

The Formation Mechanism and Solutions for Non-Teaching Burdens of Primary and Secondary School Teachers: A Grounded Theory Study Based on Sichuan Province

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Abstract. The excessive non-teaching burdens of primary and secondary school teachers have become a significant issue restricting the high-quality development of basic education. This study applies grounded theory to conduct in-depth interviews with 23 teachers from 14 primary and secondary schools in Sichuan Province, China, constructing a model of the formation mechanism and alleviation path of teachers' non-teaching burdens. The study finds that external pressures, organizational dilemmas, and role tension jointly contribute to the creation of non-teaching burdens for teachers, which lead to exhaustion of time and energy, perceived burdens, and emotional labor. These burdens give rise to multiple demands for optimizing work tasks and processes, digital reduction of burdens, clarifying boundaries of authority and responsibility, and building educational ecological support systems. From the perspective of teachers as main stakeholders, this study systematically reveals the generation mechanism and pathways of non-teaching burdens, addressing the paucity of micro-level experiential studies in the existing literature. The study suggests the establishment of an entry mechanism for social affairs into schools, optimization of school management processes, and the construction of a collaborative support system between schools, families, and society, providing empirical evidence for improving teacher burden reduction policies.

Keywords: Sichuan Province; Non-teaching burden; Primary and secondary school teachers; Formation mechanism.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the issue of excessive non-teaching burdens on primary and secondary school teachers in China has become increasingly prominent, acting as a critical bottleneck to the high-quality development of basic education. This issue has garnered sustained attention from governmental bodies and diverse societal stakeholders. In December 2019, relevant official document explicitly requires the cleaning up and regulation of various inspections, evaluations, and social affairs entering schools, aiming to "restore time for instructional activities to teachers and reinstate a serene educational milieu in schools." This document marked the formal institutionalization of teacher burden reduction at the national policy level. However, in practice, primary and secondary school teachers continue to face pressures from various non-teaching tasks, such as administrative work, data reporting, and receiving inspections, leading to an increased burden. Teachers often have to spend a significant portion of their working hours on tasks unrelated to teaching, sometimes even more than the time spent on educational activities (Zhang & Guan, 2019), which severely squeezes the time and energy they can dedicate to teaching research, professional development, and student care.

To further promote the reduction of teachers' burdens, the Ministry of Education issued a notice in 2025 which focuses on non-teaching burdens, emphasizing the establishment of long-term mechanisms such as list management, coordinated regulations, and digital empowerment, to resolutely curb formalistic tasks within schools. Studies show that teachers' burdens originate from multiple sources at various levels, especially within a system structure where the government simultaneously manages, runs, and evaluates schools, leading to the transmission of administrative pressures and a lack of coordination, which results in schools and teachers shouldering numerous additional burdens from both within and outside the education system (Song & Wu, 2022).



At present, academic research on primary and secondary school teacher burdens has accumulated a certain body of work, but most of it focuses on macro-level descriptions of the burden or quantitative analyses based on survey questionnaires, lacking qualitative research from the perspective of teachers' experiences to deeply explore the formation mechanisms and evolution processes of non-teaching burdens, especially local explanatory frameworks constructed from the bottom-up using grounded theory. International scholars have pointed out that non-teaching tasks are often seen by teachers as "thieves of time," robbing them of core time for teaching and preparation (Ahlgren & Gådin, 2011), a finding that resonates strongly with the non-teaching burden issues faced by teachers in China. Based on this, this study selects primary and secondary schools in Sichuan Province, a major educational province in western China, as the research sample. Sichuan's large and diverse education system, along with its longstanding role in the implementation and adjustment of national and local education policies, makes it an ideal representative of the complex realities faced by teachers in the Chinese educational ecosystem. This study employs in-depth interviews with teachers from multiple schools in Sichuan, using grounded theory to systematically analyze the multiple causes, formation mechanisms, and coping strategies of teachers' non-teaching burdens, with the aim of extracting key issues from teachers' real experiences and providing theoretical references and empirical evidence for improving teacher burden reduction policies and optimizing educational governance systems.

