
Preschool teachers' well-being. Impact of relationships between happiness, emotional intelligence, affect, burnout, and engagement for their initial and permanent training
Bienestar emocional de los/as docentes de Educación Infantil. Implicaciones de las relaciones entre felicidad, inteligencia emocional, afecto, burnout y compromiso para su formación inicial y permanente

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Resumen: Desde un modelo de Psicología positiva aplicado a la Educación, el objetivo es analizar las competencias emocionales y motivacionales de 82 docentes de Infantil, utilizando las pruebas TMMS-24, PANAS, UWES, SHS y MBI y establecer recomendaciones para la formación docente y el bienestar del alumnado. Se encontraron altos niveles de felicidad, compromiso laboral, inteligencia emocional y afecto positivo. Los resultados también ratifican, en esta población, las relaciones encontradas por otros estudios entre inteligencia emocional, afecto positivo, implicación en el trabajo y compromiso personal. Se encontraron altas correlaciones ($p > .01$) entre claridad y reparación y afecto positivo, y entre reparación y energía, y entre energía, dedicación, absorción y compromiso personal. El 40,6% de la varianza del bienestar docente (felicidad) se explicó por las puntuaciones en inteligencia emocional y afecto, siendo la capacidad afectiva positiva y la de reparación emocional las que mejor predijeron el nivel en felicidad. Estos resultados permiten identificar las competencias que deberían incluirse en los planes universitarios y en los centros de formación permanente.

Palabras clave: Felicidad subjetiva, Burnout, Inteligencia emocional, Afectividad, Compromiso, Maestros, Preescolar.

Abstract: From a Positive Psychology model applied to Education, the objective is to analyze emotional and motivational competencies of 82 preschool teachers, using the TMMS-24, PANAS, UWES, SHS and MBI and to establish recommendations for teacher training and student's well-being. High levels of happiness, commitment, emotional intelligence and positive affect were found. Results ratify relationships between emotional intelligence, positive affect, engagement and personal accomplishment observed by studies in that population. Strong correlations ($p > .01$) were found between clarity, repair and positive affect, repair and vigor, and between vigor, dedication, absorption, and personal accomplishment. The 40.6% of the variance in teacher well-being was explained by emotional intelligence and affective competencies, with positive affect and repair competence the most important to predict happiness level. These results allow us to identify the competencies that should be included in pre-service university plans and in permanent training centers.

Keywords: Happiness, Burnout, Emotional intelligence, Affectivity, Engagement, Teachers, Preschool.

INTRODUCTION

Well-being, quality of life and happiness are complementary concepts that describe the perception and assessment that people make of their circumstances at a given moment in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their own goals, expectations, and concerns (Marbina *et al.*, 2015; World Health Organization, 1998). Nowadays, teaching, along with healthcare, is a physically, mentally, and emotionally demanding profession that, depending on internal and external factors, can have a negative impact on health and on the perception of happiness. This in turn can affect the way teachers work, relate, and teach in schools (Adina and Clipa, 2018; Mansfield, 2021) and thus it seems essential that work be done to detect shortcomings in future teachers from initial university education and improvement programs (as the SEL, *Social and Emotional Learning Programs*) are established at curricula and in post service training (Bisquerra, 2005; Fernández-Berrocal and Extremera, 2005;

Hernández Guanir and García Hernández, 1992; Palomera *et al.*, 2014; Fundación Marcelino Botín, 2023).

Different models have identified the keys to physical and mental health, the objective and subjective aspects that make up well-being (Diener *et al.*, 1999; Spratt, 2016), how happiness is a predictor of job performance (De Stasio *et al.*, 2019) and that happy people cope better with stressful situations (Loayza-Rivas, 2021). From a Positive Psychology model, many researchers have agreed that emotional and affective aspects (as emotional intelligence and affect), and labor and motivational dimensions (as burnout and engagement), are key components to analyze well-being, understood as the overall cognitive assessment of how a person would value his or her life (Castellano *et al.*, 2013; Goleman, 1995; Merino *et al.*, 2021; Pena and Extremera, 2012; Raymundo, 2022; Salovey and Mayer, 1990). For example, the emotional thinking method (Hué, 2012) has been created for improving individual competences and for teaching university and non-university teachers in emotional competences or skills as self-knowledge, self-esteem, emotional control and motivation, others' knowledge, others' esteem and leadership. Also, the results of the research by Pena and Extremera (2012), done with primary school teachers, revealed positive correlations between emotional intelligence and engagement and emotional intelligence and the personal accomplishment factor of burnout. In addition, negative correlations were found between emotional intelligence and the emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation dimensions of burnout, concluding that emotional intelligence is a factor that protects against the onset of burnout and is associated with higher levels of engagement.

