

An Analysis of Teacher Well-Being amid Recruitment Reforms in Türkiye: A Case of Pre-Service English Teachers

(Received on November 17, 2025 – Accepted on April 28, 2026)

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Abstract

Effective teaching is an important aspect of educational planning and policy-making. As the agents of content delivery, teachers play a sound role in realizing curricular goals and objectives. However, maintenance of teachers' well-being per se is an often-unnoticed component of effective teaching. Defined as an emotional state of overall harmony among multifaceted factors influencing teachers' performance, teacher well-being contributes to the quality of instructional practices in the classroom. Given the recent developments in terms of teacher recruitment policies of the Turkish government, well-being of teacher candidates is likely to suffer from ambiguities about the test and conditions for selection, requirements of the induction period, and procedures following their selection. To shed light on possible impact(s) of these developments on teachers' well-being, the present study investigated pre-service English language teachers' perceptions of well-being amid the revolutionary changes in teacher recruitment in Türkiye. Based on both qualitative and quantitative data, this convergent mixed-methods study used descriptive statistics and content analysis. The study intriguingly found moderate levels of well-being among pre-service teachers. While initial enthusiasm about teaching and confidence in pre-service education were the major sources of well-being, several factors including financial issues, respect, school environment, ambiguity about recruitment, students' attitudes, and workload negatively affected perceptions of teacher well-being.

Keywords: well-being, emotional, unnoticed, pre-service, recruitment

Introduction

Teachers are important agents of change and development who play a sound role in shaping the future generations. While professional qualities of teachers are of crucial importance, psychological aspects of teaching should also be given due attention. As an important construct contributing to teachers' effectiveness in the classroom, teacher well-being refers to the emotional state of harmony amid several factors that affect teachers' instructional practices. Perceived as a by-product of the interplay between teachers' resources and challenges, teacher well-being is defined as a positive emotional state which results from the harmony between contextual factors on the one hand and personal needs and wants of teachers on the other hand (Van Petegem et al., 2005). Teacher well-being is associated with feelings of satisfaction, happiness, fulfillment and purposefulness (Acton & Glasgow, 2015) deriving from teachers' interactions with students, colleagues, school administrations, and the overall educational context where they work. Teacher well-being is proposed to have five main

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components including positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011).

Surprisingly, though, there were some changes in the teacher recruitment system of Türkiye in 2024. The Turkish government made drastic changes in the test and conditions for teacher selection, requirements of the induction period, and procedures following their selection. The new system required taking a high-stakes test and language proficiency test. Selected participants should undergo an induction period of approximately two years with a reduced monthly payment. However, the content and length of the training that selected teachers would take and who would offer this training was still ambiguous when the data was collected. Yet, the ambiguity associated with the new system was likely to pose a sound threat to teacher well-being. Therefore, the study investigated English as a foreign language (EFL) pre-service teachers' (PSTs) perceptions of well-being amid the ambiguities of the new recruitment system. To this end, the study was aimed at answering the following question.

Q-1- What are EFL PSTs' perceptions of well-being given the new teacher requirement system in Türkiye?

Q-2- What are the factors shaping PSTs' perceptions of well-being?

Q-3- What are EFL PSTs' suggestions to promote teacher well-being?

Theoretical framework and Literature Review

Teacher well-being is a crucial construct for the sustainability of effective teaching. It is a complex phenomenon associated with various components such as job satisfaction, a sense of belonging, and managing possible challenges at one's workplace and/or personal life. Fox (2021) emphasizes that a viable conception of teacher well-being should incorporate teachers' sense of efficacy, their individual dispositions (such as positive attitudes or ability to handle challenges) and school connectedness whereas teaching-related stress surfaces as the primary barrier to teacher well-being. In general, teacher well-being is characterized by two complementary theoretical perspectives i.e. hedonic and eudaimonic. Hedonic perspective focuses on happiness and positive emotions as a way to monitor and manage emotions triggered by the demands of working conditions. With subjective well-being as its core construct, hedonic perspective intends to maximize positive emotions and avoid negative emotions (Pereira et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Eudaimonic perspective, however, prioritizes meaning and self-realization along with a focus on purposeful living. While hedonic perspective centers on external resources such as institutional support, eudaimonic perspective underlines the role of internal resources such as workplace spirituality in teacher well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Thottathil & Nandakumar, 2025).

