# Language Teacher Wellbeing across the Career Span

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PSYCHOLOGY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING: 21

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**Giulia Sulis, Sarah Mercer, Sonja Babic and Astrid Mairitsch**

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# 1 Introduction

Teachers are essential to the quality of education (Hattie, 2008). Yet, educators across a variety of educational settings are currently experiencing significant levels of occupational stress, burnout, and decreased job satisfaction leading to increasing rates of attrition (Chang, 2009; Vesely *et al*., 2014). The sources of teachers' occupational stress are diverse and include factors such as workload, discipline problems, time pressure, conflicts with parents, emotional dissonance, lack of support, job insecurities, and low salaries (Antoniou *et al*., 2013; Krause *et al*., 2011). The period of the pandemic amplified the challenges and drew attention to the difficulties teachers face in their professional lives, not only in a time of crisis but ongoing (MacIntyre *et al*., 2020; Zacher & Rudolph, 2020).

While some of the demands and strains remain similar for teachers across all subjects, for language teachers, there are potentially unique additional stressors. For instance, language teachers often experience intense levels of emotional labour as learners negotiate the close relationships between language, identity, and face (Gkonou & Miller, 2019). The methodologies typically employed to teach languages are also known to be particularly energy-intense compared to other subjects (Borg, 2006). Furthermore, language educators are typically required to deliver lessons in a language that is not their L1, which can lead to a reduced sense of efficacy and language anxiety (Horwitz, 1996). Additional pressure is caused by the ever-growing dominance of English as a lingua franca, which is associated with a sharp decrease in the teaching of other modern languages, thus compromising the professional standing and prospects of those teaching languages other than English (Mason, 2017).

Further challenges may include poor induction and mentoring programmes for beginning language teachers (Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2016), large numbers of students with varied levels of proficiency in language teaching (Mason, 2010), and limited budget and resources for language departments (Ewart, 2009). Additionally, the introduction of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programmes in various settings across the globe and especially in Europe has placed additional demands on language teachers' professional competence, often leading to the redefinition of their roles and posing challenges to their

self-efficacy beliefs (e.g. Cammarata, 2010; Cammarata & Tedik, 2012). Those working in the private sector also face additional strains, such as poor working conditions and job precarity (Mercer, 2020b; Wieczorek, 2016). These challenges have led to low motivation, poor job satisfaction, reduced confidence, as well as increasing rates of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion, which may threaten language teachers' ability to cope with the demands of their role (King & Ng, 2018; MacIntyre *et al*., 2019; Wieczorek, 2016). In light of these challenges, it is not surprising that increasing numbers of language teachers are leaving their jobs, many within the first five years in the profession (Worth & De Lazzari, 2017).

To understand the challenging professional working conditions surrounding the teaching profession, a notable body of research has focused on the factors leading to teacher stress and burnout (e.g. Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Whilst these aspects remain important to understand, they present only part of the picture. From a holistic perspective, there is a commensurate need to examine what contributes to language teachers not only surviving in the profession but also flourishing in their professional roles (Mercer *et al*., 2016). In other words, what are the positive factors in teachers' professional lives that contribute to their job satisfaction, wellbeing, and willingness to remain in the profession? The underlying premise of this book is that it is not enough to understand what causes stress and burnout; we also need to understand how and when people thrive in their professional and personal lives, what strengths they can draw on to manage the demands of their profession, and what opportunities and resources they have and can utilise in their surroundings to sustain their wellbeing. While the topic of teacher wellbeing is gaining momentum and relevance in the field of educational psychology, research focusing on language teachers has only recently come more notably into focus (see Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017; MacIntyre *et al*., 2019, 2020; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2019; Ončevska Ager & Mercer, 2019). In this book, we contribute to this limited body of research by casting light not only on the strains language teachers experience in their professional roles but also on the psychological strengths and resources they draw on in their lives to manage and nurture their wellbeing.

This book reports on a study that not only deals with this critical topic within language teacher psychology but that also takes three original perspectives that add to the body of literature within second language acquisition (SLA) and general education. Firstly, language teacher wellbeing is viewed through the lens of challenges and resources. From this perspective, wellbeing is examined in terms of the interplay between the challenges language teachers encounter in their personal and professional lives, and the psychological, social and contextual resources that they draw on to buffer the impact of these challenges and give them strength

and support in their professional roles (Hobfoll, 2001, 2002). Developing these resources 'can impact one's ability to not only rebound from adversity but also bounce forward towards growth and development' (Falecki & Mann, 2020: 179). When these resources are depleted, however, individuals can experience stress and burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). As such, examining language teacher wellbeing in terms of the ongoing interaction between challenges and resources can offer critical insights into the ways language teachers not only manage adversities and setbacks in their personal and professional contexts but also in fact thrive and keep growing in their roles. These insights are critical to understand what kind of support can be offered to language teachers to enhance their wellbeing and help them flourish in their professional roles. It is a balanced view that enables us to understand not only the causes of stress but also the reasons for high wellbeing.

The second innovative perspective adopted in this book is to examine teachers at different phases of their professional development. It is known that, as teachers age and gain experience, the challenges and stressors they face may vary, as well as the resources they draw on to sustain their wellbeing (Day, 2017). According to Goodson (2008: 34), teachers have different 'centres of gravity' at different points in their lives and careers. This means that, during some periods of their lives and careers, work tends to predominate, while other phases may be characterised by a stronger focus on family and the self. Since language teacher wellbeing in each life and career phase appears shaped by different demands and tensions, it is critical to examine the unique challenges and resources language educators experience throughout different phases of their career trajectories. To date, most research on teacher wellbeing has focused largely on pre-service and early-career stages (e.g. Bowles & Arnup, 2016; Clandinin *et al.*, 2015; Hobson & Maxwell, 2017; Hong, 2010; Hong *et al.*, 2018; Pearce & Morrison, 2011). Research on teacher wellbeing at mid- and late-career phases remains particularly scarce (for notable exceptions, see mid-career: Gallagher, 2017; Lazarides *et al.*, 2020; and late-career: Gutman & Oplatka, 2020; Lowe *et al.*, 2019). Literature on the wellbeing of language teachers in these two career phases is even scarcer (for one notable exception, see Martin, 2017). As such, to create a comprehensive picture of language teacher wellbeing covering teachers with varying degrees of experience, this book explores the interplay of challenges and resources of language teachers at different phases of their career, from pre-service to late-career.

Thirdly, language teacher wellbeing is examined in this book from an ecological perspective (Mercer, 2021). From this perspective, wellbeing is seen as dynamically emerging from 'the interaction of multiple intrapersonal, and contextual factors and is constantly shifting and changing as it adapts to changes in the broader ecology' (Jin *et al.*, 2021: 27). Such a perspective enables us to cast light on how teacher psychology is

embedded within broader social, cultural and political contexts which shape individuals' experiences of wellbeing (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Jin *et al.*, 2021; Mercer, 2021; Price & McCallum, 2015). This view also enables an understanding of the specific, tailored support needed by language teachers at different phases in their career across diverse settings, as well as the sociocontextual conditions enabling language teachers to thrive in the personal and professional domains. It is a perspective that recognises that teacher wellbeing is not solely an individual trait or characteristic but rather it is shaped through the interaction of the personal together with the social and contextual (Falecki & Mann, 2020). It implies a shared responsibility for wellbeing stemming from what teachers themselves can do but within the bounds of the supports and constraints of their environments. It means that policymakers and institutional leaders need to understand what about their actions and working conditions are damaging or sustaining teacher wellbeing. Our aim is to shed light on not only the individual characteristics but also the contextual factors which contribute to wellbeing.

To the best of our knowledge, there is no research that examines language teacher wellbeing across the career span. Thus, the third original perspective in this monograph is to explore the personal and professional challenges and resources of teachers at different phases of their career trajectories. Based on the framework of teacher career phases proposed by Day and Gu (2010), this book has organised data according to three major career phases: early-career teachers (0–7 years of teaching experience), mid-career teachers (8–23 years) and late-career teachers (24–31+ years). In addition, we included the career phase of pre-service teachers, who are studying to become teachers. The path towards becoming an in-service teacher is a vital part of a teacher's career, and examining this particular stage can offer valuable information about teachers' future motivation, commitment to the profession, and wellbeing starting points. Although the distinctions between the phases are blurry and people may have characteristics of one phase but in actual years of experience belong to another, research in repeated contexts has shown that there tend to be some patterns to the characteristics shared by teachers following a certain number of years of experience (Day & Gu, 2010).

By analysing the data from teachers across each career phase and taking an ecological perspective encompassing aspects of both their personal and professional lives, we have tried to construct a comprehensive picture of how language teachers experience their wellbeing within their respective ecologies across the career span. This offers a unique cross-sectional insight into language teachers' lives as they move through the profession. It helps us to appreciate how language teachers can preserve and nurture their wellbeing across each career phase as well as what social contexts contribute to those processes, so that teachers not only remain in the profession but also thrive in it in the long term.

## 1.1 The Study Presented in this Book

This book is based on two sets of interview data collected during a three-year project funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF). Individual articles have already been published drawing on this data, each focusing on specific career phases (e.g. Babic *et al*., 2022a; Mairitsch *et al*., 2021; Shin *et al*., 2021; Sulis *et al*., 2022); however, in this monograph, we take a holistic look at the data and conduct a cross-sectional analysis of all career phases, in order to gain insight into language teacher wellbeing across the whole career trajectory, from pre-service to late-career. The first set of interview data was collected between January and June 2019 and investigates language teacher wellbeing across the career trajectory in two different social, cultural, and linguistic contexts: Austria and the UK. The second set of interviews was collected between May and September 2020 and sought to explore the wellbeing of language teachers across the globe at different career phases during the first wave of the pandemic crisis. The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 contributed to dramatic changes in language teacher wellbeing, and thus, during this phase of our project, we took the opportunity to gain insights into the ways in which language teachers responded to the challenges brought by the pandemic across diverse career phases, geographical, and instructional contexts. This provided us with the opportunity to gain a better understanding into language teacher wellbeing in times of crisis and to consider the implications of experiences during the pandemic for teacher resilience and coping strategies beyond the period of crisis.

### 1.1.1 Austria and the UK

The two contexts investigated in the first dataset, UK and Austria, were chosen to compare how Modern Languages (MLs) are taught in a predominantly Anglophone country and a setting where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), of which Austria is relatively typical. These different conditions reflect different priorities, attitudes, and status in relation to language teaching and learning. Within EFL settings, the increasing recognition of English as a pluricentric lingua franca (Seidlhofer, 2011) suggests that the status of English language teachers may differ from that of teachers of other languages. In Austria, English is one of the core subjects in the national curriculum; therefore, its status within the educational system is relatively high (BMBWF, 2022a). Furthermore, in EFL settings, such as Austria, the proliferation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) or English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) programmes has led to the redefinition of English teachers' roles, who are now required to acquire competences and responsibilities that go beyond those of teachers of other languages (Cammarata, 2010; Cammarata & Tedik, 2012). While in EFL settings, such as Austria, English typically

enjoys a high status, this is not the case for MLs in Anglophone countries such as the UK, which often reflect a lower prestige. In fact, over the past 20 years, there has been a drop of over 50% of students taking General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) language courses in the UK (Jeffreys, 2019). Furthermore, British students show some of the lowest motivation rates for learning MLs across Europe (Eurostat, 2012).

Another distinction between the two settings, which can help us better understand the context of pre-service and early-career teachers in Austria and the UK, is related to the teacher education programmes in these two countries. These differ substantially in terms of length of the studies (Mairitsch *et al.*, 2021). All our participants based in the UK undertook the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE), a teacher training programme that lasts one year. In Austria, to become a secondary school teacher, students have to complete a six-year teacher education programme. Similarly, the length of practica in school also varies between the two settings; typically, British education students have longer internships in school compared to Austrian pre-service teachers. In the UK, PGCE pre-service language teachers undertake two school placements as part of their teacher training course and teach a minimum of 150 hours. In contrast, during their practica, pre-service language teachers in Austria teach a minimum of 28 hours (Mairitsch *et al.*, 2021). There are additional contextual differences between the two settings, such as teaching inspection systems, standardised school-leaving exams, and the kind of pastoral support offered by schools in the two countries, which will be further explored in Chapters 5 and 6. By comparing teachers who are embedded in different contexts, our book aims at offering rich, context-sensitive understanding of the ways different linguistic, political, and educational ecologies may impact the wellbeing of language teachers in these two settings and across the career trajectory.

### 1.1.2 The pandemic crisis

The global pandemic took hold in February/March 2020 in Europe (Schleicher, 2020). During these months, many in-service and pre-service teachers had to face the sudden transition to online learning and teaching with little notice and formal training (Gregersen *et al.*, 2021). This transition has posed substantial threats to the wellbeing of language teachers around the globe, in addition to the challenges posed by lockdowns and social isolation (MacIntyre *et al.*, 2020). During this time, teaching required increased mental and physical effort, as educators had to adapt their lessons to be taught online and spent substantial time in front of their screens (Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2021). Other key challenges for teachers during this time were related to the lack of appropriate materials and equipment, and a decrease in students' attention and motivation, which often undermined the pre-existent student–teacher dynamics (Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020).

While the pandemic crisis represents one exceptional form of challenge, teachers may experience other challenges in their personal and professional lives that may threaten their wellbeing, including, for example, educational reforms, moving schools, or issues in dealing with the school administration. By investigating teacher wellbeing during the pandemic, the study was able to cast light not only on the challenges at this time but also on the resources they drew on to gain strength during these unprecedented times and the coping strategies used to enact their resilience. As such, the insights from this period may offer valuable lessons for teacher wellbeing generally moving forward for the future beyond the pandemic crisis.

### 1.1.3 The participants

This book presents insights from two datasets collected at different points in time and with different populations of participants. The first dataset featured in this book includes data from 28 ML secondary school teachers working in the UK and 30 EFL secondary school teachers working in Austria. The breakdown of participants for each career phase is presented in Table 1.1. More details about the participants within each career phase will be provided in Chapters 3–6. Participants were recruited through the authors' departmental mailing lists, social media channels, as well as personal and professional contacts of the researchers. The dataset comprised approximately 500,000 words.

The participants in our second dataset were six pre-service and 21 in-service secondary school language teachers from 14 countries spread across five continents. Table 1.2 shows the distribution of these teachers across the four career phases. Participants were recruited among those who took part in a questionnaire survey administered at an earlier stage of the study and who agreed to take part in a follow-up interview. The data collection period was during the early stages of the pandemic crisis. The corpus for this dataset comprised approximately 255,000 words.

**Table 1.1** Participants – Phase 1

| | **Pre-service** | **Early-career** | **Mid-career** | **Late-career** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| UK | *n* = 7 | *n* = 8 | *n* = 7 | *n* = 6 |
| Austria | *n* = 7 | *n* = 6 | *n* = 9 | *n* = 8 |

**Table 1.2** Participants – Phase 2

| **Pre-service** | **Early-career** | **Mid-career** | **Late-career** |
|---|---|---|---|
| *n* = 6 | *n* = 8 | *n* = 9 | *n* = 4 |

### 1.1.4 The interviews

The first set of data presented in this book was collected between January and June 2019 by means of one-off, semi-structured individual interviews conducted either online or in person. The semi-structured interview design allowed us to compare our participants in relation to specific aspects of their wellbeing, and it also enabled the in-depth exploration of individual participants' life and career trajectories, as well as the interplay of personal, social and contextual factors shaping the wellbeing of each participant within their own ecologies. The interview protocol for this dataset aimed at retracing participants' career trajectories from their own perspective and addressed the highs and lows of their career trajectories, their sources of joy and stress across time, their language teacher identities, future goals, perceptions of socio-environmental factors including personal and professional relationships, teacher status in their resident country, and perceptions of their physical wellbeing. The rationale for choosing these categories was informed by the current body of literature on teacher wellbeing, as these factors are considered to play a substantial role in the wellbeing of pre-service and in-service teachers (e.g. Buchanan *et al*., 2013; Hong, 2010; McCallum & Price, 2010; Pietsch & Williamson, 2010). Interviews lasted approximately one hour.

The second set of interview data was collected during the first wave of the pandemic crisis, between May and September 2020. All interviews were conducted online, using Zoom or Skype, and lasted approximately one hour. An in-depth, semi-structured design was also chosen for this dataset in order to enable the comparison between participants while doing justice to their individual histories, psychologies, and trajectories. The interview protocol for this dataset included questions about the participants' teaching biography, teaching life prior and during the pandemic, sociocontextual factors, teacher identity, sense of meaning in relation to teaching, and perceptions of their physical wellbeing before and throughout the pandemic as well as coping strategies being used. The interview protocols for pre-service and in-service teachers are presented in Appendices 1–4.

Prior to collecting data and throughout the entire data collection process, ethics considerations were carefully implemented. Before contacting participants and conducting both sets of interviews, ethical approval was obtained from our partner's institution, the University of Leicester, and from our institution, the University of Graz. A participant information sheet (PIS) and consent form were constructed following the British Association of Applied Linguistic (BAAL, 2021) guidelines and distributed to the teachers who were willing to take part in the study. The PIS included details about the study, participants' involvement in the research, their rights and any foreseeable risks, as well as our assurance

that the data would be stored securely and treated with confidentiality and anonymity. In light of the sensitive nature of the topic of wellbeing, participants were given the option not to answer any questions that they may perceive as uncomfortable. Upon transcription, any identifiable markers such as personal names and places were removed from the transcript, and original recordings were destroyed.

Both datasets were analysed through an inductive approach informed by Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006). Such an approach enabled us to take an explorative and holistic view on the interactions between psychological, relational, and contextual factors contributing to shaping the wellbeing of our participants. Having gained familiarity with the data through repeatedly reading and memoing the interview transcripts, we conducted a first round of line-by-line, inductive coding which allowed us to identify emergent categories and sub-categories in the data. After this exploratory phase and the repeated refinement of codes, categories, and sub-categories, we conducted a second round of coding which deliberately focused on the personal, social, and contextual challenges and resources of participants across the four career phases and in their ecologies. These challenges and resources will be presented in the four empirical chapters of this book. Across the four findings chapters of this book, each dedicated to a specific career phase (Chapters 3–6), we will present insights from both datasets, highlighting the distinctions between the different ecologies, and between the pre- and during-pandemic contexts.

## 1.2 Organisation of the Book

This manuscript encompasses eight chapters including *Chapter 1: Introduction*, outlined as follows.

### 1.2.1 Chapter 2: Language teacher wellbeing

In this chapter, we discuss the nature of teacher wellbeing, its benefits for all stakeholders, and personal and contextual variables known to affect it. We also shed light on our conceptualisation of wellbeing as shaped by the interplay of challenges and resources from an ecological perspective. The chapter then focuses on the situation of language teachers specifically and provides a synthesis of the body of research available to date on language teacher wellbeing, showing the specific needs of this under-researched population, as well as the particular resources that they can draw on to sustain their wellbeing. Finally, the chapter outlines models used to understand teachers' career spans and discusses the importance of investigating teacher wellbeing across different career phases, illustrating the specific issues facing teachers at different stages of their career spans.

### 1.2.2 Chapter 3: Pre-service language teachers

This chapter is the first of the data-related chapters. It focuses on the context of pre-service teachers and reports on the wellbeing of seven pre-service EFL teachers in Austria, seven ML teachers in the UK, and six pre-service teachers from four different countries interviewed during the first wave of the pandemic crisis. This chapter will focus on how pre-service teachers built their repertoire of knowledge and skills, how they coped with their initial teaching experiences, and how they managed their dual identities as teachers and students. In this chapter, we will also explore how the different kinds of support and mentorship offered to pre-service teachers shape their wellbeing, highlighting contextual and systemic differences between the different teacher education programmes. The chapter will also examine how pre-service teachers coped with the challenges of online learning and teaching, and the lessons learnt for their professional future.

### 1.2.3 Chapter 4: Early-career language teachers

In this chapter, we examine factors affecting the wellbeing of six early-career EFL teachers in Austria, eight early-career ML teachers in the UK, and eight early-career teachers interviewed during the first phase of the pandemic crisis. This chapter will focus on the resources and challenges experienced by early-career teachers in relation to their initial teaching experiences, the mentorship and guidance provided within their school setting, and the difficulties in managing the balance between their work and personal lives during this phase, which appeared aggravated during the pandemic crisis. Given the high attrition rates that have been reported in the literature for this group of educators, in our analysis, we also focus on the interplay between intrapersonal, societal and contextual factors in relation to wellbeing which contribute to shaping participants' decision to remain or leave the profession across different settings.

### 1.2.4 Chapter 5: Mid-career language teachers

In this chapter, we contribute to the sparse body of research available at present on mid-career language teachers by focusing on the wellbeing of nine mid-career EFL teachers in Austria, seven mid-career ML teachers in the UK, and nine mid-career teachers from diverse settings interviewed during the pandemic crisis. The chapter examines the resources and challenges faced by mid-career teachers in their ecology, paying particular attention to the processes of maturation characterising this phase and the diverse needs for professional development experienced by teachers during this phase. The chapter also offers an insight into the ways in which mid-career teachers juggle their multiple roles and responsibilities across

their life and work domains, and the coping strategies they developed to manage these during the pandemic crisis.

### 1.2.5 Chapter 6: Late-career language teachers

This chapter explores the wellbeing of eight late-career EFL teachers in Austria, six late-career ML teachers in the UK, and four late-career teachers interviewed during the first wave of the pandemic crisis. Firstly, the chapter will explore how teachers in this career phase approach their transition to retirement. The chapter will then explore the different challenges and resources in relation to these teachers' perceptions of their age and longevity in the profession. It will then examine the process through which these teachers have taken stock and have found a balance between the different domains of their lives.

### 1.2.6 Chapter 7: Teacher wellbeing across the career span

In this chapter, we offer a comparative analysis across the career phases, providing insights into the ways in which individual teachers carry out their professional roles within their ecologies and the effects of this on their ongoing, dynamic wellbeing. The chapter will discuss and compare the resources that teachers at different phases of their career and lives draw on to protect and enhance their wellbeing, the challenges they face across their career and life trajectories, and the transitions between these phases. We focus in particular on the ecological character of wellbeing and the specific insights from the diverse contexts as well as the other layers of each teacher's ecological system. The chapter reveals a comprehensive, nuanced, and contextualised understanding of the complex, holistic lives that language teachers lead.

### 1.2.7 Chapter 8: Future directions

In this final chapter, we suggest future directions for research and practical implications for language teachers, teacher educators, school leaders and policymakers. This final chapter communicates clear messages about systemic features that are needed to support language teacher wellbeing at the different stages of their careers and lives, individual strategies that can be taken, and policy changes needed throughout teacher education programmes at both pre- and in-service levels. The chapter also concludes by reflecting on future directions for this field of research and the benefits of an ecological perspective in particular for such work.

# 2 Language Teacher Wellbeing[1]

## 2.1 What is Wellbeing?

This book is about the wellbeing of language educators. Before we proceed, we will outline our understanding of wellbeing and how we will use it in this book. As a construct, wellbeing is regarded as 'intangible, difficult to define, and even harder to measure' (Thomas, 2009: 11). Perhaps due to its multifaceted nature, attempts to define it have produced definitions that are often 'blurred and overly broad' (Dodge *et al*., 2012: 222). Nevertheless, many scholars have attempted to disambiguate the term to facilitate empirical work in this area.

An early notable example was Bradburn (1969), who focused his research on psychological wellbeing and was interested in understanding people's coping mechanisms and the ways in which they dealt with the difficulties of daily life. Bradburn (1969: 9) concluded that, 'an individual will be high in psychological well-being in the degree to which he has an excess of positive over negative affect and will be low in well-being in the degree to which negative affect predominates over positive'. This definition puts the focus on the relative ratio of positive to negative emotions, which is reminiscent of more recent work by Diener and colleagues (Diener *et al*., 1999, 2002; Kim-Prieto *et al*., 2005) and definitions of the construct of Subjective Wellbeing (SWB). SWB is the key construct at the centre of the hedonic perspectives on wellbeing. SWB refers to peoples' perceptions of the balance between their positive and negative emotions (Diener *et al*., 1999; Kim-Prieto *et al*., 2005; Lucas *et al*., 1996) and is 'an umbrella term used to describe the level of well-being people experience according to their subjective evaluations of their lives' (Diener & Ryan, 2009: 391). It is typically defined in terms of overall life satisfaction and the presence of positive emotions and a corresponding relative absence of negative emotions (Kahneman *et al*., 1999). SWB and hedonic perspectives do not negate the existence and experience of negative emotions, which represent an integral

[1] This chapter was written in collaboration with Sun Shin, University of Graz, Institute of English Studies

part of 'the tapestry of everyday life' (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020: 2), but are rather concerned with the relative balance of positive to negative emotions. As such, hedonic approaches focus primarily on the emotional and subjective experience of wellbeing and life satisfaction.

While hedonic perspectives on wellbeing are invaluable, many scholars criticised the polarity of positive versus negative emotions in describing people's wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Ryan and Deci (2001: 145) argued that 'Aristotle […] considered hedonic happiness to be a vulgar ideal, making humans slavish followers of desires. He posited, instead, that the true happiness is found in the expression of virtue – that is, in doing what is worth doing'. Indeed, other scholars took different directions in describing wellbeing. For instance, Ryff's (1989) work yielded six key elements of wellbeing, which included positive relationships, meaning and purpose in life, autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and personal growth and development (see also Ryff & Singer, 2008). More recently, other researchers have focused on positive functioning and what makes a life worth living (see, for example, Seligman, 2002, 2011). As such, growing attention has been given to constructs such as optimism (Peterson, 2000), happiness (Seligman, 2002), self-determination (e.g. Ryan & Deci, 2000) and wisdom (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000) in respect to wellbeing. These perspectives are characteristic of eudemonic approaches to wellbeing which centre on people's perception of their ability to lead meaningful and authentic lives.

Perhaps one of the most prominent eudemonic models is Seligman's (2011) framework of wellbeing, PERMA. Seligman (2011) argues that flourishing stems from five elements of wellbeing, namely, positive emotion (P), engagement (E), relationships (R), meaning (M) and accomplishment (A). We will explain this model in more detail as it has formed the basis of much of our work and understanding of wellbeing, including how we originally designed the interview protocol.

The first element of PERMA refers to positive emotions. According to Seligman (2011), a wide variety of emotions contribute to wellbeing such as gratitude, hope, joy, contentment, pride and satisfaction. The contribution of positive emotions to wellbeing is well known. In her broaden-and-build model, Fredrickson (2001: 219) highlights that, positive emotions 'broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires, which in turn serves to build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources'. This view of positive emotions acknowledges their role in building resources which individuals can draw on in times of stress and adversity. In other words, the emotions are not merely a psychological response but lead to enduring changes. In language education, positive emotions can have many desirable outcomes, both for teachers and their learners, such as learners attaining higher achievements, developing resilience, and counteracting negative emotions, such as, for instance, anxiety (Dewaele *et al*.,

2019; Gregersen, 2013). Furthermore, teachers who experience more positive emotions in their workplace tend to have higher job satisfaction, which, in turn, can strengthen teacher retention (Dreer, 2021).

The second component of PERMA is engagement. Engagement can be described as an action-oriented construct comprising affective, behavioural and cognitive components (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). In the context of education, affective engagement refers to experiencing positive emotions in the classroom; behavioural engagement concerns active involvement in the classroom and collaboration with peers; finally, cognitive engagement refers to the extent to which someone is mentally focused and motivated in the classroom (Fredricks *et al*., 2004). In teaching specifically, engaged teachers who are absorbed in their teaching experience higher levels of control over their work, job satisfaction and less occupational stress (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

PERMA's third component refers to social relationships from both personal- and professional-life domains. Research has shown that enjoying positive relationships and social contact is paramount for people's wellbeing and health across their lives (Rath *et al*., 2010; Umberson *et al*., 2010). Nurturing and caring relationships provide support to individuals, help them cope with stress, and evoke positivity, thus leading to higher levels of wellbeing (Lyubomirsky *et al*., 2005; Seligman, 2011). For example, positive relationships at work play an important role in employees' job satisfaction, effectivity and performance (Ferris *et al*., 2009). In education, relationships with colleagues, students and school principals or leadership have been regarded as critically important for an individual's professional wellbeing and job satisfaction (e.g. Hargreaves, 2001; McLaughlin, 1993; Troman, 2000).

The next element of PERMA is a sense of meaning and purpose. Meaning 'refers to making sense, order, or coherence out of one's existence' and is regarded as 'a significant and universal human motive' (Reker *et al*., 1987: 44). Having a sense of meaning has been shown to promote overall health, life satisfaction and longevity (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). In education, studies show that teachers' sense of meaning can greatly influence their relationship with their students and overall sense of job satisfaction (e.g. Lavy & Bocker, 2018; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020).

The final component of the PERMA model refers to accomplishments. Khaw and Kern (2014) argue that making progress towards one's goals stemming from different life domains and achieving these leads to a positive sense of accomplishment, which is further linked to one's perceived sense of wellbeing. Accomplishments can be pursued for their own sake and can be defined by individuals and their own subjective interpretation of their achievements as well as by the society which estimates accomplishments of others (Khaw & Kern, 2014). A sense of accomplishment can serve as a critical contributor towards an individual's feelings of mastery, self-efficacy and self-satisfaction (Butler & Kern, 2016). In teaching

specifically, accomplishment is closely linked to teachers' relationship with their students (Corbin *et al*., 2019). Additionally, the authors found that teachers' personal accomplishments 'significantly negatively predicted emotional exhaustion' (Corbin *et al*., 2019: 9) and, as such, positively influenced their overall wellbeing.

More recently, PERMA has been further extended to include physical wellbeing or vitality (see e.g. PERMA Profiler measurement in Butler & Kern, 2016). Physical health is a key pillar of overall wellbeing (e.g. Howell *et al*., 2007) because all the other pillars are affected if a person is experiencing difficulties in terms of physical health. Physical and mental health are deeply intertwined and mutually affect each other (e.g. Ohrnberger *et al*., 2017; Surtees *et al*., 2008). Diener and Chan's (2011) study shows that good physical health is strongly correlated with individuals' ability to cope with stress and retain their positive sense of wellbeing. Positive physical health can be maintained by focusing on a healthy diet and good nutrition, ensuring enough sleep and being physically active through sports and other forms of physical activity (Hosker *et al*., 2019). In other words, interventions directed towards physical health are likely to also lead to positive benefits for mental health. In the context of education, teachers are typically under a lot of stress, and susceptible to burnout, which also results in a diminishment of their physical wellbeing (Bradley, 2007; Chaplain, 2008; Ritvanen *et al*., 2006). The most common physical complaints of teachers include backpain, headaches, tension, burning eyes, hot flushes, fatigue, restlessness and sleeping disorders (Scheuch *et al*., 2015).

In sum, PERMA is a multidimensional model of wellbeing encompassing hedonic (relative positive affect), eudemonic (sense of meaning and life well lived) and physical health perspectives. Some researchers believe that SWB and PERMA share 'the final common path' regarding wellbeing (see Seligman, 2018: 333). For instance, Goodman *et al*. (2018) measured SWB and PERMA among 517 participants and found a latent correlation of .98 between the two. Referring to this study, Seligman (2018: 333) concluded that, 'SWB probably is the useful final common path of the elements of well-being'. He also added that, 'PERMA is merely a good start on the complex work-in progress that will result in an adequate theory of the elements of well-being' (Seligman, 2018: 335). As is the case with many models of wellbeing stemming from psychology, PERMA places an emphasis on a personal or subjective perspective, with little focus on the commensurate systemic or objective determinants of wellbeing (Mercer, 2021). In the section that follows, we explore this missing element in individual subjective notions of wellbeing.

## 2.2 The Definition of Wellbeing in this Study

In this study, we have largely drawn on the broader eudemonic notion of PERMA+ as our definition of wellbeing. However, we have made some

important adaptations to offer a more socially situated and ecologically sensitive understanding of wellbeing which accommodates individual diversity and contextual variation.

### 2.2.1 Ecological perspectives on wellbeing

Firstly, it is important to recognise that wellbeing is not only about individual agency but is determined by social structures and processes (La Placa *et al*., 2013; White, 2010). Wellbeing is individual and subjective, but it is also socially determined and objectively defined (Mercer, 2021). While individuals have 'the power and consciousness to design their wellbeing' (La Placa *et al*., 2013: 118), it is important to keep in mind that, 'wellbeing does not reside solely within individuals' (Leiter & Cooper, 2017: 4). According to La Placa and colleagues (2013: 118), wellbeing is subjectively defined and thus includes 'positive and negative evaluations about, for example, work and life satisfaction and affective reactions to life events such as joy and sadness'. Although the individual actively defines their wellbeing, it can nevertheless be influenced by cultural concepts of wellbeing that can shape an individual's perception of how life should be lived. In fact, culture plays a crucial role in how humans can achieve their optimal functioning and wellbeing (Joshanloo *et al*., 2021). La Placa *et al*. (2013) foreground the multifaceted and multidimensional nature of wellbeing, which incorporates 'subjective experiences of career and financial wellbeing, […] physical, psychological, spiritual, and moral experiences, further conditioned by those wider structural conditions and objective circumstances of an individual's life which are capable of external observation and measurement' (La Placa *et al*., 2013: 118). Additionally, they highlight the important role that family, community, and societal wellbeing play in shaping the individual's perspective on their own wellbeing within their respective communities (La Placa *et al*., 2013). In sum, they conceive wellbeing as shaped by a complex interplay of subjective experiences and objective and structural conditions.

In a similar vein, McCallum and Price (2016: 17) foreground that wellbeing does not solely reside within the individual but describe wellbeing as 'diverse and fluid respecting individual, family and community beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities and contexts across time and change'. They further highlight that wellbeing is a common goal that everyone is aiming for, 'yet is unique to each of us and provides us with a sense of who we are which needs to be respected' (McCallum & Price, 2016: 17). In their study on ecological factors influencing the wellbeing of 120 teachers, they highlight that teacher wellbeing is 'a collaborative concern shared across schooling sectors, universities, employing authorities, and professional associations' (Price & McCallum, 2015: 197). Price and McCallum (2015) applied Bronfenbrenner's (1972) ecological model as a conceptual framework to examine teachers' wellbeing. They divided

contexts and ecologies of teachers' wellbeing into diverse categories and levels, including (1) the capacities and working conditions of individual teachers (microsystem), (2) teachers' relationships with others and whole school networks (mesosystem), (3) organisation and context (exosystem), and (4) societal beliefs, values, and legislation (macrosystem) (Price & McCallum, 2015). In educational research specifically, these ecological influences are regarded to be considerable factors in influencing teachers' wellbeing (Roffey, 2012). As such, this view acknowledges wellbeing as being contextually situated and influenced by various ecological factors.

Considering the contexts of wellbeing, there are distinct differences in terms of subjective wellbeing between nations related to the cultures, customs, or the socioeconomic status of a country. Firstly, some emotions are differently valued across cultures, e.g. guilt, pride, calmness or excitement (Tsai *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, people living in industrial countries are not necessarily more satisfied than people in poorer regions (Diener & Ryan, 2009). The findings from these two studies imply that, 'some motives may correlate universally with wellbeing, whereas other motives or goals are culture-specific correlates of wellbeing' (Tov & Diener, 2009: 703). In fact, wellbeing is fundamentally shaped by objective factors such as social status (Rice, 2005), job precarity (Pacheco *et al.*, 2020) and financial status (Brüggen *et al.*, 2017; O'Neill *et al.*, 2005), but it is also important to look at these factors within their cultural context and to how much value individuals place on these factors.

Thus, our definition of wellbeing seeks to understand how individuals subjectively perceive their personal and professional lives. We see wellbeing thus as individually and socially determined with the potential for dynamism across time, place, and individuals (Mercer, 2020a).

### 2.2.2 Resources and challenges perspective

A particularly useful perspective to understand how wellbeing emerges, which combines individual as well as social aspects, is the resources and challenges definition of wellbeing offered by Dodge and colleagues (2012). The authors suggest that people face threats and challenges to their wellbeing, but they also possess resources they can draw on to counter the effects of these and to bolster their sense of wellbeing. They propose that wellbeing emerges from the interaction of social, psychological and physical resources in the face of adversities and hardships. Resources have been broadly defined as 'entities that either are centrally valued in their own right (e.g., self-esteem, close attachments, health, and inner peace) or act as a means to obtain centrally valued ends (e.g., money, social support, and credit)' (Hobfoll, 2002: 307). Hobfoll (2002: 308) further argues that individuals who possess, for example, 'high levels of self-efficacy might be more capable of selecting, altering, and implementing

their other resources to meet stressful demands'. As such, in relation to wellbeing, resources can be defined as protective factors that support individuals' ability to cope with challenges and retain their positive sense of wellbeing (Babic *et al.*, under review; Hobfoll, 2002; Luthans *et al.*, 2007). There are different kinds of resources that can be tapped into to combat stress (Cosco *et al.*, 2017); these include a sense of meaning and purpose (e.g. Seligman, 2011), self-efficacy (e.g. Bandura, 1997), social relationships (e.g. Hobfoll, 2002), resilience (e.g. Masten, 2001; Masten & Reed, 2002) and optimism (e.g. Seligman, 2011), among others.

In this book, we have chosen to understand wellbeing as emerging from the unique interplay between an individual's psychological, social and contextual resources and their experience of and perception of challenges and stressors (Dodge *et al.*, 2012). Dodge and colleagues (2012: 230) explain that wellbeing is 'the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced'. They further explain that, 'when individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing and vice-versa' (Dodge *et al.*, 2012: 230). In teaching contexts, this would mean that, if teachers face too many challenges and their resources are low or depleted, their wellbeing would suffer. However, if they have sufficient resources to cope with adversities, their wellbeing may remain in balance or even in some cases improve, as is the case with the building of resilience (e.g. Masten & Reed, 2002; Southwick *et al.*, 2014).

The resource-based definition of wellbeing is useful as it accommodates psychological, environmental and sociological perspectives, and it reflects the dynamic nature of wellbeing. Resources that contribute to individuals' wellbeing can be 'distal and proximal to the self, internal and external, and biological and cultural' (Hobfoll, 2002: 307). Scholars argue that the fit between demands and coping abilities are determinants of individuals' wellbeing and that the interplay between resources and challenges plays out against the backdrop of individuals' ecologies (see Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). Indeed, resources may have different effects in different contexts. For instance, if we consider individuals' social relationships (e.g. private–family and professional–colleagues), in specific life situations, an individual's colleagues may be of greater support and understanding, helping the individual to cope and counter adversity, while in others, their families and friends may play a more salient role. As such, the importance and prevalence of resources, such as social, psychological and human, may change against the backdrop of the specific situation or a period in an individual's life (Volker, 2020).

In this book, we explore the challenges and resources perspective on language teachers' wellbeing throughout the career trajectory. In this regard, Kloep and colleagues (2009: 333) argue that, over the lifespan, 'new resources are added, others disappear, some characteristics become resources, and some lose their resourceful quality'. In other words, there is a constant

adjustment and adaptation throughout individuals' lives, with the types and levels of resources and challenges fluctuating depending on the circumstances of an individual's personal life phase, experiences and career phase (Kloep *et al*., 2009). For example, in teaching contexts, educators, who pursue leadership positions and additional responsibilities, may experience a motivation boost and enhanced sense of job satisfaction with the new role (Day, 2017; Shin *et al*., 2021). However, such a career shift may also lead to new challenges. Kloep *et al*. (2009) further explain that, while resources provide support, challenges are also crucial for growth and development, and can thus consequently turn into resources.

Hendry and Kloep (2002) argue that different contexts and circumstances can affect people in different ways. As teachers progress through their lives and careers, the kinds of resources they draw on and challenges they face may change in accordance with the demands from their personal and professional life domains. To better understand teachers' lives and resources, it can be useful to draw on Kloep and colleagues' (2009) conceptualisation of the different 'shifts' and changes an individual experiences over time. They distinguish between maturational, normative, quasi-normative and non-normative shifts. Maturational shifts refer to changes that are common to all humans regardless of their culture, cohort and age; puberty, the menopause and ageing are examples of such shifts, which are typically experienced by every individual at some point in their lives (Kloep *et al*., 2009). Normative shifts are those prescribed by law for individuals belonging to certain groups, for instance, starting school or reaching legal adult status. Quasi-normative shifts are shared among members of a given culture and, while not explicitly prescribed, they are expected; an example of quasi-normative shift can be leaving the parental home or having children. Naturally, these expectations vary across cultures, between and within societies, and over time (Kloep *et al*., 2009). Finally, non-normative shifts are those that vary for each individual and that can serve as key 'turning points' in their lives (Kloep *et al*., 2009); examples of these can be experiencing an accident, changing jobs, or getting a divorce, which can have huge long-term consequences for an individual's life development.

A useful resources and challenges perspective in relation to wellbeing in the workplace is offered by Demerouti *et al*. (2001), who developed a resource-based model called the job demands-resources (JD-R). This model integrates the views of job stress research and motivation research (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011) and proposes that 'all job characteristics can be classified in two main categories – namely job demands and job resources' (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018: 2). One of the strengths of this model is that the JD-R theory links contextual and personal factors in relation to employee wellbeing. In this model, work demands typically include work aspects that drain employees' energy levels, such as workload, conflicts and complex tasks, while resources encompass aspects that support employees' wellbeing, such as social relationships and performance feedback. Similar to Dodge and

colleagues' (2012) view on the interplay between resources and challenges for wellbeing, Bakker and Demerouti (2018) suggest that stress occurs when demands are high and there are no resources to draw on to cope. In other words, the employees 'see-saw' dips in such situations and their sense of wellbeing is threatened. Studies have applied the JD-R theory in the teaching contexts and focused especially on teacher wellbeing (e.g. Granziera *et al*., 2021; Hakanen *et al*., 2006; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). For example, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018) explored how JD-R perceptions of 760 Norwegian school teachers were related to their wellbeing, engagement and motivation to leave the profession. The study found that job demands, such as time pressure, discipline problems, and low student motivation, predicted lower teacher wellbeing, while job resources, such as supportive relationships, leadership and culture, predicted higher wellbeing. Granziera and colleagues (2021) also adapted the JD-R model to fit teaching contexts and suggest that job resources can include school climate, supportive leadership, and social support. The authors also distinguished teachers' personal resources that encompass adaptability, self-efficacy, and mental and emotional competences, while demands include role stress, workload and student misbehaviour (Granziera *et al*., 2021). As such, in the teaching profession, resources can be of both contextual and personal nature; these resources help teachers combat challenges and hardships and serve to protect their wellbeing.

### 2.2.3 Dynamism

Another defining core characteristic of wellbeing, which is also inherent in resources/challenges models of wellbeing, is its dynamism (e.g. Sulis *et al*., 2021). Wellbeing is not static, but it changes dynamically over time, based on complex interactions of psychological, social and contextual factors at specific points in time. Such dynamism in wellbeing can take place on different timescales. For example, a person's wellbeing can change over the course of a single day. Gregersen *et al*. (2020) conducted an Experience Sampling Method (ESM) study of language teacher wellbeing, using an app to generate data on participants' wellbeing, 10 times a day for seven days in a row. Gregersen and colleagues (2020: 18) showed that 'the relationship between overall wellbeing scores, perceptions of long-term chronic stressors and experiences of stress on a daily basis is complex, individual and clearly dynamic over time'.

However, our wellbeing profile and needs change across our lifespan. As Sugarman (2001: 2) points out, 'to live is to change'. As we grow older, we go through physical, cognitive, personal and social changes that shape who we are. However, despite the growth and change we undergo, we do not become completely different people, as our lives are characterised not only by change but also by continuity (Sugarman, 2001). In other words, some aspects of our psychologies remain relatively constant and less subject to change. In

highlighting the dynamism of human psychology across the lifespan (Hendry & Kloep, 2002), Mascolo and Fischer (2010: 149) conclude that:

> The most exciting developments [in life-span psychology] have come from the recognition that the components and contexts of human activity cannot be understood independent of each other. Instead, human development occurs in medias res – in the middle of everything. […] Instead of operating as separate modules, thought and emotion, experience and action, biology and agency, person and environment, and other ostensibly opposing processes are highly dependent on each other.

The key issue is that all change is the product of previous change, 'as systems develop in an iterative nature, where every state is dependent upon the previous one' (Sulis *et al.*, 2021: 5). As such, it appears crucial to consider human development as dynamic, influenced by the many diverse interrelated processes and interactions underlying human nature, as opposed to reaching one static milestone after another (Raeff, 2016). In their research, Kloep and colleagues (2009) take a new theoretical stance on human development by looking at it in terms of the dynamicity of resources, challenges and risks instead of chronological age as the driving factor. The authors highlight that, 'challenges and shifts in the human life course can act as catalysts for change, dependent upon the resources available to the individual' (Kloep *et al.*, 2009: 332).

As such, it is important to understand wellbeing as an ongoing dynamic process that can change over the lifespan (Dolan & White, 2006). Dolan and White (2006: 304) created the framework of Dynamic Well-Being (DWB) where wellbeing 'is viewed as a temporal and iterative process, and the various indicators are essentially tapping into wellbeing at various stages in this process'. In a similar vein, Mercer (2021: 3) stresses that wellbeing can never be the sole responsibility of the individual but is always a systemic responsibility too:

> Well-being is defined as the dynamic sense of meaning and life satisfaction emerging from a person's subjective personal relationships with the affordances within their social ecologies. The implication of this definition is that research or interventions which target only either the individual or the contextual dimensions are addressing only one part of the equation. Well-being emerges from the subjective way a person makes sense of and interacts with their social contexts.

Drawing on these perspectives on wellbeing, we conceptualise wellbeing as multifaceted and dynamic emerging from the interplay between psychological and sociocontextual factors changing across settings but also time. Therefore, when striving to understand wellbeing, it is vital that scholarship examines the individual embedded in their holistic personal and professional lives and understands how their wellbeing resources and needs can change over time.

## 2.3 Why Wellbeing Matters?

Wellbeing matters for everyone, regardless of their profession or position. The importance of attaining and maintaining optimal levels of wellbeing and beyond has been recognised by a number of countries across the globe, which have included wellbeing at the core of their economic policies. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022: para 2) declared wellbeing as a basic human right, stating that 'the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition'. Such examples can be found in countries like Bhutan (Gross National Happiness), India (Ease of Living Measurement), and New Zealand (the Happiness Index). New Zealand, for instance, became the first western country to create a 'wellbeing budget' to fight poverty and violence, and invest in mental health (Roy, 2019). The Deputy Prime Minister, Grant Robertson, stated, 'for me, wellbeing means people living lives of purpose, balance, and meaning to them, and having capabilities to do so' (Roy, 2019: para 18).

Within education in particular, increasing awareness of the importance of wellbeing and preparing students for life beyond schooling was given a boost by the UNESCO initiative in 1996 (Delors, 1996) to establish four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. A number of other educational frameworks have since also included individual and collective wellbeing. For example, the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has incorporated learner wellbeing into their Global Competence Framework in 2018. The United Nations' (UN) 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) includes a goal that focuses on 'Good health and well-being', stating: 'Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being at all ages is essential to sustainable development' (United Nations, 2022: para 1). The UN (2022) further highlights that promoting wellbeing across nations and generations is important for building prosperous societies and that we need concentrated efforts globally to attain universal health and wellbeing for all. As Mercer (2021: 1) states:

> Giving rising rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues across societies, but especially among youth, there is a pressing need for protective measures to counter this worrying trend in all areas of education, including ELT.

The importance of wellbeing in education has become more critical following the global pandemic (e.g. Allen *et al.*, 2020; MacIntyre *et al.*, 2020; Van de Velde *et al.*, 2021). Studies have shown that the wellbeing of many teachers plummeted during the outbreak due to increased workload, transfer to online teaching, blurred boundaries between work and private life, and emotional exhaustion (e.g. Allen *et al.*, 2020;

Carver-Thomas *et al.*, 2021). Learner wellbeing was equally affected during the Covid-19 outbreak, 'the effects of which we are only beginning to realize' (Goldschmidt, 2020: 88). Experiencing wellbeing is 'the foundation of a life well lived' (Mercer, 2020a: 1) and is a key determinant of good practice and a desirable outcome of learning experiences.

## 2.4 Why Teacher Wellbeing?

Teachers are often cited as playing a key role in forming future generations of citizens and are considered 'the architects of society' (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017: 405). However, this important profession is under threat from high rates of burnout and high levels of stress, combined with low job satisfaction leading to alarming rates of attrition in numerous countries, for example the US, the Netherlands, Australia, Israel, Norway and England (Craig, 2017). Indeed, teaching is widely recognised as one of the most stressful professions (Johnson *et al.*, 2005; McIntyre *et al.*, 2017; O'Connor, 2008).

Striving towards improved teacher wellbeing is a worthy goal in itself as all individuals deserve to have positive wellbeing in their personal and professional lives (Roffey, 2012). However, reducing teacher burnout, stemming the tide of attrition, and ensuring the professional welfare of educators by enhancing teacher wellbeing is not only beneficial for teachers themselves, but it can also lead to positive student outcomes (Herman *et al.*, 2020; Lauermann & König, 2016). When teachers enjoy high wellbeing, they typically experience fewer discipline problems and have better relationships with their students (Caprara *et al.*, 2006). In addition, research has revealed a link between teacher wellbeing and students' socioemotional adjustment and academic outcomes (e.g. Roffey, 2012; Roth *et al.*, 2007; Spilt *et al.*, 2011). Grenville-Cleave and Boniwell (2012) state that teachers act as role models when they are in a positive psychological state with high-perceived wellbeing. As such, they are then able to support students' personal growth along with their academic achievements, inspire students to engage in lifelong learning, and help students reach their highest potential. In contrast, if teachers are suffering from burnout or low wellbeing, they serve as poor role models and might negatively influence students' self-worth (Briner & Dewberry, 2007; Grenville-Cleave & Boniwell, 2012). Teacher wellbeing and student wellbeing are closely linked to each other, like two sides of the same coin (Roffey, 2012), and a healthy education system must attend to both. Furthermore, teachers' perceived levels of wellbeing may influence their ability to be creative, adapt to changes, and connect with others, which help them to be more innovative in teaching (Grenville-Cleave & Boniwell, 2012; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Teachers with positive perceived wellbeing are also better at coping with challenges being generally more resilient (Kunter *et al.*, 2013; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). As a result, they are less likely to leave the profession (Spilt *et al.*, 2011; Watlington *et al.*, 2010).

Although studies on teacher wellbeing are relatively new, there is already a large related body of research on stress and burnout to date (e.g. Geving, 2007; Prilleltensky *et al*., 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). The concept of stress has received scholarly attention since 1936 where Hans Selye (1956) described it as the body's non-specific response to any demand for change. Later, the concept was refined by distinguishing general 'stress' from 'stressors' and 'stress responses'. As Koolhaas *et al*. (2011: 1292) point out, 'a stressor is considered a stimulus that threatens homeostasis and the stress response is the reaction of the organism aimed to regain homeostasis'. Burnout is a chronic stress-related illnesses, which stems from a 'prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job' (Maslach *et al*., 2001: 397). Burnout shows three main characteristics – exhaustion, cynicism and professional inefficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). When an individual experiences burnout, they feel drained with lack of energy (exhaustion), show negative and detached reaction to work (cynicism), and get declined competence and productivity at their job (professional inefficacy) (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Experiencing burnout is, unfortunately, common in human services occupations, including teaching (Maslach, 2003). Stress and burnout at work are closely related to professional wellbeing with one body of work looking at the problem factors and the other body of work looking at what contributes to professional flourishing (Rothmann, 2008). Together, both fields of inquiry create a fuller picture of what factors affect teachers positively and negatively in their professional roles. Revisiting the models of resources and challenges, teacher burnout can be conceptualised as a negative response to an imbalance between teachers' resources and work demands (Kyriacou, 2001; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). In other words, when teachers are exposed to stressors without having adequate resources to manage or counter these, the risk of burnout typically increases (Han *et al*., 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). Literature shows that teachers who are experiencing burnout with low perceived wellbeing may feel dissatisfaction and exhaustion and distance themselves from their colleagues and students (e.g. Chan, 2003). In turn, they may exhibit negative emotions in the classroom, which can lower the quality of teaching, the interactions in the classroom and teacher–student relationships (Yoon, 2002).

Indeed, a body of research has shown that teaching is an emotionally demanding profession (Chang, 2009). Emotional labour refers to 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display' (Hochschild, 1983: 7). Teachers frequently have to engage in emotional labour to manage their emotions in class (King & Ng, 2018). For instance, when a teacher exaggerates their positive emotions to increase student engagement and participation, even when they may feel unwell or face personal issues, this creates a dissonance between actual and displayed emotions which can be exhausting and

stressful (Zhang & Zhang, 2013). Repeatedly having to engage in emotional labour can negatively impact on teachers' overall wellbeing (Taxer & Frenzel, 2015).

## 2.5 What Factors Affect Teacher Wellbeing?

One factor that has been identified in affecting teacher wellbeing at a broader societal level is teacher status. High rates of teachers all over the globe perceive their societal status as low, which has led to increased professional dissatisfaction (Rice, 2005). In countries where students have particularly low motivation to learn foreign languages and where foreign languages do not enjoy a high status, language teachers suffer from a rather low status in society compared to teachers of other subjects (European Commission, 2012). More broadly, research on satisfaction in the workplace has demonstrated 'that a dissatisfied workforce is a less productive one that is prone to expensive behaviours such as absenteeism and […] stress leave' (Scott & Dinham, 2001: 4). In fact, many teachers across the globe regard their diminishing standing in society as one of the core negative aspects in their jobs, which can influence their decision to leave the profession early (Rice, 2005). In 2018, the Varkey Foundation reported in their Global Status Teacher Index that increasing teacher status and promoting their role in society is not only vital for teachers and their wellbeing, which is an important goal in itself, but it can, in turn, also improve student's performance. As such, they highlight that it should be a common goal across countries and policymakers to take teacher status seriously and use all efforts to improve it (Varkey Foundation, 2018).

