

A transcendental phenomenology on existential positive psychology (EPP) and L2 education: Setting a practical agenda for regulating students' well-being and ill-being

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Abstract

The contributions of positive psychology (PP) to the study of second and foreign language (L2) emotions have received considerable scholarly attention in recent years. In response to the criticism that it adopted a limited viewpoint, PP has broadened its perspective. Existential positive psychology (EPP) is a branch of PP that can address prior critiques and inform English as a foreign language (EFL) learning, particularly the dialectical relationship between positive and negative emotions. Focus group interview data from eight experienced EFL teachers were analyzed to produce a five-dimensional model, including agendas and sample pedagogical practices. The five layers are "assigning meaningful, relevant, and authentic classroom tasks," "providing personalized learning paths and plans for learners," "empowering learner agency, choice, and responsibility," "admitting and facing existential adversities/feelings," and "cultivating a culture of positivity and appreciation." The findings are discussed in light of PP and EPP, and implications are provided

for EFL teachers, policymakers, and teacher educators to raise their awareness and knowledge of the EPP contribution to learner emotionality.

Keywords: positive psychology; existential positive psychology; learner ill-being; learner well-being; transcendental phenomenology

1. Introduction

With the growth of positive psychology (PP) in second language acquisition (SLA) research, greater attention is being paid to researching and developing the factors that promote greater well-being and positivity (Derakhshan, 2022; Dewaele et al., 2019; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2024; MacIntyre, 2021; Mercer & Gregersen, 2023; Tsang & Lee, 2024; Wang et al., 2021). In particular, research on positive emotions has garnered attention (Derakhshan & Yin, 2024; Dewaele et al., 2024). However, it is noteworthy that the division between positive and negative emotions is not clear-cut; they are not easily distinguishable categories but are best seen as complementary and interacting processes (MacIntyre, 2021). Considered more broadly, the distinction between what is considered “positive” and what is a “negative” factor in language learning can become blurry, especially over shorter and longer timelines. For example, is a negative emotion such as anxiety always “negative” or can we recognize that it may aid in adaptation within the immediate situation, protecting the learner from a threat to self-esteem? On the other hand, does a positive emotion such as enjoyment become problematic if it supplants learning as the major outcome of a language course?

Existential positive psychology (EPP) deals with the dialectic relationship between positive and negative psychological experiences. EPP is an extension of positive psychology’s historical connection to humanistic psychology. It emphasizes the integration of positive and negative emotions (Wong, 2021) and underscores the necessary synthesis of both bright and dark aspects of one’s life (Mayer, 2020). According to Wong et al. (2022), a shift toward EPP is taking place that offers a more comprehensive view for considering both positive and negative emotions, within the context of well-being or ill-being as longer-term experiences. Ill-being is a state capturing the holistic experience of learners’ negative emotions, non-functionality, and inefficiency in language learning. It is the counterpart of well-being and is influenced by numerous factors, such as learners’ inherent senses, contextual factors, and competence (Stoloff et al., 2019; Sutton, 1984). Moreover, cultural factors and social interactions affect ill-being (Yong et al., 2020). To date, ill-being has been scarcely explored in educational milieus compared to well-being (Mercer, 2020; Stebbings & Taylor, 2016).

Under the banner of PP in SLA, research on the well-being of language learners and teachers has been growing rapidly (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Mercer, 2020; Wang & Derakhshan, 2025; Wang et al., 2024; Zhi & Derakhshan, 2024). Pioneering studies show that learner well-being affects different dimensions of language learning, including engagement, academic performance, self-regulation, and motivation (Derakhshan & Fathi, 2024; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Pan et al., 2023). Research on language teacher well-being, once rarely discussed, now has an emerging literature (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Nevertheless, learning can be a difficult process in which language learners may face numerous challenging situations and encounter a variety of negative emotions (MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017; Mercer, 2020; Pawlak et al., 2024) that may lead to ill-being.

Despite the prominent role of feelings and inner states in diverse aspects of second and foreign (L2) education (Dewaele & Saito, 2024; MacIntyre, 2021), learners' well-being and its effects on the learning process have not been fully explored, and this is even more so regarding ill-being. Furthermore, given the potential and benefits of using an EPP approach to study complex emotions, it is vital to explore well-being and ill-being from teachers' views as they are the main shapers and directors of education. Yet, this topic has few (if any) studies to date. Therefore, to capture the complexities of learner emotions and their connections to both well-being and ill-being, we will examine how EPP can be helpful in understanding well-being and ill-being from the teachers' perspective, yielding practical applications for L2 classes. The rationale for using EPP in this study was that this approach promotes the investigation of both negative emotions (e.g., ill-being) and positive ones at the same time (e.g., well-being).

