

Aleksandra Osuch
Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Łodzi
e-mail: ola20osuch@gmail.com

Ola Majchrzak  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2161-3909>
Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Łodzi
e-mail: omajchrzak@ahelodz.pl

The role of positive institutions in language teachers' well-being

Abstract

Positive psychology was established on three fundamental principles: positive emotions, positive character traits that lead to a fulfilling life, and positive institutions that foster an environment for growth and prosperity. However, positive emotions and character traits have mostly been the focus of psychological research, while positive institutions, the organisations that support such growth, have received noticeably less attention. We tried to fill the gap by taking a closer look at a primary school in Lodz, Poland – SP 81, which calls itself a positive institution (*Budząca się Szkoła*). The purpose of the study is to ascertain whether SP 81, a positive institution, has an effect on language teachers' well-being. Additionally, it was intended to determine whether a positive institution plays a significant role in the lives of language teachers and what that role is. The way school influences the teachers' well-being is examined from three different perspectives: the physical aspect, the pedagogical approach and the psychological aspect, by means of one-to-one interview with each teacher. The results demonstrate that the institution and all three different perspectives have a significant impact on language teachers' well-being. The study is hoped to have contributed to positive psychology research by demonstrating what it means to be a positive institution in practice.

Keywords: positive psychology, language teachers, positive institution, well-being, primary school

1. Introduction

Language teachers are essential in influencing students' lives and creating an environment that promotes growth and learning. However, given the demands of the job and the numerous difficulties facing the educational system, teachers might frequently experience high levels of stress and burnout. Exploring elements that can improve and support teachers' general psychological and emotional health is becoming more and more important. It is understood that their wellness is important for both their personal well-being as well as the quality of education they give. "Teachers are students' greatest resource. Not the building, not the computers," said Keishia Thorpe, the winner of the Global Teacher Prize 2021. Nevertheless, to demonstrate the possible advantages and consequences of improving teachers' well-being in order to implement positive institutional practices, this article explores the role of positive institutions in language teachers' well-being. It emerges from the realisation that, despite recent growth in the field of teacher well-being research, little has been researched about the third pillar of positive psychology, which are positive institutions.

Positive psychology was founded on three main pillars: positive emotions, positive individual traits associated with good living and positive institutions that create conditions for students to flourish (Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The first step is to measure and specify positive traits "that transcend particular cultures and politics and approach universality" (Seligman, 1998). Recognising positive individual traits requires the study of strengths, such as the capacity for love and work, courage, compassion, resilience, creativity, curiosity, integrity, self-knowledge, moderation, self-control, and wisdom. The second aim is to promote positive emotions and experiences. Understanding positive emotions entails the study of contentment with the past, happiness in the present, and hope for the future. The third focus is on understanding positive institutions that entails the study of the strengths that foster better communities, such as justice, responsibility, civility, parenting, nurturance, the work ethic, leadership, teamwork, purpose, and tolerance. As Budzińska (2021) notices, the focus of research in psychology so far has been concentrating on positive emotions and character strengths. Institutions have received the least number of studies out of the three pillars.

2. Positive institutions as the third pillar of positive psychology

Positive institutions have been defined as "enabling institutions," "organizational structures that enable success and promote positive language learning environments," as well as "institutions that enable people to flourish" (MacIntyre, Mercer, 2014: 154, 165). Family, religion, education and work are examples of institutions. However, specific families, particular religions, places of work, employers, specific schools or universities are organisations. Positive organisations encourage people to act in a prosocial manner (Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Additionally, positive institutions refer to that aspect

of positive psychology that studies how “organisations contribute to the fulfilment of their members” (Peterson, 2006). However, as Salamanca (2011) shows, studies on positive institutions are primarily focused on positive workplaces and positive schools, with only a secondary focus on families, legal and policy institutions, and university campuses.

The subjective well-being of students indicates a positive school. Positive schools value student abilities and foster social, emotional, and academic competence. Good educational practices emphasise the development of each individual student (Peterson, 2006). Positive emotions that are essential to the learning process are increased by supportive teacher and peer connections, as well as by meaningful tasks that entail group effort and active learning. A strength-based approach acknowledges unique skills connected to the student’s intellectual and socioemotional growth as a responsible citizen. Engaging activities, as opposed to traditional lectures, serve as motivational tools to inspire participation (Salamanca, 2011).

Salamanca (2011) summarises that the necessity of combining academic and emotional education is a recurring issue. Children spend a significant portion of their lives at school; therefore, both the school and the family have a crucial role in the development of future citizens. Academic education is insufficient on its own to support an adult’s happiness and fulfilment. Individuals and the groups they establish can grow into healthy social systems in the home, workplace, and community with the help of social skills and emotional control.

