

# Exploring Professional Wellbeing of English Language Teachers

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## Abstract

Teacher wellbeing concerns teachers' satisfaction, happiness, and attraction to their profession. It is equally essential in quality education since the attraction to English language in schools is growing gradually. This study aims to discover perceptions of English language teachers teaching secondary level on their wellbeing in an institutional setting. Using lived stories through in-depth interview and informal communication, the study explores the perception of their wellbeing. The research findings show that teachers teaching English perceive their wellbeing as having positive psychology, positive emotion, respect and achievement in the job, and healthy relations among the institutional members. This study paves the way for a more extensive debate on policy and practice surrounding teachers' wellbeing among educators, academicians, and decision-makers.

**Keywords:** *wellbeing, happiness, satisfaction, competence, accomplishment*

## Introduction

The debate surrounding teacher professional development and quality education at the school level often neglects the concept of teacher wellbeing. Educational policies, practices, and discussions need to focus on teacher wellbeing, particularly in school level. In all-purpose, satisfaction, enjoyment, and commitment to the teaching profession significantly influence teachers' wellbeing (Dreer, 2021). In Nepal, attraction to the English in many educational institutions poses numerous challenges for English language teachers, ranging from content delivery to language skills (Sah & Li, 2018), which

might influence their wellbeing. However, teacher wellbeing is always in the shadow in the context of Nepal. Teachers' role is vital in cultivating a positive school culture and developing innovative teaching methods and materials. They also assist other teachers in delivering subject matter in the school using English as the primary medium of teaching learning, making them integral contributors to creating an inclusive environment for English language instruction (Chaudhary, 2011), as schools are increasingly adopting English as a medium of instruction (Ojha, 2018). Competent, dynamic, and dedicated English language teachers are crucial in successfully implementing EMI (Karki, 2021).

Recent studies have pointed out that EMI poses complex challenges for language teachers' wellbeing, including the pressure to maintain high English proficiency (Yuan & Yang, 2022), communication hurdles, and the need to adapt teaching methods (Ismailov et al., 2021). Navigating diverse student backgrounds, managing professional development demands, and achieving work-life balance are crucial factors (Yusuf et al., 2022) for teachers using EMI. Despite their crucial contributions to shaping a positive school culture (Yusoff et al., 2016), many English language teachers experience frustration due to an unfavorable school environment.

English language teachers are pivotal in fostering institutional development and improving student outcomes. Teachers' performance significantly impacts a school's effectiveness (Ozgenel & Mert, 2019), and a positive working environment is crucial for teachers' instructional efforts. Teacher wellbeing is paramount in ensuring their commitment and success in the classroom. Zhu et al. (2011) suggest the pivotal role of institutional goal orientation, shared vision, and formal relationships among staff on wellbeing. A trusting school environment that offers teachers coaching, training, and support is vital (Aelterman et al., 2007) for their overall wellbeing and dedication.

Numerous studies have investigated the factors influencing teacher wellbeing and its impact on education. For instance, Wei and Chen (2009) found that individual traits, peer relationships, and teachers' subjective wellbeing were positively associated with students' attachment to school. Similarly, Zhu et al. (2011) identified personal commitment and goal orientation as significant factors in achieving teachers' wellbeing and organizational commitment. Besides, Bhusal

(2015) highlighted challenges, including varying student abilities, large class sizes, and limited use of student-centered techniques that negatively impacted teacher wellbeing. Furthermore, the teacher wellbeing was significantly hampered during pandemic. Dawadi et al. (2020) highlighted the detrimental shadow of COVID-19 on students' learning and wellbeing, potentially exacerbating educational disparities. However, in a related study, Gautam's (2020) study stated teachers developed confidence and knowledge on digital tools online professional development programs. These studies highlighted the contexts related to the teachers' wellbeing issues that signify the need for in-depth research on the field.

Similarly, Mercer (2020) emphasized the crucial role of a supportive work environment and positive interactions in promoting language teachers' wellbeing. Examining the specific impact on Portuguese language teachers, Alves et al. (2021) investigated the pandemic's influence on their perception of professional wellbeing. Additionally, Sulis et al. (2021) explored teacher wellbeing considering various contextual factors. These studies contribute to my understanding of the features shaping teacher wellbeing and the far-reaching implications for education.

