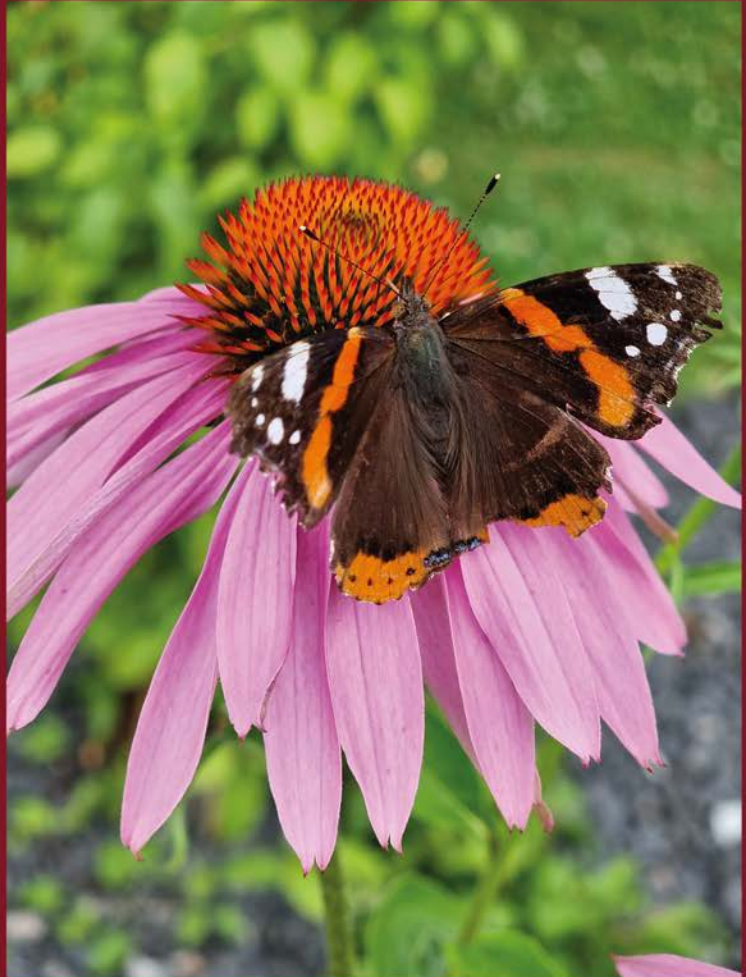


Sabina A. Nowak (ed.)

Well-being in EFL Education

Diverse Contexts and Perspectives





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To the memory of Władysław T. Miodunka

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Introduction

In recent years, the concept of well-being in education has moved from a marginal topic to an urgent priority. Increasing levels of stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion among teachers and learners have highlighted a need for research-based approaches to understanding and supporting well-being in educational contexts. The monograph arises precisely from this need: to identify, document, and analyse the diverse factors influencing well-being in education. It offers a comprehensive exploration of well-being within different contexts of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and focuses on studies conducted among university educators, pre- and in-service teachers and students. Bringing together research from various Polish academic and school settings, the volume examines the interplay between well-being, educational practices, culture, and school values. By addressing Polish educational contexts, where empirical work on well-being in EFL is still limited, the book offers interdisciplinary perspectives that challenge the often-fragmented nature of well-being research.

Various authors contributed to the volume. *Katarzyna Morena* and *Krzysztof Wrześniewski* explore university scholars' well-being in English studies departments through the lenses of self-determination theory, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction. The findings indicate that competence, autonomy, and high self-efficacy contribute to scholars' well-being, while economic and work-life balance issues negatively affect job satisfaction. *Anna Stefanowicz-Kocoł* investigates the correlation between cultural values and well-being among ESP students. By applying the PERMA Profiler and Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the research reveals how individualism and power distance impact students' satisfaction. It suggests that recognizing these cultural aspects can enhance academic success and well-being. *Małgorzata Szulc-Kurpaska*, *Sabina A. Nowak* and *Maria Kurpaska* explore the flourishing of EFL pre- and in-service teachers, utilizing the Flourishing Measures, namely Harvard Flourishing Programme and Gallup, to assess domains such as happiness, life satisfaction, mental and physical health, as well as financial stability. The quantitative study provides insights into the differences in flourishing in terms of teaching experience and type of school,

