

Resilience, Psychological Well-being, and Professional Development of Iranian EFL Teachers: A Structural Equation Analysis

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Abstract

Because of the significance of teachers' individual and psychological qualities in affecting their performance, an increasing number of studies have been conducted to probe the relationships among teacher constructs in influencing their professional development. In an attempt to clarify the association among teacher constructs, the current study examined a structural model hypothesizing the predictive role of teachers' resilience and psychological well-being in promoting their professional development using 300 Iranian English language teachers as a sample. In doing so, the validated scales of the three mentioned constructs were administered to gather data and Structural Equation Modeling was utilized to evaluate the hypothesized model of the variables. The findings indicated that both resilience and psychological well-being significantly predicted professional development for the whole sample. However, psychological well-being appeared to be a stronger predictor of professional development in comparison with resilience. The results are discussed, and the pedagogical implications are proposed for teacher education programs.

Keywords: Resilience, Psychological well-being, Teacher professional development, Structural equation modeling

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INTRODUCTION

The significance of teachers in the effectiveness of any educational context is perhaps undebatable. It is claimed that by improving the efficacy of our teachers, the overall education could be improved (Wright, 2010). Considering the influential role of teachers, teacher education programs have undergone a remarkable shift in their epistemological and practical orientation. The shift is evident in the form of continuous concern for teacher educators and policymakers to equip their teachers with the various skills that could improve the quality of teaching and lead to influential learning (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

As a result of the shift, the kind of simplistic viewpoint of teachers regarding them as just containers of knowledge and passive consumers has changed to giving them the role of “active, thinking decision-makers” (Lantolf, 2008). A clear manifestation of this shift can be observed in the post method era in which teachers are given an agency to have their voice and recognize their significant role (Kumaravelu, 2006). Most of these qualities highlighted for teachers are considered teacher variables which are the result of such a flourishing shift in teacher education programs (MacIntyre et al., 2020).

Other studies have shown that some qualities such as teacher resilience and well-being are vital factors associated with professional development in teaching careers (Khajavy et al., 2017; Kalinowski et al., 2020). Studying such qualities is particularly important to understand their roles in promoting professional development. It is an inevitable fact that an array of factors within the close and distant environment could affect the relationship between resilience, wellbeing, and professional development (Zavelevsky & Lishchinsky, 2020). Although there are some studies in literature investigating the relationships between these qualities individually or in combination with some other factors (Beltman et al., 2011; Gu & Day, 2013; Johnson et al., 2012; Osman & Warner, 2020; Zhaleh et al., 2018), there is still a gap in the literature to investigate these constructs simultaneously

and to examine the predictive power among them. To bridge this research lacuna, this study is an attempt to assess teacher resilience and well-being thought to be possibly contributing factors in promoting teachers' professional development through a structural modeling analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher Professional Development

In any educational setting, various challenges and difficulties for teachers are inevitable. Factors such as technological changes accompanied by an increasing global connection through the world, make it essential for teachers to be informed problem solvers with the ability to identify and assess various and contrastive views (Wagner et al., 2010). It seems essential that professional development (PD) implants the qualities and skills required to encounter the everyday challenges of any educational setting and context.

There are strong pieces of evidence that qualified teachers facilitate students' success (Kalinowski et al., 2020); however, studies are commonly limited in weighting the most viable constructs to develop qualified teachers. Research is even thinner concerning which qualities make teachers ready for the contemporary challenges of global settings, which need teachers to be responsive and active problem-solvers (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Koellner & Jacobs, 2015).

In an attempt to make teachers responsive and problem-solvers, Koellner and Jacobs (2015) considered two levels of professional development: adaptive and specified. At the specified level, teachers usually learn a specific kind of skill while at the adaptive level, teachers promote their competencies to flexibly encounter various challenges in their immediate and unique settings. Despite the vivid value of adaptive level, Koellner and Jacobs (2015) discussed that specified levels are the preferred programs in professional development. They reported that the specified levels are

typically easier to measure quantitatively, a quality considered essential by funding agencies.

Empirical studies have indicated that teachers with higher level of PD can have a crucial role in developing their competencies (Osman & Warner, 2020). Furthermore, some studies show considerable positive effects of teachers' uptake of PD on their teaching quality as well as student achievement, while other studies claim only small or no effects (Supovitz, 2012). The positive effect of PD is vivid when training programs represent high quality. Therefore, it is important to probe the contributing factors of PD such as resilience and wellbeing.

