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**Dear Diary:**

Journaling as a Tool for Maintaining  
EFL Teachers' Wellbeing

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## **Abstract**

Teacher wellbeing is a crucial aspect of effective education, especially in English Language Teaching (ELT), where English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers constantly navigate unique cultural, emotional, and professional challenges. These issues continuously contribute to high levels of stress and, consequently, risks of professional burnout. This thesis explores the multifaceted nature of EFL teaching and the factors that shape teachers' experiences. Through an autoethnographic approach, this study examines the use of personal narrative, specifically diary keeping, as a tool to improve and maintain wellbeing of EFL teachers. The results deriving from the researcher's personal diary entries and semi-structured interviews with fifteen EFL teachers suggest that implementing journaling into teachers' working routine provides them with a reflective practice that can help them manage various challenges they face both inside and outside the classroom, build their resilience, and foster emotional awareness. Furthermore, it helps EFL instructors to process their experiences more healthily and effectively by creating a positive outlook on their work and their professional identity. This study aims to raise awareness regarding teacher wellbeing and underscores the need for a greater emphasis on self-reflective practices within teacher training programs, offering a draft of a teacher journal for self-care.

## **Introduction**

“Self-care is not selfish. You cannot serve from an empty vessel.” – Eleanor Brown

When I began my journey as a young English teacher, I quickly realized the numerous daily challenges my colleagues and I have to face, and how profoundly these issues influence our mental state and ability to work. Every lesson brought new experiences, and I was eager to learn how to manage diverse classrooms, adapt to modern agendas, and develop effective teaching strategies. However, with the enthusiasm of entering this profession, I also encountered moments of uncertainty, stress, and even frustration. In order to maintain a positive outlook even during challenging times, I turned to journaling. I have been keeping my personal diary since 2015, when I was still a school student, and to this day, it remains my primary source of comfort. As I was growing and developing as a person, changing my social roles and interests, so was my diary obediently bending to fit my new identities. It has always been my safe space to express my thoughts and concerns, process difficult and even traumatic experiences, and celebrate successes. Throughout the past few years, journaling has allowed me to document my winding path as an English teacher and develop a deeper awareness of my strengths and areas for growth. Putting thoughts on paper is my form of self-therapy that helps me release stress and make sense of my emotions.

Kate Brierton (2022), a clinical psychologist, suggests the use of an oxygen mask metaphor. This analogy with an airplane safety measure underscores the crucial importance of prioritizing teacher wellbeing. Just as passengers are instructed to put on their oxygen masks before assisting others, teachers must first prioritize their own wellbeing to effectively support the needs of their students. When teachers experience high levels of wellbeing, characterized by positive degrees of their physical and mental state, they are more motivated and engaged in their instructional practices. Consequently, this leads to improved students' outcomes and overall better academic performances. On the contrary, low levels of teacher wellbeing that are caused by such factors as excessive workload, chronic stress, and excessive emotional engagement often lead teachers to experience burnout and can even result in teacher turnover (Taylor et al., 2024: 23). Since the state of EFL educators has a great impact on the effectiveness of language instruction and student outcomes, research is shedding more and more light on teachers' wellbeing, highlighting its role as one of the most important pillars of education. However, teachers are still constantly facing countless challenges in the educational settings, causing them to feel decreased job satisfaction (Sulis et al., 2023: 1). Additionally, responsibilities such as grading, lesson planning, and record keeping are generally rather time

consuming and exhausting. For instance, teachers that I talked to during my internships in Russia and Italy highlighted paperwork as one of the main reasons that lead them to the feelings of frustration, demotivation, and burnout. EFL teachers, in particular, have to navigate through even a wider range of difficulties, which is due to a highly complex and demanding professional landscape of a foreign language instructor (Mercer, 2020: 106).

Despite these issues, there is also a variety of effective strategies available to support EFL teachers' wellbeing. Among them, the approach that is going to be the focus of this study is the use of personal narrative practices, specifically journaling or diary keeping. It has proven to be a powerful mechanism for teachers to reflect on their experiences, process their emotions, and gain insights into their professional and personal lives (Kelly et al., 2022; Petrón & Uzum, 2016).

Chapter I focuses on establishing the theoretical framework by providing information on the concept of teacher wellbeing, with a specific emphasis on ELT, and its importance in the educational settings. Then, it examines the factors that impact EFL teachers' wellbeing, including personal characteristics and emotions, relationships, societal status of teachers in the society, and working environment. Next, the focus shifts to the theoretical foundations of journaling as a tool for promoting teacher wellbeing, and its role in self-reflection that helps teachers to manage stress and foster emotional resilience.

Chapter II provides an overview of the research design and methodology used in this study, which explores the challenges of ELT, and investigates the use of journaling as a tool for maintaining teacher wellbeing through an autoethnographic approach. It begins by outlining the context in which the study is situated, and presents the research questions that guide this thesis. Next, the participants involved in the study are described, including the researcher herself and fifteen EFL teachers that contributed to the research by participating in semi-structured interviews. The chapter then discusses the research tools and data collection procedures, and outlines the data analysis procedures that were used to interpret the collected data.

Chapter III presents the findings of the study and discusses their implications in the context of EFL teacher wellbeing. It outlines the results obtained from the analysis of the researcher's personal diary entries and semi-structured interviews with fifteen EFL teachers. The results were organized into key themes and patterns identified from the gathered data, and they served as the foundation for the creation of the draft teacher journal for teacher self-care. Moreover, the results are interpreted in the context of the existing literature examined in this study. Additionally, this chapter also addresses the limitations of the study, and provides practical recommendations for further research in the field of teacher wellbeing and journaling.

## **Chapter I. Literature Review**

This chapter provides a theoretical foundation for the concept of teachers' wellbeing by exploring definitions based on the existing research in this area. This allows for a better understanding of the multifaceted nature of wellbeing and its critical role in the educational environment. By examining the key elements that contribute to teacher wellbeing both positively and negatively, we gain a deeper understanding of its profound influence on teachers and students. Moreover, this study takes a closer look at teacher wellbeing from the perspective of online teaching in terms of additional challenges EFL teachers face in the online classrooms. In the second section of this chapter, the idea of promoting and maintaining teacher wellbeing through the practices of personal narrative, specifically diary keeping, is explored in detail. This part of the present study focuses on how these tools facilitate reflective practices and effective stress management within an educational context.

### **1.1 Theoretical Framework of Wellbeing in English Language Teaching**

Understanding and promoting wellbeing in the educational context has become increasingly important, particularly within the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Research has shown that teachers' mental health has significant influence on their effectiveness, job satisfaction and overall wellbeing. The first subsection introduces the theoretical foundation of teacher wellbeing and examines ideas related to it, such as mental health, mindfulness and others, emphasizing its multifaceted nature. The focus of the second subsection is the importance in maintaining EFL teachers' wellbeing, highlighting unique challenges and demands they face at work. Finally, the third subsection outlines several important internal and external factors that affect teachers' wellbeing, including personal characteristics and emotions, relationships, societal status and others. It is important to acknowledge the general concepts of wellbeing and the key factors that influence it in order to develop effective coping strategies for teachers.

#### **1.1.1 The Concept of Wellbeing in Education**

In order to explore the role of teacher wellbeing, it is important to first clarify the key notions related to this field. Wellbeing is a concept that has been approached and defined in various ways by scholars, for example Seligman (2011), Mercer and Gregersen (2020) and Sulis et al. (2023). Sulis (2023: 12) argues that its multifaceted nature makes it almost impossible to give



it a clear definition. However, according to Mercer and Gregersen (2020: 15), wellbeing can be generally identified as the “state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy”. This broad definition drawn from Oxford Dictionary encompasses a general sense of feeling content with one’s life, including both physical health and emotional stability. In a more specific definition that Mercer and Gregersen (2020: 15) adopted from Diener, Oishi, and Lucas (2003), wellbeing is described as “presence of positive emotions, a lack of negative emotions, and a sense of overall life satisfaction”. This definition emphasizes the importance of achieving a balance between positive and negative emotions, and the key idea in this interpretation is that wellbeing does not imply suppressing or total denial of distressing feelings. Instead, the focus is rather on the attempt to increase the proportion of optimistic ones. This approach acknowledges the fact that experiencing negative emotions is a natural part of life, but it is also important to aim for a higher ratio of positive feelings, which consequently contributes to a greater sense of wellbeing (ibid.).

There are several frameworks present in contemporary research regarding wellbeing. One of the most prominent ones is Seligman’s (2011) PERMA, which consists of five elements: Positive emotion (the value of a wide range of positive emotions), Engagement (being fully immersed in the task that bring one joy and satisfaction), Relationships (having positive social connections), Meaning (understanding the importance of one’s life and their actions), and Accomplishment (achieving goals and acknowledging the sense of success) (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020: 15). It is believed to be a multidimensional model of wellbeing that includes hedonic (relative positive affect), eudemonic (sense of meaning and life well lived) and physical health perspectives (Sulis et al., 2023: 15). It is important to note a strong correlation between physical and mental health, as they mutually influence each other. As Mercer and Gregersen (2020) claim, fulfilling one’s basic needs such as adequate sleep, proper nutrition and regular exercise is crucial for giving our bodies enough energy to work productively. Even lacking in one of these layers of the individual’s physical wellbeing can lead to serious cognitive issues, problems with emotional stability, and can negatively influence the teacher’s overall effectiveness at work.

In the existing literature, a term that is often discussed in the context of wellbeing is “mental health”. According to Taylor et al. (2024: 5), despite their similar nature, these two concepts address different aspects of a person’s overall health. The term “wellbeing” is a broader concept that includes mental health itself, as well as various objective and subjective measurements of an individual’s overall life quality. It encompasses such aspects as psychological functioning, emotional health, sense of purpose, and satisfaction with life (Taylor et al., 2024: 5). In contrast,

according to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is characterized as a state of mental wellbeing that allows individuals to manage stress, recognize their own abilities, learn and work effectively and contribute positively to their communities. Additionally, it encompasses factors such as the absence of mental illnesses and the presence of positive mental states (World Health Organization, 2022). This comprehensive view highlights mental health as a fundamental component of overall health and wellbeing, crucial for personal, social and professional development.

Another concept related to wellbeing that is gaining more attention is “mindfulness”. According to Baroni (2018: 46), it encompasses a mental state characterized by non-judging openness, curiosity and acceptance of inner and outer experiences. This also involves the ability to “slow down”, deliberately pay attention to the present moment, and foster an inner calm that strengthens one’s ability to cope with daily challenges (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020: 169). Further studies presented in Fallah (2023) have shown that mindfulness practices can beneficially affect teachers’ wellbeing, especially in reducing consequences of depression, stress, and anxiety. This ability also has been able to help teachers become more aware not only of their own emotions, but also of those of their students, allowing them to better regulate their responses to stressful teaching situations. Finally, once EFL teachers start becoming more mindful, their self-efficacy improves, leading to increased confidence in their ability to manage the anxiety associated with foreign language teaching (Fallah, 2023: 3028).

Applying these definitions to the context of teacher wellbeing, it becomes evident that teacher’s overall health encompasses a broad spectrum of factors, including their physical health, emotional stability, and sense of purpose and satisfaction in their professional and personal lives. Positive states of mental health allow teachers to cope with challenges they face at work and increase their ability to teach effectively and maintain a positive classroom environment.

### **1.1.2 The Importance of Teacher Wellbeing in English Language Teaching**

In recent years, teacher wellbeing has proven to be a crucial element that is able to increase the quality and effectiveness of educational systems on many levels. Brierton and Gkonou (2022: 1), for instance, characterize it as “the central hub in any classroom”, as teachers’ positive emotions and behaviors have a great influence on students’ learning and wellbeing, motivating them to participate in classroom activities more actively and feel more content with themselves. Mercer and Gregersen (2020: 14) also highlight the importance of teachers’ good mental and physical health, as they both help the teacher to cope with their daily challenges of teaching

languages to their students. A teacher's overall wellbeing allows them to manage stress, stay motivated, and maintain a positive attitude, which consequently leads to effective teaching. Furthermore, according to Taylor et al. (2024), when teachers experience high levels of wellbeing, they tend to report improved physical health, better emotional regulation and heightened creativity, as they have more emotional resources that help them to adapt to diverse student needs, implement innovative and creative teaching strategies, and provide individualized support. This, in turn, results in better organizational level outcomes, such as lower absenteeism and turnover. Schools with a focus on teacher wellbeing can therefore experience greater stability and academic performance. Moreover, teacher wellbeing has also gained significant attention on European agendas. According to the Council conclusions of 26 May 2020, the wellbeing of teachers significantly affects their job satisfaction and enthusiasm for their work, influencing the attractiveness of the profession and retention rates (European Commission, 2021: 141).

In recent years, education has seen an increased popularity of online teaching, especially following the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This form of instruction not only includes the challenges that analog teachers experience in class, but also poses its own complex issues specific to online learning. When the lockdown began, most of the educational institutions abruptly changed the form of instruction from face-to-face to online or remote teaching, which caused EFL teachers to immediately start facing numerous new challenges (MacIntyre et al., 2020: 2). However, many schools were not ready for such a fundamental change in their teaching methodologies, and oftentimes teachers had to experience an increased amount of workload and even worked overtime. Moreover, some of them were not even provided with the training and support needed to adapt to new technologies and online platforms. In the study conducted by Wong et al. (2022), eight primary school teachers were interviewed in the context of this sudden shift to online teaching, and four main challenges were indicated: lack of administrative support, difficulties in productive collaboration with general teachers, problems with supporting students with varying language proficiencies, and lack of technology skills (Wong et al., 2022: 7). All these factors negatively influenced EFL teachers' wellbeing, caused a considerable amount of frustration, and made teachers feel overwhelmed, because they, as the interviewed teachers reported, "had no clue what they were doing" (Wong et al., 2022: 6).

Despite the ongoing research in the field of teacher wellbeing, practice has shown that it is still very often overlooked. This has been a critical issue for a long time, as the focus in teacher training programs is predominantly on classroom management, teaching methods, techniques

and materials (Brierton & Gkonou, 2022: 2). Even though these components are essential for a productive classroom environment and effective instructional delivery, teachers frequently ignore their personal needs and wellbeing in the pursuit of meeting academic standards and fulfilling their professional responsibilities. Some EFL instructors have reported that they even feel selfish and egocentric when they are asked to reflect on their own emotions, as it does not put the students in the core of the educational process (Brierton & Gkonou, 2022: 2). This presumably comes from the learner-centered teaching where the focus is on learners' needs and goals, and creating a supportive, nonfearful and nondefensive atmosphere in the classroom (Brown, Lee, 2015: 46). This approach requires a significant amount of emotional and cognitive investment from teachers, as they have to design and facilitate personalized learning experiences. Due to the persistent feeling of responsibility and the urge to put significant effort into their work, which is driven by their commitment to their students, teachers often fear to take a sick leave as it might be perceived by the school administrators as selfish or detrimental to their students' progress. The findings presented by Kidger et al. (2016) indicate a significant link between poor wellbeing, high depressive symptoms and presenteeism among teachers, which refers to the practice of attending work despite being ill. This tendency results in decreased productivity and worsening of health problems, and those instructors who are prone to presenteeism itself are often more likely to take time off work due to the increasing number of mental health issues and deterioration of their physical health (Kidger et al., 2016: 81).

When it comes to online teaching, EFL teachers face similar challenges of a demanding nature of this form of instruction. Wong et al. (2022) shared teachers' concerns regarding the pressure they have to address in online classrooms and the way they have to manage their workload. Many teachers reported having to work long hours, often from eight in the morning to nine at night. When seeking support from the administrators, teachers frequently were given additional tasks and responsibilities (Wong et al., 2022: 6). This often found its roots in decreased student engagement due to a high number of distractions, such as unstable internet connections and blackouts (Zarfsaz & Uçar, 2023: 48). These technical issues disrupt the learning environment and place additional pressure on teachers who must adapt quickly, prepare more engaging materials, and maintain instructional continuity.

In summary, teacher wellbeing is a multifaceted and essential component of effective ELT. It influences teaching quality, student engagement, and the overall functioning of educational institutions. By prioritizing teacher wellbeing, schools can create a supportive and productive environment that benefits both teachers and students, leading to improved educational outcomes.

### **1.1.3 Factors Influencing EFL Teachers' Wellbeing in Educational Settings**

Understanding the factors that influence the wellbeing of EFL teachers is essential for fostering a supportive environment and enhancing overall job satisfaction and effectiveness. These factors encompass various aspects of individuals, organizations and other aspects that could affect teachers' mental and physical health. Apart from that, a rather new perspective of online teaching adds additional pressure, and new challenges related to technology, workload management and communication.

#### ***Personal Characteristics and Emotions***

At the individual level, teachers' wellbeing is heavily influenced by personal characteristics, intrinsic qualities and coping strategies that EFL instructors already possess or acquire during their professional development. Certain personality traits and psychological features can cause teachers to feel specific emotions more intensely, shaping their experience and responses to the situations they encounter at work. In general, language teaching is considered to be very emotional, as it can generate a wide variety of different feeling, ranging from negative ones such as anger, frustration and anxiety, to positive feelings including happiness, pride and excitement (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020: 128). One of the feelings that is specifically challenging for EFL teachers is anxiety. It often stems from low professional and linguistic self-esteem, fear of evaluation, overwhelming administrative duties and issues related to time management (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020: 139). The idea of receiving judgement from colleagues or students can be incredibly overwhelming and stressful, and then consequently lead to even deeper self-doubt and self-criticism, harmful perfectionism or, on the contrary, procrastination. Non-native EFL teachers also tend to experience a specific kind of foreign language anxiety, which can find its form in the fear of making mistakes in front of their students, not being able to answer some of the language related questions that students might ask, or feeling uneasy while speaking the foreign language in front of their colleagues or native speakers (Horwitz, 1996: 365). Even though sometimes this feeling can be actually helpful, for instance, when teachers spend more time on lesson preparation or pay more attention to the language they use in class, it can still be very exhausting. Horwitz (1996) claims that these concerns usually do not have any real reason behind them, and teachers who suffer from foreign language anxiety rarely assess their personal language proficiency objectively. Even if there are some aspects that EFL teachers might want to improve, this should only serve as a motivation for seeking practice opportunities (Horwitz, 1996: 370). These concerns very often come from the pervasive ideology of "native speakerism", which positions native speakers as those who

are superior in linguistic competence and teaching ability (Holliday, 2006: 385). This belief can lead non-native EFL teachers to the feeling of being less competent compared to their native-speaking colleagues, or to other non-native teachers whose proficiency is native-like, regardless of their own actual proficiency and teaching skills. In the context of online EFL instruction, teachers are frequently exposed to a broader variety of language interactions with native speakers and highly proficient non-native teachers through social media. This can cause teachers with lower language skills to feel incompetent, and force them to improve their language abilities to better match the high standard. Furthermore, the lack of confidence combined with constant self-doubt can also affect teacher's professional identity and self-efficacy. When teachers feel uncertain or insecure about their professional skills and abilities to make a positive impact on their students' academic outcomes, they may start feeling demotivated and their job satisfaction decreases (Sulis, 2023: 31). As Horwitz (1996) argues, the pursue of fluency can almost never be fulfilled due to the time constraints and very often only results in higher levels of anxiety regardless of the achieved accomplishments. Additionally, native speakerism can also affect hiring practices and professional development opportunities, as many companies often state in the job advertisements they are searching for "native speakers" or "bilingual teachers", which undermines the professionalism of non-native EFL teachers. Addressing the issue of native speakerism is essential to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all language teachers.

When it comes to positive influence on teacher wellbeing, individual traits like resilience, optimism and other characteristics are crucial in handling stress and maintaining teachers' mental health. The idea of working on those traits stems from positive psychology, a field that was coined by Seligman (2011). This practice focuses on the strengths and virtues of an individual in order to increase life satisfaction (Seligman, 2011: 20). Optimism, one of the core concepts in positive psychology, involves maintaining a hopeful and positive outlook on oneself and a person's future (Yang, 2022: 3). A more specific term of academic optimism has been developed by scholars in the recent studies, which focuses more on the ability of the educator to encourage students to succeed in their studies, their belief in the students' capability to overcome obstacles and hardships (Yang, 2022: 2). Optimistic teachers can inspire their students, create a positive classroom environment and view challenges as opportunities for growth, rather than an inconvenience. This is particularly important in digital settings, where feelings of loneliness and isolation can arise (MacIntyre et al., 2020: 4). Cultivating resilience is also extremely important for EFL teachers. Aguilar (2018: 3) describes resilience as an adaptive dynamic process that allows individuals to quickly recover from challenging

situations. Resilience not only involves restoring the state of the person back normal, but also consequently becoming stronger by learning from these experiences and therefore fulfilling their life goals. Since this is a dynamic process, one's resilience is able to evolve over time, as the individual constantly has to interact with the complex environment surrounding them.

### ***Relationships***

Maintaining good relationships within and outside the workplace is crucial for any profession, and it is particularly important for teachers, especially those who are teaching foreign languages. Being an EFL teacher implies a lot of communication not just with students, but also with colleagues, administrators and parents. This high level of social interaction underscores the necessity of cultivating and sustaining positive relationships within the educational context. First, the relationships between EFL teachers and their students is a critical aspect of the teaching and learning process, which not only brings satisfaction and sense of reward, but also can prevent teachers from leaving their profession. Studies have shown that cooperation between teachers and their students can be effective and productive only in the case when language learning is built on trust and mutual respect between a teacher and their student (Spilt et al., 2011: 458, 460). On the contrary, negative teacher-student relationships that include conflict has been associated decreased teachers' beliefs in their efficacy and increased feelings of helplessness (Spilt et al., 2011: 461). Building a positive and secure connection with students is important in order to create a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom, which will allow students to feel safe to share their thoughts and ideas (Brierton & Gkonou, 2022: 82). This in turn can increase teachers' sense of purpose, improve their motivation, and their overall wellbeing.

