A MIXED-METHODS ANALYSIS OF EFL TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIO-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND WELL-BEING: INSIGHTS FROM POLAND AND UKRAINE

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Abstract. *This mixed-methods study explores EFL teachers' attitudes toward social-emotional learning (SEL) and well-being in Poland and Ukraine, focusing on how socio-demographic factors and professional contexts influence these perspectives. Findings reveal that younger Polish teachers, generally more open to adopting innovative SEL strategies, demonstrated higher engagement in SEL practices, while older, more experienced Ukrainian teachers exhibited a robust commitment to well-being but faced greater challenges in implementing SEL due to socio-political pressures. Age and institutional environment were significant factors in shaping teachers' SEL engagement, emphasizing the need for professional development programs tailored to these demographic and contextual differences. The study also found that Polish teachers more frequently used well-being apps, while Ukrainian teachers, facing the stresses of teaching in a conflict zone, showed a more cautious approach to managing their workload and self-care. These insights highlight the necessity of contextualized SEL and well-being teacher training and strategies that account for the distinct educational and socio-political landscapes in each country, contributing to ongoing discussions about enhancing teacher well-being and SEL engagement in diverse contexts.*

Keywords: *social-emotional learning (SEL), teacher well-being, EFL (English as a Foreign Language), English language teaching (ELT), Poland, Ukraine, teacher attitudes.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In times of global pandemics, armed conflicts, and social and political unrest, maintaining careful planning and organization in education becomes a formidable challenge.

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These disturbances can disrupt traditional educational practices and hinder the psychological safety that is crucial for learning. Despite these adversities, education remains a fundamental human right and plays an essential role in equipping individuals with survival skills, conflict resolution strategies, and resilience necessary to navigate and thrive in such turbulent contexts (Cahill, 2010; Retamal & Aedo-Richmond, 1998). As the world faces increasing instability, the need to foster both cognitive and emotional resilience in learners becomes more crucial than ever, emphasizing the transformative power of education in shaping adaptive and resilient individuals. It is within this context that social-emotional learning (SEL) emerges as a critical educational paradigm. By directly addressing the social and emotional dimensions of learning, SEL initiatives aim to equip students not only with academic skills but also with the emotional intelligence required to face life's challenges (Pentón Herrera, 2020). This shift towards integrating emotional well-being within the curriculum acknowledges the complex interplay between emotional health and academic success, setting the stage for a more comprehensive approach to education.

The importance of integrating SEL into educational frameworks has been highlighted as a response to past, present, and future global challenges. SEL is not merely a popular educational trend but a vital approach that underpins effective teaching and holistic student development (Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021; Pentón Herrera et al., 2023). Originating from research focused on prevention and resilience, SEL has gained significant traction among educators and researchers, particularly following the influential works of Daniel Goleman on emotional intelligence and Howard Gardner on multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993; Goleman, 1995). These and other ongoing conversations in the field of education underscore the role of emotional and cognitive competencies in personal and professional success (Durlak et al., 2011). More recently, in the field of English language teaching (ELT), SEL has been gaining equal momentum, with emerging research and publications highlighting the potential of SEL to support students' academic, cognitive, and personal growth, as well as student and teacher well-being (Pentón Herrera, 2024; Pentón Herrera & Darragh, 2024).

Social-Emotional Learning and Well-Being: A Brief Overview

Given that this mixed-methods study focuses on participants' attitudes toward SEL and well-being, a detailed exploration of both concepts is essential. In this section of the article, we provide an overview of SEL and well-being to serve as a foundation for the rest of the paper.

Social-emotional learning

SEL is broadly recognized as an educational practice that significantly enhances emotional intelligence. This approach seeks to support students as they develop emotional regulation, engage effectively with others, navigate complex social interactions, pursue meaningful personal goals, and adapt to changing environments (Elias et al., 1997). SEL encompasses three interconnected dimensions: the learning context, students' SEL, and teachers' SEL practices, each dynamically influencing the others (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Fundamentally, SEL underpins the holistic development of students by facilitating the development and application of critical skills necessary for emotional regulation, goal attainment, empathy, relationship building, responsible decision-making, and effective problem-solving (CASEL, 2012). When seamlessly integrated into daily educational

practices, SEL not only enriches the learning environment but also strengthens the interactions between students and educators, thereby nurturing the development of critical life skills in students (Bai et al., 2024; Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021).

Educators play an instrumental role in the implementation of SEL practices, as their social-emotional competencies and well-being profoundly impact student development and academic outcomes. Despite its importance, teacher well-being, as an essential element of SEL practices, frequently remains overlooked. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl has highlighted how teachers' stress adversely impacts students and has advocated for augmented support to enhance teachers' SEL capabilities, thereby promoting more constructive educational environments (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). The multifaceted well-being of teachers, encompassing their physical, mental, emotional, and social health, has been significantly affected by global crises such as pandemics, armed conflicts, and socio-political turmoil. The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has intensified the focus on teachers' socio-emotional health, which is crucial for both effective teaching and the well-being of students (Belmonte et al., 2022; Chugai & Svyrydova, 2022). Recent findings also indicate that after the pandemic, teachers continue to face significant stress and mental health challenges (Ludwig et al., 2024).

Despite these challenges, many educators continue to fulfill their roles even when unwell, with more than half unable to discuss their mental health concerns openly with employers. This underscores the high-stress nature of the teaching profession (Savill-Smith & Scanlan, 2022). Research from conflict zones like Ukraine shows that a considerable number of educators suffer from burnout and emotional exhaustion, forcing them to persevere through significant hardships to conduct lessons (Lavrysh et al., 2022; Tsybuliak et al., 2023; Westerlund et al., 2023). Such conditions lead to high rates of teacher attrition and burnout, driven by factors such as student misbehavior, insufficient support, job stress, and emotional burdens. The demanding workload, long hours, and continuous pressures severely impact teachers' ability to maintain a balanced work-life dynamic (Abou Assali & Al Abdouli, 2024; Amzat et al., 2021). Additionally, a survey among technical university students during the Ukraine conflict highlighted the significant role of SEL in creating a cooperative and supportive classroom environment, with a substantial majority recognizing the need for emotional support (Ameridze et al., 2022). Thus, it is crucial for EFL teachers to recognize the importance of their well-being in effectively supporting students, particularly in challenging conditions, ensuring a balanced approach to integrating the three components of the SEL framework: the learning context, students' SEL, and teachers' SEL (Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Well-being

Well-being is described as a balanced state where individuals enjoy health, happiness, and success, leading to life satisfaction, personal growth, and the ability to act responsibly in various life domains (Pentón Herrera et al., 2023). This equilibrium supports enduring beneficial outcomes, which is crucial for both teachers and students in educational settings (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2022). For teachers, particularly in high-stress environments, maintaining well-being is facilitated by understanding the 'resilient zone'—a psychological state where one is most capable of effective decision-making and problem-solving (Emory University, 2019). In extreme conditions, however, typical self-regulation

strategies may falter, leading individuals outside this zone to experience symptoms like exhaustion, depression, or irritability, which can adversely affect their performance and interactions (Emory University, 2021).

