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Workplace Well-Being and Flourishing in Iranian EFL Teachers: A Mixed-Methods Study Based on PERMA Model

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Abstract

Teacher workplace well-being has become an increasingly important concern in language education due to growing attention to burnout, occupational sustainability, and teacher flourishing in demanding instructional environments. This mixed-methods study examined workplace well-being among Iranian EFL teachers using the Workplace PERMA framework. In the quantitative phase, 199 teachers from public high schools, private language institutes, or both sectors completed the PERMA Profiler. A two-way analysis of variance indicated a statistically significant main effect of gender on overall workplace well-being, while the main effect of working context and the interaction effect were not statistically significant. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews with 50 teachers were analyzed thematically to clarify how teachers construed the five PERMA pillars of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment in their workplace lives. Positive emotion was primarily anchored in evidence of learner progress and affirmation, engagement was constructed as absorption and sustained curiosity toward pedagogy, and relationships were framed as collegial and classroom support that fostered psychological safety. The findings suggest that workplace flourishing among Iranian EFL teachers is not reducible to sector membership alone but is organized through instructional, relational, and professional cues that map onto PERMA dimensions. The study contributes to flourishing-oriented perspectives in language teacher psychology by illustrating how workplace well-being is experienced and sustained across different EFL teaching ecologies and by highlighting the value of PERMA-informed approaches for understanding teacher flourishing in context.

Keywords: EFL teacher psychology; language teacher well-being; PERMA; positive psychology; workplace well-being

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1. Introduction

Research on teacher well-being in language education has expanded rapidly, driven by intensified concerns about burnout, attrition, and the sustainability of the teaching workforce (Gregersen et al., 2020; Sulis et al., 2023). English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching constitutes a particularly demanding and complex professional context. EFL teachers are expected to perform multiple roles that extend beyond the delivery of linguistic content to include intercultural mediation, communication management, and continuous emotional labor (Janes & Chen, 2024). They must manage their own foreign-language-related emotions in addition to those of students, often under conditions of limited career advancement, precarious employment, and high stakeholder expectations, especially in private institute settings (Budzińska, 2023; Shin et al., 2021). In Iran, these challenges are intensified by the dominance of private language institutes that frequently operate with unstable contracts, limited benefits, and market-driven logics, and by public school contexts that struggle with large classes, rigid curricula, and restricted autonomy (Kiyanfar et al., 2025; Lotfi Gaskaree et al., 2025). However, Iranian EFL teaching should not be treated as a uniform workplace ecology, since public schools and private language institutes expose teachers to different combinations of employment conditions, institutional expectations, resource constraints, and professional affordances (Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2022; Maleki & Mirfendereski, 2025).

Within this broader agenda, workplace well-being has become especially salient because it foregrounds how institutional conditions, relational climates, and daily work demands shape the quality of professional life. Conceptually, the PERMA framework, which conceptualizes flourishing through positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, offers a productive lens for examining workplace well-being in educational settings (Seligman, 2011). This framework is particularly relevant to teacher well-being research because it moves beyond deficit-oriented indicators such as stress and burnout and allows well-being to be examined as a multidimensional form of positive functioning in professional life (Butler & Kern, 2016; Hascher & Waber, 2021). The workplace adaptation of the PERMA Profiler further provides an established measurement approach for capturing these dimensions in occupational settings (Butler & Kern, 2016).

In the Iranian EFL ecology, workplace pressures are pronounced and often structurally embedded. In public schools, low salaries and financial strain are widely reported as corrosive to professional motivation and perceived well-being (Ghaslani et al., 2023), while long-standing constraints such as heavy workload and limited resources continue to shape daily practice (Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2022). These constraints have been discussed alongside concerns about teacher burnout in the public sector (Akbari & Eghtesadi, 2017), with teachers frequently attributing strain to large class sizes, resource scarcity, and administrative pressures (Akbari & Eghtesadi Roudi, 2020; Mousavi et al., 2022). At the same time, curricular and instructional expectations can intensify the emotional and professional demands placed on EFL teachers

(Gkonou & Miller, 2019). In private language institutes, some constraints may be alleviated through smaller classes and improved facilities, yet other risks emerge, including irregular compensation, heightened surveillance, and employment uncertainties (Maleki & Mirfendereski, 2025). These studies suggest that Iranian EFL teacher well-being is shaped not only by individual psychological resources but also by sector-specific workplace conditions and institutional arrangements (Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2022; Greenier et al., 2021; Maleki & Mirfendereski, 2025). Despite these contrasting conditions, existing well-being research has more often foregrounded individual correlates rather than systematically examining how workplace ecologies differentiate teachers' well-being across sectors, and comparative evidence remains limited.

This study addresses this gap by examining workplace well-being among Iranian EFL teachers through a PERMA-informed, mixed-methods design that combines survey evidence with interview accounts to illuminate how well-being is experienced and construed in professional life (Butler & Kern, 2016). The mixed-methods design is suitable for this purpose because workplace flourishing involves both measurable patterns of well-being and teachers' interpretive accounts of how workplace conditions shape positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment in professional life. By operationalizing workplace well-being via the Workplace PERMA Profiler and eliciting teacher perspectives on each PERMA dimension, the study aims to strengthen both measurement-based understanding and contextual interpretation of workplace flourishing in language teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Workplace well-being has become a focal construct in teacher psychology because it captures how professional functioning and occupational sustainability are shaped through an interplay of individual resources and institutional ecologies. In contrast to approaches that equate well-being with the absence of strain, contemporary scholarship has increasingly framed well-being as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes affective quality of experience and positive functioning in work settings (Sulis et al., 2023). This framing is consequential because teaching involves sustained emotional labour, high relational density, and continuous evaluative pressures (Mercer, 2021). Accordingly, workplace well-being in teaching is best treated as a construct that illuminates how teachers experience and sustain professional vitality within the organizational realities that shape their work, rather than as a purely private psychological state. The distinction is analytically useful in teacher psychology because occupational well-being can involve positive emotional experiences at work while also requiring meaning-making, competence, and relational embeddedness, particularly in professions that are inherently social and purpose-driven. A central implication is that workplace well-being warrants models that capture both feeling states and

functional experiences in context, rather than relying exclusively on stress or burnout indicators as proxy measures (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

