



Bridging Language and Well-being: Exploring the Potentials of Integrating Positive Psychology Content into English Language Teaching

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Abstract

Positive Language Education (PLE) has emerged as a significant area of focus within foreign language education, emphasizing the incorporation of well-being and positive psychological principles into the language learning process to foster a more holistic and supportive educational environment. Despite the growing scholarly interest in this approach, the application of Positive Psychology (PP) themes within language curricula, particularly in non-Western educational contexts, remains underexplored. In this qualitative study, the researchers explored the potential benefits of embedding PP content within a General English course. Drawing on established well-being themes from the literature—such as gratitude, resilience, emotion regulation, altruism, creativity, and life’s meaning—the researchers designed and implemented a series of activities and materials incorporating multimodal resources, including texts, audio recordings, and video clips across diverse genres (e.g., fiction and non-fiction). The study was conducted with a cohort of 85 Iranian female undergraduate students enrolled in a General English course at a state university in Tehran., Iran Data were collected over the course of a semester through a combination of methods: classroom observations, analysis of student-generated materials, and in-depth semi-structured interviews with a selected number of participants. Thematic analysis of the collected data revealed that the integration of well-being themes and activities fostered the development of both linguistic and non-linguistic competencies, including enhanced positive self-expression, introspective self-reflection, well-being literacy, and the cultivation of a foreign language growth mindset. The findings highlight the multidimensional benefits of integrating PP principles into foreign language education.

Keywords: Positive Psychology (PP), Foreign Language Education, Positive Language Education (PLE), Well-being Literacy, Growth Mindset

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Though still a nascent field of study, Positive Psychology (PP), a sub-branch of psychology that focuses on flourishing human well-being, strengths, and virtues, has garnished attention in Applied Linguistics (AL) over the last few years and a growing focus on its pedagogical applications could be seen (Babic, 2024; Gabryś-Barker & Gałajda, 2016; Helgesen, 2019). Previously, scholars in language education primarily examined negative emotional states such as anxiety, stress, burnout, and demotivation; nevertheless, the emergence of PP, which led to the introduction of Positive Education (PE) and Positive Language Education (PLE), prompted a shift toward investigating positive emotions in language learning and teaching (Dewaele & Li, 2020; MacIntyre, 2016). A corollary to this has been a multitude of studies investigating PP themes within foreign language education, encompassing foreign language enjoyment (FLE) (e.g., Lee et al., 2024; Yang & Lin, 2024; Wu et al., 2024); foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) (e.g., Derakhshan & Fathi, 2023; Li, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020); grit (e.g., Csizér et al., 2024; Fathi & Hejazi, 2024); love (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2022); ideal L2 self (e.g., Liu et al., 2024); and foreign language peace of mind (e.g., Haidar & Farrukh, 2023; Zhou et al., 2023), inter alia. To a lesser extent, various quantitative, mixed-methods, and qualitative studies have been conducted in diverse geographical language education contexts examining the impact of PP intervention tasks on improving language learners' linguistic and global skills (e.g., Gregersen, 2016; Narafshan & Nouri, 2018; Rogers et al., 2024; Zare et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, as asserted by Wang et al. (2021), while previous studies have established the significance of positive states, there remains a notable gap in research regarding “how individuals can be empowered by receiving intervention and instruction on these factors” (p. 7). Similarly, Mercer (2021) argues that although “learner well-being has been receiving increasing attention, there is still much that we do not yet know or understand about its nature in relation to learning a language specifically and how best to promote it in practical terms alongside linguistic competences” (pp. 17-18). Furthermore, Resnik and Mercer (2024) highlight that “there remain very few studies or interventions that provide practical guidelines” (p. 112) regarding the integration of well-being into language curricula. This underscores the need for further investigation into how incorporating well-being themes can enhance both the linguistic and non-linguistic capabilities of language learners. Supporting this perspective, Mercer (2021) contends that the English Language Teaching (ELT) community bears a responsibility to improve learners' well-being and recommends that curriculum developers and practitioners broaden their focus beyond linguistic skills to thoughtfully integrate 21st-century life skills, such as fostering optimism, a growth mindset, and resilience, into language curricula. This holistic approach is essential for equipping learners with the necessary capabilities to thrive both academically and personally.

In this study, the researchers endeavored to explore the potential benefits of integrating well-being topics and activities into a General English course attended by Iranian female EFL

learners. This integration was designed to promote the flourishing of both linguistic and non-linguistic strengths, thereby enhancing overall student development. The following context-specific questions guided the study.

- 1) How does integrating well-being-focused topics and activities into a General English course contribute to the cultivation of linguistic and non-linguistic capabilities among EFL learners?
- 2) How do the EFL learners perceive the value of well-being-focused topics and activities in shaping their language learning experiences?

By examining the intersection of language education and PP principles, this study sought to provide robust evidence on how such an interdisciplinary approach may contribute to the enrichment of the well-being literacy of EFL learners. It is hoped that the research offers practical implications for foreign-language educators, particularly in pedagogy, syllabus design, and materials development.

Literature Review

During World War II, many individuals faced challenges such as unemployment, financial instability, and psychological distress. Despite this turmoil, some maintained their integrity and sense of purpose, regardless of their educational background or social status. The resilience and well-being demonstrated by these individuals led psychologists to shift their focus from human weaknesses, disorders, and impairments to the study of human strengths and virtues. This new focus included qualities such as optimism, hope, love, resilience, courage, and a growth mindset (MacIntyre, 2021; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

In the late 1990s, PP was introduced as “The study of what constitutes the pleasant life, the engaged life, and the meaningful life” (Seligman, 2011, p. 3). Its primary objective was to contribute to the flourishing of individuals’ “well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present)” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). This initial phase, often referred to as the “first wave,” predominantly emphasized positive emotions and traits. However, it faced criticisms for its insufficient consideration of the dynamic interplay between positive and negative experiences. In response to such critiques, the “second wave” of PP emerged, characterized by a “dialectical” approach that acknowledged the constructive role of negative emotions and experiences, such as justified pessimism or humility, in fostering individuals’ growth and strengths. This perspective sought to move beyond an exclusive focus on optimism or hedonic well-being, addressing the enduring impact of challenges and negative experiences on individual development (Ivtzan et al., 2015). Subsequently, the “third wave” of PP marked a paradigmatic shift from the individual-centric focus of earlier phases to a broader exploration of groups, systems, and socio-cultural contexts. This wave embraced interdisciplinary and multicultural approaches to address the complexities of human experience (Lomas et al., 2021). Despite its

evolution, PP has faced ongoing criticisms, including concerns about its lack of originality, insufficient theoretical and conceptual development, methodological and measurement challenges, and the promotion of neoliberal and capitalist ideologies (van Zyl et al., 2024).