In the context of Nepal discussion of entire teacher wellbeing is in the primitive stage. After COVID 19, a few studies have been done on teachers' challenges in ICT integration, pedagogical shift (Gautam, 2020), and learning management, and educational policies (Dawadi et al., 2020). Going to the literature, internet, scholarly journals, and personal contact with ELT practitioners of Nepal, I found a limited number of studies on language teachers' wellbeing. Regarding the English language teacher's wellbeing, K.C.

(2021) reflected on the general introduction and pedagogical success to wellbeing. The issue of language teachers' wellbeing has not been well-explored in ELT discourse, so this article is a step towards addressing the gap. To address these issues, the study aimed to explore the initial awareness of English language teachers on their professional wellbeing.

## Conceptualizing Wellbeing

Wellbeing is characterized by contentment with one's current circumstances and striving for progress, encompassing a healthy body, mind, and relationships (Alexander et al., 2021). Wellbeing is commonly understood as a state of health and happiness (Fellmann, 2018). It is subjective and varies among individuals in different professions. Synonymous terms such as happiness, comfort, security, protection, profit, success, prosperity, and success have been used interchangeably with wellbeing. Diener et al. (2002) describe it as satisfaction and love towards one's profession and the people around them, involving joy, fun, and gratification.

Although the term wellbeing received scholarly attention in the 1960s, there is no universally accepted definition (Seligman, 2012). Researchers defined wellbeing as a lifestyle quality, life satisfaction (Deiner & Suh, 1997), negative and positive effects (Deiner & Suh, 1997), goal accomplishment (Felce & Perry, 1995), positive performance (Duckworth et al., 2005), happiness (Pollard & Lee, 2003), and flourishing (Seligman, 2012), looking at the various time-spaces of wellbeing in chronological order (as cited in Birchall, 2021).

Furthermore, wellbeing has been discussed from both eudemonic and hedonic perspectives (Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). The hedonic

model of wellbeing, prevalent in social science, assumes that humans have initially malleable bodies (Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). In the same way, the eudemonic perspective focuses on personal meaning, fulfillment, and authenticity, considering wellbeing as the optimal function of an individual (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Mercer (2020) outlines the hedonic perspective of wellbeing, which emphasizes objective happiness derived from personal experiences and an individual's perception of emotions and satisfaction, often influenced by social and cultural practices. In contrast, hedonic wellbeing, as described by Schimmack et al. (2002) and Allen et al. (2016), is a model of subjective wellbeing that segregates measures of negative and positive effects, offering predictions about an individual's overall personal experience. These perspectives differ in their approach, with the hedonic perspective focusing on personal happiness experiences and the hedonic wellbeing model providing a more comprehensive evaluation of wellbeing.

Over time, the concept of wellbeing has evolved, leading to comprehensive definitions by psychologists and researchers. Positive psychological functioning, emphasising positive affect, happiness, and life satisfaction, was referred to as individual wellbeing in the early 21st century (Dodge et al., 2012). It is widely recognized as a multidimensional concept with various components, as different scholars provide distinct definitions and viewpoints. Generally, four types of wellbeing are discussed in the literature: physical, psychological, spiritual, and social (Curtis, 2016; Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Livesey et al., 2012; Voigt et al., 2010).

Physical wellbeing pertains to the body's physical state, including maintaining a healthy weight, good posture, the ability to

perform daily tasks, absence of exhaustion or discomfort, and proper organ functioning (Davis, 2019). Psychological wellbeing is associated with the mind and involves the ability to manage stress and experience emotions that contribute to a positive state (Conversano et al., 2010). Social wellbeing relates to external factors within society. According to Davis (2019), it involves the capacity to engage in society, culture, and the environment. Spiritual wellbeing is a deeply personal aspect, focusing on the meaning and purpose of life for an individual (Dhar et al., 2013). Martin, et al. (2021) highlights spiritual wellbeing as the core dimension that provides a profound sense of identity, purpose, direction, and the means to achieve personal goals.

I believe wellbeing is a multifaceted concept characterized by contentment, health, and happiness. While lacking a universally accepted definition, it encompasses various physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. Wellbeing varies among individuals and professions, making it subjective. In essence, it represents a holistic state of wellbeing that involves a balance of body, mind, and relationships.