Positive schools may be a remedy for more and more frequent mental health problems among students nowadays. The example of Geelong Grammar School (GGS) is worth mentioning here. The programme of this Australian school was designed by Martin Seligman. It transpired that it has proved successful in combating anxiety and depression. The program objective was to promote psychological well-being of students since the sole focus on academic excellence has been found to insufficiently prepare young people for real life (Green, Oades, Robinson, 2011).

3. The concept of well-being and PERMA model

By 1946 World Health Organisation (WHO) made an early contribution on the significance of well-being (Hascher, Waber, 2021). Instead of only the absence of disease or infirmity, the WHO had already defined health as a condition of whole bodily, mental, and social well-being. Diener (1984) was one of the pioneering psychologists to study subjective well-being and put the subject on the scientific radar. According to him, both positive and negative affect, as well as subjective life satisfaction, are indicators of well-being. His contributions served as a foundation for subsequent research, such as that of Ryff (1989), who defined psychological well-being as a state characterised by autonomy, positive relationships with others, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and purpose in life. Later, Keyes (2002) incorporated the concepts of emotional, psychological, and social well-being into the idea of mental health. Research on well-being from the standpoint of organisational psychology was also sparked by Diener’s work. Warr (1994), for instance, listed the following elements when describing employee well-being: affective well-being,

aspiration, autonomy, competence, and integrated functioning. Similar to this, Bakker and Oerlemans (2011) created a multidimensional model of employee well-being outlining two negative dimensions (workaholism and burnout) as well as three positive dimensions (work engagement, happiness at work, and job satisfaction). Furthermore, it can be claimed that Diener's early work serves as a foundation for many well-being models used in positive psychology, including Seligman's (2012) PERMA model, which has five components: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Seligman's PERMA model is described below.

3.1. Positive emotions

The category of positive emotions is self-explanatory; it is focused on the importance of feeling good. It can encompass the entire spectrum of feelings other than happiness, including joy, pride, satisfaction, astonishment, etc.

3.2. Engagement

Engagement is the term used to describe a strong emotional attachment to a certain activity, group, or cause (such as being interested, engaged, and immersed). Flow has been described as a condition of total participation. The flow state is described by Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura (2002) as an ideal state of focus on an intrinsically motivating work. When in a flow state, awareness of time may diminish, and good thoughts and feelings may be present.

3.3. Relationships

In relationships, people experience sentiments of belonging to a society or a community, feelings of affection and support from loved ones, and satisfaction with their social networks. As humans, we spend a lot of time around other people. Social support has been associated with fewer cases of depression and psychopathology, improved physical health, a decreased mortality rate, and other favourable outcomes. There is proof that social connections help with healthy habits like self-management of chronic illnesses and a decline in suicidal thoughts.

3.4. Meaning

Meaning is having a sense of direction and purpose in life, as well as feeling a connection to something greater than oneself. Although the meaningful life is not always the joyful one, those who assert that they have more meaningful lives frequently also claim to be pretty happy and content with their lives as a whole (Baumeister et al., 2013).

3.5. Accomplishment

Making progress towards one's objectives and obtaining superior outcomes can result in both public acknowledgment and a sense of self-worth in many cultures. Achievement can be defined objectively, but it also depends on each person's desire, motivation, and personality. For instance, a mother who raises a lovely, kind family can consider her life

to be very successful, but her husband may define success as getting a job promotion (Butler, Kern, 2016). Furthermore, accomplishment is frequently sought after for its own sake. For instance, studies reveal that skilled bridge players are motivated to play to the best of their abilities; even if they lose, they feel proud of themselves for playing effectively (Seligman, 2011).

4. Language teachers' well-being

Since the global pandemic in 2020, there has been a rise in interest in the topic of well-being on a global scale. Well-being has also served as the foundation for economic policy in a number of nations. For instance, Bhutan has used the Gross National Happiness (GNH) since 2008, India implemented the Ease of Living assessment in 2019, and New Zealand adopted the Happiness Index. Eight out of ten respondents in the UK said in a YouGov poll conducted during the 2020 lockdown that they would like the government to emphasise health and wellness more.

The level of teacher well-being has been the subject of a lot of research in recent years. Many of these studies, however, have concentrated on addressing poor teacher well-being, such as teachers' elevated stress levels, their increasingly demanding workloads, and teacher burnout. In fact, teachers evaluate their well-being lower than representatives of other professions (Turner, Thielking, 2019). High levels of stress and poor professional wellness are now common in the teaching profession. However, studies have shown that educators with high levels of well-being are more successful and innovative in their classroom management, which eventually results in higher levels of student achievement. Simply said, both instructors and their students benefit from good teacher well-being (Mercer, 2020).

The increased interest in well-being is a trend that also applies to language teaching. Most significantly, there has been a recent rise in research examining the health of language teachers in the context of language education (Mercer, Gregersen, 2020). So far, its main goal has been on attempting to empower learners and facilitate their learning. However, there has not been much focus on teachers' psychology or how it may assist them "thrive" in their careers as opposed to just "survive" in them (Mercer, Oberdorfer, Saleem, 2016).