Another contextual factor shaping wellbeing concerns job (in)security. Job security is referred to an employee's expectation 'about the stability and longevity of their job in an organization' (Lu *et al*., 2017: 30). Job security can be seen as 'a key determinant of wellbeing' (Pacheco *et al*., 2020: 59); its absence can trigger feelings of stress and job dissatisfaction and increase physical strains and illnesses (Witte, 1999). Feeling insecure in one's workplace and not being able to plan into the future not only affects an individual's financial security, but it can also deprive them from many social benefits that are associated with a secure workplace, such as social status and being part of a social network (Fullerton *et al*., 2020; Pacheco *et al*., 2020). In a study by Seifert *et al*. (2007), the authors found that teachers' precarious working conditions negatively affected both their mental health and their interpersonal relationships in the workplace, as educators lost their sense of pride and success in their work when the conditions were unstable. In language teaching specifically, a study by Mercer (2020a) found that job precarity and insecurity experienced by ELT teachers in Malta, who were teaching in the private sector, were core sources a core source of dissatisfaction for all participants and a main factor that might lead to them leaving the profession in the future.

Closely linked to societal status and job insecurity is the financial status of teachers and its possible effects on their wellbeing. For example, in their study, Brüggen and colleagues (2017: 235) highlight the interdependence between individuals and the society in terms of their financial wellbeing, as 'money is a fundamental aspect of human life throughout the world, and financial well-being needs to be approached in diverse ways – from politics, culture, and economics to digitalization and financial service development'. Being financially secure is closely linked to an individual's wellbeing (Salignac *et al.*, 2020; van Praag *et al.*, 2003); however, if one's financial stability is shattered, or if one is financially disadvantaged, this can trigger serious health related issues, such as stress and depression (Hojman *et al.*, 2016). Increasing inequality in many societies highlights the importance of paying more attention to economic wellbeing for all members of society (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015). In the teaching profession specifically, the OECD (2019) released a report stating that countries need to make the teaching profession more financially attractive to attract novice teachers and keep them in the profession, as they found that up to 70% of teachers worldwide consider adequate salary as a core factor of work satisfaction. They conclude that policymakers and education leaders 'need to carefully determine their overall education budget envelope in terms of human resources and methodically decide how to best allocate it between recruitment efforts and salary increases' (OECD, 2019: 46), in order to promote the teaching profession both as intellectually and financially rewarding compared to similar professions in educational fields.

Other contextual factors influencing teacher wellbeing include educational policies (Lenhoff *et al.*, 2017), administrational demands (McCarthy *et al.*, 2014), and national reforms and inspection systems, such as OFSTED in the UK setting. In fact, educational policies and inspection services have a profound influence on teachers across subjects and career phases (Brimblecombe *et al.*, 1995; Chapman, 2002). In a case study of 10 secondary schools about teachers' perceptions of inspection processes, Chapman (2002) found that the majority of teachers experienced high levels of stress prior to and during inspection days, with inspections contributing to increased workload, job dissatisfaction and – for some – even to greater vulnerability to illnesses. In a similar vein, educational reforms can also have negative effects on teachers' wellbeing, often causing high stress levels and anxiety towards implementing these new and unknown educational changes (Kyriacou, 2001). In Austria, the introduction of the new centralised form of the school-leaving examination in 2015, the so-called Zentralmatura, has caused more workload for teachers to prepare students for this final exam (Hofstadler *et al.*, 2020). As such, teachers in Austria reported that this reform had negatively affected their wellbeing (Babic *et al.*, 2022a).

Furthermore, the educational institutions themselves play a crucial role in sustaining teacher wellbeing over the course of their careers. School

culture (Babic *et al.*, 2022a); social support from administrators, headteachers and colleagues (Aelterman *et al.*, 2007); and relationships with students (Aldrup *et al.*, 2018) are all key factors influencing teacher wellbeing. In their study on teacher wellbeing, Kidger and colleagues (2016: 81) highlight that social conditions in educational institutions, including supportive relationships among colleagues and teachers working in a 'school culture of trust, respect and openness', are crucial factors in determining work satisfaction and are correlated with high teacher wellbeing. Brady and Wilson (2021: 45) also emphasise that wellbeing measures work best when they are implemented in 'supportive whole school cultures which aim to minimise burdensome workloads and maximise feelings of autonomy, relatedness and competence'. In particular, a healthy, supportive and compassionate relationship with headteachers can be vital for teacher wellbeing (Eldor & Shoshani, 2016). Eldor and Shoshani (2016) underscore that acts of compassion from headteachers can significantly affect teacher motivation and work outcomes, and thus positively influence their wellbeing. In respect to other professional relationships, experiencing and maintaining a healthy relationship with one's students have been shown to be core factors in influencing teacher wellbeing (Roffey, 2012; Spilt *et al.*, 2011).

But also outside of the school context, factors such as relationships with family members, partners, friends and the community in which the teacher is embedded in play a vital role in shaping the teacher's wellbeing. Social support outside the educational domains can help teachers to cope with stress and work exhaustion (Liu *et al.*, 2018; Price & McCallum, 2015). Similarly, a study by Fiorilli and colleagues (2019) found that external emotional support (i.e. support from family members, friends, partners and the community) may significantly contribute to teacher wellbeing. Overall, they highlight that social external support can strongly influence teachers' emotional intelligence and levels of burnout (Fiorilli *et al.*, 2019).

In sum, multiple layers of sociocontextual factors affect teacher wellbeing, stretching from the macro-level of society and government policy to the level of family and community, further down to micro-level of the school and each individual classroom. As such, teacher wellbeing must be understood as emerging from the interaction between an individual and the multiple levels of context in their personal ecologies. Ecological theory makes clear that an individual is embedded within contexts that develop and change over time. Applying this lens to teacher wellbeing helps illuminate the complex range of sociocontextual factors affecting teachers' lives.

## 2.6 Why Wellbeing of Teachers Across the Career Trajectory?

The literature suggests that teachers 'have different attitudes, skills, and behaviors at various points during their careers' (Lynn, 2002: 179).

Across their careers, teachers' engagement, commitment and motivation, including their sense of wellbeing as professionals, can vary (Day, 2017; Day *et al*., 2007). In light of such changes and fluctuations, we believe that it is important to gain an in-depth understanding of each career phase, what it entails, teachers' wants and needs, resources and factors that influence their wellbeing.

Another model of teacher career development stems from work by Fessler and Christensen (1992). They proposed eight characteristic stages of a teacher's career, starting from pre-service, induction, competency building, enthusiasm and growth, career frustration, career stability, career wind down and career exit. Fessler and Christensen's (1992) model of teachers' career cycle is important for this study because it highlights that teachers are embedded within a 'context of a dynamic and flexible social system' (Lynn, 2002: 193). As teachers progress in their careers, they move from one phase to another in a dynamic, rather than a linear lock-step manner. When teachers experience events such as changing school or principal, they may feel like novice teachers again even if they have been in the profession for years. For instance, during the pandemic, faced with the dramatic transition to online teaching without training or preparation, many experienced teachers felt themselves back in the situation of being a novice educator and struggled with using technology (Kraft & Simon, 2020). Such disruptions to a teacher's sense of efficacy caused by systemic changes can negatively affect the teacher's sense of wellbeing. Indeed, in their understanding of teacher career phases, Fessler and Christensen (1992) highlighted that the environments in which teachers are embedded as well as specific situations can have a positive or a negative influence on their experiences across their teaching pathways.

An important model of teachers' career development is Fuller's (1969) three-stage model (see also Fuller & Bown, 1975). This suggests that teachers have different concerns at different stages of their careers such as pre-teaching (concern with self), early teaching (concern about tasks/situations) and late teaching (concern about one's impact on students). This model has been especially important in understanding novice teachers' career development, from the point of studying, entering the workforce and finding themselves as professionals (Conway & Clark, 2003). According to Fuller and Bown (1975), teachers move from their inner concerns to the outer professional world – from concerns about the self, to concern about the situation in which they find themselves in, to concern about their pupils. Conway and Clark (2003: 467) believe that, due to 'the elegance and clarity with which [this model] portrays the outward trajectory of teacher development', it 'remains appealing' to date. Fuller's (e.g. Fuller & Bown, 1975) and Fessler and Christensen's (1992) models prompted us to also include pre-service teachers in our study. Their work inspired us to reflect on how these differing stages of development and diverse set of concerns may affect teachers' wellbeing.

Another influential model has been proposed by Huberman (1989b). In the 1980s, Huberman conducted studies with teachers of different subjects, whom he divided into four categories: Those teaching from 5 to 10 years, 11 to 19, 20 to 29 and 30 to 39 years (Huberman, 1988). Huberman conducted interviews with 160 teachers and asked them to reflect on and describe their teaching trajectories. He found that, for instance, in the group of teachers from 5 to 10 years, there were teachers who characterised their teaching beginnings as 'easy' or 'painful' (Huberman, 1988: 124). These appeared to be directly linked to teachers' wellbeing, as Huberman explained, '"easy beginnings" involve positive relationships with pupils, "manageable" pupils, the sense of pedagogical mastery, and enthusiasm', while '"painful beginnings" are made up of role overload and anxiety, difficult pupils, heavy time investment, close monitoring by teacher education staff, and isolation inside the school' (Huberman, 1988: 124). As such, Huberman (1995a: 193) noted that, 'teachers have different aims and different dilemmas at various moments in their professional cycle and their desires to reach out for more information, knowledge, expertise and technical competence will vary accordingly'.

Huberman (1995b) also acknowledged that teachers' lives are influenced by both social and historical factors that his model failed to account for. As such, Day and colleagues (2007) took up the call to further empirically research teachers' career phases and to design a more comprehensive model of teachers' lives and work. Day *et al*. (2007) identify three main teacher career phases and six sub-phases, which are based on years of teaching experience. These include early-career (1–3 and 4–7), mid-career (8–15 and 16–23), and late-career (24–30 and 31+) phases (Day, 2017; Day *et al*., 2007). In this study, we draw on this framework as one of the most comprehensive models for understanding teacher career development to date, and we also add the pre-service phase to the categories.

The different phases are characterised by different issues and concerns. For example, Huberman (1988) reported on how pre-service teachers experience high levels of stress as they try to balance their roles and identities of being both a student and a teacher (see also Day, 2012, 2017; Mairitsch *et al*., 2021). Early-career teachers typically have to construct their identity as professionals and negotiate the transition from pre-service into in-service roles, finding their place not only within the professional as a whole but also within specific schools (Schlichte *et al*., 2005; Sulis *et al*., 2022). By mid-career, teachers have typically accrued various resources that they can draw on to cope with stress (Hargreaves, 2005). However, during this phase, they also face competing obligations in school as well as at home (Farrell, 2014; Gu & Day, 2007; Shin *et al*., 2021). Finally, having been in the career for over two decades, late-career teachers may experience a slow decline in motivation, commitment and enthusiasm for teaching, although some continue to thrive and relish their professional roles (Babic *et al*., 2022a; Day, 2012, 2017).

All the models above essentially suggest that 'teachers' characteristics change, their needs with regard to professional activities, relationships, and interests will change accordingly' (Lynn, 2002: 193). Raduan and Na (2020) argue that, at every phase of their careers, teachers need an adequate support in terms of improving specific skills and gaining new ones; however, we also need to understand teachers' wants and needs as well as specific challenges and resources at various points in their careers to be able to support them and ensure they are able to enjoy high wellbeing. It is therefore vital to see teachers as 'individuals with their own motivations and visions' who 'move backward and forward between phases of their working lives, due to different personal, contextual, and social factors, such as taking on a new role, changing schools, or teaching a new age group or a new syllabus' (Raduan & Na, 2020: 435). These dynamic changes can influence teachers' ability to cope with challenges and nurture a positive sense of wellbeing. It implies that any study of teacher wellbeing needs to understand the context the teacher is working and living in, as well as how this relates to their prior and ongoing experiences.

## 2.7 Teacher Wellbeing in Language Education

Naturally, language teachers experience many of the same issues that any teachers have to face. However, there are some additional factors that are particularly critical for language teachers' wellbeing. Firstly, language teaching is deeply infused with interactional, emotional and cultural elements. As a result, language teachers may deal with more emotional issues compared to teachers of other subjects (Mercer, 2020b; Wieczorek, 2016). For instance, communicative pedagogies have become widely employed in language teaching across the globe during the past decades. Such approaches seek to foster a more participatory classroom environment (Borg, 2006) and typically require high energy and greater creativity to create an interactive and engaging classroom environment. Language teachers also tend to work with learners on a more personal level through communicative tasks such as when they respond to students' writing assignments, run classroom discussions (Benesch, 2017), or when their students display anxiety in using the language (Gkonou & Miller, 2019). In addition, supporting learner autonomy is also considered an important task for language teachers in communicative pedagogies (Brown, 2007; Najeeb, 2013). This can be a complex endeavour involving students' motivation, willingness to communicate and beliefs about learning among others.

Language learning also involves developing multiple selves and identities, and it influences learners' participation in communities of language users (Morita, 2012). In particular, cultural dimensions of language learning can be complex. As such, language teachers need to employ higher

levels of emotional labour than teachers of other subjects in order to support students to negotiate the links between language and identity (Benesch, 2017; King & Ng, 2018; Miller & Gkonou, 2018). In addition, experiencing foreign language anxiety is not only common for learners but also for teachers who are required to teach a foreign language (Gruber & Mercer, 2021; Horwitz, 1996; Talbot & Mercer, 2018). Indeed, studies have found that lower self-perceived linguistic proficiency and self-confidence can also negatively affect teachers' professional identity and self-efficacy, which can contribute to teacher burnout (Mercer *et al*., 2016; Nayernia & Babayan, 2019).

In terms of contextual factors affecting language educators specifically, the status of the language being taught may also play a role in how teachers experience their professional lives. For example, those teaching in anglophone countries, such as the UK, may experience specific challenges related to the low status of modern languages and low student motivation for learning these languages (Mason, 2017; Sulis *et al*., 2022; Tinsley, 2019). As a result, modern language teacher attrition has been a serious concern in English-speaking countries (Mason & Poyatos-Matas, 2016). Additionally, teachers who move to a foreign country in order to teach a language may find themselves exposed to additional intercultural and emotional challenges to their sense of self as they navigate other social, cultural and educational systems (Cowie, 2011; Halicioglu, 2015; Yim & Hwang, 2019). There is a larger private sector involved in language teaching, and some may encounter poor working conditions, such as irregular working hours, insecure job contracts, low wages and lack of union support (Bowen, 2013; Mercer, 2020a; Wieczorek, 2016).

Another contextual issue specific to language teachers concerns language learning and teaching beyond the classroom. What learners do and experience outside of the classroom are crucial aspects of their language learning process (Richards, 2015). Language learning beyond the classroom refers not only to learning outside of the classroom as a setting or a location; it also refers to 'an extension of classroom learning' (Reinders & Benson, 2017: 574) and considers that being in the classroom is only one of many ways to learn a language (Benson, 2011). For instance, globalisation and the availability of technology have made authentic materials widely available and have presented students with the opportunity to interact with people from different countries using the target language all without teacher intervention or direction (Kramsch, 2014). Some have expressed a concern about a growing gap for some learners between their formal language learning environments and their own digitally mediated language lives (Thorne, 2008). Naturally, this access to the language and ability to practise it can alter the position and status of the language teacher as expert. In respect to English specifically, teachers are facing shifting attitudes among learners who may question the need for traditional language classes in the face of the opportunities for language use

beyond the classroom and increasing levels of proficiency among school-aged children (Haukås & Mercer, 2021). The consequences of these developments in language learning and use opportunities naturally has the potential to impact on teacher wellbeing as their position as expert and sole conduit to the language is dismantled.

While language teacher wellbeing research is growing, it remains a relatively small field (e.g. Gregersen *et al*., 2020; Gruber *et al*., 2020; Jin *et al*., 2021; MacIntyre *et al*., 2019). However, given the criticality and potentially unique context of language education as well as the attention drawn to educator wellbeing generally as a result of the global pandemic, there is likely to be a welcome increase in empirical work across contexts and populations in the coming years to add contextual and individual nuance to understanding of the role teacher wellbeing plays in practice and how it can best be fostered and supported (Gu & Day, 2007; Luthans *et al*., 2007).

This book examines the wellbeing of language teachers at different phases of their professional development in two different educational contexts. This cross-sectional research examining language teacher wellbeing across the career span considers the challenges and resources they draw on at these different stages of their careers. It also reflects on the role of context – micro and macro – in determining the wellbeing of educators both by offering support and posing threats. The design is intended to be holistic in order to capture the resources and challenges of teachers and the ways in which their personal, professional and contextual ecologies interact across the career span.

# 3 Pre-Service Language Teachers

In this chapter, we discuss the findings from the teachers in the pre-service phase. The analysis of resources and challenges pre-service teachers faced during this phase revealed three main themes: managing student life and school life, building knowledge and experiencing the realities of classroom life, and scaffolding social support.

In total, 20 pre-service teachers participated in our study (pre-pandemic $n = 14$; during pandemic $n = 6$); biographical details about the participants can be found in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 below.

**Table 3.1** Pre-service teachers' biodata and demographic information (pre-pandemic)

| Pseudonym | Gender | Country of residence | Age group | Languages taught |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bree | F | Austria | 25–34 | English |
| Lily | F | Austria | 24 or younger | English |
| Mary | F | Austria | 24 or younger | English, German |
| Maya | F | Austria | 24 or younger | English |
| Pete | M | Austria | 24 or younger | English |
| Ruby | F | Austria | 24 or younger | English, Italian |
| Sally | F | Austria | 24 or younger | English, Spanish |
| Alina | F | UK | 25–34 | French, Spanish |
| Cynthia | F | UK | 25–34 | French, Spanish |
| Frank | M | UK | 35–44 | French, German |
| Lea | F | UK | 25–34 | French, German |
| Mark | M | UK | 25–34 | French, Spanish |
| Nataly | F | UK | N/A | French, German, Russian |
| Rebecca | F | UK | 24 or younger | French |

**Table 3.2** Pre-service teachers' biodata and demographic information (during the pandemic)

| Pseudonym | Gender | Country of residence | Age group | Languages taught |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Amelie | F | Austria | 24 or younger | English, German |
| Mary | F | Austria | 24 or younger | English |
| Noah | M | Austria | 24 or younger | English |
| Ella | F | Netherlands | 25–34 | English |
| Carmen | F | Spain | 24 or younger | English |
| Judy | F | UK | 25–34 | French, Spanish |

## 3.1 Managing Student Life and School Life

One of the key characteristics of this phase concerns pre-service teachers' dual roles as both students and teachers. The duality of their roles implies multiple responsibilities managing their commitment to their studies while simultaneously working and organising their initial teaching experiences. Alongside the practical challenges this involves, such as managing one's time, tasks, and workload, it is a period which also leads to an uncertain sense of identity. Among the teachers in this study, despite tensions, it was possible to see how the pre-service teachers gradually learnt to juggle their different responsibilities and gained an increasing awareness of their place in the profession.

### 3.1.1 Challenges

Learning to teach is a complex process. According to Timoštšuk and Ugaste (2010: 1563), 'learning to teach—like teaching itself—is always the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one was doing, and who one can become'. This process is central in informing the development of one's teacher identity and is shaped by multiple interrelated influences; life histories, the experiences within and outside the classroom, education programmes and relationships with students are some of the factors that influenced our pre-service teachers' beliefs about themselves as educators. Teacher identity is commonly defined as the 'conceptualization, conscious or not, that teachers have of themselves' (Izadinia, 2016: 127). In our study, eight pre-service teachers reported on the difficulties in finding their identities as teachers during this particular phase of their career. According to Cynthia, it takes time to become 'a great teacher'; she explained how the two roles as student and teacher were bound to the specific environments of university and school, respectively:

> I feel a bit of both really because you can't really walk into a classroom and be a great teacher straight away […] obviously, we're still doing

> assignments we're still being treated as students while we're at university because we have all these studenty things to do, but then when you're actually in a school, you are responsible for the class, you are responsible for the learning and progress, and you have to do all your lesson plans, so it's a balance really. Right now, I probably feel like more of a student, but I know that when I start teaching again, I'm going to feel more of a teacher.

This was also the case of Amelie, who possessed a stronger sense of teacher self when being in the classroom during her practica; in contrast, she reported feeling more like a student outside the classroom: 'I think especially in the practica, I mean if it's over and I wasn't in class for a longer time I would obviously feel more like a student, but then when I am in class every week then it feels more as if I am a teacher'. As seen earlier, the experience gained in the classroom served a key determinant shaping their unstable and under-developed sense of teacher self. For example, Noah explained:

> I'm definitely not a teacher yet, because I very much believe in learning on the job. I know that I have a million things to figure out before I'm actually going to be a good teacher. But I also know that I can figure them out once I'm in the job and once I'm actually confronted with the situations. But for now, I'm definitely still a student and not a teacher yet.

Noah appeared confident that, over time, he would strengthen his identity as a teacher and was aware this was a 'work-in-progress'. Similarly, Mara reported that, in her case, her sense of teacher self was not fully formed yet, and she believed that she only needed more practice to start feeling more prepared as a teacher:

> I don't necessarily think that I'm ready yet, because I feel like I'm missing a lot of legal knowledge on how teachers are employed and what like kind of restrictions there are for teaching in Austria. Language wise, I can teach. I feel like I'm prepared enough and also that the themes and topics that are covered in school, I just probably need practice, and that's it.

These examples show how practical teaching experiences were defining in shaping pre-service participants' sense of teacher self. For the pre-service teachers interviewed during the pandemic, the transition to online teaching generated additional challenges in defining their teacher identity, as being physically in the classroom was central to these pre-service teachers' sense of teacher self. Judy, for instance, reported how she struggled to view herself as a teacher under these circumstances which did not meet her expectations and imagination of what teaching is: 'For me, right now, it's really hard to picture myself as a teacher. Especially with all this going on'; she further explained: 'If I had to go back right now and teach classes

in the normal way, I would probably feel sort of somewhat confident […] But if I had to go now and teach online 30 kids [...] that would be a bit difficult for me'. In line with our findings, the literature suggests that pre-service teachers' understanding of their role as teachers is typically associated with the amount and quality of their initial teaching experiences (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Woods & Lynn, 2014). A longitudinal study by Izadinia (2017), for instance, has shown that, as teachers went through their first practicum experience, their confidence and teacher voice grew; furthermore, their vision of the teacher they wanted to be changed over time, revealing the importance of practicum experiences for shaping pre-service teacher identity. These experiences, moreover, can contribute not only to a stronger sense of teacher self and a more realistic account of the teacher role but also to pre-service teachers' long-term retention in the profession (Izadinia, 2015; Scheib, 2007).

Another aspect contributing to these pre-service teachers' understanding of their role was related to the way they were viewed by students and whether they were validated by them in this role. Three participants in our study reported on this issue, highlighting how this influenced not only their identities as teachers but also their sense of confidence in the classroom; in fact, they were particularly worried about whether they looked authoritative and experienced enough in the eyes of their students and colleagues. Mary, for instance, reported about her students perceiving her as a 'wannabe teacher' and not taking her seriously during her practicum because of her young age; this became a source of struggle and insecurity for her:

> They don't really take me seriously. And one student also said 'Yeah, because you're just a wannabe teacher.' […] I think it would change when I also look older, because it's a lot about looks […] I'm sure that even if I look like a granny, outfit wise, they will still not respect me. Because they see my face, that I still don't have this expression of authority.

Sally, similarly, was concerned about not looking assertive enough in light of the small age gap between her and her students:

> I would like to seem very confident in what I do and give students a sense of confidence […] I don't know if I have that yet. I'm working on it. […] Partly it's because I think I look very young for my age […] I think students see that too. They could also think that I'm younger than I am. And I think with age, there comes a certain degree of authority.

Dassa and Derose (2017: 109) conclude that, 'it is the idea that pre-service students are suddenly viewed as the teacher by their colleagues and students that impacts how they begin to identify themselves', suggesting that the process of becoming a teacher and gaining a sense of teacher self is shaped by the complex interplay of internal and external perceptions. Similarly, Sutherland *et al.* (2010), drawing on Coldron and Smith (1999:

455), consider that, 'the notion of being a teacher is socially legitimised through the accredited teachers' interactions with other members of the profession, parents and children', revealing how teacher identity is built through the manifold social interactions teachers engage in.

Managing the student and teacher roles during this phase also led to practical challenges due to dealing with multiple tasks and commitments at university and in school. Typically, within 'a compressed timeframe, pre-service teachers must juggle demands from students, mentor teachers, school administrators, and university supervisors, all in what is typically a new work environment' (Klassen & Durksen, 2014: 158). These multiple roles and responsibilities often reflected in a doubled workload, leading to stress and difficulties in finding an appropriate work–life balance. This was an issue reported by 12 pre-service teachers in our study, who struggled in managing their multiple duties. Lily, for instance, reported feeling overwhelmed by her intense workload and mentioned difficulties in finding a balance:

> I go to bed every night not before 12 o'clock. Because I have to do this and I have to finish that and this is important and there is a deadline there. So coping and balancing university and life and private life is [hard] – I mean right now university is just more important. But I'm wondering if I'm becoming a teacher, if I'm going to do it better, if I can balance better. I'm not sure.

Maya, similarly, was hoping that her workload would change after she finished her studies: 'I imagine it won't change very much, but it will be different workload. And it won't be so many little things, maybe I can focus a little bit more on my one job'. She also highlighted how these multiple tasks led to intense stress and mentioned how she was forced to eventually take care of her work–life balance:

> It's definitely something I'm working on. Because last semester I definitely came to my limit and I got very ill and I wasn't happy and work suffers if you're doing too much and I was forgetting the simplest but most important things.

The intense workload these pre-service teachers had to deal with during this phase of their teaching career inevitably led to issues in finding enough time to dedicate to their relationships, hobbies, and self-care outside university and school; this was the case of seven pre-service teachers in this study. Ruby, for instance, reported being 'willing to sacrifice some of the free time' and felt that it was natural to be particularly busy during this phase: 'It's normal that I have a lot to do'. However, she also reported that, during a period of very intense work, she experienced issues in managing her personal relationships and experienced stress: 'That influenced my private life, because my boyfriend was complaining. I was very stressed; I

was very grumpy'. The combination of an intense workload and lack of time meant that these student teachers necessarily had to prioritise their studies and teaching in order to be able to successfully complete their education programmes and move forward in their careers.

Issues related to an intense workload and a lack of time are well-known stressors for pre-service teachers (Klassen *et al*., 2013; Paquette & Rieg, 2016; Vesely *et al*., 2014), who are typically expected to manage too many tasks in too little time (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). It is therefore critical, from the earliest stages of their career, to support pre-service teachers in becoming aware of strategies they can implement to effectively manage their multiple commitments in practical terms. Appropriate training, however, also needs to be accompanied by an adequate and manageable amount of workload during teacher education programmes and during practica. As will be seen in the next section, self-care, relationships, and time for leisure positively contributed to shaping pre-service teacher wellbeing and helped to maintain a healthy balance; when individuals are not given any choice but to prioritise their studies and work, the sense of balance is inevitably tipped off centre.

As with all issues, the managing of multiple concurrent tasks at university and during the practica became even more pressing and stressful for pre-service teachers during the first wave of the pandemic crisis. For five out of our six pre-service teachers interviewed in April 2020, dealing with their workload and commitments became even more difficult during the crisis. For some, their stress was amplified due to a lack of structure and the need for a new routine; for others, the lack of temporal and spatial boundaries made it more difficult for them to concentrate on and compartmentalise their commitments and tasks (see also Sulis *et al*., 2021). An example of the latter was offered by Mara: 'I'm not as productive as I would be if I had been at university. Because at university I'm focused […] and at home, this is my personal space. I don't want to have my work intrude and it certainly does'. Similarly, Noah felt less productive under these circumstances, which meant that the time needed to complete his tasks substantially increased: 'Being locked down definitely didn't improve my productivity and my focus, so things got delayed a little bit'. His productivity and motivation were impacted by having to work and live in the same space:

> I think it's just this omnipresence of everything because you're always in the place where you are doing your work. Basically, you could work all the time. But then again, I'm also the least motivated to do any work. So, I'm probably working the least.

This suggests the critical importance of setting spatial and temporal boundaries for one's wellbeing and work–life balance beyond the pandemic crisis. When boundaries between domains become increasingly

interwoven, this can lead individuals to feel 'overwhelmed, overtaxed, and exhausted due to expectations for constant availability' (Wepfer *et al.*, 2018: 727). As will be seen in Chapters 5 and 6, during the mid- and late-career phases, teachers typically display a stronger awareness of the importance of boundaries across their different life domains and are equipped with strategies to better synthesise their work and nonwork lives, which often come from their length of experience in teaching. In contrast, due to their limited experience, novice teachers may struggle to find a balance and workable structure to delineate their personal, student and work lives.

### 3.1.2 Resources

While the duality of student/teacher roles served as a source of insecurity and uncertainty for some, for three other pre-service language teachers in this study, these dual roles were perceived as a resource sustaining their commitment to teaching. Sally, for instance, felt that her dual perspective enabled her to better identify with her students and empathise with them:

> I think it's like an in-between stage. Because you already teach sometimes, but you're still a student. I think it's nice, you have both perspectives. You are still a student at university, but you're a teacher at school. You can really identify with your students but can also adopt the teacher's perspective.

Ruby, who was also teaching adult classes in her free time, also recognised the benefits of concurrently being both a student and a teacher: 'I'm a teacher for adults, but I'm a pre-service teacher for students. I'm enjoying the experience, because I can see the point of going to university and I can see for me if it's worthy or not'. While these pre-service teachers enjoyed their twofold roles, five other teachers in this study tended to identify more as teachers, which appeared to strengthen their confidence, self-efficacy and sense of purpose. In Lily's case, her sense of identity stemmed from her initial teacher experiences: 'I see myself as a teacher, definitely. And I would say I feel confident. Because by now, the little experience I have, tells me that I really enjoy it and it motivates me to be a good teacher as well'. In Lea's case, being treated like an in-service teacher at school by colleagues and the institution contributed to strengthening her teacher identity. She reported:

> [I feel like a teacher] Really a lot, because they, well they treat us like proper teachers that are full-time in a school […] you do all the things that a normal teacher does. They want us really to experience everything that a does. So definitely, I never say like 'Oh you know I'm training to be teacher'. If somebody asks, I'm just like, 'Yeah I'm a teacher'.

Lea's interview extract shows that, when pre-service teachers are treated as experienced teachers and assigned the duties and responsibilities of in-service teachers, not only do they gain a deeper understanding of the realities of their role, but their sense of teacher identity is also consolidated. This, in turn, plays a critical role in shaping their sense of agency (Teng, 2017) and self-efficacy (Pendergast *et al*., 2011), and it contributes to keeping them in the profession (Mansfield *et al*., 2014); all of which are key positive determinants of wellbeing. When pre-service teachers are marginalised and treated differently from other in-service teachers during their practica, they can experience difficulties in developing their teacher identity and a sense of isolation (Shapiro, 2010; Teng, 2017). Being authenticated by students and fellow teachers as legitimate teachers can empower them with a stronger sense of teacher identity, giving them a heightened sense of agency and confidence in their professional roles.

In order to manage their student and teacher roles, pre-service teachers in this study also gradually developed a series of practical strategies to deal with their duties, tasks and commitments in both their studies and at school. Five pre-service language teachers mentioned time-blocking and planning as an efficient way to manage their time and tasks within their multiple life domains; crucially, as will be seen later in this section, this also helped them to allocate some time to leisure, which they perceived as increasingly important to maintain a balance across all these domains. This was the case, for instance, for Maya: 'I just try to be a little bit more organised. And to have a certain time, where I stop doing things. I literally write things down – from this time to this time, I will do this and then stop'. Alina, similarly, greatly valued organisation and relied on her to-do list in order to manage the different tasks she needed to accomplish at university and in school: 'I think if you're not organised, everything will get over you, there are so many things to do and plan […] this is the key, organisation, to-do list, I have my to-do list and it's my goal'. Lily reported that a key strategy is to 'set yourself a time limit […] because you can always get a better lesson plan and whatever. You can always improve your lessons and so I think setting a time limit is very important'.

Setting a specific time to dedicate to leisure was another key strategy employed by our pre-service participants to balance their different work, university, and life domains. Lily, for instance, mentioned that, 'there's definitely a time where you can relax and you're not doing university related things, studying or preparing for courses'. Alina also tried to have a day off to dedicate to her family: 'My main model is trying to have at least (the Sundays), just for my family and not to do anything'. However, she still struggled not to think about work during her free day: 'This is hard because I keep thinking about "Oh my God, I've got to do this, I've got to do that"'. Similarly, Pete was aware of the importance of setting aside time for leisure and sport; however, he felt that he simply could not find the time for it: 'I do a bit of weightlifting, but only when I have time

to, and people say you've got to make time, but now I'm really busy, so there's no time'.

Time-management strategies are vital to teachers' long-term sustainment in the profession, especially in terms of countering stress and preventing burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). For pre-service and early-career teachers in particular, time management can become a key stressor threatening their work–life balance and wellbeing (Paquette & Rieg, 2016), as they are still in the process of learning how to effectively plan their multiple ongoing tasks and craft boundaries between their work and non-work lives. Explicit training in time management and other self-care strategies could serve as key resources helping novice teachers preserve their sense of resilience and sustain their long-term retention in the profession (Rieg *et al*., 2007).

Not unexpectedly, problems with work–life balance were aggravated by the pandemic crisis. This experience triggered a process of awareness for four pre-service language teachers, who realised during the crisis the need to shift their priorities and dedicate more time to leisure and self-care over their work and studies. This shift in priorities and time allocation was due to a number of concurrent factors, including less time to commute, changes in the practicum and schedule of lessons, and overall more free time available at their disposal. Ella, for instance, recognised a shift in her overall wellbeing:

> Ironically, I've been doing much more sports, because I used to have to travel about two and a half hours a day, which was just sitting. And now I do not travel at all and then I use those hours to do sports. I actually feel health-wise, I feel better […] I also go on regular walks, so I sleep better […] actually the wellbeing has gone up amazingly.

Judy, similarly, had more time to read and cook healthier food, which benefitted her overall wellbeing: 'I get to read a lot more things, that I can catch up on […] that's quite nice as well, I probably eat healthier because in school as you know, we have 20 minutes to eat'. For Carmen, who was particularly stressed and displayed workaholic tendencies before the pandemic, having more time as a result of the transition to online learning meant a shift in perspective and a reconsideration of her priorities: 'The pandemic has taught me that I have to have more time for myself, more time to be alone, more time for things'. The lessons learnt during the pandemic can potentially be vital for these teachers' work and life beyond the pandemic.

Indeed, while the pandemic appeared to have accelerated for some pre-service teachers the process of gaining explicit awareness of the importance of self-care and boundaries which is typical of teachers in mid- and late-career phases, the findings have also revealed how gaining this kind of mindful awareness as early as possible in one's career can be

instrumental in developing a sense of agency in relation to actively taking care of one's wellbeing and devising strategies to balance the different competing tasks across studies, work and life domains. Cherkowski and colleagues (Cherkowski, 2018; Cherkowski *et al.*, 2018) elaborated the notion of flourishing mindsets to refer to the opportunities through which teachers use their agency to enhance their sense of wellbeing; this is referred to as 'a capacity to notice, seek out, and magnify opportunities for wellbeing, positive relationships, purpose and a sense of meaning, play, and enjoyment' (Cherkowski, 2018: 68). They argue that flourishing mindsets can be learned and developed by means of ongoing attention and practice (Cherkowski *et al.*, 2018). Supporting pre-service teachers to develop a flourishing mindset and agentic thinking could therefore be key for helping them regulate their wellbeing throughout the stressful time of their teacher education programme, better manage their dual roles as both students and teachers, and ultimately experience a positive transition from pre- to in-service teaching.

## 3.2 Building Knowledge and Experiencing the Realities of Classroom Life

The pre-service phase of teachers' professional trajectories is typically defined by the gradual building of knowledge and skills through their teacher training programmes, including seminars, lectures and activities, combined with guided practica in real classroom settings (Ambrosetti, 2014). In the context of our study, these teaching education programmes varied in length and form, depending on the participants' chosen programmes and the countries they were studying in. When pre-service teachers in our study felt that their teacher education programmes were equipping them with a set of skills that were valuable for their teaching practice, they gained confidence in their roles as student teachers and looked forward to their future in the profession. However, when they felt that they were lacking the skills and practical experience to teach effectively in a classroom and handle classroom management, they experienced a sense of unpreparedness that posed a threat to their teacher identity, sense of efficacy, motivation, and ultimately challenged their wellbeing.

### 3.2.1 Challenges

The process of becoming a teacher is complex; as such, pre-service teachers are susceptible to a multitude of challenges that are unique to their career phase (Nilsson, 2008). This phase is typically defined by a struggle to juggle both studies at university and initial teaching experiences at the same time while simultaneously seeking to develop knowledge and skills to build one's own teacher identity and find one's position as an educator (Ayua & Pila, 2018).

In our study, one of the key challenges during this phase stemmed from pre-service teachers' perceived lack of practical teaching experiences. In particular, 10 pre-service language teachers, of which seven from Austria, two from the UK and one from the Netherlands, reported feeling that they had insufficient practical experience during their teacher education programmes and therefore feared that they were not sufficiently prepared for the realities of teaching in an actual classroom setting. A possible difference between our participants from the UK and Austria could be due to the different structures of their teacher education programmes. In Austria, the teaching education programme typically lasts six years and includes four practica in which a minimum of 28 hours needs to be taught in a school setting (BMBWF, 2022b). However, our participants from the UK doing their one-year university-led teacher training had to spend at least 24 weeks in school, teaching a minimum of 150 hours, which is typical for PGCE programmes in the UK (e.g. Rogers, 2011). This comparatively low number of in-class teaching hours may be one reason why Austrian teachers reported feeling less prepared for their future teaching career compared to their UK colleagues.

In particular, all seven Austrian pre-service teachers, and one teacher from the Netherlands, Ella, reported on a perceived mismatch between the theoretical input they received at university and the teaching skills required for their practica. Maya from Austria, reported:

> What I worry about is that what we get taught here [at university], doesn't give us an insight as to what school life is really about. […] I worry about all these other things I'm meant to know about, but I don't.

She further added that she looked forward to her first year of full-time teaching in school, which she believed would 'definitely prepare [her] for what's to come', as opposed to her teacher education programme which – in her opinion – valued theory over practice. Similarly, her Austrian colleague, Lily, mentioned that the subject input she received through her university lectures 'is not connected to teaching at all', which made her feel unprepared for facing the realities of the language classroom. Ella, from the Netherlands, also criticised the theory-driven approach of her teaching programme and felt that most of the theory acquired during her studies was irrelevant for teaching: 'It's hard to implement theory into practice right away. So, we get all kinds of models and ideas thrown at us that are sometimes not very relevant. […] I can't use it for my practice'. As such, it appears that these pre-service teachers in our study felt unprepared and ill equipped for the demands of the classroom. This, in turn, seemed to affect their motivation, self-efficacy and posed a threat to their wellbeing. In fact, the structure of many teacher education programmes is often based on theory and may not offer pre-service teachers adequate opportunities to 'transform the knowledge they acquire during course

work into the type of knowledge they might need to teach in a school context' (Nilsson, 2008: 1282). Nilsson (2008) further highlights that pedagogical skills and subject knowledge are often taught separately in teacher education programmes and, as such, it is up to pre-service teachers to combine these sets of skills and implement them into the context of teaching, which may be difficult and challenging.

Relating theory to classroom practice is a complex task, and although pre-service teachers in our study struggled to find meaning in the theoretical aspects of their teacher training programme, research has found that only through theory can pre-service teachers become 'well-informed' and 'morally-sensitive' future teachers (Deng, 2004: 143). As Deng (2004: 143) further explains, 'the role of theory is not only to assist in the training of pre-service teachers in skills and procedures, but more importantly, to educate them more widely about the complexities, intellectual and moral nature of classroom practice'. Furthermore, research has shown that a sense of preparedness is a crucial factor within teacher education and can affect teacher's sense of efficacy and motivation (Downing & Dyment, 2013; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012); studies have also highlighted that pre-service teachers' set of skills and confidence increases with time and experience (Martin *et al.*, 1999; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012). As such, 'it is acknowledged that initial teacher education cannot be expected to provide all the knowledge and skills a teacher requires, and that teachers should be life-long learners' (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012: 1141).

A particular challenge that seemed to affect the wellbeing of eight pre-service teachers in our study was their inexperience in handling difficult classroom situations and dealing effectively with students' misbehaviour. For instance, Sally, from Austria, explained that, throughout her teaching education programme, she had not learnt about how to manage students' misbehaviour, which she considered to be a core element of teaching: 'One thing I really miss is that we don't get taught enough about how to handle difficult students […] I think that's very important as a teacher […] Because that's something that you would really have to know about'. This was also the case of Mary, from Austria, who felt like university did not prepare her for any challenging social interactions in the classroom:

> And the bad part is? At university I don't learn [about] social behaviour problems […] I'm not used to kids that are just mocking you as a teacher, or just saying no to you when you tell them to do something.

A similar experience was shared by Rebecca from the UK, who felt powerless in the classroom: 'Students do what they want. Teachers can't do anything at all. It's becoming less about learning and more about teaching them what their parents should teach them […] It's basically babysitting'. Their accounts of these experiences illustrate how dealing with student misbehaviour was a critical challenge for many of them in

both settings, causing a considerable amount of stress and discomfort. Managing classroom behaviour is one of the core concerns for future teachers and often a prime reason for pre-service teacher stress and burnout (Chan, 1998; Dlamini & Martinovic, 2007; Lewis *et al*., 2005; Main & Hammond, 2008; Stoughton, 2007). Spooner-Lane *et al*. (2009) found that the ability to manage classroom management is indeed one of the biggest challenges facing pre-service teachers' wellbeing, and developing this skill set takes considerable experience and time. The authors concluded that, providing student teachers with appropriate tools to 'manage student behaviour is a vital area to include in pre-service teacher training' (Spooner-Lane *et al*., 2009: 86). When pre-service teachers lack practical knowledge and skills, this will inevitably affect their sense of efficacy, teacher identity and motivation to stay in the profession (Freeman *et al*., 2014; Nguyen & Yang, 2018).

Another particular contextual challenge related to students' misbehaviour was the low status of modern languages, as reported by all UK teachers in our study. These teachers reported that their students showed a tendency to misbehave in the language classroom, as the value and importance they assigned to MLs was substantially lower compared to other subjects. Alina, for example, reported that 'languages are not taken seriously' in the UK, and Lea felt that teaching German to her pupils 'was a challenge'. Similarly, Rebecca linked students' misbehaviour in the classroom also to the language subject (French) she was teaching:

> For me it has to do with the fact that kids don't want to learn languages. Their parents tell them that they've lived their entire life without speaking anything but English. You tell that to a kid it is going to say: 'My parents didn't need languages. I don't need languages either'.

Over the past decades, MLs have been affected by political changes and curricular developments in the UK (Dobson, 2018). Since 2004, MLs have been removed from the core curriculum for Key Stage 4 (Ofsted, 2021), which has resulted in a notable drop of students participating in language classes (Boffey, 2013). This political decision also affected the status of MLs as a school subject, with both students and parents disregarding language classes, thereby creating additional challenges for language teachers who feel that their subjects are not valued or respected (Boffey, 2013; Coleman, 2009; Coleman *et al*., 2007). Since pre-service teachers still lack experience and classroom management strategies to handle students' misbehaviour, teaching a subject that is not valued by students and their parents poses additional stressors on their already demanding lives. Interestingly, this issue was completely absent from the Austrian dataset. English is perceived as a global language and enjoys high status not only in the Austrian education system but also on a broader societal level

(Dalton-Puffer *et al.*, 1997). Furthermore, as English is also used as a lingua franca in Austria, students are also able to see the relevance of learning the language in school (Dalton-Puffer *et al.*, 2011). English is a core subject in Austrian secondary schools (BMBWF, 2022c), and as of the school year 2025/2026, English will be introduced as a compulsory school subject in Austrian elementary schools (BMBWF, 2022c).

Another challenge for five pre-service language teachers in this study was their perceived low sense of efficacy in relation to their own language skills and subject knowledge. Carmen, for instance, reported not feeling confident in the language she was studying to teach (English); this meant that she needed to invest more time to respond to students' questions in the classroom:

> Sometimes I feel that I have to study a little bit more about the language in general, so I have to go deeper […] in order to be well-based and to answer the question that my students could ask, so I feel confident, but sometimes I'll say I feel vulnerable because I can't predict the questions. […] So, you have to be aware that you have to prepare more. And I think that I need to go a bit deeper into the subject.

In a similar vein, Alina reported that she was afraid to make any mistakes in the classroom, especially in terms of pronunciation:

> My weakness is my lack of confidence with myself and my knowledge. I'm always scared of doing errors on the board, I'm petrified. That is my main fear. In French I'm scared that I forget double p or double m, and in Spanish […] I've all this trouble with my accent.

These findings align with research that has found that becoming a language teacher can be especially challenging compared to other subjects; indeed, 'language teachers teach communication, not facts; in other subjects, teachers can increase their subject matter knowledge through books, but it is harder for foreign language teachers to maintain and increase their knowledge of the foreign language' (Borg, 2006: 5). Furthermore, Horwitz (1996) stresses that language teachers encounter specific challenges unique to their subjects, as they might suffer from low linguistic self-efficacy and speaking anxiety, since they teach a language that is often not their L1 and might have problems expressing themselves in another language; a skill that is visible to all in its expression in class.

The challenge of learning and teaching a language that is not the participants' first language seemed to make some feel especially vulnerable. According to Kelchtermans (2009), vulnerability is a structural characteristic of the teaching profession, and the sources of such vulnerability are diverse. They can concern the micro-level of the classroom, the level of relationships in school with colleagues, principals and parents, as well as the micro-level of administration and policy (see also Chapter 4). For

language teachers in particular, and especially beginning teachers, one of the key sources of vulnerability lies in their language competences, which are believed to be core skills language teachers are ought to possess. According to Shin (2008: 59), 'having an excellent command of the target language is indeed one of the most important characteristics of outstanding foreign language teachers'.

As such, it is imperative that teacher education programmes ensure that pre-service language teachers are provided with ample opportunities to work on and improve their language competences alongside their pedagogical skills, as reportedly some teacher education programmes are still not paying enough attention to fostering language competences, despite the criticality of these for language teacher self-efficacy (Bartels, 2005; Cots & Arno, 2005; Peacock, 2009).

Those pre-service teachers, who were studying to become teachers and undertaking their practica during the first wave of the pandemic crisis, experienced additional challenges caused by a lack of training regarding online teaching. They explained that they felt particularly concerned about not being trained how to teach effectively in an online context and felt that they had to learn these skills on their own through a process of trial and error. For instance, Mara from Austria mentioned that she would have wished for more input on digital skills to create meaningful lessons for her students and concluded that her inadequate knowledge on remote teaching is 'like a whole void that has to be filled'. Similarly, Carmen from Spain explained that she 'had no previous knowledge' in relation to online teaching and felt abandoned by her university in this sense. She eventually asked her brother, who worked as a programmer, how to use different online tools that she could use for her teaching. The lack of digital experience and training was also mentioned by Noah from Austria, who had never received any training on digital technologies during his studies and had to learn these skills on his own: 'I didn't have any training, and […] I haven't heard about [it] before'.

These findings echo similar studies showing that, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, not only pre-service teachers, but teachers all over the world experienced stress during the switch to online teaching with little or no preparation beforehand (Reimers *et al*., 2020). For pre-service teachers specifically, they had to balance both their remote university courses and their mandatory online practica which were 'significantly altered from what pre-service teachers had anticipated, [and which] placed them in an arduous position' (Jones *et al*., 2021: 2). Consequently, pre-service teachers sought help from their mentors and professors, who also had to 'adjust in situ to the evolving conditions' (Jones *et al*., 2021: 2) and, therefore, could often not provide the support pre-service teachers would have wished for. This process was emotionally challenging, exhausting and extremely stressful for pre-service and in-service teachers across the globe as well as for their teacher educators. It is clear that

looking ahead teacher education programmes will have to prepare teachers for a future that will most likely be characterised by both in-person and virtual teaching situations (Jones *et al*., 2021; Herold, 2020).

### 3.2.2 Resources

Despite their initial insecurities, when pre-service teachers in our study perceived the knowledge and skills accumulated through their university courses as valuable for their future careers, they experienced higher confidence in their role, increased motivation to pursue the teaching career and developed a stronger sense of teacher identity. Twelve pre-service language teachers equally split between the UK and Austria in this study reported that the knowledge and skills acquired during their education programmes equipped them with valuable resources they could draw on in the future. Sally, for instance, mentioned that when she believed the input she received during her university courses was useful for her future career as a teacher, she felt secure and this motivated her during her classes: 'I know that I will be a teacher. And I think what I learn now is so relevant. I know which knowledge I will need and what I won't need. […] And I pay attention in the courses'. This positive tenor was also underscored by Lea, who stressed that she was studying 'at a really good university' which was 'brilliant'. Similarly, Frank thought his 'university [was] great' as the professors advised all students to take care of their wellbeing during the process of becoming a teacher, hinting that they might never be prepared for everything that may happen in school: 'The university professors already told us, from the first day, never think that you will be 100% prepared. And if you realise that it's already too much, plan differently, take some time off'. This suggests that the perceived quality of expertise in university courses and the way in which students feel supported during their studies are crucial aspects of successful teacher education programmes and can contribute to the sense of confidence, self-efficacy and the wellbeing of pre-service teachers (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010).

As seen early in this chapter, one of the key issues facing pre-service teachers was the gap between theory and practice, leading some of them to feel disoriented as they approached their initial teaching experiences. Receiving hands-on teaching advice was thus greatly appreciated by these pre-service teachers; this served as a critical resource empowering them with confidence and agency at a time where they typically felt most vulnerable and anxious. Lily, for instance, provided an example from one of her professors: 'She really wants to give you a lot of practical resources you can use later on'. She further explained:

> She gave me so much input and practiced with me so much […] She goes beyond what she has to do. And she always made the connection between

> what's important for your later life. Like, 'you need to know this'. And this also increases your motivation.

Another example about the importance of receiving practical teaching advice at this stage was offered by Amelie: 'Some of them are great, and we learn many things that I can actually use in the classroom'. This is again a reminder of the need to equip pre-service teachers with an appropriate balance between theoretical knowledge but also practical competences to face the initial difficulties they will encounter in the classroom (Hudson *et al*., 2008). A study on teacher professional development conducted by Genç (2016) has revealed that pre-service teachers require more opportunities for acquiring practical competences throughout their path towards becoming teachers, while in-service teachers need to be more engaged with theory and research to update their theoretical knowledge. As such, pre-service and in-service teachers can work together to 'exchange practical and theoretical ideas and knowledge that may help both pre- and in-service teachers to improve themselves in their professions, and make necessary and working connections between theory and practice' (Genç, 2016: 682).

As they became aware of the skills and competences they gained, 12 pre-service teachers in our study highlighted their growing sense of confidence and ability to focus on their strengths as student teachers. Ella, for instance, explained that through her studies she had discovered strengths about herself that she was not aware of, and that her studies helped her to develop new skills: 'I did find some hidden talents, I guess. For example, I'm much more creative than I give myself credit for'. Bree also discovered that she was very 'authentic and honest' in classroom settings and appreciated the positive relationships she could build with her students which reassured her that she had chosen the right career pathway for herself and made her look forward to her future as a teacher.

Research on the role of confidence in teacher education programmes has found that it has become increasingly important to emphasise the development of pre-service teachers' 'ownership of their craft' (Stahl *et al*., 2016: 725) and to further understand how they develop their practical and theoretical skills in and outside of the classroom in order to foster their teacher identity and to help them thrive in their chosen profession (Anspal *et al*., 2012; Ghaye, 2011). Gregersen *et al*. (2022) have shown that, when the focus is placed on teachers' strengths rather than their weaknesses, they can become more confident, courageous and agentic in their teaching. As such, a strength-based approach in teacher education programmes could play a valuable role in helping pre-service teachers become aware of their strengths and develop a sense of confidence and wellbeing, rather than taking a critical deficit view which focuses unduly on what they cannot yet do (Gregersen *et al*., 2022; Kaplan, 2014; Marable & Raimondi, 2007).

Another resource contributing to the motivation of the pre-service teachers in this study concerned the positive teaching experiences during their teacher education programmes. All 20 participants in this study reported about how positive experiences during their practica affected their motivation and sense of commitment to teaching. Ruby highlighted that, before her first practica, she was still considering changing her studies. After her first teaching experiences in her school placement, she changed her opinion and decided that this was indeed the right profession for her: 'Before it was just hearing about it and knowing, but then doing – going and seeing and doing it myself, I'm even more convinced'. Similarly, Pete recalled one of his first teaching experiences in which his students gave him such positive feedback in form of standing ovations; this motivated him immensely and also boosted his wellbeing:

> It was the first mini-placement, but all of a sudden students started giving me standing ovations and I was like 'okay, is this for me? Or did just someone enter the room?'. I didn't even consider being treated like that and it was just such a boost, such a rush. It was amazing.

Mara also reported on the positive teaching experiences during her practica and explained that each teaching opportunity made her want to come back to school and continue teaching, which for her was the ultimate sign that she had chosen the right profession: 'I think I have high points every single time that I'm teaching a practicum at one of the schools, so I feel like there's always something that makes me want to come back and, and continue teaching'. The tenor of these pre-service teachers' experiences in the classroom was mostly related to the positive relationships they formed with their students, even if it was just for a few lessons at a time. Nataly, for instance, explained: 'The children are absolutely delightful. It's an all-girls school, so there's barely any behavioural issues apart from chatting or just being silly. There is not really anything to deal with', and she concluded that 'the children are just lovely'. In another example, Noah described 'how much fun [teaching students] is' and how this 'keeps [him] going'. In Frank's case, what he appreciated in the classroom was that students perceived him as a role model whom they could identify with: 'Many students identified themselves with me. They saw a foreigner who teaches French, maybe it's best if they listen, because he's a foreigner himself and he's made it this far, so I was like a role model for them'. This positive feedback from his students motivated Frank and affected his identity as a teacher.

Research on pre-service teachers' relationships with their students during practica has revealed indeed that pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching are largely influenced by the relationships they create with their students (Yuan & Lee, 2014). In a study by Ng *et al.* (2010), the authors highlight that pre-service teachers' beliefs about building a good

student–teacher rapport influenced their motivation to teach and self-efficacy in the classroom. Furthermore, when student–teacher relationships are perceived by pre-service teachers as positive and gratifying, they can experience higher job satisfaction and willingness to remain in the profession (Wubbels & Korthagen, 1990). In turn, pre-service teachers' intrinsic motivation prior to starting to teach can have a great impact on a student's enjoyment, participation in class and eagerness to learn (de Jong *et al.*, 2014).