Notwithstanding its potential theoretical shortcomings, the concept of well-being, which encompasses hedonic, eudaimonic, and social dimensions, remains central to the field of PP. In a notable conceptualization, Javier et al. (2022) define well-being as “a state of equilibrium where individuals experience health, happiness, and prosperity, all of which lead to developing life satisfaction, self-realization, and the ability to engage in socially responsible behaviors—personally, professionally, emotionally, and spiritually—that produce long-lasting positive effects” (p. 14). This definition underscores the multifaceted nature of well-being and its implications for individual and societal flourishing. Due to the emphasis on “positive life” dimensions, scholars in PP across various disciplines have proposed various models of well-being. The most prominent among these is the PERMA model, developed by Seligman (2011), which comprises five key elements: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning in life, and Accomplishment. Seligman (2011) further articulated an overarching framework consisting of six “virtues”: Justice, Wisdom, Courage, Humanity, Temperance, and Transcendence. These virtues are associated with corresponding “character strengths,” aiming to elevate human life beyond mere hedonic pleasure. In a subsequent development, Oxford (2016) posited that the dimensions of the PERMA model “are complex, interrelated, interacting, and evolving” (p. 16), leading to the introduction of a more comprehensive well-being model known as EMPATHICS. This model includes dimensions such as Emotion and Empathy, Meaning and Motivation, Perseverance, Agency and Autonomy, Time perspective, Hardiness and Habits of mind, Intelligences, Character strengths and virtues, and the Self factor (Oxford, 2016). However, Alrabai and Dewaele (2023) critiqued the EMPATHICS model for its extensive range of dimensions, arguing that “such a large number of dimensions [makes] it impossible to have sufficient depth to match the enormous width” (p. 3). In response to this critique, they proposed the E4MC model, which focuses on fewer dimensions: Empathy, Emotions, Emotional intelligence, Engagement, Motivation, and Character strengths (Alrabai & Dewaele, 2023). This model emphasizes a more streamlined approach to understanding well-being and awaits further empirical exploration.

In extending the discourse on well-being, Oades et al. (2022) posited the necessity of “well-being literacy” encompassing the possession of “vocabulary” and “declarative knowledge about and for well-being,” the capability to comprehend multimodal ensembles containing aspects of well-being; and the capability to compose texts relevant to well-being in multiple modalities of “writing, creating, and speaking” (p. 93). Additionally, according to them, well-being literacy necessitates the proficiency to discern “contextual sensitivities” and adapt language use accordingly. “Intentionality,” defined as “the capability to maintain positive intentions

concerning language use for well-being” thoughtfully, is identified as the subsequent component of well-being literacy (p. 93). Well-being literacy has been the focus of minimal studies. Addressing this gap, Hou et al. (2021) devised and preliminarily validated a well-being literacy scale (Well-Lit 6) comprising six items of knowledge, vocabulary, comprehension skills, composition skills, and adaptability of language based on audience and context. The study suggested that well-being literacy positively correlated with various aspects of well-being and negatively correlated with indicators of ill-being.

The investigation of well-being themes has been conducted across diverse disciplines, including foreign language education; a brief history of which is presented below.

Positive Psychology, Well-being, and ELT

As outlined by Dewaele and Li (2020), research on emotions in applied linguistics has evolved from an “emotion avoidance” phase (1960s-1980s) to an “anxiety-prevailing” focus (1980s-2010s) and finally to an “emotional turn” in the 2010s, influenced by the introduction of PP. This phase has expanded research to include both positive and negative emotions, emphasizing the study and enhancement of positive emotions in language learning and teaching. Key themes such as foreign language enjoyment, hope, flow, grit, love, growth mindset, and engagement have since been explored through various methodologies, including correlational, experimental, mixed-methods, and qualitative studies (e.g., Derakhshan & Fathi, 2023; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2024; Zhang et al., 2020). Below, a number of these studies are succinctly reviewed:

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2024), in a mixed-methods study, investigated the relationship between positive and negative emotions and the experience of flow in foreign language classrooms. Results from the questionnaire administered online to 1,044 foreign language learners across the world showed that language enjoyment was a stronger predictor of flow experience than anxiety, and the flow experiences became more frequent, intense, and sustained as learners advanced in their foreign language proficiency. Khajavy et al. (2017) investigated the extent to which emotions and classroom atmosphere affect “willingness to communicate” among 1,528 Iranian secondary school students studying English. Using a doubly latent multilevel analysis, they found that enjoyment had the strongest link to willingness to communicate. The classroom atmosphere also impacted the learners’ enjoyment, anxiety, and communication willingness. It was argued that teachers can enhance communication willingness by selecting engaging topics, providing feedback, delaying error correction, and fostering a supportive environment.

