

Transnational English language teacher wellbeing: An ecological perspective

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ABSTRACT: Teacher wellbeing has recently received enormous research attention, especially post-pandemic after teachers functioned as stress absorbers in society. However, there is a group of teachers who have escaped the scrutinizing lens of researchers. Transnational teachers who leave their homeland with the hopes of a better job opportunity are an under-researched group of teachers, whose wellbeing is potentially affected by diverse factors. This article aims to uncover how major changes in expatriate teachers' professional lives such as immigration can influence their wellbeing from an ecological perspective drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology of human development theory. To this end, online interviews were conducted with a group of Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers (N = 6) who have immigrated to Türkiye and work in Turkish private high schools. Thematic analysis of the interview data highlighted more satisfactory levels of wellbeing in these teachers compared to their counterparts residing in Iran. However, minute levels of stress were identified in these teachers that could be handled through proper planning, and techniques like finding silver linings from positive psychology. Further findings that have implications for policymakers are discussed in light of positive psychology.

Keywords: EFL teachers, ecology, private high schools (colleges), positive psychology, transnational teachers, wellbeing

El bienestar transnacional de los profesores de inglés: Una perspectiva ecológica

RESUMEN: La investigación sobre el bienestar del profesorado ha recibido recientemente una enorme atención, especialmente después de la pandemia en la que los docentes actuaron como amortiguadores del estrés en la sociedad. Sin embargo, hay un grupo de profesores que han escapado al examen de los investigadores. Los docentes transnacionales que abandonan su país de origen con la esperanza de una mejor oportunidad laboral son un grupo poco investigado, cuyo bienestar se ve potencialmente afectado por diversos factores. Este artículo tiene como objetivo descubrir cómo los cambios importantes en la vida profesional de los docentes transnacionales, como la inmigración, pueden influir en su bienestar desde una perspectiva ecológica utilizando la teoría del desarrollo humano de Bronfenbrenner (1979). Con este fin, se realizaron entrevistas en profundidad en línea con un grupo de profesores

iraníes de inglés como lengua extranjera ($N = 6$) que emigraron a Turquía y trabajan en centros de educación secundaria. El análisis temático de las entrevistas revela niveles más satisfactorios de bienestar en estos docentes en comparación con sus homólogos que residen en Irán. Además, se identifican niveles mínimos de estrés en estos profesores que podrían manejarse mediante una planificación adecuada y técnicas como el lado positivo de la psicología positiva. En el artículo se analizan otros hallazgos que tienen implicaciones para los responsables educativos a la luz de la psicología positiva.

Palabras claves: profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera, ecología, institutos privados, psicología positiva, profesores transnacionales, bienestar

1. INTRODUCTION

Although teachers are the most precious facet of education (Leiter & Maslach, 1999), they have received less attention compared to learners. Teachers, specifically language teachers, have to deal with numerous challenges in their workplace; and international language teachers in particular are even more strained in their workplace (Gregersen et al., 2020). Although studying language teacher psychology is of paramount importance, it has been given short shrift in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) (Songhori et al., 2020). Examining teacher psychology is vital not only in relation to learning outcomes but it is also essential in order to assist teachers to experience a happier professional path. Studying language teacher psychology is yet in its infancy stage (Hiver, 2018); therefore, examining its various constructs, including teacher wellbeing, is urgently needed to expand our understanding of the factors that can lead education onto the right track. To the best of our knowledge, there is a very limited number of studies that specifically examine the wellbeing of transnational EFL teachers. As an endeavour to fill this research lacuna, we aimed at investigating the wellbeing of teachers through the eyes of Iranian EFL teachers residing in Türkiye.

Due to the prevalence of cognitive perspectives in the last few decades, the importance of emotions in language learning and teaching has been underestimated (Sharwood Smith, 2017), with emotions being considered an unscientific realm. However, the situation seems to be changing, and labels such as "emotionology" are attracting attention (Dewaele et al., 2019). Although the existence of negative emotions and problems they generate cannot be denied, the focus is currently more on the positive side of the coin such as wellbeing, flourishing, and happiness. Positive Psychology (PP), which originated from a call in the second half of the 20th century to attend to more positive aspects of life and which is rooted in humanistic psychology, aims to explore how people flourish through their positive emotions and feelings (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006). It aims to offer a more reasonable perspective on lived experiences by understanding what adds to positive feelings and the circumstances under which individuals flourish (Mercer & Gregersen, 2023). Flourishing is an individual's subjective feeling of wellbeing which originates from his/her experiences and is related to his/her social circumstances; in other words, the integration of social and psychological aspects influence one's flourishing (Mercer & Gregersen, 2023). PP works for building the best things in life as well as repairing the worst (Peterson, 2006). By focusing on wellbeing and happiness rather than highlighting obstacles, PP aims to assist people in living a happier life. Indeed, PP underscores the importance of people's happy lives and state