Below factors that contribute to language teachers' well-being are described.

4.1. Psychological factors

Language teachers frequently feel a greater emotional load at work as a result of the personally significant material and interpersonal interactions in language classrooms. Thus, when compared to other subjects, teaching a language requires from a teacher to have a greater understanding of emotional issues. What is even more, as language and self are so closely interconnected, teaching a language may involve more and deeper emotional connections compared to teachers of other subjects (King, Ng, 2018). Also, dealing with the worries of the pupils who learn languages while simultaneously handling personal insecurities in the chosen language may influence teachers' overall well-being (Babic

et al., 2022). Besides, ‘blurry boundaries’ (Day, Gu, 2010) between teachers’ personal and professional lives contribute negatively to the perceived well-being of teachers. These may include a need to invest a greater amount of their time and resources in and outside of the classroom due to the amplified focus on administrative tasks and the growing number of children with behavioural and learning difficulties.

4.2. Pedagogical factors

The fact that the target language is used for education in foreign language classrooms is a fundamental factor in why the specificity of foreign language teaching is so significant in the context of occupational stress. In contrast to teachers of other subjects who employ their native language for instruction, foreign language teachers apply a language other than their own. While they are undoubtedly trained for this task and are assumed to be proficient in the language they teach, there is a potential challenge. If they are not native speakers of the languages they teach, they might not feel as comfortable as they would when communicating in their mother tongue (Wieczorek, 2016). Foreign language instructors frequently have negative perceptions about their language ability, which shows itself as anxiety when they bring it up. Additionally, teachers must change the linguistic input to suit the level of the group being taught, which can be difficult, particularly early in one’s career (Wieczorek, 2016).

Apart from the very proficiency of the language taught, other issues affecting language teachers well-being are: managing students who frequently have negative attitudes towards the educational system; intense intercultural demands that language teachers have to tackle in their work (Mercer, Oberdorfer, Saleem, 2016; King, Ng, 2018); low linguistic self-efficacy in interactions with students (Horwitz, 1996; Mousavi, 2007); need to create communicative encounters between learners and maximize active student participation, which can require considerable effort and creativity from teachers using diverse, energy-intensive methodologies (Borg, 2006). The need to use new, more and more engaging teaching methods results from the inability of learners to focus on one issue for a longer time due to many reasons, among them persistent and ever-evolving electronic device stimulants which surround learners, the influence of social media, unhealthy eating habits, and inadequate sleep. These factors seem to play a decisive role in altering the dynamics in language classrooms. This, in turn, challenges teachers’ methods and approaches, placing even more significant pressures on teachers (Majchrzak, Ostrogska, 2021).

4.3. Workplace factors

Teachers’ well-being also depend to a great extent on the place where they work. This concerns both the very building they reside in but also the relations that are present in it. Social relationships in the workplace, including the ones with their colleague teachers but also administrative staff, students and parents, are very important for teachers in terms of their well-being. Also leadership behaviours, namely the way in which the head teacher treats their teachers, contribute to how they feel in their job. It is also worth mentioning that the status of the school, namely whether it belongs to a public or a private sector,

impacts the teachers' well-being to a great extent. Language teachers who work in the private sector might have unfavourable conditions for their well-being due to its uncertain working conditions, absence of collective unions, and poor status (Mercer, 2020).

Also, the fact that teachers' performance is evaluated primarily on the basis of ranking positions rather than the actual progress of their students negatively affects teachers' well-being. Teaching primarily for external assessments, working in environments subject to micromanagement based on bureaucratic procedures, and dealing with a number of in-school "pull" factors that are increasingly to blame for student drop-out rates does not help teachers either (Doll, Eslami, Walters, 2013).

High levels of stress, rising burnout rates, and unfavourable working circumstances are frequent problems in the language teaching industry, and as a result, many language teachers around the world may decide to leave their jobs. It appears that retaining motivation, commitment, and optimal levels of well-being over time has become more difficult for teachers all around the world (Babic et al., 2022). However, when considering the learning process, it is evident that the well-being of both teachers and students are interconnected. If teachers experience happiness and contentment in their professional lives, they are more likely to convey those positive emotions through their words and actions, thereby influencing those around them (Roffey, 2012). When teachers experience a positive state of mind, their cognitive abilities expand, enabling them to think more creatively, consider a wider range of options, and establish stronger connections with others. These factors contribute to their growth as improved, more effective, and innovative educators (Mercer, Gregersen, 2020).

Recognizing the significance of the well-being of language educators in relation to their professional responsibilities, it becomes crucial to comprehend how to value, safeguard, and provide assistance to those engaged in this fulfilling yet challenging field. In this regard, recent initiatives that introduce positive psychology to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) could provide beneficial insights into potential strategies to consider (MacIntyre, Gregersen, Mercer, 2016).