2. Literature review

2.1. Positive psychology

In order to understand the complex roles of emotions, L2 researchers have been working to examine different dimensions of emotions in teaching and learning processes (Prior, 2019). This represents a shift from primarily emphasizing the cognitive dimensions of language learning toward a more integrated understanding that features emotions, with a rich theoretical context provided by PP (MacIntyre, 2021; Pawlak et al., 2024). Initially, PP addressed the significant imbalance in the psychology literature by advocating strongly for studies of positive aspects of life. Maslow (1954) noted that over decades of growth, the field of psychology seems to have voluntarily restricted itself to the darker, meaner side of life. PP was born with the intention to augment the success of psychology in

examining negative emotions, deficits, and disorders with an emphasis on nurturing positive emotions, enhancing relationships, and cultivating meaning in individuals' lives (Seligman, 2011). For example, whereas psychology has been known to study adverse experiences such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), PP includes the study of post-traumatic growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2014). This movement toward a more positive perspective posits that, rather than focusing on weaknesses, emphasizing the development of individuals' strengths and well-being is a critical part of growth and is more likely to lead to flourishing (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

During its rapid development in the early 2000s, PP made strides in studies of well-being, growth, resilience, fulfillment, and progress in different life domains, dramatically increasing the relevance of such topics to psychology (Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and the kinds of literature that make use of its theorizing (Mercer & MacIntyre, 2014). PP accentuates factors such as optimism, immunity, well-being, creativity, courage, and the like that are applicable to second language learning and use (Derakhshan, 2022; Mercer, 2020). However, as a dynamic school of thought, PP has faced its share of criticism – some of it justified and some of it not. Recognizing that PP has changed over time, Lomas et al. (2021) suggest there have been three partially concurrent waves of PP. The first wave underscored the need to focus on positive traits, positive feelings, and progress (Seligman, 2011) to better balance the narratives in the field between the relatively desirable (positive) and undesirable (negative) processes. During this period, the core focus was on exploring and promoting individual happiness, joy, and well-being by moving from problem-oriented and deficit-based approaches toward positivity. The goal was to understand what makes people happier and more fulfilled. Character strengths, flourishing, authentic happiness, and subjective well-being were key concepts developed during this wave. Empirical designs and interventions were common research instruments used to study and promote positive emotions. In recent years, this wave has been criticized for its tendency to exclude consideration of contexts, including language and culture, and regarding negative emotions as signs of pathology.

The second wave of PP better addressed the dialectic between positive and negative facets of life, seeing each as one side of a two-sided coin where exploring the interactions and coordination among positive and negative processes is preferred over emphasizing one or the other (Wong, 2021). This approach better reflects the views of theorists such as Viktor Frankl¹ (1905-1997) who saw that the single-minded pursuit of happiness often has an unintended, reverse impact. He considered happiness and positive emotions to be byproducts of the

¹ If Martin Seligman is considered the modern father of positive psychology, Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) is a forefather.

ability to embrace suffering essential to the human condition. As part of the second wave of positive psychology (or PP 2.0), researchers emphasized the significance of meaning, purpose, engagement, authenticity, and positive relations. However, the measurement and operationalization problems with abstract concepts such as authenticity and meaning endured, but cultural diversity and the complexity of inner factors were still downplayed during this period.

The nascent third wave of PP has been seen as emphasizing the dialectical processes of the second wave as they operate within specific contexts, emphasizing the complexity of the processes at play (Lomas et al., 2021). It is argued that the third wave of PP will integrate the positive with the negative, arguing that suffering is an inevitable element of life and that well-being can appear from encountering and overcoming challenges. Collective well-being, resilience, and community are considered common concepts of this wave. As an example, cross-cultural studies and mindfulness practices are used by scholars inspired by the third wave. Although this period is in the early stages of development, and it is not yet clear where it is going, the third wave of PP has the potential to expand the scope and methodology of PP in future work that has the added benefit of bringing PP closer to its deep historical roots in humanistic and existential psychology.

2.2. Existential positive psychology

EPP is an emerging area of psychology that integrates elements from both existential philosophy and positive psychology. It seeks to address fundamental human questions of meaning, purpose, and well-being. In doing so, it explicitly acknowledges the challenges and realities of daily life. Frankl (1984) declares that human mental and societal problems are due to existential meaninglessness or vacuity. Hence, he calls for a clear sense of meaning and purpose to obtain positive mental health. A life with meaning makes people creative, devoted, and optimistic when they face a challenge or negativity (Frankl, 1984). Work in this field strikes a balance between confronting the struggles inherent in life with promoting personal growth, resilience, and the pursuit of a meaningful life. EPP seeks to offer a robust research basis “. . . open to insights, wisdom and research on all aspects of the human existence from all sources regardless of the paradigm of knowledge claims” (Wong, 2021, p. 2; Yalom, 1980). Put simply, EPP examines how people can experience positive reactions to inevitable adversities to obtain well-being. According to Frankl (1984), it integrates existentialism with PP by positing that human well-being is not just about happiness or experiencing positive emotions but includes facing existential realities (e.g., meaninglessness, suffering, and death) to find meaning, purpose, and growth despite those challenges.