## **English Language Teachers' Wellbeing**

Teacher wellbeing encompasses teachers' satisfaction with and love for their profession (Diener et al., 2002). It is characterized by their commitment to teaching and positive attitudes towards their work and stakeholders within the school (Engels et al., 2004). This favourable emotional state arises when there is harmony between teachers' individual needs and expectations for the school, considering the unique contextual factors at play (Alterman et al., 2007). Acton and

Glasgow (2015). Santro (2011) emphasized that a friendly school environment is crucial in fostering teachers' positive attitudes and love for teaching. Schools significantly influence teacher wellbeing and development. Mercer (2020) asserts that wellbeing is a socially constructed value applicable to all.

Due to the demands of managing intercultural dynamics in the classroom, school, and community, language teachers experience higher stress levels than teachers of other subjects (Mercer et al., 2016). They may encounter difficulties with language self-efficacy when communicating with students (Mousavi, 2007). Teaching a language involves deeper emotional connections as language and self are closely intertwined. Borg (2006) highlights that language teachers are often expected to facilitate student communication and increase participation, which demands significant effort and innovative approaches.

Similarly, English language teachers, particularly those working in private schools, often face high-stress levels and struggle to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Mercer (2020) explains that motivations for teachers is extrinsic rather than inherent which affected the work effort and happiness. The teachers in the Nepalese schools have what has been described as 'the extrinsic motivation' for their profession.

The wellbeing of English language teachers is a multifaceted aspect of their professional lives, influenced by various factors. One crucial element is the connection between language proficiency and happiness in teaching, as highlighted by Sahito et al. (2018). Language teachers often derive joy and positive feelings from their language skills, which can enhance their enthusiasm and effectiveness in the classroom. However, maintaining this positive

mindset towards work, as emphasized by Luthans (2010), is equally vital. Teachers face a delicate balance between positive resources and negative factors, as noted by Babic et al. (2022). Economic stability, as mentioned by Day et al. (2006), plays a significant role in sustaining the teaching profession, reducing the need to seek additional income sources. This stability, coupled with status within the school and society, can serve as a motivator for teachers to remain engaged and content in their roles, aligning with the insights of Babic et al. (2022).

Furthermore, the importance of work-life balance and status is reiterated in Dodge's Model of Wellbeing, which posits that equilibrium between an individual's resources and challenges is essential for wellbeing (Wassell & Dodge, 2015). Achieving this balance is crucial for teachers, as it strengthens their ability to confront professional challenges and promotes their social, emotional, and physical wellbeing, as suggested by Ovenden-Hope and Brimacombe (2018). In addition to personal factors, positive relationships play a pivotal role in teacher wellbeing. Collie et al. (2020) stress the significance of positive relationships with colleagues and support systems in reducing stress and maintaining wellbeing. In addition, Ainsworth and Oldfield (2019) emphasize the positive impact of teacher-student relationships on professional satisfaction. These relationships benefit teachers and significantly influence student learning, behavior, and achievement, as noted by Wubbels, et al (2015). Overall, fostering competence, maintaining positive relationships, and achieving a harmonious work-life balance are crucial components of teacher wellbeing and happiness in the English language teaching profession.

The discussion surrounding the overall wellbeing of teachers in Nepal is still in its early stages. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, a few researchers exist focusing on teachers' difficulties, including ICT integration, pedagogical shifts (Gautam, 2020), learning management, and educational policies (Dawadi et al., 2020). However, upon reviewing the existing literature, online sources, scholarly journals, and through personal communication with English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners in Nepal, it became evident that there is a limited study specifically addressing the teachers' wellbeing. While K.C. (2021) provided a general introduction and touched on pedagogical success concerning English language teacher wellbeing, the topic remains underexplored within the ELT discourse. Recognizing the importance of this issue, This study investigates the initial perceptions of English language teachers on their wellbeing.

## Methodology

Storytelling and narrative inquiry are powerful tools for understanding the multifaceted and deeply personal aspects of teacher wellbeing. By collecting and analyzing teachers' stories, researchers can uncover important truths about their experiences and gain insights that might be missed through quantitative data alone. This approach not only deepens our understanding but also helps create more empathetic and effective interventions to support teacher wellbeing.

In the same line, narrative inquiry provided a comprehensive framework for investigating how the participants interpret the world through their stories (Mertova & Webster, 2007; Kim, 2015). It allowed us to engage with participants' stories within a holistic framework that fosters meaning making. In

this study, I delved into participants' stories to uncover the realities of their wellbeing experiences (Atkinson, 2007).