5. Research methodology

5.1. Objectives of the study

This case study explores the role of positive institutions in supporting language teachers' well-being through physical, pedagogical, and psychological aspects.

5.2. Institution studied

Primary School No. 81, named after the Heroic Children of Lodz, is a public school located in Lodz, Poland. The school is the first public school in Poland that is so-called "awakening". The "awakening" school represents the idea to create a child-friendly environment. Primary School No. 81 has been implementing various initiatives for several years to foster a positive work environment. These initiatives include taking children out from behind their desks, allowing them to learn while in motion, creating conditions for

the children to play and learn without realising that they are learning and allowing them to learn from each other.

To promote a pleasant working environment, the school has put in place a number of measures. These activities include providing opportunities for teachers' to develop professionally, encouraging promotion at work, and establishing and maintaining good relations between work colleagues. The administration considers that taking care of these issues helps to promote the overall welfare of instructors.

Primary School No. 81 in Lodz, Poland, is recognised for its emphasis on organisations that foster the welfare of both its teachers and pupils. The school management is aware that a conducive learning environment and successful student outcomes depend on the wellness of the teachers.

5.3. Respondents

All three study participants teach English in the studied institution. For ethical reasons, all the participants have been given a nickname.

Anna is the first interviewee. She is 28 years old and has a master degree in Iberian Studies. She has been teaching in SP 81 for two years. She teaches year 7 and year 8 classes. She also teaches in another primary school. She shares her time between two jobs. She has got experience working at other primary schools.

Bella is the second interviewee. She is 40 years old and has a master degree in English Philology. She has been teaching in SP 81 for twelve years. She teaches year 4–8 classes. She has got experience working at other primary schools.

Clara is the third interviewee. She is 38 years old and has a master degree in English Philology. She has been teaching in SP 81 for four years. She teaches year 1–3 classes and year 8. In the evening she also teaches in a private language school. She has got experience working at other primary schools.

5.4. Instruments

The interview questions were established after a literature review on the well-being of foreign language teachers in order to identify gaps in current knowledge and confirm the need for further research. The interview questions were divided into three categories: physical, pedagogical, and psychological aspects. The participants were asked about their experiences and perceptions regarding the impact of a positive institution (SP 81) in each of these domains on their well-being. The list of questions can be found in the Appendix 1.

5.5. Procedure

One-to-one interviews were conducted with three language teachers from Primary School No. 81 to gather insights on the role of positive institutions, namely SP 81, in their well-being. All three interviews were conducted in June 2023.

The first interview was conducted with Anna over a video conference. The second interview was undertaken with Bella in a face-to-face interview. It happened outside of the school premises, at a café in the centre of Lodz. The third interview was conducted with Clara over video conference.

The interviews were conducted in the Polish language. All interviews were first recorded, then transcribed and lastly translated into English. The statements were analysed systematically from different interviewees to identify patterns, common themes, variations in perspectives, and key insights related to the research question.

5.6. Results and discussion

In this section, the findings of the analysis conducted on the collected data will be presented and discussed to address the research objectives.

Physical aspects of the institution consist of the premises such as the teachers' room, the school outside area, the location of the school, the school décor; the classrooms and the equipment in the school. Concerning the pedagogical approaches, there are a number of categories such as: teaching style, teaching methods, language teachers' choices, continuous professional development, teacher training, daily responsibilities and paperwork. The psychological consequences included various aspects of interpersonal relationships, including interactions with the administration, fellow teachers, students, and their parents. The findings are organised based on the identified themes and categories. Teachers' narratives are merged as quotations to demonstrate each theme. The provided examples represent recurring opinions expressed by the teachers. While a variety of illustrations of their experiences is presented, there is an agreement among all the participants, indicating a shared overall impression. The teachers' responses revealed a strong consensus among them on the value of positive institutions for teachers' well-being.

5.6.1. Well-being in the eyes of language teachers

All teachers understand well-being as a state of feeling well and positive. The teachers' statements present that they consider well-being to include not only welfare and happiness but also a sense of fulfilment, comfort, and security. It is also worth mentioning that for one of the teachers being in a good state of well-being allows her to "grow and learn" (Clara).

5.6.2. Physical Aspect

Teachers' room

All three teachers acknowledged the positive impact of a dedicated space for teachers, so called the teachers' room, on their well-being. The availability of the room contributed to their overall comfort and reduced stress levels "away from the students". It was highlighted that the teachers' room enables them to relax in a comfortable environment "away from the students" (Anna). The teachers' room is not only for relaxation purposes but also to "make plans, discuss something" (Bella). Teachers integrate there as well as "share [...] successes or failures" (Bella). Although the teachers' room is designated for the teachers only, the students are aware that if they need a teacher who is in the room, they can always call them through the transparent door and "it doesn't create any problem" (Clara).