In response to the challenges of maintaining well-being in high-stress educational environments, educators are encouraged to actively engage in practices that manage stress and enhance emotional resilience. Grounding techniques, which involve focusing attention on alternative stimuli, are crucial for educators, particularly in emergencies where they are responsible for student safety. Such practices not only help in immediate stress alleviation but also build long-term resilience (Emory University, 2021; Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021). Furthermore, the cultivation of mindfulness, self-compassion, empathy, and gratitude among teachers can profoundly influence the classroom atmosphere, fostering a nurturing and supportive educational environment conducive to academic success (Pentón Herrera & Darragh, 2024). Studies have shown that these practices not only improve teachers' well-being but also enhance student engagement and learning outcomes, demonstrating a significant positive correlation between teacher well-being and student performance (Dreer, 2023). By integrating these well-being strategies, schools can create a more empathetic and responsive educational setting where both students and teachers thrive.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) framework on teacher well-being outlines four key components: physical and mental well-being, cognitive well-being, subjective well-being, and social well-being (Viac & Fraser, 2020). This comprehensive model examines the multifaceted nature of teacher well-being, assessing how institutional and systemic working conditions impact these areas. It also explores how these factors influence outcomes, such as teacher retention and teaching quality. Tools like the Teacher Well-being Scale (TWBS) help measure factors affecting educators' well-being, providing insights into stressors such as workload and interaction quality (Collie et al., 2015; Viac & Fraser, 2020). These tools are essential for identifying specific areas where interventions are needed, allowing for targeted support and policy development to enhance teacher well-being. Despite the availability of such tools, there is a persistent gap in research regarding EFL teachers' attitudes toward SEL and well-being, especially in Ukraine and Poland, which are the two nations represented in this study. Understanding these attitudes is crucial for developing effective support systems and interventions that cater to the unique challenges faced by educators in these regions.

2. METHODS

This mixed-methods study aimed to examine how socio-demographic factors influence EFL teachers' engagement with SEL and their attitudes toward well-being, as well as to explore their perceptions and experiences of well-being in both Poland and Ukraine. The research questions guiding this study were:

– Quantitative Research Question: How do socio-demographic factors (such as age, teaching experience, and gender) influence levels of engagement in social-emotional learning and attitudes toward well-being among EFL teachers in Poland and Ukraine?

– Qualitative Research Question: How do EFL teachers in Poland and Ukraine perceive and experience well-being in their professional and personal lives, and what contextual factors influence these perceptions and experiences?

Participants

The study targeted participants (i.e., EFL teachers) working at any education level in Poland and Ukraine. A convenience sampling method was employed, selecting participants who were readily accessible and relevant to the study's focus (Etikan et al., 2015). This approach was chosen to gather insights from a diverse set of educators actively involved in teaching English in these two countries, allowing for a broad understanding of how SEL is implemented and perceived in different educational contexts. A total of 53 teachers participated, with 22 from Poland and 31 from Ukraine. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, ensuring ethical standards of confidentiality and informed consent.

Data Collection

A mixed-methods research design was employed to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' attitudes by integrating numerical trends with personal narratives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Data collection was conducted between October and November 2023. Quantitative data were collected using a structured survey administered via Google Forms. The survey included twenty questions divided into three categories: demographic aspects (questions 1 to 4), engagement in social-emotional learning (questions 5 to 15), and importance of well-being (questions 16 to 19). Question 20 allowed for additional comments. The survey utilized various types of questions, including single-answer multiple choice, Yes/No, and Likert scale items, with the purpose of capturing a range of data: factual information (demographics), binary responses (engagement in specific SEL practices), and attitudes (depth of engagement and perceptions of well-being). Descriptive statistics, including the median (Mdn) and interquartile range (IQR), were calculated for the Likert scale responses to summarize the central tendency and dispersion of the data.

Qualitative data were gathered through open-ended questions within the survey, providing participants with an opportunity to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions. This method facilitated the collection of rich, detailed narratives that complemented the quantitative findings. In the survey, participants shared their thoughts on well-being practices, the challenges they faced, and the impact of socio-political contexts on their professional lives. This approach aligns with the principles of mixed-methods research, which emphasize the integration of quantitative and qualitative data to achieve a comprehensive analysis (Johnson & Gray, 2010). By incorporating both types of data, the study aimed to understand the complexities of teachers' experiences more fully. The qualitative data allowed for the exploration of nuanced aspects of well-being that might not be captured through quantitative measures alone, thus providing a more in-depth understanding of the factors influencing teachers' attitudes toward SEL and well-being.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method suitable for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Responses to open-ended questions were coded by the second author and categorized to identify recurring themes and patterns related to teachers' perceptions and experiences of well-

being. This analysis provided deeper insights into the contextual factors influencing their attitudes toward SEL and well-being. The thematic analysis process involved several stages, including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes. This rigorous approach ensured that the qualitative findings were robust and reliable. The themes that emerged from the data helped to contextualize the quantitative results, offering a richer, more nuanced understanding of the teachers' experiences and the factors affecting their well-being. To ensure reliability, the coding process was reviewed and discussed by both authors, reaching a consensus on the final themes, thereby enhancing the validity of the analysis (Campbell et al., 2013).

