

# Teacher Wellbeing as a Cornerstone of Student Success in Foreign Language Education

## El Bienestar Docente como Piedra Angular del Éxito Estudiantil en la Educación de Idiomas Extranjeros

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### Abstract:

This article delves deep into the crucial link between teacher wellbeing and student success. Through a qualitative exploratory and descriptive paradigm, the research includes a theoretical review, a survey, and a focus group to explore the current state of the multifaceted relationship between teacher wellbeing and the quality of learning and student outcomes in the Foreign Language Major at the University of Ciego de Ávila. The findings reveal that teacher wellbeing is decisive in ensuring student success, as happy and fulfilled teachers are more likely to provide positive, engaging, and effective learning experiences to their students. However, it is often hindered by numerous challenges, including burnout, excessive workload, lack of support, and inadequate compensation. These challenges can negatively impact teacher morale, job satisfaction, and performance, leading to decreased student engagement, achievement, and overall success. In response, a range of innovative and practical solutions to support teacher wellbeing are proposed, leading to happier teachers and more successful students.

**Keywords:** Foreign Language Major, student success, teacher wellbeing

## Resumen:

Este artículo profundiza en el vínculo crucial entre el bienestar del docente y el éxito estudiantil. La investigación comprende una revisión teórica, una encuesta y un grupo focal para explorar el estado actual de la relación polifacética entre el bienestar de los profesores, la calidad del aprendizaje, y los resultados de los estudiantes, basándose en un paradigma cualitativo exploratorio y descriptivo. Los resultados revelan que el bienestar de los profesores es un factor fundamental para garantizar el éxito de los estudiantes, dado que profesores felices y satisfechos son más propensos a brindar experiencias de aprendizaje positivas, atractivas y eficaces a sus estudiantes. Sin embargo, a menudo este proceso se ve obstaculizado por numerosos retos, como el agotamiento, la excesiva carga de trabajo, la falta de apoyo y una remuneración inadecuada. Dichos problemas pueden repercutir negativamente en la moral, la satisfacción laboral y en el rendimiento de los docentes, lo que los conlleva a un menor compromiso, rendimiento y éxito general. Como respuesta a esta situación, se proponen una serie de soluciones innovadoras y prácticas para apoyar el bienestar de los profesores, las mismas conducirán a una mayor satisfacción de los docentes y a mejores resultados en los estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** bienestar del docente, Carrera Lenguas Extranjeras, éxito estudiantil

## Introduction

Teachers play a central role in shaping the future of society by educating and inspiring the next generation. As such, it is essential to recognize the importance of their work and support them in providing quality education. Over the years, researchers have explored various factors that influence the quality of teaching and learning, including curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. However, one aspect that has received increasing attention is the wellbeing of teachers.

Wellbeing is a multifaceted concept that encompasses both subjective and objective aspects of life. It refers to the degree to which individuals feel satisfied, fulfilled, and happy in their lives, as well as the extent to which they have the necessary resources and capabilities to achieve their goals and aspirations (Huppert & So, 2013; Lambert et al., 2020; Sulis et al., 2023). Moreover, it is influenced by a range of factors, including physical health, social support,

financial security, and psychological wellness. Consequently, the term teacher wellbeing is used for making reference to the degree to which teachers feel satisfied, fulfilled, and happy in their work, as well as the extent to which they have the necessary resources and capabilities to teach effectively and achieve their professional goals (Chang, 2013; Jiménez, González, & Gómez, 2020; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020).

The existing literature reflects some divergent perspectives on the conceptualization and study of teacher wellbeing. Hascher, et al. (2021) emphasize that wellbeing is a construct, showing positive impacts on teaching quality, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction. They argue that teacher wellbeing is a key factor within the resilience process, shaping how teachers interpret and respond to challenges. In contrast, Hascher & Waber (2021) highlight the ambiguity and heterogeneity in how teacher wellbeing is defined and operationalized across studies, which may hinder the development of a coherent theoretical framework. While acknowledging the significance of teacher wellbeing for school functioning and student outcomes, Hascher & Waber (2021) call for clearer conceptualization and measurement of this construct. Meanwhile, Bardach et al. (2022) adopt a broader systems perspective, proposing that the effects of teacher psychological characteristics like wellbeing may operate through more proximal teaching processes and be shaped by student, colleague, and contextual factors. Maricuțoiu et al. (2023) take a narrower empirical focus, examining the relationships between teachers' hedonic and eudaimonic subjective wellbeing and various student outcomes. Taken together, these diverse viewpoints underscore the need for greater conceptual clarity and integration in the study of teacher wellbeing and its role in educational settings.