All three teachers cannot imagine functioning at school without the teachers' room. They stress that the teachers' room plays a massive part in their work life and has a significant impact on their well-being. As Anna says, "If I didn't have a place to sit and feel comfortable, I wouldn't be able to fully relax. For example, if we didn't have a microwave,

there would be no possibility to have something warm to eat. These are like basic needs that I couldn't fulfil without the teachers' room, and it would negatively affect my well-being" (Anna). The teachers' room is well equipped, there is always a seat available, there is enough space to leave personal belongings and work things, tea and coffee is always available due to the fact that all teachers donate money to buy them.

It is worth mentioning that SP 81 tries to cater for the basic needs of its employees. As Clara says, "I used to work in another school where we simply didn't have such facilities, so it's truly amazing convenience" (Clara).

Outdoor area

The school is very privileged as it has an outdoor area in the form of a school field, a playground, and an additional section dedicated to growing vegetables and herbs. Allotments are not a standard characteristic at Polish schools in towns. This is in fact a very important and beloved part of the school for both teachers and students.

During warm months, breaks between lessons usually take place outdoors. If the teachers are on their supervision duties, they have the opportunity to go out and get some fresh air too. Otherwise, they "stay in the teachers' room [...] to have a cup of coffee or have a snack" (Bella). Another thing is the possibility of conducting classes outdoors. As one of the teachers says, "[...] being able to have an English lesson outside of the classroom in a truly enjoyable way [...] has an impact on my well-being" (Anna). Overall, the availability of the whole outdoor space has a significant impact on the teachers' well-being.

School décor

The school has been refurbished and well-maintained. There are plants in the school which "add charm and maybe a sense of calmness to the interior" (Anna). The language classrooms have also been renovated. Apart from educational and thematic posters displayed on the walls, there are also students' work presented. In front of each language classroom "there are these nice pin boards" (Clara) where, for instance, information about holidays in other countries is written. If the teachers want to make announcements, the pin boards are also used as a form of communication with students. As all three teachers claimed in the interviews, a well-maintained school has a significant impact on their well-being.

Classrooms and the school equipment

The classrooms are spacious, "well-ventilated or protected from the sun" (Bella). The children have enough space to place their books, notebooks, and school supplies. There are also designated areas for backpacks. The classrooms "are well-lit as natural light comes in through the windows" (Clara). Blinds are installed on the windows "if it gets too bright, we have blinds that we can always lower" (Clara). There is also enough space in the classrooms for teachers to store their belongings. Spacious and bright classrooms have an impact on the teachers' well-being and provide "a pleasant atmosphere" and "it is definitely pleasant to work" (Bella). As Clara says, "If the classrooms were much smaller and dark, I would certainly feel overwhelmed, sad, and lacking energy" (Clara).

The school's provision of various teaching tools and equipment have a significant impact on the teaching experiences "because we can focus on the things we want to show

and present to the students visually” (Bella). The classrooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards, whiteboards or chalkboards, and projectors, each catering to different teaching needs. Technology integration promotes teacher-student relationships because “if they see that we want to present things to them in the way they would like to see them, it immediately improves everyone’s work” (Bella). All the teachers highlight that the classroom equipment is very important for language teachers because interactive games and activities are frequently used. However, there are still few classrooms in the school where equipment as such is not available, therefore, “it sometimes makes life difficult” (Anna) for the language teachers.

SP 81 provides each teacher with a laptop at the beginning of the year. This is not a standard procedure for state schools in Poland. Teachers use these laptops regularly during lessons, as well as after classes, for tasks such as updating the electronic register or grades. Having a laptop provided by SP 81 “is essential for me” (Clara) and “I don’t have to figure out how to buy a laptop” (Clara). An additional and a very important aspect for language teachers is an access to Wi-Fi which allows them to reach for additional teaching aids.

The school is also equipped with two printers; however, the one in the staff room is “unreliable, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t” (Anna). The accessibility and functionality of printers in the school have a considerable impact on teachers’ everyday activities and well-being. The teachers emphasise the impact of printer availability on their independence and well-being as “language teachers [...] need to print a lot of additional materials, such as tests” (Anna). Having “independence in this regard is important” (Anna). As a consequence, the teachers very often have to print materials at home.

School location

The school is located near a park in a noise-free environment with convenient access to outdoor areas. The location of the school is “important” (Bella) for the teachers and promotes well-being of the teachers and the children. Privileges such as the close proximity of a park, peace and quiet, good public transport connections and off-street parking are considered “beneficial for both the children and the teacher” (Anna). The teachers agree that the school location has its beneficial effects on their comfort at work and overall job satisfaction.

