



JEPIC

Volume 2: Issue 2

2026



Mobilizing Positive Psychology for Language Teacher Well-Being in Higher Education: Three Pillars that Teachers Can Control

Deborah Azaryad Shechter

Tel Aviv University

Abstract

Informed by positive psychology, this position article aims to empower language teachers to take charge of their own well-being—and that of their students—in order to sustain a long and fulfilling career. Despite external challenges such as limited institutional support and heavy workloads, teachers can prioritize their well-being by focusing on what lies within their control. Confident and compassionate teachers who embody the KEEP principles (Kindness, Empathy, Enthusiasm, and Professionalism) can foster positive emotions in the language classroom, thereby motivating their students to engage in learning. The article identifies three pillars that teachers can cultivate independently: fostering strong teacher–student relationships, enhancing foreign language teaching enjoyment (FLTE), and promoting foreign language learning enjoyment (FLLE). These pillars also help teachers meet the basic psychological needs central to self-determination theory (SDT), thereby strengthening the article’s theoretical foundation. Drawing upon SDT and the author’s autobiographical reflections, the article explains why she continues to flourish after four decades in the profession and offers practical, actionable guidance for cultivating teacher well-being, even in less supportive institutional settings.

Keywords: foreign language teaching and learning enjoyment, language teacher and student emotions, positive psychology, relationships, self-determination theory (SDT), well-being,

Corresponding author: Deborah Azaryad Shechter, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel
Deborah.shechter@gmail.com; Ushechte@tauex.tau.ac.il

<https://www.notion.so/Deborah-Azaryad-Shechter-1e69e7e9b31c80acad4be501d941a44b?pvs=4>

This is an Open Access which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

“Well-being is realized by small steps, but it is truly no small thing.”
Zeno of Citium, the father of Stoicism

Introduction

The concept of well-being was introduced to the field of second language acquisition (SLA) with the emergence of positive psychology (PP) (Mercer & Murillo-Miranda, 2025). In recent years, researchers in PP have increasingly turned their attention to the well-being of language teachers (e.g., Babic et al., 2022; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2024; Gregersen et al., 2023; Resnik et al., 2026; Sulis et al., 2023). This focus on language teacher well-being is not only warranted by the emotional demands of the teaching profession (Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018), but also by the fact that the emotional states of teachers significantly influence the quality of teaching, students’ emotions, and their academic outcomes (Frenzel et al., 2018; MacIntyre et al., 2019; Mercer, 2018; Resnik et al., 2026; Richards, 2022). Against this backdrop, this article fills a gap in the literature by examining teacher well-being, its causes, and its ripple effects from the perspective of a veteran language teacher who has maintained professional well-being over four decades. It is, therefore, of interest to language teachers at any stage of their careers who wish to improve their own well-being and that of their students.¹

Research shows that teachers’ and learners’ emotions are connected, and that the teacher's emotional state sets the emotional tone in the classroom (Dewaele, 2021; Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021). According to Dewaele et al. (2022), when students perceive their teachers as happy, they tend to feel more motivated to learn and report greater foreign language learning enjoyment. Given this strong link between teacher happiness and student motivation, an important question arises: How can teachers be happy? Dewaele (2021) answers this question explicitly and unambiguously: “In order to be happy (and thus more effective), teachers need to be treated fairly, have manageable workloads, a decent salary, regular training, agency in curricular and pedagogical matters, and support from school, regional and national authorities” (p. 216). Similarly, leading scholars studying the application of PP in SLA emphasize that achieving teacher well-being is a collective

¹ While many scholars use the term *well-being* (e.g., Mercer, 2021), others prefer *happiness* or *happy* (e.g., Dewaele et al., 2022), and some use both terms within the same study (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2022) to describe a state of personal and professional satisfaction that enables teachers to flourish and foster fulfilling teaching and learning experiences in the classroom. For the purposes of this article, I consider *well-being* and *happiness* practically synonymous and use the terms interchangeably.

endeavor, rooted in the wider ecological context of the language teaching environment (Jin et al., 2021; Mercer, 2021; Sulis et al., 2023). Building on this view, prominent researchers maintain that well-being must be nurtured and sustained as a shared responsibility between individuals and their institutions, highlighting the significant role of systems in teacher well-being (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2024; Resnik et al., 2026). Consistent with these studies, Pentón Herrera et al. (2023) argue that teacher well-being is “an ecological responsibility rather than a personal duty” (p. 5). This vision reflects what many teachers would like to see more fully realized in their professional environments.

In an ideal scenario where the conditions outlined by Dewaele (2021) were met and students actively engaged in language learning, teachers could be happy. However, most of us who have been in the profession for a few years would agree that Dewaele is describing a utopia. In practice, teachers’ emotional well-being is strongly influenced by student attitudes and leadership dynamics (Alzaanin, 2024). Factors such as limited agency in curriculum decisions, increased workloads, large class sizes, lack of institutional support (e.g., Resnik et al., 2026; Sulis et al., 2023), and low salaries—combined with personal struggles, disengaged students, and crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Kim et al., 2022; Kotowski et al., 2022; MacIntyre et al., 2020)—often undermine the happiness and well-being of even the most dedicated and skilled teachers. In such unsupportive circumstances, teachers must rely on certain intangible, teacher-driven resources to foster positive emotions and well-being for both themselves and their students.

Inspired by PP, this article aims to empower language teachers to become creators of their own well-being—and that of their students, despite challenging external factors beyond their direct control. It focuses on three pillars of well-being that teachers can cultivate independently through their own resources, even in the absence of institutional support. These pillars consist of fostering strong teacher–student relationships, enhancing foreign language teaching enjoyment (FLTE), and promoting foreign language learning enjoyment (FLLE). Even if the broader teaching environment is less than favorable, language teachers can rely on these three pillars to sustain their own well-being and that of their students.