This perspective opposes essentialism that regards human essence as inborn and immutable, preceding existence. Frankl (1984) also argues that freedom of choice, responsibility, finding meaning in suffering, and the uniqueness of each person are critical for shaping human experiences and well-being.

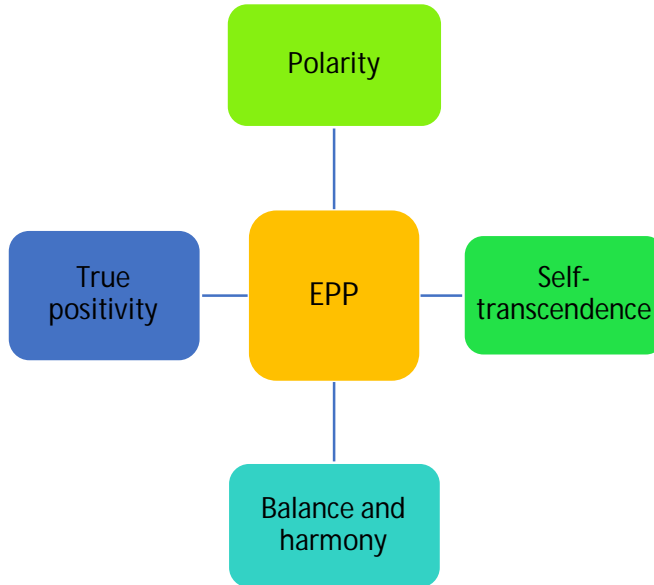


Figure 1 The tenets of EPP

Inspired by these ideas, in a seminal work, Wong et al. (2022) developed a framework in which four fundamental tenets of EPP were explicated (Figure 1). Their model provided a unique perspective on well-being by combining both the lighter and darker sides of human experience. The first tenet is *polarity*, which means that every element in nature and human life possesses two apparently opposite but interrelated aspects. In other words, positive experiences are innately associated with negative ones. For instance, joy cannot exist without sadness, and strength regularly comes out of weakness and vulnerability. EPP declares that this inherent duality should not be avoided; instead, it is a pivotal feature of life to be navigated. *Self-transcendence* is the second tenet, which means addressing constraints by sustaining equilibrium between opposite aspects. It connotes moving beyond duality and establishing a harmonious balance rather than emphasizing one side over the other. This might include admitting and incorporating personal efforts while chasing meaningful goals and ambitions. Self-transcendence needs an acceptance of self-limitations and expansion of consciousness to a communal and transcendent perspective. This view supports the next tenet, which is *balance and harmony*, suggesting that well-being

stems from harmony between various aspects of one's life. As Frankl (1984) suggested, genuine well-being is not achieved in the persistent quest for happiness, but in attaining harmony between different aspects of one's being. This tenet underscores the value of accepting a range of emotions and experiences instead of suppressing opposing or uncomfortable ones. It is noteworthy that this balance requires a person's active and intentional engagement in/with life and work. The fourth tenet is *true positivity*, which stresses the importance of preserving positive facets during hardship and suffering. In contrast with simple optimism, true positivity endorses the existence of adversity and pain, yet it also acknowledges one's capability for resilience, development, agency, and problem-solving. This tenet of EPP accentuates the prominence of nurturing inner power, maintaining hope, and accepting the possibility of transformation despite severe challenges. With this interconnected lens, EPP calls for a more authentic, meaningful, and integrated life in light of complex and rich human experiences (Wong et al., 2022).

While PP puts more emphasis on positive emotions, it does not disregard the role of negativity and suffering in life (Mercer, 2020). In a more balanced view, EPP actively considers both bright and dark dimensions of life and emotionality (Mayer, 2020; Wong, 2021). According to Wong et al. (2022), a paradigm shift toward EPP provides an integrative approach for perceiving, assessing, and augmenting well-being. It also substantially changes perspectives on how to nurture and sustain individuals' well-being (Wong & Bowers, 2019). EPP can enable people to confront unpleasant experiences and adversities (Derakhshan & MacIntyre, 2025) and develop diagnostic cognizance, which generates positive transformations (Wong et al., 2021). So, contrary to the traditional PP, EPP provides a holistic existential perspective on one's existence (Wong et al., 2022). Given such affordances, this study draws on EPP to examine learners' well-being and ill-being.

