Research paper

Sustainable positive psychology interventions enhance primary teachers' wellbeing and beyond — A qualitative case study in England

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) may help to enhance teacher wellbeing.
- Teacher wellbeing is a multi-faceted construct, including subjective and psychological wellbeing in professional-and-personal contexts.
- This study addresses the experienced challenges of applying PPIs, enabling teachers to develop sustainable wellbeing.
- Findings show PPIs enhanced teachers emotional, relational and work-related wellbeing.
- Further recommendations to tackle challenges of sustainable teacher wellbeing programmes and professional development are offered.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) have become an influential approach to foster teacher wellbeing; however, little research addresses the critiques and sustainability of PPIs. This study investigated teacher experiences of PPIs and the impact on their wellbeing in professional and personal contexts. Qualitative data were collected using multi-methods in a primary school in two settings: staff-meetings with 21 teachers and a self-interest group with 9 teachers. Results showed practising PPIs enhanced teachers' wellbeing multidimensionally and produced positive impacts on others. The challenges experienced and plans for sustainable actions were identified. Insights into sustainable teacher wellbeing programmes and professional development are offered.

1. Introduction

Evidence suggests that enhancing teacher wellbeing will improve teacher retention (Grant et al., 2019) and promote school success (Briner & Dewberry, 2007). Teaching responsibilities have become increasingly complex, causing a global concern about teachers' wellbeing, competence, retention, stress, depression and anxiety (Grant et al., 2019; Grenville-Cleave & Boniwell, 2012; See et al., 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Since the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers' roles have become even more influential in student success and wellbeing, and are critical to the effectiveness of any school wide improvement, carrying enormous social and economic implications globally (Gouëdard et al., 2020; Varadharajan, 2020). However, with the increasing workload and societal expectations, supporting teachers to maintain and enhance

their own wellbeing is vital. For example, in the UK teacher population, a national survey (n = 3354) revealed that 77% experienced poor mental health symptoms due to their work; 72% were stressed; 46% continued to work whilst feeling unwell; 42% felt the organisation's culture negatively influenced their wellbeing; and 54% considered to leave their profession (Education Support Partnership, 2021). This shows there is a pressing need for more guidance and support regarding mental health and wellbeing at work for teachers.

In many countries where teacher shortages are experienced (e.g., the UK and the US), provisions and policy initiatives have focused on providing continuous professional development (CPD) and improving working conditions in order to address recruitment and retention issues (See et al., 2020). Both approaches are seen as beneficial to students and teachers' performance and wellbeing (See et al., 2020). Therefore, it is imperative to identify professional development which supports teacher wellbeing because their healthy wellbeing substantially impacts effective teaching and

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learning, and positive school climate (McCallum et al., 2017; Paterson & Grantham, 2016).

Recently, positive psychology interventions (PPIs) have been recommended as strategies for teacher retention and development (De Stercke, et al., 2015). In addition, PPIs have been found to enhance teacher wellbeing and school climate indirectly by focusing on developing student wellbeing within classes (Froh et al., 2008) or whole-school practices (e.g., Green et al., 2012). PPIs are defined as "practices, methods, programmes or activities that aim at cultivating positive feelings, positive behaviours, or positive cognitions" (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 467). Rather than focusing narrowly on repairing pathological functioning (e.g., reducing anxiety and stress) from the medical model, PPIs have been developed to also enhance wellbeing with an emphasis on supporting the development of both individual and organisational strengths from a salutogenic approach (Parks & Biswas-diener, 2013; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009) by enhancing positive aspects of human experience, such as wellbeing, optimism, happiness, strengths, and creativity (Joseph & Sagy, 2022; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). For example, instead of targeting depressive symptoms, exercising practices that increase positive emotions, engagement and meaning help depressed individuals to speed up the recovery and bounce back from physiological effects of negative emotions (Seligman et al., 2006).

However, school PPI programme initiatives to improve well-being often focus on enhancing students' wellbeing and do not prioritise teachers' perspectives and experiences of the pro-grammes and, where teachers' wellbeing is neglected, resistance to PPIs may arise, affecting the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017). To address this issue, this study examines teacher experiences of PPIs and the impact on their wellbeing in professional and personal contexts. The challenges, resistance and sustainable application of PPIs from teachers' per-spectives are also considered. The following sections present the theoretical background on the importance of teacher wellbeing and recent research on PPIs enhancing teacher wellbeing. The current case study designed by adapting Seligman's (2011) PERMA model of flourishing (positive emotions, engagement, relationship, meaning, and achievement) is also presented, followed by findings, discus-sion, recommendations and conclusion.

2. Theoretical background

This section focuses on the importance of teacher wellbeing and PPIs aimed at its enhancement.

2.1. The importance of teacher wellbeing

In recent decades, teacher wellbeing has received increasing attention globally as it is related not only to teachers themselves but also to students, schools, communities and society (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Teacher wellbeing is powerfully related to the quality of work effectiveness, student wellbeing and performance (Center for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE], 2014; McCallum et al., 2017; Paterson & Grantham, 2016). In the UK, student SAT (Standard Assessment Test) scores varied depending on the level of teacher wellbeing; stronger teacher wellbeing led to better student performance (Briner & Dewberry, 2007). Socially and emotionally competent teachers with a high degree of wellbeing were associ-ated with a positive school climate and desired student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser et al., 2012), whereas, depressed teachers were associated with negative pedagogies (McLean et al., 2018), poor learning environment, and weaker students' academic performance (Mclean & Connor, 2015), as they paid more attention to their personal survival rather than

supporting students' achievements (Bernaus et al., 2009).