Although these pre-service teachers developed a sense of confidence through their positive teaching experiences, they, naturally, still made mistakes in the classroom. However, five pre-service teachers in our study explicitly mentioned that they were not afraid to tackle these and tried to develop a growth mindset about making mistakes. Ruby, for example, highlighted that she generally felt confident as a student teacher, but if there were things she did not know, she was not afraid to let the students know: 'I think I'm quite confident. […] And if you ask me a question and I don't know how to explain to you this grammar thing, I'll find it out and I'll explain it to you next time. That's okay'. A similar example was provided by Pete who also stressed that he was not afraid of making mistakes, as these experiences could help him become a better person and teacher:

> One of my strengths is that I'm very confident in what I'm doing. If I make a mistake, it's not that big of a deal and even if it's the end of the world for the student, I don't care, because I know that I can do this, and I know that I can grow from it. And I always tell my students, that mistakes are not the end of the world. […] So, you see, I'm the person who is confident enough to look forward to having that lesson, because I feel that without having it, I'm not the teacher I want to be.

A sense of perfectionism can threaten any teachers' wellbeing (Jones, 2016; Stoeber & Rennert, 2008), but it can be especially damaging during the earlier phases of a teacher's career. This stage is typically characterised by teachers' uncertainty and tendency towards perfectionism, as they are still adjusting to a more realistic set of expectations regarding the professional and personal demands of the teaching profession (Palos & Samfira, 2021; see also Chapter 4). For these five teachers, being able to positively react to and learn from their mistakes was a key resource to help support their wellbeing and counter these potential problems. These teachers accepted that they could not be perfect and flawless. Bree explained: 'I have no problem admitting not being perfect in certain areas or making mistakes, I'm just trying to show that I'm a real person as well'. Similarly, Frank accepted that he would not always be fully prepared and the gradual loss of perfectionism and increased sense of realism served as a protective factor against the stress of teaching: 'Teachers want to have everything prepared, everything written, everything planned. That doesn't always

work. And I already go into this career knowing that I won't be prepared every day'. Indeed, when pre-service teachers are invited to reflect upon their own strengths, but also to gain awareness of their limits, they can gain higher self-efficacy and thus experience better wellbeing (Saraç, 2017; Shirazizadeh & Karimpour, 2019). This shift to more realistic expectations and letting go of perfectionism is an important phase to go through to cope better with the demands the teaching profession poses on them in real daily life. In fact, if teachers learn how to reduce their perfectionistic tendencies during their pre-service education programmes, they are better equipped to cope with the realities of teaching and might be more resilient in their early-career phase as teachers.

Although the pandemic crisis inevitably posed challenges to these teachers' wellbeing and sense of competence, it also provided some of them with the opportunity to learn new skills and knowledge they could reuse in the future beyond the pandemic. Three participants in this study reported positively on the competences accumulated during this time, and how these strengthened their sense of efficacy. Ella highlighted how the transition to online teaching positively contributed to her motivation to pursue the teaching career, as she learned new skills she probably would not have acquired otherwise in such a short time and how this experience ultimately gave her confidence in her abilities as a teacher:

> What I enjoy the most, specific to the pandemic? Just the learning a new skill. So finding new ways to teach digitally. Learning how to screen capture and learning how to make different assignments. In a way, I think it does make me a better teacher in the end. […] And honestly, I think it has actually made me more motivated to be in teaching […] Because I think now, I realized that even in a pandemic, I can teach and they learn something. So, apparently, I am good, better at this than I thought. That has motivated me.

Her experience was echoed by Judy who reported becoming 'really good with online stuff' and learning how to be 'more creative and resourceful with online tools'. Although the Covid-19 pandemic crisis 'represents a traumatic event that has profoundly changed working conditions' (Finstad *et al.*, 2021: 1), research has also shown that such traumatic experiences can change people's perspectives and can lead to positive reactions, resilience and feelings of post-traumatic growth (PTG) (Bonanno, 2004; Brooks *et al.*, 2020; Finstad *et al.*, 2021; Littleton *et al.*, 2007). Not everyone will experience growth, but as Olson *et al.* (2020: 1830) explain, 'growth may occur by responding to the trauma in a manner that focuses on learning how the trauma might serve as a positive catalyst for the future'. It can thus be useful for pre-service teachers to learn adaptive coping strategies and reflect on the potential for growth after any crisis or failure to help develop resilience which will be useful throughout their career.

## 3.3 Scaffolding Social Support

The relationships pre-service language teachers experience during their studies and practica play a key role in their journey to becoming in-service language teachers. The quality of the support and scaffolding provided by mentors, professors and colleagues is vital during this phase and can ultimately determine their long-term commitment to the profession (Mansfield *et al.*, 2014; McGraw & Davis, 2017). For the pre-service teachers in our study, scaffolded support and caring relationships at university and in school positively contributed to their wellbeing by enhancing their confidence in their abilities, sustaining their motivation to pursue the teaching profession, and empowering them with a sense of agency. In contrast, poor mentorship and a lack of collegial support during this phase negatively informed the emotional tenor of their initial teaching experiences, making them feel unwelcomed in the teaching community, and compromising their teacher identity and confidence.

### 3.3.1 Challenges

To be able to successfully navigate their teaching education programmes and practica experiences in the classroom, pre-service teachers need to be adequately supported by a strong network of relationships, including mentors, university professors, peers and colleagues. The lack of support and guidance throughout the process of becoming a teacher can damage pre-service teachers' wellbeing (Paquette & Rieg, 2016) and personal growth (Devos, 2010). Crucially, it can have important repercussions for their motivation to become teachers and their willingness to remain in the profession (Beltman *et al.*, 2011; Mansfield *et al.*, 2014).

The relationships pre-service teachers build with their mentors are known to be particularly influential for their development as teachers (Arshavskaya, 2016; McGraw & Davis, 2017). These 'have the potential to help preservice teachers considerably in the process of socialization into the profession' (Izadinia, 2016: 128) and, as such, can be defining in shaping the kinds of teachers they are going to become. Six pre-service language teachers in our study equally split between the Austrian and British contexts reported on the challenges related to the perceived limited guidance received from their mentors. One of these challenges was a lack of practical support during their internships in school, as highlighted by Maya, a pre-service language teacher from Austria:

> My relationships with them have all been fine, but I would say a little bit too distanced. There is just kind of a little bit of a distance and maybe not as much support as I would have liked. Doing this for the first time, or even the second time, it's still not that much when you consider it. So, just a bit more hands on support. Real experiences being exchanged would have been nice.

Another pre-service teacher from Austria, Bree, explained that she would have appreciated more hands-on training and personalised feedback from her mentor while conducting her lessons:

> I wouldn't say that I really had any training from her, in a specific way, she never watched me in a classroom […] I was typically alone even though I wasn't supposed to be, but I also enjoyed it in the sense that the class is a little different when the teacher is around […] Probably, not all the time, but I would have appreciated more feedback if she would at least come in a few times.

Interestingly, while these Austrian pre-service teachers highlighted the need for more practical support and feedback during their practica, three pre-service teachers in the UK context called for more individualised interaction with their mentors. This was the case for Judy, who explained: 'She [mentor] has premade sentences that she uses, which makes sense because she can get really involved in with all her duties […] So I can get some support from her but she's not the person that knows me the best'. Rebecca was left to battle with the challenges of teaching by herself: 'Every time I asked for help, I was told pretty much "no". I was told that in the training I need to figure out these things myself'. Mark, similarly, reported being 'left alone' by his mentor; he also felt that he was given minimal individualised support: 'He was just giving me drips of information every here and there just little tips. That's not how it's meant to go'. The lack of guidance from his mentor led him to reconsider the choice of becoming a teacher: 'I thought that, "oh, maybe this isn't the place for me", because of this negativity straight away'. This reveals the potential impact exerted by mentor on pre-service teachers' development and career choices, an issue that is well-documented in the literature (Devos, 2010; McIntyre & Hobson, 2016). Despite mentors playing a crucial role in the lives of pre-service teachers, they do not always receive formal training to be prepared for this role (Beutel & Spooner-Lane, 2009). As such, the quality of their mentorship can often be rather 'hit or miss' (Russell & Russell, 2011: 2), with important consequences for their mentees. If these experiences with mentors and feedback culture at their school are negative and imbued with tension, this can be detrimental for the preservice teachers' motivation and confidence for teaching (Copland, 2010).

In addition to a negative relationship with mentors, two Austrian pre-service language teachers also commented on the challenges caused by a perceived lack of support from their university professors. Mara saw some of her professors as 'obstacles' into her path to becoming an in-service teacher: 'While becoming a teacher you're going to have obstacles that you need to overcome during university, a lot of professors, or classes, or practica, or whatever else it is. They kind of put in your way'. According to Amelie, her professors had an unrealistic expectation in the workload

they assigned to students, leaving them feeling overwhelmed: 'I sometimes think that they don't really realise how much we're actually doing […] But actually, in the teachers' program, I have a feeling that all of us are doing much more'. Like mentors, teacher educators play a defining role in shaping pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching and socialising them into the requirements of their future roles (Izadinia, 2016). Without their positive, individualised support, pre-service teachers may experience a sense of loneliness, insecurity and eventually lose their motivation to teach. The implication is that teacher educators and mentors need to be adequately trained to support pre-service teachers in terms of the emotional and practical challenges of teaching. As Cochran-Smith (2003: 6) argues, more attention should be given 'to what teachers of teachers themselves need to know, and to what institutional supports need to be in place in order to meet the complex demands of preparing teachers for the 21st century'.

The degree of mentorship and support offered by school colleagues during practica also contributed to shaping these pre-service teachers' initial experiences in school. Three pre-service language teachers in our study, two of whom were based in the UK and one in Austria, reported on their negative experiences with colleagues. Nataly from the UK, for instance, found particularly distressing not receiving enough advice from some of her colleagues, or receiving too much of it from others; she felt that this was indeed 'what I'm finding most frustrating, and challenging'. Rebecca, also based in the UK, reported that her expectations regarding the challenges she would encounter at school changed: 'I thought that the main challenges would be kids and I found the main challenge is actually the staff'. This made her first placement feel 'horrendous'. As highlighted by Izadinia (2016: 138), 'the more positive experiences pre-service teachers have in the practicum, the more likely they are to stay in the profession'. Given that colleagues, professors and mentors serve as the 'gatekeepers to the teaching profession' (Graves, 2010: 219), the kind of support they provide to pre-service teachers as they begin to navigate the unfamiliar challenges of the profession is critical. Ideally, an appropriate balance between autonomy and support, individualised feedback, clear expectations and personalised interaction attending to the emotional dimensions of teaching would provide vital resources to support pre-service teachers while they cope with the many obstacles they may encounter along their path to becoming teachers.

With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic and the transition to online learning and teaching, the relationships pre-service language teachers had built with their mentors, professors and colleagues inevitably shifted. While some pre-service teachers experienced stronger empathy and compassion from their university professors, mentors and colleagues, other pre-service teachers felt increasingly detached from their relationships at university and in school. Four pre-service language teachers in our study, three of whom were based in Austria and one in Spain, reported on

the difficulties in communicating with their university professors during the first wave of the pandemic crisis. Mara, who was based in Austria, highlighted that, 'communication between students and professors is just really messed up right now'. She also commented that professors would assign more work than usual, suggesting a lack of empathy under such taxing circumstances: 'I would usually tell the professors when I'm overwhelmed with the workload, and when I do that now, I don't really get positive responses. I've also done that because I've noticed that there's a lot more than it will usually be'. The insufficient guidance and structure from professors during the pandemic were also reported by Carmen in Spain, who commented:

> It was almost impossible to establish a connection because they weren't available on Skype or because they didn't answer. Some teachers just disappeared. And I was a bit despaired […] I needed feedback, I needed to know [what to do] and that also made me really, really stressed.

Similarly, Amelie from Austria was stressed by the lack of interaction with professors: 'Some of them don't give us any information, that is really bothering. Because you are like "What should I do?"'. The limited communication with some professors during this time seemed to have substantially contributed to the overall sense of uncertainty and frustration these pre-service language teachers were already experiencing. During this period, they felt a need for more support and reassurance than ever. Research on pre-service teachers during the first pandemic wave has also highlighted the importance of student–lecturer interactions and the need for clear, unequivocal instructions from educators (Nasri *et al.*, 2020; Pather *et al.*, 2020). Interestingly, however, none of the six pre-service language teachers interviewed during the first wave of the pandemic crisis reported that their relationships with their mentors and peers had deteriorated during this particular period of time. The compassion and empathy offered by their mentors and fellow pre-service teachers during this time was in fact an extremely positive resource for them which helped them to endure the challenges brought along by the transition to online learning and teaching.

### 3.3.2 Resources

The relationships and social interactions pre-service teachers engage in at university and during their practica are at the heart of their learning experiences, motivations and beliefs about teaching. When adequately provided, this served as an invaluable resource to maintain and fuel pre-service teachers' enthusiasm for their job, their resilience in the face of adversities and confidence in their teaching abilities.

The theoretical and practical input provided by university professors, as well as the compassion and empathy shown towards their students,

were perceived by 13 pre-service language teachers in this study as playing a paramount role in supporting their journey to becoming language teachers. While much of the literature on pre-service teachers to date has focused on their relationships with mentors (see e.g. Arshavskaya, 2016; McGraw & Davis, 2017), studies investigating the impact of teacher educators on pre-service teachers' wellbeing are much scarcer. However, their influence on student teachers' development should not be overlooked; they play an active part in the process of socialising pre-service teachers into the requirements of the profession, and in shaping the kinds of teachers they will become in the future (Izadinia, 2016). Ten teachers in our study, six of whom were based in Austria and four in the UK, reported on the empathy and emotional support offered by their professors as key resources sustaining them through their studies. Maya highlighted how her professors' understanding and flexibility in relation to the workload they assigned influenced her wellbeing. As seen in the previous section, difficulties in managing the workload were indeed one the most pressing challenges during this phase for some of these teachers:

> It probably does influence my wellbeing if they're understanding of the workload that we do have. To be more flexible is always nice and appreciated. You know, sometimes we ask 'could we maybe have the deadline a little bit later' or something and a lot of the time they're okay with these things. Because they understand and I appreciate that. And so, yeah, there's a little bit more empathy with the amount of work needed to be done.

Mara emphasised the vital role played by her emotional interactions with professors for her motivation to become a teacher: 'What pushes me […] It's more like the emotional connections that I have with professors and feeling that they actually care about my wellbeing and my professional career'. Mary compared the two departments in her teaching education programme in Austria where she attended her classes, respectively German and English, and reported dissimilarities in the way her professors related to her as an individual other than a student:

> In German, they're really strict and there's not a lot of contact between students and the teachers. And in English they are all so lovely, they're so nice and they want to talk with you and want to know how you're doing. And they also remember your name and I was impressed when someone was greeting me and I was like, 'You remember me? Why?'. In the German department it's different […] you're just a number. And in the English department, you have a name.

Interestingly, while pre-service language teachers in Austria perceived differences in the way their professors related to them across diverse university departments, a pre-service language teacher who took part in the teaching education programme both in the UK and Austria, Lea,

perceived considerable differences in the amount and quality of support from professors in the two countries:

> In Austria, some teachers say, 'If you have a problem, ask your colleagues, don't ask me' […] whereas [in the UK] they're like: 'We're here. Before you have a problem, if you feel like a problem is coming, come and talk to us, and we'll you know, find a way'. […] You always have the feeling that you can always go to them, you can always send them an email […] they keep saying how important it is to like not be by yourself.

Mark, who was also based in the UK, appreciated this sense of emotional support: 'They genuinely do want the best for you'. During the first wave of the pandemic crisis, the opportunities for open communication and emotional support offered by university professors also served as critical resources sustaining pre-service teachers' wellbeing under these particularly taxing circumstances. Four pre-service language teachers in this study reported on the proactive help offered by the university professors throughout this time. Ella, for instance, reported on the understanding and interest shown by one of her teachers:

> The other teacher actually has been a tremendous help to me. She contacted me one on one in a video call and helped me with all the deadlines too, because I was really lost with the deadlines. So that's really nice. And she's been really helpful to all of us. She's been checking in with us.

These examples highlight the importance for pre-service language teachers, and for university students more generally, to feel that their professors care for them personally as well as professionally. Without this individualised emotional support, as seen in the previous section, they may feel demotivated, marginalised, and even reconsider their career choices. Constructing effective pastoral support mechanisms for students in higher education can be defining for their academic development and overall wellbeing (McChlery & Wilkie, 2009). Furthermore, the discrepancies found between the two contexts suggest that, while pastoral care is highly valued within the UK higher education setting, this may not consistently be the case in Austria, where this kind of pastoral support is typically not offered within teacher education programmes but rests largely on individual dispositions.

The scaffolded support and emotional connection with professors at university also needed to be paired with appropriate guidance by mentors at school. Nine pre-service language teachers in our study, four of whom were based in Austria and five in the UK, reported on how their positive relationships with their mentors sustained them in various ways throughout their practica. Alina, who was based in the UK, greatly valued how her mentors were not pressuring but enabled pre-service teachers to

approach classroom teaching at their own time and pace, thus being very mindful about their potential stress:

> They train really well the mentors because my mentor's amazing, she said you know when you're ready you can start slowly and slowly so that process makes you feel like more like 'ah! yes, take your time', I don't need to stress. Some of the people have already started teaching because maybe they're feeling more comfortable, and some others weren't teaching at all […] I feel like that's really smart because it doesn't make you feel the pressure […] that in itself relieves you so much stress because if I had to teach straight away, I would be panicking.

She also reported on how the encouragement and positive feedback given by her mentor served as a stress relief for her: 'For us as new teachers, having all this praise it makes you feel like "Wow! She is proud of me. That means I've done well!" […] and that as well in itself relieves you of the stress'. Similarly, the positive feedback and trust shown by Sally's mentor in the Austrian context emerged as sources of positive emotions and satisfaction: 'I got really, really good feedback from my Spanish mentor. After my first lesson, she said like, "you know what? You could start right away. Teaching now." […] I felt really good about that'. This highlights the value of positive feedback from mentors and a supportive relationship as a resource for pre-service language teachers not only in terms of evaluating their own progress and performance but also in terms of feeling appreciated. Indeed, the feedback received during this phase is paramount to building pre-service teachers' sense of efficacy in relation to teaching; mentor teachers have indeed a substantial impact pre-service teachers' perceptions of their competency and self-worth in the classroom (Ticknor, 2014). This, in turn, can inform their future outlook on the profession and empower them with agency and resilience as they move ahead in their careers (Grima-Farrell, 2015).

In addition to the positive feedback and encouragement from their mentors, another relational characteristic greatly valued by pre-service teachers as a key resource supporting their wellbeing during their initial teaching experiences was scaffolded support. Indeed, 'much of a mentor teacher's role is about providing encouraging and challenging scaffolding for the process of learning to teach' (Le Cornu, 2009: 722). This scaffolded support, however, needs to be balanced with commensurate autonomy and an expression of confidence in the teachers' abilities. The ratio between the degree of support and autonomy needed by each student may vary on an individual basis; indeed, as explained by Lea, 'it depends on your personality'. Three teachers in our study, two based in the UK and one in Austria, also reported on the importance of reaching this balance. Ruby, for example, mentioned how her mentor provided her with guidance while also trusting her and giving her the autonomy she needed: 'She tried to guide me and support me throughout the project […] she trusts me so much and

I'm amazed and actually scared, and I'm like, "are you sure?"'. Lea also assigned importance to the balance between guidance and autonomy she was given by her first mentor; in her opinion, this balance contributed to making her first practicum experience a very positive one:

> My first school was absolutely lovely, like absolutely, because my mentor was my age […] I found that weird at the start, I was a bit sceptical but to be honest […] She was just like, 'we can learn from each other' and she was very nice […] I feel like mentoring is more than just having a person that knows everything and, you know, it's more like, letting you try out stuff […] She just said 'Try out whatever you like and then you'll see afterwards', and we discussed afterwards. She gave me extensive feedback. She's never been a mentor, so she really had an informal feedback book where she like gave me extensive feedback, what went well, what didn't go [well].

Pete, a pre-service language teacher in Austria, greatly valued being given autonomy and freedom over scaffolded support: 'Now that I'm older, I prefer the freedom and autonomy and I think that's what research says. The younger you are, the more inexperienced you are, the more structure you need'. A study on pre-service teachers' relationship with their mentor by Izadinia (2015: 7) has reported similar findings; the author highlighted that, 'for some, having the freedom to test their teaching ideas freely in the classroom was very significant; for others, being consistently supported mattered the most'. It strengthens the case for personalised support, based on each pre-service teacher's own needs, preferences and pace.

Other social relationships that were defining for pre-service teachers were those they built with their university peers during their teacher education programme. Thirteen pre-service teachers in this study, six in Austria and seven in the UK, reported on the mutual support received by their peers throughout their journey to becoming teachers. Sally from Austria recommends that those who have just entered the programme to 'connect, or become friends with your peers'. She added: 'I think that's crucial. I know a lot of people who gave up their studies because they don't find friends'. Reaching out to peers, especially when feeling under pressure or experiencing challenges was seen by Mara, also based in Austria, to alleviate her stress: 'If you just tighten up it's going to get overwhelming. Talk to your peers. I got really anxious because of my professor that wasn't supportive and I talked to colleagues and that helped a lot'. According to Cynthia, a student in the UK, without that kind of support, 'you would just burn out and you would just probably collapse in a heap', highlighting how supportive relationship with peers can serve as a source of resilience for student teachers.

In a similar vein, Howard and Johnson (2004) have also highlighted how peer support can serve a protective factor against stress, emphasising the value of collaboration and mutual support. Peer support has, indeed,

'emerged as being central to both the learning communities model and to the development of resilience' (Le Cornu, 2009: 721). These positive effects appeared even amplified in the case of small cohorts, as highlighted by pre-service teachers in the UK. Teacher training cohorts in the UK typically included only 15–16 students who remain together as a coherent group throughout; this, according to Mark, contributed to strengthening their connections: 'That's great, that's a little family. And that's how it works'. He further commented on his relationships with his peers outside the PGCE course: 'We do socialize quite a lot on the weekends, and stuff like that. We've got a chat where we talk in it, so I'd say I'm very close to the people on my languages course and I'm happy about that'. Similarly, Frank highlighted the close relationships among the peers in his cohort: 'I think there are only 15 or 16 of us in our programme, for example. So you can imagine, we are like a family'.

In contrast, Mary, who was based in Austria, described a different kind of relationship with her peers: 'And at university […] I wouldn't say [we are] friends. I would say you meet them in courses, you talk, you kind of meet them again. Or go somewhere, to an event together. But I would still say [we are] colleagues and not friends'. However, the distinction between the Austrian and UK contexts may be related not only to the small cohort size but also to the specific structure of the PGCE course (Mairitsch *et al*., 2021). In the UK, pre-service teachers remain in the same cohort over the whole duration of their PGCE studies, whereas in Austria, the modular nature of the teaching education programmes means that pre-service teachers attend a multitude of classes with different peer groups each semester (Mairitsch *et al*., 2021). As such, the strength of relationships, sense of belonging and degree of support received from peers in this context is likely to impact differently on their peer relationships as a resource compared to the UK cohort system.

## 3.4 Summary

The present chapter has presented three main themes that characterise the pre-service career phase. These are: managing student life and school life, building knowledge and experiencing the realities of classroom life, and scaffolding social support. Each theme has revealed unique challenges that pre-service teachers faced during this particular phase of their career, and resources that they drew on to manage and nurture their wellbeing. One of the key challenges characterising this phase was related to issues in finding one's teacher identity and simultaneously managing dual student and teacher roles, coping with multiple tasks and increased workload as they combine studies and teaching in the classroom, and subsequent difficulties in finding an appropriate work–life balance. However, for some pre-service teachers, having a dual role as both students and teachers was also seen as a resource; indeed, they enjoyed being able to switch

between the two roles and experience the benefits of working in both worlds. Over time, many of these student teachers also managed to handle their multiple responsibilities and find a better balance between their studies, work and private lives.

Another defining challenge for this career phase was the initial insecurity and limited confidence, which was paired with a perceived imbalance between the theoretical and practical competences acquired during their teacher training programmes. This led to issues such as a low sense of efficacy, a lack of knowledge of behaviour management techniques, as well as a sense of reality shock upon entering the language classroom. However, when these pre-service teachers valued the theoretical knowledge and practical skills accumulated throughout their teacher training programme, they felt equipped with increased confidence in their abilities, motivation and enthusiasm for the chosen career path. Furthermore, these experiences provided them with a sense of realism regarding the demands of the profession. The findings have revealed the central role played by practical teaching experiences for pre-service teachers. These served as a source of confidence, motivation, as well as a better understanding of the realities of teaching. These experiences can also prevent them from experiencing a mismatch between their initial ideals and the realities of the language classroom when they get qualified teacher status. Indeed, this remains a central issue in the early career phase when affordances for extensive and high-quality practical teaching experiences are not provided (see Chapter 4).

Finally, this phase was defined by a need for scaffolded support and guidance at university and school; when this was not provided, this could lead to frustration, a sense of abandonment and insecurity, which could challenge these student teachers' motivation to pursue the teaching career. In contrast, when scaffolded guidance was offered by university professors, mentors, school colleagues, as well as peers, this served as invaluable sources of both pedagogical as well as emotional support, which was especially needed at this time. Only through personalised feedback on their teaching performances, tailored guidance, and appropriate emotional support did these pre-service teachers make positive sense of their experiences and gain a better understanding of their identities and role as a professional. As such, teacher education programmes need to ensure that pre-service teachers are offered extensive opportunities for practice in the classroom paired with scaffolded guidance and support from teacher educators and mentors.

The experiences in classrooms and teacher educator programmes can inform pre-service teachers' outlook towards the profession, as well as their motivation, enthusiasm and resilience not just in the present but looking ahead along their entire professional career trajectory (Grima-Farrell, 2015). At this stage, these experiences can set the tone for the start and potential path of development throughout their careers. If we want language teachers to flourish in their professional roles, we need to create and model positive wellbeing behaviours and strategies right from the outset.

# 4 Early-Career Language Teachers

In this section, we present the findings from the teachers in the early-career phase. Four main themes emerged from the interview data in relation to the resources and challenges teachers faced during this phase: learning on the job, developing realism, learning to balance personal and professional lives, and seeking support and mentorship within the school.

Twenty-two early-career teachers were interviewed before ($n$ = 14), and during ($n$ = 8) the pandemic crisis. More information about their biodata can be found in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 below.

**Table 4.1** Early-career teachers' biodata and demographic information (pre-pandemic)

| Pseudonym | Gender | Country of residence | Age group | Languages taught |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Andrew | M | Austria | 25–34 | English, German |
| Anja | F | Austria | 25–34 | English |
| Christina | F | Austria | 25–34 | English |
| Finn | M | Austria | 25–34 | English, German |
| Hannah | F | Austria | 25–34 | English |
| Julia | F | Austria | 25–34 | English, German |
| Bonnie | F | UK | 25–34 | Chinese, English, Russian |
| Daisy | F | UK | 35–44 | French, Spanish |
| Florence | F | UK | 35–44 | French |
| Josephine | F | UK | 25–34 | Chinese, French |
| Mila | F | UK | 35–44 | French |
| Sabrina | F | UK | 25–34 | French |
| Stephanie | F | UK | 55–64 | Chinese |
| Tracey | F | UK | 25–34 | German, French |

**Table 4.2** Early-career teachers' biodata and demographic information (during the pandemic)

| Pseudonym | Gender | Country of residence | Age group | Languages taught |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Amber | F | US | 25–34 | German, Spanish |
| Charlotte | F | US | 24 or younger | Spanish |
| Gabriela | F | Nicaragua | 24 or younger | English |
| Hilary | F | Argentina | 25–34 | English, German |
| Jennifer | F | UK | 45–54 | French, German, Spanish |
| Liliana | F | Hungary | 25–34 | English |
| Louise | F | Switzerland | 45–54 | French |
| Robin | N/A | Netherlands | 35–44 | French |

## 4.1 Learning on the Job

Across the different contexts, the early-career phase appeared characterised by two interrelated professional coming-of-age processes. Firstly, initial teaching experiences provided teachers with opportunities to develop further their knowledge and skills about their chosen profession, but also this time sees most of the teachers grow in confidence and self-efficacy, as they become increasingly self-assured in their classroom roles. This period of time was marked by a steep learning curve about how to teach in the real world and how to find one's identity in the profession through processes of discovery, experimentation, and repeated trial and error. These teachers were learning on the job and gaining in confidence as they found their own way of doing things.

### 4.1.1 Challenges

It is unsurprising that, at the beginning of their careers, teachers are insecure in their professional roles. Starting in school, they are typically confronted with a number of new and unfamiliar responsibilities and tasks in an unfamiliar environment which can make them question their sense of efficacy. Indeed, 9 out of our 22 early-career participants mentioned feeling unprepared to deal with the realities of the language classroom at the start of their teaching career. These teachers reported on a number of interrelated challenges affecting their confidence and thus undermining their wellbeing during this phase. One of these challenges included a perceived lack of content knowledge. Josephine, for instance, talked about her perceived lack of preparation in the subject she was teaching: 'When I first started, I felt like: "Oh, my goodness! How am I going to teach them? I don't even know this"'. Julia, for instance, also explained that she felt inhibited about putting her ideas into action in the classroom due to her perceived lack of knowledge: 'I felt kind of […] inhibited, so sometimes I thought: "This would be a cool idea!" But I

didn't know if I could pull it off because I thought I just didn't have the knowledge to do it'. Without sufficient prior teaching experience, these teachers did not seem to possess a frame of reference to draw on; as such, this was a period marked by uncertainty.

This uncertainty and lack of confidence was also expressed in their sense of inadequacy. Tracey highlighted that, 'when you're just starting out, you're not really sure what you're doing'. Anja reported feeling 'afraid of seeming stupid […] I felt really insecure'. This lack of experience and heightened insecurity were major challenges to their wellbeing during this particular career phase. Indeed, these are familiar issues in the literature on early-career teachers. As they transition from being 'students of teaching' to 'teachers of students' (Ingersoll, 2012), beginning teachers typically need to deal with concerns regarding their content knowledge (McCann & Johannessen, 2004) and low confidence in their teaching skills (Castro *et al*., 2010). Research conducted in the British setting has suggested a reduced or developing sense of efficacy within the first four years of teaching and increased efficacy between five and seven years in the profession (Day *et al*., 2006, 2007).

Uncertainty and limited efficacy were paired with a strong sense of vulnerability. As seen earlier, vulnerability can be viewed as a structural characteristic of teaching and can be attributed to a variety of sources ranging from the micro-level of the classroom to the macro-level of policy and administration (Kelchtermans, 2011). For early-career teachers, in particular, the majority of this vulnerability concerned the micro-level of the classroom. This was mostly related to the perceived lack of control they experienced in relation to the classroom environment, student behaviour, and student outcomes. Naturally, when early-career teachers perceived their locus of control as external, their sense of agency was challenged.

The sense of unpreparedness to deal with the demands of the teaching profession is often attributed to the perceived inadequacy of training and pre-service education programmes which leave early-career teachers to 'sink or swim' (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004: 28) in the face of the initial challenges of the profession. In our study, four participants reported on the mismatch they perceived between the extensive theory and a lack of practical teaching preparation offered by their university programmes. This emerged as a major source of stress once they entered the language classroom, contributing to a sense of 'reality shock', which is frequently seen as defining for this phase (Mason, 2017). Christina, for instance, revealed her dissatisfaction with this aspect of her studies: 'I would have changed our studies a lot because I think we are not prepared to teach. We are prepared to be kind of expert at our subjects, but we are not prepared. The "how" is just not enough'. Crucially, this sense of unpreparedness appeared to have challenged her sense of identity as a teacher: 'I cannot really imagine myself there [in the classroom] and what I really do and how I do it'.

In the literature, there is a broad-ranging discussion about the problems student teachers face in transitioning from the theoretical foundations of many pre-service training courses to the reality of the classrooms they work in. For example, research from Russell and McPherson (2001) has revealed substantial gaps between the preparation gained in teacher education programmes and the realities experienced upon entering the classroom. They highlight the gap between teachers' preparation and the actual demands of in-service teaching. This has implications for the pre-service preparation of teachers which, in several context, including Austria and the UK, has been addressed through the introduction of practica in teacher training programmes to overcome this perceived mismatch and offer increased levels of in-class experience.

As in the case of pre-service teachers, also for early-career language teachers, additional challenges may be posed by a perceived low level of language proficiency. This was the case for seven of our participants, who highlighted a lack of confidence and preparation in relation to their own language competences. These teachers reported feeling either not proficient enough in the language they taught or not confident enough to teach it to others. An example was provided by Jennifer who explained, 'I was actually having to teach myself Spanish before I taught it to them and kind of looking up and saying, "Well hang on, what's this? What does this mean?" and that sort of thing'. Louise reported feeling a lack of language training during her studies: 'I probably didn't have a specific enough language teaching training because of the way that I was taught when I did my teacher training'. Language teachers typically use their language in class as a skill; as such, their own language competence is permanently on display. In light of the ongoing nature of the language learning process, 'most nonnative language teachers are likely to have uncomfortable moments speaking their target language' (Horwitz, 1996: 366). This sense of inadequacy can lead in turn to feelings of language anxiety (Horwitz, 1996), suggesting the central role played by self-efficacy for language teachers in particular. A meta-analysis conducted by Mason (2017) suggests indeed that language teachers, who possess higher self-efficacy in their language teaching abilities, are better equipped to overcome the challenges they are likely to experience during the first years in the profession. It is important that pre-service teachers have sufficient training in the language they are meant to teach so they feel prepared for their professional roles and can approach language issues with confidence (Ewart, 2009).

Data collected during the pandemic saw a continuation of this problem in confidence among this population. All teachers were confronted with an entirely new teaching and living situation (MacIntyre *et al.*, 2020), and the transition to online learning and teaching meant learning to teach in a completely different context under unprecedented conditions. All eight early-career participants interviewed during the pandemic reported

on these challenges which were compounded by a lack of clear instructions from school, resources, or training. Hilary, for instance, reported:

> It's completely different and it's like starting all over again. I have a lot of, or some previous experience that allows me to know what to do and what not to do. But still, it is the first time that I teach online. It's sometimes hard to put up with some problems that may arise.

Hilary's confidence in her teaching abilities, which was in the process of becoming established, was disrupted by the transition to online teaching: 'I am quite confident in my classes, and with online classes it has completely changed'. Similarly, Robin also added that, in light of this shift, his 'motivation dropped dramatically'. Thus, although teachers at all career stages were suddenly repositioned as early-career teachers in the online context suffering from a weakened and unsettled sense of confidence as a professional (Gregersen *et al.*, 2021), those actually at the beginning of their careers were in an especially difficult position. It seems that the gains they had been making in self-efficacy and in becoming a more confident professional were suddenly disrupted again, and their self-efficacy was set back in a retrograde step.

### 4.1.2 Resources

Although many of these early-career teachers battled insecurities as they faced new realities and challenges, they were also in the process of building up their resources in terms of skills and knowledge on a daily basis. Indeed, it was in the classroom context that they could further develop their practical expertise and acquire confidence in their teaching abilities. During this phase, they were learning on the job and finding strategies for coping with a range of challenges. Nineteen out of the 22 early-career participants characterised the early-career phase as one of becoming familiar with the profession by gaining practical experience in the language classroom. These teachers referred to this process in various ways. Mila, for instance, defined this phase as 'learning to teach'. Julia, Josephine and Hilary referred to this process as 'finding your way'. Similarly, Ulrich recalled the first few years in the teaching profession as a phase of 'finding your steps', while Sabrina mentioned a process of 'finding your feet'.

Six teachers reported on the early-career phase as one of experimentation and trial and error. What these definitions have in common is the concept of discovery, which concerned not only finding their own teaching style and determining what practices worked best for them in the language classroom, but also discovering their own identity and maturing as teachers. An example of this discovery process was provided by Mila, who explained: 'The first four years of teaching, I was learning to teach […]

kind of looking for myself and doing some experiments. Discovering myself and develop my skills'. Similarly, Julia reported that, during the initial phase of teaching, 'you have to grow. And you have to find yourself […] You have to find your way of teaching'. As highlighted in the literature, the process of becoming a teacher is also essentially one of identity-making. A study by Flores and Day (2006) has shown how beginning teacher identities are deconstructed and (re)constructed over time as teachers interact with the classroom context and school culture, and make personal sense of their experiences. It is a period of psychological dynamism marked by identity formation, growing confidence and an increasing repertoire of coping strategies which strengthen resilience and wellbeing.

This process of growth inevitably involved the ongoing interaction between resources and challenges, and thus meant a dynamic period of wellbeing. Resources such as the practical experience and knowledge accumulated through facing the initial challenges of the profession appear to play a key role towards building the resilience of early-career teachers. In our study, 10 participants reported on how the experiences they accumulated and the initial challenges they faced in the classroom nurtured their capacity to be resilient. For instance, Mila explained how her teaching experience provided her with coping strategies and knowledge: 'After all, my teaching experience gave me lots of independence, more confidence and the skills to solve problems'. In Josephine's case, her experience helped her face the challenge of not being able to answer students' questions: 'It just comes from experience, and it comes from myself getting better at subjects […] I don't worry as much now that I'm going to panic in class, that students ask me something that I don't know'.

A model of resilience elaborated by Mansfield *et al*. (2014: 562) places this construct 'at the interface of personal and contextual challenges and resources'; they have shown how their interplay 'highlights the potentially infinite variations in the way the resilience process occurs for beginning teachers'. Resilience is shaped over time through the different scenarios teachers meet in their career, and their capacity to overcome the challenges posed by these scenarios (e.g. Day & Gu, 2007; Gu & Day, 2013). Castro *et al*. (2010) have also shown how self-efficacy, confidence and agency serve as key resources to help teachers to overcome the challenges, adversities and setbacks they encounter in their profession. In this way, the challenges faced in the language classroom were often seen as an opportunity to grow and learn.

This growth of resilience was mediated not only by professional experiences, but also by the life experience accumulated over time. Natural processes of maturation play a decisive role in building psychological resources that can be also employed to face challenges in all life domains (Kloep *et al*., 2009). Four teachers reflected retrospectively on the role played their life experiences in shaping their confidence and resilience in the face of difficulties. For example, Stephanie, who was in the 55–64 age

group, explained, 'I wasn't twenty-one, twenty-three when I came into teaching. I am an experienced person and I think that […] your confidence grows with age. Your confidence grows with your life-experience'. Florence, who was in the 35–44 age group, also reported that she could better deal with challenges such as work-related stress and exhaustion, due to her age and experience: 'I have seen every single teacher crying […] And not me, it is not me. I think it has lots to do with my experience, my working experience and the age'. A meta-analysis conducted by van Kessel (2013) revealed that older people enjoy higher resilience if they have a sense of their abilities, have learned to solve problems, take care of others, draw on spirituality, accept their own circumstances and look to the future with optimism.

The process of gaining resilience in the face of adversities became even more apparent in the respect to our participants interviewed during the pandemic. The transition to online teaching at short notice and without preparation inevitably posed additional strains for teachers (MacIntyre *et al*., 2020; Schleicher, 2020). These included the lack of contact with students, low student engagement in the online setting, limited resources for online teaching, and increased workload and preparation time, among others. However, despite these challenges, all of these early-career teachers reported developing and implementing strategies to manage the practical challenges of online learning and to cope emotionally with the stress during this time. Indeed, having to face these challenges, but then finding coping strategies, and ultimately managing to succeed actually contributed to the teachers recognising new strengths and competences. This was particularly the case for Liliana, Jennifer and Charlotte. Jennifer, for instance, acquired more confidence in her teaching abilities, as she believed that under the circumstances she was 'doing a really good job for my department and pulling really, really good and exciting and interesting lessons out'.

Research on resilience across career stages has shown that, 'the more extreme the scenario, the more energy it took a teacher to sustain their capacity to be resilient' (Gu & Day, 2013: 29). This suggests that, while in the short term, these teachers showed high resilience as part of a reactive 'survival mode', in the long term, disruptions to their wellbeing – such as the ones brought by the pandemic – could lead to a progressive depletion of the resources sustaining their wellbeing over time. When there are no resources to draw from, individuals experience stress, ultimately leading to burnout (Snyder & Lopez, 2009). As explained by Dodge *et al*. (2012: 230), 'when individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing and vice-versa'.

## 4.2 Developing Realism

As seen throughout the previous section, a key concern for teachers in the early-career phase was to find their own way into teaching through

developing their subject knowledge and finding their teaching style, while at the same time building their confidence and teacher identity. An interrelated challenge defining this phase concerned the development of realism in relation to the practical challenges of their professional roles. This involved a number of interdependent processes, such as letting go of the initial perfectionism and sense of idealism concerning the teaching profession, becoming acquainted with practical and contextual aspects of teaching such as managing pupils and workload, and learning to manage the boundaries between the personal and professional domains.

### 4.2.1 Challenges

An additional defining challenge for this phase concerned the mismatch between the realities of the language classroom and the teachers' initial ideals about the profession, as well as the daily challenges of coping with classroom management issues. During this phase, a key concern for all early-career teachers in this study was to deal with practical and contextual aspects of teaching such as managing students' discipline and behaviour, which often contrasted with their initial expectations and ideals about the profession. Amber explained that, during this phase, 'you're not only learning about your specific curriculum', but also need to develop an awareness of 'what you need to survive every day in a school'.

According to Hong *et al.* (2018), the everyday challenges in the classroom are the most immediately relevant for beginning teachers and, as such, can be critical for their wellbeing within and beyond school. A number of studies have revealed the role of student behaviour and workload demands as key stressors experienced by early-career teachers, combined with unrealistic expectations about the teaching profession (e.g. Gilad & Alkalay, 2014; Kyriakou *et al.*, 2003; Meister & Melnick, 2003). Furthermore, the sense of unpreparedness in the area of classroom management was found to be a critical threat for a teacher's self-efficacy (Melnick & Meister, 2008). Early-career teachers in this study often felt unprepared to face practical challenges in the language classroom and experienced a reality shock during their first teaching experiences. Julia described how her ideals about teaching clashed with the reality of the classroom:

> At the beginning, I think students are teaching you. They are teaching you a lot. You come from university, and you have all these visions. You want to do things and then you come to your first real school and then it hits you in the face. Reality hits you in the face.

Florence also mentioned that her expectations regarding her students changed when she realised that things were not working out as she

planned in the classroom. She reported: 'I was just like, "What's wrong? What's wrong with these children?". That was my first thought'. This 'reality shock' not only concerned dealing with students and their behaviour but also facing an unexpectedly high workload. This emerged as another major challenge in this phase, as reported by 10 teachers, six of whom were based in the UK. For instance, Mila reported how the workload and stress clashed with her initial enthusiasm when she started teaching: 'I was so excited for all the challenges and so looking forward to experiencing everything. And it's much more difficult than I imagined. It's so overwhelming. The workload, the stress'. The mismatch between expectations and realities of teaching has been found in the literature as leading to feelings of frustration, dissatisfaction, disillusionment, and ultimately a desire to abandon the profession (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014; Sabar, 2004). As highlighted by Schlichte *et al*. (2005: 38), the 'growing awareness of the less exciting realities of teaching can be followed by feelings of ineffectiveness, loneliness, and alienation from the profession'. As such, it can represent a major challenge threatening the wellbeing of beginning teachers.

Another related challenge for their wellbeing stemmed from perfectionist tendencies at the outset. Eight out of the 22 early-career participants reported on their high levels of perfectionism and unrealistic expectations at the beginning of their career. For example, Christina stated: 'I make my life harder than it is actually, because I always tend to be perfect'. She further explained how this influenced her sense of efficacy: 'I put a lot of pressure usually or I used to. Now I'm better, but still, it makes me feel insecure'. Christina's example suggests that perfectionism may deplete psychological resources such as efficacy and contribute to a sense of uncertainty as outlined earlier. For Julia, high levels of perfectionism ultimately led to a breakdown: 'And of course, if you are an overachiever and if you always want to be the best […] and you don't get support, of course you'll have a breakdown. It's not really surprising'. In her case, her wellbeing was further compromised by a lack of support.

Research in other domains has already shown that teacher perfectionism can threaten wellbeing and job satisfaction. Indeed, a relationship was found between perfectionism and burnout among teachers, suggesting that the threats posed by having unrealistic expectations to their wellbeing can ultimately lead to burnout and contribute to them leaving the profession early (Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2017; Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). It is well known that teacher attrition is particularly acute in the first five years of working in the profession (Ingersoll, 2012) and that low levels of self-efficacy and burnout are among the main causes of attrition (Hong, 2010). As such, the continual threats to one's self-worth and efficacy posed by perfectionism can be central to the issue of early-career attrition (see also den Brok *et al*., 2017; Sulis *et al*., 2022).

### 4.2.2 Resources

While this 'reality shock' represented a key threat to their wellbeing, at the same time, the teachers were gaining confidence and learning from colleagues which helped them to develop a range of coping strategies. As such, 13 of the teachers reported eventually finding pathways to overcome initial difficulties in respect to both critical areas of classroom management and excessive workload. Hannah, for instance, noticed a change over time in the way she dealt with students' behaviour: 'It's kind of changed. You find strategies to keep them quiet and to make sure that they know that you're in charge of the lesson'. Anja, similarly, reported being initially 'really stressed out about, "okay, how do I deal with students?" and in the end, I figured [it] out'. This reveals a progressive accumulation of resources over time, such as confidence from experience and knowledge of a range of coping strategies to deal with issues like discipline and behaviour in the classroom.

This growing expertise in coping with challenges also contributed to building resilience, as a result of the ongoing process of negotiation of challenges and resources. Indeed, research defines the dynamism of resilience as stemming from the complex interplay between personal and contextual challenges and resources (Mansfield *et al.*, 2012). Resilience is a psychological characteristic known to be a vital buffer in coping with stress and maintaining wellbeing (Gu & Day, 2013). There seems to be an agreement among researchers that resilience becomes apparent under stressful circumstances or adversities; in this sense, Tait (2008: 58) defines resilience as 'a mode of interacting with events in the environment that is activated and nurtured in times of stress'.

The benefits of resilience for teachers are countless. Increasing teacher resilience is viewed not only as a possible way to address teacher attrition (Tait, 2008) but also as a means to foster 'quality retention' of teachers (Gu & Day, 2007: 1314). This means that a sense of resilience can help teachers not only to survive in their role and cope with the challenges they encounter in the classroom but also to thrive professionally. In this study, nine early-career teachers reported on how making mistakes, undergoing negative experiences, but then successfully dealing with these difficult situations in the classroom helped them to grow as teachers and develop resilience for the future. Hilary, for instance, provided an example of this process:

> From those bad experiences, you will always learn something. The good thing with teaching is that it doesn't happen just once. I mean, it's not that you get one only class to a student and never see them again. It is a process, so it can only get better. The more you know your students and the more you know how to work in certain situations, the better you will be prepared for the following classes.

Gabriela mentioned a process of growth in relation to the challenges she had faced: 'If you decide to start this journey, take into account that

there's going to be a lot of challenges as a person, as a teacher, but that definitely will help you grow'. For Amber, the challenges she faced contributed to strengthening her motivation to teach: 'I think a positive came out of a really challenging time […] so that year really just for me solidified why I want to do this job'. Acknowledging the challenges of the profession but simultaneously developing a growth mindset in relation to these challenges contributed to the broader process of gaining confidence and maturing in the professional role. As explained by Kutsyuruba *et al.* (2018), those teachers who reflect on their vulnerabilities and embrace them may see a growth in their abilities. In contrast, 'others may feel that they are running the gauntlet through a dangerous obstacle course with both visible and invisible pitfalls' (Kutsyuruba *et al.*, 2018: 45) and, as such, might leave the profession despite their initial enthusiasm. In this way, a growth mindset can serve as a key resource shaping the resilience of beginning teachers. When challenges are welcomed as an opportunity for growth and development, people are more likely to persist in the face of setbacks and learn from them (Dweck, 2007; Fredrickson, 2001). A recent study by Haukås and Mercer (2021) aimed at understanding the complexity and nuance of mindset beliefs of pre-service language teachers has revealed that, while technical aspects of language teaching were often seen by participants from a growth orientation perspective, competences viewed as being more closely related to personality factors or social skills tended to be seen as more fixed. This is critical given that 'mindsets about their own competences as educators will be likely to impact not only on their willingness to engage in professional development now and in the future, but also their wellbeing and sense of agency' (Haukås & Mercer, 2021: 11).

While the workload remained a pressing issue for most participants, seven teachers reported that, in light of their growing experience and familiarity with their roles, they needed increasingly less preparation time. Josephine, for instance, explained:

> I was completely new last year teaching it, and then this year I already kind of know what to expect. I don't have to study and prepare that much before a lesson […] It just comes from experience, and it comes from myself getting better at those subjects.

Liliana commented on the fact that she gained the ability to improvise more in the classroom and realised how this was a positive resource she had developed over time: 'Sometimes I just had to go in and improvise. Actually, it was a good thing that I realised that I can improvise, that was very good that nothing happens if I have a lesson without much of preparation'.

Another resource helping early-career teachers to better manage their workload and, more broadly, their wellbeing within and outside the

classroom concerned letting go of their initial perfectionism and learning to accept one's mistakes. As seen earlier, the issue of perfectionism can be defining for this phase, as beginner teachers might hold unrealistic expectations regarding their professional roles. However, the ongoing process of gaining realism led these teachers to revaluate their expectations and let go of perfectionism in favour of more realistic conceptualisations of practice. Indeed, 13 participants reported on how letting go of perfectionism helped them preserve their wellbeing within and beyond the workplace. For example, Jennifer highlighted the importance of learning to accept that 'good enough is good enough'. Tracey commented on the long-term nature of this process: 'I don't think you get that before you've been in teaching for a couple of years. I think that comes with time […] It took me a lot to realise that you just can't be perfect all the time'.

The process of letting go of perfectionism was inevitably paired with a shift of attitude towards one's mistakes. Josephine referred to a progressive shift in her mindset: 'The mindset is different now […] I still get stressed, but I don't beat myself up if I don't know something […]. It just comes with experience, reflection and realization'. A similar process of self-reflection was also described by Liliana, who explained: 'It's okay, I can learn from my mistakes. […] And reflecting on these, and learning and developing in these things, helped me a lot'. The ability to engage in self-reflection, as well as the development of a growth mindset, appeared as critical resources contributing not only to these teachers' development in their professional role but also to their overall wellbeing. Earlier studies have also shown how reflective practice could benefit teachers' resilience and wellbeing (Cook-Sather & Curl, 2014), as well as effectiveness (Motallebzadeh *et al*., 2018). Furthermore, reflection practices could act as a 'protective shield' against burnout and, as such, teachers who are self-reflective are more likely to respond positively to the challenges posed by their professional role (Shirazizadeh & Karimpour, 2019). In light of the benefits of self-reflection for teachers, and particularly for those at the beginning of their career, who are at higher risks of burnout and attrition, self-reflection training should be given space and consideration within teacher training programmes; this would provide them with practical strategies to minimise the effects of perfectionism and to prevent burnout.

## 4.3 Learning to Balance Personal and Professional Lives

The processes of learning on the job and gaining realism also involve learning how to find a balance between the personal and professional life domains. Especially for early-career teachers, the high workload and increasing responsibilities often lead to tensions between the personal and professional contexts. Kutsyuruba *et al*. (2019b), for example, have shown

that early-career teachers are particularly susceptible to work–life imbalance and workplace stress. Having to deal with a sheer amount of workload, beginning teachers often face the dilemma of whether to work longer hours in school or bring some of their schoolwork home, which can come at the expenses of their personal life (Kutsyuruba *et al.*, 2019b). However, it is during this phase that the teachers start to become aware of the importance of their own wellbeing, and develop strategies to protect their work–life balance, becoming more realistic about their commitments and creating clearer boundaries between work and personal domains. This notable shift to protecting their wellbeing is vital if these teachers are to remain in the profession. Indeed, given the rate of teachers leaving the profession within the first five years, and noting the important role that wellbeing plays in fostering teacher retention (Day & Gu, 2007), beginning teachers should be equipped with explicit strategies to preserve their wellbeing in the long term.

### 4.3.1 Challenges

The workload for teachers typically requires them to work long hours, often bringing their work home, which may leave them with little free time available to pursue their own interests and nurture their personal relationships. For early-career teachers, these issues are typically exacerbated by their lack of experience and confidence, combined with perfectionism and unrealistic initial expectations. As such, the issue of work–life spillover is particularly prominent during this phase. Spillover refers to 'the overflow of stressors and/or joys from one domain of life into another and focuses on within-the-person transmission between domains' (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020: 37). For teachers, finding ways to manage the boundaries between the work and life domains and reaching a satisfactory balance between these can be challenging; they typically bring their work home or work long hours in school, which leaves them little free time available.

Furthermore, what is viewed as balance can vary from individual to individual (Fox, 2015); as such, particularly at the beginning of one's career, it may take some time and experience for them to find their own preferred equilibrium. Difficulties in managing a work–life balance were mentioned by 14 participants as negatively affecting their wellbeing on different levels. Tracey, for instance, commented on how her thoughts about work constantly invaded her personal life: 'You dream about work. You dream about talking to students'. Similarly, Hilary mentioned that, 'it was very hard to disconnect […] most of the day, most of the time I'm thinking about teaching'. Christina explained that she did not know strategies to deal with her work–life balance, and she was struggling to set boundaries in her physical space: 'I don't really have techniques to just divide my personal from school life, yet. Because I'm

living by myself and there's just a table with all the sheets and maps and it's always in front of me'.

