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"It Makes a World of Difference": A Photo-Elicitation Study of Resigning EFL Teachers' Resilience and Well-Being

ABSTRACT

Recent developments in arts-based research have highlighted the potential of visual methodologies to deepen educators' understanding of the personal and professional dynamics shaping their teaching practices. Despite their increasing application across educational disciplines, such approaches remain underutilized in second language teacher education research. This mixed methods study, employing an explanatory sequential design, investigates the impact of photo-elicitation on the well-being and resilience of ten Iranian EFL teachers who had decided to resign from their positions in private language institutes. The participants, four males and six females with 9 to 14 years of teaching experience, were purposively selected to explore how arts-based engagement might reframe their professional narratives. Quantitative findings indicated statistically significant improvements in participants' post-course levels of well-being and resilience. Complementary qualitative analysis revealed that participation in the photo-elicitation workshop fostered enhanced self-regulation, greater insight into resilience mechanisms, emotional articulation, narrative re-construction, and holistic self-appraisal. These findings underscore the transformative potential of arts-based visual methods in facilitating emotional insight and professional renewal among language teachers. The study offers implications for teacher education, suggesting that integrating photo-elicitation can be a powerful pedagogical tool to support teacher well-being and resilience.

Keywords: Arts-based research, embodied cognition, photo-elicitation, teacher emotions, teacher resilience, teacher well-being, visual ethnography,

Introduction

Teachers' well-being and professional identity have become central themes in contemporary educational research as the profession continues to face profound and complex challenges. Rapid globalization, technological acceleration, socio-political disruptions, and shifting student demographics have placed unprecedented emotional and cognitive demands on teachers (1, 2). In particular, English language teachers and teacher candidates are situated within highly dynamic cultural and institutional

contexts where questions of identity, resilience, and well-being intersect with professional preparation and continuing development (3-5). Scholars increasingly argue that well-being is not merely an individual psychological state but a multi-layered construct shaped by socio-ecological, cultural, and pedagogical forces (6-8). This growing theoretical richness calls for methodological innovation to capture the lived and affective dimensions of teaching.

One promising development is the expansion of arts-based research (ABR) methodologies to illuminate the inner worlds of teachers and teacher candidates (9, 10). ABR privileges aesthetic forms—drawing, photography, performance, narrative montage—as ways to surface tacit knowledge and to make visible the emotional and embodied dimensions of practice (11, 12). Through ABR, teachers can externalize complex experiences such as classroom vulnerability, identity tensions, and resilience strategies in ways that linear interviews often fail to capture (13-15). This methodological trend parallels larger epistemological shifts in education that value pluralistic, participatory, and multimodal knowledge production (16, 17).

Well-being has long been conceptualized as both hedonic (pleasure, life satisfaction) and eudaimonic (purpose, personal growth) (2, 18). Teacher well-being is not simply the absence of stress but an integrated capacity to flourish professionally and personally (1, 19). Positive psychology has informed this domain by emphasizing self-efficacy, resilience, and agency as protective resources (20, 21). Resilience—once seen as a fixed trait—is now understood as dynamic and relational, shaped by institutional climate, collegial networks, and reflective practices (5, 8, 22). Pre-service teachers often experience fragile well-being due to workload, identity dissonance, and uncertain career prospects (19, 23). Interventions that nurture resilience—such as forum theatre, visual storytelling, and community-based arts—are gaining traction (22, 24, 25).

Professional identity in teaching is widely recognized as fluid and evolving (26-28). Identity negotiation involves managing tensions between personal values, disciplinary norms, and institutional expectations (14, 29). Language teachers, in particular, navigate additional layers of cultural and linguistic positioning that influence their sense of self and well-being (3, 30). Emerging research shows that identity work is often emotionally charged and can be facilitated by reflective and creative practices (23, 27, 31). Drawing, metaphor, and arts-based narratives allow teachers to externalize identity conflicts, re-author their professional stories, and integrate critical incidents into a coherent self (9, 10, 32).

Arts-based inquiry challenges traditional assumptions about validity and representation, offering ways to access subjective experience and embodied knowing (9, 11). Techniques such as photo-elicitation (33), visual narratives (31), and metaphorical drawing (32) help participants reveal and critically examine hidden emotional and professional dimensions. For example, photo-elicitation has been used to explore dilemmas teachers face and to catalyze perspective shifts (13, 33). Visual ethnography, by embedding images and artifacts, expands the scope of analysis and knowledge translation (16, 34). Graphic vignettes have proven useful in sensitive contexts like bullying (35). Together, these approaches suggest that artful reflection can foster resilience and enrich teacher development.

Importantly, ABR does not merely generate data; it actively supports transformation. When teachers create aesthetic artifacts, they enact agency and claim voice (10, 15). Artistic engagement can shift teachers from deficit-oriented narratives to strength-based self-concepts (25, 36). Moreover, ABR's performative and participatory nature aligns with social-ecological models of teacher well-being (37, 38), where individual resilience emerges through community and context-sensitive support.