Resilience

Previous research has shown that all teachers encounter various kinds of everyday challenges in various years of their experience and the inability to face these kinds of challenges may eventually lead to burnout and job frustration (Agyapong, 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). To make "classroom-ready" teachers (Mansfield, 2016), resiliency is considered a quality that empowers teachers to handle the difficulties of their teaching context and thrive in their profession instead of just surviving.

As a significant contributor to every educational context, teachers would be more confident and successful if they promote this developmental quality within themselves (Kalinowski et al., 2020). Resilience is defined as the process of positive adaptation and ongoing thriving in face of challenging settings. Teacher resilience can be formulated through various interconnected sources of individual, situational and contextual factors. Previous studies indicated that the positive outcomes of resiliency are thriving personally and professionally, enjoying general well-being and consequently having higher levels of professional commitment (Krummenache, 2024; Salvo-Garrido et al., 2025). As Gu and Li (2013) documented, resilient teachers possess a useful lens to probe the external and internal factors to maintain the balance in their passion, profession and experience a strong sense of accomplishment.

Mansfield et al. (2012) mentions three major dimensions of resilience including social dimension, professional dimension, and emotional dimension. The social dimension of resilience is formulated by interpersonal relationships as well as the ability to welcome suggestions and support professional and personal networks. On the other hand, while the professional dimension includes teaching competence and skills, preparation, organization, class management, facilitating effective learning, and the ability to be flexible, an emotional dimension often concerns personal attributes including showing a sense of humor, self-confidence, and the ability to bounce back.

It is documented that resilience is associated with personal growth, job satisfaction, and work engagement (Day & Gu, 2014) as well as student accomplishment (Gu & Li, 2015). Furthermore, teacher variables such as social and emotional competence, motivation, and self-efficacy are essential in making successful and resilient teachers (Beltman et al., 2011). Against public belief, Doney (2013) believed that resilience is not a quality that emerged in various challenging cases. To manage the challenges and difficulties in their everyday teaching practice, teachers need to be resilient to handle them (Gu & Li, 2013). This kind of everyday resilience empowers teachers to go beyond just bouncing back from difficulties and to manage emotional and intellectual challenges as well to achieve personal and professional development (Mansfield et al., 2016). Therefore, resilience should not be considered just a personal quality but “a complex construct resulting from a dynamic relationship between risk and protective factors” (Beltman et al., 2011, p. 186).

Well-being

The well-being theory first was proposed by Seligman (2002, 2011), rooted in positive psychology in which positive mental models and human qualities are studied (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). As proposed in the earliest version of his theory, Seligman (2002) said that “happiness” is divided into three basic elements of engagement, positive emotion, and meaning. In his

revised theory (2011), he added two more elements of accomplishment and relationships. Based on Seligman (2011), having a positive relationship has a significant role in general psychological well-being. It was also documented that well-being is more than just happiness and should be considered a quality rather than a thing (Mercer et al., 2020).

Well-being is defined in various ways by different researchers but Ashford et al. (2006) well defined it as “a person’s emotional and psychological capacity to cope with demands across time, circumstance, and setting” (p. 530). In the context of language teaching, well-being is referred to as a positive emotional state and a balance between a person and the surrounding context, in which teachers must be “capable of attuning to their own needs and expectations to specific context factors and demands of the school” (p. 35). In this case, teachers must fit with the immediate educational setting and context in which they practice. Recently, researchers approached the teacher psychological well-being from a viewpoint of positive psychology (King & Ng, 2018; MacIntyre et al., 2019; Seligman, 2011) rather than focusing on stress and burnout. More specifically, teacher psychological well-being is viewed as a priority in its own right, rather than merely as a means to prevent attrition and burnout.

Based on an ecological viewpoint, psychological well-being can be backed when a person applies some techniques including goal setting, constant problem-solving and communicative skills to have access to contextual and personal resources (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Mercer et al., 2020; Yong et al., 2020). Personal resources including motivation, high expectations, optimism, and courage, and contextual resources such as trust, strong relationships in the workplace, and collaborative partnerships seem to be closely associated with resilience (Mansfield et al., 2016).

