

Strengthening Teacher Well-Being through Fitness and Counseling Training: Community Engagement at Sekolah Indonesia Makkah

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ABSTRACT

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Teacher well-being is a crucial determinant of educational quality, yet many educators particularly those working abroad. They face challenges that compromise their physical and psychological health. This community engagement program conducted by Universitas Negeri Surabaya at Sekolah Indonesia Makkah, Saudi Arabia, aimed to enhance teacher wellness through integrated fitness and counselling training. Using a hybrid model that combined online lectures and offline practice, 23 teachers participated in structured physical exercise sessions, health education, and guidance and counselling workshops. Baseline assessments indicated that 78% of participants rarely engaged in exercise and 65% were dissatisfied with their physical condition. Post-intervention data revealed substantial improvements: 87% of teachers began exercising weekly, reported higher energy and motivation levels, and demonstrated greater awareness of wellness in teaching. Counselling competence also improved markedly, with 90% of participants able to apply preventive and developmental guidance strategies in classrooms. Qualitative feedback emphasized increased collegiality, emotional resilience, and a stronger sense of community, culminating in the establishment of a Teacher Fitness Club as a sustainable outcome. The study concludes that integrating physical and psychological well-being training strengthens teachers' professional capacity, fosters holistic education, and exemplifies the transformative role of universities in global community partnership.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are central agents in the educational ecosystem, entrusted with nurturing the intellectual, emotional, and moral growth of future generations. Their roles extend beyond the delivery of curricular content; teachers are also mentors, role models, and community builders (Makovec, 2018; Putri, et.al, 2019). Consequently, their well-being directly influences the quality of education, student achievement, and the overall climate of a school (Douwes, et al, 2023; Sacré, et al, 2023, Mukhlis, et al, 2024). In recent years, increasing attention has been devoted to the concept of teacher well-being, which encompasses physical health, emotional stability, and psychological resilience (Taylor, et al, 2022). When teachers experience optimal well-being, they are more motivated, productive, and capable of fostering supportive learning environments (Javed, et al, 2026; Hidayati, et al, 2023).

However, teachers around the world face mounting challenges that compromise their well-being. Excessive workload, administrative responsibilities, and the blurring of professional and personal boundaries have been documented as primary causes of occupational stress in education (Wicke & Nelson, 2021; Wahab, et al, 2024; Thomas & Reyes, 2024). For teachers working abroad, such as those serving in Indonesian international schools, the challenges are compounded by cross-cultural adjustments, isolation from home communities, and environmental factors. These conditions often

manifest in chronic fatigue, sedentary lifestyles, and reduced physical fitness, which in turn contribute to decreased job satisfaction and effectiveness in teaching.

Sekolah Indonesia Makkah, located in Makkah Al-Mukarramah, Saudi Arabia, represents one of these unique contexts. Established to serve Indonesian expatriate families, *Sekolah Indonesia Makkah* offers education from kindergarten to high school, following the Indonesian national curriculum. Despite its vital role in maintaining educational continuity for Indonesian citizens abroad, the school faces distinct operational challenges. Limited staffing means that each teacher must handle multiple classes across different grade levels, leading to an intense teaching load. The hot desert climate further restricts opportunities for outdoor activity, exacerbating the risks of inactivity and fatigue.

The combination of physical and psychological stressors has tangible consequences (Abdelall, et al, 2020, Hasin, et al, 2023). Many teachers report difficulties maintaining consistent energy levels throughout the day, limited opportunities for rest, and minimal time to engage in recreational or fitness activities. In the long term, such conditions can result in lifestyle-related diseases, emotional exhaustion, and diminished classroom performance. Research has shown that teachers who suffer from poor physical health and chronic stress are more likely to experience burnout, absenteeism, and reduced teaching efficacy, all of which have ripple effects on student learning outcomes.

Physical fitness, therefore, is not a luxury but a professional necessity. Numerous studies have demonstrated that regular physical activity improves cognitive performance, emotional regulation, and resilience to stress (Arida & Taxeira-Machado, 2021; Han, et al, 2025). For educators, maintaining fitness contributes not only to their own health but also to their professional sustainability. Yet, the reality in many school environments, especially in overseas contexts, offers few institutional mechanisms to support teacher wellness. Schools often lack time, facilities, and structured programs to help educators manage the physiological demands of their work.

