

Emotions, Well-Being, and Language Teacher Identity Development in an EFL Teacher Preparation Program

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Language teacher education is continually evolving to prepare educators for the ever-changing demands of the field, which mirror the realities faced around the world. In recent years, the need for professional development on emotions and well-being has become significant, but there is still much work to be done, especially in the field of language teacher education. The purpose of the present qualitative case study is to examine English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' reactions and language teacher inquiry development while learning about emotions and well-being in their teacher preparation program. The two research questions guiding this inquiry are (a) What were participants' responses to emotions and well-being professional development in their teacher preparation program? and (2) How did emotions and well-being professional development affect their identity development as EFL teachers? In answering the first research question, participants responded positively to receiving teacher preparation in emotions and well-being in their language teacher preparation programs and their stories shed light on the centrality of emotions and well-being in language teaching and learning. In answering the second research question, data revealed that delving deeper into the topics of emotions and well-being during language teacher preparation programs resulted in participants engaging in language teacher work, even if unintentionally.

Keywords: emotions, well-being, language teacher identity, EFL, language teacher preparation

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, especially because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the field of language education has experienced an eruption of research and publications exploring emotions and well-being around the world (e.g., Gkonou et al., 2020; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Pentón Herrera et al., in press). Extant literature maintains that emotions are among the most empowering and motivating factors affecting teaching, learning, and professional development (Benesch, 2012; Karagianni & Papaefthymiou-Lytra, 2018; Richards, 2020). Similarly, research shows that teacher well-being plays a central role in student achievement, teacher effectiveness and performance, and the wellness of both students and teachers inside and outside classrooms (Corcoran & O’Flaherty, 2022; Mairitsch et al., 2021). Although this growing line of research is solidifying the significance of emotions and well-being in language teaching and learning, these two elements are often left unaddressed in language teacher preparation programs (Heineke & Vera, 2022), leaving pre-service teachers ill-prepared to meet the affective demands of life and work after graduation.

Against this backdrop, language teacher identity (LTI) work has also gained momentum in the field, especially after 2010 (Kayi-Aydar, 2019), reflecting its multiple, complex, shifting, and fluid nature. Further, studies have solidified the link between LTI and other areas of interest within language education, such as agency (e.g., Clarke, 2008), professional development (e.g., Canagarajah, 2012), transnational experiences (e.g., Solano-Campos, 2014; Yazan et al., 2022), and more recently, emotions and well-being (Anand, in press; Pentón Herrera et al., 2021; Siriwardana, in press). Although different understandings of LTI exist in the literature, we define it as the continuous process in which language teachers, who both self-position and are positioned by others (e.g., see Fallas-Escobar & Pentón Herrera, 2022), affiliate to different aspects of teaching in their lives. Thus, “teacher identity is related to factors such as one’s ongoing contacts with fellow teachers and students as well as the tasks that one engages in, which can be said to constitute teaching” (Block, 2015, p. 13).

Increasingly, scholars have proposed and approached the exploration of LTI through ecological frameworks (De Costa & Norton, 2017; The Douglas Fir Group, 2016) to best understand how teachers negotiate the constraints and affordances in their specific contexts (Varghese et al.,

2016). From this ecological viewpoint, scholars describe LTI as “produced and discursively constructed within hierarchically organized racial, gendered, linguistic, religious, and classed categories and processes within teachers’ personal lives as well as in and through their teacher education programs, classrooms, schools, disciplines, and nation-states” (Varghese et al., 2016, p. 546). Research on LTI concludes that continual identity development and work are inextricable parts of teachers’ learning, teaching, and growth (De Costa & Norton, 2017; Lindahl & Yazan, 2019; Yazan & Lindahl, 2020).