Concerning contextual factors, different studies have investigated the role of predictors such as work demands, the size of a class, and school cultural atmosphere on teachers’ psychological well-being (Chang, 2009). Regarding the significance of personal variables on teachers’ well-being, findings of recent studies have also extensively explored motivational factors

such as self-efficacy (Wang et al., 2015), emotional factors such as passion (Keller et al., 2013; Moe, 2016), personality attributes such as openness to experiences (Karim & Weisz, 2011), as well as teaching experience (Rahimi et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2015; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Beyond the existing studies focusing primarily on individual or structural factors that predict the psychological well-being of teachers, the impacts of both dispositional and contextual predictors on teachers' professional development have been increasingly highlighted (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011b).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

A call for agentic professional teachers has emerged in recent years as an output of sociocultural theory and a dialogic approach toward teaching (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Recently, the need for teachers has been highlighted to formulate and guide change in education by enhancing the "capacity to engage fully with the complexities of education" (Donaldson, 2011, p. 4). However, studies recognize the challenges which are indispensable parts of every educational system where teachers are intentionally dynamic and have concerns about their PD but institutionally constrained in making changes (Wolf & Peele, 2019; Zavelevsky & Lishchinsky, 2020). The present study investigates the predictive role of EFL teachers' resilience and their well-being in fostering their professional development in their teaching contexts. More specifically, this study provides answers for these questions:

- (1) Does resilience significantly predict the professional development among EFL teachers?
- (2) Does psychological well-being significantly predict the professional development of EFL teachers?
- (3) Which of the constructs is a significant predictor of the professional development of EFL teachers?

METHOD

Participants

A total of 300 Persian EFL teachers (165 females and 135 males) who were teaching general English courses in private institutes were randomly chosen for the present study. The participants had the same native language due to their place of living. They were teaching English courses to teenagers and adults with different levels of proficiency (ranging from elementary to advance). The teaching experience of teachers ranged between 2 years and 25 years, and their age varies from 19 to 60 years with an average of 32. Concerning their academic degrees, most of the participants held degrees including BA, MA, and PhD degrees. Two hundred and sixty-four of the participating teachers had English-related academic degrees (English Translation, English Literature, and English Teaching), while other participants' academic degrees were not related to teaching English. However, all the participants confirmed that they had certified by attending a teacher education programs before starting their teaching practice.

Instrumentation

To address the research questions, a battery of questionnaires was distributed in four sections; the initial part aimed at gathering background information such as age, years of experience, gender, and degree. Then, the researcher distributed the instruments of well-being (Dagenais-Desmarais & Savoie, 2012), professional development (De Vries et al., 2013), and resilience questionnaire (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007).

Well-being questionnaire

In this research, the experimental version of the Index of Psychological Well-Being at Work (Dagenais-Desmarais & Savoie, 2012) was used, which has five underlying components: Desire for Involvement at Work, Interpersonal Fit at Work, Feeling of Competency at Work, Thriving at Work, and Perceived Recognition at Work (e.g., Item 1: *I value the people I work with*; Item 4: *I feel that my work is recognized*; Item 8: *I feel confident at work*; Item 12: *I am proud of the job I have*; Item 20: *I want to contribute to achieving*

the goals of my organization; Item 24: I feel that I am a full member of my organization). Five items are used to assess each component. The items are scored on a six-point scale (ranging from Disagree to Entirely Agree).

Resilience questionnaire

There is an eight-item resilience index (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007) with items reflecting keeping calm, continuing going, bouncing back, and doing important tasks.

Professional development questionnaire

The questionnaire included twenty-four closed-ended items investigating the professional development of teachers (De Vries et al., 2013).

Data Collection Procedure

This study employed a quantitative design to answer the research questions. Initially, the participants completed the survey containing questionnaires including all the constructs. To increase the ease of administration of questionnaires, accessibility, and ease of use, the online forms of the questionnaires were made using Google Docs. Following that, the online battery of questionnaires was shared on English teacher channels and internet groups in WhatsApp and Telegram applications. Before answering the items on the questionnaires, the teachers were requested to answer the first part of the booklet of the questionnaires including their personal information. Moreover, the respondents were assured that the data would be used just for the present study and that all their information would be kept confidential. There was no need for teachers to fill out their names and they were anonymous during the research.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data were done using the SPSS AMOS 22. First, the outliers and missing data were recognized and considered. The analyses showed no wrongly coded data in the data set. Then, Structural Equation Modelling