Human experiences unfold in a narrative sequence, commonly called a story, and emerge through the collaboration between researchers and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Barkhuizen, 2011). This collaboration, occurring in various periods, social settings, and contexts, facilitates the process of meaning-making. It amplifies participants' voices as they employ their own words to convey their experiences, ultimately leading to a shared purpose (Flick, 2010). Through storytelling, individuals express their emotions and contribute to the process of meaning-making.

Given the nature of the study, purposive sampling has been employed to select participants. According to Cohen et al. (2007), purposive sampling entails researchers carefully selecting cases for the sample based on the analysis of the narratives/sharing (Hallmark & Ardoin, 2021). To ensure proper data analysis, Creswell (2011) and Kiger and Varpio (2020) suggest including an appropriate number of participants. The selected four participants are from the Kathmandu Valley. This location was chosen for the study as it allowed convenient access to the participants and enabled regular interactions. Stories from experienced secondary English teachers teaching in community schools were collected through interviews. These interviews enabled us to gather detailed information about the lived experiences of the participants (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). The pseudonymous names of the four participants in the study are Dinesh, Shree, Gopi, and Muna.

Dinesh, the first participant, teaches at a community school in the Kathmandu District. After completing his bachelor's degree in Rupandehi district, he pursued higher education in Kathmandu. He later transitioned to a community school, accumulating twenty years of experience in both private and community institutional settings at the lower and secondary levels. I conducted the first-round interview with him at his school and conducted further interviews in different settings.

Similarly, Shree, the second participant, has been teaching at a community school in the heart of the valley for seven years. Originally from Dhading, he moved to Kathmandu after securing a permanent appointment as a secondary-level teacher through the Teacher Service Commission. All interviews with Shree took place at his school. Gopi, the third participant, is a permanent teacher at a community school on the outskirts of the Kathmandu district. He was born in Taplejung in 1971 and possesses over twenty-five years of teaching experience in private and community schools. Gopi teaches English from grades nine to twelve and coordinates extracurricular activities at the school. The only female participant in the study was Muna, who teaches in the western part of the valley. She holds an MPhil degree from Kathmandu University and has taught English to secondary-level students for eleven years. Ms. Muna, born and raised in Terai, demonstrates a dynamic personality. She serves as the +2 coordinator at her school and teaches five periods a day.

The interview was in the Nepali language, which were transcribed and analysed the recorded data after collecting information from secondary-level English language teachers and then put on the table for coding and categorizing. Coding helped us organize

and group into categories of similar characters and patterns (Saldana, 2016). It further helped generate proper discussion and bring novelty to writing. Themes from the research questions and the participants' responses were used as codes, and were further grouped and categorised in terms of the commonality and differences. Then those categories helped to create themes and subthemes related to the perception of teacher wellbeing. Patterns for the stories and sub-patterns that linked them to relevant types of literature and theory were created. Finally, based on themes generated from transcribing, coding, categorising, and analysing the themes, the meaning is created.

## Findings and Discussion

In this section, I present teachers' experiences and perceptions on teacher wellbeing. I engaged in an in-depth discussion to derive meaning. It became evident that the concept of wellbeing among teachers is relatively underexplored. Following the prolonged engagement with the participants and a comprehensive exploration of their wellbeing narratives, several valuable insights emerged. These insights, gleaned from their stories, were critically examined, shedding light on their understanding of professional wellbeing.

### *Positive Emotion and Respect in the Profession*

English language teachers at the secondary level perceive their wellbeing as closely tied to positive emotions and professional respect within their profession. Positive emotions, such as happiness and enjoyment, are integral to their job satisfaction and dedication. English language proficiency, a valuable skill, brings them recognition and a unique status in their family, society, and

school. Furthermore, the adoption of English as a primary language of teaching learning in institution has elevated their importance and garnered them greater respect, contributing to their happiness. The love and appreciation from students, coupled with the pleasure and enjoyment they find in teaching and building strong relationships, play a significant role in their overall wellbeing. This combination of positive emotions, professional recognition, and enjoyment in their profession contributes to their happiness and job satisfaction as English language educators.

