SCIENTIFIC CULTURE
www.sci-cult.com

SCIENTIFIC CULTURE, Vol. 12, No. 4, (2026), pp. 9351-9363
Open Access. Online & Print

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.12426917

THE EMOTIONAL ECOSYSTEM OF THE L2 CLASSROOM: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF TEACHER WELL-BEING, EMOTIONAL LABOR, AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

Sultan Ayed Alanazi[1]*

[1]Department of Languages and Translation, Faculty of Education and Arts, University of Tabuk.
Email: s_alanazi@ut.edu.sa

Received: 26/10/2025
Accepted: 08/03/2026

Corresponding Author: Sultan Ayed Alanazi (s_alanazi@ut.edu.sa)

ABSTRACT

Research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has extensively explored learner emotions, yet the psychological state of the language teacher remains comparatively under-synthesized. This systematic review addresses this gap by synthesizing empirical evidence concerning the interplay of teacher well-being, emotional labor, and student outcomes in L2/foreign-language settings. Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021), this review maps the theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and key findings from 28 empirical studies of L2/FL teachers published between January 2015 and December 2024. To situate the L2-specific narrative findings within a broader quantitative context, we triangulate them against the pooled effect sizes reported in a recent high-quality meta-analysis of teacher well-being and student outcomes in general education (Granziera et al., 2023); we explicitly caveat these benchmarks as cross-context rather than L2-specific. The evidence indicates that teacher eudaimonic well-being is moderately associated with student engagement (r = .250) and teacher–student interactions (r = .243) but only weakly with student achievement (r = .065) in the general-education meta-analytic benchmark. In the L2-specific primary studies reviewed here, deep acting is consistently linked with positive teacher well-being, whereas surface acting is associated with burnout and emotional exhaustion. These findings are integrated into an Emotional Ecosystem Model of the L2 classroom that extends, rather than replicates, Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) Prosocial Classroom Model by foregrounding three L2-specific features: the emotional labor demands of language teaching, the reciprocal influence of learner foreign-language emotions (enjoyment, anxiety) on teacher affect, and identity-related vulnerability in L2 learning. The review concludes with evidence-based pedagogical implications for teacher professional development and institutional support.

KEYWORDS: Teacher Well-Being, Emotional Labor, L2 Emotions, Systematic Review, Classroom Climate.

1. INTRODUCTION

The "emotional turn" in SLA is transforming how we understand the process of learning, from the cognitive to the affective dimensions of the learner's experience (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), and an enormous amount of literature has been developed around the role of foreign language anxiety, enjoyment and motivation for learners' success (Pawlak & Kruk, 2022). This intense study of the learner has resulted in an unbalanced view at both theory and practice levels. While the learners' emotions have been examined thoroughly in previous studies, there is little or no knowledge regarding the teachers' emotional life as well as their place in the classroom's affective ecology.

This systematic review will address the above issue by analyzing the emotional agent — the teacher — and how their emotional well-being and management of emotions while professionally teaching influence their classroom. The emotionally demanding nature of a language teacher's job requires continuous demonstration of emotional expression control that Hochschild (1983) refers to as "emotional labor". When combined with the pressure from institutions and/or school systems that teachers experience, it has a cumulative negative effect on their overall well-being. In addition, Dreer (2023), in his systematized review of teacher well-being research found there are statistically significant associations between positive education outcomes (such as better sleep quality for both the teacher and the student; higher teacher retention rates; improved relationships between the teacher and students; improved student outcomes) and teacher well-being.

1.1. Problem Statement and Significance

The theoretical link between teachers and students' affective states (e.g. via emotional contagion or through modeling) are very strong. However, there is no one study that can provide a cohesive picture on how this relationship works in an L2 classroom as the studies were done in various areas of research such as SLA, Educational Psychology, and Teacher Education. A systemic review needs to be conducted that will synthesize all the evidence regarding the mechanisms and effect size relationships between teachers' well-being and emotional labor and their students' outcomes so that we have the data needed to develop evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice.

In other words, this study has a triple significance. On one hand, theoretically, it unifies many of the previous research findings on the affective environment in an L2 classroom to build on prior theory as well as move past the previously dominant learner-centered approach. On the other hand, empirically, it is a qualitative integration of L2 classroom research conducted during the last few years which was synthesized with quantitative pooling of effect size data from both the broader educational psychology and psychological education literatures to be able to triangulate those findings; at the same time, the study explicitly acknowledged limitations related to generalizing across different contexts. Finally, in terms of pedagogical relevance, the study directly provides institutional policy suggestions as well as evidence-based training for teachers.