Unsurprisingly, work–life spillover can lead to a plethora of stress-related issues critically affecting early-career teachers' mental and physical wellbeing. For example, in a study focusing on academics in the UK, Kinman and Jones (2008) found that the more hours their participants worked over weekends and evenings, the more psychological and physical symptoms they reported. Furthermore, they also found a link between work–life conflict, job satisfaction and potential attrition. Maeran *et al.* (2013) have also revealed a negative relationship between job satisfaction and work–family conflict. Crucially, they found that the length of service was positively related to work–family conflict, suggesting that teachers at the start of their career are more vulnerable in this sense. They suggest that, while experienced teachers are more likely to have developed adaptive behaviours helping them cope with the demands of the profession without thwarting family responsibilities, beginning teachers still struggle to find a balance between the two domains (Maeran *et al.*, 2013).

In our study, four teachers reported having experienced burnout or depression due to work-related stress. Anja explained: 'And then I had a breakdown […] I was just completely overworked'. Frida reported that, 'at the end of the year you are burned out'; she also added that complaints by teachers regarding the heavy workload had been ignored by her school, suggesting a critical lack of support at the institutional level. Tracey reported that, once she had realised being 'in a state of depression', her attitude towards work had shifted, and she decided not to let herself become as stressed: 'I'm not going to spend that much time on my lesson plan and I'm going to spend more time making sure all my work is not done at home and I've got all the weekend'. Gabriela reported a number of stress-related health issues ultimately leading to depressive episodes: 'My hair was falling out. I didn't want to exercise. I mean, I'm still dealing with that. I was just eating, eating, eating because I felt really anxious […] I felt very depressed'.

In all these cases, the high levels of stress and anxiety appeared to have depleted these teachers' psychological resources, leading to physical manifestations of ill-health as well as serious mental health issues. Chronic stress is known to negatively impact both mental and physical wellbeing. This is, of course, also the case of teachers. Indeed, chronic stress in teachers was found to have negative consequences for physical health, psychological well-being and job satisfaction (Johnson *et al.*, 2005; Kyriacou, 2011). Furthermore, it is known that physical and mental health are interdependent and thus subject to cross-over effects (Surtees *et al.*, 2008). Mental health problems can substantially exacerbate physical illness; in turn, individuals with physical health conditions commonly experience mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Naylor *et al.*, 2012). Accounting for these interconnections, therefore, is vital when considering an individual's holistic wellbeing.

While the issue of spillover was apparent for most participants across contexts, a notable contextual difference in our data concerns the fact that, within the UK setting, the excessive amount of workload and subsequent work–life spillover was seen as a systemic issue by participants. Five of the six UK participants, who reported suffering from workload-related issues, mentioned the role played in this respect by factors such as the education system or the school management. This suggests that these teachers were aware that work-related stress not only depends on individual factors such as perfectionism or work attitudes, but is also determined by ecological and systemic factors (see also Mercer, 2021). This awareness is important so that teachers do not feel as if their wellbeing is solely their responsibility but understand that, although there are elements in their locus of control, institutions and education systems must make serious changes to make the profession a healthier and more sustainable one.

The sense of control and agency in respect to their wellbeing was a theme touched upon by Bonnie, who explained, 'if you're going to be a good teacher, you have to work hard, and you cannot work hard and cook healthy food or go to the gym every day. You just can't'. She further stated: 'I think it's sort of collusive acceptance of what's bad and no one talks about […]. But no one ever tries to change that, because you can't. You have to work'. In light of these issues, Bonnie appeared deprived of a sense of agency in relation to taking care of her own wellbeing. As will be seen in the next section, this is a key psychological resource sustaining wellbeing; when both a sense of individual agency and support from the context are lacking, as in Bonnie's case, wellbeing can be severely compromised. Similarly, Josephine remarked that, 'as a teacher in the UK, particularly in a state school, if you're not suffering, you're not a good teacher'. This shows the normalisation of an overly high workload, high levels of work-related stress, and work–life spillover in this context. A possible reason underlying this could be due to the 'culture of performativity' affecting the teaching profession in countries such as the UK, Australia and the US (Gu & Day, 2007), which places unreasonable work demands upon teachers.

This issue could also be linked to the teacher shortage affecting the country; Stephanie explained how the high workload and intense stress experienced by teachers in the UK could be related to the ongoing 'teacher crisis' in this context: 'Teacher shortage […] is affecting our mental health. It really is. […] And within the four years of me teaching I have had sleepless nights, more than all my years put together […] it's a very stressful situation'. The shortage of language teachers has emerged as a critical issue facing the UK education system in recent years (Sibieta, 2020). As will be seen in the following section, this situation was made worse by the perceived lack of support from both the school management and the broader education system in the UK context.

Unsurprisingly, the changes brought by the pandemic, and particularly the transition to online teaching and learning, contributed to making the boundaries in teachers' lives even more permeable and indistinct (see MacIntyre *et al*., 2020). During this time, teachers often had to use the same space to live and work, and sometimes had to share it with their family members. They were confronted with challenges such as home-schooling their children, while simultaneously having to prepare their lessons in a completely new format, which in most cases required additional hours of work. As such, in light of these challenges, finding a balance between the personal and professional life domains appeared even more arduous. For five out of the eight early-career teachers interviewed during the pandemic, the transition to online teaching had further exacerbated difficulties in finding an appropriate work–life balance. In particular, these participants seemed to struggle to manage temporal and spatial boundaries during this time, causing an overlap between their personal and professional life domains. For instance, Liliana stated:

> Now that work came into our private life, being everything at the same place, it completely got mixed up. Sometimes I was just sitting in front of the computer and realised that it's midnight, and I'm still working. It was very, very difficult to find the boundaries to work out how much time and energy I would like to spend on it.

Robin, similarly, commented on these fuzzy boundaries during the first pandemic wave: 'At a certain point, everything starts to get mixed up in a way that you're cooking and making notes at the same time. You're playing with your children and sending out an email on your mobile phone'. Robin added that, in this context, 'the hard thing is not to do everything just because it is possible'. Research conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic has also shown online working as undermining individuals' work–life balance, leading to the 'intensification and an extensification of work and nonwork efforts' (Palumbo, 2020: 786). Interestingly, the same research has shown that individuals with high work engagement may be unaware of work–life spillover, but still suffer from overwork; this might threaten their ability to re-address their work–life balance, and ultimately undermine their wellbeing (Palumbo, 2020).

### 4.3.2 Resources

Growing realism also involved developing an awareness of the importance of one's wellbeing within and beyond school, as well as learning to actively employ self-care strategies. This phase was defining in terms of making sense of one's own personal and professional priorities and finding a balance between the domains that could

be sustainable in the long term. Hannah, for instance, provided an example of how she gained awareness of the importance of setting boundaries during this phase, which was a key resource sustaining her wellbeing: 'I have learned that over the past three years that you just have to kind of go home and be home'. She further explained this shift in her mindset: 'School was always my number one priority, and then university was my number one priority, then my job became my number one priority and then I kind of realised there needs to be something other than that'. In a similar vein, Josephine explained that she is now able to 'draw a line to how much work I'm going to finish at work and then not bring any work home'. She appeared aware of the importance of actively taking care of her wellbeing and used her agency to do this: 'You just have to actively engage in looking after yourself. Although it might sound like students at school are a priority […] I do have lots of moments that I think: "It's okay if I can't get this done". So, I don't want to stress about it'. Mila, similarly, reported: 'I have to have a line. I need to spend time with my friends on the weekend. I need to attend church and I need to exercise'. She explained that she learned to prioritise her health and social connections:

> You just need to prioritise things. And if you put it as priority, you then spend time on it. If you do not spend time on it, that means it is not important enough. If I don't exercise, I don't think that my health is important enough. If I don't spend time to socialise with other people, that means that my personal wellbeing is not important enough for me to spend time on it. So, I will have to prioritise these things.

Developing a sense of agency became a key resource supporting these teachers' wellbeing and sense of resilience. Agency is commonly defined as the will and capacity to act (Gao, 2010). An individual perceived awareness and capacity to be in charge of their own wellbeing can foster a sense of agency (Bandura, 2006). Crucially, however, in order to be able to exert their agency and take control over their life path, individuals need adequate social support and resources (Biesta, 2015). As explained by Bandura (1989: 8), 'the life paths that realistically become open to individuals are also partly determined by the nature of societal opportunity structures'. As such, the degree to which a teacher can attend to their own wellbeing is inevitably bound to the affordances offered and perceived in their environment. For our participants, the importance of proactively attending to one's wellbeing was often triggered by negative events such as experiencing a breakdown or burnout, which forced these teachers reconsider their priorities and realise the need to find a new balance in their lives. This was the case of four of our participants. For instance, Tracey came to this realisation when she recognised her depressive state: 'I realized that I was a bit in the state of depression. I really noticed it. And […] I told myself that when I come back, I'm not going to stress myself out

as much'. Christina, similarly, came to this realisation only when realising that working that much was not sustainable for her body: 'I feel like my body said: "No more!", because otherwise I couldn't handle it anymore'.

This suggests that early-career teachers only recognise the importance of attending to their wellbeing when facing serious threats to their mental and physical health. Similarly, Clandinin *et al.* (2014) found that several early-career teachers recognised the need to live differently only after having faced health issues, or while struggling to keep up the pace. It implies the need for greater awareness about the importance of attending to one's wellbeing during teacher education programmes so that early-career teachers are better prepared to cope with the demands in school life and have a knowledge of strategies to engage in self-care and knowing when to seek help or advocate for systemic changes. Additionally, practical training should be provided to pre-service and in-service teachers on how to recognise symptoms of burnout before this causes irreparable damage to their wellbeing and willingness to remain in the profession (see also Fernandes *et al.*, 2021; Mansfield *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, research on wellbeing interventions repeatedly makes clear that prevention is better than cure (Reynolds, 1997). As such, education systems need to take steps, especially during teacher training, to help prevent poor wellbeing, excessive levels of stress and risk of burnout by preparing teachers in advance.

Early-career teachers in this study employed their agency in different ways to protect their wellbeing. Three teachers relied on the help of a therapist to support their mental wellbeing. Julia, for instance, explained: 'I couldn't cope. I couldn't stand it anymore, so after a week of constant crying, I knew I had to go to therapy'. Other strategies involved setting temporal boundaries, as in Christina's case: 'I still do something for school just very shortly and then I need to do something for myself'. Anja consciously made boundaries in her physical space: 'I keep the school stuff out of the bedroom and in the bedroom there's all of my creative stuff and drawing stuff […] That is nice, not having tests lying next to my drawing pad'. When teachers acquire practical strategies to sustain their wellbeing, they are likely to gain higher self-confidence, agency and resilience (Le Cornu, 2013). Earlier studies have also revealed the role played by agency in the process of developing resilience (e.g. Luthar *et al.*, 2000). In particular, Keogh *et al.* (2012: 48) consider that agency, efficacy and resilience work jointly 'in a symbiotic arrangement'. They found that agency sustains teachers in addressing the challenges they encounter, which in turn develops their sense of efficacy and strengthens their resilience, revealing how these operate as part of a returning cycle. This suggests how these psychological resources are highly interdependent and all vital to the sustainment of teacher wellbeing.

Naturally, for the teachers interviewed during the first wave of the pandemic, managing the boundaries between the personal and professional domains posed additional challenges. However, all participating

teachers reported having progressively developed coping strategies and routines helping them survive, cope, or in a few cases, even thrive in the face of these challenges. Jennifer, who took advantage of not having to commute by taking care of her garden, knitting, or engaging in physical activity, was somebody who made changes to her lifestyle during the pandemic in ways that positively enhanced her wellbeing. She proactively set boundaries to protect her wellbeing: 'If I'm doing my online yoga, I'll turn my phone off, and I'll make sure that my school email isn't open'. Similarly, for Louise, not having to commute meant that she had more time to take care of her wellbeing; she also gained greater awareness of the importance of having a healthy routine, and she engaged her agency to proactively take steps to nurture her wellbeing during this time:

> I didn't have to commute. And I took two hours off my day. I could get up later. And having more sleep actually was really, really good. […] So, getting into a healthy kind of sleep routine and […] not just doing work just because. In evenings I tried to make sure that I had a bit of time to relax. Having been in lockdown, I think that helped to realise that you need to have a good healthy routine.

However, those teachers, who particularly relied on social support as a key resource sustaining their wellbeing before the pandemic, appeared to struggle more than others in regulating their wellbeing during the pandemic. For instance, Hilary explained: 'I would balance my work with social meetings or cultural plans or whatever, that are much more limited now. I would try not to work on the weekends. I would like to go to a theatre, go to the movies or go to a concert'. However, she decided to purposely take care of her wellbeing by adopting a dog: 'I got a puppy because I knew I needed more balance between my life and my work […] a puppy is a perfect excuse for me to go out and not worry about anything else'. Liliana, similarly, reported that her wellbeing was heavily dependent on social activities: 'I love going out with friends, going to the cinema. So, absolutely, I have lots of activities and a lot of things were planned for this period as well. And of course, everything was cancelled'. However, she attempted to 'keep in touch with my friends and family, so we had lots and lots of online discussions, which was very good', and added that this 'made me energised', although she still severely missed the personal contact.

These examples of self-regulation further show the vital role of agency as a key resource shaping participants' wellbeing, both under normal circumstances and in times of crisis. They also highlight the important role played by continuous self-monitoring and self-evaluation of one's wellbeing in order to be able to agentically adjust it and regulate it based on the specific environmental conditions. Self-monitoring is indeed central to

self-regulation processes (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). Furthermore, these examples also reveal how effective self-care strategies may vary across individuals. Some individuals flourish more with increased social contact, others need more sport or time in nature. The data reinforced the understanding that what is vital for an individual's wellbeing can be highly personal and it is impossible to prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach to wellbeing. For different people, and at different points in time, different aspects may play a larger or lesser role affecting the state of their wellbeing, depending on their different 'centers of gravity' (Goodson, 2008: 39), at specific points in their lives and careers. However, when participants perceived an imbalance between the internal and external factors regulating their wellbeing, they appeared more likely to experience a sense of powerlessness and lack of agency in relation to their wellbeing. This was especially the case when they felt a lack of support in their workplace or, at a broader level, from the education system, as will be seen in the following section.

## 4.4 Seeking Support Within School

As in the pre-service phase, the early-career phase remained characterised by a substantial need for support and guidance. While pre-service teachers sought support largely from their university teachers and mentors, early-career teachers appeared to look for guidance and assistance within the school. This support appeared to play a key role in the ongoing process of finding one's place within the school community and gaining confidence as a professional. This social support within schools was typically not provided by means of formalised procedures of mentorship but merely emerged from positive relationships with colleagues who volunteered support or who these teachers approached as role models.

### 4.4.1 Challenges

Arriving in a new school, early-career teachers can struggle to find their place within the school community and face difficulties in establishing connections with colleagues and administrators, leading to a sense of isolation and frustration. In this study, four participants revealed challenges in getting to know their colleagues and asking for advice when needed. Julia's school had no staff room, and so she explained, 'you don't even meet other teachers if you don't seek them out and I didn't know any of them, so I couldn't just go there, knock on the door and say: "Hey! I'm a young teacher. Please, help me"'. She reported a sense of helplessness without this support and felt 'like a warrior in the jungle'. This suggests the importance of structural conditions for facilitating the integration of early-career teachers into the school community and for their wellbeing (Babic *et al.*, 2022b). Anja, similarly, reported on the difficulties in connecting with colleagues during the first years in the profession: 'I never

really felt like I could connect to anyone'. According to Mila, 'everyone is very busy at school apparently' and, as such, she sought support outside school through the teachers attending her church. These experiences reveal an initial sense of isolation at a time when they needed the most support. Previous research from Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) has also revealed that a lack of social support from colleagues could prompt emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation in teachers, which can ultimately lead to burnout.

A lack of supportive relationships was also perceived in respect to the school management. Facing initial teaching experiences without being able to rely on the support of the head teacher or head of department was a key challenge for some of these early-career teachers, who were seeking guidance and direction. Seven participants mentioned a critical lack of support from the school administration at the outset. Sabrina, for instance, reported on the scarcity of concrete assistance from the school management: 'It was sort of ironic because they were sort of saying: "We can help you here". But they were the ones who were making me feel uneasy'. Julia, similarly, mentioned that her head teacher 'promised me to help and of course he didn't help me', suggesting again the need for active strategies by school leadership. Another example was provided by Charlotte, who was expected to understand how to teach a curriculum on her own without any support: 'They gave me a curriculum. They were, like, "teach it". And they didn't really give me any guidance on how to do it'.

An extensive body of research on early-career attrition has revealed the role played by a lack of support from the school administration as one of the main reasons beginning teachers leave the profession (e.g. Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Scherff, 2008). Without this support, early-career teachers often experience a sense of abandonment and isolation. They feel on their own at a time where they need the most guidance (e.g. Clandinin *et al*., 2014; Jones, 2005), which can result in poor job satisfaction, stress and, ultimately, attrition (Buchanan, 2010). Schools may need to consider deliberate strategies to facilitate the integration of new teachers and enable them to make social connections and seek collegial support. Mercer and Gregersen (2020) provide several practical examples; for instance, they suggest that institutions could offer specific in-house training to new teachers to become familiar with the inner-workings of the school, provide a mentor, give them time to adjust and settle by lightening their schedule in the first few weekends, and organise activities such as coffee breaks, group lunches, or after-work drinks to introduce new members to the established staff.

Another related social issue concerned the school management's attitudes towards teacher wellbeing. Seven teachers, five of whom were based in the UK, criticised the lack of support for wellbeing within their school. Julia, for instance, reported on a lack of concern and emotional support from her head teacher:

> He's probably one of the most disinterested people I've ever worked with in any job […] He just doesn't care. Towards the end of last term, I was just like: 'I'm really struggling, I'm really stressed, I'm being anxious. This is not going well for me. I'm not sure I'm going to make it this way. I don't know if I'll make this, or I'll be here come summer'. And his response was: 'Oh, okay'.

Research from Spencer *et al.* (2018: 42) in the UK context has also shown the need for considerable emotional support during this phase and revealed that, 'the greatest need is the least well addressed'. Frida also commented on this issue which appeared to critically affect her levels of stress and anxiety: 'Teachers are not looked after […] the things that cause me stress and anxiety at work could not be addressed by going for a run. I'm stressed and anxious at work because of the way I'm being treated at work'. Frida condemned the fact that wellbeing was considered by her school and, at a broader level, by the government, as an individual responsibility: 'I really want to change that dialogue from "what can teachers do to be well" to "how can schools ensure or how can the education system ensure that it treats its staff well". That's what we need to do'. Bonnie also reflected on the issue of accountability in relation to teacher wellbeing:

> It feels like the government, at the top, and the group of schools, then the head teachers, then the head of subjects and the parents, all expect you to do one thing, which is work really, really hard, but also, they expect you to look after yourself and don't get too stressed, which is really hypocritical.

As seen earlier, this appears as a systemic issue especially prevalent in the UK data. The data in this study show very clearly how wellbeing emerges from the interaction of the individual in social and relational contexts. This highlights the importance of ensuring that social setting and educational structures and institutions take concrete actions to support teacher wellbeing. It should never be solely as a teacher's own responsibility, but is a shared collective and systemic responsibility (Beltman, 2021; Mansfield *et al.*, 2020; Mercer, 2021). While teachers do have agency to affect their wellbeing in part, without appropriate structural and systemic support, this is likely to be insufficient. Given the alarming attrition rates in the UK within the first few years in the profession (Worth & De Lazzari, 2017), a stronger proactive programme of support for teacher wellbeing at the school, especially for new teachers, could make a critical contribution towards retention in the profession.

Across various contexts, research has cited a lack of support and poor work conditions at school as two of the main causes of early-career teacher attrition (Buchanan, 2010; Flores & Day, 2006; Guarino *et al.*, 2006; Schlichte *et al.*, 2005; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Interestingly, in the Austrian data, none of the participants mentioned the influence of the

education system on individual teacher wellbeing. However, Harald did note the important role played by interpersonal relationships at school: 'If you're at a school where you fit in, I think you're going to have a nice time, regardless of the system […] I think it's all about the interpersonal relationships at school'. One possible reason for the differences in awareness of systemic factors in wellbeing could be better conditions for the early-career teachers in Austria, or potentially also a lack of awareness of the role systemic factors can play and a greater sense of individual responsibility. It would be important for further research to clarify teachers' sense of attribution and locus of control in respect to wellbeing across settings.

The pandemic data also revealed the key role played by the school management in managing the transition to online teaching and the impact of this social support on early-career language teacher wellbeing. While most teachers reported positive experiences in this respect, as will be seen below, Gabriela had to rely alone on her own knowledge and research skills:

> I didn't feel like I had support from the principal. I mean, they didn't have a coordinator or anything to help me through the process. Everything that I did was basically with what I learned and what I knew and what I looked on the internet.

Furthermore, she felt that teacher wellbeing was not cared for at her school, which was frustrating for her: 'They have done surveys about that, the way we feel. But it's not worth it, because they don't care, they don't do anything about it'. This lack of support appeared to further contribute to the high levels of stress Gabriela was experiencing, as seen earlier, showing how this lack of support critically affected her wellbeing, leaving her feeling overwhelmed and isolated.

### 4.4.2 Resources

While a lack of support appeared as one of the main challenges threatening early-career teacher wellbeing, the presence of this support at school emerged as a primary resource sustaining teachers in the profession. Social support within the school was especially needed and sought out by beginning teachers to counterbalance their low sense of efficacy, initial insecurities and lack of familiarity with the demands of the profession. Indeed, 10 out of the 22 early-career teachers in this study reported on how social support from colleagues was a key resource not only for their wellbeing in school, but also for their motivation in relation to teaching and overall job satisfaction. For instance, Christina reported on how the support from her colleagues was beneficial for feeling more at ease in her teacher role: 'Most of them, if I have questions, they support me and I feel at this school or in

the classes, I feel that I can be more myself then playing the teacher's role'. Hilary also described how having a supportive colleague at the very beginning of her career contributed to her job satisfaction:

> This colleague at one of my schools, she was so welcoming when I just started teaching […] she was always willing to help and giving me information on the children […] She's always sharing her materials and everything […] having her like as a model I think it also like made me like feeling positive about my profession because I was welcomed by such a really nice person.

For Amber, the ability to go through the initial years of teaching alongside a colleague, who shared the same ideals regarding language teaching, helped her to navigate the first years in the profession:

> I was really lucky at that first school, with one of my colleagues we really clicked and we're still really good friends now, and so I think like she and her philosophy and like our goals together with like, the way that pedagogy for language teaching has really evolved and changed […] I like, her being my colleague, and kind of going through that together. And then her also helping me as a young woman navigating the teaching profession.

Sources of support from colleagues also helped these teachers to feel valued and trusted, as reported by Ulrich and Hannah. Hannah commented on the importance of relating with 'people who appreciate your work and who appreciate what you do and how you are. And I think that's kind of the main factor'. Within the field of education, 'the feeling of not being appreciated by administrators, parents and the general public, may be a large contributing factor to the stress felt by teachers' (Clement, 2017: 136). Appreciation serves therefore as a key social resource teachers can draw on to cope in the profession and maintain a sense of efficacy; feeling appreciated and having a sense that one is making a valuable contribution to the workplace are indeed known to be important for wellbeing (Adler & Fagley, 2005). Another source of social support in this respect concerned feeling 'in the same boat' and being able to complain with colleagues, as reported by Josephine, Bonnie and Julia. This provided them with a sense of mutual reassurance and encouragement while at the same time strengthening collegiality. Collegiality is seen indeed as a vital component of school effectiveness and teacher development (Park *et al*, 2007; Shah, 2012).

Earlier studies have also shown the role played by these positive relationships in building psychological resources such as confidence and efficacy (e.g. Fenwick, 2011), as well as job satisfaction (e.g. Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011), thus revealing the interdependence between social and personal resources shaping wellbeing. Bonnie, however, appeared

conscious of the risks of only focusing on the negatives when sharing her experiences with her colleagues: 'Teachers really like to complain. […] it's useful, it's cathartic, it helps you relieve some stress, I think, but it can also be like a spiral. It can make you feel even worse'. Previous research has shown that teachers' capacity can benefit from positive relationships with colleagues (Kutsuyriba, 2019a). However, the role of 'relational energy' shows how some relationships can uplift and support, whereas others may be toxic and drain your of energy (Owens *et al.*, 2016); a notion hinted at by Bonnie. In other words, not all relationships in the workplace are inherently positive, and teachers need to select which relationships are beneficial and which may in fact be damaging.

Interestingly, all the participants commented on the role played by perceived support from school management and, in particular, from the head teacher or head of the department. Ulrich states simply that this plays a 'major role, if not the most important role' in their wellbeing. Mila reported positive experiences in her current school: 'I like my current school because it's more supportive […] they are always supporting teachers and they understand the teachers. They know what teachers need'. In Hannah's case, the fact that the head teacher was an English teacher himself was clearly an added value: 'There's quite a big difference because our headmaster is an English teacher himself. Whenever you have a question about English or whenever you want to do something that is an English project, he'll always have your back'. In a meta-analysis by Mason (2017), it was seen that language teachers are best supported in schools where language education is valued, and naturally, if the head teacher actively supports and appreciates language teaching, then this will likely create a much more positive and appreciative climate for the subject.

One way in which the school management were able to communicate their support and trust in early-career teachers was in relation to the autonomy they were granted in their professional role, as mentioned by 10 participants. Harald reported on the autonomy support offered by his head teacher: 'My principle is an angel, basically. Because he really supports us teachers in every way, and we've got all the autonomy we need'. Josephine reported that the autonomy and trust she was granted from her head teacher positively influenced her sense of agency: 'A lot of the time I do have the choice to make decisions […] I'm able to make the choice that I think it's best'. During this career phase, there is thus an interesting balance to be struck between providing clear guidance and also empowering teachers by trusting their decisions and affording them autonomy to grow in their professional roles. This appears in line with research on early-career teachers conducted by Hobson and Maxwell (2017) who, using a self-determination theory (SDT) perspective, found that the presence or absence of autonomy could determine their participants' wellbeing. In other research, it has been shown that teacher autonomy plays a significant role in teachers' job satisfaction and perceptions of professional

status (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Strong & Yoshida, 2014). Crucially, teacher autonomy was also linked with perceptions of workload manageability and intentions to remain in the profession (Worth & Van den Branden, 2020), showing that enhancing teacher autonomy would be a vital step in promoting teachers' wellbeing, job satisfaction and retention. Similarly, when trust is built and promoted in the school community by leadership, teachers can experience a sense of belonging, ownership and wellbeing (Day & Gu, 2010). In turn, 'principals who are disposed to help teachers solve problems, encourage open communication, and consistently help teachers do their job are principals who are likely to earn the trust of their teachers' (Tschannen-Moran, 2003: 166).

### 4.4.3 Summary

In sum, this chapter has highlighted four themes that define this career stage. These are: learning on the job, developing realism, learning to balance personal and professional lives, and seeking support within school. In the context of these themes, we explored the nature of the challenges that defined this professional period as well as the growing resources that these teachers were able to draw upon to support their wellbeing. A defining challenge for this phase concerned the limited practical experience and confidence in their teaching abilities and language competences, which made early-career teachers particularly vulnerable and insecure. However, these teachers were also able to draw on the growing experience and confidence they were developing on a daily basis in the classroom, which empowered them with confidence and resilience in the face of adversities. Through repeated trial and error, they were able to find their own way into teaching, and to become more self-assured about their roles.

Another key challenge characterising this phase was the high sense of idealism and unrealistic expectations of these teachers in terms of the teaching profession; this, combined with a strong sense of perfectionism, often contributed to these teachers experiencing a 'reality shock' upon entering the language classroom. However, as they gained familiarity with the profession and hands-on experience in the classroom, these teachers developed increasing realism regarding the demands of the profession, higher tolerance towards their own mistakes, as well as coping strategies helping them to better manage student misbehaviour and workload.

The third theme examined in this chapter has shown the initial difficulties of early-career teachers in balancing their personal and professional domains, which served as a key source of stress during this period of their career. Furthermore, especially for those who were interviewed during the first wave of the pandemic crisis, setting boundaries between their different life domains was particularly challenging. However, at the same time, it was during this phase of their professional trajectory that

teachers started to gain increasing awareness of the importance of their own wellbeing. Indeed, while the priority during this time often remained work, most of the early-career teachers in our study started to develop a sense of agency in terms of taking care of their wellbeing and devised strategies to preserve their work–life boundaries.

Finally, the fourth theme has revealed that another critical challenge for early-career teachers concerned difficulties in finding their own place within the school community, which was often paired with a lack of guidance within the workplace. However, some of these teachers could also rely on support from more experienced colleagues and school administrators; in particular, a sense of collegiality and the feeling of being valued and appreciated appeared as critical resources sustaining the wellbeing of early-career teachers.

The findings imply that integrating instruction on teacher wellbeing during pre-service training could play a vital role in protecting early-career educators by empowering them with a knowledge of self-care strategies as well as an awareness of the potential role for institutional support, which teachers may feel empowered to advocate for. Making early-career teachers feel agentic in relation to their wellbeing as well as providing the practical guidance and support they need during this phase serves as a critical step towards promoting their resilience and long-term retention in the profession.

# 5 Mid-Career Language Teachers

In this section, we present the findings from the teachers in the mid-career phase. Through our analysis of the interview data, we identified three interrelated themes – each associated with different challenges and also related resources: maturing with experience, taking on additional responsibilities and shifting centres of attention.

We interviewed 25 mid-career language teachers before ($n$ = 16) and during ($n$ = 9) the pandemic crisis. Their biodata can be found in Tables 5.1 and 5.2.

**Table 5.1** Mid-career teachers' biodata and demographic information (pre-pandemic)

| Pseudonym | Gender | Country of residence | Age group | Languages taught |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alexandra | F | Austria | 35–44 | English |
| Claudia | F | Austria | 35–44 | English, Italian |
| Cora | F | Austria | 45–54 | English, German |
| Elena | F | Austria | 35–44 | English |
| Mia | F | Austria | 45–54 | English, Spanish |
| Monika | F | Austria | 35–44 | English |
| Quirina | F | Austria | 35–44 | English |
| Simon | M | Austria | 35–44 | English, French |
| Theresa | F | Austria | 35–44 | English |
| Rose | F | UK | 35–44 | Chinese, English, French |
| Keira | F | UK | 45–54 | French, German, Spanish |
| Rachel | F | UK | 35–44 | French, Spanish |
| Ellie | F | UK | 25–34 | French, German |
| Mara | F | UK | 55–64 | French, German |
| Alison | F | UK | 35–44 | French, German, Spanish |
| Casey | F | UK | 45–54 | German |

**Table 5.2** Mid-career teachers' biodata and demographic information (during the pandemic)

| Pseudonym | Gender | Country of residence | Age group | Languages taught |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Eliza | F | US | 45–54 | German |
| Jakob | M | Austria | 35–44 | English |
| Jane | F | UK | 35–44 | French, Spanish |
| John | M | UK | 35–44 | French, German |
| Maddison | F | Australia | 35–44 | Japanese, Spanish |
| Maria | F | Argentina | 45–54 | English |
| Penelope | F | Greece | 35–44 | English |
| Suzy | F | US/South Korea | 25–34 | English, German |
| Victoria | F | UK | 45–54 | French, German, Spanish |

## 5.1 Maturing with Experience

By the time teachers transition from the early stages of their career to the middle years, they have acquired considerable classroom experience. They might have experienced multiple schools and roles, and they have typically overcome the challenges encountered at the start of their careers. These 'experience and experiences' (Hargreaves, 2005: 979) have shaped their competence and confidence and helped them settle into and become established in their roles. However, mid-career teachers can also encounter feelings of dissatisfaction and stagnation during this phase, which can compromise their growth in the profession, as well as their motivation and sense of purpose. It is a complex career phase inherent with paradoxes of both psychological strengths but also a commensurate risk of falling into a rut and experiencing boredom.

### 5.1.1 Challenges

The mid-career phase is considered as pivotal in a teacher's career (Fessler, 1995). Typically, during this phase, teachers either keep growing in the profession and expand their professional role, or can experience a sense of stagnation (Rolls & Plauborg, 2009). For this reason, it has been defined as a crossroad for teachers (Day & Gu, 2010). This is usually a time where individuals reflect and re-evaluate their work orientations and career aspirations, and, as such, this phase can be defining for the future direction of their career trajectory (Cawte, 2020).

Having gained experience in their personal and professional lives, mid-career teachers tend to enjoy a sense of confidence in their teaching abilities. Over time, they have matured in their professional roles and familiarised themselves with the demands of the profession. For most teachers, this career phase also coincides with their midlife period, which is typically characterised as a period of 'social maturity', namely, 'a period

providing optimal opportunities to become a productive and involved contributor to society' (Lataster *et al.*, 2022: 25). However, their personal and professional development is not always linear and proportional to their experience; as highlighted by Huberman (1995b: 196), a teacher's career path is filled with 'plateaus, discontinuities, regressions, spurts, and dead ends'. Furthermore, the teaching profession is 'perhaps the only career in which people have such an extended term of development' (Christie, 2019: 20). Depending on the sense of control they possess over their own teaching and the support received within the workplace, teachers in this phase might keep growing or, conversely, reach a plateau by the time they get to the middle point of their career. As a result, some teachers might gradually lose their motivation for teaching; others might change school, while some of them might decide to leave the profession altogether. The 'mid-career teacher apathy' (Kostantinides-Vladimirou, 2013) and heightened potential for job ennui (Demerouti *et al.*, 2012) may lead teachers to reconsider the direction of both their personal and professional lives. This career phase also coincides with the lowest point in the happiness curve in terms of life phase for many teachers; researchers refer to a so-called 'midlife dip' in wellbeing (Blanchflower & Graham, 2020), which seems determined by a complex interplay of factors including financial and parental pressures, and issues in managing one's work–life balance (Easterlin, 2006; Lachman, 2015; Lataster *et al.*, 2022).

Four mid-career teachers in our study reported on a sense of professional stalemate during this period. Suzy, for instance, decided to leave the school she was working in as she could not envision opportunities for development there: 'I left the middle school I was at because I felt like I'd stopped growing there'. She further explained: 'I came up with lots of different ideas and approached my administrative team about it constantly throughout the year. And I kept getting shot down constantly […] That's part of the reason I moved to South Korea'. Despite Suzy's need and willingness to mature professionally, and to experiment with her teaching, her school environment did not offer any opportunities to meet this need. Indeed, even worse than that, they appeared to rather put obstacles in the way of her professional growth. A similar experience was reported by Jane: 'There was a phase of about two years where I was quite unhappy with my teaching, because I felt there was going to be no opportunity for progression for me at the school I was at'. Like Suzy, Jane found it particularly frustrating when her head teacher would not endorse her ideas and suggestions: 'If you suggest an idea that he doesn't like it, he just won't acknowledge it'. Maddison felt that, in her previous school, her voice 'wasn't heard at all', whereas in her new school, she enjoys her current leadership role and takes meaning from it: 'I am enjoying being part of – not just being part of the decision making, but just having my voice heard'.

Consistent with these findings, Farrell (2014) identified a lack of opportunities for professional advancement as one of the main factors leading to

EFL teachers' plateauing during the mid-career phase and highlighted the key role played by the school administration in this sense. When affordances for growth and maturation are not provided within their workplace, mid-career teachers can feel a sense of sameness, disempowerment and stagnation (Day, 2012), which can ultimately lead to attrition (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). This support is critical as it can 'influence their commitment and their capacities to teach to their best in the next 10–20 years of their work in school' (Day & Gu, 2010: 99). As highlighted by Christie (2019: 20), nearly all of the growth in teaching is 'informal, haphazard and idiosyncratic. Only during a minuscule portion of career development are individuals given formal, research-based information on the act of becoming a teacher'. This reveals the need to offer mid-career teachers adequate formal training and clear pathways of professional development tailored to their career phase and personal interests, in order to avoid them feeling dissatisfied and frustrated, and ultimately leaving the institution or even the profession.

Another related challenge contributing to a sense of professional stagnation and loss of enthusiasm during the mid-career phase concerns a lack of autonomy in the workplace. A sense of autonomy is known to be key for a teacher's professional development and job satisfaction (Booth *et al*., 2021; Kyndt *et al*., 2016). Feeling a lack of control and agency over their teaching, teachers may experience lower levels of commitment and motivation, and again ultimately decide to leave the profession (You & Conley, 2015). When individuals feel an inadequate sense of control over their own environment, they can have 'little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties' (Bandura, 2001: 10). This suggests that autonomy and agency are two key interrelated factors underlying not only teachers' growth in the profession, but also their resilience and retention. Ten mid-career teachers in our study reported on the lack of autonomy they perceived in the workplace and how this negatively impacted their perceptions of professional growth and maturation. Cora, for instance, when asked about her future professional goals, mentioned: 'I don't have any goals because so much of the work content is given anyway by authorities'. Simon highlighted the link between a lack of autonomy and the perception of teaching solely for testing purposes; he reported not feeling a sense of control over the curriculum, as he had to uniquely rely on predetermined test formats. He described how this contributed to a sense of sameness and frustration: 'The thing I hate about teaching, really, are the test formats […] what we are doing for years, is teaching to the test […] it's so dull, all the time the same things'. Eight mid-career teachers reported on the challenge of 'teaching for testing', which not only hindered their autonomy, creativity and involvement in decision-making, but was also reported as an ongoing source of pressure and stress, leading to damaging consequences for their motivation for teaching. According to Casey, 'the pressure on teachers to get results is huge', as they are often positioned as being solely responsible for student achievement, and their

professionalism can be judged based on their students' grades. Maddison mentioned how this challenge has become more acute over time, aggravated by a lack of adequate support from the respective school management and broader education system:

> I worry that a lot of teachers are put under so much pressure and not necessarily given the support, so they do what they can to survive […] when I first started teaching, the curriculum was very loose and very up to interpretation, and I feel like it's becoming stricter and stricter and narrower and narrower. The amount of hoops you have to jump through has definitely increased.

Accountability policies, standardisation initiatives and high-stakes testing measures critically impact a teacher's autonomy, which is a key contributor to teacher motivation and job satisfaction (Hartsel, 2016). Such policies undermine not only a teacher's autonomy and sense of agency, but also their willingness to teach. Policymakers and school administrators need to keep in mind that, 'effective teaching, the most powerful factor influencing student learning, is enhanced when teachers have the opportunity to develop their professional identity to the fullest and to exhibit agency in setting direction for their students and their schools' (Brunetti & Marston, 2018: 889). Institutions and education systems should therefore be more invested in and trusting of teachers' professionalism, such as through resources for continuing professional development (CPD), and less focused on students' performance (Brunetti & Marston, 2018; Hartsel, 2016).

Furthermore, the perception of teaching for testing often clashed with these teachers' initial ideals and expectations about teaching. The growing focus placed on assessment by school administrations and educational policies over time was paired with a sense of discouragement and disillusion as they progressed through their career. Research by West (2012) suggests that, as teachers move forward in their career, their motivation shifts from the desire to acquire competence, which is typical of early-career teachers, to a sharper focus on value and purpose in the mid-career phase. This is possibly one of the reasons why these frustrations emerged acutely during the mid-career phase, rather than at the start of teachers' career trajectory. In Alison's case, for instance, the pressure in relation to testing increased over time and prevented her from taking risks and teaching creatively, with negative repercussions on her enjoyment of teaching: 'In the beginning of my career, I took more risks and maybe have more fun in some ways […]. But it was a different time in education and I feel now under more pressure to get the children through exams'. Elena was also concerned about the focus on tests rather than knowledge and recognised that, 'this testing is too important'. Rather, in her view, students 'should have fun, they should experiment with the language, they should enjoy the language, they should get to know more about the countries […]

that's more important'. This is consistent with research showing that outcome-based accountability is a key stressor for teachers, as it poses excessive demands and responsibilities (von der Embse *et al*., 2016), and negatively influences school climate (Putwain & Roberts, 2009). However, additional frustrations and discontent emerge when teachers believe that these policies do not serve the best interests of students (Mathison & Freeman, 2006). Research by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011, 2015) has identified value consonance as a key source of job satisfaction and sense of belonging for teachers. Value consonance refers to 'the degree to which teachers feel that they share the prevailing norms and values at the school where they teach' (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015: 182). In our study, a lack of value consonance appeared related to the increasing tendency of schools and education systems to emphasise students' achievement over learning, and emerged as an important source of frustration and demotivation for teachers, often leading to dissatisfaction and loss of enthusiasm and motivation. As such, policymakers would be well advised to develop accountability policies that prioritise teacher expertise, offer opportunities for self-determined CPD and empower teachers to fulfil their professional roles in line with their teaching values with scope for autonomy, creativity and innovation.

### 5.1.2 Resources

While for some mid-career teachers this phase can be characterised by feelings of sameness and stagnation, for most of the participants in our study, it was also a time defined by confidence and security. They reported having an understanding of the workings of the teaching profession, and being self-assured in their abilities as teachers. Having moved beyond the initial 'reality shock' of the early-career phase, they have gained a sense of expertise and confidence in managing their teaching roles (Day & Gu, 2010). The sense of confidence is the most salient psychological resource reported by teachers in this particular phase and, as will be seen in the next chapter, this remains relevant for the late-career teachers in this study. As literature suggests, it takes approximately five years for teachers to develop a sense of confidence in their abilities (Ingersoll *et al*., 2014; Klassen & Chiu, 2010); so that by the time they reach the middle of their career, teachers can benefit from a heightened sense of self-efficacy and competence (Lazarides *et al*., 2020). All 22 mid-career teachers in this study reported having gained increasing confidence over time, as a result of their experiences within and beyond the language classroom. This helped them to better cope with the demands of the job, including classroom management and teaching practices. An example was provided by Mara: 'As I've become more experienced, I've become more confident in terms of what I'm doing'. Jakob, similarly, reported that, in light of his experience, he could now face challenges he could not have otherwise

overcome as an early-career teacher: 'There are lots of things that I wouldn't have been able to pull off five years ago'. Like Jakob, Cora reported on her initial difficulties in dealing with students, which – over time and with experience – she eventually managed to deal with:

> At the beginning I had the feeling that you have to cry out of the classroom because the lesson didn't work at all. And there was a mess and people didn't listen. But somehow either you get used to such situations, or you handle them in a different way.

She also acknowledged that she had overly high expectations towards herself and her teaching at the start of her career, an issue encountered in the previous chapter. In particular, eight out of these 22 mid-career teachers reported feeling not only increasingly confident as they gained practical knowledge and experience, but also settled and secured in their roles. Cora, for instance, explained: 'At the moment I have the feeling that I'm quite settled […] whatever change there will be, I hope it will not shock me, or challenge me too much'. Monika, similarly, reported that, professionally: 'It's the best time so far'. For Rose, this was a phase where everything was 'sort of in line', and added: 'Compared to [before], I feel happy about the role, and I'm happy about the school, and happy what I'm doing'. Indeed, by the time they reach this phase having gained substantial experience in their roles, mid-career teachers have developed a repertoire of resources sustaining their commitment to the profession.

While this heightened sense of efficacy was largely gained through the experiences and challenges these teachers went through, three teachers also acknowledged the influence of the school culture and environment on their levels of confidence. Alison, for instance, reported that she felt more confident dealing with troublesome pupils when the school had a strict system in place to control their behaviour: 'It depends a lot on the whole culture of the school […] When I felt most confident is when the whole school had a good, strong system'. Mara, similarly, felt less confident dealing with students' behaviour in a comprehensive school, compared to a grammar school, because of the different school system and student population: 'I used to work in a state school, in a comprehensive and things were much tougher. The kids were much harder, I found that that was difficult'. Whole school approaches to behaviour management have proven to be more effective than the individual practices of teachers, with positive effects on staff wellbeing and job satisfaction (De Nobile *et al.*, 2013). This reveals how these teachers' confidence in dealing with student behaviour was not solely based on their experience, but it was also determined by the broader environment they were working in, highlighting the continual interplay between individual and contextual factors shaping teacher psychology and wellbeing (see also Jin *et al.*, 2021; Mercer, 2021).

By mid-career, these teachers had developed a repertoire of coping strategies to help them deal with the challenges and demands of their roles. In our study, 18 mid-career teachers reported having devised strategies particularly aimed at lessening their workload. These coping strategies served as key resources to help them protect the boundaries between their work and personal lives, and better manage their wellbeing. As Penelope explained simply, 'wellbeing is doing what needs to be done with the least amount of trouble'. These coping strategies were varied in nature. Alison, for instance, reported that one of the strategies she implemented to manage her workload was to readapt her previous lessons, which saved her a considerable amount of time, compared to preparing lessons from scratch. She mentioned that she now prioritised students' learning over making new resources for each lesson:

> I think young teachers, especially when they are enthusiastic, spend too long making new resources all the time. And I recycle a lot. I spend the time building relationships with the children, I think that makes your life easier as you go on. It doesn't need to be new every lesson, it needs to be a good lesson for the children.

Like Alison, Jane recognised a change compared to the beginning of her career, when she dedicated most of her time to lesson planning and marking; her strategy now was to effectively employ her time in school and not to bring any work home:

> I really focus on making the most of every free minute at school [...] I suppose that's a real contrast to when I first started teaching. When I'd get in at like quarter past seven in the morning and work through dinner, work through break, stay until about half past four, five o'clock. I'd take work home with me.

The development of these strategies was partly linked to the process of letting go of perfectionism. As we have seen in Chapter 3, this process started in the early career phase and carried on throughout the mid-career one. For mid-career teachers, this process was also paired with a better knowledge of one's boundaries and priorities, gained through time and experience. Ten mid-career teachers reported becoming more tolerant and patient towards themselves and their students over time. This shift in attitude emerged as a key resource helping them nurture their wellbeing and was an inherent part of the broader process of maturing and gaining perspective during this phase. Monika, for instance, explained: 'I always thought I have to change and develop and getting better and better [...] nothing was enough. And that was one of the problems when I started not feeling well. Always being pushed and push yourself'. In her case, these high levels of perfectionism at the start of her career were threatening her wellbeing. However, she eventually 'totally stopped that', and reported

that, 'since then, I feel a lot better'. Jakob, similarly, highlighted the importance of finding a balance between the willingness to keep improving and not being overly perfectionist:

> I think it's very important to try and make progress and to improve - what should be really essential to being a teacher is learning yourself. But that also means learning that you can't be perfect and that also means learning, not to hate yourself or today just because tomorrow's self will be better.

This process, however, does not stop during the mid-career phase, but it sustains in the late-career phase, as we will see in the next chapter. As highlighted by Graves and Hasselquist (2020), as they move forward in their career, teachers are increasingly able to focus on the big picture and become less concerned with small matters. As such, they become more concerned with matters such as value and purpose, over subject competence.

As part of the process of maturing, mid-career teachers also appeared to have developed a sense of authenticity in their roles over time. Teacher identity is not stable; rather, it is flexible and changes over time as the result of the continuous interplay between personal and contextual influences (Flores & Day, 2006). As seen in the previous chapter, a key concern for early-career teachers is to consolidate their identity as teachers and to find their own way into the profession on their own terms. By the time teachers reach the mid-career phase, they have gained awareness of who they are and who they want to be as teachers, and what constitutes good teaching. In our study, five teachers reported explicitly on this aspect. An example was provided by Alexandra: 'You have to be authentic […] if it doesn't work for you, it doesn't work for you'. She further explained:

> What I really like about myself as a teacher now is that I found the way I want to be. Because at the beginning […] I was really unhappy about the way I had reacted, or about what I had said in class, or about what I had done […] and now I think I've found a way of teaching, or of behaving, or of treating pupils, or engaging with pupils that I'm happy with.

Monika, similarly, reported on the importance of feeling authentic in one's role: 'Being more of myself, that was the hardest lesson and you need to be yourself to be happy and to feel well, because if you always pretend to be someone else or something else, it doesn't work'. The necessity of finding one's own way was also underscored by Elena, who mentioned that, 'you have to find your own way […] and find out about yourself and find out if it works or not'. This suggests that, while one of the key challenges for pre-service and early-career teachers was to develop a sense of identity, these mid-career teachers have acquired more stability in their sense of self, and a clearer view of what gave them meaning and

satisfaction in their professional roles. This heightened awareness of identity in more experienced teachers can also lead to a stronger sense of agency (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Brunetti & Marston, 2018). While much of their strong sense of identity comes from experience, practical self-reflection activities can be offered as part of CPD training courses to further prompt teachers to actively reflect on their own teaching identity, their goals, and values as teachers. Reflective practice 'offers support to the personal and professional development of teachers' (Cirocki & Farrel, 2017: 5). Thus, engaging in reflective practice can empower teachers with a sense of agency to feel confidently in charge of their teaching roles and responsibilities.

## 5.2 Taking on Additional Responsibilities

As teachers move forward in their career, the needs and wants they experience progressively shift. While, as seen in the previous chapter, a key concern in the early-career phase was to gain experience and familiarity with the realities of teaching, one of the distinctive features of the mid-career phase was the willingness to further develop and grow in the profession by taking on additional responsibilities and trying out new things. Having gained confidence in their teaching abilities, many mid-career teachers felt ready for the next steps in their career and were more willing to take on new challenges and engage in more complex tasks and duties. While this internal 'quest for stimulation, for new ideas, challenges and engagement' (Huberman, 1989a: 352) can lead to stronger motivation and job satisfaction for most teachers, it can also contribute to increasing tensions between their work and personal lives. As will be seen in the next section, for many teachers, this time often coincided with the middle phase of their lives, which was defined by added responsibilities not only in their career domain, but also in their personal lives.

### 5.2.1 Challenges

Having established themselves in the profession and enjoying a high sense of competence and confidence in their teaching abilities, many teachers in the mid-career phase seek opportunities for additional responsibilities and career advancement. The needs for professional growth and renewal become more pressing during this phase; however, these professional development needs are not univocal for teachers at this stage, but can be 'varied, based on individual ambitions, motivations, expertise, circumstances and wider life orientations' (Booth *et al.*, 2021: 21). Indeed, while pre-service and early-career teacher display relatively homogeneous development needs, for mid-career teachers, these needs for professional development may vary, depending on their different career orientations, priorities and aspirations (Booth *et al.*, 2021). Crucially, a teacher's

development throughout this phase 'can have a powerful impact on the kind of teachers they ultimately become' (Brunetti & Marston, 2018: 2) and therefore plays a key role on their future levels of professional commitment and motivation. As seen in the previous section, mid-career teachers' need for professional development is not always met within their ecology, leading to frustration and demotivation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012); however, when teachers do manage to obtain added responsibilities and take opportunities for career advancement, a whole new set of challenges can emerge.

In our study, 16 mid-career participants reported pursuing opportunities for professional and academic development during this phase. This is in line with a broad range of literature identifying the mid-career phase as one of diversification and experimentation, where teachers actively seek new challenges and opportunities to grow professionally and academically (e.g. Muller *et al*., 2021; Ponnock *et al*., 2018). Seven of our mid-career participants took on leadership or administrative positions, three teachers were involved with teaching unions or organisations, three were doing additional teaching at university, two intended to pursue a PhD and one participant opened her own language school. These new roles and added responsibilities required a substantial amount of time and energy, leading to unique pressures for these teachers. Naturally, one of the main challenges posed by these additional undertakings was an increase in the overall workload. Thirteen participants commented on the substantial amount of workload they were confronted with and acknowledged it as a key source of pressure. A high workload is recognised as a major cause of stress and job dissatisfaction for mid-career teachers, often leading to exhaustion and, ultimately, attrition (Cawte, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020). An example in this study was provided by Cora, who reported working every weekend: 'I don't manage to do all the things I have to do during the week […] I'm just too tired sometimes'. Similarly, Rachel reported finding 'the current workload, along with a middle management role, quite demanding' and added that, 'that has been a source of stress'.

Not unexpectedly, the increase in workload experienced by many teachers during the pandemic crisis led to further stress and pressure. In our study, six mid-career teachers interviewed during the first wave of the pandemic reported on this issue. Jakob, for instance, mentioned that 'the preparation time exploded'. Maria reported that the start of the pandemic 'was the most difficult moment. The hours of the day were not enough'. Due to the transition to online teaching and learning, three of our participants reported experiencing initial feelings of confusion and uncertainty. As they were not familiar with online teaching, this transition meant for them starting from scratch and suddenly feeling like novice teachers. This was the case of Eliza:

> As a teacher, there's always stress and I was stressed, but it was manageable. With the pandemic several times I hit panic mode […] I had several

> days where I couldn't make it through a class because I'd start crying. And it wasn't because I was sad or upset, it was because I was frustrated.

This is consistent with the body of research conducted during the pandemic crisis showing that workload increased exponentially during this phase, bearing important consequences on teachers' mental and physical health (e.g. Kaden, 2020; MacIntyre *et al*., 2020; Parlina *et al*., 2021).

In conjunction with the intensification of their workload, the mid-career teachers in our study also reported on an increase in the responsibilities required by their new roles, which also served as an additional challenge. Alison, for instance, mentioned: 'I am responsible for all the staff and their progress. And I line manage business studies of the department. I am responsible for the exams in French, Spanish, business studies and law […] So I feel a lot of responsibility'. Likewise, Casey reported that his behavioural responsibilities resulted in 'a mountain of work in the department'. In light of the taxing workload and additional responsibilities, three participants did not intend to move forward in their administrative career, as they were concerned by the negative impact on their work–life balance and were content with their current duties. This was, for instance, the case of Jane:

> I didn't go for the head of department job because I thought I'm happy with my work life balance. The extra money is not worth the extra time at all. I'm happy with the responsibility that I've got. And the job that I'm doing. So I'm just going to leave it as it is.

Mara reported being willing to step down from her current responsibilities and not wishing to take on additional ones at that time: 'I don't know how much longer I'm going to be teaching […] I may decide next year to, or a year after, just to sort of take a step back. I don't want any more responsibility than I've already got'. Eliza made the deliberate decision to step down from some of her executive responsibilities, as the amount of work became unbearable: 'My husband and I had an agreement that I would remove myself from a lot of things that I was doing because I had too much on my plate [….] it was time for me to step down'.

Feeling overworked is indeed one of the main reasons mid-career teachers withdraw from positions of additional responsibilities and often decide to return as classroom teachers (Cawte, 2020; Fisher & Royster, 2016). As will be seen in the next chapter, this is also the case for late-career teachers, many of whom decide to step down from their responsibilities to enjoy a healthier work–life balance. Furthermore, the prospective of an unsustainable workload may also prevent mid-career teachers to seek opportunities for career advancement and added responsibility, especially if their job is no longer their sole priority, as will be seen later in this

chapter. This can result in progressive disillusion and discouragement (Rolls & Plauborg, 2009), which heightens the risk of attrition or stagnation.

