English Language Instructors' Well-Being in the Workplace

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Abstract

Well-being is the experience of prosperity, happiness, and health, crucial to teachers' motivations, occupational satisfaction, and quality of life. Higher well-being in education is linked to more effective teaching, personal welfare, better student relationships, and academic success. Several factors that need to be explored, particularly at the personal and institutional levels, affect EFL instructors' well-being. Thus, this qualitative case study investigates institutional and individual-level factors influencing EFL instructors' well-being in the workplace. The researcher collected the data from six EFL instructors working at the School of Foreign Languages (SoFL) through semi-structured interviews, which were thematically analyzed through Quirkos 2.5 software. A convenience sampling technique was utilized. To discover the individual and institutional factors affecting EFL instructors' well-being, positive organizational scholarship was exploited by scrutinizing three pillars of positive psychology. The research identified eight key themes that influence the well-being of teachers, such as work-life balance and workload, support system and collegial relationship, meaning and professional identity, the physical environment and resource availability, professional development opportunities, teacher-student relationships, autonomy, and decision-making involvement, physical health and its impact on welfare in the workplace. Important insights revealed the substantial impact of workload spillover on personal time, the value of supportive relationships and professional independence, and the necessity for sufficient physical and professional resources. Additionally, participants highlighted the essential importance of relationships between teachers and students. Sufficient physical and professional resources are crucial for job satisfaction and teacher autonomy, and having the freedom to make decisions enhances teachers' feelings of belonging. This paper suggests reducing workload, reinforcing support mechanisms, and applying fair administration policies to increase EFL instructors'
well-being at the workplace. It also presents implications for administrators and policymakers that well-being is a socially and collectively determined phenomenon, emphasizing the need for collaborative action to improve it.

Keywords: EFL instructors, job satisfaction, well-being, workplace.

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Introduction

Well-being is universally recognized as crucial for education quality and excellence (Sulis et al., 2024). According to OECD's (2019) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), well-being should be integrated into education measures for learners and teachers. Particularly in teaching language, teacher well-being has gained a focal point in a thriving variety of scientific studies (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021; Ončevska Ager & Mercer, 2019; Sulis et al., 2023), encompassing studies during COVID-19 (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Zacher & Rudolph, 2020). If teachers or instructors have high well-being, numerous benefits such as learners' success, better social relationships, and increased resilience unfold (Roffey, 2012).

Language teaching frequently suffers from elevated stress levels, rising burnout rates, and poor working conditions, which may ultimately result in language teachers worldwide (Swanson, 2008). It appears that preserving enthusiasm, dedication, motivation, and ensuring optimal well-being over time has become progressively more difficult for educators worldwide (Day & Gu, 2010; Sulis et al., 2024). However, the factors that affect teacher well-being are intricate (Sulis et al., 2024). Hence, this study aims to explore EFL instructors' perspectives on institutional and individual factors affecting their well-being in the workplace. The data from in-depth interviews with six EFL instructors at SoFL in Türkiye present insights into what factors at the institutional and individual levels affect their well-being in the working environment.

Review of Literature

Well-Being: A Closer Look

The PERMA framework by Seligman (2011) has been utilized extensively to grasp the concept of well-being. It is based on five elements of well-being such as positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning, and achievement. The PERMA concept originates from the notion of Positive Psychology, which looks at well-being being constituted or guaranteed by three pillars: positive experiences, positive personal traits, and positive institutions. The positive experience element provides emphasis on an individual's satisfaction with their past and present life and optimism regarding what the future holds. Positive personal virtues that add to the good life include courage, perseverance, and the ability to love, which also transcends value from within a person (Babic et al., 2022). Finally, enclave institutions deal with the crucial structures and resources necessary to inspire and maintain thriving communities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It is crucial since all three dimensions and their interaction need to be put into consideration when it comes to well-being; well-being emanates from the dynamic relation between personal factors and contextual elements in people's lives (Babic et al., 2022).