1.2. Research Questions

This systematic review is guided by the following research questions:

1. What theoretical frameworks are predominantly used to investigate the relationship between L2 teacher well-being, emotional labor, and student outcomes?
2. What L2 student outcomes (e.g., motivation, engagement, achievement) are empirically linked to L2 teacher well-being and emotional labor?
3. What are the methodological characteristics (e.g., research design, sample size, instruments) of the empirical studies in this area?
4. What key mechanisms (e.g., emotional contagion, teacher immediacy, emotional support) appear to mediate the influence of teacher well-being and emotional labor on the L2 classroom affective climate?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Emotional Labor Theory: Surface Acting, Deep Acting, and Burnout

Emotional labor, as conceptualized by Hochschild (1983), refers to the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display. In the L2 classroom, teachers are often required to display positive emotions (e.g., enthusiasm, patience) even when they feel otherwise. Two main emotional labor strategies are widely recognized: surface acting and deep acting (Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting involves modifying one's outward expression without changing the underlying feeling— essentially, faking the required emotion. Conversely, deep acting involves genuinely trying to feel the required emotion by altering one's inner thoughts and perceptions. According to emotional labor theory, prolonged surface acting is related to increased levels of emotional exhaustion and

burnout, which affects teachers' overall well-being (Chang, 2009)

The L2 classroom is especially vulnerable to high levels of emotional labor due to a learner's inherent relationship with his/her identity and vulnerability when learning a new language (Teimouri, 2018); teachers are required to regulate both their own emotions and those that arise from their learners' intense emotional responses to learning English (i.e. foreign language anxiety [FLA] and foreign language enjoyment [FLE]) (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). In a study of 803 junior-high-school EFL teachers in China, Peng, Liu, and Peng (2023) found that among the three dimensions of emotional labor examined (expression of naturally felt emotions, surface acting, and deep acting), only deep acting significantly predicted teacher well-being, both directly and indirectly through occupational commitment (p. 1). This finding underscores the importance of differentiating emotional-labor strategies when examining their effects on teacher well-being and, subsequently, on student outcomes.

2.2. Control-Value Theory of Achievement Emotions

CVT, primarily developed by Pekrun (2006), provides a robust framework for understanding the interplay between students' appraisals of control and value and their resulting achievement emotions (e.g., enjoyment, anxiety, boredom). While traditionally applied to the learner, the teacher's emotional state and behavior can be viewed as a critical proximal environmental factor shaping the student's control and value appraisals (Dogan et al., 2023).

The teacher's well-being and emotional displays act as powerful environmental cues. For instance, a teacher exhibiting high emotional exhaustion (low well-being) may inadvertently reduce the clarity of instruction, provide less individualized feedback, or display less patience, thereby lowering students' perceived control and increasing their anxiety. Conversely, a teacher who demonstrates genuine enthusiasm (deep acting) and emotional support is likely to enhance the perceived value of the learning task and the student's sense of control over their learning process. Liu, Zhang, Zhao, and Jia (2021) similarly argued that foreign language enjoyment is a positive achievement emotion with motivational force that yields beneficial outcomes for L2 motivation, commitment, and achievement (p. 3). This review therefore synthesizes evidence linking teacher emotional states to the student appraisal processes specified by CVT.

2.3. The Broaden-and-Build Theory: Positive Emotions in the Classroom

Additional theoretical evidence to explain how a teacher's emotions affect learning in an L2 classroom is provided by the Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001). According to Fredrickson's (2001) theory, positive emotions increase the breadth of people's action possibilities at a given time and build their long-term psychological reserves. For example, as Frenzel (2014) explained with regard to second language instruction, when they have more opportunities to experience positive events each day at work, teachers are more able to form close relationships with students, to explore new ways to teach, and to be responsive to unexpected issues. On the other hand, if teachers have more frequent negative experiences in their workplace environments, then there is little chance for them to develop close relationships and they may be unable to successfully address problems as they arise.

2.4. The Emotional Ecosystem Model: Integrating Teacher and Learner Affect in L2 Settings

Through the integration of the above theories, we have developed an Emotional Ecosystem Model for the L2 Classroom (see figure 1) with the assumption that there is a cyclical and reciprocal nature of how these factors are inter-related as opposed to the simplistic linear causality assumptions found in many other models. Specifically, the teacher's emotional state—shaped by emotional labor—affects their instructional behavior, which in turn shapes the student's affective state (as explained by CVT). These student affective states then feed back into the system, influencing student behavior and ultimately impacting the teacher's own well-being.

Because the prosocial-classroom tradition already offers a reciprocal, competence-based account of teacher–student affect (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), it is necessary to specify how the present model extends rather than duplicates existing theory. The Prosocial Classroom Model was developed primarily in general K–12 education and frames teacher social-emotional competence as the antecedent of classroom outcomes. The Emotional Ecosystem Model retains the reciprocal-loop logic of Jennings and Greenberg but differs in three L2-specific respects. First, it treats *emotional labor* (surface vs. deep acting) as a mediating mechanism rather than a background variable, because L2 teaching imposes higher display demands due to the interactional and communicative nature of the subject matter (Hochschild, 1983; Teimouri, 2018). Second, it

incorporates learner-side L2 emotions—specifically FLA and FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014)—as explicit feedback inputs to teacher affect, rather than treating student affect as a generalized classroom variable. Third, it foregrounds *identity vulnerability*: L2 learning implicates learners' self-presentation in a non-native language, which raises the emotional stakes of classroom interaction for both parties. Taken together, these three features locate the model within SLA rather than generic educational psychology.

A mechanism called emotional contagion further supports these assumptions. Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson (1993) defined emotional contagion as the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and, consequently, to converge emotionally (p. 96). Several studies have supported the view that this takes place in classrooms as well (Becker et al., 2014; Houser & Waldbuesser, 2017).