Furthermore, establishing positive partnerships with parents is just as important. When teacher-parent relationships are characterized by conflict, criticism and lack of support, this could result in high emotional distress among teachers. Educators who face constant criticism from parents may experience a decline in their professional self-esteem and confidence. Apart from that, teachers are usually seen as role models by their students, and EFL instructors have a responsibility of shaping minds of their students (Brierton & Gkonou, 2022: 81). However, this puts another layer of pressure on teachers from the students' parents, who might have rather high unrealistic expectations and standards that they want teachers to meet. It can be extremely overwhelming and lead to exceeding levels of anxiety. Another problem that arises in the context of online teaching is the issue of blurred work-life boundaries (MacIntyre et al., 2020: 11). Parents sometimes may expect teachers to be available for communication even beyond their working hours, e.g. late in the evening or at the weekend. This is another stressor that can

have negative affect on teacher's personal and family relationships. Thus, it is important for teachers to create certain boundaries and try to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Setting clear communication guidelines can help teachers in creating collaborative and respectful relationships with students' parents.

Another important aspect is teacher-teacher relationships that are able to shape the overall work environment and impact EFL instructors' wellbeing. Positive interactions among colleagues are crucial in order to create a sense of community within a school, and fostering good connections with other teachers can bring a certain sense of belonging (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020: 50). Building rapport with colleagues that share the same values and educational goals allows effective communication and the exchange of valuable resources and ideas. In contrast, partnership with teachers who show such traits as unreliability, negativity and anxiety may drain one's energy and have a bad influence on wellbeing and professional fulfillment (ibid.). When it comes to teachers who work online, the feeling of isolation can also influence relationships with colleagues, as the lack of real-life interaction can make it challenging to build and maintain strong professional bonds. In traditional educational settings, teachers have many opportunities to communicate and exchange their thoughts and feelings during breaks, staff meetings or informal gatherings outside working hours. However, online teachers either do not interact with fellow teachers at all due to the specific structures of certain online schools that do not imply direct interaction between teachers (e.g. private teaching), or have very little amount of opportunities for communication.

### ***Societal Status***

One more factor that has been discussed by scholars is the societal status of teachers. Despite the historically acknowledged role of teachers in nurturing children's intellectual growth and raising future generations, nowadays teachers themselves do not always see their profession as something that brings them high status, respect and rewards one might expect. For instance, in Italy, in 2018 only 12% of teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that their profession is valued in society, while in Austria the percentage of teachers who agreed with this statement was 16%. It is considerably lower than the average across OECD countries and economies participating in Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), which stands at 26% (Education GPS, OECD, 2018). These figures underscore a global issue where the societal value and recognition of teachers does not align with their crucial role. The reason behind this might be the educational reforms that are taking place. Nowadays, the teacher's role has been reduced to "training", and instead of teaching students how to become intellectual individuals capable of thinking critically, educators are limited to management pedagogies (Giroux, 1985: 3). This shift has



significant influence on teachers' wellbeing, as the loss of creative freedom may contribute to their feeling of disconnectedness from their core purpose of fostering meaningful and valuable learning experiences. Additionally, the aspect of the societal status often implies that teaching is a well-paid profession. However, in some countries teachers have to face various challenges, such as inadequate salaries, uncomfortable working conditions, or even delays in receiving payment, all of which contribute to heightened dissatisfaction with their job and influences their psychological and physical wellbeing in a negative way (Hargreaves, 2009: 217). In the study conducted by Babic et al. (2022), some participants emphasized that teachers are "not well paid", while the information provided by the media indicates otherwise. A teacher from Hungary, for instance, highlighted this inconsistency between public perception and reality, where media reports high raises for teachers. This miscommunication contributes to a widespread belief that teachers are overpaid, despite the contrary reality.

When students fail to recognize the significance of learning foreign languages and possess low levels of motivation, it often leads to decline in the societal status of teachers (Sulis, 2023: 25). For example, during the outbreak of the political conflict between Russia and Ukraine in February 2022, a notable decrease in students' motivation to engage in language learning was observed. The geopolitical tension resulted in the closure of airspaces, suspension of international flights, and withdrawal of foreign companies from the Russian market. This led many students to question the relevance of learning English, as they were experiencing the reduced amount of opportunities for international interactions and professional prospects. Apart from that, various language proficiency tests, including IELTS and TOEFL, are no longer available in Russia. These restrictions significantly affected students' motivation and decreased the status of the English language as a school subject.

### ***Working Environment***

The working environment is a factor that encompasses all of those mentioned above. Many researchers state that a positive change should start within the educational system, as a positive working environment is crucial for fostering EFL teachers' wellbeing and overall job satisfaction (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Sulis, 2023; Taylor, 2024). In schools, the support from administration and overall productive relationship dynamic with colleagues can foster a sense of community and collaboration. In the environment where teachers feel supported, they are more likely to feel motivated and committed to their work, which improves overall teacher retention rates (Taylor, 2024: 23). Alternatively, a toxic environment can lead to feelings of isolation, stress and burnout. One of the problems that contributes to the unhealthy atmosphere at schools is workplace bullying (WPB). Despite the fact that bullying is very often associated

solely with students, studies have shown that WPB performed by other teachers, administrators, or even students and their parents in school systems is pervasive. The survey conducted in 2010 by the National Education Association (NEA) revealed that approximately 18% of teachers reported experiencing WPB from someone at their current school, while in the urban areas the percentage rose to 36% (Scheeler, 2021: 123). Bullying behaviors in the workplace come in many different forms, such as withholding important information that could affect one's job performance, assignment of unreasonable tasks with impossible deadlines, and failing to recognize or acknowledge one's colleague's good job performance. The consequences for victims of WPB are severe and even harmful, including reduced self-confidence, absenteeism, loss of sleep and appetite, anxiety, depression, and even substance use (Mercer, 2020: 122). There are several reasons why toxic atmosphere arises in educational settings. According to Mercer and Gregersen (2020), this is often the result of overworked staff, lack of role clarity, limited autonomy, and gossiping among colleagues. Babic et al. (2022) also provided examples where male colleagues, who "had the power", negatively influenced certain teachers' productivity and created unhealthy working relationships. This case study does not specify the form of toxic behaviors performed by male teachers in this workplace, however, some studies show that mistreatment of teachers can be verbal, non-verbal, or physical, and in some cases even includes sexual harassment (De Wet & Jacobs, 2021: 199).

Another issue that has been arising recently is online bullying within the teaching community. This problem is closely related to WPB, as online bullying often reflects similar dynamics among colleagues at schools. Due to the increasing popularity of the use of social media, unfortunately, some educators started to engage in destructive behaviors that undermine professional respect towards other EFL teachers. One particularly concerning form of this trend is the public criticism of colleagues based on their accents or language proficiency, which once again adds to the phenomenon of native speakerism. There have been instances of EFL teachers recording videos where they "go undercover" and have a private lesson with their colleague, sometimes even disclosing the teacher's identity. These recordings usually contain negative comments regarding the educator's accent, methodologies and teaching techniques. Such actions not only breach professional ethics, but also supports harmful stereotypes and biases within the educational community. Criticizing another teacher's language abilities can detrimentally affect the targeted teacher's self-esteem and overall wellbeing, undermine trust and respect among fellow teachers, and create a toxic environment. Addressing the issue of online bullying could help promoting a healthier online space for teachers to communicate.

One more significant aspect of a supportive work environment is the encouragement for

teachers to be autonomous and openly express their beliefs. Letting teachers understand that their opinions matter and involving them in important decision-making processes can increase teachers' sense of belonging and professional fulfillment. In the study conducted by Babic et al. (2022), six participants emphasized the importance of having their voice being heard. One of the teachers mentioned monthly meetings organized by the dean where everybody could speak about their concerns and suggestions. Another participant talked about the "bottom-up" approach where program development involved input from the teachers (Babic et al., 2022: 21). Giroux (1985: 3) also stresses the important role of teachers in shaping the purposes and conditions of schooling. Educators must be given the right to view the curricula critically and constantly raise questions regarding content, teaching methodologies and goals within their classroom, making them active and reflective participants of the educational process. Having an opportunity to voice their opinions within educational settings is essential for their wellbeing, as the feeling of being valued is extremely important for one's mental health and professional growth.

In conclusion to this section, it is important to once more state that understanding and promoting wellbeing among teachers is important for fostering an effective educational environment. By applying a proactive approach that pays more attention to mental health of educators, educational institutions can create a supportive culture to enhance teacher satisfaction. The reduction of stress, managed workload, and adequate support systems are essential in creating a space where teachers can develop professionally and personally, ultimately leading to a positive impact on the entire educational community.

## **1.2 Theoretical Foundations of Journaling in Promoting Teacher Wellbeing**

The reflective practice of journaling and therapeutic benefits of journaling have been gaining their recognition in the recent research, showing that it can help people reconstruct their personal narratives while navigating complex psychological challenges and opening new opportunities in their lives (Dodd, 2019; Faccio, Turco & Iudici, 2019). This section outlines the theoretical foundations of journaling as a narrative and self-reflective tool that could be used in enhancing teacher wellbeing. Examining the theoretical concepts allows to gain a better understanding of how personal narrative practices, such as diary keeping, serve not only as a mean of documenting one's life experiences and important events, but also as an effective and powerful mechanism for managing stress and fostering resilience among EFL teachers. The first subsection discusses how self-reflection and writing personal narratives contributes to a

better understanding of one's emotions and challenges, and acknowledgement of the individual's successes. The importance of this practice for EFL teachers is also explained, as journaling allows them to gain insights into their professional development and personal growth, which consequently helps them to build their resilience and improve their wellbeing. In the second subsection, more focus is drawn to the concept of diary itself in the scope of using it for reflective practices and emphasizing its role in stress management and emotional regulation. Finally, the third subsection explores the advantages of keeping a diary for EFL teachers. This part discusses how regular journaling can enhance teacher's resilience and serve as a tool for continuous development through self-reflection practices.

### **1.2.1 The Role of Self-Reflection and Narrative in Enhancing Teacher Wellbeing**

Recent studies have shown a strong link between self-reflection and employee wellbeing. According to Van Seggelen-Damen and Van Dam (2016), those workers who are engaged in self-reflective practices show a decrease in emotional exhaustion and gain a better ability to tackle issues from different perspectives. This approach also allows these employees to become more insightful of the imbalances in their personal needs and feelings and make certain changes in the working situations to their advantage (Van Seggelen-Damen & Van Dam, 2016: 21). Stevens and Cooper (2009) claim that reflection is an active and intentional intellectual process that results in learning from one's experience, both on the informational and transformational levels. The scholars also refer to older studies that have proven reflection to be helpful in coping with complex issues in the working environment, as it starts from the feelings of discomfort in a specific situation and the urge to return to a balanced state of the individual (Stevens & Cooper, 2009: 21). A similar notion that has been studied in comparison with self-reflection is rumination, which is described as a less adaptive strategy usually associated with uncritical circular thinking processes and an excessive focus on a problem that in result causes worrisome thoughts and difficulties in constructive thinking (Van Seggelen-Damen & Van Dam, 2016: 21). When comparing these two notions, Van Seggelen-Damen and Van Dam (2016) relate reflection with positive effects and consider it to be an adaptive cognitive strategy, while rumination, on the other hand, is regarded as a maladaptive strategy that usually generates negative emotions. Despite the fact that these two definitions might seem polar at first, reflection and rumination should not be regarded as mutually exclusive, but rather co-occurring. According to findings provided by Van Seggelen-Damen and Van Dam (2016: 28), workers

that engaged in self-reflective practices sometimes found themselves generating negative thoughts and inclined to ruminate instead. Even though no strong correlation between these two processes has been proven, it highlights the need for guided and structured reflective practices where individuals are encouraged to focus on balanced perspectives, acknowledging both positive and negative sides of a situation to avoid pitfalls of excessive rumination.

When it comes to EFL teachers, it is highly important for them to implement self-reflection practices into their routine in order to maintain their wellbeing and foster their professional growth. However, very often teachers neglect such practices due to a tight schedule and high levels of exhaustion after a long working day (Brierton & Gkonou, 2022: 40). Nevertheless, it is recommended for educators to prioritize self-reflection as an essential part of their daily activities due to the effectiveness of these exercises. Sulis (2023) claims that it is useful particularly for those who are only at the beginning of their career in education, as it actually helps to reduce the risks of burnout and attrition among novice teachers. According to the scholar, such practices should also be introduced into teacher training programs in order to demonstrate future educators how they can minimize the consequences of one's perfectionism and avoid professional fatigue (Sulis, 2023: 74).

Self-reflection is also closely related to mindfulness and understanding of one's emotions that have been mentioned in section 1.1.1. Teachers experience a wide range of positive and negative emotions throughout the day as a response to challenges that they face at work, and these feelings affect their overall wellbeing, so it is important for EFL teachers to build their emotional awareness. This term refers to the ability to recognize and understand the diverse feelings that human beings encounter, be able to label them and let yourself experience those emotions without judgement. Even negative feelings should be accepted and, most importantly, reflected on (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020: 129). Moreover, the ability to understand one's own emotions and be self-aware is highly important in order to understand other people's feelings and communicate successfully. Developing this emotional awareness is crucial for EFL educators in order to advance their socio-emotional competence and increase their overall wellbeing. However, while experiencing different emotional challenges is natural for human beings, in the educational settings it is equally important for teachers to cultivate effective strategies for managing their feelings. The ability to regulate one's emotions is a crucial skill that does not let teachers' emotions influence their work, including effectiveness of their instruction, and relationships with colleagues and students. According to Mercer and Gregersen (2020: 106), students that notice their teacher's anxiety by witnessing specific facial expressions, body language and tone of voice may start to unconsciously mirror their instructor

and experience similar symptoms, such as increased levels of cortisol in their brains. Moreover, it is also vital for educators to recognize the importance of not allowing these emotional challenges to affect their personal lives outside of work (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020: 84), as bringing work-related emotions home can lead to increased stress and cause tension in personal relationships outside of school. Thus, teachers should establish boundaries between their personal and professional lives in order to maintain their effectiveness and overall wellbeing. Nevertheless, this brings teachers into liminal space where they do not have a safe outlet for their negative or even positive emotions. The reason behind this could be the factors that have been mentioned above in section 1.1.3. For instance, certain personal characteristics such as self-consciousness, lack of self-confidence and anxiety can prevent educators from sharing their successes or concerns with their colleagues because of the fear of being judged by more professional teachers. Workplace bullying can also result in lower will to share one's feelings with colleagues. Apart from that, the changed societal status of teachers can also be the reason, since nowadays, teachers are frequently expected to be able to manage all the challenges they face at work without seeking help from the administrators or students' parents. All these issues lead to harmful emotional suppression, which can consequently result in burnout and negatively influence teachers' mental health and wellbeing. As a result, it is crucial to engage teachers in ecological practices that could provide them with a channel for externalizing their thoughts and feelings, and a structured way to process and understand their experiences.

Another important issue that needs to be taken care of is the wellbeing and the role of self-reflection in the career of novice EFL teachers. All the factors mentioned in section 1.1.3 heavily influence those teachers who are just starting their career, and sometimes difficulties that they face at work can be experienced on an even stronger level. Fantilli and McDougall (2009: 814) use the metaphor of being "thrown into the deep end to sink or swim", which very graphically describes the overwhelming and even shocking reality that many novice teachers have to approach. Furthermore, Petrón and Uzum (2016: 343) provide a comparison between beginning teachers and resident doctors who practice for four years under the supervision of highly experienced mentors, during which they receive continuous feedback and guidance. This allows resident doctors to develop their skills progressively and manage their responsibilities effectively. In contrast, newly qualified teachers are often imposed with duties that are as demanding as those of their more qualified colleagues without proper supervision, which leads to feelings of discouragement and even failure (Petrón & Uzum, 2016: 343). Scholars believe that despite the strong evidence of increase in professionalism after the first few years of teaching, many educators still decide to quit their profession due to the lack of proper support

(Fantilli & McDougall, 2009: 814). In this case, engaging in self-reflective practices can be rather beneficial for beginner teachers, as it can have major positive effects on their wellbeing and professional growth during the most challenging first years of their teaching career. For instance, these practices can be useful in learning how to identify, prioritize and address teaching problems. Dealing with each issue gradually and one at a time allows to accomplish goals more effectively and helps teachers to develop as a professional (Petrón & Uzum, 2016: 343).

### **1.2.2 Defining Journaling as a Personal Narrative Tool for Reflective Practices and Stress Management**

Journaling, as one of the forms of a personal narrative, serves as an effective tool for an individual to engage in self-reflective practices in a safe space and express their feelings freely and without judgement. Self-narratives have been gaining their popularity in the recent years, finding their outlet in different forms and genres. These stories do not necessarily have to be simply accounts of one's personal experiences, but they could also be explorations of self and its connection to others in sociocultural contexts (Chang, 2008: 41). Journals, or diaries, are examples of such narratives. Some scholars distinguish between these two terms and provide definitions based on the purpose of the writing, while other use them interchangeably. For instance, Rose (2019: 348, 350) defines diaries as an "artefact of daily record keeping (e.g. to record meetings or events that occurred on each day)" that lacks certain structure and consistency, which makes some of their data irrelevant for scientific research. Journals, on the other hand, are often more purposeful and ask participants to record very specific information related to the research topic (Rose, 2019: 351). Stevens and Cooper (2009) use the terms "diary" and "journal" as synonyms, and often refer to "diary keeping" as "journaling", which will also be done in this study. They define the term "journal" as a "dated chronicle of events and ideas, which includes the personal responses and reflections of the writer (or writers) on those events and ideas". According to the scholars, recording one's experiences gives the writer an opportunity to take a moment to distance oneself and speculate on possible correlations between their observations and existing experiences, and afterwards reread their writing and find potential underlying assumptions and beliefs that might contribute to positive outcomes of the situation (Stevens & Cooper, 2009: 25). Moreover, these new insights could help approach future experiences with a fresh outlook and foster subsequent learning (*ibid.*). Brierton and Gkonou (2022: 45) add to the idea that writing down one's feelings, especially physically with

a pen and paper, helps to organize ideas and reflect on them by recognizing harmful self-beliefs and thinking patterns.

Diary keeping or journaling can take multiple forms, and “Reimagining the Diary” project is one of the examples of an effective implementation of various multimodal practices into teacher’s daily routine. Led by Kelly (2022), this initiative involved secondary school teachers in working with a “Diary Toolkit” (DT), a set various activities that could encourage reflection. These activities included storyboarding, audio recording, free writing, doodling and affirmation writing. At the end of the project, 93.3% of the participants reported noticeable improvements in their wellbeing after working with the DT, which proves that reflective practices do help teachers to gain better insights about themselves and their wellbeing. The multimodal and sensory aspect of diaries also added to the ability of the participants to reflect on their thoughts on a deeper level, and provided teachers with a therapeutic outlet for their creativity. Kelly (2022: 11) also highlights the important aspect of the materiality of the diary, as it allowed anchoring teachers’ feelings and representing their multifaceted selves within a material “beloved” object. This presumably helped teachers ground themselves and make abstract emotions more tangible and manageable. Finally, it provides teachers with a private and safe space to articulate their thoughts and emotions, as it helps them to distance themselves from issues they had to tackle at school and create a completely new and fresh perspective on the problems they needed to solve.

The notion of a journal entails six attributes. According to Stevens and Cooper (2009: 5), a journal is written (using various writing utensils such as pens or pencils, digital and technological writing instruments, voice recorders, visual images or videos), dated (following a sequential order and providing context in order to trace the evolution of the writer’s ideas and perceptions), informal (usually does not follow the established writing rules as it takes the form of a conversation with oneself), flexible (incorporates varying types of entries, formatting and purposes), private (depending on the presence or absence of the audience), and archival (may or may not be saved after completion). These attributes can be particularly helpful for EFL teachers. Written and dated nature of journals helps teachers document their experiences and track their professional growth and development over time. By keeping their diary entries informal and flexible, they can unwind and reflect on their teaching practices and emotions freely and creatively. This also allows them to experiment with different formats and come up with new ideas more easily. As for the private aspect, EFL teachers can decide whether they want to keep their thoughts and feelings to themselves or share them with a colleague or administrator that they trust in order to get constructive feedback. This act of sharing diary



entries with colleagues or a professional coach can create a sense of belonging and companionship, as it helps teachers to understand that they are not alone in a challenging situation. Additionally, feedback from coworkers can help in finding positive ways of coping with certain problems and give a fresh external viewpoint (Brierton & Gkonou, 2022: 45). Finally, the archival feature of diaries allows instructors to reflect and learn from their experiences if they decide not to dispose of their writing.

When it comes to stress management, journaling can be an effective tool too. Aguilar (2018: 4) claims that there has been a 40% increase of teacher attrition among first-year educators in the past two decades, and stress is rated as one of the top reasons for this trend. This alarming statistic highlights the need to implement stress-managing techniques into teachers' lives. Travers (2010: 208) states that one of the most useful elements of continuous diary keeping is the opportunity to detect the relationship between stressors and reactions of the individual towards them. One of the participants of the study stated that seeing their stressed behavior recorded on paper allowed understanding the irrationality of their actions and motivated this person to change the way they react to stressful situations (Travers, 2010: 210). This once again confirms that this reflective practice helps to make sense of one's emotions triggered by stressors, as writing down allows an individual to gain clarity and perspective about a certain problem (Travers, 2010: 215). Apart from that, keeping a diary can be helpful to also calm or uplift the individual when they are in a stressful situation to reduce work stress (Kelly et al., 2022: 265). Journaling, as an immediate stress-relief technique, can help teachers process their feelings, reduce anxiety, and prevent burnout.

