

Understanding Iranian EFL Teachers' Well-Being through Contributing Factors, Personal Perceptions, and Coping Strategies

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Abstract

This study explored the factors influencing the well-being of Iranian English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. It sought to develop a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their professional and personal satisfaction by examining the main contributors to well-being, teachers' perceptions of it, and the strategies they used to maintain or enhance it. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 EFL teachers from diverse educational settings across Iran and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings showed that teacher well-being was a complex and multidimensional experience shaped by supportive work environments, opportunities for professional growth, personal coping strategies, and broader social and cultural contexts. Teachers highlighted emotional satisfaction, developing professional identity, meaningful engagement, and work–life balance as central to well-being. Challenges such as workload pressure, emotional labor, and insufficient institutional support negatively affected teachers' well-being, whereas coping strategies such as mindfulness, humor, collegial support, and time management helped them maintain and improve their well-being.

Keywords: Coping Strategies, Iranian EFL teachers, Professional Development, Well-being, Work-life Balance,

1 Introduction

The well-being of teachers had emerged as a critical area of inquiry within educational research because of its implications for teacher retention, instructional quality, and student outcomes (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Borman & Dowling, 2008). EFL teachers in Iran had faced particular professional and personal challenges, as sociocultural, institutional, and policy-related factors had shaped their professional experiences (Nazari & Xodabande, 2022; Aliakbari, 2004). Teacher well-being had included life satisfaction, emotional balance, and a sense of meaning and purpose (Diener & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). It had also been influenced by the interaction of individual, relational, and systemic factors (Sulis et al., 2023; MacIntyre et al., 2020), including occupational self-efficacy, job satisfaction, professional identity, and classroom-related emotional demands (Chamani et al., 2023; Greenier et al., 2021; Talbot & Mercer, 2018). In Iran, high-stakes examinations, changing curricular requirements, and evolving language policies had added further complexity to teachers' professional lives (Nazari et al., 2021; Aliakbari, 2004).

Previous studies had emphasized the importance of positive psychology constructs, including resilience, hope, and emotion regulation, in promoting teacher well-being and reducing burnout and attrition (Derakhshan et al., 2022; Gregersen et al., 2023; MacIntyre et al., 2019). For Iranian EFL teachers, personal resources and contextual support had influenced their ability to manage stress, maintain motivation, and find meaning in their work (Chamani et al., 2023; Greenier et al., 2021). Psychological well-being, foreign language teaching enjoyment, and work engagement had also been associated with stronger teacher–class relationships (Hasankiadeh et al., 2025). Occupational self-efficacy had been linked to job satisfaction and subjective well-being (Chamani et al., 2023), while loving pedagogy had been found to foster teachers’ well-being and psychological flourishing (Enferad et al., 2026). However, these studies had mainly examined individual psychological factors and had provided limited insight into how Iranian EFL teachers had experienced well-being within their everyday professional contexts.

An ecological perspective had provided a suitable framework for addressing this limitation because it had conceptualized teacher well-being as the product of dynamic interactions between teachers and their professional environments (Hofstadler et al., 2021; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). From this perspective, collegial relationships, leadership support, school climate, and professional development opportunities had shaped teachers’ emotional experiences and sense of belonging (Cherkowski et al., 2018; Collie et al., 2015; Chamani et al., 2023; Nazari & Xodabande, 2022). The emotional labor of language teaching, including classroom management, responding to learners’ needs, and coping with assessment pressures, had also affected teachers’ well-being (Gregarson et al., 2023; Leiter & Maslach, 1999). Although emotion regulation and professional identity had helped teachers manage these demands, their effectiveness had also depended on institutional expectations, available resources, leadership practices, and collegial support (Greenier et al., 2021; Talbot & Mercer, 2018). Thus, teachers’ well-being had been viewed in this study as an interconnected phenomenon shaped by personal, relational, institutional, classroom, and sociocultural conditions.

While research on Iranian EFL teachers’ well-being had begun to grow, it had still remained relatively limited and fragmented. Existing studies had examined Iranian teachers’ wellbeing across career stages and had shown that teaching experience was associated with differences in wellbeing among novice, experienced, and highly experienced teachers (Ashegh Navaie et al., 2024). Other work had also indicated that psychological well-being was an important predictor of professional development among Iranian EFL teachers, and that it functioned more strongly than resilience in explaining professional growth (Sattari Qahfarrokhi et al., 2024). However, previous research had still focused mainly on isolated constructs such as psychological well-being, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and professional identity, and had not sufficiently explained how these factors interacted with relational, institutional, classroom, sociocultural, and policy-related conditions. Moreover, most studies had relied on quantitative or cross-sectional designs, and few had examined teachers’ lived experiences concerning their well-being through qualitative, context-sensitive approaches. The limited integration of interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals had also left unclear how teachers’ perceptions of well-being related to their professional practices and reflections.

To address these gaps, the present study had used a qualitative, multi-source design guided by an ecological perspective. It had examined how personal resources, professional relationships, institutional conditions, classroom experiences, and broader contextual pressures had interacted to

shape Iranian EFL teachers' well-being. By combining interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals, the study had provided a more context-sensitive account of teachers' lived experiences of well-being.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Background of the Study

The well-being of teachers, particularly those teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Iran, has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct shaped by personal, professional, and contextual factors. Earlier perspectives primarily defined well-being in hedonic terms, emphasizing happiness and life satisfaction (Diener & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Later approaches expanded this view by incorporating eudaimonic dimensions, including psychological functioning, meaning, personal growth, and flourishing (Seligman, 2011; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

In educational research, teacher well-being has been associated with workload, autonomy, emotional regulation, institutional support, teacher engagement, retention, and instructional effectiveness (Gregersen et al., 2023; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Recent studies have also emphasized that teacher well-being is dynamic and context-dependent, particularly in non-Western settings where cultural, institutional, and policy-related conditions influence teachers' professional experiences (Nazari & Xodabande, 2022; Aliakbari, 2004).

Accordingly, this study was guided by an ecological perspective, which conceptualized teacher well-being as a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon emerging from interactions between teachers' personal resources and the multiple environments in which they worked. This perspective provided an analytical framework for examining how individual, relational, institutional, classroom-related, sociocultural, and policy-related factors jointly shaped by the well-being of Iranian EFL teachers.

2.2 Conceptualizing Well-Being

Well-being has been defined through several complementary perspectives. At a general level, it refers to a state of flourishing that includes positive emotions, life satisfaction, purpose, and meaning (Diener & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Subjective well-being (SWB) focuses on individuals' cognitive and emotional evaluations of their lives, including life satisfaction and positive or negative emotions (Diener & Ryan, 2009; Diener et al., 1999). Among teachers, subjective well-being has been associated with job satisfaction, positive emotions, and the perceived meaningfulness of work (Chamani et al., 2023). It has also been linked to teacher resilience, engagement, retention, and professional effectiveness (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Borman & Dowling, 2008). Psychological well-being extends beyond temporary happiness and includes deeper aspects of human functioning. Ryff and Keyes (1995) identified self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth as its main dimensions. In the teaching profession, these dimensions may be reflected in teachers' professional identity, occupational self-efficacy, meaningful relationships, and opportunities for professional growth (Greenier et al., 2021; Talbot & Mercer, 2018).