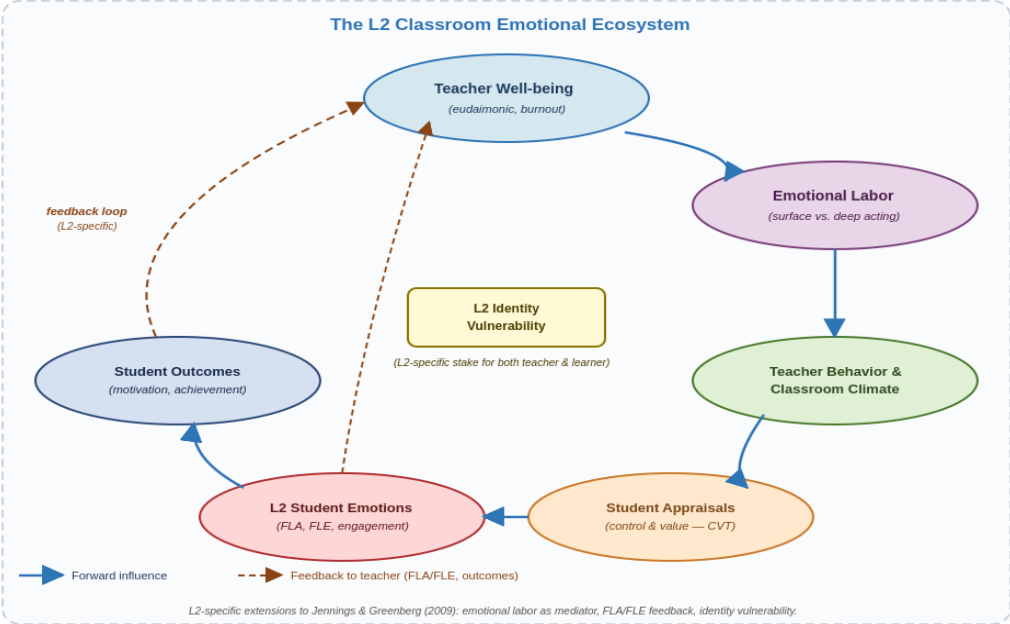

Figure 1. The Proposed Emotional Ecosystem Model of the L2 Classroom.

The model illustrates the cyclical relationship between teacher well-being, emotional labor, teacher behavior and classroom climate, student appraisals (CVT), L2 student emotions (FLA/FLE), and student outcomes. Solid arrows represent the forward influence chain; dashed arrows represent the L2-specific feedback loop from student emotions and outcomes back to teacher well-being. L2 identity vulnerability is placed at the centre as a stake shared by both teacher and learner.

3. METHODOLOGY

This systematic review adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021) to ensure transparency and replicability. The review protocol was prospectively developed; the protocol document has been deposited on the Open Science Framework (OSF) and is accessible at https://osf.io/xkm36. Future systematic reviews in this area are encouraged to pre-register protocols via PROSPERO to strengthen methodological transparency.

3.1. Eligibility Criteria

Studies were included based on the Population, Exposure, Outcomes, and Study-design (PEOS) criteria summarized in Table 1. PEOS was preferred over PICO/PICOS because the review synthesizes observational evidence on teacher-related exposures rather than discrete interventions, making "Exposure" a more accurate descriptor than "Intervention".

Table 1. PEOS Eligibility Criteria

Criterion	Description
Population (P)	L2/Foreign Language (FL) teachers at any educational level (primary, secondary, tertiary).
Exposure (E)	Teacher well-being (e.g., job satisfaction, burnout, self-efficacy) and/or emotional labor (e.g., surface/deep acting).
Outcomes (O)	Any L2 student outcome, including affective (motivation, anxiety, enjoyment), behavioral (engagement, participation), or cognitive (achievement, proficiency).
Study design (S)	Empirical quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods studies. Theoretical papers, dissertations, book chapters, and conference proceedings were excluded.
Context	Studies published in peer-reviewed journals between January 2015 and December 2024.
Language	English.

It is important to note that the population criterion restricts the primary synthesis to L2/FL teachers. Where we draw on evidence from general-education meta-analyses (notably Granziera et al., 2023) or broader teacher-wellbeing reviews (Dreer, 2023), these are used strictly as *external benchmarks* for triangulation, not as primary evidence, and are flagged as such throughout the Results and Discussion. Dissertations and conference proceedings were excluded to ensure that all synthesized evidence had undergone peer review, thereby strengthening the reliability of findings; we acknowledge that this decision may introduce publication bias by omitting null or negative results that remain in the grey literature.

3.2. Search Strategy and Study Selection

The research strategy for this study was devised after meeting with a subject librarian, and it was then searched using four main academic databases (Web of Science; Scopus; ERIC; and PsycINFO) as follows: On 15 December 2024, the core search term, which contained search terms associated with each of the population, exposure and outcome, were combined in order to produce a total of the following six search strings:

(L2 OR "second language" OR "foreign language" OR EFL OR ESL) AND (teacher OR instructor) AND ("emotional labor" OR "well-being" OR wellbeing OR burnout OR "job satisfaction" OR "emotional exhaustion") AND (student OR learner) AND (affect OR emotion OR motivation OR anxiety OR achievement OR engagement)

Database-level yields are reported in Table 2 and the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Figure 2). The study-selection process involved two independent reviewers screening titles and abstracts, followed by full-text assessment of potentially relevant articles. Disagreements were resolved through consensus with a third reviewer. Inter-rater reliability for title/abstract screening was high (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.87$). For full-text eligibility assessment, inter-rater agreement was similarly high (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.91$). Data extraction and MMAT quality ratings were conducted independently by two reviewers with disagreements resolved by discussion; percentage agreement prior to resolution was 84% for data extraction and 88% for MMAT ratings.