whereas the qualitative study shows progressive aspects of flourishing. *Monika Łodej* examines the well-being of students with special educational needs (SEN), particularly those with dyslexia, in the context of EFL learning. Using the Knowledge and Belief about Developmental Dyslexia Scale, the study assesses instances of awareness and misconceptions among English department students, identifying gaps in knowledge that should be addressed in teacher preparation programmes to improve teaching effectiveness and student support. *Dominika Chrobak* focuses on learning strategies that contribute to the well-being of primary school students learning Spanish as their third language (L3). Through interviews conducted during listening tests, the research highlights the lack of affective strategies and emphasizes the need to teach emotional regulation skills to enhance students' well-being. Finally, *Sabina A. Nowak* investigates the role of reflective journal writing in developing socio-emotional well-being (SEW) within the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) context. Content analysis of online peer-shared journals reveals their potential as a social skills development tool that allows for correcting misperceptions and supporting continuous development, contributing to transformative learning.

The monograph contributes to existing literature by expanding well-being research beyond traditional variables such as stress and burnout, directing attention toward emotion regulation, cultural values, identity formation, reflective discourse, social and emotional learning (SEL), special educational needs (SEN), and flourishing frameworks. By presenting a multidimensional view of well-being, it addresses the often-neglected aspects of EFL education. It identifies gaps in well-being research and provides evidence-based outcomes relevant to educational practice in Poland. By offering practical solutions for teachers, learners, and institutions, the monograph encourages the implementation of positive interventions and professional training to foster flourishing among both teachers and students. Responding to the urgent need for systemic change in schools, it aims to inspire well-being development in EFL education.

Sabina A. Nowak

Chapter 1: Scholars' Well-being in the Context of the English Studies

Abstract

“Well-being is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions” (World Health Organisation, 2023). This exploratory study aimed to determine the factors underlying scholars' well-being at work. The study employed the framework of self-determination theory, along with self-efficacy at work and general job satisfaction measures, to explore the determinants of well-being among scholars. Fifty-one scholars from three Krakow universities' English departments participated in the study. The results indicated that factors such as satisfaction of competence and autonomy needs, along with a high level of self-efficacy, contributed to scholars' sense of well-being. In relation to job satisfaction, scholars indicated only a moderate level and pointed to the economic, work-life balance, and job insecurity issues as factors negatively affecting job satisfaction. This study is an attempt to open a new direction for future research and exploration of scholars' well-being in the context of teaching and learning foreign languages.

Keywords: well-being, university scholars, ESL, EFL, self-efficacy at work, job satisfaction

Introduction

University scholars are the largest contributors to innovative research and scientific progress (Stupnisky et al., 2019). At a societal level, effective academic teaching and research are fundamental components of informed citizenship, quality of higher education, and institutional visibility (Javitz et al., 2010). Yet, it is a profession that is under threat from high rates of burnout and high levels of stress, combined with low job satisfaction leading to alarming rates of attrition

(Craig, 2017). Although, there is already a large body of research on language teacher stress and burnout (MacIntyre et al., 2019), the studies on a foreign language teacher well-being are relatively new (Sulis et al., 2021; Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018), while the ones focusing on language teachers in academia are scarce. The university has a major role in leading the nation's research and innovation to secure not only future prosperity but also prepare knowledgeable, well-informed, and creative members of society (Watt & Richardson, 2020). While teaching and research are the traditional roles of the university (Willett, 2019), it is the university scholars who produce innovative research and secure scientific progress (Stupnisky et al., 2019). Studies of scholars' careers show that most academics enter the profession with expectations of contributing new knowledge and research to society, intellectually stimulating work, and delivering high-quality teaching (Watt & Richardson, 2020).