2. Literature Review

The concept of "teacher workload" has been continuously enriched with the development of education and research. Pioneering studies operationalized teacher workload as the quantitative time allocated to instructional activities, but this measurement could not explain why teachers with similar working hours experienced significantly different levels of stress. Subsequent research has emphasized a more comprehensive perspective, highlighting the multidimensionality and subjective experience of the burden. Studies have pointed out that the changes in teachers' work are not only quantitative but also qualitative, specifically reflected in the increasing complexity of tasks, the compression of decision-making autonomy, and the continuous stress caused by performance accountability pressures (Apple, 1986). Furthermore, teachers have also invested a significant amount of emotional labor to manage and regulate their emotions in line with professional role expectations, which can lead to teacher burnout when prolonged (Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, & Vanroelen, 2014), thereby affecting their well-being, which has been identified as an essential dimension of work-related burden (Hargreaves, 1998). Contemporary views generally recognize that teacher workload is a product of the interplay of objective workload, work intensity, and emotional exhaustion. The core issue is the conflict and contradiction between external administrative requirements, performance pressures, and the professional autonomy that teachers expect to devote to teaching and nurturing students.

Within the broader category of "teacher workload," "non-teaching workload" is clearly defined and has a significant impact. Non-teaching tasks refer to those activities that are not directly or inherently related to core educational activities, such as classroom teaching, student academic progress, and personal development, but significantly occupy teachers' time and energy. These tasks usually have two core characteristics: first, they are non-professional, meaning that many tasks can be completed without utilizing educational or teaching expertise, thus occupying time that could otherwise be spent on professional development; second, they are performative, meaning that the primary purpose of these tasks is not to serve the educational process but to demonstrate compliance, effort, and organizational performance, thereby becoming a form of performative labor (Ball, 2003). Chinese scholars such as Song Wei et al. have pointed out the complex forms of non-teaching burdens, including handling diverse inspections, evaluations, external social tasks, completing repetitive data reports, and participating in inefficient online check-ins and training (Song&Wu, 2023). These tasks are often emergent, repetitive, and mandatory, not only consuming teachers' time and energy but also eroding their sense of work meaning and professional commitment (Creagh et al., 2023).

At present, non-teaching burdens on primary and secondary school teachers have become a pervasive and profound reality. According to a survey in China, 92.1% of teachers work more than 9 hours a

day at school, and 60.8% of teachers explicitly feel that the workload from inspections, report writing, and other non-teaching tasks has significantly increased (Jin & Yu, 2024). These tasks not only take up teachers' time for professional development and student interaction but also seriously affect their personal lives, leading to a blurred boundary between work and life. The core of the teacher's non-teaching work is the drastic increase in workload and the overload of cognitive and emotional burdens (Longmuir & McKay, 2024). Experts have pointed out that teachers often have to switch quickly between multiple non-teaching tasks, such as inspections, evaluations, and data reporting, gradually becoming focused on responding to external assessments, only paying attention to superficial aspects of the work. The reason for this is the infiltration and connection of management culture (Ball, 2003). Cross-national data further confirms that teachers generally consider "too much administrative work" to be the main source of stress (Jerrim & Sims, 2020). Furthermore, the excessive non-teaching burden also causes internal role conflicts and professional burnout, reflected in the decline in teachers' health, reduced job satisfaction, and other indicators (Creagh et al., 2023). Therefore, the characteristics of non-teaching burdens on primary and secondary school teachers include large workloads, distorted job nature, and the erosion of professional value.

Current research on the causes of non-teaching burdens on primary and secondary school teachers primarily analyzes the issue from external environments, school management, and teachers' own perspectives. Some studies from the perspective of external environments point out that formalism and bureaucratism in policy implementation lead to the transfer of many non-teaching tasks to teachers, forcing them to spend a significant amount of time on administrative tasks unrelated to teaching (Huang & Wang, 2024). Moreover, the high expectations that society has for education, in contrast to the practical limitations of daily educational practice, create an irresolvable contradiction. Teachers' work pace is forced to accelerate, leaving them in a state of time poverty (Creagh et al., 2023). Insufficient internal management within schools further exacerbates the burden. Inefficient administrative processes and poor communication and collaboration mechanisms significantly increase work repetition and time consumption for teachers (Lagawid, 2024). Experts have also noticed that the unlimited expansion of teachers' roles is another key cause. In many cases, teachers are forced to take on a broad range of social responsibilities, such as supporting elections and public health campaigns, which severely blur their professional boundaries and distract them from teaching (Nasreen et al., 2019). Bubb and Earley (2004) empirically revealed that these imposed administrative and bureaucratic tasks, such as collecting fees, organizing exam data, and conducting inventory checks, have been systematically identified and listed. These tasks not only take up teachers' core time for teaching and lesson preparation but also cause extended workdays and reduced job satisfaction.