Holistic approaches integrate subjective and psychological dimensions and view well-being as a dynamic balance between personal resources and life challenges (Dodge et al., 2015). This approach

is consistent with ecological models that emphasize the interaction of personal, relational, and systemic factors (Hofstadler et al., 2021; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). In educational settings, teacher well-being therefore includes emotional, social, physical, and professional dimensions shaped by both internal dispositions and external environments (Cherkowski et al., 2018; Collie et al., 2015).

Research in language education has further demonstrated that teacher well-being changes across situations and career stages. Gregersen et al. (2023) highlighted daily fluctuations caused by professional stressors and positive experiences, while Sulis et al. (2023) emphasized changes in teachers' well-being and available resources across the career span.

Overall, the literature suggested that well-being should not be treated as a fixed or one-dimensional construct. For Iranian EFL teachers, it was better understood as a context-sensitive process involving satisfaction, meaning, psychological growth, resilience, and the balance between professional demands and available resources (Chamani et al., 2023; Nazari & Xodabande, 2022).

2.3 Teacher Well-Being

Teacher well-being has been recognized as an important factor in the sustainability and effectiveness of educational systems. It affects teachers' personal health and satisfaction as well as their retention, instructional quality, and students' educational experiences (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Poor well-being, particularly when associated with stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction, may increase teachers' intentions to leave the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Leiter & Maslach, 1999). Supportive school environments may reduce turnover and help retain skilled teachers. This issue is especially important in language education, where high workloads, emotional labor, and changing policy demands may increase professional pressure (Chamani et al., 2023; Gregersen et al., 2023).

Teacher well-being is also related to instructional quality. Teachers with higher levels of well-being are more likely to demonstrate enthusiasm, creativity, engagement, and professional efficacy (Greenier et al., 2021; Talbot & Mercer, 2018). They may also manage classroom dynamics more effectively, respond to students' needs, and use innovative teaching strategies. In contrast, stress and emotional exhaustion may reduce classroom-management skills, instructional clarity, and teaching quality (Harris & Sass, 2011; Leiter & Maslach, 1999). Emotional regulation and psychological well-being have also been identified as important predictors of teachers' work engagement and professional efficacy (Greenier et al., 2021; Gregersen et al., 2023).

Teacher well-being may further influence student outcomes. Teachers with higher well-being may contribute to students' academic achievement, motivation, classroom engagement, and positive attitudes toward learning (Collie et al., 2015; Harris & Sass, 2011). A positive classroom climate may also reduce behavioral problems and encourage student participation (Cherkowski et al., 2018; Collie et al., 2015). Emotionally healthy teachers can serve as models of resilience and adaptive coping (Greenier et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2021). This is particularly relevant to language learning, where teachers' emotional states may influence learners' willingness to communicate and take risks in the target language (Gregarson et al., 2023).

At the systemic level, teacher well-being has implications for educational organizations and policymaking. Professional development, mentoring, supportive leadership, and positive school climates may enhance teacher well-being and consequently improve retention, instruction, and student success (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Cherkowski et al., 2018; Collie et al., 2015).

These findings indicated that teacher well-being was not merely an individual concern. It was connected to the quality of classroom instruction, teacher retention, student outcomes, and the broader functioning of educational systems.

2.4 Contextual and Dynamic Factors Affecting Iranian EFL Teachers' Well-Being

Unlike prior studies that often examined teacher well-being factors in isolation through broad cross-sectional surveys, language teacher well-being in this context was understood as being dynamically shaped by the interaction of personal, professional, and contextual factors. Workload, autonomy, job satisfaction, emotional regulation, and personal psychological resources may support or undermine teachers' professional fulfillment. Stress and burnout may emerge when professional demands exceed available personal and institutional resources (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Kyriacou, 2001; Leiter & Maslach, 1999).

Workload has been identified as a major determinant of teacher well-being. Long working hours, administrative responsibilities, large classes, and excessive demands may increase stress and reduce job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Collie et al., 2015). Language teachers may also experience curriculum-adaptation demands, assessment responsibilities, and pressure to address diverse learner needs (Gregersen et al., 2023; Burkhauser & Lesaux, 2017). When workload exceeds teachers' perceived capacity, it may lead to chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced professional efficacy (Leiter & Maslach, 1999).

Autonomy refers to teachers' perceived control over instructional decisions and classroom management. Higher levels of autonomy have been associated with greater job satisfaction, motivation, and psychological health (Burkhauser & Lesaux, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Conversely, centralized educational systems and rigid curricular mandates may restrict teachers' agency and contribute to frustration and disengagement (Nazari & Xodabande, 2022). Teacher autonomy may also promote innovative teaching practices and professional growth (Talbot & Mercer, 2018).

Job satisfaction is both a component and a predictor of teacher well-being. It involves teachers' evaluations of their work environment, relationships with colleagues and students, recognition, and opportunities for professional development (Chamani et al., 2023; Collie et al., 2015). Satisfied teachers are more likely to remain in the profession, demonstrate commitment, and maintain work engagement (Borman & Dowling, 2008). In contrast, low job satisfaction has been associated with turnover intentions, absenteeism, and reduced instructional quality (Nazari & Alizadeh Oghyanous, 2021).

Emotional regulation refers to the strategies teachers use to manage their emotions in challenging professional situations. It supports classroom management, positive relationships, and professional engagement (Greenier et al., 2021; Gross, 2015). Teachers with stronger emotional-regulation skills may cope more effectively with student behavior, diverse learner needs, and competing professional and personal demands (Gregersen et al., 2023; Talbot & Mercer, 2018).

Emotional regulation has therefore been associated with lower stress and burnout and with higher work engagement and psychological well-being (Greenier et al., 2021).

Personal psychological resources, including grit and a growth mindset, may also contribute to teacher well-being. Fathi and Soleimani (2025) investigated these constructs among 375 Iranian EFL teachers and found that teachers with stronger persistence and beliefs in personal growth reported higher levels of well-being. Their findings suggested that teacher well-being was influenced not only by external working conditions but also by teachers' attitudes toward professional setbacks and their ability to maintain cognitive resilience.

Burnout and stress are common risks when workload, autonomy, job satisfaction, emotional regulation, and institutional support are inadequate. Burnout includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). Unmanaged stress may negatively affect teachers' mental and physical health, increase absenteeism, and strengthen intentions to leave the profession (Nazari et al., 2021; Kyriacou, 2001). Language teachers, including those in Iran, may be particularly vulnerable because of the emotional demands of teaching and the high expectations placed on them (Chamani et al., 2023; Gregersen et al., 2023).

The literature therefore suggested that these factors should not be examined independently. Their effects on teacher well-being may depend on the extent to which teachers' personal resources are supported or constrained by their workload, institutional conditions, leadership, and professional relationships (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Leiter & Maslach, 1999).

2.5 Related Empirical Studies

Empirical research examined teacher well-being from individual, emotional, relational, institutional, and ecological perspectives. Although the studies differed in design and context, their findings converged on the view that teacher well-being could not be adequately explained by personal characteristics alone. Rather, it emerged through the interaction between teachers' psychological resources, professional relationships, institutional conditions, classroom demands, and broader sociocultural contexts.

