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Factors Influencing the Well-being of ESL Teachers in Pakistan's Private Educational Institutions

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Abstract

This study explores the well-being of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers working in private institutions in Pakistan. This study adopted a qualitative, interpretivist design. Ten ESL teachers (P1-P10) completed an open-ended written questionnaire, and the data were analyzed using the Reflexive Thematic Analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2000). The interpretation of the findings used Bronfenbrenner's (2003) Ecological Systems Theory to sensitize the analysis across the microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems. Seven different themes were identified: student interaction and relations as a source of meaning and purpose in the profession; excessive workload, pressure, and emotional labor; pay packages, financial recognition, and professional value; job security and support from the institution; relationships with coworkers and administration, recognition, and respect; career growth and resilience; and social expectations of English language teaching in Pakistan.

The findings show that ESL teachers' wellbeing is shaped by workplace relationships, classroom atmosphere, institutional support, and their value and status as professionals in Pakistan. Although learners' relationships and professional growth improved teachers' wellbeing, financial pressure, job insecurity, and excessive workload continued to challenge it. The research study concludes with recommendations for private institutions to elevate ESL teachers' wellbeing through fairer compensation, job security, and stronger institutional support, and suggests directions for future research, including comparative work with public-sector ESL teachers.

Keywords: ESL Teachers, Teacher Wellbeing, Private Education, Pakistan, Ecological Systems Theory

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Introduction

Teacher wellbeing is an integral area of educational research, as increasing demands continue to affect teachers' psychological, emotional, and physical wellbeing. Beyond their primary responsibility of facilitating learning, teachers are expected to undertake numerous additional roles, including curriculum planning, assessment design, administrative responsibilities, integration of educational technologies, classroom management, and continuous professional development. Because of these additional responsibilities, teaching is now considered a highly demanding job, contributing to heightened levels of occupational stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout (Mercer, 2023). These challenges affect teachers' personal well-being and contribute to low job satisfaction, demotivation, reduced teaching and learning quality, and increased intentions to leave the teaching profession.

Teaching is a socially intensive profession that requires constant interaction with learners, parents, peers, and administration. This interaction can be rewarding, but it also exposes teachers to interpersonal conflicts, emotional demands, and institutional pressures and challenges that may adversely affect their wellbeing (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). From a positive psychology perspective, teacher wellbeing extends beyond the absence of stress or illness. It encompasses teachers' ability to experience positive emotions, maintain meaningful professional relationships, demonstrate resilience, and flourish within their work environments (Seligman, 2011). Therefore, maintaining and supporting teacher wellbeing has become a significant priority for private institutions to improve teaching quality and teacher retention.

The significance of educators' well-being extends beyond individual educators to the broader educational system. Teachers with improved well-being are more likely to demonstrate passion, creativity, resilience, and dedication in the teaching profession. They can also create supportive classroom environments that encourage learner participation, engagement, motivation, and academic progress. On the other hand, compromised well-

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being may hinder their teaching career. Teachers' cognitive functioning, including concentration, decision-making, and critical thinking, might be affected. Overall teaching quality and students' learning experience may decline as a result (Kinman, 1998). Research consistently indicates that teachers with higher levels of wellbeing display stronger professional commitment, greater resilience when facing workplace challenges, and more effective classroom practices (Seligman, 2011; Mercer, 2023).

Within this broader discussion, ESL teachers face unique professional demands that differentiate them from teachers in other disciplines. Beyond delivering language instruction, ESL teachers are expected to facilitate meaningful communication, motivate learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds, promote intercultural understanding, and create highly interactive learning environments. Their professional responsibilities frequently involve substantial emotional labor, as they must continuously regulate their own emotions while motivating learners, building positive relationships, and maintaining an encouraging classroom atmosphere (Borg, 2006; Gkonou & Miller, 2017). As language teaching involves emotional engagement, it adds the element of stress and exhaustion for ESL teachers, especially when institutional support is lacking

ESL teachers' wellbeing has received increasing scholarly attention internationally; existing research has primarily focused on general educators or teachers working in Western educational contexts. Studies examining language teacher wellbeing have also grown considerably in recent years; however, empirical evidence from developing countries remains relatively limited. More research has examined teachers' burnout and stress in Pakistan; however, the broader, multidimensional concept of English language teachers' wellbeing needs further exploration.