2.3. Student well-being

Well-being has arrived on the broad research agenda in education, given its impact on diverse dimensions of learning (Pan et al., 2023; Powel et al., 2018). Learners' well-being fosters the emotional aspects of learning in educational environments (Buettner et al., 2016). It has received various conceptualizations by scholars that converge on similar themes but emphasize different aspects of the concept (Graham et al., 2017; Powell et al., 2018). Fraine et al. (2005) regard well-being as "the emotional experience shown by the domination of positive emotion and cognition about the learning environments, instructors, and peers" (p. 299). Garg and Rastogi (2009) define well-being as the degree to which students feel content and joyful in learning contexts. Miller et al. (2013) introduce a conceptualization

with three components: psychological well-being, school connectedness, and rapport with teachers and peers. Renshaw et al. (2015) suggest four dimensions for this construct: efficacy, connectedness, learning preferences, and academic goals.

Two approaches to well-being can be found in the literature: psychological well-being and subjective well-being (Kállay & Rus, 2014), with the former pertaining to the relative prevalence of positive emotions over negative ones (Myers & Diener, 1995) and the latter addressing the maintenance of balance between positive and negative emotions (Ryff et al., 2006). Seligman (2011) extended the notion of well-being beyond emotion in his PERMA framework that entails five components, positive emotions (e.g., joy), engagement (i.e., engrossment in activities), relationships (i.e., positive rapport and interaction), meaning (i.e., perceived value of life), and accomplishment (i.e., achieving goals).

Recent studies suggest that learners with more satisfaction in their lives experience more positive feelings and well-being (Derakhshan & Fathi, 2024). Well-being is intertwined with self-confidence and one's capability to appreciate strengths and accept weaknesses, construct rapport with others, rely on principles of a meaningful life, and strive for desires (Mikus & Teoh, 2021). Student well-being plays a pivotal role in academic achievement, motivation, and engagement (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Pan et al. (2023) examined the effects of teachers' affective scaffolding on English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' engagement and well-being showing that learners' engagement and well-being were positively predicted by the teacher's affective scaffolding. Engagement and well-being were also positively correlated.

As noted above, however, the research emphasis on positivity (while neglecting negative processes) is falling out of favor among PP researchers and theorists. With the second and third waves of PP, we must also consider how well-being is related to the other side of the coin: ill-being. Doing so has deep roots in the humanistic tradition of psychology, most notably in the work of Frankl, whose 1946 landmark publication *Man's Search for Meaning* is a must-read for modern PP advocates. In this publication, he emphasized that finding meaning is the most enduring remedy for suffering. Life will generate adversity – it is unavoidable – but Frankl (1946) believed a person's ultimate freedom is choosing how to respond. If early work in PP neglected that message, EPP is bringing it back to prominence.

2.4. The concept of ill-being

In educational contexts, students undergo upsetting or unfortunate situations that may be temporary or long-lasting. Encountering adversities and unhappy states may engender ill-being among students. Ill-being is a longer-lasting state

that differs from a fleeting sadness. Contrary to well-being, ill-being is underexplored in educational psychology and L2 education, given the inherent inclination of PP advocates to emphasize positive constructs rather than negative factors (Mercer, 2020). Ill-being pertains to either one's mental or physical condition (Ryff et al., 2006). In this study, learners' ill-being concerns negative emotions, adverse conditions, and non-functionality in learning English. Experiencing ill-being hinges upon numerous variables, including personality characteristics, social interactions, social background, and other life facets (Stebbing & Taylor, 2016). Theoretically, ill-being is corroborated by the basic needs theory (BNT), a sub-branch of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It suggests three basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which ought to be fulfilled to attain growth, performance, and functionality. Neglecting these needs may cause ill-being and adverse circumstances. According to Ryan (1995), social contexts and communications can influence such needs and either promote well-being or ill-being. Learners' ill-being could emanate from their inherent feelings, context, interactions, and mental health (Jurčec & Rijavec, 2015). This also echoes the capability approach to human growth, postulating that one's competence and functionality contribute to one's quality of life or profession (Sen, 1993). Simply, a person's competence, personal qualities, and social context determine how one perceives the learning process. Also, hopelessness and lack of self-esteem may lead to ill-being (Cuevas et al., 2018).

Additionally, Hurtado-Pardos et al. (2017) ran a cross-sectional study revealing that ill-being can be mitigated through policies and practices that support emotions and foster one's mental health positively. Additionally, Chen et al. (2015) contended that the unfulfillment of basic needs, namely, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, causes ill-being. In L2 education, Yong et al. (2020) demonstrated the significant role of culture, classroom management skills, and teaching experience in tackling and averting ill-being. Collectively, these studies indicate that there is a research gap regarding learner ill-being in L2 education. The available literature mainly addresses the theorization of well-being and omits ill-being and its potential roles. Additionally, efforts to simultaneously study learner well-being and ill-being are absent in language studies. To address the gaps, this study uses a focus group interview with teachers to explore practical strategies that can affect EFL learners' well-being and ill-being from an EPP perspective. Our guiding research question was:

In what ways can EPP enhance the understanding of EFL students' well-being and reduce their ill-being?