Studying of the subjective well-being of preschool teachers is vital as they work with a particularly vulnerable age, i.e., children between 0 and 6 years who are going through a special development phase, hence teachers require even more emotional balance. These pupils, unlike those of other educational stages, are more physically and emotionally dependent; they are also more influenced by their teacher's attitudes, abilities, and behavioral and emotional responses as this is the age when children establish very intense and important bonds. Therefore, among the job responsibilities, preschool teachers need to be teaching their pupils how to socialize emotionally, help them develop and build the ability to self-regulate cognitively and emotionally, internalize norms, be empathetic, etc. (Aritzeta *et al.*, 2016; Pianta *et al.*, 2014). Hence, as the daily work they have to deal with involves a high amount of stress, teachers need to have specific affective and emotional capabilities in order to handle the children's socio-emotional needs (Pianta *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, as they substitute the parental figure during school time, in some ways teachers influence young children like parents do, hence their mental health

will affect students the same as their parents' mental health does (Bowlby, 1980). However, few of these studies focus specifically on preschool teachers, concentrating instead more frequently on the population of elementary and secondary school students and teachers (Cachón *et al.*, 2018; Erazo and Riaño-Casallas, 2019; Gutiérrez Caballero, 2020; Puertas *et al.*, 2018). This is despite that fact that preschool teachers are known to have specific personal characteristics (the majority are women with high academic performance) and work characteristics (high vocational levels, altruistic commitment to children) that are different from teachers of other educational stages, these qualities have been associated with greater life satisfaction and mental health than in students of other educational stages (Cazalla-Luna and Molero, 2018; Pinedo *et al.*, 2017).

In general, the teachers' psychological well-being has been linked with their satisfaction with life and family, but also with their ability to face the current teaching demands, with a good social environment at school, with social support for their training needs and good teaching practices, and with an adequate level of happiness and certain emotional and affective competencies, such as affectivity, emotional intelligence and engagement (Gutiérrez Caballero, 2020; Marchesi, 2012).

Perceived emotional intelligence (PEI) is the ability to perceive one's own and other people's emotions and to process such information to better understand and reason upon the situation, as well as enabling the regulation of emotions in oneself and in others and giving an appropriate emotional response (Salovey *et al.*, 1995). The most recent review papers state that PEI is a predictor of success in school environments, it positively influences mental and social well-being, it helps avoiding Burnout Syndrome and that it acts as a moderating variable between stress and negative affect, and the opposite in terms of positive affect (Serrano-Díaz *et al.*, 2018; Puertas *et al.*, 2018). The importance of PEI and its effect on stress and *Burnout Syndrome* in teachers should therefore be highlighted. Some studies in Spain have identified higher levels of emotional understanding and control in students training to be elementary school teachers than in students training for preschool (Cazalla-Luna and Molero, 2018), while other studies have found adequate or high levels in preschool training students, that active preschool teachers show high or adequate levels in the PEI dimensions and non-significant or low levels of burnout in preschool teachers (Fernández-Molina *et al.*, 2019; Salazar Mendías and Fernández-Molina, 2021; Serrano-Díaz *et al.*, 2018).

The *Burnout Syndrome* was described in the mid-1970s by Freudenberger as a syndrome affecting professional careers who work in permanent contact with other people offering them a service (Extremera *et al.*, 2003). Three main indicators were identified in the detection of burnout syndrome: fatigue and emotional

exhaustion, depersonalization or presence of cynical attitudes or lack of empathy towards others, and feelings of incompetence and work failure due to the lack of personal achievement with the job (Maslach and Jackson, 1986). Correlations between PEI and burnout were also observed. Thus, significant negative relationships were found between the PEI clarity and repair dimensions with emotional burnout, and significant positive relationships were found between clarity and repair with personal achievement (Serrano-Díaz *et al.*, 2018). Likewise, our 2021 study found low levels of burnout in these teachers, thus associating job satisfaction inversely with emotional exhaustion and directly with emotional management and personal achievement (Salazar Mendías and Fernández-Molina, 2021).