Teacher well-being promotes not only teacher effectiveness (Bajorek et al., 2014; Day, 2008) but also students' achievement and well-being (McCallum, 2020; McCallum & Price, 2010). Previous study premised that teacher well-being had a direct interplay with individual, interpersonal and contextual factors (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Soini et al., 2010). Individual factors refer to the cognitive and affective traits of teachers including self-efficacy, autonomy and attitudes towards teaching (Soini et al., 2010). Interpersonal factors stand for the relationship between individual teachers on the one hand and school administration, students and other colleagues on the other (McCallum & Price, 2010; Osuch & Majchrzak, 2023). In particular, possible problems caused by students can negatively affect teacher well-being (Milatz et al., 2015; Spilt et al., 2011). Contextual factors are associated with traits of the local context where teachers work including classroom size, socio-geographic location and workload (Babic et al., 2022; Doecke et al., 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

The extent to which teachers are given a voice and offered support by other stakeholders in their school contexts is another salient component that influences teacher well-being (Chen et al., 2022; Hobson & Maxwell, 2017). Moreover, Imazeki (2005) defined job stability and career options as sound predictors of teacher well-being, which implied that teachers granted with full-time, permanent positions

and professional development opportunities would have higher levels of well-being. In this regard, cultivating a reliable self-awareness of well-being in early-career teachers may reduce high attrition rates all over the world as well-being awareness will contribute to teachers' longevity and productivity (McCallum & Price, 2010). Accordingly, teachers with high well-being were found to share personal examples and experiences more freely, use humour and praise their students more compared to teachers with low well-being (Kansu, 2018).

Analyzing teacher well-being through five dimensions including physical well-being, workplace culture, social relationships, teacher status, and personal meaning and purpose, Babic et al. (2022) premised that teacher well-being was a collectively and socially determined phenomenon. Similarly, teachers' perceptions of well-being are not static (Osuch & Majchrzak, 2023); that's why various developments in physical, social and professional lives of teachers can trigger fluctuations in their well-being. Given that EFL teachers are specifically prone to job-related stress and burnout, it is essential that ideal socio-economic and physical conditions should be set to ensure high teacher well-being and maximize benefits for effective teaching and learning (Diener & Seligman, 2004).

Policy reforms to update the conditions required for teacher recruitment have been made across several countries. Common to such reforms was the attempt to enforce certain requirements to ensure teacher quality and effectiveness. For example, India introduced the Teacher Eligibility Test, in which teacher candidates were mandated to have pre-determined qualifications for a teaching position in public schools (Ghazee, 2021). Moreover, Finland imposed a decentralized recruitment reform which granted school administrations and municipalities to recruit teachers (Sahlberg, 2011). Though no studies could be found which investigated direct links between such reforms and teacher well-being, it was logical to claim that the stricter requirements mandated by these reforms aggravated possible challenges teachers would face for being recruited and in turn, promote their teaching-related stress and anxiety along with threatening their well-being.

Method

Study design

The study was a descriptive, explanatory study (Creswell, 2003) which was primarily aimed at investigating EFL PSTs' perceptions of well-being amid the developments in the teacher employment system in Türkiye. This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design as both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in parallel (Heap & Waters, 2019) so that a comprehensive projection of EFL PSTs' well-being could be provided. The study ensured anonymity by using pseudonyms where participant names were required. Participation in the study was voluntary.

The study was conducted in a public university located in the southern region of Türkiye. The institute where the participants were enrolled offered courses such as Linguistics, Language Acquisition, Teaching English to Young Learners, Teaching Language Skills, and Language Teaching Methodologies. The institute largely adopted English-mediated instruction. The study was conducted at a time when the recruitment system for teachers was subject to drastic reforms. The new system required teacher candidates to take an exam titled 'Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Akademi Giriş Sınavı (MEB-AGS)' (literally translated as Ministry of National Education Academy Entrance Exam) and follow an extra training program which would last about 12 months for graduates of education faculties. The program was supposed to include theoretical and practical courses; however, no clear information was yet available at the time of data collection. According to the system, the candidates would be granted limited salary and health insurance throughout the training program.