### **1.2.3 The Benefits of Diary Keeping for Teacher Wellbeing**

Diary keeping has proven to have a variety of benefits, especially in terms of enhancing wellbeing and managing stress, and research has shown that regular journaling can have various positive outcomes in this regard. Stevens and Cooper (2009), for instance, presented findings from James Pennebaker, an American social psychologist, that show evidence that journal writing can improve both mental and physical health. Over the ten years of research, people who participated in the study wrote both about their traumatic experiences and trivial events, and as a result, there was a 50% drop in the number of people who turned to the help of health centers (Stevens & Cooper, 2009: 15). Apart from that, other studies indicate a decline in absenteeism from work and depressive symptoms, improvements in relationships, and increased appreciation for life among those who consistently wrote about their problems,

including those that they were worried about their future (*ibid.*). Another proof for the healing benefits of diary keeping would be the results of the project conducted by Laitinen and Ettore (2007) in Finland among women who considered themselves depressed or were diagnosed with clinical depression. Among different therapeutic techniques used in this project were also journaling practices, in which the participants had to perform weekly diary tasks in order to understand the way their depression became part of their lives. This way, women could use their diary as a tool for self-reflection and assistance in coping with psychological and physical pain (Laitinen & Ettore, 2007: 6). At the end of the project, the analysis of the diary entries revealed the therapeutic effect of journaling, as it helped the participants to gain self-knowledge and self-understanding that consequently allowed for a change in the women's lives through meaningful appreciation of themselves and their place in the world (Laitinen & Ettore, 2007: 17).

Another benefit is connected with building one's resilience through diary keeping. During the "Reimagining the Diary" project, some teachers noted that writing down even small positive events allowed them to "offload" and start noticing good things that sometimes got lost in the busy schedule (Kelly et al., 2022: 271). This practice of focusing on positive experiences and celebrating successes can help enhance resilience by promoting a more optimistic outlook on person's professional life. The process of acknowledging one's strengths and achievements can boost the person's confidence while writing them down, and re-reading old entries afterwards to follow the positive changes in the individual's professional path. Building resilience can also be done with the help of visualization, affirmations, and setting intentions, which could be a part of one's diary entries. These empowering techniques create healthy habits, new self-narratives of what the person wants to become, and serve as a motivation for improvement (Aguilar, 2018: 80). Visualization involves creating an image in one's head of what the person wishes to be true, and this image could be described with words or drawn on paper. For instance, Aguilar (2018: 81) recommends teachers to visualize themselves in a healthy professional community, imagining possible dialogues they could have with their colleagues and their reactions to those conversations. The idea behind this technique is creating an alternative reality, and imagining its existence can help an individual mentally prepare for an eventual real-life scenario. Creating a potential image can actually help an individual find it in real life, as letting go of an unwanted reality and creating a new one could lead you to an environment you actually aspire to live in (*ibid.*). This practice can raise confidence and reduce anxiety when facing certain challenges, for example, when the teachers is confronted with disrespectful behavior at work. Engaging in a creative visualization exercise can give a teacher motivation

to approach challenges in a more constructive manner. Another technique for creating a new narrative is through affirmations, which involves saying or writing down positive statements that reinforce desired beliefs or outcomes of a person. This practice has a variety of benefits, which not only helps to build one's resilience, but also contributes to the overall wellbeing and even physical health. According to Aguilar (2018: 81), saying positive affirmations raises the levels of feel-good hormones and stimulates the brain to create new "positive thought" neurons, which, as a result, can reshape individual's mindset and emotional responses. These statements can meet the variety of needs of EFL teachers and can be altered to match specific professional or personal goals they want to achieve, the examples being "I am proud of myself", "I make a positive difference for my students", "I am confident in my teaching skills", "I handle challenges well", etc. These affirmations can be written down in one's diary daily, gradually building sense of accomplishment and one's worth. Finally, intention setting is a practice that is very similar to affirmations. The main difference between these two techniques is that intention setting focuses on a specific goal that is defined clearly, for example, "I am going to be calm and patient with my fifth period today" (Aguilar, 2018: 82). These intentions give a transparent idea and direction in which the person needs to act, and it involves both affirming one's capability of successfully achieving something and creating attainable plans to follow. All these practices can help EFL teachers to clarify their priorities, maintain focus and stay motivated towards their professional and personal development. By combining these techniques in their diary writing routine, teachers can effectively build their resilience, self-efficacy, and consequently enhance their wellbeing.

The reflective nature of journaling can also help EFL teachers to become more mindful in terms of their emotions, and this characteristic has a variety of benefits too. As it has been discussed above, it is extremely important for teachers to be self-aware of their feelings and be able to regulate them, so that they do not influence their professional and personal lives in a negative way. An important part of building this emotional self-awareness is recognizing one's emotional triggers, which Mercer and Gregersen (2020: 191) define as "a topic, experience, or issue that typically causes a specific type of emotional response in an individual". The way we respond to those triggers is also the aspect that should be taken into consideration. Our responses may include physical feelings, thoughts, specific behavior and actions, and noticing these patterns can help us develop effective coping strategies and modify these responses. Eventually, by understanding one's own emotions a person not only gains insights into their own feelings, but it also gets a better understanding of other people's emotions, which results in building healthy positive relationships. There is a big variety of ways to record situations that

trigger strong emotions, and the most suggested one in therapy is the emotions tracking diary, which usually takes a form of a table. An example of such practice can be seen below in Table 1.

Table 1. *Understanding Your Emotional Triggers exercise adapted from Travers (2010) and Mercer & Gregersen (2020).*

Emotion	Event (Trigger)	Response (Physical Feelings, Thoughts, Behavior, Actions)	Outcome
Joy			
Pride			
Excitement			
Anxiety			
Anger			
...			

Nevertheless, time constraints among teachers often become a problem in being consistent with these techniques, as their busy schedule can hinder educators in their effort to create a diary writing habit. In the “Reimagining the Diary” project, many teachers reported time being an issue on different levels. First, they often found themselves in a situation where they had to choose between what they wanted to do and what they needed to do, as the demanding nature of their professional responsibilities required them constantly to be “care-givers” and tackle issues related to work (Kelly et al., 2022: 270). Thus, little time was left for such personal activities as journaling. However, journaling and different self-reflection exercises are recommended to be performed on a regular basis, as only this way they would show long-lasting effects over a period of time (Brierton & Gkonou, 2022: 45). Researchers highly advised participants of the “Reimagining the Diary” to make diary keeping part of their routine, despite the fact that initially many teachers complained about time constraints due to their busy schedule, and, as it has already been stated above, those teachers who eventually engaged in this practice regularly showed very good improvements regarding their wellbeing. Stevens and Cooper (2009: 15) also state that consistent writing for even fifteen minutes a day over a four-day period is already enough to show significant improvements that could last for six weeks. This proves that even a minimal daily commitment to journaling can have positive results.

According to Gabryś-Barker (2009), diary keeping can be particularly useful for novice EFL

teachers in terms of their professional and personal development and a way to acknowledge their strong and weak points when analyzing their teaching experiences as trainees, particularly focusing on critical incidents that happened in classrooms. While engaging in the reflective practice of journaling, they are able to inspect their teaching identity and understand their teaching beliefs, becoming more professionally aware. This allows them to reflect on their teaching strategies, encourages them to search for more theory and validate it in the classroom (Gabryś-Barker, 2009: 425). Additionally, they become aware not only of themselves, but also of their learners. This motivational aspect of diary writing is crucial to cultivate the will to change and improve among those who are only starting their teaching career.

## **Chapter II. The Study**

In this chapter, a detailed overview of the research is provided. First, the background context of the researcher and her motivation for conducting this study is outlined. Then, the research questions guiding the study are presented, followed by a description of the participants, including the researcher herself and fifteen interviewed EFL teachers. Next, the research tools employed in the study and procedures used for data collection are discussed.

The study was conducted in several steps. The first stage was the preparation and framing during which the research questions reflecting the focus of the study were identified. This phase was important to set the right direction of the research and understand what cultural and social issues and aspects should be addressed through the study of the researcher's personal experience. Then, the review of existing literature on the topic was carried out in order to gain insights into the current state of the research in this field, and to identify theoretical frameworks and existing research gaps. This also allowed to define the key themes and issues that were to be investigated. The second stage was data collection, where primary data, namely diary entries that served as the foundation for the study, was collected and digitalized. Finally, to gain a broader perspective and gain more insights into the concept of teacher wellbeing, several interviews were conducted among other EFL teachers, and their answers were qualitatively analyzed in relation to the research questions.

### **2.1 The Context of the Study**

Throughout my academic path, I have witnessed countless struggles my teachers had to face. During our conversations outside the classroom settings, they often openly shared their worries and confessed how frustrated they felt having to constantly break themselves to fit into the system they often did not agree with. Some of them tried their best to fight for changes; others simply obeyed the rules and went along with the educational structure. I believe that both positions are valid and have the right to exist. However, once I started teaching English myself, I realized that I began to struggle with the same issues, both physical and psychological. Seeing myself and my colleagues deprived of sleep, having to suppress our emotions and not having a say regarding the curriculum made me question which side I wanted to take in this complex education environment. At some point, while reading a chapter from the work of Cummins (2021: 342), I encountered the following phrase: "To make headway, you have to go against the flow". These words resonated with me so much and have been stuck in my head ever since.

With this study, I want to contribute to the fight for teachers' voices that have been long silenced. As a person who has been keeping a diary for almost a decade, I have always believed in the importance of documenting one's ideas, experiences and emotions on paper. This way of self-reflection helps me to actually slow down, listen to my thoughts and acknowledge them, especially when I have to silence them throughout the day. My journaling habit has deeply influenced my approach to this study, in which I aimed to explore how this tool could support my fellow EFL colleagues in managing their wellbeing and challenges of the profession.

The foundation of the study is comprised of two rich sources of qualitative data. My personal diary offers a detailed introspective account of my experience working as an online EFL teacher over a period of six months, and its analysis reveals the recurring patterns and challenges I faced during my work. Fifteen interviews, conducted with EFL teachers from Russia and Kazakhstan, provide an additional perspective on the teacher wellbeing and explore common themes and shared struggles. Data acquired from these conversations helps to understand the way other EFL teachers address the issues raised in this study. Together, these two sources of information create a comprehensive view of the complex professional landscape of EFL teachers.

## **2.2 Research Questions**

The study was guided by two research questions.

The first research question was the following: "What factors influence EFL teachers' wellbeing?" It aims to identify and analyze the complex aspects of the teaching profession, especially in the context of language teaching. Understanding these factors could provide a profound idea of positive and negative influences present in teachers' lives and contribute to further development of coping strategies that could be applied in educational settings.

The second research question focused on the role of the reflective practice of journaling and its influence on teachers' psychological and physical wellbeing: 'How does diary keeping impact the wellbeing of EFL teachers?' Here, the potential benefits and drawbacks of documenting one's experiences in the context of ELT are explored.

By attempting to answer these research questions, this study aims to contribute valuable insights to the field of language education and offer practical recommendations for maintaining EFL teachers' wellbeing.

## **2.3 Participants**

This section presents the participants involved in the study, including the researcher herself and fifteen EFL teachers who took part in the interviews. Their experiences played a crucial role in answering the research questions, as they revealed many different aspects related to teacher wellbeing and possible implications of diary keeping in the daily routine of an EFL teacher. The first section focuses on the researcher's professional and personal background, and the way her journaling practice has helped her to reflect on her teaching experience. The second section provides information about fifteen EFL teachers who were interviewed to gain a broader perspective on the topic of the study. The teachers' profiles include such information as their home country, age, gender, number of years of experience, and their current role. The participants for the interview were asked a set of seven questions related to the focus of the research, and their insights were crucial for giving more profound answers to the research questions.

### **2.3.1 Me, Myself, and I**

I was born in Moscow, Russia, and from the early age, I had a dream to become a teacher. I spent a lot of time playing games, where stuffed animals were my students, and I was teaching them. I even had a little blackboard, a set of chalk, and a little notebook to keep track of my students' grades. I saw teaching as something fun, something that brought me joy. It was not until Year 7 of middle school when I suddenly understood what I actually wanted to teach – English. I was lucky to have passionate English teachers throughout my language-learning path, and I saw every one of them as my role models. I was slowly absorbing their teaching techniques and experience, preparing for final exams in the meantime. After successfully being admitted to my dream university, I started teaching privately. I can still remember my first lesson. Shaking, I walked into the house where my student lived, not knowing what to expect from a six-year-old boy who I have never seen before. I did not know what to expect from his parents, and what to expect from real teaching, not playing with stuffed toys or giving a fun lesson as a part of a holiday back in high school. Surprisingly, it went well. My student liked my printed handouts and an orange ball-shaped tiger toy that I brought with me. That is how it all started and has not ended yet. Since then, I have taught many students of different ages and different backgrounds, I have completed several internships both in my Bachelor's and my Master's degrees, I have tried teaching offline and online, and I am not planning to stop any



time soon. Despite the challenges that I have to face, I am still willing to teach. I am willing to pass on my knowledge and experience, and I love to see my students grow and learn. I love to see their gratitude, their pride in their achievements, and their excitement every lesson. It has not always been easy and perfect, because nothing is. Not every lesson that I have given was interesting or engaging. Not every student was happy with the way I teach. Not every parent was satisfied with how much their child has learnt. Not every colleague agreed with my perspectives on education. However, this is normal, because I am not perfect, and I will never be. It has taken me many years to understand that is impossible to meet everyone's needs, but you can try, and that is what counts. You can try to do your best, and your best is good enough. In my five years of experience as an English teacher, apart from private tutoring I have tried working at two different online schools, and both times, I worked with adult students aged from eighteen. My first experience was in my senior year in February 2022, seven months before my immigration to Italy to study for my Master's degree. This period from February 2022 to November 2022 will not be considered in detail in this study due to the lack of diary entries. After quitting this job, I turned back to working at a different online school in December 2023. This school focused on the "caring" approach, and it aimed to foster secure and inclusive environment for students. The main principles of the school were empathy, modern educational trends and wellbeing of both the students and teachers. Educators were required to take into account individual needs and backgrounds of students in order to create personalized programs and lessons for each of them, which were delivered through online platforms. One of the key features of the school was its emphasis on the holistic student and teacher support by providing optional therapy sessions with a professionally trained psychologist. The counseling service gave learners and staff an opportunity to address a wide range of issues, including academic stress, personal problems, burnout, and others. After some time, the school also started providing teachers with body therapy sessions, offering an additional layer of physical wellbeing support. This practice intertwined the physical and psychological aspects of teacher wellbeing and aimed at preventing burnout, teacher attrition, and contributed to the overall teacher effectiveness and satisfaction. Despite a variety of benefits and support that the school provided to both teachers and students, while working at this school I still had some issues and challenges that I struggled with on a personal level. This period was well documented in my diary, because in the difficult times, I have always turned to journaling. Writing down my feelings helped me acknowledge my emotions and express my concerns without the fear of being judged, and those diary entries form the foundation for this study. By analyzing these entries, I aim to explore how journaling helped me cope with the problems and overwhelming

emotions I experienced during that period.

I have been keeping my diary for almost ten years, and the reason why I decided to start journaling is actually rather unusual. In 2015, I was introduced to a computer game “Life is Strange”, where the main protagonist Max Caulfield, an 18-year-old photography student, has supernatural abilities to rewind time, and the player explores the story while she documents her experiences in a journal. In her entries, Max records her adventures, fears and concerns, and decorates her writing with stickers and doodles. In this journal, she also keeps some information about other characters, different items, and photographs. While playing the game and following Max’s story, I was greatly inspired by her way of capturing those important moments of her life and decided to start doing the same. I was consistently writing in my diary from December 2015 until July 2016 before I started going through major changes in my life. Year 2017 was completely absent in the diary entries, and only one diary entry was written in July 2018. This period of my life coincides with my high school years, final exams and my first relationship, all of which created very stressful conditions. Whenever I wanted to open my diary and note something down, I felt guilty and thought this would be a waste of time, since studying was more important at that time. In March 2020, when the COVID-19 lockdown started, I returned to keeping my diary as a way to escape into a safe space where I could express my feelings and emotions freely. Another gap appeared between January 2021 and April 2023, which was also marked by huge changes and important events in my life, like preparation for graduation from my Bachelor’s degree, application to Italian universities, and further moving abroad. At times, I was ashamed to write anything, again thinking that this would be useless or that certain situations were not worth recording. I even questioned the validity of my emotions that I felt during some of the events, thinking that they were not significant enough or were even imagined. In April 2023, I broke the silence by writing down the following entry: “It never gets better. It never gets easier. I’ve forgotten completely what it feels like to be happy. To be free from all the worries” (Researcher’s diary entry, April 28, 2023). Since then, I have been regularly writing in my diary as a promise to myself. I promised to never dismiss my emotions or diminish my worries, and I promised to write down whatever I thought was important to me and whatever I wanted to keep as a memory.

The format of my diary entries was also heavily inspired by the design of Max’s journal. Its multimodal format allowed her to record her story in a variety of creative ways, with her doodles capturing important moments, and her photographs allowing her to literally go back in time. According to Kelly (2022: 4), adding this layer of multimodality to the reflective practice of journaling allows the person to represent their ideas and concepts through multiple forms. In

my diary, I followed the same idea and incorporated a variety of different elements to enrich my personal reflections with additional meaningful symbols. By decorating my diary entries with drawings, colorful stickers, tickets and other physical objects, I created deeply personal and visually engaging records of my experiences, making the journaling process more enjoyable and allowing myself to express emotions and memories in more tangible ways that could not be captured in words. This way, this creative process helped me connect more closely with my thoughts and feelings, making the journaling practice even more therapeutic and grounding.



Figure 1. *Researcher's diary.*

I have always kept my diary somewhere close, usually on my desk or on my bedside table. This way I could turn journaling into a regular habit and incorporate it into my daily routine. As it can be seen in Figure 2 below, the cover of the diary is bright green, decorated with stickers – this served as a reminder of always having an opportunity to write down my thoughts whenever I needed it.



Figure 2. *Researcher's diary front cover.*

Turner et al. (2022) did a similar thing in their autoethnographic research. In order to encourage the first participant to consistently reflect on their experience within the study, the diary prompts were placed in a purple folder next to their bed of the author in order to prompt their daily reflection (Turner et al., 2022: 3). This created an inviting space for self-reflection, making it more accessible and helping the participant to engage in this practice more willingly.

### **2.3.2 Fellow Teachers**

In addition to the researcher's personal reflections, a series of interviews with fifteen EFL teachers was conducted in order to understand the way my colleagues perceived the concept of teacher wellbeing in the context of their personal experience. The semi-structured interviews aimed to explore the challenges EFL teachers are facing nowadays and the ways they address certain issues in their work, as well as their opinion on journaling as a reflective tool to maintain their wellbeing. The questions that were asked focused on the key aspects of this study, such as the perception of the role of EFL teachers in the modern society, coping with stress, reflective practices, and journaling. As an introduction at the beginning of the interview, the teachers were required to give a general overview of their work experience, considering how long they have been working in the profession, what age groups they have taught, and whether they have experience in working offline and online. Most of the interviewees had around six years of teaching experience, and many of them have worked not only as teachers at public educational institutions, such as schools or language courses, but also as private tutors. Additionally, all teachers had experience working with students of various age groups and diverse backgrounds, having worked with both school students and adults. Some of the teachers also stated that at some point of their career they decided to quit their job at public state schools and made private practice their main source of income. Moreover, several participants were not initially coming from ELT academic backgrounds, but graduated from closely related fields, such as English philology or English translation studies, and then later decided to transition into teaching. Their desire to experiment and explore different career opportunities often came from either the ability to use teaching as their additional income, or their discovery of their passion for education. Sometimes the participants even pursued a second degree in ELT to acquire necessary qualifications and deepen their expertise after discovering their enthusiasm for pedagogy.

Table 2 below presents the overview of the participants, providing interviewee identifiers

further used to refer to their specific responses, interviewee information containing participants' age, gender, country of origin, years of experience, background information and current working status, and general themes tackled during the conversation.