In addition, the article draws on self-determination theory (SDT) to provide a theoretical lens that substantiates the proposed pathways to teacher and learner well-being. According to SDT, humans have three basic psychological needs that are crucial for optimal functioning and personal well-being: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When these needs are fulfilled, individuals are motivated and able to flourish. By integrating these theoretical principles with my own pedagogical framework, I illustrate how fulfilling these needs serves as the foundation for professional vitality and enduring personal well-being. My claims also align with recent research underscoring the value of SDT for understanding language teacher well-being (Haukås, 2024).

The challenges of language teaching in higher education

Language classes at universities differ from other courses within students' chosen disciplines. At Tel Aviv University, where I teach, all students are required to complete the B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in English by the end of their first year. However, since English grades do not factor into students' grade point averages (GPA), motivation in these classes tends to be low. Many students believe they know English well, yet they struggle with fluency and accuracy in both writing and speaking. They often express frustration, noting that they invest more time and effort in English classes than in courses related to their major.

A similar trend is seen in Languages Other Than English (LOTE), which are typically elective. As a result, dissatisfied students can easily drop these courses. Although grades in LOTE courses do count toward the GPA, many students are reluctant to enroll, as they receive only four credits for an eight-hour course that demands a substantial amount of work. Even when programs require a LOTE for the B.A. degree, many students enroll without genuine commitment and lack the motivation to achieve meaningful proficiency. Given these challenges, language teachers must strive to make a particularly positive impact on their students. This involves harnessing the power of positive emotions to boost student motivation and build resilience, thereby creating an environment that supports language learning.

Emotions in the language classroom

Language teaching and learning are inherently emotional experiences that affect both teachers and students. Over the past decade, research in SLA has emphasized the significant role positive emotions play in the classroom (Dewaele, 2021, 2023; Dewaele et al., 2022). Positive emotions are not a luxury; emotional satisfaction is crucial for sustaining a fulfilling teaching career and for successful language learning. Just as negative emotions in students can hinder foreign language (FL) acquisition (e.g., Resnik et al., 2025), negative emotions in teachers can demotivate them, contributing to burnout (Pawlak et al., 2024). This is in line with previous research showing that negative teacher emotions may lead to feelings of hopelessness (Hiver, 2016) and even depression (Sulis et al., 2023). Teachers need to minimize negative emotions not only for their own well-being but also because their psychological states can profoundly influence the emotional climate of the classroom and the experiences of individual students (Mercer, 2018). Ultimately, teacher and learner well-being are inseparable—two sides of the same coin (Roffey, 2012).

This interconnectedness highlights the importance of nurturing teacher well-being as a key factor in promoting student well-being. According to Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory (2004), even mild positive emotions can make individuals more open, more creative, more trusting, and more resilient. It is therefore no surprise that positive emotions contribute to improved academic performance (Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2021). Consequently, teachers should strive to cultivate expansive emotions such as joy and interest while minimizing constrictive emotions such as anxiety and boredom to support learning. Furthermore, since shared positive emotions enhance both individual and collective well-being (Fredrickson, 2013), teachers must develop the qualities and practices necessary to cultivate positive emotions in the classroom.

Teacher qualities and practices that foster positive emotions

Before presenting the three pillars of well-being, it is important to outline the qualities and practices that enable teachers to achieve them. These pillars do not arise spontaneously; rather, they grow out of self-awareness, intentional effort, and a sustained commitment to cultivating positive

emotions in the classroom. The qualities represented in the acronym below not only support the development of the three pillars but also help teachers meet the basic psychological needs central to SDT. When teachers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled, they are better positioned to support these same needs in their students, thus increasing overall well-being in the classroom.

KEEP

I introduced the acronym KEEP—Kindness, Empathy, Enthusiasm, and Professionalism—as a tool to foster positive emotions in the language classroom in my earlier work (Azaryad Shechter, 2021). When teachers embody the principles of KEEP—meaning they treat students with kindness and empathy, teach with enthusiasm, and demonstrate professional competence—they are more likely to nurture positive emotions such as joy, trust, hope, interest, and gratitude in their classes. These emotions help students feel psychologically safe and pedagogically cared for, thereby increasing their motivation and enabling them to navigate occasional moments of boredom or anxiety. Students' ability to manage these states is a sign of adaptive resilience, an essential factor in successful language learning. Resilient students, in turn, make it easier for teachers to bring KEEP to life in the classroom, creating a virtuous cycle of mutual support.

As a teacher who consciously and joyfully practices KEEP, I have observed how deeply students value these qualities, and many express their appreciation in written feedback on teaching evaluation surveys. The comments in Appendix A are the students' responses to the question, "What aspects of the course helped you learn effectively?" and are included here as illustrative examples of how students respond when teachers enact KEEP. When students are treated respectfully and caringly, when they are confident that their teacher has their best interests at heart, they respond with trust, respect, and, I would argue, gratitude. Gratitude is often regarded as one of the healthiest human emotions (Emmons, 2013). It not only encourages self-improvement but also fosters greater connectedness, leading to enhanced overall well-being (Armenta et al., 2017). These effects of KEEP become even more evident when viewed through the framework of SDT.

Deliberately choosing to adopt KEEP as a guiding framework reflects intentional, values-driven action that supports the need for autonomy in SDT. Kindness, empathy, enthusiasm,

and professionalism are all choices that teachers can intentionally cultivate. By focusing on what is within their control, teachers exercise their agency and reclaim their autonomy. From the perspective of SDT, KEEP also satisfies the need for relatedness, since teachers who embody KEEP naturally form strong, trusting connections with their students. These secure and supportive relationships strengthen teachers' confidence and reduce classroom management difficulties, thereby satisfying the need for competence in SDT. When these psychological needs are met, harmony reigns in the classroom: students feel they can express their opinions without fearing negative consequences and are not afraid of making mistakes. This fosters an environment conducive to successful language learning.

