even when conditions were far from ideal. Importantly, they were not striving for perfection but for a functional rhythm that allowed them to carry out daily responsibilities with a sense of stability.

The participants often expressed this balance in emotional or intuitive terms, rather than through measurable or objective benchmarks. When both domains—work and family—were running smoothly, they felt “balanced.” However, when stress from one sphere spilled into the other, even briefly, it disrupted their emotional equilibrium, showing the delicate interdependence within their microsystem.

This understanding aligns with Greenhaus et al. (2003), who define work-life balance as the experience of satisfaction and effectiveness in both work and family roles, guided by personal values and priorities. It also resonates with Lu et al. (2010), who argue that in collectivist cultures, emotional harmony and relational stability are considered more essential indicators of balance than time distribution or productivity. For mother-teachers, emotional well-being functioned as the internal barometer for assessing whether they were maintaining work-life balance.

### ***5.2.2 Cultural Influence***

Cultural expectations played a significant role in shaping how mother-teachers understood work-life balance. The traditional Kazakhstani view that women should prioritize family over career meant that many participants viewed work-life balance as an ongoing responsibility rather than a goal to be achieved. This reflects findings by Chandra (2012) and Le et al. (2020), who note that in collectivist societies, work-life balance is often shaped by deeply embedded gender roles that place caregiving as a woman’s default responsibility. This normalization of dual roles—teaching and mothering—suggests that many participants do not view their load as extraordinary but as expected and non-

negotiable, a perception shaped by cultural norms within the macrosystem. As a result, mother-teachers were less likely to externalize their struggle or advocate for structural change.

### *5.2.3 Value of Self-Care*

Despite the dominant theme of prioritizing family and professional responsibilities, several participants acknowledged the importance of self-care and personal well-being in their understanding of work-life balance. Although this was not a widely emphasized strategy, it emerged as a meaningful aspect of balance for a few mother-teachers who consciously carved out time for themselves.

These participants described personal time—such as engaging in hobbies, reading, spiritual reflection, or connecting with friends—not as luxuries, but as necessary moments to recharge. Even though these activities were often secondary to family and work obligations, they contributed to emotional stability, personal identity, and the ability to continue fulfilling both roles. One implicit idea was that to effectively care for others—students or children—a woman must also care for herself.

This view aligns with Allen (2001), who argue that true work-life balance should go beyond merely fulfilling family and job duties to also include attention to the individual's psychological and physical well-being. In the context of Kazakhstan, where traditional gender norms may place less emphasis on women's personal needs, these expressions of self-care reflect a quiet form of agency—where mother-teachers attempt to preserve their individuality amid competing demands.

Additionally, research by Pasay-an et al. (2014) supports this notion, finding that educators who neglect self-care are more prone to burnout and dissatisfaction, particularly when juggling caregiving responsibilities. Similarly, Haar et al. (2014) suggest that emotional health and personal fulfillment are key dimensions of work-life balance,

especially in cultures where women's work is emotionally intensive, both at home and in their profession.

Thus, while not universally prioritized, the inclusion of self-care in some participants' conceptualizations of balance points to a more holistic and human-centered view—one that acknowledges the mother-teacher not only as a worker and caregiver, but also as an individual with personal needs, emotions, and aspirations.

#### ***5.2.4 Work as Emotional Fulfillment***

The role of teaching itself significantly influenced how mother-teachers experienced and interpreted work-life balance. Several participants described their profession as a source of emotional reward, rather than a burden. For these women, teaching offered not just financial stability but also personal meaning, joy, and identity, which in turn made family-related stress feel more manageable. These positive experiences highlight interactions across settings—home and school—that together shape emotional well-being, illustrating the mesosystem.

This perspective aligns with recent studies on positive work-family spillover, which suggest that fulfilling and meaningful work can enhance emotional well-being and resilience at home. For example, Chen et al. (2021) found that when educators perceive their work as meaningful, they experience higher work engagement and greater home-life satisfaction. Similarly, Hamid and Yusof (2020) showed that teachers who find value in their work report fewer stress-related symptoms, as the emotional rewards of teaching spill over into their personal lives.

It also reflects the concept of role enrichment, introduced by Greenhaus and Powell (2006), which suggests that participation in one role (e.g., work) can enhance the quality of life in another role (e.g., family) through the transfer of skills, energy, or emotional resources. While the concept originated in earlier work, more recent studies (e.g., Lapierre

et al., 2018) confirm that enrichment remains highly relevant, particularly in caregiving professions such as teaching. These insights challenge traditional Western models that view work and family as competing spheres and instead support a more integrative understanding—especially in collectivist contexts.

In Asian and post-Soviet societies like Kazakhstan, where social and professional roles often overlap, this integrative model is especially fitting. Chandra (2012) and Le et al. (2020) both highlight that in such cultural contexts, family and work are not experienced as isolated domains but as part of a shared social purpose. Teaching, being a respected and relational profession, often allows women to derive emotional strength and identity, which enhances their capacity to manage family demands.

In sum, for several mother-teachers, teaching was not merely a professional obligation but a deeply fulfilling role that contributed to their emotional strength, identity, and coping capacity. This integrative view redefines work-life balance as not just about minimizing conflict, but as the maximization of harmony—where roles reinforce one another by providing energy, purpose, and a sense of meaningful contribution.