Positive affect refers to feelings of enthusiasm, activation, energy, and rewarding involvement, whereas negative affect refers to general feelings of distress and unpleasant involvement including dislike, anger, guilt, fear, and nervousness (Watson *et al.*, 1988). These two dimensions are regarded as affective states or as a person's tendency to have emotions that are more or less stable. It also appears that negative emotions decrease intentions to achieve goals, make an effort, and cognitive processes such as attention and memory, motivation, self-regulation, and self-efficacy (Finch *et al.*, 2015). The positive and negative affect have been identified as predicting variables of mental health of future teachers (Pinedo *et al.*, 2017). Specifically, positive affect appears to have an important influence on the job-related well-being of elementary school teachers. Thus, some authors have found higher values of negative affect in university students of preschool education compared to those of elementary education (Cazalla-Luna and Molero, 2018) while others find higher values of positive affect in teachers of other educational stages (Pinedo *et al.*, 2017).

Engagement is theoretically made of three factors (vigor, absorption, and dedication), currently measured through the UWES-S questionnaire (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). Engaged employees have an energetic and affective connection to their work and perceive themselves as having sufficient capabilities to cope with the demands of their job. Maslach and Leiter stated that engagement and burnout are total opposites, the former positive and the latter negative (Maslach and Leiter, 2016). Has been found association between burnout and exhaustion, cynicism, and low performance, while engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and effectiveness (Marsollier, 2019; Sun, 2019; Usán and Salavera, 2020). Raymundo (2022) showed that there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and engagement in virtual teaching. There is a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the dimensions of engagement. If emotional intelligence is developed, teachers will be dedicated,

engaged and ready for creativity with vigour, absorption and dedication. In addition, engagement is related to the dimensions of emotional intelligence; therefore, if there is engagement in teachers, there will be clarity, attention and emotional repair in each of them, favourable for a good interrelation and comfort in their work. In university students, for example, a correlation between engagement and burnout has shown that less exhaustion and higher engagement lead to a lower burnout (Kiema-Junes *et al.*, 2020). The research by Castellano *et al.* (2013) shows that the relationship between engagement and positive affect would be better understood if it is conceptualised as a sequence of psychological experiences rather than as an isolated temporary episode. Indeed, employees who tend to experience positive emotional states during their working day are likely to show greater interest in their work, which will lead to higher levels of motivation and engagement. On the other hand, higher levels of engagement will lead to the development of positive emotions, generating a positive upward spiral. Conversely, there is a reciprocal relationship between negative emotions and levels of burnout, depersonalisation, cynicism and ineffectiveness. Higher levels of negative emotions would favour the development of higher levels of burnout, which in turn would influence an increase in the levels of negative emotions.

In conclusion, preschool teachers are a professional group with their own characteristics and specific work needs due to the population they teach, which would affect their levels of well-being and, therefore, their work performance. Little is still known about the correlation of these levels with emotional and occupational factors. Although in our previous studies some results on the levels of PEI and *Burnout Syndrome* in preschool teachers came to light, the influence of other factors, such as affection or engagement, is yet to be explored. For this reason, the main goal of this work is to study preschool teachers' emotional competencies, by identifying their level of happiness, and its correlation with the affective/emotion dimensions (emotional intelligence and affectivity) and the job and motivational dimensions (burnout and engagement), as well as the influence of the teachers' academic and work profile (age, years of work experience, location and type of school, work conditions, and training in emotional education). Likewise, the study has a second objective consisting of identifying necessary lines of action both in initial training and in permanent training, and drawing lines of future research on the relationship of these capacities with the well-being of preschool students in the classroom.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 82 preschool teachers (73.2% women, 8.5% men and 18.3% no data) chosen by randomization system from schools which collaborate with University in curricula external practices in 2020 year, from 13 public and private schools in the province of Málaga (Spain). Table 1 shows personal, work, and educational profile. Participants were between 26 and 58 years old ($M= 43.03$; $SD= 8.08$). Most of participants work in urban school (medium and big cities as Málaga or Marbella), in state-funded school and they are permanent teachers (official teachers who work to Government). Working experiences were between 0 and 39 years old ($M= 15.88$; $SD= 8.03$). In this context, number of children in each classroom is usually 23 to 25 children on average, and children have 3, 4 or 5 years old. Special needs children are usually randomly distributed in the different groups of classrooms and they have support teachers, speech therapist, visual or motoric aids, etc. In this context, preschool teachers must work inside an inclusive model. Most of participants (69.5%) had not receive specific training in emotional competencies, but many (51.2%) had training in children's emotional competencies.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics. Personal, professional, and education profile of teachers