At the individual level, occupational self-efficacy, meaning at work, grit, emotion regulation, and psychological well-being were consistently associated with more positive professional outcomes. Chamani et al. (2023) found significant positive relationships between subjective well-being and occupational self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and meaning at work among 120 Iranian EFL teachers. Occupational self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of subjective well-being, although its association with job satisfaction and meaning at work also suggested that personal resources were connected to teachers' professional experiences. Similarly, Greenier et al. (2021), using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design with 108 British and 255 Iranian English language teachers, found that emotion regulation and psychological well-being significantly predicted work engagement, with psychological well-being showing the stronger effect. The cross-cultural differences reported in that study further indicated that the contribution of emotional resources to professional functioning was shaped by educational and cultural contexts rather than operating identically across settings.

The role of career experience provided further evidence that individual resources developed within professional trajectories. Sulis et al. (2023) reported that early-career teachers experienced greater stress, whereas mid- and late-career teachers demonstrated greater resilience. In a similar vein,

Nazari and Alizadeh Oghyanous (2021) found that more experienced L2 teachers reported lower occupational stress and turnover intentions and higher psychological well-being and grit. Taken together, these findings suggested that experience could support the development of coping strategies and resilience; however, it should not be regarded as an independent protective factor. Its effects appeared to depend partly on the availability of institutional support, mentorship, professional development, and opportunities for participation in professional communities, particularly during the early stages of teachers' careers.

The connection between personal resources and working conditions was made more explicit in qualitative and ecological studies. Drawing on self-determination theory and interviews with Iranian EFL teachers, Nazari and Xodabande (2022) showed that autonomy, competence, and relatedness shaped both professional identity and well-being. Their findings indicated that the satisfaction of psychological needs depended partly on institutional support, professional growth, and opportunities for autonomous decision-making. Similarly, Mercer and Gregersen (2020) found that institutional policies, collegial relationships, and personal coping strategies interacted to influence language teacher well-being in the private sector. These findings challenged approaches that placed responsibility for well-being solely on individual teachers and instead supported interventions at both individual and systemic levels.

Other studies further demonstrated that supportive organizational environments could strengthen teachers' personal resources. Cherkowski et al. (2018) showed that structural support, flexibility, collaboration, community, and adaptive leadership enabled teachers to flourish under challenging conditions. Talbot and Mercer (2018), based on 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews with ESL/EFL teachers in the United States, Japan, and Austria, likewise found that emotional well-being was shaped by the interaction of professional challenges, personal and professional sources of well-being, and emotion-regulation strategies. Informed by Positive Organizational Scholarship (Spreitzer & Cameron, 2012), their study showed that teachers' emotional well-being was influenced not only by personal coping abilities but also by the professional relationships and organizational conditions in which teachers worked. Thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework enabled the researchers to examine these experiences as interconnected rather than isolated factors.

The broader school environment also appeared to influence the relationship between personal resources and professional well-being. Collie et al. (2015) found that positive school climate and effective social-emotional learning practices were associated with lower teacher stress, greater job satisfaction, and higher teaching efficacy. Considered alongside Mercer and Gregersen's (2020) and Cherkowski et al.'s (2018) findings, these results suggested that collegial support, leadership, collaboration, and institutional climate could mediate or strengthen the effects of teachers' individual resources. Thus, teacher well-being appeared to be supported when personal capacities were accompanied by enabling relational and organizational conditions.

The literature also highlighted the dynamic nature of teacher well-being across time and situations. Gregersen et al. (2023), using surveys, experience sampling, the PERMA Profiler, personality measures, and chronic-stressor questionnaires, examined six case studies drawn from a larger sample of 47 teachers. Their findings revealed dynamic relationships among daily stress, chronic stressors, well-being, health, and the spillover of workplace stress into home life. These

findings indicated that well-being fluctuated across situations and that professional experiences could affect teachers' personal lives. Consistent with this view, Hascher and Waber's (2021) systematic review of research published between 2000 and 2019 emphasized the multidimensional character of teacher well-being and the combined contribution of personal and contextual factors. Their call for further research in non-Western contexts, particularly through longitudinal and intervention-based designs, also demonstrated that existing research had not sufficiently captured how well-being developed over time or how it was experienced within specific cultural and educational settings.

Overall, the empirical literature revealed three interrelated patterns. First, personal resources such as self-efficacy, grit, emotion regulation, and psychological well-being were associated with more positive professional outcomes. Second, these resources were developed, maintained, or constrained through relational and institutional conditions, including autonomy, collegial support, school climate, leadership, and professional development. Third, teacher well-being was dynamic and varied across career stages, daily situations, classroom experiences, and professional and personal environments. The findings therefore supported an ecological understanding in which well-being resulted from the continuous interaction among individual resources, workplace relationships, institutional structures, classroom demands, and broader sociocultural expectations.

Despite these contributions, important gaps remained in research on Iranian EFL teachers. Existing studies had often examined selected predictors separately, relied on quantitative or cross-sectional designs, or focused on general levels of well-being rather than on teachers' lived experiences. Even when qualitative approaches were adopted, the interaction among personal resources, institutional policies, classroom demands, professional relationships, and sociocultural expectations was not examined systematically within the same study. This limitation was particularly significant in Iran, where teachers' well-being could be shaped by centralized educational policies, limited institutional resources, cultural expectations, and the distinctive demands of English language teaching (Nazari & Xodabande, 2022; Hascher & Waber, 2021; Nazari et al., 2021; Aliakbari, 2004). Consequently, the existing literature had not sufficiently explained how Iranian EFL teachers experienced and negotiated well-being across interconnected individual, relational, classroom, institutional, and sociocultural levels.

Moreover, qualitative evidence concerning Iranian EFL teachers' lived experiences and coping strategies remained limited (Chamani et al., 2023). In particular, few studies had combined interviews, classroom observations, and teacher-authored reflective journals within a single ecological inquiry. In the present study, interviews were used to examine teachers' reported perceptions, emotions, interpretations, and coping strategies; classroom observations were used to explore how their well-being was reflected in classroom interaction and professional practice; and reflective journals written by the participating teachers were used to capture their ongoing experiences, reactions, and interpretations over time. Examining these sources in relation to one another made it possible to compare what teachers reported, how they acted in classroom settings, and how they reflected on their experiences.

The present study therefore addressed this gap through a qualitative, multi-source inquiry guided by an ecological perspective. By integrating interviews, classroom observations, and teacher-authored reflective journals, it examined how Iranian EFL teachers experienced, interpreted, and managed their well-being across individual, relational, classroom, institutional, and sociocultural

levels. This design provided a more context-sensitive account of teacher well-being and clarified how personal resources were shaped by, and responded to, the environments in which teachers worked.

3 Research Questions

This study explored the multifaceted nature of Iranian EFL teachers' well-being by examining the interaction between personal resources, professional challenges, and institutional conditions, including leadership and resource availability. It specifically focused on how teachers' well-being was shaped across individual, relational, classroom, and institutional levels. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What were the key factors that contributed to the overall well-being of Iranian EFL teachers?
2. How did Iranian EFL teachers perceive and describe their professional and personal well-being?
3. What strategies or practices did Iranian EFL teachers employ to maintain or improve their well-being?

