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Evaluating the Perception of Turkish EFL Instructors about Teacher Wellbeing

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Abstract

Although wellbeing has been widely discussed in the literature, it is still a relatively new concept in education. This study reviews the concept of teacher wellbeing in depth. It was also conducted to examine English language instructors' perspectives on the concept of teacher wellbeing. The study, which encapsulates two discrete data collection methods, is intended to contribute to the literature in terms of the concept of teacher wellbeing. For this purpose, a questionnaire was administered to the English language lecturers to determine their demographic characteristics and the results of the questionnaire were presented. Subsequent to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were carried out with the same English language lecturers in order to seek their views on the subject. The interviews were analyzed by means of content analysis method and results were presented.

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Keywords: Wellbeing; Teacher wellbeing; Language learning; Descriptive analysis

Introduction

Teacher wellbeing is considered as teaching efficiently, having positive relationships with students, and commitment to schools. (Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009). Teacher wellbeing is significant for both schools and students; the reason behind this point is that this facilitates how teachers deal with challenges while teaching subjects to others. Fredrickson (2013) mentioned the eminence of wellbeing by stating that when people are in positive situations their minds will broaden. This can be interpreted by when teachers are content with

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their position; they are in favor of communicating with others easily. Moreover, Hascher & Waber (2021) highlighted in their study that teacher wellbeing is an umbrella term that covers all theoretical considerations and research addressing any aspect of teachers' physical, social, cognitive, and emotional functioning (p.18). Therefore, it is essential to generate a study clarifying the thoughts of instructors especially those who are teaching a new language.

In the educational setting, teachers are the backbone of the process of teaching. Their psychological situation towards students, the institution where they professionalize and the curriculum they follow are also crucial since they are linked to each other. In addition, wellbeing is another point to be considered in terms of teachers' point of view.

Literature Review

Generally, when the literature is analyzed, it has been noticed that even if there are related to subject of teacher wellbeing (Jian, 2021; Mercer, 2021; Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem, 2012; Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012; Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011), the majority of studies are based on stress, burnout and anxiety. With regard to wellbeing, studies are held to investigate the wellbeing of teachers, and to explore the utility of positive wellbeing indicators, such as positive emotions and cognitions; the value of teacher–teacher-studentships for the wellbeing of teachers and one of those studies also mentioned the wellbeing of English language teaching (ELT) in the private sector.

Moreover, when all the concepts of wellbeing are considered in terms of education, the relationship between the teacher and wellbeing has gained importance. Teacher, student and their relationship are the backbone of the teaching and learning process, especially as far as foreign language learning is concerned. The psychological situation of an instructor should be counted as one of the fundamental factors of the language learning process. There are dimensions of teacher wellbeing: feeling valued and cared for, and job stimulation and enjoyment (Briner & Dewberry, 2007).

McCallum and Price (2016) defined teacher wellbeing as “diverse and fluid respecting individual, family and community beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities and contexts across time and change. It is something we all aim for underpinned by positive notions, yet is unique to each of us and provides us with a sense of who we are which needs to be respected” (p.17). Especially, as the word ‘wellbeing’ suggests, teacher wellbeing is

promoting wellbeing and it should be the primary aim of an institution rather than giving stress or making teachers feel burnout, . Following this point of view; Quinlan and Hone (2020) pointed out research and concluded that with higher wellbeing in workplaces, teachers tend to be more productive and engaged since they enjoy job satisfaction (Nagar,2012; Ololube, 2006; Parker & Martin, 2009). McCallum and Price (2016) additionally emphasized that investment in teacher wellbeing grants better health conditions for both teachers and their students since this positive engagement broadens their horizons and positive learning outcomes for students will be maintained.

The correspondence between teachers and wellbeing is followed by teachers' sense of effectiveness. Figure 1. illustrates the interconnectedness between teachers' professional life phases, their professional characteristics, and their wellbeing.

