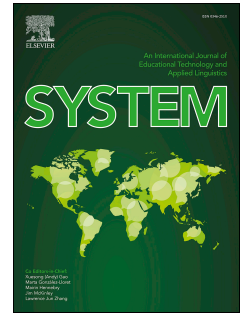# Journal Pre-proof

'You just appreciate every little kindness': Chinese language teachers' wellbeing in the UK

Jun Jin, Sarah Mercer, Sonja Babic, Astrid Mairitsch

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Jun Jin: Conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing – original draft and revisions.

Sarah Mercer: Conceptualisation, methodology, data analysis, writing – review, revisions, and editing, funding acquisition.

Sonja Babic: Conceptualisation of data collection tools, methodology, data analysis, writing – review and editing.

Astrid Mairitsch: Conceptualisation of data collection tools, methodology, data analysis, writing – review and editing.

'You just appreciate every little kindness':

Chinese language teachers' wellbeing in the UK

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Abstract

Drawing on a positive psychology perspective, a resource-based view of wellbeing, and an ecological perspective, this article provides an in-depth account of Chinese language teachers' wellbeing in the UK. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 teachers who teach Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) at secondary-school level in the UK. This study identified four ecological systems that interconnected with one another that are associated with these CFL teachers' wellbeing: the ecology of the school, the ecology of work and life, the ecology of the education system, as well as the societal ecology of teaching generally and modern foreign languages (MFL) specifically. The study also found that these CFL teachers drew on a number of psychological, social, and contextual resources to manage their wellbeing and remain positive in the face of challenges. This study provides an ecological understanding of CFL teacher wellbeing in the UK and offers a broader lens for the design and implementation of effective prevention, intervention, and remedial actions to address teacher wellbeing.

Keywords

Wellbeing; Language teacher; Chinese language teacher; Positive psychology; Ecology

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Abstract

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1. Introduction

Teaching is acknowledged as a job with a high-risk of burnout (Gu & Day, 2007; Maslach, 1999). Teachers regularly face intellectually, emotionally, and physically challenging situations, such as misbehaving students (Aldrup, Klusmann, Lüdtke, Göllner, & Trautwein, 2018), unsupportive school management (Pickering, 2008), heavy workloads (Education Support Partnership, 2018), and low social recognition (Hargreaves, Cunningham, Hansen, MacIntyre, & Oliver, 2006). Surveys have shown, for example, that 57% of teachers in the UK have considered leaving the profession because of burnout (Education Support Partnership, 2018). Recent work has emphasized the importance of understanding teacher wellbeing across the globe (Education Support Partnership, 2018; Hong, 2010; Ofsted, 2019; Parker & Martin, 2009) and a growing number of researchers have started to explore language teacher wellbeing specifically (e.g., MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020; MacIntyre, Ross, Talbot, Gregersen, Mercer, & Banga, 2019; Mercer, Oberdorfer, & Saleem, 2016; Wieczorek, 2016). However, this body of research is still in its infancy and, to date, the lived experiences and wellbeing of teachers who teach Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) in the UK have not been examined.

With the rapid expansion of teaching CFL at different levels across the globe, CFL teachers are increasingly in demand (Wang, Moloney, & Li, 2013). This has been due, in part, to China's economic power, strategic policy, and the worldwide demand for learning CFL (Wang, Moloney, & Li, 2013; Zhao & Huang, 2010). In the UK, Mandarin Chinese has been identified as one of the five most important languages (British Council, 2017). The UK Government was especially keen to double the number of Chinese learners particularly in schools and among young people by 2020 (Tinsley & Board, 2014). As such, CFL has consequently emerged as a key foreign language and a focus in pedagogic research and teacher education (Du & Kirkebæk, 2012). However, there has been a paucity of research

attention to CFL teachers themselves (Wu, Palmer, & Fied, 2011), although there have been some notable exceptions (e.g., Liu, 2006; Wu, Palmer, & Fied, 2011).

This study was designed to contribute to the growing body of research on language teacher wellbeing and to focus on a growing but under-researched population. As such, the focus of this study is on CFL teacher wellbeing in the UK. A positive psychology perspective (Seligman, 2018; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), a resource-based view of wellbeing (Hobfoll, 2002), and an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994) were combined to provide a rich, socially situated, and individually sensitive lens for understanding CFL teacher wellbeing.

2. Literature review

2.1. Positive psychology, resources, and teacher wellbeing

There has been an extensive body of research in general education which has examined teacher stress and burnout (e.g., Coulter & Abney, 2009; Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015; Kyriacou, 1987), although interestingly there is only sparse research in this area in language teaching specifically (for some exceptions, see Mousavi, 2007; Nayernia & Babayan, 2019; Wieczorek, 2016). A related but different perspective on teachers' experiences is offered by positive psychology (Seligman, 2018; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which focuses on examining what contributes to teacher wellbeing, happiness, and flourishing – the flipside of stress and burnout (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Mercer, Oberdorfer, & Saleem, 2016). In respect to teachers, it means understanding not only what affects teachers negatively in terms of stressors, but also appreciating what factors boost teacher wellbeing, generate positive emotions, and help them to flourish in their professional roles in spite of challenges and difficulties. A balanced view needs to address both.