Most educational research has investigated teacher wellbeing indirectly through the lens of stress, burnout and competence (e.g., Gold et al., 2010; Ross et al., 2012; Shankland & Rosset, 2017), teacher-student relationship (Spilt et al., 2011), work-life balance and work-life conflicts (Bell et al., 2012). For example, Pillay et al. (2005) showed that pressure from work practices and environ-ments increased the levels of teacher attrition and stress, and reduced teacher competence and wellbeing. A few studies emphasised the strong influence of student-teacher relationship on teachers' work performance and personal life (Spilt et al., 2011) and wellbeing (McCallum & Price, 2010, 2016). A vast body of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) research for educators provided evidence that practising attention awareness helped teachers to gain insights into how their minds may respond to their environment, manage stress, and improve their wellbeing (e.g., see Jennings et al. (2013) for Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) and Taylor et al. (2016) for Stress Management and Relaxation Training (SMART). Some research defined teacher wellbeing as subjective wellbeing through measuring school-life quality and burnout levels (Cenkseven-Önder & Sari, 2009), school connectedness, teaching efficacy (Renshaw et al., 2015) and work-life balance (Bell et al., 2012).

The above literature implies that teacher wellbeing is associated with various factors due to its multidimensional nature (Collie et al., 2015; McCallum et al., 2017). Meanings of teacher well-being are interpreted differently depending on how the term is applied within an educational issue (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008). Aelterman et al. (2007) defined teacher wellbeing as 'a positive emotional state, which is the result of harmony between the sum of specific environmental factors on the one hand, and the personal needs and expectations of teachers on the other hand (p. 286)'. This definition is aligned with the subjective wellbeing that illustrates the hedonic or emotional states of wellbeing in terms of 'experi-encing a high level of positive affect, a low level of negative affect and a high degree of satisfaction with one's life' (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 1). From an occupational perspective, Acton and Glasgow (2015, p. 102) defined teacher wellbeing as a 'sense of personal profes-sional fulfilment, satisfaction, purposefulness and happiness, con-structed in a collaborative process with colleagues and students. This definition covers subjective wellbeing as well as eudaimonic/ psychological wellbeing, focusing on the thriving aspects of teachers' professional life and achievement, and seeing wellbeing as a process of actualising human potential (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Waterman, 1993). These definitions demonstrate that teacher wellbeing is interrelated with both personal and organisational characteristics as a teacher (Cotton & Hart, 2003). In other words, teacher wellbeing is associated with both personal and professional work contexts or the interference of them (Bell et al., 2012). However, few studies have examined teacher wellbeing through the lens of both professional and personal circumstances. In the current study, teacher wellbeing is considered broadly as encom-passing both subjective and psychological wellbeing within pro-fessional and personal contexts which reflects the complex nature of teacher wellbeing directly.

In addition, previous literature examining "how" to support teacher wellbeing across professional and personal contexts is sparse. Providing strategies and guidance to maintain and enhance teacher wellbeing may support them to develop skills in managing challenges, demands and pressures (McCallum & Price, 2010; Roffey, 2012; Zinsser et al., 2016), leading to improved retention (Grant et al., 2019), particularly in the current Covid-19 climate (Simmons United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2020; Cullinane & Montacute, 2020; Varadharajan, 2020). PPI may help to address this issue.

2.2. Positive psychology interventions enhance teacher wellbeing

Recent research has demonstrated PPIs have promising impact on both student and teacher wellbeing and mental health (e.g., Hwang et al., 2017; Shankland & Rosset, 2017; Soini et al., 2010; Wessels & Wood, 2019). Since Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) promoted the significance of positive psychology, utilising PPIs in educational settings focuses on fostering the positive sides of mental health and wellbeing through school-based psychological interventions (Dawood, 2013; Shankland & Rosset, 2017; Waters, 2012). However, the majority of the school-based PPI research focused on developing and supporting student well-being (e.g., Froh et al., 2008; Green et al., 2012). Only a few provided direct evidence that PPIs enhanced teacher wellbeing (e.g., Shankland & Rosset, 2017; Turner & Theilking, 2019; Waters, 2012; Wessels & Wood, 2019).

One popular approach of PPIs to enhance teacher wellbeing is Seligman's (2011) PERMA model of flourishing, emphasizing that individual wellbeing can be developed through the elements of positive emotion, engagement, positive relationship, meaning and accomplishment. Within this model, Seligman defined that positive emotion is individual subjective feelings of happiness and life satisfaction, such as joy and gratitude. Engagement is the state of individuals being absorbed in a task which they find interesting. Positive relationship refers to the desire to seek out and maintain positive relationships with others. The element of meaning is obtaining a sense of belonging to and serving something greater than oneself. Accomplishment is motivation to achieve, master and be competent. Wessels and Wood (2019) adapted PERMA module to design PPIs aimed to promote teacher wellbeing. They reported how actively participating in PPIs had improved social connections with colleagues, increased frequency of positive emotions and wellbeing. In a similar vein, Turner and Theilking (2019) found out when teachers consciously applied PERMA positive psychology strategies, their teaching practices and students learning improved.

However, there is a lack of empirical research addressing the critiques of positive psychology, such as over emphasizing 'positive' experiences (Fernandez-Rios & Vilarino, 2016), and 'polarising positive-negative dichotomy' (Lomas, 2016, p. 536) or identifying why positive psychology 'won't stick' in educational systems (White, 2016). The above philosophical critiques of PPIs reveal the importance of conducting empirical research to examine teachers' negative experiences of PPIs and providing insights into sustainable school wellbeing initiatives.

In addition, there have been critiques in past research regarding cost and commitment in PPIs implementation (Shankland & Rosset, 2017; White, 2016). They were usually run by costly trained experts; and teachers often felt overwhelmed by spending extra time and effort to implement them. Successful implementation of PPIs requires school staff initiatives, engagement and commitment at all levels. Therefore, PPIs should be designed to be easily applied in the school setting to suit teachers' needs associated with fast-paced work life. Following PERMA model of flourishing (Seligman, 2011), Shankland and Rosset (2017, p. 365) promoted 'brief school-based positive psychology interventions (BPPIs)' designed for implementation in the school setting without extensive need for time, materials or expertise. They can be easily applied by individual teachers within the existing routines.

In order to provide an authentic account to address the barriers of implementing PPIs from teachers' perspectives, the current study adapted the PERMA model of flourishing (Seligman, 2011) and Shankland and Rosset's (2017) principles of BPPIs to tailor the PPIs for the case study school.

The aim of this study is to investigate teachers' experiences of PPIs in relation to their wellbeing in professional and personal life, what barriers they encountered and how they responded to challenges. The research questions are.