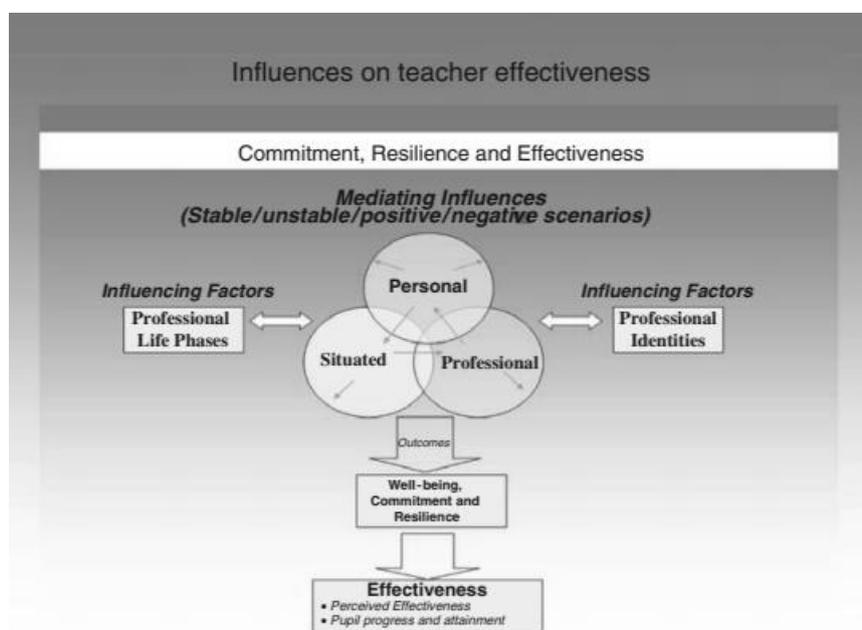


Figure 1. *Teachers' wellbeing, commitment and effectiveness* from Day, C., & Qing, G. (2009). *Teacher emotions: Well-being and effectiveness*. In *Advances in teacher emotion research* (pp. 15-31). Springer, Boston, MA.

In addition to the fact that teachers' feelings of wellbeing and effectiveness should be emphasized in all circumstances, there is a particular need to revolve more around motivation, loyalty and the ability to continue doing their best in their profession, while maintaining these positive qualities and strengths. Teacher wellbeing was also specified by Bethune (2018) in the piece of wellbeing in the primary classroom: a practical guide to teaching happiness added that

according to Health and Safety Executive (2017), teaching has become one of the most stressful careers, therefore teachers need taking care of themselves to get away from a distinct source of stress. Bethune emphasized that teacher wellbeing has been carrying a great significance in being healthy since this process results in different positive situations. First, teachers are role models for students, in other words, they observe, and watch their behaviors and they commence acting like their role models that is the main reason for being mentally positive during classes. Additionally, teachers reflect on how they feel about the classroom, students, and their teaching (p.160).

Wellbeing has taken an increasing interest in schools since it is noticed that whole school wellbeing has a positive impact and presents motivation on school administration. Quinlan and Hone (2020) put forward two reasons for supporting wellbeing. As a first element, wellbeing brings desirable outcomes; such as having better health conditions and relationships even in the societal dimension. Another point for encouraging wellbeing in schools is that as stated as an imitation of teachers' positive feelings, Quinlan and Hone (2020) added that resilience and wellbeing could be instructed and taught. Thus, positive feelings become contagious.

McCallum and Price (2015) remarked that “educator and learner wellbeing is an individual, collective and community responsibility” (p.128). On the other hand, many policymakers and education stakeholders have been emphasizing the need to foster wellbeing and enable them to adapt to changes by redesigning, applying and reviewing, repeating, and remodeling wellbeing policies in schools. There is a general belief among school administrators applying wellbeing as “whole school wellbeing” that wellbeing builds staff ownership if wellbeing is mainly centered on staff. Quinlan and Hone (2020) summarized the points as;

1. Staff need and appreciate the investment in their wellbeing.
2. Staff wellbeing influences student learning and wellbeing.
3. Equally importantly, staff knowledge of wellbeing is essential to teachers being able to implement relevant and useful strategies in their classrooms. (p.97)

These are the non-negligible items since learning takes place between teacher and student and schools are expected to care about their staff.

Wellbeing can be also coined as having enough professional learning and development while having successful wellbeing, which embraces mutual understanding. Quinlan and Hone (2020) presented wellbeing model for schools since a school wellbeing model assists in not

only informing but also educating, motivating and evaluating. Applying wellbeing to education is accepted as a significant skill for parents and educators. The benefits are giving a chance for having a mutual language of wellbeing. The second benefit can be introduced as school wellbeing supports the communication and relationship with parents, students and the school community. Additionally, being a part of supportive wellbeing serves as a framework for evaluating the progress within a model.

When teachers positively feel wellbeing, there are outcomes observed such as; belonging and connectedness, feeling safe, experiencing success, resilience, being active, student confidence in their own identity, mindfulness, and strengths-focused social and emotional learning, and refreshing practices. In other words, as an individual seeing value increases the sense of belonging, therefore, teachers especially those conducting one of the most devoted jobs are wedded to their institutions too since they feel their distinction. This also leads teachers to cherish. Thus, happy and motivated teachers create a successful learning environment and students become more participated in the courses so they become more apprehensive. Since teachers who do not have other concerns provide more efficient teaching, students flourish their success by experiencing more social and emotional education. Teachers who spend more time on teaching present different ways of teaching to students. (Quinlan and Hone, 2020, p.99).