Competent, dynamic, and dedicated English language teachers are crucial in successfully implementing EMI (Karki, 2021). As a result, English language teachers in community schools receive heightened respect. Professional respect is another source of happiness. Shree, another participant, highlighted, *"Despite the challenges and responsibilities, we receive high respect in schools. I was treated differently and entrusted with implementing new policies and programmes, despite not holding any official position."* He further narrated a story:

*It was the story of 2016. I was appointed as an English teacher at the school and offered a class in grade three. I taught four periods a day. Though not assigned any other responsibilities, I started conducting assemblies in English and conducted many English-based programs. My senior English teacher praised the work, and the school administration decided to give me the coordinator position only after three months of joining that school. It is the respect to me I got because of my English.*

English language teachers derive happiness and positive feelings from their language skills (Seligman et al., 2009). They also find

happiness in the love and appreciation they receive from their students and institutions. Muna emphasized the positive energy generated by students' love. Therefore, the student's behaviour and results contribute to teachers' happiness. She shared,

*The reason that I am sustained here in the school for a long is my English, and I have a unique position in my family, society, and school because of the English language. I am happy because I am an English teacher.*

Similarly, pleasure and enjoyment significantly affect teachers' happiness and wellbeing. Gopi finds fun and enjoyment in building good relationships with students, which contributes to his wellbeing. He added, "*Good relationships with pupils give me fun and enjoyment. It is my wellbeing, My happiness, and my satisfaction.*" Dinesh viewed, "*My wellbeing is part of my pleasure in teaching English.*" Dinesh connects his wellbeing with the pleasure he derives from teaching English. The experiences of Muna and Shree indicate that pleasure, joy, and happiness derived from their profession are integral to their wellbeing. Pleasure can be manifested in various ways for English teachers, such as engaging in teaching-learning activities, listening to students' concerns, and sharing expectations. The respect they receive also brings them pleasure. Shree shared how being addressed as 'sir' before he even started teaching made him emotional and responsible, creating a pleasant situation.

### ***Balance and Status in the Society***

Community school English teachers perceive teacher wellbeing as a delicate equilibrium between various facets of their lives. This balance encompasses personal, professional, and community dimensions, all of which play a

significant role in shaping their overall sense of wellbeing. Maintaining harmony between their teaching responsibilities and personal lives is a paramount concern for these educators, as they often experience unique pressures within their community school roles. Balancing the demands of their profession with family and personal time is a shared challenge, with many teachers considering this equilibrium essential for their overall wellbeing. Economic stability also holds a crucial place in their perception of wellbeing, providing them a sense of security and motivation to continue serving their community.

Maintaining wellbeing involves balancing personal and professional aspects of life. This balance encompasses various dimensions, such as personal life, economic stability, and relationships, significantly influencing teacher wellbeing. The terms "balance" and "status" intertwine in teachers' stories as crucial for maintaining wellbeing. According to Babic et al. (2022), teacher wellbeing fluctuates based on the relative weighting of positive resources versus negative factors and demanding challenges. For the participants, maintaining a balance between personal and professional life contributes to their sense of wellbeing. Muna expressed, "Balancing students, parents, and administration is crucial for my wellbeing." Similarly, Gopi shared his early teaching experience, highlighting the need for balance:

*When I first started teaching, I felt inferior in spoken English, and my grammar was poor. Teaching required much more effort than simply passing an exam. I had to study and prepare five times more than I did for exams. As a bachelor's student, I juggled studying, teaching, and family responsibilities. While preparing for teaching and studying, I had little time for my family. Therefore, after learning about*

*positive psychology, I started considering the management of my personal and professional life as a key aspect of my wellbeing.*

The aforementioned narration reveals that English language teachers face more pressure in schools than other teachers (Chaudhary, 2011) due to their diverse roles. Consequently, finding time for family becomes a significant challenge, leading teachers to view work-life balance as an essential component of wellbeing. Shree narrated,

*I vividly remember the challenges of managing my time when my daughter was born. It was a fortunate coincidence that her birth coincided with me securing a permanent job in Kathmandu. I had to adjust to teaching at a new school while caring for my new family members. Although my mother supported my wife and daughter, my wife always sought my company, which I struggled to provide due to being on school probation. I dedicated more time to my profession because it was a new school with a different culture and students. Managing balance equates to managing wellbeing.*

In line with the above, research by Ainsworth and Oldfield (2019) indicates that approximately 40% of teachers leave their jobs due to an imbalance between their profession and family life. Furthermore, a national survey on teacher wellbeing conducted by YouGov (2018) reported that 65% of teachers struggle to enjoy quality time with their families and friends. The same report highlighted that 62% of teachers work on weekends, and 60% use their holidays to balance work. Considering the participants' stories and the provided report, it becomes evident that balancing work and family life is a critical measure of wellbeing.