- What are the benefits of applying PPIs relating to teachers' wellbeing in work and personal life contexts?
- What are the challenges in applying these PPIs?
- What actions do teachers take to apply the PPIs sustainably?

3. Methodology

This session discusses the PPI design and the case study rationale, as well as the processes of data collection and analysis.

3.1. School context and PPIs design

The case study was carried out in a South-West England primary school with 235 students aged 3-11 years-old and 54 staff. The school had an open-minded approach to supporting teacher wellbeing prior to this case study. Through CPD, staff had been introduced to other wellbeing initiatives such as mindfulness programmes. The lead-teacher (LT) was an experienced PPI practitioner who actively sought opportunities to introduce PPIs to colleagues. The LT and the researchers met via professional networks.

Fig. 1 illustrates the design and timeline of the tailored PPIs. At the development phase, the researchers collaborated with the LT, who sought the agreement with the school's senior leaders and teachers to explore the feasibility, commitment and expectations to implement PPIs. Following discussions between the researchers and the LT over 3 months, the PPI programmes were collaboratively designed by considering relevant theories, the existing school schedule, staff interests and availability. The next phase involved implementation in two settings over 4 months (See Table 1), including three stages: 1) introducing the PPI initiatives so teachers could choose their level of participation; 2) implementing the PPIs in two different settings; and 3) reflecting on what had been introduced to them. Data were collected throughout all three stages (See Section 3.2). The evaluation phase involved data analysis. Finally, a report was produced to communicate the outcomes of PPIs to the school.

Table 1 presents the design, setting, length, duration and content of the PPIs. Overall, the tailored programme adapted Seligman's (2011) PERMA model of flourishing and incorporated Shankland and Rosset's (2017) recommendations of BPPIs which could be implemented with minimal demands on time, materials or expertise. It represented a general wellbeing intervention, encompassing a variety of activities (e.g., gratitude letters, savouring practices and mindful meditation).
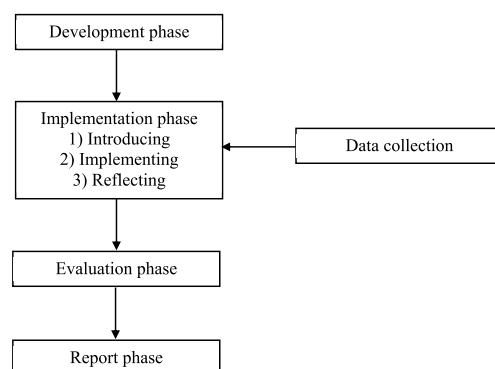

Fig. 1. The design of the tailored PPIs in the case study.

Table 1
The tailored Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs).

Setting	Staff-meeting	Self-interest group
Length (per session)	5−10 min	45−50 min
Durations	7 Weeks	8 Weeks
Content	– *Flipping the lid*	– *Positive emotions*
	– *Mindfulness meditation (Part 1): savouring and visualisation*	– *Engagement*
	– *Growth mindset (Part 1)*	– *Relationships*
	– *Growth mindset (Part 2)*	– *Focus group discussion (1)*
	– *Mindful breathing*	– *Meaning*
	– *Gratitude*	– *Achievement*
	– *Mindfulness meditation (Part 2): FOFBOC (Feet on Floor, Bum on Chair)*	– *Mindfulness*
		– *Focus group discussion (2)*

By considering the time limitation and teachers' commitments, each setting had its own design and emphasis. Within staff-meeting intervention, the design focused on brief introduction to theories and short practices commonly used in positive psychology, including *Flipping Your lid* by Dan Siegel (Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education, 2012), *Growth mindset* (Dweck, 2015, 2017), *Mindfulness meditation (*e.g.*, savouring* and *visualisation), Mindfulness breathing*, and *Gratitude* (e.g., *a gratitude tree*). In each session, teachers were encouraged to use the introduced concept and practices in their personal and professional lives. For example, in the mindfulness breathing session, the content of breath counting was introduced briefly first, then teachers were encouraged to be aware of the movement of their own breath, and count their breaths from 1 to 9 repeatedly. Five-finger breathing exercise was also introduced as a home practice. These breath counting techniques were found to improve mindfulness (Levinson et al., 2014).

In the self-interest group intervention, an eight-week PPIs course was designed for teachers in the same school who wished to take part voluntarily. This short course was developed based on Seligman's (2011) PERMA model, including *Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning, Achievement* and an additional *Mindfulness*. Each of these six sessions consisted of an introduction to a basic theoretical concept, a few easy in-session activities and suggestions for home practices. For example, in *Relationship* session, the concept of *Active-constructive responding* (Passmore & Oades, 2014) and the practice of *Spotting strengths* (e.g., writing a positive comment to each participating colleague) were introduced within the session, then an encouragement to apply this practice with others in their personal and professional lives. Two focus group discussion sessions were designed within the short course in the fourth and the final week to encourage participants' reflections on the introduced practices and for the researchers to evaluate and gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences of PPIs.

3.2. Rationale of the case study

A qualitative case study was conducted to investigate teachers' experiences of PPIs in relation to their wellbeing in work and life contexts. This enabled the researchers to explore a social phenomenon through a wide range of data sources and lenses so as to uncover multiple facets of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Rashid et al., 2019), which is resonant with the multifaceted nature of teacher wellbeing. The qualitative data collection methods were chosen because teacher's experiences regarding their wellbeing and the PPIs programme can be subjectively and relationally constructed. Hence, the philosophical foundation of this study is interpretivism with an ontological nature in relativism, seeing realities as relative and multiple, and with an epistemological perspective of seeing realities as socially and subjectively constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Multiple data sources were used as

a strategy to allow triangulation (Yin, 2009), and bring richness and rigor to the study (Rashid et al., 2019). Research ethics clearance was granted by the institutional research ethics committee, ensuring the case study adhered to the ethics requirements, including participation consent, voluntary nature of participation, and anonymity.