Table 2. *Participant Overview*

<b>Interviewee Identifier</b>	<b>Interviewee Information</b>	<b>General Themes</b>
Teacher 1	A 25-year-old female EFL teacher from Russia with 7 years of working experience. Has experience working at an online English school. Currently lives in Italy and works online as a private English tutor.	Joy, students' achievements, teacher-parent communication, stereotypes, lack of appreciation, thoughts about quitting, overthinking, therapy, teacher community, reflections on progress.
Teacher 2	A 23-year-old male EFL teacher from Russia with 6 years of working experience. Has experience working at a public state school. Currently working online as a private tutor.	Mixed experience, importance of feedback, feeling valued, imposter syndrome, workplace gossiping, useful school subject, openness to discussion, sleep deprivation, weight loss, personal space, problem of finding students for private practice, work-life balance.
Teacher 3	A 38-year-old female EFL teacher from Russia with around 10 years of working experience. Has experience working at an English language learning center. Currently lives in Italy and works as an online private English tutor.	Positive experience, sharing knowledge, problems with timing, gratitude, therapeutic effects of teaching, taking control over a situation, lack of patience, procrastination.
Teacher 4	A 24-year-old female EFL	Gaining experience, difficulties

	teacher from Russia with 7 years of working experience. Currently works as a private tutor and as a tutor for prisoners.	of beginning, traditional tools, new settings, immigration, different attitude, supportive working environment, advice from colleagues, diary as a way to process hard life situations, self-care mobile apps.
Teacher 5	A 29-year-old male EFL teacher from Russia with around 6 years of working experience. Currently working in the USA as a Russian as a foreign language teacher and an online private EFL tutor.	Rewarding, and nerve-racking experience, lack of progress, age gap, lack of respect, student motivation, responsibility, self-discipline, tiredness from communicating, avoiding conflicts, second language identity, multilingualism, tracking patterns, critical thinking, professionalism, language learning through diary writing.
Teacher 6	A 23-year-old female EFL teacher from Russia with 2 years of working experience. Currently working at a public state school.	Unmotivated students, disrespect, phone usage in class, sense of being useful for the society, doubting one's professionalism, advice from colleagues, therapeutic effects of diary keeping.
Teacher 7	A 24-year-old female EFL teacher from Kazakhstan with 2 years of working experience. Currently looking for a job.	Difficulties of working with a group of students, students' concentration and focus, criticism from parents and administrators, gratitude, additional unpaid workload, student motivation, physical

		strains, therapy, personal and professional diary, second/third language identity, benefits of handwriting.
Teacher 8	A 37-year-old female EFL teacher from Russia with 10 years of working experience. Currently working as a private English tutor.	Competitive market, change in profession, financial problems, high expectations from students' parents, weight gain, life-long learning, lack of physical activity, lack of respect from male students, negative experience of diary keeping.
Teacher 9	A 25-year-old female EFL teacher from Russia with 6 years of working experience. Currently working as an online private English tutor.	Misbehavior, students do not understand the purpose, difficulties teaching online, ability to choose students, high expectations, competition among teachers, creativity, multifaceted role of the teacher, burnout, venting, personal boundaries, mobile apps, finding patterns.
Teacher 10	A 33-year-old male EFL teacher from Russia with 14 years of working experience. Has experience working at university, as a private tutor, and at the language center. Currently working at the English language learning center.	ADHD students, misbehaving, challenging situations, physical activity to deal with stress, compromise, emotional diary, cyphering.
Teacher 11	A 24-year-old female former EFL teacher from Russia with	Multifaceted role of the teacher, students' tantrums,

	3.5 years of working experience. Has experience working as a private English tutor.	underappreciated profession, unreasonable working conditions, reflective practices, high expectations from parents, professional and personal growth.
Teacher 12	A 23-year-old female EFL teacher from Kazakhstan with 4.5 years of working experience. Has experience working at English language courses. Currently working online as a private English tutor.	Rewarding experience, diversity, digitalization of education, attention deficit, work-life balance, eyestrain, peer support, breathing techniques, teaching community.
Teacher 13	A 25-year-old female EFL teacher from Russia with 5 years of teaching experience. Currently works online as an English private tutor.	Teaching as a side job, guiding students, responsibility, repeating material, not working in a system, setting boundaries, feeling exhausted, energy demanding, preference for high levels.
Teacher 14	A 24-year-old female EFL teacher from Russia with 5 years of teaching experience. Has worked at a public state school. Currently working as a private English tutor both online and offline.	Physical strains, lack of respect, flexibility of tutoring, inspiration, Internet connection problems, lack of proper teacher training, students oversharing their personal information, teaching “real” English, fitting into the system, impostor syndrome, teaching as a service, anxiety, sleep deprivation, photo diary.
Teacher 15	A 25-year-old female EFL	Rewarding experience,



	<p>teacher from Russia with 6 years of teaching experience. Currently working online as an English private tutor.</p>	<p>teaching as a part-time job, boundaries and rules, imposter syndrome, ADHD, supportive and motivating teacher, physical strains, being an active listener, tutoring as a comfort zone, lack of professional progress, language learning through diary writing.</p>
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Participants for the interviews were selected among individuals who originated in Russian-speaking countries and work, or have worked, as EFL teachers. To ensure a broader perspective on the topics of the study, both novice and experienced teachers were interviewed. Thirteen participants were actively involved in teaching English in different educational settings, including public state schools, universities, English courses, online language schools, and private tutoring contexts. Two of the participants stopped working as EFL teachers at some point of their life due to different reasons but had at least two years of teaching experience prior to the interview. Twelve participants were already known to the researcher, through either professional networks or personal connections, and three more teachers were referred by one of the initial interviewees. This snowball sampling method allowed to overcome the problem of a potentially geographically dispersed population and ensured that the study included individuals who may have felt stigmatized or hesitant to participate in the study due to the unwillingness to show vulnerability or sensitivity that could arise while discussing personal topics (Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019: 3). By building trust and rapport, this network-based approach contributed to maintaining a supportive atmosphere during interviews where participants felt more comfortable sharing their experiences.

## 2.4 Research Tools and Data Collection Procedure

This section describes the research tools and methodology employed in the study, giving details regarding the approaches applied for collecting data. First, the fundamental principles of autoethnography are described, along with its advantages and limitations. Next, the process of conducting semi-structured interviews is outlined.

### **2.4.1 Diary and Autoethnography**

The main research method for this study is autoethnography. This qualitative research method is deeply rooted in self-reflection, and it focuses on using researcher's personal experience in order to analyze cultural background, personal beliefs, perspectives and observations (Adams et al., 2017: 1). According to Ellis et al. (2011: 273), it challenges traditional methods of conducting research and considers it as a political act of social justice and social consciousness. Cooper and Lilyea (2022: 197) state that autoethnography encompasses several traditional qualitative methods, including narrative research, autobiography, ethnography, and arts-based research. When comparing autoethnography, autobiography and ethnography, Ellis et al. (2011: 275) indicate that the center of autoethnographic research is the writings of personal experiences that are perceived through the lens of the author's culture identity. These experiences are critically analyzed and interpreted with the help of methodological tools and research literature, which allow making these certain cultural characteristics familiar for other people, who might be both insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers). Additionally, autoethnography often incorporates the use of interviews with cultural members and examination of relevant cultural artifacts in order to compare and contrast personal experiences, adding another layer to the autoethnographic study (Ellis et al., 2011: 277). As for autobiography, it primarily focuses on the narrative part of the writing, retroactively and selectively considering the life experiences. While providing detailed accounts of one's life, it typically lacks the critical analysis and broader cultural context that is crucial in autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011: 275). On the other hand, when doing ethnographic research, scholars become participant observers in the culture and take field notes while examining cultural practices, behaviors and beliefs in order to share the knowledge with insiders and outsiders (Ellis et al., 2011: 276). This peculiarity makes this type of research different from autoethnography where the researcher is both the subject and the observer of the study. However, autoethnographic studies have received certain criticism regarding their mixed nature. Ellis et al. (2011: 283) state that from the point of its characteristics similar to ethnography, autoethnography is often considered too artful and emotional, and is thought to lack scientific rigor, fieldwork and observations of other cultural members. Further critical claims regard autoethnographic data as biased and navel-gazed, while not enough time is devoted to developing hypothesis, theories, and conducting analysis. When it comes to connections with autobiography, autoethnography is criticized for not being aesthetic and artful enough. Despite these claims, the main idea of autoethnography is exactly disrupting the

polarization of science and art, adding emotional, artful and therapeutic layers to the rigorous and analytical nature of research.

To collect data for this study, the researcher's personal diary, kept since December 2015, was used. The diary entries were not written for research purposes, which adds authenticity and unfiltered nature of the data to this study and provides genuine accounts of the researcher's experiences. In order to conduct a rigorous research, certain criterion considering the time frame was set for this study. The time period which lasted from December 2023 to April 2024 was chosen due to the fact that it covered the researcher's experience working at an online language school as an EFL teacher, aligning with the focus on EFL teachers' wellbeing of this thesis. Each diary entry was written either at the end of the working day, or at the end of the week, depending on the time available for writing. The purpose of the journaling practice was to reflect on the situations that occurred during the lessons, and while having conversations with the school's administrators and managers. The writing process helped to acknowledge certain emotions and thoughts and understand the reasons behind specific actions and behaviors of the researcher in different cases. The number of diary entries was as follows: five in December, eight in January, six in February, four in March, and four in April, which makes up to twenty-seven entries. Another aspect that had to be considered was the ethical issues. Despite the fact that the researcher's personal diary was the primary source of data, there were other people also present in the diary entries. When conducting an autoethnographic research, it is important to take into account the protection of the researcher's own privacy, and confidentiality of individuals present in the self-narratives, either as active or non-active participants (Chang, 2008; Edwards, 2021). To address these ethical issues, certain measures were implemented. Any names, descriptions of individuals' appearances, and other information that could potentially disclose the identities of people present in the diary entries were removed. Additionally, prior to including any citations from diary entries in the research, all the content was carefully considered in order to prevent disclosure of any sensitive information about the individuals involved in the study that could potentially cause harm to their privacy. These measures were also taken in terms of the researcher's confidentiality, as it was important to maintain a balance between sharing personal experiences and maintaining personal boundaries.

#### **2.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

The interviews took around forty minutes on average and were conducted in different modes depending on the availability of the participants. Ultimately, one interview was conducted in

person, thirteen interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom, and one interview was conducted asynchronously in a form of text messages via a messenger app. The remote format of the interviews was used due to the geographical distance between the researcher and the teachers. Apart from that, it also offered teachers an opportunity to participate in the interview at the most convenient time and location. The form of an asynchronous interview provided the participant with an even more flexible way to formulate her responses in a thoughtful and profound way at any available moment, letting her spend more time on self-reflection of her experiences and take breaks when necessary. According to Ratislavová and Ratislav (2014: 454), participants also tend to be more focused during such interviews, and their responses are believed to be denser, more structured and explicit compared to face-to-face interviews. Additionally, it allowed the researcher to reflect more thoroughly on the participant's answers and formulate more detailed follow-up questions. However, there were certain drawbacks in both formats. Internet connection issues sometimes disrupted the flow of synchronous online interviews conducted via Zoom, affecting the spontaneity of responses. On the other hand, despite the fact that during asynchronous interviews the researcher could always text the participant for further clarifications of her responses, this mode still lacked the back-and-forth dynamic. In the end, the interviews still allowed to gather valuable qualitative data for this study. The interviews were composed of seven open-ended questions designed to explore the participants' experiences, challenges, emotions, and coping strategies (diary keeping or others) related to their work as EFL teachers. For those who did not have experience in journaling, questions were focused on alternative reflective and stress coping strategies they used to maintain their wellbeing. The interviews conducted in person and via Zoom were recorded and transcribed for better accessibility and the simplification of the analysis stage, while the text-based interview was compiled into one Word file and systematically organized. The interviewees gave their consent to be recorded and had an opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without explaining the reasons behind their decision, with their responses being removed. Overall, the conducted interviews gave the teachers an opportunity to voice their concerns and share their experiences that complemented and enriched the findings from the researcher's personal diary.

The choice of the semi-structured type of interview allowed for the exploratory manner of the discussion, where the usage of both pre-prepared guiding questions was combined with the follow-up questions that could arise as a response to the interviewee's reflections (Dörnyei, 2007: 136). The set of fixed questions was the following:

***Q1: How would you describe your overall experience working as an EFL teacher?***

This question allowed to narrow down the interviewees' narratives to a more precise description of their work, prompting them to give an evaluation of their teaching journey. The participants could describe their experience in any possible way, for example, using solely adjectives, providing specific examples, or any other way they thought was appropriate.

***Q2: What have been the main challenges you have faced in your teaching experience?***

This question was designed to uncover the key challenges that EFL teachers encounter in their professional lives, and identify the most common stressors. Understanding these challenges would allow narrowing down the focus of the study and providing possible techniques that could be used in supporting EFL teacher wellbeing more effectively.

***Q3: How do you think people perceive the role of English teachers these days?***

The third question touched upon the issue of the societal status of teachers discussed in this study and the way it could affect EFL teaching wellbeing. It aimed to reveal teachers' beliefs about the ways students, parents, colleagues, administrators, and society in general view them and their contribution.

***Q4: How has teaching influenced your wellbeing?***

The fourth question touched upon positive and negative impacts on the participants' physical and psychological wellbeing. This dual perspective allowed the study to highlight the complexity of teachers' experiences, and the dynamics in the ways teaching influenced the educators' wellbeing in the long term.

***Q5: How do you typically deal with stressful situations and emotional triggers in your teaching practice?***

The fifth question aimed at exploring different stress managing strategies that teachers use when they encounter problematic situations at work, and the way they address emotionally triggering events. This was crucial in identifying healthy and maladaptive coping mechanisms in order to reveal potential areas for further studies, and understanding whether journaling could provide additional support.

***Q6: Have you ever kept a diary or a journal?***

- *If yes: Why? What motivated you to start and stay consistent? What do you think are the main benefits of diary keeping? Are there any drawbacks?*
- *If no: Why not? What do you see as the potential benefits or drawbacks of keeping a diary? Would you be open to trying diary keeping and under which conditions?*

The sixth question regarded the participants' experiences of practicing journaling as a reflective

practice. The follow-up questions aimed to understand teachers' motivations for diary keeping, and build a more comprehensive view on its advantages and disadvantages. For those interviewees who have not kept a diary, the questions focused on their reasons behind this decision, and any possible obstacles that prevented them from engaging in this activity. Understanding teachers' attitudes towards journaling would allow facilitating further research regarding this reflective tool.

***Q7: Is there any advice you would give to other EFL teachers?***

Finally, the participants were asked to provide their colleagues with some guidance and recommendations, which could be helpful for novice EFL teachers and other EFL educators in case they were going through similar issues and challenges. Participants could share any tips, strategies, and pieces of wisdom that they gained after several years of their teaching careers. The data collected from the interviews allowed to compare the researcher's experience with other teachers' practices and helped to create a comprehensive view on the current state of teacher wellbeing in the context of ELT.

## **2.5 Data Analysis Procedure**

This section outlines the process of analyzing data collected from the diary entries of the researcher and during the interviews conducted with the EFL teachers. The goal of this procedure was to identify key themes and patterns that could help in finding answers to the research questions.

### **2.5.1 Diary Analysis**

In order to analyze data provided by the collected diary entries of the researcher, coding and categorizing of the most prominent themes and patterns was performed. This phase was important for interpreting the diary entries and other collected materials in a structured manner. Descriptive Coding was used to indicate the basic topics of passages of qualitative data in order to understand the main ideas contained in the texts (Saldaña, 2013: 88). Additionally, Emotion Coding was used to categorize and analyze the emotional content expressed in diary entries. This qualitative coding method involved identifying and labelling various emotions recalled and experienced by the researcher (Saldaña, 2013: 105). The digitalization of the diary entries performed prior to the data analysis helped to better organize the data and facilitated easier access and management. Some of the diary entries were already digital, since on some

occasions, the physical paper diary was not accessible, and the Notes app on the researcher’s phone was used. The obtained data was organized in chronological order. Moreover, in order to add more context to the diary entries and provide a deeper understanding of the primary data, secondary data including photographs, private text and voice messages were also collected. The data was analyzed in the context of the research questions that were set at the beginning of the study and resulted in better understanding of the key themes and issues in the field of EFL teacher wellbeing.

An example of a passage analyzed in terms of its codes, themes and final categories can be seen below in Table 3.

Table 3. *Example of diary entries coding.*

Date	Diary Entry	Codes	Themes / Categories	Final Categories
29/02/2024	Well, last night I went to sleep at four I think. Or at five, I don’t remember. And I slept for like two hours because I had to work. I forgot that one of my morning class was cancelled and now I’m also having problems with payment because what they’ve counted is different from what I’ve counted. I’m just really worried about the payment because I’m scared I’m the	‘I went to sleep at four or five.’ ‘I slept for like two hours.’ ‘I forgot that one of my morning class was cancelled,’ ‘Problems with payment’ ‘I’m just really worried about the payment’ ‘I’m scared I’m the one who messed up.’	1. Sleep Deprivation 2. Forgetfulness 3. Work stress 4. Anxiety 5. Fear of Making Mistakes	1. Work-Related Stressors 2. Emotional Responses to Stress 3. Physical and Cognitive Impact

	<p>one who messed up. I didn't even want to tell them that the payment was wrong. Now I feel guilty that I did tell them, and if I messed up I will look stupid. I feel like shutting down.</p>	<p>'I feel guilty.'  'If I messed up I will look stupid.'  'I feel like shutting down.'</p>	<p>6. Guilt  7. Fear of Judgement  8. Overwhelm</p>	
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The organization of the data into general, but meaningful themes and categories, allowed to identify certain patterns and most recurring topics that reflected the challenges the researcher faced working as an online EFL teacher, and coping strategies that were applied in order to address these issues. Additionally, positive aspects of the teaching experience and the way they benefitted the researcher's wellbeing were also recognized.

### 2.5.2 Interviews Analysis

The analysis of the interviewee responses was conducted involving a systematic coding process, which allowed transforming the raw data from descriptive narratives into more concrete concepts (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012: 355). The first step of the analysis was initial coding, where the transcripts of the interviews were closely examined line-by-line. At this stage, the data was decomposed into discrete excerpts to make beginning analytical decisions, where the most significant words and phrases were highlighted. The following step was selective coding, during which the focus shifted to identifying the most frequent and significant codes. These codes were more abstract but allowed to represent the most essential information derived from the interviewee responses. Considering the finalized codes allowed to identify the most recurring themes and patterns among interviewee responses that could be later interpreted to answer the research questions. In addition to this, findings from the interviews were compared with the data obtained from the diary entries, and this comparison helped to recognize the commonalities between the researcher's experience and other EFL teachers' narratives. This comparison process ensured that the findings from the diary entries were not limited to a single perspective, but aligned with a wider range of experiences, and resulted in additional validation of the themes identified both through the analysis of diary entries and interviews. Sometimes



the participants' responses contained sensitive topics, and emerged themes often covered very personal matters regarding the interviewees' lives. In order to protect the teachers' privacy, they were given an anonymized identifier containing the code "Teacher" followed by a number, which corresponded to the number of the interview. Overall, the analysis procedure resulted in creating a more comprehensive understanding of the current state of EFL teacher wellbeing and the influence of journaling as a reflective tool.

## **Chapter III. Results and Discussion**

This chapter presents the findings retrieved from the analysis of twenty-seven diary entries over the period from December 2023 to April 2024. In the Results section, the overview of the diary entries is given in order to provide context and general idea of the content present in the writing, including key themes and patterns observed in the texts. The noticeable impacts of diary writing on the researcher's wellbeing that have been observed are discussed in detail. The findings of the interviewees are presented in the form of a narrative, comparing interviewee's responses and sharing valuable insights gained from the conversations. Then, the concept ideas for a teacher journal for self-care are proposed. In the Discussion section, the results are interpreted in the context of the two research questions. Certain limitations of the study are acknowledged, offering a balanced view of the research and its implications. Finally, recommendations are provided to facilitate future research aimed at enhancing EFL teacher wellbeing and supporting educators through a variety of self-care practices, including journaling as a tool for self-reflection and stress management.

### **3.1 Results**

This section presents the findings from the analysis of the data collected during the study. The results are organized into several key themes that emerged during the analysis of both personal diary entries and the interviews with fifteen EFL teachers, providing a number of internal and external factors that affect EFL teacher wellbeing, and the impact of journaling in managing those factors.

#### **3.1.1 Diary Key Themes and Patterns**

In order to provide a profound analysis of the diary entries, key themes and patterns were identified. The analysis of the diary showed six main categories which are presented below.

##### ***Work-Related Stressors***

This category entails the factors within the working environment that caused the researcher to feel stress, and consequently contributed to her state of burnout. One of the work-related stressors that was mentioned most often was student-related challenges, especially the necessity to create personalized lesson plans for students with highly specific learning objectives. For example, the niche area of English for graphic designers lacks materials and resources available for use in class, and thus requires creating them from scratch. Despite the fact that this

encouraged the researcher to get out of her comfort zone and facilitated improvement of her skills and general knowledge in various subjects, it still put a significant amount of pressure on her and required her to spend extra time on lesson preparation. Furthermore, the necessity to create and conduct personalized trial lessons for new students caused additional stress. Trial lessons, which are also tailored specifically to each student according to their interests, are critical in establishing the teacher-student relationship. Even though it is normal for a teacher and a student not to connect for a certain reason, the intention to make a good impression still served as a source of anxiety as can be seen in the Excerpt below.

*Excerpt 1: Researcher's diary, December 28, 2023*

I've just had the worst class and I feel [really bad]. I'll have to text the manager first, but I feel like they're gonna fire me now. I don't know. I'm not even imagining things now, I'm saying facts. The student was bored, I could feel it. I tried to make a fun lesson because it's Christmas time, but she didn't seem very impressed.

This passage shows an immediate reaction of deep self-doubt of the researcher coming from the pursuit of perfection. Not receiving positive feedback from the student caused the researcher to start doubting her skills and intensified her fear of failure.

### ***Emotional Responses***

Identifying the most recurrent emotions was important in this study in order to understand the way the researcher reacted to different events, and the way her feelings impacted her wellbeing as an EFL teacher. Negative emotions played an important role in her experience of an English teacher despite their nature. As it has already been mentioned, experiencing negative feelings is simply inevitable. Even though at times they can be beneficial, for example, encouraging the person to change or to be more productive, negative emotions can also cause a variety of problems, such as phobias, anxiety disorders, and even stress-related physical disorders (Fredrickson, 2000: 1). The most prominent negative emotion present in the diary entries was anxiety. This feeling occurred in a big number of situations, heavily affecting the researcher's relationships with other people and her overall wellbeing. Most of the times, it emerged from the feeling of unknown and lack of control over future events. In one entry, she wrote:

*Excerpt 2: Researcher's diary, January 4, 2024*

I feel so lost and burnt out. I feel so behind everyone, so helpless and stupid. I'm almost 23 and... how am I supposed to have everything figured out already? I'm so scared, I have no idea what to do with my life. I know I stress over things too much. Whenever something goes wrong, I go into freeze mode. I simply can't do anything else apart from being worried. I also can't really talk about it to anyone. It feels like I'm burdening the person with my worries. [Name] says I am

annoying my boyfriend too much. Well... I guess she's right. (Researcher's diary entry, January 4, 2024).