CHARACTERISTICS	LEVELS	N	%
School location	Rural	19	23.2%
	Urban	63	76.8%
Type of school	State	70	85.4%
	Private	12	14.6%
Current work situation	Permanent	67	81.7%
	Interim	14	18.3%
Training in children's emotional competence	Yes	42	51.2%
	No	38	46.3%
	No data	2	2.5%
Training in teachers' emotional competence	Yes	23	28%
	No	57	69.5%
	No data	2	2.5%

METHOD

Happiness

The tool used to measure happiness was the *Subjective Happiness Scale* (SHS, Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999) translated into Spanish by Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2014). The SHS is a 4-item instrument rated on a 1-7 Likert-type scale that measures global subjective happiness whereby participants either self-rate themselves or compare themselves to others. Studies on the psychometric properties of this scale have found variances between 63.5% and 57.38%, supporting the validity of this scale (Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal, 2014; Hernández Moreno and Landero Hernández, 2014).

Burnout Syndrome

The *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (MBI, Maslach and Jackson, 1986) was used to measure the burnout syndrome, specifically the subtype aimed at education professionals, the so-called MBI-Educators, adapted to Spanish. The scale consisted of 22 items rated on a frequency scale from 0 to 6, with 0 being never and 6 being daily. In addition, it analyzed the three dimensions that make up the syndrome: emotional exhaustion, consisting of 9 items, depersonalization, consisting of 5 items, and personal achievement, consisting of 8 items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the original scale was .90 for depersonalization and .71 for personal achievement.

Perceived Emotional Intelligence

The *Trait Meta-Mood Scale* (TMMS, Salovey *et al.*, 1995) is the most widely used tool to measure perceived levels of emotional intelligence, providing an PEI index through three factors: attention to moods, clarity about moods, and mood repair. Its adaptation to Spanish was carried out by Fernández-Berrocal *et al.* (2004). The questionnaire consists of 24 items designed to assess people's attention to their inner feelings, the clarity with which they perceive them, and their ability to repair their emotional states. The participants must rate each of the statements about themselves with a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5 representing their degree of agreement with each of the statements. This questionnaire has shown adequate internal consistency and acceptable discriminant and convergent validity (Salovey *et al.*, 1995). Its reliability on all three subscales is above .85 Cronbach's alpha (Fernández-Berrocal *et al.*, 2004).

Affectivity

Affect was measured with the *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule* (PANAS, Watson *et al.*, 1988) adapted to the Spanish population, which showed a robust and stable two-dimensional structure (positive and negative affect), and strong support to construct validity, reliability (internal consistency) and cross-cultural validation (Moreta-Herrera *et al.*, 2021). It consists of 20 items divided into positive and negative affect subscales with 10 items each that are answered on a five-choice Likert scale.

Engagement

The tool used was the Spanish version of the *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (UWES-S, Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004), validated for Spain (Salanova and Schaufeli, 2004; Gómez Garbero *et al.*, 2019) which assessed the degree of the person's commitment to the activity he/she is carrying out. It is a questionnaire with 17 items, with a five-position Likert scale, ranging from 1= totally disagree to 5= totally agree with the items. International studies carried out on the psychometric properties of this scale confirm the factorial validity, high internal consistency and test-retest reliability, and that the differences between the average levels of engagement between different groups, occupational hazards are significant, but relatively small and almost never exceed the size of a standard deviation (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

Procedure and strategy of data analysis

In order to carry out this study, a letter was sent to the director or head of studies of preschools in Málaga and its province requesting their participation in the study (procedure authorized by Ethic Committee of University). The letter explained the objectives of the study, the tools to be used and how to send the questionnaires once they were completed. All the contacted schools agreed to take part in the study. The questionnaires were anonymous and on a voluntary basis. The teachers filled out the questionnaire in their free time after lessons at school. All teacher contacted answered the questionnaire. The data were then uploaded and analyzed using the SPSS 25 statistical package for Windows.

Cross-sectional study was made. Descriptive analyses of all the variables under study and calculation of Pearson's bivariate correlations between the different dimensions of the tests and with the quantitative variables of the personal and work profile of the participants (age and years of experience) were carried out.