Inevitably, the additional workload and responsibilities can become a threat to mid-career teachers' work–life balance, an issue that will be further explored in the following section. It is a known fact that for teachers work rarely switches off when paid working hours are over; rather, a large part of their work continues beyond official paid working hours (Philipp & Kunter, 2013). Fifteen participants reported on the struggles in negotiating administrative and leadership duties with their personal commitments and the spillover of work commitments into leisure time. Alison, for instance, underscored the difficulties in managing her workload and family responsibilities:

> I have been head of department in four schools and I have not moved into school leadership and I don't want to […] I don't enjoy the politics of it. I don't enjoy having to bring so much work home. And I find that hard with my children because every evening I get home late from school and then I have maybe two hours, very limited time to see my own children.

She further highlighted that, in light of the challenges in dealing with family and work responsibilities, many of her colleagues left the profession, suggesting how this can serve as a key source of attrition: 'I know a lot of teachers who have left teaching. And a lot of the people that trained with me are no longer teaching'. Rose, similarly, reported on the difficulties in combining her workload with her family commitments: 'You always feel that you don't have enough time with your family. Because you're working full time all the time'. Alison concluded: '[Teaching] is not compatible with my family. It doesn't work for me, with my family life'.

The issue of maintaining a work–life balance is reported as an ongoing challenge for mid-career teachers in the literature, as this is typically a phase where individuals are confronted with more responsibilities in their personal life domain such as caring for children or aging family members (e.g. Muller *et al.*, 2021). As such, this is a period where teachers often need to renegotiate their work–life balance in light of these conflicting priorities and commitments (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). Crucially, these tensions between work and private life are sometimes accepted by teachers as simply being part of their job (van der Want *et al.*, 2018), thus revealing a widespread tendency to normalise this stressor. In our study, this was the case for three participants. Alexandra, for instance, when referring to the spillover between personal and professional lives, explained: 'There is an interference, but then of course that has an influence on my family life, so it's a vicious circle sometimes, but they go hand in hand […] I also feel that it's part of our job'. Cora revealed that she would like to lessen her workload in order to reach a healthier work–life balance, but felt unable to do

so, thus displaying a reduced sense of agency and control over her wellbeing: 'Less work, that would be just perfect […] Having enough time and still having a good work life balance. I can't do it at the moment, so probably won't be able to do it in the next few years'.

This shows the need to understand how to effectively support mid-career teachers in managing their multiple responsibilities without letting the spillover between their work and private life become a continual, normalised source of stress. To do so, administrators and policymakers should critically evaluate the necessity of any supplementary duties, paperwork, and responsibilities in the attempt to find ways to reduce such non-essential commitments. Another possible way to overcome this ongoing issue could be to offer flexible models of working arrangements, an initiative that has been recently introduced in the UK by the Department of Education to sustain teacher motivation and promote their retention in the profession (Speck, 2021).

### 5.2.2 Resources

While seeking new professional challenges inevitably led to an intensification of workload for most participants, it also contributed to the accumulation of positive resources they could draw on to sustain their wellbeing. As seen earlier, having moved on from the 'survival stage' characterising the earlier years in the profession (Chubbuck *et al.*, 2001), teachers may feel the need for professional renewal and advancement (Hartsel, 2016; Steffy & Wolfe, 2001).

Having gained confidence and security in their teaching abilities, many mid-career teachers diversify their career by seeking new research interests, developing new pedagogies, or expanding their role within the school organisation (Briesh *et al.*, 2020). In this sense, expanding their human capital can serve as a key resource helping them to avoid feeling 'the stale breath of routine' (Huberman, 1989b: 43). In our study, 18 mid-career participants reported on their willingness to keep learning and improving their skills, and the benefits for both their development as teachers and overall wellbeing. Claudia, for instance, reported: 'To stay motivated you need to like what you're doing. And to be optimistic, to be open. To not restrict yourself. And to accept challenges'. Monika, similarly, considered taking up new challenges and reflecting on her teaching as 'not always fun', but considered this to be 'worth it, definitely'. Maria reported on her willingness to keep developing and growing: 'One of my goals to continue growing as a teacher because I think that I am in a lifelong journey'.

Naturally, professional development could only occur when paired with an adequate contextual support and affordances from the broader ecology. This suggests the continuous interplay of psychological and contextual resources shaping a teacher's process of growth and maturation.

An example was provided by Penelope, who highlighted that not only her experience, but also the opportunities for development offered by her school made her more prone to development:

> Obviously, as I have progressed, I have learned ways to deal with my students […] but it's more like, which school I am and which state of development this school is. I tried to adjust myself to the circumstances of my teaching, and as a person of course I developed. However, I have developed based on what I have.

This willingness to develop and grow was not only pedagogical in nature; career advancement through pastoral and leadership responsibilities also appeared to contribute to replenishing these participants' resources and providing them with valuable skills they could incorporate into their teaching. In particular, five participants reported on how actively pursuing opportunities for career development such as taking on leadership positions or joining teaching organisations contributed to keeping them engaged in the profession and avoiding feelings of stagnation. Ellie, for instance, reported that, in her previous school, she was overall 'happy with my team and my teaching. But it wasn't enough'. As such, she sought a position of added responsibility as an Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) supervisor, which she particularly enjoyed and helped her familiarise with students in new ways: 'And I love it! […] That allows me to get to know the students in a different light'. Her experience echoes similar findings from Cawte (2020); she also found that, those mid-career teachers who moved onto responsibilities of pastoral care particularly enjoyed the opportunity to relate to students in a different way from their typical teacher role. In a similar vein, Monika, who took the position of head of the English team and was involved in teacher training and mentoring, reported the need to extend her responsibilities and duties beyond teaching: 'If I was just a teacher who went in the morning, back home midday, just going from one class to another, I would be frustrated. I need it. It would be boring otherwise'. She highlighted that these responsibilities gave her 'a lot of positivity', thus making a beneficial contribution to her wellbeing. These examples suggest that, when the needs for professional development and career advancement are met within one's ecology, teachers can experience a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction which, in turn, can positively influence their wellbeing generating increased psychological and human capitals. Alison, for instance, gained a sense of reward and satisfaction from her work, alongside an intense sense of purpose, which she could not envision in other professions: 'I have looked at other jobs […] and I think it would not be as rewarding in terms of satisfaction, in feeling I'm doing something worthwhile'.

Additional responsibilities and a sense of professional growth could also lead to feelings of efficacy and pride, which are known to be key

psychological resources sustaining teacher commitment, motivation and wellbeing (e.g. Castro *et al.*, 2010; Zee & Koomen, 2016). This was the case of eight teachers in our study. An example was offered by Monika: 'I have changed from a standard normal teacher to someone who has a lot of different roles and tasks […] I'm proud of that, what I accomplished to be who I am right now'. As seen throughout this section, the mid-career phase is a 'watershed' for a teacher's development (Day & Gu, 2010); thus, school administrators and policymakers 'must better understand the nature and characteristics of such development' (Brunetti & Marston, 2018: 3), in order to respond effectively to their needs for professional and academic growth, provide adequate resources that sustain teachers' ongoing development, and empower them with a sense of agency over their career choices and wellbeing. It is essential that teachers are supported in their quest for growth and new challenges but that institutions also recognise the increase of work that accompanies these new responsibilities. This means providing also a commensurate reduction of workload in other areas to accommodate new roles, rather than merely adding further and further additions to an already full workload.

## 5.3 Shifting Centres of Attention

The process of maturation characterising the mid-career phase inevitably led teachers to reassess their priorities and they reported gaining increasing awareness of their sources of meaning in their professional lives, as well as in personal domains. While, for most early-career teachers their job remained a key priority, mid-career teachers faced increasing responsibilities at work and in their personal lives. During this phase, they experienced growing tensions in managing their work–life balance. This was typically a phase where teachers sought opportunities for professional development and added commitment at work. However, the mid-career phase often coincided with the mid-life phase for many of these teachers; this meant that some of them were starting to build a family and experienced increasing caring responsibilities at home. This phase has been defined indeed as a 'crossroad' or 'watershed' (Day *et al.*, 2007; Day & Gu, 2010), where teachers need to rethink their career choices, manage conflicting commitments and balance the different domains of their lives.

### 5.3.1 Challenges

This middle phase of teachers' career is one where new priorities emerge which potentially are in conflict with each other. Many teachers are engaging in new professional challenges; however, this is also a time where family responsibilities increase for many. Some mid-career teachers

are at a life stage where they start to build a family, some need to care for their elderly parents, while others do both. As such, teachers in this phase most typically need to juggle their different work and life roles, leading to challenges in managing their time, professional/personal boundaries and commitments.

One of the key struggles for this phase was related to the difficulties in balancing one's workload with family responsibilities, often leading to a negative work–life spillover and acute stress. This tension of feeling pulled between family and work is viewed as a key characteristic of this phase (Booth *et al.*, 2021). The difficulties in balancing these multiple, conflicting responsibilities during the mid-career phase can lead to feelings of guilt, resentment towards the workplace, feelings of job dissatisfaction and, ultimately, attrition (Cawte, 2020; Sorensen & McKim, 2014). Naturally, these difficulties multiply for teachers with young children. Parental status is indeed a key demographic characteristic to examine when looking at teachers' work–life balance (e.g. Flynt & Morton, 2009; Murray *et al.*, 2011). For female teachers, these challenges are typically exacerbated, consistently with a body of literature showing that work–family conflict is still more taxing for female educators than for males (Madipelli *et al.*, 2013; Murray *et al.*, 2011).

Due to time constraints, managing these diverse responsibilities can make it difficult for teachers to effectively balance their work and non-work roles, ultimately leading to untenable strain (Booth *et al.*, 2021). In our study, 10 mid-career teachers mentioned their hardships in finding a routine and schedule that accommodated both work and family commitments. Having to divide their time and attention between their family and work meant less time for leisure and self-care, as well as the necessity to multitask and juggle between different duties and life roles, all of which can lead led to emotional distress and physical exhaustion. This was, for instance, the case of Alison, who was also head of department at her school:

> Before I had children, I used to stay at school until six o'clock and finish my schoolwork at school. When I first met my husband, we used to go out a lot in the evening, I was able to do that. But if I do that now, I don't get home in time to spend any time with them. So now, I actually find that harder having my children because the best time to see them is after school, before they go to bed. I can't stay at school late. So I have to bring more work at home now.

Crucially, she also reported on the emotional challenges and sense of guilt related to not being able to dedicate enough time and attention to her children in light of her work commitment. Working mothers typically experience a sense of guilt when they have to balance family life and their job, with negative consequences for their wellbeing (Aarntzen *et al.*, 2019;

Borelli *et al.*, 2017). In Alison's case, this appeared to contribute to an inner conflict, as well as a sense of frustration:

> I do have a dream of a job with no homework so I could enjoy more family life. Because I feel sad that I am trying to put my children off to bed so that I can do my schoolwork. I don't think that that's what I want, you know. I wanted to have my own children. I waited a long time to have them […] But I spend time too trying to get them out of the way because I have got work to do. I don't like that.

Rose, similarly, reported not having enough time to spend with her children because of the heavy workload: 'You always feel that you don't have enough time with your family. Because you're working full time all the time'. Another example of the hardships experienced by teachers in managing their work and family commitments was reported by Alexandra. She mentioned having to work during the weekend, but also wanting to spend time with her children, leading to what she referred to as a vicious circle. This generated a sense of frustration, as well as tensions between the personal and professional spheres, of which she was aware:

> At weekends I have to work. I would like to have family life at the weekend, to be honest. On Sundays for example, I stop preparing, because I want to do something with my kids, but then I set the alarm clock at four, because I'm not finished. So there is interference, and then I'm tired and then of course that has an influence on my family life, so it's a vicious circle sometimes.

Alexandra expressed a desire to be able to balance her work and family lives: 'In my ideal world I could prepare while my children are playing, and not having to prepare once they're in bed, starting my preparations at 8pm, when I'm really torn'. Like Alexandra, six other participants reported having to work in the evening or during the weekend in order to accomplish their work tasks, which crucially threatened their wellbeing and left little time for their family and for themselves.

While in-service training could be offered to teachers in order to help them find practical strategies to better manage their time (Murray *et al.*, 2011) and balance their diverse responsibilities (Igo & Perry, 2019; Solomonson & Retallick, 2018), one critical step to protect teacher wellbeing and work–life balance would be to reduce their workload outside school hours and ensure that the core work is manageable within traditional working hours. Our data revealed that the amount of work mid-career teachers had to deal with outside their teaching hours at school could not be managed without working at night and during the weekend, a time that many teachers in this phase, as seen earlier, would have preferred to dedicate to their family and personal interests. While some teachers enjoy the flexibility of working when it better suits them, for

others, this means sacrificing most of their free time. This shows once again how workload was a pressing issue across all phases of teachers' career; however, this led to different challenges for each particular career phase. Alison felt that working at night was her viable option and could not envisage an alternative: 'I don't see another way to manage it, really'. However, this was not seen as an efficient nor sustainable way to manage their heavy workload: 'I work very inefficiently […] because I am very tired'. This was also the case of Casey: 'I kind of did everything just a little bit badly'. This sense of tiredness due to having to juggle multiple tasks and responsibilities not only had an influence on the quality of their work, but also of these teachers' relationships beyond work. Maria, for instance, revealed that, before the pandemic, the tiredness she experienced at work had had an impact on her family life: 'When I arrived [at home], I was tired. And I did a great effort, to be with them, to be with my daughter, to listen to her, because I was tired'.

Having to divide themselves between work and family naturally meant, for some teachers, less time to dedicate to their own wellbeing. Indeed, four teachers in our mid-career dataset reported putting themselves and their own wellbeing last in the order of priorities. This was the case, for instance, for Claudia: 'Of course, I would love to have a little bit more time for myself. But I think if you have small children, you anyway forget a little bit'. Similarly, Eliza reported putting herself last in the order of priorities, which had a negative influence on her wellbeing: 'My family is important, my work is important […] Those things all come first before me. And that has been difficult over the years and sometimes it makes a lot of problems'. As will be seen later in this chapter, however, this was not the case of all teachers; indeed, for many of them, this was also a phase where they gained awareness of the need to prioritise their wellbeing, in order to sustain their motivation to remain in the profession.

Not unexpectedly, the issue of work–life spillover and the difficulties in managing multiple responsibilities increased for teachers during the pandemic. The rapid transition to online teaching and learning created for most teachers a higher workload along with a host of emotional challenges associated with the drastic changes brought about by the pandemic (see also Gregersen *et al.*, 2020; MacIntyre *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, working from home and sharing one's own space with the rest of the family meant that the boundaries between work and life were even blurrier. Kraft and Simon (2020) found that, mid-career teachers, who are more likely than other career phases to have children at home, faced substantial difficulties in managing the balance between their work and home lives throughout the first wave of the pandemic. This also seemed to be the case of our participants; while managing the multiple life and professional roles was a key issue for mid-career teachers before the pandemic, during the pandemic, the problems caused by this intensified. For Jakob,

for instance, having to plan his lessons while caring for his children meant that preparation time substantially increased: 'I spent hours and hours in front of the screen preparing and planning stuff […] of course being there with two little kids at home in front of the screen probably didn't help. That's probably the reason why the thing took ages'. Maria reported that the pandemic brought more chaos in her professional and personal domains, due to the overlap between her roles as teacher, mother and wife, which she now had to manage within the same environment:

> Everything was chaotic at the beginning because there was no time to stop […] I think that the most stressful thing is the organization, my personal organisation and my family organisation, because I work at home and I am a mom, and I am a wife, so many things at the same time and in the same place.

Victoria, similarly, described the lack of boundaries between the different domains of her life during the pandemic. She described a situation where school and private life continuously blend into each other:

> The kids and the stuff from school are in my private life permanently […] my husband's a teacher at home and [I have] two children, both at different schools doing their schoolwork at home. So, it feels like four different schools have permeated our house and there are no dividing lines.

She also explained how this work–life spillover threatened her wellbeing, and reflected on how this was greatly influenced by her personal relationships which, in a situation of enforced contact, underwent tremendous change: 'You don't realise how much of your relationships being well, depends on people going out and coming back again. And being all sort of bunched in together for so long really is the thing we're all finding hardest'. However, as will be seen in the following section, for some teachers, this 'enforced proximity' meant more time to spend with their family compared to before, as well as an opportunity to re-shift their centre of attention from work to private life; a difference in perspectives which reinforces the unique subjectivity of teacher wellbeing.

### 5.3.2 Resources

While the mid-career phase appears characterised by substantial tensions between teachers' multiple roles, responsibilities and commitments, this is also a phase where teachers typically gain an awareness of their priorities and of what contributes towards a meaningful life for them. Progressing in their career, many have begun to realise that work is not their sole priority and are experiencing a shift in perspective, leading them to re-evaluate their 'centres of gravity' (Goodson, 2008). Research by Traini *et al.* (2020) has also recognised a change from the early-career

phase, where work seems to preponderate within a teacher's life, to the mid-career one, where teachers seek to establish firmer boundaries between their work and life domains.

In our study, nine mid-career teachers reported on a shift in their priorities and sources of meaning. For some teachers, this meant a stronger focus on relationships and family life; for others, it foregrounded the need to prioritise their own wellbeing. In most cases, however, these two aspects go hand in hand; indeed, the quality of these teachers' relationships became increasingly important in shaping their wellbeing as they progressed in their life and career. Monika, for instance, reported on the importance of her personal relationships for her wellbeing, which became more prominent during this particular phase. She also revealed how these contributed to her happiness at work, thus revealing the interconnections between the different components of her overall wellbeing: 'I couldn't be happy at work if I wouldn't have them. Work relationships are important, but work is just a small part of my life, so private relationships I would say are more important'. Claudia considered how her 'centres of gravity' (Goodson, 2008) shifted when she had children: 'School is not the most important thing in in the world […] It's a routine, we have to go to school, but it's not the focus anymore'. For Quirina, 'seeing that everyone is happy in the family […] that's a goal'. For these teachers, the happiness and meaning gained from their personal relationships served as key resources sustaining their wellbeing. Strong family engagement can serve as a stress relief for teachers (Clement, 2017). As will be seen in the next chapter, dedicated to late-career teachers, positive relationships within and beyond work were a key ingredient for a long-lasting teaching career (see also Babic *et al.*, 2022a).

While acknowledging the importance of personal relationships as key resources shaping their wellbeing, three participants also reported on the importance of finding a happy balance between their own wellbeing and their caring responsibilities towards others. In the context of self-care, a metaphor that is often used by researchers and practitioners is that of the oxygen mask. They typically advise to put your oxygen mask first before assisting others – meaning that, without being well ourselves, we cannot help anyone else (Taylor, 2014). A study by Grady and McCarthy (2008) on mid-career professional working mothers has also shown that individuals in this stage, and especially women, seek more self-care time in an effort to find renewed balance between the work, family and self domains. Three participants in our study have also come to the realisation that they need to prioritise their wellbeing in order to be able to care for their loved ones. This was the case, for instance, for Penelope:

> I find it laughable, and even dangerous, when people say: 'I put myself second in order to take care of my family'. Yes, obviously you have to take care of your family and your loved ones, but if you're not happy, eventually your body or your mind will take revenge on you.

In this sense, self-reflection about wellbeing can serve as a key resource for teachers to draw on to evaluate their priorities and goals. A number of studies have shown, for instance, that mindfulness trainings can help significantly reduce teachers' stress (e.g. Hwang *et al*., 2017, for a meta-analysis). Indeed, mindfulness interventions can provide teachers with tools to cope strategically with stress and difficult emotions and to manage conflict, by raising their awareness and triggering processes of self-reflection. Furthermore, self-compassion and emotional regulation strategies can also represent valuable resources helping teachers cope with stress and manage their wellbeing (see also Mairitsch *et al*., in press). Crucially, self-compassion has been associated with a number of factors related to wellbeing such as life satisfaction, happiness, optimism, positive affect, wisdom, personal initiative, curiosity and exploration (Neff, 2003; Neff *et al*., 2007).

For five participants, in particular, the shift in priorities mentioned earlier did not occur naturally as they moved forward in their lives and careers; this happened as a reaction to the shifts brought by the pandemic or perhaps the pandemic accelerated a process that would have eventually taken place. For these teachers, the issues, stresses and life changes generated by the pandemic served as a trigger for re-evaluating their priorities and reflecting on their centres of attention (see also Sulis *et al*., 2021). An example of this was provided by Jakob who was prompted into a process of self-reflection about his wants and needs:

> I felt I needed to do less work and spend more time with others […] I get a lot of satisfaction out of my work and I like doing it, but I see that I need to take care of myself and my life as well as work. But that is a difficult learning process that I'm in the middle of.

A similar process of self-reflection was described by Maria, who explained how the slower pace of the pandemic had made her more conscious about the quality of the time she spends with her family: 'The pandemic made us reflect about a lot of things, and especially the question of quality time […] now I am enjoying more to be at home and to be with my family, and disconnect from technology when I need'. As seen in the previous chapter, many early-career teachers also gained a new awareness of their priorities and needs during the pandemic crisis; this shows that the shifts brought by the pandemic generated a huge impact on all teachers' wellbeing irrespectively of their age and career phase.

The process of re-evaluation of these teachers' needs and wants was paired, in the mid-career phase, with an increasing awareness and knowledge of the strategies and support needed to find an appropriate balance between the different domains of their lives. As highlighted by Clement (2017: 136), 'teachers who experience longevity in the classroom are the ones who have developed multiple support systems for themselves'. As

explained by Quirina, being able to juggle between the different duties at work and at home requires 'a lot of organisation and time management'. Four participants mentioned prioritising their different tasks as a key strategy they adopted to better manage their time. Claudia, for instance, mentioned: 'I put the priority of the things I have to do in a kind of list when they are due […] so I have the to-do list and then I cross it off'. In addition to prioritising, being efficient by 'satisficing' also became a strategy mid-career teachers increasingly relied on in order to preserve their work–life boundaries. As they gained perspective and let go of perfectionism, these teachers realised that they did not need to accomplish every task perfectly but satisfactorily enough. Casey, for instance, explained:

> I'm compartmentalising it to some degree. There has to be a cut-off point and my catchphrase is always 'You know, no one died'. It's never going to be life or death, whether I finished the to-do list or not […] There is no point me worrying about what's on that list. Just do what I can at work and tick off the little things that I can get done.

Prioritising has been found, indeed, as an effective coping strategy teachers can adopt to protect themselves from stress and burnout (Lindqvist *et al.*, 2021). Another strategy adopted by four teachers to set clearer boundaries between work and personal life was not to bring any work home. Eliza also agreed with her husband on a set time after which she would not work, in order to enjoy her time with her family: 'I stay until six because I refuse to take any work home. So I grade everything at school […] my husband and I agreed six o'clock I come home. So that I get done whatever I can get done'. Similarly, Jane reported not bringing any work home in order to preserve the boundaries between work and home: 'Over the last three, four years, I've really tried to not bring anything home. I would rather stay an extra hour at school. And then when I get home, my home is my home'.

The support given by family members can also be defining for mid-career teacher wellbeing and highlights the important role played by others in a teacher's social network. This is consistent with research in the US context showing that relying on family members and friends can serve as a key strategy to cope with the stresses of teaching (Richards, 2012). Three mid-career teachers in our dataset reported relying on their partner to better manage their time and tasks outside of work, while two of them mentioned that they relied on their parents for baby-sitting duties, in order to have more time available for work and for themselves. Claudia, for instance, mentioned that her husband takes care of 'all the housework, the cooking and the cleaning up'. Keira, similarly, reported that she was able to rely on her husband to accomplish all the housework duties: 'I have a very nice husband who does most of the cooking, most of the cleaning'. However, for those who could not rely on the help of their family,

managing their different tasks within and beyond work became more complex. As seen earlier, this meant for many teachers in this phase having to work at night or during weekends, thus sacrificing a large part of their free time.

Our findings showed that, by the time they reached this phase, teachers have gained an awareness of the strategies and support needed to manage their multiple roles and different life domains. This means that the type of support and training offered to such teachers should be rooted in the needs voiced by these teachers. Thus, CPD opportunities should ideally be self-directed empowering teachers to decide what they need, in what format, and when they can engage with it so as to suit their specific profile and challenges (see also Mercer *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, specific in-service training opportunities could be offered aimed at developing teachers' abilities to cope with challenging conditions and better manage their often conflicting roles.

### 5.3.3 Summary

The present chapter has identified three main themes that appear defining for the mid-career phase. These are: maturing with experience, taking on additional responsibilities and shifting centres of attention. Within each theme, we examined the challenges and obstacles that teachers faced during this particular phase of their career in terms of this theme, as well as the resources and sources of support they were able to draw on to nurture and preserve their wellbeing in this regard.

Key challenges for this phase included limited support for professional development, increasing accountability measures, and a lack of autonomy which often led to a progressive sense of stagnation, as well as a loss of motivation and sense of purpose in relation to teaching. However, during this phase, teachers also typically enjoyed high competence and confidence in their teaching abilities, which empowered them with a sense of authenticity in their role. These were paired with a vast array of coping strategies that these teachers could draw on to manage their workload and the different challenges encountered in the classroom.

Having gained familiarity with the demands of teaching and self-assuredness about their roles, mid-career teachers in our study strived for further professional development and growth by acquiring increasing responsibilities or gaining administrative roles; however, this often resulted in increasing workload and pressure, both of which served as key challenges during this phase. Despite the accumulation of workload, these new responsibilities and roles were also a source of positive resources such as efficacy, pride, and satisfaction, which further contributed to the process of maturation into the profession.

Finally, our third theme revealed that one of the most defining challenges for this phase concerned work–life spillover, and thus the strains

related to managing different, often conflicting priorities at home and work, and the lack of boundaries between these domains. This was especially problematic during the Covid-19 pandemic, where these boundaries became even more blurred. However, during this phase, teachers also developed a stronger awareness of self-care approaches such as a recognition of one's priorities and sources of meaning in life. Through explicit awareness and self-reflection about their priorities and needs, these teachers were also able to develop practical strategies aimed at preserving the boundaries between work and life.

The findings have shown that the demands and responsibilities of teachers typically multiply in the mid-career phase, as teachers need to juggle diverse challenges in their personal and professional lives, and experience increasing pressures across competing life domains. These findings imply that, more so during this particular phase, professional development, school administrators, as well as policymakers should take into consideration the complex lives of these teachers and the need to look at teachers' lives holistically to appreciate their experience of their professional roles. Teachers at any stage but especially mid-career cannot detach themselves as if in a vacuum separated from other facets of their lives. A truly supportive workplace should recognise those demands and needs, and thus seek to tailor support for this specific career stage in order to make the work of such teachers within and beyond the classroom more sustainable in the long term.

# 6 Late-Career Language Teachers

In this chapter, we present the findings from the teachers in the late-career phase. We explore three themes in relation to the wellbeing of late-career language teachers: managing the transition to retirement, age awareness and taking stock.

In total, 18 late-career language teachers took part in our study. Fourteen teachers were interviewed before the pandemic crisis occurred, and four were interviewed during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. More information about their biodata can be found in the Tables 6.1 and 6.2 below.

**Table 6.1** Late-career teachers' biodata and demographic information (pre-pandemic)

| Pseudonym | Gender | Country of residence | Age group | Languages taught |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Birgit | F | Austria | 55–64 | English, Latin |
| Edith | F | Austria | 45–54 | English |
| Elisabeth | F | Austria | 45–54 | English, Italian |
| Gerda | F | Austria | 45–54 | English |
| Iris | F | Austria | 55–64 | English, German |
| Melanie | F | Austria | 55–64 | English, German |
| Sabine | F | Austria | 55–64 | English, German |
| Tanja | F | Austria | 55–64 | English |
| Betty | F | UK | 55–64 | French, Spanish |
| Caroline | F | UK | 45–54 | German, Russian |
| Felicity | F | UK | 45–54 | French, Spanish |
| George | M | UK | 55–64 | English, French, Spanish |
| Karen | F | UK | 45–54 | French, Spanish |
| Mabel | F | UK | 65–74 | Chinese |

**Table 6.2** Late-career teachers' biodata and demographic information (during the pandemic)

| Pseudonym | Gender | Country of residence | Age group | Languages taught |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adrian | M | Germany | 55–64 | German |
| Alice | F | New Zealand | 55–64 | French, Spanish |
| Christine | F | Australia | 45–54 | English, French |
| Naomi | F | Argentina | 45–54 | English |

## 6.1 Managing the Transition to Retirement

Transitioning to retirement is one of the most important milestones in a person's lifetime, and it involves every individual making critical decisions about their pathway to retirement (Furunes *et al*., 2015; Schooler & Caplan, 2009). During this phase of their career, teachers may decide to gradually slow down by reducing workload and responsibilities, quit their current positions in their schools, leave the profession, or remain until retirement and thrive in their professional roles (Day, 2012, 2017; Furunes *et al*., 2015). While some teachers experience decreasing enthusiasm, engagement, and motivation throughout their last years in the profession, other late-career teachers may still flourish in this career phase, have a positive outlook towards the future, and experience a sense of positive detachment as they look forward to having time for themselves. Each person experiences this period of transition in their own way; in this section, we explore these different experiences through the lens of challenges and resources and ways in which these affected late-career teachers' well-being in this career phase.

### 6.1.1 Challenges

As they approach retirement, many late-career teachers feel ready to leave school and focus on their lives outside of the profession (see e.g. Chiong *et al*., 2017; Day, 2017; Huberman, 1989b; Shields & Mullen, 2020). In this study, nine out of 18 late-career teachers reported having reached a sense of saturation in their profession and, as such, expressed a readiness to leave. For instance, Birgit explained that she has decided to quit her job before she reaches retirement age 'because it's getting strenuous' at her school, and there are significantly more stressors for her than in previous years. Similarly, Karen stated: 'I'm at that situation where I'm thinking of leaving the job because of the stress that I'm feeling in the job'. She further explained that, over the past years, her feelings about the teaching profession have deteriorated due to the increasing levels of stress brought about largely by educational policy changes: 'All the changes that happened have been for the worse. […] It hasn't got any better in 18 years. But now I think I feel a little bit more cynical about it and less hopeful'. Indeed, the

implementation of new policies, initiatives and bureaucracy is often linked with late-career teachers' willingness to leave the profession and enter retirement (Chiong *et al.*, 2017; Day & Gu, 2009; Goodson *et al.*, 2006).

In fact, two major educational policy issues affected seven participants, and these were teaching inspections (Ofsted) in the UK and the standardised school-leaving exam (Matura) in Austria. Ofsted is a non-ministerial department of the UK Government put in place in 1992, which inspects a large range of educational institutions and their teachers and reports on their findings. However, the effects of these inspection services on school quality and students' exam performances are reportedly small (Rosenthal, 2004). Instead, Ofsted inspections often lead to a high-stress response from teachers, as they feel deprofessionalised, anxious and they may even doubt their competences in the classroom as a result of these inspections (Jeffrey & Woods, 2006). In our dataset, three UK teachers complained about the negative effects Ofsted inspections had on the school in general, and on them as teachers specifically. Karen described how, in light of the current Ofsted evaluations of her school, her headteacher had decided to 'focus all our efforts on results, on teaching-learning results'. Consequently, teachers were deprived of any support in relation to classroom management and had to deal with students' misbehaviour by themselves. She further elaborated:

> Basically, he took all the support and all systems, like the senior leadership involvement in detentions and they took all that away and was all left to individual teachers to deal with students in class. So, that was responding to Ofsted. Since then, teachers have complained so much.

Similarly, George reported on how unwell he felt on inspection days and how that affected his wellbeing: 'There is no way you could just lead a normal life and then go into school, normal'. Felicity also highlighted how the data-driven approach of the government had caused everyone in her school to feel stressed. Indeed, a recent report by Ofsted (2019) revealed that constant inspections can have a strong negative impact on the school climate and the wellbeing of teachers in the UK.

Compared to the UK setting, a policy that contributed to the feelings of stress among the late-career teachers from Austria was the standardised school-leaving examination, Zentralmatura (BMBWF, 2022d), which was introduced in 2015. In fact, four out of eight teachers experienced the introduction of a new form of the Matura as highly stressful and one of the reasons for them to consider leaving the profession before their official retirement age. The previous format of the school-leaving exam differed dramatically to the newly introduced Zentralmatura (OECD, 2017), as teachers had more freedom, autonomy and creativity in creating their own exams and assessment (Hofstadler *et al.*, 2020). Eight Austrian late-career teachers in this study confirmed that the implementation of the

new school-leaving exam posed great challenges for them and felt that the 'teaching for testing' approach hindered their autonomy and creativity in the classroom. Research has shown that standardised testing and accountability policies can affect teacher motivation and autonomy (Hartsel, 2016). For example, Birgit stated that, 'creativity is getting lost' and added: 'So this is something which I really feel sorry about, you can't give away to students' interests so much as you could, because there are not enough lessons […] so you always have this stress as well'.

The implementation of the standardised Matura also reportedly led to increased amounts of stress and greater workload, which added to these teachers' obligations outside of their regular working hours. Tanja explained: 'The problem is in the last, I think 10 years or the last years, with the new Matura, because it's getting more stressful for us. You really have to do all this, in addition to your teaching job'. In light of these challenges, four teachers felt deeply dissatisfied as they could not devote sufficient time to their families and personal interests and, therefore, were keenly awaiting their retirement. In addition, these teachers also felt that this system also negatively influenced their students. Tanja explained that, students 'don't learn a lot [and] are struggling' in the context of the new Matura format. As a result of these challenges, seven late-career teachers in this study were experiencing overwhelming negative emotions and stress, which heightened their willingness to leave. It raises questions about the effects of educational policies which impede teachers' autonomy and can thus threaten their well-being and willingness to remain in the profession.

Another factor reported by late-career language teachers as negatively impacting their job satisfaction as they transitioned to retirement was their perception of students' deteriorating behaviour. For example, Betty from the UK stated: 'I do have one class that was really difficult in terms of behaviour, that no one in the whole of my school can teach. They are the worst'. She added: 'They hate school, they hate teachers, they hate everything. And they are incredibly difficult, even to just get them to go into a classroom […] is a challenge. You are battling with them all the time'. Although students' behaviour caused her dissatisfaction, Betty remained confident that it was not a result of anything she was doing. Indeed, teachers who remain in their professional roles for many years typically experience a sense of resilience in their jobs, which helps them cope with challenges in the workplace (Gu & Day, 2007).

An issue brought by the pandemic crisis was the abrupt switch to online teaching, which was particularly challenging for all four late-career teachers in this study and coloured their last years of teaching with negativity and frustration. Naomi described how the transition to remote teaching had negatively influenced her wellbeing:

> It was like a storm. The very first week it was really, really bad. I spent like two, three days crying, because I didn't know how I was going to go

> through this. […] I phoned my coordinator [and] I told her that I was not going to be able to keep on. So I was going to ask for leave till the situation got better.

Naomi's perceived sense of efficacy appeared visibly shaken, as she started doubting her competences and ability to manage the transition and teach online. As such, even though these teachers had decades of experience behind them, this new situation appeared to set them back as they had to learn and adapt to unknown forms of teaching.

Research on teacher wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis revealed that the abrupt shift to online teaching indeed represented quite a challenge for many teachers in different career phases (e.g. Dabrowski, 2021; MacIntyre *et al*., 2020; Sulis *et al*., 2021; Truzoli *et al*., 2021), causing a sharp increase in workload and stress (Dabrowski, 2021; Gurung, 2021; MacIntyre *et al*., 2020). Adrian, for example, referred to the pandemic as his lowest moment in teaching from his entire career because his workload had doubled: 'I felt to be teaching online almost like 24/7'. As such, the pandemic crisis made these late-career language teachers' final years in the profession particularly challenging and unpleasant.

Another factor that provoked difficulties in managing the transition to retirement was the teachers' worry about their current and future financial security. For the most part, this affected our participants from the UK who complained that teachers and their students do not receive sufficient resources. For instance, Betty disclosed: 'We don't have exercise books, we don't have any glue sticks, we don't have textbooks, so we have to project the textbook onto the board because we can't afford to buy them'. She added: 'I've actually spent quite a lot of money buying things for my students'. As a result of such precarious work conditions, another teacher, Felicity, mentioned that she would gladly retire early; however, she alluded that she cannot afford to do so: 'I'd rather have a maximum of another three years, but financially I don't think that's going to be feasible, unless, you know, I win the lottery, and everything is paid'. In contrast, late-career teachers from Austria are in the highest income stage (BMBWF, 2022e), as teacher salaries grow progressively throughout their careers. The OECD reported on teachers' salaries among its 38 member countries across the world. The report ranked Austrian secondary school late-career teachers' salaries on the sixth position (OECD, 2021). The UK, however, is positioned only on rank 22 (OECD, 2021). Data in this study show that Austrian participants felt quite satisfied with their current income. In particular, Birgit mentioned that teacher salaries in Austria are quite good, but she shared her worry about future teacher generations: 'I don't know how they will cope, they will probably have to work part time, and then of course, they'll get even less money'. While Iris from Austria was pleased with her current financial situation, she was concerned that the government might make 'severe cuts in pensions' and added, 'I hope

that I'm going to get the money I'm supposed to be getting'. Experiencing financial stability and security, having control over one's finances and feeling satisfied with one's living standard are key for one's sense of wellbeing generally (Brüggen *et al*., 2017; Dolan *et al*., 2008; Netemeyer *et al*., 2018; Ruberton *et al*., 2016) and in retirement particularly (Goldsmith, 2000; Ruberton *et al*., 2016).

The challenges outlined in this section inevitably led to a progressive decline in five late-career teachers' motivation, engagement, and enthusiasm for teaching as they approach retirement. Tanja mentioned that her own motivation had been negatively affected by certain aspects of her work and that she had lost her faith and did not see any positive changes coming soon: 'I will retire before something happens'. Sabine has also begun to lose her motivation and patience, and highlighted that she wanted 'some kind of freedom' in this phase of her life, suggesting that she is looking forward to the transition to retirement and reaching such a sense of freedom. Indeed, literature exploring the lives of late-career teachers argues that, especially in this career phase, challenges experienced at work might have a strong influence on these teachers' motivation, commitment, and engagement, including ways in which they transition to retirement (e.g. Battitori, 2010; Day, 2017; Edwards, 2003; Goodson *et al*., 2006). Such challenges may cause teachers to transition to retirement with poor memories of their last years as well as experiencing negative wellbeing (Day, 2017).

### 6.1.2 Resources

Throughout their professional lives and during the late-career phase, teachers can experience high levels of stress, which can influence their decision to leave the profession prematurely (Goodson *et al*., 2006). However, late-career teachers have also accumulated various resources that they can draw on to bolster their commitment and willingness to stay in the job until retirement (Battitori, 2010; Chen *et al*., 2020; Day, 2017). Our data revealed that nine late-career language teachers were flourishing when the interviews took place, which became apparent through the way they talked about their positive workplace culture, colleagues, and students, and how satisfied as professionals they were. One of the resources that contributed to these teachers' thriving in their profession was their job satisfaction. For example, Betty mentioned how much she still enjoys teaching: 'I'm just loving what I'm doing now'. She further disclosed that, although she was working long hours and has an extensive workload, she was content: 'I'm really not finding it hugely stressful, because I'm happy'. Betty added: 'I think, if your state of mind changes and you're not happy, then you're going to feel a lot more stress than you would otherwise'. As such, her satisfaction in her job supported her wellbeing enabling her to enjoy her professional life during this career phase.

As suggested by Hobfoll (2002, 2011), gaining and storing resources one can draw on in adverse times help individuals to cope with stress and preserve their wellbeing. Similarly, Felicity's interview revealed that the high status she has as a late-career teacher in her school brings her positive emotions and affects her wellbeing and job satisfaction positively: 'I've got a status in the school. I'm highly respected'. In fact, research on teacher status has shown that if teachers feel respected in their school communities and in society, it can positively affect teachers' job satisfaction, retention and their willingness to stay in the profession, as opposed to teachers who feel unvalued and disrespected (Battitori, 2010). Furthermore, Dobrow Riza *et al.* (2018) found that one reason why job satisfaction can increase with age might be due to employees' perceived increased status, as they feel more confident and empowered in their jobs. Elisabeth from Austria also felt appreciated and valued in her job as she was awarded as favourite teacher in her school. Such feelings combined with a positive workplace climate contributed to her job satisfaction and wellbeing as a late-career teacher. She said: 'Actually, you know what? There is nothing I'm dreaming of now because I'm so very happy that I'm basically doing all the things I have always wanted to do. […] It's the best time of my life now'. It is important and supports retention when teachers approaching retirement feel valued and appreciated, and that they experience job satisfaction in the final years of their teaching. It is an indication of the moral status of a profession when it values and respects those who have given decades of committed service to the profession.

Another resource that was particularly visible in the data of three late-career language teachers interviewed during the first wave of the Covid-19 outbreak was their willingness to learn and grow. Indeed, they reported enjoying their teacher roles despite the challenges posed by the pandemic crisis. For example, Adrian explained that he is quite happy and confident because his scope of knowledge and abilities as a language teacher increasingly expanded as he acquired a new set of skills in terms of using technology in the classroom. In particular, he explained that he finds most enjoyable 'exploring new fields in terms of – well, right now, at the moment – how to teach digitally or how to be able to find out what the individual needs of students are and incorporate them in teaching'. Even though the literature proposes that many teachers in their final years of teaching feel demotivated, disengaged and unwilling to pursue additional professional development (e.g. Day, 2012; Day *et al.*, 2007, 2017; Goodson *et al.*, 2006), some late-career teachers indeed sustain their motivation and willingness to learn and grow (e.g. Arnau *et al.*, 2004; Day & Gu, 2009; Gorlewski & Greene, 2010). For instance, Arnau *et al.* (2004) explored late-career teachers' experiences with peer-coaching and found that late-career teachers were eager and motivated to learn through peer-coaching, particularly if they felt that new knowledge and skills would positively affect their students' learning and growth (Arnau

*et al.*, 2004). In our study, seeing the purpose in further professional development seems to be key for motivating these late-career teachers to engage in such activities which sustain their job satisfaction in times of crisis and beyond.

Another important resource for late-career language teachers' wellbeing was their decision to gradually start letting go of various responsibilities accumulated over the years. As seen in the previous chapter, teachers in their mid-careers tend to take on additional professional responsibilities and obligations, which typically makes it difficult for them to juggle their multiple roles in work and at home (Booth *et al.*, 2021; Igo & Perry, 2019). However, as they approach their final years in the profession, late-career teachers typically come to realise the extra effort that the additional responsibilities require, and they begin to step back and let other teachers take over.

In our study, eight late-career teachers reported on purposefully reducing their workload to alleviate some of their stress. Birgit, for instance, explained that, with experience, she knew how to alleviate work by saying no and delegating to others in order to protect her own time and wellbeing. In addition, she explicitly mentioned that she had made a conscious decision that certain aspects of her work would no longer cause her stress which helped her to enjoy teaching more. Melanie commented on her ability to say no and highlighted: 'This made life much easier'. In another example, Iris said that if her head teacher or colleagues tried to put additional workload on her, she replied that she was sorry but that she could not take on any further responsibilities. Similarly, Felicity learned how to express her strong attitude towards things she does not want to do: 'I don't want to be a senior teacher where I'm having to agree with all the decisions I don't want to be a part of'. Managing the transition to retirement typically involves a degree of control in making decisions on whether, and under which conditions, one wants to approach retirement (Furunes *et al.*, 2015). These can include reducing workload, responsibilities and obligations, changing the employer, becoming self-employed, or quitting (Furunes *et al.*, 2015). As such, perceived control (Schooler & Caplan, 2009) and feeling empowered to make such decisions can positively influence individuals' job satisfaction (Furunes *et al.*, 2015).

Another key resource sustaining the motivation of late-career teachers and helping them experience a positive transition to retirement was looking forward to their retirement and having more time for themselves and their loved ones. Having a positive outlook on their retirement served as a resource for wellbeing in the last phase of their careers (Day & Gu, 2009). Six teachers in this study mentioned that they were happily awaiting their retirement because they would have more time to devote to their personal endeavours such as learning a new language, travelling, spending time with their family and friends, and also having more time for themselves. Tanja from Austria provided an example: 'Well, I'm looking

forward to having more time for myself and I am looking forward to working less'. She owns a family farm and already looks forward to spending more time there: 'We have the animals and they are relaxation'. Similarly, Sabine had already started putting her own needs first more than she used to in the past and aimed to continue to do even more so once she has retired. She explained: 'I do definitely more for my personal wellbeing than I did in the past and I think I also need it more'. Huberman (1989b) argued that many late-career teachers experience a positive withdrawal and detachment from the profession due to the desire to devote more time to themselves and their interests outside of school. He further suggested that such teachers experience serenity – a positive and untroubled state of mind – which arguably eases their transition to retirement (Huberman, 1989b).

## 6.2 Awareness of One's Age

During the late-career phase, teachers typically report becoming aware of their biological age and paying closer attention to their wants, needs, health and wellbeing than before (Day & Gu, 2010). Age awareness can be characterised as 'all those experiences that make a person aware that his or her behaviour, level of performance, or ways of experiencing his or her life have changed as a consequence of having grown older (i.e. increased chronological age)' (Diehl & Wahl, 2010: 340). As teachers grow older and become increasingly aware of their own age, they experience a range of challenges and resources that influence their sense of wellbeing.

After over two decades of teaching, maintaining commitment in their chosen profession can become increasingly difficult, as some perceive a growing generational gap between their students' attitudes, belief systems and behaviours, in comparison to those of their own (Gutman & Oplatka, 2021; Hargreaves, 2005). As they grow older, some teachers may also experience health-related issues, a lack of interest in professional growth and difficulties in adapting to unexpected changes (Almeida & Wong, 2009; Day & Gu, 2010). However, awareness of their range of expertise and knowledge, their willingness to further grow and attend CPD training, their conscious care of their physical health and their established long-lasting relationships (Day & Gu, 2010; Louws *et al.*, 2017a; Sabatini *et al.*, 2020) can help these late-career teachers to buffer these stressors and challenges, thus supporting them to thrive in the last phase of their careers.

### 6.2.1 Challenges

One of the age-related challenges that 13 late-career teachers reported was their growing awareness of themselves and their family members

getting older, which, in their opinion, also had implications for their physical health. For example, thinking of her own and her parents' age, Iris disclosed that she is 'not looking forward to losing [her] parents' as they are also getting older and their health is slowly deteriorating. She further elaborated:

> It is not as pleasant to look forward to getting older as it was when I was looking forward to getting thirty, getting forty, even getting fifty. So, the prospects are not as thrilling as they were probably ten, twenty, thirty years ago.

Indeed, some major life changes, such as those mentioned by Iris, are typically perceived as stressors which require adaptations and adjustments (Wheaton, 1990). If life changes are perceived as stressful, they can cause mental health issues for individuals experiencing them (Almeida & Wong, 2009; Wheaton, 1990). For example, George mentioned thinking about his age and realising that, 'some teaching situations would affect [his] health' and that teaching started to deplete his time and energy. For these reasons, he decided to retire early from his job in school and continue teaching under conditions and at a pace he was comfortable with.

Other teachers also reported feeling that their health slowly started deteriorating. For instance, Gerda concluded that, in the past, she was able to recharge after the summer holidays, but because she started getting more tired with the years, the annual summer breaks no longer sufficed for her. Mabel started to develop actual physical problems: '18 years ago, when I was nearly 60 years old, I felt my heart every morning, that means my heart had some problems'. She assigned her health issues to her advancing age: 'Because I'm getting older, these kinds of things happen. And now, in the last two years, I've started to feel that I cannot walk properly, so, I've started to think of my body'.

Declining physical strength and experiencing health issues are common among some older adults (e.g. King & King, 2010; Scartoni *et al*., 2018; Unger *et al*., 1997). In particular, three out of four late-career language teachers interviewed during the pandemic expressed their concerns about their physical health in this period. For instance, Christine explained that, because she was sitting for hours during remote teaching, her 'physical wellbeing was definitely suffering'. Naomi disclosed that, due to online teaching, her neck started to hurt, she developed strong headaches, and her eating and exercising habits changed, which resulted in her gaining weight: '[I] put on three, four kilos because of the situation'. Adrian also explained that he was going through similar changes, which negatively impacted his physical wellbeing: 'Now with the pandemic, hardly any physical activities, I have to admit'. Research conducted during the pandemic to explore any changes and enhance physical health of older adults suggest that the lockdown limited their opportunities for physical activity

and enhanced sedentary lifestyle, which made an impact on their sense of health and wellbeing (e.g. Callow *et al*., 2020; Goethals *et al*., 2020; Heid *et al*., 2021). However, three late-career participants in our study reported that, due to the pandemic crisis, they paid additional attention to their physical needs and wellbeing, as will be further addressed in the following section. These studies highlight the importance of engaging in physical activity, specifically for older adults, to protect both their mental and physical health and preserve their wellbeing (Callow *et al*., 2020; Goethals *et al*., 2020; Heid *et al*., 2021).

Another challenge experienced by four late-career teachers concerned their dissatisfaction with further professional development options, which they felt were enforced upon them and given their experience, unnecessary. Melanie from Austria, for example, explained a situation that was quite challenging for her. The local educational authorities and her headmaster, in her words, forced her to attend a CPD event she believed 'was something totally useless' and unnecessary for her. She said that she was 'really angry' because she had her autonomy removed: 'I really don't like being ordered around'. Melanie further elaborated: 'If I can see that this is important, I can accept that, but not if it's just showing me that they are the ones who have the power'. This situation caused her a great deal of stress and dissatisfaction at work. In a similar vein, Birgit was pushed by authorities to attend CPD events she also saw little point in. However, she explained: 'I've done my job for 38 years now', and therefore, she did not feel the need for further education. She added: 'I don't go to many seminars any longer, because I say "well, if you think I have to, and I say I don't, just send me to retirement, I've got enough things to do at home"'. However, while this caused stress to Melanie, Birgit relied on her long-lasting teaching experience and readiness to leave the profession to cope with this challenge. A series of studies conducted by Day, Gu and colleagues (e.g. Day, 2017; Day *et al*., 2007; Day & Gu, 2009) suggest that key negative influences on late-career teachers' effectiveness and commitment in this career phase concerned imposed professional training and stream of new initiatives. Late-career teachers typically feel that their years of teaching experience and career longevity have provided solid grounds and equipped them well to deal with any possible issues in the classroom; therefore, more often than not, they see little point in further professional education (Day, 2017; Day *et al*., 2007; Day & Gu, 2009). However, there were some teachers in our study who still relished CPD opportunities and their experiences are reported in the next section.

Another age-related challenge that appeared in the interviews of four late-career participants is the generational gap that they feel between them and their students. Late-career teachers can experience an intergenerational gap between them and their students as well as to younger colleagues (Gutman & Oplatka, 2021; Hargreaves, 2005). Teachers who reported on the intergenerational differences in the current study

underscored the lack of mutual understanding between them and their students. For instance, Sabine explained:

> Due to my age, I'd say we live in different worlds sometimes. And I think that we often don't understand our students anymore. We do not understand their music, the things they do in their spare time and maybe it's not really a problem if they've got younger teachers and not the older ones.

Feeling disconnected from her students, especially the younger ones, threatened her job satisfaction at this point in her career. In light of such a job climate, Sabine felt discouraged and was happy to let younger generations of teachers take over. Still, she disclosed that, she 'would like to keep up, but it has become very difficult' for her. She added that an additional challenge for her was that, 'English is changing so quickly', and she sees that her students are in fact surpassing her own English language proficiency: 'They speak English sometimes better than I do, because, of social media, because of gaming, and there are students who are really, really good'. As such, the speed at which her students develop their language skills outside of school influenced her self-efficacy as a language teacher and ultimately her wellbeing in her last teaching phase. Another challenge related to this intergenerational gap is the perceived lack of respect afforded by students. For example, Birgit mentioned the lack of respect she receives from young students: 'Sometimes you have to be aware of not being knocked over [in the hallway], and if you tell them "Hey what's going on?", they just look at you "What is she saying? This old witch!"'.

Late-career teachers sometimes perceive an absence of respect from their students or younger colleagues, which is unpleasant for them in this particular career phase (Hargreaves, 2005). In general, experiencing a lack of respect as a teacher at different points in their professional lives has been found to make a negative impact on teachers and promote their willingness to leave the profession (Berridge & Goebel, 2013; Brown, 2009; Marlow, 1996). Indeed, in Berridge and Goebel's study (2013: 420), participants were 'shocked by the lack of respect students had for teachers', which caused frustration and dissatisfaction among these teachers. Moreover, Birgit explained that, in the past few years, she started being more sensitive and annoyed towards the loud noise produced by younger students: 'Doctors say you would have to wear ear protection because it can be so loud, they scream and shout and rush'. This work climate appeared to negatively influence her wellbeing during her last years of teaching.

Another challenge that was especially visible in the Covid-19 late-career dataset was their struggle with unexpected technological changes they had to try to adapt to. They reported that, never before in their careers, had they had to teach in an online classroom, use digital resources

and means of communication to such an extent. For example, Christine highlighted that she lacked the technological skills: 'Because we had never done, or I had not used Google Classroom or any of the online things because we never needed it'. Adrian reported that, being over 60 years old, it was quite challenging to take on board the novel technological developments: 'And that felt stressful'. This was echoed by other three teachers, who also experienced stress and related physical consequences. In addition, Alice reported that she has not been in favour of online teaching as she 'much prefer[s] [teaching] with a pen and paper' than using a keyboard because she was used to it throughout her whole teaching career. Moreover, she also believed that online teaching is not good for children: 'And I don't like the idea of kids sitting in front of a screen [even] for an hour'. Studies conducted during the pandemic crisis revealed many teachers' resistance to switching to online teaching as teachers disliked spending a long time in front of the screen, changing their teaching plans, materials, assessment, and finding new ways of interacting with their students (Mitchell, 2020; Molise & Dube, 2020). As such, the mismatch between the teachers' long in-class work experience and the fact that they had to adapt to novel online teaching approaches seemed to impede their sense of self-efficacy and wellbeing during the pandemic crisis.