The methodology of research on non-teaching burdens for primary and secondary school teachers has distinct temporal and spatial development characteristics. Early studies mostly started from a macro perspective, using theoretical speculation and policy text analysis to explore the relationship between system design, management structure, and the expansion of teacher responsibilities (Cao et al., 2024), providing the foundational analytical framework for subsequent empirical investigations. In recent years, quantitative empirical research has gradually become mainstream. Scholars widely use questionnaire data, employing statistical methods such as structural equation modeling and regression analysis to precisely measure the composition and causes of non-teaching tasks, and to explore their effects on teachers' well-being and retention intentions. For example, Jerrim et al. (2021) showed how different types of tasks produce differential impacts on teachers, providing empirical evidence for understanding the complexity of workload. At the same time, scholars have also used in-depth interviews, case studies, and open-ended surveys to reveal the micro-level processes of how non-teaching tasks affect teachers' daily work, as well as the coping strategies and emotional adjustments teachers make (Perryman & Calvert, 2019). Mixed-methods research has further integrated quantitative and qualitative data, offering a more comprehensive explanation of the systemic and cultural logic behind this issue (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). In addition, researchers have attempted to conduct cross-cultural or regional comparisons to reveal the formation mechanisms of

teacher burdens under different educational systems, providing new perspectives on the global and local aspects of the problem (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012).

In summary, regarding research direction, the field of non-teaching burdens for primary and secondary school teachers have been mostly analyzed under the broader category of "teacher workload," with limited studies focusing directly on "non-teaching burdens." Quantitative research often conducts large-scale surveys to uncover the factors influencing teacher workload and its relationships with variables like professional burnout and turnover intention, forming a relatively mature system. Some mixed-methods studies, although combining questionnaires and interviews, often lack in-depth qualitative analysis and mainly serve as supplementary explanations to quantitative results. These studies fail to truly delve into teachers' daily states and emotional experiences in work scenarios. Therefore, existing research lacks an exploration and analysis of the subjective perceptions, coping strategies, and intrinsic demands of teachers, who are the direct bearers of the burdens. This study, therefore, takes the teachers' perspective as its foundation, applying grounded theory as a research path to systematically present teachers' perceptions of non-teaching burdens, dilemmas, and demands, aiming to fill the gap in current research regarding micro-level experiences and provide empirical evidence for formulating more effective and human-centered burden reduction strategies.

3. The Categorization and Model Construction of Non-Teaching Burdens of Primary and Secondary School Teachers

This study selected 23 teachers from 14 primary and secondary schools in Sichuan Province as interview subjects. The sample included a diverse range of teachers in terms of gender, years of teaching experience, age, subject background, and positions within the school. This diversity was chosen to uncover the real state of non-teaching burdens faced by teachers in various educational contexts. The interviewees included general subject teachers, homeroom teachers, and grade group leaders, from schools located in urban, county, and rural areas, providing a certain degree of representation and heterogeneity of the teaching workforce in the region. All research was conducted in accordance with the principle of informed consent.

During the data collection process, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as the primary method. The interviews covered aspects such as the content, sources, perceptions, and coping strategies of teachers' non-teaching tasks. The total transcription of all interviews amounted to over 14,000 words, which were then coded using NVivo software for programmatic analysis.

3.1. Open Coding and Initial Categories

According to the standard research procedures of grounded theory, this study used open coding as the starting point for data analysis and theory construction. In this phase, the study analyzed all transcribed texts (a total of over 14,000 words) line by line and sentence by sentence, tagging and conceptualizing the phenomena expressed in the original statements. Then, on the basis of continuous comparison, similar or related concepts were grouped together, and repetitive or vague expressions were removed, thus forming the initial categories. This analytical process yielded 157 meaningful extracts, which were subsequently categorized into 32 initial categories, which were summarized into 32 initial categories.

Table 1. Teacher Interview Codes and Basic Information.

Code	School	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience	Position	Subject	Interview Code
01	A	Female	52	30	Subject Teacher	Biology	20250320A1
02	A	Female	46	23	Subject Teacher	Politics	20250320A2
03	B	Male	43	23	Grade Leader	Mathematics	20250321B1
04	B	Female	45	25	Homeroom Teacher	Chinese	20250321B2