This research context is important because English occupies a prominent position in Pakistan's education system. It is considered the second language in Pakistan and is linked to professional advancement, socioeconomic mobility, and academic achievement. Therefore, ESL teachers in private institutions are often expected to meet high academic

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standards while managing large classes, extensive administrative duties, curriculum planning, substitute teaching responsibilities, extracurricular activities, lower pay than other professions, and increasing accountability for students' academic performance. These demands can create pressures that affect teachers' psychological, emotional, and professional well-being. Despite the important role private educational institutions play in English language education across Pakistan, relatively little empirical research has explored how these workplace conditions influence ESL teachers' wellbeing. Therefore, addressing this gap is important for educational research and practice. A deeper understanding of the factors that promote or hinder ESL teacher wellbeing can inform institutional policies, leadership practices, professional development initiatives, and teacher support programs aimed at improving teachers' quality of working life. Improving teacher wellbeing benefits teachers and also enhances teaching quality, creates a healthier learning environment, improves learning outcomes, and helps retain teachers in the institution.

This research study aims to explore the wellbeing of ESL teachers working in Pakistan's private educational institutions by evaluating features such as personal, professional, and organizational wellbeing. By providing an in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on language teacher wellbeing and to offer practical recommendations for fostering healthier and more sustainable teaching environments within Pakistan's private education sector

Literature Review

1. Teachers' Wellbeing

Every job gives some level of stress to professionals; however, teaching tends to stand out-it is linked with higher stress levels and lower wellbeing than multiple other jobs (Johnson et al., 2005). Given that teachers are arguably the most valuable resource any education system has, it makes sense that improving their wellbeing, alongside the quality of their

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teaching, should sit near the top of education leaders' priorities. That's why keeping teacher wellbeing central to both research and policy matters so much (Maslach & Leiter, 1999). Many researchers have noted that the teaching field has changed over time. Teachers' wellbeing has become a major research area because it relates to other areas such as the quality of instruction, professionalism, learners' outcomes, and how the institution functions as a whole. Previous studies focused more on stress and burnout of teachers, but now researchers are discussing teachers' wellbeing as a multifaceted area that covers psychological, emotional, social, and professional wellbeing. (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Workload is one of the clearest drivers of that stress. In a study of elementary teachers at private schools in Karachi, Ali (2024) found that teachers were often doing roughly twice the workload expected of them in a single day. That kind of overload left teachers demotivated and took a visible toll on both their physical and mental well-being. Ali's recommendations were fairly practical: better time management, more scheduling support from administrators, wellbeing workshops, and a hard look at existing workload policies. Seligman (2011) captured wellbeing in a structured manner by providing the PERMA framework, which focused on five major components of wellbeing: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. This framework treats wellbeing as a dynamic, layered state rather than a fixed one, depending on these five components, which work together to improve wellbeing. Because teachers so often work under pressure, and because their own wellbeing is closely tied to their students, researchers and policymakers have good reason to treat it as a genuine priority rather than an afterthought (Babic et al., 2022).

The dynamic quality of wellbeing is demonstrated in teaching practice. Educators' wellbeing shifts constantly depending on what's happening in the classroom, how heavy the workload is, and how much institutional support is available. Students are often the biggest source of positive emotion for teachers, while poor attendance, a lack of empathy, or behavioral issues tend to have the opposite effect. Therefore, it is reasonable to

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understand that teachers' wellbeing is not black and white or simply good or bad; it is a mix of several aspects. It is a space where challenges and satisfaction coexist (Mercer, 2023)

2. ESL Teachers' Wellbeing

Teachers' wellbeing has been researched in multiple settings; however, ESL and EFL educators' ideas of wellbeing differ from those of teachers in other disciplines. ESL or EFL teachers' work is not only delivering content in the classroom, but it is far more than that. They are expected to uplift students' confidence in demonstrating their communication skills effectively, and they also create a supportive classroom environment that keeps the students' anxiety levels in check. Language instruction demands more emotional labor, energy, and language efficacy; because of this, wellbeing matters for sustaining effective language instruction. (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020).

According to Talbot and Mercer (2018), language teachers' wellbeing develops and depends on personal values, institutional challenges, and organizational policy. Teachers in their study pointed to communication with learners as one of the biggest factors behind both their best and worst emotional moments at work, while unrealistic institutional expectations, heavy workloads, and limited autonomy consistently dragged wellbeing down.

These challenging areas explain why language teaching has been described as a career in crisis. Many teachers leave the profession of teaching soon after joining. Organizations' retention power is low. (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017) To understand how teachers keep going despite this, Hiver and Dörnyei (2017) developed the idea of "language teacher immunity," a kind of psychological defense that builds through repeated exposure to stress and hindrances in the classroom and at work. They describe two versions: a productive form that relieves stress and improves teaching, and a maladaptive form that does the opposite, reducing effectiveness and eventually leading to burnout. Immunity, in their framing, cuts both ways: it can protect a teacher's well-being or quietly undermine it.

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Although ESL or EFL teachers are generally considered highly proficient speakers of the language, many non-native teachers still have self-doubt when using their target language. Even a genuinely competent teacher can feel unsure in the moment, and that anxiety can look remarkably similar to what a beginner learner experiences. (Horwitz et al., 1986).