The connection between teacher wellbeing and student success has been dealt with by several authors, for instance, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) have explored the impact of teacher stress on classroom climate and student behavior, highlighting the need for interventions to support teacher wellbeing. Other scholars, such as Ingersoll & Strong (2011), have highlighted the impact of teacher turnover on student achievement, emphasizing the need to support and retain experienced teachers. Additionally, researchers such as Hargreaves & Fullan (2012), Pellowski (2020) and Zulkifli et al. (2022) argue that the wellbeing of teachers is a prerequisite for student success.

More recent studies have continued to emphasize the importance of teacher wellbeing. For example, Flook, et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review of interventions to support teacher wellbeing and found that mindfulness-based interventions were effective in reducing stress and improving teacher wellbeing. Pekrun, et al. (2019) explored the role of teacher emotions in the classroom and found that positive emotions, such as enjoyment and pride, were associated with better student engagement and achievement. In the same year, Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on teacher job satisfaction and found that high job satisfaction was associated with better student outcomes. Besides, it was further highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as teachers have had to adapt to new teaching modalities, manage their own personal challenges, and support the wellbeing of their students (Zhang et al., 2021).

Despite the growing awareness of teacher wellbeing, many teachers still face significant challenges that hinder their welfare, and consequently, affect the teaching-learning process. Therefore, this article is intended to explore the current state of the relationship between teacher wellbeing and the quality of learning and student outcomes in the Foreign Language Major at the University of Ciego de Ávila.

## **Development**

English is a global language that is spoken by millions of people around the world, and its importance in international communication, trade, and education is increasing every day. Therefore, the role of English teachers in preparing students to become proficient in the language and to participate in a globalized world is critical.

The Foreign Language Major with a focus on English is an essential program that prepares both pre-service and in-service teachers to become effective English teachers in a diverse and changing society. It provides them with the necessary knowledge and skills to teach English effectively to students from different backgrounds. Students in this program gain a deep understanding of the structure and rules of the English language, as well as effective strategies for teaching English language skills, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. They also develop an appreciation for the cultural and social context of the English language, which helps them create effective and relevant learning experiences for their students.

When considering what makes an effective English teacher, it is important to note that they must possess a range of qualities to succeed in their role. Firstly, they must have a strong command of the English language and be knowledgeable about grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. However, this is not enough on its own. A good teacher must also be able to use effective teaching methodologies to help their students learn.

In addition to subject knowledge and effective teaching methods, a good English teacher should also have strong interpersonal skills. They should be approachable, patient, and adaptable to the needs of their students. They should show interest in their students as individuals, get to know them and their interests, and tailor their teaching to suit each student's individual needs and learning style.

A good English teacher should also be creative and engaging. They should be able to make their lessons interesting, challenging, and varied to keep their students engaged and motivated. They must be able to inspire their students to learn and to help them achieve their goals.

Furthermore, a good English teacher must be able to assess their own teaching and evaluate the success of each lesson. They must be able to provide constructive feedback to their students and be open to feedback themselves. Besides, the following comment support the previous data.

I think to be a successful teacher you have to like the job. One should be able to motivate the students and make lessons fun. A dash of humour would be good, too. The ability to explain something complicated in a clear way is important. Having patience, creativity, and good communication skills are an advantage, too. I started teaching and it's great fun. I was really nervous before the first lesson but everything went smoothly. The worst thing that has happened to me as a teacher was that I wanted to teach them too much – I had three fifty-minute lessons and prepared a lesson plan for each lesson. But after two lessons I was still doing material which I had prepared for the first and in the end I hurried them just to get through everything. Looking back, I think that was a mistake (Riddell, 2014, p.36).

Despite possessing all of the qualities needed to be a successful English teacher, it is important to understand that teachers are also human beings who may be influenced by external factors that can impact their wellbeing. Therefore, this article will delve into it by exploring the current state of the relationship between teacher wellbeing and the quality of learning and student outcomes in the Foreign Language Major at the University of Ciego de Ávila.

As for the major at the University of Ciego de Ávila, it is composed of 216 students from pre-service and in-service courses. Their professional training is conducted by 50 teachers, of whom 16 are mentors that do not work directly at the university, but contribute to the pre-service teachers at practicum institutions where they will be practicing after graduation. Additionally, 9 of them teach subjects in Spanish, including Philosophy and National Security, among others. The remaining 25 are English teachers who work directly in the major.

In spite of the previous population that comprises the major, this studied was based on 20 teachers of the Foreign Language Major, including 10 English teachers, five teachers from other college areas, and five mentors of the practicum. The selection process took into account that all areas which have an impact on the preparation of language professionals were covered.