To understand how teachers can flourish in the face of adversities, research has frequently examined personal resources that are known to contribute to positive teacher wellbeing such as self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, self-esteem, and cognitive and behavioural coping resources (proactive and reactive) (Bermejo-Toro, Prieto-Ursua, & Hernandez, 2016; Cheung, Tang, & Tang, 2011; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). However, more social perspectives have stressed that wellbeing also stems from the interaction with social variables such as social support from colleagues and supervisors, and feedback provision at work (Bermejo-Toro, Prieto-Ursua & Hernandez, 2016; Ju, Lan, Li, Feng, & You, 2015; Väisänen, Pietarinen, Pyhältö, Toom, & Soini, 2016). In research on resources that enhance teacher wellbeing, it is therefore wise to adopt both an individual and social perspective.

A number of valuable models for understanding the interaction of personal and social variables in wellbeing were reviewed by Hobfoll (2002), who noted that, "the resource-based views of human adaptation, coping, and wellbeing" does not deny the self, and their roots are more environmental and sociological that may "reinforce its fundamental precepts" (p. 308). Dodge, Daly, Huyton, and Sanders (2012) suggested that wellbeing emerges, "when individuals have the psychological, social, and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social, and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing, and vice-versa" (p. 230). Therefore, to understand teacher wellbeing, we need to investigate what resources teachers draw on to successfully cope with challenging situations referring to both personal and social resources.

2.2. An ecological perspective on teacher wellbeing

To appreciate the unique set of resources and threats to wellbeing for the population at the heart of this study, we chose to take an ecological perspective. An ecological perspective

18

enables the interplay between the context and the individuals as agents within their contexts to become apparent (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; Shelton, 2019). Bronfenbrenner's model of ecological development has been utilized widely within the social sciences. He identifies four systems that contain rules, norms, and roles that help to shape human development, including the microsystem (relations of individuals with immediate settings), mesosystem (interrelations among the microsystems), exosystem (settings which do not directly influence the individual), and macrosystem (cultural patterns) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) further describe the chronosystem, which highlights the importance of time in an individual's development. Using Bronfenbrenner's model, we can examine more specific aspects at different systemic levels and explore what contributes to wellbeing for these teachers.

From an ecological perspective, the language teacher population brings with it its own unique characteristics as well as challenges and joys. Teaching a language has its own character in terms of how the language is taught, which language it is, and teacher-student relationships (Borg, 2006). It has also specific stressors such as the status of language teaching as a profession (Johnston, 1997) and job insecurity (Wieczorek, 2016). The additional pressure for MFL teachers is associated with a sharp decline in the status of MFL in English-speaking countries including the UK, since English as a Lingua Franca is dominant (e.g., Busse & Walter, 2013; Coleman, 2005). Additionally, pupils in these countries often have a low motivation to learn a foreign language (Bartram, 2010; Tinsley & Board, 2014), and the numbers of students who take MFL courses at school and university in the UK are steadily decreasing (British Academy, 2013; British Council, 2014). In the case of CFL teachers, they have unique adversities and resources as well as additional pressures including cultural and pedagogical acculturations (Moloney & Xu, 2015; Wu, 2017), a weak sense of professional identity (Wu, Palmer, & Field, 2011), mixed institutional support (Wang, Moloney, & Li,

18

2013), and potentially complex personal contexts. Over years, the numbers of students taking Chinese language courses has gradually increased in schools in the UK (Tinsley & Doležal, 2018). In addition, CFL teachers who previously worked in China may have a range of cultural experiences and expectations which may differ to those of their current workplace. For instance, it is reported that teachers in China are given highest level of public respect comparing the status of teachers in 35 countries including the UK, which is in the upper half of the ranking (Varkey Foundation, 2018). The social status of teachers in UK is regarded as being most similar to social workers, and interestingly, teachers in the China are compared to doctors (Varkey Foundation, 2013, 2018). The differences in societal appreciation between China and other countries such as the UK can affect the ways in which CFL teachers feel valued and respected in the country they teach. As argued by Troman (2000), a low social status of the teaching profession can have a negative effect on teachers, making them feel stressed, and even leading them to consider choosing another profession. In our study, we aimed to gain a fuller understanding of the ecology contributing to CFL teachers' wellbeing by also explicitly examining contextual and cultural issues, in particular, how the CFL teachers' cultural expectations, values, and beliefs may shape their wellbeing.

3. Research questions

The research questions informing this study are:

RQ1: How can we understand CFL teachers' wellbeing from an ecological perspective?

RQ2: In what ways do these CFL teachers draw upon their psychological, social, and contextual resources to manage their wellbeing?