of mind (Wang, et al. 2021). This is indeed the notion of happiness, as meant in Aristotle's deep reflections, in which he zooms in on the life an individual leads rather than a transient happiness feeling (Mercer, 2021). In other words, Aristotle's happiness is the sense of fulfillment that is gained from focusing on meaning and self-realization, which is called wellbeing.

To understand wellbeing, a basic human right according to the World Health Organization, the PERMA (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments) framework has been widely used (Seligman, 2011). The model not only includes the consideration of positive affect but also incorporates the idea of a life lived with a sense of meaning. However, the model seems to solely focus on personal aspect of wellbeing, ignoring contextual factors that can affect wellbeing. As the literature in English Language Teaching (ELT) ecology clearly defines wellbeing as both an individually and a socially constructed concept, studies that consider either the individual or contextual aspects are "addressing only one part of the equation" (Mercer, 2021, p.16); that is, there is a need for studies to examine wellbeing deeply in a variety of contexts and conditions and collectively consider the influence of contextual and social perspectives to enrich theory and research. Therefore, wellbeing should be viewed from an ecological perspective in which an individual has the agency to actively and consciously relate to personal, cultural, institutional, and interactional ecologies (Mercer, 2021). Moreover, ELT is a field where English teaching "cannot be viewed as [a] unitary enterprise but as an ecology" (Pennington & Hoekje, 2014, p.172). An ecology is defined as the relationship between organisms and their environment. ELT ecology accordingly includes all organisms such as teachers and learners in academia, universities, schools, and public or private contexts at different levels which can all influence each other. Moreover, all ecologies of wellbeing are interconnected as wellbeing is not an individual trait. Such ecologies are well addressed in human development ecology theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in which human development is influenced by various dimensions including people and the environment surrounding the individual. This bioecological model consisting of microsystem (i.e., relationships in the immediate environment), mesosystem (the connection between structures of microsystem), exosystem (larger social systems like workplace), macrosystem (larger principles such as cultural values), and chronosystem (timing of different events in individuals' lives), is believed to offer a clear view of the problems faced by people (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As such, language teacher wellbeing cannot be investigated merely within an individual; rather, it should be explored considering all the ecologies. Such an ecological perspective can provide a deeper understanding of teacher wellbeing.

Within the ELT ecology, language teachers are the most important elements affecting language learners' success (Dörnyei, 2018). However, they are simply ignored and considered one of the many factors, a misconception that mainly emanates from the predominance of learner-centered perspectives and the difficulty in studying teachers' lives (Mercer, 2021). Moreover, teachers, the shock absorbers of society (Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2022), have been reported to experience substantial levels of stress that exert an impact on them physically and mentally. Furthermore, having constant interactions with many people such as learners, parents, and school administration and staff (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007) and the need to make quick decisions (Kyriacou, 2001) augment teachers' stress. Also, a lower level of second language (L2) proficiency can lead to additional stress for language teachers (Gregersen et al., 2020). On top of these, transnational teachers may face further cultural challenges and

stressors (Gregersen et al., 2020) as well as the language barrier that are not experienced by teachers in their homelands. As such, given the importance of language teachers in today's world, and the substantial levels of stress experienced by language teachers (Greenier, et al. 2021), more attention needs to be devoted to understanding the emotions of people in such a stressful profession, specifically when they have to work and live in a different cultural setting than their own.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To date, several studies have attempted to examine language teacher wellbeing in different contexts. While some studies have attempted to find a relationship between teacher wellbeing and other factors such as job satisfaction (Kern et al., 2014; Song et al., 2020), and some have explored techniques to improve teacher wellbeing (McKay & Barton, 2018), others have aimed at identifying the main teacher stressors that threaten wellbeing (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Gregersen et al., 2020) or examined contributions of factors such as school climate and job crafting (Dreer, 2022).