3. Method

3.1. Design

This study draws on transcendental phenomenology to examine teachers' perceptions about the use of EPP to understand learners' well-being and ill-being (Figure 2). This design is descriptive in essence and analyzes individuals' reports of a phenomenon (i.e., the contribution of EPP to learners' well-being and ill-being) (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016). Previous beliefs and experiences are fully bracketed to offer a fair account of the phenomenon. This design was selected because teachers may have different perceptions about EPP and its contributions. Moreover, its potential to manifest teachers' lived experiences and perceptions of EPP, as well as learner emotions, supports the selection of transcendental phenomenology. This perspective also allowed researchers to examine how EPP influences learners' well-being and ill-being with its emphasis on participants' subjective experiences, the meaning of experiences, and holistic views of the phenomenon.

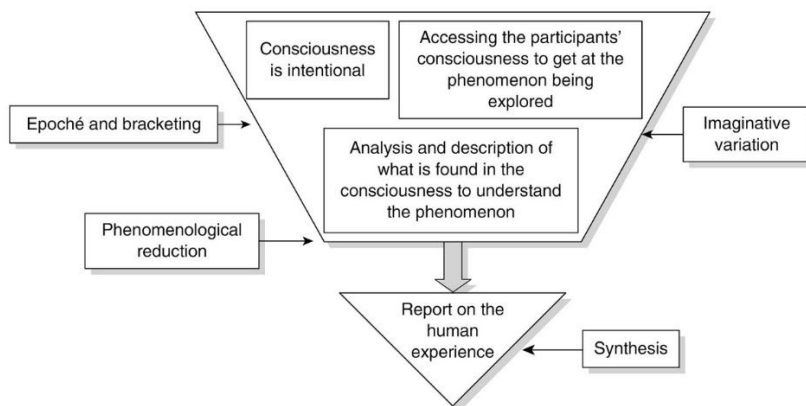


Figure 2 Transcendental phenomenology (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016, p. 172)

To apply Edmonds and Kennedy's (2016) framework, the lead researcher (first author) conducted a focus group interview and data analysis. Participants were asked to discuss EPP and learners' emotional experiences to make them conscious. Secondly, via an interview, the participants' opinions about EPP and its role in learners' well-being and ill-being were explored. Thirdly, the lead researcher bracketed their own experiences and provided textual and structural descriptions of EPP. Fourthly, the data were reduced to extract core themes pertaining to the phenomenon. Next, the interpretations and themes were synthesized to enhance the rigor of the study. Finally, a descriptive report was provided to demonstrate the participants' perceptions of the interplay of EPP and learners' well-being and ill-being.

3.2. Participants and context

A sample of eight experienced EFL teachers (Ts) participated in this study using purposive sampling. There were five males and three females, with their ages ranging from 25 to 40 years. They had MA (3) and PhD degrees (5) in applied linguistics. Concerning their teaching experience, all the participants had more than five years of experience and hence were considered experienced teachers. They were teaching English in different universities in Iran with knowledge of PP and EPP, as self-reported.

3.3. Instruments

3.1. Focus group interview

To obtain a collective understanding and rich data from informed respondents, a focus group interview was used. It was conducted online using Skype. All eight teachers partook in the interview with the first author, which lasted approximately two hours. There were warm-up questions, and the participants were interviewed with three main questions (Appendix). The session was recorded using audio recording and screen-saving software. The interview was conducted in English, with the first author serving as the process mediator.

3.4. Data collection procedure

The data were collected through a focus group interview with a group of experienced EFL teachers. They were informed of the goal of the study, and only those who had ample experience and expertise regarding PP and EPP were selected for the interview. A consent form and the interview protocol were given to the participants. No conflict of interest existed. Ethical considerations of privacy and identity confidentiality were ensured. The time of the interview was discussed and agreed upon based on teachers' schedules. For their convenience, the interview was online, and all the teachers were encouraged to explicate each question using real examples and experiences. The process was managed and monitored by the researcher so that all teachers could have equal time to share their opinions. Reticent teachers were invited to talk as much as possible. The interview was interactive and friendly. Probing questions and clarifications were asked to engage the teachers more. They could also comment on and expand others' views. The session was recorded for later transcription and analysis.

3.5. Data analysis

To analyze the data, in light of transcendental phenomenology, the first author excluded prior self-experiences and then carefully listened to the interview recordings and read the transcriptions over and over. Next, preliminary notes and exploratory comments were made on interview responses. Moreover, salient codes, comments, and memos were highlighted in different colors. This process continued iteratively until the data were codified. A list of initial codes was generated in this phase. Furthermore, to develop emerging themes, the researcher went back and forth reading the codes and transcripts once more. A thematic table was drawn to sort the themes, frequencies, and excerpts. The extracted themes were later combined to reach common patterns across the dataset. Afterward, for each theme, labels were provided along with exemplary quotes from interviews.