This entry highlights the overwhelming feeling of anxiety that she was experiencing at the start of her work at the online English school. Even though the researcher only began working there, she already felt burned out. Due to the sudden rise of responsibilities, confusion and stress that she had to face while entering a new environment, she felt overwhelmed and even helpless, but was still reluctant to seek help. Together with the overlapping pressure of exam preparation and the need to combine work with studies, the fear became so intense that every stressful situation triggered a freeze response, which negatively influenced the researcher's productivity. Another negative emotion that the researcher experienced rather often was frustration:

Excerpt 3: *Researcher's diary, January 18, 2024*

I feel like a complete failure these days. All I do is staying at home, working, trying to prepare for my exam and hating myself. Everybody is getting jobs here in Italy, [...], travelling, enjoying their lives while I'm rotting here in my room. I don't know why I'm writing all this. I can't say that life is unfair. It's my fault that I'm so lazy. I'm not even sure I'm a good teacher. Everyone is better than me. I can't even tell this to my therapist because it's the same [...] thing every [...] time.

In this paragraph, the researcher expresses very strong feelings of self-criticism and even self-loathing triggered by the necessity to stay at home due to the working conditions. The phrase "rotting here in my room" suggests strong and painful feelings of being trapped and isolated, and comparisons that were drawn between herself and other people imply disconnectedness from the outside world and even envy. Another important thing that should be noted is that during that period, the researcher was actively working with her private therapist, yet she found it difficult to fully express her feelings during their sessions. Despite the therapeutic environment, she often felt like she was repeating the same concerns, which made her hesitant to discuss them further. This hesitation can be traced from the entry written on January 4, where the researcher expressed her concerns about burdening her partner with her problems.

Another emotion that the researcher experienced quite frequently was envy. In the diary entry written on January 18, 2024, the phrase "Everyone is better than me" not only shows the researcher's extreme levels of self-consciousness, but also implies jealousy towards other people being more skillful. She addressed this issue in the diary entry she wrote on January 8, when she tried to reassure herself and stop underestimating her abilities.

Excerpt 4: *Researcher's diary, January 8, 2024*

Another thing that I'm trying to put into my head is that I should stop comparing myself to others.

I asked [name] about her plans for her internship. [...], for a second I felt envious. [...] I don't even know if I am going to find a job here in Italy. I should stop and calm my mind. But I'm scared of letting everyone down... Why, why can't I stop being so negative? It's gonna be okay, I know. Whatever is there, I will achieve it. I will take the responsibility. I am an adult. It will work out. It's gonna be okay.

Here, trying to calm herself, the researcher turns to using affirmations. Repeating phrases like "It's gonna be okay" and "I will achieve it", she tries to restore a sense of control over the situation and gain clarity in the state of fear. This act of repeatedly writing positive statements was able to shift the focus and reduce anxiety by reinforcing the researcher's confidence in her abilities and skills. Experiencing positive emotions played a crucial role in the researcher's EFL teaching, as they heavily influenced her wellbeing in a helpful way. By identifying and acknowledging these feelings, she could increase her sense of self-worth and efficacy, and every positive experience helped her build her resilience. For instance, in the beginning, many of the researcher's students experienced a certain feeling of a "language barrier". By following the principles of the online school, she tried very hard to create a comfortable atmosphere and a safe space for them to express themselves. The positive feedback from students who managed to overcome the fear of speaking the language brought joy and sense of satisfaction to the researcher, reassuring her in the effectiveness of her teaching approaches and motivating her to continue working as an EFL teacher.

### ***Physical and Cognitive Impact***

During the analysis of the diary entries, it has been noted that constant emotional tension caused the researcher to experience physical and cognitive strains. As it has been seen in the coding example in Table 2, the researcher often struggled from the lack of sleep, which was caused by the need to spend additional time on lesson preparation. The researcher often found herself staying up late at night trying to complete all the necessary tasks before going to bed, which also contributed to her constant fatigue, and resulted in such symptoms as headaches, sore eyes and muscle tension. In turn, the combination of physical exhaustion and pains resulted in reduced concentration and memory impairment. All these strains negatively influenced the researcher's productivity, creating a vicious cycle of stress and overwork.

### ***Relationships***

The negative impact of the researcher's physical and mental health on her relationships is also evident from the diary entries. Constant stress caused her to become more irritable and more prone to emotional outbursts, consequently affecting her interactions with her friends and family. In one of the diary entries, the researcher expressed her concern about the growing

tension in her relationship with her partner because of the stress that was affecting her wellbeing:

Excerpt 5: *Researcher's diary, April 10, 2024*

I'm scared we will fight so much that at some point we will just fall out for good. I don't want to lose him.

Experiencing professional frustration inevitably led to personal conflicts, which were becoming more frequent. Nevertheless, the researcher acknowledged these changes in her behavior and showed her intention to change for the better:

Excerpt 6: *Researcher's diary, April 10, 2024*

I want to become a better person and make him happy. We will become happy together, I'm sure. The relationships between the researcher and her students were also extremely important for her. The diary entries showed a deep connection that she was able to build with them over a short period of six months. This bond had both positive and negative impacts on her wellbeing. Seeing her students trust her and feel comfortable in class made the researcher feel valued and satisfied with her job. However, this strong connection and students' gratitude not only reinforced her purpose as a teacher, but also made the prospect of leaving the learners even more emotionally challenging. At some point, due to the necessity to quit the job, transferring her students to another teacher made the researcher feel extremely stressed and even guilty:

Excerpt 7: *Researcher's diary, February 13, 2024*

I cried for the whole day yesterday because I feel bad for sending my student to the other teacher. And I felt like a [bad person] for having to think who else I should send away, because I care about all of them and each student became like a close friend, even though I understand that this is just business and work and I shouldn't care about it too much.

In this entry, the researcher acknowledges the fact that it is important to maintain the professional relationship with her students, but still sees this challenge as something deeply painful. This underscores the complexities of teacher-student relationships that can be rewarding, but also distressing.

### ***Coping Strategies***

For the researcher, writing in different forms has always been the main strategy for stress management. This included writing diary entries, which provided the researcher with a sense of relief, since the act of leaving thoughts and worries on paper helped her acknowledge and process her emotions better. At times, this writing process even provoked crying, which served as an outlet for suppressed emotions and ultimately brought emotional release. Griffith, Hall and Fields (2011: 172) believe that there is a specific concept of "crying that heals", which

results in a variety of therapeutic effects, such as decreased stress. In the researcher's case, the combination of writing and crying provided an effective mechanism for coping with work-related challenges and personal issues. Additionally, creative writing was an alternative outlet for expressing complex thoughts and emotions and played an important role in the researcher's attempts to address different problems she encountered working as an EFL teacher. In her diary entry written on February 19, 2024, she talks about her dream to finally finish her book she has been working on, but not having enough free time to do that. She wrote:

*Excerpt 8: Researcher's diary, February 19, 2024*

I really want to finish it this year. I have so many ideas about it. I used to write all the time, like literally every day.

This entry reflects on the internal conflict emerging from the need to balance her professional responsibilities and personal passions. Moreover, this activity of creative writing is more than just a hobby for the researcher; it is also a method of processing positive and negative life events.

However, the diary entries also revealed maladaptive coping strategies that the researcher unconsciously used in response to overwhelming feelings. The "freeze response" mentioned above was the researcher's reaction to situations where she could not control the outcome, for example, when she was waiting for the other person's reply in text messengers regarding her work. In addition to this, the researcher was also engaged in self-punishing behaviors, such as purposeful self-starvation:

*Excerpt 9: Researcher's diary, December 26, 2024*

I'm just too overwhelmed with everything, there are too many things I need to solve and I can't solve them because everything is so shaky. But I can't change the focus either. I'm starving myself today because I feel guilty for everything that's been happening. Because I can't control anything. I dunno how to stop it. I can't distract myself until the thing is fixed.

This passage reveals the instance of the researcher attempting to gain control over her body as a way to regain the sense of agency while feeling powerless over external challenges she cannot manage. This behavior is a vivid example of the desperation to regulate the aspect of her life within the researcher's reach, despite the fact that it ultimately led to even deeper emotional and physical distress. In order to prevent such actions, it is important to raise awareness among EFL teachers about constructive and healthy stress-management practices, and providing them with resources and proper training on how to recognize and address early signs of burnout.

### ***Professional Identity***

The theme of the researcher's professional identity as an EFL teacher can be traced in the

majority of the diary entries. Over the period of six months, the researcher's sense of self as an educator evolved significantly under the influence of the challenges she had to face, and with the help of reflections that she was documenting in her diary. At the beginning of working at the online school, her mind was filled with self-doubt and constant comparing with her colleagues. These negative ruminations were coupled with the feelings of uncertainty regarding her studies and career.

Excerpt 10: *Researcher's diary, January 7, 2024*

I really feel like quitting, but I need money. And [name] says I need a job. Preferably in Europe, but I'm a [...] loser. I'm not determined enough, I can't even plan out my next six months. Because I have this [...] job and I can't decide when to get my CELTA and I also don't know if I'm gonna go on this Austrian internship. I can't plan anything.

Here, the researcher wrote about the pressure to meet expectations of close people, which caused her to engage in excessive amounts of self-criticism and doubts considering her professionalism. The fear of failure and the possibility of disappointing others added to her anxiety over inability to plan her future.

Moreover, a rather destructive pattern was noticed during the analysis of diary entries that the researcher wrote during her work at the online school. Very often, the researcher turned to writing about her experiences only when they were negative, for instance, when there were problems with scheduling classes, or if her students were not satisfied with the lessons and did not show much enthusiasm. Although many of her diary entries lacked descriptions of positive situations, they happened rather frequently. Looking through her private messages, lesson plans saved on the online platform, and simply recalling specific situations that were the most memorable ones, the researcher realized how much these positive situations had shaped her experience as an EFL teacher. Each message, whether it was a thankful note from a student or a happy recap of the day that she shared with her partner, made her wonder why she undervalued her work and herself so much.

However, despite numerous challenges, the process of writing and reflecting on her experiences gradually helped her to gain clarity and build a healthier approach towards her professional identity. By acknowledging her successes and positive situations that happened in class, the researcher was able to restore her confidence. For instance, on March 11 she wrote:

Excerpt 3: *Researcher's diary, March 11, 2024*

My student thanked me for today's class. She said she always feels more energetic after them. I'm so glad I can make at least one person feel a bit better. I think that is actually my purpose in life. Maybe that's why I became a teacher.



This diary entry once again highlights the importance of positive feedback from students in the teacher's life. Hearing grateful comments from her learners positively influenced the researcher's wellbeing and helped her grow confidence in her abilities as an EFL teacher. As she recognized the positive impact she had on her students, she began to shift her focus from self-doubt to appreciating her efforts.

Overall, the diary entries allowed the researcher to recall the emotions and experiences that shaped her wellbeing as an EFL teacher. Sometimes, it was hard to distance herself from those reflections that she wrote during that period working at the online school, as reading those emotional handwritten notes brought back the intense feelings she was overwhelmed with. Occasionally, it was even hurtful to read those "cries for help" and not being able to help the person who had written them, ironically, that person being herself. Staying in her room and not leaving the house, skipping meals, depriving herself of sleep, constant overthinking, all those things really corrupted her physical and psychological wellbeing. In pursuit of pleasing everyone and to be "perfect", she completely forgot about things she needed to care about the most. On the other hand, while reading the diary entries, the researcher was pleased to see even occasional gleams of light breaking through the darkness. She tried to learn from her mistakes and change her attitude towards work by seeking help from her friends and colleagues and asking them for advice. Despite the fact that the researcher cannot help the person that she used to be during that period of time, those reflections helped her understand the ways she could help the person she is now. Apart from that, these insights can also help other teachers who may be going through similar struggles and challenges.

### **3.1.2 Teacher Voices: Interview Findings**

After the analysis of diary entries, interviewee responses were examined and compared with the findings from the researcher's journal. The following section presents the overview of the key themes that emerged from the discussions with the participants of the study.

#### ***Q1: How would you describe your overall experience working as an EFL teacher?***

Interviewee answers to the first question provided deep reflections of teachers' experiences, capturing the diverse range of positive and negative emotions. Despite all the challenges that the teachers voiced further in the interview, most of the interviewees described their experiences as "primarily positive" and as something that brought them joy.

#### ***Intrinsic rewards***

One of the recurring themes in their responses was the sense of pride and satisfaction from

seeing the results of their students. Teacher 1 said that she considered even small achievements of the students, such as understanding grammar rules or remembering basic vocabulary, as steady steps towards their goal. This made her feel proud of her learners and motivated to continue her work. The ability to share their love for the language with their students and inspiring learners to discover new things about English-speaking cultures was also mentioned as the source of personal fulfillment. Answering the first question, Teacher 3 said: “The English language is my favorite language. So I really enjoy sharing this love with people, first of all. I like to open a new culture for people” (Teacher 3 interview, August 3, 2024). Similarly, Teacher 11 also said that teacher’s role is not simply limited to teaching the language, but it also includes being a guide for one’s students to another culture.

### ***Dual nature of public school teaching***

The interviewees also mentioned negative sides of their job, especially when it comes to working at a public state school. Teacher 6, who has been working as a school teacher for two years, has described her experience as “neutral”, meaning the amount of positive and negative aspects was almost equal. However, as this teacher said, it is not “too bad to quit”, since there were still students who were motivated enough and made her work meaningful and made her feel useful for the society. On the other hand, Teacher 2 and Teacher 14 eventually decided to quit their jobs at public schools after a couple of months of working there, realizing early that the environment they were working in could not provide them with proper professional development. The rigid structure, lack of autonomy and absence of proper feedback made it difficult for them to see their worth and understand whether their teaching was actually productive and effective. Transitioning into the role of private tutors was very liberating for many teachers, as the ability to choose their students, set boundaries and always have an opportunity to stop working with a certain student at any point was something that made them feel valued again.

### ***Q2: What have been the main challenges you have faced in your role as a teacher?***

The analysis of teachers’ responses to the second question revealed a variety of challenges that were related to their personal characteristics, and interactions with students, parents, and administrators. The challenges were further categorized as follows:

#### ***Impostor syndrome***

This phenomenon is described as a “sense of personal inauthenticity in individuals who evidence achievement”, and it is especially common among non-native EFL teachers (Bernat, 2008: 1). For Teacher 2, switching from working in traditional educational settings to private tutoring helped to alleviate the feelings of self-doubt, as positive feedback from his students

served as empowering proof that his job satisfied the learners and was actually effective. For Teacher 14, who now also focuses solely on private practice, it is still rather difficult to acknowledge her high competency. Despite the fact that her students achieve rather high results at school and at the exams, she experiences the imposter syndrome almost constantly. Those teachers who work as a private tutors have also mentioned the problem of pricing their service and promoting themselves to find students. These issues are closely related to the impostor syndrome phenomenon, as for some tutors it is often difficult to reasonably set a price for the lessons, especially when it comes to students they are already working with. Teacher 15 said that she sometimes feels hesitant to notify her students about the increase in prices, as she is worried they would refuse to pay more and would stop having classes with her. This fear manifests itself despite the positive reviews she constantly receives from the learners, and her self-conscious nature does not allow her to accept the fact of her professionalism that deserves to be paid respectively. However, sometimes it can be impossible to keep students even if the tutor keeps their prices at the same level. As Teacher 8 mentioned, some of her students may simply encounter some financial problems and lose their source of income. This way, they would not be able to spend money on their private English classes anymore, and in this case, the teacher cannot force their students to stay.

### ***Age gap***

Another significant challenge that Teacher 5 had to experience at the beginning of his teaching career was the age gap between him and his students. He started working as a teacher at an online English school, where his students were often twice his age. This age difference created certain tension in class, making it difficult for him to establish authority and gain respect from his students. Teacher 5 recalled instances when older learners would disregard his instructions and recommendations, especially when it was concerning learning grammar. The interviewee described the frustration that he felt every time his effort to explain rules was ignored, which made him question his effectiveness as a teacher. This experience also highlights the vulnerability that novice young teachers have to experience rather often trying to assert themselves as professionals. However, this challenge prompted Teacher 5 to reflect on his teaching beliefs and his approach towards his work. In order to overcome this obstacle, he started building his confidence and a stronger sense of his professional identity. Over time, his self-reflection let him develop a work ethic rooted in deep self-assurance and belief in his professionalism. Now, after gaining enough experience, he is convinced in the effectiveness of his teaching methods and expects his students to follow his instructions: “I’m a professional, I’m a teacher and you’ve got to just, you know, do what I’m telling you, because I know where

we're going, otherwise it's not going to work out" (Teacher 5 interview, August 4, 2024).

### ***Finding an approach***

Teacher 7 faced an issue where she had to find a balance between finding a proper approach to manage her students, and responding to the parents and administrators' feedback. She recalled that her strict attitude to maintain discipline in class would often lead to criticism from the administrators and uncomfortable conversations with parents. On the other hand, whenever she tried to adopt a more liberal approach, incorporating playful learning activities in her lessons and giving her students more freedom, she would again have to face criticism. Teacher 7 recalled: "In that case, managers also call me and say that, okay, they didn't learn any words from today's lesson because it was just a game, and you have to be stricter" (Teacher 7 interview, August 4, 2024). This constant inability to fulfill everyone's needs left her feel frustrated and discouraged. In Teacher 9's experience, finding common ground with students has also been a challenge, because it has been difficult for her to find a balance between being a strict and understanding teacher. It has also been particularly challenging for Teacher 14 to understand how to address this problem, since she did not want to refuse being empathetic towards the learners, but also wanted to maintain certain boundaries. In her experience, students often shared their personal issues that were too sensitive, and sometimes even rather concerning and alarming. In these situations, she did not know whether she should breach their privacy and share those issues with their parents, or try to help her students with their problems discreetly. This placed her in a very uncomfortable situation, but she still tried to maintain a respectful and professional manner understanding the limits of her support that she can provide her learners with.

### ***Lack of student concentration***

The challenge of maintaining students' concentration and focus also emerged as an important challenge of the online teachers. As Teacher 12 pointed out, the digital age has significantly influenced the way students process information. She expressed her frustration from her students losing their focus too easily when they have to process information in a more traditional way. Sometimes the issue of the student's attention span is worsened by the presence of certain mental disorders, such as Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The behaviors can be extremely frustrating and sometimes even impossible to prevent, especially when the teacher does not have prior training. Teacher 10 shared his experience of working with such students with special needs, which at first was extremely challenging. The interviewee said that it is crucial to learn and apply specific teaching strategies that should be used when working with students with ADHD, and it is important to understand the difference between young and adult

learners with this condition.

### ***Usage of interactive materials***

In addition to the issue of lack of student concentration, another challenge was mentioned related to the interactive materials used in class. As it turned out, very often efforts to create engaging lesson plans are not appreciated enough. Teacher 9 highlighted a common problem where many parents take for granted the usage of online platforms, for example, an online board Miro. The usage of these platforms has become a trend among teachers, leading parents to view it as a common practice. This puts additional pressure on teachers to adopt certain tools in their work, despite their personal preferences and comfort. Apart from that, the perception that online platforms have become a norm also creates a misconception that developing interactive lessons with these tools does not require much time. This leads to parents refusing to compensate teachers financially for the extra effort they have to put, even though working on these platforms is in reality time-consuming, especially in the beginning of the introduction to the program.

### ***Q3: How do you think people perceive the role of English teachers these days?***

The analysis of answers to question 3 highlighted a prevailing concern of the diminished professional role of teachers, often overlapping with the challenges that the participants talked about in the previous question.

### ***Teacher-parent relationships***

Teacher 1 mentioned the following problem related to teacher-parent relationships that is rather prevalent among private tutors: “Unfortunately, many people, especially parents, they feel very privileged and they treat you as a service worker, not as a teacher. It’s something that I feel makes this job more complicated than it should be” (Teacher 1 interview, August 1, 2024). This feeling of a certain privilege often makes parents and/or students abuse their rights and expect too much from their teachers, which leads to the issue of setting boundaries. Teacher 13 explained that some of the students’ parents did not respect her working hours and often texted her around midnight, expecting her to answer at that hour. For the interviewee it was difficult to explain to people that being a tutor is only a part of her life, and apart from work, she also has her personal life. Other interviewees also mentioned the problem of parents treating education as a “transactional service” rather than a collaborative process aimed at the students’ development, which causes extreme frustration among teachers. On the contrary, Teacher 2 and Teacher 9 believed that the fact of payment raises the trust among parents towards private tutors. Interviewees argued that when parents invest financially in the children’s education, it makes them value the work of the teachers and appreciate the efforts of tutors more. Additionally, as Teacher 2 said, most of the parents he had to work with understood that the biggest part of

responsibility still rested on their children.

### ***Student autonomy and responsibility***

Despite the fact that teachers are responsible for sharing knowledge with their students, still it is the students' responsibility to study and learn the materials, and, as Teacher 13 said, it is crucial to just try to do your best. While discussing a closely related topic, Teacher 5 cited a very interesting idiom: "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink" (Teacher 5 interview, August 4, 2024). Many teachers struggle with finding the balance between their duties as educators and the autonomy of their students. They can create perfect learning conditions, encourage their students, put all their effort in preparing lesson materials and provide all the necessary resources, but they cannot force their students to learn. As Teacher 13 echoed this idea, it is important for teachers to understand that their role is to facilitate and guide their students' learning.

### ***Feedback and recognition***

Teacher 2 recalled his negative experience from his time working at a school, where he felt extremely undervalued. As he explained, he never got any feedback for his work: "It's just the system itself. And no one really cares about what you do, how you do it. You just need to follow the curriculum and there are time restrictions" (Teacher 2 interview, August 3, 2024). This lack of communication with the administrators left him feeling disconnected from his work. On the other hand, Teacher 4 said that after moving to Italy and starting her work as an EFL tutor there, she noticed a dramatic shift in the attitude of her administrators towards her. During work meetings, she often expected to be yelled at and receive criticism, as it was something she had witnessed before in her home country and was considered a norm. However, the situation at her new workplace was completely different from what she expected. The atmosphere at these meetings was very comfortable and supportive, and all the Teacher 4's effort was genuinely appreciated. The contrast between these experiences underscores the influence of institutional culture on a teacher's sense of self-worth and job satisfaction. The positive environment makes teachers feel valued and more motivated to put even more effort into their work.