However, with the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic and high levels of ensuing stress and other challenges faced by people, researchers have strived to find the influence of the pandemic on teachers who continued their profession even during the lockdowns. While Alves et al. (2021) reported falling wellbeing levels of Portuguese teachers during the pandemic, studies such as MacIntyre et al. (2020) outlined coping strategies that teachers utilized to deal with new challenges and examined how such techniques positively influenced their wellbeing. Although heavy workload and family health issues were found to erode language teachers' wellbeing in MacIntyre et al.'s (2020) study, the participants who used techniques based on approach rather than avoidance, manifested higher wellbeing levels. Meanwhile, navigating through the main factors deteriorating teacher wellbeing, numerous researchers (Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2022; Pourbahram & Sadeghi, 2022) have highlighted the devastating influence of unhealthy relationship patterns (between teachers and learners/colleagues/staff) on teacher wellbeing. Specifically, conversion to online platforms heavily influenced the way people communicated; and consequently, the quality of relationships went downhill. This lack of appropriate relationship patterns between colleagues, teachers, and school staff led to an increased stress level during the pandemic in a New Jersey study (Wong et al., 2021). The student-teacher relationship was also found to be influential on teacher wellbeing in Uganda and Sudan, where Falk et al., (2022) interviewed 42 teachers and found the complex positive and negative influence of the student-teacher relationship in this respect. Factors such as heavy workload, life-work spillover and remuneration were also reported to severely cast a dark shadow on language teacher wellbeing during the pandemic (Pourbahram & Sadeghi, 2022).

Despite the slowly growing trend of research on L2 teacher wellbeing, what is missing in this puzzle is the attention to teachers who have left their homeland in search of a better future. Comparatively very little attention has been paid to expatriate EFL teachers, whose wellbeing can be expected to be influenced by other cultural and contextual factors than those affecting teachers residing in their own cultural setting. In one rare case study, as an example, Gregersen et al. (2020) applied a PP intervention to alleviate an American

teacher's stress as she worked in Africa. Their silver lining intervention (i.e., staying optimistic and considering the positive side of the problems to promote emotional resilience) was temporarily effective in managing the stressful situation for the teacher. However, the effects were not long-lasting. Likewise, there are a limited number of studies on Chinese as a Foreign Language Teachers abroad, such as those conducted by, for example, Jin et al. (2021) and Wang (2022). Both studies focused on Chinese language teachers in the UK and adopted an ecological perspective on wellbeing. In both cases, contextual resources such as support from the institution played a significant role in boosting teacher wellbeing. Moreover, psychological resources and socializing were positively influencing teachers (Jin et al., 2021). However, the stress from the heavy work schedule and cultural adjustment was creating some challenges for teachers threatening their wellbeing (Wang, 2022).

The brief review of the whatever existing literature above reveals that there is very little empirical evidence available to understand transnational English language teachers' emotions. Given that teaching is a stressful profession, with language teachers bearing more stress compared to their counterparts in other fields, and that language teachers working in a foreign context are expected to face additional challenges, understanding the personal and contextual factors that boost or deteriorate the wellbeing of this group of L2 teachers seems imperative. To fill in this gap and add to the gradually growing body of literature on language teacher wellbeing, this study is an attempt to highlight the factors that boost or hinder wellbeing of Iranian EFL teachers working in Türkiye. The following research question is addressed:

What factors boost or deteriorate transnational EFL teachers' wellbeing from an ecological perspective?

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Design

This study employs narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004), which is the umbrella term for studies involving stories (Barkhuizen et al., 2013). Narrative inquiry is understanding teachers' lived experiences by considering their interactions (whether personal or social), the situation (place), and temporality (their past, present, and future). Oral narratives/interviews are a common form of narrative data, with different formats of interviews such as semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are one of the most commonly used qualitative data elicitation tools in language teaching research, which offer additional flexibility as the researcher moves on with the interview protocol and the participants share their life stories (Barkhuizen et al., 2013).

Oral narratives were obtained through semi-structured interviews in this study. Temporality was examined by asking the participants about their past experiences, the current situation, and their future plans. An ecological perspective was adopted while considering interactions and situations (i.e., their workplace, class, students, colleagues, social interactions, and host culture). This ecological perspective to examine teacher wellbeing is consistent with the narrative inquiry as it considers life from situated, temporal dimensions, teachers' dynamic interactions, as well as teachers' personal and professional lives.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, credibility of the findings was checked using member-checking as the participants were given a chance to re-read the transcriptions of the interviews. Furthermore, detailed descriptions of the context, participants, interview protocol, and, finally, the analysis accompanying extracts of interviews (as evidenced below) will enable future researchers to replicate the study in similar conditions, consequently boosting transferability. In addition, two researchers oversaw the process of data collection and data analysis and discussed any conflicting issues to avoid researcher bias (in an attempt to ensure confirmability).