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the socio-demographic characteristics and engagement levels in SEL among the participants. Median and interquartile ranges were calculated for Likert scale items to understand the central tendency and variability of responses. This statistical approach helped to identify general trends and differences between the two groups of teachers, providing a foundational understanding of their engagement with SEL and their well-being. These quantitative findings were essential for establishing the context in which qualitative insights could be interpreted.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data occurred at multiple stages of the research. Initially, quantitative findings provided a broad overview of the participants' characteristics and engagement levels. These results were then contextualized and enriched by qualitative insights, offering a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing teachers' attitudes toward SEL and well-being. This mixed-methods approach ensured a comprehensive analysis, capturing both the general trends and individual experiences of E teachers in Poland and Ukraine (Creswell, 2014). By combining these methods, the study was able to draw on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research, providing a more holistic view of the issues at hand. This integrated approach facilitated a deeper exploration of how socio-demographic factors and engagement with SEL practices intersect to influence EFL teachers' attitudes towards SEL and well-being, ultimately contributing to more effective educational interventions and support strategies.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In response to the research questions posed, our study has elucidated several key aspects of EFL teachers' attitudes toward SEL and well-being in Poland and Ukraine. Firstly, regarding the quantitative research question about how socio-demographic factors (such as age, teaching experience, and gender) influence levels of engagement in social-emotional learning and attitudes toward well-being among EFL in Poland and Ukraine, the findings revealed distinctive patterns in both countries. Polish teachers, generally younger, showed a higher tendency toward adopting innovative SEL strategies and demonstrated considerable engagement in well-being practices. Ukrainian teachers, typically older and with more extensive teaching experience, exhibited a robust commitment to well-being, though their engagement with SEL practices was less influenced by educational innovations in the field. These demographic and professional experiences shaped participants' attitudes and approaches to SEL and well-being, indicating that both teachers' age and professional

context seem to be significant determinants in the integration of SEL into educational practices.

Addressing the qualitative research question, teachers in both countries shared rich narratives that highlighted how their professional and personal experiences influence their perception of well-being. Polish teachers often discussed the beneficial impact of well-being on their teaching effectiveness and student interactions, while Ukrainian teachers focused on the challenges and necessities of maintaining well-being amidst ongoing socio-political instability (i.e., the current war on Ukraine). Contextual factors such as the educational setting, national educational policies, and current socio-political events played crucial roles in shaping these perceptions for Ukrainian participants, underscoring the complex interplay between individual experiences and broader systemic influences on teacher well-being. In the sub-sections below, we present the findings in more detail.

Demographic Aspects, SEL, and Well-Being

The collected data on EFL teachers' attitudes toward well-being provided a basis for analyzing demographic aspects, their engagement in SEL, and their recognition of the importance of well-being. The age distribution of the respondents generally ranged from 25 to 55 and older. Specifically, EFL teachers from Poland predominantly fell within the 25 to 44 age range, whereas EFL teachers from Ukraine were primarily between 35 to 54 (Figure 1). This demographic information served as a foundational piece in the data analysis process, as it indicated that age was an influential aspect affecting the attitudes and approaches of teachers toward SEL and well-being, with younger Polish teachers potentially being more open to innovative strategies compared to their slightly older Ukrainian counterparts.
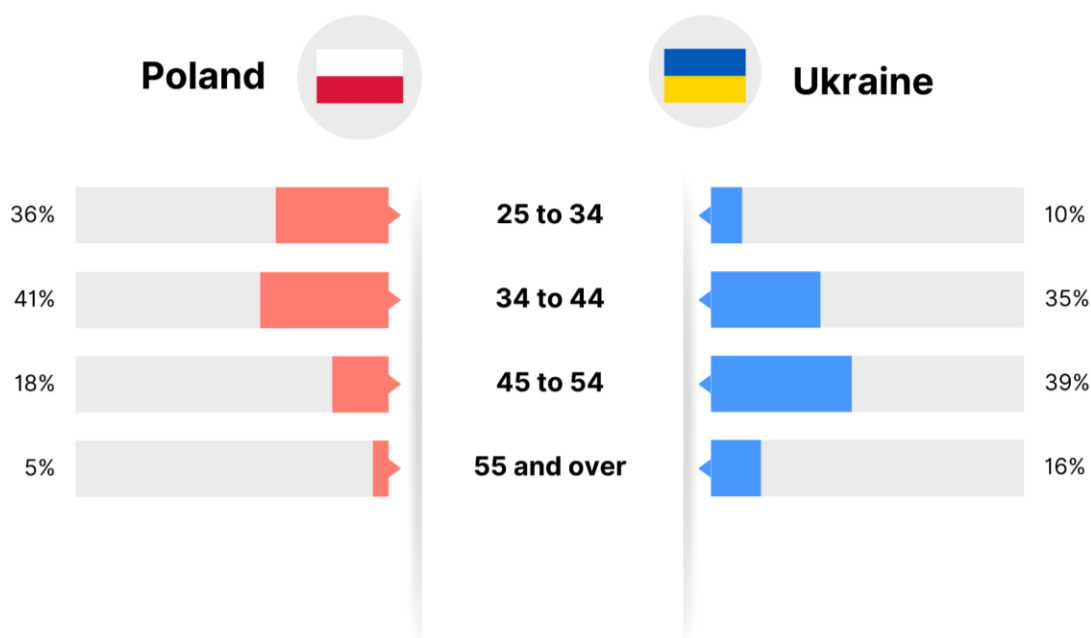

Figure 1. Age of Participants

Gender distribution among the participants also revealed notable differences. The majority of respondents in both countries were women, which reflects common trends in the teaching profession globally. However, the study found a significantly higher proportion of