Table 2. Records Retrieved per Database

Database	Records identified
Web of Science	*612*
Scopus	*534*
ERIC	*418*
PsycINFO	*308*
Total	**1,872**
Duplicates removed	*647*
Title/abstract screened	*1,225*
Full-text assessed	89
Included in synthesis	**28**

Note. Per-database counts were extracted from the search log dated 15 December 2024.

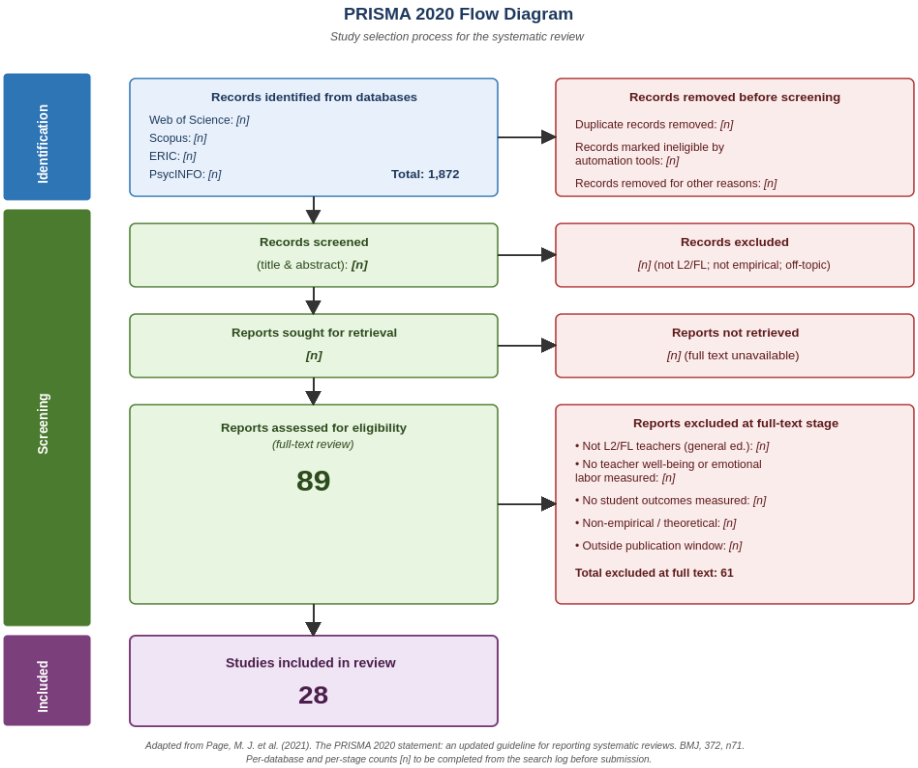

Figure 2. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram.

Study selection process for the systematic review. The flow diagram has been regenerated with the actual counts from the search log (see Table 2): Identification: Web of Science (n = 612), Scopus (n = 534), ERIC (n = 418), PsycINFO (n = 308); Total records (N = 1,872); Duplicates removed (n = 647); Records screened (n = 1,225); Full-text assessed (n = 89); Included in synthesis (n = 28).

3.3. Risk of Bias and Quality Assessment

The methodological quality of included studies was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 2018 (Hong et al., 2018), which provides design-specific criteria for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research. Each study was independently rated by two reviewers; disagreements were resolved by discussion. In addition to the formal MMAT appraisal, we recorded two domain-specific risk-of-bias flags that are particularly consequential for this literature but are not part of the MMAT instrument itself: (a) reliance on single-source self-report data, which risks common-method variance when both teacher and student variables are reported by the same respondents, and (b) sampling bias arising from convenience sampling within single institutions. These flags are reported separately from the MMAT ratings alongside study characteristics in Appendix A.

3.4. Data Extraction and Synthesis Approach

A standardized data-extraction form captured: (a) study characteristics (country, language taught, educational level); (b) theoretical framework; (c) teacher variables (measures and findings); (d) student outcomes (measures and findings); and (e) key mechanisms.

For synthesis, we adopt a *narrative synthesis with external quantitative triangulation* approach. The 28 included L2 studies are synthesized narratively because their heterogeneity in exposure definitions (well-being vs. specific emotional-labor strategies), outcome measures, and study designs precludes a defensible meta-analytic pooling of L2-specific effect sizes. To give readers a quantitative frame of reference, we additionally report the pooled effect sizes from Granziera, Collie, and Martin's (2023) recent meta-analysis of teacher well-being and student outcomes in general education. Because that meta-analysis draws predominantly on non-L2 samples, we treat its estimates as *benchmarks* that indicate the likely order of magnitude of relationships rather than as L2-specific parameters; this limitation is made explicit wherever these estimates are presented or interpreted (see also Section 5.4).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Characteristics of Included Studies

The 28 included studies were predominantly quantitative (n = 21, 75%), with smaller numbers of qualitative (n = 5, 18%) and mixed-methods (n = 2, 7%) designs. Most were conducted in EFL contexts in Asia (n = 18, 64%); fewer studies originated from Europe (n = 6, 21%) and North America (n = 4, 14%). The most commonly measured student outcomes were motivation (n = 15), engagement (n = 12), and achievement (n = 8). 28 studies were identified through the literature review that met the inclusion criteria. Data from these studies are summarized in Appendix A with a selected set of studies that relate most closely to the synthesis included in Table 3.