4. Method

In this study, we adopt narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative inquiry as "the study of experience" (Clandinin, 2013, p.45) is "a way of

understanding experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20), and it is also "an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individual's experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted." (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006, p. 42). Drawing on criteria of experience in narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006; Dewey, 1938), we explore a narrative view of participants' experience in three dimensions: the personal and social (*interaction*), past, present and future (*continuity*), and place (*situation*) (Clandinin, 2006; Dewey, 1938), in order to understand participants' lived experiences. While we trace participants' past and current lived experiences as Chinese language teachers as well as their future perspectives, we pay attention to the dimensions of *interaction* and *situation* by examining participants' ecological systems (participants' school, their work and life, the educational system, teaching generally and MFL specifically in the society) to understand the ecology of teacher wellbeing.

4.1. Participants

CFL teachers in the UK are the focus in this study. To reach such teachers, we approached different institutes and programs, which support schools in starting and developing the teaching and learning of Mandarin. After contacting an institute in the UK, one staff member agreed to help us to post our recruitment letter in their e-forum. Finally, seven CFL teachers contacted us to be interviewed. Six participants taught Chinese at secondary level in the UK and one (Amanda) recently lost her job of teaching Chinese in her secondary school. Table 1 below provides a detailed breakdown of participants' gender, age group, marital status, first language, and years of teaching. The names of interviewees are pseudonyms.

Table 1

Participants' background information.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age group	Marital Status	Children	First language	Years of teaching
Josephine	F	25-34	Divorced	2	Chinese	0-3
Mila	F	35-44	Single	0	Chinese	0-3
Bonnie	F	25-34	Single	0	English	4-7
Stephanie	F	55-64	Married	3	Chinese	4-7
Rose	F	35-44	Married	2	Chinese	8-15
Amanda	F	45-54	Married	1	Chinese	24-30
Mabel	F	65-74	Married	2	Chinese	31+

4.2. Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interview protocol was designed to explore participants' wellbeing (e.g., happiness, challenges) in narrative chronological order (e.g., past and present working experience, future perspectives). It enabled a more detailed investigation of various resources (e.g., psychological, social, and contextual) and emphasized the social situatedness of their lives (Kvale, 1996). The interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes and were conducted via Skype. Six out of seven interviews were conducted in English, while one interview with Amanda was conducted in Chinese because she preferred to use her native language. The data were collected between January and April 2019.

4.3. Data transcription and analysis

We used Dragon software 1.0 to aide data transcription. In total, around 9.5 hours of interview data were transcribed and a corpus of 90,626 words was generated. Stress, pauses, and laughter were included in the transcription. Paradigmatic-type narrative analysis

(Polkinghorne, 1995) and an inductive coding process (Kasper, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Strauss & Carbin, 1990) were adopted to develop categories and subsequent salient themes concerning the participants' wellbeing using Atlas.ti. Polkinghorne (1995) noted that the analysis of narratives "gathers stories for its data and uses paradigmatic analytic procedures to produce taxonomies and categories out of the common elements across the database" (p.5). Four steps were followed: first, researchers reviewed interview transcripts and wrote memos to articulate and explore their own interpretations and thoughts. The use of memos in the research team conveyed ideas to other members and maintained an open communication (Richards, 2005). Next, narrative interview data were examined multiple times in order to discover and generate initial provisional categories and themes in the data as well as identify commonalities and differences across the seven participants. Codes were revised until a point of data saturation was reached. Finally, recurring themes were grouped and conceptualised in line with an ecological model of teacher wellbeing.

4.4. Ethics

Participants were not known to the research team and contacted the researchers through an open call, thereby effectively opting in. An information sheet and a consent form were designed to explain the confidentiality and rights of participants as well as explicitly ask for permission to audio record. At the point of transcription, data were immediately anonymized and any potential identifying markers were removed.

5. Findings

To understand these teachers' wellbeing from an ecological perspective, the findings are organized according to four levels of contextual systems. Within each level, we discuss how the teachers draw upon their psychological, social, and contextual resources to manage their wellbeing in response to changing ecological circumstances.

5.1. The ecology of the school

The ecosystem closest to the teachers is the school itself. The characteristics of this system affects what teachers do, the roles they adopt, their interpersonal relationships with others, and their general sense of belonging and identity.

5.1.1. Heavy workload

Workload is a salient aspect notable across the data. Besides teaching in the class, teachers need time to plan lessons, check students' homework, develop skills and knowledge, and interact with colleagues, students, and parents. All the teachers' data revealed similar concerns about their heavy workload and all the teachers reported feeling overwhelmed. The full teaching schedule every day and a large number of students were key contributory factors to this sense of overwork so that teachers described a lack of sleep and not even sufficient time for lunch. For example, Stephanie described that teachers had to, "on average, teach five lessons a day" and "sometimes, lots of teachers do not have time to have lunch!" She further elaborated that she taught "more than 200 students" from "five years of different classes." Especially, four teachers (Mila, Rose, Mabel, and Amanda) are or were the only Chinese teachers in their schools, so they took on additional responsibilities. Josephine explicitly explained:

> I'm in charge of all the business stuffs concerns Mandarin, so any school trips, international trips, managing budgets, purchasing resources, choosing and subscribing to online platforms, and then leading couple of language assistants, and then sometimes mentoring student-teacher as well.