At the same time, as more research has focused on stress and negative aspects of wellbeing, positive psychology has also entered ESL/EFL research, bringing concepts like foreign language teaching enjoyment (FLTE). Derakhshan et al. (2022) found that wellbeing, resilience, and L2 grit were some of the stronger factors behind FLTE among Iranian teachers. Those with more resilience, grit, and wellbeing simply enjoyed teaching more, and their impact was seen in the classroom environment.

3. Private Institutions and ESL Teachers' Wellbeing

Because private institutions are, at the end of the day, run for profit, ESL teachers working there often feel heightened job insecurity and a nagging uncertainty about where their career is headed (Mercer, 2023).

In her study, Mercer (2023) found that language teachers' wellbeing in private institutions is influenced mainly by the institutions' business-driven model, particularly by working conditions and how language teachers' status is viewed professionally. Her interviews with teachers in private institutions in Malta revealed that some struggled with long hours, job insecurity, and high language-proficiency demands. She also found many positive factors that support teachers' wellbeing, such as genuinely enjoying their work, strong relationships with learners and coworkers, and a positive workplace atmosphere.

A similar pattern emerged in a different setting. A study at a private elementary school in Turkey found that teachers' emotional, psychological, and professional growth was shaped by both personal circumstances and professional conditions. These included work exhaustion, job insecurity, demanding schedules, and parents' expectations. Similar to Mercer's findings, supportive relationships with coworkers proved to be a significant factor in keeping teachers motivated and improving their well-being. (Irgin, 2025).

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Across both studies, the private sector seems to have two different types of influences that, on the one hand, affect teacher well-being negatively through job insecurity and work challenges but also improve it through strong, supportive institutional and collegial relationships. For this reason, an ecological perspective is important for understanding it.

4. Understanding Wellbeing Through Context: An Ecological Perspective

Most studies in the field of wellbeing tend to overlook context and its significance. Wellbeing is not only a subjective experience, but it is also shaped by the environment around it. (La Placa et al., 2013). This aligns well with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, which argues that human development happens through constant interaction with one's environment, from immediate day-to-day settings to broader cultural and societal forces. This supports the view that the same academic pressures can affect different teachers very differently, depending on how their personal and social lives are progressing. Instruction quality depends not only on an individual's skill, but also on the working atmosphere. Long hours, large classes, excessive workload, admin work, and less time for self-care. Over time, that kind of grind builds up stress, fatigue, and demotivation, which inevitably bleeds into the quality of teaching itself (Ali, 2024).

This framework becomes especially valuable when looking at ESL teachers in Pakistan, where institutional policies, socioeconomic conditions, and societal expectations surrounding English language learning constantly intersect to shape a teacher's daily reality. Because these environmental pressures are hard to change directly, it's worth looking at what teachers actually do to cope.

5. Strategies to Cope and Professional Growth

To protect their wellbeing, teachers lean on a range of self-regulation strategies such as reframing negative thoughts, building genuine rapport with colleagues, using humor, and drawing clear lines between work and personal life (Talbot & Mercer, 2018). These approaches rely heavily on underlying cognitive and behavioral emotion regulation processes that shape how individuals respond to ongoing psychological demands (Gross & John, 2003). Their findings also suggest wellbeing isn't fixed; it shifts depending on each

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teacher's mix of professional and personal circumstances. Emotional regulation is a broad category, covering behavioral, cognitive, and psychological processes: a reminder that coping is an ongoing effort, not something teachers figure out once and file away.

Beyond the day-to-day emotional work, teachers' longer-term growth depends a lot on how they engage with professional development. Borg (2015) argued for a self-directed approach shaped around teachers' own interests, rather than institutional programs that push a single, fixed body of knowledge. He noticed that much professional development still treats teachers as passive recipients rather than active participants, and argued there's no one-size-fits-all formula for what works. Development tends to succeed, in his view, when its content genuinely speaks to both the teachers and the students involved.

Taken together, these coping and development strategies suggest something important: while institutional and contextual pressures are real and often hard to shift, teachers aren't just passively absorbing them. They actively adapt, regulate, and grow within the constraints they're given.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the perception and description of ESL teachers' professional well-being in private educational institutions in Pakistan?

RQ2: What are the main factors affecting ESL teachers' well-being in private educational institutions in Pakistan?

RQ3: What are the impacts of personal, interpersonal, institutional, and sociocultural contexts on ESL teachers' well-being?