Studies have documented that more well-being is associated with higher happiness and productivity (Krekel et al., 2019), higher income, social awareness and connectedness, better social equality (White, 2010), and also good physical health with longer life expectancy (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Feeling more well-being can benefit educators and their learners (Roffey, 2012). Teachers with positive wellbeing tend to use more innovative teaching practices (Bajorek et al., 2014), develop better relationships in the classroom (DeVries & Zan, 1995), experience greater student performance (Briner & Dewberry, 2007), and see less discipline problems (Kern et al., 2014). Overall, it is easier to handle the routine stresses of working with learners when educators are physically and psychologically healthy (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Finally, well-being is associated with being an essential facilitator of practices of good teaching (Babic et al., 2022).

Factors Affecting Well-Being

Several factors affect teachers' well-being, such as individual, psychological, social, and systematic. Individual factors encompass elements such as self-efficacy, work engagement, and a sense of purpose. Nonetheless, psychological factors are influenced by and also influence the surrounding social and contextual conditions. Significant social factors encompass individual connections, the atmosphere within the school, and interactions with both colleagues and students. Systemic factors include the societal standing of educators, their working environments, the amount of work they have, job security, educational policies, and national evaluation systems. (Sulis et al., 2023, 2024). This suggests that in order to understand or address the well-being of language teachers, it is vital to acknowledge not only the individual and their behaviors but also their role within their specific social relationships and larger systems. Considering that well-being is influenced by social contexts, it is essential to take into account the entire environment in which teachers operate in order to enhance their well-being (Sulis et al., 2024).

Method

The current study is a qualitative case study in which six EFL female participants were selected using convenience sampling on a voluntary basis. A case study was selected since it facilitates in-depth exploration of specific phenomena—in this case, the EFL teachers' experiences of their well-being in the workplace—within the actual environment. This method is fairly useful for comprehending intricate,context-sensitive matters as it allows the researcher to get specific viewpoints and reveal subtle insights (Yin, 2014).

Of these, three were currently in doctoral studies; two had graduated with a doctorate, and one was a holder of a master's. The participants' working experiences in this institution vary between five and fifteen years. For data collection, workload, workplace support, sense of purpose, and job satisfaction were availed through in-depth, face-to-face interviews with each participant for 30-50 minutes. Thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2012) was performed using an inductive coding procedure in Quirkos 2.5. Initial exploratory coding was condensed in a second round to eight central themes that illustrate participants' perspectives on their well-being based on individual and institutional levels, which will be elaborated in the findings section. The participants in the results section will be referred to as "P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6."

Findings

The results section includes eight themes from the data as having an impact on the participants' well-being: work-life balance and workload, support system and collegial relationship, meaning and professional identity, the physical environment and resource availability, professional development opportunities, teacher-student relationships, autonomy, and decision-making involvement, physical health and its impact on welfare.

Work-life Balance and Workload

All the participants frequently mentioned the heavy workload beyond the hours of teaching, as it also encompasses lesson preparation, grading, administrative tasks, and attending meetings. This often spills over into their personal time and negatively affects worklife balance. The participants shared the following insights:

> Our last class is around 3 p.m., and it's already dark when I get home. I don't have much time for myself because I have to care for my family, and I'm already tired. (P1)

> Even though classes end, the errands don't, and I feel like I have no time to be 'me' or take that time to grow between switching from one role to another. (P2)

> The work doesn't end when the school day does in the afternoon. Trying to balance work and home life is too much for me, and I'm always tired. (P3)

> By the time I finish work and other responsibilities, I'm already too tired to enjoy any personal time. Life shouldn't be all about work. (P4)

> It feels like there's no clear line between work and personal life because of all the tasks that need to be done and the lack of time. (P5)

> The workload is exhaustive, and constant time management is involved, as it often causes personal burnout due to the lack of time available for relaxation. (P6)

The demands of teaching are not restricted to classroom hours but overflow into personal time, thus creating a sense of ceaseless responsibility. The instructors also expressed that it remains on the mind even after class since work-related jobs stay in the head, which does not allow them to disconnect from work or pay attention to personal things. As specified by all participants, this spillover of work-personal life constitutes an immense source of stress and exhaustion.