### ***5.2.5 Evolving Nature of Balance Over Time***

Finally, participants often described work-life balance as something that evolves over time, particularly influenced by the age of their children. This process illustrates the chronosystem, where individuals' experiences and perceptions of balance change across life stages and transitions.

Many highlighted that the period of early motherhood was the most difficult, marked by intense caregiving demands and limited personal time. As children matured and became more independent, these women reported finding it easier to manage responsibilities, with more structured routines and emotional resilience. For example, one participant shared that she used to leave her toddlers locked at home briefly while running

to work—a strategy she no longer needs as her children are now older. This dynamic change reflects the chronosystem in Bronfenbrenner’s theory, where individuals’ experiences shift based on life stages and transitions.

This pattern reflects Bronfenbrenner’s chronosystem, which emphasizes that human experiences evolve with time and life transitions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Similarly, Nordenmark (2004) points out that women with younger children are more likely to experience role strain and work-family conflict, a finding echoed by participants’ own reflections.

Recent studies further support this evolving understanding of balance. Research by Schieman and Glavin (2017) and Livingston and Judge (2020) shows that work-life dynamics are not static but shift with changing career phases and family needs. Some mother-teachers also noted that their expectations and definitions of balance changed over time, becoming more flexible and realistic. When their children were very young, they described balance as almost impossible to achieve, but over time, they adjusted their expectations, learning to accept imbalance as temporary and redefine what balance meant in their daily lives. Overall, participants viewed balance not as a fixed achievement, but as a lifelong process of adjusting, learning, and rebalancing.

### **5.2.6 Summary**

In conclusion, mother-teachers in Kazakhstan define work-life balance as an emotional and evolving state of managing multiple roles rather than achieving ideal conditions. Unlike Western perspectives that often emphasize individual autonomy in balancing work and family, Kazakhstani mother-teachers perceive balance as a relational construct shaped by family, societal norms, and workplace dynamics. Their understanding is rooted in their cultural setting, life stage, and profession. Rather than separating work and family, they aim for a harmonious coexistence. For them, balance is not about

perfection, but about *adapting, coping, and carrying on*. These insights provide a foundation for understanding the challenges they face, which will be explored in the next section.

### **5.3 Challenges in Managing the Dual Roles of Mother and Teacher**

#### **RQ2: What specific challenges do mother-teachers face in managing their dual roles?**

This research question explored the specific difficulties mother-teachers face as they try to meet the responsibilities of both their teaching job and their role within the family. The interviews revealed that these challenges are complex, emotional, and shaped by cultural, professional, and family contexts. While most participants reported feeling capable and organized, they also expressed moments of exhaustion, guilt, and stress that come from the constant negotiation between their dual roles.

##### ***5.3.1 Exhaustion***

A dominant theme was emotional and physical exhaustion. Participants described how teaching duties extended beyond school hours—through lesson planning, grading, and constant communication with parents—and how these overlapped with parenting responsibilities within their immediate microsystem.

This echoes findings by Tekin and Demirkasimoglu (2023), who found that increased workload significantly decreases work-life balance among teachers. Similarly, the idea of “the second shift” (Hochschild & Machung, 2012) is evident, as participants repeatedly mentioned that their responsibilities continued after they returned home.

The blurring of boundaries between professional and personal settings reflects mesosystem tensions, where demands from interconnected environments, such as the school and the home, place cumulative pressure on mother-teachers.

### **5.3.2 Guilt**

Participants also reported feelings of guilt, particularly about not spending enough quality time with their children. Despite their commitment to both work and family, some mothers expressed regret that their attention was divided. This is consistent with Sahana and Bagali's (2015) study, which found that working mothers often experience emotional stress when they feel they are not fully meeting their caregiving roles. This is especially common in collectivist cultures, where the macrosystem reinforces the expectation where women must succeed in both domestic and professional domains without compromise (Chandra, 2012; Lewis & Beauregard, 2018).

### **5.3.3 Children**

The age of children emerged as a particularly significant factor. Teachers of younger children shared stories of frequent lateness, fatigue, and even leaving children unattended at times to fulfill work duties. These accounts demonstrate how individual experiences shift within the chronosystem, as parenting demands evolve over the life course.

As Nordenmark (2004) argued, younger children require greater attention and care, which increases the tension between professional obligations and parenting. The findings of this study confirm this pattern, highlighting that the early years of motherhood are especially challenging for balancing work and family spheres. Similarly, Schieman and Glavin (2017) emphasize that parenting young children exacerbates work-life conflict, as emotional and time demands are higher during this stage compared to later phases of family life.

### **5.3.4 Daughter-In-Law Responsibilities**

In addition, the study highlighted culturally embedded responsibilities, such as daughter-in-law obligations in extended households. Several teachers described added

pressure from their in-laws and the expectation to fulfill traditional domestic duties regardless of their professional workload. These experiences reflect tensions within the microsystem, where close family dynamics significantly influence daily life, and are further reinforced by cultural norms within the broader macrosystem.

This reflects findings from Chandra (2012), who noted that in collectivist cultures, the intersection of gender, family hierarchy, and professional identity creates particularly complex challenges for working women. The literature review similarly emphasized how traditional family structures and cultural expectations affect work-life balance for women in Central Asian and other collectivist contexts.

### ***5.3.5 Work Demands***

Although most participants did not openly complain about their workload, their reflections on duties such as being a class teacher, staying available on messaging apps like WhatsApp after hours, and managing extracurricular responsibilities subtly revealed the expansive scope of their work.