Methodology

1. Research Design and Paradigm

The research study employed a qualitative interpretivist (constructionist) research design to explore the factors influencing the well-being of ESL teachers in Pakistan's private education institutions. This approach was adopted because teachers' well-being is

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considered to be a socially and contextually built experience influenced by teachers' professional environment, work relationships, perceptions, and job dynamics

A qualitative approach was considered most suitable for this study to understand subjective experience and purpose rather than gauge wellbeing through predetermined variables. Data were gathered using an open-ended questionnaire in which respondents could write about their experiences, problems, and sense of wellbeing in their job.

The responses were evaluated and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). This approach enables the development of interpretive themes through systematic engagement with qualitative data.

2. Theoretical Framework and Analytical Approach

Reflexive Thematic Analysis was selected because it provides flexibility to examine complex experiences and acknowledge the researcher's interpretive role in knowledge production. In RTA, themes are developed through active engagement among the researcher, the data, and the theoretical assumptions guiding the study.

This method was suitable for exploring ESL teacher wellbeing because teachers' experiences are influenced by complex factors such as classroom and workplace relationships, workload, financial aspects, institutional support, and opportunities for professional development that interact with one another.

The study used Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as a sensitizing framework to understand how multiple environmental contexts affect teachers' wellbeing. The framework facilitated the positioning of participants' experiences in a complex interplay of systems ranging from immediate contacts within the classroom (microsystem), its relationships with other systems in the workplace (mesosystem), institutions where English instruction takes place (exosystem), the broader cultural norms associated with English teaching in Pakistan (macrosystem), and changes in the profession (chronosystem) over time.

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The ecological framework did not restrict the data to predetermined categories; instead, it informed the interpretation of how various contextual factors interact to affect ESL teachers' wellbeing.

3. Participants and Sampling

In this paper, the participants were 10 ESL teachers working in Pakistan's private education sector. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to reflect experiences relevant to ESL teaching and to offer meaningful insights into factors that impact professional wellbeing.

The participants had a wide range of professional experiences and employment contexts, reflecting diverse perspectives on classroom experiences, institutional conditions, workload pressures, financial recognition, and professional development.

The sample size was selected based on the quality, richness, and relevance of participants' responses, consistent with qualitative research principles that prioritize depth of understanding over statistical generalization.

4. Data Collection

An open-ended questionnaire was used to gather data capturing ESL teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding professional wellbeing. The questions focused on teachers' awareness of wellbeing, enabling and inhibiting factors for teacher wellbeing, teachers' workplace experiences, institutional support, financial concerns, relationships with students and colleagues, and opportunities for professional development.

The open-ended format allowed participants to reflect in detail and give personal insights into their experiences in private education institutions.

Respondents were informed of the study's objective and the confidentiality of their answers, and participation was voluntary. During analysis and reporting, participants were assigned codes (P1-P10) to protect their anonymity.

5. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (RTA) was used to analyze the responses obtained from the questionnaire. Analysis comprised familiarisation with the

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data, initial coding, candidate theme generation, candidate theme refinement, thematic meaning definition, and final analysis.

The researcher interacted with the data inductively, allowing patterns and meanings to emerge from participants' responses rather than from predetermined categories. After developing the themes, the researchers applied Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to understand how personal, relational, institutional, and sociocultural contexts shape teacher wellbeing.

Themes that emerged from the final analysis included themes of student relationships, workload/emotional demands, salary/financial recognition, job security, workplace relationships, professional growth, and broader expectations of English teaching in Pakistan.

6. Researcher Reflexivity

As in all analysis, consistent with Reflexive Thematic Analysis, the researcher recognized that interpretation of qualitative data is shaped by personal assumptions, experiences, and theory. Throughout the analysis process, the researcher-maintained reflexivity by continually reviewing participants' responses, critically examining emerging themes, and considering alternative interpretations. The researcher's function was thus not to remove subjectivity, but to make the interpretation process explicit and theoretically grounded.

7. Ethical Considerations

The researcher upheld the principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and informed consent throughout the research process. All participants were briefed on the study aims and assured that their data would be used for only academic purposes.

The final report did not contain any identifying information; codes (P1-P10) were used to maintain participant anonymity.

Findings

1. Overview of Participants

The study examined the factors influencing the well-being of ESL teachers working in Pakistan's private education institutions. Data were gathered from 10 ESL teachers from

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different contexts and with varied professional experience. Participants worked at different educational levels and varied in teaching experience, institutional atmosphere, education-system level, and employment status.

This diverse group of teachers in private institutions in Pakistan allowed exploration of how personal, interpersonal, organizational, sociocultural, and psychological factors influence ESL teachers' professional well-being. To maintain confidentiality and protect participants' identities, participants are referred to using codes (P1-P10).

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Participant Code	Institution Type	Teaching Role	Employment Status
P1	Private educational institution	ESL/English Teacher	Full-time
P2	Private educational institution	ESL/English Teacher	Full-time
P3	Private educational institution	ESL/English Teacher	Full-time
P4	Private educational institution	English Lecturer	Contract/Visiting
P5	Private educational institution	English Lecturer	Full-time/Contract
P6	Private educational institution	ESL/English Teacher	Full-time
P7	Private educational institution	ESL/English Teacher	Full-time
P8	Private educational institution	ESL/English Teacher	Contract/Visiting
P9	Private educational institution	ESL/English Teacher	Full-time
P10	Private educational institution	ESL/English Teacher	Full-time

Note. Participant codes ensure anonymity.

2. Themes Influencing ESL Teacher Wellbeing

Reflexive thematic analysis of responses from ten ESL teachers generated seven themes that elaborate the factors influencing ESL teachers' wellbeing in Pakistan's private educational institutions. The findings reveal that teachers' wellbeing is dynamic and multifaceted, impacted by classroom relationships, workload, the conditions of the institutions, financial status, workplace environment and culture, professional development, and sociocultural aspects surrounding English language teaching

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Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory served as an interpretive framework for understanding the system in which these factors operate at different levels of teachers' professional environments. Rather than treating ecological systems as separate categories, the findings show how systems interact to shape teachers' wellbeing experiences.

Table 2. Themes Influencing ESL Teacher Wellbeing and Ecological Connections

Theme	Main Factors Identified	Ecological Level
Student Relationships as a Source of Meaning and Professional Satisfaction	Student progress, appreciation, classroom connection, teaching fulfillment	Microsystem
Workload, Professional Pressure, and Emotional Labor	Teaching responsibilities, administrative workload, learner diversity, emotional demands	Microsystem/Exosystem
Salary, Financial Recognition, and Professional Value	Low salary, financial pressure, feeling undervalued, compensation concerns	Exosystem
Job Security and Institutional Support	Employment stability, contract conditions, management support, institutional policies	Exosystem
Workplace Relationships, Recognition, and Respect	Colleague support, communication, leadership, workplace culture	Mesosystem
Professional Growth, Adaptation, and Resilience Over Time	Experience, training, confidence, coping strategies	Chronosystem
Social Expectations of English Teaching in Pakistan	Language status, expectations of English teachers, professional identity	Macrosystem

Theme 1: Student Relationships as a Source of Meaning and Professional Satisfaction (Microsystem)

The strongest pattern throughout the ten open-ended questionnaire responses was the importance of student relationships in influencing ESL teachers' well-being. The teachers who participated consistently described student progress, encouragement, and academic achievement in learning English as a second language as a major reason for their professional satisfaction

ESL teachers explained that seeing students learn and overcome language challenges gave them a sense of fulfillment and motivated them to work harder for their students'

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achievements. For most participants, teaching wasn't limited to instruction; it also involved boosting students' confidence, supporting academic development, and providing better opportunities.

Learners' appreciation was a significant emotional resource for teachers. Participants reported that positive feedback played a vital role in increasing their motivation and supported them to progress despite workplace challenges.

Though, participants also explained that in order to maintain a positive classroom environment required considerable emotional labor. The teacher's role was complicated by having to work with students with varying levels of language mastery, learning needs, and expectations.

Ecologically speaking, this theme is the microsystem, that is, one of the most direct social environments in which teachers work daily.

Theme 2: Workload, Professional Pressure, and Emotional Labor (Microsystem and Exosystem)

While participants reported high commitment to teaching, they also noted workload as a factor affecting their well-being. Participants mentioned that ESL teaching in private institutions in Pakistan involves responsibilities beyond classroom teaching, such as lesson preparation, assessment, administrative work, curriculum requirements, and institutional duties.

Teachers in the private sector elaborated that managing diverse groups of students was particularly challenging because they had to adapt their teaching approaches while keeping students' proficiency levels in mind. Teachers invested additional time, energy, and emotional effort to adapt and modify their teaching

Beyond workload, participants discussed the emotional aspects of teaching English in Pakistan. The pressure on teachers to meet the high expectations of students and private institutions was closely linked to the perceived association of English with educational success, social status, and job achievement.

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The results suggest that ESL teachers face both visible and invisible demands. Workload refers to the real-life demands of teaching, while emotional labor involves managing others' expectations, staying motivated, and projecting confidence as a language professional.

This theme reflects both the microsystem and the exosystem. Microsystem through daily classroom experiences, and the exosystem through the institution's expectations of administrative and teacher workload.

Theme 3: Salary, Financial Recognition, and Professional Value (Exosystem)

The findings suggest that one of the important factors influencing ESL teachers' well-being is financial recognition, specifically salary and compensation, particularly in private institutions. Private institutions can offer high wages and attract high-quality teachers, or they can offer very low wages because of limited resources and funds. Pakistan's private education sector is highly heterogeneous, encompassing institutions ranging from prestigious and well-resourced to modest and under-resourced, with salary structures varying accordingly based on institutional standing. This contrasts sharply with government institutions, which typically offer permanent positions, fixed salary scales, and structured benefits including retirement plans.

In the open-ended questionnaire responses, financial concern was seen as a consistent pattern. Participants explained that salary was not just an economic issue, but also reflected the institutions' appreciation of their teachers' professional contribution.

Most participants shared that their monthly pay package didn't always align with their educational qualifications, experience, workload, classroom management, and other teaching and administrative responsibilities. Teachers were demotivated and unsatisfied with the salary and compensation because it affected their financial stability in the current economy.

Pay was also associated with recognition among participants. Teachers' perceptions of low pay resulted in a sense of under-compensation. This suggests a strong link between

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financial and emotional well-being; salary reflects both economic security and institutional appreciation.

Despite this, participants also showed dedication and commitment to teaching beyond financial considerations. Some teachers said their commitment to teaching and their students' growth encouraged them to continue despite financial challenges. This suggests that intrinsic motivation can support wellbeing, but it does not fully offset the negative effects of financial pressure.

Ecologically, salary conditions fall under the exosystem, where teachers are influenced by institutional economic decisions and employment processes over which they have little control. The results show the importance of individual efforts to improve teacher well-being, but also the importance of providing equitable institutional support.

Theme 4: Job Security and Institutional Support (Exosystem)

Job security and institutional support in private institutions came up as another significant factor influencing ESL teachers' well-being. These factors impacted their confidence, stability, and professional satisfaction.

Teachers in temporary, contract-based, or visiting positions expressed concerns about job security, whereas teachers in permanent positions reported a stronger sense of security. Uncertainty about the job created emotional and psychological stress and affected teachers' ability to plan their personal and professional lives with ease properly.

Participants reported that job insecurity was especially difficult because contract decisions, workload assignments, and decisions on the continuation of employment were made at the institutional level. Although these decisions affected teachers' well-being, they had limited control over them.

Institutional support was also identified as an important protective factor. Participants who experienced supportive management described feeling more motivated and valued. Supportive administrators who provided guidance, communicated effectively, and acknowledged teachers' efforts contributed positively to workplace satisfaction.

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Participants with supportive employers described feeling more motivated and recognized. Administration that supported teachers, provided guidance, maintained smooth communication, and valued teachers contributed quite positively to teachers' careers. On the other hand, restricted communication, lack of support, vague instructions, and unclear expectations added to workplace stress and affected teachers' wellbeing.

This theme reflects the exosystem level because institutional support, policies, and employment arrangements indirectly affect teachers' experiences.

Theme 5: Workplace Relationships, Recognition, and Respect (Mesosystem)

Participants explained that workplace relationships played an integral role in shaping their well-being at work. Positive and supportive interactions with coworkers, administration, and mentors added to feelings of belonging, confidence, and professional motivation. ESL teachers highlighted encouraging colleagues as a main source of motivation and support. The idea of sharing experiences, getting guidance about different aspects, and discussing teaching challenges made the process of improving wellbeing at work even better.

Participants also highlighted the importance of respectful communication from administration. Participants explained that when people feel heard and appreciated, it deepens their sense of belonging to their institutions and boosts their positive contribution. Not all of the experiences were positive, though. Some participants mentioned poor communication, less recognition, lack of guidance, or feeling that their contributions are not recognized. These experiences negatively affected their emotional health and job satisfaction.

The results indicate that wellbeing is influenced not only by the work environment as experienced in a formal setting, but also by the quality of day-to-day workplace relationships.

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This theme relates to the mesosystem, as it involves teachers' interactions with others in their professional setting. Relationships between teachers, colleagues, and management can be positive or negative for workplace wellbeing.

Theme 6: Professional Growth, Adaptation, and Resilience Over Time (Chronosystem)

Professional development also emerged as one of the most significant factors supporting ESL teachers' wellbeing. Participants described that training and development added value to their teaching and improved their competence and confidence at work.

Educators explained that over time, they became more trained and experienced in managing classrooms, understanding students' needs and expectations, and handling workplace challenges. Experience helped them develop coping strategies and build confidence while delivering their work.

Professional development opportunities like training, workshops, seminars, and self-paced learning appeared to be a valuable source of growth and development. These opportunities help participants improve their practices and adapt to changing educational expectations. However, not all teachers received equal opportunities for professional growth. Some teachers received opportunities from the institution, while others relied on personal motivation and effort to improve their teaching practices.

These experiences show that participants' wellbeing is not static. Resilience develops over time through professional learning and adapting to new circumstances as teachers accumulate experience.

This theme relates to the chronosystem, and it emphasizes teachers' professional identity and wellbeing as they change over time.

Theme 7: Social Expectations of English Teaching in Pakistan (Macrosystem)

Participants also discussed the influence of wider social expectations surrounding English language teaching in Pakistan. English occupies a significant position in Pakistani

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education and society, often being associated with academic success, employment opportunities, and social mobility.

Participants also described the impact of wider social expectations around English language teaching in Pakistan, especially among teachers in private institutions. English holds an important position in Pakistan's education system and society, often associated with academic achievement, job opportunities, and social mobility.

Because of English's significant position in society, ESL teachers feel pressure to demonstrate stronger language competence and maintain high standards. Some participants felt that ESL teachers were expected to represent native-like English proficiency, which sometimes created more pressure.

Teachers explained that students and communities often held high expectations for English teachers, including expectations about pronunciation, fluency, and communication skills. These expectations influenced teachers' professional identities and emotional experiences. Meanwhile, participants shared how these pressures eased with experience and professional development. With time, teachers gained confidence and came to understand that they could not strive for perfection in their teaching, but could help their learners.

The theme opens a conversation about the macrosystem, which relates to broader cultural beliefs, values, and expectations related to English language education in Pakistan.

3. Integrated Ecological Understanding of ESL Teacher Wellbeing

The results reveal multidimensional factors that influence teachers' wellbeing in private institutions in Pakistan. Instructional contexts, cultural norms, professional development, impact of technology, best practices, etc shaped teachers' experiences.

The microsystem affected wellbeing in daily classroom experiences, specifically through relationships with learners and the demands of teaching. The mesosystem shaped wellbeing through relationships with peers, mentors, reportees, and institutional leaders. Exosystems affected teachers through salary structures, working conditions, excessive workload, and career development opportunities. The macrosystem affected teachers' role in English

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language teaching through social expectations. Lastly, the chronosystem showed that wellbeing changes depending on teachers' experience and growth throughout their careers.

Table 3. Factors Supporting and Challenging ESL Teacher Wellbeing

Factors Supporting Wellbeing	Factors Challenging Wellbeing
Positive relationships with students	Heavy workload
Student appreciation and progress	Low salary and financial pressure
Supportive colleagues and administration	Job insecurity
Professional development opportunities	Limited career growth opportunities
Teaching experience and confidence	Excessive institutional demands
Workplace respect and recognition	Lack of communication and recognition
Personal coping strategies	Emotional pressure related to English teaching

4. Summary of Findings

The general findings suggest that ESL teachers' wellbeing in private education institutions in Pakistan is influenced by both supportive and challenging factors. Professional satisfaction was meaningful for teachers in terms of relationships with students, personal growth, and positive relationships with others. Workload stress, low pay, job insecurity, lack of recognition, and institutional issues, however, had a negative impact on their health. According to the results, to improve the wellbeing of ESL teachers, individual coping strategies need to be supplemented with consideration of institutional conditions. To support sustainable teacher wellbeing, teachers' pay packages should be improved; they should have job security, access to professional development opportunities, and respectful, supportive working relationships.

Discussion

1: ESL Teachers' Perceptions and Descriptions of their Professional Wellbeing (RQ1)

Participants did not describe wellbeing as simply not being stressed. Wellbeing was consistently described as relational and additive (as it was experienced in the classroom, with satisfaction (Theme 1); valued by coworkers, supervisors and management (Theme

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5); as it was built over time, with a sense of becoming more competent (Theme 6); and as it was continually diminished by financial stressors (Theme 3) and employment stressors (Theme 4). This follows positive psychology perspectives on teacher wellbeing (Seligman, 2011; Mercer, 2023), where wellbeing is presented as a dynamic, complex state rather than a fixed condition, and Mercer (2023) noted that many private sector language teachers experience strong positive and strong negative feelings simultaneously.

2. Factors that can influence ESL teacher wellbeing (RQ2)

The study identified two main themes across the seven themes, broadly following the demands-and-resources continuum documented in the broader teacher wellbeing literature (Mercer, 2023; Talbot & Mercer, 2018). On the demand side, participants identified workload, emotional labor (Theme 2), low salary (Theme 3), job insecurity (Theme 4), and sociocultural pressure on ESL teachers in Pakistan's private sector (Theme 7). However, on the resources side, participants identified the factors that helped to maintain their wellbeing despite these demands: student relationships (Theme 1), supportive coworkers, supervisors, and management (Theme 5), and opportunities for professional growth (Theme 6).

Financial recognition was a common theme, both as an economic issue and as a factor that made the teachers feel valued and recognized in society. This aligns with Ali's (2024) research, which found that private school teachers in Karachi often have workloads that exceed what is officially assigned to them, often without adequate compensation, meaning salary can be seen as a representation of institutional respect as well as a means of earning income.