5.1.2. Relationships with school management and colleagues

Positive relationships with school management teams and colleagues have been shown to be positively related to teacher wellbeing (Collie & Martin, 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

All the CFL teachers in this study talked about school management and their colleagues, which seem to influence their wellbeing in various ways. Particularly, the school management appeared to play a crucial role. Mila, Rose, and Mabel reported that a good management team in their schools helped teachers to reduce their workloads and deal with misbehaving students. However, in Mila's previous school as well as in Amanda and Stephanie's current schools, the teachers felt less supported. Mila contrasted her experience across two schools:

> I like my current school because it's more supportive, like a more supportive SLT team, senior leadership team. They are always supporting teachers and they understand the teachers. So they know what the teachers need, but in my previous school, I think that the school it's more under control of the parents. Why the parents would judging the teachers from a non-professional perspective and if the school cannot stand up for the teacher, then the teachers will get all the pressures from the your SLT team and from the parents, non-professional judgment, and from the students.

Three teachers (Mila, Stephanie, and Rose) expanded on this and described different relationships with the management team particularly in respect to teacher inspection. Rose did not feel that the inspections were stressful because "they are keeping it low profile, so you don't need to worry about it that much. And they don't grade you and they just give you some feedback." However, in Stephanie's school, she felt the inspections were unfair and she was frustrated at how her senior manager behaved after observing one class. She stated, "without giving me a chance to explain what I was doing. And then insisting on having a lesson observation the first day – first lesson back [from Christmas holiday]." She then sent a complaint letter to this senior manager for the unreasonable demand and use of unacceptable language. It appears that Stephanie's life experience helped strengthen her resilience, as she further described:

I wasn't twenty-one, twenty-three when I came into teaching. I am an experienced person. Your confidence grows with age. Your confidence grows with your life-experience. So, I came into teaching for a reason. What I have been seeing, what is the right things, what are the wrong things. I dared to challenge.

Besides the management team, three teachers' (Mabel, Bonnie, and Amanda) reported that they can manage their wellbeing better with support from their colleagues. Bonnie felt "useful" and "cathartic" to "relieve some stress" when she and other five new teachers in the same school went "through this new process together" and told "each other when we have a bad day", but she was also cautious that "it can also be like a spiral. It can make you feel even worse". However, Amanda perceived that dynamic with her colleagues had changed after exam results in her Chinese class were outstanding among those of all modern foreign language classes. She reported that this situation of being isolated negatively affected her sense of belonging in the workplace. She further explained:

Once everyone knows the results of language examinations, my colleagues did not talk about it at all, none of my colleagues says 'congratulations' to me as courtesy. Since then, the atmosphere is changed, and I feel excluded by my colleagues. [Translated from Chinese]

When CFL teachers reflected on their experiences, they seem to remain positive by having a perceptive of gratitude. Three teachers (Josephine, Mila, and Mabel) explicitly expressed that they felt "very fortunate" and "very lucky" to work in the UK. Mila described how she felt gratitude when one of students' parents invited her for a coffee and supported her:

Because she understands how difficult, how challenging it could be. But even though she did not do so, but I just really appreciated for the kindness. So, you are kind of working so far away from home, facing here so much challenges and you just, you just appreciate every little kindness.

18

5.2. The ecology of work and life

All the teachers referred to the connections and tensions between their lives in school and their family lives.

5.2.1. The connections and tensions

All the teachers reported "blurry boundaries" (Day & Gu, 2010) between their work and private lives. Three teachers (Mila, Bonnie, and Mabel) reported that they worked in the evenings, weekends and holidays (e.g., Christmas) for lesson preparation, marking, and other work-related tasks. Mila, Bonnie, and Rose further stated that their excessive workloads had a detrimental impact on their home life, with too little time for family especially their children and too little time for a social life. Mila spoke of her frustration at having no spare time for her personal life.

In addition, four teachers (Josephine, Stephanie, Rose, and Amanda), who had young children, faced challenges in terms of the tensions between work and non-work domains. This problem was exacerbated as they had limited social networks in the UK to support them. Stephanie described a conflict situation that she had to go home for her children because no one else could help while her assistant principle expected her to stay in the school:

Last year, there was a big snow in London, and I came in, I stayed half of the day, because, I had to go back home because my children are coming back from the school, the school sent them back, and I went back. Next day, I was told that the assistant principle wanted to see me. And I said to the co-principle: 'Look, you haven't thanked me for coming in for half of the day, I came in because of the heave snow, and I had to go because my kids were going home. He said: 'You are a teacher.' But I said: 'I am a mother first.'

While the connections and tensions between work and life may cause teachers' anxiety and frustration, three teachers (Mila, Rose and Mabel) had social connections which enhanced their wellbeing. For example, Mila went to the church in the city, and made friends who were also language teachers in schools and offered her emotional and professional support. Most of Rose's friends were parents and teachers in her Chinese class on Sunday. Mabel invited her students from private classes and grandchildren to perform in the open days of Chinese school on Sunday.