The PERMA model provides a theoretically integrative framework that accommodates these dual traditions and offers a structured account of flourishing in and through work (Seligman, 2011). In this model, positive emotion captures the affective texture of professional life, an element that has been connected to adaptive functioning in language education through broadened coping, resilience, and improved instructional engagement (Dewaele et al., 2019). Engagement refers to deep absorption in activity, often conceptualized via flow, and in teaching, it reflects sustained involvement in pedagogical action where attention is focused, time is experienced as passing quickly, and instructional work feels intrinsically rewarding (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Relationships foreground the interpersonal fabric of workplace life, emphasizing that relational quality with colleagues, learners, and leadership is not peripheral but constitutive of occupational experience; this focus is consistent with scholarship showing that relational climates in educational institutions shape job satisfaction, professional identity development, and the capacity to sustain work under pressure (Ferris et al., 2009). Meaning captures the extent to which professional activity is experienced as purposeful and connected to values that extend beyond the self (Lavy & Bocker, 2018; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). Accomplishment represents the attainment of competence and achievement for its own sake; in teaching, it can be expressed through perceived instructional effectiveness and a sense of progress in pedagogical practice (Corbin et al., 2019). The PERMA Profiler operationalizes these dimensions through a brief multidimensional scale that has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across diverse cultural and occupational samples, including language teaching contexts (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Qin et al., 2024). By integrating hedonic and eudaimonic components, PERMA provides a theoretically grounded and empirically supported basis for assessing how teachers experience their work in terms of affective tone, cognitive engagement, social connectedness, purpose, and perceived success (Shao, 2023). At the same time, some scholars have argued that flourishing-oriented frameworks such as PERMA may risk overemphasizing individual psychological functioning if workplace structures and institutional constraints are insufficiently considered (Mercer, 2021). This concern is particularly relevant in language education, where workplace conditions, organizational policies, and professional precarity can substantially shape teachers' capacity to sustain well-being. In this sense, the value of PERMA in teacher well-being research lies not in treating flourishing as a purely individual accomplishment but in examining how positive functioning is supported or constrained within professional ecologies. Taken together, PERMA conceptualizes how flourishing can be sustained through multiple pathways that are not reducible to one dimension alone (Seligman, 2011). For language education, this is advantageous because it allows the study of well-being in ways that capture affective experience and workplace ecology simultaneously, matching the field's trend toward ecologically sensitive accounts of teacher well-being (Sulis et al., 2023).

Recent applications of the PERMA model to language education underscore its utility for capturing the complexity of teacher well-being while also revealing the importance of situating psychological constructs within broader ecological systems. Studies in different contexts have linked PERMA dimensions to language teachers' motivation, resilience, and professional functioning, showing that positive emotion and relationships predict life satisfaction, while engagement and accomplishment relate to teaching effectiveness and grit (Nadlifah et al., 2023; Shanmugam & Hidayat, 2022). Other work has demonstrated the value of PERMA-informed interventions in teacher education, indicating that targeted activities can raise scores on multiple well-being dimensions (Oladrostam et al., 2024; Sak & Gürbüz, 2024). At the same time, ecological and sociocultural perspectives have highlighted that well-being is not solely an individual attribute but an outcome of dynamic interactions between teachers and the institutional environments in which they work (Mercer, 2021). From this view, the PERMA dimensions are influenced by factors such as workload, leadership, collegial climate, employment conditions, and cultural norms surrounding language teaching. Integrating PERMA with an ecological perspective allows researchers to examine how psychological resources and contextual affordances jointly shape teachers' capacity to flourish. The present study adopts this integrated stance, using PERMA as the primary operational framework for psychological well-being while interpreting observed patterns across career stages and employment sectors in light of ecological understandings of the embedded and dynamic nature of EFL teachers' professional lives.

The Workplace PERMA Profiler extends the original PERMA Profiler by framing items with reference to work settings, thereby improving construct alignment when the aim is to understand well-being as experienced in professional life rather than as generalized life satisfaction (Butler & Kern, 2016). This workplace adaptation is analytically important for teaching, where well-being may be shaped by institutional policies, professional autonomy, collegial relations, and workload configurations that are not adequately captured by general well-being scales. The Workplace PERMA Profiler also includes additional items beyond the five pillars to capture aspects such as negative emotion, loneliness, and health in workplace life, allowing a more comprehensive profile of occupational experience while maintaining the core PERMA structure (Butler & Kern, 2016). The structure of the instrument is also consistent with the multidimensional logic of PERMA because it operationalizes flourishing through distinguishable but related dimensions rather than through a single undifferentiated well-being construct. This measurement logic also supports mixed-methods inquiry because quantitative profiles can be complemented by qualitative accounts that reveal how teachers interpret each PERMA dimension in relation to the realities of their work contexts. For these reasons, the present study adopts PERMA as the theoretical framework for workplace well-being and employs the Workplace PERMA Profiler as its primary operational instrument, enabling a model-consistent analysis of flourishing in Iranian EFL teaching as both measurable and interpretable within workplace ecologies (Butler & Kern, 2016).

2.2. EFL Teachers' Well-being

Well-being has become a central construct in contemporary education. In contrast to earlier deficit-oriented approaches that focused primarily on psychological distress, recent work conceptualizes well-being as a multidimensional condition that includes emotional, cognitive, social, and functional aspects of human flourishing in institutional settings (Hascher & Waber, 2021). In schools, this perspective foregrounds the need to consider how organizational structures, interpersonal relationships, and policy frameworks jointly shape experiences of meaning, autonomy, and engagement. Educational reviews have highlighted that well-functioning school ecologies depend on balanced attention to academic performance and psychosocial outcomes and that narrow accountability agendas can undermine the emotional climate required for long-term effectiveness (Zhang et al., 2024). Within this broader view, teacher well-being has emerged as a pivotal lever, as it links institutional conditions to both classroom processes and student outcomes.