It is noteworthy that different strategies to safeguard the principles of trustworthiness were used. To ensure the credibility of the findings, member checking was done by inviting the participants to review the data and findings. Concerning confirmability, an experienced L2 researcher was invited to examine all the data analysis processes. To guarantee the dependability and transferability of the findings, the researcher provided a description of the design, context, participants, tools, data collection, and data analysis procedures that could facilitate the replication of the study in other contexts. Likewise, in the interests of transparency, memos, thematic tables, codebooks, and notebooks were used during the data analysis. Regarding positionality, the lead researcher was an insider who conducted the focus group interview session.

4. Findings

To examine EPP-driven practices that may regulate learners' well-being and ill-being from teachers' perspectives, a thematic analysis was conducted. The results showed five macro agendas and a wide range of practical realizations and exercises that may increase learners' well-being and reduce their ill-being (Figure 3).

The first theme or agenda is "assigning meaningful, relevant, and authentic classroom tasks" to learners to enhance well-being and minimize ill-being. This strategy was regarded as "the 'why' of learning," according to T3. To make connections with the real-life world, teachers argued for the use of "relevant and interesting tasks that could make learning engaging and meaningful instead of memorization of rules and words" (T5). To provide more practices, T7 stated: "I believe that community-based and group projects are suitable for regulating these two existential feelings in L2 education." Another participant, however, claimed that "self-

selected activities like presentation and lecture foster meaningfulness and authenticity of language learning, and this affects learners' well-being and ill-being" (T8).



Figure 3 Practical agendas of EPP for regulating learner well-being and ill-being

The second extracted theme is labelled "providing personalized learning paths and plans for learners" as a practice that highlights the individuality and specificity of goals, plans, and trajectories of learning among students. In this regard, T3 declared: "L2 learning is complex and learners have different styles, needs, and features. So, teachers should set learner-specific goals and plans for each student. This consideration increases well-being and prevents ill-being."

Power, agency, and voice of learners are highlighted in the third agenda in the interviews labeled "empowering learner agency, choice, and responsibility." Three practices manifested this agenda, namely, "free choice of activities," "flexible, learner-centered syllabus," and "self-regulated and autonomous learning." Supporting this theme, T7 maintained: "In light of EPP, teachers can allow students to select activities that they favor and pace their own learning process and progress." Moreover, it was argued that "moving from traditional and strict syllabi to learner-centered ones is a good technique to enhance well-being and decrease ill-being, as existential realities of education" (T1). Another participant focused on independence and stated: "Learners should be taught about various learning strategies and goal setting skills to become independent learners. This feature automatically affects well-being and ill-being" (T6).

The fourth extracted theme concerns “admitting and facing existential adversities/feelings” in L2 education. T5 explains this practice by saying: “L2 learning is full of negative emotions and adversities, and teachers have to make them normalized and clarified. They are by no means dreadful monsters.” Another teacher referred to the essence of EPP that considers both positive and negative emotions/factors by declaring that “adversities like ill-being and positive variables like well-being are both common existential factors in L2 learning. They should be admitted and dealt with using effective strategies” (T2). Another teacher suggested the use of “discussion and talk to say to learners that mistakes, stress, and anxiety are normal in L2 learning” (T8). This could affect their well-being and ill-being. Shifting toward positive character strengths, T5 stated: “Teachers should make students resilient, courageous, and persistent in facing adversities and coping with them bravely.” Emphasis on strength was implied by teachers in this practical agenda. Another practice was using collaborative tasks that could “effectively reduce negative emotions and behaviors like isolation” (T4). Similarly, T2 declared: “Providing an inclusive environment allows students to encounter negative emotions like ill-being more efficiently than a biased context.”

The last theme pertains to “cultivating a culture of positivity and appreciation” in L2 classes in which students are trained to celebrate small and big achievements and feel happy and content. In this regard, one of the respondents stated: “Establishing a positive learning culture is pivotal for success and feeling well in the class. So, I suggest that teachers train students to keep journals and diaries of appreciation and gratitude for their learning process” (T6). Moreover, T3 declared: “Positive culture is cultivated via simple celebrations and rewards that teachers provide for learners because of their achievements. This act really enhances well-being and reduces ill-being in learners.” In conclusion, the findings showed that EPP can be effectively injected into L2 education via five agendas encompassing various techniques and practices to enhance learner well-being and decrease ill-being. However, the extracted practices are neither fixed nor universal, as they may change or expand in other contexts. Still, they serve as a roadmap for integrating EPP into the emotional world of L2 students.