### 6.2.2 Resources

One of the resources that appeared to support the wellbeing of late-career language teachers in this study was their conscious care of their physical health as they became more aware about their age. Eleven late-career language teachers in this study admitted that, thinking of their age, they had started prioritising their physical health and mentioned consciously trying to keep themselves active and fit in the present but also in the future. Betty, for instance, explained: 'I'm more into sports now […] than I was before, I think that's taken on more of a priority. So, I'm quite careful about making sure I have the time to do sports'. She realised that, in this stage of her life, doing sports 'helps [her] hugely to get rid of any stress', to cope and to support her wellbeing. Similarly, Iris highlighted the importance of taking conscious care of her health at her age: 'The older I get, the more concerned I'm about [my health]', and therefore, she tries to eat healthily and engages in various sport activities, such as walking, swimming and going to gym. She further explained that this lifestyle gives her energy, helps her to manage stress better and protects her wellbeing: 'I'm at a quite good point in life, I would say'. Furthermore, Birgit said that she became aware of the fact that, due to her age and current physical wellbeing, she needs to 'take more breaks, […] look after [her] health and do more exercise'. As such, an awareness of the importance of physical health and its implications for their wellbeing increased with age. Research has shown that people who are aware of their ageing

process and look positively towards their future are highly motivated to 'engage in health-promoting interventions' (Sabatini *et al.*, 2020: 478), which can serve as a resource helping them prevent poor emotional and physical wellbeing in their present and future lives. If elderly people engage in health behaviours and pursue regular physical activities, they often have better physical health and fewer depressive symptoms (Jeoung *et al.*, 2013; Ohrnberger *et al.*, 2017).

During the pandemic, three late-career participants mentioned that they paid special attention to their physical health and wellbeing at this time. Due to lockdowns and restrictions, they tried to find alternative ways to remain healthy and in a good shape, such as exercising at home, especially because online teaching made their lives more sedentary than before. Indeed, sedentary behaviours during lockdown have been shown to reduce people's physical activity, which can lead to a deterioration in their wellbeing (Chouchou *et al.*, 2021). In a large empirical study on the physical behaviour of Belgians during the pandemic crisis, it was found that more than half of the participants managed to balance their sedentary lives with alternative activities at home (e.g. yoga, dancing, bodyweight training) or outside activities they could do alone (running, cycling, walking) to stimulate their physical and mental health (Constandt *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, three participants in our study found ways to stay active and to flourish both physically and mentally during lockdown.

As seen in the previous section, one of the challenges for this career phase concerned being unnecessarily forced to attend CPD events, which some teachers felt did not bring any substantial benefits or novel input. However, our data also revealed that, when teachers see the purpose in attending CPD training, they are typically more eager to indulge in professional growth and development, which can bring them joy and satisfaction. Edith, for instance, mentioned that she is 'satisfied with some professional things' she had recently engaged in and added: 'I really had the urge to get some input for myself'. As Hustler (2003) points out, teachers value continuing professional development highest and are motivated to engage in CPD training, if they themselves can choose the courses they want to attend and see meaning in them. This intrinsic motivation to attend CPD training can, in turn, increase teacher's professional satisfaction (McMillan *et al.*, 2016). In a study by Louws *et al.* (2017a) on late-career teachers' specifically, they found that late-career teachers seek CPD opportunities to learn about extracurricular tasks and technological innovations in the classroom, in order to be up-to-date in their teaching and become even better teachers. Relevant stakeholders in education could, therefore, consider offering CPD opportunities that are tailored to late-career teachers' particular needs and areas of interest. This could be done to support their motivation and willingness to undertake such professional events, and positively influence their job satisfaction during this career phase.

Another resource for all late-career teachers in this study was their awareness of their accumulated knowledge, teaching experience, skills and competences as language professionals. The fact that they could draw on this resource supported their sense of self-efficacy and wellbeing during this career phase. Perceived high levels of intellectual resources and personal strengths can positively influence people's perceived quality of life (Hobfoll *et al*., 2018; OECD, 2011; Winters, 2011). These can serve 'as a significant buffer against the resource-depleting effect of high workload and high emotional demands [at the workplace]' (Hobfoll *et al*., 2018: 117). For instance, Melanie explained that her experience and knowledge had grown over the years and that she was now able to draw on this set of resources: 'At 45, I would say it starts, you really have a lot of experience that you can go back to, […] and this, of course, makes it a lot easier'. She added that she felt quite confident as a language teacher because she has 'all this experience' and knows exactly what works in the classroom and what does not. Similarly, accumulated knowledge and experience represented an important resource for Caroline from the UK. She highlighted that her 'subject knowledge is very good' and that she was confident that she could answer any questions her colleagues and students might have: 'They can ask me any questions and I can answer and explain in a way that they understand. I think I'm pretty good. […] I'm well prepared'. George's interview also revealed that, based on his decades of teaching experience, he felt confident as a language teacher: 'I've got a lot of experience and I've dealt with lots of different things and situations, [and] I feel pretty well equipped for anything now'. These teachers' sense of self-efficacy gained from their experience, in turn, provided them with a positive sense of control in the school and classroom. Teachers who have internal locus of control, i.e. a sense of control and belief that the individual is in charge of their self-control, have higher self-esteem, emotional stability, motivation and success (Kiral, 2019). People with high internal locus of control are more positive, experience less stress, and enjoy better health and wellbeing (Reknes *et al*., 2019).

Interestingly, one of the late-career language teachers in our dataset, Betty, had over 31 years of teaching experience; however, her confidence was a bit shaken when the interview took place. She explained that she had just started working in a new school, teaching new students, collaborating with new colleagues and having new responsibilities. This made her feel as if she was at the beginning of her career, which challenged her sense of self-efficacy as a language teacher: '[I was] kind of doubting myself and thinking: "I'm not sure if I can do this or not"'. However, drawing on her extensive teaching experience and knowledge, she was able to quickly regain her confidence and enjoy her teaching again: 'I think the experience of teaching [helped] a lot', and concluded: 'That's fine, I can totally do that'.

A similar experience was reported by a teacher interviewed during the pandemic, Christine. While her colleagues felt quite confident in their

teaching abilities during the pandemic, her interview showed that her sense of self-efficacy had been challenged. She explained that, before the pandemic, she was quite confident: 'I've been teaching now for how many years, 30? So [I can] almost do it sleepwalking'. However, she explained that, with mandatory remote teaching, she 'had to restart from zero, pretty much'. Although this was difficult for her at the beginning, being in the profession for so long, she managed to learn and adapt to the students' needs quickly, which ultimately brought her positive experience and emotions: 'So I think for me personally, it definitely has been a very positive thing'. As such, additional, and in a way unexpected, professional development supported the growth of her already established resources and contributed to her sense of wellbeing and job satisfaction.

All 18 teachers further revealed that they have come to an age in which they have established long-lasting social relationships that nurture their wellbeing. These include relationships of both personal and professional nature, such as with family and friends, as well as with students, colleagues and head teachers. For late-career teachers, the relationships they have created with their headteachers, colleagues, families and friends over time play a crucial part in sustaining their commitment in the final phase of their teaching career (Day & Gu, 2010). For instance, Karen explained that her relationships at school turned into long-term friendships: 'I made some very good friends at my school'. Her interviews revealed that these friendships were an important resource of strength and positivity for her. Building friendships with colleagues at the workplace is quite common, as several studies have shown, and can positively affect employee's wellbeing (Gersick *et al*., 2017; Methot *et al*., 2015; Rath, 2006). In fact, employees, who see their colleagues both as friends and co-workers, can be more productive, satisfied and engaged in their jobs and are more likely to stay in their profession (Rath, 2006). Late-career teachers are no exception, as having friendships and positive rapport in their workplaces can positively influence their job satisfaction and wellbeing (Hargreaves, 1994, 2005; Tabancali, 2016).

Five late-career language teachers in this study explicitly mentioned that, during their professional pathways, their schools served as important support systems when issues in their personal lives occurred. Interestingly, four of these teachers were from Austria. Melanie depicted a phase in her life when she was experiencing personal issues and highlighted how school helped her cope: 'Work and especially this school was very important to me, because it was something that went on as usual'. Having friends among her colleagues and spending time with them supported her during those difficult times; she added: 'There are a lot of my friends here, everything was as usual, not breaking apart, like everything at home, this helped me a lot'. Moreover, as Day and Gu (2010) stress, late-career teachers' positive relationships with students lie at the core of their job satisfaction and motivation. The authors further added that the positive

relationships with students serve as a resource for late-career teachers which can be 'banked or stored' to 'function as reserves in times of challenge, which fuel and promote teachers' sense of resilience and commitment' (Day & Gu, 2013: 42). Similar to Day and Gu's (2010) findings, the positive aspect that was most mentioned by the late-career language teachers in this study was their relationship with their students and bonds they established with many generations over time. Due to her extensive teaching experience, being both a class teacher and a student counsellor, Gerda from Austria mentioned that she became aware of the centrality of having good rapport and positive relationships with students. She added that she had tried to establish and maintain such relationships throughout her career. In addition, she mentioned that she became a teacher whom students trust, which is something she is 'always very grateful' for. Melanie also underscored the importance of creating and keeping positive relationships with students across the years and added that she could draw on such relationships to cope with any hardships that occurred. She said: 'To work with the children […] was one thing that was important to me, I have always enjoyed [teaching] children my whole life'. Such positive relationships have contributed to her job satisfaction and wellbeing throughout her career and continue in the present.

Not only were the teachers drawing on their relationships and friendships at school, but their wellbeing was also supported by their personal bonds with family, friends and partners. One example provided by Elisabeth from Austria depicted the support and love her husband has provided over many years: 'My husband has always, from the moment I met him, he has always tried to give me more confidence'. A similar source of strength and support for Mabel was her long-established friendships outside the school contexts with whom she sought to spend as much time as possible. She said: 'Whenever I have time, I will go somewhere with my friends' and added how much these experiences and time spent together mean to her and bolstered her wellbeing. Strong social relationships play a central role in any individual's mental health, health behaviour and wellbeing (Hawe & Ghali, 2008; Umberson & Karas Montez, 2010). As teaching is a job heavily based on relationships, strong social support inside and outside the classroom play a fundamental role in teachers' wellbeing (Fiorilli *et al.*, 2017). Teachers who perceive both their internal (i.e. colleagues, headteachers, students) and/or external (i.e. friends, partner, family members) social support systems as positive, supportive and understanding are less likely to suffer from stress and burnout and more likely to experience higher wellbeing (Fiorilli *et al.*, 2017).

## 6.3 Taking Stock

Being in the last phase of their teaching careers, these teachers took the opportunity to look back and take stock of their careers. This process

inevitably brought to the surface a range of emotions which impacted on their sense of wellbeing. For example, reflecting on their careers led the late-career teachers in this study to experience a sense of resentment about their workaholism in the past. They also noted the deterioration in the status of the teaching profession in general and the subject they teach (i.e. languages) more specifically, which provoked a sense of dissatisfaction. However, the teachers also reported positively on the lessons they had learned about themselves both personally and professionally. In particular, understanding themselves – their wants and needs – better, they felt they could more easily reject anything posed on them, say no and let go of additional responsibilities. Finally, their reflection led them to appreciate and give the time to themselves and their loved ones in their current lives.

### 6.3.1 Challenges

Four late-career language teachers' interviews revealed that, due to their intense workload in the present, their current lives resembled mid-career teachers' lives. Like mid-career teachers, they were also drowning in obligations and piles of work and still were not at the point where they could take time to slow down and reflect comfortably on their careers. Despite all their years of experience, these teachers were still figuring out their priorities and how to manage their multiple commitments. For example, Gerda mentioned that she struggled to find ways to combine her personal and professional commitments. Due to her family obligations over the weekend, she could not find the time to work on school-related tasks as she would have otherwise done: 'Oh, my God! I didn't have time at the weekend to catch up, to put everything in order'. She further added that she felt pressured to maintain both life domains (the personal and professional) and not forget anything: 'It's actually the many different things that you should somehow bring together, not forget anybody or anything'. While taking stock is common among teachers in the late-career phase (Day & Gu, 2009, 2010), as it appears, Gerda was still caught up between multiple obligations and roles in home and at the school, which caused her distress. Similarly, Caroline explained that she felt torn between giving her attention to her six-year-old son and her ever-increasing workload: 'It's just the time that I spend and the time that I sacrifice […] my relationship with my husband and my child' and added: 'There's a feeling from both of them that I work too much, that I'm spending too much time at work and that I'm neglecting them'. She admitted that this is 'the biggest source of stress' for her. On the other hand, she mentioned that her workload continues to pile up: 'And if I didn't do it at home, then I would be behind the next day'. Like Gerda, and mid-career language teachers in this study (see also Chapter 5), Caroline struggled to balance her increasing obligations at work and home. She was also not able yet to take stock and slowly reduce her work hours like other late-career

teachers. It appears that both Gerda and Caroline, although being in their late-career phase, encountered more intensified work–life tensions than other late-career teachers in this study, one reason for that being that they still had to take care of their children living at home. This shows that life and career phases do not always coincide, as these teachers were – by counting their years of teaching experience – already in the late-career phase, but experienced similar issues regarding their personal life as those teachers in the mid-career phase. Furthermore, doing household chores and taking care of children is still mostly done by women (Bekker *et al.*, 2005), adding more pressure on them to balance both private and professional life.

Another challenge three late-career language teachers in this study reported on was their resentment about their past workaholism throughout their careers. As teachers who have now started reducing their professional obligations, they realised that they resent how much of their lives and time they had devoted to their work in the past. Day and Gu (2010) highlighted that resentment about excessive workload is typical for late-career teachers. For instance, Iris explained that, if she could choose again the subjects she will teach, she 'would not do these two subjects [German and English] together again'. Looking back over her career, she realised that teaching both subjects was 'just too much', as they are core subjects in the Austrian curriculum, being taught over all eight years of secondary school and German being a mandatory subject choice for the school-leaving examination, Zentralmatura (BMBWF, 2022d). Sabine echoed Iris' experience and said that she now feels sorry that she did not allocate her time better and that she was overly engaged with her job: 'It's too late for me, but I should have done better. Or learn better [and] try to separate – this is my job, this is my leisure, this is my personal life'. Taking stock of her career, she advised future generations of teachers to reassess their careers earlier to allow opportunities for implementing changes that would benefit their wellbeing. In fact, research on regret and disappointment in life has shown that the most mentioned life regrets include living up to someone else's expectations instead of fulfilling one's one wishes and needs, failing to choose happiness and change over remaining in old patterns and habits; this, consequently, can lead to missing out on important life events, such as seeing one's own children grow up (Beike *et al.*, 2008; Ware, 2019). In another example, Edith reflected on a bad decision she made during her mid-career phase that she now regrets. She explained that she had experienced severe burnout due to which she was hospitalised. However, as soon as she was released from the hospital, she came back to work, which is a decision she resents. Now, she knows that she would have needed more time to recover: 'I had panic attacks. So, on my way home from [school], sometimes I couldn't make it. I had to park the car somewhere, I couldn't breathe, I had to step out of the car and get some fresh air'. She further revealed that, thinking back on this decision, she realised that choosing

work over health has had long-term consequences for her wellbeing, which she was still experiencing at the time of the interview. Taking care of one's own wellbeing, including its physical, psychological and social components, is of utmost importance for any individual to function well in all aspects of life (e.g. Bradburn, 1969; Dodge *et al*., 2012; La Placa *et al*, 2013; Rath *et al*., 2010). However, in teaching specifically, teachers are confronted with a multitude of challenges and strains which often lead to them experiencing high amounts of stress, anxiety, exhaustion, and can, ultimately, result in burnout and attrition (Newberry *et al*., 2013). Sadly, burnout rates among teachers are continuously rising (Pressley, 2021), which can have 'devastating consequences both for the teachers and the quality of education' (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016: 1786). When employees suffer from burnout, it is necessary that they stay on sick leave until they have fully recovered and that the process of reintegrating them into the workplace is optimised through supportive colleagues and leadership, in order to reduce possible burnout symptoms (Rooman *et al*., 2021). However, in order to minimise these high levels of stress and avoid teachers suffering from burnout in the first place, taking stock and reflecting on their lives earlier in their careers, and, importantly, learning from the regrets of late-career teachers, might lead them to make necessary changes to support their wellbeing across their professional trajectories.

Having realised the detrimental effects of workaholism and overwork during their careers, 15 late-career teachers in our study had started to reduce their workload; however, they still complained about their busy schedules and increasing duties. These teachers reported that their workload was still increasing towards the end of their careers, which at times caused them stress. For instance, Betty explained: 'I think stress is probably… It is partly the amount of work and thinking: "How am I going to get everything done before I go back the next day?"'. Birgit's interview also revealed that this amount of work was quite stressful for her, especially marking students' assignments: 'It's a lot of stress and of course this is another low point of correcting, correcting, correcting'. Indeed, workload and time pressure appear to be especially relevant for teachers experiencing stress in and outside of their work domains (e.g. Chaplain, 2008; Greenglass & Burke, 2003; Kyriacou, 2001). For late-career teachers specifically, heavy workload and long working hours were a central challenge throughout the last phase of their careers, as also highlighted by Day and Gu (2010). In the pandemic dataset, two late-career language teachers complained about the increased work obligations that the novel situation caused. Christine mentioned that, in light of the pandemic, she understood that her workload had temporarily increased and concluded that working at such a pace and amount would be unsustainable in the long run: 'I'm very aware that the amount of work that went into [online teaching] would not have been sustainable long term because it's not possible to be up till 3am every night just to get the next day's lessons ready'.

Finally, six teachers reflected on the status of the teaching profession and felt that the general status of teachers in society was quite low as teaching was not seen as a highly respectable profession; something they believed this was different in the past. Adrian explained: 'My impression is that the attitude has increased among parents, they expect you as a teacher to do more and more for their children'. In another example, Edith highlighted that she did not feel that the teaching profession is highly respected in Austria: 'I think that people envy teachers for the holidays or the weeks off that we have and that's what is obvious, what people see, and that's what people judge. I think our image is not the best'. Indeed, across the globe, teacher status is exceptionally low (Varkey Foundation, 2018). A lack of appreciation by parents, students and society as a whole can lead to teacher frustration (Buunk *et al*., 2007) and can lower teachers' 'morale, thus ultimately reducing productivity' (Troman, 2000: 350). Low status and societal appreciation are issues that can occur across all career phases of the teaching profession, including late-career. In the UK context specifically, teachers of MLs perceive the status of their profession and subjects as particularly low, due to students' and parents' lack of interest in languages (Tinsley, 2019). Indeed, one of our late-career language teachers from the UK, Betty, who taught French and Spanish, was unhappy about students' decreased interest and negative attitudes towards learning MLs:

> The thing that really drives me crazy is [students'] attitude towards learning languages. So, the idea that they don't need them, that they're never going to go to France, that they're never going to go to Spain and if they do, they're just going to speak English.

The status of languages other than English in the UK has dropped significantly over the past decades (Coleman *et al*., 2007), and, subsequently, learning languages in school has become a low priority for students (e.g. Boffey, 2013). British students have one of the lowest motivations to take language courses compared to other European countries (European Commission, 2012), as they typically see little need to learn other languages when they can manage easily by only speaking English. This low status of languages can, indeed, be a challenge for language teachers across the profession and make them feel frustrated and dissatisfied in their jobs (Collen, 2020).

### 6.3.2 Resources

Taking stock of their careers, six late-career language teachers revealed important lessons they had learned about themselves personally and professionally that helped them to support their wellbeing during their current career phase. These lessons include, for example,

self-acceptance, learning how to reduce workload, becoming aware of one's needs and wants, and seeing the positives in life. For example, looking back at her career, Melanie said: 'I think that getting older made me much calmer. I accepted myself, and I accepted that I can do this, I am good at that, and I also accepted what I'm not very good at'. Similarly, Birgit also shared a lesson she learned about herself reflecting over the years: 'Because it makes you aware of the good points of your life and also what you yourself can change'. She added: 'If you can't change the situation, you have to change the attitude. This is something which is really helpful, but you don't manage to do it always. But to reflect on it more frequently, it might help'. Alice echoed Birgit's and Melanie's experiences and added that she had learned to take care of her wellbeing effectively by remaining positive and not engaging in negative self-talk. In a study by Carstensen *et al.* (2011), the authors found that, as people grow older, they tend to become more secure and emotionally stable and show higher levels of emotional wellbeing. As elderly people learn from their experiences and know themselves better, they can handle problems more efficiently, while not dwelling on the negatives but focusing on the positive aspects in their lives instead (Carstensen *et al.*, 2011).

Another invaluable lesson reported by eight late-career teachers in this study was the importance of keeping a healthy work–life balance. Gerda, for instance, mentioned that, throughout her career, she had learned to better organise and manage her time, which helped her in her current phase of teaching: 'I spend time more consciously'. In the past, she used to have a bad conscience when she was unable to finish all her tasks; however, her interview revealed that she had been using the 'time-boxing' strategy to manage her work and life domains. Adrian also relied on time management strategies. Specifically, he recommended colleagues to try not to do little bits of work every day, but instead, compress it into only a few days and have at least one or two days per week off. George also agreed with this strategy and added:

> I think the focus has changed, but also I think, as you get older, you learn what is more important, like your family life and your own life, your own time. It makes you who you are, it enables you to refresh, to recharge and I think that's work-life balance.

Having a healthy work–life balance is, in fact, crucial for late-career teachers' wellbeing, their morale and willingness to remain committed in the profession until retirement (Day & Gu, 2010). Furthermore, a healthy work–life balance can affect teachers' job performance, productivity and can reduce attrition (Johari *et al.*, 2018).

Re-evaluating their careers, work conditions were also mentioned as important resources for all late-career language teachers in this study. A positive workplace culture and environment, including aspects of

encouraging leadership support, having a sense of autonomy, and feeling valued and appreciated, are considered as important factors that keep teachers in the profession and help them to thrive throughout their careers (Babic *et al.*, 2022a; Fernet *et al.*, 2014). Positive work conditions that encouraged these language teachers to remain in the profession for over two decades include having a secure job, autonomy, long holidays and being surrounded by youth. For instance, Melanie highlighted that, across her professional life span, she had been given autonomy to choose where she wanted to work from when it comes to correcting, organising and planning her lessons. As a result, she was able to combine family and school life and appreciated the fact that her profession allowed such freedom: 'That helps you to organise your life, not all other jobs have that. […] I think being a teacher is really good, it's a very family friendly job here [in Austria]'. In another example, reflecting on her career, Christine also elucidated on ways in which her job supported her autonomy: 'I don't really depend on anyone but just on my own decisions. So that gives me quite a lot of autonomy, which is good because it helps my nerves'. Depending on the context, certain occupations, such as the teaching profession, are considered more attractive to people who want to balance their work and family lives and prefer to work more autonomously (Hakim, 2006). Indeed, being more flexible and autonomous in their jobs was a motivating factor for teachers to retain their enjoyment and satisfaction in their work, as evinced in a study by Carson *et al.* (2016).

Another factor that four late-career teachers mentioned appreciating more as they got older were the holidays, since these breaks helped them to alleviate their stress and recharge their batteries. Caroline, for example, characterised the summer holidays as much needed, and Iris echoed this by explaining how she manages to zone out completely and forget about work. In the case of these teachers, a clear division between their work and private lives during the summer break was seen as an important aspect of being able to cope with the job and subsequently stay in the profession. As Melanie, from Austria, stated: 'I really must say if there are not these long holidays, I think I could not have been a teacher my whole life'. A study by Ritvanen *et al.* (2004) with Finnish high school teachers found that teachers' stress levels significantly dropped after a six-week summer break and helped them to recharge after a stressful school year. Similarly, in a qualitative longitudinal study, Lam and Yan (2011) interviewed teachers about factors that influence their job satisfaction and wellbeing, and long holidays were one of the main factors mentioned by their participants to keep them motivated and satisfied in their profession.

In addition, three late-career language teachers from Austria also discussed the fact that their jobs as teachers in this country have always been safe and guaranteed, which gave them a sense of stability and security, and supported their wellbeing throughout their lives. Elisabeth, for

instance, disclosed that she felt 'safe and secure' in her job over the years and in the present. Melanie highlighted: '[Teachers] have a guaranteed job' and added that her school cannot lay her off unless she does 'something really wrong. […] I really have a safe job, nobody else [from other professions] has that'. Indeed, research has found that employees with high job security, financial stability and long-term contracts experience higher wellbeing than their counterparts who have only temporary employment and suffer from job precarity (Dawson *et al.*, 2017; Walsh, 2019).

Finally, reassessing their long careers, three late-career language teachers in this study specifically mentioned that one of the aspects they enjoyed most, which supported them to stay in the profession until retirement, was being surrounded by young people. For instance, Tanja (Austria) elaborated: 'If I could decide again, I would definitely choose to be a teacher again because I really like the job, […] you really stay young because you work with young people every day and I really enjoy that'. Similarly, Felicity felt inspired through her work with 'many youngsters and [she] think[s] that's the boost'. As teaching is a profession that is surrounded by young people and adolescents, teachers work in an environment full of possibilities to help young people grow and educate their minds while, simultaneously, learning about their lives and being inspired by them (MacBeath, 2012; Nieto, 2001).

## 6.4 Summary

In this chapter, we presented three main themes that emerged from the late-career language teacher data. These themes included: transitioning to retirement, age awareness and taking stock. Within each theme, we explored challenges and resources unique to this career phase which resonated with those core themes. Challenges that marked transitioning to retirement of the late-career language teachers in this study encompassed experiencing saturation, losing motivation, enthusiasm and a sense of engagement. However, some late-career teachers also manage to thrive during this phase of their career. In addition, while a number of late-career teachers flourish in their professional roles as they approach the final years in their profession, others draw strength from the thought of slowly detaching from their jobs as teachers and entering their retirement. Particular resources that supported late-career teachers to sustain their motivation in their careers were their job satisfaction, and their willingness to learn, grow and become even better teachers at this stage of their careers.

Challenges related to the teachers' growing awareness of their biological age and deteriorating physical health contributed to concerns including unpleasant feelings of the intergenerational differences stemming between them and their students. Some of the late-career teachers also felt

that, due to their years of teaching experience and accumulated expertise, they did not need to attend CPD events unless they found them purposeful. In terms of resources, the interviews revealed that the late-career teachers' awareness of their accumulated knowledge, teaching experience and competences as language professionals supported their sense of self-efficacy and ultimately their wellbeing. Furthermore, data evinced that another important resource for late-career language teachers' wellbeing was their decision to let go of responsibilities they had accumulated over their careers, as they slowly started to approach retirement. As such, they learned how to say no to work obligations to create a better work–life balance for themselves. With time, late-career teachers in this study also learned how to take conscious care of their physical health, which was further amplified with the pandemic crisis, and which helped them to stay physically and mentally fit and active.

Finally, another challenge that occurred while these teachers reflected over their careers was their realisation that they resented certain aspects of their teaching lives. These encompassed devoting most of their time to their work and not taking better care of themselves, their needs, wants and their wellbeing. Comparing the profession in the past to now, the teachers also reported about the status of teaching in their countries as being low, which evoked a sense of dissatisfaction with their professions. However, they still reported positive resources they could draw on, such as the positive work conditions and supportive long-lasting social relationships, which nurtured the participants' wellbeing throughout their careers and helped them to remain in their chosen profession until retirement.

# 7 Teacher Wellbeing Across the Career Span

The analysis of challenges and resources presented in the previous chapters has revealed the typical types of stressors facing teachers at different points of their lives and careers, as well as the various resources they tend to draw on to sustain and enhance their wellbeing. In this chapter, we compare the different career phases to generate a cross-sectional perspective on how the kinds of perceived challenges and resources may change across teachers' career and lives. We examine resources and challenges not as two separate determinants of wellbeing, but as mutually interacting processes that can be seen as part of the same continuum. Indeed, the absence of a resource may serve as a challenge; vice versa, experiencing a challenge may lead to the replenishment of resources, such as the building of resilience. A summary of the findings, highlighting challenges and resources for each career phase, is presented in Table 7.1.

## 7.1 Challenges and Resources: Cross-Comparison Across Career Phases

While there are exceptions, each phase of a language teacher's career is characterised by distinctive challenges and resources, which typically shape the wellbeing of those in this career phase. In order to understand how the types of challenges and resources facing language teachers across the different phases of their career change over time, the findings were considered from a cross-sectional perspective. This revealed three interrelated macro-themes that remain relevant across all career phases but have different characters: knowledge and experience, support and autonomy, and balancing priorities and domains. We will reflect on each theme in turn to create a full picture of how language teachers experience their wellbeing across the career span.

### 7.1.1 Knowledge and experience

A teacher's professional trajectory is marked by the progressive building of competences, skills and experience. The process of learning

**Table 7.1** Summary of findings

| | Pre-service | Early-career | Mid-career | Late-career |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Challenges | • Lack of practical teaching competences<br>• Low sense of efficacy<br>• Lack of behaviour management techniques<br>• Fluctuating teacher identity<br>• Managing student/teacher roles<br>• Inadequate guidance and mentorship at university and in school<br>• Multiple concurrent tasks at university/school | • Limited practical experience in the classroom<br>• Issues in dealing with students' discipline<br>• Mismatch between ideals and realities of teaching<br>• Perfectionist and workaholic tendencies<br>• Limited sense of belonging to the school community<br>• Minimal work/life boundaries | • Limited support for professional development<br>• Sense of stagnation<br>• Lack of autonomy and increasing accountability measures<br>• Increase in workload and responsibilities<br>• Juggling multiple tasks across personal and professional domains | • Job saturation and progressive loss of engagement<br>• Dissatisfaction with professional development events<br>• Growing age awareness and perceived intergenerational gap<br>• Perceived physical deterioration<br>• Sense of resentment about prioritising work throughout career |
| Resources | • Knowledge and skills accumulated through teacher training<br>• Initial teacher experiences through practica<br>• Increasing confidence, motivation and sense of meaning<br>• Scaffolded guidance at university and in school<br>• Ability to juggle student/teacher roles | • Growing experience and confidence<br>• Increasing resilience and coping strategies<br>• Growth mindset and positive attitude towards mistakes<br>• Appropriate balance between autonomy and support<br>• Awareness of self-care strategies and importance of work/life boundaries | • Sense of confidence and security accrued through experience<br>• Strong and stable sense of teacher identity<br>• Satisfaction and pride from professional development<br>• Strong network of support in the workplace<br>• Stronger awareness of priorities and strategies to preserve work/life balance | • Accumulated knowledge, teaching experience, and competences<br>• Growth mindset<br>• Positive work conditions and long-lasting relationships<br>• Progressively letting go of responsibilities<br>• Self-care strategies for physical wellbeing |

about teaching as a profession starts long before one enrols in the pre-service programme. By the time a prospective teacher decides to join a teacher education programme, they already possess a reservoir of knowledge and skills to build on from their experience of schooling. This has been referred to as 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975), which refers to what people learn about teaching from their own previous experiences of schooling. These experiences, in turn, inevitably shape their beliefs about teaching and the kind of teachers they aim to become (Lortie, 1975). This is the start of a 'career-long process' developing a 'set of cognitions and understandings about one's job and the way to properly enact it' (Kelchtermans, 2009: 38). The journey of growth and learning about the profession continues across a teacher's career although the type of knowledge and learning naturally changes.

#### *7.1.1.1 Challenges*

For pre-service teachers, the gradual building of knowledge and skills takes place in a variety of ways, including teacher education seminars, lectures, and activities, combined with guided practica in the language classroom and mentorship opportunities as well as informal professional development opportunities. The path to becoming a teacher varies given different educational backgrounds, different approaches to teacher training and different growth opportunities, which can crucially impact on a teacher's career trajectory (Rolls & Plauborg, 2009). Despite the potential for variation, for most of our pre-service participants in both the UK and Austria, this phase appeared characterised by the persistent difficulties in combining studies with practical teaching experiences. This led to struggles in defining their own professional identities and in dealing with the complex realities of the language classroom. One of the key challenges for pre-service teachers in our study was the perceived imbalance between the theoretical and practical knowledge acquired during their teacher training programmes. This is a well-known issue in the literature on teacher education (see e.g. Korhonen *et al.*, 2017). The OECD (2011: 5) has identified the 'limited connections between teacher education, teachers' professional development, and school needs' as a key source of concern and has highlighted the need for stronger partnerships and connections between teacher education institutions and schools. This disconnect contributed to the 'reality shock' that about a third of the pre-service teachers in our study experienced at the start of their practica and challenged their beliefs about teaching. Indeed, upon starting their in-school placements, eight pre-service teachers in our study experienced a mismatch between their previous expectations about teaching and the realities of the profession. They soon realised that the demands of the job differed from their initial beliefs and that dealing with their workload and students was much more challenging than they expected. This mismatch inevitably challenged their sense

of wellbeing, self-efficacy, as well as their motivation. In a similar vein, Schlichte *et al*. (2005: 38) highlight that 'a growing awareness of these less exciting realities of teaching can be followed by feelings of ineffectiveness, loneliness, and alienation from the profession'. Especially within the Austrian context, this challenge appeared worsened by the perceived lack of authority in the eyes of their students and colleagues, which further threatened their confidence leading to them feeling vulnerable. As highlighted by Day and Gu (2007: 429), teachers' wellbeing is inevitably determined by tensions between how 'they define themselves as professionals, and how they see their professionalism being defined by others'. The differences between the UK and Austrian setting in this regard may be in part determined by the length of practica in the two contexts; in the UK, pre-service teachers typically teach a minimum of 150 hours, whereas in Austria, the total length of practica is 28 hours (Mairitsch *et al*., 2021).

Another source of concern for five pre-service teachers in our study was their limited sense of efficacy in relation to their subject-specific competences. Indeed, compared to other subjects, teaching a language requires unique competences and skills. For example, Borg (2006: 5) explains that in other subjects, 'teachers can increase their subject matter knowledge through books, but it is harder for FL teachers to maintain and increase their knowledge of the FL because doing so requires regular opportunities for them to engage in FL communication'. This means that not all the skills required to teach a language can be formally acquired during the teacher training programme (Borg, 2006). Furthermore, since 'the process of learning a foreign language is never complete' (Horwitz, 2012: 2055), when the language taught is not one's L1, novice teachers can question their language competences, feel inadequate to play the language teacher role and ultimately experience language anxiety (Horwitz, 1996). The combination of these hardships inevitably challenged these pre-service teachers' sense of efficacy and confidence in their teaching abilities, their sense of identity and motivation to teach; all of which served as key determinants of their wellbeing during this particular career phase. Furthermore, those pre-service teachers, who were undertaking their practica during the first wave of the pandemic crisis, experienced additional struggles caused by a lack of training about language teaching in an online context. Indeed, around the globe, the teaching experiences of pre-service teachers in the online context greatly differed from what they were initially being prepared for in their teacher training programme, requiring them to quickly adapt to the new teaching format (Jones, 2021; Nasri *et al*., 2020; Ogbonnaya *et al*., 2020). This rapid shift challenged the beliefs of efficacy and confidence of our participants, especially when it was accompanied by inadequate guidance from their mentors and professors.

The perceived quality of the teacher education programmes combined with their initial teaching experiences determined the tenor of the transition for teachers into their early-career roles. Moving from teacher

education to in-service teaching is a critical phase for a teacher's professional trajectory and wellbeing (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). This period can be highly emotional and professionally demanding (Korhonen *et al.*, 2017); indeed, it is within the first five years in the profession that researchers have found the highest attrition rates (Ingersoll, 2007). When they enter the classroom as in-service teachers, early-career educators are confronted with new and unfamiliar duties, tasks and responsibilities, which may differ from those they encountered during their practica. Nevertheless, novice teachers are typically required to hold the same responsibilities as more experienced teachers (LeMaistre & Paré, 2010). Naturally, quickly adapting to these new conditions can lead to high levels of stress and emotional labour (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Mukamurera, 2011).

A perceived lack of subject knowledge and the absence of a frame of reference to draw on were key challenges for over a third of our early-career participants during this phase, the majority of whom was based in Austria. Perceptions of inadequate knowledge and skills and decreased self-efficacy are recognised as two of the most common challenges facing early-career teachers (Stokking *et al.*, 2003; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011). For our participants, this perceived lack of confidence also concerned their language abilities, implying that pre-service training programmes may offer insufficient support and preparation in relation to language competences specifically (see also Mason, 2017). Initial training routes and experiences are key determining factors in early-career attrition and retention (Allen *et al.*, 2018). It suggests the importance for these teachers' wellbeing of feeling adequately prepared in practical and linguistic terms.

Another source of stress for early-career teachers concerned the perceived mismatch between their teaching ideals and the realities of the classroom, which was paired with a high sense of perfectionism and unrealistic expectations about their roles. This 'reality shock' and perceived gap between theory and practice was also reported by pre-service teachers during their initial practica in the classroom, suggesting that these challenges may endure from the pre-service phase to the early-career one, especially if prospective teachers have insufficient opportunities to develop practical teaching competences and gain authentic in-class experience. It is known that appropriate support and experience is critical in reducing the stress involved in transiting into in-service roles (Le Cornu, 2005). It is thus essential that they feel adequately prepared to face the initial challenges of teaching and are not left to 'sink or swim' (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004: 28). Such transitional phases can also reoccur later in teachers' careers such as when they move to a new school or begin working with a new school principal (Fessler & Christensen, 1992). In other words, the lessons drawn about the kinds of support teachers need as they transition from pre- to in-service roles are valuable for other types of transition at diverse career phases.

While the pre-service and early-career phases are marked by the building of new knowledge and competences, the mid-career phase sees teachers who are typically already confident and secure about their professional roles. They have become acquainted with the demands of the profession and have matured as educators. While this phase has not received the same degree of attention in the literature as the early-career one, it is key to understanding the underlying processes of long-term retention in the profession and continuing professional development. Indeed, it has been defined as a career crossroad or period of transition (Day *et al.*, 2007; Huberman, 1993) where teachers make some key career choices that define the future course of their career trajectories. Likewise, for our participants, this was notably a phase where they either kept developing and maturing in their roles, or where they experienced a perceived stagnation and frustration with little prospect of professional growth. This dual scenario appeared mostly due to three interrelated aspects. The first aspect concerns teachers' different needs, ambitions and life orientations at this stage of their life and career spans. The second aspect is contextual and involves the actual opportunities for professional development and growth offered by institutions and local/national education systems. The third aspect refers to the challenges of combining work and family responsibilities, which forced many teachers, and especially female teachers with young children, to voluntarily step down from their roles and curb their professional growth. In line with the current body of research on mid-career teachers (e.g. Day & Gu, 2010; Farrell, 2014; Hargreaves, 2005), most of our mid-career participants expressed a need for professional renewal during this phase. One way of meeting this need was to take on new roles and increasing responsibilities, such as taking up leadership or administrative positions. Teaching is often referred to as a profession that does not offer a career progression in the traditional sense of the term; rather, climbing up the career ladder usually involves spending less time in the classroom and get increasingly involved with administrative tasks (Lortie, 1975; Rolls & Plauborg, 2009). Combining these two different roles inside and outside the classroom may therefore lead to conflicts in the way teachers make sense of their professional identity and take meaning from their jobs. Furthermore, for our participants, the added responsibilities required a substantial amount of time and energy, as well as an increase in workload, which brought additional stress and pressure and also meant less time at their disposal for family and self-care. For four teachers, however, the desire for professional growth and renewal was not met within their school due to an absence of opportunities for professional development in their institutions, or their perceived poor quality. The frustration and demotivation caused by this stunted CPD potential ultimately informed two participants' decision to change schools. This highlights the critical importance of professional development during this particular phase and its value for their motivation and commitment to the profession (Day & Gu, 2007).

While one key challenge for the mid-career phase was a sense of stagnation, in the case of late-career teachers, a key issue was experiencing feelings of exhaustion, ultimately leading them to feel ready and willing to leave the profession. This was the case of about half of the late-career teachers in our study. In particular, the increase in accountability measures and the standardisation of school-leaving exams have been reported as key challenges undermining their sense of autonomy, creativity and perceived professional growth. These changes in educational policies have forced them to adapt to new ways of teaching which greatly differ from what they were used to and motivated them in the past. In fact, these reforms can critically hinder 'the relative stability of teachers' work and the conditions for their learning and development and, in some cases, their beliefs, practices and self-efficacy, and that in general they challenge existing notions of professionalism' (Day & Gu, 2007: 425). One of the key reasons teachers reportedly leave the profession during the late-career phase is their difficulty in complying with the numerous reforms and policies at the state and local level (Barnett & Kasmin, 2017; Jacob *et al*., 2012). For our participants, these challenges led to negative emotions and dissatisfaction as they approached their final years in the profession, with tragic consequences for the sense of meaning they draw from their work. We note a connecting thread between the threat of stagnation in the mid-career phase and the sense of exhaustion and saturation in the late-career phase. It suggests that, when affordances for developing a sense of agency and continued growth are not provided earlier and indeed throughout a teachers' career, teachers may find their last years in the profession tiresome and frustrating. Ultimately, this can result in veteran teachers retiring early, as was the case with George in this study. Like many highly experienced teachers, he was lost to the profession due to a lack of opportunities for responsibility and professional advancement, limited recognition of his talents and accomplishment, and a lack of autonomy and control over his teaching (Jacob *et al*., 2012).

Another challenge characterising teachers' perceived professional growth during the late-career phase concerned the perceived utility of CPD training. Four late-career teachers in our study saw little point in further professional education and felt that CPD training sessions were forced upon them. They reported that the CPD sessions they attended were unnecessary, and saw these more as an additional stressor instead of a beneficial opportunity for growth. However, as will be seen below, the majority of late-career teachers in our study felt that they benefitted from CPD training, when this matched their prior knowledge and experiences. This finding highlights the importance of tailoring CPD to the distinctive learning needs and interests of teachers at different career phases (Furner & McCulla, 2019). Indeed, given their vast experience, this could be a time to create opportunities for these educators to share their knowledge and expertise as CPD trainers or through mentorship with other less

experienced educators instead of being on the receiving end of CDP. However, these kinds of opportunities can also be promoted across all teacher career phases, in order to foster authentic intra-faculty collaboration, as well as the development of supportive mentoring relationships, where all parties involved can learn from each other. This kind of exchange can help connect senior and junior faculty by building stronger bonds between them, it can expose senior teachers to new, fresh ideas and techniques that they can implement in their teaching, and it can further support junior teachers in building professional skills through sharing their knowledge with senior faculty.

Further, the switch to online teaching during the first wave of the pandemic crisis appeared to have exerted the most negative impact on teachers in the late-career phase alongside pre-service. While, under regular circumstances, these experienced teachers enjoyed a strong sense of efficacy and expertise, the unexpected transition to online teaching and their struggles with technology challenged their perceived competence and ability to teach. Especially for late-career teachers, online teaching required changing teaching practices and habits that they had developed and strengthened over the course of their long career. Quickly adapting to the new online format and adjusting their lessons and teaching materials took them substantial time, leading to a sharp increase in their workload and a dramatic loss of familiarity with professional roles and procedures. As such, at the start of the pandemic, all four late-career teachers interviewed during this time reported commensurate low levels of efficacy, agency and a sense of unpreparedness, which are all typical challenges facing novice teachers. Furthermore, the perceived lack of control over their work conditions during this time further contributed to a sense of vulnerability, which, as seen earlier, is a distinctive characteristic of the pre-service and early-career phases.

Thus, even in the case of experienced and highly competent teachers, a rapid and sudden change in teaching formats and expectations, such as changing schools or dealing with educational reforms, can threaten their wellbeing and recreate many of the challenges typical for pre- or early-career stage teachers. This was, for instance, the case of our late-career participants based in Austria, who reported on the large amount of stress they experienced following the introduction of the new standardised school-leaving exam (Zentralmatura) in 2015, which differed dramatically from the previous format.

#### *7.1.1.2 Resources*

The individuality of how teachers experience their teacher education courses was evident in these data. While the sense of unpreparedness remained a challenge for this phase, 12 pre-service teachers in this study also reported that the knowledge and skills accumulated through their pre-service courses was invaluable and expressed a sense of satisfaction

about their training. The perceived value and quality of their teacher education programmes helped them to feel secure, confident and motivated for teaching. The sense of preparedness to deal with the demands of teaching can be defining for their wellbeing (Stokking *et al.*, 2003; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011) and retention in the profession (Darling Hammond, 2000).

In addition, their experiences in the actual classroom positively shaped their wellbeing during this phase. All pre-service teachers in this study reported that, despite initial insecurities, authentic teaching experiences in the classroom were an invaluable source of motivation and confidence. These practical experiences provided them with the opportunity to expand their teaching competences and acquire hands-on knowledge of how to manage their students and workload. It is widely acknowledged that practicum experiences can help student teachers to gain a better understanding of 'what it means to be a teacher' (Cooper & Grudnoff, 2017: 228), to gain an insight into the duties, workload and lives of teachers, and to connect the theoretical knowledge they acquired during their teacher training programme to the actual teaching practice in the classroom (Grudnoff & Williams, 2010). Crucially, engaging with students in the classroom also strengthened pre-service teachers' sense of meaning in relation to their chosen profession, as well as their identity as language educators; both of which serve as key factors in shaping a teacher's wellbeing and job satisfaction (Day *et al.*, 2009). The practical experiences in the classroom also made them aware of their strengths and abilities, thus reinforcing their sense of efficacy and willingness to pursue the teaching career. In the context of the pandemic crisis, three pre-service teachers also felt that teaching online had given them the opportunity to learn new skills and competences which could be useful in their future teaching careers beyond the pandemic.

While the early-career phase was defined by some initial insecurities and vulnerability, it was also marked by a steep learning curve accompanied by a growth in confidence and efficacy. As early-career teachers acquired more hands-on experience in the classroom, they became increasingly self-assured in their classroom roles. This reflects a critical phase of professional identity development, in which teachers experiment, make new discoveries, learn on the job and find their own ways of doing things. Indeed, this phase was described by Huberman (1989b) as one of 'experimenting and discovering', characterised by a willingness to try out new methodologies, and find out what practices works best for oneself. It is often during this phase that teachers develop teaching approaches that they maintain throughout their career (Tripp, 1994). The initial challenges the teachers overcame in the language classroom also helped them to gain a sense of realism and thus re-calibrate their expectations of the profession and their own roles, becoming more tolerant towards their mistakes. In addition, these experiences in coping helped to build their

sense of resilience and develop a range of strategies, which serve as valuable resources moving into the future. As explained by Barnett *et al.* (2017: 1022), it is 'in the act of teaching that one determines when it is best to bend in the wind, stand strong in a storm—or in one way or another—move out of the tempest', suggesting that these initial critical incidents can be decisive in terms of fostering – or potentially undermining – a novice's teacher resilience and sense of coping efficacy. Over time, as they gained familiarity in their roles, most of these early-career teachers also reported that they felt that they were learning how to better deal with their workload and to manage student behaviour in the classroom. In addition, those early-career teachers interviewed during the first phase of the pandemic crisis reported that dealing with the practical and emotional challenges of online teaching also served as an opportunity to acquire new skills and strengthen their ability to cope. According to Day and Gu (2007), when a teacher's situation becomes more challenging, teachers exercise their resilience more frequently in order to preserve and maintain both their commitment and effectiveness. This sense of growth and increased resilience stems from successfully coping and overcoming difficulties. However, it is also important to remind that, in the long run, an individual's resources may become eventually depleted if the challenges are too great (see Dodge *et al.*, 2012).

Teachers in the mid-career phase also had a large repertoire of resources to sustain their wellbeing. Crucially, they gained confidence as professionals and strengthened their teacher identities. Comparing the different career phases reveals an increasingly stable sense of professional identity as teachers acquire experience and familiarity with their roles, and refine their own notion of what constitutes good teaching (Durksen *et al.*, 2017; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Their sense of efficacy was yet further increased when these teachers chose to diversify their knowledge, fulfil professional ambitions and gain additional responsibilities; however, these opportunities were contingent upon the affordances in their own environment and broader support from their ecologies. Despite the added pressure and stress from such additional roles, these new pastoral and leadership responsibilities also provided the teachers with valuable competences they could incorporate into their teaching and gave them a stronger sense of job satisfaction. Furthermore, they also generated feelings of pride and professional accomplishment (cf. Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). This was critical for their motivation as they entered the late-career phase. Indeed, those late-career teachers, who reflected positively on professional development earlier in their career, appeared to have maintained a growth mindset and continued pursuing opportunities for further development, which were a valuable source of joy and satisfaction.

For late-career teachers, the experience, knowledge and skills acquired over the course of their long careers were also key positive

resources sustaining their wellbeing. The conscious awareness of their competences and abilities equipped them with a sense of efficacy which, in turn, empowered them with a sense of agency and control in their teaching. By this point in their career, these teachers typically know what works for them and what does not, and they have accrued an ample repertoire of coping strategies to draw on in the face of difficulties. Indeed, it is known that teachers at later stages of their career are able to respond more flexibly to the challenges of teaching (Berliner, 2001).

However, their confidence did not hold back the majority of the teachers in this study from engaging in further professional development. While only four late-career teachers in our study perceived CPD training as useless, all the others were still eager to pursue opportunities for professional development such as taking part in training courses, if and when they saw value and meaning in them. Doing so provided them with a sense of joy and ensured they felt up-to-date in their teaching. Thus, although the drive for renewal and advancement was most common in the teachers from the mid-career phase, the late-career teachers also continued to display an interest in and willingness for CPD as long as it aligned with their needs and interests. As such, teacher development needs to be conceptualised 'as a journey and not a destination' (McMahon *et al.*, 2015: 163). This means that opportunities for CPD should be offered in all phases of a teacher's career based on their evolving needs and wants. Our findings also highlight how a growth mindset can serve as a positive resource sustaining teachers' motivation, enthusiasm and willingness to teach at the best of their abilities throughout the career trajectory right up to retirement. Teachers with a growth mindset tend to believe that their teaching competences can be acquired and enhanced; in contrast, teachers displaying a fixed mindset typically consider their competences as linked to some natural, fixed talent (see Irie *et al.*, 2018). Findings from Gero (2013) suggest that teachers with a growth mindset are more likely to engage in professional development and are more open to feedback; in contrast, those with a fixed mindset may be less willing to take risks in their teaching. Research by Irie *et al.* (2018) and Haukås and Mercer (2021) revealed that pre-service teachers in both studies had a complex blend of fixed and growth perspectives regarding their teaching competences. Both studies showed how pre-service teachers had overall an optimistic outlook regarding the learnability of didactic and pedagogical competences, while they considered personality factors or social skills to be more fixed. To date, however, there is virtually no research focusing on how teacher mindsets may fluctuate over the course of a teacher's career trajectory; given the influence of mindsets for a teacher's sense of wellbeing and resilience (Zeng *et al.*, 2019), this aspect certainly deserves more attention in future research.

### 7.1.2 Support and autonomy

The second main theme emerging across all career phases concerns the effects of the perceived degree of support and autonomy available to teachers in fostering or inhibiting their sense of professional wellbeing. As they advance throughout their career, educators are likely to have different needs in terms of the kind of support they require to teach at the best of their abilities (Keller-Schneider *et al*., 2020). Those at the outset of their careers may wish for greater structure and support, whereas those with more experience may yearn to be able to make more autonomous decisions in various areas of their professional lives. As such, the ratio between the amount of support and autonomy a teacher needs to thrive in their roles can shift according to career phase and personal preference.

#### *7.1.2.1 Challenges*

For pre-service teachers, the quality of support received from their university professors, mentors, and peers during their teacher education programme can greatly influence their wellbeing in the present, but can also be defining for their future development as teachers. Not unexpectedly, across our dataset, both the pre-service and early-career phases emerged as those where the teachers felt a need for more scaffolded support and practical guidance. Teachers at the earlier phases of their career typically rely on social support to cope with the challenges in their new roles (Carton & Fruchart, 2014). The absence or poor quality of such support emerged as one of the key challenges for student teachers in our study, with important repercussions for their self-efficacy, motivation and willingness to remain in the profession.

In particular, inadequate guidance from mentors was cited as an important issue facing pre-service teachers. A closer look at the two contexts reveals that, while pre-service teachers in Austria advocated for more hands-on support from their mentors during their in-classroom practica, their counterparts in the UK reported needing more personalised, individual support. Lacking such support, these pre-service teachers reported experiencing a sense of loneliness and frustration, and felt unprepared to deal with the challenges of their actual classrooms. Indeed, the quality of the mentor/pre-service teacher relationship has been found in earlier research to be a determinant of student teachers' confidence, agency and beliefs about teaching (Grima-Farrell, 2015), as well as their sense of efficacy (He, 2009). As such, good mentorship is critical, and mentors require quality training in how best to support pre-service teachers generally and in personalised ways (Ambrosetti, 2014). In addition, an absence of guidance from colleagues during the in-school practica also contributed to a sense of isolation and, in some cases, even made them reconsider their expectations about teaching. Without advice from

colleagues, learning the unwritten rules within the school may be especially difficult, and can lead to struggles in finding their own role and place within the school organisation (Bayer & Brinkkjaer, 2009).

Paradoxically, for three participants, receiving too much advice and structure was perceived as depriving them of a sense of autonomy and creativity. They felt that they were hindered in their ability to experiment in the classroom, which, especially in the case of early-career teachers, is a key step to finding one's own identity, authentic teaching self and pathway into the profession. Thus, from the earliest phases of teaching, a balance between individualised support and autonomy is essential to the process of socialisation into the profession (see also Chan *et al.*, 2021). It is important to establish the preferences and needs of individual teachers, given that some relish greater autonomy and others need support for a longer period of time.