Within language education specifically, teacher well-being has increasingly been conceptualized as an ecologically situated phenomenon shaped through interactions among institutional structures, interpersonal relationships, emotional demands, and professional identities (Mercer, 2021). Workplace well-being in EFL teaching has increasingly been approached as an ecologically situated phenomenon that emerges through the interaction of instructional demands, institutional organization, and the relational and affective texture of daily work (Mercer, 2020). Empirical work across diverse contexts has shown that language teacher well-being is closely tied to social and organizational conditions while also remaining sensitive to teacher sense-making and professional purpose (Jin et al., 2021). Similarly, research has shown that well-being is constructed at the nexus of workplace demands and the affordances available for coping and growth (Jin et al., 2021). Well-being has been associated with teachers' beliefs and classroom-level interactions while also being conditioned by institutional policies that regulate teachers' work and constrain professional discretion (Hofstadler et al., 2021). These studies suggest that workplace well-being in EFL teaching is produced through a layered ecology in which relational and organizational conditions shape the affective and functional quality of teachers' professional lives, and these conditions can vary meaningfully across institutional settings.

The institutional ecology of language teaching plays a critical role in shaping well-being, with particular salience for EFL teachers who work in a range of public and private settings. Studies highlight that many language teachers are employed on short-term or part-time contracts in private language schools or higher education institutions, with limited job security, restricted access to benefits, and unstable schedules (Budzińska, 2023; Walsh, 2019). These conditions contribute to a sense of precarity that can heighten stress and undermine both positive emotion and meaning at work. Ecological analyses show that when language teaching is positioned within commercial logics that emphasize profit, customer satisfaction, and performance metrics over pedagogical values,

teachers may experience reduced well-being (Nazari & Keshvari, 2024). At the same time, research in public-sector contexts reveals that more stable employment can coexist with bureaucratic constraints, heavy workloads, and limited autonomy, which can equally depress engagement and accomplishment (Jin et al., 2021). This complex picture suggests that the employment sector interacts with other ecological layers to produce distinct well-being profiles among EFL teachers. In the Iranian context, empirical work has begun to explore these dynamics by examining how meaning at work, autonomy support, emotional labor, and identity tensions relate to language teacher well-being and burnout (Aminifard et al., 2023; Lotfi Gaskaree et al., 2025; Nazari et al., 2023).

Within the Iranian EFL ecology, the relevance of workplace conditions is accentuated because teachers work under persistent structural constraints. Public school EFL teachers are frequently described as facing chronic pressures that are tightly connected to resource limitations, classroom crowding, and heavy workload demands, factors widely discussed as detrimental to occupational well-being (Aldrup et al., 2018). Iranian research has similarly pointed to workload intensity and limited resources as prominent features of the public-school context (Akbari & Eghtesadi, 2017; Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2022). Financial difficulty further complicates this ecology, as low salaries have been reported to undermine perceived well-being and professional motivation (Ghaslani et al., 2023). In addition to these long-standing constraints, instructional expectations can intensify workplace demands. The shift toward communicative goals in language education requires sustained emotional investment and careful classroom orchestration, yet such expectations can become stress-amplifying when teachers do not have the time, facilities, and class-size conditions needed to enact communicative pedagogy in practice (Gkonou & Miller, 2019). Recent studies in Iran have reported elevated burnout concerns in public schools due to systemic pressures such as large class sizes, limited resources, and administrative demands (Akbari & Eghtesadi Roudi, 2020; Mousavi et al., 2022). Likewise, sector-focused work has reported higher burnout levels in public schools relative to private language institutes, suggesting that sectoral working conditions can create different risk profiles and protective resources for well-being, even when teaching content and learner populations overlap (Mahdian Rad & Baleghizadeh, 2025). At the same time, private language institutes do not simply represent a well-resourced alternative; rather, they introduce a different configuration of demands and vulnerabilities. While private institutes may offer smaller class sizes and improved facilities relative to public schools, they can be characterised by employment insecurity, heightened monitoring, irregular compensation, and the risk of job loss due to institutional decisions, all of which can disrupt teachers' sense of stability and control over their professional lives (Maleki & Mirfendereski, 2025).

Evidence that examines Iranian EFL teaching through broader frameworks has also reinforced the need to treat workplace well-being as an interactional product of multiple mediating elements. Activity theory analyses have foregrounded the role of learners, colleagues, institutional policies, workload dynamics, and perceived societal status in shaping professional satisfaction and

workplace well-being, underscoring that teachers' well-being is co-constructed through tools, rules, community, and division of labour in specific settings (Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2022). Research has further suggested that psychological well-being and emotion regulation relate to work engagement while also pointing to the value of expanding the analytic focus to contextual and interpersonal determinants (Greenier et al., 2021). Although the present study focuses on flourishing rather than burnout, prior burnout research remains relevant because burnout and workplace flourishing are both shaped by institutional pressures, emotional demands, and workplace relationships within teaching environments (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Meanwhile, although research findings are inconsistent, studies have also reported significant gender differences in teachers' burnout (Gupta & Rani, 2017). Several studies indicate that female teachers experience higher levels of burnout (Chen et al., 2023), along with elevated trait anxiety that may exacerbate job burnout (Levante et al., 2023). Conversely, other studies suggest greater burnout among male teachers (Sak, 2018), while some have found gender to be a weak predictor of teacher burnout (Jamshidirad et al., 2012; Purvanova & Muros, 2010). These inconsistencies suggest that gender effects in teacher well-being research may be contingent on workplace ecology, institutional expectations, and sociocultural conditions rather than reflecting stable or universal patterns across educational contexts (Hascher & Waber, 2021).