5.6.3. Pedagogical approach

Teaching aids

For the language teachers it is vital to adhere to a curriculum and at the same time to have the freedom in selecting teaching methods and materials. The language teachers can choose suitable materials to teach and “often consult with each other and simply advise each other on various matters” (Bella). They have freedom in choosing the publisher, a textbook from which they teach, which allows them to “work with different materials, try new things” (Clara). A teacher’s ability to adapt materials and procedures to their pupils’ requirements is greatly appreciated by the teachers and gives them “a great sense of accomplishment and job satisfaction” (Anna).

Professional training

The school organises various training sessions, contributing to teachers' "self-development" (Bella) and boosting their confidence. The school offers a wide range of training opportunities, both internally and externally, which makes the teachers feel "truly motivated" (Bella) and they "don't get stuck in a routine" (Anna). The school encourages collaboration among staff members, even involving parents in organising training sessions. As Bella says: "During the pandemic, a parent organised a training session for us about Teams program." Last year there were also other training sessions organised by parents for teachers including classes on mental health, depression, sexuality and similar topics. SP 81 emphasises teachers' development as an important factor and offers a wide range of courses and training. Training sessions are seen as important for teacher well-being, enhancing professional qualifications, providing new perspectives on teaching and helping to "prevent burnout" (Anna). Promotion at work is also very much encouraged and the teachers are "truly motivated here" (Bella).

Paperwork

Paperwork is an important part of teaching in primary schools. Attendance records, topic planning, test checking, grading, and communication with parents are examples of responsibilities. The amount of paperwork varies depending on whether a teacher has additional responsibilities like being a class tutor. Then there is a considerable increase in paperwork due to the need to write many reports especially after each semester but "there is a sense of satisfaction" when the work is completed (Bella). While paperwork does not "cause much trouble" (Anna) and does not significantly affect overall teachers' well-being, it can be time-consuming and sometimes the teachers "return home and continue working" (Bella). Regular documentation is necessary for recording and evaluating both teacher and student work. Although it does not significantly affect teachers' well-being, paperwork is a necessary part of teaching and can be time-consuming, especially for those who have additional obligations. Regular documentation is seen as crucial for maintaining order and evaluating work, and there are both positive and negative aspects to it.

Classroom observation

SP 81 has introduced an observation visits system in the form of open classes. The school management and other teachers can attend them, which is not a standard procedure for state schools in Poland. Visits are scheduled in advance and immediately after the observation, the lesson is discussed with the school management. All three teachers admit that although such visits can be stressful, they "learn a lot from them" (Clara), they look at them from "a developmental perspective" (Bella) and "take out as many positive aspects as possible" (Bella).

5.6.4. Psychological aspect

Achieving well-being and taking care of positive emotions at school

The teachers acknowledge the fact that the school helps them achieve well-being and maintain positive emotions. The teachers appreciate that the school positively influences

various factors which are vital for the teachers. The teachers stress the importance of “praise and kind words” (Clara) to boost their self-confidence and to “give them wings” (Clara) to continue their work. The teachers mention the significance of staff integration and building “relationships among ourselves” (Clara), emphasising the importance of a positive working atmosphere which is “crucial” (Clara). The school organises staff training on a regular basis. The teachers see professional growth as a contribution to their well-being and praise well-organised staff trainings and staff outings which “bring us together in some way” (Bella).

Managing stress at school

The teachers emphasise the importance of having support systems in place to cope with stressful situations. They express the fact that they can “rely on their colleagues” (Clare) and “there’s always someone who will listen” (Bella). The teachers stress that they can trust school psychologists and school counsellors as valuable resources when “seeking advice” (Anna), discussing problems, and receiving emotional support. This mutual support for each other within the teaching community plays a crucial role in their daily work and contributes to their overall well-being. SP 81 occasionally provides training sessions aimed at helping staff manage and handle stressful situations.

Relations amongst the teachers

The teachers at SP 81 participate in “team-building outings” (Anna) that are planned by the school and by other teachers. To commemorate significant occasions such as National Teachers’ Day, teachers organise a variety of events to celebrate together. The teachers emphasise that their well-being and productivity are directly impacted by the workplace environment. Birthday or Christmas gift contributions and shared tea and coffee funds promote a sense of a community. Building positive relationships and mutual respect among colleagues is highly prized for its positive impact on their work and daily lives. As Bella says, “I can’t imagine working among people where there are no shared relationships, no respect” (Bella). The school and external training sessions, including stress management, further their professional development allowing the teachers to participate as one team.

