
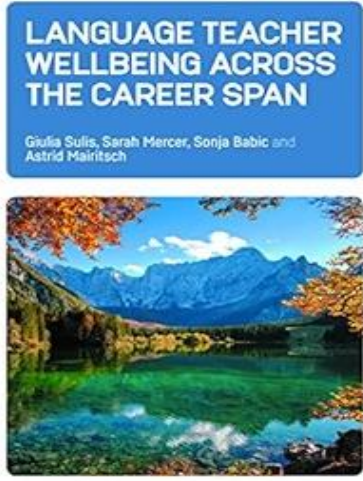


Book Review on ‘Language Teacher Wellbeing across the Career Span’

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Language Teacher Wellbeing across the Career Span</p> <p>Authors: Giulia Sulis, Sarah Mercer, Sonja Babic, Astrid Mairitsch Publisher: Multilingual Matters Pp. 264 ISBN: 9781800412798</p> <p>Reviewed by ¹ Muhammet Yaşar Yüzlü </p> <p>Institution: Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University e-mail: muhammety.yuzlu@beun.edu.tr DOI: https://doi.org/10.51726/jlr.1356636</p> | <p>IMAGE OF THE BOOK</p>  <p>PSYCHOLOGY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING</p> |
|---|--|

Teacher wellbeing is gaining prominence in the realm of educational psychology, although it remains a relatively nascent domain. This trend is propelled by a perceptible shift in research focus, transitioning from an overwhelming emphasis on student-centred paradigms to a recognition of the indispensability of catering to teacher-centric considerations. This shift in emphasis underscores the evolving dynamics. Within this milieu, the domain of language teacher well-being emerges as a pivotal locus of inquiry within the broader landscape of language teacher psychology.

Although there are certain shared exigencies and stressors that cut across disciplines, language teachers contend with stressors that are potentially distinctive in nature. These distinct stressors are notably characterized by heightened degrees of emotional labour and challenges pertaining to identity negotiation. While extant research has indeed delved into the idiosyncratic dimensions of language teacher well-being across discrete career phases - specifically, the pre-service and mid-career stages, a comprehensive exploration that spans the entirety of a language teacher's career trajectory, from its inception in pre-service training to its denouement in late-career stages, has hitherto been a scholarly lacuna.

In response to this scholarly gap, a concerted endeavour was undertaken by Giulia Sulis, Sarah Mercer, Sonja Babic, and Astrid Mairitsch. This three-year undertaking, funded by the Austrian Science Fund, yielded a seminal monograph entitled "*Language Teacher Wellbeing across the Career Span*." The primary objective of this monograph is to cast a spotlight on the salience of well-being considerations. This is achieved through the astute convergence of challenges that are endemic to the vocation of teaching at large and the specific challenges that are intrinsic to the realm of language

¹ ORCID: 0000-0002-5377-7329

Submitted: 07.09.2023

Accepted: 07.10.2023



pedagogy, prominently encompassing emotional labour and the intricate tapestry of identity negotiation.

The book consists of 8 Chapters. The first chapter, i.e., introduction, presents the rationale and organisation of the book which provides concise information of each chapter. This part also shows three main ways the book contributes to the body of literature within second language acquisition and general education. Firstly, language teacher wellbeing is examined in terms of the interplay between challenges and resources. This section demonstrates the dynamic interplay between a challenge and a resource which is, I think, the most engaging part in which readers can see how a challenge could transform into a resource or vice versa through different perspectives. Secondly, various “centres of gravity” (p.3) are presented along teachers’ career trajectories and lives. This also helps the readers to get a deeper understanding of the interaction between the life phase and professional life demands and affordances. Thirdly, the ecological perspective is adopted to showcase the dynamic interaction of multiple factors, which also aligns with the complex nature of the construct and helps the reader to acknowledge the complexity of the well-being construct. Chapter 1 also presents the context of the participant teachers who are either secondary school teachers who teach modern languages in the UK or English as a foreign language in Austria. Moreover, it elucidated how language teacher well-being transformed in times of crisis since the data was gathered through two different sets of semi-structured interviews, the first of which was in 2018 and the second in 2020 during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 2 points to the difficulty in providing a clear-cut definition of well-being as a construct. To disambiguate the term, the contradiction between the hedonic perspective, i.e., “making humans slavish followers of desires” (p. 13) and the eudemonic perspective, i.e., “people’s perception of their ability to lead meaning and authentic lives” (p.13) is provided. By broadening Seligman’s (2011) framework of well-being PERMA, i.e., positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, authors offer a more socially situated and ecologically sensitive understanding of well-being which accommodates individual diversity and contextual variation. In this respect, authors emphasize the link between language teacher wellbeing, as a basic human right, and their creativity, adaptation to change, being more innovative in teaching, and student wellbeing. Societal status, educational policies, administrative demands, school culture, job (in)security and relationships with family members, partners and friends, the status of the language being taught, and higher levels of emotional labour are cited among the factors influencing language teacher wellbeing. This awareness-raising analysis tends to enable language teachers to identify the challenges in their profession.