Seen from a broader perspective, KEEP and SDT mutually nourish each other; KEEP helps satisfy teachers' essential psychological needs as outlined in SDT, and those fulfilled needs, in turn, make KEEP easier to practice. Taken together, this creates a win-win scenario. In line with SDT, teachers who let KEEP guide their behavior become more attuned to their students' needs. They recognize that excessive control, unrealistic demands, or a lack of genuine connection undermine students' emotional well-being, consistent with Ryan and Deci (2000; 2020). Embodying the principles of KEEP ensures that the students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are respected and supported as well. To sustain this way of teaching, teachers themselves must possess certain personal qualities that make KEEP possible in daily practice.

Essential qualities that enable teachers to embody KEEP

Before turning to the three pillars, it is helpful to examine the personal qualities that allow KEEP to be practiced consistently. Certain characteristics help teachers embody the principles of KEEP and create an environment where students feel psychologically safe and pedagogically cared for. I consider two qualities indispensable for teacher and learner well-being: confidence and compassion. Confidence is necessary to satisfy the need for competence in SDT and motivates us to develop professionally, which further enhances our confidence and our sense of competence. However, confidence alone does not guarantee that teachers will earn students' trust, respect, or genuine engagement. A confident teacher who lacks compassion cannot be authentically kind, empathetic, and enthusiastic. To fully embody KEEP, teachers must therefore integrate both confidence and compassion.

Confident and compassionate teachers are better able to cope with problematic students, challenging classes, and other difficulties that inevitably emerge in the teaching profession. They are more likely to respond with self-compassion—showing sensitivity toward themselves—and sensitivity toward their students, thereby contributing to well-being in the classroom. According to Mercer (2025), when we teach with compassion, we form secure relationships with our students and help them feel psychologically safe, consequently enhancing their engagement and language learning. Consistent with these findings, I have witnessed firsthand that teacher confidence and compassion foster stronger interpersonal relationships, supporting the fulfillment of SDT’s relatedness need. A key ripple effect of confidence and compassion is reciprocal resilience: teachers who are confident and compassionate are more likely to build meaningful relationships with their students, thus strengthening their own resilience and that of their students. Resilient students, in turn, make it easier for teachers to embody KEEP, creating a virtuous cycle in which teachers and students mutually reinforce one another’s well-being.

Beyond these interpersonal benefits, confidence and compassion promote a more flexible and creative pedagogical approach that further enhances teacher and student resilience, especially when workloads become overwhelming. Over the years, I have found practical strategies to alleviate my workload without compromising pedagogical standards. For instance, I have developed Moodle quizzes with a variety of question types that can be automatically graded by the platform. While preparing such quizzes requires substantial initial effort, in the long run it is well worth the investment. Moreover, students rarely contest grades generated by the computer, whereas they may object to marks taken off by teachers. Colleagues who have followed my advice report the immense relief of no longer having to mark thirty or more quizzes manually several times a semester. They also enjoy the sense of peace that comes when students do not dispute their grades. Similarly, collaborative writing tasks and oral presentations have become standard practice in our A2–B2 English classes, appreciated by teachers and students alike. These activities foster teamwork skills and prepare students for real-world communication. I also recommend in-class pair quizzes, where two students discuss each question and submit a shared answer. Likewise, implementing occasional ungraded, low-stakes quizzes familiarizes students with question types and allows them to test their knowledge in a stress-free environment. In brief, creative and

pedagogically sound practices can lighten our workload while simultaneously enhancing students' learning experiences, outcomes, and satisfaction. These practices constitute an excellent expression of KEEP and also contribute to the three pillars of well-being discussed below.

Three pillars of well-being in language teaching and learning

The three pillars of well-being emerge naturally from teacher confidence, compassion, and the consistent practice of KEEP. Although each pillar is distinct, they are closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing. When we cultivate one, the others become easier to develop. I have repeatedly observed that drawing on these pillars in my everyday teaching strengthens both my own and my students' happiness. Together, these pillars support teacher and learner well-being not only in challenging circumstances but also in contexts characterized by strong institutional support. In addition, while broader working conditions and identities can affect teachers' overall well-being, these differences do not limit their capacity to cultivate the three pillars in their daily practice. Thus, the pillars remain accessible to all teachers, regardless of their professional status or personal background. Finally, the pillars align with SDT, as they help satisfy the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Therefore, I wholeheartedly recommend cultivating the following pillars, all of which lie largely within a teacher's control.

Teacher–student relationships

As humans, we have a deep need to feel appreciated. When this need is met, we feel content and more motivated. Similarly, when our students appreciate us, our motivation increases and we feel more confident and competent. To earn their appreciation, we must express genuine care for their success and well-being through our words and actions and demonstrate that we have their best interests at heart. By embodying KEEP, we can put this genuine interest into practice and forge strong connections, thereby motivating students to attend class regularly and engage willingly in activities. Furthermore, when we cultivate trusting relationships with our students, we can let go of the need to be perfect, leading to a more relaxed and authentic classroom presence. Strong relationships help us come to class with more enthusiasm, as they inspire us to sustain the positive

atmosphere we have co-created with our students. I have observed that this atmosphere also fosters supportive relationships among the students themselves.

The world's longest scientific study of happiness reveals that a good life depends on good relationships, which make us happier and healthier (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). This longitudinal research, which has followed several generations across their lifespans, shows that the strongest predictor of human happiness and long-term well-being is the quality of personal relationships. Consistent with these findings—and with SDT—language teachers' happiness, too, is closely tied to the quality of their relationships with their students. As Mercer (2018, 2025) and Moskowitz et al. (2022) emphasize, FL learning is inherently relational, shaped fundamentally by teacher–student interactions. From an SDT perspective, strong teacher–student relationships are essential because they directly satisfy the need for relatedness, creating the psychological safety that enables both teachers and learners to thrive.