Support Systems and Collegial Relationships

The positive relationships at work were identified as crucial in terms of the emotional support that made the working conditions more endurable. However, all the participants indicated the absence of any meaningful institutional support. Colleagues have become an even more important component in maintaining a supportive environment, considering no formalized support structures exist. They can help one another cope with the stresses and pressures of the job. Such a sense of community is welcomed by the participants, as they feel that through such support, the tensions of teaching are diffused. Knowing colleagues who understand what they face boosts morale greatly, showing how it matters in interpersonal relations. The participants provided the following insights:

> Having coworkers who are there for you makes all the difference. It's the only thing that makes me think I can get through hard times. (P1)

> My colleagues are the ones I turn to when things get overwhelming. Without them, it would be much harder to manage. (P2)6

> Sharing experiences with colleagues who truly understand the challenges we face makes the workload feel less burdensome. (P3)

> Good relationships at work enable me to cope with my workload more effectively and be motivated. (P4)

> Through a supportive network at work, positive effects on my well-being have been achieved because it builds up team spirit, whereby mastering everyday stress is much easier. (P5)

> Even though there's no formal support from the institution, my colleagues' encouragement and understanding have been a lifeline. (P6)

In conclusion, participants stressed the significance of supportive colleagues despite the absence of formal institutional support. These relationships are essential for alleviating teaching tension, promoting a sense of community, and increasing morale. The encouragement and comprehension of their colleagues significantly contribute to their overall well-being and make challenging workdays more manageable for many.

Meaning and Professional Identity

Indeed, all participants stated that student feedback and a change in students' lives brought a sense of purpose and validation that allowed them to reinforce their professional identity and passion for teaching. The participants' quotations are as follows:

> Observing my students succeed reminds me why I chose this profession. (P1)
>
> Positive feedback from students keeps me motivated to do better. (P2)
>
> I am inspired by the feedback and appreciation I receive from my students, reinforcing my profession's meaningfulness. (P3)
>
> When students acknowledge my efforts, it strengthens my connection to teaching. (P4)
>
> Knowing I make a difference in their lives is the most rewarding part of my job. (P5)
>
> Student growth is important to me, and knowing that I've played a role in their academic and personal development is meaningful. (P6)

The participants consider their teaching job highly meaningful, especially when they feel that they are producing positive effects on students' academic and personal growth. Students' feedback and continued contact with alumni are considered confirmation of their work and make them valued and motivated to further invest in the profession. Such a sense of making a difference brings a strong commitment to teaching, enhancing job satisfaction and dedication.

Physical Environment and Resource Availability

For most participants, the physical teaching environment, contingent upon officelayout, available technology, and resources, caters significantly to job satisfaction and productivity. Limitations in this regard mostly lead to frustrations, as stated below by the participants.

Unavailable resources mean trying to lead an orchestra without the instruments, and they frustrate me by preventing me from focusing on my primary role of just teaching. (P1)

Outdated technology slows everything down and makes teaching unnecessarily difficult. (P2)

Having the right tools would help lessons go better and make it less stressful to have to always make things up on the spot. (P3)

When basic resources are missing, I feel like I'm always compensating for the system's shortcomings, and it's exhausting. (P4)

A lack of resources would interrupt productivity, creating more obstacles, while an appropriately equipped workplace is essential for job satisfaction. (P5)

When classrooms lack basic equipment, it feels like the institution doesn't value our work, and that's demoralizing. (P6)

The physical environment continues to support effectiveness in teaching. The participants reported that a lack of resources, such as poor classroom equipment or outdated technology, inhibits them from effectively teaching lessons. Institutional lack of support for physical infrastructure creates added stress since teachers have to adjust to less-than-ideal circumstances, taking away from their main focus on engaging students and providing quality lessons.