3.2. Participants and context

To recruit participants, an EFL teacher who was teaching in Türkiye (known by one of the researchers) was contacted through Instagram. Then snowball sampling was used to find other participants. As a result, 6 teachers (Female = 3, Male = 3) participated in the study. All the participants were Iranian graduates of English majors (mostly English Literature) and worked at private high schools (called colleges or KOLEJ) in Türkiye. None of the participants had prior teaching experience in contexts other than their homeland (Iran). They also held Azeri as their mother tongue. The demographic details of the participants are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographic information of participants*

	GENDER	AGE	TEACHING EXPERIENCE	YEARS IN TÜRKIYE	MOTHER TONGUE	MARITAL STATUS	DEGREE
Interviewee 1	M	34	10	4-Istanbul	Azeri	Married with a child	BA (English Literature)
Interviewee 2	M	37	14	7-Istanbul	Azeri	Single	BA (English Translation)
Interviewee 3	F	36	14	4- Izmir	Azeri	Married	BA (English Literature)
Interviewee 4	F	35	13	2-Istanbul	Azeri	Single	MA (English Literature)
Interviewee 5	M	36	9	3-Istanbul	Azeri	Married	BA (English Literature)
Interviewee 6	F	34	9	4-Istanbul	Azeri	Single	BA (English Literature)

English is considered a foreign language in Iran as well as in Türkiye. In Iran, English is taught in the public and private sectors. In public schools, English is a compulsory course taken in junior and senior high schools (beginning at grade seven). The syllabus and course content are prescribed for all schools by the Iranian Ministry of Education and two to four hours a week is devoted to teaching English (Sadeghi & Richards, 2016). Minimal achievements in communication skills in English after six years of instruction in this context highlight the problems in course content, curriculum, and planning (Sadeghi & Richards, 2016). To compensate for such inefficiency, most students enrol in private language insti-

tutes, where teachers have an easier route for recruitment (compared to the public sector) but need to try harder to satisfy supervisors and parents to be able to extend their short-term contracts. The books in this sector are unauthorized versions of internationally published general English books and the classes meet twice or three times a week in the afternoons.

In Türkiye, the physical and cultural bridge between Asia and Europe, the language teaching story is different. English is taught in all public and private schools (colleges). Language education begins in grade two. In public schools, books are prescribed by Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı (Turkish Ministry of Education); however, teachers use supplementary materials (usually books written and published nationally) and other available resources during the two hours of language instruction (per week). There are also private schools called colleges (all the participants of the current study teach such private schools), which use similar prescribed books to those in public schools, but those published by Cambridge or Oxford University Press. Classes may meet 10 to 20 hours a week, depending on specific schools' curricula. Apart from private schools where English is taught, there are also private language institutes in Türkiye, with classes held anytime including the evenings (on weekdays or weekends), with no age restrictions (similar to private language institutes in Iran). While some prestigious private language centers prefer to use their own books, others prefer authorized versions of books published by Cambridge or Oxford University Press.

3.3. Data collection

In this study, the data was gathered through online in-depth interviews. In line with the principles of narrative inquiry, the interview protocol focused on teachers' past, present, and future professional lives. First, the teachers introduced themselves, and demographic information (age, teaching experience, educational background, etc.) was collected. Then teachers' professional life was probed into, from how/why they became teachers, to their experiences, and emotions (career trajectory). Next, their current professional and personal lives in Türkiye were discussed, and, finally, questions about their future plans were posed. Sample questions from the three sections of the interview protocol are provided below:

Past:

- ▶ Can you please share your story of how you became an EFL teacher?
- ▶ What have been critical experiences in your language teaching autobiography?

Present:

- ▶ What is the status of EFL teachers in Türkiye?
- ▶ (If you have moved to Türkiye), how integrated into Turkish life do you feel as a foreigner?

Future:

- ▶ What are your goals for the coming years?
- ▶ Are there any things you would like to change in the future (near or distant future)?

Google Meet was used for the interviews, which were recorded with ZD Soft Screen Recorder (version 11.3.1 available at www.zdsoft.com). Interviews took about 34-65 minutes; all were conducted in English (as the participants preferred so) and were transcribed for later analysis.

Before conducting the interviews, participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. They were also informed that the data would only be used for research purposes and that all care would be taken for their identity to remain anonymous. Participants were given numbers instead of their real names (throughout the study), so their anonymity could be protected. All the details about participant rights and the interview process were provided through online consent forms.

3.4. Data analysis

To analyze the data, the interview recordings were listened to meticulously and transcribed. The transcriptions were reviewed several times and the emerging themes were categorized initially into two sections: positive and negative emotions. The commonalities and differences across participants were also identified. Finally, the recurring themes were conceptualized according to the ecological model of teacher wellbeing (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem).

4. RESULTS

The narratives of six teachers showed sources of enjoyment as well as stress. This section provides an overview of the positive and negative affects experienced by teachers that either boost or deteriorate their wellbeing from an ecological perspective.

4.1. Rewarding experiences of transnational EFL teachers

Concerning the sources of positivity, all participants emphasized their *harmonious relationships* with learners and colleagues. They also mentioned positive relationships with friends and acquaintances which generated positivity. The complex relationship between an individual and the people in his/her immediate environment and the influence it exerts on individuals are part of a microsystem ecology (within which the most powerful interactions happen). The participants' satisfaction with these relationships originated from the *respect* society showed for teachers. Such cultural values are well-defined in Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem and are an indispensable part of human development. The following excerpts from interviews clearly tell the story:

Excerpt 1: *I have a really good relationship with my learners. You know, teachers are really respected here. They call us "Hocam" which means 'my master'. From children to adults, all respect teachers a lot.*

Excerpt 2: *Everybody as well as students and also the government respect teachers in Türkiye, but in Iran it wasn't like that.*

In describing the joy of teaching English in Türkiye, the teachers highlighted the highly respectful status of teachers in society. The support they gained from school staff, parents, adults, and even neighbours significantly contributed to teacher wellbeing. Interviewee 6, for example, highlighted the cheerful moments of singing and partying with colleagues after school and how happy she noticed the culture to be, underscoring the importance of macrosystems (such activities are prohibited in the Iranian culture, and teachers involved in such entertainment will immediately lose their jobs), and signifying the close relationships between colleagues in schools.

When asked about *workload*, all the participants were satisfied with their teaching load (compared to the situation they faced in their homeland). As school hours were from 9 am to 4 pm, teachers were free for the rest of the day and they could decide to work extra hours or just enjoy their time. Only Interviewee 1, who was a married man and had a child, decided to work long hours in the evenings; even in this case, he felt a balance between his work and life as he had free weekends. Inquired about workload, a female participant replied:

Excerpt 3: I think it is well-balanced. I have 6 classes a day, which are nearly 40 minutes each. Then the rest of the time is mine: I can cook healthy food, speak with my husband and his family [being married to a Turkish man], or go out and have fun. Our teaching hours are really perfect for women.

As an extension of mesosystem, exosystem composes specific social structures such as the workplace and the influence it poses on individuals. Payments and consequently workload can be considered a part of this exosystem that influences teacher wellbeing to a great extent. When asked about the reasons for migration, all the participants, except Interviewee 3, mentioned financial issues. They maintained that teaching was not a well-paid job in Iran and they could not afford life with the payments they received in their homeland. However, Interviewee 3 said that as she was living with her parents in Iran, she did not have any financial problems and she wanted to take risks and go on an adventure. With respect to their *salary* in Türkiye, the participants considered it satisfactory; however, while the 3 female participants decided to enjoy themselves in their free afternoons (school finished at 4 pm), their male counterparts devoted some more time to work in the institute (interviewees 1 and 5) or have online tutoring (Interviewee 2) to earn a bit more.

Following this, the teachers were asked about cultural adjustments that they needed to make. Being an essential part of macrosystems and the blueprints in a community, cultural values exist implicitly in the minds of individuals in the form of customs or ideologies that influence people. No cultural *shocks/adjustments* were identified among participants and their cultural integration was smooth. One participant was even surprised that he could blend so easily with the new culture and not feel like a foreigner (Interviewee 2). Interviewee 4, however, shared some stories of strange feelings but she did not refer to them as a cultural shock. She told us about her first month of residence in Türkiye when people possibly regarded her as inferior, but once they found out she was possibly smarter, had a higher qualification, and was similar to them, relationships improved to a great extent. She also talked about different cultures of the younger generation, especially regarding greetings, which she somehow considered “odd”. The way teens greet adults was also mentioned by Interviewee 6. Although strange, the participants had noticed such behavior in their hometown as well and thus did not regard it as a cultural shock.