To gather data, a survey was conducted among the 20 teachers. It was designed based on the dimensions of wellbeing according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2018). One of these dimensions is *cognitive wellbeing*, which refers to the skills and abilities that teachers need to effectively carry out their work. This is reflected in teachers' self-efficacy, which is their belief in their ability to perform their duties. Another aspect is *psychological wellbeing*, which is related to how teachers feel about their work. *Physical wellbeing* is also important and includes measures of health related to teachers' working conditions. Burnout, a key issue in health, can occur when teachers experience physical exhaustion due to job demands. Additionally, *social wellbeing* is essential, as the level of support and collaboration from colleagues has been linked to teachers' overall job satisfaction and the quality of their instruction.

The survey consists of closed and open-ended questions, with questions related to the previous dimensions, as well as questions related to teaching practices, student outcomes, and the impact of teacher wellbeing on the teaching-learning process. The survey was distributed to

participants both in paper and digital formats.

The data collected from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages, to provide an overview of the responses. Additionally, the open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns related to teacher wellbeing and the teaching-learning process.

Based on the results of the survey, a focus group was afterwards conducted to further explore the findings and gather additional perspectives from the participants. The focus group consisted of six participants. It was structured around the themes and patterns identified in the survey data, with participants invited to discuss their experiences and perspectives related to teacher wellbeing and the teaching-learning process. The focus group was audio-recorded, with the participants' consent, and was transcribed for analysis.

The following questions were analyzed:

- Should educational institutions be responsible for supporting teacher wellbeing, or is this solely the responsibility of individual teachers?
- What impact does teacher wellbeing have on student outcomes, and how can educational institutions ensure that their teachers are well-supported in order to improve these outcomes?
- Should teacher preparation programs focus more on developing skills related to teacher wellbeing, such as stress management and self-care?
- How can educational institutions create a culture of collaboration and support among teachers in order to improve overall teacher wellbeing?
- Should educational institutions provide more resources and support for teachers who are experiencing burnout, or is it the responsibility of individual teachers to manage their own workloads?
- What role can technology play in supporting teacher wellbeing, and how can educational institutions ensure that technology is being used in a way that is beneficial for teachers?
- How can educational institutions ensure that they are providing adequate support for teachers from diverse backgrounds and with diverse needs?

- What impact does leadership have on teacher wellbeing, and how can educational institutions ensure that their leaders are supporting the wellbeing of their teachers?
- Should educational institutions be more transparent about the factors that can impact teacher wellbeing, such as workload and job demands, and how can they work to address these factors?
- How can educational institutions measure and track teacher wellbeing over time, and what are some potential indicators of wellbeing that could be used for this purpose?

The data collected from both the survey and focus group was later analyzed by using a data triangulation approach which led to common potentialities and limitations. This formed the basis of finding practical solutions to support teacher wellbeing.

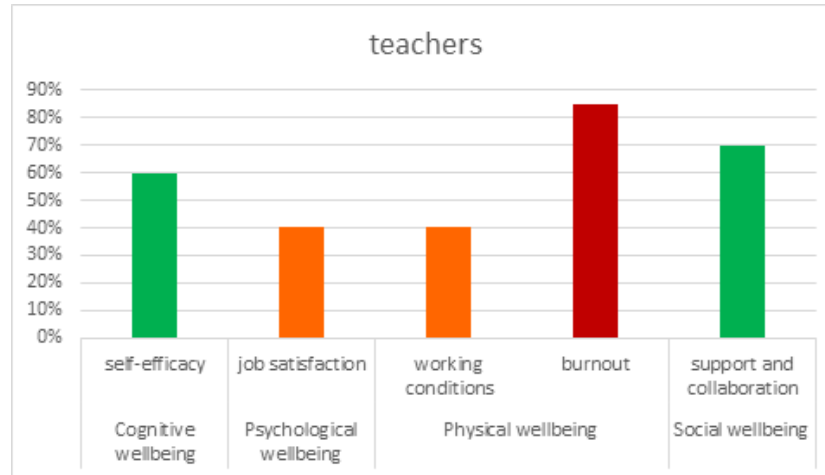
### *Results and discussion*

The data collected from the survey showed that the majority of the 20 teachers in the Foreign Language Major reported moderate levels of self-efficacy (60%) and low levels of psychological wellbeing (40%). However, a significant number of teachers reported experiencing burnout (85%). In terms of physical wellbeing, 37% of the teachers reported high levels, while 63% reported low levels.