(SEM) was utilized to investigate the predictive role of resilience and psychological well-being on professional development among ELT teachers. The structural equation modeling method was used to investigate this newly integrated framework. SEM is a multivariate statistical method for investigating complex relationships between variables by developing a theoretical model of such relationships (Walker & Maddan, 2008). According to Dörnyei (2001b), the technique is appropriate for testing models involving multiple complex, interrelated variables, which is precisely the situation with L2 learning issues. SEM provides a trustworthy framework for researchers to evaluate latent variables by relating them to observed variables. The indices of comparative fit index (CFI), chi-square (χ^2), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) were considered for the goodness-of-fit indices (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The acceptable values for these indices are $GFI > .95$, $\chi^2/df < 3$, $RMSEA < .06$, and $CFI > .95$, and $TLI > .95$. (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

RESULTS

Firstly, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was run to check the reliability and validity of the questionnaires used. CFA which is used to make sure of coefficient alphas and the indices of the scales revealed a good fit: $\chi^2/df = 1.72$, $p = 0.00$, $GFI = 0.97$, $TLI = 0.96$, $CFI = 0.98$, $RMSEA = 0.04$. The internal consistency of questionnaires was checked through Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and it was revealed that it was above 0.84 for all the used scales, indicating that all the scales enjoyed good indices of internal consistency. Table 1 shows the internal consistencies and relevant descriptive statistics for the constructs and Table 2 indicates correlations among them.

Table 1: *Related internal consistencies and descriptive statistics for the constructs*

	M (SD)	Cronbach's alpha
Resilience	37.58 (10.02)	0.87
Psychological well-being	81.34 (17.89)	0.84
Professional development	67.74 (14.75)	0.89

As Table 2 shows, the degree of the correlation between well-being and professional development ($r=.53$, $p<.01$) is more than the connection between resilience and professional development ($r=.39$ $p<.01$). These results suggested that psychological well-being and professional development were more associated among EFL teachers.

Table 2: *Correlations among the constructs*

	1	2	3
1. Resilience	-	0.29***	0.25***
2. Psychological well-being	0.33**	-	0.29***
3. Professional development	0.39**	0.53***	-

To explore the significance of teacher psychological well-being and teacher resilience as predictors of professional development, SEM was adopted to check the structural model proposed in this study. By providing an assessment of latent constructs, a precise estimation of the measurement error function is much better in the model evaluation of a structure. Besides, it presents the error variance estimation for both observable and latent constructs (Byrne, 2010).

Table 3: *Goodness of Fit Indices of Resilience and Psychological Well-being*

	χ^2	χ^2/df	GFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2$
Models A and B	10.21	1.72	0.98	0.97	0.98	.03	
Model A1 (β RES = 0)	14.82	2.08	0.97	0.98	0.98	.06	4.61*
Model A2 (β PWB = 0)	15.24	2.43	0.96	0.97	0.97	.04	5.03*

Note. RES= resilience; PWB= psychological well-being. * $p <.05$.

To check the structural relationships among variables under investigation via SEM, two hypothetical models were presented based on the literature (Figure 1). Both models are similar in the formats of the relationships among the

constructs. So, they can be the same statistically. However, both models were investigated to verify the statistical results. To examine the unique contributions of both predictor variables (i.e., resilience & psychological well-being), the goodness of fit indices were considered in investigating the suitability of the models presented. Indices for the model assessment indicated a good fit as demonstrated in the following table.