This aligns with the findings of Day and Gu (2010), who emphasize that teachers' work encompasses not only classroom teaching but also numerous non-instructional tasks that require emotional, cognitive, and time investment. Similarly, OECD (2019) reports that teachers in many countries spend considerable time outside teaching hours preparing lessons, grading, and performing administrative duties—often without formal recognition or compensation.

In Kazakhstan, research by Satybaldina (2021) and Bimendina (2018) also identifies the intensification of teacher workload due to increasing bureaucratic requirements and parental expectations. Teachers are frequently engaged in paperwork, lesson planning, and extracurricular supervision, contributing to high rates of professional stress. Moreover, Schaufeli and Taris (2014) argue that the expansion of teachers'

responsibilities into personal time reflects broader trends of boundary blurring between work and life. Communication technologies such as messaging apps exacerbate this issue, as teachers feel compelled to remain available after hours, creating what Mazmanian et al. (2013) call a state of “perpetual availability.”

The normalization of this overwork is particularly problematic in the context of mother-teachers, who juggle these professional expectations with caregiving and household responsibilities. Study by Grady et al. (2008) highlights that when work demands encroach on personal domains, it significantly contributes to emotional exhaustion and work-life conflict.

### **5.3.6 Summary**

In conclusion, the challenges mother-teachers face are not isolated issues but are deeply interconnected with cultural norms, institutional structures, and family dynamics. These women often carry the emotional weight of their dual roles quietly, making constant adjustments to ensure both areas of life are “managed.” While many show resilience and resourcefulness, the findings clearly show that their path is not without considerable emotional and logistical strain.

## **5.4 Coping Strategies Used by Mother-Teachers**

### **RQ3: What coping strategies do secondary school mother-teachers use to manage work-life balance?**

The findings of this study reveal a diverse array of coping strategies employed by mother-teachers in Kazakhstan to maintain a functional work-life balance. These strategies span across personal, familial, organizational, and cultural domains. While some strategies are proactive and empowering, others emerge as necessary responses to systemic limitations and contextual challenges.

Importantly, the ways in which participants managed competing demands reflect not only the influence of multilayered ecological systems but also align with the principles of Border Theory (Clark, 2001). Border Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how individuals create, maintain, or negotiate the boundaries between their work and family domains. Participants' strategies varied in terms of how rigidly or flexibly they navigated these boundaries, influenced by available support systems, role expectations, and the permeability between professional and personal spheres.

The discussion below links these coping mechanisms to the existing literature and broader cultural context,

#### ***5.4.1 Time Management and Daily Structure***

Time management was a widely reported and essential coping strategy among mother-teachers. Participants described intentionally planning their days, using timetables, and aligning work tasks with family duties. This proactive approach allowed them to gain a sense of control over their schedules, reduce stress, and ensure personal well-being.

This aligns with Lockwood (2003) and Greenhaus et al. (2003), who argue that structured routines allow working individuals to maintain alignment between responsibilities and personal values. In collectivist societies like Kazakhstan, where caregiving is culturally expected of women, such planning is often the only way to sustain emotional and physical balance. Meyers & Gornick (2005) also emphasize the burden of time-based role conflict, particularly for mothers with young children, making time management a foundational strategy for avoiding emotional burnout.

The use of deliberate daily structuring can also be interpreted through the lens of Border Theory (Clark, 2001), which suggests that individuals who proactively organize their activities are better able to maintain role clarity and reduce conflict between work and family domains.

#### ***5.4.2 Family and Spousal Support***

In addition to personal strategies, family support—particularly from spouses, older children, and in some cases in-laws—played a critical role in mitigating work-life stress. Many participants credited their spouses' emotional and practical contributions as vital to managing household duties and childcare. This type of relational support reflects the strong influence of the microsystem and is echoed in the studies of Ferguson et al. (2012) and Xu (2012), which highlight the significance of spousal and family support in improving work-family outcomes for women. Within the Kazakh context, these findings reinforce the conclusions drawn by Kabylova (2022) and Dugarova (2019), who found that mothers often rely heavily on extended family members to fill childcare gaps left by limited institutional support from the exosystem. Interestingly, the role of extended family, especially in-laws, was more nuanced. While some mother-teachers described in-laws as burdensome or emotionally taxing, others portrayed them as key enablers of work-life balance, especially when in-laws understood the teaching profession or actively supported childcare. These findings resonate with Kabylova (2022), who highlights the dual nature of extended family dynamics in Kazakhstan: they can act either as a resource or source of tension depending on intergenerational expectations.

#### ***5.4.3 Workplace Flexibility and Collegial Support***

Another key coping strategy was seeking flexibility and support from school administrators and colleagues. Participants who had built reputations for competence and trustworthiness were more likely to receive accommodations such as schedule changes or early departures to attend to family matters. Collegial support was also mentioned by all participants as a key coping mechanism. These forms of institutional and interpersonal support reflect the mesosystem, where interactions between the workplace and home settings significantly impact individual coping.

This finding is supported by Agha et al. (2017) and Dean (2022), who assert that workplace support is a major determinant of work-life satisfaction. According to Dean, school leadership that offers scheduling flexibility and empathetic supervision creates a more inclusive and sustainable environment for working mothers. Moreover, in rural areas, as this study found, limited staffing and strong community bonds sometimes foster closer support networks among teachers. This reflects the mesosystem level of Bronfenbrenner's theory, where the interaction between professional and personal domains is mediated by workplace culture. In contexts where school administration is family-aware and responsive, the work-life interface becomes more navigable.