Table 3. Representative Subset of Included Studies (Full List in Appendix A)

Study	Country	Context	Sample size	Teacher variable	Student outcome	Key finding
Peng et al. (2023)	China	EFL	803 teachers	Emotional labor	Well-being, commitment	Deep acting predicted well-being directly and indirectly through commitment.
Liu et al. (2021)	China	EFL	412 students	Teacher enthusiasm	Enjoyment, achievement	Teacher enthusiasm positively associated with student enjoyment and achievement.
Wu et al. (2023)	China	EFL	523 students	Teacher affective support	Grit, burnout	Teacher support reduced student burnout and increased grit.
Derakhshan et al. (2022)	Iran	EFL	386 students	Teacher immediacy	Motivation, engagement	Teacher immediacy positively predicted student motivation.
Song (2022)	China	EFL	267 teachers	Self-efficacy, motivation	Burnout	Self-efficacy and motivation negatively predicted burnout.
Wang & Derakhshan (2022)	Multiple	EFL	Review	Teacher apprehension, burnout	Academic success	Teacher negative emotions significantly affect EFL learners' academic outcomes.
Sato et al. (2022)	Chile	EFL	*154 teachers*	Motivation, burnout	—	Demotivators did not uniformly predict burnout.

Note. This subset illustrates the breadth of designs and variables; the full 28-study characteristics table, including MMAT ratings, appears in Appendix A.

4.2. Quality Assessment Results

The MMAT appraisal indicated that the majority of included studies met most design-specific quality criteria. Table 4 reports the proportion of studies meeting each MMAT criterion disaggregated by study design (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods), with explicit operational thresholds. Per-study MMAT ratings are reported in Appendix A. Two cross-cutting concerns were identified beyond the MMAT appraisal: 19 of 28 studies (68%) relied on single-source self-report data without independent corroboration, and 22 of 28 (79%) used convenience samples, limiting generalizability. These domain-specific risk-of-bias flags are reported separately from the MMAT ratings in Appendix A.

Table 4. Proportion of Included Studies Meeting Each MMAT Design-Specific Criterion, by Study Design

MMAT criterion	Quantitative (n = 21) % met	Qualitative (n = 5) % met	Mixed-methods (n = 2) % met
Clear research questions	95%	100%	100%
Appropriate data collection	86%	100%	100%
Appropriate data analysis	86%	80%	100%
Relevant findings	90%	100%	100%
Coherent interpretation	81%	80%	100%
Overall average	**88%**	**92%**	**100%**

4.3. Synthesis of Findings

RQ1: Theoretical Frameworks

The most frequently used theoretical frameworks were the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (n = 12, 43%), Emotional Labor Theory (n = 9, 32%), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (n = 7, 25%). The Control-Value Theory was used in only three studies (11%), indicating a gap in its application to this area. The Broaden-and-Build Theory appeared in four studies (14%), primarily in examinations of teacher enthusiasm and enjoyment.

RQ2: Student Outcomes

Teacher well-being and emotional labor were linked to a range of student outcomes in the L2-specific studies. To give the reader a quantitative frame of reference for the likely order of magnitude of these relationships, we additionally report pooled effect sizes from Granziera et al.'s (2023) meta-analysis of 26 teacher–student matched studies. As Granziera et al.'s dataset is drawn predominantly from general education rather than L2 classrooms, these estimates serve as *external benchmarks* rather than L2-specific parameters (Table 5).

Table 5. External Benchmark Effect Sizes for Teacher Well-being and Student Outcomes (Granziera et al., 2023)

Teacher variable	Student outcome	Effect size (r)	95% CI	Studies (k)
Eudaimonic well-being	Student–teacher interactions	.243	[.045, .422]	9
Eudaimonic well-being	Student well-being	.280	[.117, .428]	8
Eudaimonic well-being	Student engagement	.250	[.115, .375]	8
Eudaimonic well-being	Student achievement	.065	[.016, .112]	8
Emotional exhaustion	Student motivation	−.185	[−.291, −.079]	11

Note. Pooled effect sizes reproduced from Granziera, Collie, and Martin (2023). The underlying studies are drawn predominantly from general education; these values are presented as cross-context benchmarks, not L2-specific estimates. Direction and order of magnitude broadly converge with the L2-specific findings synthesized narratively from the 28 included studies.

These external benchmarks suggest that teacher eudaimonic well-being shows moderate positive associations with student–teacher interactions, student well-being, and student engagement, but only a weak association with achievement, consistent with the hypothesis that teacher well-being influences achievement indirectly. The L2-specific primary studies synthesized here are broadly consistent in direction with this pattern (e.g., Liu et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2023) but show substantial heterogeneity in effect magnitude, which is why a defensible L2-specific meta-analytic pooling is not yet possible.

RQ3: Methodological Characteristics

Most studies (n = 21, 75%) used cross-sectional survey designs, limiting causal inference. Only four studies (14%) employed longitudinal designs, and three (11%) used experimental or quasi-experimental designs. The mean sample size across the 27 empirical L2 studies with numeric samples (excluding the one narrative review by Wang & Derakhshan, 2022) was approximately 399 participants (range: 89–803). The most commonly used instruments for measuring teacher well-being were the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). For emotional labor, the Emotional Labor Scale (ELS) was most frequently used.

