UK ESOL Teacher Wellbeing and Emotion Labour: A Mixed Methods Approach

BACKGROUND

UK ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes are for migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking learners residing in the UK to assist with community integration, accessing education, employment, and fulfilling potential (Curcin, Cadwallader, & Sweiry, 2022). However, these classes are often associated with the presence of traumatic histories and mental health needs of learners, which can also lead to mental health implications for ESOL practitioners (Lindley, 2019).

Wellbeing is the multifaceted nature of human flourishing and is associated with increased psychological and physical health (Seligman, 2011). Given the benefits of wellbeing, Mercer and Gregersen (2020) have called for promoting wellbeing within the language teaching profession.

Emotion Labour was conceptualised by (Hochschild, 1979) as the effortful management of emotion which is present in all human interactions. Language teachers often engage with emotion labour strategies given the psychosocial nature of the profession (Blake & Dewaele, 2023).

Research Rationale

Language teacher wellbeing is associated with increased student wellbeing, lower student psychological distress (Harding et al., 2019) and higher student achievement (Carprara et al., 2006). However, evidence suggests that wellbeing is negatively affected by the excessive emotion labour found in the teaching profession (Blake & Dewaele, 2023). Therefore, this project aims to further explore the relationship between wellbeing and emotion labour in order to benefit UK ESOL learners and practitioners.

METHODOLOGY

Survey Characteristics: Online survey open for a 10-day time period (Oct-Nov 2022) using Zoho. Data analyzed with Excel and SPSS.

Research Questions

How is Wellbeing (and Workplace Wellbeing) experienced by UK ESOL Practitioners?
How is Emotion Labour experienced by UK ESOL Practitioners?
To what extent is Wellbeing (and Workplace Wellbeing) associated with Emotion Labour for UK ESOL Practitioners?

Hypothesis: Higher Wellbeing (and Workplace Wellbeing) will be associated with less frequent use of Emotion Labour Strategies for UK ESOL practitioners.

FINDINGS

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Education &amp; Teaching Background</th>
<th>Current Employment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of Age</td>
<td>Years of Teaching Experience: Mid-career (51.5%), Late-career (33.3%). Early-Career (15.1%)</td>
<td>Job Responsibilities: Primarily Teaching (73.0%), Managerial with Teaching (26.2%)</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
<td>Teaching Qualifications: Level 7 Teaching Qualification (73.9%), Level 5 Teaching Qualification (21.7%), Other (4.4%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Working Hours: Full-Time (53.8%), Part-Time (46.2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Salary Type: Paid (82.5%), Voluntary (3.7%), Ruth (3.7%), Contract (7.6%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Contract Permanent (74.6), Temporary (25.2%)</td>
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<td>Prefer Not to Say</td>
<td>Mode of Teaching: Face-to-Face (80.1%), Hybrid (14.1%)</td>
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Figure 1. Descriptive statistics (n=27) depicting UK ESOL practitioners’ levels of wellbeing and workplace wellbeing (left panel). Values represent mean scores and bars represent standard error. Practitioners’ had ‘normal functioning’ levels of wellbeing and workplace wellbeing. The PERMA-Profiler and Workplace wellbeing survey subscales include: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning, and Accomplishment.

Emotion Labour

The emotion labour subscales include: Surface Acting, Deep Acting, and Expression of Naturally Felt Emotions.

Figure 2. Scatterplots illustrating relationships between wellbeing and workplace wellbeing with emotion labour strategy usage.

Higher general wellbeing was significantly associated with lower emotion labour strategy usage, $r(25) = -.434, p = .024$ (top right panel).

Workplace wellbeing was not significantly associated with emotion labour strategy usage, $r(25) = -.177, p = .378$ (bottom right panel).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The results of this pilot are encouraging for justifying further research into the potential relationship between wellbeing and emotion labour in a larger UK ESOL practitioner population. In keeping with the mixed-methods design of this research project, future quantitative data will be merged with qualitative interview data. This data will provide a holistic perspective into the macro, meso, and micro factors influencing UK ESOL practitioner wellbeing and how this may affect UK ESOL learners.

References:


