

A Review on Correlations among Teacher Wellbeing, Mindfulness and Foreign Language Teaching Enjoyment

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Abstract: This study will report on a review investigating the researches on correlations among teacher wellbeing (TWB), mindfulness and foreign language teaching enjoyment (FLTE). The aim is to better understand how TWB is developed and influenced within the domain of mindfulness and FLTE. The first part of this paper explains the definitions of TWB, mindfulness and FLTE respectively. It then summarizes the existing literature, trying to lay a solid foundation for discovering the potential relationships among them. Furthermore, the paper discusses the research gaps based on the literature review and provides implications for the researchers in this field.

1. Introduction

For a long time, foreign language education in China has tended to focus on the cognitive dimension of learning, ignoring the emotional and psychological dimensions to a large extent^[1]. The emergence of positive psychology has led researchers to focus more on the positive aspects of life, aiming to enhance wellbeing and promote mental health and success. Most of the previous studies on positive psychology and positive emotion have been conducted on foreign language learners, and in recent years they have also begun to focus on foreign language teachers. However, compared with the research on foreign language learners, the number of teacher-related studies is much smaller. Teachers are under constant pressure and face many challenges. Positive psychology and teacher wellbeing play a decisive role in their own professional development, as well as in the quality of teaching, student learning and student psychology^[2].

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of Key Terms

2.1.1 Teacher Wellbeing

There is a variation on the definition of teacher wellbeing, for different theories include different domains and perspectives. However, it is increasingly recognized that teacher wellbeing is multidimensional and inherently complex^[3]. Teacher Wellbeing (TWB) generally refers to the unity of the fulfillment of teachers' physical and psychological needs and the development of their profession^[2]. It includes subjective wellbeing (SWB) and psychological wellbeing (PWB)^{[2][4]},

which is likely to reflect an integration of both “feeling good” and “living well” [5].

2.1.2 Mindfulness

Mindfulness, commonly defined as the ability to pay attention to the present moment intentionally without judging experiences [6], represents a promising way for human flourishing [7]. Mindfulness is not about clearing one’s mind of thoughts [8] but is an active process where the focus of attention leads to self-awareness and insightful reflection and concentration [9]. Mindfulness-based interventions can reduce stress and promote wellbeing [10].

2.1.3 Foreign Language Teaching Enjoyment

Dewaele and MacIntyre [11] defined Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) as “a complex emotion, capturing interacting dimension of challenge and perceived ability that reflect human drive for success in the face of difficult tasks” (p. 216). Teachers’ Foreign Language Teaching Enjoyment (FLTE) is a mirror of learners’ FLE [12], targeting at the enjoyment of FL teachers to the context of teaching. According to Proietti Ergün and Dewaele [12], FLTE includes three dimensions: personal enjoyment in the classroom, appreciation of the learners and social enjoyment in the classroom.

2.2 Studies on Teacher Wellbeing, Mindfulness and Foreign Language Teaching Enjoyment

2.2.1 Studies on Teacher Wellbeing and Mindfulness

A large number of empirical studies have confirmed the relationships between teacher wellbeing and mindfulness, which mainly focus on two dimensions: the correlation between teacher wellbeing and mindfulness, and the effects of diverse mindfulness-based interventions on teacher wellbeing.

Previous studies are likely to regard mindfulness as an intervention (e.g., yoga, meditation, and breathing exercises) to verify whether it could promote teacher wellbeing [13][14]. Lomas et al. [15] found that mindfulness interventions do improve educators’ mental health and wellbeing, and also positively affect life satisfaction [16], positive emotion [13], and relaxation [16]. Furthermore, mindfulness has a huge potential on enhancing in-service teachers’ wellbeing and performance [17].

In addition, mindfulness training plays a pivotal role in attenuating negative emotions of teachers as well [18]. Although the interventions varied considerably across studies in terms of dosage, frequency, and mode, it had significantly positive impacts in all domains. The intervention affected teaching mindfulness largely, and had a moderate impact on reducing teacher stress and anxiety, and a small impact on teacher depression and burnout [19].

Previous studies have also elucidated the relationship between teacher wellbeing and mindfulness theoretically. Moreover, some scholars have examined the underlying correlation between the two and other variables. For example, Jennings [10] explored the relationships between classroom quality, students’ attitude, TWB and mindfulness of 35 early childhood teachers in Northern California. The research findings indicated that teachers’ psychosocial characteristics and wellbeing could enhance their resilience, performance and students’ classroom performance accordingly.

2.2.2 Studies on Teacher Wellbeing and Foreign Language Teaching Enjoyment

Existing studies have focused on the role of teacher wellbeing and foreign language teaching enjoyment as predictors of each other. On the one hand, studies exploring the predictive role of TWB on FLTE accounted for a relatively large number of studies. For example, Proietti Ergün & Dewaele [12] first investigated the effect of TWB and resilience on FLTE. Through multiple regression analysis, significant positive correlations were provided between TWB, resilience and FLTE, with resilience

as the strongest predictor of FLTE. Based on this, Derakhshan et al. ^[20] introduced the concept of teacher L2 grit and utilized structural equation modeling (SEM) to construct the relationship between the four variables. The results also suggested that the variables were significantly correlated with each other. However, L2 grit emerged as the greatest antecedent on FLTE.

In addition, previous studies ^{[12][20]} have encouraged more researches on the potential variables that can predict FLTE and find the relationship between them. Therefore, Noughabi et al. ^[21] combined with emotion regulation (ER) to discover the extent to which psychological well-being and emotion regulation of 575 Iranian FL teachers on FLTE. It revealed that FL teachers' psychological well-being and emotion regulation significantly influenced foreign language teaching enjoyment. Moreover, except for teacher internal factors, the relationship between external environment (e.g., school climate) and TWB and FLTE has also been developed. Zhang et al. ^[22] proposed six predictions of the relationship between teacher psychological well-being, self-efficacy, school climate, and FLTE of 335 Iranian English language teachers with the help of questionnaires and structural equation modeling. It has found that the school climate directly affects teacher psychological well-being and indirectly affects FLTE.

On the other hand, there implies a bidirectional reinforcement between TWB and FLTE. However, there is a paucity of research examining the predictive effect of FLTE on TWB. Noughabi et al. ^[23] conducted a cross-cultural study with 581 Chinese and 497 Iranian FL teachers to examine the role of FLTE on teacher engagement and well-being in different cultural contexts. The findings suggested that both Chinese and Iranian teachers were positively affected by FLTE. The relationship between FLTE and work engagement was stronger for Chinese FL teachers, while the relationship between FLTE and teacher psychological well-being was stronger for Iranian FL teachers.

2.2.3 Studies on Mindfulness and Foreign Language Teaching Enjoyment

Previous research has shown that teaching mindfulness buffers negative stressors such as burnout ^[24] and also protects teachers from the negative effects of pressure on their classroom teaching ^[25]. Mindful teachers are able to cope with professional obstacles flexibly and achieve high levels of well-being, satisfaction, and engagement ^[24]. In addition, mindfulness improves teachers' emotional competence ^[26], suggesting that mindful teachers are more likely to experience positive emotions. Thus, two possible outcomes of conducting mindfulness are higher engagement and lower burnout ^[27]. Garland et al. ^[28] demonstrated their own hypothesis that the effect of mindfulness on teacher engagement and satisfaction may be mediated through positive emotions.

Few studies have examined the importance of teacher mindfulness from a positive psychology perspective ^[29]. There has been insufficient attention to mindfulness and FLTE, thus it is not clear whether mindfulness is related to FLTE. Therefore, Yang et al. ^[27] probed the relationship between FLTE and mindfulness, combining two possible outcomes of mindfulness, namely engagement and burnout. The results showed that FLTE, as a mediating role, moderated the relationship between mindfulness and engagement and burnout. Mindful teachers who enjoyed their profession were more likely to achieve higher levels of engagement and satisfaction, thus creating a positive feedback loop. The study also emphasized the instrumental role of positive emotions in the psychological development of foreign language teachers.

3. Analysis and Reflection

Based upon the review of previous studies, teacher wellbeing is tightly related to mindfulness and foreign language teaching enjoyment. A large number of empirical studies have examined these variables in terms of definitions, measurements, correlations, and influencing factors. Nevertheless, there are still several research gaps.

Firstly, limited studies have paid attention to the predictive effects of mindfulness and foreign language teaching enjoyment on teacher wellbeing of Chinese foreign language teachers. Existing studies have mainly focused on the mediating role of mindfulness-based intervention to moderate teachers' psychology and emotions.

What's more, previous studies mainly focused on rural teachers, primary and secondary school teachers and less on foreign language teachers in higher education, especially in China. Therefore, it is instrumental to investigate the status quo of FL teachers' wellbeing and dig out their internal real feeling based on Chinese educational background and policy.

Finally, it concerns the measurements of TWB, FLTE, and mindfulness. Quantitative research is still the mainstream method in relevant research. Structural equation models, correlation analysis, and other techniques are used to deal with the data in a quantitative way, lacking the support of qualitative data such as interviews, journals, and observations. Therefore, the underlying reasons about TWB and FLTE still remain vague.

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