To excel in teaching and research, scholars across fields of science and universities contend with competing demands and performance pressures (Watt & Richardson, 2020). The academic profession involves dealing with a wide range of stressors, e.g., those related to the research include insufficient funding, difficulties in attracting grants or other scholars to collaborate, as well as unsatisfactory foreign language competences to achieve in the research-related domains (Horn, 2017; Kwiek, 2015; Siemieńska et al., 2019; Watts & Robertson, 2011). In addition, stressors related to teaching involve work overload, mass participation of students with different needs, interests, and abilities, or in the case of international students – problems with language skills (Bugaj, 2016; Macaro, 2018). Additionally, Winwood et al. (2003) have identified administration-related stressors such as an insufficient recognition and reward system, poor management policies, and job insecurity. Additional stressors include restructures, performance measures, external regulations, and frequent reforms (Winwood et al., 2003). Demands placed on scholars continue to increase; however, their self-efficacy beliefs, job satisfaction, and overall well-being remain unknown. Only recently have some empirical studies attempted to explain key outcomes related to scholars' emotions, motivations, and professional development (Stupnisky et al., 2017, 2018, 2019; Daumiller & Dresel, 2020 a, b). The first systematic review on well-being in working contexts was proposed by Nunes, Proenca & Carozzo-Todaro (2023), and the language teacher lens was adopted in a book by Sulis and colleagues (2021).

Definition of well-being in the context of self-determination theory

The concept of well-being has been equated with the term “happiness” in scientific literature (Deiner & Ryan, 2009); however, the proper definition is a matter of considerable debate. In short, happiness designates the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 240) while well-being is conceptually broader and encompasses both the ideas of short-term pleasure (i.e., happiness) and long-term personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2001, 2017). In other words, happiness is considered to be a subjective symptom of well-being, however, well-being is better defined in terms of flourishing, thriving or being fully functioning person and is associated with basic needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) satisfaction and growth (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Self-determination theory (SDT) provides a framework for understanding the factors that promote (or frustrate) motivation, well-being, and in general, healthy psychological functioning in multiple contexts and domains of life (Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT concerns the conditions and factors that facilitate intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It also explores how basic psychological needs (satisfaction or frustration) relate to well-being. According to SDT, individuals have universal and inherent basic psychological needs (BPN): autonomy (the need to experience self-endorsement, and ownership of one's actions, i.e. to be self-regulating), competence (the need to be efficacious, to experience opportunities for the exercise, development and expressions of one's capacities and talents) and relatedness (the need to be connected and involved with others and having the sense of belonging) (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 86). Central to the SDT approach is the assumption that greater satisfaction of basic psychological needs leads to enhanced well-being, integrity and optimal development (Deci & Ryan, 2017).

BPN and well-being at work

In working contexts, the positive association between satisfaction of basic psychological needs (SBPN) and well-being has been determined empirically (Deci & Ryan, 2017; Deci et al., 2001; Chen et al., 2015) indicating that adequate working contexts can promote satisfaction of BPN; which in turn can lead to a greater well-being and motivation (La Guardia et al., 2000), life satisfaction and vitality (Chen et al., 2015; Church et al., 2013). Some studies found that workers who perceive that their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness with their colleagues are satisfied feel more energised and engaged in work (as indicators of well-being) (Van den Broeck et al., 2008). In a more recent meta-analytic study, Van den Broeck et al. (2016) confirmed that satisfaction of BPN is a powerful

mechanism in predicting well-being, as the basic needs showed significant positive correlations with all the job resources (e.g., autonomy, social support, and skill utilisation). Additionally, a systematic review conducted by Nunes and colleagues (2023) showed that satisfaction of BPN is an important mechanism for explaining both “the bright and dark side” of psychological functioning in the workplace. While the satisfaction of BPN leads to well-being, the frustration of BPNs is related to ill-being (Deci et al., 2017). Although the latter direction has received less attention in the literature, the link should not be ignored. In some BPNs measurement tools, e.g., the Work-related Basic Needs Scale (W-BNS), which was developed to measure SBPN, Van den Broeck et al., (2010) also included reverse-scored items that measure need frustration. According to SDT, the frustration of basic psychological needs results in a decrease in job satisfaction and ineffective functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

BPN, well-being and teacher work

It is widely acknowledged that teacher well-being is in crisis, as this group of professionals has the highest levels of stress and burnout globally compared to other professions (Falecky & Mann, 2021). Burnout and socio-emotional stresses affect teachers' well-being and their abilities to cope (Parker & Martin, 2009). Additionally, poor work-life balance and inability to disconnect after work exacerbate these issues (Falecky & Mann, 2021). Scholars are frequently subject to an excessive workload linked to both teaching and research, as well as administrative and management activities. These tasks were found to impact psychological well-being and stress levels (Pace et al., 2021).