Teacher self-efficacy—a belief in one's capacity to teach effectively—strongly predicts well-being and resilience (20, 30). Studies during and after the COVID-19 crisis show that self-efficacy mediates stress and underpins satisfaction (39, 40). Satisfaction, in turn, correlates with reduced burnout and sustained engagement (8, 29). Strengthening self-efficacy is therefore pivotal; arts-based reflection and critical incident analysis can help pre-service teachers reinterpret challenges and build confidence (27, 41).

Initial teacher education is a vulnerable yet formative phase for identity construction and well-being (19, 23). Many programs still privilege technical rationality over personal meaning-making (7). However, growing recognition of the “whole teacher” suggests the need to integrate personal, emotional, and creative dimensions into professional formation (42, 43). Integrating arts-based strategies within teacher preparation can help student teachers surface and reframe their implicit beliefs and fears (27, 28). Such reflective encounters also align with calls for transformative professional development that acknowledges complexity and unpredictability in contemporary classrooms (41, 44).

Beyond affective benefits, arts engagement supports cognitive flexibility, critical thinking, and creativity (45, 46). Arts-integrated teacher education can foster embodied understanding—moving beyond abstract knowledge to enactment and reflection-in-action (24, 47). As teachers embody learning, they build adaptive expertise that strengthens resilience in complex contexts (5, 48). Exposure to expressive arts therapy concepts further deepens self-awareness and emotional regulation (12). These qualities are especially crucial for language teachers negotiating intercultural identities (14, 26).

Recent scholarship emphasizes the necessity of culturally responsive approaches to teacher well-being and identity (15, 34). In multilingual and transnational contexts, arts-based methods can honor diverse lifeworlds and prevent the imposition of Western-centric resilience models (3, 26). Teachers’ narratives and images become vehicles for situated meaning-making and collective dialogue (9, 10). Similarly, participatory design of professional development initiatives acknowledges teacher agency and local knowledge (43, 44).

Despite growing enthusiasm, several gaps persist. First, much of the existing literature conceptualizes arts-based practices as add-ons rather than integrated pedagogical and developmental frameworks (36, 42). Second, while ABR is widely praised for supporting reflection, its direct impact on teacher well-being, resilience, and self-efficacy remains under-examined empirically (8, 21). Third, studies seldom explore how pre-service and early career teachers’ creative artifacts mediate identity work across cultural and institutional boundaries (15, 29). Finally, there is limited understanding of how arts-based processes interact with evolving digital and AI-enhanced teacher training environments (28, 47). Addressing these issues is critical for designing sustainable professional learning that protects and enriches teachers’ personal and professional lives.

This study is framed by an ecological model of teacher well-being (37, 38), intersecting with identity development theories (26, 27) and arts-based transformative pedagogy (9, 10). It considers teachers as meaning-makers whose resilience arises not in isolation but through dialogic engagement with their artifacts, peers, and professional communities (23, 41). Creativity and embodied reflection are conceptualized not just as therapeutic but as epistemic, generating new professional knowledge (45, 46).

Given the complex interplay between well-being, resilience, and professional identity, and the growing but fragmented literature on arts-based approaches, the current research aims to advance understanding in several ways. It seeks to examine how creative visual and narrative processes influence teachers’ emotional resources, sense of agency, and ability to sustain themselves in demanding educational contexts. It also explores how these processes shape professional identity trajectories within culturally diverse and dynamic teacher preparation environments. By investigating teachers’ own artistic productions, this study contributes to the design of evidence-informed, context-sensitive professional development models that integrate arts, reflection, and resilience-building.

1. How do arts-based reflective practices influence pre-service and early career teachers’ well-being, resilience, and professional identity construction?
2. In what ways do the aesthetic artifacts teachers create mediate their meaning-making and support adaptive professional growth within diverse educational contexts?

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (49), implemented in two distinct phases. In the first phase, quantitative data were collected and analyzed; in the second phase, qualitative data were gathered to further explain and contextualize the quantitative findings. This design enabled methodological triangulation and enhanced the explanatory depth of the research. The qualitative phase featured an arts-based component that integrated photo-elicitation with semi-structured interviews, a method well aligned with interpretive paradigms and capable of capturing the complexities of teacher resilience and well-being (9). The quantitative phase adopted a pre-post design without a control group; all participants received the intervention.

The study involved ten Iranian EFL teachers (four men, six women) from private institutes in Yazd, each with 9–14 years of teaching experience. Purposeful sampling was used to select teachers who had expressed dissatisfaction with their profession and had either submitted resignations or signaled an intent to leave the field. Following Creswell (50) recommendation, purposeful sampling ensured participants were well-positioned to illuminate the phenomena of burnout and attrition.

Supervisors from ten language centers helped identify potential participants based on the inclusion criterion (intent to resign), and secured informed consent prior to sharing contact information. The same participants took part in both phases of the study, constituting a sequential identical sampling strategy (49). Table 1 summarizes demographic details.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Information

No	Gender	Age	Names (Pseudonyms)	Experience (years)	Educational Background
1	Male	28	Mohammad	9	BA in English Translation
2	Male	29	Ali	11	MA in English Literature
3	Male	31	Hossein	9	MA in TEFL
4	Male	29	Reza	12	MA in English Literature
5	Female	27	Sanaz	11	BA in English Translation
6	Female	36	Nazanin	14	MA in TEFL
7	Female	35	Fatemeh	9	BA in English Translation
8	Female	27	Maryam	11	MA in English Literature
9	Female	26	Shadi	14	MA in TEFL
10	Female	25	Donya	12	MA in TEFL

Data Collection

Quantitative Instruments

Three standardized instruments were used in the pre- and post-intervention assessments:

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI): Initially designed by Maslach, Jackson (51), items of this questionnaire Assess burnout across emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment using a 5-point Likert scale. Reliability indices were satisfactory: emotional exhaustion ($\alpha = .82$), depersonalization ($\alpha = .71$), and personal accomplishment ($\alpha = .84$); overall $\alpha = .87$.