Economic stability and harmonious relationships are additional constituents of wellbeing. Economic stability holds significance for teachers' wellbeing; as Gopi noted, "*A stable economy is a green light for happiness and motivation. Unlike other government professionals, teachers are not provided with extra facilities. In such conditions, managing the needs of one's family and maintaining good relationships contribute to wellbeing.*" Muna also emphasized the importance of economic stability for wellbeing. Day et al. (2006) supports this notion, stating that economic stability helps teachers sustain their profession and eliminates the need to seek additional income resources. Economic stability and status within the school and society motivate teachers to remain engaged (Babic et al., 2022).

### ***Achievements and Satisfaction***

English teachers view wellbeing as closely linked to achievement and job satisfaction, finding purpose and fulfillment through goal attainment, as per Seligman's perspective. Teachers like Dinesh and Muna exemplify the happiness derived from reaching career goals. They also emphasize the significance of positive relationships and a supportive school culture, highlighting the importance of collaboration, shared experiences, and solutions in reducing challenges and enhancing the joy of successes. These relationships, both with colleagues and students, are seen as crucial for emotional wellbeing.

The concept of achievement and satisfaction was explored during conversations with the participants, similar to Seligman. Seligman (2012) suggests that setting and accomplishing goals enhance our sense of wellbeing, motivating us to set new goals and find our

purpose in life. Dinesh shared his perspective on happiness and its connection to his profession. Despite his family's opposition, he pursued education instead of science, focusing on English studies. He set a goal to become an English teacher and worked hard to achieve it. Dinesh expressed his happiness and satisfaction with his current position, emphasizing that achieving his desired goal brought him joy. He shared,

*As I already told you, my family was not in favour of sending me to the education sector; they instead wanted me to study science, but I liked education and started studying. Though I failed English in class nine, I joined the English group and completed it in 1988.*

His views align with Adler et al.'s (2016) perspective, which emphasizes the importance of accomplishment and satisfaction as dimensions of optimism and perseverance. When asked about other aspects of satisfaction in his teaching career, Dinesh recalled when he received his first salary and gave it to his mother. Seeing her overwhelmed with happiness motivated him to continue in his profession. Similarly, Muna shared a similar story of achieving job satisfaction and making teaching her career. She shared her initial days as:

*I was not much interested in teaching. But slowly, I understood the art of teaching and realized how sensitive the profession is. Then I determined to be a good teacher. I spent about 12 years teaching and experiencing pleasure and pain. I am satisfied and could make my family satisfied. I chose it lately, but I achieved it.*

Her journey as a teacher began unintentionally but evolved into a conscious choice as she

experienced the pleasure and challenges of the profession. Both of their views aligned with Sahito and Vaisenen (2018) viewed emphasizing the connection between language competence and happiness in teaching. The narratives of Dinesh and Muna further resonate with Gill Windle's perspective, which suggests that job satisfaction positively influences teacher retention and performance. Achieving goals in the profession contributes to lasting happiness. Hill and Together (2020) note that setting and achieving goals enhance our effectiveness and wellbeing, providing meaning and progress in life.

### ***Positive Relationships and Supportive Culture***

English language teacher understands wellbeing as the positive relationships and a supportive school culture. Collaborative problem-solving and a culture of sharing within schools are seen as vital for reducing challenges and amplifying the joy of teaching. Positive associations in school and emotional support, are recognized as key factors in reducing stress and enhancing teacher satisfaction. On the contrary, poor communication and a lack of support are detrimental to teacher wellbeing. In essence, cultivating healthy relationships among educators, students, and school leaders is fundamental to promoting teacher wellbeing.