Professional Development Opportunities

Most participants (as follows) assumed that their institutions provided professional development training where they could improve their skills; however, during the academic year, they had limited time to participate.

Professional development is useful, but finding time for it is challenging. (P1)

These sessions are valuable but shouldn't interfere with teaching schedules. (P2)

Practical and relevant training would be more effective for us. (P3)

I would prefer them to be in another spare time, and they should be voluntary to avoid conflicts with teaching duties. (P4)

Workshops that align with our daily teaching realities would be much more helpful.(P5)

Professional development opportunities can be welcomed if challenges with classroom workloads are balanced. (P6)

In a nutshell, participants view professional development as a means of honing their skills, yet they feel relatively unable to capitalize on these opportunities. They acknowledge the need for professional development but emphasize considerable obstacles in accessing these opportunities due to time limitations and scheduling conflicts with teaching responsibilities.They underlined the need for pragmatic, relevant sessions and arranged at more suitable times. Voluntary engagement and alignment with regular teaching practices are essential to guarantee the accessibility and effectiveness of these programs. Harmonizing professional development opportunities with current workloads is essential to maximize their advantages without exacerbating educators' stress.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Positive contact with students is a main source of job satisfaction and motivation for participants. They stated that respectful, involved students made teaching more satisfying, while complicated interactions lowered motivation as follows:

Engaged students make my job more enjoyable and give me a sense of accomplishment. (P1)

Students' interest and respect boosts my confidence and motivation to teach. (P2)

Positive relationships with my students motivate me to teach enthusiastically, enhancing my job satisfaction and reducing my workload feelings. (P3)

Supportive interactions with students make me feel valued as a teacher. (P4)

Polite relations and mutual contact with students give me energy. (P5)

> Students' participation actively creates a positive environment that makes teaching much easier and more rewarding. (P6)

Teacher satisfaction is at the heart of student relationships. Students respect their teachers, motivate them, and actively participate in their classes, which provides an engaging atmosphere that helps students get the job done with less burden. In contrast, poor experiences with students lead to greater dissatisfaction, highlighting the emotional demands of teaching.

Autonomy and Decision-Making Involvement

Greater participation in decision-making is associated with job satisfaction and belonging. Participants who believed their opinions counted behaved in a manner much more likely to work towards the institution's interests. The participants' insights are showed as follows:

> When my opinions are considered, I feel more motivated and valued. (P1)

> Being part of the decision-making process makes me more committed to my role. (P2)

> Having a say in institutional decisions gives me a sense of ownership in my work. (P3)

> Feeling heard and included makes me more engaged with both my job and the institution. (P4)

> More involvement in the decision-making process enhances my bond with the institution. (P5)

> Finding a chance to express my ideas strengthens my commitment to institutional choices and gives me a feeling of belonging at work. (P6)

Amplifying their voice in institutional choices and the importance of their voice cultivates agency and ownership. When instructors are involved in shaping curriculum and assessment practices, they have a stronger engagement with their jobs and institution, increasing motivation and commitment to the institutional mission.

Physical Health and Its Impact on Welfare

The participants asserted that body health is significant for sustainable teaching. A sound body is essential for the endurance and focus needed to teach. When teachers are healthy, they can actively engage with their students. Conversely, physical discomfort or recurring illness prevents them from focusing on and relating to the class. The participants quoted as follows:

> I can focus better and deliver my lessons more effectively when I feel physically well. (P1)
>
> I can compare teaching to singing on stage in front [of] an audience, with reciprocal energy transfers between teacher and student. (P2)
>
> Good health gives me the energy and patience to connect with my students. (P3)
>
> If I'm unwell, giving my full attention to teaching is hard. Staying healthy is essential. (P4)
>
> Physical discomfort makes teaching challenging, but feeling healthy allows me to be fully present in class. (P5)
>
> When teachers' physical health is poor, their energy and quality of teaching decrease, but good health enables complete engagement with students. Physical health plays an important role in my effectiveness as a teacher and in my enthusiasm and performance. (P6)

The participants brought attention to the significant role that physical health plays in the efficacy and engagement of teaching. They can engage with their students more meaningfully when they are in good health, improving their ability to concentrate and their energy levels. On the other hand, a lack of physical well-being greatly hinders their capacity to carry out their responsibilities, so maintaining physical health is vital to sustainable teaching.In a nutshell, the following table shows the overall picture of the study's results.