Social wellbeing was also an essential dimension that emerged from the survey. 70% of the teachers reported high levels of social wellbeing, indicating that the level of support and collaboration from colleagues is essential for teachers' overall job satisfaction and the quality of their instruction.

The chart provided below illustrates the percentages of the different responses given by the teachers to the survey questions.





**Figure 1**

*Survey results. This figure is an original elaboration created in Microsoft Excel*

The focus group showed: 100% of the teachers believed that educational institutions should be responsible for supporting teacher wellbeing. The results also indicated that 66.66% of the teachers believed that teacher preparation programs should focus more on developing skills related to teacher wellbeing, such as stress management and self-care. This suggests that improving teacher wellbeing should be a priority in teacher education programs.

In terms of creating a culture of collaboration and support among teachers, 50% of the teachers believed that educational institutions should take the lead in this area. They suggested that institutions should provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate and support each other, such as through professional learning communities, mentoring programs, and team teaching.

It was also revealed that 100% of the teachers believed that educational institutions should provide more resources and support for teachers experiencing burnout. This highlights the need for institutions to be proactive in identifying and addressing the causes of burnout, such as workload and job demands.

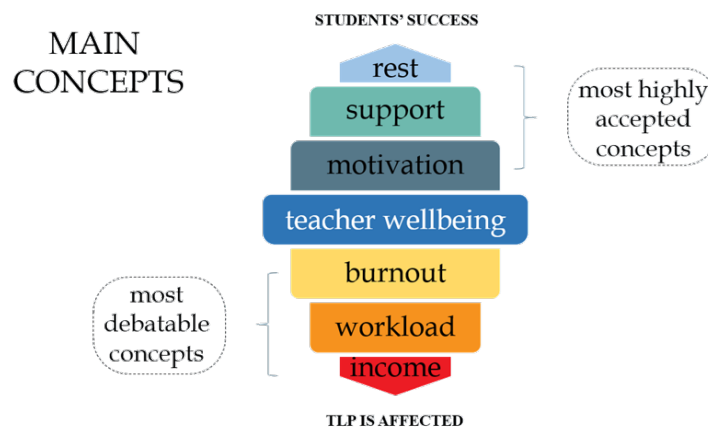
Technology was also identified as having potential to support teacher wellbeing, with 66.66% of the teachers believing that technology can play a role in supporting teacher wellbeing. However, it was also noted that institutions need to ensure that technology is being used in a way that is beneficial for teachers and does not add to their workload.

In terms of ensuring that educational institutions are providing adequate support for teachers

from diverse backgrounds and with diverse needs, 66.66% of the teachers believed that institutions need to be more proactive in identifying and addressing the specific needs of different groups of teachers. This could involve providing targeted support and resources, such as professional development opportunities and mentoring programs.

The results also highlighted the importance of leadership in supporting teacher wellbeing, with 100% of the teachers believing that leadership has a significant impact on teacher wellbeing. They suggested that educational institutions should ensure that their leaders are supporting the wellbeing of their teachers by providing opportunities for professional development and mentoring.

The findings suggest that educational institutions should prioritize teacher wellbeing in their policies and programs, and develop strategies that support the different dimensions of wellbeing. This could involve creating a culture of collaboration and support among teachers, providing resources and support for teachers experiencing burnout, and ensuring that technology is being used in a way that is beneficial for teachers. Additionally, teacher preparation programs should focus on developing skills related to teacher wellbeing, such as stress management and self-care. To sum up the following figure provides the main concepts that were discussed in the focus group.



**Figure 2**

*Main discussed concepts and their implication. This figure is an original elaboration created in Microsoft PowerPoint.*

The study also highlights the need for educational institutions to be more transparent about the factors that can impact teacher wellbeing, such as workload and job demands. Institutions should measure and track teacher wellbeing over time, using potential indicators of wellbeing to monitor progress.

Some opinions from the focus-group participants:

As teachers, we greatly appreciate these types of debates, not very common, since we are used to exchanging only about work issues. However, we have never looked at the other side of the coin. I do believe that teacher preparation programs should focus more on developing in teacher skills to manage stress, mental burden, self-care as well. I consider that as part of teacher training, would-be teachers should be taught how to deal with wellbeing. (Teacher A).

Teacher wellbeing, in many ways, may have positive impact on student outcome. The happier and healthier the teacher will be; the better students will do in in learning. Negative energy or feelings may be passed on to students by the teacher, so wellbeing is crucial to make the teaching learning process work properly. To this end, educational institutions should provide all necessary support to teachers by taking care of their mental and physical health. Also, by providing health and mental assistance with specialists during periods of stress, by promoting meditation and reflection sessions, by properly balancing working schedules, by assuring necessary breaks, by providing feedback on teacher´s satisfaction or dissatisfaction with teaching, and by creating necessary working conditions among others. (Teacher B).