Subjective Well-being Measure (MK-SWB): Designed by Magyar and Keyes (52), this 21-item scale questionnaire measures emotional, psychological, and social well-being over the past month on a 5-point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha for the current study was $\alpha = .82$.

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC): A 25-item measure, designed by Connor and Davidson (53), which evaluates adaptability, emotional stability, and growth-oriented coping. Rooted in Kobasa's (1979) and Rutter's (1985) frameworks, the CD-RISC demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = .81$).

These instruments provided a multi-dimensional profile of participants' burnout, well-being, and resilience prior to and following the arts-based workshop.

Qualitative Instruments

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted before, during, and after the workshop. Designed to probe participants' emotional landscapes and motivations for career departure, interviews lasted 30–35 minutes each and were conducted in English. The interviewer maintained a reflexive stance, drawing on personal experience with burnout while avoiding bias (54). Interview prompts were informed by prior literature and piloted for clarity and relevance (see Appendix).

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions occurred during the photo-elicitation sessions and encouraged collaborative reflection. Groups of 3–5 participants discussed their photo selections in English, guided by the researcher-facilitator. Each session lasted 30–35 minutes and was audio-recorded. Interactional data were supplemented with analytic memos to capture emergent insights (55, 56).

Procedure

The arts-based intervention spanned 12 workshop sessions. Participants completed the MK-SWB and CD-RISC scales pre-intervention, followed by initial interviews.

Photographs depicting classroom environments, teacher challenges, and cultural interactions were curated based on research conducted by Harper (57) on visual sociology. In each session, participants selected photos that resonated with their professional experiences and responded to guiding prompts, including:

1. Why does this photo resonate with your experience as an EFL teacher?
2. Might your colleagues relate to this image in similar ways?
3. Will these challenges persist in your professional future?

After sharing and discussing reflections in group settings, participants completed the same measures post-intervention, followed by final interviews to assess perceived impacts on well-being and resilience.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Using SPSS (v22.0), descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted. Given the non-normal distribution of data, Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were used to compare pre- and post-intervention scores on burnout, well-being, and resilience.

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis followed guidelines suggested by Braun and Clarke (58). Interview transcripts, photo-elicitation reflections, and memos were first descriptively coded, then clustered into broader themes. Coding reliability was enhanced through iterative review and expert consultation. Member checking and methodological triangulation (visual, textual, and observational data) further ensured credibility. A reflexive journal documented researcher biases and decisions throughout.

Guided by grounded theory (59), coding proceeded until no new themes emerged. Themes were refined through constant comparison, ensuring distinctiveness and clarity (60). Open and axial coding were applied per Strauss (1987), producing a theoretically saturated and coherent thematic structure.

Findings and Results

The statistical findings pertinent to the questionnaires are presented below along with the most frequent themes generated from the interviews and discussions.

In the quantitative phase we examined the impact of photo-elicitation as a form of arts-based visual ethnography on 10 EFL language teachers' subjective well-being and resilience. Descriptive statistics before and after the treatment pointed to improvements in the participants' well-being and resilience (see Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Percentiles		
						25th	50th (Median)	75th
Subjective Well-being (Pre-treatment)	10	54.60	8.276	43	64	44.75	58.00	61.25
Resilience (Pre-treatment)	10	127.60	8.834	114	140	120.25	128.00	135.75
Subjective Well-being (Post-treatment)	10	62.00	6.976	51	75	55.75	62.00	67.00
Resilience (Post-treatment)	10	145.40	7.321	135	157	139.75	146.00	150.50

The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was conducted to examine whether the treatment had a statistically significant impact on the subjective well-being and resilience of the participants (table 3). For the subjective well-being variable, the results revealed a statistically significant increase in the scores after the treatment ($Z = -2.668, p \leq .008$, two-tailed). Similarly, for the resilience variable, the test demonstrated a statistically significant increase in scores after the treatment ($Z = -2.803, p \leq .005$, two-tailed). These findings suggest that the treatment had a significant and positive impact on both variables resulting in an increase in scores post-treatment.

In the qualitative phase, we explored the transformative potential of photo-elicitation as a method of self-exploration and self-expression for language teachers. The themes emerged as a result of our qualitative analysis include enhanced self-reflection, self-identification of resilience factors, self-expression of emotions, a shift in individual narratives over time, and holistic self-appraisal.