In these specific lines of research of (a) emotions, (b) well-being, and (c) LTI within language education, it is not uncommon to find publications that draw connections among them – even if unintentionally. For example, in a study exploring the kinds of emotions language teachers in the United States, Japan, and Austria face and their expression of emotional well-being, Talbot and Mercer (2018) found that participants employed different strategies to regulate undesired emotions, which promoted their well-being. Similarly, Song (2016), exploring how South Korean English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers’ emotions affect their LTI transformation, found that language teachers’ emotional responses to global and local shifts shape their identity construction and teaching practice. Lastly, in a collaborative autoethnography, Pentón Herrera et al. (2021) explored how the cultivation of calm and stillness influenced their well-being at the doctoral level. In their study, Pentón Herrera et al. (2021) found that engaging in well-being practices that promoted balance, including self-exploration, “also meant, inadvertently, engaging in identity work” (p. 135). These and other scholarly works reflect that emotions, well-being, and LTI are interconnected elements in language education, and as such, they should be explored in unison to gain a deeper understanding of how they affect and interact with one another.

Although research exists about teacher emotions and well-being, and LTI in teacher preparation programs (e.g., Dimitrieska, 2022; Gregersen et al., in press), at the time of writing this manuscript, scant publications examined EFL teachers’ LTI development while enrolled in a teacher preparation course about emotions and well-being in Poland. Inspired by the paucity of research exploring the interconnected nature of emotions, well-being, and LTI development in language education, we propose this study. The purpose of the present qualitative case study (see Yin, 2017) is to examine participants’ reactions and LTI development while learning

about emotions and well-being in their teacher preparation program. Specifically, we looked at participants' beliefs about exploring the topics of emotions and well-being in a teacher preparation program and how this knowledge affected their perceived identities as EFL teachers. Thus, the following two research questions guided the study:

- RQ1. What were participants' responses to emotions and well-being professional development in their teacher preparation program?
- RQ2. How did emotions and well-being professional development affect their identity development as EFL teachers?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Heeding the growing number of scholars proposing ecological frameworks to explore LTI, emotions, and well-being in language teacher education (i.e., De Costa & Norton, 2017; Jin et al., 2021; The Douglas Fir Group, 2016), we employ Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development (1979) as the theoretical lens guiding this inquiry. This perspective allows us to approach the present study from the stance that human development is a progressive, ever-changing process that is affected by immediate and larger contexts and environments where people reside (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Further, an ecological lens also "captures the holistic interconnections between a teacher's professional and personal lives and recognizes the critical role played by contexts of foreign language education" (Jin et al., 2021, p. 19). Employing this ecological purview, we are primarily interested in exploring how the micro (i.e., individual, family, peers), meso (i.e., teaching context, neighborhood), and macro (i.e., laws, culture, society) levels influence participants' responses to emotions and well-being professional development in their teacher preparation program and LTI development.

For teachers, factors affecting their emotions, well-being, and LTI development often expand beyond professional settings, including their home and personal lives (Mercer, 2020). Mercer (2020) related this phenomenon to the development of EFL teachers and their well-being, noting that well-being – and by extension, healthy emotions and LTI development – should not rest solely as the responsibility of teachers. Institutions and organizations need to support EFL teachers' well-being by providing the time, space, and resources needed for teachers to build

this capacity – whatever that may look like in their specific contexts. The different factors influencing EFL teacher wellness, healthy emotions, and LTI development are interdependent and can make a difference in the educators' personal and professional outcomes. For example, what happens within an EFL teacher's classroom with a student at the micro level is connected and can be determined by institutions at the macro level (Mercer, 2021). Thus, this study seeks to examine EFL teachers' reactions to emotions and well-being issues at the micro, meso, and macro levels (as presented in their teacher preparation program) knowing that the interrelatedness and varying levels of support at each level can also alter teachers' responses, professional practice, and LTI.

METHODS

The present qualitative case study (see Yin, 2017) aimed to examine participants' reactions and LTI development while learning about emotions and well-being in their teacher preparation program. Specifically, we looked at participants' beliefs about exploring the topics of emotions and well-being in the language teacher preparation program and how this knowledge affected their perceived identities as EFL teachers.