It is important to evaluate the teachers' satisfaction level in the working environment. I believe that institutions should be responsible for supporting teacher well-being as a way to foster better performance and satisfaction while teaching. It should not be only or solely the responsibility of individual teachers. Teachers' working and health conditions may contribute to better outcomes as one may feel at ease and institutionally supported to be successful and happy with one´s teaching. (Teacher C).

Leadership impacts greatly on teacher wellbeing since the leader is a kind of pattern or guide to be followed by the teachers' staff. Leaders bring about a sense of comfort and self-confidence at work. It also has influences on the quality of the services of any institution. Tough demands, or too much workload are shortcomings which impact leadership (if working conditions have not been analyzed previously). Educational institutions can ensure that their leaders are supporting the wellbeing of their teachers, firstly throughout the observation and supervision of the social environment of teachers, to be attentive to any comment, administering surveys, interviews, and other strategies. (Teacher D)

Educational institutions should be more transparent about the factors that can impact teacher wellbeing. Workload and job demands are contracts, among others, an agreement between two parties. Transparency is a requisite to success. On the other hand, educational institutions can measure and track teacher wellbeing over time by an uninterrupted socio-psychological exploration, also talking to teachers spontaneously about key issues, giving to them the possibility to criticize when things go wrong, etc. (Teacher E)

Another important point which was taken into account was the proposal of a range of innovative and practical solutions to support teacher wellbeing. One such solution could be a simple activity that explores teacher wellbeing in the workplace, such as conducting a survey or getting colleagues together to discuss moments when they and/or their colleagues are engaged and having fun at work, and things that they are often grateful for at the end of each workday.

This activity could be followed by a time of reflection to identify areas where improvements could be made to support teacher wellbeing. For instance, promoting college projects is a wonderful idea to involve both teachers and students in activities they both enjoy and have fun. Educational institutions should not be just a place for studying; it should also be a place where everyone wants to go, as the atmosphere contributes to learning, growing, and having fun.

For example, holding festivals for both students and teachers can be an effective way to improve

the wellbeing of all participants. By engaging collaboratively and enjoying while practicing the English language, participants can change the overall vibe of the educational institution, making everyone happier and more motivated when returning to their classrooms.

In addition to promoting college projects and holding festivals, there are several other ways in which educational institutions can support teacher wellbeing and create a positive atmosphere. For example, providing opportunities for professional development and growth can help educators feel more engaged and motivated in their roles. This can include attending conferences, workshops and training sessions, as well as offering mentoring or coaching programs.

Another aspect for creating a positive atmosphere in educational institutions is promoting open communication and collaboration among teachers, students, and administrators. Encouraging teachers to share their ideas and experiences with one another can foster a sense of community and provide support and inspiration for everyone involved. Similarly, involving students in decision-making processes and allowing them to have a voice in their own education can help to create a more inclusive and empowering learning environment.

By focusing on teacher wellbeing and creating a positive atmosphere in educational institutions, we can help to ensure that everyone involved in the learning process feels valued, supported, and motivated to succeed. This not only benefits individual teachers and students but can also have a broader impact on society as a whole, as it helps to foster a culture of lifelong learning and personal growth. Ultimately, by prioritizing teacher wellbeing and creating positive learning environments, we can help to build a brighter and more successful future for everyone.

Overall, to support students' learning, teachers are required to be well, engaged, innovative, collaborative, resilient and, most importantly, happy. Therefore, behind a happy classroom there is always a happy teacher.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the analysis of the instruments used to collect teachers' opinions in this specific context, it is clear that teacher wellbeing is a multifaceted construct that encompasses a

variety of dimensions, such as cognitive, psychological, physical, and social. The results of the instruments suggest that many teachers in this context are experiencing high levels of stress and burnout, which can have negative consequences for both their personal and professional lives.

The teachers' opinions emphasized the importance of promoting teacher wellbeing in order to create a positive and productive learning environment for both teachers and students. It was suggested that teacher preparation programs should focus more on developing skills to manage stress, mental burden, and self-care, and that educational institutions should take responsibility for supporting the mental and physical health of their teachers. Transparency, evaluation, and support from leadership were also highlighted as crucial factors in promoting teacher wellbeing.

Moving forward, it will be important to continue to invest in strategies and initiatives that promote teacher wellbeing, such as mentoring programs, peer support networks, and ongoing professional development opportunities. By doing so, we can help ensure that our teachers are able to thrive both personally and professionally, and that our students receive the high-quality education that they deserve.

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