Research also indicates an established positive relationship between teacher-student well-being and achievement (McCallum & Price, 2010). In the ELT context, Mercer (2021) highlights that when teachers experience well-being, they teach more creatively, and their learners achieve more. However, while nobody disputes the pressing need for protecting learner well-being, taking into consideration the rising levels of depression, anxiety and other mental states, the focus on teacher well-being remains relatively low. Although many individual teachers naturally attend to learner well-being in how they teach and interact with their learners, there is much to be understood about teacher well-being and its relation to teaching a language and how to promote it alongside linguistic competences (Mercer, 2021).

One important research framework to better understanding of teachers' psychological need satisfaction versus frustration was to examine the effects of support vs. pressure on teachers from above, from within and from below (Soenens et al., 2012). Support vs. pressure from above refers to how constructive

vs. coercive teachers experience interactions with administrators and parents, how educational policies and societal expectations force teacher responsibility and accountability for students' learning, performance and desired behaviour. Support vs. pressure from within refers to teachers' own autonomous vs. controlled motivations to teach and the autonomy- and control-oriented beliefs and personality dispositions. Support vs. pressure from below refers to teachers' day-to-day perceptions about how motivated and engaged their students are (or are not) and to their beliefs about student motivation. In short, pressures from above, within and below negatively predicted teachers' autonomous motivation for teaching, led to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of students, and a controlling motivating style during instruction (Soenens et al., 2012). The study by Bartholomew and colleagues (2014) revealed that the greater the job pressure teachers experience, the more they tend to exhibit burnout, and this relationship is mediated by the frustration of their basic psychological needs.

Teacher well-being is influenced by various factors, including emotions and motivational aspects. More recently, Dreer (2024) found that positive emotions, out of the other four indicators of teacher well-being at work, i. e., engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement, predicted greater job satisfaction among teachers. Roth and colleagues (2007) revealed that teachers who are autonomously motivated in their teaching, experience greater need satisfaction at work, and their students perceive them to be more autonomy supportive. It is then associated with the students being more autonomously motivated for learning. Further work (Fernet et al., 2012) has shown that an increase in work overload and student disruptive behaviours predicted less autonomous motivation for teaching and less perceived competence. Addressing the basic psychological needs of teachers is crucial in enhancing their well-being and effectiveness at work, ultimately benefiting both educators and students.

Well-being and language teachers

Language teachers experience many of the same issues as other teachers; however, there are some additional factors critical to their well-being (Sulis et al., 2023). In language teaching, there are stressors unique to the domain, including energy-intensive methodologies, language anxiety, shifting identities, and intercultural demands (Mercer & Kostoulas, 2019). For the past decades, language teaching has relied on communicative pedagogies, which typically require high energy and creativity to foster a more participatory and interactive classroom environment (Sulis et al., 2023). Language teachers also tend to work with learners on a more personal level during classroom discussions or when responding to learners' writing assignments. Everyday interactions in the language

classroom require teachers to deal with a set of emotional elements, including high emotionality, personally meaningful content, or issues with shifting motivation (MacIntyre et al., 2019).

Some teachers, who are required to teach in a foreign language and might still be learning it themselves, experience foreign language anxiety (Gruber & Mercer, 2021; Horwitz, 1996). In addition to language anxiety, some language teachers show a lower self-perceived linguistic proficiency and lower confidence that negatively affect their self-efficacy and professional identity (Mercer et al., 2016). Moreover, language learning is not limited to the classroom. Globalisation and access to technology have presented learners with the opportunity to enjoy authentic materials, tools such as AI to find information or perform translations, and also to interact with people from different countries using the target language without teacher direction or intervention (Kramsch, 2014). As Sulis and colleagues (2023, p. 64) highlight, this access to the language and the ability to practice it beyond a traditional language classroom can alter the position and status of a language teacher as an expert. As a consequence, language teachers may encounter shifting attitudes from learners who undermine the need for language learning in the classroom.