Chapter 3 presents three main themes which characterize the pre-service career phase. The first theme, i.e., managing student life and school life reveals that having a dual role as both students and teachers could be a challenge or a resource to manage and nurture the well-being. The second theme, i.e., building knowledge and experiencing the realities of classroom life evinces the gap between theoretical and practical competencies, which leads to initial insecurity and limited confidence. The third theme, i.e., scaffolded social support, highlights the need for not only pedagogical support but also emotional support by university professors, school mentors, and school colleagues. As a Turkish former practitioner and early-career researcher, I noticed that all these themes echoed with my early-career phase despite the contextual difference. Thus, language teachers, i.e., EFL teachers and other foreign language teachers who would most probably align with modern language teachers in the UK due to similar challenges from other contexts, find commonalities in challenges and benefit from different perspectives in resource part to overcome their challenges.

Chapter 4 illustrates the characteristics of the early-career language teacher phase through four main themes, i.e., learning on the job, developing realism, learning to balance personal and professional lives and seeking support within the school. The first theme indicates that early career language teachers find their way into teaching through repeated trial and teaching, which empowers them with confidence and resilience. The second theme shows that the high sense of idealism and a strong sense of perfectionism are gradually replaced by increasing realism stemming from the divergence between theory and hands-on practice. The third theme demonstrates that setting work-life boundaries is troublesome, while the fourth theme presents a lack of guidance as a challenge and

support from more experienced colleagues and school administration as a resource to promote these teachers' resilience. Just as these themes resonated with my early-career language teacher phase (Yüzlü, 2023), these themes could also apply to different contexts around the world. These themes basically highlight the importance of collaboration and collegiality not only for language teachers but also for policymakers.

Chapter 5 delves into the mid-career language teacher phase. Maturing with experience, taking on additional responsibilities and shifting centres of attention emerge as main themes. During this phase, a lack of autonomy, increasing accountability measures and limited support for professional development might lead to a progressive sense of stagnation, whereas high competence and confidence in teaching abilities as well as a sense of authenticity are enjoyed. Work-life spillover, i.e., difficulty in setting boundaries between personal and professional lives, seems to be among the main challenges since especially mid-career teachers cannot detach themselves from other facets of their lives. All these themes imply that this phase is critical and assigning new roles such as mentors or administrative could overcome inertia and augment dynamism. Most of the mid-career language teachers would acknowledge these themes.

Chapter 6 presents transitioning to retirement, age awareness, and taking stock as main themes in the late-career teacher phase. While the transition to retirement could be smooth for some, it might also become stressful for others. These teachers' growing awareness of their biological age makes them pay particular attention to their health by letting go of responsibilities they have accumulated over their careers. Reflecting on their careers, these teachers resent having devoted most of their time to their work instead of taking better care of themselves although they are content with supportive long-lasting social relationships. This part is the most striking in that it clearly shows that teachers should not get lost while struggling to do their job effectively.

The authors present three macro themes which are relevant across all career phases, i.e., knowledge and experience, support and autonomy, and balancing priorities and domains. This displays a holistic picture of each phase of a language teacher's career with its distinctive challenges and resources in Chapter 7. Here, the authors also present their conceptualisation of well-being which encompasses multiple factors, i.e., psychological characteristics, life cycle, career phases, personal environment, and professional environment and their dynamic interaction. This part also helps the readers to envision the life span of a language teacher as a movie and shows what to do and how to do it irrespective of the career phase.

Chapter 8 presents that well-being across the career span, well-being in context, personalised continued professional development opportunities, and agency for well-being could be the main areas of implication. To have a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic interplay between various factors influencing language teacher well-being, complexity theory and ecological systems theory are offered as theoretical lenses for future studies. Methodologically, longitudinal studies are indicated to reveal temporal dynamic fluctuations of teacher language well-being. Contextually, different countries and different educational levels such as primary school, tertiary education, and private sector are recommended to be investigated.

As a result, the book presents the criticality and complexity of language teacher well-being by walking the readers along the whole career trajectory of a language teacher in a way that the readers are likely to find commonalities in terms of challenges and resources. I think the reader, particularly practitioners will be encouraged to reflect on their practices, contexts, and overarching system. This critical reflection might also empower the readers to reconceptualise the life-work balance. Additionally, policymakers could benefit from the resources of each phase by redesigning teacher career paths in a dynamic way which allows teachers to collaborate and build on their strengths. It could hinder not only attrition but also engender dynamism and long-lasting passion. I highly recommend this book to all stakeholders, including practitioners, pre-service teachers, teacher trainers, and researchers.

REFERENCES

- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*. New York: Free Press.
- Yüzlü, M. Y. (2023). Identity reconstruction of an in-service teacher as a critical bilingual: an autoethnography. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 17(3), 650-663.