### ***Gender bias***

Teacher 1 and Teacher 14 also mentioned the common stereotypes affecting female EFL teachers in Russian-speaking countries. According to the participants, there is still a common belief that many young female English teachers enter the profession only to then quickly quit their job to go on maternity leave without ever coming back to school. Additionally, Teacher 8 brought up an important issue regarding the treatment she received from her male students, particularly in the context of teaching Business English to corporate clients. After working with

them, the interviewee often felt stressed due to their strong dominant attitude that they expressed in class. As Teacher 8 said, this issue reflects a lack of gender equality present in Russian-speaking countries, which found its outlet in men attempting to gain control over the educational process and criticizing female teachers' approaches. In response to this behavior, the participant had to develop certain strategies to manage the disruptive dynamics in the classroom without directly confronting the students. Despite the effectiveness of the new approach, she expressed her frustration and confusion, highlighting the fact that the classroom is not a place for students to demonstrate their power in these diminishing ways, and emphasized the importance of mutual respect.

***Q4: How has teaching influenced your wellbeing?***

Answering the fourth question, the participants touched upon various factors that positively and negatively influenced their wellbeing.

***Physical strains***

When it comes to physical wellbeing, many teachers who work as online private tutors mentioned having to deal with such problems as sore eyes, scoliosis and headaches. Working online involves spending several hours in front of the computer screen, often in an uncomfortable sedentary position. Physical strains also often occur while working offline. Teacher 14 mentioned her personal chronic sleep problems, which were worsened by the demands of her job as a teacher at a public school. As someone who has always struggled with anxiety, she also experiences insomnia rather often. However, even if she did not sleep properly during the night, she did not resort to napping during the daytime either. The only instances when she had a strong need to nap, was when she started to fall ill, so the sleepiness often signaled a developing sickness that she needed to address as soon as possible. Working at a school, she constantly felt the need to nap, which was the symptom of her constant fatigue. However, even at weekends, she could not rest properly, as her school frequently demanded her to be present at meetings, online calls, etc. This quickly led her to the state of burnout and left her feeling continuously exhausted. Teacher 2 also experienced many negative effects of the overwhelming and demanding schedule working at a public school. The necessity to go to sleep late and wake up early combined with constant stress caused him to experience a concerning weight loss of seven kilograms in just one month. The opposite problem of gaining weight due to developing unhealthy eating habits was also present during discussions with another interviewee. As Teacher 8 mentioned, teaching is a profession that requires the person to put a lot of energy into their work, which often results in the need to restore the lost calories, sometimes in the form of consuming fast food. The lack of physical exercise and excess

amounts of fats in processed foods lead to negative impact on Teacher 8's physical health. This highlights the importance of creating better working conditions for teachers and taking a more careful approach towards their health. As it has been mentioned in section 1.1.1, there is a strong connection between the physical and psychological wellbeing, as they mutually affect each other. Thus, by taking care of one's physical health, the individual is able to also improve their mental state and, consequently, become more productive. As it has been mentioned in Q1, many teachers who changed their focus to private tutoring started to see improvements in both physical and mental wellbeing. The opportunity to structure their own schedule in the most convenient way allowed them to care more about their physical needs. Even the ability to have prolonged lunch breaks had positive effects – Teacher 14 said that very often she and other teachers at her school did not have time to simply eat, so when she was structuring her personal schedule as a private tutor, she always left one or two hours in the afternoon for proper lunch or naps. This, as a result, helped her to maintain a more balanced approach to her lifestyle and helped her improve her physical wellbeing.

### ***Emotional labor***

When it comes to psychological wellbeing, the challenges that were mentioned in Q2 had a significant negative impact on the teachers' mental health. Teacher 9 and Teacher 11 talked about the multifaceted role of a teacher and how emotionally draining it can be. The peculiarity of the profession lies in the necessity to not just be an educator, but also a psychologist and an entertainer for the students. The constant responsibility to manage classroom dynamics, address students' emotional needs and keep the lessons engaging at all times requires a huge amount of energy and effort from the teacher, and can often lead to burnout over time. Teacher 11 also emphasized the importance of not showing signs of tiredness in class, especially when students are showing low levels of motivation themselves.

### ***Emotional fulfillment***

However, the interviewees also talked a lot about the positive sides of the teaching that helped them maintain their wellbeing. Pride and joy from teaching that was often mentioned in Q1 served as a powerful motivation and a source of emotional fulfillment. The feeling of doing something important and the ability to change students' lives, seeing their progress and accomplishments significantly influenced teachers' confidence and sense of self-worth, and, consequently, their wellbeing.

### ***Personal boundaries***

Additionally, many teachers again said that switching to private practice helped them to start caring about their mental health more, putting their needs first. Teachers 13 and Teacher 15



emphasized the importance of setting boundaries in maintaining their wellbeing. For Teacher 13, establishing certain rules was not just a professional strategy, but also a necessary measure to keep her psychological and physical wellbeing at a positive level. She shared that she has always kept a certain attitude towards her work. Whenever she started to feel overwhelmed by multiple responsibilities, such as balancing between her studies and work, she would always make the decision to put her personal needs first. If a student lacked sufficient motivation or respect towards her despite her effort to engage them, she would tell the student in advance that she would not be able to continue working with them. In order to ensure a smooth transition for the student, she always found them a suitable substitute teacher. Teacher 13 herself called this approach rather radical, but for her it was one of the ways to manage her workload and prioritize her wellbeing. By setting these boundaries, she could protect her mental health and devote her time and effort to those students who were genuinely committed to their learning. Teacher 15 maintained a similar attitude – whenever she started having difficulties with her students who would disrespect her boundaries by violating set guidelines, she would establish new rules. These rules could regard the payment policy, students’ punctuality, and other aspects of the learning environment. By reinforcing her boundaries, she could maintain a professional and respectful learning atmosphere, ensuring that both sides adhere to the agreed-upon standards and contribute to a more structured and effective educational process.

***Q5: How do you typically deal with stressful situations and emotional triggers in your teaching practice?***

### ***Venting***

One of the most common ways to deal with stress was venting, a coping strategy which involves expressing one’s negative emotions to other people in order to release those feelings and receive moral support, sympathy and understanding (MacIntyre et al., 2022: 2; Savage, Woloshyn, 2022: 3). Although it is usually categorized as an avoidant or maladaptive coping strategy (Savage, Woloshyn, 2022: 6), some research suggests that the act of venting could have positive effects on the individual’s growth, as it can foster person’s hope for a better future (MacIntyre et al., 2020: 11). Some participants of the interview admitted turning to venting when talking to their colleagues or close people as a way to avoid overthinking about certain problems. Teacher 9 explained: “It does make you feel better because when you vent your emotions, when you have a person who is willing to listen, it can help. It’s important not to get stuck in this condition, like, overthinking” (Teacher 9 interview, August 5, 2024). However, while venting to friends and colleagues can provide teachers with temporary relief, it often fails to identify and address the underlying causes of stress and does not allow solving the problem at its roots,

but simply alleviates its symptoms.

### ***Therapy***

As a more structured and effective alternative to venting, several teachers suggested an option of seeking professional help of a therapist, which has a variety of benefits both for personal and professional growth. Three case studies presented by Farber (2000) illustrated how teachers experiencing different forms of burnout benefitted from consistent therapy. In these cases, the therapist employed specialized approaches tailored individually to each patient, leading to significant improvements in their emotional state. The duration of these courses of treatment ranged from six to eighteen months, which highlights the importance of the individual's commitment required for positive outcomes of one's therapy. Nevertheless, according to Farber (2000: 688), it is still important not to just provide teachers with proper psychological support, but make an effort to actually change the system itself, namely creating a supporting and nurturing work environment for teachers where their needs are genuinely valued. By implementing changes into the educational system, the emergence of certain disorders could be prevented. As Teacher 1 said, despite her long work with a private therapist, she still sometimes thought about not belonging in the teaching community and even considered quitting her profession. For her, one of the solutions to address negative thoughts was constantly learning something new about teaching methodologies: "It feels like the more I learn about teaching in general, the more confident I get" (Teacher 1 interview, August 1, 2024). Another solution that helped her handle the feeling of not belonging was engaging with the community of other teachers through social media. She mentioned that participating in discussions in online group chats on Telegram and following teacher-influencers on Instagram helped her to feel better. This engagement with other educators made her realize that she was not the only one who faced certain issues, and it was comforting to know that many teachers experienced the same problems.

An interesting alternative to traditional therapy that has become popular these days is turning to the help of artificial intelligence. The latest update of Chat-GPT, for instance, includes several new modes of interaction available, one of them being an AI therapist. Teacher 7 shared her experience with this technology: "It says, like, "I'm Robin, I'm trying to help you" and asks such kind of questions. Sometimes I can't share something with my friends because I'm hesitated, I'm embarrassed to ask something, but artificial intelligence doesn't care about that" (Teacher 7 interview, August 4, 2024). This method offers an opportunity to discuss one's concerns without the fear of being judged, and can be particularly useful for those who are reluctant to disclose personal information even to a professionally trained therapist. However,

studies suggest that the use of AI assistants should not be used as a standalone method, but rather as additional support to the assistance from a real person, since therapy requires the fundamental aspect of human interaction and empathy (Cheng et al., 2023: 595). Machines like Chat-GPT lack understanding of human emotions and peculiarities of human language, and they are only able to “mimic” empathetic utterances (Carlbring et al., 2023: 1). Additionally, some ethical concerns arise when it comes to the possibility of an AI system to provide harmful advice. This underscores another reason why it should be solely used as an assistant to professional therapists until the language model undergoes proper training (Cheng et al., 2023: 595).

***Q6: Have you ever kept a diary or journal?***

- *If yes: What motivated you to start and stay consistent? What do you think are the main benefits of diary keeping? Are there any drawbacks?*
- *If no: Why not? What do you see as the potential benefits or drawbacks of keeping a diary? Would you be open to trying diary keeping and under which conditions?*

As it turned out, 14 out of 15 teachers have practiced journaling at some point in their lives. However, the purpose of their journal and approach to diary keeping varied among the interviewees.

***Professional diaries***

Some teachers preferred to keep only a professional teacher diary, but did not use it for reflecting on their teaching experience. For them, their teacher journal simply served as a tool to keep record of their students’ needs, performance, and individual characteristics. Additionally, they usually included ideas for lesson plans and notes considering classroom dynamics that had to be taken into account in further classes. On the other hand, some teachers only preferred to keep a personal diary where they kept records of their daily thoughts and emotions, deciding to separate them from their professional life. Further in this section, different approaches to diary keeping and interviewees’ opinions on journaling are discussed in deeper detail.

Teacher 7 shared her experience in journaling both for personal and professional purposes. At the moment, she is looking for a job as an English teacher, so she is using her diary as a way to analyze and reflect on her behavior and answers after the interviews. This allows her to self-evaluate her communication skills and improve her performance in future interviews.

***Second/third language identity***

During the conversation with Teacher 7, a very interesting peculiarity about diary keeping

emerged. While discussing her journaling experience, she revealed that she keeps her personal and professional diaries in different languages. For example, when reflecting on her job interviews, she tried to write her professional diary in English, while in her personal diary she used the mixture of three languages: English, Kazakh, and Russian. Sometimes the choice of the language depended on her inability to express certain ideas driven by not recalling specific vocabulary items. On the other hand, it often also depended on her mood and the purpose of her writing. For instance, when asking or praying for something, she tended to use the Kazakh language, while she preferred Russian when she felt upset or frustrated with herself or other people. In contrast, when she tried to calm herself down, she chose to write in English. Moreover, Teacher 5 also mentioned a similar observation, as he noticed that he became less emotional and more rational when he spoke English, compared to Russian and other languages he knew. This interesting phenomenon of a second or even a third language identity has not been studied in detail and is still not well defined. According to Benson et al. (2013: 28), this concept is integrated into the person's overall identity, but at the same time, it is also a specific identity construction that is created during the second language acquisition. This notion suggests that multilingual teachers navigate their professional and personal lives differently depending on the language they use, and it should be studied further in order to develop effective strategies that could support teachers in acknowledging their multilingual identities and the way this peculiarity could help them improve their wellbeing.

### ***Diary keeping for language learning***

One of the benefits of journaling mentioned by Teacher 5 and Teacher 15 was the language learning opportunities that come with diary keeping. Both teachers used their diaries as a tool for learning English during their teenage years. Teacher 15 noted that writing a diary in another language encourages the person to approach the usage of different grammar structures in a more thoughtful manner and motivates to express themselves more effectively while searching for appropriate words. She also mentioned that journaling could be particularly useful for beginner learners, as it stimulates them to expand their vocabulary and practice the language more frequently. On the other hand, for Teacher 5 it was not an intentional decision to start journaling in English, but rather something that happened naturally due to his personal preference. However, he confirmed that keeping that diary turned out to be a great way for him to practice his writing skills, which even helped him to win an essay-writing contest. This benefit could be also useful for experienced teachers despite their already high language proficiency, as the nature of the teaching profession implies life-long learning. According to Shelton-Strong and Mynard (2020), keeping track of one's language learning journey through journaling could

increase the person's confidence regarding their language proficiency. In their study, those participants who kept a confidence-building diary while learning a language reported notable improvements in their emotional responses towards their learning, including increased positive feelings of satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment. This reflective practice not only allowed learners to track their progress, but also helped them recognize and acknowledge their growth, which in turn helped them maintain their autonomous motivation for sustained learning (Shelton-Strong & Mynard, 2020: 13). By adopting a similar concept in the context of ELT, cultivating these positive feelings could be a great way to help teachers to deal with foreign language anxiety. By writing down their experiences, challenges and accomplishments, they could reflect on their progress, develop a more positive self-perception of their language skills and become more confident about their language proficiency.

### ***Emotion diary***

Three other educators, Teacher 10, Teacher 12, Teacher 13, were more engaged in keeping an emotion diary, which has been discussed in section 1.2.3. For instance, Teacher 10 described his way of organizing this type of journal:

I have my emotional diary. First of all, I write down the what I feel. Do I feel sad? Do I feel like, I don't know, something unusual for me? I write it down. Next, I write down why I feel that way. What is the reason? And the third line is, like, how can I stop it, or how can I develop it if I lack this emotion? If I don't like this emotion, I think, how should I cope with? How should I deal with it? How should I stop it? Or maybe if I like this emotion, how can I be able to prolong it? (Teacher 10 interview, August 5, 2024)

This way of acknowledging emotional triggers serves as an effective and structured reflection tool for emotional self-management. Through this systematic documenting of his feelings, Teacher 10 was able to gain a clear perspective on his mental state and develop practical strategies directed at addressing both positive and negative emotions, which, as a result, enhanced his personal and professional wellbeing. Teacher 12 and Teacher 13, on the other hand, did not follow such a structured approach towards their emotions. For them, keeping their emotion diary was more about a free-form expression of their feelings. Teacher 12 explained that she simply wrote down her thoughts on situations that happen to her in the “stream of consciousness” manner, and then reflected on them. This way, she gained a whole picture of her work and understood how to address certain issues. The act of leaving her thoughts and worries on paper helped her to clear space in her mind for other more important things she needed to focus on. Teacher 13 also said that for her, her diary was a place where she could just leave her emotions in different creative forms. As she described, she did not keep records of

situations that happen to her during the day, but simply expressed herself in thoughts, sketches, and poetry. This unfiltered approach towards her emotions also highlights the importance of creative and non-traditional methods in psychological self-care that could suit those who prefer a less systematic method of self-reflection.

### ***Time constraints***

Most of the teachers named lack of free time as one of the main reasons for not keeping a diary, as the practice of journaling required them to devote a decent amount of time to writing down their reflections. Additionally, some of them stated that they tried keeping a diary for personal use, but could not stay consistent after a few days. Teacher 15, for example, noted that despite understanding the potential benefits of journaling, she often found herself more inclined to spend her leisure time on less demanding activities, such as scrolling social media or doing some other hobbies she was more interested in. Such activities provide the person with a quick sense of satisfaction, whereas diary keeping requires patience and a high level of mental engagement that could feel too demanding when the person is feeling fatigue after a long working day. However, many interviewees did not usually count the time consuming nature of journaling as a drawback, but as a mere peculiarity that should be taken into account. As Teacher 7 pointed out, it should become a habit in order to give positive results: “Even if the person doesn’t care about writing, sometimes I heard from my friends that they are lazy to fill their diary, [...] but the person should make it habitual. Every morning or every evening to write their thoughts” (Teacher 7 interview, August 4, 2024).

### ***Privacy issues***

One of the drawbacks mentioned by several teachers was the possibility of someone finding the person’s diary and reading it. Teacher 8 mentioned a traumatizing situation where one of her family member’s diary was found, and she decided for herself never to keep a diary, but to keep all her secrets and thoughts in her head. Teacher 15, on the other hand, solved the problem of privacy. As she recalled, one of her family members had a habit of reading her diary, so Teacher 15 decided to start writing her diary entries in English, since that family member did not know this language. She said: “I felt like English was my secret language to cipher some thoughts” (Teacher 15 interview, August 8, 2024). Teacher 10 also mentioned the ability to cypher his writing. By combining several languages he knew into a special code, he was able to make his diary entries secret. Despite the fact that Teacher 10 sometimes could even forget the clues to deciphering his codes, he counted it as an advantage too. This way he could simply write down his thoughts and forget about them, not caring about nerve-racking situations anymore.

## Diary formats

One of the topics that also arose during some interviews was the preferred format for keeping a diary or a journal. It appeared that many teachers would prefer to write down their thoughts in a digital diary. For instance, Teacher 2 explained that since all his materials were digitalized due to his work as an online private tutor, for him it would be more convenient to have his journal in a digital format as well. This way he would have access to it any time and in any location. Similarly, Teacher 1 also expressed her preference for having a digital diary, as for her it would be easier to write down her thoughts in, for example, a Notes app on her phone. This way she could also access her writing any time and not lose her ideas, compared to writing them down on a piece of paper.

Two teachers also shared their experience of using self-care mobile apps designed specifically for diary keeping and mood tracking. One of the examples of such apps was Finch. Teacher 4 explained its main features and the way this app helped her to maintain her wellbeing. The interface of the app can be visible in Figure 3 below.

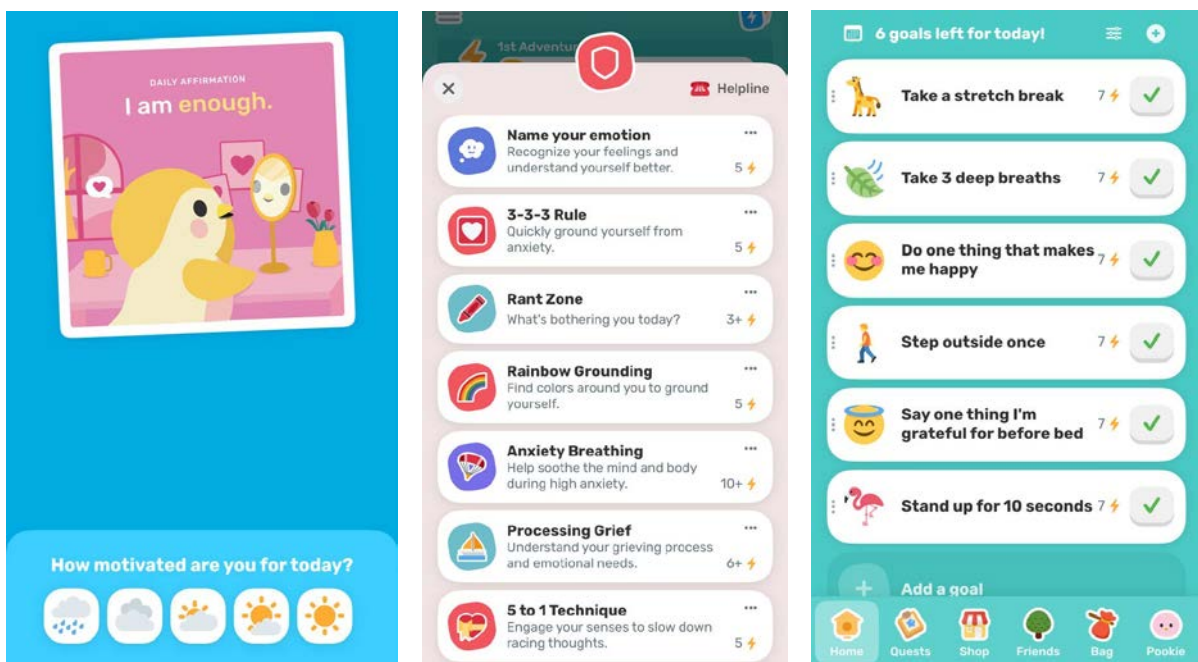


Figure 3. *Finch App Interface. Source: Finch App*

The idea behind this app is to approach self-care in the most unique and engaging way in a gamified environment. Teacher 4 described it as a motivational tool that combined elements of a Tamagotchi game, where the person could take care of their pet, with a set of daily self-tasks. In this app, users have an opportunity to set different goals for themselves that can be as

simple as brushing one’s teeth and going out for a walk, or more complex, such as writing an exam paper or working on the thesis. One of the features of this app is a mental health first aid kit that the person can access at any time if they feel anxious or distressed. The exercises provided in this section include a variety of reflective practices, such as naming and acknowledging one’s emotions, writing supportive messages as if they were coming from a close person, and different diary prompts. Teacher 4 also mentioned that having a mobile app had been more effective for her in terms of staying consistent, compared to having a traditional paper diary. She explained that using a digital app on her phone made it more accessible, and she did not feel the pressure to write lengthy or perfect diary entries. Apart from that, Teacher 4 highlighted the app’s interactive aspect of caring for a virtual pet, which allowed the user to gain experience points and in-game currency. Those rewards could be used to decorate pet’s house or customize its clothes and accessories. This gamification of self-care not only makes the process more enjoyable, but also encourages the person to be consistent in their wellbeing journey, as they stay motivated to achieve set goals and unlock new rewards.