The U-Mann Whitney test for independent samples and effect size (r) were used to determine whether there were any differences depending on the qualitative dimensions of the participants' personal and work profiles. A multiple regression analysis, stepwise method, was performed using the SPSS 25 statistical package for Windows to find out which dimensions have the biggest impact or can predict the happiness of teachers.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

In terms of the results of the participants' well-being, Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation for dimensions of happiness, emotional intelligence, burnout, affect and engagement scales.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of scales and dimensions included in the study

SCALES	DIMENSIONS	M	SD
Happiness, SHS	Level of happiness	5.64	.92
TMMS, PEI	Attention	3.34	.80
	Clarity	3.78	.73
	Repair	3.77	.70
MBI, Burnout	Emotional exhaustion	1.40	1.02
	Depersonalization	.23	.40
	Personal accomplishment	4.67	.56
PANAS, Affect	Positive affect	4.07	.56
	Negative affect	1.87	.72
UWES, Engagement	Vigor	5.48	.58
	Dedication	5.69	.45
	Absorption	5.37	.78

Pearson correlation, contrast analysis of means, and multiple regression analysis

Table 3 shows correlations found between demographic variables of teachers' life (age and years of labor experience) and different dimensions of scales used in the study. Significant bivariate Pearson correlations were found between age and years of experience ($r = .719$, $p = .000$), meaning that older teachers also had more work experience. The teachers' happiness was found to be significantly positive related

to clarity and repair, positive affect, and vigor and dedication, while negatively related to negative affect and exhaustion. None of the sociodemographic variables correlated with happiness or wit emotional and motivational scales.

Table 3. Pearson correlations

	LIFE		TMMS-24			PANAS		SHS	UWES			MBI		
	Ag.	Ex.	A	Cl	R	A+	A-	SHS	V	D	AB	EE	DEP	PA
Ag.	.711**		-.44	.153	.100	-.136	-.194w	-.146	-.005	-.075	-.050	.109	-.115	.080
Exp.			-.32	-.002	.008	-.133	-.157	-.198	.020	.070	-.084	.008	-.068	.010
A				.319**	.110	.051	.347**	-.067	-.119	-.005	-.036	.146	.032	.021
Cl					.337**	.295**	-.203	.319**	.273*	.265*	.161	.091	-.017	.280*
R						.343**	-.311**	.508**	.323**	.280*	.208	-.197	.103	.031
A+							-.136	.495**	.467**	.288**	.143	-.259*	.012	.268*
A-								-.268*	-.159	-.069	.023	.263*	.102	-.106
SHS									.399**	.381**	.200	-.232*	.046	.172
V										.712**	.463**	-.574**	-.178	.498**
D											.568**	-.400**	-.263*	.505**
AB												-.241*	-.044	.325**
EE													.180	-.303**
DEP														-.297**
PA														

*p > .05; ** p > .01. Ag.= Teacher's age; Ex.= Years of experience; A. = Attention level; Cl. = Clarity level; R.= Repair level; A+= Positive affect; A- = Negative affect; HA = Happiness; V = Vigor, D = Dedication; AB = Absorption; EE = Emotional exhaustion; DEP = Depersonalization; PA = Personal accomplishment

Independent samples no-parametric U-Mann Whitney test was performed to contrast analysis of means between employment status and training variables, and results in emotional intelligence, affect, engagement and burnout scales (Table 4). We found differences by age (r= .24, small effect size) and years of experience working at school (r= .32, medium effect size) between permanent and temporary staff. Emotional attention was the only dimension analysed that showed small differences between teachers who received emotional courses or not (r= .21), and those who work in state school or private school (r= .25).

Table 4. Independent samples U-Mann Whitney test

VARIABLE	GROUP	N	ORDER MEAN	U	p	r
Age	Permanent staff	64	42.13	279.500	.028	.24
	Temporary staff	14	27.46			
Years of experience	Permanent staff	66	42.59	192.000	.005	.32
	Temporary staff	12	22.50			
Emotional attention	Training in teachers' emotional competences courses	23	47.02	459.500	.050	.21
	No training in teachers' emotional courses	55	36.35			
Emotional attention	State school	69	42.85	217.500	.023	.25
	Private school	11	25.77			

Finally, in order to answer whether and to what extent the variables included in study allow predicting happiness, a multiple regression analysis by stepwise method was carried out. The explained variable was the happiness level. The explanatory variables were socio-demographic variables (age, years of experience, training in emotional competencies), the three dimensions of PEI, the two dimensions of affect, the three dimensions of engagement and the only dimension of burnout related with happiness level. In step 1 of the analysis, age, years of experience, and training in emotional competencies were introduced. In step 2, the three dimensions of PEI were introduced. In step 3, the positive and negative affect. In step 4, the motivational and labor variables. The variables eventually considered by the model were: positive affect, and repair.