#### ***5.4.4 Self-Care***

Several participants reflected on the importance of self-care, though their approaches and interpretations differed based on their personal circumstances and stages of life. For some, self-care meant finding time alone to recharge, engaging in spiritual or reflective practices, setting clear boundaries around school-related tasks at home, or occasionally making space for rest or hobbies—even in small and simple ways. These actions were not seen as indulgences, but rather as essential responses to protect their emotional well-being and maintain a sense of autonomy.

The significance of self-care in sustaining teachers' professional and personal resilience has been acknowledged in educational literature. For instance, Kinman et al. (2011) found that teachers who actively engage in self-care and set boundaries report lower levels of psychological distress and greater professional efficacy. In the specific context of mother-teachers, Grady et al. (2008) highlight that even brief acts of self-preservation—such as moments of quiet, journaling, or prayer—can serve as meaningful tools for renewal. These seemingly modest practices allow women to regain a sense of

control over their time and emotions amid the often-conflicting demands of work and home.

Importantly, the findings suggest that coping is not about eliminating stress entirely, but about carving out small, restorative moments within the realities of a demanding life. These micro-moments, though brief, are valuable strategies that help restore balance. It can also be interpreted as efforts to strengthen personal borders between professional and domestic roles, in line with Border Theory (Clark, 2001).

#### ***5.4.5 Summary***

In summary, mother-teachers in Kazakhstan cope with work-life balance through a blend of personal strategies (time management, self-care), family support (especially from spouses and older children), and workplace accommodations (supportive administration, flexibility). These strategies are deeply influenced by contextual factors such as rural-urban differences, the age of children, and family structure. The coping mechanisms used are not uniform; rather, they are dynamic and evolve over time as teachers adapt to life changes and institutional realities.

### **5.5 Urban–Rural Differences in Work-Life Balance Experiences**

#### **RQ4: How do the experiences of secondary school mother-teachers differ in urban and rural socio-cultural contexts?**

This question explored how the work-life balance experiences of mother-teachers differ across urban and rural contexts. While all participants were navigating similar professional and familial responsibilities, their experiences revealed that context significantly shapes how those responsibilities are carried out and experienced. The differences were not only logistical but also emotional and structural, shaped by geography, infrastructure, and local community dynamics.

### ***5.5.1 Access to Services***

One of the key distinctions between urban and rural mother-teachers in Kazakhstan lies in the infrastructural context that shapes their daily routines. Rural settings often presented logistical challenges such as longer commutes, fewer childcare facilities, and limited access to extracurricular programs or healthcare. These factors required careful time management and sometimes additional physical effort to maintain a functional work-life rhythm. Nonetheless, many rural mother-teachers developed effective routines and relied on informal support systems to meet both family and professional demands. This reflects findings by Palacios and Tomic (2019), who observed similar patterns in rural post-Soviet regions.

Urban teachers, meanwhile, generally had better access to services such as public transportation, formal childcare, and medical facilities indicating more developed exosystem support structures. These resources helped them manage the practical side of work-life balance more efficiently. However, the presence of infrastructure alone did not simplify their experience. Urban mother-teachers also faced packed schedules and intense multitasking, similar to their rural counterparts. This supports OECD (2019) findings, which show that workload remains a major issue for teachers in Kazakhstan regardless of location. Ultimately, both groups encountered significant structural demands, but the form of those demands varied by context.

### ***5.5.2 Household Structures***

Household arrangements influenced how mother-teachers balanced work and caregiving. In rural areas, multigenerational living often provided practical support through shared childcare and domestic tasks. However, this support sometimes came with traditional expectations for women to maintain primary responsibility for the home, reinforcing gendered labor divisions embedded in the macrosystem.

Urban mother-teachers, more commonly in nuclear households, had fewer sources of direct family assistance. Some reported more flexibility in sharing responsibilities with spouses or using paid services, though caregiving still largely fell to women. This reflects broader findings by Craig and Mullan (2010), who argue that even in dual-earner urban families, women continue to carry the main load of unpaid domestic work.

Overall, the type of household structure shaped the form—not the presence—of support. In both contexts, mother-teachers adapted to their environments, using available resources while managing persistent cultural expectations around motherhood.

### ***5.5.3 Gender Norms***

In rural areas, more traditional views about women's roles often remained deeply embedded, resulting in persistent expectations for mothers to prioritize home responsibilities regardless of their professional obligations. These norms influenced how teachers distributed their energy and time and sometimes led to feelings of guilt or inadequacy when balance was not fully achieved (Sung et al. (2020)).

Urban settings showed more variation in how these norms were expressed. While many urban teachers still carried the primary responsibility for caregiving and household duties, some reported shared decision-making or more flexible role arrangements within their families. Nonetheless, the presence of changing norms did not mean that traditional expectations had disappeared. Hofstede's (2011) framework helps explain the persistence of gendered roles in both urban and rural environments, with the key difference being in how these expectations are enforced or negotiated within the household and community.

### ***5.5.4 Professional Expectations***

Mother-teachers in both urban and rural contexts experienced strong professional expectations, but the nature of those expectations was shaped by their immediate environment. In rural schools, as the participant who had worked in both settings noted,

teachers often held prominent social roles within the community, and their actions were more visible and subject to local norms. This reflects the findings of van den Broeck et al. (2014), who argue that in smaller communities, teachers' identities are more deeply embedded in the social fabric, making them more susceptible to role fusion between their personal and professional lives. Similarly, Clarke (2009) emphasizes that in rural settings, teachers are seen not only as educators but also as moral and cultural exemplars, which intensifies expectations for role-model behavior both in and out of school.