05	B	Female	35	9	Subject Teacher	English	20250321B3
06	C	Female	24	2	Subject Teacher	Mathematics	20250322C1
07	D	Male	27	3	Subject Teacher	Mathematics	20250322D1
08	E	Female	31	5	Homeroom Teacher	Chinese	20250323E1
09	E	Male	28	3	Subject Teacher	Mathematics	20250323E2
10	E	Female	40	16	Lesson Group Leader	Mathematics	20250323E3
11	F	Female	37	15	Subject Teacher	Science	20250324F1
12	G	Female	35	13	Homeroom Teacher	Chinese	20250324G1
13	H	Male	40	16	Subject Teacher	Chinese	20250325H1
14	H	Female	45	20	Lesson Group Leader	Chemistry	20250325H2
15	H	Female	34	8	Subject Teacher	Physics	20250325H3
16	I	Female	36	12	Homeroom Teacher	Chinese	20250326I1
17	I	Male	42	15	Subject Teacher	Physical Education	20250326I2
18	J	Female	35	8	Homeroom Teacher	Mathematics	20250326J3
19	K	Female	40	12	Political Education Director	Chinese	20250327K1
20	L	Female	36	9	Lesson Group Leader	History	20250327L1
21	M	Female	29	3	Subject Teacher	History	20250327M1
22	M	Male	25	1	Subject Teacher	Mathematics	20250328M2
23	N	Female	49	22	Subject Teacher	Chinese	20250328N1

Table 2. Sample Original Statements and Initial Categories (Partial Example).

Original Statement	Conceptualization	Initial Category
"Now, the main issue is the number of meetings, such as lesson preparation meetings, performance analysis meetings, and notification meetings. These meetings are very frequent."	Frequent participation in meetings	Frequent meetings
"There are too many inspections to check... The most urgent thing is to reduce various inspections, evaluations, and assessments."	Excessive inspections and evaluations	Burden from inspections
"Parents and teachers need appropriate communication time, but the frequency and duration sometimes take up a lot of teachers' personal rest time."	Complex school-family communication	Complexity in school-family interactions
"I feel many tasks are just formalities, dealing with the inspections from higher-ups and the school, without any actual meaning. Most of them are a waste of time."	Perception of formalism	Perception of formalism
"We often have collective lesson preparation that is just a formality, with low efficiency and minimal meaning."	Collective lesson preparation as a formality	Inefficient lesson preparation
"During breaks... if the next teacher hasn't arrived, I stay in the classroom to answer students' questions. At lunch... I oversee students' lunch routines, and in the afternoon... there may be after-school math services where students do consolidation exercises."	Severe fragmentation of time	Fragmentation of work time
"I hope there will be dedicated living teachers to guard lunch breaks and accompany students, allowing teachers to rest and have energy to focus on teaching in the afternoon."	Strong expectations for substitutes	Need for external support
"It should be controlled from the source... reducing the tasks assigned to teachers and strictly controlling the entry of social affairs into schools."	Control over the entry of social affairs	Demand for social affairs entry control
"Roles should be clearly defined, and the boundaries between educational teaching tasks and non-teaching tasks should be refined... to avoid the unreasonable distribution of non-teaching tasks due to unclear responsibilities."	Clarification of boundaries of authority and responsibility	Need for clearer authority boundaries

3.2. Axial Coding and Main Categories

Based on the results from open coding, the study systematically analyzed the internal relationships and logical connections between the initial categories, classifying, integrating, and abstracting them into more generalizable and explanatory main categories. After multiple rounds of refinement and comparison, under expert guidance and through a review of the latest literature, the 32 initial categories were clustered into 13 main categories that could encompass a large portion of the information. The relationship between the main and initial categories was established (see Table 3).

3.3. Selective Coding and Pathway Construction

In the selective coding phase, the main categories formed earlier were further integrated into more abstract and explanatory core categories. Through analyzing and consolidating the main categories, the study identified four core categories: external pressures, organizational dilemmas and role tension, individual impacts and behavioral responses, and systemic burden reduction demands (see Table 3), constructing the formation mechanism and alleviation pathway model for non-teaching burdens of primary and secondary school teachers (see Figure 1). The mechanism and pathway are summarized as follows: under the influence of external pressures, internal organizational dilemmas, and role tension, teachers experience time and energy exhaustion, perceived burdens, and emotional labor. These effects lead to demands for optimizing work tasks and processes, digital burden reduction, clarifying boundaries of authority and responsibility, and the construction of educational ecological support systems.

Table 3. Axial Coding and Main Categories.