Excerpt 4: *Sometimes they don't even say 'hi', or don't show respect to others. In the class, when they are late, they just go and sit at their desk, without even looking at others or greeting them. I feel the younger generation is kind of rude compared to our generation. It is somehow similar to young people in my country; they don't care about such things.*

Considering their *future plans*, when asked about areas that teachers needed to improve and their future plans, no teacher saw the need to improve their current teaching/language skills as they considered learners' proficiency levels less advanced compared to Iranian learners. Interviewee 6, for example, mentioned: "Working in these high schools makes us lazy; we don't need to improve". This is justifiable as studies such as Işıklı and Tarakçıoğlu, (2017) found that 80% of the students in Turkish high schools were at A2 (beginner) proficiency level, which is much lower than the target of the national curriculum. That is, more than half of the students' proficiency levels were reported to be lower than expected.

However, when reflecting on their future plans, ALL teachers were inspired to advance their professional skills. They felt like having enough time and resources to devote to their development. While some teachers were planning to teach at the tertiary level after completing their postgraduate studies, others thought of teaching IELTS/TOEFL preparation courses, producing interactional learning content packages, or founding language centers:

Excerpt 5: *I plan to move to the USA, and there I want to study for my Master's.*

Excerpt 6: *You know; I have some skills in using computers. I want to combine technology and teaching and create interactional-teaching packages. It is going to be something different and unique. I want to make a lot of money.*

4.2. Challenging experiences of transnational EFL teachers

Investigating the challenges of teaching abroad, we found that teachers had adapted themselves well to the culture. When asked about being homesick, only one participant seemed to be severely missing home. Interviewee 3 who had been living in Türkiye for 4 years, and married a Turkish guy, did not have a chance to meet her dear ones for 3 years. Pandemic-related issues did not allow her family to visit her at her wedding ceremony in Türkiye; and later because she was planning to apply for a USA visa, she avoided traveling back home to prevent visa rejection. Indeed, the experience of marriage during the pandemic was an example of a chronosystem influencing the individual. The following excerpt illustrates this point:

Excerpt 7: *I can cry for this question [to what extent do you feel homesick?]. I miss my family and friends. They couldn't even attend my wedding party. I even miss our food. You can't compare Iranian food with others.*

Other participants mentioned occasional feelings of being homesick and missing close family members, feelings that could easily be tolerated by a visit to their homeland or video-calling. No participant wished to return to their own country or missed the atmosphere.

Two other stressors were found in relation to the macrosystem. One participant mentioned the stress related to extending their working visa. Work permit in Türkiye is normally

given for a period of one year and an individual needs to leave the country when the permit expires; however, if the person continues to stay in the country without such a permit, they will have to be deported, and returning to the country will be very difficult (Büro, 2022).

Excerpt 8: Nowadays because of new policies things have changed. I have to renew my visa in August, and if I can't, I have to leave Türkiye in 10 days. It wasn't like this till last year. For this, I need to get a good score on YDS [Foreign Language Examination] exam, it is a difficult exam, and I know I can do it, but it sometimes makes me stressed.

One participant also highlighted the negative impact of inflation on everybody's well-being. This is understandable as the inflation rate of Türkiye in 2022 was reported to be 72.3% by the World Bank, with even higher rates in 2023, especially after the May 2023 presidential elections, whereas the same source reported inflation in Iran as being 43.4% (recent data in 2021) (World Bank Open Data, n.d.)

Excerpt 9: Well, the most important thing which creates stress in me is the inflation rate. When the price of the Dollar goes up, everything in Türkiye becomes expensive; so in this aspect, Türkiye is not a good place. And this inflation will affect everything like transportation, rents, gas bills, and so on.