Participants and Context

This qualitative case study took place during a 15-week course at a higher education institution in Poland during the summer 2022 semester (January to June 2022). Information and data collected come from eight pre- and in-service teachers ($N = 8$) – all pursuing an MA in English studies – enrolled in a master-level course titled Emotions and Well-Being in English Language Learning and Teaching and taught by one of the authors of this manuscript. The course was taught entirely in English and its goal was to explore the effects emotions and well-being have on English language teaching and learning through narratives, interactive activities, and in-class conversations. Table 1 provides the pseudonyms and relevant information for each participant.

TABLE 1. Participant Pseudonyms and Relevant Information

Participant Number	Pseudonym	Country of Origin	Self-Identified Gender	Teaching Status
1	Dara	Poland	Female	In-service teacher
2	Kerem	Turkey	Male	In-service teacher
3	Elżbieta	Poland	Female	In-service teacher
4	Zoran	Kurdistan	Male	In-service teacher
5	Akin	Nigeria	Male	In-service teacher
6	Safet	Turkey	Male	Pre-service teacher
7	Lucía	Spain	Female	Pre-service teacher
8	Jakub	Poland	Male	Pre-service teacher

Data Collection and Analysis

The data selected for the purposes of the present study come from (a) weekly, in-class focus group conversations, (b) participants reflective journals, (c) researcher's field notes, and (d) unstructured, informal interviews. Every week, the class discussed specific topics related to emotions and/or well-being in English language teaching and learning. Topics of conversation in the classes included teachers' own emotions when teaching and learning English, emotional regulation strategies, assessment of their own well-being, social-emotional learning, and ecological factors affecting teachers' emotions and well-being in different contexts, to name a few. Similarly, prompts for the weekly, in-class focus group discussions sought to help students delve deeper into the topics of emotions and well-being and included prompts such as *How has your well-being and the well-being of your teacher-colleagues been a priority in your teaching environments?* and *How have you used your emotions as data to improve your emotional response in future events?* During those weekly, in-class focus group conversations, data were collected by recording the conversations in the researcher's field notes. Also, participants recorded their reactions to these weekly meetings in their reflective journals. In addition, unstructured, informal interviews occurred organically throughout the 15 weeks of class, usually before or after class, and were recorded in the researcher's field notes. All the data collected were in English.

During data analysis, all the data were printed out, organized by

instrument (e.g., participants reflective journals), and analyzed inductively (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) following three main stages. In the first stage, data were reduced by scanning the raw data several times to identify salient patterns and condense the texts. During the second stage, the condensed texts were assigned labels and descriptions to establish clear links between the data and the research questions. During the third stage, conclusions were drawn through a recursive process of moving back and forth between the emerging findings and available publications to ensure trustworthiness, measurability, and validity of the data (Azungah, 2018). Lastly, to provide an additional layer of reliability, validity, and triangulation, verification strategies were employed (Morse et al., 2002) where each of the authors of this manuscript took turns analyzing the data and findings – first individually, and then together – to check, confirm, make sure, and be certain that the results were accurate (Morse et al., 2002; Yin, 2017).

FINDINGS

In this section, we use the participants' narratives collected through the four aforementioned data sources to identify the most salient findings directly responding to the two research questions guiding this study. Generally speaking, all participants identified that emotions and well-being professional development in teacher preparation programs is beneficial for both teachers and students. In addition, data revealed that delving deeper into the topics of emotions and well-being during this course resulted in participants engaging in LTI work, even if unintentionally. To better delve into these salient findings, we divided this section into the three sub-sections below: (a) importance for teachers, (b) importance for students, and (c) engaging in LTI work.

Importance for Teachers

Participants agreed that courses in emotions and well-being are beneficial for teachers – especially novice teachers – as it prepares them for the emotional journey that is language teaching and learning. In one of the weekly, in-class focus group conversations, Dara shared, “In my personal opinion, language teacher preparation programs should address

emotions and well-being.... I think such courses should be mandatory.... Potentially, introducing well-being and emotions in the early years of a teacher's career may prevent burnout in the future.”