Wellbeing models used in education are; “Te Whare Tapa Wha” (the Four-Walled House) model that has four dimensions: physical wellbeing, emotional and mental wellbeing, social wellbeing and spiritual wellbeing. Each of them represents four walls of wellbeing and strengthens integrity. The PERMA model represents Positive, Emotions, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning and Purpose and Accomplishment and a growing number of schools is adopting this model. The ‘Five Ways to Wellbeing’ are being active, giving, taking notice, connecting and keeping learning to promote wellbeing. The PROSPER wellbeing framework is the abbreviated form of positivity, relationship, outcomes, strengths, purpose, engagement and resilience which are representatives of ‘evidence-based practices’ suggested to the schools to build wellbeing for their community.

This study was conducted to examine English language instructors' perspectives on the concept of teacher wellbeing. The wellbeing of teachers is a topic that receives a lot of attention. English language teachers are interviewed employing semi-structured questions in this study to clarify their views on teacher wellbeing. The study, which includes two different data collection methods, is intended to contribute to the literature in terms of the concept of teacher wellbeing. For this purpose, a questionnaire was administered to the English language lecturers

to determine their demographic characteristics and the results of the questionnaire were presented. Various studies are conducted when the literature is analyzed, however language teachers have various viewpoints on their wellbeing since they also teach students in a different language. They value institutional assistance, just like other teachers.

When the literature is examined, it is noticed that a great deal of research focus on stress, burnout, and anxiety. There are studies on subjects like instructors in other disciplines, their institutions, or learners, but the topic of teacher wellbeing has not been examined from the perspectives of language teachers. Studies on teacher wellbeing are conducted to examine the usefulness of positive wellbeing indicators, such as positive emotions and cognitions, the significance of teacher-teacher-student relationships for teacher wellbeing, and the wellbeing of English language teaching (ELT) in the private sector. By highlighting the various circumstances teachers confront, more research on teacher well-being should be implemented.

Methodology

The methodology of this study is a small-scale qualitative study; therefore, a semi-structured interview was used to collect data. The interview has four predetermined questions that focus on the definition of teacher wellbeing for EFL instructors, positive and negative circumstances that affect their wellbeing, how they deal with negative situations.

First a questionnaire had conducted to EFL instructors to evaluate their personal information. After conducting questionnaire, the semi-structured interview questions were reflected to beforehand to the EFL instructors.

A questionnaire about demographic information was distributed to online to English lecturers and the results that emerged were put forward. Online interviews were conducted with 25 lecturers who were of various ages and gender. Participants were asked questions through semi-structured interviews. After the semi-structured interview, the answers were transcribed. Transcripts of the answers were analyzed. A constant comparison method was used to analyze the answers, which combines analysis and data collection, forming categories and concepts by constantly comparing particular data points to other data points. In case study methodology, the process of coding data occurs over the entire research process. Data is coded in intrinsic case studies to determine the significance of a case in the context of a situation, as well as issues, contexts, and interpretations. A coding process aims to detect patterns of data to develop issues (Clandinin, 2005). The results were presented.

Data was collected online one by one with English language instructors on Zoom. The researcher sent the semi-structured interview questions beforehand to the English language

instructors attending the meeting. The participants answered the questions in almost thirty minutes.

Research Design

To design a study as qualitative research, Creswell (2014) described qualitative researchers as examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants themselves to collect data. They may harness a protocol as an instrument for collecting data but the researchers are the ones who actually gather the information. Also as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) defined qualitative research as:

“Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials - case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts - that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.2).

Accordingly, the present study was designed as a qualitative study by meeting the requirements of the qualitative research design proposed by Creswell (2014). Moreover, the content analysis method was applied to analyze it. Köse (2006) pointed out the qualitative data analysis as the process to execute content analysis. The model is composed of the following categories: familiarization, coding/labelling, clustering, defining codes operationally, retrieving and organizing data, and looking for interrelationships between categories. On the other hand, familiarization, coding/labelling, clustering, retrieving and organizing data, and looking for interrelationships between categories were utilized (76-88).

Initially, a questionnaire with demographic questions was given among English lecturers employed at both private and public universities in Ankara for the objective of the study.