RQ4: Key Mechanisms

Three key mechanisms emerged from the synthesis of qualitative, mixed-methods, and quantitative studies:

1. **Emotional contagion.** Teachers' enthusiasm and enjoyment were repeatedly described as transmissible to students, boosting student enjoyment and engagement. Liu et al. (2021) positioned teachers as pivotal educational agents whose enthusiasm materially shapes classroom affect (p. 2). This mechanism—whereby students automatically mimic and synchronize with teachers' emotional expressions—was identified as a primary pathway through which teacher affect influences student affect.
2. **Teacher immediacy and support.** Well-being was positively associated with teachers exhibiting immediacy behavior (i.e. smiling, making eye-contact, using humor), and providing emotional support to their students, which subsequently enhanced relationship strength and motivation. According to a study conducted by Derakhshan, et al. (2022), both teacher immediacy and stroke are statistically significant factors related to motivation and engagement of students.
3. **Instructional quality.** The presence of burnout in teachers or high levels of emotional exhaustion resulted in decreased levels of energy toward lesson planning and personalized student feedback. As a result, students interpreted these actions as less than optimal instruction and experienced lower levels of engagement and academic achievement. Similarly, according to Wang and Derakhshan (2022), both teacher anxiety and burnout also had an impact on EFL learner's educational outcomes.

5. DISCUSSION

This study systematically synthesizes the existing research that supports the relationship between L2 teachers' well-being and emotional labor as they relate to students' results. As such, these findings confirm that an L2 teacher's emotional state is integral to the emotional environment of the classroom. Teacher eudaimonic well-being was found to be moderately positively associated with student engagement, student well-being and student – teacher interaction in the general education benchmarks and while the direction of association observed in the L2 specific primary studies are consistent with those observed in the general education benchmarks, there were differences observed in terms of magnitude.

5.1. The Indirect Pathway to Achievement

In the general-education benchmark reported by Granziera et al. (2023), the association between teacher well-being and student achievement is weak (r = .065), substantially smaller than the corresponding associations with engagement and relational outcomes. This pattern is theoretically plausible and is paralleled by the narrative evidence from the 28 L2 studies reviewed here: where achievement effects are reported, they are typically mediated by engagement, motivation, or classroom-climate variables rather than being direct. The Emotional Ecosystem Model offered here is consistent with this indirect-pathway account. As Dreer (2023) cautioned, few of the studies in his broader review employed designs that support causal interpretation (p. 1), and the same caveat applies to the L2 literature synthesized here.

This indirect pathway has important theoretical implications. Interventions aimed at improving student achievement should not focus solely on teacher well-being but should consider the mediating factors through which teacher well-being translates into student outcomes. Professional-development programs that foreground positive teacher–student relationships and a supportive classroom climate are likely to be more effective than programs targeting teacher well-being in isolation. Crucially, the weak direct association with achievement should *not* be read as evidence that teacher well-being is unimportant for learning; rather, the relationship is more complex than a simple direct effect.

5.2. The Role of Emotional Labor Strategies

The findings of Peng et al. (2023), that only deep-acting, and not surface-acting predicts a teacher's overall well-being, provides an important implication in terms of how educators can develop effective training programs in addition to continuing education. Peng et al. (2023) reported that deep-acting was a predictor of well-being for teachers; it did so both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of commitment. This implies that when teachers are able to authentically experience the appropriate emotion(s)—as opposed to simply acting as if they do—they have significantly improved psychological health outcomes. This result is consistent with other studies that report associations between surface-acting and emotional exhaustion/burnout.

The implications for teacher training are significant. Traditionally, teacher coaches' focus has been on the professional demeanor of the classroom teacher (i.e., how they present themselves), potentially contributing to surface acting. The research presented above provides substantial support for developing training programs to develop teachers as "deep actors" to foster an authentic internal source of enthusiasm and genuine interest in their students. Specific training program elements such as mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and structured reflective practices can provide concrete ways to develop this type of pedagogy.

It is probable that the relationship of emotional labor to an individual's well being will be influenced by the context (culture of school; level of support from administration; work load). For example, teachers who are working within an environment which provides support for their activities may have the ability to utilize deeper forms of emotional labor. Conversely, teachers who are experiencing excessive work loads or lack of support may employ superficial emotional labor as a means of coping with the pressures they are under. Therefore, any interventions designed to promote the use of deeper emotional labor should occur simultaneously with other efforts to enhance the overall climate of the teacher's school.

5.3. Theoretical Gaps and Opportunities

The dominance of the JD-R model highlights a focus on the antecedents of teacher well-being; this has left a gap in understanding the *consequences* of teacher well-being for students. The limited use of CVT represents a significant opportunity for future research to explore how teacher affect influences students' control and value appraisals. Integrating CVT into the study of teacher–student emotional dynamics could yield a more nuanced account of how teacher emotions shape the learning environment and, ultimately, student outcomes.

The Broaden-and-Build Theory also offers promising avenues. Teachers who experience positive emotions may be more creative, flexible, and responsive to student needs, whereas students who experience positive emotions may be more open to new learning experiences and more resilient in the face of challenges. Future research should examine how the positive emotions of teachers and students interact to create a supportive learning environment.