Interestingly, during the pandemic crisis, the relationships pre-service language teachers had built with their mentors, professors and colleagues shifted. While 13 pre-service teachers reported experiencing greater compassion and empathy in their relationships at university and in school, the others encountered considerable issues in communicating with their professors and mentors, who were difficult to get hold of and notably 'absent'. The pre-service teachers lamented the lack of emotional support and reassurance during this critical time and pastoral care emerged as a key competence required of mentors to support future teachers both in times of crisis and beyond. Indeed, pastoral care has 'the potential to strengthen and fortify the wellbeing experiences of the pre-service teacher throughout the practicum process' (Gillett-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2020: 402). It suggests that mentors need to become competent not only in their area of expertise, but also in terms of their ability to provide appropriate psychological and emotional support (Gillett-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2020; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

For early-career teachers, this kind of support and guidance needed to be provided within the school setting by their administrators and colleagues. Depending on the specific context of the teaching education programme, pre-service teachers could have had short and fragmented teaching experiences. In Austria, for instance, due to the limited length of practica, pre-service teachers change schools, students and colleagues frequently during their teaching education programme (Mairitsch *et al.*, 2021). As they transition to in-service teaching, novice teachers therefore need perhaps additional help to find their place at school within an already established network of social relationships. One of the challenges for early-career teachers in our study was the difficulty of establishing connections with colleagues and administrators, and feeling able to ask them for guidance and advice. Likewise, in the literature, early-career teachers have been shown to often be left to their own devices, with very little formal help or guidance from colleagues in their first years of

teaching (Tickle, 1994). Tynjälä and Heikkinen (2011) found that uncertainty regarding the role and position of novice teachers in the teaching community is one of the key challenges threatening the wellbeing of teachers during this phase. McCormack *et al*. (2006: 110) have also shown that many teachers at the end of their first year keep questioning their role and position within the school and need 'some form of feedback and confirmation as to their value within the school'. When this is not provided, however, novice teachers can experience difficulties in recognising their own values and strengths.

In addition, the absence of direction from school administrators was another challenge facing novice teachers as they transitioned into their in-service roles. School leadership has 'the potential to be both an enabler or inhibiter of teachers' moral purposes in being a teacher, their professionalism and their overall resilience' (Furner & McCulla, 2019: 506). Headteachers are typically responsible for developing school structures that support the induction of novice teachers as well as mentoring processes (Kutsyuruba *et al*., 2020). However, our data show that this support is not provided in concrete terms such as through formal mentorship opportunities or initiatives such as buddy systems or social events, designed to familiarise novice teachers with the profession and specific institution (see also Roffey, 2016).

In particular, within the UK setting, early-career teachers reported limited support from school administrators not only in terms of the practical demands of the role, but also in terms of proactively sustaining their wellbeing. This systemic issue was especially prevalent in the UK, where novice teachers complained about the limited emotional support both at the micro-level of their school, and at the macro-level of the education system as a whole. The UK teachers, in particular, criticised the fact that wellbeing was considered as an individual responsibility by school administration and governments, who did not offer any structural support but, instead, enforced an excessive workload which was constantly threatening their work–life balance. This is a reminder that, 'good teaching is a collective accomplishment and responsibility' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012: 14). Likewise, teacher wellbeing should be seen as a collective responsibility (Mercer, 2021). Teacher wellbeing is contingent upon individual teachers' perceptions of the affordances within the different layers of their ecology; as such, it is not solely an individual responsibility, but all relevant stakeholders in education should make conscious effort in fostering it (Mercer, 2021; Roffey, 2012).

Mid-career teachers in our study sought out a different kind of support, namely, support for professional development and career advancement. The lack of such support could lead to a professional plateau, characterised by feelings of disempowerment and stagnation (Huberman, 1989b). The absence of opportunities and affordances for growth and professional development for mid-career teachers was perceived as a key

challenge reported by our participants during this phase. Professional growth requires teachers to have the motivation, autonomy and self-efficacy to engage with CPD opportunities, but it also requires contextual support from educational authorities or schools in terms of time, financing and opportunities (Kyndt *et al*., 2016). Indeed, teachers are often faced with a lack of funding, resources, or time to engage in CPD opportunities, despite their motivation to do so. A report from the European Commission (2018: 13) has shown indeed that, 'career guidance specifically targeting serving teachers wishing to develop within the profession is rare, despite the diversity of teacher roles available and the existence of a multi-level career structure in half of the education systems'. As such, more efforts should be undertaken by governments and education systems in providing all teachers with CPD opportunities that are tailored to their needs for professional growth and development; this kind of 'support in the early stages of a teacher's career and throughout their professional life should be accessible to all' (European Commission, 2018: 18).

Crucially, 10 mid-career participants across different contexts reported on the perceived lack of autonomy in the workplace as threatening their professional wellbeing. Mid-career teachers are confident and secure in their roles, and so having a sense of control over their own professional context is essential for their sense of growth and professionalism. However, in our study, several mid-career teachers felt that their voice was not being heard and that their school leadership actively rejected their willingness to experiment and explore new pedagogies. An absence of autonomy was reported not only at the level of the school administration, but also at the broader level of the national education system. A progressive loss of autonomy often accompanies increasing accountability demands (Bayer & Brinkkjaer, 2009). Indeed, the implementation of accountability policies, standardisation initiatives and high-stakes testing measures across the different contexts were seen to deprive some teachers of a sense of agency. They perceived the education system as being directed towards 'teaching for testing' and, in many cases, this clashed with their ideals about the profession and the sense of meaning they took from their jobs. Across the globe, the increase in workload and bureaucracy, greater public accountability measures and reduced autonomy over teachers' work that have been indeed held responsible for deteriorating working conditions for over the last few years (Flores, 2018).

The accountability measures (UK) and standardisation initiatives (Austria) led to stress and demotivation, which remained a key challenge in the late-career phase, where it was linked to feelings of professional saturation. In contrast, the pre-service and early-career teachers were less stressed by these issues. Possibly, because they were new to the system and so did not know the system any different; they merely accepted this as the norm. At the start of their career, teachers are also typically concerned

with the acquisition of skills and competences, while late-career teachers focus on gaining a sense of value and purpose (West, 2012), which suggests a greater challenge for more experienced teachers who may feel their notion of the profession under threat from these measures.

During the last phase of their careers, teachers also benefit from a strong network of support in order to maintain their motivation, enthusiasm and commitment to the profession. A key concern was to prevent a premature sense of disengagement as these teachers approached their retirement. As seen earlier, one of the defining challenges for the late-career phase was experiencing saturation. This can be characterised as feeling helpless, overwhelmed and reaching the point of having had enough (see Chapter 6). For nine out of our 18 late-career participants, this translated in a strong willingness to leave the profession (see also Babic *et al*., 2022a). Maintaining late-career teachers' motivation until the very end of their career has been a concern of education systems (Eurydice, 2004); however, these same education systems are often responsible for making late-career teachers disillusioned, tired and overwhelmed with work.

Interestingly, the factors leading to a perceived period of stagnation in mid-career phase and to saturation in late-career are similar and both related to a perceived loss of autonomy and sense of agency in the workplace. These factors served as key contributors to wellbeing in our study; likewise, Reece (2004: 24) concludes that, 'work related stress results from the combination of high job demands and low control over how the job is done', highlighting how a sense of control is an essential component of wellbeing. In our study, the constant inspections conducted in the UK by Ofsted contributed to teachers feeling stressed and deprofessionalised, despite the vast set of knowledge and competences acquired throughout their long career. Similarly, four late-career teachers felt that the standardisation of the school-leaving examination in Austria (Zentralmatura) deprived them of their autonomy, creativity and a sense of professional direction, which they had enjoyed previously in the many years of their careers. These changes have inevitably transformed the nature of teaching, with considerable implications for teachers' sense of professionalism, meaning and commitment (Day *et al*., 2007). As such, when educational reforms are introduced, top-down initiatives must consider the possible effects on the wellbeing of teachers generally and at specific phases of their career – the success of school reforms depends on this.

#### *7.1.2.2 Resources*

While the absence or poor quality of environmental support served as a threat to pre-service teachers' wellbeing, the presence of practical and emotional support from trainers, mentors and peers helped them flourish in their roles. It sustained their wellbeing and made a marked difference in the perceived quality of their experiences at university and in school.

The theoretical and practical input received from teacher trainers, as well as their ongoing emotional support, were reported by the majority of our participants as playing a vital role in their path to becoming teachers. This guidance, combined with the feeling of being valued and cared for by their teacher trainers and university professors, boosted these pre-service teachers' motivation, enthusiasm and resilience. Gu (2014) claims that teachers' capacity to be resilient is greatly influenced by the relational and organisational conditions in which teachers work. In particular, pre-service teachers in the UK were extremely satisfied with the wellbeing support and pastoral care offered, whereas, in the Austrian setting, pre-service teachers reported receiving less emotional and psychological support and felt this was in places completely absent. When mentors are trained to offer such support system, they can make a huge difference in the experiences of wellbeing of pre-service teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), showing once again how 'expertise does not guarantee effective mentoring in teacher education' (Pretorius, 2015: 139), but how subject-specific and pastoral care need to be combined to fully support pre-service teachers in getting the most of their practicum and initial teaching experiences. In addition, the practical guidance and scaffolded support offered by mentors helped pre-service teachers become familiar and comfortable with the demands and responsibilities of their prospective roles.

This kind of support, however, needed to be balanced with the autonomy to experiment in the classroom as well as an expression by the mentors of trust in the pre-service teachers' abilities to teach. Crucially, the ratio between autonomy and support varied from individual to individual; furthermore, three participants deliberately reported that finding a balance between autonomy and support was key in determining the effectiveness of their mentorship. They appreciated receiving individual guidance, but also the opportunity to experiment and find their own way into teaching. This suggests that mentors should offer personalised, individual support that accounts for each pre-service teachers' unique needs and preferences.

Finally, another source of social support sustaining pre-service teachers stemmed from the mutual support received by their peers in their teacher education programme. Reaching out to peers and feeling 'in the same boat' helped to alleviate stress strengthening pre-service teachers' sense of resilience as well as sense of belonging to a teaching community. Furthermore, this feeling of solidarity provided a sense of mutual reassurance and encouragement which further contributed to their wellbeing during this phase. In particular, pre-service teachers in the UK reported feeling particularly close to their peers outside their training programme too; this was due to the small size of cohorts in this context, as well as the fact that, in the UK, pre-service teachers remain in the same cohort over the whole duration of their PGCE studies (see also Mairitsch *et al.*, 2021). Conversely, in Austria, the modular nature of the teaching

education programmes requires pre-service teachers to attend different classes with different peer groups, which inevitably impacts on the quality and depth of relationships they establish with their peers and sense of community.

When affordances for support and guidance were provided to beginner teachers from more experienced colleagues and school administrators, it acted as a key support for the transition from pre-service to in-service teaching. The amount of support novice teachers receive from school leaders and colleagues can determine whether they will experience 'easy' or 'difficult' beginnings to their careers (Day *et al*., 2006). Feeling appreciated and trusted by colleagues was important for these beginner teachers to feel a sense of efficacy. These close bonds and emotional understanding with colleagues are seen by Hargreaves (2001) as a key ingredient of successful teaching. As headteachers are responsible for establishing the vision, ethos and school goals, they play a critical role in socialising early-career teachers into the school culture (Delp, 2014). In our study, this sense of support was amplified when headteachers valued other languages specifically and showed an understanding regarding the particular issues facing language teaching.

The mid-career phase has been characterised by Huberman (1989b) as one of stabilisation, where teachers have fully committed themselves to the profession and can enjoy a comfortable sense of efficacy in relation to their abilities. Their confidence in dealing with the demands of their roles was also strengthened by a strong social support network in the workplace. Indeed, workplace contexts that support teachers in dealing with the challenges of teaching can foster the long-term effectiveness and success of educators (Day & Gu, 2014). Mid-career teachers in our study reported, for instance, feeling more secure in dealing with students when the school had a coherent, whole school system in place to manage misbehaviour. When a school-wide framework and policies are available to teachers to help them deal with student behaviour, this can serve as a source of support they can draw on to improve their instructional practices (Fallon *et al*., 2018) and alleviate their stress (Rogers, 2015). Furthermore, when mid-career teachers' needs for professional development and career advancement were supported within their own contexts, they were more satisfied, suggesting that an environment that is responsive to teachers' development needs during this phase could enhance their wellbeing. While meeting these needs is typically a headteacher's responsibility, headteachers are not often adequately trained to support teachers' professional development. Furthermore, they typically experience high rates of professional stress themselves as they transition to their management role with limited training and support and are faced with issues such as multitasking, accountability, internal pressure and absence of resources (De Nobile *et al*., 2010; Elomaa *et al*., 2021; Friedman & Kass, 2002; Phillips & Sen, 2011). Thus, if we want headteachers to

support teachers to the best of their abilities, the wellbeing of school leaders should also be promoted and sustained.

Teachers in the late-career phase also relied on the support from their professional networks as well as their personal relationships. A particular concern for late-career teachers was the need to feel valued and respected within their school community. The recognition of their efforts and competences served as a source of motivation and job satisfaction as they approached their last years in the profession. Feeling valued and appreciated in the workplace is a critical contributor of job satisfaction and wellbeing (e.g. Briner & Dewberry, 2007; McCallum & Price, 2010; Retallick & Butt, 2004). Furthermore, all late-career teachers in this study cherished the positive, nurturing relationships they had with colleagues, students and administrators as a key resource that had and continued to sustain them throughout their long careers. Indeed, they considered these positive relationships as a key reason why they had thrived and maintained their commitment throughout their careers. This highlights the key role of a positive school climate in nurturing and preserving teacher wellbeing (see also Cohen *et al*., 2009; Hughes, 2012).

Another source of support highly valued by these late-career teachers concerned positive work conditions, which helped them maintain their professional commitment, in particular, having a secure job and autonomy. Job security as a positive contributor to teacher wellbeing was especially prevalent in the Austrian context, where teachers typically enjoy financial stability and long-term contracts (BMBWF, 2022e). Sadly, this was not the case in the UK context, where a lack of financial security and job stability threatened the educators' wellbeing. Ironically, among other factors, job security and a stable income are some of the reasons underlying teachers' decision to pursue this career in the first place (Heinz, 2015; Mansfield & Beltman, 2014). However, the teaching profession appears to be increasingly at risk of precarity; as highlighted by Mercer (2020a: 16), 'it is possible that precarity and lower status in the teaching profession are becoming more commonplace, not only in the private sector but beyond more broadly as a result of neoliberal education policies'. Job precarity is, indeed, recognised by Kelchtermans (2011) as a high-priority concern, as well as one of the key aspects contributing to making vulnerability an inherent condition of the teaching profession.

While these issues appear to affect the teaching profession more broadly, language teaching appears more vulnerable to job precarity and low professional status; job instability, low salaries, poor societal recognition and a sense of marginalisation from teachers of other school-subjects are some of the key factors leading to language teacher attrition across various anglophone settings including the UK (see Mason, 2017, for a meta-analysis).

Across our dataset, in particular, the relative status of languages and language teaching in the two countries influenced their wellbeing in

different ways. Our participants based in Austria were all teaching English; this is a core subject in the national curriculum, and it therefore enjoys a relatively high status (BMBFW, 2022a). This is not the case of Modern Languages in the UK, whose status is comparatively much lower; this is also reflected in students' low motivation to learn MLs in prevalently anglophone contexts (Busse & Walter, 2013; Eurostat, 2012), and the decreasing numbers of students taking ML courses at school and university in the UK (British Academy, 2013; British Council, 2014). In our study, ML teachers based in the UK reported that they felt that their subjects were not valued nor respected by students and parents; furthermore, their students showed a tendency to misbehave in the language classroom. These issues brought additional stress and frustration for UK teachers at all career phases, but especially for beginner teachers who particularly struggled with classroom management in this phase (see Chapter 3).

Throughout their careers, teachers typically need increasingly less structure and, instead, they express a need to be able to teach creatively, make their own decisions and be flexible when it comes to lesson planning and marking. Providing affordances for teacher autonomy and experimentation in schools and education systems inevitably strengthens teachers' wellbeing, job satisfaction and morale (see also Benson, 2010; Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). For the late-career teachers in this study, a sense of autonomy and flexibility served as key contributors to job satisfaction; this helped them to feel in control of their time and workload, and to better manage the balance between the personal and professional domains, as in the case of Melanie. In addition, the strong relationships with family, friends, and partners served as an essential resource bolstering the wellbeing of all 18 late-career teachers by helping them to maintain a positive balance across their work/life domains. While the mid-career phase is typically characterised by a tension in the constant juggling between personal and professional domains, during the late-career phase, the teachers take stock and progressively shift their attention towards the personal sphere, gradually letting go of their professional responsibilities.

### 7.1.3 Balancing priorities and domains

The third theme, which was defining for teacher wellbeing across the trajectory, was the balancing or diverse priorities across different life and work domains. Some periods of their lives see a deeper focus on work, while other phases are characterised by the continuous juggling between a teacher's personal and professional domains. Across all career phases, finding the personally preferred equilibrium between work and life remains a challenge; however, as teachers gain experience, they can also draw on experience and a greater repertoire of strategies to make achieving greater balance more manageable.

#### *7.1.3.1 Challenges*

For pre-service teachers, one of the key challenges was balancing the constant tension between their student and teacher roles. This dual role not only led to a fluctuating sense of teacher identity but also to difficulties in dealing with multiple, and sometimes conflicting tasks and commitments at university and in school. Juggling the multiple demands of their studies and teaching often meant a double workload, heightened stress, and difficulties in finding an appropriate balance between studies, work and private lives. Indeed, the issue of workload and difficulties in managing one's time and schedule was one of the main issues experienced during this particular phase, leading to intense stress (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011, 2015; Vesely *et al*., 2014). Since their workload depleted most of their time and energy, most pre-service teachers in our study were left with no choice but to prioritise their studies and teaching. This means they found it particularly difficult to nurture their personal relationships, engage in leisure activities and integrate self-care routines. Furthermore, due to their limited experience, pre-service teachers also appeared less aware, compared to teachers at later phases of their careers, of the importance of attending to their own wellbeing and of setting boundaries between their work and private lives. Concurrently, 12 of them still lacked practical strategies to preserve their wellbeing and work–life balance. Similarly, Price and McCallum (2015) found that, while pre-service teachers were able to identify the key influences on their wellbeing, their repertoire of proactive strategies to support their wellbeing was still limited at this stage. Worryingly, pre-service teachers in our study often normalised their high workload and saw it as natural to be particularly busy during this phase of their career.

For those pre-service teachers interviewed during the pandemic, the transition to online teaching compounded problems in managing their temporal and spatial boundaries, as they often had to tackle all their commitments within the same space at home and in a tightly compressed time-frame with spillover into what should have been non-work hours (Gregersen *et al*., 2020; MacIntyre *et al*., 2020). For three of them, this led to a drop in productivity and motivation; for the other three, it acted as a trigger to become aware of and actively engage in self-care activities taking more conscious care of their physical and mental wellbeing (see also Sulis *et al*., 2021). This highlights the importance of greater awareness about wellbeing during this phase. As underscored by McCallum and Price (2010: 19), 'promoting self-awareness of wellbeing in beginning teachers will contribute to their longevity and productivity' and is therefore vital if we want them to thrive in the long-term. As such, teacher education programmes could integrate deliberate sessions on wellbeing awareness and strategies, in order to offer pre-service teachers tools and resources to reflect on and take action to preserve their wellbeing.

The issue of an excessive workload remained a challenge for early-career teachers. Their limited classroom experience and fragile confidence, combined with intense work demands, appeared to further aggravate the issue of work–life spillover (see Mercer & Gregersen, 2020) during this phase. Tasks such as lesson planning and marking took substantially more time for early-career teachers compared to mid- and late-career ones. This issue appeared mainly due to a combination of factors. The first one concerns perfectionism, which is particularly prevalent during this phase (Sulis *et al.*, 2022), and led early-career teachers to spend a large amount of time in preparing very detailed lesson plans. The second issue relates to their limited teaching experience; while more experienced teachers feel more flexible and comfortable in improvising and using their intuition, novice teachers still heavily rely on lesson plans, which they feel need to be carefully designed and structured (Westerman, 1991). As such, this meant that early-career teachers often completed their work duties at home or worked long hours in school.

Inevitably, these early-career teachers had little time available to dedicate to their personal interests and relationships, further contributing to an imbalance between the work and life domains, with a clear preponderance of the professional sphere over the private one. Ironically, while many novice teachers enter the profession with the belief that the teaching profession offers family-friendly conditions, they often come to realise that, due to their workload and schedule, 'teaching hours may in fact become noticeably family-unfriendly' (Latifoglu, 2016: 66), and they risk becoming disillusioned with their career choice as they advance. Crucially, most teachers during this phase were still in the process of finding their own preferred equilibrium and developing adaptive behaviours and strategies to cope with the demands of teaching. Inevitably, this led to teachers reporting issues affecting their physical and mental health and, in some cases, to burnout and depression.

In particular, while work–life spillover was an issue reported by most early-career teachers irrespective of their context, teachers based in the UK placed greater responsibility for their excessive workload on their school administration and education system. Empirical research conducted by Bubb and colleagues (Bubb *et al.*, 2005; Bubb & Earley, 2004) in the UK has shown indeed that, 'much of this workload has been driven by the fear that teachers will be called to account by Ofsted inspectors and must have evidence of what has been taught' (Bubb & Earley, 2004: 80). Five of the early-career teachers in our study condemned the normalisation of a high workload in the UK context and felt deprived of a sense of agency to take active care of their wellbeing. Thus, even though they were aware of the need to attend to their wellbeing, they felt unable to undertake proactive action to sustain their wellbeing in the face of contextual demands and lack of proactive support. This is a reminder that wellbeing is not only the by-product of psychological determinants but

depends on social and structural systems. Rinke and Mawhinney (2017) confirmed that poor workplace conditions including excessive workload can lead to teachers' progressive disillusionment, exhaustion, stress and ultimately attrition. The prevalence of this theme across our dataset reiterates that wellbeing is a collective responsibility (Mercer, 2021), and teachers alone cannot be held accountable for their wellbeing if their working conditions are not adequate. Indeed, schools and institutions should provide opportunities for teachers to be able to take proactive steps to nurture their own wellbeing, and should guarantee working conditions that do not overwork and exploit educators, and also make them feel valued and appreciated.

The difficulties in finding a balance between professional and personal domains persisted in the mid-career phase but were contingent upon different underlying factors. During this phase, teachers appeared secure in their roles and had a solid grasp of the demands of the profession; however, this period of time also coincided for many with a life phase where they experienced multiple, often conflicting priorities with demands of responsibilities in their personal life and simultaneously a yearning for growth and professional challenge. Sixteen of them actively sought out career advancement and additional responsibilities; however, some also had children or elderly relatives to care for, sometimes both simultaneously. The pull between work and family is indeed recognised as one of the key challenges facing mid-career teachers across different social, cultural and educational contexts (Booth *et al.*, 2021; Hartsel, 2016; Smalley & Smith, 2017).

For those who engaged in professional development, the additional responsibilities typically meant a more intense workload, higher pressure and less time to dedicate to their family and themselves. These teachers usually brought their work home and worked at night and during the weekend to be able to accomplish their work, which served as a continual source of stress and emotional exhaustion. They reported on a sense of guilt and frustration as they could not devote sufficient time to their family and loved ones, and often put themselves and their own needs last in the order of priorities, with clear repercussions for their wellbeing. The difficulties in combining career and family responsibilities even led three of our participants to withdraw from their current responsibilities, or to abandon the pursuit of career advancement, in order to enjoy a healthier work–life balance and protect their wellbeing. In their study of stress among mid- to late-career UK primary school teachers, Troman and Woods (2000) listed three strategies for dealing with stress. The first one, retreatism, concerns leaving the profession for good. The second strategy, downshifting, refers to taking a voluntary step down the career ladder and giving up ambitions of future career advancement. Finally, self-actualisation refers to active strategies to create a better sense of balance such as leaving the profession to pursue unfulfilled ambitions, moving to a

different school better aligned with one's ethos, or developing hobbies outside the workplace (Troman & Woods, 2000). It seems that downshifting was the most prevalent strategy reported by mid-career teachers in this study. Indeed, progressively abandoning one's responsibilities also served as a step late-career teachers took to preserve their wellbeing as they approached their final years in the profession. This enabled them to prioritise themselves and their loved ones over work and to experience a more positive transition to retirement.

Furthermore, for mid-career teachers interviewed during the pandemic crisis, the pre-existent issues of combining their personal and professional duties inevitably intensified. Especially for teachers who had children at home, which was particularly common for those in the mid-life phase, working from home and sharing the same space with their family further exacerbated the work–life spillover and shattered boundaries between personal and professional domains even further. Other research has also found that mid-career teachers were those experiencing the greatest challenges in combining teaching with caretaking responsibilities during this period; these challenges appeared even worse for female teachers (Kraft *et al.*, 2021). This is not surprising, given that women typically spend more time on housework and childcare and are more exposed to work–family conflict compared to their male counterparts (Bekker *et al.*, 2005; Moreno-Colom, 2017). In addition to greater expectations for women to take on unpaid domestic and caring responsibilities at home and in family networks, female teachers typically experience higher work demands (Antoniou *et al.*, 2006) and worse overall work conditions compared to male teachers (Stengård *et al.*, 2021). According to a recent study conducted in the Swedish context by Stengård and colleagues (2022: 171), female teachers are at greater risk of depression which 'may be explained by their exposure to more challenging conditions in both the work and home spheres compared to male teachers'. This suggests the urgent need to address gender inequalities not only in the teaching profession but in society and culture more broadly.

By the time teachers reached the late-career phase, they had typically gained an astute awareness of their wants and needs; they took stock and learnt valuable lessons about managing the boundaries between their personal and professional lives. This, however, did not mean that they were exempt from issues of work–life spillover during this phase. Even if these teachers could draw on a vast repertoire of strategies and resources to manage their time and commitments, the ecological pressures of accountability and workload still threatened their ability to take proactive action to preserve their wellbeing. Similar findings were reported by Day and Gu (2009) in the UK context; more than a third of the late-career teachers in their study who had taught for 24 or more years reported that a combination of heavy workload, national and institutional policies, and

difficulties in dealing with student behaviour led to fatigue, disillusionment and demotivation.

Moreover, for those who needed to combine family responsibilities with an intense workload during this time, the challenges they experienced appeared to align with those facing mid-career teachers; this was particularly the case of female teachers younger than 55 years of age, who still had their children at home or needed to care for their elderly parents (Edith, Elisabeth, Gerda and Karen). Career and life phases do not necessarily overlap, as some teachers join the profession late, and it is therefore important to consider teachers' life holistically as it is the combination of career and life phase together that it is essential to understand for wellbeing.

For those teachers interviewed during the first pandemic wave, the issue of a heavy workload became even more pressing, further threatening a healthy work–life balance. Alongside pre-service teachers, who had no prior teaching experience and thus no framework of reference to draw on, late-career teachers were the ones who reported feeling the least comfortable with online teaching, compared to early and mid-career teachers (Kraft & Simon, 2020). Finally, as they reflected back on their careers, three late-career teachers in our study also reported a sense of resentment about having dedicated too much of their time to work over the years. As they gained awareness of their priorities, they realised the damaging impact of workaholism on their wellbeing and personal lives and took action to reduce their workload; potentially a valuable life lesson from experience for others at different career stages. Nevertheless, despite these strategies and awareness, they still perceived an ever-increasing workload towards the end of their careers, which remained a key source of stress and pressure.

#### *7.1.3.2 Resources*

While the duality of their roles as students and teachers posed challenges to pre-service teachers' work–life balance, gradually, they started to become aware of the importance of attending to their own wellbeing. Five pre-service teachers in our study started to develop practical strategies to manage the balance between their studies, work and private lives. One of the most frequently mentioned strategies was that of time-blocking (see also Chase *et al.*, 2013); this strategy enabled them to assign blocks of time to their studies and teaching, and still be able to allocate some time for leisure and self-care. Furthermore, five other pre-service teachers also reported that letting go of their initial perfectionism and gaining perspective in relation to their mistakes helped them combat stress, especially when they felt overwhelmed with their tasks and duties, and acted to counterbalance their limited sense of efficacy. Perfectionism remains prevalent in the early-career phase, where novice teachers typically still hold unrealistic expectations about their roles at the start of

their career. This mismatch inevitably influences their motivation to remain in the profession (see also den Brok *et al*., 2017).

The process of gaining perspective appeared accelerated for those interviewed during the pandemic crisis. The sudden transition to online teaching and the need to adapt to a completely new situation pushed them to gain sudden awareness of their priorities. During this time, the teachers started to take more active care of their wellbeing, and appeared more mindful of the need to preserve their boundaries and balance across their work and life domains. This mindful awareness can be critical in terms of developing a sense of agency to proactively preserve and regulate their wellbeing throughout the stressful period of the teaching education programme (Sulis *et al*., 2021).

Although the sheer amount of workload remained a pressing issue for early-career teachers in our study, the growing realism they gained helped to lead them towards a more sustainable balance between their personal and professional lives. As they advanced in their career, these teachers reflected more on their priorities and the importance of setting boundaries between their life and work domains. This awareness empowered them with agency to take care and feel in control of their wellbeing. However, this was often triggered as a consequence of particularly stressful events, such as experiencing depression or burnout, which served as 'catalysts for change' (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1991). Teachers need preventive strategies to nurture their wellbeing and to recognise and respond to symptoms of stress as early as possible in their career before this leads to irreparable damage. Prevention is better than cure. As such, deliberately addressing wellbeing in teacher education programmes should be key and the norm to preserve teacher wellbeing in the long term; furthermore, wellbeing strategies and training should also be implemented in CPD courses for teachers at all phases of their career.

During the mid-career phase, those who engaged in career advancement typically experienced tensions in managing their workload and any additional responsibilities. It was also a time where teachers re-evaluated their different 'centres of gravity' (Goodson, 2008: 39). According to Coulter and Lester (2011: 21), a central dimension of mid-career teachers' resilience is indeed the ability to 'differentiate the important aspects of their professional and personal lives'. They highlight that finding a balance between their different work and personal domains can help mid-career teachers get 'over the hump' (Coulter & Lester, 2011: 6) of the initial years in the profession and make them more able to cope with the challenges of teaching. As a consequence of this process, nine of our mid-career participants decided to dedicate more time and energy to their family, or to prioritise their own wellbeing. Furthermore, three of them realised that they needed to actively attend to their own wellbeing in order to be able to care for others.

Another strategy was that of sufficing, that is, realising when tasks were completed satisfactorily enough, if not perfectly. The notion of 'good

enough' was a valuable way of coping with multiple competing demands on their time and resources. Although perfectionism remained a challenge for teachers in the early-career phase, by mid-career, teachers appeared much aware of the perils of perfectionism and the importance of gaining perspective and a sense of realism. This enabled them to better manage their time and energy and to preserve the boundaries between their work and private lives. Similarly, Graves and Hasselquist (2021) have shown that, as teachers advance in their career, they tend to focus on the big picture, rather than on small matters. While this shift in perspective occurred gradually for most teachers as they advanced in their lives and career, for others, it appears to have been accelerated by the sudden changes brought by the pandemic crisis as teachers reconsidered their wants and needs.

By the time teachers reach the late-career phase, they have acquired a solid grasp of their personal priorities. They tend to be aware of what gives meaning to their lives and what they need to feel fulfilled. As such, in alignment with other research (Chen *et al*., 2020), this phase appears characterised by an overall sense of emotional stability. However, contextual issues such as the intense workload and accountability measures still remained a threat to the work–life balance of seven of these educators. Over time, these teachers had learned how to say no to certain aspects of their job or resist requirements they did not agree with.

Other strategies such as prioritising and progressively letting go of their work responsibilities further protected their wellbeing as they entered their final years in the profession. Prioritising one goal and postponing others is a key way of successfully managing one's limited and competing resources (Wiese & Freund, 2001). Delegating and refusing additional workload also helped them gain a sense of control and agency in respect to their wellbeing. In addition, experience has taught most of them to focus on the positive aspects of their work and lives, instead of dwelling on the negatives. Possessing this kind of mindset can contribute to strengthening a teacher's job satisfaction and reducing burnout (Chan, 2011).

This sense of serenity and contentment was also critical for participants entering retirement. Naturally, as the participants volunteered to take part in this study, it must always be remembered that not all teachers approach retirement with such positivity, but these teachers reveal how important such a mindset can be (see also Babic *et al*., 2022a). Finally, for three of the late-career teachers during the first wave of the pandemic crisis, the slower pace of the lockdown also eased their stress and actually heightened their wellbeing. Indeed, they felt they had more time available which gave them the opportunity for self-reflection, stronger connections with family members and spending time in nature. These are comparable to some of the uplifts that Gregersen *et al*. (2021) identified when looking at teachers' coping experiences during the pandemic. In

particular, acquiring a sense of learning and growth, enjoying a slower pace and becoming more aware of the factors bringing balance in their lives emerged as key positive dimensions of these teachers' experiences during the pandemic. They suggest that having a generally optimistic disposition can help teachers protect and boost their wellbeing and resilience even against adverse circumstances (Gregersen *et al.*, 2021).

## 7.2 Lessons Learnt on Challenges and Resources

The cross-sectional analysis presented in this chapter has revealed the complex interplay of challenges and resources shaping language teacher wellbeing across the career trajectory. While we can identify some patterns at different phases of language teachers' careers, how these patterns were expressed remained individual depending on their personal and professional contexts, their life stories and critical incidents they had encountered during their lives and career. As such, we cannot think of career phases as watertight compartments, but they can help sensitise us to the fact that teachers are in a continuous state of 'becoming' (Vinz, 1997: 139), negotiating and reconstructing their identities and roles, their beliefs and their resilience in meeting challenges in their environments.

Advancing through one's career does not just imply a continuous growth of accumulating new resources to counter stress. Rather, there is a complex and ongoing process of adjustment and adaptation between challenges and resources across a teacher's career and life; these 'should be regarded as highly interactive' (Kloep *et al.*, 2009: 333). Some resources are accumulated at the expense of others depending on individual vocations, ambitions, and priorities. For instance, acquiring new professional responsibilities can be a source of pride and motivation for teachers, but it can also mean less time to spend with loved ones. In contrast, other teachers may tend to prioritise their social resources, and choose to step down from their roles to enjoy more time with their family and friends.

Other resources need to be combined with others in order to sustain teachers against the challenges they may encounter in their personal and professional lives. For instance, teacher training alone cannot fully prepare future teachers to transition into their in-service roles, if not accompanied by adequate mentorship and practica opportunities in the classroom. Likewise, when not afforded enough autonomy and responsibility, even the most motivated late-career teacher may be driven to leave their school or the profession altogether. Furthermore, some resources can only be acquired through experiencing challenges; there are some critical events in teachers' lives that may that act as 'catalysts for change' (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1991). These can lead to growth and development, and thus to the accumulation of new resources including a sense of resilience in the face of adversities. For instance, despite the disruptions brought by the pandemic crisis and subsequent shift to online

teaching, some of our participants saw this as an opportunity to learn new skills and competences.

The process through which challenges become resources depends on a complex web of factors including an individual's pre-existing system of resources, their contextual conditions and other psychological determinants (Kloep *et al.*, 2009). As shown by our data, in particular, a sense of agency and environmental support played a key role in determining whether the challenges encountered within and beyond the classroom could turn into future resources. For instance, the initial challenges in managing student behaviour experienced by pre-service teachers could turn into opportunities for learning and developing resilience when accompanied by a strong support system from mentors and university professors.

As explained by Kloep *et al.* (2009), without challenges individuals tend to stagnate, as challenges are prerequisite of growth. They distinguish between two types of stagnation: the first one, 'contented stagnation', refers to a comfortable state that does not offer much potential for growth. This is often the case of late-career teachers, who are contented with the knowledge and experience accumulated over their long career, and often decide not to engage in further professional development. The second type of stagnation identified by Kloep *et al.* (2009) is 'unhappy stagnation', and it is experienced when individuals do not have resources at their disposal to seek out further challenges. This is, for instance, the case for those mid-career teachers who experienced a need for professional growth and renewal but were not provided with opportunities for CPD and career advancement in their own environment. The difference between these two types of stagnation lies in the fact that contented stagnation is chosen, while unhappy stagnation is imposed (Kloep *et al.*, 2009).

The presence of challenges does not always represent a chance for development; when the challenges become too great, resources can become progressively depleted (Dodge *et al.*, 2012). This situation is typically the process underlying teacher attrition. In our study, George was an enthusiastic, experienced and dedicated late-career teacher; however, a combination of challenges such as an intense workload, financial insecurity and accountability measures led to a high level of stress that he could no longer manage. Combined with a spectacular lack of support from school administrators, this led him to retire prematurely. His example shows the importance for teachers of all career stages of having a supportive school culture. Jacob *et al.* (2012) refer to teachers like George as 'Irreplaceables', namely, teachers who are invaluable assets to their schools, especially given their vast experience and knowledge, but who are too often neglected or simply ignored by their institutions and education systems. All teachers need to be seen, valued, appreciated and actively supported.

The challenges individuals experience at a particular point or phase of their career and the resources at their disposal to meet these challenges are not only key to understanding their wellbeing in the present, but they are also crucial determinants of their wellbeing in the future. Critical experiences earlier in a teacher's career and life trajectory may influence their long-term retention and professional development (Ewing & Manuel, 2005; McCormack & Thomas, 2003). For instance, changing school or headteacher at some point in their career may have a long-term impact on the future course of their wellbeing and lead even the more experienced educators to feel like novice teachers. As such, it is crucial to consider the iterative processes underlying a teacher's wellbeing in the present, and consider how their life histories, alongside their career phases, impact on these processes. Taking a holistic perspective can help us better understand the complex interaction between teachers' personal and professional life domains and how their ongoing interplay shapes their wellbeing. Importantly, the study draws attention to the fact that teachers need different kinds of support and opportunities at different career and life stages. If institutions and policymakers are serious about wellbeing of their staff, a differentiated view of teacher needs and motives will be essential.

## 7.3 A Holistic Perspective on Language Teacher Wellbeing

How wellbeing changes across the different phases of a teacher's career is not merely a function of the time they spent in the profession, but of other factors that are personal, contextual and systemic in nature. Teacher wellbeing does not solely depend on what occurs in an educator's professional life; teachers' personal and professional domains cannot be separated, but they continuously interact and shape each other.

Most work on teacher wellbeing to date has examined wellbeing determinants that are grounded within the school and education system, such as relationships with mentors and colleagues (e.g. Kutsyuruba *et al.*, 2019a; Hargreaves, 2019), with students (e.g. Gkonou & Miller, 2019; Martin & Collie, 2019) and administrators (e.g. Cansoy, 2019; Sowell, 2018). Other studies have looked at intrapersonal factors such as resilience (e.g. Beltman *et al.*, 2011; Mansfield *et al.*, 2012), self-efficacy (e.g. Perera *et al.*, 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), and motivation (e.g. Bardach & Klassen, 2021; Hiver *et al.*, 2018). However, studies looking at how teachers' careers interact with their private lives are rarer.

Just as teacher development can be viewed as an 'ongoing negotiation between life experiences and workplace contexts' (Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017: 362–363), teacher wellbeing also emerges at the intersection between the different facets of a teacher's life. As such, to understand and do justice to the complexity of their wellbeing, we need to look not only at teachers' career development and the key characteristics defining the different

phases of their career, but also at how their life course and responsibilities beyond the professional domain influence their sense of wellbeing in the present.

One useful perspective that can help us understand these complex processes is to examine teachers' lifespan development alongside their career phase. The pioneering work of Erikson (1950, 1968) described people's lifespans as a sequence of life stages that one needs to master and resolve before moving onto the next one. However, while his theory was certainly revolutionary, today there is recognition that human lives rarely develop in linear, subsequent stages (Cohen, 2005). Rather, human lives are much more dynamic, flexible and adaptable throughout life and into late adulthood (Bateson, 2011; Cohen, 2005; Hendry & Kloep, 2002). In some cases, the life and career phases of a teacher overlap; as seen in the chapter dedicated to the mid-career phase (Chapter 5), those mid-career teachers who are also in the mid-life phase often experience similar struggles, the most prominent being having to juggle their family and work responsibilities. However, this is not automatically the case. For instance, our data revealed it was more common to choose teaching as a second career path in the UK, so they began their lives as teachers at a much older age than the Austrian participants who were much more homogeneous in terms of age and career progression, and typically started around the same age in their mid-20s. In the UK, the path to becoming a teacher is much shorter compared to Austria, where the teaching education programme lasts six years (Mairitsch *et al.*, 2021).

The life experience of older early-career teachers makes a difference in the way they perceive the challenges in their environment and how they use their pre-existing resources to meet these challenges. For an early-career teacher in their 20s, it may be more difficult to gain perspective on making mistakes in the classroom than for an individual starting their teaching career in their late 30s who has already developed resources and resilience from challenges in other life or previous work contexts; all of which enables them to keep a sense of perspective in relation to their work. A clear example of this was shown in Chapter 3, in respect to Stephanie and Florence, two early-career teachers in the UK who were respectively in the 55–64 and 35–44 age groups. They both recognised that they had confidence gained from their life experience, which shaped their sense of resilience in the present and how they made sense of their current challenges at work. The core implication is that teachers of different ages have different experiences to draw on as well as different life commitments and responsibilities. As such, a career phase perspective alone may be misleading in respect to wellbeing if it does not also seek to understand the teachers' life phases and how the two interact. A holistic perspective means integrating insights from their personal and professional domains as both determine an individual's wellbeing at any one time. A teacher's wellbeing at work can never be thought of as detached from their personal lives.

Kloep *et al.*'s (2009) conceptualisation of the different 'shifts' and changes an individual experiences over time in their lives can help us better understand the interactions between teachers' career and life phases, as mentioned in Chapter 2. When looking at teacher wellbeing, examining these 'life shifts' alongside their career phases can help us understand the complex interactions between their personal and professional domains, and how these define their individual wellbeing at a particular moment in their lives and career.

For instance, considering maturational shifts such ageing can help us gain an insight into some of the challenges teachers face as they progress in their life and career trajectory. One consequence of these maturational shifts was, for instance, the growing intergenerational gap between four late-career teachers in our study and their students as they advanced in their career; this led to increasing difficulties in connecting with them on a personal level and in dealing with misbehaviour in the classroom. Furthermore, as they grow older, teachers may be more likely to experience deteriorating health and increasing tiredness, which can impact on their perceptions of stress – as seen in Chapter 6. At the same time, some of these maturational shifts in teachers' lives were also associated with the accumulation of positive resources. For example, older teachers, who were in the earlier phase of their teaching career, could draw on the resources accumulated through their prior life and career experience, which helped them lessen some of the challenges and insecurities that are typical of the early-career phase.

Looking at normative and quasi-normative shifts in teachers' lives can also help us make sense of their experiences of wellbeing across their career trajectory. Having children, for instance, was for many teachers in our study a key shift marking their personal and professional life and wellbeing. As seen in Chapter 5, this shift was most often experienced during the mid-career phase, which is indeed defined as a 'crossroad' in a teacher's life (Day & Gu, 2007). During this phase, many teachers juggle between the need for professional advancement and their family responsibilities, often leading to work–life spillover (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Some of these issues tend to progressively diminish in the late-career phase, as their children grow older and become more independent. However, those teachers who were in the late-career phase, but still had children to take care of, experienced similar issues as those in the mid-career phase. This highlights that life and career phases do not always overlap, and looking at career phases alone can only provide a partial picture of these teachers' complex lives and experiences of wellbeing.

Finally, non-normative shifts such as changing school or experiencing a radical education reform later in one's career can present a teacher with the kind of challenges and feelings of uncertainty that are more typical of the early-career phase, regardless of their years of experience. In a longitudinal, life history study involving 20 teachers, Troman and

Woods (2000) found that teachers may experience certain 'epiphanies' or 'fateful moments' during particularly stressful moments of their lives leading them to leave the profession, downshift into a new role or change school. Similarly, we found specific turning points in teachers' lives which shifted how they perceived and took care of their wellbeing. For some teachers, these shifts occurred in conjunction with experiencing severe stress-related issues such as burnout and depression; for others, they were triggered by shifts in their personal lives such as taking on a new professional role. For many in this specific study, such 'epiphanies' were triggered by the pandemic crisis. Naturally, how an individual experiences such shifts and how these shifts impact on their wellbeing is contingent upon a range of factors such as their gender, culture, ethnicity and nationality. For instance, a study by August and Quintero (2001) has looked at two teachers' trajectories and revealed how different financial situations, educational attainment, class, race, career opportunities and critical incidents in their life-span shaped the life and career direction of these two teachers over time and led to very different paths to retirement. In a similar way, there was diversity in the different pathways to retirement of our late-career participants, even those who were in the same age group and based in the same educational context.

All of this diversity and complexity in life and career trajectories emphasises the value of taking a holistic perspective to language teacher wellbeing, considering the complex interactions between the different layers of their personal and professional ecologies and the variability in terms of the typical kinds of resources and challenges experienced in different ages and career phases as well as their personal biographies and history of critical experiences. Here, Fessler and Christensen's (1992) model of the teacher career cycle and environmental influences can serve as a useful tool to appreciate the many, interconnected factors shaping a teacher's wellbeing. In Fessler and Christensen's (1992) model, the career cycle is not conceptualised as a linear series of subsequent stages but rather as phases that individuals can move in and out depending on their personal and organisational environmental conditions. Among the different elements that belong to teachers' personal environment, Fessler and Christensen (1992) acknowledge psychological and social factors such as family, individual dispositions and avocational outlets, but also aspects related to an individual's cumulative life experiences, their crises and positive critical incidents. This perspective enables us to consider teachers' whole life course, and the respective shifts teachers experience at different points in their life, as an aspect continuously influencing and coming into contact with their career cycle. Alongside the personal environment, Fessler and Christensen (1992) recognise the influence of a teacher's organisational environment on their career cycle; this includes school regulations, administrators' management style, public trust from the community, societal expectations, activities of professional organisations and

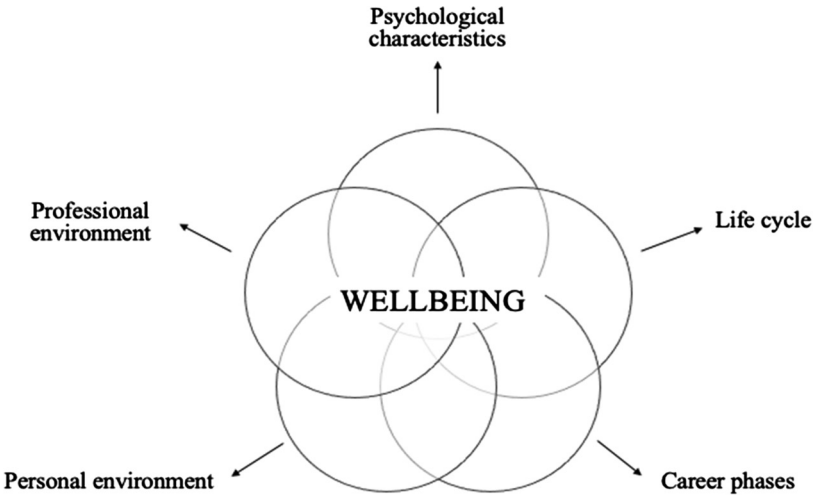


**Figure 7.1** Our conceptualisation of wellbeing

associations, and teacher union. While different teachers at different life and career stages may be affected to differing degrees by these factors, a key implication to take from this model is how both personal and professional domains impact on teacher wellbeing. While Fessler and Christensen (1992) see the personal and organisational environments as two distinct influences, we see the many layers of a teacher's personal and professional environments as continuously interacting and shaping each other in mutual ways, thus more integrated than separate, as shown in Figure 7.1.

In our understanding, wellbeing emerges from the complex interplay of personal and professional challenges and resources, which are determined by teachers' cumulative life experiences and contexts. It includes a temporal element, which considers the teachers' interpretations of their pasts, present and hopes for the future. It requires an understanding of what teachers' lives are like beyond the professional domain, what life experiences they have had and are currently experiencing, what career phase they find themselves in, what educational system and culture they work within, and what hopes, fears, and ambitions they have looking forward. Crucially, wellbeing has an emergent quality that reflects the continuous interaction of diverse components over time. Its dynamism has been witnessed in this study across the career trajectory but was also apparent in the retrospective reporting of critical experiences, highs and lows. The analysis revealed how some resources are accumulated at the expense of others over time, how some challenges can ultimately generate resources for the future, while other resources become depleted as a result of excessive challenge and stress. Future research on language teacher wellbeing needs to accommodate this

dynamism and complexity, which reflects changes and stability in teachers' personal and professional lives in the moment and across time. Teacher wellbeing is seen as being psychologically and socially determined, and any study that seeks to understand how teachers are coping or flourishing in their professional lives needs to take care not to create an artificial distinction between the personal and professional domains. Each teacher is one holistic person who must accommodate a multitude of competing demands from all domains of their lives at the same time. How they manage that balance, what resources they can draw on, and how they conceive of challenges will be key to understanding how they cope and experience wellbeing as an ongoing dynamic process. There is no end state to a teacher's wellbeing, and it will continue to change and develop throughout their careers and lives.

# 8 Implications and Future Directions

In this final chapter, we will consider some of the practical implications of the findings of our study for language educators, teacher educators, administrators, and policymakers. We will also discuss potential avenues for further research into language teacher wellbeing.

## 8.1 Implications

There are four main areas of implications of our study: wellbeing across the career span, wellbeing in context, personalised CPD opportunities and agency for wellbeing. We will reflect on each in turn.

### 8.1.1 Wellbeing across the career span

Our study has revealed the different issues facing language teachers at different stages of their careers and life span. This has implications for research in two ways. Firstly, data are often collected and used in aggregated ways looking at teachers as a homogenous group, without recognition of the role of experience and life phase in determining the kinds of challenges teachers face as well as the types of resources they can draw on. When all teachers are clustered together, vital temporal differences may be overlooked, and one-size-fits-all solutions may be proposed too quickly without recognising the differing needs for teachers across the career span. Naturally, even teachers in the same context and same career and/or life phase may not experience the stressors and wellbeing in the same ways. As such, we are cautious not to over-emphasise these phases as watertight categories. However, they have drawn attention to critical differences in respect to wellbeing that may be being disregarded (see Jin *et al.*, 2021).

A second implication in the face of such uniqueness and diversity is the potential offered by getting teachers themselves to research their own wellbeing and share their insights with others (Sullivan *et al.*, 2021). To date, there have been very few teacher-driven research studies on teacher wellbeing. One notable exception is a study conducted in the

South-African context by Wessels and Wood (2019), where they adopted a participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) design. In the study, six teachers in a rural primary school conducted critical and collaborative reflection about how to enhance their experiences of wellbeing over a period of six weeks. The study involved three main stages. The first stage concerned identifying teachers' needs and expectations, and formulating plans to meet these needs. The second stage included activities aimed at addressing these needs and reflection on these activities; furthermore, teachers were involved in deciding collaboratively on data generation and analysis methods. Finally, during the third stage, the participating teachers reflected on their own learning about wellbeing and presented their insights at a celebration function. One of the key features of this study was that teachers were actively involved in determining and reflecting about their own wellbeing needs. Additionally, the PALAR process provided a 'reflective, relational space where colleagues could share personal challenges', which improved relationships among colleagues and increased positive emotions (Wessels & Wood, 2019: 6). This study offers innovative ideas to empower teachers to research their own wellbeing and add their unique voices to the body of scholarship on language teacher wellbeing.

Although there were patterns associated with career phases, there was also considerable individuality across the data. Indeed, while our study highlighted some of the common challenges and resources of teachers at different phases of their career, it is important to remember that each individual teacher may experience different wants, needs and priorities, depending on the ways their unique psychologies interact with their environment. Thus, we need to beware of the risk of overgeneralising insights from career phases and recognise that interventions for wellbeing cannot be prescriptive but must allow for such diversity and individuality.

### 8.1.2 Wellbeing in context

Our study also illustrates the merits of adopting an ecological perspective on wellbeing. The findings revealed the dynamic interplay between the challenges a language teacher encounters across the different contexts of their lives stretching from national educational policy to school structures, personal lives and individual relationships, and the kind of resources they have been able to develop to help them cope with challenges based on their past experiences. As such, there are valuable insights to be gained to understand the role of an individual's biography in determining how they cope in the present (Kloep *et al.*, 2009). It is also important for wellbeing research to appreciate that it is impossible to try to separate a teacher's personal and professional life domains as both interact and contribute to their wellbeing. A teacher has one life, which must accommodate both personal and professional roles and commitments. It is the dynamic

interaction of both that contributes to the emergent quality of teacher wellbeing. Research that only examines a teacher's working life is at risk of gaining a very distorted view of their wellbeing. Similarly, policymakers and institutions need to adopt a whole-person approach (see also Mercer & Gregersen, 2020: 7), which looks at teachers' personal and professional lives as one to promote interventions addressing teacher wellbeing. For example, there is a need to understand how family commitments influence teacher wellbeing, and particularly that of female teachers; indeed, they are typically more likely to manage family responsibilities, care for elderly parents and take a career break in order to raise their children (Thornton & Bricheno, 2009). This exposes them to higher risks of negative work–life spillover (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013), compared to male teachers. Indeed, men typically report having less responsibility for home life, which means that they can dedicate themselves more easily to work and be more flexible in managing the boundaries between their personal and professional domains, thus experiencing less work–family conflict (Horne *et al*., 2018; van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2020).

Acton and Glasgow (2015: 100) stress that examining teacher wellbeing within 'the wider social and professional contexts that teachers operate in is necessary to gain an understanding of the complex interplay between individual, relational and external factors that affect, constrain and mediate the wellbeing of teachers'. However, it is also important to note that the impact of contextual factors may also depend 'on the extent to which these factors are experienced as psychologically frustrating or fulfilling' (Lataster *et al*., 2022: 2); as such, their influence is mediated by teachers' unique psychologies and how they interact with the environment. Indeed, what may be stressful for one educator may not bother another teacher; it is not just the stressors themselves that affect an individual's wellbeing, but what these stressors mean and how each individual teacher feels about them. Nevertheless, there are also objective, systemic, and structural issues such as poor salary, precarity and low status among other factors which are likely to affect teachers in similar ways. Drawing on Ushioda's (2009) person-in-context approach, we claim that research would benefit from a wellbeing-in-contexts perspective. From this view, the context is not seen as an external force influencing wellbeing; in contrast, wellbeing is seen as emerging from the ongoing interaction between an individual's psychological and social contexts. This lens would enable an in-depth understanding of how individuals interpret and make sense of their environment, as well as how they contribute to shaping, through their agency, the multiple layers of their ecology.

#### *8.1.2.1 Relationships*

One notable finding was the key role played by relationships in different contexts. For example, at the level of the classroom and school, it was possible to see the importance of positive connections with colleagues.

This aspect appeared to sustain the wellbeing of teachers at all career phases, from pre-service to late-career. Teachers need to be given time and opportunity to engage with each other socially and professionally. This means that schools should take the time to provide opportunities for staff to socialise together, build relationships and a sense of team and belonging, as well as the importance of a space to do this such as staffrooms. Mercer (2020a) reported on the problems for staff working in the private sector in Malta who had no staffroom to socialise in coffee breaks with colleagues or even to store their things or prepare their classes. The physical space can thus make a difference in facilitating and supporting staff wellbeing and relationships (Eyre, 2016; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020).