If there is one factor that most powerfully shapes both teacher and student well-being, it is the quality of the teacher–student relationships. In my experience, a language course is only as successful as the relationships the teacher builds with students. When students are confident that the teacher cares about their academic progress and overall well-being, they are not afraid to express their opinions or make mistakes. They feel psychologically safe and pedagogically cared for because they trust and respect the teacher. This creates more enduring motivation and sustained engagement, helping students develop adaptive resilience—an essential quality for successful language learning. Resilient students are a great asset in the classroom, as they naturally reinforce the next two pillars. For all these reasons, we should prioritize cultivating strong relationships with our students.

Foreign Language Learning Enjoyment (FLLE) and Foreign Language Teaching Enjoyment (FLTE)

Enjoyment should not be an emotion we only experience when we engage in a hobby. According to neuroscientist Andrew Huberman (2021), when we pursue activities we enjoy, our dopamine and motivation levels increase. In other words, enjoyment is indispensable for

successful language learning because it fuels motivation. This connection between enjoyment and learning is echoed in Xie et al. (2023), who demonstrated that student enjoyment, derived from perceived teacher enjoyment, leads to improved student performance. Therefore, it is essential that both teachers and students experience enjoyment in the language classroom. Consistent with this view, Sulis and Mercer (2025) emphasize that teacher and learner emotional engagement are interconnected, supporting the existence of emotional contagion in the classroom. This aligns with earlier research showing that teacher and student enjoyment are reciprocally connected and that both positively influence student achievement (Frenzel et al., 2018). This reciprocal emotional dynamic sets the stage for understanding enjoyment at the construct level.

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014a) introduced the notion of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) in SLA, pioneering extensive research on this emotion (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014b, 2016). I prefer the more explicit term Foreign Language *Learning* Enjoyment (FLLE) to distinguish it more clearly from Foreign Language *Teaching* Enjoyment (FLTE). While FLLE and FLTE are distinct pillars, I discuss them together to emphasize their interdependence in the language classroom. FLLE consists of three key components: teacher appreciation (how well the teacher meets the learner's psychological needs), personal enjoyment, and social enjoyment in the FL classroom (Botes et al., 2021). These components align closely with SDT: teacher appreciation nurtures relatedness, personal enjoyment strengthens competence and autonomy, and social enjoyment supports both relatedness and autonomy by creating a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere in which students feel connected and participate willingly. According to Botes et al. (2022), FLLE is highly desirable in the language classroom, as it is linked to lower anxiety and higher academic achievement. This evidence highlights the broadening effect of FLLE, consistent with broaden-and-build theory. By expanding students' thought–action repertoires, FLLE helps them cope more effectively with the challenges of FL learning, thereby enhancing their resilience and well-being.

FLTE is a more recent addition to SLA research. To the best of my knowledge, Proietti Ergün and Dewaele (2021) were the first to investigate FLTE in relation to teacher resilience and well-being. Their research showed that resilience and well-being are significant predictors of FLTE. Derakhshan et al. (2022) also found that happy and resilient teachers report higher levels of

FLTE. Similar to FLLE, FLTE consists of three components: the teacher's appreciation of students, personal enjoyment, and social enjoyment in the classroom. These elements also map onto SDT's basic psychological needs: appreciating students strengthens teachers' sense of relatedness, personal enjoyment reinforces competence and autonomy, and social enjoyment supports both relatedness and autonomy by creating a positive, low-pressure classroom climate in which teachers feel free to teach in ways that align with their values and authentic selves. FLTE and its connection to teacher well-being continue to attract attention in PP-informed SLA research. Most recently, Resnik et al. (2026) confirmed earlier findings by showing that teachers' well-being positively predicts FLTE.

It is not surprising that high well-being leads to high FLTE; after all, it is easier to enjoy anything when one is happy and resilient. But what if a teacher's circumstances do not support their resilience and well-being? Can they, then, not expect to have high FLTE like the teachers in Proietti Ergün and Dewaele (2021)? The crucial question, then, is this: how can teachers cultivate happiness and resilience when external conditions are unsupportive? My four-decade teaching career has had extended periods of adversity, and yet I have found joy in teaching. My strong relationships with my students and my high FLTE have been key *sources* of my resilience and well-being. I believe I am happier and more resilient as a language teacher *because* I have high FLTE, and not the other way around. Even when our well-being leaves much to be desired, we can still enhance our FLTE through confidence and compassion, supported by the practice of KEEP. Learning a new language, developing one's own materials, watching inspiring TED talks, and using engaging course materials can all boost FLTE. The use of appealing materials is something I prioritize in the classroom. For instance, incorporating a television series to teach grammar in my second-year Turkish class has turned grammar learning into an activity my students absolutely love. For more information on how to implement this approach with English or a LOTE, please see my previous work (Azaryad Shechter, 2018).

In my view, FLTE is the most accessible and beneficial emotion for fostering teacher resilience and well-being, much like FLLE is for student resilience and well-being. Recent studies show that FLTE increases student engagement and motivation (Yang et al., 2023), further highlighting the importance of this emotion for both teachers and students. We cannot expect high

FLLE among students if our FLTE is low. These emotions mutually reinforce each other: higher teacher FLTE leads to higher student FLLE, and higher student FLLE, in turn, strengthens teacher FLTE. Teachers who establish strong relationships with their students create a virtuous cycle where high FLTE boosts their resilience and well-being, thereby further strengthening their FLTE. At the same time, FLTE nurtures FLLE, making it an integral component of this virtuous cycle. These reciprocal dynamics demonstrate why FLTE and FLLE function as two distinct pillars of well-being. Both have shaped my own four-decade career, as the following autobiographical reflections illustrate.