3.3. Participants and data collection

Empirical data were collected through multiple sources at three stages of the implementation phase (see Fig. 1 and Table 2). Consent was acquired and agreed upon prior to data collection. At the introducing stage, 21 out of 54 members (14 females, the mean age 42 years) volunteered to take part in the staff-meeting setting and/ or self-interested group setting. Data were collected using a pre-implementation feedback sheet, collecting demographic data and asking staff to describe their views and experiences of positive psychology, their wellbeing and what areas of their work and personal lives they would like to improve (e.g., How satisfied are you in different areas of your work and personal lives?).

Next, PPIs in two different settings were implemented. In the staff-meeting setting, PPIs were introduced at the end of the staff meeting by the LT to blend into their work schedule, and other staff who were not participants could join in based on their own discretion. To avoid participation burden in the tight schedule, 1) written feedback in response to one open-ended question (i.e., what was your feedback to this activity?) from the participants; and 2) an observational feedback sheet (e.g., How did the session went? What were participants' responses?) from the LT were collected weekly. In the self-interest group setting, 9 teachers (6 females; the mean age 37 years) participated in the 8-week course and data were collected using 1) individual weekly reflection sheets (e.g., please describe one situation that you have used one practice/exercise/idea introduced this week.); 2) two focus group discussions (The general reflections on the focus of each session were revisited, followed by questions asking participants to describe their experiences and barriers to apply the introduced practices.); and 3) LT's weekly feedback sheets (e.g., within this session, please describe what went well and what did not.). Finally, at the reflecting stage, a post-implementation meeting was carried out and data were collected through 1) feedback sheets (e.g., What are the overall benefits of these positive psychology practices for your work and life?) and 2) one focus group discussion with 12 teachers who took part in either of the two settings to capture reflective experiences of PPIs participation as a whole (8 females; the mean age 43 years); and 3) semi-structured interviews with two participants who took park in both settings, and the LT). The focus group discussions and semi-structed interviews were guided by open-ended questions related to the three research questions (i.e., benefits, challenges, and further actions). All focus groups and interviews were audio recorded. To ensure the voluntary nature of this study, teachers

Table 2
Multiple sources of data collection in the implementation phase.

	Type of data collection	
Stage	Staff-meeting setting	Self-interest group setting
Introducing		− Pre-implementation feedback sheet
Implementing	− Weekly written feedback	− Weekly reflection sheet
		−2 Focus group discussions (45 min)
	− LT weekly feedback sheet	− LT weekly feedback sheet
Reflecting		− Post-implementation feedback sheet
		− Focus group discussion (45 min)
		− Semi-structured interviews (30−45 min)

were reminded that they did not need to return any written feedback unwillingly, and all individual written-form data were collected in a sealed envelope to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

3.4. Data analysis

All data were analysed using thematic analysis (Bryman, 2016). All audio recorded data were transcribed and each type of dataset was organised in the Microsoft Excel systematically by its type (e.g., group discussion, weekly evaluation sheet and interview). A series of analysis processes began, starting with opening coding, categorisation, and identifying themes. Firstly, each type of text was read and texts relating to teacher wellbeing in work and life experiences were marked according to the three research questions: benefits, challenges, and follow-up actions. Then, text-based codes were generated for each type of data. All codes across the dataset collected from different data sources were reviewed and compared, categorised, recategorized until the themes emerged and refined as presented in the next sections (4.1, 4.2 and 4.3). The trustworthiness of the study was enhanced by the triangulation utilising multiple sources of data (Hwang et al., 2017) and detailed description about the design of the PPIs to enable transferability and dependability (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004).

4. Findings and discussion

The findings are presented with discussions in the following sections and are representative of teachers' experienced benefits, challenges and plans for sustainable actions in relation to their wellbeing in work and personal life contexts.

4.1. The experienced benefits

The benefits of PPIs reported by the participants included improvement to emotional and social wellbeing, as well as improved work-life balance and work practices.

4.1.1. Regulating emotions improved emotional wellbeing
The strongest and most frequently reported benefits of PPIs experienced by the participants was related to the subjective emotional dimension of teacher wellbeing. They experienced an obvious change in managing and regulating their negative emotions (e.g., reduced *stress*) and cultivating positive emotions (e.g., *enjoyment*).

The participants shared two powerful stories that the introduced PPIs: *Visualisation*, *flipping your lid* and *mindful breathing* helped to regulate their negative emotions and enhance their emotional wellbeing within work and home circumstances:

To reduce stress … when I drive home … I'm imagining what it's like for them (my kids) to run towards me and have cuddles … that's just a little technique … but somehow it's helpful … (Male T1).

I used to argue the toss with them (my kids) and never got anywhere … With mindfulness and just staying calm … Breathing helps there and just thinking, don't argue, don't retaliate, …when they've calmed down, then maybe have a chat afterwards. (Male T2)

Applying the PPIs: S*avouring, visualisation, and gratitude* helped to cultivate their positive emotions, including enjoyment, appreciation and gratefulness. Overall, the participants reported that they were 'being more present', 'enjoying and appreciating' (a) things (e.g., food, lighting a log fire, school environmental resources, and nature) (b) people (e.g., family members, colleagues, friends and students); around them; and (c) actions they did (e.g., walking and teaching) within both work and home contexts.

Some teachers went 'beyond' applying PPIs to themselves and introduced them to their students to also benefit from: (a) *Mindful breathing* to 'calming them before home time'; (b) *Flipping your lid* to manage students' emotions and behaviours in and outside the classrooms 'when conflicts happened between students'; and (c) *Gratitude* to create a 'gratitude board in the classroom' to encourage students to 'think of happy memory in PE lesson' and to 'thank pupils for helping with lessons'. In addition, *visualisation* to anticipate and savour the future feelings helped to boost up the positive spirit within the teacher and his students:

I asked the kids visualising everything that they were looking forward to (a two-night camping trip) and there was a surprisingly long list and actually suddenly the term ahead didn't seem quite daunting so that was a nice way to savour the future. (Male T5)