In urban contexts, while professional standards remained high, the teacher's role was generally less shaped by close-knit community surveillance due to the larger, more anonymous school and neighborhood structures. Urban teachers often faced institutional pressures related to performance metrics and accountability systems, rather than community-driven social monitoring.

#### **5.5.5 Summary**

The experiences of mother-teachers in urban and rural Kazakhstan illustrate the significance of context in shaping work-life balance. Rather than viewing either setting as inherently more supportive or more challenging, the evidence suggests that teachers in both environments face distinct configurations of demands and resources across the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

Rural mother-teachers often draw strength from extended family and community ties, even as they manage traditional expectations and infrastructural limitations. Urban mother-teachers may benefit from better access to services, but often contend with intensified institutional workloads and more individualized household structures.

Importantly, across both contexts, mother-teachers demonstrated a remarkable degree of adaptability, resilience, and agency. They developed locally grounded strategies

to meet their responsibilities, negotiated familial roles within existing cultural frameworks, and maintained strong professional identities.

## **5.6 Summary**

This chapter has examined the multifaceted work-life balance experiences of secondary school mother-teachers in Kazakhstan through the lens of four guiding research questions. The findings offer a nuanced understanding of how these women interpret, navigate, and cope with the intersecting demands of motherhood and teaching within their socio-cultural context. Rather than adhering to a singular or static definition, work-life balance was revealed to be a dynamic, emotionally driven process shaped by evolving personal circumstances, cultural expectations, and structural conditions.

First, mother-teachers conceptualized balance not in terms of perfect symmetry between work and home, but as a sense of emotional stability and functionality. Their understanding was grounded in relational well-being and inner coping capacity, aligning with subjective and culturally sensitive definitions found in the literature. Importantly, their sense of balance was constantly evolving—shaped by their children's developmental stages, career maturity, and personal growth.

Second, the challenges they faced were deeply interwoven with gender norms, institutional pressures, and family structures. These challenges ranged from chronic exhaustion and guilt to structural constraints like rigid school policies and unmet childcare needs.

Third, mother-teachers employed a range of coping strategies—spanning personal agency (time management, self-care), familial reliance (spousal and in-law support), and workplace negotiation (flexibility from administrators). These strategies were often fluid and responsive, highlighting the women's resilience and adaptability.

Fourth, the study illuminated clear differences between urban and rural experiences. While urban teachers generally benefited from infrastructural advantages, they often grappled with institutional performance pressures and isolation from extended family. In contrast, rural mother-teachers navigated traditional expectations and logistical challenges, but also drew on strong familial and communal support systems.

Overall, this discussion chapter affirms that the work-life balance of mother-teachers in Kazakhstan is a socially constructed, emotionally mediated, and contextually dependent phenomenon. It is not defined by external benchmarks of success but by the women's ability to adapt to and navigate their realities with perseverance and purpose. These insights lay the groundwork for the next chapter, which will offer concluding reflections and practical recommendations aimed at enhancing institutional, familial, and societal support for mother-teachers across Kazakhstan.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This final chapter brings together the key insights gained through this study on the work-life balance experiences of secondary school mother-teachers in Kazakhstan. It begins by summarizing the major findings in relation to the research questions, followed by a discussion of the theoretical contributions and practical implications of the study. The chapter then outlines the limitations and proposes directions for future research. It concludes with a personal reflection on the research process.

### **6.2 Summary of Key Findings**

This study explored the work-life balance experiences of secondary school mother-teachers in Kazakhstan, aiming to understand how they define balance, what challenges they face, how their experiences differ across rural and urban contexts, and what strategies they use to manage their dual roles. The research was grounded in in-depth interviews with five mother-teachers, whose voices illuminated the emotional, practical, and cultural complexities of balancing teaching and parenting.

The findings revealed that participants do not view work-life balance as a perfectly equal distribution of time or tasks. Instead, they understand balance as a subjective sense of control and emotional stability—something that allows them to feel they are managing their responsibilities without completely sacrificing one role for the other. This understanding aligns with Guest's (2002) subjective model of work-life balance, where personal perception plays a central role in determining whether balance exists.

Participants shared a range of challenges, including emotional and physical exhaustion, guilt related to parenting, and the demands of both school and home. These difficulties were heightened for those with young children and were further complicated by cultural expectations, especially for those living with extended family. Teachers mentioned

the emotional weight of trying to be fully present at work while worrying about their children, or vice versa. The findings confirmed that work-life conflict is deeply embedded in both institutional structures and social norms.

The study also found that geographic and community context significantly shaped the work-life balance experiences of the participants. Rural teachers often faced additional household burdens and limited access to services like childcare and transportation. However, they also benefited from closer proximity to work and stronger support from their local communities. Urban teachers had access to better infrastructure and more professional opportunities but often experienced longer commutes, greater isolation, and more rigid school environments. These differences reveal how structural and cultural contexts influence both the demands placed on mother-teachers and the resources available to support them.

Despite the challenges, participants demonstrated considerable agency and resourcefulness. They employed a variety of coping strategies, including careful time management, emotional boundary-setting, reliance on family support, and gradual adjustments in their personal and professional priorities. Over time, some developed ways to redefine balance, not as the elimination of conflict, but as a sustainable rhythm that allowed them to function effectively in both domains.