Autobiographical reflections and pedagogical insights

One might wonder where my well-being comes from and how I sustain it in my fifth decade as a university teacher. As a character trait, I inherently enjoy learning and teaching languages. I was intrigued by foreign languages as early as preschool age and felt the frustration of not being able to communicate with my American cousins who were visiting us in Istanbul. In third grade, I was thrilled to start learning French, and I took to it naturally. This love for languages has accompanied me all my life and inspired me to learn several foreign languages. The role of a language teacher was, therefore, a most natural choice for me. Surely, this genuine fascination with languages sustains my motivation as a teacher and fuels my high FLTE. I take every opportunity to communicate this love to my students, and to my great joy, I have had students change their attitude towards the English course and even say they feel motivated not only to master English but also to learn another language.

The qualities and practices I have discussed in this article are the very means through which I have sustained my well-being for four decades. My teaching almost always evokes positive emotions and optimism. I joyfully put KEEP into practice, seeing it as the key to well-being for my students and for myself. As a lifelong language learner, I can put myself in my students' shoes, appreciate their challenges, and celebrate their epiphanies. I genuinely enjoy accompanying them on this journey of continuous discovery called language learning. I respect their individual differences, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. I offer them as much freedom and autonomy as possible. Thanks to my disposition, being kind, empathetic, and enthusiastic is natural to me. It

Language Teacher Well-Being

is deeply gratifying that my sincere commitment to their well-being does not go unnoticed. Over the years, I have consistently received positive feedback from my classes in teaching evaluation surveys (see Appendix A), reflecting their appreciation of my honest efforts to create a psychologically safe place for them to learn a language successfully while also enjoying the process.

Another factor that enriches my work is that I teach two languages. I teach A2-B2 English as well as first- and second-year Turkish (my first language). While my small Turkish classes consist of students who are intrinsically motivated, having chosen this elective course because they like the language or they are studying the history of the Middle East, my large English classes are filled with students who take the course only because it is mandatory. As a result, I face distinct challenges in each language class. In recent years, I have taught B1 English classes at 8:15 in the morning, an hour at which most students would prefer to be tucked up in bed. Yet, I have had the pleasure of receiving very flattering comments from my students about why our classroom is full at such an early hour. Ultimately, regardless of the circumstances, when we embody KEEP, we have a good chance to cultivate well-being in the classroom. When we choose flexibility over rigidity, consideration over indifference, and encouragement and appreciation over criticism, we create a psychologically safe space for our students to flourish.

These principles guide how I approach the first lesson of every course. Before the first lesson, I do not experience anxious thoughts such as “Will they like me?” I love my students before I have even met them, and I have no doubt that they will appreciate this love. When the academic year began, I entered the first lesson with my B1-level English class feeling excitement and joy. While I did not plan every word I would speak, I entered the classroom with a clear goal: to inspire my students and encourage them to attend class willingly. I aimed to help them realize from the very first lesson that this course is not only relevant and valuable, but also enjoyable and rewarding. From the way the class responded to my questions and engaged in the tasks, I sensed that we had already forged a positive connection in that initial session. By the end of the third lesson, I had learned the names of all 31 students in the class. I could see the students’ appreciation in their eyes. They were clearly not used to being addressed by their names in other classes, and certainly not so early in the semester. I met a student from that class four months after the end of the course, and the

student alluded to this very fact. In his memory, I already knew everyone by name in the second lesson, and this impressed the entire class deeply.

I bring the same care to the first lesson with my Turkish students, ensuring that they leave with a sense of accomplishment and zest for the lessons to come. Since my Beginners' Turkish classes are small, I learn all my students' names in the first lesson. In my professional development seminars, as well as in Azaryad Shechter (2021), I emphasize the importance of starting the semester with an appealing first lesson. A positive first lesson sets the emotional tone for the classes ahead. While a disappointing or mediocre first lesson can be remedied, it is particularly rewarding to start with a great first lesson. If we enter the classroom with self-confidence, believing in our ability to create a positive learning experience, we position ourselves to achieve it. I encourage teachers to treat every lesson as the first and to approach each class with renewed optimism.

Beyond these classroom experiences, common self-care practices help me sustain my physical and mental health, enabling me to practice what I preach. As much as possible, I make time to take walks along the Mediterranean coast in the morning, listening to a podcast or lecture—often in a foreign language I am trying to improve. While not as frequently as I wish I could, I spend time in nature, finding solace in the mountains, hills, and forests. There is no “one-size-fits-all” formula in self-care. People should do what they love: knit, paint, bake, meditate, go to the gym, or spend time with their loved ones or their dogs. We all deserve to dedicate time to activities that nourish us and recharge our batteries. Self-care is not a luxury but a fundamental need to help us show up in our professional lives in ways that align with our values and allow us to feel satisfied at the end of the day.

On a professional level, SDT provides further insight into why I continue to thrive after four decades in the profession. As a dedicated teacher, the leadership respects my teaching record and trusts my experience. In particular, my Turkish classes, which I developed from scratch, offer greater freedom, allowing me to express my creativity. Even in English classes, where most materials are provided by the course coordinator, we have the freedom to develop our own materials and to choose articles and tasks that resonate with us. When we are enthusiastic about our

course materials, we have a better chance of engaging our students. Choosing what I teach and how I teach fulfills my need for autonomy, enhancing my motivation and well-being.

The second SDT need, competence, is supported by my extensive teaching experience and my passion for languages. Being a continuous language learner motivates me to share my learning practices and challenges with my students, which they often find inspiring. I feel competent in my role and confident that I am the right person in the right place. I know which teaching methods work, and remain flexible in adapting my lesson plans to suit the needs of the class at any given moment. I aim to minimize negative emotions, such as boredom and anxiety, and maximize positive emotions such as curiosity, interest, joy, and amusement. When their emotions are acknowledged and addressed, students are more motivated to engage with the task at hand. I love teaching not only because it allows me to flourish but also because it enables me to help others flourish. Their engagement and satisfaction in class are my sources of joy and gratitude, enhancing my sense of competence.