Considering intervention-based studies, Gregersen’s (2016) investigation into the effects of PP-based treatments, including gratitude, altruism, music, and laughter, on a sample of female language learners revealed benefits for both second language acquisition and the overall

well-being of the participants. Similarly, Shafiee Rad and Jafarpour's (2022) study highlighted the positive impact of interventions targeting grit, emotion regulation, and resilience on the writing skills of Iranian English learners. A quasi-experimental research by Narafshan and Noori (2018) also reported positive outcomes, as Iranian MA TEFL students who viewed PP clips exhibited improved self-esteem. Furthermore, Zare et al.'s (2023) investigation into the effects of altruistic teaching on the emotions and summary writing skills of Iranian EFL learners found that learners' L2 summary writing skills significantly improved as a result of this pedagogical approach. Haidar and Farrukh's (2024) study on the use of peacebuilding-focused storytelling in an undergraduate English class at a Pakistani university suggested that this practice helped English-major students address social and inner conflicts, develop acceptance and tolerance of ethnic diversity, build stronger connections, and attain greater mental peace. Rogers et al.'s (2024) study on the impact of PP interventions, based on the PERMA model, on students' English language learning in an intensive English program in the Western United States suggested that the students generally perceived the PPIs as beneficial for their well-being while supporting their language development.

While the conducted studies have chiefly employed correlational and experimental designs to investigate the associations between PP variables and language learning outcomes, more in-depth explorations are required to examine how language learners' engagement with well-being themes would shape their foreign language learning experiences and transcend language learning beyond the acquisition of conventional language components. Against this backdrop, the present qualitative study aimed to explore the potential benefits of integrating a selected number of well-being topics and activities into a General English course, focusing on the cultivation of both linguistic and non-linguistic strengths among EFL learners.

Method

Design

Given the study's objective, a classroom ethnography, characterized by direct observation of participants and their interactions, was deemed the most appropriate research design. This approach offered distinct advantages for capturing a contextually rich understanding of educational practices and classroom dynamics encompassing detailed descriptions of classroom events, conversations, and other relevant information (Tracy, 2020). Through the adoption of classroom ethnography, the researchers engaged in close observation and in-depth analysis of the teacher's practices and the learners' interactions and reflections on well-being themes. Moreover, this method facilitated an exploration of the learners' holistic development, encompassing not only language-related competencies but also non-linguistic capabilities, thereby aligning with PLE's emphasis on fostering global skills.

Context and Participants

The research was conducted at a state university in the north of Tehran, Iran, within the context of a three-credit General English course. This course is mandatory for non-English major students and aims to enhance language skills and sub-skills, ensuring an essential level of English proficiency for academic and professional pursuits. The literacy-oriented nature and objectives of the course provided a suitable context for implementing the pedagogy. The study involved three cohorts of female first-year students, totaling 85 participants, who enrolled in this semester-long course during the academic year of 2023. Sessions were conducted twice a week, adding up to a total of 150 minutes per week for each cohort. Participants came from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, aged between 18 and 22 years. Although traditional English proficiency assessment tools were not employed, the participants demonstrated linguistic competencies ranging from pre-intermediate to intermediate levels through their overall performance. The course was conducted by one of the researchers, a university instructor with a foundational background in PP, who also developed the course content. Oversight on PP integration was provided by a psychologist specializing in the field. An MA TEFL student, serving as another researcher, observed the sessions and collaborated in preparing and executing the instructional content.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Prior to the study, the researchers selected and prepared the content and activities based on the well-being themes elucidated in the literature. Teaching materials encompassed multimodal resources—such as texts, audio files, and video clips—spanning various genres (e.g., fiction and non-fiction). These materials addressed well-being topics, including gratitude, courage, resilience, emotion regulation, altruism, creativity, and life's meaning. Language activities, comprising writing, listening, and discussion-based exercises, were selected or adapted from PP-focused publications designed for language classrooms (i.e., Helgesen, 2019; Phillips et al., 2022). Consideration was also given by the researchers to the learners' demographic profiles, interests, language proficiency levels, cognitive and affective engagement with materials, and cultural relevance in the adaptation process.

Data collection for the study involved a multifaceted approach. Extensive class observations, spanning approximately 30 sessions, were conducted by one of the researchers throughout an academic semester. The course was taught by another researcher, a TEFL university instructor with a foundational knowledge of PP. These sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and supplemented with detailed field notes documenting session events, instructor-learner interactions, and the learners' "under-construction language" (Mirhosseini, 2020). Additionally, a variety of learner-generated documents, such as written assignments, oral presentations, and relevant multimedia artifacts, were collected as supplementary data sources. At the conclusion of the course, in-depth semi-structured electronic interviews were

conducted with nine voluntary participants. These interviews, lasting between 30 to 60 minutes each, aimed to elicit the participants' perspectives on the classroom environment, instructional materials, and their envisioned applications of the acquired knowledge. The interview questions were designed based on an extensive review of literature related to the study's focus areas. The initial draft of the interview guide was reviewed by an expert on PP and an Applied Linguistics professor who assessed the questions' relevance, clarity, and alignment with the research objectives. The feedback provided by these reviewers was included in the final draft of the interview guide.

In conjunction with data collection, one of the researchers transcribed non-textual data, including the recorded observations and interviews. These transcriptions, along with other textual data, were systematically coded, categorized, and thematically analyzed, adopting the guidelines delineated by Charmaz (2020) for creating initial codes, focused codes, representative sub-categories, and categories. The researchers collaboratively undertook data analysis and interpretation, focusing on the research objectives of the study. While discussing the categories, original quotes from the data were incorporated as evidence of the arguments.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, they employed triangulation by collecting data from multiple sources. Moreover, the prolonged engagement in the classroom conduct and observation by two of the researchers provided firsthand insights and helped establish rapport with the participants. Regular debriefing sessions enabled the researchers to discuss conclusions, address biases, and explore alternative approaches. Additionally, a thick description strategy was utilized to document each stage of the research in detail. Ethical considerations were carefully maintained too, ensuring the participants' anonymity and informing them of their access to the research findings upon request.

Results

Through meticulous data analysis, it became evident that integrating well-being themes and activities facilitated the cultivation of several linguistic and non-linguistic strengths among the language learners participating in the course. Table 1 summarizes the major categories and sub-categories.

Table 1.