Results of Survey

Participants

A questionnaire was administered to the instructors teaching English courses in order to determine their demographic characteristics. Twenty-five EFL instructors who are teaching both private and state university in Ankara participated in the study voluntarily. The results of the survey are presented below with the demographics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic data about the participants

	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Female	25	69.2
Male	25	30.8
Age		
30-39	25	46.2
20-29	25	15.4
40-49	25	15.4
50-59	25	15.4
60 +	25	7.7
Level of education		
Master's Degree	25	61.5
Bachelor's Degree	25	30.8
PhD	25	7.7
Work experience		
11-15	25	38.5
21+	25	38.5
1-5	25	15.4
16-20	25	7.6
Your weekly class hours		
21-25	25	38.5
16-20	25	30.8
11-15	25	23.1
0-5	25	7.7

The demographic data about the participants is given on Table 1. This table demonstrates that 69, 2 % of the participants were female while the rest were male. When the age range is considered, the majority of the participants are in the 30-39 age range; in other words, the largest age range is the 30-39 age range, with 46.2%. This indicates that the majority of the group studied was in this age range. The second largest age group is 20-29 with 15.4%. 40-59 age range is remarkable: 40-49 and 50-59 age ranges are also represented at the same rate with 15.4%. This reflects that middle-aged and older adults occupy a significant place in the group. There is also an age group of 60 years and above with a rate of 7.7%. This suggests that older adults or retirees are represented within the group.

The most common education level among participants is "Master's Degree" at 61.5% when the participants' level of education is analyzed. This indicates that a large proportion of the group had graduate level education. At 30.8%, "Bachelor's Degree" represents the second largest portion of the group. This displays that undergraduate education is also quite common.

With a rate of 7.7%, it seems that people with a "PhD" education level are less in the group. This shows that people with higher levels of education are in the minority.

11-15 years of work experience and 21+ years of work experience is in the majority. Two different work experience ranges make up the majority, both at 38.5%. This certifies that the majority of the group studied either had 11-15 years of work experience or had 21 years or more of work experience. With a rate of 15.4%, the "1-5 Years of Work Experience" range represents another segment of the group. This exhibits that people who have just started working or have less experience are also included in the group. 16-20 years of work experience is the smallest percentage with 7.6%.

The most common weekly lesson hours are "21-25 hours" with 38.5%. This shows that a large proportion of the studied group took between 21 and 25 hours of classes per week. With a rate of 30.8%, it represents the other large portion of the group of people with a "16-20 hour" course schedule. This shows that weekly class hours are frequent in this range.

There are also 11-15 Hour and 0-5 Hour Courses: There are also "11-15 hour" and "0-5 hour" course programs with rates of 23.1% and 7.7%. This reflects people taking fewer classes and the diversity of weekly class hours.

Results

The main purpose of the study is to seek the opinions of EFL instructors about teacher wellbeing. In line with this purpose, demographic findings were firstly revealed by conducting a questionnaire with English language lecturers at universities in Ankara and then their opinions were sought through semi-structured interview questions. Demographic findings are provided in detail in Table 1.

When the definition of teacher wellbeing is asked English language instructors, defined teacher wellbeing as key terms such as the perception of job satisfaction, being supported professionally and self-efficacy, the state of being satisfied and contented without being overwhelmed before, during, and after teaching. Teacher 5 clearly indicates this:

Teacher 5: *As a teacher, teacher wellbeing can be described as feeling good in the classroom, outside of the classroom and while teaching even while giving feedback, you can feel this satisfaction.*

In other words, as Teacher 5 mentioned as an EFL instructor, teacher wellbeing is a feeling that brings happiness to the teacher, while teaching and even giving feedback, feeling good in the classroom, outside of the classroom, dealing with intervenes.

Teacher 15: *Another point for teacher wellbeing is resilience, it is a key component of teacher wellbeing.*

Moreover, another teacher believes that being resilient can be linked with teacher wellbeing since there are also challenges like students' indifference to the language or applying problematic curriculum into their courses even if teachers feel confident and happy when they are in the classroom.

Teacher 17: *Positive working environment is milestone for a teacher to feel free when they are teaching.*

In this way, it can be clearly observed that as EFL instructors apart from using efficient material or having voluntary students, institutions should provide positive working environment so that teachers feel well since their only concern should be these elements, students and materials, and being under pressure is another negative effect for teachers' wellbeing.

As a second question, what positively affects your wellbeing as a teacher is asked and teachers denoted their wellbeing affects positively as a teacher when there is a financial motivation and a high salary.

Teacher 1: *Financial motivation affects my wellbeing positively.*

Nowadays, it is one of the most disputatious topics among EFL instructors; therefore some of them stated the salary issues as financial motivation.