Relatedness, the third psychological need of SDT, is likely the primary reason I continue to thrive in this profession. Teaching fulfills my need for relatedness because I genuinely enjoy interacting with people. Building relationships with my students satisfies my desire to care for, guide, and support them. I treat every student with the respect they deserve, and it brings me joy to brighten their day. Over the years, students have told me that the supportive relationships that developed among them stemmed from the classroom atmosphere I fostered. My lessons serve as spaces not only to acquire language skills but also opportunities for students to express their thoughts and feelings on topics that matter to them through writing and speaking tasks. Such tasks increase positive affect among students and enhance their well-being. Consequently, my students generally demonstrate greater levels of hope and gratitude. This is in line with Peterson (2013), who claims that grateful connection creates resilience and joy—qualities that are also essential for successful language learning.

My personal experience aligns with Haukås (2024), who found that autonomy in choosing subject content and teaching approaches significantly contributes to language teacher well-being. Her study showed that competent teachers who actively engage their students enjoy greater well-

being, as they are trusted and respected by their students. The teachers in her study reported maintaining their well-being for four decades until retirement, attributing their longevity to their passion for language teaching and the strong relationships they cultivated with students. I can wholeheartedly say that these findings mirror my own professional experience as well; indeed, I could easily have been one of the participants in her study, further reinforcing her findings. When the needs outlined in SDT are met, teachers not only sustain their well-being for decades but also become agents of well-being for their students.

Conclusion

In recent years, the COVID pandemic and other adverse national and global events have made the goal of teacher well-being feel further out of reach. Leading PP researchers in SLA rightly emphasize that well-being is not the sole responsibility of the individual teacher; positive workplace practices play a crucial role in promoting language teacher well-being (e.g., Mercer, 2021; Pentón Herrera et al., 2023; Resnik et al., 2026). Pentón Herrera et al. (2023) illustrate a professional reality where institutions prioritize student well-being at the expense of teachers. The English teachers quoted in their introduction vividly articulate ever-increasing workloads and a systemic lack of consideration from leadership and institutions that often address teachers' challenges only superficially.

No wonder teachers who work in institutions where they are treated unfairly—and where their dignity and psychological safety are not protected—report declining levels of happiness (Resnik et al., 2026). Such negative workplace environments often prevent teachers from voicing their concerns without fear of repercussions, leaving them increasingly frustrated by their inability to initiate meaningful change. Addressing the root causes of language teachers' disproportionate workloads requires institutional accountability rather than relying solely on individual coping strategies. I call on policymakers, department heads, and those in leadership positions to consult the works of Pentón Herrera et al. (2023), Resnik et al. (2026), and related research on teacher well-being to critically examine the systemic challenges facing language teachers and to spearhead policy reforms and positive workplace practices that improve their overall conditions in higher education. Ultimately, institutions that prioritize the dignity and well-being of their faculty are

rewarded with enhanced student outcomes, creating a virtuous cycle that serves the long-term success and reputation of the institution itself.

While awaiting such systemic shifts, teachers can strive to improve their circumstances using their own resources and the guidance offered in this article. Evidence from decades of classroom practice suggests that positive emotions are essential for language teachers to succeed, thrive, and effectively motivate their students. This view aligns with Mercer and Murillo-Miranda (2025), who emphasize that flourishing teachers, who teach to the best of their abilities, are essential for successful language learning. By recognizing how our emotions affect our well-being and shape that of our students, we can flourish as teachers regardless of whether we are at the beginning or the end of our careers. A professional mindset grounded in love and determination is our greatest ally, enabling us to become the confident and compassionate individuals whom students trust and respect. By embodying the principles of KEEP, we forge strong relationships with our students, creating a positive environment where we enjoy teaching, students find joy in learning, and well-being naturally emerges. This also indicates that our basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness have been satisfied.

This article aims to empower language teachers to reclaim their agency by providing pathways to flourish in their profession despite external challenges and adversities. We can cultivate our well-being even when our working conditions remain far from ideal. I believe our classrooms can become “protected spaces” where, for 90 minutes at a time, we set aside other concerns and ensure the time spent together is valuable and enjoyable for both our students and ourselves. As Resnik et al. (2026) note, “happier teachers with a higher degree of well-being are more likely to lead to teacher retention and better student outcomes” (p. 14). I invite my fellow language teachers to prioritize their own well-being and that of their students by investing in the three pillars outlined in this article.

References

Alzaanin, E. I. (2024). Capturing the emotional experiences of English as a foreign language university teachers: A critical perspective. *Language Teaching Research*, 28(3), 931-947.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211012863>

JEPIC, Vol 2:2, 2026

Armenta, C. N., Fritz, M. M., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2017). Functions of positive emotions: Gratitude as a motivator of self-improvement and positive change. *Emotion Review*, 9(3), 183-190. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073916669596>

Azaryad Shechter, D. (2018) Overcoming the grammar barrier in foreign language learning: the role of television series. *Journal of Language and Education*, 4(2), 92-104. <https://doi.org/10.17323/2411-7390-2018-4-2-92-104>

Azaryad Shechter, D. (2021). Keep up the good work: How language teachers foster positive affect in university students. *Konin Language Studies*, 9(4), 477-497. <https://doi: 10.30438/ksj.2021.9.4.4>

Babic, S., Mercer, S., Mairitsch, A., Gruber, J., & Hempkin, K. (2022). Language teacher well-being in the workplace. *Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition*, 8(1), 11-34. <https://doi.org/10.31261/TAPSLA.11514>

Botes, E., Dewaele, J.-M., & Greiff, S. (2021). The development and validation of the short form of the foreign language enjoyment scale. *The Modern Language Journal*, 105(4), 858-876. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12741>

Botes, E., Dewaele, J.-M., & Greiff, S. (2022). Taking stock: A meta-analysis of the effects of foreign language enjoyment. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 12(2), 205-232. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2022.12.2.3>

Derakhshan, A., Dewaele, J.-M., Noughabi, M. A. (2022). Modeling the contribution of resilience, well-being, and L2 grit to foreign language teaching enjoyment among Iranian English language teachers, *System*, 109, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2022.102890>.