male respondents in Poland compared to Ukraine. Specifically, in Poland, the proportion of men in the total number of participants was three times bigger than in Ukraine, indicating potential cultural or systemic differences in the recruitment or retention of male teachers within these regions. The detailed breakdown included five males (23%) and 17 females (77%) from Poland, and two males (7%), 28 females (90%), and one non-binary individual (3%) from Ukraine. Additionally, the working experience of the teachers varied considerably between the two countries. In Poland, over half of the respondents reported having 6 to 20 years of experience, and about a quarter had more than 21 years. Conversely, in Ukraine, more than half of the teachers had over 21 years of experience, and a third had between 11 and 20 years. This variation in experience may influence their views on and implementation of SEL practices, as more experienced teachers might have different perspectives and openness towards new educational paradigms (Figure 2).
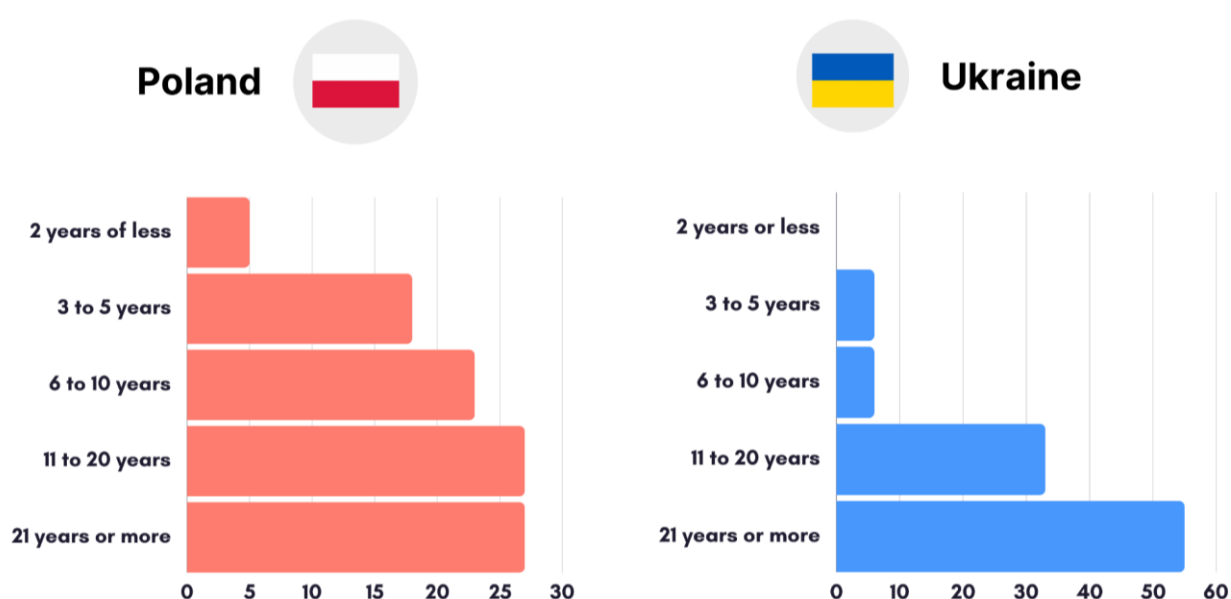

Figure 2. Distribution of Teaching Experience among Participants

Workplace settings differ significantly between Poland and Ukraine, reflecting distinct educational environments. In Poland, the majority of EFL teachers work in secondary schools (32%) and primary schools (also 32%), followed by private language schools (27%), and higher education institutions (9%). Conversely, a substantial majority of respondents from Ukraine, 85% of them, are employed at colleges or universities, with the rest being employed at private language schools, secondary schools, or corporate English (15%). This contrast in job placements could potentially influence their approaches to SEL and well-being. The predominant employment of Ukrainian teachers in higher education, mainly by experienced female educators, suggests potential differences in how these environments influence their engagement with and attitudes toward SEL. These distinctions, driven by the unique institutional demands and student demographics in higher education, could explain variations in the adoption and perception of SEL strategies across the two countries.

The demographic distinctions observed between Polish and Ukrainian teachers reflect broader trends in the literature regarding teacher engagement with SEL. Younger

teachers, like those in Poland, may be more inclined to adopt innovative SEL strategies due to their exposure to newer educational paradigms, as supported by research on the relationship between teacher age and receptivity to pedagogical change (Acker, 1988; Snyder, 2017). In contrast, Ukrainian teachers, with more extensive experience and higher education backgrounds, may be slower to adopt SEL innovations due to institutional pressures and the challenging socio-political context they operate in, which aligns with findings on teacher burnout and emotional exhaustion in conflict zones (Lavrysh et al., 2022; Westerlund et al., 2023). Although gender differences were observed in the participant sample, with a higher proportion of male teachers in Poland, the study did not find any significant gender-based differences in the implementation or engagement with SEL. This aligns with research indicating that both male and female educators can engage with SEL practices—although female and primary school teachers are more likely to engage (Molina et al., 2022)—and that emotional labor, while a factor in teaching, does not vary significantly by gender when it comes to SEL implementation (Aminifard et al., 2024). Instead, other demographic and contextual factors, such as age and institutional environment, may play a more prominent role in shaping teachers' engagement with SEL practices. These findings suggest that tailored professional development programs, sensitive to both demographic and contextual factors, are essential for optimizing SEL practices (Pentón Herrera, 2024).

Engagement in SEL Practices

The data revealed a high level of engagement among ESL teachers in Poland and Ukraine in SEL practices, with particular emphasis on reflective activities and community-building strategies. Teachers frequently engaged in reflective practices, regularly evaluating their successes and failures, with a median score of 2 in both countries. However, this engagement was slightly more decisive among Polish teachers, as indicated by an IQR of 1, while in Ukraine, the responses showed greater variation (IQR = 1.5). Similarly, teachers' involvement in community-building activities, such as sharing ideas with peers and allocating time for personal reflection ('me-time'), also scored highly, with both groups recognizing the importance of peer support and self-care in their professional lives. A notable contrast between the two groups was the emphasis on 'me-time,' with nearly half (48.4%) of Ukrainian teachers reporting daily engagement in self-reflection or personal time, compared to 18.2% of Polish teachers. This disparity likely reflects the distinct socio-political contexts in which the teachers operate, as Ukrainian educators face the pressures of working in conflict zones, leading to a greater perceived need for self-care as a coping mechanism.