Teacher wellbeing is closely linked to positive relationships and supportive culture in the workplace. Teachers must create a positive culture within schools to address challenges and make progress (Mercer, 2020). Ekwulugo (2015) supports this idea, stating that a optimistic rapport with the school equips teachers with the skills to handle conflict and tension. Teaching English presents challenges such as unfocused classmates, inadequately

trained English language teachers, and students who need to practice grammar regularly (Al Hosni, 2014). Shree shared an incident that taught him a valuable lesson in managing a problematic student. In this regard, Shree shared:

*A student, Samir, was notorious in class ten. He never did his work, and only he disturbed the class. I was new to that class; I did not know about him. I started being strict with him. It was the second last class of the day; I inquired about homework and threatened them with punishment if he did not do it again. To my surprise, he stood up with a bag and went out, saying, “Aulas Baira Pakh” (I will see you outside). I was shocked. I shared this incident with a senior colleague, who advised me to be polite and praise him if I wanted to control him. He would love you. Following him, I praised his handwriting, behaviour, and writing habits. He showed positive behaviour and did not disturb us in class. He got 54 on the exam and failed all subjects.*

Shree was advised to be more polite and praise Samir, resulting in a positive change in his behavior. This incident prompted Shree to collaborate with colleagues to solve common classroom problems. Muna and Dinesh shared similar experiences, highlighting the value of a sharing culture in finding solutions and deriving satisfaction from their profession (Mercer, 2020). Muna’s story demonstrated how a sharing culture within a school creates a family-like environment where challenges are reduced through shared experiences while joy is amplified through shared successes. She shared:

*It worked, and now we have a family environment. They helped me as I started helping. They realized that helping*

*and sharing adds joy to the profession. Nowadays, school is like a family where I have Jethi didi (elder sister) and Kaka (uncle) in school. We share our pain and pleasure, which relieves the profession.*

In this line, Collie et al. (2020) emphasize that maintaining teacher wellbeing and reducing stress heavily rely on positive relationships with colleagues and receiving support. Similarly, Gopi reflected, “Positive relationships and student attachment keep the teacher refreshed and happy.” Ekwulugo (2015) asserts that ensuring teachers’ wellbeing involves cultivating positive and healthy relationships between teachers and students, as these relationships enhance teachers’ ability to manage tension and conflict. Additionally, Ainsworth and Oldfield (2019) also believe that a good contacts with pupils are related with teacher wellbeing and increased professional satisfaction. As teachers spend significant time with students, fostering positive relationships benefits both teachers and students.

Muna shared that she enjoys working with students and spends her leisure time listening to their ideas, problems, and experiences related to school and teachers. Muna provided an example where a student, Rita, approached her with a serious problem. She said, “*Rita was suffering from a personal psychological problem.*” By offering suggestions and support, Muna alleviated Rita’s distress and felt a sense of responsibility. This highlights how emotional attachment and fostering open communication can address hidden issues and contribute to personal growth. However, Shree noted that unhealthy relationships with students can be discouraging and lead to extra stress.

Social beings naturally seek connections to fulfil their emotional needs (Seligman, 2012). Gopi emphasized that positive relationships among teachers, students, and school leaders contribute to the wellbeing of everyone involved. He believed, *“One of the most enjoying factors for me in this profession is my student’s positive response and sharing that we make during and after class.”* Along the same line, Mercer (2020) found in her study that teachers enjoy their profession when they have positive relationships with colleagues and students, work in an encouraging environment, and experience a culture of sharing. Similarly, Le Cornu (2013) views positive collegial interactions as essential for improved teacher wellbeing. They create a sense of community, emotional support, and a safe space for taking risks and voicing concerns.

### ***Competences and Engagements***

Shree, an English teacher, exemplifies the relationship between competence and engagement, stating that his competence in English keeps him engaged in his profession. He confidently said, *“My English language competence makes me engage in this profession.”* He added, *“You know you are involved when you do not know you don’t or observe to learn.”* He emphasizes the importance of being involved without realizing it or consciously observing it. Shree’s experience highlights that expertise in a particular area sustains prolonged engagement. Hanaysha (2016) emphasizes the importance of employee engagement in retaining talent and increasing productivity. In the context of teaching, prolonged engagement and the resulting competence led to satisfaction, a component of wellbeing (Dodge et al., 2012). Thus, the combination of engagement and competence fosters overall happiness and wellness.

Engagement and competence are closely intertwined in the teaching profession. Competence leads to engagement and ensures productive outcomes. According to Danielson (2007), teaching is an art that requires competence to foster deep engagement and engaging in any activity leads to mastery. Similarly, Seligman (2012) defines engagement as *“Flow,”* a state of attachment, concentration, and involvement in activities.