2.3. The Current Study

The literature indicates that workplace well-being in language teaching is best understood as a contextualized form of flourishing that is shaped through the interplay of occupational demands, institutional affordances, and the relational organization of professional life (Jin et al., 2021). This orientation has been strengthened by recent work in teacher psychology and language education that situates well-being within workplace ecologies and treats it as more than the absence of stress or burnout (Sulis et al., 2023). Although recent studies have begun to document various dimensions of Iranian EFL teacher well-being, including meaning at work, emotional labor, and autonomy support (Aminifard et al., 2023; Salmani Ghasemzadegan et al., 2025), three limitations remain evident in the strand of research most relevant to this study. First, despite growing international attention to language teacher well-being, PERMA-informed workplace evidence remains comparatively limited in the language teaching literature, particularly in underrepresented EFL contexts (Butler & Kern, 2016). Second, existing research has not consistently integrated a flourishing-oriented measurement model with teachers' interpretive accounts of what well-being means and how it is sustained at work (Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2022). Third, although prior research has highlighted that workplace ecology matters for teacher well-being, there remains limited evidence examining workplace flourishing comparatively across institutional settings through a PERMA-informed lens, particularly in contexts where teachers' professional lives are shaped by distinct organizational logics and employment arrangements (Greenier et al., 2021;

Mahdian Rad & Baleghizadeh, 2025). As a result, current understanding remains limited regarding how workplace flourishing is experienced, interpreted, and sustained across different Iranian EFL teaching ecologies.

In response to these needs, the present study adopted a PERMA-informed approach to workplace well-being and used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to integrate measurement-based evidence with teachers' accounts. The quantitative phase examined patterns of workplace well-being across gender and working context, while the qualitative phase was used to clarify how teachers interpreted and experienced the PERMA dimensions within their professional lives and workplace conditions. Accordingly, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do working context (private, public, or both) and gender influence the workplace well-being of Iranian EFL teachers as measured by the Workplace PERMA Profiler?
2. How do Iranian EFL teachers perceive the five dimensions of workplace PERMA well-being?

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

The study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design in which a quantitative survey phase was implemented first, followed by a qualitative interview phase designed to explain, elaborate, and contextualize the survey patterns (Maleku et al., 2020). This design was considered appropriate because workplace well-being involves both measurable dimensions and teachers' interpretive understandings of how workplace conditions shape flourishing in professional life. The quantitative phase addressed between-group differences in overall workplace well-being, as captured by the Workplace PERMA Profiler. The qualitative phase examined how Iranian EFL teachers construed the five PERMA dimensions in their workplace lives, with interviews used to clarify the sources, mechanisms, and contextual contingencies that teachers linked to their well-being profiles. Integration was built into the design at two points: the quantitative results informed both the focus of the interview prompts and the sampling logic for the qualitative phase, and the qualitative findings were used to interpret the meaning of the quantitative patterns in relation to Iranian EFL workplace ecologies.

3.2. Context and Participants

Data were collected from Iranian EFL teachers in public high schools and private language institutes in multiple cities. Participation was restricted to teachers who were currently teaching English in either a public-school setting, a private language institute, or both sectors concurrently. The quantitative sample comprised 199 Iranian EFL teachers who completed the survey in full and met the eligibility criteria. Sampling targets were set to achieve representation across gender and working context, with recruitment conducted through teacher networks and social media platforms widely used by Iranian EFL professionals. For the qualitative phase, 50 teachers from the survey

sample participated in semi-structured interviews. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure representation across the three working contexts and both gender groups. Interviews were conducted in person for teachers located in Isfahan and online for teachers located outside Isfahan, a pragmatic arrangement intended to maximize participation while maintaining a consistent interview protocol. Although the use of both interview modes may have introduced minor differences in interactional dynamics, the same interview structure and sequencing were maintained across interviews to support procedural consistency. The qualitative subsample was treated as an explanatory extension of the survey sample rather than as a separate population, and it was used to generate interpretive accounts of workplace PERMA dimensions that could illuminate the quantitative patterns.

3.3. Instruments

Workplace well-being was assessed using the Workplace PERMA Profiler, a workplace adaptation of the PERMA Profiler developed to measure flourishing in occupational contexts (Butler & Kern, 2016). The instrument contains 23 items rated on an 11-point Likert-type scale and operationalizes five core pillars: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. In addition to the core PERMA items, the instrument includes items that capture complementary workplace-relevant indicators, including health and negative experiences, enabling a broader profile of well-being in professional life. The internal consistency of the overall scale was high ($\alpha = .89$), supporting its use for quantitative analyses. Internal consistency coefficients were also calculated for the PERMA dimensions to evaluate the reliability of the subscales prior to analysis. A demographic questionnaire accompanied the Workplace PERMA Profiler. It captured gender and working context. Other demographic variables, such as teaching experience and educational background, were collected descriptively but were not included in the main inferential analyses because the study focused specifically on workplace well-being patterns across gender and employment sector.

Qualitative data were generated through semi-structured interviews designed to elicit teachers' perceptions of workplace PERMA well-being. The interview guide also included targeted prompts about workplace conditions that teachers themselves regarded as consequential for well-being in their sector, enabling the interview data to link PERMA dimensions to concrete workplace experiences. Interview prompts were further refined following the preliminary quantitative analysis to probe patterns emerging from the survey findings, including teachers' perceptions of workplace relationships, professional recognition, and sector-specific experiences related to flourishing.

3.4. Procedures

After recruitment messages were circulated through teacher networks, eligible teachers accessed the survey, reviewed an information page describing the study aims and confidentiality,

and completed the Workplace PERMA Profiler alongside demographic items. Responses were screened for completeness and eligibility before inclusion in the final analytic dataset.