Table 1. EFL Teachers' Engagement with SEL

Questions	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mdn	IQR
Reflect on failures and successes (Poland)	18.2% 4	45.5% 10	36.4% 8	0	0	2	1
Reflect on failures and successes (Ukraine)	38.7% 12	35.5% 11	19.4% 6	6.4% 2	0	2	1.5

Questions	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mdn	IQR
Connect with peers sharing ideas (Poland)	9.1% 2	45.5% 10	31.8% 7	13.6% 3	0	2	1
Connect with peers sharing ideas (Ukraine)	16.1% 5	54.8% 17	25.8% 8	3.2% 1	0	2	1
You need "me-time" (Poland)	18.2% 4	40.9% 9	27.3% 6	13.6% 3	0	2	1
You need "me-time" (Ukraine)	48.4% 15	35.5% 11	16.1% 5	0	0	2	1

These findings emphasize the critical role that reflective practices and community support play in fostering well-being and SEL engagement across different teaching environments. In this study, both Polish and Ukrainian teachers demonstrated strong alignment with reflective practices, though to varying degrees. However, when comparing the engagement levels reported in this study with findings from other global contexts, it becomes evident that reflective practice is more prominent among teachers in Poland and Ukraine. This divergence in reflective engagement could be influenced by cultural, socio-political, and institutional factors. For instance, a comparative study exploring the reflective practices of Sri Lankan EFL teachers revealed that 78% do not view themselves as reflective practitioners (Cirocki et al., 2014), which underscores regional differences in the perception and integration of reflective practices, such as SEL. Employing theoretically driven and empirically validated frameworks, such as the dynamic model of educational effectiveness, could serve as a guide for improving teaching practices and fostering reflective engagement among teachers (Azkiyah & Mukminin, 2024). It is important to clarify that in contexts like Sri Lanka, where educational systems may prioritize traditional, exam-oriented methods over reflective, student-centered approaches (Cirocki et al., 2014), teachers might not be encouraged or trained to engage in reflective practices. Similarly, cultural expectations and institutional frameworks also play a significant role, as more hierarchical educational systems may limit opportunities for self-reflection and collaboration among peers (Schweisfurth, 2015). This contrasts with Poland and Ukraine, where evolving educational reforms and socio-political pressures may promote reflective teaching as a means to cope with challenges and enhance personal well-being.

In conflict zones such as Ukraine, teachers' engagement with reflective practices may serve as a necessary tool for navigating emotional and professional challenges (Lavrysh et al., 2022; Westerlund et al., 2023), whereas, in more stable contexts like Poland, reflection may be viewed as part of a broader commitment to professional development and well-being. These contextual differences highlight the importance of understanding the socio-political and cultural underpinnings that shape teachers' engagement with SEL and reflective practices across different regions. Deep reflection on personal and professional experiences is crucial for EFL teachers, as it helps to bridge the gap between their expectations and

reality and addresses conflicts within their beliefs. Incorporating reflective practice also supports critical literacy development, which enhances not only academic outcomes but also personal well-being (Nam, 2016), an essential feature and vital pillar of both SEL and teacher well-being (Pentón Herrera & Darragh, 2024).

Workspace Reorganization

Reorganizing the workspace in educational settings transcends mere physical rearrangement; it embodies a shift towards innovative teaching methodologies and redefines the roles of teachers and students. This approach facilitates the adoption of cooperative learning, which significantly alters traditional educational routines by dismantling hierarchical and undemocratic frameworks, thereby fostering a more inclusive and interactive classroom environment (Arató, 2013). Such strategies are instrumental in cultivating a compassionate and engaging ELT community, substantially enhancing student learning outcomes (Kagan & Kagan, 2015). Feedback on workspace reorganization reveals a divergence in attitudes between Polish and Ukrainian teachers. A greater proportion of Polish teachers exhibit a positive inclination towards reconfiguring their teaching spaces, whereas Ukrainian teachers show somewhat less enthusiasm, as indicated by a higher incidence of negative responses. Specifically, 64% of Polish teachers were favorable towards workspace changes, compared to 36% who were not; in contrast, 45% of Ukrainian teachers expressed readiness to adapt their spaces, with 55% opposing such changes. These differing attitudes may reflect the varying degrees of stability and access to resources in each country, with Polish teachers benefiting from more stable educational environments, while Ukrainian teachers face logistical and psychological constraints due to the ongoing conflict.

These findings highlight the enthusiasm of Polish teachers to actively embrace changes within their working environments. Teachers provided detailed comments on the extent of their modifications, ranging from "getting new equipment, new furniture" to practically "changing almost all room." Significant alterations noted included "moving the teacher's desk to create more space in the office," "adding a standing desk option," and "separating the working and resting areas." Some Polish teachers even confessed to venturing to extend their classroom settings to outdoor spaces (i.e., nature and the environment), utilizing various school locations for diverse activities, thus enhancing the learning experience with visual aids and thematic decorations. They described rearranging the desks in "groups and horseshoes" and "moving outdoors for activities … having stations in different places at school," as well as "hanging posters," "adding decorations to illustrate different topics of study," and "reorganizing displays" to just "tidying up the working space," aiming at "less clutter." However, Polish teachers, especially those in K-12 spaces, also stated that such initiatives are occasionally constrained by the logistical limitations of sharing multiple classrooms across different subjects in public schools. These logistical constraints, common in public education systems, align with literature on the challenges of implementing innovative teaching spaces in environments where resources are shared (Häkkinen & Hämäläinen, 2012; Wang & Hannafin, 2005).

In the context of ongoing conflict, Ukrainian EFL teachers have increasingly embraced online platforms, adapting their teaching environments to ensure continuous and effective education. Many teachers have creatively modified their virtual backgrounds or

restructured their home teaching spaces to create more engaging and conducive learning environments. The use of digital tools has allowed for flexibility and innovation, supporting the resilience of teachers who must cope with limited physical classroom access (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). For those still able to conduct face-to-face lessons, strategic adjustments to classroom layouts have been implemented, such as rearranging desks to facilitate better interaction and occasionally moving classes to open spaces like university parks. This not only enhances the learning experience but also helps maintain a semblance of normalcy. Additionally, some educators have introduced innovative teaching methods and tools online, utilizing digital resources to enrich their lessons and provide students with a broader range of learning materials. These adaptive strategies align with research on teaching in conflict zones, where flexibility, creativity, and resilience are crucial for maintaining educational standards under extreme circumstances (Tsybuliak et al., 2023). These efforts showcase the teachers' resilience and creativity in overcoming the logistical challenges posed by the conflict, ensuring that education remains uninterrupted and continues to meet high standards under less-than-ideal circumstances.