Core Category	Main Category	Initial Category	Explanation
External Pressure	Administrative Inspection Pressure	Burden from inspections	Refers to externally imposed mandatory requirements stemming from inspections, meetings, and evaluation systems initiated by higher-level authorities, such as completing student attendance reports, attending non-instructional meetings, and undergoing lesson plan inspections and performance evaluations.
		Frequent meetings	
		Hidden assessment pressures	
	Social Affairs Transfer to Schools	Transfer of social affairs	Reflects the transfer of social responsibilities into schools and the resulting emergent burdens, such as data collection for tuberculosis screening, participation in "civilized city" evaluations, and statistics on medical insurance enrollment.
		Disruption from unexpected events	
	School-Family Communication Pressure	Complexity in school-family interactions	Focuses on communication pressure arising from school–family interactions and the workload associated with managing student behavioral issues and conflicts.
		Student conflict management burden	
Organizational Dilemmas and Role Tension	Policy Implementation Gap	Policy execution gap	Refers to the discrepancy between teachers' understanding of burden-reduction policies and their actual implementation and effectiveness in practice.
		Awareness of burden reduction policies	

Table 4. (Continued) Axial Coding and Main Categories.

Core Category	Main Category	Initial Category	Explanation
Individual Impact and Behavioral Response	Prevalence of formalism	Perception of formalism	Reveals teachers' perceptions of excessive emphasis on formality and procedural compliance, and how such practices crowd out time for core instructional work.
		Non-core tasks occupying time	
		Role overload	
	Role conflict	Lack of job autonomy	Reflects the pressure and identity crisis experienced by teachers due to multiple role expectations and the erosion of autonomy in their work and professional decision-making.
		Loss of professional autonomy	
	Time and Energy Exhaustion	Fragmentation of work time	Describes the objective condition in which non-teaching tasks lead to fragmented schedules, insufficient rest, and interference with core instructional responsibilities.
		Disruption of rest time	
		Heavy core teaching tasks	
	Perceived Burden	Proliferation of non-core tasks	Encompasses teachers' subjective feelings of workload pressure and the passive coping behaviors adopted in response to administrative demands.
		Perception of work burden	
Administrative task compliance			
Emotional Labor	Emotional control and handling	Refers to the emotional costs incurred as teachers regulate their emotions to meet professional expectations when dealing with difficult parents, students, and work situations.	
	Professional role exhaustion		
Work Task and Process Optimization	Task simplification demand	Reflects teachers' expectations for reducing workload through simplifying tasks, optimizing workflows, and minimizing redundant work at the systemic level.	
	Process streamlining demand		
	Avoidance of repetitive work		

Table 5. (Continued) Axial Coding and Main Categories.

Core Category	Main Category	Initial Category	Explanation
Systemic Burden Reduction Demands	Digital Burden Reduction Demand	Use of technology to reduce workload	Indicates teachers' specific expectations for using digital technologies to improve efficiency and alleviate workload pressures.
	Authority and Responsibility Boundaries and Entry Mechanism Demand	Clear authority and responsibility boundaries Control the entry of social affairs into schools School-family communication system	Reflects teachers' expectations to clearly define the boundaries between teaching and non-teaching tasks, distinguish responsibilities between teachers and administrative staff, and regulate the entry of external social affairs into schools.
	Educational Ecological Support System Construction Demand	External support needs Organizational feedback mechanism Resource allocation optimization	Expresses teachers' urgent need for a multi-level support system involving schools, families, and society, along with improved feedback mechanisms and more equitable and efficient allocation of resources to support instructional work.