The participants' experiences of PPIs in regulating negative emotions and increasing positive emotions are consistent with other relevant mindfulness-based intervention literature. For instance, mindfulness practices helped to create boundaries and segmentations, separating life domains between work and home and improving work-life balance (Althammer et al., 2021), and reduced reduce teachers stress (Beshai et al., 2016; Gold et al., 2010). *Flipping your lid* concept supported teachers to cultivate awareness and resilience, avoiding stress and burnout (Sharp & Jennings, 2016). *Savouring* reduced teachers' stress and depression level (Taylor, 2018) and emotional wellbeing (Mercer et al., 2016). *Mindful breathing* as practices to improve teacher wellbeing were welcomed by preservice teachers who found the practice enjoyable and helpful for themselves and children to calm down in stressful situations (Beers Dewhirst & Goldman, 2020). *Gratitude* exercises enhanced subjective wellbeing (Liao & Weng, 2018), physical and psychological wellbeing (Lai & O'Carroll, 2017), teachers' wellbeing (Lottman et al., 2017). *Appreciation*, defined as 'the perception of deeper meaning, the feeling of being moved, and the motivation to elaborate on thoughts and feelings inspired by the experience' (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, p. 76), helped to create a culture of peace and enhance wellbeing (Campos & Willenberg, 2018). Teachers being able to regulate their emotions has a direct impact not only on their own wellbeing, personal development and improving high-quality work environment (Yin, 2016), but also their students' emotional awareness and wellbeing (Swartz & McElwain, 2012).

4.1.2. Strengthened social relationships and social wellbeing

Practising PPIs was reported to have improved the participants' social wellbeing in terms of their interactions and relationships with family members, work colleagues and students in both work and personal lives. For example, they reported that expressing *Gratitude* using simple actions (e.g., 'a thank you letter') had a positive impact on their own emotional and social wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of others around them.

Active-constructive responding (Gable et al., 2006; Passmore & Oades, 2014) introduced in the *Relationship* session of the self-interest group intervention, and *Growth-mindset* (Dweck, 2015, 2017) had helped their interactions with students, changing the way how they managed students' undesired behaviours and encouraged a trust relationship with students. For example, one participant expressed that 'What a culture this has encouraged a relationship that … even if they have done something wrong, they can still come to me' (Male T2).

The participants realised the reciprocal benefits of showing *Gratitude* and *Spotting strength* with their colleagues, helping them to value and appreciate each other more than they used to expect:

> It bounces off each other. It's sort of encouraging other people to come out as well, so you feel good about yourself by giving somebody a boost and then you get something back, sometimes unexpectedly. (Female T1)

> I think it's not the kind of thing that people normally tell each other … So that was a good example of gratitude and positive relationships being kind of developed through communication. (Male T3).

This growth of relationships amongst colleagues in the case study school was emphasised by the lead-teacher confirming the tailored PPIs remarkably helped the participants to build social connections with each other, to appreciate the strengths of one another, and to recognise their own strengths. One teacher expressed deep dissatisfaction within her work relationships (See section 4.2.3 Experiencing negativities), others were able to support her to resolve the issue by suggesting to create extra time for colleagues, such as 'get together in holidays and outside of school time' and 'book time with colleagues intentionally'.

The PPIs provided the participants the means and opportunities to enhance and reflect on their personal social networks, collegial relationships and student-teacher relationship at work, which normally are not easy to be nurtured particularly at the workplace, however, important to their meaning making in life and flourishing wellbeing (Mansfield et al., 2016; Seligman, 2011), especially teachers' work-related wellbeing (Price & McCallum, 2015). More recently, the student-teacher relationship, often neglected in teacher wellbeing research (Braun et al., 2019; Spilt et al., 2011), is considered as an important influencer to teachers' emotional wellbeing and personal accomplishment (Corbin et al., 2019). In addition, establishing positive professional relationships with work colleagues can help to (a) foster teacher resilience (Mansfield et al., 2016); (b) enhance teacher wellbeing and establish networks of emotional support (Buonomo et al., 2017; De Cordova et al., 2019); and (c) develop effective working community where the collective strengths can be built to identify problems and create potential solutions (Acton & Glasgow, 2015). In alignment with the case study, practicing PPIs helped teachers to discover the importance of having a communal space to bond with colleagues, enhancing their emotional and relational wellbeing mutually (Wessels & Wood, 2019).

4.1.3. Improved work-life balance and work practices

The participants reported that *mindfulness practices* helped to reduce stress from work, improve work practice and improve work-life balance and work-related wellbeing:

> Stress carries over into the home as well as at school. Having that bit of time to sit down and then talk to my wife, hold my son – being aware I've still got all this stuff … then when I did go into the work emails, I was much calmer about it … it gives me the confidence to actually prioritise yourself and your family's needs … The course has made me much more aware of not separating the two halves of my life – work and home but actually to integrate them more. (Male T5).

Applying *Growth mindset* principles, the participants helped to encourage their students' engagement in their learning by (a) using more frequent 'positive and active constructive listening, feedback and comments'; (b) using 'praises of effort rather than outcomes'; (c) permitting students to 'grade themselves on the degree of their effort'; (d) use 'the *power of 'yet'* at the end of certain sentences'; and (e) to 'learn from the mistakes'.

Strikingly, the impact of PPIs on teachers' work practices went 'beyond' the immediate school setting and extended to a wider community through the teacher-parent communication. Applying the concept of *Growth mindset* about students' growth in parent evenings had opened up a new channel of communication between the participants and their students' parents, and generated a ripple effect on a wider community:

> Two of them (parents) have taken it (the growth mindset chart) to the next schools their children are going to, sat down with the other teachers and said: Look! this *(fixed mindset)* is my child at the moment, this *(growth mindset)* is what they're going towards; just so you have an understanding of my child … (Male T2)

In additional, notable evidence from the participants showed that concepts learnt from *engagement, achievement* and *growth-mindset* had helped them to 'be more mindful of the flow moment during marking, teaching and planning the lessons' and 'enjoy the challenge and pace myself', 'try hard and try your best, looking at achievement'.