Naturally, the context in which the language is taught matters. In settings where the English language is recognised as a *lingua franca*, the status of the English language teacher and the language itself differ from those of teachers of other languages (Sulis et al., 2023). In Poland, English is one of the core subjects in the national curriculum, and the status of the English language is high (European Commission, 2012). The English language is now taught as the first foreign language in all primary and secondary schools in Poland, and it is also assumed that candidates applying for jobs in multinational companies and corporations in Poland should be fluent in English (Dabrowska, 2022). Accordingly, English has not only become a *lingua franca* or international business, but is also present in entertainment, the media, tourism, advertising or academia. The use of English is encouraged in scholarly projects and as the language of academic coursebooks in line with the EU policies and practices (Dabrowska, 2022).

Well-being and job satisfaction

Systemic factors in ELT are also rarely the focus of empirical studies, although sufficient research exists in the mainstream education, which identified several known factors that affect teacher well-being and job satisfaction at the institutional level, including pay, job security, societal status of teaching, workplace culture, leadership styles, professional resources, collegial support, administra-

tive responsibilities and workload, or opportunity for teacher autonomy (Mercer, 2021; Riva et al., 2024).

Studies have shown that job satisfaction (as a contextual and individual variable) contributes to well-being (Nunes et al., 2023). Evidence suggests that positive individual resources such as active engagement in work, creative thinking, hardiness, optimism, self-efficacy and self-esteem contribute to higher levels of well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Regarding workplace variables, three categories were identified: (a) organisation environment and practices; (b) relationship between employee and leader/supervisor; and (c) job/task content or execution. For organisation environment and practices, findings indicate that empowerment, investiture, and serial socialisation, as well as procedural justice, have a positive impact on well-being. Besides, the perception of organisational support – from administration, colleagues, family, friends, and psychopedagogical resources – positively impacts well-being. Regarding the relationship between an employee and leader/supervisor, leader–member exchange, managerial need support, and open conflict norms are shown to positively impact well-being. Among the variables related to job/task content or execution, job crafting (cognitive, relational and task) seems to enhance well-being. However, well-being appears to decrease as job demands and job insecurity increase, while job complexity has no significant association. Evidence indicates that work contexts that enable workers to actively engage in their activities in a fair, open and supportive environment are more favourable to workers' mental health, thereby increasing their well-being (Nunes et al., 2023).

Self-efficacy at work

The central tenet of self-efficacy theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1997), is the subjective belief of a person regarding their ability to perform specific tasks successfully. Individuals obtain self-efficacy (SE) information from mastery experiences, i. e., the interpretation of their actual performance; therefore successful performance increases self-efficacy, whereas failures lower it (Schunk & Usher, 2019). Another source of SE is social comparison with others (Bandura, 1997). Observing similar others accomplishing/performing the task with success can raise the observer's self-efficacy, since they believe that if others can perform well, they can as well (Schunk & Usher, 2019). A contrary situation may occur when an individual observes similar others fail the task; they may think they lack the competence to succeed. As a result, their SE becomes negatively affected (Schunk & Usher, 2019). The other sources of SE information stem from social persuasion and physiological and emotional reactions, such as stress and anxiety (Bandura, 1997). Social persuasions (e. g., I know you can do this) that come from

credible individuals (i. e., supervisor, teacher, parent) affect an individual's self-efficacy to a certain degree. Social feedback should be matched to the individual's current competence level, as incredible or empty praise may be quickly dismissed (Schunk & Usher, 2019). Emotional and physiological reactions also provide information about anticipated success and failure, which may affect self-efficacy. Negative thoughts about one's competence can lower self-efficacy, whereas positive affect can increase it. Individuals who feel energised by challenging academic work hold high self-efficacy for succeeding (Schunk & Usher, 2019).