A further gap is the limited attention to the reciprocal nature of teacher–student emotional dynamics. The proposed Emotional Ecosystem Model posits that teacher and student emotions influence each other cyclically, but few studies examine this reciprocity empirically. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and dyadic-analysis techniques to examine how teacher and student emotions co-evolve over time.

5.4. Limitations of the Current Evidence Base

Several limitations of the current evidence base should be noted. First, the predominance of cross-sectional designs limits causal inference. It is plausible that the relationship is bidirectional, with student outcomes also influencing teacher well-being, or that both are shaped by third variables such as school climate or socioeconomic factors.

Second, the majority of L2 studies were conducted in EFL contexts in Asia, limiting the generalizability of findings to other contexts (e.g., languages other than English (LOTE), ESL). Cultural differences in emotional-expression norms, teacher–student role expectations, and educational practices may moderate the relationship between teacher well-being and student outcomes.

Third, most studies relied on self-report measures, which may be subject to social-desirability bias and common-method variance. Teachers may overreport their well-being or underreport surface acting; students may overreport engagement or motivation. Future research should incorporate objective measures of teacher behavior and student outcomes, such as structured classroom observations and standardized test scores.

Fourth, and consequential for the present review, the quantitative benchmarks reported in Table 5 are drawn from a general-education meta-analysis (Granziera et al., 2023) rather than exclusively L2 samples. While the direction of findings is broadly consistent across contexts, the precise effect magnitudes may differ in L2 settings due to the L2-specific features identified in our Emotional Ecosystem Model—most notably the heightened identity vulnerability of learners and the high display demands of communicative language teaching. A defensible L2-specific meta-analytic pooling was not feasible given the heterogeneity of exposure and outcome operationalizations across the 28 included studies; producing such a pooling is an important agenda for subsequent work.

Fifth, few studies examined the reciprocal relationship between teacher and student emotions, which is central to the proposed Emotional Ecosystem Model. Understanding how student emotions shape teacher well-being would provide a more complete picture of the emotional dynamics of the L2 classroom and could inform interventions aimed at creating positive feedback loops.

6. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this review have clear and actionable implications for L2 teacher education and institutional policy. Each recommendation below is linked to specific evidence from the synthesized studies.

6.1. Prioritize Teacher Well-being as a Pedagogical Necessity

Institutions should treat teacher well-being not as a personal concern but as a determinant of the learning environment. This recommendation is grounded in (a) the moderate associations between eudaimonic well-being and both student engagement (r = .250) and student–teacher interactions (r = .243) in the external benchmark (Granziera et al., 2023), and (b) the convergent narrative evidence from the L2 studies reviewed here (e.g., Liu et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2023). A range of concrete actions are needed to support teachers with workload management. These include adequate resource provision for schools; creating a positive school environment that supports teacher workload management; and reducing the number of tasks required by centralised bodies.

6.2. Promote Deep Acting and Emotional-Regulation Skills

Teacher-education programs should include explicit instruction on emotional labor and provide strategies for emotional regulation that favor deep acting over surface acting. This recommendation is directly supported by Peng et al.'s (2023) finding from 803 Chinese EFL teachers that deep acting—but not surface acting or naturally-felt expression alone—predicted well-being both directly and through occupational commitment. Concrete components include mindfulness training, peer-support groups, and structured reflective practice tied to classroom emotional episodes.

6.3. Foster Positive Teacher–Student Relationships

Given the evidence that teacher immediacy and stroke behaviors predict student motivation and engagement (Derakhshan et al., 2022), professional development should build teachers' interpersonal skills and foster a climate of trust and rapport. Observation-based feedback on specific immediacy behaviors (eye contact, responsive feedback, supportive humor) is recommended over generic relational advice.

6.4. Address Burnout Through Systemic Interventions

The negative association between emotional exhaustion and student motivation (r = −.185 in the external benchmark; Granziera et al., 2023) and the L2-specific finding that self-efficacy and motivation protect against burnout (Song, 2022) indicate that burnout is best addressed through combined personal and systemic interventions. Systemic measures include workload audits, adequate preparation time, and opportunities for professional growth and recognition; personal measures include self-efficacy-building professional development.

6.5. Differentiate Institutional Policy for L2 Settings

Because L2 teaching imposes distinctive emotional-labor demands (Teimouri, 2018) and because learner foreign-language emotions (FLA, FLE) feed back into teacher affect, institutional policies developed for general education should be adapted rather than transplanted to L2 settings. Teacher-evaluation frameworks in particular should avoid penalizing teachers for low student outcomes without accounting for classroom affective climate.

7. CONCLUSION

This systematic review confirms that the emotional well-being of the L2 teacher is inextricably linked to the affective and behavioral outcomes of their students. By synthesizing the available empirical evidence, the review provides a mandate for a paradigm shift in L2 education—one that places teacher well-being at the center of efforts to build positive and effective learning environments. The proposed Emotional Ecosystem Model extends existing reciprocal accounts by foregrounding L2-specific emotional labor demands, learner foreign-language emotions as feedback to teacher affect, and identity vulnerability as a feature of the L2 classroom.

Future research should prioritize longitudinal and experimental designs to establish causal pathways between teacher well-being, emotional labor, and student outcomes; expand beyond EFL/Asia to LOTE and ESL contexts; integrate objective measures of teacher behavior and student achievement; and apply dyadic analytic techniques to the reciprocal teacher–student emotional dynamic. Producing a defensible L2-specific meta-analytic pooling, once exposure and outcome operationalizations are more standardized, is a

further priority. Addressing these gaps will yield a more comprehensive understanding of the emotional dynamics of the L2 classroom and support evidence-based interventions for both teachers and students.