Study participants

The study used convenience sampling (Cohen et al. 2007). A total of 42 FL pre-service teachers (15 males and 27 females) participated in the study. The participants' age ranged between 22-30. The

participants were senior students in an English Language Teaching program. They had all completed compulsory teaching practicum and all the other courses in the program. Informed of the purposes of the study, the participants were ensured that they were free to withdraw from the study any time, and their responses would be anonymously used for research purposes only. Yet one should notice that the relatively small number of the sample along with the sampling method were major limitations reducing generalizability of possible results.

Instruments

The study used both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) was used to collect information about pre-service FL teachers' perceptions of well-being regarding their prospective occupation. The scale consists of 14 Likert-type statements of feelings and thoughts. The items in the scale are anchored from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time). All the items are positively scored and thus, the possible scores range between 14-70. The study found that the WEMWBS was internally consistent as the Cronbach' Alpha was high (Table 1). To collect qualitative data, the study used a structured form. The form was developed by the researcher to probe deeper into well-being perceptions of the participants. Consisting of three open-ended items, the form asked the participants to document a) if they feel well as a teacher candidate, b) factors that make them feel well/unwell, and c) possible factors to make EFL PSTs feel better.

Table 1.

Reliability analysis for the WEMWBS

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	N of items
,900	,899	14

Data analysis

The study used a mixed-methods approach to analyze the data collected from the participants. The quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics. The quantitative analyses revealed means and standard deviations in addition to maximum and minimum values for the WEMWBS. The qualitative data obtained from the participants' responses to the structured form were analyzed through content analysis. Conducted by the researcher, content analysis included a binary process of preliminary and focused-coding (Charmaz, 2006). Preliminary coding yielded tentative codes and keywords while the focused-coding provided themes and categories for a thorough representation of the data. To find out possible factors affecting teacher well-being, for example, preliminary coding yielded a set of codes including student behaviours, students' noise, students' good behaviours, and classroom management whereas focused-coding summarized them under the roof term 'students'. Given the analysis was done by the researcher, intra-coder reliability was used to measure reliability of the coding procedures. Following the re-coding of the original data after a one-week interval, the researcher used Miles and Huberman's formula of "number agreements/ total number of agreements + disagreements" (1994, p. 64) and found an intra-coder reliability of .84, which was a sufficiently high score (Saldana, 2009).

Findings

EFL PSTs' perceptions of well-being

The present study revealed that EFL PSTs had moderate levels of well-being as their mean on WEMWBS was 3,28 (Table 2). The results of the descriptive statistics implied that with a standard deviation of .65, the participants' well-being scores roughly ranged between 37-55 out of a total of 70. It was surprising to note that the participants who were to start a new professional career were nowhere near a satisfactory level of mental well-being regarding their prospective occupation.

Table 2.

Descriptive analysis of FL teachers' well-being

	f	Min.	Max.	X	Sd
WEMWBS	42	1,93	4,57	3,28	,65

Factors shaping the perceptions of well-being

Results of the content analysis provided valuable insights into possible factors that shaped the participants' perceptions of well-being. Based on the responses given to the open-ended form, the study revealed that the participants underwent a sound confusion about their professional trajectory. On the one hand, some of the participants stated that they were feeling well and optimistic about their job. This group of participants ascribed their well-being to their initial motivation and enthusiasm about teaching and the professional training they had at the university. To exemplify the participants' positive perceptions of well-being, one of the participants highlighted that *"I generally feel well because I have always wanted to be a teacher and now, I am ready to do my dream job"* (Kubra). Another participant underlined the role of professional training by noting that *"based on my academic background and pedagogical knowledge, I feel well and enough for teaching. I learned about creative materials and effective methodologies and how to design engaging lessons"* (Cemre).