Extracted categories and sub-categories

Categories	Sub-categories
Craft of Positive Languages	a) Appreciative Expressions b) Compassionate Self-talk
Creative Reframing	a) Cognitive Reappraisal b) Artistic Self-expressions
Reflective Self-exploration	a) Reflection on Emotion Regulation b) Expressing Humility and Awe

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Cultivation of Well-being Literacy	a) Developing Vocabulary and Language Structures to Discuss Well-being Concepts (e.g., Resilience, Emotion regulation)
	b) Comprehending and Producing Well-being Topics across Genres (Stories, Animated content, Personal narratives)
Savoring Foreign Language Learning	a) Reduced Negative Emotions
	b) Growth Mindset Development

Below, some of the key findings are elucidated briefly:

I am appreciative of...: Craft of positive languages

The analysis of the data indicated that engagement in well-being themes such as gratitude, optimism, and love made the learners craft linguistic constructs demonstrating positivity, hope, appreciation, and self-love. One manifestation of crafting positive language was most notably observed in the learners' interaction with a brief English poem and the associated classroom exercises. The poem portrayed a woman who conveyed gratitude for seemingly mundane tasks in her life, such as handling household chores. Having discussed the poem, the learners were assigned the task of writing an "appreciation letter" to whomever they desired to express gratitude, a practice that was a novel experience for the majority of the learners, as stated by them. The analysis of the letters showed that the learners had predominantly used lexical choices related to thankfulness, like "thank you," "I am grateful for," "I appreciate," and "I am appreciative of" to convey their heartfelt gratitude to God, family members, and friends. For instance, Mahsa, a reticent learner, had composed a letter expressing gratitude to her mother. Employing the metaphoric expression of "angel of my life," the adjectives "lovely" and "kindest," and positive nouns like "generosity" and "devotion," she conveyed her appreciation for her mother's kindness and benevolence.

My dear and lovely mother, you are the angel of my life. Whenever I was sad, you made me happy. Every time I was alone, you were with me. I can't describe your generosity and devotion. I can't forget that every time I wanted your help, you always said yes to me. You are the kindest person I've ever seen. I always appreciate you, My dear mother.

In several other cases, a number of learners while addressing *themselves*, had appreciated their "selves" by acknowledging their own strengths, abilities, efforts, and accomplishments, besides accepting their mistakes. As an example, saluting herself as "Dear Razieh" and finishing her letter with "I am proud of you," Razieh had expressed gratitude towards herself for staying "strong," making "efforts," being "successful" and "independent," and demonstrating "emotional strength" and "power." She had also acknowledged her imperfection by "forgiving" herself for the mistakes she had made and striving to improve.

Dear Razieh,

I'm writing this letter to say thank you for staying strong when you feel like giving up on life. Sometimes you make mistakes and you get angry, however, you forgive yourself and try to be better.... You have an independent personality and, moreover, you have always tried to be your best. I am proud of you.

Another incidence of crafting positive language was observed in discussing “Hair Love” and “Bao” animations, both depicting themes of familial love and support during challenging circumstances. In analyzing the animations, the learners explored concepts like “family love,” “care,” and “support,” emphasizing their significance and the importance of respecting and caring for parents. For instance, Niloofar highlighted the role of “hope” in overcoming difficulties, emphasizing its transformative power. Nasrin underscored the “happiness” derived from familial unity, reflecting on personal lessons of patience she had learned from her parents. She recounted, “As a child, I was very talkative, but my dad never ever told me to ‘stop talking,’ which aided in my development of patience in life.” Faeze emphasized the need to prioritize “attention and care to parents.” She said, “After watching ‘Bao’ animation, I felt I must pay closer attention to my parents.”

As the data suggests, the learners’ engagement with well-being topics triggered the production of positive language constructions characterized by appreciating the positive aspects of life, concentrating on what is going well rather than dwelling on what is missing or lacking in life, and recognizing the contributions of others and their love, protection, efforts, and affection. Furthermore, the learners more or less constructed a language of *self-compassion* marked by using *positive self-talk*, treating oneself with kindness and understanding instead of self-blame and self-criticism, and acknowledging that imperfections, suffering, and failures are part of human experiences.

I am able to...: Spark of creative reframing.

The learners’ “creative reframing”—the process of looking at a situation, issue, or problem from a fresh or innovative perspective—emerged as another prominent theme. Creative reframing is a recognized theme in PP, associated with cognitive reappraisal and artistic self-expression. This reframing manifested in both written and oral presentations by the learners, highlighting their ability to think outside the box and their strengths and artistic prowess. For instance, a number of learners in their appreciation letters had imaginatively addressed abstract entities and personas instead of real individuals. In one case, Shaghayegh starting the letter with “Dear lovely hardships” and ending it with “The only survivor,” typed in all caps, had appreciated the difficulties and the “pains” she had been “fighting with” as they had made her become “much stronger” than the past and each had taught her virtuous “lessons”. Creatively, she had characterized these difficulties with gentle and empathetic language, ascribing human

qualities such as “lovely,” “best teachers,” and “you guys” to them. In other words, rather than reacting negatively, she shifted her thought patterns to a more positive view of the situation.

This is a letter for appreciating my difficulties which are my best teachers

Dear lovely hardships, good job! thank you for all pain you have given to me that have made me stronger. Anyone of you taught me a lesson. One of you taught me insistence; One optimism; and ... Now I'm the one that have grown a lot in comparison with ex me. I have learned to live with you guys and fight with you while thinking about the result which is certainly me as a winner and stronger. THE ONLY SURVIVOR!

Another spark of creative reframing was observed in the artistic presentations demonstrated by several learners. It is worth noting that the instructor had previously laid the foundation for discussing the importance of creativity by encouraging learners to reflect on a variety of textual and multimedia content with a focus on creative expression. One influential piece was a poem about a schoolboy being restricted by his teacher from drawing his favorite subjects, resulting in the gradual suppression of his creativity. Another comparable material was the animated film “Alike,” set in a colorless city where institutions stifled creativity, discouraging even the most passionate individuals. In this film, a young boy’s creativity is suppressed, yet his father eventually helps him reclaim his passion. These resources emphasized the importance of fostering personal strengths and creativity in educational environments, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of these themes.