4 Method

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design rooted in an interpretivist paradigm to explore the subjective experiences and contextual factors shaping the well-being of Iranian EFL teachers (Poth, 2018). This methodological framework was selected to capture the nuanced, multidimensional, and context-dependent nature of teacher well-being, which quantitative methods may overlook. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and teacher-authored reflective journals. These complementary data sources provided detailed personal narratives, contextual evidence of teachers' professional practices and interactions, and ongoing reflections on their emotional experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and sources of support. The data were subsequently analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework to identify and interpret recurring patterns across the three sources. Ultimately, this qualitative approach facilitated a holistic understanding of the participants' lived realities and provided rich insights into the institutional, social, and personal dynamics that promoted or hindered their well-being.

4.2 Participants

The study involved 20 Iranian EFL teachers working in diverse educational settings, including public schools, private language institutes, and language academies. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals capable of providing rich, relevant, and varied insights into the factors affecting teacher well-being (Palinkas et al., 2015). The inclusion criteria required at least two years of EFL teaching experience in Iran, representation across different genders and age groups, and experience in a range of teaching contexts.

In addition, participants had to be willing to openly share their personal and professional experiences related to well-being. The recruitment process was designed to maximize diversity in demographic characteristics and instructional settings so as to capture a broad range of perspectives. Sample size was guided by the principle of data saturation, with recruitment continuing until no new

themes emerged from the interviews (Guest et al., 2006). This carefully selected and diverse sample enabled a comprehensive exploration of Iranian EFL teachers' wellbeing across multiple contexts. Table 1 presents the participants' age, gender, teaching experience, highest educational degree, and type of institution.

Table 1

Demographic and Professional Characteristics of the Participants (N = 20)

Characteristic	Category	N (%)
Age	20–29 years	7 (35%)
	30–39 years	11 (55%)
	40 years and above	2 (10%)
Gender	Female	11 (55%)
	Male	9 (45%)
Teaching Experience	1–5 years	7 (35%)
	6–10 years	8 (40%)
	11 years and above	5 (25%)
Highest Educational Degree	BA	6 (30%)
	MA	14 (70%)
Type of Institution	Public school	8 (40%)
	Private language institute	12 (60%)

4.3 Instruments

4.3.1 Semi-Structured Interview

Data were primarily collected through semi-structured interviews, chosen for their flexibility in capturing in-depth insights while maintaining thematic consistency across participants. The interview guide was developed based on a comprehensive literature review drawing upon key frameworks of language teacher well-being, workload challenges, and coping mechanisms (e.g., Greenier et al., 2021; Gregersen et al., 2023; Mercer, 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018) and centered on four core areas: perceptions of overall well-being, influencing factors, coping strategies, and the role of institutional support. To ensure participants could express nuanced emotions and experiences without language barriers, all interviews were conducted in Persian, audio-recorded with consent, and lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. Subsequently, the recordings were transcribed verbatim in Persian and translated into English for thematic analysis.

To ensure the instrument's content validity, the interview guide underwent review by a panel of three experts, including university faculty members in Applied Linguistics and senior teacher trainers with over a decade of experience in the Iranian EFL context. Their feedback was used to refine the wording, structure, and scope of the items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with research objectives. The rigor of the research process was further maintained through several reliability measures: the researcher kept detailed field notes, maintained an audit trail of analytical decisions, and practiced continuous reflexivity to minimize bias. Additionally, two independent researchers with expertise in Applied Linguistics were consulted as external auditors to verify the coding frameworks.

The coding process followed the principles of reflexive thematic analysis, particularly the stages of familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, theme review, and theme definition proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). The coding procedures also drew on Saldaña's (2021) guidelines for first-cycle and second-cycle coding. These procedures helped ensure that the findings accurately reflected the participants' lived experiences of teacher well-being.

4.3.2 Observation

Observation was employed as a complementary method to provide a more holistic understanding of Iranian EFL teachers' well-being within their naturalistic teaching environments. Across diverse public and private educational settings, the researcher conducted observations focusing on interpersonal interactions (with students, colleagues, and administration), non-verbal cues, and the impact of environmental stressors or supports. Detailed field notes were documented during and immediately after sessions to capture behavioral, emotional, and contextual nuances that might remain implicit in self-report interviews. This triangulation of observational and interview data served to minimize the limitations of self-reporting, allowing for a robust analysis of the day-to-day professional realities and potential discrepancies between teachers' reported experiences and their observed classroom environments.

Participants also completed reflective journal entries during the data-collection period. These teacher-authored entries documented their ongoing emotional experiences, professional challenges, coping strategies, and perceived sources of support, whereas the researcher's separate reflexive journal was maintained solely to record methodological decisions and reflections.

4.3.3 Reflective Journal

Two distinct forms of reflective writing were used in this study. First, participating teachers were invited to write brief reflective journal entries about their emotional experiences, daily professional challenges, coping strategies, and perceived sources of support. These teacher-authored reflective journals were treated as participant-generated qualitative data and were included in the thematic analysis. They provided ongoing, introspective accounts that complemented the interview narratives and classroom-observation data. Second, the researcher maintained a separate reflexive journal throughout the study to document methodological decisions, emerging interpretations, and personal assumptions. This researcher reflexive journal was used solely to enhance reflexivity, credibility, transparency, and the audit trail of the study; it was not analyzed as evidence of participants' well-being (Poth, 2018). The clear distinction between these two forms of reflective writing strengthened the interpretation of the findings while minimizing the potential influence of researcher bias.

4.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection spanned a two-month period, employing a purposive sampling strategy to ensure a diverse representation of Iranian EFL teachers across public schools and private language institutes. Following informed consent, semi-structured interviews (45–60 minutes) were conducted in participants' preferred settings including private institution offices or secure video conferencing to ensure comfort and confidentiality.

To elicit culturally grounded and detailed narratives, all interviews were conducted in Persian, audio-recorded, and subsequently transcribed verbatim. To ensure conceptual equivalence during

thematic analysis, transcripts were carefully translated into English. To establish the dependability of the thematic analysis and minimize analytical bias, intercoder reliability was examined by involving a second independent researcher with expertise in Applied Linguistics. A randomly selected subset of 20% of the interview transcripts was independently coded by both coders based on the established coding manual. The intercoder agreement was assessed using Cohen's Kappa (Cohen, 1960), which yielded an agreement coefficient of $\kappa = 0.86$, indicating an almost perfect level of consistency (Landis & Koch, 1977; Miles et al., 2013). Minor discrepancies were subsequently resolved through collaborative discussion and consensus-building sessions to ensure a unified and rigorous final coding scheme.

Complementing the interviews, systematic observations and researcher field notes captured real-time workplace dynamics, non-verbal behaviors, and environmental stressors. Concurrently, a reflective journal was maintained to document methodological decisions and support researcher reflexivity, thereby enhancing the study's credibility (Poth, 2018). Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved, at which point no new insights emerged from further data gathering.

4.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. The analysis involved six stages: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, development of candidate themes, review of themes against the coded extracts and the complete dataset, definition and naming of themes, and final interpretation. The researcher transcribed and repeatedly read the interview data, classroom-observation notes, and teacher-authored reflective journals. Meaningful segments were then coded according to participants' personal resources, emotions, coping strategies, professional relationships, classroom experiences, institutional conditions, and sociocultural pressures. Related codes were grouped into broader themes and refined according to their coherence and relevance to the research questions.