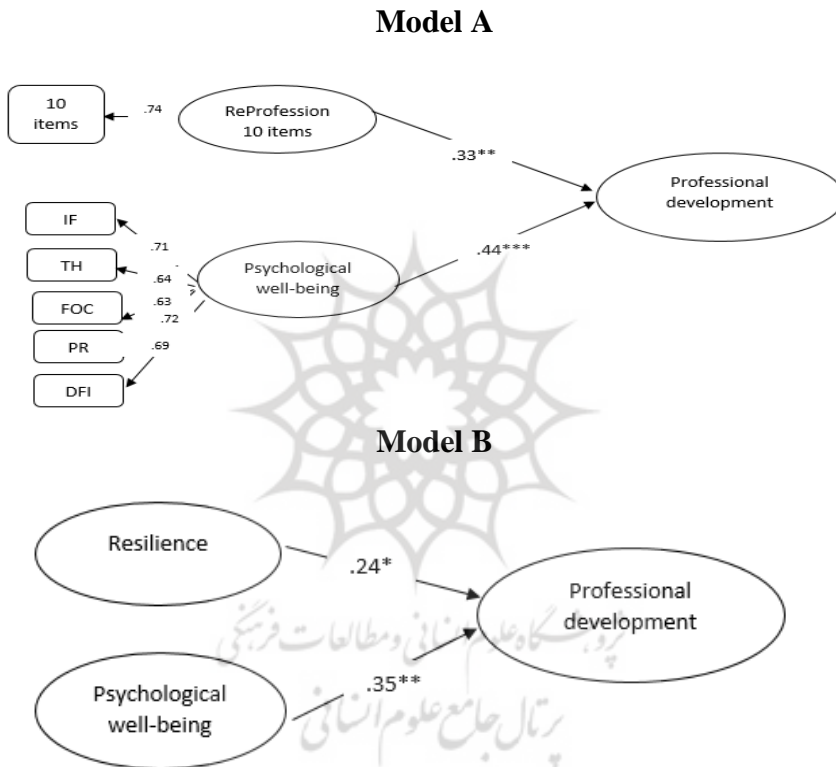


Figure 1: Teacher Resilience and Teacher Psychological Well-being as Predictors of Professional Development.; PR= Perceived Recognition at Work; TH= Thriving at Work; IF= Interpersonal Fit at Work; DFI= Desire for Involvement at Work; FOC= Feeling of Competency at Work. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. ***. $p < .001$.”

As illustrated, model A revealed that the connections among the latent constructs were statistically significant. More specifically, resilience and

teacher psychological well-being had 5 % for the common variance ($R^2=.307$). Similarly, psychological well-being and professional development demonstrated a shared variance of 19.7% ($R^2=.445$). In the same way, teacher resilience and professional development shared a variance of 11.2 % ($R^2=.337$). Therefore, it can be concluded that psychological well-being is more strongly correlated with professional development than teacher resilience. Then, to investigate the unique impact of resilience and psychological well-being above each other, increments were considered in R^2 values by comparison of the variation percentage in professional development as proposed in both models A and B. As can be observed in model B, resilience and psychological well-being together contribute to 26% of the variance in professional development. Therefore, beyond psychological well-being as the single predictor variable ($\Delta R^2=.26-.19=.07$), it seems that resilience accounted for 7% of the variance in teachers' professional development. Furthermore, it was found that psychological well-being had a unique variance of 15% ($\Delta R^2=.26-.11=.15$) as the strong predictor of teacher professional development.

According to these findings, it can be concluded that psychological well-being had a stronger unique effect on teacher professional development than resilience. Then in the subsequent analysis of data, the unique effect of resilience and psychological well-being as the two predictor variables were investigated on professional development regarded as the criterion factor. In so doing, each corresponding beta weight was limited to zero and afterwards, their χ^2 changes were evaluated in model B. In a case where constraining beta weights to zero results in a significant difference in χ^2 , it can be concluded that each variable and its unique effect in influencing professional development is regarded to be significant. Table 3 indicates the fit indices of both models. It also was revealed that constraining beta weights to zero in the case of model A1 (β resilience =0) and model A2 (β psychological well-being=0) led to significant differences in the chi-square test (model A1 (β resilience=0): $\Delta\chi^2$ (1, N=300) =4.63, $p<.05$; model A2 (β psychological well-being =0): $\Delta\chi^2$ (1, N =300) =5.02, $p<.05$). The findings showed that resilience

and well-being had a significant effect on professional development as the criterion variable in this study.

DISCUSSION

The current study examined the role of well-being and resilience in predicting the professional development of EFL teachers. The findings obtained from SEM indicated that although both variables had a contribution to professional development, well-being seemed to be a stronger predictor of professional development compared to teacher resilience. The findings are in line with an accumulated body of studies in which teacher well-being predicts significant work involvement and professional development (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Theoretically, this result lent more credence to the increasing implementation of positive psychology in the process of learning and various studies with a focus on teaching, indicating how EFL teachers' resilience and psychological well-being increased their professional development and work involvement (Dewaele et al., 2019).

The significance of the relationship between resilience and professional development is on par with some recent research in the growing field of teacher education (Taylor, 2013). It was found that resilience and professional development are positively and significantly associated. Moreover, resilience results in self-efficacy, responsiveness, effectiveness, job satisfaction, successful interpersonal relationships, autonomy, competency, a sense of agency, positivism, wellbeing, and emotionally competent teachers. It is also reported that resilient teachers are probably more efficient in dealing with the sociopolitical atmospheres in language institutes and teaching contexts (Richards, 2015). Moreover, it is documented that resilient teachers perceive higher layers of role consensus and accordingly experience less tension at work which leads to a higher sense of connection and community, causing teachers to have more self-efficacy in addressing expectations (Richards, 2015). So, resilient teachers are less exhausted emotionally, are more successful in making good connections with

their colleagues and students, and enjoy wellbeing and job satisfaction. Teachers with a higher degree of resilience experience less job-related stress, which in turn reduces the likelihood of burnout (Howard & Johnson, 2004). The results of the current study is consistent with recent pieces of research, highlighting the positive role of well-being and resilience in protecting the mental health of teachers and flourishing in their PD (Benesch, 2018; Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020b; Gregersen et al., 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2019).