Additionally, teachers feel positive when there is a positive working environment; supportive administration and positive attitudes of other colleagues. When teachers feel that they are precious and are appreciated for their success and their admin tolerates their little mistakes, they feel motivated.

Teacher 8: *When my admin supports me for completing a task or encourage me for completing postgraduate education, I feel better and precious. Sometimes, our admins overreacted some trifling mistakes which lead demotivation.... If they empathize, I feel that I am important for them.*

Teacher 10: *My colleagues motivate me a lot...*

These imply that working environment is crucial for feeling positive.

Teacher 10: *Teaching young adults and their eagerness to learn a new language makes me feel like being sitting on cloud nine.*

As English language instructors, when students are highly motivated to learn English, when students' profile is available for learning English, when students learn and participate, when students are successful, when there are well-qualified and well-designed materials and the curriculum is also organized efficiently, their wellbeing is affected positively. Being with young people affects instructors' wellbeing positively as a teacher as they indicated. As a final remark, instructors define wellbeing as a teacher as not outside but inside the joy of teaching.

As third question reflected to English language instructors, "what negatively affects your wellbeing as a teacher?" and it can be concluded that teachers' wellbeing affects negatively when they are not supported and appreciated by the administration and institution when there are distracted, unmotivated, irresponsible, and indifferent students and students do not feel safe psychologically and emotionally. Additionally, when there is an inefficacy about technology such as technique tools; internet, projector, speaker, and power cut affect my wellbeing negatively. Teaching the same topics, again and again, affects their wellbeing negatively. As a final comment negative feeling is working under pressure. The following comments illustrate this:

Teacher 17: *If anything happens negative, the content of the course, news about institution (underpayment) and even repeating the same subject makes me feel negative.*

Teacher 21: *I feel exhausted if there is no participation and in different students.*

Teacher 4: *... In our curriculum, we have a new course which is based on a system and when I face problems about technical issues such as low internet connection, I believe I lose my face validity.*

The final question is "what do you do to increase your wellbeing in a positive way when your wellbeing as a teacher is affected negatively?". Teacher 1 and 8 mentions this issue as follow:

Teacher 1: *I find activities for myself like socializing, going out, reading a book, yoga and focusing on my personal life to increase my wellbeing in a positive way when my wellbeing as a teacher is affected negatively.*

Teacher 8: *I try to compensate the lack by using teaching artistry.*

Furthermore, they enumerated that they share problems with their colleagues who are older and more experienced colleagues to heighten my wellbeing in a positive way when my wellbeing as a teacher is affected negatively, they ignore the negative situation to increase their wellbeing in a positive way when my wellbeing as a teacher is affected negatively. Some of the instructors think over the negative situation and manage to strengthen their wellbeing in a

positive way when their wellbeing as a teacher is affected negatively. The following excerpts are indicators of this.

Teacher 5: *The best thing I can do is telling my older colleagues what I had experienced and I benefit from their knowledge and experiences and generally they handle challenges by eliminating them. ... Sometimes I find new materials for the course to make lessons more attractive for the topics that are discussed throughout the term.*

The data was collected online one by one with English language instructors on Zoom. The researcher distributed the semi-structured interview questions beforehand to the English language instructors attending the meeting. Participants responded the questions in almost thirty minutes.

Conclusion

Given the fact that teacher wellbeing is a subject that attracts great attention, which is the main reason for materializing this study. In this study, semi-structured interview questions are prepared and asked English language instructors so that their opinion about teacher wellbeing is clarified. When the literature is analyzed, different studies are performed but language teachers have different perspectives on teacher wellbeing since they also direct students in another language. Like other instructors, they place emphasis on institutional support. However, especially the crucial point is as a language teacher they put effort while giving feedback because it is noticeable to be understood and these feedbacks shape their knowledge about the language that is also a point denoted by teachers that they feel positive while giving feedback when they are understood. In addition, financial support is a point for feeling good, which is an element stated as feeling negative. English language instructors emphasized curricula and students' attention since they are significant for feeling wellbeing while working.

Participants are reflected four different questions to express their point of view, and as the occasion demands, different questions are also asked. Generally, instructors are happy since they love teaching a different language, however, there are challenging situations at the same time, like not being appreciated and having problematic curricula, and financial problems. Even some of the institutions are obstinate in supplying stationary equipment.

Findings of this study can be employed to improve the current situation of EFL instructors. It can be observed that when instructors lack financial situation and institutional support, they are not happy. On the other hand, EFL instructors are generally happy to conduct

their courses with their eager students and qualified materials. Concisely, this study aims to contribute to the clarification of the term ‘teacher wellbeing’ and add knowledge about teacher wellbeing from the English language instructors’ point of view.

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