The three data sources were integrated through systematic cross-source comparison. Interview data captured teachers' reported experiences and interpretations, classroom observations provided contextual evidence of their professional practices and interactions, and reflective journals documented their ongoing experiences and reflections. These sources were compared to identify convergent and divergent patterns. Convergence strengthened the interpretation of a finding, whereas discrepancies were examined as meaningful differences between what teachers reported, how they acted in classroom settings, and how they reflected on their experiences.

The researcher conducted the initial coding and theme development and maintained an audit trail of coding decisions, theme revisions, and interpretive choices. Two independent Applied Linguistics researchers reviewed the coding framework and emerging themes. Disagreements were resolved through discussion of the relevant data extracts and revision of code definitions or thematic boundaries until a reasoned agreement was reached.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in strict adherence to ethical research protocols, with formal administrative and ethical approvals obtained directly from the relevant educational authorities overseeing the participating settings. Specifically, official permissions and clearance were secured

from the regional Department of Education to conduct research with public school teachers, while organizational authorization and administrative consents were obtained from the directors and administrators of the participating private language institutes. Prior to data collection, written informed consent was secured from all participants, who were fully briefed on the study's objectives, their right to voluntary participation, and the option to withdraw at any stage without penalty (Bryman, 2016). To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all data were anonymized using pseudonyms, and audio-visual materials were securely stored on password-protected devices, accessible solely to the researcher. Furthermore, the study remained sensitive to cultural norms, ensuring all interactions respected participants' values and professional dignity.

5 Results

5.1 Addressing Research Question One

The first research question examined the key factors influencing Iranian EFL teachers' well-being. Through the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and observations from the 20 participants (T1–T20), four major themes were identified: Organizational and Environmental Conditions, Professional Growth and Recognition, Personal Resources and Emotional Resilience, and Socio-cultural Support and External Pressures. The data showed that well-being did not depend on any single factor; it was continuously shaped by the interaction between institutional conditions, individual coping capacity, and wider social expectations. As summarized in Table 2, these themes encompassed a range of factors that either facilitated or hindered teachers' sense of well-being.

Table 2

Summary of Themes for RQ1: Key Factors Influencing Iranian EFL Teachers' Well-Being

Theme	Core Concept
Theme 1	Organizational and Environmental Conditions (Institutional context as a primary driver/stressor)
Theme 2	Professional Growth and Recognition (Development and validation as pillars of identity)
Theme 3	Personal Resources and Emotional Resilience (Individual coping mechanisms and self-regulation)
Theme 4	Socio-cultural Support and External Pressures (The influence of family, community, and societal expectations)

Theme 1: Organizational and Environmental Conditions

The workplace was the strongest predictor of teachers' daily emotional states. The data showed that the same environment could either buffer or intensify stress, depending on how it was experienced by each teacher.

Participant T4 emphasized the importance of institutional support:

"When the school administration recognizes our effort and provides basic teaching resources, it reduces our daily anxiety and allows us to focus on teaching, which directly improves my mental state."

T4's account showed that administrative recognition freed up teachers' mental energy for actual instruction rather than mere survival.

Participant T8 highlighted the burden of structural constraints:

“Large classes make it impossible to give students proper attention. No matter how much I prepare, the lack of space and resources makes me feel like I am failing to reach my potential.”

T8 revealed a crucial mechanism whereby structural shortages were internalized as personal failure, directly damaging professional self-efficacy.

Participant T19 illustrated the role of collegial support:

“Good relationships with colleagues make hard days easier. When we share our frustrations during breaks, the weight of the workload feels less crushing.”

T19 highlighted the regulatory role of collegial interaction, showing that sharing frustrations mitigated the psychological weight of an unyielding workload.

Table 3

Some Samples of Direct Quotations, Codes, Significant Statements, Formulated Meanings, and Categories for Theme 1

Direct Quotation	Code	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Category
“When the school administration recognizes our effort... it reduces our daily anxiety.” (T4)	Admin recognition	Institutional support directly lowers anxiety	Recognition alleviates stress	Institutional support
“Large classes make it impossible to give students proper attention.” (T8)	Resource scarcity	Class size limits instructional quality	Structural constraints erode efficacy	Environmental barriers
“Good relationships with colleagues make hard days easier.” (T19)	Peer buffering	Colleagues help process daily stress	Shared experience mitigates burden	Collegial climate

Across the three accounts, well-being at work depended less on objective conditions than on the meaning teachers attached to them, and the same institution could be experienced as supportive or suffocating depending on recognition, resources, and peer relations.

Theme 2: Professional Growth and Recognition

The data showed that well-being required more than surviving the job, as it depended on visible progress and external validation, and growth and recognition acted as protective forces against professional stagnation.

Participant T3 described the value of constructive feedback:

“When my supervisor gives constructive feedback, I feel I am improving.”

For T3, feedback was not evaluation but evidence of improvement, which strengthened self-perceived competence.

Participant T9 noted the impact of professional learning:

“Professional development courses renew my energy.”

T9 indicated that learning itself was restorative, counteracting the monotony of routine teaching.

Participant T6 explained the significance of recognition:

“Being recognized for our effort motivates me to continue.”

T6 showed that recognition converted daily effort into long-term commitment, reinforcing career persistence.

Table 4

Some Samples of Direct Quotations, Codes, Significant Statements, Formulated Meanings, and Categories for Theme 2

Direct Quotation	Code	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Category
“When my supervisor gives constructive feedback, I feel I am improving.” (T3)	Developmental feedback	Supervisor input drives improvement	Feedback fosters growth	Professional development
“Professional development courses renew my energy.” (T9)	Learning opportunities	PD acts as a source of renewal	Engagement prevents stagnation	Vitality & motivation
“Being recognized for my effort motivates me to continue.” (T6)	Institutional validation	Recognition sustains long-term commitment	Acknowledgment builds resilience	Professional recognition

The consistent pattern was that growth and recognition did not merely please teachers, but anchored professional identity and gave teachers a reason to remain committed even under difficult conditions.

Theme 3: Personal Resources and Emotional Resilience

Rather than waiting for institutional change, teachers actively managed their own well-being. The data showed that internal strategies could partially compensate for external pressures.

Participant T1 described physical self-care:

“Exercise helps me release stress after a long day.”

T1 used physical activity as a deliberate mechanism to discharge accumulated tension.

Participant T12 highlighted the importance of boundaries:

“I try not to bring school problems home.”

T12 treated the work–home boundary as a protective wall that prevented stress from spreading into personal life.

Participant T7 illustrated cognitive reframing:

“I remind myself that difficult days are part of teaching.”

T7 normalized hardship by redefining difficult days as inherent to the profession, which reduced their emotional impact.

Table 5

Some Samples of Direct Quotations, Codes, Significant Statements, Formulated Meanings, and Categories for Theme 3

Direct Quotation	Code	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Category
“Exercise helps me release stress after a long day.” (T1)	Physical recovery	Exercise is essential for stress release	Embodied self-regulation	Physical self-care
“I try not to bring school problems home.” (T12)	Boundary setting	Detachment protects personal time	Deliberate work-life separation	Boundary maintenance
“I remind myself that difficult days are part of teaching.” (T7)	Cognitive reframing	Perspective-taking reduces personal impact	Resilience through mindset shift	Cognitive resilience

The three strategies operated across the levels of body, boundary, and mind while serving the shared function of restoring a sense of control that the environment failed to provide.