5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed at shedding light on elements boosting/detracting from transnational EFL teacher wellbeing from an ecological perspective. Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that development is the product of the interaction of humans and the environment, and this development involves a change over a course of time, in which various systems/ecologies are involved (Härkönen, 2007). Our findings revealed the interrelationship of such ecologies, confirming the findings of Hofstadler et al. (2021). As the analysis of the data indicated, and considering the influence of various ecologies, there were more positive emotions than challenges experienced by Iranian EFL teachers in Türkiye. Possibly, the most important factor enhancing teacher wellbeing in the context of the study was the microsystem (the closest environment of the individual) and consequently, the macrosystem associated with teacher status and respect, leading to constructive relationships with colleagues, students, and the community. Such quality relationships are reported to boost teacher wellbeing substantially (Harding et al., 2019; Hofstadler et al., 2021). These bi-directional interactions are the most powerful ones in Bronfenbrenner's microsystem. Being called "Hocam" was interpreted as a highly-respected position, making teachers proud of their profession. Not only students but also other members of the society, school staff, colleagues, and even university professors call teachers "Hocam". These honorifics boost teacher wellbeing substantially and are implicitly enveloped in communities' ideologies. Therefore, it can be concluded that the participants had found meaning and connection in the world, which is the backbone of wellbeing (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). This is in contrast with the findings of Jin et al. (2021), in which Chinese language teachers in the UK did not find the expected respect that they have been accustomed to. Iranian teachers do not enjoy such status in the Iranian setting either (Pourbahram & Sadeghi, 2022).

The next wellbeing booster was related to the exosystem and the balance between life and work due to satisfactory payments and teaching schedules at schools (although salaries are not very high in Türkiye, teachers in our study were satisfied as they compared payments to their counterparts in Iran). This balance provided teachers with the time to reflect, develop professionally, relieve stress, and socialise. The relationship between income satisfaction and teacher wellbeing has previously been highlighted by Song et al. (2020). Unlike their counterparts residing in Iran (Pourbahram & Sadeghi, 2022), the participants in this study did not suffer from heavy workloads and considered themselves much happier compared to the time they were teaching in Iran. It seemed that these migrating teachers had found the space where they could flourish (they could devote enough time for their growth and entertainment). Unfortunately, many similar studies report heavy teacher workload experienced by teachers (Gillespie et al., 2001; Jin et al., 2021; Mairitsch et al., 2021; Shin et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2021), which is a serious threat to teacher wellbeing.

To our surprise, the cultural shock did not function as an obstacle impeding teacher wellbeing. Having background information about Turkish culture, knowing the Turkish language before migrating (to some extent at least), and the similarities between Turkish and Iranian cultures/traditions possibly assisted these teachers in easier integration into the new culture. However, it should be noted that all the participants of this study spoke Azeri as their mother tongue (and they resided in Azeri-speaking cities in Iran); and given numerous commonalities between Azeri and the Turkish language spoken in Türkiye, integration into the new culture was as easy as moving “from one city into another in Iran”. Turkish language is found to be 56% intelligible to Azeri-speaking people in Iran, which is because of the lexical and structural similarities between the two languages (Salehi & Neysani, 2017). In other words, cultural values embedded in the macrosystem ecology worked in the favor of our participants. In the words of Härkönen (2007, p. 12), “The macrosystem can be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture, or other broader social context”. However, cultural shock could be a severe problem when the home and the host countries do not have much in common. For instance, Chinese language teachers in the UK had a difficult time adapting to the new circumstances, relationship patterns, and social contact (Jin et al., 2021). Such difficulties in adjusting to the new culture have been reported to be challenging for transnational teachers in a study by Greenier and Connor (in press) as well. In other words, people with different language backgrounds (i.e., from Persian-speaking cities in Iran) could experience different feelings due to the language barrier. Considering that over 2.5 million Iranians could visit Türkiye in 2023 according to the Hotel Association of Türkiye (Association - Türkiye News, 2022b), it can be concluded that Iranians develop a good knowledge of Turkish culture and admire it as well.

Enjoying satisfactory wellbeing levels in Türkiye, the teachers’ optimism and positive prospects toward the future sparked hope of progress in the profession, from continuing their higher education to teaching at more advanced levels, which can be another indicator of favorable wellbeing status. This is in accordance with the findings that wellbeing is a strong predictor of work engagement (Greenier, et al. 2021). Satisfactory wellbeing level is also an indicator of higher teacher motivation and contributes to teacher progress. Indeed, teachers’ wellbeing can be observed in their mood and motivation (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Such optimism and positive perspective toward one’s future have also been highlighted

by transnational teachers in Greenier and Connor's (in press) study, where educators engaged in meaningful interactions and found purpose in their lives, indicating high wellbeing levels.