Another app that was recommended by Teacher 9 was Dailyo. This digital journaling app was designed to track daily thoughts, moods and activities of its user. The interface of this app can be seen in Figure 4 below.



Figure 4. Dailyo App Interface. Source: AppStore



The app allows to document and reflect on the person's life with the help of various features. For instance, the user can create daily diary entries to capture their experiences either by themselves, or by choosing one of the templates available. Optionally, the person can attach photos or videos to their entries, and add tags to categorize their reflections. The app also includes a function for recording moods from a selection of different options. With time, the app generates a graph to visually represent mood trends, that helps the user to see patterns and changes in their emotional state over a chosen period of time. One of the peculiarities that Teacher 9 noted was the fact that she often logged her mood on the app only when she was feeling down. This behavior could imply that she may not have paid enough attention to positive moments of her personal and professional life, which could lead to an imbalanced view of her emotional wellbeing. By focusing primarily on negative experiences, the teacher may unintentionally reinforce the habit of ruminating rather than healthily reflecting on different experiences and acknowledging their successes. This could be seen as an area for personal and professional growth, where teachers learn how to express gratitude and incorporate a more balanced approach to mood tracking by acknowledging both good and bad experiences. Eventually, this could help to develop a more accurate and positive view on one's emotional state and to build resilience by creating a more optimistic outlook.

In contrast, many teachers also talked about the benefits of keeping one's diary in a paper form, emphasizing its tactile advantages for emotional release. For instance, Teacher 7 expressed her belief that physically writing one's thoughts offers a unique connection between the person's hand and their brain, compared to typing on the phone or using a keyboard. According to her, this physical act of writing offers a deeply therapeutic effect, as seeing one's words on paper makes the person's thoughts and emotions more real and tangible, which digital diaries do not provide to the same extent. Teacher 9 also suggested that writing down one's thoughts on paper makes the person realize that the problem could actually be solved.

### ***Consistency and commitment***

Answering this question, the majority of teachers expressed their willingness to try keeping a diary more consistently and turning it into their habit, as they recognized the benefits of journaling and were open to experimenting with this tool, which they could use to manage stress more effectively, and reflect on their experiences. On the other hand, some teachers rejected this idea, stating that they do not have enough time for self-reflection, or simply did not see this mechanism as something that they would be interested in, despite the fact that they understood the potential positive influence it might have on their wellbeing. Nevertheless, both opinions are valid, and it is important to take into account personal preferences of each person. Journaling

is only an example of a self-care practice among many other practices that are as powerful and as effective. Therefore, it is important to recognize and respect alternative strategies that could be more suitable for other teachers.

***Q7: 'Is there any advice you would give to other EFL teachers?'***

The answers were collected and visually represented in a word cloud visible in Figure 5 below.



Figure 5. *Teachers' Advice Represented in a Word Cloud.*

Many pieces of advice echoed each other, which shows that a lot of teachers agree on the importance of certain points. For example, a common idea regarded the importance of finding a supportive community. Engaging with like-minded people online or in the local teacher groups and sharing one's experiences can provide support through gaining new perspectives and sense of belonging that helps to feel less isolated. Another advice considered constant learning. For EFL teachers, finding new opportunities for professional development is essential. Not only does it make their practice more engaging and effective, but also boosts their confidence as they gain more experience and knowledge. Moreover, the English language is constantly evolving itself, so it is important to always pay attention to the linguistic changes. By keeping up with these developments, teachers can prepare their students for real-life communication. Then, the importance of maintaining a work-life balance was also prevalent in many interviews, as maintaining clear boundaries between personal and professional lives is crucial in order to avoid burnout. Professionalism combined with kindness was another

important aspect. While always striving to be professional, it is also important to be kind to yourself and others. Making mistakes is an important part of learning of both teachers and students, and perfection is impossible to reach. Additionally, many interviewees highlighted that seeking help is also something that not only novice teachers, but also experienced educators should not be ashamed to do. The need for assistance must not be considered as one's weakness, but as an aspiration for development and pursuit of knowledge.

At the end of the interview, the teachers were invited to provide feedback and ask questions related to the topic of the discussion. Many of the participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to take part in the interview and voice their opinions, struggles, and concerns, saying that the cause behind this study is extremely important. Some of the interviewees also showed interest in gaining access to the final product of the study to get acquainted with its results and other teachers' perspectives. Several participants said that it is crucial to pay more attention to the emotional and psychological challenges faced by the EFL educators, and shared their hope for positive changes in the teaching community. Their ideas regarding different types of diaries, reflective tools and mindfulness techniques were significantly beneficial, and could be used in future studies regarding journaling and teacher wellbeing. Additionally, Teacher 10 proposed the idea of organizing workshops for EFL teachers, as it could be very useful to share the findings of the study and share certain exercises with them in order to promote self-reflective practices and raise awareness about the importance of maintaining wellbeing among them.

### **3.1.3 Teacher Journal for Self-Care: Concept Ideas**

All the responses from the interviews inspired the creation of a teacher's journal for self-care, designed to address specific needs and challenges voiced by the teachers who participated in the discussion. The idea behind this journal is to help both novice and experienced EFL teachers to integrate self-reflective practices into their daily routine in order to manage stress and regulate their emotions in a structured and supportive environment. This could positively contribute to maintaining their wellbeing and tracking their personal and professional development by documenting their teaching journey. The draft created for this study incorporates various elements and exercises mentioned by the teachers and reviewed during the stage of the literature review. It includes sections for daily reflections, goal setting, mood tracking, emotion analysis, writing prompts, etc. A specific section for First Aid Kit strategies was added in order to provide teachers with techniques that they could use in the moments of high levels of stress and anxiety to alleviate negative feelings. To meet different preferences,

two versions of the journal were created using Canva online software. The screenshots below illustrate these concept ideas for the journal.

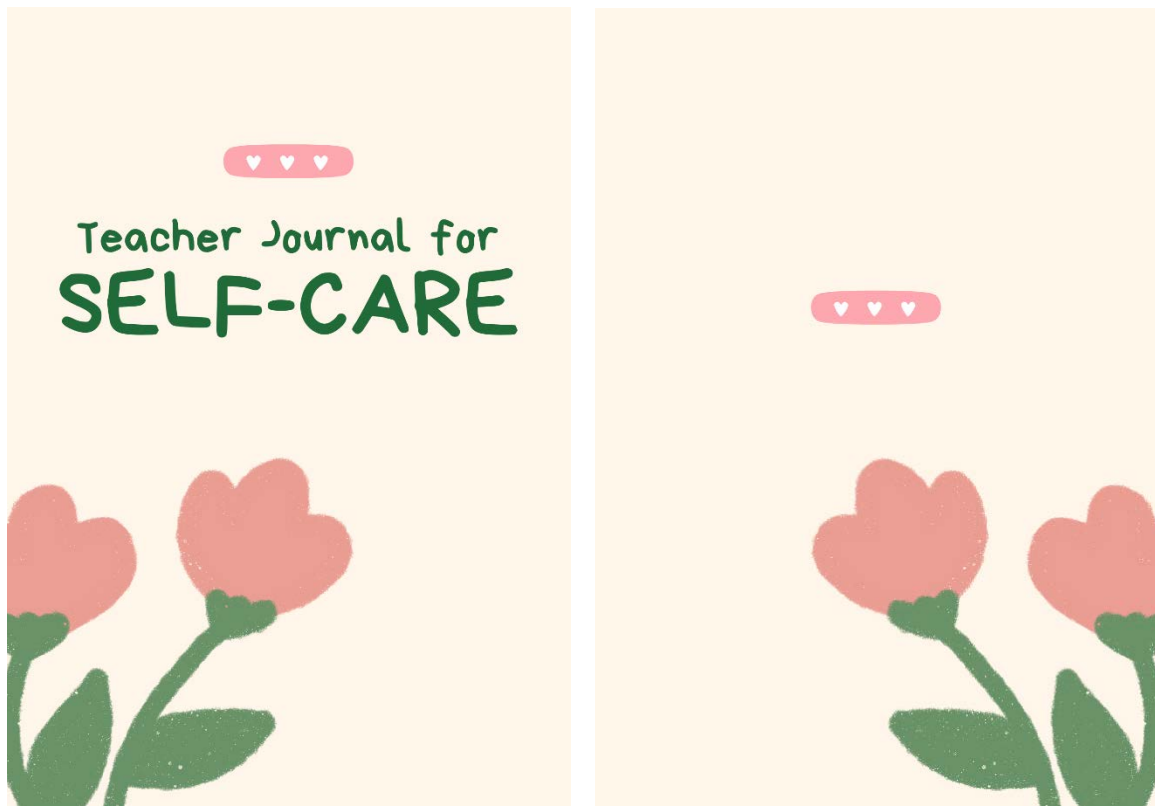


Figure 6. *Front and Back Cover Concept.*

The first version of the journal shown in Figure 6 incorporates a playful “childish” design that includes the usage of bright colors and cheerful illustrations. It intends to create a fun and engaging experience for those teachers who prefer a more lighthearted and creative approach to journaling. On the other hand, the second version, which can be seen below in Figure 7, adopts a more elegant and professional aesthetic with a clean and minimalistic design. It focuses on providing a clear and straightforward layout for teachers who value simplicity and prefer a more traditional and formal way of journaling. The colors used are muted, and the lack of visual elements helps to provide teachers with clarity and a private space without any distractions.



Figure 7. *Front and Back Cover Concept.*

The two versions of the journal, each with a unique design and philosophy behind them, were developed to ensure that all teachers had an opportunity to choose a journaling format that was the most comfortable for them. Additionally, teachers can further personalize their journal by signing who it belongs to on a page specifically designated for this purpose (Figure 8). This tiny feature adds a touch of ownership and reinforces the connection between the teacher and their diary. It also makes the self-reflective practice even more intimate and meaningful.



Figure 8. *Two versions of the signing page.*

The Journal section contains several options for reflective practices that could help the teacher track their mental state and improve their wellbeing. Below, the first page of this section can be observed in Figure 9.

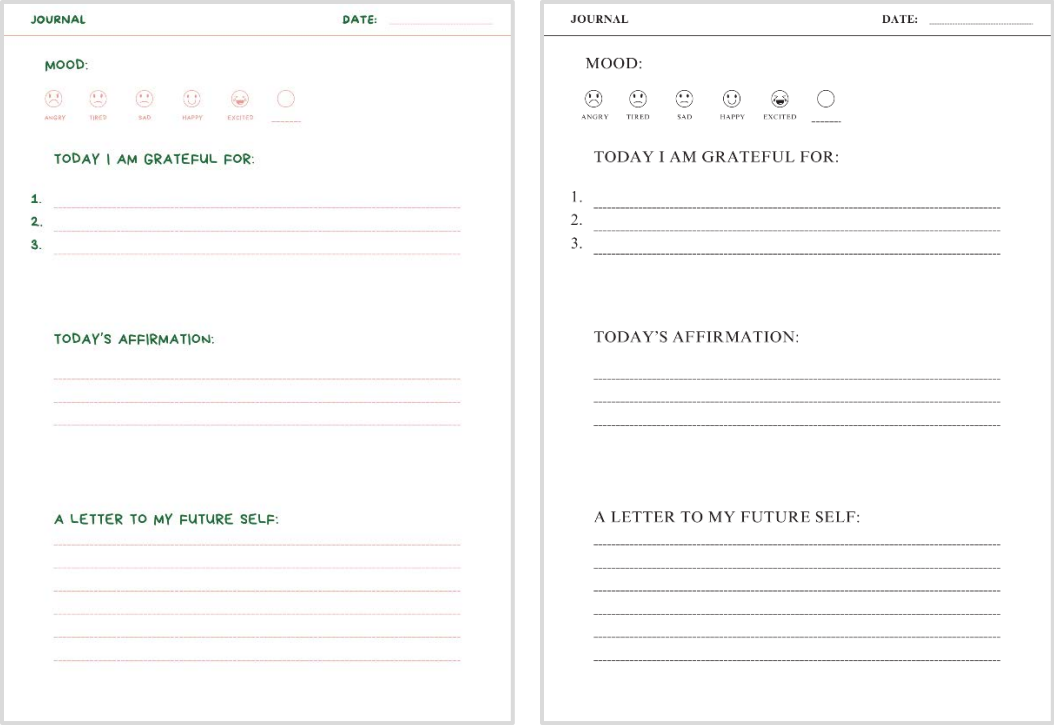


Figure 9. *The Journal section.*

By writing down the date at the top of the page, teachers are able to establish a structured routine of recording their experiences chronologically. This could help them track certain patterns and changes in their emotional and mental state, and see the progress of their teaching journey. First, the teacher can give a general overview of their state by choosing an emoji face that corresponds to their mood. This visual representation serves as a quick way to acknowledge and validate their feelings that they are experiencing at the moment. If none of the provided emojis accurately reflect their mood, they can draw their own version in the blank emoji face, which allows for a more personalized and flexible reflection on their current state. Additionally, they could also name that emotion if it is possible for them, which allows for an even better understanding of their own self. Next, the teacher is prompted to write down three things they are grateful for. This gratitude exercise is a great tool to shift one’s focus from stressors to positive aspects of their life and work. By regularly acknowledging things that bring them joy, the person can cultivate a more optimistic mindset that could help to enhance their overall wellbeing and build resilience. Then, the teacher can write down their affirmations of the day,

which can be either one affirmation repeated several times in order to reinforce its positive effects, or a set of different affirmations based on various the goals that the teacher is trying to reach. As it has been discussed in section 1.2.2, these positive statements can improve the person’s confidence and reinforce their self-efficacy. Consistent affirming of one’s strengths and abilities creates an empowering and motivating environment, which is crucial for maintaining their effectiveness as teachers. Finally, a To-Do List is provided for teachers to write down things they need to complete during the day or in the coming week.

The Diary section depicted in Figure 10 below is presented in a form of a lined page that facilitates the free-writing process of any situations or thoughts that the teacher thinks are worth being written down.

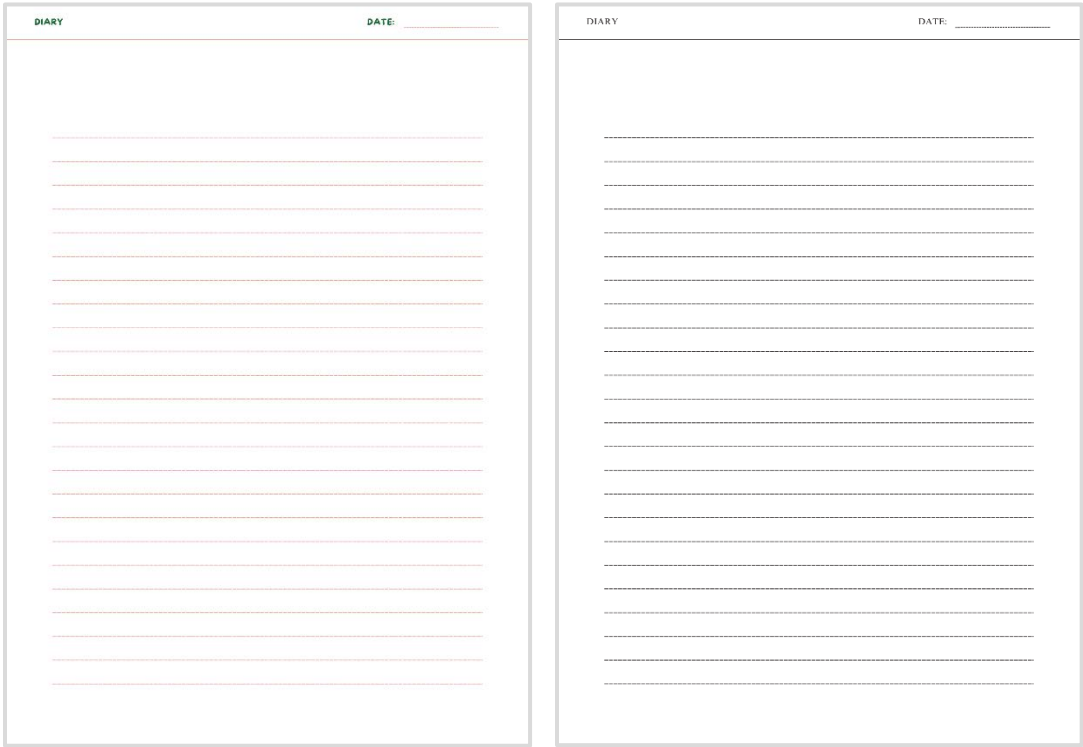


Figure 10. *The Diary section.*

The layout encourages a natural flow of their thoughts without any distractions. Potentially, a list of possible prompts could be later provided for those teachers who struggle with expressing themselves in a written form and need some sort of encouragement. For instance, such prompts as “What was the most challenging thing in today’s classes and how did you handle it?” or “What was your biggest success this week that you are proud of and how did you achieve it?” could serve as a starting point, helping teachers to articulate those things they might not have thought of.

The Emotion Diary section visible in Figure 11 provides teachers with a structured table where they can analyze and reflect on situations that occurred in class in terms of five aspects: event, thought, emotion, behavior, and outcome.

The figure shows two identical forms for an 'EMOTION DIARY'. Each form has a header with 'EMOTION DIARY' on the left and 'DATE: \_\_\_\_\_' on the right. Below the header is a table with five columns: 'EVENT', 'THOUGHT', 'EMOTION', 'BEHAVIOUR', and 'OUTCOME'. The left form has a red header for the table columns, while the right form has a blue header. The table body consists of six empty rows for recording data.

Figure 11. *The Emotion Diary section.*

The first column called “Event” encourages the teacher to describe particular situations that took place during the classes. This could be a challenging interaction with a student, a successful lesson, or a frustrating conversation with colleague. Here, it is important to try to address both positive and negative events, as they are equally crucial. Then, the teacher should try to recall what were immediate thoughts they had in the response to this event. These could be some assumptions or judgements either directed at themselves or at the situation. After this, it is important to identify the emotion that was triggered during the event. Acknowledging such emotions as joy, anxiety, frustration and others is essential in improving one’s emotional regulation. Next, teacher’s behaviors should be documented, including physical responses in their body, such as an increased heart rate or hyperventilation, and their actions, for example, raising their voice or remaining calm. Finally, the outcome of the event is also important to be considered. In this column, the teacher is invited to reflect on the consequences of their responses to the event that took place and the way it resolved. By analyzing the results, the teacher can understand whether their actions were effective and led to a positive outcome, or if



they contributed to an undesirable resolution and should be reconsidered.

Another section presented in Figure 12 is called “Self Exploration”, which includes several self-reflection exercises that the teacher can perform at any convenient moment. This section is designed to encourage deeper introspection and personal growth among teachers, allowing them to slow down and pay attention to different aspects of their lives more attentively.

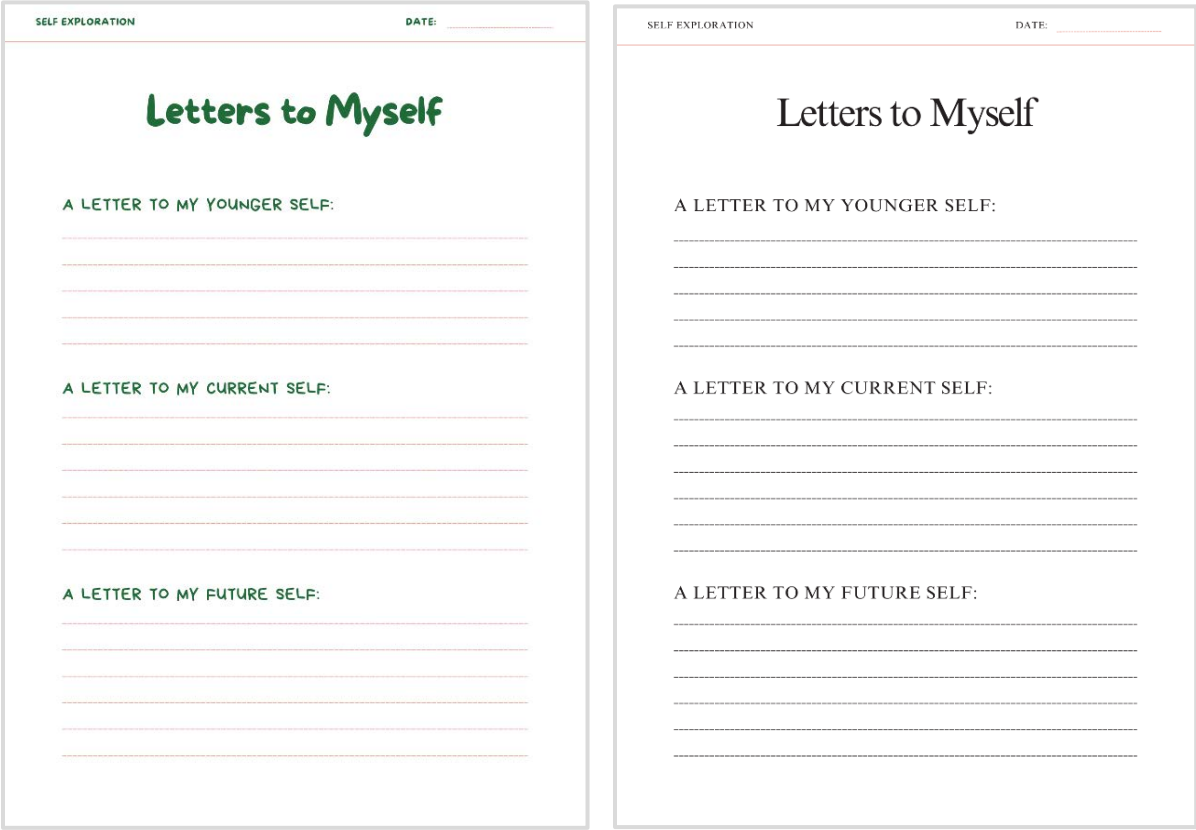


Figure 12. “Letters to Myself” reflective practice page.