Jakub, taking a self-reflecting look as a pre-service teacher, also reported the potential benefit of including courses that focus on emotions and well-being in language teacher preparation programs. Jakub wrote in his reflective journal:

As a relatively new teacher of English I must admit I have been prepared for certain situations in the teaching context during my BA [Bachelor of Arts] studies; however, there is work to be done. Subjects such as psychology and pedagogy were helpful, but it seems to me that if we had separate [courses] that would cover emotions and well-being, it would be even more valuable and beneficial because in the mentioned [courses] they were just covered in the BA program, so to say “additionally.” [They were] never the main concern, but since emotions and well-being affect so many levels concerning the essence of being a student at school but also the teaching profession, such issues should be included in the preparation programs for teachers. [Jakub, reflective journal]

The statements from Dara and Jakub suggest that, although they are at different stages in their teacher life (Dara being an in-service teacher, and Jakub a pre-service teacher), they both perceive emotions and well-being as vital, ever-present concerns in language teaching and learning. However, they acknowledge that they have not previously received teacher preparation focusing specifically on the topics of emotions and well-being. The lack of professional development on emotions and well-being in language teacher preparation programs was not reserved to participants from Poland; it was also present in responses from participants who received teacher preparation and/or professional development in other countries, such as Lucía (Spain), Akin (Nigeria), Zoran (Kurdistan), Kerem (Turkey), and Safet (Turkey). The inattention toward emotions and well-being in language teacher preparation programs has been previously highlighted in the literature (Benesch, 2012; Johnson & Golombek, 2018; Mercer, 2021). Yet, to date, scant studies have explored how preparing language teachers on the topics of emotions and well-being affects their personal and professional lives.

While exploring the detrimental effects that not receiving professional development about emotions and well-being can have on

new teachers and their students, Kerem shared this in a weekly, in-class focus group conversation:

Nearly all of the preparation programs do not cover this crucial issue. Rather, they cover much theoretical knowledge and some practices that are done either in the schools via creating a classroom-like environment where other classmates act like they are children or in the school where you do your internship with the real students. Due to this issue, when I was in the university [in Turkey] having the internship in a school, I could not manage to handle my own thoughts, feelings, and emotions, especially with fear, apprehension, and the feeling of inability. Therefore, this affected my whole class lessons during the internship, and I could not properly interact with the students, which made them more anxious. [Kerem, focal group]

When Kerem disclosed this information, the class was exploring the topic of teacher emotions in language teaching and learning. His statement echoes previous publications asserting that “early career teachers are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of emotional labor of teaching because they are rarely prepared for it” (Molyneux, 2021, p. 43). In addition, teachers are seldom equipped “to handle the emotional labor of teaching during their vulnerable first years” (Molyneux, 2021, p. 43). Further expanding on the harmful effects that the lack of emotions and well-being professional development have on new language teachers, Zoran shared a short story following Kerem’s comments about his first year of teaching in Turkey:

After graduation, I was desperately looking for a job because my family needed me to contribute [financially]. I was ready to accept any offer without thinking of taking the emotional preparation into consideration. Finally, I was hired by an international school [in Kurdistan]. I started the job but within the first three months, I was unaware that I was stressing myself excessively in order to [meet] everybody’s satisfaction – the school, the students, and the colleagues, above all, to satisfy myself, which was the hardest. In fact, I would blame myself for anything that would go wrong in the classroom and started feeling many negative emotions. My body could only endure three months until it reacted and I became emotionally and physically sick, without knowing what caused it or

what was the sickness. Finally, I realized that it was all out of too much stress and pressure at the expense of my body. I wish I had received training about dealing with my emotions and taking care of myself in my teacher training so I did not have to go through this. I strongly believe language teacher preparation programs should address emotions and well-being. [Zoran, focus group]

Zoran's story is, sadly, the story of many new language teachers. Ecological factors at the micro, meso, and macro levels (Mercer, 2021; Pentón Herrera et al., in press) contribute to language teachers' episodes of burnout, which may lead to mental and physical breakdowns, and potential attrition (Sulis et al., 2022). As stated by Elżbieta in an unstructured, informal interview, "teacher preparation programs are mostly focused on methods of relaying information to students and this is not correct because it paints the picture of teaching and learning as happening in an emotional limbo devoid of any radical emotions." Language teaching and learning is, indeed, filled with "radical emotions" (as Elżbieta calls it), which, in turn, influence teacher well-being; however, the lack of attention these two topics receive in language teacher preparation affect both teachers' and students' emotions and well-being inside and outside the classroom (Pentón Herrera, 2020; Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021).

Importance for Students

Using their personal experiences as a site for exploration (see Yazan, 2018), participants also reflected on the effects that receiving professional development about emotions and well-being in language teaching has on language learners. In an unstructured, informal interview, Lucía disclosed that she was taking Polish classes, but her Polish teacher was not able to motivate her or keep her emotionally involved in learning the language, so Lucía dropped the class.

I was taking Polish lessons a few months ago, but I felt so confused most of the time and each class was harder [more difficult], so I finally gave up. I think my teacher noticed it because I was asking her [questions] all the time but her answer[s] did not convince me. So, in that case, I think that teachers have to make an effort to make the students enjoy the class and not suffer. [Lucia, informal

interview]

From Lucía's statement, two important points are particularly salient in the context of this study. The first point is Lucía's recognition that teachers and teacher behavior have a vital effect in shaping language learners' motivation (or lack thereof), which aligns with recent publications (e.g., Dewaele et al., 2022). In Lucía's case, it seems like the Polish teacher became aware that she was confused and/or struggling in class, but the teacher's response and/or behavior "did not convince" Lucía, resulting in her feeling demotivated and leading to her dropping the class. The second point is Lucía's acknowledgment that teachers have the ability to "make the students enjoy the class and not suffer." In this quote, the contrast between *enjoyment* and *suffering* is particularly noteworthy and speaks directly to her experience as a language learner of Polish. Available research confirms that high levels of undesired emotions – such as anxiety and confusion – in the foreign language classroom make students suffer (see Liu & Hong, 2021). Thus, language teachers need appropriate preparation in emotions and well-being to help them recognize the symptoms, identify the causes, and implement strategies that mitigate or significantly reduce students' suffering in their learning environment.

A comment directly associated with Lucía's experience as a language learner of Polish comes from Elżbieta's reflective journal. In this particular entry, Elżbieta reflected on the culture of formal education in Poland and the place that emotions and well-being occupy (or not) in it. She wrote,

Given the prevalent school system and parenting modes [in Poland], adults have problems managing their emotions and understanding their relationship with children. Offering teachers classes [about emotions and well-being] would not only prepare them for the realities and challenges of the school day-to-day but would also plant the seeds for healthier and more self-aware generations to come. [Elżbieta, reflective journal]

In this reflection, Elżbieta acknowledges the need to educate children in becoming emotionally intelligent individuals. *Emotional intelligence* is defined in the literature as individuals' "ability to know and manage their emotions, motivate themselves, recognize others' emotions, and

handle relationships” (Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021, p. 7). Elżbieta explains that adults (including teachers) “have problems managing emotions and understanding their relationships,” which might explain, for example, why Lucía’s teacher was not able to deploy affective strategies (i.e., lowering the affective filter and promoting a risk-taking learning environment, etc.) to increase her enjoyment and lower her suffering in Polish class. Elżbieta’s reflection closely resembles the written thoughts of two other classmates, Safet and Akin, who also recognized the necessity of emotional intelligence (EI) in language teaching to support students in the learning environment appropriately. Safet shared in his reflection journal, “Students must be able to regulate their emotions to be successful in life. For this reason, teachers have to possess this sort of skill [emotional intelligence] so that they [can] help students do the same thing.” Similarly, Akin recorded in his reflection journal, “Receiving training about emotions and well-being is important because it helps teachers understand the psychological realities of both teachers and students in any learning environment. This training is important for me whether I teach here [Poland] or in Nigeria.”