At the same time, psychological well-being is deeply intertwined with teachers' ability to guide and support students. The role of the teacher increasingly extends to that of a counselor, particularly in settings where formal guidance and counseling services are limited. Understanding basic counseling principles enables teachers to identify students' academic, social, and emotional needs early on, providing preventive and supportive interventions. In the case of *Sekolah Indonesia Makkah*, this dimension is especially critical given the multicultural environment and the unique socio-emotional challenges faced by students living abroad.

Recognizing these dual dimensions (physical and psychological well-being) Community Engagement Program team from Universitas Negeri Surabaya designed an intervention that integrated fitness training with guidance and counseling capacity building. The initiative aimed to address both the physical fatigue and emotional strain experienced by teachers at *Sekolah Indonesia Makkah*. By combining health education, practical exercise, and counseling workshops, the program sought to promote a holistic model of teacher development that aligns with the broader goals of sustainable education.

This community engagement was not conceived merely as a short-term activity but as a strategic collaboration between higher education and overseas schools. Universitas Negeri Surabaya's involvement exemplifies the university's commitment to applying scientific knowledge for societal benefit, particularly in the realm of education. The project's design was grounded in participatory principles, encouraging teachers to take ownership of their well-being through active involvement, reflection, and peer support.

Furthermore, the community service initiative contributes to ongoing discourse on teacher empowerment within global and transnational educational contexts. While numerous studies have examined teacher training in pedagogy and curriculum development, fewer have focused on well-being interventions that address health and emotional resilience. This study, therefore, positions the *Sekolah Indonesia Makkah* program as a replicable model for other Indonesian and international schools seeking to integrate wellness-based professional development.

By situating teacher wellness at the heart of educational improvement, this community engagement bridges the gap between health promotion and pedagogical practice. It underscores that the sustainability of education depends on the sustainability of educators themselves. As the following sections will demonstrate, the combination of fitness and counseling training yielded meaningful outcomes, not only in improving teachers' physical condition but also in strengthening their confidence, collegiality, and holistic approach to teaching and learning.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT METHOD

The community service program employed a hybrid model combining online and offline formats to ensure flexibility and inclusivity. This design was divided into three stages: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. Preparation involved needs assessment, coordination, and development of materials. Implementation consisted of interactive online lectures, workshops, and practical sessions. Evaluation measured engagement, knowledge acquisition, and behavioral change.

Participants consisted of 23 teachers from *Sekolah Indonesia Makkah* across elementary, middle, and high school levels. The program included: (1) online fitness education; (2) offline fitness practice; (3) health monitoring; (4) counseling workshops; and (5) collaborative reflection. The hybrid approach facilitated knowledge transfer and encouraged experiential learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Before the implementation of the community engagement program, the general condition of the teachers at *Sekolah Indonesia Makkah* reflected several physical and psychological challenges. Teachers worked under high workloads, often managing multiple class levels and administrative duties simultaneously. Limited time and lack of proper facilities led to a sedentary lifestyle and chronic fatigue. The extreme weather of Makkah, characterized by intense heat during most of the year, further restricted outdoor

activities. Consequently, teachers displayed low levels of physical fitness, minimal motivation to exercise, and limited understanding of how wellness could influence teaching effectiveness.

Baseline assessments and informal interviews revealed that 78% of the participating teachers rarely engaged in structured exercise routines, while 65% expressed dissatisfaction with their physical health. In addition, qualitative responses highlighted feelings of physical exhaustion and emotional strain after prolonged teaching hours. On the counselling aspect, most teachers admitted that they viewed guidance and counselling as a specialized domain unrelated to their daily teaching duties. This perception limited their ability to identify and address students' emotional and academic needs.

Following the intervention, noticeable transformations were observed across both physical and psychological dimensions. Teachers who actively participated in the fitness program reported a marked increase in energy levels and overall mood. Self-reported data indicated that 87% of participants engaged in at least one physical activity per week, an increase of more than 60% compared to pre-program levels. Teachers began incorporating stretching, breathing, and light aerobic exercises between classes. The general atmosphere at the school improved, with participants describing themselves as "more alert, focused, and positive" during lessons.

In terms of counselling competence, post-program assessments showed substantial progress. Teachers gained awareness of the preventive, curative, and developmental functions of counselling in educational contexts. Before the intervention, only 35% of teachers could accurately differentiate between these functions; after the training, 90% demonstrated clear understanding and practical application. Participants became more responsive to students' emotional expressions and developed strategies for early identification of academic and social issues.