5.2.2. Conscious strategies for work/life balance

In an effort to attain a better work/life balance, teachers in this study reported using three strategies: a) making social time an explicit priority; b) finding support in school and socially; and c) empowering themselves through positive beliefs and practices.

Three teachers (Josephine, Mila, and Amanda) made a personal decision to prioritize their time for a healthy work-life balance. For example, Amanda described that after she gave a birth, she chose to work as a part-time teacher, instead of working full time, to give herself time for her family. Similarly, Josephine noted, "the benefit of going part-times comes off. It happens I found out that this is a better work-life balance." Besides changing to a part-time job, she further explained how she now draws a clear line between her work and private life to better manage her time for improved wellbeing.

> I just draw a line to how much work I'm gonna finish at work and then not bring any work home and then sometimes I bring some work home, but not too much. So, you can go on and on and on and on, Monday to Sunday in this job, but you just have to draw a line. And the work you can't finish you just can't finish.

Mila had no family obligations in the UK, but she started to realize the importance of her personal life for her wellbeing and her personal needs beyond the workplace so she decided to consciously prioritize it, as she stated, "I cannot allow work to occupy my life. I have to have a line. I need to spend time with my friends on the weekend. I need to attend church and I need to do exercise".

In addition, teachers are less likely to suffer from burnout if they have a strong network of support (Fiorilli, Albanese, Gabola, & Pepe, 2017; Hobfoll, 2001). Four teachers (Josephine, Stephanie, Rose, and Amanda) actively sought out both school support (e.g., school management team) and social support (e.g., husband, husband's family, church group). For example, one of the greatest stressors was attributed to the long hours of commute, which left teachers with little spare time during the term. Rose had to travel to the school for two hours per day, but she felt less stressed when her husband and in-laws were supportive in helping manage the children's appointments and commitments. In terms of school support, for example, Josephine requested that the school changed her work time from 5 days to 4 days per week.

Additional aspects notable across the data are all the teachers' positive beliefs and practices. For example, both Josephine and Mabel meditated regularly and had positive mindsets. As Josephine stated, "instead of seeing it as a problem, that when things arise, how do I use it as an opportunity for me to transform this into something positive, better or to create value."

5.3.   The ecology of the education system

The next layer of teachers' ecological systems refers to influences that may impact upon the teacher more indirectly. The Department for Education (DfE), the non-ministerial department

18

such as The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted),

teacher union, and charities for teachers are situated in the teachers' exosystem.

5.3.1. Professional accreditation and job changes

One aspect in the ecology of the education system notable for wellbeing across the data is

professional accreditation and job changes. Four teachers (Stephanie, Rose, Mabel, and

Amanda), who had previously been teachers in China or had worked in a different profession

in the UK, faced challenges to attain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in order to take up a

permanent teaching post in state-funded schools in the UK. Mabel indicated, "in the UK, they

don't accept teaching qualification from other countries." Amanda further described her

experiences:

> I possessed a teaching certificate in China and did an oversea trained teacher
>
> programme (OTTP) in the UK in order to get QTS. Actually, I felt I was fighting for
>
> honour. I worked in China for more than 10 years, but suddenly I became an unqualified
>
> teacher in the UK. [Translated from Chinese]

The above extract shows that having to attain QTS in order to be recognised as a legitimate

teacher in the UK, threatened Amanda's sense of self-worth and pride. The UK DfE made

efforts to recruit overseas trained teachers and these teachers qualified in China including

Amanda were legally allowed to teach in schools without QTS for up to four years. However,

they were considered as unqualified teachers (supply teachers) and required to enrol in

programs to obtain QTS within a maximum of four years. Therefore, the lack of recognition

of her existent teacher qualifications, experience of both working in the school and training in

OTTP at the same time, and the additional time pressure of obtaining QTS were likely to all

contribute to Amanda's frustration. This cross-cultural shift in perspective on her teaching

experience appeared to threaten her personal sense and actual professional status leading her to 'fight for her honour'.

Another issue in understanding CFL teacher wellbeing is the acute teacher retention problem in the UK. Stephanie contrasted this issue across two countries:

> In China, teachers stay for a long time. And I have friends who have stayed in a good school for twenty years, or ten years, okay? In UK system, here, each year there's turnover. It's the system itself contributed to the stress, you know? School starts in September. And by January you will start to see people moving, looking for jobs.

In China, being a teacher means having a stable job with a stable salary, and this is especially true for the teachers who started their careers several decades ago when China was poorer as a nation (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2014). Stephanie' comparisons across the two educational systems have no doubt impacted on her sense of stress and frustration when evaluating her current situation.

At the time of the interview, four teachers (Josephine, Mila, Bonnie, and Stephanie) had permanent contracts, while three teachers (Rose, Mabel, and Amanda) had part-time or freelance contracts. Both permanent and non-permanent teachers (Mila, Bonnie, Rose, and Amanda) reported that they had changed their jobs in the past year, which influenced their wellbeing. Mila was quite happy and felt lucky to change her jobs across countries and relocate in the UK, as she stated, "I just apply for a job from online and I just think that I'm very fortunate at this job opportunity and then, and then I just come to the UK". When she felt overwhelmed and stressed due to a heavy workload, she decided to work in another school in the UK. She explained:

Now you have to change to another school, you need to apply for another work visa,

which is sponsored by another school. This is really unusual, but I just want to say that

I'm a very fortunate person.