Emotional intelligence has become a topic of interest in recent years in the field of language education. Studies exploring the effects of emotional intelligence on language learners find that students who score higher levels of EI experience less undesired emotions, such as anxiety and stress, in the foreign language classroom and acquire higher levels of language proficiency (Dewaele et al., 2008; Shao et al., 2013). On the other hand, studies exploring the effects of emotional intelligence on language teachers assert that educators with higher EI attend to and are more empathetic toward their students’ needs – including social-emotional needs – and are capable of deploying techniques that improve their and their students’ well-being (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017; Shahivand & Moradkhani, 2019). However, research shedding light on how emotions and well-being professional development in language teacher preparation programs affect the EI of teachers and, consequently, the experience of language learners is scant. Thus, we encourage the scholarly community to delve deeper into this necessary topic of inquiry.

A similar, relevant point of how emotions and well-being teacher preparation influence language learners came from Kerem in a weekly, in-class focus group conversation. In this particular conversation, we were talking about how preparing language teachers about emotions and well-being directly shapes student–teacher relationships. Kerem shared,

I am of the opinion that knowing about emotions and well-being provides both the learner and the teacher with an opportunity for positive student–teacher relationships. For example, while I was taking the teacher preparation program [in Turkey], since I did not know that the emotions and well-being of a student can have an effect on the motivation, the self-courage, and the participation, I did not give due importance to listen[ing] to the students’ problems that they are having in their life or their mood in general. However, in time, by reading and learning more about this issue, I have realized that I did make some mistakes [while teaching in Turkey], yet I think if the preparation programs had covered these topics [emotions and well-being] earlier, I would have not [made] these mistakes. [Kerem, focal group]

In this reflection, Kerem recognized that building a reciprocal relationship of respect between teachers and students clearly involves the affective domain, that is, emotions, empathy, and caring. At the same time, Kerem regrets making mistakes early in his teaching career because he did not receive professional development on emotions and well-being, which shaped his teaching practice into one devoid of care for his “students’ problems ... in ... life or their mood in general.” The emotion of regret has been previously identified in the literature, and it is often connected to language teachers realizing that their past practices were not adequate due to different reasons (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020), such as not receiving appropriate professional development (e.g., Humphries, 2020; Tomlinson, 2018). Nonetheless, we could not find studies shedding light on the emotional and well-being toll connected to language teacher regret. Connected to this particular event, the researcher’s journal had the following note recorded: “Kerem looks distraught sharing this story, we need to take a five-minute break.” Certainly, the emotional and well-being toll of language teacher regret is an area that needs further exploration.

Engaging in LTI Work

Data also revealed that, during the 15 weeks, participants began to engage in identity work, more specifically in LTI work, although the word *identity* was not explicitly used in the participants’ communication. Scholars suggest that exploring and recognizing one’s emotions – and/or

emotional struggles – allows language teachers to deepen their understanding between their teacher identity and their pedagogy (Song, 2022; Yazan & Peercy, 2018). At the same time, publications have proposed that delving deeper into one’s well-being as a language teacher also means, inadvertently, engaging in identity work both personally and professionally (Nazari & Xodabande, in press; Pentón Herrera et al., 2021). The excerpt below comes from an unstructured, informal interview with Safet, who stayed after class to seek advice:

Professor, our class today made me think and I want to ask you for your advice. I am currently dealing with some emotions that I don’t know how to deal with and I wonder if you can share some books with me.... I am not asking about books about psychological self-help, but books about understanding our emotions better. I want to be a good role model for my students and show them that I can regulate my emotions so they can do the same.... I want to be a good teacher. [Safet, informal interview]