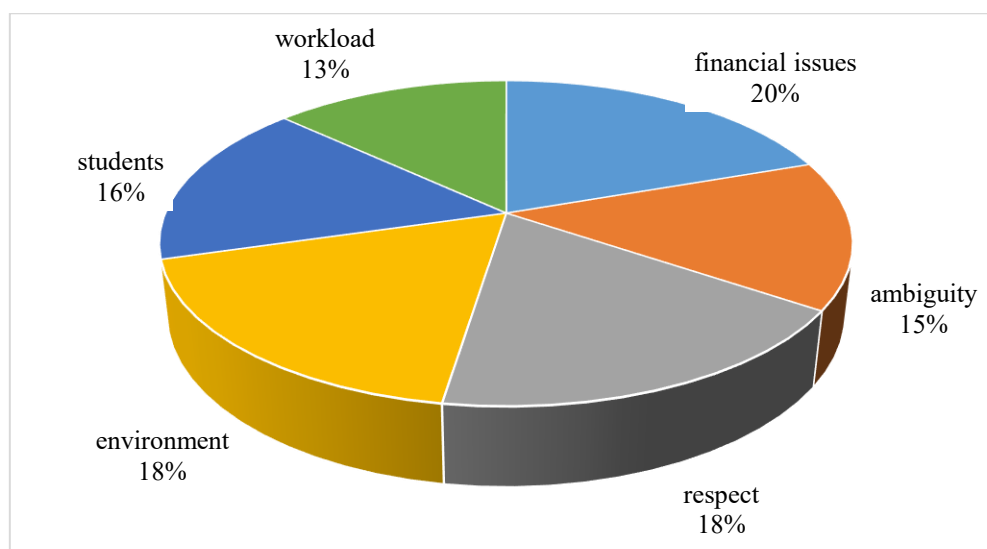


Figure 1. Factors affecting pre-service FL teachers' well-being

On the other hand, a large number of participants documented that they didn't feel well about being a teacher. The study found several factors that negatively impacted the participants' perceptions of well-being (Figure 1). These factors included financial issues, respect, the school environment, ambiguity about recruitment, students' attitudes, and workload. Of these factors, financial issues proved to be the most influential one in that the participants unequivocally reported strong dissatisfaction about the salary they would be offered as a teacher. The participants criticized that *"getting a salary that makes teaching worth doing it would make me feel better. But most teachers unfortunately suffer from economic insecurity"* (Aydan). Respect featured to be another factor that affected teacher well-being. The study demonstrated that despite the well-entrenched role of teachers in establishing and guiding the ideal society, EFL PSTs felt unwell about a lack of respect for their profession. One of the participants complained that *"what makes me feel unwell is that teachers are seen as unimportant by the students and parents. They don't respect teachers although it is the teachers who teach, train and shape new generations"* (Ceyda). Furthermore, the school environment where teachers work surfaced to be an equally important factor in teachers' well-being. The study showed that schools where there was "no

cooperation between teachers” (Can), “crowded classrooms” (Ragıp), “unsupportive administration” (Ali), and “insufficient infrastructure like smart boards, computers etc.” (Esra) were defined by the participants as a challenge that threatened teachers’ perceptions of well-being.

In addition, the study pointed out that student-related factors had an impact on teachers’ well-being. In particular, the participants enlisted that “negative student behaviors or their low motivation for learning could directly make teachers feel unwell about teaching” (Erdem). The study indicated that ambiguity about the new requirements for being recruited as a teacher was similarly a predominant factor which reduced the participants’ perceptions of well-being. Given that there was widespread ambiguity over the content, length, location and selection/elimination criteria of the additional training they would be required to take as a result of AGS (i.e. the aforementioned MEB-AGS), EFL PSTs felt deeply unwell about their prospective profession. On the participants stressed that

“We have already been sufficiently trained with courses such as teaching methods, materials design and development, classroom management, and testing/evaluation. However, the new system called AGS causes stress and pressure rather than supporting our development. Therefore, I think that the AGS system should be abolished or transformed into a more teacher-friendly structure” (Ceyhun).

Finally, excessive workload seemed to be the other factor affecting teachers’ well-being. With an emphasis on the number of daily teaching hours, the participants argued that *“too much workload can drain my energy. I feel unwell and stressed when I have too busy a schedule at school”* (Ege).