In one related practice, the learners were invited by the instructor to present one of their own artistic abilities, which they cherished. Atena, for instance, devoted her presentation to her pottery creations. She displayed photos of her handmade pottery works, such as Persian Khatoon, butterfly, and vase, and described in English the process of creating and painting them (Figure 1). She also shared the positive emotions she experienced while working with clay. She said: “Making something by your taste and creativity... it’s a good feeling. The pottery makes me patient. You have to be very careful and work gracefully because you must make things neat.”



Figure 1. Images of handmade pottery works created by one of the learners

Similarly, Farnaz and Faezeh talked about their own art of making candles and smudges. They also shared some pictures and video clips showing the process of preparing and designing candles. When the teacher asked what made them interested in making candles, Farnaz timidly expressed, “The candles share a good feeling...”. Additionally, Arezoo presented an impressive artistic performance by dubbing an episode from a well-known Iranian comic animation series. Her ability to flawlessly imitate the characters’ voices evidently impressed the class. Such performances may evidence the power of well-being topics and tasks in igniting language learners’ personal strengths and fostering their creativity.

I think we are very small creatures: A pause for reflective self-exploration

The analysis of the data also revealed that integrating well-being topics encouraged the learners to take time and ponder over significant life issues. Such self-reflective practices encouraged learners to implicitly ponder over PP themes such as cognitive flexibility, emotion regulation, empathy, perspective-taking, and delayed judgments and appraise their own manners in terms of these concepts. A particularly impactful theme in this regard was the notion of paradigm shift, drawn from Stephen Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey describes an incident where his irritation with a couple of unruly children in a subway turned to empathy and compassion upon learning that their mother had just died, prompting a shift in his perception and behavior. This idea was further explored through Sundar Pichai’s “Cockroach Theory,” which emphasizes avoiding quick reactions and practicing proactive thinking, and the film “Snack Attack,” depicting an elderly woman’s mistaken aggression towards a young boy over a snack. These narratives highlighted the significance of emotion regulation and thoughtful responses in challenging situations. Expressing that they had found the texts impressive and engaging, the learners actively shared their understanding of the topics. Nilufar used the term “quick judgment” to describe her understanding of paradigm shift. Rosa stated that the text meant “don’t jump to conclusions” to her. Sara highlighted the importance of controlling impulses and emotions, saying, “Sometimes we have not to judge soon...we have to wait and consider all of the conditions.”

Following these classroom discussions, the instructor invited the learners to reflect on their *personal* experiences of paradigm shifts. The learners’ shared self-reflections chiefly hovered around “bitter” or “eye-opening” memories of “wrong” or “hasty” judgments, plus their realization of the need to empathize with others. For instance, Maryam, Nasrin, and Sara shared memories of overcoming hasty judgments and learning to empathize with different perspectives. Sentences like “I felt ashamed and tried not to...,” “I become sad because of my reaction,” “Since then, I have learned that we have to consider all the possibilities,” or “I realized that only God can judge us” may indicate that these personal experiences, which had triggered their empathy, had encouraged them to be more patient and considerate in the future and not dwell on their initial negative emotions. Below is a reflection shared by Maryam:

I had a classmate who one day criticized another friend for not returning the small amount of money she had lent her. At that moment, I thought how stingy my classmate is! But later I found out that his family is not in a good financial situation and they need even a small amount of money. After that event, I felt ashamed and tried not to judge people very soon.

Another dimension of self-contemplation involved reflecting on the meaning of life, one's personal mission, and the grandeur of creation. This chiefly occurred while watching and analyzing a couple of scientific texts and video clips depicting the complexities of human fetal development and the wonders of the cosmos and galaxies. For instance, on one occasion, the class read and discussed a text about black holes' formation, their supermassive size, and attractive forces by which they swallow everything around, including light. Voicing their awe and wonder, a number of learners commented that "simply imagining something one million times bigger than the sun" or "its speed in swallowing everything is so scary" as "we are actually nothing in comparison to supermassive black holes and their magnitude," and that "we humans, after centuries, haven't been able to discover a little of the mysteries of creation, while we call ourselves the supreme creature." They also referred to the "power," "creativity," "greatness," "delicacy," and "flawless engineering" of God in creating astonishing events, phenomena, and creatures; "smallness" of mankind and his mundane affairs before the "vastness," "diversity," and "complexity" of the mysterious universe; as well as human being's "inability" to understand this grandeur. Below is one of these contemplative excerpts:

I think we are very small creatures and there are many big and wonderful things in the world that we are unaware of. We live on a planet called Earth, which is one of the tiny planets in our solar system. The solar system is located in a corner of the Milky Way galaxy. So we are really, really small. Certainly there are complexities and secrets about creation that we do not yet know!

As the data suggests, reflecting on the topics of emotion regulation as a sub-theme of well-being engaged the learners in meaningful discourse and fostered self-contemplation, emphasizing the critical importance of empathy and perspective-taking. Furthermore, the discussions on the wonders of the universe gently encouraged a deeper contemplation by the learners over human existence, possibly fostering a sense of humility, purpose, and a desire to lead meaningful lives.

When life knocks me down, I need to bounce back: A path to well-being literacy cultivation.

The analysis of classroom conversations and documents produced by the learners also indicated a gentle cultivation of "language-based capabilities" for well-being or well-being

literacy, which refers to the intentional and mindful use of language *about* and *for* well-being (Oades et al., 2022). Specifically, the learners gradually developed the background information and vocabulary to comprehend textual and animated contents related to gratitude, emotion regulation, creativity, perseverance, hope, and resilience—as outstanding well-being themes—and to apply the acquired declarative knowledge and lexical items in their written and oral productions.