In this vignette, Safet was referring to a class where we talked about how the emotions and well-being of language teachers directly influence our practice. The information we discussed in this class and, more specifically, the final activity where we had a group conversation about this issue seemed to help Safet become more self-aware of the emotional struggles he was facing and how those struggles would affect his teaching practice and, by extension, his students. Thus, Safet sought advice to understand what he was feeling and learn how to regulate his emotions to serve as a role model for his students. Safet’s actions show that as a human being and language teacher experiencing tensions, engaging in this type of conversation about emotions and well-being prompted him to reflect upon his moral values and responsibilities (i.e., wanting to be a role model for students) as well as his desire for being a “good teacher.” Although Safet’s tensions have been previously contextualized in the literature as practices of engaging in individual and LTI work (De Costa & Norton, 2017; Kind, 2015), further inquiry is needed into the effects of teacher development on emotions and well-being in the context of LTI.

Another participant who engaged in identity work was Akin. During the first weekly, in-class focus group conversation, Akin disclosed that he approaches the topics of emotions and well-being in English language

teaching and learning differently from the other participants in the course because “I come from Nigeria, a country that was colonized by the British, and the effects of colonization still affect education institutions to this day.” When asked if he would like to expand upon this comment, Akin replied by saying,

Colonization has affected Nigerian society in all areas, including education. For example, the teacher–student relationship in schools is more akin to a slave–master relationship [i.e., the teacher is the master and students are the slaves] because students cannot truly express themselves in the classroom unless the teacher is absent. In this slave–master relationship, teachers do not care for students’ emotions or well-being, they just care about students doing their work [learning and getting good grades]. When I was in school, teachers were uninterested in student criticism, and I had no genuine desire to learn [the English] language because I knew my teachers didn’t truly care about me or any of us. But I want my students to have a different experience; I don’t want to teach like my teachers taught me. [Akin, focal group]

There are two relevant points emanating from Akin’s revelations. The first point is Akin’s realization and recognition of the effect colonization had on Nigeria and, more directly, on his formal schooling during his formative years. The way he used the phrase “slave–master relationship” to describe how he felt in school and explain why emotions and well-being were not present in his education reflects Akin’s awareness of his positionality (i.e., self-awareness) and his maturity level (i.e., emotional intelligence). At the same time (and the second point), he shows both personal and professional growth, stating, “I want my students to have a different experience; I don’t want to teach like my teachers taught me.” Throughout the 15 weeks, Akin’s active input in class and written reflections suggested that engaging in explorations of emotions and well-being during this course allowed him to engage in explorations of decolonization simultaneously, affecting his individual and language teacher identities in the process.

The salient examples of Safet and Akin are reflective of the data collected throughout this project. During the course, participants increasingly became more aware of their emotions and sought advice on how to manage them. Also, they became aware that their own emotions

and well-being as individuals and language teachers also affected their practice and their relationship with students. In many ways, the participants' actions throughout the course reflect that they had become increasingly self-aware and emotionally intelligent (Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021). Further, their candid comments and discussions also showed that they had become more empathetic toward their individual selves, their professional selves, and their present and future students. We encourage the academic community to expand upon this finding and continue exploring the intersection and relationship of emotions, well-being, and LTI within and beyond language teacher preparation programs.

DISCUSSION AND FINAL THOUGHTS

In this qualitative case study, we examined participants' reactions and LTI development while learning about emotions and well-being in a teacher preparation program in Poland. In answering the first research question, participants responded positively to receiving teacher preparation in emotions and well-being in their language teacher preparation programs, and their stories shed light on the centrality of emotions and well-being in language teaching and learning. Further, data revealed that participants identified how professional development on emotions and well-being in language teacher preparation programs is beneficial for both teachers and students. Moreover, participants agreed that courses on these topics are valuable for teachers – particularly novice teachers – because it prepares them to deal with the “radical emotions” (as Elżbieta stated) of teaching and learning, which can affect EFL teacher well-being (Gkonou et al., 2020). In answering the second research question, data revealed that delving deeper into the topics of emotions and well-being during language teacher preparation programs resulted in participants engaging in LTI work, even if unintentionally. The findings for the second research question align with available research proposing that delving deeper into one's well-being as a language teacher – whether in or beyond teacher professional development programs – also means, inadvertently, engaging in identity work (Nazari & Xodabande, in press; Pentón Herrera et al., 2021).