Moreover, the significant interplay between teachers' well-being and their professional development is consistent with the findings of other similar studies confirming the significant effect of teachers' well-being on their professional development and work engagement (Parker et al., 2012; Parker & Martin, 2009). This result is also in congruence with the findings in Saks' study (2006), in which it was found that both well-being and work engagement for professional development refers to the degree of employees' emotional satisfaction with their jobs and cognitive commitment within an institution. Based on this viewpoint, stronger degrees of well-being and professional development are associated with positive job desires, a higher level of job satisfaction, and extracurricular activities (Saks, 2006). The strong connection between professional development and well-being can be justified based on the broad-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001). In this theory, it is claimed that well-being can expand the thought-action scopes of individuals and construct capabilities, thereby flourishing effective functioning and promoting their psychological well-being. Therefore, there is a bidirectional relationship between well-being and PD. It is also argued that more engagement and professional development can lead to job satisfaction and well-being (Buric & Macuka, 2018).

Furthermore, the findings of this study showed that teacher well-being was a stronger predictor of professional development compared to teacher resilience. This result is supported by the recognized importance of psychological well-being as a key factor influencing general teaching practices and professional development (Roffey, 2012), and its

interconnection with job stress and various forms of dissatisfaction (Gregersen et al., 2020; Kidger et al., 2016; MacIntyre et al., 2019).

According to a version of psychological well-being proposed by Ryff (1989), teachers who have mental health and maturity are commonly more successful in establishing a trusting and warm connection with others, making contexts adaptable to their psychological conditions, pursuing targets and intentions, and insisting on enhancing their personal and professional identity and growth. All these outcomes can make teachers cognitively and emotionally involved in their teaching practice. It is also argued that higher levels of teachers' cognitive and emotional involvement in their profession are associated positively with psychological well-being and professional growth (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Researchers also documented that teachers' work involvement and professional development play mediating roles in influencing the association between their positive emotions (Rusu & Colomeischi, 2020).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The main goal of the present study was to examine the role of resilience and well-being in professional development among EFL teachers. It was concluded that both resilience and psychological well-being significantly predicted professional development for EFL teachers, although well-being was a stronger predictor of professional development. It was revealed that well-being and having positive emotions are essential for EFL teachers because teachers with positive emotions are more probable to experience PD. However, serious attention should be given to teachers' well-being to effectively inspire their PD. Consequently, PD could be regarded as the main determinants of teachers' effective functioning and consequently students' success. Besides, teachers with high degrees of well-being are more resilient and figure out viable solutions for everyday challenges and conflicting situations. They can construct supportive relationships with students through

developing collaboration and mutual understanding and consequently, this can result in professional development.

Since teachers' professional and psychological well-being positively affect their learners' psychological well-being and their professional development (Mercer et al., 2020; Roffey, 2012), developing EFL teachers' resilience and well-being needs serious attention through providing rich education programs for teachers. A teacher training program designed to equip pre-service teachers with essential qualities such as well-being and resilience can foster consistent engagement in their professional development. The ultimate goal is to create a positive school climate and a supportive teaching environment that promotes student success. In addition to resilience, such a program could also enhance other desirable qualities, including teaching efficacy and job satisfaction.

Obtaining more knowledge about teachers' psychological well-being and resilience can promote teachers' overall psychological health and subsequently professional development. Looking from a practical perspective, more empirical studies with a focus on EFL teachers' psychological well-being, resilience, and other related variables may contribute to fostering the quality of the atmosphere in educational contexts, thereby promoting the efficacy of teaching practice. In conclusion, developing these qualities in teachers through a rich educational program seems a necessity in many educational settings in which teachers are considered "frontline soldiers" in encountering and facing everyday challenges, and teachers' psychological well-being could make a considerable amount of change in educational outputs through the world (Derakhshan et al., 2020, p.12).

Although the results of this study may have some implications for teachers and teacher education programmers, the study is not void of some limitations. The results of this study need to be interpreted carefully. The investigation should be repeated to see if the same results hold true when data are collected from different contexts or teachers in public schools.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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