An example of enhancement of well-being literacy was developing the knowledge and vocabulary for talking about *resilience*. A series of classroom events and activities led to the emergence and cultivation of these language-based capabilities. Noteworthy instances included discussing the story of a runner who, despite getting crippled in his childhood showcased exceptional determination and achieved notable success in the realm of athletics; watching a YouTube-sourced short video wherein a teacher introduced the concept of resilience to young kids using wooden bouncing dolls which bounced back again as soon as they were being knocked down; and analyzing a silent animation depicting a fledgling sandpiper navigating the challenges of acquiring food amidst scary waves.

After reading or watching each text or video clip, the instructor invited the learners to reflect on the presented themes. Arezoo, a learner who participated actively in class discussions, highlighted the concept of “iron persistence” from the runner’s story and believed that with “strong determination,” one can achieve success. She said: “When I read this story, I thought it was a dream, but when a person has an iron persistence in her or his life, she or he can [become] successful.” Conversely, Farnaz, a learner who initially professed her “hatred” of English but progressively exhibited more enthusiasm and engagement with the discussed topics, shared her understanding of resilience, as depicted in the story, employing a well-known proverb. She said, “This story is an example of the sentence: where there is a wish, there is a way.” Moreover, in interpreting the animation, the learners consistently employed expressions such as “facing fears,” “bouncing back,” “coping with hardships,” and “changing the self into a better version” to portray their recognition of resilience as a means of surmounting challenges. Such language productions may suggest the learners were collectively moving one step further in deepening their understanding of the concepts of resilience and perseverance beyond the surface meanings.

Searching for and narrating the life story of a resilient person was the next related task undertaken by the learners. The learners presented a variety of multimodal narratives focusing on how the characters confronted their fears or chronic life events, maintained their determination and resiliency, stood strong, recovered, and experienced “growth.” For instance, Arezoo, a girl who, despite her low language proficiency, often tried her best to participate in class discussions, chronicled the narrative of Nicholas James Vujicic, an inspirational speaker born without limbs, as an exemplar of resilience. She said:

Although he did not have arms and legs, he had a healthy childhood and now has very gifts [rewards]. He can do everything; he can swim; he can play football. When he was a child, he wanted to die [commit suicide], but her parents and his lovely family stopped him. He is so resilient.

In a more concrete manifestation of their engagement with resilience, a few students opted to share firsthand accounts of their own resilience journeys. One of them was Shabnam, a learner who had joined the class a few sessions late due to the problems she had confronted because of an accident. She was also an athlete who had won medals and positions in various sports. She told the class about her experience of practicing resilience by going on a weight-loss diet and working out for a considerable period. She explained:

I hated myself for being overweight and I had no motivation to exercise. I realized that due to my overweight I had serious physical problems. I realized that I have to do something about it. I started working out again and I have been on a diet for a year and half. My hard work finally paid off and I could lose 21 kg.

Through their performances, it became evident that the learners successfully comprehended multimodal texts of various genres that explored well-being themes. In the case of resilience, they demonstrated not only an understanding of the concept but also declarative *knowledge* about its essential components and vocabulary to discuss it. Moreover, they effectively composed the language of resilience and perseverance by sharing biographies of resilient individuals or recounting their own personal stories of overcoming challenging circumstances, showcasing their ability to narrate and reflect on their experiences.

In the follow-up interviews conducted after the course completion, the majority of participants also expressed that their engagement with well-being content and classroom discussions had extended “beyond language learning,” providing them with novel insights and transforming their perspectives on well-being and its practical applications in their daily lives. For instance, Niloufer recounted how the COVID-19 pandemic had previously transformed her from a patient and calm individual into someone consumed by anger. She credited that engaging with the course material, particularly the theme of resilience, had aided her regain a sense of balance in her life; though slightly.

Over the past three years, I have suffered greatly by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced everything to shift online and left us in isolation. I had been transformed from a patient and energetic person to someone full of anger and rage. While I'm not yet fully myself again, the discussions on resilience in this course encouraged me to reflect and make an effort to incorporate these values into my daily life. (Translated from Persian to English)

Maryam also expressed that throughout the course, she had gotten acquainted with topics she had no idea about before, and this gave her a new perspective on life issues. She claimed that she was a quick-tempered person, and the contents gently helped her recognize this characteristic and made her decide to be more patient and consider the repercussions of her behavior more mindfully.

There were very good topics. I had not even thought about some of them. For example, about the paradigm shift and cockroach theory. They gave me a new perspective on some issues. I was a quick-tempered person, then I realized that I have to wait and be more patient in some situations. (Translated from Persian to English)

Shabnam explained how pondering over the same themes had altered her perspective on certain matters. She mentioned her tendency to judge others hastily and how the stories made her realize that people can react to the same problem differently. This prompted her to adopt a more comprehensive approach by considering multiple aspects before forming judgments about others.

I realized that I often form preconceived notions about people or things without knowing the facts. When we explored these stories, it was transformative for me, as it made me more mindful of the importance of not jumping to conclusions. I found it fascinating to see how different individuals can approach common problems in distinct ways. (Translated from Persian to English)

Overall, the exposure to narratives and animated content related to well-being topics, combined with reflective discussions, provided the learners with a platform for introspection about their own well-being. Specifically, this reflection facilitated the growth of language capabilities relevant to well-being literacy, including the ability to comprehend, analyze, and create multimodal texts that addressed the discussed well-being themes.