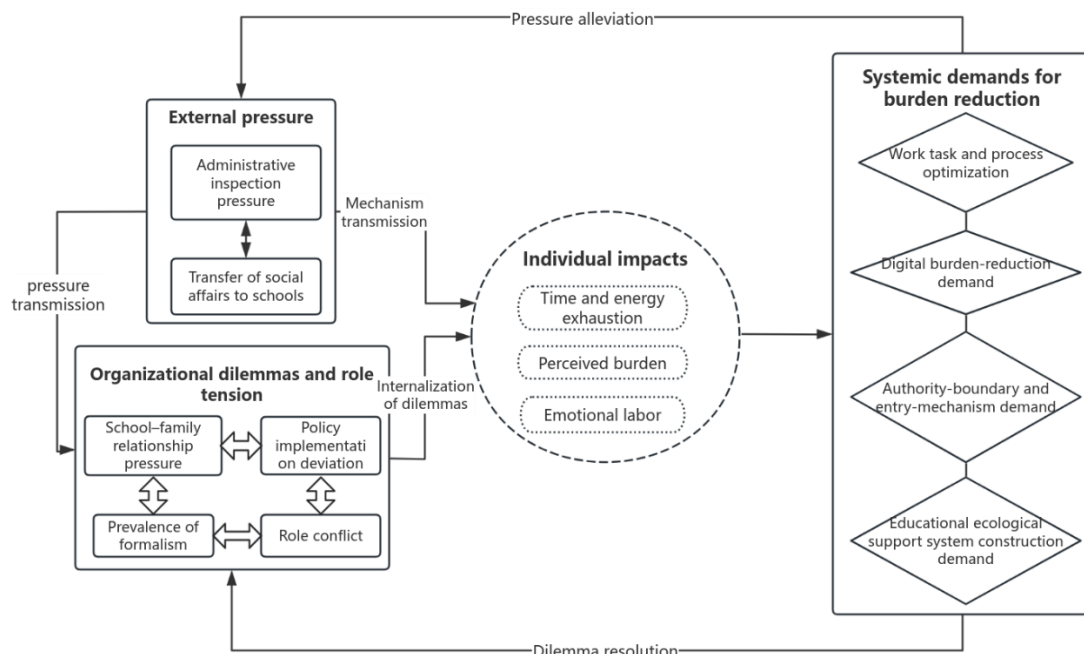


Fig 1. Theoretical model of non-teaching burdens for primary and secondary school teachers.

3.4. Theoretical Saturation Test

To ensure methodological rigor, iterative theoretical sampling and constant comparative analysis were employed during data collection. By the time the 20th teacher interview was conducted, the coding results began to show repetitive trends, and new interview data did not produce new initial categories or concepts. To ensure theoretical saturation, the study continued to interview and analyze the data from the 21st to the 23rd teachers. The additional data only served to enrich and validate the existing categories without introducing groundbreaking new concepts or categories. Therefore, it can be concluded that the theoretical framework of this study has reached a saturation point, ensuring good reliability and validity.

4. Research Findings

(1) External Pressures—Administrative Inspections and the Transfer of Social Affairs into Schools
China's education management is implemented in a top-down manner, where primary and secondary schools belong to various levels of educational departments within the administrative hierarchy. Due to factors such as teacher title evaluations and performance-based salaries, schools often lack room for negotiation when facing administrative instructions. Therefore, when tasks are assigned by higher-level departments, they tend to be layered and passed down, ultimately reaching frontline teachers. As a result, teachers commonly feel that non-teaching tasks significantly invade their teaching time, particularly tasks such as inspections, evaluations, meetings, and data reporting. These tasks are often emergent, mandatory, and repetitive, entering teachers' daily schedules through administrative orders, becoming uncontrollable elements in their workday. Teachers expressed:

"Now, there are too many meetings, like lesson preparation meetings, performance analysis meetings, and notification meetings. These meetings are very frequent." (20250320A1).

"There are too many inspections to check... The most urgent thing is to reduce various inspections, evaluations, and assessments." (20250321B3)

This aligns with the findings of Ahlgren (2011), who also argued that non-teaching work takes away from time for lesson preparation, teaching, and professional development. They pointed out that the time spent on tasks that are less or unrelated to teaching may actually account for a higher percentage of a teacher's work time than time spent on educational activities, thus severely undermining teachers' professional practice space.

Moreover, the study found that social affairs, which should be handled by other administrative departments, are increasingly transferred to teachers, further exacerbating their workload. Tasks such as population census, medical insurance publicity, poverty alleviation, and civil city creation—which should be managed by other administrative bodies—are being transferred to schools, blurring the professional boundaries of teachers and consuming additional energy. Teachers commented:

"Many tasks could clearly be done by local civil servants, but they are forced onto teachers, such as rural revitalization and student household registration checks." (20250323E1)

"Tasks that should be handled by the community or the hospital are instead forced onto teachers, who are already very busy." (20250326I1)

Many studies have noted that the infinite expansion of teachers' roles is a common phenomenon, where teachers are forced to take on a wide range of social duties, such as election support and public health promotion, which severely distracts them from teaching (Nasreen, 2019). Scholars Bubb and Earley also pointed out that such imposed administrative and bureaucratic tasks not only take up core time for teaching and lesson preparation but also extend teachers' workdays and reduce job satisfaction.

(2) Performative Labor—The Proliferation of Formalism and the Erosion of Professional Autonomy
Performative labor refers to the "performative" work that teachers do in response to evaluations and inspections. It reflects the compliance with processes and performance metrics. These tasks include

both internal evaluations and classroom supervision, as well as cross-departmental collaborations like city civil creation and public health campaigns. The study finds that teachers gradually develop a sense of formalism, acutely aware of the emphasis on form and process in their work and how these practices squeeze out core educational tasks. The primary purpose of many non-teaching tasks is not to serve the educational process itself but to demonstrate compliance and organizational performance, forcing teachers to "manufacture" measurable work results. Teachers expressed:

"I feel that many tasks are just formalities, dealing with the inspections from higher-ups and the school, without any actual meaning. Most of them are a waste of time." (20250322D1)