Amanda recently lost her teaching job due to a funding shortage in her school, but she focused

on the bright side: "I refuse to let myself being miserable. You just choose to be positive, right?

You just look at bright side, look at what you get [Translated from Chinese]". Before Rose

took up her full-time job, she taught Chinese for two days in two different schools and worked

as a supply teacher to teach all other subjects. Rose's self-efficacy and sense of worth

increased in her current full-time work compared to her feelings as a part-time teacher before.

5.3.2. Evaluation system

In addition to classroom observations from school management teams, inspections by Ofsted

and other private bodies added to three teachers' (Josephine, Bonnie, and Amanda) perceived

stress and workload. Amanda criticised that, "teacher assessment in the UK was very tedious,

in the evaluation form, we have to find evidence to support the descriptions of assessing

criteria. If we do not keep the evidence, then inspectors would judge and question us

[Translated from Chinese]". Bonnie further described that unrealistic expectations and

number-driven assessment existed in the British education system and evaluation bodies,

which became one of her stressors:

And there's a thing in the UK, you can't just be good at the same level all the time. You

have to always be getting better. So when kids are ten or eleven, they take an exam

called the SAT and the grade they get in maths will predict five years later their GCSE

grade and if you teach them and they stay on that curve, that's not good. You have to do

better than that prediction otherwise you're a bad teacher.

Even though teachers were not satisfied with this evaluation system, Josephine felt that the teacher had to "make a lot of efforts" and "play that game" although this may be at odds with their own personal convictions. Amanda explained, "I teach by heart. You want to find the evidence, so tick this box and that box. I do not want to tick any boxes. I love my children, so I would like to do a lot for them, miles away beyond [Translated from Chinese]". There is a paternalistic tradition of teacher morality in China and traditionally a good teacher's relationship with students should be "love students like their own children" (*ai sheng ru zi*, Confucius) (Ye & Law, 2019). The friendly and warm-hearted images of Chinese teachers have also been linked to the Confucian concept of 'ren' (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998), which "translates to something like human-heartedness or love" (Watkins, 2000, p.168). It is possible that Amanda's personal beliefs and values have roots in this paternalistic tradition, which is in contrast to the evidence-based evaluation system that dominates the UK education system.

5.3.3. Teacher training and support

Although the promotion of wellbeing has become a stated goal for DfE in the UK (Ofsted, 2019), the implementation of policies and reforms related to teacher wellbeing appears to be a challenge. Bonnie stated that it was "hypocritical" to promote teacher wellbeing, while expecting teachers to do so much: "all expect you to do one thing, which is work really really hard, but also they expect you to look after yourself and don't get too stressed, which is really hypocritical. And that's really annoying." In her view, additional teaching development courses did not help improve her wellbeing, but left her no time for her work and personal life:

> It feels like there's a lot of pressure to constantly do personal development, and be a
> healthy teacher with a good work-life balance, but at the same time they are taking up
> my time that I could be using for my marking and that I would then have to be with my
> friends.

18

However, three teachers (Rose, Mabel, and Amanda) stated that teacher training programmes provided them with the opportunity to enrich their knowledge, which potentially helped them to handle cultural and pedagogical challenges as well as increase their confidence in teaching. Rose stated, "it's almost every week we have something different. That is really kind of help you."

It appears that four CFL teachers (Josephine, Rose, Mabel, Stephanie), who experienced teacher training in both countries, had nuanced perspectives about their appreciation of the respective British and Chinese education systems. Mabel had a very positive view about teaching methods she learned and experienced in the UK, as she stated, "because in the UK the creative part you can do much easier." In China, the centralised education system may result in limited teacher autonomy in classrooms (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2014). It has been found that CFL teachers educated in China tend to adopt traditional pedagogic approaches which overstress teacher-centred, grammar and textbook oriented methods (Liu & Dervin, 2016). Since Mabel moved to the UK, she appeared to have experienced a higher level of teaching autonomy and felt more empowered to be able to use a range of more creative teaching methods, which she enjoys. In contrast, Stephanie valued her previous learning and teacher training experiences in China,

> We have seen what MFL teaching is like (in China), what are the things that's very important for good foreign language learning. And when we see it's not there (in the UK). For example, allocated curriculum timetable is very small, we know that's not right. We know that changing classes every year is not right. I realize they have double lessons for Year 7, Year 8, Year 9. And that is not right. You ask 11-year-olds, 12-year-olds to concentrate for two hours on end. It's not possible.

Stephanie was educated and had some teacher training in China. Her comparison of and experience of the differences between the educational cultures in the UK and China contributed to her dissatisfaction with her current setting which she felt unhappy about given she had experienced a system she felt worked better.