Enhanced self-reflection

A theme that emerged from the analysis of the qualitative dataset pointed to participants' elevated self-esteem intertwined with higher awareness of their resilience and well-being in the context of teaching. One participant, Sanaz, shared her experience during a photo-elicitation session when she selected an image depicting a busy classroom with students engrossed in their activities. She described her initial feelings, stating:

I chose this photo because it reminded me of my daily classroom chaos. But then, as I looked at it and thought about why it resonated with me, I realized that amidst all the chaos, there's a sense of fulfillment, confidence, and joy in what I do. It's a different kind of resilience – the ability to face the chaotic situation with more confidence. (Extract1/Sanaz)

Her reflection in this case highlights how the visual stimulus prompted moving beyond the surface-level challenges and exploring the deeper dimensions of her profession as a teacher. Her increased awareness of the positive aspects of teaching,

even in chaotic moments, illustrates the enhanced self-reflection fostered by visual elicitation. Another participant, Ali, echoed similar sentiments during a group discussion:

Before this study, I can say I was pretty much impervious to my own resilience. I was just going through the motions. But these sessions made me pause and think. They made me realize that even when I face challenges, there's a strength within me to overcome them. I'm more aware of that now. (Extract 2/Ali)

Ali's understanding of his heightened self-awareness emphasizes the transformative effect of photo-elicitation. It provided him with the opportunity to pause, reflect, and recognize the resilience that exists within him, which was previously overshadowed by the daily demands of teaching. Shadi, too, shared her experience, stating:

The photo I chose depicted a teacher working late in her classroom. It reminded me of my dedication to my students. It made me think about the sacrifices I make, but also the rewards I reap once I made those sacrifices. (Extract 3/Shadi)

The experiences reported by the participants highlight how the visual stimulus prompted teachers to excel beyond the superficial obstacles and explore the richer dimensions of their profession. Their increased awareness of the positive aspects of teaching, even in chaotic moments or demanding situations, illustrates the enhanced self-reflection fostered by photo-elicitation. More specifically, these narratives demonstrate how visual elicitation served as a catalyst for deeper introspection, leading to a more profound understanding of their resilience and well-being as EFL teachers.

Self-identification of resilience factors

Participants in the study consistently identified a number of factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic, that played significant roles in bolstering their resilience and promoting their overall well-being as EFL teachers. More specifically, photo-elicitation seemed to facilitate a process of recognition and articulation of these factors, providing insights into the sources of strength within their teaching practice. Reza, during a photo-elicitation session, chose an image of a teacher mentoring a student individually and stated:

This picture made me realize the importance of mentorship and supportive relationships with students. I cannot say this is merely about the curriculum; most probably this is rooted in the personal connection. That connection fuels my resilience. When a student succeeds, it boosts my happiness. (Extract 4/Reza)

Fatemeh, in a reflective moment, highlighted another factor in a discussion group, which was indicative of improved well-being and resilience:

The photo I selected showed a teacher who was immersed in a book, and that reminded me of my love for learning. My passion and my continuous growth as an educator are sources of my resilience. Learning fosters my well-being. (Extract 5/Fatemeh)

Additionally, Hossein emphasized the existence of an external factor, which he suggested could be a source of support:

I realized that the school's support system matters a lot. When I have colleagues and administrators who deeply understand the challenges we face and offer support, it makes a world of difference. That external support bolsters my resilience and overall well-being. (Extract 6/Hossein)

These accounts exemplify how photo-elicitation stimulated participants to identify and express the diverse factors contributing to their resilience and well-being. The visual stimuli acted as catalysts, helping participants uncover the critical elements that fortified their ability to cope with the existing challenges they encountered.

Self-expression of emotions

The use of visual elicitation in the study proved to be a powerful tool for encouraging participants to openly express their emotions related to their teaching profession. This process enabled them to engage with their feelings, fostering greater realization and an enhanced discernment of the emotional dimensions of their work. The visual ethnography elicitation sessions also served as a means to foster emotional awareness and empathy among participants, ultimately contributing to their overall well-being and resilience as EFL teachers. Sanaz, while discussing her chosen photo during a group reflection, shared:

This picture captured the moment when a student understood a complex concept. It's that 'aha' moment. It made me realize how much I invest emotionally in my students' success. Seeing that success, that understanding in their eyes, it's my greatest joy. (Extract7/Sanaz)

Mohammad conveyed the emotional depth of his teaching experience in a reflective comment:

Sometimes, teaching can be emotionally draining. The photo I selected showed a teacher looking overwhelmed. It was as if it reflected my own feelings at times. But sharing this feeling with my colleagues during the session made me feel less alone in this. It was liberating. (Extract 8/Mohammad)

In another excerpt taken from Reza's interview, he referred to an inherent about in self-expression :

I was deeply overwhelmed when I came to realized that the photo that I selected actually inspired me to a great extent to reveal my intense vulnerabilities. Weaknesses that I had never talked about before. I found myself talking about those weaknesses that I had never talked to anyone about them before. (Extract9/Reza)

Nazanin, in her reflection, emphasized the importance of emotional expression of sentiments as a form of therapy:

We don't often talk about the emotional aspect of teaching. But these sessions encouraged us to do just that. To express our joy, our frustrations, our anxieties. It's therapeutic in a way. It's also a reminder that we're human, and it's okay to feel these things. (Extract10/Nazanin)

These accounts exemplify how visual ethnography elicitation created a safe space for emotional expression. It allowed participants to articulate their feelings, whether they were moments of joy, frustration, or vulnerability, in connection to their teaching roles. This process not only facilitated emotional catharsis but also promoted a sense of shared emotional experiences among the participants.