A limited number of stressors were revealed in the study. As an example, homesickness was likely to erode wellbeing. This feeling originated mainly from specific events during the pandemic that could be explained in the ecology of chronosystems. This ecology can cover short or longer periods. Although the specific circumstances that one of our participants experienced could be possibly changed in a few months, homesickness can sometimes be considered an illness, and if not treated, can have potentially damaging impacts (Hack-Polay, 2012). Two other stressors exacerbating teacher wellbeing in relation to the macrosystem were inflation in the country and problems associated with extending work permits. While only two participants mentioned these general stressors, such issues could be experienced by other immigrants as well and are not limited to EFL teachers. Although part of the problem with extending a work visa could be handled by timely planning either by the teacher or his/her organisation, an issue such as inflation is not under the direct control of individuals or their institutions. The silver lining from positive psychology can be deployed in such situations when the individual volunteers to take steps to alleviate their stress (Gregersen, et al., 2020). As an emotion regulation strategy, finding the silver lining, which is noticing the positive aspect of a challenge/problem, can be effective in dealing with the stress that is not under the direct control of an individual, such as inflation. However, depending on the context, severity/intensity of the stressors, and nature of the stressor, various emotion techniques could be employed. In this respect, the importance of having access to professional development resources in providing support to teachers in mitigating the influence of challenges should not be ignored (Barbieri et al., 2019; Hapsari, 2020; Jin et al., 2021; Wang & Chen, 2022).

6. CONCLUSION

The current study is one of the rare attempts in the literature to unravel transnational EFL teachers' wellbeing. The research highlighted the influence of different ecologies on teachers' wellbeing especially microsystems (e.g., relationships), macrosystems (e.g., cultural values, government regulations), and exosystems (e.g., workplace). The work reported here outlined more positive emotions than challenges faced by transnational EFL teachers in Türkiye, a promising finding in ELT ecology. The study, however, suffers from some limitations. One such limitation is that the participants of our study all came from Azeri-speaking cities in Iran, having commonalities with the Turkish language and culture, so it behoves researchers to consider groups of teachers with different backgrounds as differences in the cultures of host and home countries can bear different results. Moreover, considering the number of participants and the sampling technique used in this study, a broader sampling of the participants that could involve teachers working in different Turkish cities and other countries can yield more credible findings. In addition, the participants fall within a narrow age range (34 -37) and mainly completed a BA in English literature, which might lead to a lack of diverse perspectives and experiences. Including more junior or senior teachers, as well as those with previous experiences in international settings, could offer more valuable insights and enrich the study's findings. Furthermore, as the data from Interviewee 1, who

was the breadwinner of the family, was slightly different from others, it is suggested that further studies investigate difference in wellbeing status of single versus married teachers, as it seems that financial issues could be of more concern to those who need to support their families. Last but not least, longitudinal studies are needed to consider the fluctuation in expatriate teachers' wellbeing, while also taking account of the wellbeing of other stakeholders such as learners, administrators, etc.

The study has implications for policy-makers in both countries (Iran and Türkiye) as well as elsewhere in that providing better facilities to boost teacher wellbeing can help advance education and influence wellbeing of learners and consequently the whole community. In other words, wellbeing of teachers spreads to learners, influencing their mood, motivation, and wellbeing (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020); and consequently, it transfers to the whole society. Moreover, as the main motivation for teachers' migration in this study was economic and relevant ecologies in the workplace (macrosystem), the warning bell is already ringing for the educational system in Iran because if quick actions are not taken to boost teacher wellbeing, the system will face more serious problems in finding quality teachers (who are leaving the country or quitting the profession primarily due to financial problems) as staff turnover is on the rise. Moreover, cultural values as part of macrosystem ecology can potentially influence people to a great extent. Not only did our participants not observe a destructive competition among colleagues in the Turkish school (unlike the Iranian context), which led to positive relationships, they were also satisfied with the way people treated each other in the community, not interfering with personal issues (such as the way they dressed). Furthermore, techniques such as the silver lining intervention from positive psychology need to be incorporated into teacher training courses to equip teachers to deal with the influence of stressors that are not controlled by individuals (like inflation). Researchers also recommend having easy access to psychological counselling experts at schools or mental health/wellbeing officers (Greenier & Connor, in press), especially for transnational teachers who may need to cope with novel challenges in the host culture or feelings of homesickness. Schools and institutions worldwide can also devise wellbeing plans for their staff including teachers, similar to higher education institutions in the UK (ibid). Last but not least, professional development courses should be promoted to help offer solutions to a plethora of teacher problems and assist them in flourishing.

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