Dewaele, J.-M. (2021). The emotional rollercoaster ride of foreign language learners and teachers: Sources and interactions of classroom emotions. In M. Simons & T. F. H. Smits (Eds.), *Language*

Education and Emotions. Research into Emotions and Language Learners, Language Teachers and Educational Processes. Routledge, pp. 205-220. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003019497-17>

Dewaele, J.-M. (2023). Foreword: The learner emotions that oil the cogs in TBLT. In C. Lambert, S. Audrey & G. Bui (Eds.), *The Role of the Learner in Task-based Language Teaching. Theory and Research.* Routledge, ISBN 9781003227267
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003227267>

Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P.D. (2014a). Foreign Language Enjoyment and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. The right and left feet of FL learning? Unpublished manuscript.

Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014b). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 4, 273-274. <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/10592/>

Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2016). Foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety: The right and left feet of the language learner. In P. D. MacIntyre, T. Gregersen, & S. Mercer (Eds.), *Positive psychology in SLA* (pp. 215–236). Multilingual Matters.
<https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783095360-010>

Dewaele, J.-M., Saito, K., & Halimi, F. (2022). How teacher behaviour shapes foreign language learners' enjoyment, anxiety and attitudes/motivation: A mixed modelling longitudinal investigation. *Language Teaching Research*, 13621688221089601.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221089601>

Emmons, R. A. (2013). *Gratitude works!: A 21-day program for creating emotional prosperity.* John Wiley & Sons.

Fredrickson, B. L. (2004). The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B: Biological Sciences*, 359(1449), 1367-1377. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2004.1512>

Fredrickson, B. L. (2013). Positive emotions broaden and build. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 47, pp. 1-53). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-407236-7.00001-2>

Frenzel, A. C., Becker-Kurz, B., Pekrun, R., Goetz, T., & Lüdtke, O. (2018). Emotion transmission in the classroom revisited: A reciprocal effects model of teacher and student enjoyment. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 110(5), 628-639. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000228>

Gregersen, T., & MacIntyre, P. (2024). Language teacher well-being: An individual–institutional pact. *ELT Journal*, 78(2), 179-188. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccad053>

Gregersen, T., Mercer, S., MacIntyre, P., Talbot, K., & Banga, C. A. (2023). Understanding language teacher well-being: An ESM study of daily stressors and uplifts. *Language Teaching Research*, 27(4), 862-883. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820965897>

Haukås, A. (2024). Understanding the factors supporting language teachers' sustained motivation until retirement. *Modern Language Journal*, 108, 430-445. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12920>

Hiver, P. (2016). The triumph over experience: Hope and hardiness in novice L2 teachers. In P. D. MacIntyre, T. Gregersen, & S. Mercer (Eds.), *Positive psychology in SLA* (pp. 168-192). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783095360-008>

Huberman, A. (2021). *Controlling Your Dopamine For Motivation, Focus & Satisfaction* [video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLQRAMZi--c>

Jin, J., Mercer, S., Babic, S., Mairitsch, A. (2021). Understanding the Ecology of Foreign Language Teacher Well-being. In: Budzińska, K., Majchrzak, O. (eds) *Positive Psychology in*

Second and Foreign Language Education. Second Language Learning and Teaching. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64444-4_2

Kim, L. E., Oxley, L., & Asbury, K. (2022). “My brain feels like a browser with 100 tabs open”: A longitudinal study of teachers’ mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(1), 299-318. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12450>

Kotowski, S. E., Davis, K. G., & Barratt, C. L. (2022). Teachers feeling the burden of COVID-19: Impact on well-being, stress, and burnout. *WORK: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment & Rehabilitation*, 71(2), 407-415. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-210994>

MacIntyre, P. D., Gregersen, T., & Mercer, S. (2020). Language teachers’ coping strategies during the Covid-19 conversion to online teaching: Correlations with stress, wellbeing and negative emotions. *System*, 94, 102352. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102352>

MacIntyre, P. D., Ross, J., Talbot, K., Mercer, S., Gregersen, T., & Banga, C. A. (2019). Stressors, personality and well-being among language teachers. *System*, 82, 26-38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.02.013>

Mercer, S. (2018). Psychology for language learning: Spare a thought for the teacher. *Language Teaching*, 51(4), 504-525. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444817000258>

Mercer, S. (2021). An agenda for well-being in ELT: An ecological perspective. *ELT Journal*, 75(1), 14-21. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccaa062>

Mercer, S. (2025). *Compassion-based Language Education (EPUB)*. Oxford University Press.

Mercer, S., & Kostoulas, A. (Eds.). (2018). *Language teacher psychology*. Multilingual Matters.

Mercer, S., & Murillo-Miranda, C. (2025). Research agenda on well-being and language education. *Language Teaching*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444825000060>

Moskowitz, S., & Dewaele, J.-M. (2021). Is teacher happiness contagious? A study of the link between perceptions of language teacher happiness and student attitudes. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 15(2), 117-130.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2019.1707205>

Moskowitz, S., Dewaele, J.-M., & Resnik, P. (2022). Beyond the boundaries of the self: Applying relational theory towards an understanding of the teacher-student relationship as a driver of motivation in foreign language learning. *Journal for the Psychology of Language Learning*, 4(2), e429622. <https://doi.org/10.52598/jpll/4/2/5>

Pawlak, M., Zawodniak, J., Kruk, M. (2024). Language Teacher Demotivation and Burnout. In: Tajeddin, Z., Farrell, T.S. (eds) *Handbook of Language Teacher Education*. Springer International Handbooks of Education. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-43208-8_7-1

Pentón Herrera, L. J. P., Martínez-Alba, G., & Trinh, E. (Eds.). (2023). *Teacher well-being in English language teaching: An ecological approach*. Taylor & Francis.