Furthermore, competence encompasses the management of social and emotional experiences and personal abilities, which are fundamental for teacher wellbeing (Collie, 2020). Muna highlights the significance of competence in managing professional challenges as an English teacher. Muna showed determination: *“Competence in content, i.e., English language and engagement in profession give the strength to maintain professional challenges.”* She further added:

*Teaching has many challenges as it is an art. See, the language itself is a challenge for ESL speakers. Similarly, we English language teachers are in the center school where the notion of EMI came. I have many challenges like maintaining English speaking zone, helping co-teachers as they are crawling in EMI, teaching large classes with diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and lacking teaching materials. In such cases, maintaining all these challenges and continuing teaching in a healthy, happy environment, we need competence in managing skills. I need to have the skills to manage my challenges. I can handle professional challenges because of my long engagement in this profession. High engagement and dedication are needed to cope with the challenges so we can be happy and enjoy our profession.*

Her narrative emphasizes that competence is essential for overcoming challenges in teaching-learning, especially for English language teachers at the center of language instruction in schools. Furthermore, competence relates to teacher psychology, enabling them to navigate challenges effectively. Mental and emotional competence helps individuals manage daily life, handle demands and problems, and perform their duties successfully (Birchall, 2021). Dinesh shared, *“Competence develops trust and self-confidence in the classroom, reducing stress. Teachers who have faith in their skills at home and school experience higher levels of wellbeing.”* Day et al. (2006) supports the similar idea that competency fosters motivation, autonomy, and trust, benefiting teacher wellbeing.

Gopi emphasizes that teachers with good social and emotional skills, classroom management abilities, personal emotional balance, and an accepting nature enjoy their profession. He shared, *“A teacher with good social and emotional skills, classroom management skills, ability to maintain personal emotion, good social behaviour and accepting nature enjoy this profession.”* Competence in content and behavioral skills contributes to happiness and satisfaction. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) also highlight the importance of competence in content, social behavior, classroom management, individual counseling, and personal relationships for teacher happiness and success. Collie et al. (2020) emphasize the mutual relationship between social and emotional intelligence and wellbeing, suggesting that higher wellbeing can be achieved through better social and emotional competence among instructors.

Engagement and competence are intertwined in the teaching profession, with competence

fostering prolonged engagement and happiness. Competence enables teachers to overcome challenges and maintain their wellbeing. Positive relationships, supportive cultures, and a sense of accomplishment are significant aspects of teacher wellbeing. By exploring the participants' perceptions, it can be deciphered that the connection between competence, engagement, and overall wellbeing in the teaching profession.

## Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the perception of teacher wellbeing among secondary-level English language teachers employing Narrative Theory. The study underlines the significance of multiple factors in shaping the teachers' wellbeing. Firstly, it emphasizes the crucial role of balance, both in personal and professional life, as well as maintaining harmonious relationships. Achieving this equilibrium, economic stability, and societal status emerge as fundamental elements contributing to teacher wellbeing. A teacher's status within the school and society reflects and influences their overall sense of wellbeing. Moreover, the study recognizes the profound impact of achievements and satisfaction on teacher wellbeing. The attainment of set goals, such as becoming an English teacher, brings happiness and fulfillment, motivating teachers to set new objectives and derive purpose from their profession.

Furthermore, the study highlights the pivotal role of positive relationships and a supportive workplace culture. Positive interactions with colleagues, administrators, and the broader school community significantly benefit teachers' wellbeing. This culture of sharing and collaboration aids teachers in addressing challenges and advancing in their careers, ultimately enhancing their overall sense

of wellbeing. In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the perceptions of wellbeing among secondary-level English language teachers. It underscores the importance of fostering positive emotions, maintaining balance, achieving personal and professional goals, cultivating supportive relationships, and nurturing a collaborative culture to promote teachers' happiness and wellbeing in their demanding profession.

As there is limited debate and discussion of teacher wellbeing in Nepal, the study can be a milestone for researchers and wellbeing practitioners. Although this study explored secondary-level English language teachers' perception of wellbeing, the practical aspect needs to be explored by the other study. Using fewer participants from urban areas' stories might not explore the accurate perception of the teachers teaching in remote or other situations. So, further study can be done using a large sample and other research methodologies. Similarly, the study side and particular types of wellbeing can be examined in different situations and places.

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