Engagement with Well-being

Well-being apps for teachers are designed to enhance their personal well-being by promoting mental and physical health, and encouraging activities such as improved sleep, regular exercise, hydration, and stress reduction (Hart, n.d.). In this study, 55% of Polish EFL teachers reported regular use of a variety of well-being apps, including Bible apps, Booksy, and occasionally meditation apps, although some noted these were not always effective. They claimed that saying "I organize my own self and sell-being and stay off my phone as much as possible," "I don't use apps but I have my bullet journal," "I've tried meditation apps but they did't help me." They also engaged with social networking sites like Slack, Telegram, and Facebook, and some preferred traditional methods such as maintaining a bullet journal or simply relaxing away from digital devices. Conversely, only about a quarter of Ukrainian EFL teachers reported using well-being apps such as Daylio, Betterme, and various fitness and meditation applications. Some Ukrainian teachers noted preferring physical activities like sports or painting over digital apps, citing these as more effective ("Do sports or paint," "Go for a walk," "Do stretching exercises"), or stated a lack of time to engage with these tools. They submitted quick comments like "Haven't time for it," "Don't use any," "I don't use such apps," "No applications," and "Nothing." This suggests a significant difference in the uptake of digital well-being resources between Polish and Ukrainian teachers, with Polish educators incorporating these tools into their routines more frequently.

The survey also delved into teachers' attitudes toward workload, which is directly connected to teacher well-being, revealing that Ukrainian EFL teachers are generally less cautious about overworking compared to their Polish counterparts, with an even split between those accepting and refusing additional tasks. According to the results, 50% of Polish teachers are ready to work overtime and outside of working hours, while 70% of Ukrainian teachers expressed their willingness to do so. Polish teachers frequently cited difficulties in setting boundaries as a reason for accepting more work, emphasizing a cultural or personal tendency not to appear idle. They often feel compelled to go beyond their formal duties, driven by a combination of job satisfaction and financial necessity. "I cannot set

boundaries," "I do not want to seem lazy," and "I gladly can do something extra," were common sentiments. The financial aspect also plays a significant role, with comments such as "need more money," "need to earn more," and "taking more work means additional pay" highlighting the economic pressures they face. Conversely, those who refuse additional work underscore the importance of personal boundaries and well-being, stating, "I know my limits and time availability," and "I need time for myself and my family," indicating a desire to maintain a healthy work-life balance and avoid burnout.

In Ukraine, the context of ongoing conflict adds an additional layer of complexity to teachers' decisions about workload. Ukrainian teachers also express a strong dedication to their profession, which often leads to accepting more responsibilities: "I like my profession. I like to be busy," and "Work is primarily, it must be done properly," illustrate their commitment. However, the extraordinary circumstances mean that overworking is often seen as a norm, with statements like "considered as a norm," "we just can't say no," and "I cannot avoid taking more work ... someone has to do it," reflecting the pressures of teaching in a conflict zone. Financial concerns are similarly prominent, with many mentioning "Need to make a living" and "my basic salary is not enough for me" as crucial factors. Despite these challenges, some Ukrainian teachers manage to set boundaries, highlighting the importance of self-care: "It will be too much for me now," "I love and appreciate myself," and "I'm learning how to say NO," indicating their efforts to protect their well-being amidst difficult conditions.

These findings align with existing research, which emphasizes the significance of teacher well-being in relation to workload management, professional satisfaction, and overall mental health (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Sulis et al., 2023). The higher reliance on well-being apps and self-care routines among Polish teachers reflects broader trends in educational contexts that allow for greater work-life balance and encourage the use of digital tools for stress management (Manning et al., 2022). In contrast, the limited uptake of well-being apps among Ukrainian teachers may be explained by the socio-political stressors in conflict zones, where immediate survival concerns often overshadow longer-term self-care strategies. The Ukrainian teachers' willingness to overwork, despite the personal toll, is consistent with studies showing that educators in conflict areas frequently experience burnout and emotional exhaustion, driven by the sense of duty to continue supporting students under extreme conditions (Westerlund et al., 2023). These findings underscore the necessity for tailored interventions to support teacher well-being, particularly in conflict-affected regions, where teachers may benefit from psychological resilience training and systemic support to avoid burnout.

Utilization of Self-Care Techniques

Self-care icebreakers—activities designed to enhance personal well-being while fostering engagement in educational environments—are instrumental in improving communication and collaboration among students and teachers. According to Şat et al. (2022), integrating these activities is essential for achieving educational goals in English classrooms. Findings indicate that, in Poland, self-care icebreakers are more commonly employed (55% disclosing they engage in such practices vs. 45% that do not), whereas the adoption is somewhat mixed among Ukrainian teachers (42% disclosing they engage in such practices vs. 58% that do not).

Polish teachers seem to more adeptly integrate playful and reflective activities into their English lessons, fostering a dynamic and engaging learning environment. Activities such as "two truths and one lie," "what color are you," and various "welcome chain games," alongside "quiz games, trivia, jokes, memes," and "saying positive adjectives… students use to describe themselves" were described as common routines in the English classroom. Polish participants also disclosed that these activities are complemented by mindfulness exercises, drama techniques, and reflective discussions that recap previous classes, all of which have been identified in the literature as SEL practices that enrich the educational experience (McGovern & Yeganeh, 2023). Moreover, Polish teachers regularly incorporate discussions on essential well-being topics such as sleep, breathing, nutrition, and decision-making into their curriculum, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to promoting both academic and personal growth (Luthans et al., 2015). This holistic integration of SEL practices underscores the significance of nurturing all aspects of student development, aligning with contemporary educational paradigms that emphasize well-rounded student welfare and learning outcomes.

Similarly, Ukrainian teachers employ a variety of creative and engaging SEL techniques to enhance their well-being and that of their students. Ukrainian participants disclosed utilizing board games, mood pictures, and artistic activities to articulate emotions provides a robust platform for expression and interaction, thereby fostering a cohesive and supportive learning environment (Elias et al., 1997). Prompts like "Which cloud are you today?" and "What are you unbeatable at?" were identified as common SEL practices, which serve not only to engage students but also to delve deeper into personal reflections and emotional states, enriching the dialogue within the classroom (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). Furthermore, Ukrainian participants stated that they expand the traditional greeting "How are you?" to include detailed descriptions or a numerical well-being scale, thereby introducing a nuanced method for assessing students' emotional states, occasionally supported by activities such as mindful breathing or music listening to enhance mindfulness and relaxation. These approaches exemplify how Ukrainian educators adapt SEL techniques to meet the specific needs of their students, potentially influenced by the challenging socio-political landscape, thereby contributing significantly to the adaptive and supportive capacities of their educational practices.