A particular opportunity that has been shown to be beneficial for teachers' wellbeing is the development of Professional Learning Networks (PLN)s. PLNs can be defined as 'a network of people, information, and resources that an individual strategically develops using social technologies to access informal learning' (Oddone *et al.*, 2019: 104). By means of PLNs, teachers can obtain support, advice, feedback and opportunities to collaborate with other teachers worldwide (Trust, 2012). A case study by Oddone *et al.* (2019) in the Australian context has shown that, through PLNs, teachers can establish a wide range of connections with other professionals, avoid feelings of isolation and enhance their pedagogical knowledge and practice. Another qualitative study by Schnellert and Butler (2020) in the Canadian context revealed that PLNs contributed to supporting knowledge mobilisation, both within schools and across a school district, and helped teachers enlarge their resources by interacting with educators with different perspectives and approaches.

During the teacher education programme, relationships with peers were reported as essential for pre-service teachers' wellbeing. Especially in the UK, where cohorts were smaller, pre-service teachers could rely on a strong network of peer support, which served as a key resource sustaining them against the initial challenges of their education programme (see also Mairitsch *et al.*, 2021). For those contexts where such cohorts do not exist, such as in Austria, it might be worthwhile considering how such communities can be built explicitly to ensure the students feel a strong sense of belonging and connection with each other. Developing learning communities can promote a sense of belonging and social connectedness in novice teachers (Johnson *et al.*, 2005). In the case of pre-service teachers specifically, working collaboratively was found to help them take more risks and develop more interesting and challenging lessons.

Furthermore, interacting with colleagues to review assessment data, planning the curriculum, and engaging in learning were found to have a strong positive influence on teacher effectiveness as well as student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). A study by Britton and Anderson (2010) has shown that peer coaching can be a useful tool to promote meaningful collaboration among pre-service teachers; crucially, this

contributed to their professional development and to their wellbeing, as it provided a much less stressful environment compared to formal evaluation. Similarly, critical friendships can be implemented as a tool to enhance interaction and collaboration among pre-service teachers. A critical friend 'acts as a sounding board, asks challenging questions, supports reframing of events, and joins in the professional learning experience' (Schuk & Russell, 2005). According to Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015), critical friendship can serve as a space for creating alternative interpretations of practice-based situations and shared understandings of teacher education practices. Bognar and Krumes (2017) have shown that participating in online discussion with critical friends encouraged pre-service teachers' critical and reflective thinking, thus showing its relevance as a pedagogical tool; furthermore, it was also perceived to have a positive impact on their motivation.

In the early-career phase, relationships with colleagues at school appeared crucial in helping them familiarise with the demands of the profession and with the school culture; without the guidance and support from more experienced teachers, they tended to feel lost, demotivated and could experience struggles in finding their own place within the school. A sense of belonging is necessary to help teachers thrive in the workplace; in contrast, a sense of isolation can serve as a key threat to wellbeing, especially at the start of one's career (see Butt & Retallick, 2002; Le Cornu, 2013; McCallum & Price, 2010; Pillay *et al*., 2005). School administrators could promote initiatives to explicitly make early-career teachers feel welcomed and connected to their colleagues through social events and buddy systems (see also Bush, 2003; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). A report conducted in the UK has shown that, when newly qualified teachers (NQTs) were paired with another member of staff, they were satisfied with this kind of support (Walker *et al*., 2018). The same kinds of initiatives could be implemented for teachers who have recently changed school. As seen in Chapter 8, this can be a traumatic event for teachers; even experienced educators may feel like novice teachers in a new school setting. As such, finding ways to support the integration of new teachers can make them feel connected, and experience a sense of belonging in the school. The ultimate aim is to build a sense of community which can contribute to a positive and collaborative workplace climate (see also Webb *et al*., 2009).

In the mid- and late-career phases, positive and collaborative relationships with colleagues were reported to lie at the heart of their career longevity and were recognised as an important workplace resource supporting them throughout their long teaching career. Positive relationships with colleagues are indeed recognised as a key factor influencing job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Looking back over the past 30 years of research into collaboration among educators, Hargreaves (2019: 617) concluded that 'people perform better in their work when others take an interest in them and that there is a strong relationship between friendship

and output'. Crucially, the author also highlights that efforts need to be made by leadership in fostering and encouraging collaborative relationships between teachers (Hargreaves, 2019). Teachers thus need to be given time and opportunities to engage with each other socially and professionally. Initiatives that promote teacher collaboration such as, for instance, joint projects, peer mentoring, as well as informal social functions, can foster interactions among teachers and help them develop and strengthen their work relationships and, ultimately, their wellbeing (Kolleck, 2019; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Vangrieken *et al*., 2015).

#### *8.1.2.2 Leadership*

Another key implication of our study for teacher wellbeing concerns the importance of leadership in creating positive relationships with and among their staff (e.g. Aelterman *et al*., 2007; Brady & Wilson, 2021; Brown & Roloff, 2011). Research has shown that a lack of support from school administration is one of the main reasons early-career teachers leave the profession (e.g. Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Scherff, 2008), suggesting that active efforts need to be made by institutions in recognising the unique needs of beginning teachers and providing them with an adequate system of support at this critical period. However, one problem is the lack of leadership training that many head teachers experience (Bush & Glover, 2016; Huber, 2009) and the high levels of stress they themselves are suffering as a result of excessive workloads and a lack of support from local authorities (Scott *et al*., 2021). As such, adequate training for those moving into leadership positions, as well as for experienced leaders, is needed to ensure they are equipped with the skills to take care of their staff properly and that they themselves can serve as positive role models for wellbeing behaviours.

However, as highlighted by Weinstein *et al*. (2018: 250), improving school leaders' preparation and professional development is not enough; it is also necessary 'to create a positive policy environment for school leadership that makes this training more effective'. As such, leadership could be explicitly trained in supporting the wellbeing of the whole school community. Intervention studies have shown that, receiving training on specific aspects of wellbeing (e.g. mindfulness training; see Mahfouz, 2018) or implementing school-level policies explicitly addressing the wellbeing of all members of the school (see Waters & White, 2015) can benefit not only school leaders themselves, who show gains in self-awareness, self-compassion and self-management, but also teachers and students, who feel empowered, supported and more aware of their strengths and abilities. While implementing policies specifically addressing the whole school community's wellbeing should be a priority, in lack of these policies, teachers can also organise collectively to press for policies that support their wellbeing. To do so, however, it is necessary that teachers are made aware of the importance of their wellbeing and are given a voice to call for workplace conditions that favour their best interests.

Especially for mid-career teachers, it was important that they felt that their voice was being heard by school administration, highlighting the importance of actively involving teachers in decision-making processes. A report by the National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY, 2015: 5) has highlighted that, 'education policy results are better for students when policies are informed and shaped by highly effective educators who know firsthand what it takes to deliver excellent teaching and learning'. However, the same report revealed that many teachers do not feel listened to when it comes to decisions that affect their classrooms and suggest that school administrators need to gain a better understanding of the value that these interactions can bring to their schools (NNSTOY, 2015). Contributing to schoolwide decision-making can increase teachers' job satisfaction and positive retention in the profession (Allensworth *et al.*, 2009). In contrast, teacher attrition is higher when teachers are not able to provide their own input into the school's decision-making processes (Ingersoll, 2001). Traditional vertical leadership styles and top-down approaches centralise the decision-making power in the hands of few individuals (Ryan, 2006); in contrast, 'for leadership to be genuinely inclusive, it must foster equitable and horizontal relationships that also transcend wider gender, race and class divisions' (Ryan, 2006: 8). Furthermore, distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities was found to be associated with improved learning outcomes and positive student personal development (Day *et al.*, 2009; Woods, 2011). This indicates that there are a number of gains for wellbeing, for schools, pupils and teachers, when teachers themselves are involved in decision-making processes and more democratic leadership styles are adopted in schools. Furthermore, the criticality of leadership for staff wellbeing also implies the importance of conducting research to understand the challenges and resources of school leaders and head teachers and, to date, they typically remain comparatively under-researched (Scott *et al.*, 2021).

Leadership support was also highlighted as a crucial determinant of wellbeing by late-career teachers. In particular, they underscored the need to feel valued by school administration, suggesting that institutions should make active efforts to celebrate and value experienced teachers' commitment to the profession, their achievements, and their accrued knowledge and experiences. Research on teacher wellbeing shows that feeling respected, supported and cared for in the workplace fosters wellbeing and professional satisfaction (e.g. Briner & Dewberry, 2007; McCallum & Price, 2010; Retallick & Butt, 2004). A suggestion of how schools could more proactively appreciate and utilise late-career expertise is by asking such teachers to lead CPD for their colleagues (Babic *et al.*, 2022a; Fessler & Rice 2010; Louws *et al.*, 2017). Teacher-led CPD refers to professional development in which the teachers themselves offer CPD to other colleagues. Especially given their experience, this would be a valuable way to utilise their experience and wisdom, recognise their value and esteem their position as experts, as will be seen later in this chapter.

Finally, both mid- and late-career teachers also reported on the importance of being granted sufficient autonomy to make their own choices and feel agentic in the profession. This appeared to gain in significance across our data as teachers became more experienced and familiar with the demands of teaching. Teacher autonomy is known to play a large role in determining job satisfaction (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020), and trusting teachers to make their own decisions as professionals is a key way to integrate value and esteem which can boost wellbeing (Butt & Retallick, 2002; Le Cornu, 2013). Teachers often have autonomy in many areas of their professional practice, and it may be worthwhile helping them to become aware of those options and how to exploit them more (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). For instance, teachers may be able to exercise their autonomy and make their own choices in terms of managing their workload and time schedule, planning their lessons, dealing with classroom management and organising administrative tasks (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020).

Closely linked to the provision of autonomy, trust emerged as an important characteristic of good leadership in our data; as highlighted by Day and Gu (2010: 150), 'trust and trustworthiness have been identified as key ingredients in the work of heads and essential to school improvement and success'. When teachers are trusted by school leadership, they can experience a higher sense of efficacy and feel more empowered (Day & Gu, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2003). As such, deliberately taking administrative actions to build and maintain trust can crucially benefit teacher development, success and wellbeing. Notably, feeling trusted, not only by leadership but also across all professional relationships in school (e.g. with colleagues, parents and students) may also contribute to decreasing the sense of vulnerability that is inherent to the teaching profession (see also Chapters 3 and 4); as such, we argue that leadership trust can serve as a crucial mitigator of such vulnerability.

To understand how leadership can develop and promote a sense of trust among all members of the school community, Day and Gu (2010), drawing on earlier work by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003), identified eight facets of leadership trust, namely, benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, openness, wisdom, academic optimism and emotional understanding. These facets provide a useful framework to understand how trust can be built and supported not only between school leaders and teachers, but also between teachers themselves, teachers and students, and teachers and the community.

#### *8.1.2.3 Policy and status*

At a broader level of context, our findings also offer implications in terms of the role of policymakers and education systems play in shaping language teacher wellbeing. Educational policies and reforms exert a key influence on teachers' experiences of wellbeing across contexts and

career phases, determining their individual agency and potential for action in respect to wellbeing (Brimblecombe *et al.*, 1995; Le Cornu, 2013). In our study, two aspects in relation to the macro-level of a teacher's context appeared particularly prominent, namely, accountability measures and standardisation policies. The first aspect appeared particularly prominent in our UK data, where teachers at all career phases highlighted the stress they perceived in respect to the inspection system, Ofsted. The continuous inspections and demands posed by Ofsted have led to work intensification, a loss of autonomy and creativity, additional administrative tasks and less time spent in the classroom (Adams, 2019; Ofsted, 2019), all of which have created additional pressure, anxiety and vulnerability for teachers as well as school principals (Penninckx *et al.*, 2016).

Several studies have claimed that school's self-evaluation should thus be employed as a basis for the inspection (e.g. Hargreaves, 1995; McNamara *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, in order to avoid possible negative effects of a negative inspection judgement, Hofer *et al.* (2020) suggest that inspection reports may include not only indications of areas where quality standards are not yet met, but also a recognition of the school's strengths. They also suggest leaving out overall rating and rankings, as these 'do not provide any information that can help a school improve' (Hofer *et al.*, 2020: 15).

In Austria, the educational policy that was challenging for the majority of mid- and late-career participants' wellbeing concerned the standardisation of the school-leaving exam (Zentralmatura). The standardised nature of the exam made some teachers feel less autonomous and less in control over their own teaching, which made them feel deprofessionalised and pressurised. Research on innovations in education has shown how important it is to consult teachers, provide them with autonomy to personalise educational innovations, and ensure their voice is represented at all stages of design and introduction (Rogers, 1998). Furthermore, given that school reforms 'call for profound changes in the established methods and approaches to work' (Kalin & Zuljan, 2007: 164), innovations and reforms can become less stressful when teachers are consulted, involved in decision-making, and given sufficient training and support to adjust to the change (Brezicha *et al.*, 2015).

Both examples also highlight how a culture of performativity (Day & Gu, 2010) can serve as a critical threat to teacher wellbeing, even more so when teachers believe that these policies do not serve students' best interests or align with their own pedagogical values. It is critical that policymakers place the focus on teachers' professionalism and actual competences, rather than students' outcomes, and elaborate policies that enable teachers to implement classroom practices that are coherent with their own identity, values, and skills (see Brunetti & Marston, 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

### 8.1.3 CPD opportunities tailored to career phase and experience

Our findings have revealed that teachers at different phases of their careers have different needs and wants in terms of CPD; these are based on their own experiences, prior training and their unique teaching contexts. Whether these needs are addressed can determine the effectiveness of CPD (Cordingley *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, CPD is a key contributor to teacher wellbeing; according to a recent OECD (2020: 26) report, 'in teaching, as in any other professional domain, opportunities for training and learning are an important part of what makes a job fulfilling and satisfying'. The findings suggest two key implications in terms of teacher development courses. The first implication is that CPD needs to match teachers' needs, priorities, and experience. A common issue among teacher development programmes is that they are typically designed based on current school demands and trends, rather than on a 'coherent and well-considered learning course for teachers for a longer period of time' (Louws *et al.*, 2017b: 488). Indeed, most often, these programmes do not draw on teachers' previous experiences, but address them as if they all shared the same knowledge and goals (Fessler & Rice, 2010; Louws *et al.*, 2017b). Walker *et al.* (2018) have shown that, in the UK context, teachers were less likely to report having had a positive experience of CPD training when this did not consider their needs and aspirations; in contrast, teachers who reported being provided with personalised training and support appeared particularly satisfied with their CPD courses. This highlights how a one-size-fits-all approach to CPD is neither effective nor valued by teachers; rather, CPD training should be grounded in teachers' concerns, wants, subjects, school context and career phase (Mercer *et al.*, 2022). Masuda *et al.* (2013: 12), who examined teachers' CPD needs across the career trajectory, concluded indeed that, 'regardless of career stage […] the content had to be relevant to their own teaching contexts, whether it was for the grade level or subject they taught or for the demographics of their students'. This highlights that CPD programmes should be also tailored to the specific kinds of school these teachers work in, and the particular social, linguistic and cultural context where both teachers and students are embedded in.

Alternatively, CPD should be self-directed with teachers being empowered to autonomously select the CPD opportunities they want to engage with, based on their particular needs and areas of interest (Mercer *et al.*, 2022). As seen in Chapter 6, when late-career teachers felt that CPD courses were imposed upon them and were not connected to their particular needs and experience, they saw no value or motivation in engaging with training. In contrast, when CPD was self-directed and they could choose their options, they experienced higher motivation and saw meaning and value in participating in the CPD. Masuda *et al.* (2013), similarly, found that the types and topics of CPD were often imposed to their

participating teachers, which inevitably influenced their attitudes and willingness to engage in professional development, and the value they saw in them. Likewise, McMillan *et al.* (2016) also highlight the need to take into account the motivational factors involved in engagement with CPD; in particular, they underscore the need to develop CPD programmes that draw on teachers' personal choice, as this was the strongest motivator influencing their willingness to engage in CPD. Crucially, whether CPD is voluntary or mandatory not only has an influence on teachers' motivation to engage in CPD, but also in its effectiveness. Kennedy (2016), for instance, found that voluntariness increased the positive outcomes of CPD. As such, in order to promote teachers' meaningful engagement in professional development, which is beneficial for their wellbeing, teachers should be enabled to select CPD opportunities which match their needs, wants, and personal preferences. Having this kind of autonomy could maximise their motivation to engage in CPD courses, help them make the most of professional development opportunities, and thereby boost their job satisfaction and wellbeing (Paulsrud & Wermke, 2020; Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). Furthermore, a bottom-up approach to CPD, where professional development activities not only match teachers' preferences, but also arise organically from teachers' interests and needs, can also increase opportunities for authentic collaboration and strengthened cohesion. This can prevent the risk of 'contrived collegiality' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), namely, administratively imposed colleagueship, which often arises as a result of top-down CPD training.

### 8.1.4 Agency for wellbeing

All stakeholders and structures in education play a part in shaping the wellbeing of individual teachers. The degree to which a teacher feels a sense of agency in being able to take actions to protect and nurture their wellbeing is determined by a complex interplay of individual, contextual, and systemic factors (see Sulis *et al.*, 2021); their sense of control and potential for action is dependent upon how they make sense of their environment, and the affordances that are available to them across the various layers of their ecology (Mercer, 2021). The question is, then, how can this sense of agency be developed or enhanced, and what affordances should be provided to teachers in order for them to feel in control of their wellbeing? The findings of our study offer three key implications in this sense. The first implication concerns raising explicit awareness of wellbeing across the career trajectory. Self-awareness is a crucial determinant of agency; being in control helps individuals to actively respond to environmental challenges, thus serving as a key contributor to wellbeing (Ferguson, 2008). This awareness is a first, necessary step to devise and implement self-care strategies (Reading, 2018). As such, explicitly instructing teachers to become aware of their stressors, resources and wellbeing

more broadly is essential in order to help them develop a sense of agency to take proactive steps towards nurturing and sustaining their wellbeing. As shown by the findings of our study, wellbeing awareness was largely gained over time and through experience. However, especially for novice teachers (see Chapter 4), this awareness could also be triggered by negative events, such as experiencing burnout, exhaustion, or depression. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic and the shift to online learning served as a critical incident for teachers in this study which heightened their own awareness of the importance of attending to one's own wellbeing (Mairitsch *et al*., 2021; Sulis *et al*., 2021).

However, teachers should not be prompted to attend to their wellbeing when they are already experiencing intense levels of stress but rather interventions ought to take a preventative approach and seek to prevent stress levels becoming critical and wellbeing suffering. As such, teachers would benefit from being guided towards developing wellbeing awareness as early as possible in their professional path. The literature suggests different ways of promoting wellbeing awareness in pre-service teacher education programmes, although we need to note that only rarely are these implemented in practice (Lemon, 2021; Mansfield *et al*., 2020). Shavit and Moshe (2019), for instance, suggest using reflecting journals where teachers can record their experiences, goals, problems encountered in the classroom, emotional reactions and strategies used to solve problems. By recording their thoughts, pre-service teachers can reflect and act proactively to solve the challenges they encounter (Graham *et al*., 2012). Crucially, self-reflection can also minimise the effects of perfectionism and help prevent burnout (Shirazizadeh & Karimpour, 2019).

While wellbeing awareness training should be started as early as possible, it is also crucial that this kind of awareness is promoted for teachers at all stages of their career. Many educators are often not trained to recognise warning symptoms of stress and burnout, and only seek support when it is already too late; this reveals the need to incentivise wellbeing awareness as early as possible in their career path. Furthermore, teachers may acknowledge the need to take care of their own wellbeing, but do not know any concrete self-care practice. Teachers 'require more than awareness of these risk and protective factors; they should also be skilled with enabling wellbeing strategies' (McCallum & Price, 2010: 23). A few studies have reported on interventions targeted at promoting the wellbeing of in-service teachers. A meta-analysis by Hwang *et al*. (2017) has shown how the implementation of mindfulness practices led to diminished stress and helped in-service teachers respond to challenges in more reflective and skilful ways. Similarly, Emerson *et al*.'s (2017) review suggest that mindfulness interventions can help in-service teachers reduce their levels of stress. Additionally, a recent review by Dreer and Gouasé (2022) has also revealed that Positive Psychology Interventions (PPI), namely short activities that elicit positive thinking, emotions and behaviour (Lyubomirsky

& Layous, 2013), were particularly effective in fostering participants' wellbeing. Dreer and Gouasé (2022) also found that wise interventions, i.e. brief activities aimed at triggering changes in the way people think and feel about everyday occurrences (Walton, 2014), were conducive to higher teacher wellbeing. These findings highlight that there is evidence of the effectiveness of specific interventions that can be easily incorporated into training and teachers' daily routines (Dreer & Gouasé, 2022).

Wellbeing awareness and training, however, are insufficient if a teacher does not feel agentic enough to take concrete steps towards protecting or nurturing their wellbeing. This leads to our third implication, namely that teachers across the whole career trajectory should be provided with workplace conditions and resources that empower them and foster their capacity to act in favour of their wellbeing. For instance, a teacher may be well aware of time management strategies to better deal with their workload, but if the workload is unrealistically excessive, they may feel helpless, and these strategies are in effect useless. Thus, while there are benefits to raising educators' awareness of wellbeing and burnout issues and equipping them with concrete self-care strategies, there is a commensurate need for positive workplace conditions that sustain and foster teacher wellbeing. Cooper *et al.* (2001) highlight that wellbeing management training is less effective when the stressors experienced by teachers are systemic or structural in nature (e.g. excessive workload). Similarly, Birchinall *et al.* (2019) suggest the need for a two-fold approach in this sense. Firstly, we need to equip teachers with tools and strategies to cope with the stressful demands of the profession. Secondly, 'we need to address the systemic factors which increase workload and lead to teacher burnout by participating in professional consultations, through both political and professional channels, to mitigate the pressures and stressors currently associated with the job' (Birchinall *et al.*, 2019: 7). McCallum and Price (2010: 32) also call for a holistic approach which emphasises 'how social and cultural forces shape individual and group identities, an important characteristic of long-term happiness, growth, sustainability and satisfaction in the teaching profession'. In practical terms, Cherkowski and colleagues (Cherkowski, 2018; Cherkowski *et al.*, 2018) refer to the notion of flourishing mindsets, which can be useful to understand how to generate a whole-school approach to foster agency for wellbeing. Flourishing mindsets indicate the ways in which individuals use their agency to enhance and sustain a sense of wellbeing for themselves and others (Cherkowski, 2018; Cherkowski *et al.*, 2018; see also Chapter 3). The authors claim that this kind of mindset is not innate, but it can be fostered through ongoing attention and practice. Crucially, they argue that school leadership can draw on this notion to promote workplace conditions that sustain the wellbeing of staff and students. From their perspective, individual teachers are not responsible for their own wellbeing alone, but school leaders and policy are also held accountable for teacher wellbeing.

Indeed, the authors acknowledge that, 'positive teacher leadership, with an attention toward growing wellbeing, might serve as a capacity-builder for growing more wellbeing in school' (Cherkowski *et al.*, 2018: 71). In our view, generating this kind of collective capacity for wellbeing is an essential condition for developing, in turn, individual agency for wellbeing. It implies that such collective capacity for wellbeing should also be promoted beyond the school by education systems more broadly by providing conditions that support wellbeing, such as ensuring an acceptable workload, an adequate salary, a recognition of teachers' work and effort, job security and practical resources (see also De Costa *et al.*, 2020; Mercer, 2021). Only when these basic conditions are in place can teachers develop a sense of agency to make informed and supported choices regarding their wellbeing and transform these into concrete action and outcomes.

## 8.2 Future Directions

Our aim in this book has been to provide a socially situated and ecologically sensitive understanding of language teacher wellbeing, which recognises that wellbeing emerges from the interaction between an individual, their psychology, and their diverse personal and professional ecologies. The implication is that wellbeing can never be the sole responsibility of an individual, but it is a collective responsibility also determined by structures, policies and other stakeholders (e.g. La Placa *et al.*, 2013; Leiter & Cooper, 2017; Mercer, 2020b, 2021). In educational contexts, these social factors include not only teachers themselves, but also their students, parents, colleagues, school leaders, administrators and policymakers as well as personal relationships such as friends and family. Some of the systemic factors that emerged, such as societal appreciation (e.g. Rice, 2005), job (in)security (e.g. Pacheco *et al.*, 2020), educational policies (Brimblecombe *et al.*, 1995; Chapman, 2002; Mairitsch *et al.*, 2021) and financial status (Brüggen *et al.*, 2017; O'Neill *et al.*, 2005), require further examination, in particular how they interact with other variables and maybe differ across social contexts and settings. The ecological perspective foregrounds the value for future research of taking a holistic approach to understanding teacher wellbeing considering teachers as situated within the broader ecologies of their personal, social and professional lives. In this final section, we consider in more detail implications from the study for theory, research and settings.

### 8.2.1 Theoretical lenses

In understanding wellbeing, we employed a specific theoretical lens suggested by Dodge *et al.* (2012). The authors propose that wellbeing depends on the resources individuals have at their disposal to face challenges and hardships. They offer a visual representation of this

dynamic interplay in a form of a seesaw, which varies depending on the relative balance of challenges to available resources. If a person experiences challenges which outweigh their resources to cope with these challenges, their wellbeing may drop. In contrast, if a person has ample resources to utilise to support their wellbeing in the face of challenges, their wellbeing may be maintained or indeed improved. Life is always comprised of alternating challenges and resources, and the model is important in conveying the dynamism of wellbeing which is constantly in a state of flux. The model is also valuable in highlighting that attending to stressors alone will not help us to understand the wellbeing of an individual, but we also need to appreciate what resources and strengths they can draw on in order to help them cope and flourish. Despite its usefulness, we are also aware of its simplicity which cannot capture the complexity we evinced in our data.

As such, we also suggest considering Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST; see Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) to explore wellbeing as a multifaceted and dynamic construct in future studies. As Sulis *et al*. (2021: 2) point out, 'systems are thought of as being made up of multiple, interdependent components; each of which is itself a system', adding that 'in order for systems to be recognised as complex and dynamic, they ought to possess the following core characteristics: (a) change over time, (b) interconnectedness and non-linearity, and (c) self-organisation properties'. There is a body of research suggesting that the core characteristics of a complex dynamic system, which include dynamism, interconnectedness, and situatedness, can be found in wellbeing (Lomas *et al*., 2021; Oxford, 2018). To date, these characteristics have been explored individually; however, future studies could examine these together as core characteristics of wellbeing. One article connected to this study attempted this and as a first step investigated the wellbeing of pre-service language teachers during the pandemic crisis from this perspective (Sulis *et al*., 2021). The findings revealed how the pandemic and environmental affordances acted as critical triggers in influencing participants' systems of wellbeing and its dynamism over time. While this initial study may be useful in providing a lens, much more research is needed to consider wellbeing as a CDS in other career phases and educational contexts and considering how a CDST perspective may better enable us to paint a comprehensive picture of this situated, dynamic, and multifaceted construct.

Another lens that we found beneficial for our understanding of wellbeing was Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1994) ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994) designed a model that consists of five socially organised systems. These include the microsystem (individuals' personal identities and relationships), mesosystem (an interplay between different settings in which people function), exosystem (areas in life in which a person is not directly involved but still can influence them), macrosystem (individuals' broader social and cultural contexts, which can influence all other systems) and the chronosystem (effects that time has on an

individual) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). A small number of studies already sought to apply this model to the language teaching context; while one is theoretical (see Jin *et al*., 2021), the other is empirical and looks into the wellbeing of CLIL teachers (Hofstadler *et al*., 2021). The findings from this study show that CLIL teachers' wellbeing is shaped by a number of interrelated factors including national and institutional policies, societal feedback, teachers' beliefs and relationships between teachers and their students. Taking an ecological perspective on language teachers' lives can offer enriching viewpoints on the dynamic complexity of their wellbeing and the factors that, in synergy, influence it. This is critical in ensuring that wellbeing is not isolated as a psychological variable but that there is recognition of how it is determined by the individual interacting with social settings leading to an emergent quality of wellbeing. As such, future studies could examine how an individual and their psychology experiences relates to and interprets all the systems in which teachers live and work.

### 8.2.2 Methodological approaches

In terms of the methodological implications, the data have indicated the dynamics of wellbeing which we feel is in need of a much deeper understanding. Questions to be explored include how teacher wellbeing changes across different timescales such as how a teacher experiences their wellbeing within a single teaching session, across a week, across a whole term and across a whole school year. Studies have shown that teaching in particular is susceptible to temporal variation with certain times of a year being more work-intense and stressful than others (Hofstadler *et al*., 2021; Talbot & Mercer, 2018). To appreciate such dynamics, useful insights could be gained from longitudinal work. Future studies could employ daily diary entries (written or oral) over a longer period of time in order to understand the complexity and temporal dynamic fluctuations of their wellbeing (see, e.g. Kelly, 2022; Kelly *et al*., 2022). More micro-level research has been conducted into language teacher wellbeing using Experience Sampling Methods (ESM) (Gregersen *et al*., 2020). This study used a specially designed app, called eMoodie, to collect survey and ESM data from language teachers across the globe. With their study, Gregersen and colleagues (2020: 19) highlighted the importance of taking a holistic view at teachers' lives and how their 'boundaries between personal and professional spaces are often blurred'. Another example is the study by Allen *et al*. (2020) who investigated teachers' mental wellbeing in the early stages of the pandemic crisis. Allen and colleagues (2020) used a Teacher Tapp survey app to investigate the work-related anxiety of about 8000 teachers in England and found that, during lockdown, work-related anxiety rose especially for head teachers and private school teachers. Such tools could be expanded upon in terms of the scale and range of contexts.

As technologies advance, the potential for new methods and approaches to investigating micro-scale dynamics over time is likely to increase.

In addition, adopting a mixed-methods approach by combining qualitative and quantitative methods can generate even a richer understanding of teacher wellbeing, by looking into different dimensions of the phenomenon (e.g. McKim, 2017; Sammons *et al*., 2007). For instance, Sammons and colleagues (2007) employed a mixed-methods design to investigate variations in teachers' personal and professional domains and how these affected their pupils over a three-year period. They conducted interviews and administered questionnaire surveys with teachers and pupils. By employing the mixed-methods approach, they were able to take a multi-perspective view of stability and variation among teachers, their experiences, the mediating influences on these in different phases of their professional and personal lives and identities, and their perceived and relative effectiveness (Sammons *et al*., 2007: 698). Sammons *et al*. (2007: 698) added that, 'it was, therefore, able to generate both more detailed and more holistic understandings of teachers' work, lives and effectiveness than has been possible in previous studies.' As such, a mixed-method approach allows for broad views and an in-depth understanding of phenomena and, in this particular study (Sammons *et al*., 2007), showed that teacher and student wellbeing are key and of relevance to all educational stakeholders. Especially in the post-Covid-19 world, understanding and nurturing both teacher and learner wellbeing has become of pressing urgence, and the field of education would benefit of future studies exploring these in greater depth.

Another avenue worthy of further research is to examine how teacher wellbeing can be positively affected through the use of intervention studies. Dreer and Gouasé (2022: 2) argue that, 'one possible way of fostering teacher well-being is through effective interventions that can be applied by individuals or in the context of advanced training in groups or within whole-school approaches'. In fact, research has shown that the implementation of such intervention programmes can be effective and beneficial for head teachers, teachers and students, especially if they are not time-consuming and are easily adaptable in their daily routines (Dreer, 2020; McCullough, 2015). These programmes can help teachers and their institutions to not only become aware of the importance of maintaining their wellbeing but learning how to act upon preserving it. For example, Gregersen and colleagues (e.g. Gregersen, 2016; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2021) conducted interventions with teachers employing a variety of techniques such as gratitude, altruism, music, laughter, having a pet and doing exercise to increase language teachers' positive thinking, emotions, and behaviours. Future studies could draw on their and similar work to design intervention programmes, workshops or seminars, which are tailored specifically to the needs and wants of teachers in a particular career phase, and investigate how effective they are and what mediating variables play a role.

### 8.2.3 Populations and contexts

Finally, the current study mainly focused on the wellbeing of teachers from Austria and the UK, but we also included data as appropriate from teachers working in 10 other countries during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. These included Argentina, Australia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Switzerland and the US. Given the focus only on the pandemic in that work, it was not possible to explore systemic features to the same depth as was the case for the UK and Austria. Thus, additional studies would be needed to gain a more comprehensive view of how teacher wellbeing is determined in a variety of diverse contexts including different cultural and language backgrounds, contexts with diverse socioeconomic status of teachers, different status of teaching as a profession *per se* and status of different languages being taught. Additionally, work needs to be carried out in different educational levels, such as nursery education, primary school, tertiary education, vocational schools, home-schooling and private sector. A study conducted by Mercer (2020a), who used interviews with language teachers from Malta working in the private sector, found that participants' wellbeing was defined by the business-like model of the private schools, which was characterised by short-term and unstable job contracts, unpaid sick- and holiday-leave, lack of medical care and other similar precarious work conditions. However, positive relationships with colleagues and students, including positive work climate, provided a source of strength for these teachers, which again points to the importance of a balanced perspective considering both challenges and resources. While other studies suggest similar findings (Sun, 2010; Wieczorek, 2016), private sector language teachers remain underresearched to date.

In addition, little is known about key transitional periods during the career trajectory such as moving from pre-service to in-service teaching as well as the period of retiring and exiting the workforce. These are also known as important normative shifts in a person's life and, as such, represent important milestones (Hendry & Kloep, 2002; Kloep *et al*., 2009). Transitioning from studying to becoming full-time teachers entails adjustments to new realities of teaching and being in the classroom, perfectionism, lack of self-efficacy and self-regulation, and finding one's place in a new school, which many early-career teachers characterise as stressful (Sulis *et al*., 2022). Studies also show that transitioning to retirement in general, including educational contexts, can be a turbulent and an unpleasant period (Davies & Jenkins, 2013; Emerald & Carpenter, 2014; Hendry & Kloep, 2002). After decades of being in the profession, educators identify with their professional roles, which are at times difficult to abandon. Leaving their professional roles can, therefore, be perceived as particularly difficult. However, some teachers look forward to their

retirement and do not experience this period as stressful. To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies about transitioning to retirement in the contexts of language education, and the field would benefit from gaining insights in this regard (Babic *et al*., 2022a). Moreover, exploring language teacher attrition and why teachers decide to leave would provide useful data on the stressors in the profession and could inspire institutions and other relevant stakeholders to join their efforts in reducing these (Mason, 2017; Swanson, 2012).

In sum, language teacher wellbeing is a critical component of good practice. This study has shown the potential for individual and contextual variation. Research into this critical determinant of good language teaching practice remains relatively under-researched despite an upsurge of work in recent years, especially in the context of the pandemic (see e.g. MacIntyre *et al*., 2020; Zacher & Rudolph, 2020). We hope this book may inspire others to take up researching this construct and understanding better the kind of support language educators and learners need in diverse settings across the globe.

# Appendix 1

Interview protocol for pre-service teachers (Dataset 1)

*Biography – Past*

1. Could you please describe your journey to becoming a language teacher?
   - Why did you choose to study in teacher training programme (e.g. Lehramtstudium, Bachelor of Education, etc.)?
   - Why did you choose English/MFL as one of your majors (or your major)?
   - Have you always wanted to become a teacher?
   - Is anyone in your family a teacher?
   - Did your family support your decision to become a teacher? Have you had any teaching/tutoring/mentoring experience so far? If so, when, where, and for how long?
     - How did it go?
     - In what ways do you feel the experience(s)influenced you?
   - What were your goals at the beginning of your study?
     - Do you feel that you have achieved them? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Thinking back, could you please describe any particular high points that you think have been influential for your life as a student teacher (e.g. time in school, any teaching experiences, experiences abroad, and personal life events)?
   - What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Why do you think it happened?
   - How do you feel these moments have influenced your choice of studies and life?
3. Thinking back, could you please describe any particular low points that you think have been influential for your life as a student teacher (e.g. time in school, any practica teaching experiences, experiences abroad, and personal life event)?
   - What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Why do you think it happened?
   - How did you cope with this challenge?

- Did it affect your motivation of being a student teacher? If so, did you do anything consciously to maintain your motivation? If so, what did you do to motivate yourself?

4. Could you please describe any significant events or people that have been influential in your development specifically as a language teacher so far?
   - What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling?
   - Have you had an extended stay abroad? If so, can you describe that time and how you feel it has affected you as a student teacher?
   - Who was the person? What was their relationship to you? In what ways did they influence you?
   - In what ways, do these influence your choice of study and life?
   - Who was a role model teacher for you in the past? Why were they a role model for you?
   - Is there anything you would have done differently? Why?

***Present***

*Happiness and challenges*

5. Could you please describe how you feel about your studies currently?
   - Is this teaching training programme what you expected it to be?
     - What are the best parts of your studies? What are the most difficult parts?
     - Do you enjoy it or not? Why/why not?
     - What things have gone really well? What has not gone so well?
   - What are the things you gain the most happiness from in your studies?
   - What are the biggest sources of stress in your studies at the moment?
     - Do these sources of stress affect your studies/private life? If so, how?
     - How do you manage these sources of stress?
   - Do you ever become so absorbed in what you are doing in your studies? If so, when and in what ways?
   - Do you feel you have autonomy in your studies at present? If so, in what ways? If not, in what ways?
   - Do you attend any other teacher training courses or events outside of university? If so, what are they?
     - Why do you attend?
     - What has been especially helpful?
   - Do you feel well prepared for teaching in school afterwards?
   - Has your attitude to your teacher training programme changed over time? If so, in what ways?
   - How satisfied overall are you with your studies right now? Why do you think this is?

- Has your satisfaction in your studies changed? If so, how, when, and why?

6. Are you currently doing a teaching practicum or have you done one already? If so, could you please describe your experiences in that context? What are, or were, your responsibilities and workload, etc.?
   - Is/was teaching what you expected it to be?
     - What are the best parts of your teaching? What are the most difficult parts?
     - Do/did you enjoy it or not? Why/why not?
     - What things have gone/went really well in your teaching practicum? What has/did not gone/go so well?
     - How was/is your relationship to your mentor in school?
     - How did this affect your wellbeing and experience of the practicum?
   - How is your practicum related to the content of your studies at university?

*Identity and meaning*

7. How would you describe yourself as a student teacher now?
   - How confident do you feel as a student language teacher?
     - What are your strengths/weaknesses?
     - Do you feel this has changed over time? If so, in what ways?
     - In general, what affects your confidence? Could you perhaps give an example?
     - How strongly do you feel yourself already to be a language teacher or do you feel more a student still?
     - What affects that sense of identity?
   - How do you feel about English/MFL as a language specifically?
     - What is your relationship to the language?
   - How does this affect your identity and wellbeing?
   - What does being a language teacher mean to you?
     - Has this changed over time? If so, why and in what ways?
   - What have you found rewarding about being a student language teacher so far?
   - What have you found frustrating about being a student language teacher so far?
   - How would you describe the status of teachers in Austria/UK now?
     - What you believe to be true about teaching generally and EFL specifically in Austria?
     - Do you think the situation has changed over time? If so, in what ways?
     - How satisfied are you with the educational system in Austria/UK at the moment?
     - Does the Brexit affect you on a personal and/or professional level? If so, in what ways?

*Ecologies*

8. What relationships in your university setting (e.g. supervisors, professors, classmates) influence your wellbeing? If so, in what ways? Can you perhaps give examples to illustrate this?
   - How do your relationships out of study influence your wellbeing (e.g. friends, partners, parents, etc.)? If so, in what ways? Can you perhaps give examples to illustrate this?
   - What support can you draw on in your studies and private life?
   - Is there a particular relationship that is special to you? What influence does this have on your wellbeing?
9. How do you manage the boundaries between your studies and personal life?
   - Can you provide any concrete examples that illustrate how you manage the two different aspects of your life?
     - How do they influence each other? Can you give any examples?
     - Has this changed over time? If so, in what ways?
     - Would you say you are satisfied with how you integrate studies and private life at the moment? Why/why not?
   - How do you manage your time?
   - Has this changed over time? What do you do to manage your wellbeing?
     - What do you do to relax?
     - Has your attitude towards wellbeing changed over time? If so, when and in what ways?
   - How much attention do you give to your physical wellbeing? In what ways?

***Future***

10. How would you like to see yourself as a teacher in the future?
    - What are your goals for the future?
      - How do you intend to achieve them?
      - What areas of your teaching personality would you like to develop next?
    - Is there anything you are worried about for your future?
      - Is there anything you feel you can do about this? If so, what? If not, why not?
      - How do you manage your concerns and worries?
11. What are your expectations of your teaching after your studies?
    - What are you looking forward to?
    - What are you nervous about?
    - Do you think that you learning in school would be the same experience when you start working in school? If not, in what ways?

- Do you think that you working as a student teacher in practica is the same experience when you work as an in-service teacher? If not, in what ways? Or if so, in what ways?

*Career phase and other info*

12. How would you characterise your current (career) phase as a pre-service teacher?
    - What, who or where is most significant during this phase?
13. What advice would you give to your younger self in terms of managing your wellbeing? Or to younger students starting their study?
14. Is there anything that you would like to add to our discussion?
    - Do you have any questions for me?

# Appendix 2

Interview protocol for in-service teachers (Dataset 1)

*Biography – Past*

1. Could you please describe your journey to becoming a language teacher?
   - Why did you become a language teacher?
   - Did you always want to become a teacher?
   - Is anyone in your family a teacher?
   - Did your family support your decision to become a teacher?
2. Thinking back over your career and personal life so far, could you please describe any particular high points that you think have been influential for your professional life?
   - What happened in the event, when and where was it, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Why do you think it happened?
   - How do you feel these moments influenced your professional and/or private life?
3. Thinking back over your career and personal life so far, could you please describe any particular low points that you think have been influential for your professional life?
   - What happened in the event, when and where was it, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Why do you think it happened?
   - How did you cope with this challenge?
   - Did it affect your motivation? If so, did you do anything consciously to maintain your motivation? If so, what did you do to motivate yourself?
4. Could you please describe any significant events or people that have been influential in your development as a language teacher?
   - What happened, when and where was it, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling?
   - Who was the person? What was their relationship to you? In what ways did they influence you?
   - In what ways do you feel these have influenced your professional and/or private life?

5. What have been your greatest professional accomplishments so far? What did you do to achieve them?
   - What were your goals at the beginning of your career? Do you feel that you have achieved them? If so, how? If not, why not?
   - Taking stock of your career up to now, is there anything you would have done differently? Why?

***Present***

*Happiness and challenges*

6. Can you describe your current teaching situation? What are your responsibilities, teaching and workload, types of teaching you do, etc.? How do you feel about your current job?
   - What are the things you gain the most happiness from in your professional life?
     - Has this changed over time? If so, in what way?
   - What are the biggest sources of stress in your personal and/or professional life at the moment?
     - Do these sources of stress affect your work/private life? If so, how?
     - How do you manage these sources of stress?
   - Do you ever become absorbed in what you are doing at work? If so, when and in what ways?
   - Do you feel you have autonomy in your job at present? If so, in what ways? If not, in what ways?
     - How important is it for you to have a sense of autonomy in how you work as a teacher?
   - Do you attend any teacher development courses or events? Why/why not?
     - What kinds of things would you find most useful for your own professional development?
     - Has your attitude to professional development changed over time? If so, in what ways?
   - How satisfied overall are you with your professional life right now? Why do you think this is?
     - Has your satisfaction with your professional life changed across your career span? If so, how, when, and why?

*Identity and meaning*

7. How would you describe yourself as a teacher now?
   - How confident do you feel as a language teacher?
     - What are your strengths/weaknesses?
     - Do you feel this has changed over time? If so, in what ways?
     - In general, what affects your confidence? Could you perhaps give an example?
     - How do you feel about English specifically?

- How do you feel about English/MFL as a language specifically?
  - What is your relationship to the language?
  - How does this affect your identity and wellbeing?
- What does being a language teacher mean to you?
  - Has this changed over time? If so, why and in what ways?
- What do you find rewarding about being a language teacher?
  - Has this changed over time? If so, why and in what ways?
- What do you find frustrating about being a language teacher?
  - Has this changed over time? If so, why and in what ways?
- Do you feel that what you do in your professional life is valuable? Why/why not? Could you please describe an experience of having such feeling?
  - Has this changed over time? If so, why and in what ways?
- How would you describe the status of language teachers in your school?
- How would you describe the status of teachers in Austria/UK now?
  - Do you think the situation has changed over time? If so, in what ways?
  - How satisfied are you with the educational system in Austria/UK at the moment?
- For UK context: Does the Brexit affect you on a personal and/or professional level? If yes, in what ways?
- What are the best parts of working in this profession or context? What are the most difficult parts?

*Ecologies*

8. How satisfied are you with your colleagues and the schools you work in and your head of school?
   - What are the students you work with like?
     - How would you describe your relationship with them?
     - What affects this and how does it affect you and your wellbeing?
   - Do your relationships out of work influence your professional wellbeing? If so, in what ways? Can you perhaps give examples to illustrate this?
   - What support can you draw on in your professional and private life?
   - Is there a particular relationship that is special to you? What influence does this have on your wellbeing?
9. How do you manage the boundaries between personal and professional life?
   - Can you provide any concrete examples that illustrate how you manage the two different aspects of your (work and non-work) life?

- How do they influence each other? Can you give any examples?
- Has this changed over time? If so, in what ways?

- Would you say you are satisfied with how you integrate work and non-work at the moment? Why/why not? How do you manage your time?
  - Has this changed over time?
- What do you do to manage your wellbeing?
  - What do you do to relax?
  - Has your attitude towards wellbeing changed over time? If so, in what ways and when?
- How much attention do you give to your physical wellbeing? In what ways?

*Future*

10. How would you like to see yourself as a teacher in the future?
    - What are your personal and/or professional goals for the future?
      - How do you intend to achieve them?
    - Is there anything you are worried about for your future?
      - Is there anything you feel you can do about this? If so, what? If not, why not?
      - How do you manage your concerns and worries?

*Career phases and other info*

11. Thinking back over your career so far, do you think you could describe your career in terms of different phases or stages? If so, how would you characterise these phases?
    - What, who or where was most significant during these phases?
    - Which would you say was the most positive? And why?
    - Which was the most challenging? Why?
12. What advice would you give to your younger self in terms of managing your wellbeing? Or to younger teachers starting off their careers?
13. Is there anything that you would like to add to our discussion?
    - Do you have any questions for me?

# Appendix 3

Interview protocol for pre-service teachers (Dataset 2)

*Biography – Past*

1. Could you please describe your journey to becoming a language teacher?
   - What was your motivation for becoming a teacher? (teacher or subject first)
   - Thinking back over your personal life and studies so far, could you please describe any particular high/low points that you think have been influential for your life as a pre-service teacher?
   - Is there anything you would do differently in your journey to becoming a language teacher?

*Learning and teaching experiences prior to the pandemic*

2. Could you describe a typical week of your studies to become a teacher prior to the pandemic?
   - How satisfied were you with your studies?
   - How would you describe your overall wellbeing prior to the pandemic?
   - What things did you do to manage your studies and wellbeing?

*Learning and teaching experiences during the pandemic*

3. Could you describe a typical week of your studies to become a teacher during the crisis?
   - In what ways have your studies changed in the context of the crisis?
   - How satisfied are you with your studies at the moment?
   - How much experience or training on online teaching did you have prior to the crisis?
     - How has this influenced your learning and teaching at the moment?
   - What are the aspects of your studies you are enjoying most at present?
   - What are the aspects of your studies do you find most challenging at present?

*Motivation and attitudes*

4. Has your motivation to become a language teacher changed in any ways during the crisis? If so, in what ways?
5. Has your attitude towards your studies changed in any ways? If so, in what ways?

*Wellbeing*

6. How would you describe your wellbeing at the moment?
   - What are the main sources of stress in your life at the moment?
   - How do you manage these sources of stress?
   - What are the things you gain the most happiness from at the moment?
   - How do you manage the balance between your personal and professional lives at present?
   - In what ways do you manage your physical wellbeing at the moment?

*Professional relationships and teacher status*

7. How would you describe your relationships with you professors, classmates or mentor at the moment?
   - Have they changed from prior to the pandemic? If so, in what ways?
   - If you are teaching at the moment, how have things changed for you?
   - What academic support, if any, are you receiving from your university at the moment?
   - How do you manage your relationships with your family/partner/roommates at the moment?
   - If you are living alone at the moment, how are you coping with being alone?
8. How would you describe the status of language teachers in your resident country at present? To what extent do you feel this has been affected by the pandemic crisis?

*Identity and meaning*

9. How do you view yourself as a pre-service teacher at the moment? Has this changed from prior to the pandemic crisis?
10. How confident do you feel as a pre-service language teacher at present?

*Future*

11. In what ways do you believe the current situation will influence you as a future teacher?
    - In general, do you feel you have learned anything from this experience?
12. What are your personal/professional goals for the future? (this semester, year, long-term)

*Other info*

13. What advice would you give to other pre-service teachers during the crisis in terms of managing their wellbeing?
14. Is there anything that you would like to add?

# Appendix 4

Interview protocol for in-service teachers (Dataset 2)

***Biography – Past***

1. Could you please describe your journey to becoming a language teacher?
   - Have you always wanted to become a language teacher?
     - What was your motivation for becoming a teacher?
   - Thinking back over your personal and professional life, could you please describe any particular high/low points that you think have been influential for your life as a foreign language teacher?
   - Could you describe any key individuals in your career that have shaped who you are as a language teacher?
   - Are there any particular important events in your biography, which have impacted on your development as a teacher?
   - Can you recall any difficulties in your journey to becoming a language teacher?
   - Have you worked in different schools or positions? If so, can you describe those periods and how they relate to each other?
2. Thinking back over your career so far, in what ways could you describe your career in terms of different phases or stages?
   - Could you briefly describe each of these phases?

***Teaching life***

*Teaching and workload*

3. Could you describe a typical week of your teaching prior to the pandemic?
   - What was your workload like prior to the pandemic?
   - How much time did you dedicate to your work prior to the pandemic?
   - How does it compare to your teaching now?
   - Have any things changed for the better or for the worse?

*Online/remote teaching*

4. How did you experience the transition to online/remote teaching?

- How much experience or training on online teaching did you receive prior to the crisis? How has this influenced your current teaching?
- What aspects of remote/online teaching are you enjoying and which are you finding stressful?

*Strengths and weaknesses in teaching*

5. What would you describe as your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher prior to the pandemic?
   - How do you feel about your strengths and weaknesses now?
   - In what ways are you able to use your strengths in your current teaching?
   - How confident do you feel teaching in the online context?

*Job satisfaction and engagement*

6. How would you have described your professional life prior to the pandemic?
   - How satisfied were you with your professional life?
   - How do you feel about your professional life at the moment? Can you compare how you felt before to how you feel now?
   - Have your feelings about language teaching changed in the context of the pandemic crisis? If so, in what ways?
7. What things gave you the most joy in your job prior to the pandemic?
   - What about your job gives you joy in the context of the pandemic crisis?
8. What things caused you stress in your job prior to the pandemic?
   - What causes you stress now in the context of the pandemic crisis?
9. How much time did you spend thinking about your work prior to the pandemic crisis?
   - How much time do you currently spend thinking about your work?

***Professional relationships and teacher status***

*School climate and professional relationships*

10. How would you have described the climate at your school and the relationship with your colleagues prior to the pandemic?
    - How would you describe your relationships with your colleagues and head teacher prior to the pandemic crisis?
    - How do you feel about your relationships with your colleagues and head teacher at the moment

*Students*

11. How would you describe your relationships with students prior to the pandemic crisis?
12. How do you feel about your relationships with students at the moment?

*Parents*

13. How would you describe your relationships with parents prior to the pandemic crisis?
14. How is your relationship with parents in the context of the pandemic crisis?

*Teacher status*

15. How would you describe the status of language teachers in your resident country before the pandemic crisis?
16. How would you describe the status of language teachers in your resident country at present?
    - How are teachers portrayed in the media at present?
    - Do you feel there have been changes in attitudes towards teachers during the pandemic? If so, how lasting do you feel those changes will be?

***Identity and meaning***

17. How would you have described yourself as a teacher prior to the pandemic?
    - How would you describe yourself as a teacher in the current situation?
18. What does being a language teacher mean to you? Has this changed in any way since the pandemic?
    - Overall, how important is your work for you? Has this changed in any way since the pandemic?
19. In what ways do you feel this experience has changed how you feel as a teacher?
    - In what ways do you believe the current situation will influence you as a future teacher?
20. In general, what, if anything, do you feel you have learned from this experience?
21. What are your personal/professional goals for the future? (short-term, long-term)
    - Do you feel your goals have changed compared to prior to the pandemic? If so, in what ways?

***Wellbeing***

22. How would you describe your overall wellbeing prior to the pandemic crisis?
    - What things affected your wellbeing?
    - How was your work/life balance previously?

- What were your coping strategies before?
- How much time did you dedicate to non-work activities prior to the pandemic?

23. How do you feel about your overall wellbeing at the moment?
    - What are the main sources of stress and happiness in your life at the moment?
    - How do you manage these sources of stress?
24. How do you manage the balance between your personal and professional lives at present?
    - How much time do you currently dedicate to non-work activities?
25. How important is your physical wellbeing to you? Has this changed from prior to the pandemic?
    - How would you describe your physical wellbeing currently?
    - How did you manage your physical wellbeing prior to the pandemic?
    - In what ways do you manage your physical wellbeing at the moment?
26. Has your experiences during the pandemic changed how you think about your wellbeing in any way?
    - What, if anything, do you feel you have learnt from this experience in terms of managing your wellbeing?
    - What would you like to take from this experience?

*Personal relationships*

27. How did you manage your relationships with family and friends prior to the pandemic?
28. How do you manage your relationships at the moment?
    - If you are living alone at the moment, how are you coping?

*Other info*

29. What advice would you give to a teacher starting out their career drawing on your own experiences?
    - What advice would you give to other language teachers during the crisis in terms of managing their wellbeing?
30. Is there anything that you would like to add?

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