Relation amongst teachers, pupils and their families

Not only are good relationships among teachers encouraged at SP 81, but also relationships with pupils and their families to further see “results of our joint efforts” (Bella). The school organises many meetings where teachers, children, and their parents can spend time together. Examples of joint events include pre-Christmas gatherings, where the entire school community, along with parents, create Christmas decorations. Class meetings are organised after each semester. Recently, a picnic was held to celebrate National Children’s Day. As Bella says, “Building relationships requires dedication from everyone involved, but it is worth it” (Bella). The school management encourages and supports maintaining good relationships with pupils and parents. Respect between teachers and parents is “crucial” (Anna), and maintaining ongoing communication is “vital” (Anna). Teachers conduct consultations and are always available to parents, making them feel welcome to speak with them. Teachers confirm that it definitely promotes cooperation, adding that good relationships with pupils and parents help “impact their well-being” (Clara).

5.6.5. Other issues

The teachers stress that SP 81 values strong parent-school partnerships, which are cultivated through parent consultations, electronic journal correspondence and school events. Such practice boosts a sense of “community” (Anna) and “has a very positive impact” (Anna) on well-being of teachers, parents, and children. A good teacher-pupil relation “brings a smile to my face” (Bella). Additionally, the teachers value relations with their work colleagues so that they are “pleased to come to work in the morning” (Bella). Separate staff toilets are also an important subject for the teachers and they appreciate the fact that “school has such facilities” (Clara); otherwise, it would not “feel comfortable” (Anna) to share the toilets with the pupils.

6. Conclusions

The present study was conducted to ensure a better understanding of positive institutions as the third pillar of positive psychology and to address the gap that exists in the current literature on the role of positive institutions in language teachers’ well-being. Budzińska (2018) describes positive institution studies as “pioneer research in the field.” The aim of the research was to determine whether the positive institution, which is Primary School No. 81, has an impact on the well-being of language teachers. The goal was also to understand the role of a positive institution in a language teacher’s life and whether it is important to the teacher. The results of this study have the potential to offer educational policymakers, administrators and others useful insights. The findings can also offer evidence-based suggestions for the implementation of positive institutional practices that can support teachers’ well-being and, as a result, improve the standard of education provided to students.

Through a thorough investigation of the available literature, careful data collection and data analysis, we have gained an important new understanding of this topic. According to Peterson (2006), “organisations contribute to the fulfilment of their members”. The language teachers say that they achieve professional growth, happiness and well-being at SP 81. The language teachers state that SP 81 contributes to their fulfilment by supporting their professional training, offering a positive work environment and caring for their well-being. According to Salamanca (2011), employees perform well if the workplace invests in them. In the present study, the teachers expressed that SP 81 contributes to improving teachers’ personal value by offering continuous professional development as well as improving emotional well-being of the teachers by offering a positive environment in a physical, in a pedagogical and in a psychological way.

Another goal of the study was also to better understand the relationship between the teachers and PERMA. The study shows that PERMA plays an important role in determining teachers’ well-being.

Positive Emotions

Throughout the interviews, teachers showed enthusiasm and joy when talking about all three aspects: physical, pedagogical and psychological. It can be concluded that positive emotions contribute to teachers' well-being. SP 81 provides a well-equipped staff room and classrooms, attractive décor, outdoor spaces and practical facilities which, in consequence, are very important for the teachers and play a significant role in their well-being.

Engagement

The teachers at SP 81 are engaged in their day-to-day work and their self-development. They show an interest in their students' effort and they work on maintaining a good relationship with their work colleagues, students and their families. It demonstrates that teachers' involvement is connected to teachers' well-being. SP 81 provides a suitable environment and cares for teachers' engagement.

Relationships

SP 81 supports teachers by organising training classes and encouraging good relationships and promotes a sense of belonging and support. The teachers embrace the fact that the atmosphere at SP 81 is very important for them and that SP 81 encourages that. The school organises meetings both in and outside of school, which help the teachers get to know each other better and, in this way, cooperate better. Moreover, the school also tries to build relationships between parents, students and teachers by organising many events, including Christmas meetings. Getting to know parents and students better helps teachers establish better communication and understanding and build stronger relationships with them.

Meaning

SP 81 guides their teachers by organising ongoing support and training. It helps the teachers to find a purpose and meaning of their work. Also, the freedom given to the teachers by SP 81 in selecting their own lesson plans and resources, as well as opportunities for professional growth, have a significant impact on their well-being.

Accomplishment

SP 81 makes their teachers feel competent and self-sufficient, although the teachers highlight how much support they get from their work colleagues too.

This research clearly shows that implementing elements of positive institutions and PERMA components has an impact on teachers' well-being. It matters not only for the school but also for the whole SP 81 community.

Other schools can draw inspiration from SP 81. What SP 81 offers is to improve the teachers' well-being which, in consequence, improves the work environment and enhances the quality of education. Here are some implications for a school to consider:

1. Provision of a designated area where teachers can have their own space. On top of that, aesthetic and clean facilities seem to be important from the teachers' point of view.
2. Staff training and professional development are very important for teachers. Additionally, a supportive management team can be the start of building wonderful relations among their staff.