Ranking self-care techniques, Polish EFL teachers predominantly chose walking (86.4%) more often than other activities, with reading (63.6%) as a close second, followed by deep breathing and cooking (50%), stretching exercises, and watching videos (45.5%). Conversely, Ukrainian EFL teachers also preferred walking (90.3%) as their top self-care technique, followed by watching videos (58.1%), giving themselves gifts (45.2%), stretching exercises, gardening, and reading (41.9%). Moreover, respondents from Ukraine listed new activities such as sleeping, playing board games, and learning another foreign language as self-care techniques. Unlike their Polish counterparts, they also incorporated community circles (16.1%) and birdwatching (6.5%) into their routines. These findings highlight the cultural and personal preferences in self-care practices between Polish and Ukrainian teachers, reflecting how self-care preferences are shaped by local contexts and individual needs.

Teacher Well-Being and Professional Development

Significant differences emerge between Polish and Ukrainian EFL teachers concerning the importance of teacher well-being. Ukrainian teachers more frequently strongly agree that teacher well-being is crucial (Mdn=1), compared to their Polish counterparts who typically agree (Mdn=2) (Table 2). Polish educators emphasize that "a stressed teacher is a bad teacher" and assert that their personal well-being directly influences their ability to "teach what they preach" and maintain a positive classroom atmosphere. Ukrainian teachers, echoing this sentiment, argue that a teacher's well-being directly impacts students, with happy teachers leading to happy students, and stressed teachers contributing to a tense classroom environment (Chugai, 2024).

Table 2. Importance of Well-being for EFL Teachers

Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mdn	IQR
Teacher well-being is essential (Poland)	40.9% 9	45.5% 10	9.1% 2	0	4.5% 1	2	1
Teacher well-being is essential (Ukraine)	67.7% 21	29% 9	3.2% 1	0	0	1	1
More PD on teacher well-being (Poland)	22.7% 5	54.5% 12	9.1% 2	9.1% 2	4.5% 1	2	0
More PD on teacher well-being (Ukraine)	38.7% 12	41.9% 13	19.4% 6	0	0	2	1

Polish EFL teachers strongly emphasize the critical relationship between their well-being and their pedagogical effectiveness. They articulate this connection through phrases like "teaching what you preach" and "a stressed teacher is a bad teacher." Many believe that their own health and well-being are prerequisites to fully engaging their students, as expressed in comments such as "my health comes first so I can give 100% to my students" and that well-being enables them to "help students feel secure and confident." Teachers also note that their emotional state directly influences classroom dynamics, with one stating that "teachers should be in a good mood and in form," which facilitates patience, creativity, and calmness—qualities essential for a positive learning environment. Moreover, some teachers metaphorically describe themselves as machines, underscoring the necessity of maintenance for optimal performance: "If a machine does not work, it does not fulfill its purpose." This analogy extends to their professional responsibilities, where teachers assert, "A teacher who is not able to properly care for themselves is unable to influence the students in a positive way" and "It's unfair to students if you can't do your job because you are distracted with something else." These responses highlight a broad acknowledgment of the integral role of teacher well-being in educational success, not only for themselves but as a

foundational element of effective teaching. Despite this recognition, a few teachers disclosed that they had "never really thought about it [i.e., well-being]" or were "not sure exactly how well-being looks like in teaching," indicating a gap in awareness or implementation of wellness strategies within their professional context.

Ukrainian EFL teachers underscore the profound impact of teacher well-being on student outcomes, asserting that educators serve as role models for SEL, and their emotional state significantly influences the classroom environment. As one teacher articulated, "Happy teachers lead to happy students, while stressed teachers make students stressed." This perspective aligns with research indicating that teacher well-being is directly correlated with student achievement and emotional health (Chugai, 2024). Teachers further illustrate this point with powerful analogies, suggesting, "A fearful teacher teaches fear, and an ignorant teacher teaches ignorance." They also used metaphors such as "The empty jar is not able to nurture others" and comparisons like "Teachers are like drivers; if the driver is exhausted, anything may happen, and even if a trip is safe eventually, it is never enjoyable." These expressions vividly capture the essence of how a teacher's well-being can permeate the learning experience, emphasizing the necessity for educators to maintain their health and balance to effectively support their students' development (Pentón Herrera et al., 2023).

Responses to inquiries about professional development concerning teacher well-being showed that Polish ESL teachers overwhelmingly support its importance (Mdn=2, IQR=0), recognizing that current programs in the country are not sufficiently focused on well-being but rather on traditional educational methods. These educators stress the need for a paradigm shift towards integrating well-being into professional development frameworks to enhance teaching efficacy and personal satisfaction. Further, Polish participants acknowledge the novelty and inadequacy of current well-being-oriented training and express a keen interest in adopting new methodologies that prioritize emotional and physical health within the educational context. Despite their enthusiasm, some educators express reservations, citing barriers such as "time constraints" and the "lack of practical application" in their training. The findings from the Polish participants reinforce the ongoing issue and gap in the ELT field about the gap between research and practice, and also the lack of attention to teacher wellness as an actionable practice in education (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Polish participants call for professional development opportunities that provide actionable strategies for managing the multifaceted stresses of teaching, thereby improving both teacher and student outcomes.

Ukrainian ESL teachers report a significant gap in professional development offerings that address teacher well-being, with many feeling that their needs, especially during times of crisis (i.e., the ongoing war on Ukraine), are not adequately met. The median response indicates a split perspective on the effectiveness of current programs (Mdn=2, IQR=1), with some educators voicing strong approval while others remain skeptical about the potential benefits. Teachers emphasize the necessity for support systems that cater to their psychological well-being and help them balance professional demands with personal life. In the context of ongoing conflict, the need for well-being support is described as critical, as teachers' mental health affects not only their professional performance but also the emotional climate of the classroom. Despite the acknowledged need, skepticism persists regarding the utility of professional development programs focused on well-being, with some

teachers questioning their relevance and impact, reflected in remarks such as "I have visited enough webinars lately" and "Not sure it'll help."

Building on the insights from Polish and Ukrainian teachers about the inadequacies of current professional development programs, experts emphasize the need for a comprehensive strategy to mitigate teacher burnout and enhance retention. This strategy should include targeted professional development that not only addresses educational methods but also focuses on well-being, improved compensation to recognize teachers' efforts, and the development of coping mechanisms to handle stress. Additionally, establishing robust support systems is crucial for sustaining teacher engagement and effectiveness. An illustrative example of such an approach can be seen at Fordham University's Professional Development Resource Center, where programs successfully integrate aspects of social and emotional well-being into teacher training, thereby enhancing teaching practices and educator satisfaction (Belmonte et al., 2022).