Ultimately, DfE, teacher unions, and charities for teachers seem to play a positive role in giving support and improving teacher wellbeing. Three teachers (Bonnie, Josephine, and Amanda) reported that they and their colleagues received support. Bonnie got funding to attend a language excellence program for her professional training, which cooperated with the British government, the British Council, China, and a university to help Chinese learning in UK schools in the next five years. Josephine felt more stressed to cope with the financial difficulties while she had to raise her two children alone after her divorce. Josephine also indicated that, " I think lots of teachers who were in a financial problem as well" and explicitly described that besides child allowance support, she received hardship and training funds for her language courses and MSc course during her difficult time:

> They have a very good system, that you can just call them if you've got, mental health problems or you just want to find someone to talk to. And they have a very good system, that you could apply for financial help.

Similarly, Amanda applied for funding which offered 10 hours of free childcare per week, so she was able to work part time in the school. Amanda also described that her MFL colleagues reached out to the teacher union when the school planned to stop offering MFL subjects, so her colleagues could keep their jobs with its support.

5.4. The societal ecology of teaching generally and MFL specifically

Teachers' lives are also situated within the culture, value, and laws of the society in which the teacher works, and especially how the society values the teaching profession per se, and MFL specifically can impact on their wellbeing.

5.4.1. Teacher status and finance

Teacher status can impact on teacher wellbeing (Hargreaves et al., 2007). Four teachers (Mila, Bonnie, Amanda, and Mabel) reported that teachers are not very well respected especially in the UK, in particular when compared to the status of teachers in Asian society. Bonnie described, "Teaching here is good, but abroad is easier and you feel a lot more valued and respected. They have a real respect for teachers. That's a real thing. They have national Teachers' Day." Bonnie also noticed how the government played a role in the changes in the British society:

> Since the World War II, we had conservative governments, the Thatcher year, and they've changed education more towards a utilitarian economic output system, so it's more about making a literate, numerate society rather than a wise culture tolerant society.

This comparative frame of reference led to these four teachers' lower job satisfaction as they felt they could enjoy a higher professional prestige in other countries such as China.

Another issue is that the UK government policies and funding shortage are forcefully driving teachers out of the profession and causing increased stress for the remaining teachers (Coughlan, 2018). Stephanie noted, "the schools are not receiving the funding, so they cut employees, not enough teachers, and as a result, the teachers are having full workloads. It's the system itself had contributed to the stress." Research also indicates that a low salary is linked to problems of teacher retention (Horsley & Stokes, 2005). Across the data, issues of

low payment in the school, additional jobs for supplementing teaching income, personal financial stress were reported. Five teachers (Josephine, Mila, Bonnie, Amanda, and Mabel) stated that they have financial stress. However, none of the teachers explicitly showed a desire to leave the teaching profession due to this issue, although Josephine explicitly described how better payment would help get a better life in general:

> If teachers get paid enough, like get paid more, and then you just get a better life generally. Not to say that we want to pay mega bucks, but definitely more. So, let's say, for myself I can then enjoy hobbies that I like. I could spend on takeaway sometimes and that takes stress off in daily life. That makes me better in general to give more into work.

5.4.2. Societal context of CFL and MFL

Five teachers (Mila, Bonnie, Rose, Mabel, and Amanda) reported on an increasing awareness about the importance of Chinese teaching and learning in the UK. Both Amanda and Mabel described that there had been no opportunities to be a Chinese teacher in the past and then gradually Chinese has been included in the school curriculum. In Mila's previous and current schools and Bonnie's current school, which are all specialized in language teaching, the MFL department is "the strongest and the biggest department." Bonnie further explained, the schools "think of languages very, very highly and within that Chinese is the most important. We get funding from the government, we get funding from the Chinese government as well". Similarly, in Rose's current school, Chinese is a compulsory subject and Rose explained that, the school sees "Chinese is getting important. I think it depends on the headteacher and the management team." This rising status of Chinese teaching and learning in some schools have improved Chinese teachers' employment opportunities in the UK, which subsequently builds their self-esteem and increases their job satisfaction.

However, a more broadly negative gloomy picture emerges from the lack of political and financial support for the status of MFL generally within the UK. For example, MFL including Chinese were recently cut in Amanda's school due to lack of funding and she lost her job in consequence. In addition, students' low appreciation of learning a modern foreign language has also contributed to teachers' low job satisfaction. Bonnie noted that students in the schools had low motivation to learn a modern foreign language and she outlined the problem:

> And it particularly at a time with BREXIT, real xenophobia, language teaching now is really important and it's very difficult because honestly kids believe they don't need to learn languages because everyone speaks English. They don't know the way that language changes your brain and changes how you see the world. They just think it's entirely utilitarian.

In other words, although there had been somewhat of a positive development for CFL compared to the past, this all took place against a more negative societal development in regard to MFL more generally.