Some research on SE has recently emerged in the language teacher context. Mercer and colleagues (2016) posit that positive language teacher self-efficacy beliefs contribute to psychological well-being, and highly efficacious teachers are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, self-determined educators, who are "curious, vital and self-motivated (...) agentic and inspired, striving to learn; extend themselves, master new skills and apply their skills responsibly" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). Wyatt (2018) reports studies of language teachers who, despite challenging conditions such as transitioning from teaching older to much younger learners and experiencing anxiety and negative emotions, became more efficacious through reflective learning. Additionally, Cooke (2013, as cited in Wyatt, 2018) found that language teachers working in supportive environments become more efficacious.

Research conducted in the context of higher education focused on the correlation between SE and academic performance. A recent meta-analysis examined 50 antecedents of academic performance and found that self-efficacy had the strongest correlation ($r = 0.59$) (Richardson et al., 2012). In particular, the studies examined scholars' self-efficacy for teaching and research. For example, Ismayilova and Klassen (2019) examined university faculty self-efficacy for teaching and research and its correlation with job satisfaction. In Study 1, the researchers considered participants' self-efficacy, as well as their gender, job seniority, and qualification level. The sample consisted of 205 academics from Azerbaijan and 323 from Turkey. The results showed that scholars' self-efficacy for teaching was higher than their self-efficacy for research. The authors underlined those scholars had greater exposure and practice in the teaching domain than in research. Also, Ismayilova and Klassen (2019) found that scholars with more years of job experience reported higher research self-efficacy levels than those with shorter job experience. Interestingly, higher qualification levels (PhD, MA, and PhD candidate) predicted lower job satisfaction levels, which was further explored in Study 2. This qualitative study of 14 scholars revealed that the participants felt less self-efficacious in research throughout their careers than in the teaching domain. Lower self-efficacy was attributed to factors such as a lack of institutional support for research and competing demands, including a heavy teaching load and insufficient time for research. The academics referred to

recognition, support (e. g., use of competitive funding to increase the quality and relevance of research), being involved in decision-making, and collegiality as important factors contributing to self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Ismayilova & Klassen, 2019)

Earlier, Morris and Usher (2011) interviewed 12 university professors to determine the sources of their teaching self-efficacy. They found that both mastery experiences and social/verbal persuasion were key sources of teaching self-efficacy. Additionally, professors' teaching self-efficacy develops and stabilises within the first four years of teaching, suggesting that early teaching experiences, such as those in graduate school, may be especially formative. In this vein, Fong et al. (2019) examined the predictors of US graduate student instructors' teaching self-efficacy and the perceived autonomy-supportive teaching in promoting students' classroom engagement. The researchers also considered the length of teaching experience, time spent in graduate school, pedagogy training, and whether the discipline was STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) or Liberal Arts. The findings showed that students' classroom engagement was higher when their teachers had higher self-efficacy and were more autonomy – supportive. The number of semesters in graduate school and being in a non-STEM discipline positively predicted teacher self-efficacy for instructional approaches (preparation and delivery of content using a variety of instructional strategies) and the learning environment (creating a positive learning climate where students feel comfortable participating). Teaching experience and pedagogy training did not correlate with self-efficacy. Fong and colleagues (2019) posited that graduate students often formed the pool from which faculty members were selected. Exploring their teaching self-efficacy and the associated antecedents and consequences of teaching self-efficacy was essential to understanding nascent faculty motivation in higher education.

Methodology

This study aimed to determine the underlying factors influencing scholars' well-being. So far, research has focused on scholars' emotions, motivations to teach and research, professional development (Stupnisky et al., 2017), stress and burnout (Watts & Robertson, 2011; cf. Riva et al., 2024), yet little is known about their sense of well-being. Recent studies have explored the well-being of language teachers (Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018), but none have explicitly focused on foreign language tertiary teachers. Three groups of factors related to well-being were scrutinised in this study: the satisfaction of basic psychological needs at work (adopting self-determination theory lens), self-efficacy at work and general job satisfaction.