6. Discussion

Situated within a transcendental phenomenology, this study examined experienced EFL teachers’ perceptions of practical ways through which the injection of EPP could enhance EFL students’ well-being and reduce their ill-being. The findings revealed five macro agendas with some representative classroom practices to regulate both well-being and ill-being. The first EPP-driven agenda was

“meaningful task assignment,” poised to involve and relate what is happening inside the classroom with real-world situations. This agenda resonates with previous pioneering studies that highlighted the criticality of “finding meaning in life’s adversities” (Frankl, 1984; Wong et al., 2022). This is reflected in the self-transcendence tenet of EPP and the *engagement* and *meaning* dimensions of the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011). The relatedness element of BNT also undergirds this extracted agenda (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Moreover, previous studies have reported comparable results, arguing that engaging learners in classroom activities enhances their well-being and reduces their ill-being (e.g., Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Pan et al., 2023; Stoloff et al., 2020). By assigning authentic and meaningful tasks, teachers can involve students in education that is more likely to be laden with positive emotions and well-being. The participants’ familiarity with principles and practices of task-based language teaching (TBLT) and PP may explain the finding, too. The use of community and group tasks under this agenda also showcases the collective basis of well-being and ill-being regulation other than individuality, an idea promoted by the third wave of PP (Lomas et al., 2021).

The study also showed that “personalization of learning” could strongly affect learners’ well-being and ill-being. Empirically, this outcome resonates with empirical studies highlighting the role of person-specific factors in these two constructs (Cuevas et al., 2018; Mikus & Teoh, 2021; Stebbings & Taylor, 2016). The individualization of learning also reflects both the third wave of PP and EPP in that they foreground the complexity and specificity of emotions in light of existential adversities (Lomas et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2022). Furthermore, Frankl’s (1984) emphasis on the “uniqueness of the individual” echoes this finding. This practical agenda can lead to self-transcendence and true positivity in learners, core tenets of EPP (Wong et al., 2022). The participants’ preferences and teaching styles in favor of personalization may justify this finding. Their emotional literacy and knowledge that well-being and ill-being are regulated personally explain the outcome, too.

The third theme, that is, “granting agency and choice” pertains to students during their L2 learning, as a way to regulate well-being and ill-being. Theoretically, this theme/agenda supports Frankl’s (1984) idea of freedom of choice and responsibility that drive human experiences and well-being. It also reflects the true positivity tenet of EPP proposed by Wong et al. (2022) in that agency and freedom of choice are two positive characteristics that should be preserved in the face of adversities like ill-being. Likewise, this finding agrees with the autonomy dimension of SDT that underscores agency in making decisions and acting in the classroom (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Fulfilling this need causes well-being, and its negligence produces ill-being. This echoes the role of learner-internal factors in these two constructs, as noted by Jurčec and Rijavec (2015), and Mercer and Gregersen (2020). The emphasis of EPP on one’s diagnostic cognizance and positive transformation may

justify this agenda on agency empowerment in L2 classes (Wong et al., 2021, 2022). The finding is also attributable to the teachers' knowledge of and interest in critical pedagogy practices in L2 education. Therefore, they had perceived empowerment and argentic practices as shapers and modifiers of well-being and ill-being.

The fourth finding highlighted "admitting and facing adversities" in L2 education to regulate well-being and ill-being. This is the most direct reflection of EPP principles and tenets that suggest facing and acknowledging that life simultaneously has bright and dark sides (Mayer, 2020; Wong, 2021). The same idea is reported by Derakhshan and MacIntyre (2025), who took an EPP approach to unveil L2 students' language-specific adversities and sufferings, suggesting the admission of inherent L2 learning challenges. The extracted theme aligns well with *balance and harmony* element of Wong et al.'s (2022) framework, which calls for accepting and coping with life adversities. Such a holistic perspective on existence resonates with EPP. Moreover, this agenda recognizes the polarity dimension of EPP proposed by Wong et al. (2022) in their model. In light of such a view, learners can reach transcendence, harmony, balance, and true positivity in L2 education that involves both positive and negative emotions. This theme implies resilience that nurtures individuals' well-being and curbs their ill-being, as reported in previous research (MacIntyre, 2021; Seligman, 2011; Wong & Bowers, 2019). The participants' characters and belief in developing resilient and gritty learners may justify this finding. Educational context may also be a reason for highlighting a balanced view of positivity and negativity. Another reason could be the teachers' professional and life experiences cultivating such a dualistic perspective.