Peterson, C. (2013). *Pursuing the good life: 100 reflections in positive psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Proietti Ergün, A. L., & Dewaele, J.-M. (2021). Do well-being and resilience predict the foreign language teaching enjoyment of teachers of Italian? *System*, 99, 102506.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102506>

Resnik, P., Dewaele, J. M., Li, C., & Botes, E. (2025). The role of positive and negative emotions in foreign language learning: A research agenda. *Language Teaching*, 1-26.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444825101031>

Resnik, P., Moskowitz, S., Dewaele, J.-M., & Botes, E. (2026). “A rising tide lifts all boats”: The role that positive workplace practices and teacher well-being play in foreign language teacher emotions. *Modern Language Journal*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.70049>

Richards, J. C. (2022). Exploring emotions in language teaching. *Relc Journal*, 53(1), 225-239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688220927531>

Rodríguez-Muñoz, A., Antino, M., Ruiz-Zorrilla, P., & Ortega, E. (2021). Positive emotions, engagement, and objective academic performance: A weekly diary study. *Learning and individual differences*, 92, 102087. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2021.102087>

Roffey, S. (2012). Pupil wellbeing-Teacher wellbeing: Two sides of the same coin?. *Educational & Child Psychology*, 29(4). <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsecp.2012.29.4.8>

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary educational psychology*, 61, 101860. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860>

Sulis, G., & Mercer, S. (2025). The choreography of engagement in the language classroom: Exploring the dynamic interplay between learner and teacher engagement. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 117, 102586. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2024.102586>

Sulis, G., Mercer, S., Babic, S., & Mairitsch, A. (2023). *Language teacher well-being across the career span* (Vol. 21). Channel View Publications.

Waldinger, R., & Schulz, M. (2023). *The good life: Lessons from the world's longest scientific study of happiness*. Simon and Schuster.

Xie, Q., King, R. B., & Cai, Y. (2023). Emotional contagion: A cross-cultural exploration of how teachers' enjoyment facilitates achievement via students' enjoyment. *Current Psychology*, 42(18), 15907-15910. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-02878-6>

Yang, S., Azari Noughabi, M., Botes, E., & Dewaele, J.-M. (2023). Let's Get Positive: How Foreign Language Teaching Enjoyment Can Create a Positive Feedback Loop. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 13(1), 17-38. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.32358>

Appendix A: Student Feedback Examples (Recent and Previous Years)

The following excerpts are drawn from students' responses (translated from Hebrew) to the open-ended question on the teaching evaluation survey completed at the end of the course. Over the years, these comments consistently demonstrate how much students appreciate teacher enthusiasm, a caring approach, and a positive emotional climate. These comments also illustrate how the principles discussed in this article—particularly KEEP, FLTE/FLLE, and satisfying the SDT needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy—foster positive emotions among students and contribute to the mutual well-being of teachers and students. Together, these voices remind us that when teachers flourish, students flourish alongside them.

B1 English students, January 2025

Of the 31 students enrolled in the course, 24 (77%) completed the evaluation survey. Among these 24 respondents, 12 chose to answer the optional open-ended question. Their comments are presented verbatim and in the same sequential order as they appear in the original survey results:

“What aspects of the course helped you learn effectively?”

Language Teacher Well-Being

- *“The lecturer’s attitude toward the students was very positive, contributing to the learning atmosphere in the classroom, and there was a clear desire for learning.”*
- *“Deborah really cares about the students and helps us succeed, making the lesson an interesting experience through watching videos and enriching the content with diverse materials.”*
- *“An absolutely amazing teacher! We enjoyed every moment. She made the lessons interesting and fun. Truly, she is just amazing and so caring.”*
- *“Deborah is able to incorporate a lot of technological aids into the lesson, which are relevant to the material and contribute a lot to learning. She has excellent communication with the class, and she maintains an ongoing discussion that keeps the students' attention continuously. She speaks clearly and comprehensibly.”*
- *“Presentation of the material and helping and answering every question from everyone.”*
- *“The lecturer helps and does a lot to ensure that the students succeed in the course. She explains properly and really cares about the students’ success.”*
- *“I felt how much Deborah cares about each of us. She is very attentive and did her best to adapt to us in terms of assignments and assistance. She gave us amazing attention and made me want to come to class every time, which greatly helped my motivation to learn.”*
- *“Deborah’s patience was excellent. She explained everything very well.”*
- *“The lessons were very interesting and informative. I felt that I could turn to Deborah with any question and received an answer for everything.”*
- *“Just to note that I was exempted from English B1 and therefore did not attend most of the classes. From what I experienced, she is a charming woman, there are no points for improvement.”*
- *“The many exercises helped me a lot, including vocabulary and all the questionnaires.”*
- *“Reading out loud during questions in class. Repetition of unfamiliar words. Group assignments. The lecturer is very cute. You can see that she wants to help and support us. She gives her all and is always smiling and nice.”*

English and Turkish Students from Previous Years

I have compiled these excerpts from student responses over several years without keeping specific records of the academic years or individual classes. I use these comments in my professional development talks to illustrate the positive impact teachers have when they embody KEEP, build strong relationships, and foster FLLE.

- *“Deborah listened to us and really cared about our success.”*
- *“I liked coming to class because of the warm atmosphere the teacher created.”*
- *“Deborah explained everything clearly and made sure everyone participated.”*
- *“She took into account the needs of each student.”*
- *“She smiled, she challenged us, she was committed and professional.”*
- *“Deborah is positive, kind, sensitive, patient. She wants us to succeed.”*
- *“I enjoyed every moment in this course.”*
- *“We learned so much more than a language.”*