"Many times, our collective lesson preparation feels formal and inefficient, and its significance is minimal." (20250320A2)

This dilemma is also supported by existing research, which finds that performativity, as a technical, cultural, and regulatory mode, uses judgment, comparison, and presentation as means of motivation, control, consumption, and transformation, positioning teachers as producers subject to periodic evaluations and inspections (Ball, 2003). Teachers are forced to present a measurable self to conceal aspects of their practice that are either unmeasurable or seen as undesirable. This process consumes substantial cognitive and emotional resources, leading teachers further away from genuine educational goals. Biesta (2009) also emphasized that overemphasis on measurement and accountability steers education away from its core purpose, forcing teachers to engage in extensive performative labor to present rather than promote learning.

Additionally, under the pressure of multiple role expectations and administrative orders, teachers' professional autonomy is severely eroded, and their decision-making space is constrained, leaving them in a passive situation where they must comply. The study highlights that some teachers mentioned:

"When we are asked to do something, whether or not we volunteer, it always comes from an administrative order. We must obey because we are dependent on others for our livelihoods." (20250326J3)

"As teachers, our main task is teaching. We shouldn't be handling other tasks." (20250321B1)

Similar viewpoints have been raised by scholars like Worth (2020), who noted that increasing scrutiny over teachers' professional judgment diminishes their autonomy in core areas such as teaching, curriculum, and assessment, leading to a loss of professional agency or emotional exhaustion and burnout. Additionally, changes in teacher work are not merely quantitative but also qualitative, manifesting as increasing task complexity, the shrinking of decision-making space, and continuous tension due to performance accountability pressures (Apple, 1986).

(3) Category 3: Role Multiplicity, Time Poverty, and Emotional Labor

Performative labor is not just about mechanically completing tasks; it is professional practice that requires continuous emotional investment. As teachers engage in "manufacturing" materials to meet inspection requirements, they often experience a suppression of their professional identity. Even when they know these formalities are meaningless, they still comply, resulting in emotional labor. This was reflected in the interview results, as teachers bear the burden of role conflicts and psychological strain caused by non-teaching tasks. As the non-teaching tasks lead to fragmented work time, teachers must juggle various roles, such as answering questions during breaks, supervising meals during lunch, providing after-school services, and engaging in evening parent communications. These tasks fragment the workday into countless small pieces, making it difficult for teachers to focus deeply on their teaching and work. Teachers commented:

"We teach until after 12 PM, then have to stay to supervise the lunch break. In the afternoon, there may be a class or after-school tutoring. The work pace is fast, and teachers are really exhausted." (20250322C1)

"The most relaxing part of the day is the 40 minutes of class time." (20250324G1)

Studies have also pointed out that the intensification of teachers' work is not only reflected in the increase in workload but also in the increased work density. This includes the need to make rapid professional judgments in complex situations, being pulled in multiple directions simultaneously, and the sense of being continually involved even after work hours (Creagh, 2023). Furthermore, the time teachers spend on work outside of school is significantly higher compared to other professions, especially on weekends, indicating that the boundaries between teachers' work and personal life are more blurred (Gershenson & Tekin, 2023).

Moreover, the use of digital tools has exacerbated the intertwining of time poverty and emotional labor. Teachers express a conflicting attitude toward digitalization—while they hope that digital tools can improve efficiency, they are also exhausted by various online tasks. Government apps, online check-ins, and workgroup notifications extend administrative control into teachers' personal spaces, making it difficult for teachers to truly disengage from work, thus preventing them from preparing lessons and taking breaks. Teachers commented:

"We always have to keep an eye on the workgroup because the leaders occasionally post tasks there. If we don't reply promptly, we're afraid of leaving a bad impression." (20250324G1)

"I think we should cancel the forwarding of positive energy messages and legal education online learning, as well as the 'Xuexi Qiangguo' learning. These are really time-consuming." (20250327K1)
"Now that digital technology is developing rapidly, we can actually use technology to improve efficiency, such as online homework grading systems or intelligent scheduling software." (20250328M2)

Research also points out that if digital technology is used as an administrative discipline tool, it will not alleviate teachers' burdens; rather, it will increase performative labor through "data footprints," further blurring the boundaries between teachers' work and personal life, causing distress (Williamson B, 2020).