Theme 4: Socio-cultural Support and External Pressures

Well-being was also shaped outside the school walls. The data revealed a double-edged social context. Support from family and community strengthened teachers, while societal expectations added new pressures.

Participant T4 described the role of family:

“My family understands my workload and supports me.”

T4 showed that family understanding validated the profession’s demands and provided emotional recovery at home.

Participant T13 noted the importance of public respect:

“Respect from the community gives meaning to our work.”

T13 linked community respect to professional meaning, showing that social standing fed into personal dignity.

Participant T16 mentioned social pressures:

“People expect teachers to do everything perfectly.”

T16 revealed the cost of that social standing, as idealized expectations turned the profession into a source of perfectionist strain.

The same social context therefore operated in two directions, as it supplied meaning and stability while also imposing expectations that intensified teachers’ emotional labor.

Table 6

Some Samples of Direct Quotations, Codes, Significant Statements, Formulated Meanings, and Categories for Theme 4

Direct Quotation	Code	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Category
"My family understands my workload and supports me." (T4)	Family support	Emotional backing buffers professional load	Home life provides stability	Support networks
"Respect from the community gives meaning to our work." (T13)	Social valuation	External dignity adds purpose	Community standing reinforces identity	Meaning & purpose
"People expect teachers to do everything perfectly." (T16)	Unrealistic expectations	Perfectionism creates social pressure	Societal burden adds self-strain	External pressure

5.2 Addressing Research Question Two

The second research question explored how teachers perceived and described their own well-being. Three core themes emerged: Well-being as Subjective Harmony, Well-being as an Integral Component of Professional Identity, and Well-being as an Emotional Spectrum. The data showed that teachers defined well-being as something they actively negotiated rather than passively received.

Table 7

Summary of Themes for RQ2: Perceptions and Descriptions of Well-being

Theme	Core Concept
Theme 5	Well-being as Subjective Harmony (The pursuit of balance between life and work)
Theme 6	Well-being as an Integral Component of Professional Identity (Connection between competence and self-worth)
Theme 7	Well-being as an Emotional Spectrum (Navigating the cyclical nature of teaching satisfaction)

Theme 5: Well-being as Subjective Harmony

For most teachers, well-being meant balance rather than happiness, specifically the ability to protect personal space from professional demands.

Participant T5 defined well-being as the preservation of mental energy:

"To me, well-being is having enough mental energy left after the classes to be a person, not just a teacher."

T5 defined well-being as remaining a person beyond the teaching role, indicating that the job could otherwise consume the whole self.

Participant T14 viewed it as the ability to maintain a separation between roles:

"I feel well when I can disconnect from school problems; it is about keeping a harmony between my professional duties and my home life."

T14 equated well-being with the capacity to disconnect, treating psychological detachment as a conscious act of self-protection.

Participant T17 emphasized the necessity of personal space:

“Well-being means having time for myself where I don’t have to think about lesson plans or students; it’s that sense of balance.”

T17 defined well-being through reclaiming time from the teacher role, confirming that autonomy outside work was the core of subjective balance.

Table 8

Some Samples of Direct Quotations, Codes, Significant Statements, Formulated Meanings, and Categories for Theme 5

Direct Quotation	Code	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Category
“To me, well-being is having enough mental energy left...” (T5)	Energy preservation	Energy surplus defines personal wellness	Sustaining life beyond the classroom	Subjective balance
“I feel well when I can disconnect from school problems.” (T14)	Psychological detachment	Ability to switch off denotes health	Boundaries protect personal peace	Boundary maintenance
“Well-being means having time for myself...” (T17)	Personal space	Time for oneself is vital for health	Self-time enables balance	Individual autonomy

For these teachers, well-being was measured in preserved energy, time, and identity resources the profession constantly consumed.

Theme 6: Well-being as an Integral Component of Professional Identity

Well-being was inseparable from professional competence, as teachers felt well when they felt effective and felt unwell when they doubted their ability.

Participant T2 connected well-being directly to teaching efficacy:

“My well-being is tied to my teaching; when I see students understand a difficult grammar point, I feel genuinely well.”

T2 showed that student progress functioned as immediate emotional evidence of professional worth.

Participant T11 emphasized the link between competence and self-worth:

“Feeling competent makes me feel healthy; if I doubt my skills, my whole mood and well-being drop.”

T11 revealed the vulnerability in this link. Self-doubt did not merely reduce satisfaction; it destabilized overall well-being.

Participant T10 described well-being as professional mastery:

“To be well is to feel like I am actually good at my job; knowing I can manage a class gives me peace.”

T10 tied inner peace to perceived mastery, showing that classroom control translated into psychological stability.

Table 9

Some Samples of Direct Quotations, Codes, Significant Statements, Formulated Meanings, and Categories for Theme 6

Direct Quotation	Code	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Category
"My well-being is tied to my teaching..." (T2)	Efficacy-based wellness	Student success fuels personal well-being	Competence validates wellness	Professional efficacy
"Feeling competent makes me feel healthy." (T11)	Self-worth connection	Professional doubt erodes mental health	Effectiveness sustains identity	Identity integrity
"To be well is to feel like I am actually good at my job." (T10)	Professional mastery	Perceived skill level influences wellness	Mastery promotes stability	Professional identity

The pattern showed that professional identity and well-being were mutually dependent, as competence fed well-being while its absence directly threatened mental health.

Theme 7: Well-being as an Emotional Spectrum

Teachers rejected the idea of permanent happiness and instead defined well-being as the capacity to move through emotional highs and lows.

Participant T15 described the cyclical nature of well-being:

"It is a rollercoaster; some days I feel great, other days I am drained, and well-being is how I handle those changes."

T15 defined well-being as handling fluctuation rather than eliminating it.

Participant T20 reflected on finding meaning in the struggle:

"I don't expect to be happy every day, but I try to find joy in small moments to balance the heavy ones."

T20 used small joys as a counterweight to heavy days, showing deliberate emotional balancing.

Participant T18 noted the necessity of emotional adaptation:

"Well-being isn't staying happy; it's about not letting the bad days destroy your spirit permanently."

T18 defined well-being as recovery capacity, meaning that resilience involved bouncing back rather than avoiding difficulty.

Table 10

Some Samples of Direct Quotations, Codes, Significant Statements, Formulated Meanings, and Categories for Theme 7

Direct Quotation	Code	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Category
"It is a rollercoaster; some days I feel great..." (T15)	Emotional volatility	Well-being is dynamic and cyclical	Resilience amid emotional shifts	Adaptive capacity
"I try to find joy in small moments..." (T20)	Seeking positivity	Joy mitigates the heavy burden	Active pursuit of contentment	Emotional regulation
"Well-being isn't staying	Emotional	Recovery from lows	Persistence through	Resilience

Direct Quotation	Code	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Category
happy; it's about..." (T18)	recovery	defines wellness	volatility	

Teachers thus held a realistic model of well-being, seeing it not as a fixed state to achieve but as a continuous process of recovery and rebalancing.