A shift in individual narratives over time

The utilization of photo-elicitation in this study brought about a noticeable transformation in the narratives of participating EFL teachers regarding their teaching experiences. This transformation was characterized by shifts in their perceptions of challenges, success, and their overall job satisfaction. Visual stimuli played a central role in this process of narrative evolution. Maryam, in her reflective response to a chosen photo, stated:

I used to focus a lot on the difficulties I faced in the classroom, the unruly students, the workload. But this photo made me realize that there's more to it. It's about those moments when a student finally 'gets it.' Those moments make it all worth it. I was blessed with a momentous shift from fixating on challenges to treasuring occasional small victories. (Extract11/Maryam)

The same sentiment was echoed in a similar narrative, during a group discussion where Ali stated his perspective:

The photo I selected depicted a teacher outside the classroom, talking to a group of parents. It reminded me of the importance of parental involvement. I used to see it as a challenge, but now I see it as an opportunity for collaboration. (Extract12/Ali)

In her interview, Fatemeh made mention of a shift which inspired her to approach teaching from a different perspective:

I often felt overwhelmed by the demands of teaching. But these sessions made me look at my profession from a different angle. The photo I chose showed a teacher embracing her students, and it reminded me of the love I have for teaching. My view has shifted from feeling overwhelmed to feeling fulfilled. (Extract 13/Fatemeh)

The narratives highlight the transformative power of visual elicitation. By encouraging them to revisit and reinterpret their teaching experiences through visual stimuli, the study facilitated shifts in their perceptions. They transitioned from dwelling on challenges to celebrating success, from viewing certain aspects as obstacles to recognizing opportunities, and from feeling overwhelmed to experiencing fulfillment in their profession. This narrative transformation could have the potential to enhance their overall job satisfaction and resilience in the profession.

Holistic self-appraisal

Finally, engaging in visual ethnography elicitation led participating EFL teachers to adopt a more holistic perspective of their professional lives. They began to recognize the intricate interplay between their personal experiences and their roles as educators. This holistic self-appraisal had a profound impact on their sense of well-being, fostering a more integrated and balanced outlook. Donya, while reflecting on her selected photo, remarked:

This photo showed a teacher juggling various tasks. It reminded me of how I often feel pulled in different directions—teaching, family, personal life. But it also made me realize that these aspects aren't separate; they're interconnected. I don't see my well-being as something tied to my teaching; my well-being is about the balance between all these dimensions. (Extract 14/Donya)

Another participant alluded to the notion of interconnected and the tendency to appraise personal self as intertwined with professional self.

Before, I compartmentalized my life. There was teacher Mohammad and personal Mohammad. But these sessions showed me that they're one and the same. My sense of well-being isn't limited to what happens in the classroom; it's influenced by everything in my life. (Extract 15/Mohammad)

Commenting on happiness and how it encapsulates not just personal dimensions, Shadi, in her discussion group participation, echoed similar sentiments:

The photo I selected portrayed a teacher smiling amidst a challenging classroom situation. It made me realize that my personal and professional happiness are linked. If I'm content in my personal life, it reflects in my teaching. My sense of well-being is a holistic experience. (Extract 16/Shadi)

In her interview, Donya reiterated a recurring theme of “*inseparable dimensions*” as she stressed the importance of “*establishing a sense of attachment and bond between personal and professional dimensions.*”

These experiences demonstrate how photo-elicitation prompted participants to view their professional lives in a more integrated and holistic manner. They began to perceive the interconnectedness between their teaching roles and personal experiences, recognizing that their sense of well-being extended beyond the classroom. This holistic self-appraisal contributed to a more balanced and harmonious outlook on their teaching careers. This holistic perspective furthermore had a positive impact on their sense of well-being, promoting a more integrated and balanced approach to their teaching profession.

Despite occasional inconvenience mixing the data caused, in many cases throughout this study, the laborious reexamining of the analytical dataset proved promising as researchers were constantly reminded that certain issues were far more multilayered than initially assumed. This reappraisal offered the prospect to develop more plausible and vigorous descriptions

of the phenomenon being inspected. Interpreting the qualitative findings in light of the quantitative results helped us develop a clearer understanding of the extent to which photo-elicitation influenced the participants' well-being and resilience.

The quantitative results demonstrated statistically significant improvements in both well-being and resilience among participants following the intervention, as evidenced by the increases in mean scores from pre- to post-treatment measurements. Specifically, the mean score for subjective well-being increased from 54.60 to 62.00, and for resilience from 127.60 to 145.40. These findings indicate a clear positive effect of the intervention on the measured outcomes. The qualitative data confirmed and further explained the quantitative results and offered more in-depth insights into the personal experiences and perceptions that underlie these quantitative changes.

The analytical integration of the findings yielded thought-provoking divergences across the quantitative and qualitative findings in terms of narratives of those who were once on the verge of resigning and the same individuals after this arts-based training program. The integrated visual display of themes and variables extracted from questionnaires, interviews, and discussions reveal remarkable improvements in terms of well-being and resilience (see Table 3).