During the study, the participants also reflected on the negative effects that result from the lack of professional development on emotions

and well-being in teacher preparation programs for language teachers around the world. The participants believed that having courses on emotions and well-being in language teacher preparation programs prepares them to understand themselves better and also plants the seeds for healthy, empathetic student–teacher relationships. Similarly, participants described the ways in which not having explicit teacher development courses on emotions and well-being, and more specifically, on strategies on how to successfully regulate them, negatively affected their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being inside and outside of the classroom as well as their teaching practice. By looking at the findings, it is then sensible to assume that EI is also connected to how EFL teachers respond to inner and outer obstacles they might encounter in their practices and life, which influences their overall emotions and well-being as individuals and professional educators.

Looking back at the theoretical framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the outcomes from this study help provide deeper insights into the importance of framing conversations and research about emotions, well-being, and LTI at the micro, meso, and maso levels. For example, micro-level findings, like Safet’s emotional tensions of regret due to not previously taking into consideration his students’ mood or well-being in teaching or Zoran’s story of how he became physically and emotionally ill early in his career due to self-imposed stress, reveal that these incidents are also connected to meso- and macro-level issues. In Safet’s case, his teacher preparation program in Turkey did not prepare him to acknowledge issues of emotions and well-being in the EFL classroom (i.e., meso level), which is a common issue in language teacher preparation programs and policies around the world (i.e., macro level; Heineke & Vera, 2022; Mercer, 2021). On the other hand, in Zoran’s case, the pressure to provide for his family and satisfy everyone in his community (i.e., meso level), reflects that issues of LTI, as well as emotional labor and well-being, are also connected to social norms and expectations (i.e., macro level; Benesch, 2012; Shin et al., 2021).

A particularly salient example of the effects of ecological interconnections among the issues of emotions, well-being, and LTI for students and teachers comes from Akin. Through Akin’s narratives and data, we can see that LTI is, indeed, influenced by social and contextual factors (Nazari & Karimpour, 2022; Swearingen, 2019), and it directly shapes students’ experiences and relationships with the language they are learning. In Akin’s context of Nigeria, colonization (i.e., a macro-level

issue) has actively shaped Nigerian teachers' identity construction and the perceived role of learners, turning teacher–student interactions in the classroom (i.e., micro level) into slave–master relationships (as Akin stated). This type of colonial interaction, in turn, shapes teachers' perceived LTI and practice, affecting the emotions and well-being of both teachers and students inside and outside the classroom, as shown in Akin's vignettes above. Findings suggest that the reproduction of unconscious biases emanating from colonialist practices is directly connected to LTI, emotions, and well-being for both students and learners, as previously stated in the literature (see Pentón Herrera, 2022). Although ecological concerns of colonization in EFL are beyond the purview of this particular study, we encourage scholars in the field to further explore how colonialist ideologies continue to persuade language teacher preparation and language teaching practices.

We would like to end this manuscript by restating that teacher education should continue to evolve to meet the needs of educators and their students. Through this study, we were able to contribute to the growing literature reporting on the need to offer professional development to language teachers on the issues of emotions, well-being, and LTI, as they directly influence their practice. The narratives shared by the EFL teachers in this study brought to light their highs and their lows, and it was clear that this type of professional development is both welcomed and beneficial for pre- and in-service language teachers. We recommend that EFL and language teacher education programs consider either developing courses that address issues of emotions, well-being, and LTI or embedding this information as a strand or theme throughout their courses. Further, we encourage the academic community to build on this study and continue exploring the effects of preparing language teachers on issues of emotions, well-being, and LTI in their teacher preparation programs.

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