The PPIs helped the participants to improve work-life balance, work practices (e.g., teacher-parents communication, students' engagements in learning) and work engagement. Correspondingly, PPIs increased overall job satisfaction and work engagement (Dreer, 2020), teaching performances and teaching activities (Hwang et al., 2017). Reduced daily fluctuations in work/family conflicts would help teachers to maintain a work-life balance which further enhanced teachers' work engagement, job satisfaction and mental wellbeing (Simbula, 2010). Teachers' understanding and practices of *growth mindset* certainly related to their engagement with work and wellbeing in relation to students learning and teacher-parent communication. As shown in the current case study, therefore, the application of *growth-mindset* will encourage future school improvement (Zeng et al., 2019).

The benefits of applying PPIs in the current case study had gone 'beyond' the scope of teacher wellbeing itself, corresponding to other research showing that the improved teacher-parent communication profoundly influence students' academic achievement and wellbeing (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013), and teachers' work engagement led to the best teaching practices associated with students' engagement for learning (Cardwell, 2011).

4.2. The experienced challenges

The challenges reported by the participants included resistance, lack of sufficient time or familiarity, and negative experiences.

4.2.1. Resistance and unacceptance

The acceptance level of practicing the introduced PPIs within the case study school was varied depending on the individual teachers. The participants expressed that lower acceptance from others hindered the potential positive effects they could have experienced as a group:

> It's just this little group … they don't wanna hear it … I suppose one of the barriers is actually if not everybody's reading from the same page, however positive you are, you just get on their nerves (Male T1)

Those who practiced the interventions felt resistance amongst their interactions with each other. In addition, despite the case study being introduced with an emphasis of its voluntary nature to take part, some teachers reported concern about the loss of their weekly staff meeting time and the feelings of being "forced". The same reflection was found from the LT who was torn in her dual roles as a senior leader and the instructor of PPIs at the staff-meeting setting as she expressed that 'I have a lot of deadlines and things like that I have to email out to the staff but then on the other hand I'm really keen to help with the staff wellbeing'. When asking about how to overcome this barrier, she reflected that 'I thought it was actually better that she (another colleague) organised it rather than it coming from me'.

Although the lead teacher tried her best to help in the design and implementation of PPIs to run smoothly, her position as a senior member of staff may have been a source of resistance by some of her colleagues. Identifying the actual reasons of the resistance and unacceptance may help to reduce the challenges because participants' motivation is one important factor for successful implementations of educational interventions (Hwang et al., 2017). It should be noted that the underlying reasons behind resistance and unacceptance could be due to individual differences such as personality (Boyce & Wood, 2011; Senf & Liau, 2013) and motivations (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011).

4.2.2. Lack of time, forgetting and unfamiliarity

'Finding time' and 'forgetting to practice' the PPIs were common phrases expressed by the majority of the teachers when asked about what challenges them to practice PPIs. They felt the time constraints and pressure in work and life circumstances, so sometimes they 'forgot' to practice. The LT observed that this barrier was related to the perception of time:

> I really tried to emphasise that you actually only needed about a minute so it wasn't something that needed to take a lot of time. And actually, by taking that time, it would then mean that you ended up with more time. (LT)

Indeed, the participants reported some PPIs required longer time to comprehend and familiar with the techniques, such as *character strengths* introduced in the *Achievement* session, and *Meaning* session in the self-interest group interventions. In addition, they also reported that the skills of *mindful breathing, visualisation* and encouraging *growth-mindset* required more 'practices over a prolonged period in order to experience the benefit'.

An appropriate time duration is necessary for good habits to be developed sustainably and everyone may vary in terms of time

needed to develop them (Lally et al., 2010). Hwang et al. (2017) pointed out that substantial and prolonged practice is necessary to support teachers to develop new habits which are good for their wellbeing, such as mindfulness. The degree of acceptance and willingness is dependent upon the degree of the familiarity of the techniques and their related knowledge. Truly, obtaining relevant knowledge is influential to taking intentional actions (Lekan, 2007). Without enough time to allow acquiring clear conceptual and practical knowledge of PPIs, there will be a lack of acceptance and intentional actions as participants' practice-related experiences, knowledge and motivations are important to successful implementation (Hwang et al., 2017).

4.2.3. Experiencing negativities

Not all participants' experiences of PPIs were positive when experiencing fatigue, and highlighted negativities when they were asked what had challenged them the most:

> As the term goes on, you know your patience evaporates and you begin to think more negatively. I just think that sheer fatigue is the thing that erodes it the most … (Female T2)

> The things which are negative are still there … Just feeling positive is not necessarily what's going to help those things. And so, I just don't want to brush over those negative things — they have to be dealt with and that's my one query about all of this … (Male T3)

In addition, the PPIs somehow triggered negative feelings in some occasions as the participants became more aware of the dissatisfaction in some areas of their lives. For example, during the session of *Relationship* in the self-interest group setting, one teacher realised her dissatisfaction within the work relationship and started a series of deep conversations and discussions with others, reflecting on the busy work schedule, and reduced time and space for social connections with work colleagues:

> So, it actually made me feel much worse about myself … because I realised, I wasn't very satisfied with my job and my life … which was awful … I'm sorry to say that, because it was supposed to be a positive psychology but my honest answer … actually it just made me really aware that I don't get enough time to form proper relationships … (Female T3).

Then another teacher responded: In some ways, although it felt like a negative thing, isn't realising that in the long run perhaps a positive thing, because you perhaps think of trying to find ways of changing that? (Male T2).

The participants' conversations moved on to focusing on addressing the ways in which this colleague may be supported and how to improve relationships at their workplace. This point is elaborated in the next Section: Plans for sustainable actions.