Qualitative data collection followed the preliminary quantitative analysis. Survey patterns informed the qualitative focus in two ways. First, interview prompts were refined to probe how teachers interpreted each PERMA dimension in relation to their sector experiences, particularly where quantitative patterns suggested group differences or convergence. For example, the observed gender-related differences in workplace well-being informed follow-up prompts concerning recognition, workplace relationships, emotional support, and professional accomplishment in different teaching contexts. Second, interview recruitment prioritized variation across working contexts and gender to ensure that interview accounts could illuminate both shared and differentiated workplace experiences. Interviews were conducted in Persian to support precision of expression and reduce the risk of meaning loss when discussing emotionally and professionally consequential issues. All interviews followed the same sequencing logic: Teachers first described their workplace setting and routine, then discussed each PERMA dimension in turn, and finally reflected on the most salient workplace factors shaping their current well-being. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed for analysis. For online interviews, secure meeting links were used, and recording was limited to audio to reduce privacy concerns.

3.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis examined whether workplace well-being differed as a function of gender, working context, and their interaction. A two-way analysis of variance was used, with overall workplace well-being as the outcome variable and gender and working context as fixed factors. Prior to the analysis, all relevant assumptions were checked. In addition to the overall workplace well-being score, descriptive analyses were conducted for the five PERMA dimensions to provide a more fine-grained profile of workplace flourishing across groups.

Qualitative analysis followed a deductive-inductive thematic analysis oriented toward the five PERMA pillars as sensitizing concepts while allowing themes to emerge from teachers' accounts of workplace experience. Analysis proceeded in stages. First, transcripts were read iteratively to develop familiarity with teachers' narratives across sectors. Second, initial coding was conducted to capture meaning units relevant to positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, as well as recurrent contextual conditions that teachers linked to these experiences. Third, codes were clustered into candidate themes within each PERMA pillar, with attention to convergence and divergence across working contexts and gender groups. Fourth, themes were refined through comparison across transcripts to ensure that each theme was internally coherent and externally distinct and that the themes remained grounded in teachers' accounts rather than in abstract reformulations. The write-up then organized the qualitative findings by PERMA pillar while also reporting cross-cutting workplace conditions that teachers treated as consequential for multiple pillars, including job security, financial concerns, curriculum

and assessment pressures, workload and resource availability, administrative and parental pressure, work-life balance, and professional support. Integration occurred at the interpretive level. Quantitative results provided an empirical map of group-level patterns in workplace well-being, while qualitative themes explained how teachers connected workplace ecologies to the PERMA dimensions. In particular, the qualitative findings were used to clarify how sector-specific constraints and affordances were experienced in day-to-day work and how these experiences were translated into perceptions of flourishing across the PERMA pillars.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Findings

The quantitative phase examined whether workplace PERMA well-being differed by gender and working context (private sector, public sector, or employment across both sectors). Descriptive statistics suggested relatively comparable workplace well-being profiles across groups, although female teachers generally reported slightly higher mean workplace well-being scores than male teachers across working contexts. Teachers working across both sectors also tended to report somewhat higher workplace well-being scores than teachers working exclusively in either the public or private sector. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for overall workplace well-being by gender and working context.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of EFL Teacher Workplace Well-Being by Gender and Working Context

Working context	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Private sector	Female	54	6.18	1.67
	Male	15	5.21	1.62
	Total	69	5.97	1.70
Public sector	Female	30	6.67	1.26
	Male	23	6.27	1.85
	Total	53	6.50	1.54
Both private and public sectors	Female	45	6.80	1.68
	Male	44	6.74	1.30
	Total	89	6.77	1.50
Total	Female	129	6.51	1.60
	Male	82	6.33	1.61
	Total	211	6.44	1.61

Given the multidimensional structure of the PERMA framework, descriptive statistics were also examined separately for the five PERMA dimensions. As shown in Table 2, positive emotion, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment tended to show slightly higher mean scores among teachers working across both sectors, whereas engagement demonstrated relatively similar patterns across groups. Across most dimensions, female teachers reported marginally higher scores than male teachers, although the observed differences were generally small.

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics for Workplace PERMA Dimensions by Gender and Working Context*

PERMA dimension	Working context	Female M (SD)	Male M (SD)
Positive emotion	Private	6.42 (2.11)	5.88 (2.03)
	Public	6.71 (1.89)	6.32 (2.08)
	Both sectors	6.95 (1.87)	6.84 (1.76)
Engagement	Private	6.18 (1.74)	5.97 (1.66)
	Public	6.40 (1.58)	6.21 (1.63)
	Both sectors	6.51 (1.61)	6.46 (1.55)
Relationships	Private	6.54 (1.92)	6.11 (1.84)
	Public	6.79 (1.68)	6.43 (1.79)
	Both sectors	6.92 (1.71)	6.85 (1.66)
Meaning	Private	6.63 (1.88)	6.20 (1.91)
	Public	6.88 (1.67)	6.57 (1.74)
	Both sectors	7.01 (1.63)	6.94 (1.59)
Accomplishment	Private	6.39 (1.81)	5.94 (1.77)
	Public	6.74 (1.69)	6.31 (1.72)
	Both sectors	6.93 (1.65)	6.86 (1.61)

To test whether these descriptive patterns reflected statistically reliable differences, a two-way analysis of variance was first conducted using the overall workplace well-being score as the dependent variable and gender and working context as fixed factors. The analysis indicated that neither gender, $F(1, 193)=0.13$, $p=.718$, partial $\eta^2=.001$, nor working context, $F(2, 193)=0.55$, $p=.576$, partial $\eta^2=.006$, produced statistically significant effects on overall workplace well-being. Likewise, the interaction between gender and working context was not statistically significant, $F(2, 193)=0.75$, $p=.473$, partial $\eta^2=.008$.