Table 1. Key themes affecting EFL instructors' well-being

Themes	Key Points
Work-life Balance and Workload	Heavy workload extends beyond teaching hours to lesson prep, grading, administrative tasks, and meetings. Negative effect on personal time and work-life balance. Persistent mental burden leads to stress and exhaustion.
Support Systems and Collegial Relationships	Positive work relationships provide emotional support. Lack of meaningful institutional support. Supportive networks help cope with stress and maintain motivation
Meaning and Professional Identity	Student feedback and seeing their growth reinforces the purpose and professional identity. Positive impact on students' academic and personal development boosts commitment and job satisfaction.
Physical Environment and Resource Availability	Teaching environment and resource availability impact job satisfaction and productivity. Lack of resources (e.g., technology) creates frustration and limits effectiveness

Professional Development Opportunities	Institutions provide training, but scheduling conflicts with teaching duties. Practical, day-to-day focused sessions preferred.
Teacher-Student Relationships	Positive interactions with students enhance job satisfaction. Challenging interactions reduce enthusiasm and motivation
Autonomy and Decision Making Involvement	Participation in institutional decisions improves job satisfaction and a sense of belonging. Instructors feel more invested in institutional interests when involved in decision-making
Physical Health and Its Impact onWelfare	Physical health directly affects teaching effectiveness and engagement. Good health fosters active engagement; poor health limits focus and interaction

Discussion

The aim of this case study is to explore the individual and institutional factors affecting EFL teachers' well-being. This revealed an intricately working set of interspersed themes: workload, support, professional identity, physical environment, professional developmentaccess, teacher-student relationships, autonomy, and physical health.

Initially, the participants identified how overwhelming their workload often is and how it spills into their time, influencing their work-life balance. For instance, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) realized that heavy workloads are coupled with increased stress levels and incidents of burnout among teachers. Another related study by Wahab et al. (2024) found that teachers in Malaysia also go through high workload anxieties that have debilitating impacts on their lives. These studies prove that institutions should devise mechanisms to manage workload pressures so that instructors can keep their lives in better balance. Addressing workload concerns can set a context in educational institutions that promotes teacher well-being for improved student outcomes. This is reflected in the work of Babic et al. (2022), as sustainable workload management appears to be an integral part of teacher efficacy and satisfaction. Besides workload issues, the support systems are crucial in this context—collegial relationships are vital to emotional and professional well-being. This finding is supported by Day et al. (2007), who state that supportive work relationships can promote teacher morale. Therefore, based on this, it would appear that while informal support is sometimes helpful, institutionalized support should also be provided to nurture a positive working environment. Babic et al. (2022) further highlight that a positive workplace culture significantly enhances teacher well-being; hence, schools should consider the need to formalize support networks to enhance collegial relationships. The second significant theme related to professional identity was that participants derived meaning from interactions with their students. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) support such a proposition since it has been found that positive relationships between teachers and students contribute to a sense of purpose among educators. This means that a close relationship between students and teachers could, therefore, support the professional identities of educators across various cultural fields, reinforcing their commitment to teaching.

Another influential factor of job satisfaction is related to the physical environment in which teaching takes place. Respondents feel frustrated regarding shortages of physical resources, which supported the findings of Durlak et al. (2011), identifying supportive physical environments as one relevant factor for teacher effectiveness.This complexity indicates that the development of improved teaching environments requires a holistic approach since such an approach will be necessary to demonstrate progress in a manner that promotes both teacher satisfaction and teacher effectiveness. Babic et al.