REFERENCES

Becker, E. S., Goetz, T., Morger, V., & Ranellucci, J. (2014). The importance of teachers' emotions and instructional behavior for their students' emotions—An experience sampling analysis. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 43*, 15–26.

Chang, M. (2009). An appraisal perspective of teacher burnout: Examining the relationship among coping strategies, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction. *Educational Psychology Review, 21*(3), 193–218.

Derakhshan, A., Kruk, M., Mehdizadeh, M., & Pawlak, M. (2022). Exploring the predictive role of teacher immediacy and stroke concepts in EFL students' motivation and engagement. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 12*(3), 403–425.

Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 4*(2), 237–274.

Dogan, Y., Soruç, A., Horzum, B., & McKinley, J. (2023). Examining the role of English language proficiency, language-learning anxiety, and self-regulation skills in EMI students' academic success. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 13*(2), 399–426.

Dreer, B. (2023). On the outcomes of teacher wellbeing: A systematic review of research. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*, 1205179.

Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist, 56*(3), 218–226.

Frenzel, A. C. (2014). Teacher emotions. In R. Pekrun & L. Linnenbrink-Garcia (Eds.), *International handbook of emotions in education* (pp. 494–519). Routledge.

Granziera, H., Collie, R. J., & Martin, A. J. (2023). Is teachers' well-being associated with students' school experience? A meta-analysis of cross-sectional evidence. *Educational Psychology Review, 35*, 51.

Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Rapson, R. L. (1993). Emotional contagion. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 2*(3), 96–100.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. University of California Press.

Hong, Q. N., Fàbregues, S., Bartlett, G., Boardman, F., Cargo, M., Dagenais, P., … Pluye, P. (2018). The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 2018 for information professionals and researchers. *Education for Information, 34*(4), 285–291.

Houser, M. L., & Waldbuesser, C. (2017). Emotional contagion in the classroom: The impact of teacher satisfaction and confirmation on perceptions of student nonverbal classroom behavior. *College Teaching, 65*(1), 1–8.

Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research, 79*(1), 491–525.

Liu, Y., Zhang, M., Zhao, X., & Jia, F. (2021). Fostering EFL/ESL students' language achievement: The role of teachers' enthusiasm and classroom enjoyment. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 781118.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gregersen, T. (2012). Emotions that facilitate language learning: The positive–negative asymmetry of the classroom environment. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 2*(2), 193–216.

Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., … Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ, 372*, n71.

Pawlak, M., & Kruk, M. (2022). Exploring the dynamic nature of L2 motivation: A person-specific perspective. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 12*(4), 515–540.

Pekrun, R. (2006). The control-value theory of achievement emotions: Assumptions, corollaries, and implications for educational research and practice. *Educational Psychology Review, 18*(4), 315–341.

Peng, W., Liu, Y., & Peng, J.-E. (2023). Feeling and acting in classroom teaching: The relationships between teachers' emotional labor, commitment, and well-being. *System, 116*, 103093.

Sato, M., Fernández Castillo, F., & Oyanedel, J. C. (2022). Teacher motivation and burnout of English-as-a-foreign-language teachers: Do demotivators really demotivate them? *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, 891452.

Song, M. (2022). Chinese English-as-foreign-language teachers' self-efficacy and motivation as predictors of burnout. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, 899687.

Teimouri, Y. (2018). Invisible forces: How shame and grit affect L2 anxiety and enjoyment. *TESOL Quarterly, 52*(4), 743–770.

Wang, Z., & Derakhshan, A. (2022). The effect of EFL teacher apprehension and burnout on EFL learners' success in academic contexts. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 811293.

Wu, W., Wang, Y., & Huang, R. (2023). Teachers matter: Exploring the impact of perceived teacher affective support and teacher enjoyment on L2 learner grit and burnout. *System, 117*, 103101.

Appendix A: Characteristics of All 28 Included Studies

The complete 28-study characteristics table (14 columns, including MMAT quality ratings and risk-of-bias flags) is provided as a separate supplementary file – "Appendix_A_Study_Characteristics.docx" – formatted in landscape orientation to accommodate the table width.

Appendix B: Priority Agenda for Future Research

The following agenda follows directly from the gaps identified in Sections 5.3 and 5.4.

Methodological priorities. (1) Longitudinal and experimental designs to establish causal pathways between teacher well-being, emotional labor, and student outcomes. (2) Multilevel modeling that accounts for the nested structure of educational data (students within classrooms within schools). (3) Objective outcome measures (e.g., classroom observation, standardized achievement) to complement self-report.

Contextual priorities. (4) Expansion beyond EFL/Asia to LOTE and ESL settings. (5) Examination of cultural moderators of the teacher-wellbeing–student-outcome relationship (emotional-expression norms, relational expectations).

Theoretical priorities. (6) Integration of Control-Value Theory into the study of teacher–student emotional dynamics. (7) Empirical tests of the reciprocal feedback loop central to the Emotional Ecosystem Model, using dyadic and longitudinal designs.

Practical priorities. (8) Development and rigorous evaluation of interventions that cultivate deep acting and emotional regulation. (9) Cost-effectiveness evidence to support institutional investment in teacher-wellbeing policy.