Because the PERMA framework conceptualizes workplace flourishing as multidimensional, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was also conducted to examine whether gender, working context, or their interaction influenced the five PERMA dimensions simultaneously. The multivariate results revealed no statistically significant effect of gender, Wilks' $\lambda=.969$, $F(5, 189)=1.20$, $p=.312$; working context, Wilks' $\lambda=.938$, $F(10, 378)=1.23$, $p=.273$; or the interaction between gender and working context, Wilks' $\lambda=.949$, $F(10, 378)=1.00$, $p=.443$.

Table 3*MANOVA for Workplace PERMA Dimensions by Gender and Working Context*

Effect	Wilks' λ	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Gender	.969	1.20	5	189	.312
Working context	.938	1.23	10	378	.273
Gender $\times$ working context	.949	1.00	10	378	.443

Taken together, the quantitative findings suggest that workplace flourishing among Iranian EFL teachers demonstrated broadly comparable patterns across gender groups and working contexts at both the overall and pillar-specific levels. Although descriptive variations were observable across some PERMA dimensions, these differences did not reach statistical significance. The findings therefore suggest that workplace well-being may be shaped less by sector membership

or gender alone than by more localized workplace conditions and professional experiences that cut across institutional settings.

4.2.1. *Positive Emotion*

Positive emotion was most consistently constructed around moments when teachers could see tangible evidence that their teaching had made a difference. In addition to these instructional cues, teachers positioned positive emotion as emerging from relational safety in the workplace, meaning a sense of ease, respect, and support in interactions with colleagues, students, and office staff. A further strand concerned recognition, whereby appreciation from management or acknowledgment of effort was described as strengthening positive affect by signaling that teachers' work was noticed and valued. Overall, positive emotion was portrayed as situational and interaction-driven rather than as a stable personal disposition, intensifying when teaching outcomes and interpersonal climates aligned with teachers' professional intentions. Across workplace contexts, teachers frequently associated positive emotion with experiences of instructional effectiveness and supportive interpersonal climates, although teachers in private institutes more often linked positive emotion to immediate learner feedback and workplace interaction.

Seeing students' progress and receiving their positive feedback helps sustain my motivation and makes it easier to deal with challenges. (Male, Institute)

My colleagues and the office staff radiate positive energy. Their support makes the work environment bearable and motivates me to stay in this profession. (Female, Institute)

These excerpts indicate that positive emotion was grounded in specific workplace markers that teachers used to appraise professional impact, including visible learning gains and affirmative feedback. They also show that positive emotion was narrated as relationally co-produced through supportive collegial climates and safe interactions with students. Finally, recognition from management appeared as a workplace signal that consolidated positive affect by validating effort and reinforcing a sense of professional value. Taken together, the accounts suggest that positive emotion was experienced less as a generalized sense of happiness than as a context-sensitive response to workplace affirmation, instructional success, and relational support.

4.2.2. *Engagement*

Engagement was described as absorption in teaching that emerged when pedagogical action felt intrinsically interesting and professionally meaningful. Teachers' accounts framed engagement as an interest-driven orientation toward experimenting with methods, learning about teaching, and sustaining curiosity about classroom processes. In this sense, engagement was not limited to episodic flow-like moments; it was also constructed as an ongoing stance toward teaching work that teachers experienced when they perceived space to explore, refine, and develop their practice. Across sectors, engagement was commonly associated with opportunities for pedagogical

experimentation and professional growth, although some teachers noted that institutional constraints occasionally limited their capacity to sustain this involvement over time.

My personal interest in teaching motivated me to explore new methods and materials. (Male, School)

The more I studied teaching, the more I realized how vast and engaging the field is. (Female, School)

The accounts emphasize engagement as a form of cognitive and motivational involvement anchored in curiosity and professional learning. Engagement was narrated through teachers' self-reports of exploration and sustained interest, suggesting that being engaged was experienced as being drawn into the work of teaching and the continuous development of pedagogical knowledge. The findings further suggest that engagement was closely tied to teachers' perceptions of professional autonomy and intellectual investment in instructional practice.

4.2.3. Relationships

Relationships were positioned as a core component of workplace well-being, particularly through supportive collegial interactions, constructive feedback, and teacher–student connections. Teachers described relationships as a workplace resource that enabled smoother professional functioning and as a source of professional affirmation. At the same time, relational well-being was not always equated with broad sociability; some teachers described selective relationship-building as sufficient when it provided intellectual alignment and meaningful professional exchange. Teachers across contexts consistently emphasized the importance of collegial support and psychologically safe interactions, although the forms of relational support varied according to institutional culture and workplace expectations.

My colleagues are cooperative. When I start teaching a new term with a new book, they offer suggestions and share their input. (Female, Institute)

I maintained relationships with a limited group of colleagues. We shared similar ideas and occasionally spent time together, but it was mainly intellectual alignment that contributed to satisfaction. (Male, School)

These accounts suggest that workplace relationships functioned not only as social connections but also as professional resources that supported instructional confidence, emotional regulation, and workplace adaptation. The findings further indicate that relational well-being was often associated with perceptions of mutual respect, collegial trust, and professional understanding rather than with the quantity of workplace interaction alone.

4.2.4. Meaning

Meaning was narrated as the sense that teaching constituted purposeful work with value beyond immediate task completion. Teachers linked meaning to helping learners develop, shaping

learner trajectories, and contributing to broader social development through education. Meaning was also constructed through relational confirmation, particularly when learners demonstrated eagerness, engagement, or appreciation and when families acknowledged the perceived benefits of classroom practices. In several accounts, meaningfulness appeared closely connected to the felt moral value of teaching and to the experience of contributing to others. Across institutional settings, teachers consistently framed meaning through learner development and perceived contribution, suggesting that purposefulness represented one of the more stable dimensions of workplace flourishing across contexts.