(2022) also acknowledged that physical wellbeing associated with the teaching environment contributes to teachers' general morale and productivity levels. While the teachers value professional development opportunities, the timing usually conflicts with the teaching schedule. Timperley et al. (2007) pointed out that for professional development to be relevant, it had to be timely. From these findings, one would realize the need to provide professional development opportunities that are congruent with teachers' needs and when they are available so that such opportunities yield the required results.

The relationship between the teacher and the student is also an important theme. For the teachers, positive interactions with the students were regarded as a critical source of satisfaction with their work. In similar research, Roffey (2012) identified that such good interactions increase teacher motivation. Along these lines, Karanfil (2019) determined that supportive relationships with students greatly contribute to teachers' positive job satisfaction in Türkiye, thus making interactions with them in the classroom significant. Developing respectful and engaging relationships contributes positively to regular improvements in the well-being of teachers, engages educators, and further creates a positive classroom atmosphere in which all would enjoy their teaching days. This is related to the results of Babic et al. (2022), where the determining factors of perceived success and satisfaction are noted to be good relations between teachers and students. The other theme touches on issues of autonomy and decision-making; participants in the survey showed a desire for more influence in institutional decisions. Learning from a related study, Worth and Van den Brande (2020) deduced that a teacher whose view was considered in the course of making a decision became more committed to their duties. This is in agreement with the study by Pearson and Moomaw (2005), which concluded that promoting autonomy yielded the most significant impact on enhancing job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Participatory governance, thus, plays a major role in encouraging educators and creating greater awareness of organizational membership.

Lastly, participants are often frustrated by juggling administrative matters with teaching responsibilities. This also supports Butt and Lance (2005), who reported similar experiences among practitioners. As such, these findings indicate that there is a need for adaptive strategies to cope with teaching pressures; therefore, the potential involvement of collaborative practice can be considered in building resilience among educators. Also, physical health is directly linked to job performance and overall well-being. The participants' insights thus support the findings of Haddon (2018), who stated that educators' good health is a prerequisite for teaching well.

It is on that basis that these studies, hence, posit that institutions should have health promotion activities to enable educators to take care of their physical and mental health, just as Babic et al. (2022) found that health concerns should form a part of educational policy.

In conclusion, the experiences shared by EFL instructors in this study highlight the multifaceted nature of well-being in educational settings. The synthesis of findings demonstrates that educational institutions need to adopt a holistic approach that considers workload management, support systems, professional identity, physical environment, and health as interconnected components essential for enhancing educator welfare. By addressing these factors collectively, institutions can create an environment conducive to both teacher satisfaction and student success.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study examines factors at institutional and individual levels that affect teacher well-being within educational contexts through in-depth interviews with six EFL instructors. Results revealed that EFL instructors' well-being has interrelated themes: workload, support systems, professional identity, physical environment, professional development opportunities, relationships between teachers and students, autonomy, and physical health. These themes highlight the struggles entailed in sustaining well-being in a profession that consistently surpasses even the demands of instructional tasks, as educators bear an array of responsibilities that implicate their personal and professional lives.

The integration of evidence from different cultural contexts further strengthens this position on a holistic approach toward teacher well-being. As practiced by the participants and reflected in their interviews, such an approach emphasizes the need for institutional mechanisms that make provisions for workload management, formalized support systems, responsive professional development, and autonomy in decision-making. The study concludes by suggesting that a positive physical environment and health promotion should become essential parts of education policy to ensure educators' mental and physical health sustainability.This proposed inclusive framework might enhance teacher well-being and contribute to positive student outcomes since teachers are motivated and engaged. These findings emphasize that sustainable school practices enhance teacher satisfaction, reduce burnout, and cultivate a resilient and committed teaching workforce. The present study thereby contributes to the emerging literature on teacher well-being with insights for policymakers, education leaders, and other stakeholders who want to support educators in their quest for balance and fulfillment in professional life.

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