5.3 Addressing Research Question Three

The third research question examined the strategies teachers used to maintain or improve their well-being. Three categories emerged: Proactive Self-Care and Lifestyle Management, Cognitive-Emotional Coping Strategies, and Social and Professional Support Seeking. The data showed that teachers were not passive victims of stress, but instead actively mobilized physical, mental, and social resources against it.

Table 11

Summary of Themes for RQ3: Strategies for Maintaining and Improving Well-being

Theme	Core Concept
Theme 8	Proactive Self-Care and Lifestyle Management (Intentional physical and routine-based actions)
Theme 9	Cognitive-Emotional Coping Strategies (Internal mindset shifts and emotional regulation)
Theme 10	Social and Professional Support Seeking (Relational and collaborative strategies)

Theme 8: Proactive Self-Care and Lifestyle Management

Teachers described deliberate routines of exercise, hobbies, and sleep as essential maintenance that refilled the energy teaching consumed.

Participant T1 highlighted the role of physical activity:

"I make it a rule to walk or exercise every evening; it is my way of physically washing away the day's stress."

T1 framed exercise as a ritual of cleansing, using the body to remove the day's psychological residue.

Participant T12 discussed the importance of engaging in non-work hobbies:

"I started painting on weekends. When I am with my brushes, I am not a teacher; I am just myself, and that helps me recover."

T12 used a hobby to temporarily exit the teacher identity, showing that recovery required becoming someone other than the professional self.

Participant T9 emphasized the value of sleep and routine:

"I realized that if I don't sleep enough or skip meals because of grading, my patience disappears. Now, I prioritize my physical needs first."

T9 connected basic physiological care directly to professional patience, treating self-care as a precondition for effective teaching.

Table 12

Some Samples of Direct Quotations, Codes, Significant Statements, Formulated Meanings, and Categories for Theme 8

Direct Quotation	Code	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Category
"I make it a rule to walk or exercise every evening..." (T1)	Physical discharge	Exercise acts as a stress-relief mechanism	Somatic regulation of stress	Physical self-care
"I started painting on weekends... I am not a teacher." (T12)	Creative detachment	Hobbies facilitate identity shift and recovery	Creative outlets foster renewal	Lifestyle management
"I prioritize my physical needs first." (T9)	Habit prioritization	Basic needs are foundational for patience	Routine-based self-regulation	Holistic health

These strategies shared an underlying logic, as well-being was deliberately maintained through physical care and daily routines rather than left to chance.

Theme 9: Cognitive-Emotional Coping Strategies

Teachers also worked on their inner responses, using reframing, mindfulness, and realistic expectations as mental filters against stress.

Participant T7 shared the practice of positive reframing:

"When a lesson goes wrong, I don't call it a failure anymore. I tell myself it's just data for next time; this shift in thinking saved my sanity."

T7 converted failure into feedback, a reframe that removed guilt and turned setbacks into learning material.

Participant T18 mentioned emotional regulation through mindfulness:

"I practice deep breathing for five minutes before my most difficult class. It helps me stay calm even when students are disruptive."

T18 used breathing as an in-the-moment tool, regulating emotion before and during stressful teaching situations.

Participant T13 focused on setting realistic goals:

"I used to want to be perfect, but now I accept that I can't solve every student's problem. Being 'good enough' has improved my mood significantly."

T13 lowered an unattainable standard, showing that abandoning perfectionism was itself a protective strategy.

Table 13

Some Samples of Direct Quotations, Codes, Significant Statements, Formulated Meanings, and Categories for Theme 9

Direct Quotation	Code	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Category
“I tell myself it’s just data for next time...” (T7)	Cognitive reframing	View failures as learning opportunities	Mindset shift reduces guilt	Cognitive resilience
“I practice deep breathing... to stay calm.” (T18)	Emotional centering	Mindful breathing regulates immediate stress	Real-time emotional control	Self-regulation
“Being ‘good enough’ has improved my mood...” (T13)	Expectation management	Abandoning perfectionism reduces pressure	Realism enhances contentment	Mental health preservation

All three strategies reduced stress by changing the teacher’s interpretation of events rather than changing the events themselves an internal locus of control that protected mental health.

Theme 10: Social and Professional Support Seeking

Teachers treated relationships as a resource, and sharing with peers, family, and mentors reduced isolation while providing both emotional and practical support.

Participant T19 described the power of peer collaboration:

“Talking to other teachers in the staffroom is my best therapy. We share ideas and realize that we are all in the same boat.”

T19 found validation in shared experience, discovering that isolation was broken by the realization that others faced the same struggles.

Participant T4 emphasized family as a source of strength:

“I talk to my spouse about my day; even if they don’t know English teaching, their emotional support recharges me.”

T4 showed that support did not require professional understanding; emotional presence alone was restorative.

Participant T6 mentioned seeking professional mentorship:

“I joined an online community of EFL teachers. Having a mentor to ask for advice makes me feel less alone and more confident in my skills.”

T6 used mentorship to reduce both isolation and self-doubt, combining emotional reassurance with professional guidance.

Table 14

Some Samples of Direct Quotations, Codes, Significant Statements, Formulated Meanings, and Categories for Theme 10

Direct Quotation	Code	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Category
"Talking to other teachers... is my best therapy." (T19)	Peer validation	Staffroom talk reduces professional isolation	Collective coping	Collegial support
"Their emotional support recharges me." (T4)	External emotionality	Family support provides energy renewal	Relational buffers mitigate stress	Social support
"Having a mentor... makes me feel less alone." (T6)	Mentorship	Professional guidance builds confidence	Mentorship reduces anxiety	Professional networking

Across the three accounts, support operated as a dual mechanism, as it normalized struggle through shared experience and rebuilt confidence through guidance, showing that well-being was maintained relationally rather than only individually

6 Discussion

The qualitative findings of this study provided an in-depth understanding of how Iranian EFL teachers conceptualized, experienced, and sustained their well-being within their specific professional settings. Rather than defining well-being as merely the absence of distress or fatigue, the participants described it as an active, multidimensional, and evolving process of achieving psychological balance, personal growth, and professional fulfillment. This perspective strongly aligned with foundational well-being frameworks (Diener & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman, 2011), which posited that well-being encompassed hedonic satisfaction, positive affect, meaning, and personal flourishing. Furthermore, the findings supported the equilibrium model proposed by Dodge et al. (2015), wherein well-being was achieved through a dynamic balance between life challenges and available resources. The current study advanced these theoretical models by illustrating how this balance operated in practice within the Iranian EFL context, demonstrating that well-being for language teachers was neither a static psychological state nor an individual attainment, but rather an ongoing negotiation between institutional demands and internal and relational resources.

Professional identity emerged as a central psychological anchor that shaped teachers' resilience and cognitive interpretations of professional adversity. Participants who maintained a strong, value-driven professional identity consistently reported higher levels of purpose and a greater capacity to withstand daily instructional pressures. This finding resonated with Ryff and Keyes (1995), particularly their conceptualization of self-acceptance, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth as key constituents of psychological well-being. It also directly corroborated the findings of Nazari and Xodabande (2022), who observed that professional identity development among Iranian EFL teachers was fundamentally tied to the satisfaction of their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In addition, the protective role of identity in this study supported the conclusions of Greenier et al. (2021) and Talbot and Mercer (2018), who highlighted that positive professional identity and psychological well-being fueled teachers' work engagement and

intrinsic motivation. By synthesizing these perspectives, the present study demonstrated that a coherent professional identity acted as an interpretive filter that allowed teachers to view instructional challenges as meaningful opportunities for professional growth rather than as indicators of personal deficiency.