Table 5. Multiple regression analysis results for teachers' happiness

MODELS	R	R2	ADJUSTED R2	MEAN SQUARE MODEL	RESIDUAL DF	RESIDUAL MEAN SQUARE	F	P
1	.584	.341	.309	14.670	62	4.890	10.678	.001
2	.672	.452	.406	19.444	60	3.889	9.878	.001
3	.676	.457	.381	19.698	57	2.462	6.006	.001

As shown in Table 5, out of the three models resulting from the regression analysis, model 2 explains the highest proportion of variance in the independent variable, 40.6% of the variance, which is statistically significant $F(3.889) = 9.878, p < .001$.

Model 2 individual predictor data revealed that one dimension of emotional intelligence, that is, repair ($\beta = .344$, $p < .004$), and the positive affect ($\beta = .344$, $p < .002$) were significant predictors of the teachers' happiness.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was identifying the degree of subjective well-being (happiness), and emotional and motivational competences of a rarely studied group of teachers, using standard and internationally known tests, and making proposals and consequences for initial, at University, and permanent training, and for childhood's wellbeing. For this purpose, a group of 82 in-service (permanent and temporary staff) preschool teachers, from state and private schools in the province of Málaga –southern Spain–, was evaluated. The most of them were a government-employed female, approximately 43 years old and with 15 years of work experience on average, working in a state-run school in an urban area; also although few of them are trained in emotional teaching competencies, many have received specific courses in emotional education for children.

The results showed that these teachers achieved high scores in happiness, as well as good ratings in clarity and repair, in positive affect, in the three dimensions of engagement (vigor, dedication and absorption), and in the personal accomplishment dimension of the burnout scale. Accordingly, they obtained low scores in negative affect and in the exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions of the burnout scale. These data coincide with those found in different studies (Cazalla-Luna and Molero, 2018; Fernández-Molina *et al.*, 2019; Serrano-Díaz *et al.*, 2018). In addition, the scores obtained in the dimensions of engagement, burnout, and positive affect are in line with the motivational profile found in specific studies on mental health of university students of preschool education (Cazalla-Luna and Molero, 2018; Fernández-Molina *et al.*, 2019; Pinedo *et al.*, 2017) and with psychological well-being in teachers (Gutiérrez Caballero, 2020). The correlations between emotional intelligence, engagement, and burnout coincided with those found in studies with other populations (Pena and Extremera, 2012; Puertas *et al.*, 2018; Serrano-Díaz *et al.*, 2018).

In this study, the variables positively related to the teachers' happiness were emotional clarity and emotional repair, positive affect, vigor, and dedication. Therefore, the happiest preschool teachers in this study were those who knew how to understand and readjust their emotions, were prone to feel active, enthusiastic, and energetic, connected with and committed to their work, perceiving themselves as having sufficient capabilities to do their job, getting involved with energy and

efficiency. These results are in line with previous work (Diener *et al.*, 1999; Serrano-Díaz *et al.*, 2018). The teachers' happiness was significantly inversely correlated with negative affect and with emotional exhaustion. Finally, the regression analysis results showed that the predictors of the happiness of the preschool teachers involved in this study were levels of repair and positive affect. Repair was identified as an important dimension to personal achievement (Serrano-Díaz *et al.*, 2018) and positive affect was identified as predicting variable of mental health of future teachers by Pinedo *et al.* (2017) and for elementary school teachers by Cazalla-Luna and Molero, (2018). In our study both emotional dimensions are relevant to explain happiness of preschool teachers, and these could be very important to coping stress in an early childhood classroom. A preschool classroom is a very demanding work environment where the children are the priority and, therefore, the teacher's worries and negative emotions must take a back seat. Consequently, to work with preschool children, teachers must be able to change negative feelings into positive ones, and they need to be working at 100% of their abilities (Pianta *et al.*, 2014). Thus, these teachers need to activate repair processes and positive affect, which help them minimize the inevitable feelings of exhaustion, lack of energy, anger, etc. that occur in teaching environments. In return, the effort that they put into working with children would be rewarded, day after day, by the pupils' display of affection and gratitude, and by the progress in their motor, linguistic, social, cognitive, etc. development. This progress would be highly gratifying and motivating for the teachers, and it undoubtedly helps them to cope their daily task with enthusiasm and satisfaction, and improve their sense of happiness, although these relationships must be analyze in future studies.