3. Teaching the staff to look after each other is a core base for a successful team. Sharing awareness about well-being is also very important. Organising team building activities creates a great work atmosphere.
4. Encouraging good relationships with students and their families is also a key to success. As Maslach and Leiter (1999: 303) state, “the most valuable and costly part of an education system are the people who teach. Maintaining their well-being and their contribution to student education should be a primary objective of educational leaders.”

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Introductory question: What do you understand by the term “well-being”?

Physical Aspect

1. Does your school have a teachers’ room or another designated area away from students specifically for teachers to spend time when not working? Is it necessary? Why is it necessary, or why is it not necessary? Are there chairs and a table? If so, do you always have a place to sit there? Is the teachers’ room spacious? Do you have space to hang your coat/jacket, keep your bag, or change your shoes? Do you have your own locker to store teaching aids and textbooks? Does the teachers’ room have a coffee machine, kettle, microwave, cutlery, or cabinets where you can keep dishes like mugs or plates? Does the teachers’ room and its physical aspect and amenities affect your well-being?
2. Does the school have an outdoor area? If yes, do you use it during breaks or classes? Is it important to you, and does it affect your well-being?
3. What is the decor like in your school? Are the walls empty or are there pictures hanging? Are the walls painted or peeling? Are there plants in the school? Which of these mentioned aspects are important to you, and do they affect your well-being?
4. What are the classrooms like in your school? Are they spacious or small? Do the children have enough space to place/hang their backpacks and keep their textbooks? Is the size of the classroom important to you, and does it affect your well-being?
5. What type of boards are in the classrooms? Chalkboards or interactive boards? Is it important to you, and does it affect your well-being?
6. Do the classrooms have windows? Can they be opened? Are there blinds attached to them to block sunlight? What are the views from the windows? Is it important to you, and does it affect your well-being?
7. What is the location of the school like? Is it peaceful or rather busy? Is it close to a busy road or is it close to a park? Is it important to you, and does it affect your well-being?
8. Does the school offer separate toilets/showers for staff? Is it important to you, and does it affect your well-being? For example, would sharing toilets with students bother you?
9. Does the school have computers, laptops, printers where you can search and print teaching aids, for example? Does the school offer Wi-Fi? Are these aspects important to you, and do they affect your well-being?

Pedagogical approach

1. Do you have freedom when it comes to teaching language to children, or are you given set patterns on how to teach? Can you use any teaching materials at your discretion? Are these aspects important to you, and do they affect your well-being?

2. Does the school organize professional training? If yes, do they affect your well-being?
3. Does the school support your self-development and professional advancement? If yes, do they affect your well-being?
4. Does paperwork form part of your daily duties? If yes, what do you do? Does it affect your well-being?
5. Are there classroom observations of your lessons? Are they announced in advance? Do they affect your well-being?

Psychological aspect

1. How does the school help you achieve well-being? How does the school take care of your positive emotions?
2. How does the school help you manage stress to maintain your well-being?
3. How does the school support staff in maintaining good relationships with each other? Do good relationships among staff affect your well-being?
4. Does the school support staff in maintaining good relationships with students and parents? Do good relationships with students and parents affect your well-being?

Closing question: Is there anything I haven't mentioned that is related to your school as an institution and affects your well-being?

Streszczenie

Rola pozytywnych instytucji w kreowaniu dobrostanu nauczycieli języków obcych

Psychologia pozytywna opiera się na trzech filarach: pozytywnych emocjach, pozytywnych cechach charakteru, które prowadzą do spełnionego życia, oraz pozytywnych instytucjach, które sprzyjają środowisku, w którym można się rozwijać. Pozytywne emocje i pozytywne cechy charakteru były do tej pory głównymi przedmiotami badań psychologicznych, natomiast pozytywne instytucje skupiały wiele mniej uwagi. Niniejsze badanie ma na celu wypełnić tę lukę, przyglądając się bliżej Szkole Podstawowej nr 81 w Łodzi, która określa się jako pozytywna instytucja (Budząca się Szkoła). Celem badania było ustalenie, czy SP 81, będąca pozytywną instytucją, wpływa na dobrostan nauczycieli języków obcych i jeśli tak, w jaki sposób. Zostało to zbadane z trzech różnych perspektyw: fizycznej, psychologicznej oraz pedagogicznej. Wyniki pokazują, że SP 81 jako pozytywna instytucja oraz wszystkie jej aspekty mają istotny wpływ na dobrostan nauczycieli języków obcych. Intencją niniejszego artykułu jest wskazanie właściwego kierunku tworzenia pozytywnych instytucji edukacyjnych, ale również zachęcenie do dalszych badań w tym zakresie.

Słowa kluczowe: psychologia pozytywna, nauczyciele języków obcych, pozytywna instytucja, dobrostan, szkoła podstawowa