Suggestions to promote well-being

To give insights into possible ways to make (pre-service) teachers feel well/better, the study yielded a set of factors to be considered by educational authorities (Figure 2). The study revealed that financial improvement through higher salaries was the most prominent factor to make teachers feel well. Clarifying the need for a satisfactory salary, one of the participants argued that *“to overcome concerns about house rents, fuel for my car and other expenditures, I need to make the money that I deserve. Only then, I can feel well and focus truly on my students”* (Nehir). The study unearthed that better job opportunities with conclusive criteria for selection/elimination was another factor that could contribute to teachers’ well-being. The participants elaborated on *“the replacement of the new MEB-AGS system with some more refined and fair system”* (Arda), in which *“standards for teacher selection are clearly stated from the onset”* (Beyza), and *“teachers are given their due rights”* (Hacer). Likewise, the participants underlined that *“the quota should be extended to employ more teachers as several teacher candidates feel threatened by the risk of unemployment”* (Enes). Moreover, the study unearthed that the need for social recognition was a salient factor to increase teachers’ well-being. Referring to the critical function that teachers play in the development the society, the participants required that *“teachers should feel valued and appreciated by the society because they don’t simply teach academic information. They spend a lot of time and energy to teach students ethics, culture, and how to be a good person in essence”* (Derya). A supportive environment was also identified to be instrumental in promoting teachers’ well-being. The participants defined the ideal working conditions for high levels of teacher well-being as *“a supportive environment where my voice as a teacher would be heard”* (Esra), *“I can get constructive feedback from my colleagues”* (Ali), and *“there should be sufficient support from the school administration”* (Eda). The study indicated that offering teachers a flexible schedule was the other factor for promoting teacher well-being. Closely associated with their concerns about heavy workload, the participants asked for *“less teaching hours and some time for my professional growth in order to have a well-balanced social and professional life”* (Ayla). One of the participants concluded that *“a manageable workload would help me stay motivated and confident in my job”* (Berk).

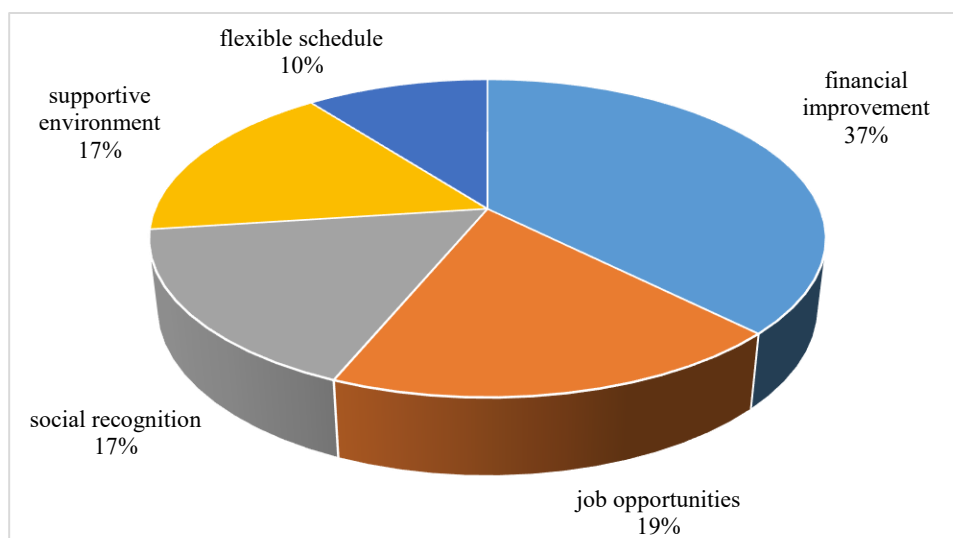


Figure 2. Suggestions to promote pre-service FL teachers' well-being

Discussion

This study probed into EFL PSTs' well-being during a period of drastic reforms in the teacher recruitment system in Türkiye. No matter how carefully these reforms might be done by educational authorities, they will inevitably pose threat to pre-service teachers' well-being. These reforms may critically trigger feelings of concern, stress and unwellness particularly during the transitioning stages because teacher candidates as they will necessarily be worried about practical implications of the reforms. Similarly, several studies (Testa & Delavin, 2025; Zhou et al., 2024) indicated that issues of job security and demands negatively affected teachers' mental health and well-being. Zhou et al. (2024) posited that the way teachers were prepared and hired before entry to the profession was a predominant predictor of their well-being trajectories. Comparing the cases of paid and fixed-term teachers with permanent teachers, Toprak and Toran (2025) documented that financial insecurity, hopelessness, workplace bullying and discrimination reduced teacher well-being.