3. How Personal, Interpersonal, Institutional and Sociocultural Contexts Influence Wellbeing (RQ3)

Viewed through Bronfenbrenner's lens, the findings indicate that wellbeing is influenced at multiple levels, not just one. The microsystem (daily classroom relationships, workload) is not separate from the exosystem (institutional salary and contract policy): participants' reports indicate that under financial and security stress at the exosystem level, emotional

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labor at the microsystem level was harder to sustain. Further, the macrosystem-level position of English in Pakistan (Theme 7) seemed to increase microsystem-level classroom pressure, as participants felt their everyday classroom practice was judged against the broader cultural demand to teach students in near-perfect English, rather than their current learners' needs.

The mesosystem (relationships between teachers, colleagues and management, Theme 5) seemed to buffer across these levels. Participants with strong support from colleagues or managers appeared more likely to cope with feelings of insecurity in their exosystems than those with weak or non-existent workplace relationships, and this support was more than additive, as it helped buffer the effects of macrosystem-level pressure. The chronosystem (Theme 6) introduced a third dimension, as teachers' ability to cope with these cross-level pressures is not static, but rather is acquired with experience, as Hiver and Dörnyei's (2017) theory of language suggests teacher immunity, which suggests that over time, the classrooms and institutions in which students spend their school days can lead to a protective or corrosive effect, depending on the level of support provided.

4. Analysis of the Open-Ended Questionnaire Format

Due to the form of the data collection (a written questionnaire), some answers were also less detailed than a follow-up probing might have produced, especially concerning the areas of salary and job security. Section 8 (Limitations) explains this further.

Conclusion and Recommendations

1. Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the factors affecting the well-being of ESL teachers in private education institutions in Pakistan and to explore how personal, interpersonal, institutional, and sociocultural contexts influenced their well-being. The results of the study revealed that the level of well-being of the ESL teacher is not a simple phenomenon, but is the result of all four factors, which discuss the ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner at the classroom level, workplace level, and institutional level, and the culture of English in Pakistani society level. Student relationships, collegial support, and professional

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development consistently benefited participants' wellbeing, whereas workload, insufficient wages, job security, and sociocultural factors consistently threatened participants' wellbeing. Hence, this sector needs multiple levels of intervention to support ESL teacher wellbeing, rather than focusing on one aspect at a time.

2. Recommendations for Institutional Leadership (Microsystem / Mesosystem)

Bullet-form recommendations informed directly by Themes 1, 2, and 5:

- Develop peer support groups, for example mentoring pairs or departmental check-ins, so that the collegial support that participants expressed to be valuable for their support and motivation is available on professional grounds.
- Review non-teaching workload, such as administrative tasks, event management, substitute duties, and also revise class sizes. These two features are identified as major sources of stress and should be reviewed by the management
- Recognize teachers' efforts and work directly, given how strongly Theme 5 linked recognition to wellbeing.

3. Recommendations for HR and Policy Design (Exosystem)

Informed by Themes 3 and 4:

- Provide ESL teachers' salaries as per their qualifications and assigned workload. Communicate how salary and compensation decisions are made so teachers understand the fairness of the salary system.
- Communicate clearly about contract renewal timelines and criteria to reduce the constant uncertainty and feeling of instability described under theme 4

4. Recommendations at the Sector and Cultural Level (Macrosystem)

Informed by Theme 7:

- Take measures to reframe expectations of English proficiency for parents and students to avoid placing teachers in the position of representing an ideal standard of native-like fluency.

5. Recommendations for Future Research

Extend this research study to ESL teachers working in the public sector for comparative analysis of both systems.

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Conduct follow-up interviews and journal entries to add depth to themes like salary, workload, and job security that may have been under-explored in the written questionnaire format

Explore the chronosystem dimension longitudinally by observing English language teachers over a longer period to evaluate how their wellbeing and coping mechanisms evolve across stages and sectors.

Limitations

- The study is limited to a small, purposively selected sample of ten ESL teachers, working in private educational institutions in Pakistan. The findings offer enriched and context-based information; however, they are not statistically generalizable to all ESL teachers in Pakistan.
- Data were collected through a written open-ended questionnaire rather than live interviews. This format allowed the teachers to take time and reflect; however, it didn't allow the researchers to investigate or clarify responses in the moment, which may have limited the depth of a few answers, specifically on sensitive topics like administrative support, salary, and job security
- Participant responses were collected at a single point in time; the chronosystem theme (professional growth over time) therefore relies on participants' retrospective recall rather than on observation of change as it occurred.
- As with all qualitative research, the researcher's own interpretive lens shaped theme development. This was addressed through reflexive practice (Section 4.6), but cannot be fully eliminated.

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