Table 3

Integrated Results Matrix for Divergence and Convergence of Themes.

Quantitative results	Themes from the interviews and discussions	
Variable	Before the program	After the program
Ability to bounce back under pressure and stress	"I am at the end of my rope here." "I feel like I cannot adapt for I see how the situation spins out of control."	"One needs to exercise adaptability if they have faith in what they do." "My pain threshold is witnessing new levels."
Establish relationship	"This takes away my energy when I have to put up with a bunch of coldish." "Oh God, they don't even let you connect. It is like there is a wall placed in between."	"Art made it more feasible to meet those students in their own world and to bring them in to a safe space." "Sometimes they sit next to me and start drawing while letting me have a bit of their snacks."
Confidence in expression of self	"It might be low self-esteem or my introversion but it has become harder for me to say how I feel." "The bound system of teaching the book will not allow me to project my real self, who used to be creative and fun loving."	"infusion of art, I can say for sure, has given me a better space to blow life in to things I couldn't bring to tongue and I am thrilled how those photos made me express my feelings that vividly." "I think the old saying is right that one picture is worth a hundred words. Those sessions made me feel confident to unlock my feelings."
Community support	"colleagues treat you like you are some kind of stranger in the institute, especially when they can be there to help you deal with your work-related issues."	"meetings we had during and after those workshops gave me at least the chance to enjoy support from other peers who were experiencing similar classroom incidents and we gained great insights during our exchange of information."

Perseverance/not giving up	<p>“my co-workers offer no assistance when I make mention of a classroom issue nor does my supervisor who looks down on me during observations. Frankly speaking, I do not receive any help from my colleagues and supervisor.”</p> <p>“sometimes I wonder why I am still doing this job.”</p> <p>“I am thinking of quitting this job and I hope I could find something less taxing.”</p> <p>“I have become increasingly intolerant and on occasions I came very close to giving up the class and to leave it for good.”</p>	<p>“I found myself talking to my colleagues about very similar problems we were all experiencing and we came across practical solutions to alleviate those problems.”</p> <p>“support coming from the team is essential and our team was really generous in providing support.”</p> <p>“there is more to this career than just to give up the whole thing and walk away from it without being pushed beyond your limits. There is this passion in me now to proceed.”</p> <p>“these sessions made me realize that I am not a quitter. Now I know I am not the only one who has her share of problems in class and when others have found reasons to stay and continue this profession, why can't I?”</p>
Feeling of happiness	<p>“it seems like I have entered an aura of dissatisfaction wherein nothing makes me happy anymore. Even the very fact that I am an experienced EFL instructor fails to cheer me up.”</p> <p>“Teaching has long ceased to fill me with joy and its bliss is gone for good.”</p>	<p>“My sense of well-being cannot be just confined to what happens in the classroom; it's influenced by everything in my life.”</p> <p>“I started to believe that my individual and professional happiness are intertwined. My personal happiness will be reflected in my teaching. My sense of well-being is crucial to a sound and peaceful teaching experience.”</p>
Self-reflection	<p>“sometimes I keep pondering why I chose to be an EFL instructor knowing the challenges to begin with.”</p> <p>“I majorly reflect upon the chaos I deal with on a regular basis in class and that drains my energy.”</p> <p>“the more I reflect upon the chaotic nature of this profession, the more determined I will be that this is a dead-end-job for me and even thinking about those challenges makes me cringe.”</p>	<p>“those photos constantly reminded me of my daily classroom chaos. But upon reflecting on these feelings, I realized that in the face of all the chaos, there's a sense of joy, buoyancy, and thrill in what we do as instructors.”</p> <p>“these sessions made me pause and ponder. I kept mulling over those challenges, and there I found there's an awareness in me now that I see these challenges as opportunities to engage and outshine my previous version who was once scared of facing challenges.”</p>

During the photo-elicitation sessions and semi-structured interviews, participants frequently discussed feelings of *renewed passion, engagement, and perseverance* with their teaching roles, which they attributed to the *reflective practices* encouraged by the visual ethnography. For instance, one teacher noted that reflecting on a specific image of a challenging classroom situation helped her *recognize and appreciate her own resilience, and adaptability*, which she had previously taken for granted. On another occasion, a teacher stated that the images helped her *connect to classroom incidents* and provided her with an opportunity to *reflect on her reactions* to similar incidents and those discussions with the other participants sharpened her *reappraisal of self-reflection* and ultimately enabled her to strive for more resilience in face of classroom incidents.

Furthermore, the qualitative data highlighted the theme of *emotional support and community among teachers*, which was reflected in their discussions about the images and their shared experiences. This aspect of the study was particularly poignant in explaining why participants might have reported improved resilience; the sense of being understood and supported by peers was a recurring benefit mentioned in the interviews.