I don't hate English as much as I did in the past: Savoring foreign language learning

In addition, the interviews with learners highlighted their positive experiences in the language classroom, emphasizing comfort, excitement, and a growth mindset fostered by a supportive environment. They described their experiences using phrases such as “positive atmosphere in the class,” “experiencing little or no panic, stress, and anxiety,” “feeling excited,” “feeling comfortable,” “finding the contents enjoyable and pleasurable,” and “having the opportunity to talk,” possibly indicating their minimal negative emotions throughout the course. A number of the interviewees also stated that while they experienced feelings of embarrassment and worry during the initial sessions of the course, the supportive and encouraging manners of the instructor, who constantly reminded them to express themselves regardless of the mistakes they made, and the engaging course content turned the language learning experience into a more

enjoyable and favorable one. For instance, Sara articulated her peace and comfort in the English class by stating, “this class was the most positive class I had this semester.” She attributed this to the friendly and welcoming demeanor of the instructor and the engaging multimodal content presented. She elaborated:

As an introvert, many professors don't know me at all because I always take a seat at the back of the class and don't speak at all. But it was the only class where I sat in the front and could really talk and communicate without experiencing negative emotions.
(Translated from Persian to English)

Similarly, Farnaz mentioned that although she was not proficient in English, she did not experience negative emotions because the teacher encouraged her to speak. She said: “I didn't experience any stress, even though I didn't speak very well. The teacher would help me with the two or three words I said, and it was very good. No, I did not feel stressed out at all.” Atena highlighted that the engaging nature of the class and the opportunity for interaction contributed to her reduced anxiety. She stated: “The content we discussed was very good. The class was very interesting to me and I was not bored at all. I could speak much better. It was great that we actually had the opportunity to talk and interact.”

Furthermore, some of the interviewees stated that they felt a transformation into their long-held negative attitudes and emotions towards the English language. This shift was particularly pronounced among students who initially harbored strong aversions to English, for various reasons. For example, Mahsa, Farnaz, and Roya described that, despite their previous conviction that they could “never learn English,” their participation in the course and their improved comprehension of the instructor's and classmates' English increased their self-confidence, motivating them to enroll in an English class at a private language institute. Mahsa, reflecting on her newfound confidence, stated:

This class changed me a lot because prior to that, I was not willing to attend an English language class at all. However, this course proved to me that I can understand English when I read and listen attentively. When the teacher and classmates talked, I understood; this somehow raised my self-confidence. After that, I felt that I don't hate English as much as the past. So, I registered at a language institute. (Translated from Persian to English)

According to the learners' accounts, the combination of engaging content, a supportive instructor, and opportunities for participation created a learning environment where they felt comfortable, enthusiastic, and less anxious. They indicated that this positive atmosphere enhanced their overall enjoyment of learning a foreign language and equipped them with a sense of growth mindset.

Discussion

The primary objective of this qualitative study was to explore how instructing English through content and activities grounded in well-being themes and activities could contribute to the cultivation of linguistic and non-linguistic capabilities among English learners attending a General English course. The analysis of the data, including the learners' evolving language and their perspectives, provided solid evidence in support of the potentials of this integrative approach.

A notable finding was the emergence of markedly positive language features in the learners' outputs, characterized by lexical choices reflecting gratitude, hope, love, self-compassion, and resilience, among others. Concerning appreciation, the demonstrated linguistic positivity aligns with Fagley's (2018) concept of the "have focus" dimension of appreciation, wherein the learners began recognizing and acknowledging both tangible and intangible blessings in their lives. Furthermore, the learners demonstrated heightened awareness of the "interpersonal aspect of appreciation" (Fagley, 2018), expressing appreciation, respect, and love towards others for their presence and positive attributes. Such expressions of appreciation and respect towards others reflect an ability to exhibit positive interpersonal dynamics. Additionally, the learners' products showed a capacity to reframe past adversities and challenges as opportunities for personal growth and resilience (Fagley & Adler, 2012; Fagley, 2018). This reframing was evident in their frequent use of positive expressions such as "determination," "persistence," "remaining hopeful and flexible," "not giving up," "being patient in tough times," "making efforts," "bouncing back," "accepting mistakes," "facing problems," and "finding solutions." These lexical choices also suggest that the learners developed a declarative knowledge and mindset related to resilience, hope, and perseverance. In addition to that, the fact that a good number of these appreciative expressions had either addressed God or acknowledged His favors and blessings, as well as their own reliance and trust in Him, may represent the religious worldview or belief structure the participants of the study, as young Muslims, hold. As argued by Khodayarifard et al. (2016), *tawakkul* (trust in God), as a coping and problem-solving strategy, plays a pivotal role in the life of Muslims as it helps them cultivate a positive perspective toward God and a greater sense of calmness and endurance of adversities. This may suggest that the virtue of appreciation, despite being universal, is socio-culturally constructed and maintained.

Furthermore, the analysis of the learners' generated data revealed instances of self-compassion, characterized by kindness, care, and understanding towards oneself, a non-narcissistic positive self-view, positive self-talk, redirecting attention away from failures and faults, and forgiving oneself for mistakes (Booker & Perlin, 2020; Shapira & Mongrain, 2010). While seeing self-compassion "theoretically congruent with" positive character strengths like gratitude, hope, and forgiveness, Booker and Perlin (2020) argue that "recognizing the good in

life could redirect one's attention away from failures and faults toward positive reframings; grateful and self-compassionate individuals alike would be expected to accept painful experiences while remaining mindful of life's existing benefits despite the setback" (p. 2).

Besides demonstrating the cultivation of positive languages, the findings suggest how the incorporation of well-being-focused themes and activities into English instruction can enhance well-being literacy among language learners. Data analysis, including the learners' developing language and perspectives, provided robust evidence supporting the flourishing of the first three components of well-being literacy as proposed by Oades et al. (2022): the development of vocabulary, knowledge, and language skills pertinent to well-being; the ability to comprehend and analyze multimodal texts encompassing well-being themes; and the composition of multimodal texts relevant to well-being. While the competencies related to the remaining two components—context awareness and adaptability, and intentionality for well-being—could not be directly traced, as these require exploring learners' language use, intentions, and cognitive and metacognitive skills in diverse contexts beyond the classroom, the learners' self-accounts suggested an increased awareness of the importance of well-being in their own lives and those of others. The findings align, to some extent, with the study conducted by Waters (2021), in which the researcher developed a positive education intervention called Visible Well-being. Following the implementation of this classroom-based intervention, the teachers observed improvements in their students' well-being. Specifically, the students demonstrated "a broader vocabulary around emotions...allowing them to express themselves in a more open and honest way" (Waters, 2021, p.148), expressed their strengths more frequently, and cared about their peers more. Nevertheless, due to limited research on well-being literacy, for sustained and heightened well-being literacy, it is essential to extend well-being practices beyond classroom activities and integrate them deeply into individuals' personal and social lives.