6. Discussion

In this study, all the participants perceived various challenges and joys in their ecological systems. Particularly, six migrant teachers reported additional challenges and difficulties compared to local teachers in the UK, and one local teacher, who had overseas teaching experience, reported an additional comparative frame of reference in respect to teaching generally and MFL specifically. However, these CFL teachers in the UK drew on various resources to handle their perceived stressors and actively sustain their wellbeing. Psychological resources (positive thinking and beliefs, gratitude, optimism, and self-awareness of own experience and age) as well as social and contextual resources (support from peer colleagues, school management, outside of school, and governments) were

identified. Participants in this study also consciously used strategies to enable them to flourish and mitigate their stress, such as making social time an explicit priority and using their leisure time for things such meditation. Their wellbeing emerges from the interaction of psychological, social, and contextual resources used to meet particular challenges in their ecosystem. This echoes Dodge et al.'s (2012) metaphor of a seesaw in constant responsive dynamism balancing between stressors and resources to generate an overall sense of wellbeing fluctuating in response to challenges. When a CFL teacher has more challenges than resources, there is a state of imbalance and their perceived wellbeing is negatively affected.

Schoon (2006) found that, "adaptive functioning in the face of adversity is not only dependent on the characteristics of the individual, but is greatly influenced by processes and interactions arising from the family and the wider environment" (p. 16). This study revealed how the multiple layers of contextual factors in their ecosystems can affect an individual's wellbeing. For example, the micro system associated with CFL teacher wellbeing included a heavy workload and relationships with school management and colleagues in the school context. The mesosystem associated with CFL teacher wellbeing included connections and tensions between teacher work and life. Additional challenges for CFL teachers were limited support from their friends and family members in the UK and long commutes to their workplace. The exosystem of CFL teacher wellbeing included the external and broader level of society such as the education system, particularly professional accreditation, job changes, evaluation system, and teacher training and support. The structural barriers that migrant CFL teachers faced particularly job insecurity and professional accreditation reflected particular stressors and challenges for this group of educators. The macrosystem of CFL teacher wellbeing also revealed the link between teacher status, finance, as well as societal context of CFL and MFL in the UK generally. As such, it can be seen how wellbeing is also connected to society's

construction of values and beliefs and the status and social recognition the profession and specific subject enjoys (Hansen, 2009; Hargreaves et al., 2007; Ingersoll & Collins, 2018).

An interesting issue that contributes to CFL teachers' wellbeing is their cross-cultural experiences of their professional roles. We found that CFL teachers in this study faced additional tensions arising from their comparison and perception of educational, social, and ideological differences between China and the UK, particularly regarding cultural norms in the educational systems and teaching profession. In contrast to Zhou's (2014) study in which CFL teachers struggled with different cultural interpretations of respect and discipline strategies, the CFL teachers in our study appeared to adapt more flexibility to the UK teaching context by recasting their expectations in response to their current teaching context. This bicultural flexibility enabled them to critically reflect on their experiences in the different education systems and societies, and subsequently reconstruct their identities and expectations in ways that affected their wellbeing positively. However, some of the teachers did note frustrations and disappointments at differences which they felt in the current setting were worse than their previous experiences of language education in China.

Among various resources CFL teachers drew on, an interesting and salient resource was these participants' positivity. All the participants seemed to hold a positive outlook with a sense of gratitude. Such positivity can be understood through Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (1998, 2001) and studies of optimism (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1998; Scheier & Carver, 1985, 1992; Seligman, 2011), which show that people with dispositional optimism and experiencing more positive emotions tend to experience higher wellbeing overall and better resilience. Gratitude relates positively with optimism and hope, as well as impacts positively on building healthy relationships and school culture more generally (Howells, 2014; MuCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). The implication is that it could be helpful to teach educators strategies of gratitude, positive outlooks and optimism to help them

develop psychological resources to help them cope with the stressors and strains in their jobs and lives.

7. Conclusions

This study provides an ecological understanding of CFL teacher wellbeing in the UK. We identified four ecological systems that interconnected with one another that are associated with teacher wellbeing: ecology of the school, ecology of work and life, ecology of the education system, as well as ecology of teaching industry and MFL culture. In this study, participants seem to embrace their difficulties and challenges to remain positive in general. Participants' practices, including medication and seeking school, institute, and social support, helped to them to address their problems at work. Their life experiences, and self-awareness of own experience and age also helped them to conceive of a big picture about their past, present, and the future, that seemed to strengthen their resilience.

The ecological perspective on CFL teacher wellbeing offers practitioners and policy makers a broader lens for the design and implementation of effective prevention, intervention, and remedial actions to address teacher wellbeing. It would be important a) at the school level, to reflect on extensive work-related demands and options for social support; b) at the level of education system, there is a need to consider a commitment to evidence-based teacher wellbeing support programs as well as practical supports to help teachers manage the work/home life balance; c) at the society level, steps must be taken to encourage a positive appreciation of teaching generally as a profession and MFL specifically within the UK; d) teachers moving across educational cultures might benefit from explicit training in how to manage differences in expectations and roles. Sir Ken Robinson (2006) described teachers as "the lifeblood of any school". As the National Education Union (2019a, 2019b) noted, "We need drastic action and a major rethink from government if we are to stop the haemorrhaging

of good teachers from the profession" and "staff wellbeing must be a priority". We can only reiterate the urgency of this call to support teachers as professionals to ensure they can flourish in their roles and teach to the best of their abilities.

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