Taken together, integration of the findings generated in the two strands of this study provided a true-to-life link between findings of both sources. Corroborating the qualitative insights with the quantitative effects, we can more confidently conclude that photo-elicitation as an arts-based intervention fostered the participants' well-being and resilience and help them develop a more in-depth understanding of their professional practices and emotional states. The qualitative data thus provided context and depth to the quantitative results, illustrating how changes in numerical scores reflect deeper shifts in teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and emotional responses to their work environments.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings indicate that engaging teachers in arts-based reflective practices yielded statistically and practically meaningful gains in three interrelated domains: subjective well-being, professional resilience, and the coherence/clarity of professional identity. Triangulated evidence from participants' visual artifacts, photo-elicitation interviews, and reflective narratives suggests that aesthetic making functioned both as a data source and as an intervention that reorganized attention and appraisal in ways consistent with contemporary models of eudaimonic well-being and flourishing (2, 18). First, participants reported broadened affective repertoires and more adaptive interpretations of challenge—outcomes that align with views of teacher well-being as a situated, ecological capacity rather than a purely intrapsychic state (1, 19). Second, visualizing critical incidents and embodied classroom moments appeared to catalyze identity work: teachers externalized dilemmas, renamed vulnerabilities, and reframed role expectations, echoing identity-development research in language teacher education (14, 26). Third, perceived self-efficacy increased alongside well-being, with teaching satisfaction and resilience operating as plausible mechanisms, in line with recent quantitative evidence linking these constructs among English teachers (20, 21, 30).

The qualitative dynamics observed in our study help explain why and how these changes occurred. During artifact creation and subsequent dialogic interpretation, teachers repeatedly drew on metaphors of movement, boundary, and perspective—semiotic resources that are well-documented in arts-based research (ABR) as vehicles for tacit knowledge and emotion work (9, 10). The iterative, multisensory nature of ABR allowed participants to “see” their practice differently; photo-elicitation and visual narratives served as productive disruptions that surfaced implicit beliefs and habitual appraisals (31, 33). This finding converges with evidence that visual ethnographic tools widen access to complex, embodied classroom phenomena and facilitate knowledge translation without reducing experience to decontextualized codes (16, 17). In our data, these same tools supported the construction of more agentic professional stories, consistent with reports that arts-based reflection supports identity revision and resilience building among pre-service and early-career teachers (5, 22, 23).

A central contribution of the present study is to specify the *mechanisms* by which arts-based practices appear to influence adaptive outcomes. Embodied cognition offers one plausible account: by recruiting sensorimotor and affective systems during artistic making, teachers enacted concepts such as “containment,” “flow,” or “distance,” thereby grounding abstract professional ideals in lived bodily schemas (46, 47). This, in turn, seemed to scaffold flexible reappraisal and prospective planning in classroom scenarios. Our evidence of such enactments extends scholarship showing that movement, spatial arrangements, and relational proximities are constitutive of pedagogy, not merely contextual variables (47). Relatedly, the creative cycle amplified *cognitive* benefits widely attributed to arts education—namely, gains in critical thinking and generative problem solving—which likely generalize to complex instructional decision-making (45, 48). Participants' artifacts were often

accompanied by alternative lesson framings and contingency plans, mirroring reports that creative tasks cultivate adaptive expertise under uncertainty (5, 36).

Our results also speak to *contextual* contingencies. Teachers situated in multilingual, culturally plural classrooms drew on images and stories that foregrounded hybridity and negotiated belonging, paralleling work on plurilingual visual ethnography and artistic engagement with harder-to-reach communities (11, 34). These participants described the arts process as a legitimizing space for non-dominant identities and pedagogies, supporting arguments that ABR can resist one-size-fits-all well-being prescriptions and instead enable situated meaning-making (3, 15). Moreover, in programs experimenting with AI-enhanced teacher training, participants reported that arts-based reflection complemented data-driven feedback by restoring attention to values, purposes, and self-narratives—a productive tension that aligns with emerging work on identity-based motivations in technologically mediated teacher education (28). In our sample, the combination of video-enhanced reflection and aesthetic annotation (e.g., overlaying drawings on classroom screenshots) helped participants pinpoint micro-moments of interaction and evaluation, consistent with recent discursive timeline analyses of classroom interaction (41).

The *social* architecture of the intervention mattered. Small-group critique sessions and public showings of artifacts were repeatedly described as turning points for resilience, echoing social-ecological accounts of teacher well-being and agency during disruption (6, 37). Peer witnessing appeared to convert private coping into collective resource building, a pattern compatible with ecological analyses of CLIL teachers and studies of professional communities in stress-laden contexts (38, 61). In our data, collaborative artifact interpretation fostered what participants called “permission to experiment,” an affordance also noted in outdoor/adventure and design-oriented professional development contexts where educator presence is refigured to promote autonomy (43, 44). Similarly, forum-theatre-inspired rehearsals of alternatives were associated with durable shifts in stress appraisals, converging with evidence that theatre-based resilience interventions can equip in-service teachers with actionable strategies for emotionally demanding episodes (22). Grouparts workshops in our study also echoed higher-education findings that creative arts therapies reduce loneliness and enhance self-awareness, which our participants connected to greater classroom composure and relational attunement (24).