Indeed, the teachers' reflections on the fatigue of being positive all the time and the necessity to deal with the negatives resonate the critiques of positive psychology. Positive psychology has been criticised as being overemphasizing on the 'positive' experiences and implying that the 'negative' experiences were undesirable so should be avoided (Fernandez-Rios & Vilarino, 2016), and as 'polarising positive-negative dichotomy' (Lomas, 2016, p. 536). In early development of positive psychology, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) had warned of not relying on the emphasis of cultivating the positive experiences solely, but must also be able to use the negatives to create positive outcomes to personal growth (Ivtzan et al., 2015). The conversations amongst the participants appeared to be open and authentic, indicating that

the PPIs triggered a series of deep and meaningful reflections amongst the teachers about the meaning of their lives and relationships at work, as they tried to manage the negative uncomfortable feelings and dissatisfying personal circumstances. Although the outcomes of PPIs are expected to be positive in some ways, Ivtzan et al. (2015, p. 2) empathised that 'yet the paths, the journeys, what we experience on the way to these outcomes may be painful and challenging'. This study provided evidence to support the notion centred on 'the second wave of positive psychology' that 'embrace the "bad" along with the "good"' (Sims, 2017). Plans to encourage conversations such as this in teachers' work place should be encouraged for sustainable implementations of PPIs.

4.3. Plans for sustainable actions

Whist the teachers identified the above challenges, they continuously generated new strategies to overcome them, including.

(A) Intentional mental choice

To make an intentional mental choice to look at the negatives from a positive light: 'I think it's how you approach things … it's how you focus on them and process them. Whether you keep thinking of them as a negative thing or actually there are positives about this.' (Male T3).

(B) Familiarisation and prolonged practice

To familiarise themselves with the learnt concepts and skills by continuously applying them in daily practices, for example: 'being mindful and grateful for small moments and daily interactions with others in life and at work' and being 'proactive in expressing positive constructive responses to others' (Female T1).

(C) Self initiatives of further wellbeing activities

A weekly Yoga class had been initiated and organised by one participant with the purpose to improve staff's wellbeing and social interactions. Some introduced other external resources (e.g., such as 'headspace app of mindfulness') and some valued work colleague relationships by organising extra social space and activities (e.g., 'a working party' and 'make the staff room a nicer area').

(D) Developing a whole school practice of PPIs for a longer period

The participants suggested creating a culture of valuing wellbeing in work contexts as a whole school practice of PPIs (e.g., being reminded regularly 'through a programme built into the timetable' and 'by the senior leaders'; and "to practice with other colleagues for a longer period of time"). As a reflection that "three months of practice was a short period of time", they expressed the willingness to conduct "an evaluation after 1 year of PPIs".

These strategies reflected by the participants show several points. Firstly, those who actively participated the interventions had deep engagements with the PPIs and experienced profound benefits from practicing them. Then, they had actively and genuinely reflected on developing a whole school approach of PPIs for a longer period in order to create a school culture of valuing teachers' wellbeing, emotional health and relationships in a more substantial way. Finally, they planned to make 'intentional mental choices and actions with 'prolonged practices' of PPIs, which are two necessary attributes for developing new habits beneficial to their wellbeing (Segal et al., 2002). For example, organising a 'Yoga' class, one

follow-up action the participants intentionally planned to do after the research period, may help to increase teachers' mental wellbeing and reduce anxiety level (Telles et al., 2018). Harris et al. (2016) have shown promising evidence that practising yoga and mindfulness using the Community Approach to Leaning Mindfully (CALM) programme in two schools helped teachers to improve wellbeing, social emotional competence and classroom management. Other research with promising PPIs outcomes had shown that the overall school culture and climate was shifted in the ways that fostered teachers' wellbeing (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Shankland & Rosset, 2017).

5. Recommendations and conclusion

This paper indicates that PPIs as strategies implemented in CPD were beneficial to improve teachers' wellbeing at the emotional dimension (e.g., reduced stress, improved enjoyment), the social dimension (e.g., enhanced relationship with others), and the professional practices dimension (e.g., teacher-parent communications). As indicated in the title of this paper, some positive impacts of the PPIs went 'beyond' the participants themselves in the school setting to a wider community through their work practices. Furthermore, unavoidably and perhaps a necessary process, the teachers also experienced some doubts and challenges (e.g., negative experiences). This shows that some selected PPIs (such as activities designed within *Meaning session*) might need to be carefully implemented in the school settings − which require future research for further investigation. Most importantly, many participants chose to continue the practices, made actions and suggestions helpful to their wellbeing by considering sustainable actions, time frame and a whole school approach. The PPIs was implemented successfully, however, a prolonged engagement and encouragement of PPIs was desired to expect a sustainable effect on teacher wellbeing, professional development, students' learning and beyond.

This study has demonstrated the following significance and recommendations relevant to teachers' professional development. Firstly, teachers' overall wellbeing can be improved by the school-initiated CPD wellbeing programmes based on PERMA model of flourishing (Seligman, 2011) and principles of BPPIs (Shankland & Rosset, 2017) to some extent. The case study shows an enhancement of teachers' overall wellbeing including both hedonic and eudaimonia wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Tennant et al., 2007). There was an increasing awareness amongst teacher participants to cultivate positive emotions and regulate negative emotions, frequent expressions of appreciation in both personal and professional contexts and improvements of work practices and work-life balance. Using PERMA model in the PPIs, the wellbeing concept was shifted from subjective wellbeing of feeling satisfied and happy in life to a wider context of eudaimonia wellbeing, considering meanings, purposes and values. However, the interventions relating to *Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationship* are probably easier to be introduced and accepted in teacher wellbeing programmes than *Meaning* and *Achievement* which require self-initiated personal reflection and actualisation over a longer time frame. The effectiveness of PPIs based on PERMA model should be examined by considering each element separately in future research.

Secondly, future teacher wellbeing interventions should target the enhancement of multiple aspects of teacher wellbeing rather than merely focusing on a unidimensional construct of wellbeing and a deficit view (such as reducing stress and burnout in Huppert & So, 2013; Perry et al., 2015; and Pillay et al., 2005). Our findings support the notion that teacher wellbeing is multifaceted in nature (Collie et al., 2015; McCallum et al., 2017). Teacher wellbeing is not a

single entity within one individual but it extends to emotional, relational and work-related dimensions. Future design of PPIs should aim to provide opportunities to enhance emotional wellbeing, social wellbeing in both personal and work-related professional contexts. In particular, tackling the less frequently addressed aspects of teacher wellbeing at the workplace such as work-related wellbeing (Price & McCallum, 2015), student-teacher relationship (Braun et al., 2019; Spilt et al., 2011) may help to improve teachers' professional life, achievement and meaning making process within their career (Mansfield et al., 2016; Seligman, 2011).