### **6.3 Theoretical Implications**

This study contributes to several theoretical frameworks related to work-life balance. First, it reinforces the value of Guest's (2002) subjective model, which views balance as an individually defined and emotionally perceived state, rather than a fixed outcome. The participants did not evaluate balance based on evenly split time or tasks, but rather on whether they felt in control and able to manage competing responsibilities. Their

reflections support the argument that subjective well-being plays a central role in how balance is defined and pursued.

Second, the study draws on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) to interpret how multiple layers of influence—ranging from immediate family and school environments (microsystem) to institutional policies and family–school interactions (mesosystem), and broader cultural expectations and gender norms (macrosystem)—shape the work-life balance of mother-teachers. Although the research questions were later revised to focus more directly on coping strategies, Bronfenbrenner's framework was central in structuring the thematic analysis and helped to reveal how individual experiences are embedded within interconnected social systems. The findings affirm that work-life balance is not only a personal issue, but one that is continuously shaped by environmental, relational, and cultural factors.

Finally, the study finds a meaningful connection with Border Theory (Clark, 2001), which examines how individuals manage the boundaries between work and family domains. Participants' narratives revealed differing approaches to boundary management—some created clear separations between school and home, while others allowed these domains to blend. These strategies were influenced by available support systems, role flexibility, and the perceived permeability of domain borders. The role of “border-keepers,” such as school administrators or spouses, also emerged as critical in either facilitating or constraining the teachers' ability to balance roles.

By engaging with these three theoretical lenses, the study not only confirms existing concepts but also demonstrates their relevance in a Central Asian context. It offers a nuanced understanding of how work-life balance is negotiated in everyday life and how theoretical models can be adapted to account for cultural, institutional, and familial dynamics specific to the Kazakhstani setting.

## **6.4 Practical Implications**

The findings have important implications for how schools and educational systems can better support mother-teachers. School leaders need to be more responsive to the realities of teachers with family responsibilities, particularly when children are young. Adjusting schedules to allow more flexibility, reducing unnecessary administrative tasks, and creating space for informal support systems within schools could ease some of the daily pressures mother-teachers face.

From a policy perspective, there is a need for more family-friendly options in the education system. Extending paid childcare support beyond 1.5 years, encouraging part-time work arrangements, and promoting in-school childcare facilities could make a significant difference. These kinds of supports are especially important in rural areas, where access to public services is more limited and domestic burdens are often heavier.

At the community and family level, it is essential to cultivate a broader understanding of the dual contributions that mother-teachers make—not only at work but also at home. A more equitable distribution of domestic responsibilities and stronger recognition of the professional value of teaching can help shift some of the invisible pressures currently shouldered by women.

## **6.5 Limitations and Future Research**

While this study offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. According to Colaizzi's (1978) method, after analyzing the data, the findings should be returned to participants for member checking to validate the results. However, due to time constraints, I was unable to carry out this step. As a result, the findings were not verified directly by participants, which may be considered a limitation of the study.

Although qualitative research does not aim for generalizability, the insights gained from this study are limited by the small sample size. As a result, the findings may not fully

represent the experiences of mother-teachers in other regions or different educational settings. Future research could benefit from including a wider range of participants from different regions, school types, and family structures. Comparative studies involving father-teachers or single-parent teachers could also provide a broader understanding of how gender, marital status, and institutional context interact in shaping work-life balance.

Moreover, a longitudinal perspective could offer further insight into how work-life balance shifts over time, particularly as children grow older or as teachers move through different stages in their careers. Another promising direction for future inquiry would be to explore how school leadership practices specifically impact the well-being and retention of mother-teachers.

## **6.6 Final Reflection**

At first, I thought the study would show that the teachers were very stressed, since balancing teaching and motherhood seemed likely to cause dissatisfaction. But the real stories shared during the interviews proved me wrong. The teachers showed a lot of resilience, emotional strength, and flexibility. Their experiences showed that while work-life balance is not easy or perfect, it is possible when seen through the reality of their lives. I was also surprised that, even though there are constant educational reforms and a lack of resources, the teachers did not raise these issues during interviews. Instead, they seemed to accept their situation in a positive and even content way. Another thing I realized during the recruitment process was that many vice-principals were hesitant to give out the invitation letters, saying that teachers were already too busy. This showed me that heavy workloads are still a big part of what shapes the work-life balance for mother-teachers. Overall, hearing their voices made it even clearer that we need to value teachers not just for their work, but also for who they are and everything they carry with them beyond their jobs.

Additionally, working closely with the participants and reflecting on their experiences also helped me grow as a researcher. Throughout this process, I could develop important academic skills: I learned to read more carefully, choose information wisely, write more precisely, and base my arguments on evidence, not assumptions.

Besides these academic skills, I also grew personally during this journey, and I am very grateful for that. Doing this research while being pregnant and giving birth taught me the importance of discipline and self-motivation, especially during times when external circumstances were challenging. I realized that meaningful work does not happen only when we feel motivated or conditions are ideal. It happens through staying consistent, being patient, and making small, steady efforts over time.