Despite the protective function of professional identity, the findings clearly revealed that individual commitment alone could not neutralize persistent structural constraints. Excessive teaching hours, non-instructional administrative burdens, and structural shortages consistently undermined teachers' well-being, confirming the established literature on teacher stress and burnout (Collie et al., 2015; Kyriacou, 2001; Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). In accordance with the Job Demands-Resources model utilized by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018), the present data demonstrated that when workplace demands chronically outstripped organizational and personal resources, teachers inevitably experienced emotional exhaustion and diminished professional efficacy.

The findings also illuminated the intricate emotional labor inherent in English language teaching, where instructors were expected to maintain motivating, highly supportive classroom climates while suppressing personal distress. This phenomenon aligned with the observations of Greenier et al. (2021), who emphasized the critical role of emotion regulation in sustaining psychological well-being and professional engagement among English language teachers. It also corroborated the findings of Gregersen et al. (2023), who demonstrated the profound effects of daily professional stressors on language teachers' psychological and physiological health. The present study nuanced these arguments by showing that emotional regulation was not solely an internal cognitive skill, but a socially situated and relational obligation shaped by classroom dynamics and institutional constraints.

In addressing occupational stressors, teachers engaged diverse proactive coping strategies, including physical self-care, daily routines, time management, mindfulness, humor, and cognitive reframing. These deliberate self-regulation practices confirmed the ecological and resource-based frameworks articulated by Hofstadler et al. (2021) and Mercer and Gregersen (2020), which emphasized the agency of language teachers in mobilizing personal strategies to maintain ecological equilibrium. Furthermore, the reliance on cognitive reframing and perseverance supported the quantitative findings of Fathi and Soleimani (2025), who identified strong positive associations between growth mindset, grit, and well-being among Iranian EFL teachers. The qualitative narratives of the present study added explanatory depth to these findings by revealing the precise mechanisms through which grit and a growth mindset operated, showing how teachers reinterpreted classroom failures as developmental feedback and strategically established psychological boundaries to prevent occupational spillover into their personal lives.

Crucially, the data demonstrated that individual psychological resources were insufficient when deployed in isolation. While grit and growth mindsets enabled teachers to cope adaptively, they could not eliminate structural deficiencies, low institutional recognition, or excessive administrative workloads. This distinction refined the personal-resource paradigm by situating teacher agency within systemic structures, echoing the arguments of Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018) and Nazari and Xodabande (2022) that personal coping must be underpinned by institutional support, professional autonomy, and equitable working conditions.

Beyond individual strategies, the findings underscored that teacher well-being was fundamentally relational and sustained through collaborative professional networks. Participants consistently mobilized collegial relationships, peer mentoring, and community sharing to buffer against professional isolation and emotional fatigue. This finding strongly corroborated the work of Cherkowski et al. (2018), who identified collaboration, community, professional flexibility, and responsive leadership as key pillars of teacher flourishing. It was also consistent with Collie et al. (2015), who found that supportive school climates and positive collegial relations fostered teaching efficacy and job satisfaction while mitigating stress. Similarly, Mercer and Gregersen (2020) highlighted that language teacher well-being was co-constructed through the dynamic interaction between individual strategies, institutional cultures, and social relationships. The current study advanced this relational perspective by showing that collegial interactions fulfilled a dual function, as they normalized professional struggles through shared experience and restored self-efficacy through collective problem solving and emotional validation.

The qualitative data also confirmed that well-being was intrinsically tied to perceived pedagogical competence and self-efficacy. Participants reported high well-being when they observed student achievement and experienced professional recognition, whereas unacknowledged efforts produced professional frustration. This finding was consistent with Chamani et al. (2023), who documented significant positive associations between subjective well-being, occupational self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and a sense of meaning at work among Iranian EFL teachers. It also complemented Greenier et al. (2021) by demonstrating that self-efficacy and well-being operated in a reciprocal loop, where pedagogical competence reinforced well-being, and enhanced well-being sustained classroom engagement and instructional effectiveness.

The findings also reflected developmental differences across career stages. While early-career teachers experienced heightened vulnerability due to classroom management pressures and workload adaptation, experienced teachers demonstrated more refined coping repertoires and emotional stability. This developmental trajectory corroborated the empirical findings of Sulis et al. (2023) and Nazari and Alizadeh Oghyanous (2021), who demonstrated that career experience was associated with higher psychological well-being, stronger grit, and lower turnover intentions.

Finally, the study underscored the broader educational consequences of teacher well-being, linking emotional exhaustion to turnover intentions and pedagogical disengagement, while connecting high well-being to classroom effectiveness and empathetic student rapport. These observations were fully consistent with Borman and Dowling (2008) regarding teacher retention, with Leiter and Maslach (1999) regarding the detrimental consequences of burnout, and with Harris and Sass (2011) and Hascher and Waber (2021) regarding the positive impact of teacher well-being on instructional quality and educational outcomes.

7 Conclusions and Implications

This study investigated the multifaceted nature of Iranian EFL teacher well-being and demonstrated that it was a complex construct shaped heavily by systemic challenges, including high-stakes examination pressures and insufficient institutional support. Although participants exhibited significant personal agency and resilience, the findings showed that professional burnout was largely driven by structural inadequacies within the educational system rather than individual shortcomings. Ultimately, the inquiry revealed that achieving sustainable well-being required a balanced integration

of teachers' professional identity, cognitive-emotional coping strategies, and collective collegial networks within their specific pedagogical ecosystem.

The findings of this study highlight a critical need for language school administrators, policymakers, and teacher educators to transition from individual-focused coping models to systemic, structural reforms. Specifically, institutions must design and implement better workload management policies, create structured professional learning communities, and integrate emotional-health development programs into pre-service and in-service teacher training. By addressing systemic pressures and providing institutional buffers rather than expecting teachers to manage emotional labor in isolation, educational stakeholders can cultivate a supportive work environment that directly enhances both instructional quality and teacher retention.

Several limitations must be acknowledged when interpreting the results of this inquiry. Primarily, the study's qualitative research design and the localized sample size of twenty participants limit the broad generalizability of the findings to all EFL teachers across diverse geographical and institutional contexts in Iran. Additionally, because the data relied heavily on self-reported reflections and interviews, the findings may have been subject to social desirability bias, where participants might have over-reported positive coping strategies or felt constrained when sharing sensitive criticisms of their respective institutions.

Future research should employ longitudinal and quantitative or mixed-methods designs with larger, more diverse participant samples across public, private, and academic sectors in Iran to capture how teacher well-being fluctuates over time under varying conditions. There is also a critical need to empirically examine the direct interplay between administrative policies, teacher well-being, and student academic achievement, thereby reinforcing well-being as a cornerstone of educational quality. Finally, future studies could evaluate the design and practical effectiveness of specific institutional interventions to determine which systemic frameworks are most successful in mitigating emotional burnout.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

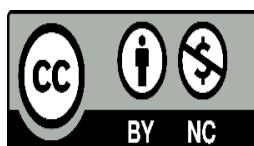
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