Next, it should be acknowledged that the impact of teachers' professional development supported by teacher wellbeing programmes can go beyond teachers' individual wellbeing to produce positive impacts on others around them. Our findings show that the impacts of enhancing teachers' wellbeing in one area may be extended on to others through work and personal networks, as well as gradually open up new ways of thinking (Härtel, 2008). Enhanced teacher wellbeing may create a shift towards an enhanced emotional and relational culture within the school and beyond teachers' personal social spheres as shown in our finding that one teacher reported that parents also applied the introduced *Growth-mindset* concept in other school settings as (see 4.1.3). This ripple effect of teacher wellbeing can be explained via the Bronfenbrenner's model of ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in which factors in any of these systems will affect teachers' wellbeing in a multidimensional way, and importantly vice versa (McCallum et al., 2017).

In addition, the findings provide insights for future researchers, practitioners, and school leaders who consider a whole-school approach of sustainable teacher wellbeing programmes with a few practical suggestions: (A) Timetable a short period of several practices into the existing school schedule. PPIs can be emailed to teachers for them to pick up at their convenience to ease the stress raised (in)between work and life (Dreer, 2020). (B) Create time and space to nurture teachers' collegial relationships, share good practices, barriers and challenges at work. This helps to create a more supportive environment to build meaningful relationships with each other. (C) Ensure that PPIs implementation is planned over a prolonged period, enabling sufficient time for teachers to familiarise and develop habits of using them in a sustainable way. (D) Make sure PPIs are less demanding in time, materials and expertise, providing space and opportunities for teachers' self-initiated activities. To reduce the resistance, unwillingness or a feeling of being forced by the senior leaders to participate in PPIs (See 4.2.1), the encouragement of self-initiative element may enable the autonomous nature of the implementation so any individual teachers may choose to apply them at their own pace, time and in their own way to reduce the resistance and barriers. Having the opportunities for ownership and autonomy will help teachers to experience the positive outcomes, nurturing their wellbeing meaningfully at their own time (Brady & Wilson, 2021). (E) Ensure that the dark sides of potential experiences (e.g., fatigue, discomfort of self-discovery) are considered and well-communicated during early preparation and implementation stages that they can be an unavoidable process which may lead to positive outcomes and should be mindfully addressed to reduce negative unwanted impacts (Ivtzan et al., 2015).

Lastly, an important implication for policy makers and school leaders to consider is that sustainable wellbeing programmes such as PPIs can be embedded within teachers' professional development through initial teacher training programmes, CPD and mentoring schemes with an emphasises on developing teacher resilience and wellbeing which will help to address the issues of teacher recruitment and retention. Research also points to the importance and values of mindfulness training for pre-service

teachers' wellbeing, stress management and professional development (Hepburn et al., 2021b; Soloway, 2016) and for early career teachers (Hepburn et al., 2021a). Global policy initiatives of teacher retention have moved from traditional short-term effect interventions (such as increasing financial incentives) to providing continuous professional development and early career support (See et al., 2020). Enhancing teachers' personal and relational wellbeing has been considered important to teacher retention and work performance (Grant et al., 2019; See et al., 2020). Future research may consider the relationship between teacher retention and the provision of teacher wellbeing programmes in initial teacher training programmes, CDPs and mentoring schemes to provide further robust research evidence and guidance to address teacher retention.

Although this paper has sought to provide an insightful example for supporting teacher wellbeing through PPIs, a number of limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, like any other case studies, the findings illustrated here are specific to a single school, so careful considerations should be taken when applying in other school contexts because each school has its own social dynamics and culture. The detailed illustrations about the school, the PPIs implementation programmes, and the experienced challenges provided here should hopefully enable the applicability and transferability of the study to other settings (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Next, future research might want to apply other forms of methodology, such as a larger scale of randomised control trials research to address the research rigorousness in order to strengthen the fidelity of positive psychology research which is often critiqued as lack of empirical evidence (Fernandez-Rios & Vilarino, 2016). Thirdly, the implementation duration of the PPIs was relatively short, and the follow up evaluation on the effectiveness of the PPIs after a longer period was missing. As reflected, a substantial and prolonged period is necessary to successful outcomes (Hwang et al., 2017). Future research may seek to evaluate the effectiveness of PPIs at a longer interval to examine the sustainability of the implementation. Finally, it should be noted that the PPIs were rolled out in a school which had already been open to teacher wellbeing initiatives so when the study began, the teachers already had some understanding and practices of mindfulness. Thus, future practices should consider other variables such as school contexts and teachers' prior experiences which may affect their motivation, attitudes, openness and the effectiveness of PPIs programmes (Lekan, 2007).

To achieve school success, it is imperative to enhance teacher wellbeing (Education Support Partnership, 2021). This paper showed that PPIs had a positive impact on teachers' wellbeing in professional and personal contexts which may shed light on supporting teachers' professional development and wellbeing, particularly in situations when the boundaries between life and work are blurred, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic (Schieman et al., 2021). Although various additional resources are provided to support teachers' wellbeing, such as Coronavirus Staff Resilience Hub by MindEd (2020) via the UK Government (2020a; 2020b), there is more that can be done within schools, local communities, educational systems and universities through strategic collaboration (Collie & Martin, 2020; White, 2016; White & Kern, 2018). This can be achieved by embedding teacher wellbeing interventions into initial teacher training programmes, CPD, educational leadership training, and educational policies. Yet it should be noted that more research is needed to examine the effectiveness of teacher wellbeing initiatives, policies and practices to enable well-meaning provisions and avoid constraining teachers' sense of autonomy and breaching of work-life balance (Brady & Wilson, 2021). Together, teachers can be empowered to create a positive and flourishing educational environment for future students in learning

how to handle an uncertain future (Waters, 2012). As schools are navigating the enhancement of teacher wellbeing, this paper has sought to provide timely advice for successful teacher wellbeing programmes implementation in schools and educational institutions.

Data availability

The authors are unable or have chosen not to specify which data has been used.

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