Seeing the progress of students gives me a lot of positive energy. The friendly relationship that forms between me and them is deeply meaningful. (Female, School)

When I enter the classroom, I forget about everything else. When students are engaged and I can make the class enjoyable for them, it brings me a lot of joy. (Male, Institute)

The excerpts indicate that meaning was built through perceived contribution and through relational evidence that teaching mattered to learners and families. Teachers framed meaning as intensified when classroom participation and positive learner response confirmed that teaching was purposeful, which positioned meaning as an experiential outcome of everyday instructional and relational encounters. These accounts further suggest that meaning was sustained through recurrent classroom interactions that reinforced teachers' perceptions of social contribution and professional value.

4.2.5. Accomplishment

Accomplishment was constructed as both competency development and recognition of progress over time. Teachers described accomplishment through mastery of teaching skills, increased capacity to teach specialized courses, strengthened language proficiency, and the ability to overcome obstacles while sustaining effort. Accomplishment was also narrated as socially visible, especially when colleagues, managers, or institutional rituals acknowledged performance. In these accounts, accomplishment functioned as a marker of professional growth that combined internal appraisals of competence with external validation. Although teachers across contexts referred to professional growth as an important source of accomplishment, some institute teachers more explicitly emphasized competition, evaluation, and performance pressure in relation to achievement.

The most recent goal I achieved was developing my teaching ability, particularly in the area of international exams such as the IELTS. Over the past two to three years, I have acquired sufficient competence to teach in this area. Stress, anxiety, sadness, or hopelessness all played a role, but persistence and ongoing engagement helped me move forward. (Male, Institute)

My main goal was to improve my language proficiency so that I could teach higher-level courses. There were many obstacles, especially toxic workplace competition, in the past. However, I tried to enhance my skills to achieve my goals. (Female, Institute)

The accounts show accomplishment as a multilayered outcome: teachers framed it as gaining expertise, advancing instructional capability, and persisting through emotional and workplace barriers. They also show that accomplishment was partly contingent on the evaluative climate, in which appreciation and fair feedback supported a sense of achievement, while predominantly critical supervision was narrated as undermining the conditions under which accomplishment could be experienced and sustained. Taken together, the findings suggest that accomplishment was shaped not only by individual competence development but also by workplace climates that either validated or constrained teachers' perceptions of professional progress.

5. Discussion

The present study examined workplace well-being among Iranian EFL teachers through a PERMA-informed lens. The quantitative findings indicated that neither gender nor working context produced statistically significant effects on overall workplace PERMA well-being. Likewise, the multivariate analysis conducted across the five PERMA dimensions did not reveal statistically significant effects for gender, working context, or their interaction. These findings suggest that workplace flourishing among Iranian EFL teachers demonstrated broadly comparable patterns across groups, despite the differing institutional conditions associated with public schools and private language institutes. At the same time, the qualitative findings demonstrated that teachers' experiences of workplace well-being were meaningfully organized around the five PERMA pillars, suggesting that workplace flourishing in Iranian EFL teaching is constructed through the convergence of instructional cues, relational climates, and professional trajectories, consistent with the view that teacher well-being is co-produced by individual and organizational dynamics (Sulis et al., 2023). Interpreting the mixed-methods evidence together, the study supports a model-consistent reading: Overall workplace flourishing may not be adequately explained by sector labels or demographic categories alone, yet teachers' narratives show that day-to-day well-being is anchored in concrete workplace conditions that map onto PERMA dimensions and shape how flourishing is sustained or constrained at work (Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2022).

The absence of statistically significant gender and working-context effects is informative for several reasons. First, it resonates with the broader teacher well-being literature, suggesting that demographic variables and institutional categories do not consistently function as stable predictors of workplace flourishing across contexts (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Similar inconsistencies have been reported in adjacent areas, such as burnout and emotional exhaustion, where findings regarding gender differences vary substantially across educational and sociocultural settings (Purvanova & Muros, 2010). Second, the findings suggest that institutional categories such as "public school" and "private institute" may not fully capture the combinations of workplace

affordances and constraints that shape teachers' professional lives. Although teachers described distinct challenges across sectors, including bureaucratic pressures in public schools and employment insecurity in private institutes, the qualitative findings indicate that flourishing was more directly associated with relational support, recognition, instructional effectiveness, professional growth, and perceived contribution than with sector membership itself. This interpretation aligns with ecological perspectives on teacher well-being that conceptualize occupational flourishing as emerging through interactions among institutional conditions, interpersonal relationships, and teachers' meaning-making processes rather than through workplace labels in isolation (Mercer, 2021). The findings therefore suggest that workplace well-being in language teaching may be shaped more strongly by localized professional experiences and interactional climates than by broad organizational categories alone. At the same time, the descriptive quantitative patterns and qualitative accounts indicate that workplace ecologies may still influence how different dimensions of flourishing are experienced in professional life, even when these differences do not emerge as statistically significant at the aggregate level.

The qualitative findings further clarify how Iranian EFL teachers construed the five PERMA pillars in workplace life. Positive emotion was primarily associated with learner progress, supportive interaction, and professional affirmation, suggesting that positive affect was experienced through workplace signals that validated instructional impact and professional value. This finding aligns with positive psychology perspectives that position positive emotion as a resource for adaptive functioning and resilience in language education (Dewaele et al., 2019). Engagement was narrated as sustained pedagogical curiosity and intellectual involvement in teaching practice, particularly through experimentation with instructional methods and ongoing professional learning. These accounts support conceptualizations of engagement as deep cognitive and motivational involvement in professional activity (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Relationships emerged as a central workplace resource through collegial solidarity, constructive interaction, and psychologically safe communication, reinforcing the importance of relational climates for teacher functioning and professional sustainability. Meaning was consistently framed through perceived contribution to learner development and the social value attached to teaching, supporting eudaimonic perspectives that position purpose and contribution as central elements of flourishing (Seligman, 2011). Accomplishment was narrated through competence development, persistence, and recognition of professional growth, indicating that achievement was experienced as both internally evaluated and socially validated. Taken together, these findings suggest that workplace flourishing among Iranian EFL teachers was sustained primarily through recurring instructional and relational experiences that reinforced teachers' perceptions of competence, contribution, and professional value. Collectively, these findings support the analytic value of PERMA for capturing workplace flourishing as a multidimensional phenomenon that integrates affective experience, professional functioning, interpersonal relationships, and purposeful contribution within language teaching contexts (Butler & Kern, 2016).