The interview coding further revealed that when facing difficult parents, problem students, and various emergencies, teachers need to continue exerting emotional effort to maintain the peaceful appearance of their professional role. This emotional labor becomes a hidden burden of work. This was reflected in the teachers' comments:

"Parents and teachers need appropriate communication time, but the frequency and duration sometimes take up a lot of teachers' private rest time. Some parents are excessively concerned and contact us too frequently, potentially ignoring the workload and arrangements of teachers, which causes a certain degree of burden on teachers." (20250323E3)

"Elementary school students, no matter how big or small the issue, always come to teachers to complain. Managing student conflicts takes up more time than actual teaching." (20250328N1)

Scholars such as Hochschild (1983) have explained emotional labor as the process of managing one's emotions and expressions to meet organizational role expectations. Teachers, as a high emotional investment profession, are undoubtedly the primary bearers of emotional labor. Hargreaves (1998) also believed that teachers spend a significant amount of emotional labor managing and regulating their emotions to meet professional role expectations, which, if sustained over time, can lead to burnout and negatively impacting their well-being.

(4) Dimension Four: From Passive Endurance to Active Demands—Teachers' Expectations for Systematic Burden Reduction

The study shows that, in the face of the unreasonable allocation of non-teaching tasks, teachers generally call for a clearer boundary between teaching and non-teaching tasks and the establishment of a clear mechanism for social affairs to enter schools, to control the entry of non-teaching tasks at the source. Some teachers specifically mentioned:

"There should be clear responsibilities, and the boundaries between educational teaching tasks and non-teaching tasks should be refined to avoid unreasonable allocation of non-teaching tasks due to unclear responsibilities." (20250325H2)

"Schools or education departments should coordinate directly with higher-level departments and issue clear regulations prohibiting non-teaching tasks from entering schools." (20250321B2)

This is consistent with the viewpoints of scholars like Worth and Van den Brande (2020), who argue that the ambiguity of responsibility boundaries is a key reason for the unreasonable allocation of non-teaching tasks, and clarifying these boundaries is the institutional premise for reducing teachers' burdens. Meanwhile, in the current decentralized governance model, teachers are overwhelmed by ever-changing priorities and compliance requirements and need systemic reforms rather than individual coping strategies. This indicates that relying solely on teachers' personal perseverance or emotional regulation is insufficient to deal with the distribution of additional tasks. Only through top-level design optimization, clarifying authority and responsibility boundaries, and building a supportive school environment can systemic pressure on teachers be alleviated, creating sustainable space for their professional development.

Additionally, teachers expressed urgent needs for multi-layered support systems, especially hoping to increase administrative staff, provide more living teachers, and reduce non-teaching tasks, allowing teachers to focus more on teaching and nurturing students.

"I hope there can be dedicated living teachers to guard the lunch break and accompany students during meals so that teachers can rest and have the energy to focus on teaching in the afternoon." (20250324F1)

"I suggest that schools establish a specialized administrative team to handle non-teaching tasks." (20250327K1)

Such urgent calls align with core academic arguments. For instance, expanding teachers' roles should be done cautiously, supported by a robust structure that provides sufficient support, such as fair workload distribution, adequate staffing, and a collaborative professional culture, to ensure the sustainable development of the teaching profession (Bartlett, 2004). Maas et al. (2021) also argue that sufficient support from school management is key to alleviating teachers' time pressure and emotional exhaustion, suggesting that strengthening the school-based support system is crucial to ensuring teacher well-being.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study applied grounded theory to systematically analyze in-depth interview data from 23 primary and secondary school teachers, constructing a model of the formation mechanism and alleviation path of teachers' non-teaching burdens. The research found that teachers' non-teaching burdens are the result of external pressures, organizational dilemmas, and role tension, which lead to individual-level effects such as time and energy exhaustion, perceived burdens, and emotional labor. These effects generate teachers' multidimensional demands for systemic burden reduction. In response to these dilemmas, teachers have raised demands for optimizing work tasks and processes, digital reduction of burdens, clarifying boundaries of authority and responsibility, and constructing educational ecological support systems, indicating a systemic solution path from source control, mechanism optimization, to ecological reconstruction.

Based on the findings, reducing non-teaching burdens for primary and secondary school teachers requires multi-dimensional collaborative efforts. The most important steps are establishing a clear entry mechanism for social affairs into schools, defining the boundaries between the education system and other social sectors, and optimizing school management processes. Additionally, using digital tools to enhance administrative efficiency and reduce formalism and repetitive tasks is crucial. Lastly, constructing a collaborative support system between schools, families, and society is essential. This study focuses on teachers' perspectives and aims to propose practical solutions. Policy-making should

also listen more to teachers' voices and incorporate their experiences into the evaluation and improvement of burden reduction policies.

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