During such a transitioning stage, this study unearthed that EFL PST had moderate levels of well-being in contrast to experiencing the heyday of initial motivation and enthusiasm about their prospective occupation. Confirming the argument that precarious conditions would negatively affect teacher well-being (Arda, 2023), this result could partially be explained by the massive ambiguity over the specifics of the new system. As such, this study suggested that top-down decisions about critical issues like the recruitment of new teachers should be avoided. Instead, teachers should be given a voice as an integral member of decision-making, which would promote feelings of professional recognition, value and thus, well-being (Hobson & Maxwell, 2017). Given that unstable and inadequate conditions may confound with the peace related to their work (Karikova, 2010), a clear understanding of pros and cons of any reform movements may similarly promote feelings of safety and ownership in teachers.

This study placed strong emphasis on financial factors as an issue affecting EFL teachers' well-being. Based on the plethora of criticisms over the salary that teachers were offered, the study premised that higher income would notably increase EFL PSTs' well-being about teaching. Moreover, social recognition in the form of being respected by the students, parents and overall society surfaced to be a major determinant of EFL PSTs' well-being. Comparing feelings of well-being among international participants, Babic et al. (2022) assured that well-being would be high in contexts where language teachers were valued and appreciated. Hence, this study implied that EFL teachers' well-being would run parallel to their status. In line with previous research (Acton & Glasgow, 2015; Osuch & Majchrzak, 2023), the school environment where teachers would work proved to be an equally important contributor to EFL teachers' well-being. Clarifying possible features of an ideal school environment, this study

underlined the role of a supportive, cooperative and collegial atmosphere in promoting high levels of well-being for EFL teachers. As part of the school environment, workload also emerged to be negatively affecting teachers' well-being. This study highlighted that giving EFL teachers more manageable workload and flexibility in their schedule might be a notable remedy to handle their concerns about professional and personal development, which was likely to promote higher levels of well-being (Arda, 2023; Doecke et al., 2010).

In the same vein, the results of this study pinpointed that as the ultimate beneficiaries of teachers' instructional practices, students factored into EFL PSTs' well-being. While several studies (McCallum, 2020; McCallum & Price, 2010) revealed a significantly positive correlation between teachers' well-being and their rapport with students along with students' academic achievement, this study postulated that student-related factors should be taken into consideration for high levels of teacher well-being. Given the specific context of this study, the results revealed a sound relationship between EFL PSTs' well-being and the perceived ambiguity over the recent reforms in the teacher recruitment system in Türkiye. This result echoed the contention that teacher well-being was a collectively and socially determined phenomenon rather than being personal and subjective (Babic et al., 2022) as the external factors had a critical impact on teachers' perceptions of well-being. Similarly, the participants were concerned with questions like whether they could be recruited and how stable their recruitment would be. Imazeki (2005) defined such concerns about job stability as institutional setbacks reducing EFL PSTs' well-being. To minimize the negative impact of these concerns, the study emphasized that in case of any reforms, detailed and clear information about pre-determined criteria and procedures should be shared with all the stakeholders including teachers in order to ensure and supplement their well-being. Content of teacher education programs should also be updated to reflect any reforms so that pre-service teachers could have sufficient awareness about what are requirements and how to better prepare to handle those requirements for a safe and stable recruitment. With this regard, teacher education programs can offer conferences, seminars and webinars along with a specific course about recruitment opportunities.

Conclusion

EFL education is an important component of the educational reforms done in Türkiye in the last three decades. Yet mere attention to policy issues would fall short of ensuring achievement in EFL education. Evidently, teachers as the agents of realizing these reforms in practice should also be given due attention. Likewise, EFL teachers' well-being merits in-depth investigation because it is through the contributions of teachers who altruistically feel well that EFL education can improve. Accordingly, this study examined EFL PSTs' well-being amid the recent developments in the teacher recruitment system in Türkiye. The study yielded valuable insights into how well/unwell EFL PST felt and what were factors that affected their well-being following the reformist developments. Moreover, the study provided insider suggestions to promote EFL PSTs' well-being as a parameter for improvement in EFL education. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the results were limited to the context of this study due to the limited number of participants. Similarly, the results should be tentatively handled given that data for this study was collected during a transitory stage when there was massive ambiguity about practical implications of the new recruitment system. Hence, it could be more informative to conduct further research with a larger group of participants from different universities.

Acknowledgement

This paper was presented orally at 7th International Symposium on New Issues in Teacher Education, held on 3-5 September, 2025 in Bursa, Türkiye.

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