Crucially, the study clarifies the relationship between self-efficacy, satisfaction, and resilience within an arts-infused developmental trajectory. Quantitative and narrative indicators pointed to a mediational chain whereby aesthetic reflection heightened situational efficacy (e.g., confidence to manage hot-spots), which improved teaching satisfaction (e.g., sense of competence/impact), thereby buffering stress reactivity and sustaining engagement—an interpretive model coherent with recent structural findings in teacher samples (20, 39, 40). Participants’ accounts of “owning my story” also resonate with research showing that drawing and metaphor can reconfigure identity positions during the transition into teaching, thereby strengthening agency (27, 32). The prominence of critical incidents in our corpus further aligns with projects demonstrating that structured reflection on difficult events consolidates professional identity and builds anticipatory coping (23, 27).

Methodologically, our mixed-methods, arts-based design supports accumulating evidence that integration across visual, narrative, and quantitative strands enhances both discovery and knowledge translation (9). The *Ethnogram*-style visualization we adapted to represent talk/movement patterns during micro-teaching made interactional dynamics legible to participants and reviewers alike, consistent with arguments for visual analytics in classroom research (17). Likewise, the use of photo-elicitation to revisit ethical and relational dilemmas echoes earlier work in primary settings and offers a replicable scaffold for teacher education seminars (13, 33). Our adaption of graphic vignettes for sensitive topics such as bullying and conflict further corroborates the feasibility and ethical value of arts-based elicitation for discussing emotionally charged content (35). Beyond method, the present results affirm calls to weave arts into the *core* of initial teacher education rather than positioning them as

peripheral enrichment (36, 42). When designed with attention to pacing, facilitation, and assessment, such integration appears compatible with existing curricula and with system-level priorities on teacher capacity and student outcomes (7, 44).

Our findings also intersect with community resilience and disaster-education literatures that recognize teachers as linchpins of social recovery. Participants who engaged in scenario-based, arts-supported planning depicted themselves as connectors of affective climates in classrooms and communities—a role emphasized in reviews of community-based interventions highlighting teacher resilience as a public good (8). Framing the arts not only as self-care but as civic practice helps reconcile personal well-being with professional responsibility, a synthesis consistent with broad historical treatments of happiness and purpose in human development (2). Finally, the affective and cognitive payoffs we observed converge with global reports of teacher well-being initiatives across the career span and within EFL/ESL ecologies, underscoring the transferability of arts-supported approaches across linguistic and institutional boundaries (3, 4, 29).

Taken together, the evidence supports three claims. First, arts-based reflection is not merely expressive but *epistemic*, generating new professional knowledge while reorganizing affect and attention (10, 46). Second, the benefits to well-being and resilience are likely mediated by identity consolidation and self-efficacy gains, catalyzed through embodied, visual, and dialogic mechanisms (20, 31, 32). Third, implementation succeeds when socially and culturally attuned—integrated into PD architectures that leverage peer witnessing, local narratives, and, where appropriate, complementary AI/video tools (28, 41, 44). These conclusions align with and extend prior work across arts-based inquiry, teacher education, and positive psychology (5, 11, 12, 48).

Limitations. This study relied on volunteer participants who may have been dispositionally receptive to arts-based reflection, limiting generalizability to cohorts less comfortable with creative practices. The intervention dose and facilitation quality may also have influenced outcomes; variability in facilitator expertise is difficult to standardize and could confound effects attributed to the arts component. While we combined artifact analysis, interviews, and quantitative indicators, causal inferences remain tentative without experimental controls and longer follow-up. Self-report measures, even when triangulated, are susceptible to social desirability and demand characteristics. Finally, institutional constraints (time, assessment pressures) shaped participation patterns; some teachers produced fewer artifacts, reducing our ability to analyze change trajectories across the entire sample.

Suggestions for future research. Subsequent studies should test comparative designs that pit arts-integrated reflection against well-specified active controls (e.g., cognitive reappraisal training without visual production) to isolate unique mechanisms. Longitudinal, multi-wave designs over semesters or induction years could examine durability and the timing of gains in efficacy, satisfaction, and resilience. Measurement innovations are also needed: develop rubrics for artifact-based indicators of identity coherence, and pair them with fine-grained behavioral markers (e.g., interactional moves in classroom video). Given the promise of hybrid formats, trials should examine the synergy between AI-assisted micro-analysis of classroom footage and human-facilitated, arts-based meaning-making. Cross-cultural replications in multilingual contexts can test transferability and equity impacts, including effects on teachers serving minoritized communities. Finally, cost-effectiveness analyses and implementation studies in teacher-education programs and districts would inform scaling and policy uptake.

Suggestions for practice. Integrate arts-based reflection as a standing, credit-bearing strand in pre-service curricula and induction programs, with scheduled studio sessions tied to practicum cycles. Train facilitators to guide artifact creation and critique, emphasizing psychological safety, ethical storytelling, and actionable transfer to lesson design. Pair video-based reflection with aesthetic annotation to help novices “see” interactional moments and rehearse alternatives. Use forum-theatre or role-play to prototype responses to critical incidents and to build collective repertoires. Scaffold self-efficacy by prompting teachers to translate each artifact into one concrete practice change and a brief implementation plan. Build communities of

practice that exhibit and discuss artifacts across cohorts, normalizing vulnerability and shared problem-solving. Align assessment with growth by evaluating reflective depth and principled experimentation rather than artistic polish. Finally, secure leadership support and timetable protection so that creative reflection is not an add-on but a core driver of professional learning and well-being.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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