An example of a reflective exercise is “Letters to Myself”, where the teacher can write three different letters to their younger, current and future selves. This prompts the person to look into themselves, contemplate about the changes in their personal and professional lives, think of their goals and current worries. To make this exercise even more effective, several copies of the same exercise could be provided for teachers to perform it again over time and see whether their perspective has changed.

A section with the First Aid Kit exercises is also present in this journal and is depicted in Figure 13 below.

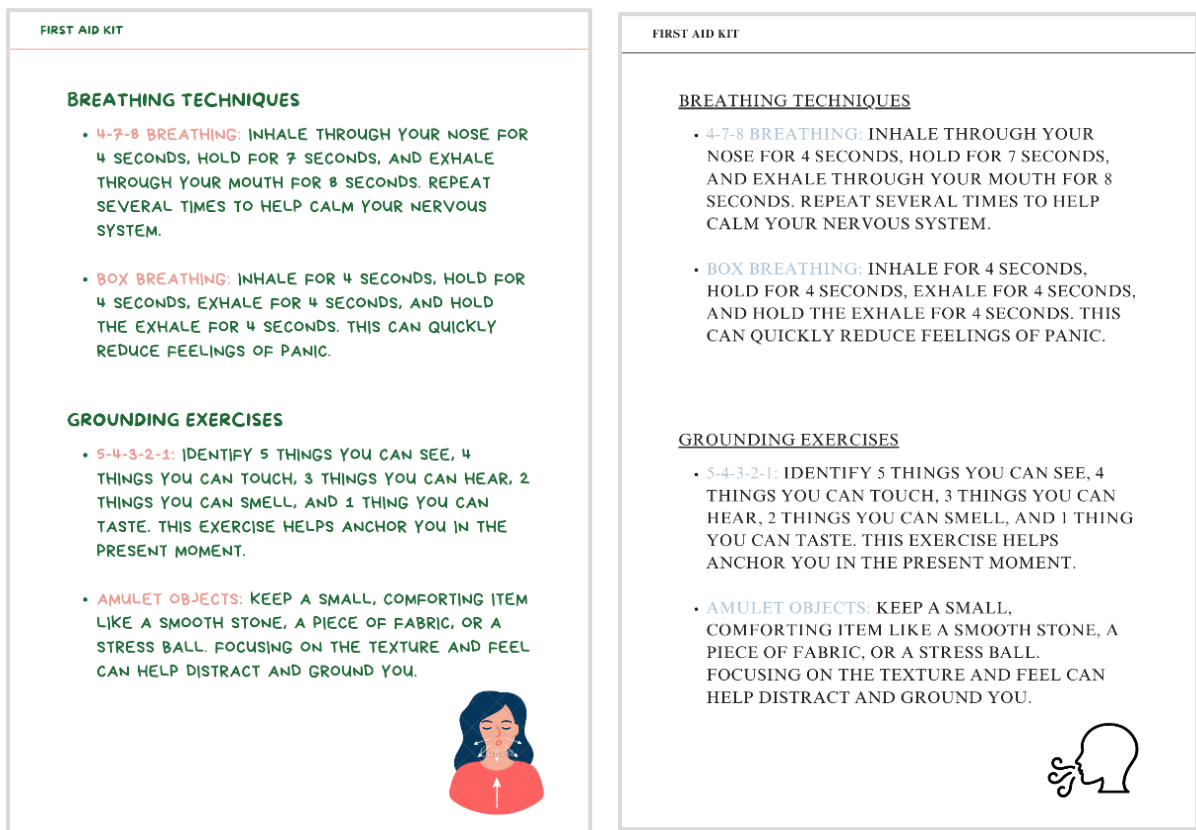


Figure 13. *First Aid Kit Section.*

This section is designed to provide teachers with effective exercises and strategies for managing stress and emotional challenges. By engaging with different activities, teachers can alleviate feelings of anxiety or even panic. However, it is important to remember that these exercises serve only as the first aid and cannot solve the problem at its roots. Thus, it would be effective to also provide teachers with hotline phone numbers, where they could seek professional help. Overall, this concept idea of an EFL teacher’s journal of self-care intends to supply EFL teachers with a structured and supportive tool to document their feelings and make sense of their emotions by engaging themselves in different self-reflective practices. This draft version of the journal emphasizes the importance of creating a safe space for educators to reflect on their personal and professional experiences and aims to help them maintain their wellbeing by building resilience, creating a more positive outlook on their lives and following a healthier work-life balance. Implementing this tool in teaching practice would serve as an effective resource of support, helping EFL teachers of different backgrounds and experience levels to address various challenges they face at work.

## **3.2 Discussion**

The following section presents the discussion of the results of this study within the broader context of EFL teachers' wellbeing. First, the results are interpreted in terms of the research questions regarding factors influencing teacher wellbeing and journaling as a reflective practice. Then, the possible implications of the findings in the current state of teacher wellbeing are considered, particularly in terms of improving EFL teachers' work-life balance and mental health. Next, the limitations of the study are acknowledged to address these issues in further investigations of the topic. Finally, a list of recommendations for future research is provided in order to alleviate the limitations discussed, and to facilitate further development and support of strategies that could be integrated into the settings of ELT.

### **3.2.1 Interpretation of the Results**

The first research question regarded factors influencing EFL teachers' wellbeing. Our results confirm the importance of aspects such as personal characteristics and emotions, relationships, societal status of teachers in the society, and working environment in shaping EFL teachers' experiences (Brierton & Gkonou, 2022; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; see Chapter 1). They also provided a more complex overview of emotional demands, stress related to cultural adaptation, and pressures from the professional responsibilities. The analysis of diary entries and interviewee's responses revealed several aspects that have a huge impact on teachers' physical and psychological states. One of the key factors affecting EFL teachers' wellbeing identified was the overwhelming workload that caused teachers to experience high level of stress and anxiety, and a wide range of physical constraints, such as sleep and food deprivation, gains and losses of weight, constant fatigue, immune system dysfunction, and others. The pressure to work overtime and not having an opportunity to rest outside regular working hours or even at weekends also contributes to teachers' physical and mental exhaustion. This necessity to accept multiple responsibilities often led to an imbalanced approach to handling their professional and personal lives. Moreover, as it has been mentioned earlier, the teacher must maintain a professional image and not let their fatigue influence the classroom atmosphere (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Nevertheless, this act of masking one's tiredness can also have negative outcomes, where teachers push to their limits and sacrifice their own wellbeing to the point where they start experiencing emotional and physical exhaustion. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance often seem to be an impossible task in the conditions that teachers have to work in,

which leads to another important factor of the workplace environment. When working in a supportive team where teachers get enough constructive feedback and have opportunities for professional development, they feel more valued and, consequently, more motivated and satisfied with their job. On the contrary, lack of support from administrators and colleagues makes teachers feel isolated and undervalued, which leads to increased stress levels and a decreased self-esteem (Babic et al., 2022). Additionally, those educators who were engaged in a private teaching practice highlighted the benefits of having an opportunity to organize their own comfortable environment. This autonomy provided teachers with flexibility to tailor their teaching experience to their personal preferences, including teaching methodologies, materials used in class, and working hours. This ultimately resulted in increased job satisfaction and reinforced their professional identity (Olsen & Mason, 2023). Another important factor that emerged from the data analysis was personal characteristics that influenced the way teachers reacted to emotional triggers and managed stressful situations. Teachers who are naturally anxious were more prone to rumination, and their tendency to overthink negatively influenced their wellbeing (Wu et al., 2023). On the other hand, those educators who employed effective coping strategies, such as mindfulness and self-reflective practices, reported better results in terms of stress management and commented on having a more positive outlook on their teaching experience (Ghasemi, 2022). Student-teacher relationships and classroom management was another factor influencing teachers' wellbeing. The way learners behave in class and their level of engagement has a great influence on the teachers' psychological and physical state. Positive interactions with students, expressions of gratitude from learners and a general sense of mutual respect contributed to a fulfilling teaching experience. Emotional bonds created between teachers and their students brought educators a sense of being valued and helped them to stay motivated (Spilt et al., 2011). However, it is important to point out that teachers still should maintain a particular professional distance between them and their students. As it has been seen from the participants responses, students sometimes begin to blur the boundaries and start treating their teacher not as an educator, but as a friend. Not seeing one's instructor as an authority figure can lead to a wide range of issues, particularly students misbehaving and not taking the instructions seriously. Another problem that could arise in this case is when students start oversharing specific personal information, especially while working with a private tutor during one-on-one classes. In these settings, students often see classes as a safe space to share their worries and struggles, seeing their private tutor as a person they could trust with their concerns. Nevertheless, teachers still should be very careful with the information they receive from their students, and tackle these situations with extreme sensitivity and professionalism

(Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013). In contrast, disrespectful and disruptive student behaviors can lead to increased stress, frustration and even burnout, as teachers tried to restore classroom discipline and maintain their boundaries (Aldrup et al., 2018). The problem of the discussed stereotypes towards female teachers particularly undermines the professionalism of female EFL educators and causes certain biases towards them among students, parents, colleagues, and even administrators. As a result, it can contribute to the undervaluation of the contribution of female teachers to the educational process and limit their opportunities for professional development, which can negatively influence their wellbeing and motivation to work (Sperandio, 2014). Moreover, the ability to access information quickly and engage with it in the highly interactive ways has made it more difficult for learners to process complex, lengthy, and less stimulating materials. This drastic change demands teachers to present their lessons in the most engaging way, although even very big efforts to create interactive lesson plans cannot guarantee that students would not lose focus. Certain psychological characteristics can also negatively influence learners' ability to follow instructions, and puts pressure on teachers who must be even more mindful of diverse learning needs and attention spans of their students, and maintain discipline and engagement in the classroom more effectively (Greene, 1995). Additionally, interviewees' responses have shown that the treatment that they got was heavily influenced by the kind of teaching role they had (a public school teacher or a private tutor), and the country in which they worked. Most of the participants highlighted the fact that the treatment they received as private tutors was significantly better compared to their working experience at public state schools (Imtiaz, 2018).

In terms of the second research question, which addressed the influence of journaling on teacher wellbeing, the results of the study has reinforced the literature's emphasis that journaling can be a powerful self-reflection tool for managing stress and professional development, and keeping a digital diary can have a variety of benefits (Dreyer, 2015; Lowe et al., 2013). Several studies discussed in Chapter I advocate for diary keeping as a method for teachers to engage in introspection and reflection on their professional growth and emotional intellect (Brierton & Gkonou, 2022; Kelly et al., 2022; Petrón & Uzum, 2016; Sulis, 2023). The commonly kept professional diary used for classroom management is extremely beneficial for teachers in terms of organizing their work. However, it could have much more potential not only for external observations, but also for internal reflections regarding the teacher's emotional responses and professional growth. Journaling can come in different forms, including paper and digital modes. Participants of the study shared two digital apps built specifically for journaling with numerous features for making one's writing experience more productive. These features include

prompting, the option to categorize diary entries, and search engines used for finding specific keywords. Apart from that, the editing opportunities are also endless. The apps allow users to create multimodal digital diaries that can include photos, links and even voice recordings, which makes the journaling experience more engaging. Additionally, they even have a feature that allows the user to set a reminder for themselves. This can be useful specifically for those who need motivation to make journaling habitual – by setting a daily reminder at a specific time, individuals can create a consistent routine, ensuring that journaling becomes an essential part of their life. These notifications can also serve as an encouragement to slow down and take a moment to acknowledge what the person is feeling at the moment. Moreover, for those who are concerned about their privacy, digital diaries provide a secure option of password protection, ensuring that personal data remains confidential.

Our data show that when exercised regularly, this practice of documenting one's thoughts, emotions and experiences allows the person to process situations more effectively, leading them to a sense of emotional clarity and control (Lowe, 2013: 14). Despite its time-consuming nature, diary keeping can help educators to develop professionally through analyzing situations that happen in class and discover better solutions to personal and professional issues by slowing down and viewing their challenges from a fresh new perspective. Furthermore, the act of acknowledging one's achievements and strong points serves as an effective self-empowering technique that helps teachers build resilience and gain a more positive outlook on their profession (Aguilar, 2018). The teacher journal for self-care that was created based on the findings of the study has a lot of potential for becoming a comprehensive tool to support EFL teachers in managing a variety of challenges they face in their professional and personal lives, and fostering their confidence, resilience and professional growth.

While the findings largely align with the existing literature on teacher wellbeing and the use of journaling in ELT, there are some nuances derived from the analysis of the data that add depth to the current research. One peculiarity is the shift of some EFL teachers from public school teaching to private tutoring and the way their wellbeing positively improved. This transition was often motivated by a desire for greater autonomy and flexibility, and this study revealed how different teaching contexts impact stress levels, job satisfaction, and professional identity. Additionally, the concept of a second/third language identity that derived from the conversations with the teachers during interviews, but has not been thoroughly explored in the existing literature. The findings suggest that language identities that EFL teachers possess play a crucial role in shaping their professional identity, especially when it comes to documenting their experiences in a diary with the help of different languages they know. Moreover, the study

also brought up unique challenges and experiences faced by expatriate teachers, who are often overlooked in discussions of teacher wellbeing (Vincent et al., 2023). The data has shown that their experiences vary depending on the environment they enter, and more focus should be drawn to this specific group of EFL educators. Also, a growing trend was identified regarding the use of gamified diary apps instead of paper journals, as receiving reward for completing daily diary tasks can increase motivation to complete journal entries (Taylor et al., 2018). The use of digital journaling tools has not been extensively covered in the literature, despite the fact that these apps provide an alternative to traditional diary keeping that could be more effective for those EFL teachers who prefer to keep their work and materials online.

### **3.2.2 Limitations**

While the study offered rich and valuable insights into the role of personal narrative and journaling as a tool for maintaining teacher wellbeing, some limitations must be acknowledged. As it has been discussed in section 2.4, autoethnography as a method can reach a high level of subjectivity and potential bias in self-reporting, since it is reliant on personal experiences (Ellis et al, 2011). The emotional and self-reflective nature of this kind of research implies that the recorded experiences and the way they are analyzed can be heavily influenced by the researcher's mood, memory and background. This makes it challenging to provide reliable objective findings. Another limitation concerns the nature of diary-based research. In this study, it has been stated that in order to fully experience the benefits and positive influence of journaling, it is crucial to perform this practice consistently and on a regular basis. However, in the context of this study, it was extremely challenging to maintain a habit of writing regularly over a long period of time due to time constraints of the working days, fatigue and self-imposed pressure put over the researcher in terms of content worth being written down. This creates a risk of diary entries providing less detailed data.

When it comes to the interviews, the small sample size was another limitation, as experiences of a small group cannot be representative of the larger population. Discussions were conducted with fifteen EFL teachers, and despite the valuable information gained from the interviews, the findings cannot cover the full range of various experiences and perspectives within the large community of other English teachers. The demographic scope also presents a certain limitation. The decision to focus on experiences of EFL teachers from Russian-speaking countries was influenced by the researcher's own background and thus sharing similar experiences with the participants. This shared cultural context served as a foundation for an open and honest

conversation with the interviewees, as both the researcher and the participants could relate to each other's narratives. However, this limits the ability to generalize the findings of the study, as EFL teachers coming from different cultural backgrounds may face contrasting challenges and approach their wellbeing in other ways. An additional limitation of the study concerns the expertise level of the interviewed teachers, as most of the participants had more than five years of ELT experience. Despite the fact that this allowed the researcher to gain valuable insights into the long-term challenges and a variety of effective coping strategies, it could have been extremely beneficial to include a larger number of novice teachers in the study. Beginner educators face unique challenges, such as adapting to the demanding responsibilities of the teaching profession and are usually at higher risk of struggling from stress and burnout (Gavish & Friedman, 2010). Thus, including their narratives could contribute to developing a more multifaceted view on teacher wellbeing. Finally, since the study primarily relies on qualitative data derived from detailed personal narratives, the lack of statistical quantitative data can be perceived as another limitation. The qualitative approach adopted in the study provides deep insights into personal emotional experiences of EFL teachers. However, quantitative data that could be derived from surveys could help reduce personal bias.

Overall, while the study offers helpful and important findings considering EFL teacher wellbeing and the potential benefits of implementing journaling into teachers' daily routine, it is crucial to acknowledge its limitations and consider them in future research. Addressing the limitations of the study will contribute to a richer and more diverse investigation of the topic.

### **3.2.3 Recommendations**

Based on the findings from the study and the information gained from the analysis of diary entries and interviews, and considering limitations discussed in the previous section, five recommendations could be made regarding future research on EFL teacher wellbeing and journaling. To begin with, future studies should include a more diverse group of participants from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. As one of the interviewees mentioned, moving to a different country significantly shifted her attitude towards teaching due to the positive change in treatment she started experiencing at an Italian educational institution. However, the constantly growing number of expatriate EFL teachers still have to deal with an increased set of issues, such as adapting to a new culture, language barriers, and getting used to unfamiliar educational systems. Their struggles of being in the "middling" position are still often overlooked, resulting in them being under-supported and contributing to their feelings of



loneliness and isolation (Bunnell, 2017: 13). Examining their particular narratives could also provide additional valuable insights into the complexities of teaching in a foreign context and the way these challenges influence their wellbeing. Furthermore, incorporating a more focused view on novice EFL teachers in future research could provide a deeper understanding of the struggles of those who are new to the teaching profession. By comparing the experiences of novice and experienced teachers, future research can provide a comprehensive perspective on the evolving nature of teacher wellbeing over time, and it would allow to identify effective strategies and tools that could support novice teachers in their early years, potentially reduce the risk of burnout, and prevent attrition. Moreover, complementing qualitative data with quantitative findings would provide the field of teacher wellbeing with a more balanced approach towards the matter. Different surveys and self-assessment tools could be used to identify the impact of journaling on teacher wellbeing in terms of managing stress and workload, consequently providing more evidence of the effects of diary keeping.

Incorporating longitudinal studies on journaling strategies within ELT contexts would serve as a step towards validating and expanding findings from this study. Further research could focus on maintaining EFL teacher wellbeing through journaling practices over an extended period of time, for example, over the course of a semester or an entire academic year. This could help to assess the continuous impact of diary keeping on their stress levels, job satisfaction, and overall psychological and physical wellbeing. As a result, findings from further studies could contribute to creating an improved version of the teacher's journal for self-care, which was presented in this thesis. In addition, based on the positive feedback from the interviewees, integrating journaling practices into teacher training programs and organizing teacher wellbeing workshops would positively contribute to the support system for educators. Educating future, novice and experienced EFL teachers on the benefits of self-reflective practices and providing them with effective tools and strategies for productive journaling could be a proactive way to raise awareness regarding teacher wellbeing and promoting self-care practices.

In conclusion, the recommendations regarding this field of study underscores the importance of approaching the topic of EFL teacher wellbeing from different perspectives. Expanding the scope of future research would help to address the issues of the diverse teaching community and contribute to the facilitation of a supportive environment of educators. Additionally, the continuation of studies regarding benefits of diary keeping in educational settings on a bigger scale would foster a healthier approach to stress-management and self-reflection among EFL teachers, helping them to build their resilience and become happier educators.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has explored the important role of EFL teacher wellbeing, focusing on the use of journaling as a reflective practice to support and maintain teachers' resilience and emotional awareness. The theoretical framework of this study defined teacher wellbeing as a multifaceted concept that is crucial not only for teachers' personal and professional satisfaction, but also for improved student outcomes and overall effectiveness of the educational system. Specifically, in the context of ELT, teachers have to address diverse cultural settings and institutional pressures, all of which contribute to high levels of stress and an increased risk of burnout. The present study suggested that self-reflective practices, such as journaling, can have a variety of benefits both for novice and experienced teachers. This powerful tool can help EFL teachers to foster their self-awareness, emotional regulation, and a stronger sense of professional identity. The application of the autoethnographic approach allowed collecting valuable insights by studying researcher's personal diary entries, and semi-structured interviews with fifteen EFL teachers. The findings provided a comprehensive understanding of the cultural, emotional, and professional challenges faced by EFL teachers, and highlighted the most prominent themes in the participants' narratives. The themes derived from the data included such topics as work-related stressors, emotional responses, relationships, coping strategies, and other subjects. Moreover, the study demonstrated how reflective practices like journaling can help mitigate various issues. Furthermore, this study contributes to the ongoing research by proposing concept ideas for a teacher journal for self-care, which were based on the insights gained from the data. This journal aims to provide teachers with a structured self-reflective safe space containing a wide range of exercises that could help to guide them through emotionally demanding environment of ELT.

In conclusion, this thesis emphasizes the need to focus on EFL teacher wellbeing and underscores the potential of journaling as an accessible strategy for promoting and maintaining self-care in the ELT settings. The combination of theoretical and practical findings suggests that integrating diary keeping into teacher training and professional development programs can offer significant benefits, enhancing both teacher wellbeing and educational outcomes. This thesis was written in the hope that its insights could contribute to the cultivation of a more supportive and sustainable educational environment, and inspire EFL teachers to prioritize their physical and mental health by incorporating reflective practices into their everyday lives.

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