## **6.7 Summary**

This chapter has provided a summary of the study's main findings, theoretical contributions, practical implications, and limitations. It has also reflected on the personal insights gained through the research process. The study has shown that while secondary school mother-teachers in Kazakhstan encounter various challenges in balancing their professional and personal roles, they also demonstrate a range of coping strategies that support their ability to manage these responsibilities. By foregrounding the voices of mother-teachers in both rural and urban contexts, the study helps to expand the scope of existing literature and offers a grounded understanding of how work-life balance is experienced and negotiated in everyday practice.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: AI Declaration



**Thesis Title:** Work-Life Balance Experiences of Secondary School Mother-Teachers in Kazakhstan: A Phenomenological Study

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#### Declaration of the Use of Generative AI

I hereby declare that I have read and understood NUGSE's policy concerning appropriate use of AI and composed this work independently (please check one):


- with the use of artificial intelligence tools, or
- without the use of artificial intelligence tools.

During the preparation of this thesis/examination, I used ChatGPT, to assist with paraphrasing, improving the clarity and flow of my writing, and Google Scholar to find and review relevant academic literature.

I also declare that I

- am aware of the capabilities and limitations of AI tool(s),
- have verified that the content generated by AI systems and adopted by me is factually correct,
- am aware that as the author of this thesis I bear full responsibility for the statements and assertions made in it,
- have submitted complete and accurate information about my use of AI tools in this work, and
- acknowledge that there may be disciplinary consequences if I have not followed NUGSE's guidelines regarding AI appropriate use.

Name: Symbat Amanbay  
Date: 28.04.2025

Signature: 

## **Appendix B: Recruitment/Invitation Letter in English**

Dear Teacher,

My name is Symbat Amanbay. I'm a current Master's student at NUGSE, and I'm conducting a research study that explores the experiences of mother-teachers in secondary schools in Kazakhstan, focusing on how they balance their work and personal lives. This study aims to understand the challenges mother-teachers face and how various factors, like school policies and societal expectations, impact your work-life balance.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. If you agree, I will ask you to participate in an interview, which will last approximately 30-45 minutes, online or face-to-face, at a time and place convenient for you. The interview will be in your preferred language, and it will be audio recorded. The recordings will be used solely for research purposes and will be destroyed after the study is completed.

If you're interested in participating, please fill out this brief survey to provide some demographic information: [Link]. Based on your responses, I will contact you further to let you know more about the study.

Your input will be invaluable.

If you have any questions or need more information, please, feel free to contact me through WhatsApp. My number is (87718768144)

Thank you for considering this!

## **Appendix C: Survey Questions in English**

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study on “Work-Life Balance Experiences of Secondary School Mother-Teachers in Kazakhstan”. I would be grateful if you could answer the following questions to provide a bit more information about yourself.

### ***1. Basic Information:***

- Full Name
- Age
- Contact Information (email/WhatsApp/phone number)

### ***2. Professional Background:***

- Where do you work? (urban school/ rural school)
- What is your current role (e.g., subject taught, position)?
- How many years have you been working as a teacher?

### ***3. Experience as a Mother-Teacher:***

- How many years have you been balancing teaching with motherhood?
- How many children do you have?
- What are the ages of your children?

### ***4. Living Arrangements:***

- Do you live with your parents-in-law? (Yes/No)
- How would you describe the level of support you receive from your spouse? (e.g., very supportive, somewhat supportive, not supportive, other)

Thank you for your responses, and I will be in contact soon.

## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form in English

### TITLE OF THE STUDY:

Work-Life Balance Experiences of Secondary School Mother-Teachers in Kazakhstan

### DESCRIPTION:

You are invited to participate in a research study aimed at exploring and understanding the experiences of mother-teachers and their roles in maintaining a work-life balance. This study will analyze the challenges faced by participants in their dual roles as teachers and parents and examine differences between these experiences in urban and rural settings. Additionally, the study will consider various contextual factors such as school policies, societal expectations, and family dynamics that influence the work-life balance of mother-teachers. You will be asked to participate in an interview, which will be audio recorded. The recordings will be used solely for research purposes and will be destroyed after the study is completed.

### TIME INVOLVEMENT:

Your participation will take approximately 30-45 minutes.

### RISKS AND BENEFITS:

There are minimal risks associated with this study. There is a possible risk of potential emotional discomfort from discussing sensitive personal and professional details. The research design is crafted to avoid causing emotional distress, and every effort will be made to ensure the dignity and privacy of all participants. The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study are increased awareness of work-life balance issues, potential improvements in school policies and support systems, and insights that may lead to more effective professional development for mother-teachers. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your employment.

### PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS:

If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your **participation is voluntary** and you have the **right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate.** You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

**Questions:** If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact Lynne Parmenter, Master's Thesis Supervisor, at [lynne.parmenter@nu.edu.kz](mailto:lynne.parmenter@nu.edu.kz)

**Independent Contact:** If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee at [gse\\_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz](mailto:gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz)

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Interview Questions in English