An observable aspect of well-being literacy enrichment in the learners' evolving language was their acquaintance with the concept of *emotion regulation*. This was marked by the frequent use of terms such as "avoiding hasty judgment," "reaction versus response," "forgiving others," and "being in control of behaviors." The learners analyzed characters' behaviors depicted in the films and narratives concerning these features and shared their personal experiences through spoken and written self-reflections, considering their "response-focused" strategies for regulating emotions. These strategies included altering their thinking about a situation to change its emotional impact (cognitive change) and reappraising the meaning of the situation (cognitive reappraisal) (Aldao, 2013; Gross, 2015). The learners' shared personal experiences also encompassed cognitive and affective aspects of *empathic reactivity*, including emotional involvement with others, perspective-taking, distress regarding aggressive behaviors, and attempts at self-control (Mercer, 2016). These findings suggest that well-chosen well-being content can foster an environment that transcends language learning beyond conventional

pedagogical goals, promoting intellectual and emotional growth. As Mercer (2016) similarly suggests, a strategy for experiencing empathy in foreign language classes could involve discussing real-life scenarios and reflecting on possible reasons for learners' behaviors, becoming sensitized to the diversity of possible reasons, and avoiding hasty conclusions.

In this regard, one of the themes that encouraged contemplation in the learners was discussing the grandeur of the cosmos. As the analysis of the learners' reflective accounts revealed, the contents and discussions aided them to look beyond mundane concerns, think about the meaning and purpose of life, feel a sense of connectedness with wondrous micro and macrocosms, and experience "awe" (Rivera et al., 2019). As described by Keltner and Haidt (2003) and Shiota et al. (2007), awe is the product of two features: "vastness" and "accommodation". Vastness refers to experiencing something much larger, vaster, or more powerful than one can perceive and accommodation refers to challenging one's existing mental frame of reference and reorganizing that to make sense of novel information. In the case of the present study, the experience of awe stirred other contemplations like pondering on the meaning and purpose in life, which are components of well-being proposed in Seligman's (2011) PERMA and Oxford's (2016) EMPATHICS models.

In addition, the analysis of the data collected through interviews with a selected number of participants suggested that the learners experienced a positive learning atmosphere, an increase in their foreign language enjoyment, a spark in their sense of creativity, and a willingness to peruse learning the English language which may indicate a transition from a "fixed mindset" to "a growth language mindset". These findings partially resonate with the results of previously-conducted intervention-based studies (e.g., Khajavy et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2024; Narafshan & Noori, 2018; Rogers, et al., 2024; Shafiee Rad & Jafarpour, 2022; Yang & Lin, 2024; Zare et al., 2023; Zarrinabadi et al., 2022). Nevertheless, notable differences can be observed across these studies. For example, while Khajavy et al. (2017), Yang and Lin (2024), Zare et al. (2023), and Lee et al. (2024) employed quantitative methodologies to demonstrate that a positive classroom environment and tasks foster enjoyment while reducing anxiety among students, the findings of the present study are derived from the participants' perceptions shared during interviews. Similarly, Shafiee Rad and Jafarpour (2022) revealed that positive emotion interventions have a significant positive impact on L2 learners' well-being, emotion regulation, resilience, as well as writing skill. The present study, however, proposes well-being "literacy" improvement as an additional dimension for exploration in future research.

Besides the positive impacts of PP incorporations, it seems that future studies should aim for a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and obstacles associated with implementing existing well-being models in diverse socio-cultural, religious, and ideological contexts, highlighting an area that warrants further investigation (Rogers et al. 2024).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of the study suggest that incorporation of PP content and activities into foreign language teaching can help foster a context of positive linguistic self-expression, facilitate the cultivation of personal strengths, promote introspective self-reflection, enhance well-being literacy, and increase a sense of foreign language enjoyment and growth mindset. The findings suggest that language curricula, by moving beyond linguistic skills and incorporating essential life skills such as developing character strengths, building resilience, regulating emotions, and including relevant activities, can enhance language learners' awareness of well-being and its significance.

Nevertheless, the present inquiry suffers from certain limitations. While the themes and tasks discussed in the field of PP abound in developing teaching content for this study, only a handful number of these topics and activities were included. By integrating additional virtues and their components—such as honesty, teamwork, spirituality, hope, forgiveness, justice, and curiosity—new well-being courses could be designed and implemented. Furthermore, due to the use of convenience sampling, the participants were young undergraduate female students enrolled in a General English course at a state university, with English proficiency levels ranging from pre-intermediate to intermediate. As such, the findings of this study are context-specific and may be transferable to similar settings but are not necessarily generalizable to other populations. Future research is recommended to include participants from diverse backgrounds, age groups, and proficiency levels to explore potential differences and similarities in their performances and perceptions when engaging with PP topics. This would enrich our understanding of the application of PP in English language classrooms and enhance the relevance of such studies across a broader range of contexts. Additionally, the literature reveals a notable gap in the exploration of challenges and hurdles associated with implementing existing well-being models in diverse cultural contexts, which warrants further investigation. Longitudinal studies, in particular, could also track how cultivating well-being literacy might contribute to enhancing individuals' psychological well-being over time.

Despite its limitations, the researchers hope this study provides valuable implications for second or foreign-language educators, particularly in the areas of teaching, syllabus design, and materials development. Curriculum developers and materials designers can develop syllabi that blend language teaching objectives with activities designed to promote personal growth and enhance emotional, social, digital, and spiritual well-being. By incorporating these themes into their classrooms, language teachers can refine their pedagogical strategies, embracing more holistic and learning-centered approaches that address the emotional, social, and cognitive aspects of the learning process.

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