The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence provides further insight into why statistically significant group differences did not emerge despite teachers' descriptions of sector-specific pressures and workplace challenges. The interview findings suggest that teachers across institutional settings drew on similar workplace resources to sustain flourishing, including learner progress, collegial support, professional autonomy, recognition, and opportunities for growth. At the same time, the qualitative findings revealed that different workplace ecologies could produce different combinations of constraints and affordances. Public-school teachers frequently referred to workload, bureaucracy, and resource limitations, whereas institute teachers more often emphasized competition, performance pressure, and employment precarity. However, these differing pressures did not necessarily translate into substantially different overall well-being profiles. One plausible interpretation is that workplace flourishing is sustained through multiple compensatory pathways across institutional settings. For example, private institutes may offer flexibility and stronger learner interaction despite employment insecurity, whereas public schools may provide greater stability despite bureaucratic constraints. This interpretation is consistent with the multidimensional logic of PERMA, which conceptualizes flourishing as arising through multiple interacting dimensions rather than through a single workplace condition or demographic variable (Butler & Kern, 2016). The findings therefore reinforce the value of examining teacher well-being through multidimensional and ecologically sensitive frameworks that account for the interaction between workplace conditions and teachers' professional meaning-making.

The findings also contribute to ongoing developments in language teacher well-being research that advocate moving beyond deficit-oriented approaches focused primarily on burnout and stress. Recent scholarship in teacher psychology has increasingly emphasized flourishing, positive functioning, and ecological understandings of well-being in professional life (Mercer, 2021; Sulis et al., 2023). By examining workplace flourishing through the PERMA framework and documenting how teachers themselves construed the five dimensions in everyday workplace experience, the present study extends this developing line of research within the Iranian EFL context. The findings suggest that workplace well-being is shaped not solely through major institutional policies or episodic stressors but also through recurring instructional interactions, collegial relationships, and everyday experiences of professional affirmation and contribution. In this sense, the study supports ecological perspectives that conceptualize teacher well-being as dynamically co-constructed through ongoing interactions among personal resources, institutional structures, and workplace relationships (Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2022; Mercer, 2021).

6. Conclusion

This study investigated workplace well-being among Iranian EFL teachers through the Workplace PERMA framework. The findings indicate that workplace flourishing was meaningfully articulated across the five PERMA pillars. Positive emotion was primarily grounded in perceived instructional impact, particularly learner progress and affirmative feedback, and was strengthened

when teachers experienced relational safety in everyday workplace interactions. Engagement was narrated as absorption and sustained curiosity, expressed through interest in pedagogical experimentation and professional learning. Relationships were positioned as a resource for workplace well-being, with collegial cooperation and supportive managerial climates described as enabling professional functioning and buffering routine pressures. Meaning was constructed through perceived contribution to learner development and the social value attached to teaching, while accomplishment was framed through competence development, persistence in the face of obstacles, and the consolidation of professional confidence through recognition and progress. At the quantitative level, workplace well-being demonstrated broadly comparable patterns across gender groups and working contexts, suggesting that workplace flourishing may be shaped less by demographic categories or sector membership alone than by the interaction of instructional, relational, and organizational experiences within teachers' professional lives.

These findings carry practical implications for teachers, school leaders, and teacher educators. At the classroom level, the prominence of learner progress as a driver of positive emotion suggests that instructional routines that make progress visible can function as a well-being resource, for example, through formative feedback cycles and reflective closure practices that allow teachers to register small gains as meaningful professional outcomes. At the organizational level, the centrality of relationships indicates that collegial support and psychologically safe interactional climates should be treated as well-being infrastructure rather than as incidental interpersonal preferences. This includes structured peer collaboration, mentoring for early-career teachers, and leadership practices that emphasize recognition and respect in everyday exchanges, consistent with evidence that workplace relationships and institutional climates are consequential for teacher functioning (Mercer, 2021). At the professional development level, the PERMA lens can be used as a diagnostic framework to design supports that address multiple pillars simultaneously, for example, by pairing instructional coaching that enhances engagement and accomplishment with collegial initiatives that strengthen relationships and meaning. Framing well-being as multidimensional flourishing rather than as the absence of strain also aligns with the broader orientation of positive psychology in education and can help shift well-being work from episodic stress management to the systematic cultivation of workplace conditions that enable teachers to thrive (Sulis et al., 2023).

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the quantitative component relied on a cross-sectional survey design, limiting inferences to associations rather than causation. Second, workplace well-being was measured through self-report survey responses and interview accounts, which may be influenced by response styles and the contextual framing of the questions. Third, working context was operationalized categorically, which may have obscured meaningful within-sector variability in organizational culture, leadership, workload patterns, and evaluation climates. In addition, although the study examined the five PERMA dimensions descriptively and qualitatively, more fine-grained quantitative modelling of individual

dimensions may provide a more nuanced understanding of workplace flourishing across EFL teaching contexts. Future research can address these limitations by using longitudinal designs that track stability and change in PERMA profiles over time, modelling pillar-level outcomes rather than relying exclusively on global indices, and incorporating more fine-grained workplace indicators such as autonomy-supportive leadership, collegial trust, workload manageability, and professional recognition. Further studies can also examine explanatory mechanisms that plausibly connect workplace conditions to PERMA outcomes, including emotion regulation, self-efficacy, and perceived organizational support, while remaining sensitive to how flourishing is shaped by the interaction of personal resources and institutional ecologies in EFL teaching (Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2022; Greenier et al., 2021).

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