1. Could you, please, describe what work-life balance means to you?
2. What does a typical workday look like for you, and how do you prioritize your responsibilities as a teacher and a mother?
3. Do you feel like you have enough time to dedicate to both your work and your personal life?
4. Do you have dedicated time for yourself amidst your work and family commitments? If so, how do you protect that time?
5. What are some of the biggest challenges you face in managing your role as a teacher and a mother?
6. How do you manage the demands of your teaching job with the needs of your family?
7. Do you feel these challenges are different for mother-teachers compared to other teachers or mothers in other professions? How so?
8. Can you share any specific situations where you felt overwhelmed or conflicted due to your dual roles?
9. Do you believe there are differences in the experiences of mother-teachers in urban and rural areas of Kazakhstan? If so, what are some of these differences, and what factors contribute to them?
10. Do you think there are differences in the support systems available to mother-teachers in urban and rural areas?
11. How would you describe the level of support you receive from your family (spouse, parents, etc.)/ immediate environment in managing your work and personal life?
12. How do your family members (spouse, children, extended family) support or hinder your ability to manage work and family life?
13. Do you feel supported by your school and colleagues in balancing your responsibilities? How so?
14. How does your teaching schedule impact your ability to manage family responsibilities?
15. Do you think there are any societal expectations or cultural norms (daughter in-law/ responsibilities divided according to gender) in Kazakhstan that impact your ability to achieve work-life balance?
16. Are there any policies or resources at the school or national level that could better support mother-teachers in achieving a better work-life balance?
17. Are there any policies or initiatives you would like to see implemented to better support working mothers in balancing their responsibilities?
18. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as a mother teacher in Kazakhstan, particularly regarding work-life balance?

## Appendix F: Coding Sample

EST System	Theme	Code	Quote in Kazakh	Quote in English
	Struggles in Balancing Teaching and Parenting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Managing dual responsibilities of teacher and mother</li> <li>2. Heavy workload as a class teacher.</li> <li>3. Difficulty in managing work with young children.</li> <li>4. Limited time for personal care and self-development.</li> <li>5. Lack of quality time with children due to school workload.</li> <li>6. Prioritization of work over family at times.</li> </ol>	<p>- Біз мұғалімдер өзіміз баламызға көп көңіл бөле алмаймыз себебі өзіміз баламызға қарауға уақыт бола бермейді. Біз жұрттың баласын қараймыз, жұрттың баласын тәрбиелейміз.</p> <p>- Сыншп жетекшілік өте ауыр жауапкершілік. Таңертен завуч хабарласады. Сондай кезде мектепте дайын тұру керек, мен оған дайын емеспін, себебі бала-шағам бар.</p>	As teachers, we often cannot spend much time with our own children because we are too busy caring for and educating other people's children.
	Family Support in Work-Life Balance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Husband's support in household responsibilities</li> <li>2. Older children assisting with younger siblings.</li> <li>3. The impact of living with in-laws on work-life balance.</li> </ol>	<p>- Әрине, бір өзім жалғыз үлгеруім мүмкін емес қой. Үйде үлкен қызым мені балам әсіресе көп көмегін береді. Жолдасым да балаларды балабақшадан алып келеді.</p> <p>- Жолдасым мені әрқашан қолдады. Балаларымның сабағына әжесі қарап отырды. Лауазымдық жұмысқа да, үй шаруасына да, қонақ күтуде де барлығына үлгертім.</p>	Of course, I couldn't handle everything alone. My old children, especially my daughter, help a lot. My husband also picks up the kids from kindergarten.
<b>Microsystem</b>	Time Management and Balance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Time management is key to balance</li> <li>2. Struggle when plans are disrupted</li> </ol>		
	Workplace Flexibility and Administrative Support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understanding administration allowing schedule adjustments</li> <li>2. Colleagues helping by covering classes when needed.</li> </ol>	Бізде оңдай кезде оқу ісінің орынбасарымен хабарласып жағдайды, мән жайды түсіндіріп, ол кісілер де түсінеді ғой. Сабақтан жібереді, босатады.	In such cases, I contact the deputy principal, explain the situation, and they understand. They let me leave the class if necessary.
	Emotional Spillover from Work to Home	Emotional burden from work affecting home life		
<b>Mesosystem</b>	Work vs. Family Prioritization	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prioritizing family over work</li> <li>2. Prioritization of work over family at times.</li> </ol>	Мектептің ішінен ашылатын садиктер ыңғайлы еді бұрын, баламызды садикке апарып, өзіміз сабағымызға кіре беретінбіз.	Previously, having a kindergarten inside the school was convenient. We could drop off our children and head straight to class.
	Government and School Policies for Working Mothers	1. Availability of maternity leave and its impact on teachers	Қазіргі уақытта көпбалалы аналарға кішкентай бөпелі аналарға көп жағдай қарастырылған ғой үкіметтен. Декретный демалыс бар.	Currently, the government provides various benefits for mothers with many children and those with infants. Maternity leave is available.
	Professional Development Barriers			
<b>Exosystem</b>	Rural-Urban Disparities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Urban schools having better access to technology and teaching materials</li> <li>2. Rural teachers having additional household duties such as heating homes.</li> </ol>	Қала мектептерінде жетіспеушілік деген аз болады деп ойлаймын. Көрнекіліктер жеткілікті болады. Бізде біреуі істесе, екіншісі істемейді.	In city schools, there is hardly any shortage. Teaching materials are readily available. In our school, if one teacher works, another doesn't.
	Gender Expectations and Societal Norms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cultural perceptions of mothers working outside the home</li> <li>2. The expectation for women to balance work and home effortlessly.</li> </ol>	Біздің отбасымызда, әулетімізде оңдай әйелдер үйде отыру керек деген мәселе жоқ. Декретке шыққаннан кейін күйеуім 'жұмысқа шықсай' деп шығарып жібереді.	In our family and among our relatives, there is no expectation that women must stay at home. After maternity leave, my husband encourages me to return to work.
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers expected to prioritize students over personal lives</li> <li>2. Challenges in balancing professional</li> </ol>		As teachers, we cannot dedicate much time to creating