Finally, it was found that well-being and ill-being could be regulated by "providing a culture of positivity" in L2 classes. EPP's emphasis on considering both the positive and negative sides of life may support this theme. Although EPP looks at human experiences and feelings through the lens of adversity, acceptance, and regulation, it does advocate cultivating positivity (Wong et al., 2022). This finding also highlights the role of macro factors and classroom climate/culture in learners' emotionality. PP advocates have eloquently emphasized establishing positive classroom atmosphere/culture to cultivate positive emotions and reduce negative ones (Derakhshan & Shakki, 2024; Mercer, 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Furthermore, in the EFL context of China, Yong et al. (2020) reported on the influence of classroom culture for enhancing well-being and averting ill-being at the university level. In her ecological study, Mercer (2020) also referred to the role of macro factors like culture in L2 educators' well-being. This finding also points to the multidimensional nature of both well-being and ill-being that is affected by micro and macro factors (Renshaw et al., 2015; Seligman, 2011; Stebbings & Taylor, 2016). This understanding also reflects the third wave of PP and the emphasis of EPP on emotions' contextuality and complexity

(Lomas et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2021). The teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and field expertise can explain such a broad understanding of learner emotionality and EPP. Their previous teacher education programs can also justify the finding, especially their recommendation of journal keeping and award celebration to cultivate appreciation in learners. These acts significantly affect learners' senses of well-being and ill-being. It seems that their teaching experience level played a role, as well. The present study, however, has not addressed the mediating role of many other teacher-related factors in perceiving EPP and its contribution to well-being and ill-being.

7. Conclusion and implications

This study represents an attempt to propose a practical agenda for injecting EPP into L2 education to nurture learners' well-being and decrease their ill-being. It suggests that a five-dimensional model of practices can offer a basis for doing so. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that EPP is an influential and effective school of psychology, derived from PP, which can shape and regulate learners' emotional states and experiences. It can improve positive emotions and minimize negative ones in those cases in which teachers use proper practices. EPP can affect emotions via "task assignment," "personalization," "empowerment," "resilience-building," and "positive culture establishment." Hence, EPP has the capacity to influence various aspects of L2 education in light of addressing emotional factors like well-being and ill-being. The proposed agenda aligns with the complexities of learner emotions and principles of PP and affective pedagogy. Theoretically, the study expands existing knowledge and theories of PP and EPP in that it connects theory to practice by listing practical methods used by EFL teachers. It also adds to educators' understanding of EPP and ill-being as two less-trodden paths of research. Practically, the findings can inform EFL teachers worldwide and encourage them to find ways to inject EPP into their classes that are meaningful in their context, with the goal of helping regulate and promote learner emotions. Teachers can implement the proposed techniques in their classes or devise new ones in light of EPP. They can consult with their colleagues and generate new methods and practices to deal with learners' well-being and ill-being. Their knowledge of emotional complexity, individuality, and contextuality may also improve in light of the current study. Pedagogically, EFL teachers can use different regulatory strategies before and after experiencing positive and negative emotions in the classroom to either prevent or boost them, depending on whether they are negative or positive. Learners can also benefit from this study in that they can realize the complexity of their emotions and how psychological approaches can mitigate their emotional problems, like ill-being.

Policymakers may draw on the study and foster the establishment of a positive and inclusive learning environment and culture that welcomes EPP principles and practices to regulate learner emotions. They can also provide facilities and resources for teachers to provide meaningful tasks and personalize their instruction based on learners' needs and interests. Reducing ill-being and promoting well-being can be accomplished by stakeholders as well. Teacher educators can use the findings and propose training courses for EFL teachers regarding PP, EPP, as well as emotional regulation techniques. In such programs, practical ways to integrate EPP into classroom practices can be illustrated and the ways in which well-being and ill-being should be regulated can be explicated. Moreover, the contributions and conceptualizations of EPP can be covered in such training courses, encouraging teachers to inject this school of psychology into their instruction.

The study is, however, limited in terms of sample size and sampling technique. Future studies might want to consider employing larger samples and other sampling techniques because purposive sampling might be biased and non-representative. The data were collected only in one interview session without using other instruments. Hence, future research can utilize mixed-methods designs and tools like scales, observation, narrative frame, and diaries. The perceptions of learners were excluded in this study as they were perceived to lack knowledge of EPP. Further research can thus juxtapose teachers' and learners' perspectives of the injection of EPP. The comparison of novice and experienced EFL teachers is another line of research. This study just focused on experienced teachers, so the findings may not apply to novice teachers. Longitudinal research on the fluctuations of learners' well-being and ill-being in light of EPP-oriented practices and interventions is also recommended. Researchers are also encouraged to replicate or test the extracted model in other cultural contexts. Finally, passionate scholars are recommended to explore the interconnectedness and complexity of EFL students' language-specific sufferings and adversities and their associated coping techniques.

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APPENDIX

Focus group interview questions

Demographics:

- 1) Age:
- 2) Gender:
- 3) Field of Study
- 4) Educational Degree:
- 5) Teaching Experience: years.

Interview questions:

Warm-ups:

- 1) Would you please introduce yourself?
- 2) How long have you been teaching L2 students?
- 3) Have you received training on educational psychology?

Main questions:

- 1) What do you think of positive psychology? How familiar are you with it?
- 2) Have you heard of existential positive psychology? How can it be injected into L2 education?
- 3) Can you please list some practical methods, driven from existential positive psychology, to enhance EFL students' well-being and reduce their sense of ill-being? You can use real-life examples.