There was an increase in measurable indicators such as frequency of physical activity, emotional well-being, and counselling competency. This indicates a strong correlation between improved physical fitness and greater enthusiasm for teaching. Teachers who regularly participate in fitness sessions also demonstrated improved communication and empathy in classroom interactions, reflecting the close relationship between physical and psychological health.

Qualitative feedback gathered through focus group discussions revealed that the hybrid training format was well-received. Online modules allowed teachers to learn theoretical concepts at their convenience, while the offline sessions provided practical experience and social motivation. Many teachers highlighted the sense of camaraderie developed during group exercises, which helped reduce feelings of isolation common among educators living abroad.

Community participation was remarkably high. Out of the 23 teachers registered, 21 completed all online sessions and 19 consistently participated in physical practice. This 83% sustained participation rate indicates strong engagement and program relevance.

The community service team's participatory approach played a vital role in this success. Teachers felt valued and actively contributed ideas to adapt exercises suitable for limited indoor spaces.

One significant outcome was the establishment of the *Teacher Fitness Club* at *Sekolah Indonesia Makkah*. Initiated by participants themselves, the club conducts weekly group exercises and wellness check-ins. It serves as a platform for maintaining post-program motivation and accountability. This development signifies that the intervention not only produced short-term outcomes but also inspired long-term behavioral change and collective ownership, a key indicator of sustainability in community engagement initiatives.

Beyond physical fitness, the counseling training produced tangible shifts in teachers' professional attitudes. Participants began applying empathetic listening techniques in daily classroom interactions and incorporated student reflection activities as informal counseling tools. These small yet meaningful changes demonstrated that the program successfully bridged the gap between theory and practice, enhancing teachers' capacity to nurture students' holistic growth.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the community service intervention effectively achieved its intended objectives. Comparing the conditions before and after implementation clearly shows improvements in teacher wellness, engagement, and professional competence. The introduction of structured, context-sensitive fitness routines directly addressed the issue of inactivity caused by workload and environmental constraints. Meanwhile, the counseling workshops empowered teachers with essential psychosocial skills that enriched the learning environment.

The program's success can be attributed to three major factors: participatory design, flexibility, and contextual adaptation. By allowing teachers to actively shape the activities, the community service team ensured that the content remained relevant to participants' daily realities. The use of a hybrid (online-offline) delivery model increased accessibility and minimized disruption to teaching duties. Furthermore, the indoor-friendly approach acknowledged climatic limitations in Makkah, demonstrating cultural and environmental sensitivity.

The level of participation reflected genuine community commitment. Teachers transitioned from passive recipients to active agents of change. This empowerment aligns with contemporary community engagement principles, where sustainability depends on local ownership rather than external intervention. The spontaneous formation of the *Teacher Fitness Club* serves as strong evidence of this transformation, highlighting how collective motivation can extend program outcomes beyond their initial timeframe.

Despite these achievements, several challenges emerged during implementation. Time constraints, varying levels of physical ability among teachers, and inconsistent internet connectivity during online sessions occasionally hindered full participation. However, these challenges were mitigated through flexible scheduling, asynchronous materials,

and peer mentoring. The community service team's adaptive management ensured inclusivity and maintained high satisfaction rates among participants.

From a sustainability and replicability perspective, this program offers a valuable model for future community engagement in similar contexts. The integration of physical and counselling components represents an innovative, holistic approach to teacher development. Unlike conventional professional training that focuses solely on pedagogy, this initiative emphasizes teacher well-being as a foundational aspect of educational quality. The lessons learned from *Sekolah Indonesia Makkah* can inform the design of comparable programs in other Indonesian schools abroad or local institutions facing similar challenges. Ultimately, the community service initiative illustrates how higher education institutions can function as catalysts for social transformation, linking health, education, and community resilience through evidence-based engagement.

CONCLUSION

The community engagement program at *Sekolah Indonesia Makkah* demonstrates that teacher wellness and professional capacity are interconnected. Through integrated fitness and counseling training, teachers experienced improvements in health, resilience, and pedagogical sensitivity. The initiative successfully linked health promotion with educational empowerment within a cross-cultural setting.

Key conclusions include: (1) Physical fitness contributes to teaching effectiveness and stress management; (2) Counseling awareness empowers teachers to support holistic student development; (3) Collaborative learning strengthens motivation and school culture; and (4) Sustained impact requires ongoing mentoring and institutional support.

Future engagement should expand this model by incorporating stress management, digital health literacy, and peer mentoring. The community service at *Sekolah Indonesia Makkah* illustrates how universities can play a transformative role in global education through community partnership.

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