Effective professional support is pivotal in equipping teachers with the essential tools for self-care and emotional resilience. This support helps educators to identify personal strengths and areas needing improvement, engage in reflective practices, and foster empathy and connectivity within their professional communities. By incorporating strategies such as resilience training, mindfulness, and emotional regulation into professional development programs, teachers can significantly reduce the chronic stress that is often prevalent in educational settings. Such programs are instrumental in not only enhancing teachers' well-being but also in boosting their capacity to effectively support student learning. Furthermore, when teachers are well-equipped to manage their stress and emotional health, they can create more supportive and productive learning environments, thereby improving outcomes for both students and themselves (Li, 2021; Trujillo, 2022). These comprehensive professional development initiatives are crucial for sustaining teachers' long-term engagement and success in their roles, underscoring the vital link between educator well-being and educational quality.

Successfully implementing SEL necessitates a fundamental shift in how educators approach teaching, structure routines, and perceive their roles to optimally foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Teachers can significantly enhance student engagement and cooperation by effectively linking emotions to actions and language, and by thoughtfully designing both physical and virtual classrooms to be inclusive. Establishing classroom norms collaboratively rather than imposing rules, and gradually integrating SEL practices into the daily educational activities are essential strategies for embedding SEL in the classroom. Conducting regular informal assessments helps monitor progress and adapt practices as needed. Crucially, the active involvement of educational leaders in promoting and supporting SEL practices is imperative to ensure that these approaches are sustained and become an integral part of the educational framework. Such leadership commitment not only reinforces the importance of SEL but also provides the necessary resources and support to make SEL a transformative element of school culture (Pentón Herrera & Martínez-Alba, 2021).

5. CONCLUSIONS

While acknowledging the relatively small sample size of participants, the insights gained from this study provide valuable implications for understanding ESL teachers' attitudes toward SEL and well-being in Poland and Ukraine. The demographic analysis revealed that Ukrainian respondents were generally older and had more teaching experience, with a significant proportion working as university lecturers, whereas Polish teachers were predominantly younger and working in primary and secondary schools. This demographic distinction likely influences the differences in engagement with SEL practices and perceptions of well-being observed between the two groups (Snyder, 2017). Teachers in both countries demonstrated a strong commitment to SEL, regularly reflecting on their successes and failures, connecting with peers, and recognizing the importance of personal time. The study emphasizes that SEL practices directly contribute to teacher well-being, particularly in varied socio-political contexts where stressors differ significantly. However, Polish teachers exhibited a higher enthusiasm for physical workspace reorganization, possibly due to the greater feasibility of such changes in their in-person teaching environments compared to the online and shelter-based settings necessitated by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

The study also highlighted notable differences in the usage of well-being apps, with Polish teachers more frequently incorporating these digital tools into their routines. Conversely, Ukrainian teachers, faced with the stresses of teaching in a war zone, displayed a more cautious approach to overworking, valuing the importance of setting boundaries to maintain personal well-being. Polish teachers, on the other hand, expressed a stronger tendency to accept additional work due to financial pressures and a desire to avoid appearing idle or lazy. Regarding professional development, both groups acknowledged its importance for teacher well-being, although Polish teachers were more definitive in their agreement, reflecting perhaps a more pressing need for such support in their educational context. These findings indicate that while both Polish and Ukrainian teachers recognize the critical role of well-being in their professional lives, SEL can serve as a protective factor against burnout, especially in conflict zones, further underscoring the role of context in shaping teacher attitudes and practices (Pentón Herrera et al., 2023; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Future research should aim to expand the sample size and include a more diverse range of participants to enhance the generalizability of the findings, particularly across different cultural and socio-political contexts. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how ongoing socio-political changes, such as post-conflict recovery, and cultural factors impact teachers' attitudes toward well-being and SEL over time. Additionally, further research could explore the specific types of professional development that most effectively support teacher well-being in different educational contexts, providing evidence-based strategies for designing interventions. Investigating the impact of SEL and well-being practices on student outcomes across various settings would also be beneficial, offering a more holistic understanding of the interplay between teacher and student success.

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ВИКОРИСТАННЯ ЗМІШАНОГО МЕТОДУ ДЛЯ АНАЛІЗУ СТАВЛЕННЯ ВИКЛАДАЧІВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ЯК ІНОЗЕМНОЇ ДО СОЦІАЛЬНО-ЕМОЦІЙНОГО НАВЧАННЯ ТА ПСИХОЕМОЦІЙНОГО СТАНУ: ДОСВІД ПОЛЬЩІ ТА УКРАЇНИ

Анотація. Це дослідження з використанням змішаного методу аналізує ставлення викладачів англійської мови до соціально-емоційного навчання (SEL) і психоемоційного стану в Польщі та Україні, зосереджуючись на тому, як соціально-демографічні чинники та професійний контекст впливають на їхні точки зору. Результати показують, що польські викладачі молодшого віку, що загалом більш відкриті до впровадження інноваційних стратегій SEL, продемонстрували більшу залученість до практики SEL, тоді як старші, більш досвідчені українські викладачі, приділяли більшу увагу психоемоційному стану, та зіткнулися з більшими труднощами під час впровадження SEL через соціально-політичні чинники. Вік та інституційне середовище були суттєвими факторами у формуванні залученості викладачів до SEL, що підкреслювало потребу в програмах професійного розвитку, адаптованих до цих демографічних та контекстуальних відмінностей. Дослідження також показало, що польські викладачі частіше користуються додатками для підтримки психоемоційного стану, тоді як українські викладачі, які стикаються зі стресом під час викладання в зоні конфлікту, більш чутливі до перенавантаження та піклування про себе. Ці висновки підкреслюють необхідність контекстуалізованої підготовки зорієнтованої на соціально-емоційне навчання (SEL) і психоемоційний стан викладачів, а також врахування відмінностей між освітніми та соціально-політичними реаліями в кожній країні, що сприяє дискусіям про покращення психоемоційного стану викладачів та залучення SEL у різноманітних контекстах.

Ключові слова: соціально-емоційне навчання (SEL), психоемоційний стан викладача, EFL (English as a Foreign Language), викладання англійської мови (ELT), Польща, Україна, ставлення викладачів.