Although it could be assumed that the age, the number of years of work, or the employment situation (permanent staff or temporary staff) might play some role in levels of happiness, engagement, or burnout, none of these variables seemed to be relevant in this group of teachers. These teachers were on average 43 years old and had 15 years of work experience, which could contribute to a certain sense of fatigue, depersonalization, or low motivation. A possible explanation could be in the vocational, supportive, and altruistic nature of their professional choice, the pleasure and enjoyment of dealing with young children, their desire and energy when working with them, and the concern of these future teachers for the needs of early childhood. These are women who, while still studying to be teachers, were already passionate about dealing with children and, once settled in their school, understood and accepted the high demands of a job that, most of the time, requires working and interacting with joy and energy, showing and receiving affection, calming down crying children, preventing aggression, avoiding accidents, constantly moving around,

etc. In conclusion, these teachers need to remain active to be alert and respond appropriately to the constant requests, needs, and reactions of the youngest and most vulnerable children. Thus, results show that the years of experience, that are associated with a permanent labor situation, have not only not exhausted teachers, but have given them more emotional tools, as emotional repair skills and positive affect, because no differences have been found between younger and older teachers, but differences have been found between permanent and temporary staff (medium effect size). In this way, it seems that these early childhood students are with emotionally balanced teachers, including them oldest and with more years of experience. In our study, preschool teachers seem to be competent to be emotionally positive models for their immature students. Besides, the low levels of burnout and negative affect found in this study may also be due to the fact that the more vocational and satisfied teachers remain in preschool, while the teachers who lose their desire to work with these children and feel less satisfied decide to change educational stage, since the university degree in Spain allows them to also work in elementary education.

And the other way, training in children's emotions and training in own emotional competencies were not a predictor of happiness nor did it make a difference in most of the dimensions studied. Only the emotional attention has been related with having a specific training in teachers' emotional performance. Teachers who attended to a specific training and those who work in state school had greater emotional attention than teachers from private school and those who didn't receive a specific training. Probably, teachers in state school have more opportunities to attend to free courses, and that training on emotional competencies could increase their process of self-perception on emotional situation. However, it is known that high level of emotional attention would be psychologically harmful. Could be necessary to explore more the characteristics of received training of teachers (training time, type of training, contents of courses, etc.), and clarify these influences to know the role of training in preschool teachers' well-being.

It appears logical that investing in the teachers' emotional training is the appropriate step towards their happiness, and repair and positive affect would be essential in courses for management of emotions and those should be included in curricula plans of the Universities and work-life training. The thematic lines or contents of these courses should include: emotional self-assessment processes, experiences and strategies to improve positive affect, tools for emotional understanding, and emotional repair strategies.

In conclusion, results from this study improve the knowledge on well-being of preschool teachers. The preschool teachers who took part in this study are happy and emotionally intelligent, because they have adequate skills such as clarity and

repair; they are more prone to positive than negative affect, are active and energetic, and also feel committed to their work, despite their long professional career and the stressful consequences of interacting with such young children. They are happy and tend to see stressful situations more as a challenge than as a threat, hence they use adaptive coping emotional strategies and positive affect. It would be argued that, according to the emotional and motivational characteristics identified in the participants, preschool teachers analyzed in this study would be excellent school agents, and these abilities could be used in the classroom and thus these teachers would improve children's positive development. Given the relevant role in the happiness of teachers, it is therefore essential to include courses on emotional teaching skills in the teachers' initial and ongoing training plans.

Limitations of study and future lines of research

Results from our study must be analyzed with caution because the size of the sample and the lack of sufficient variability in the group studied. In future studies, the number of participants should be increased, and a bigger effort should be made to involve teachers in complicated work situations or to collect the perceptions of teachers who have changed educational stage. Also, we must improve data on previous training of emotional competencies because data recollected in this study are not sufficient to know relationships with teachers' well-being. Design of study would be to improve (i.e. a pre-post design) or including another variables from personal life of teachers (be mother or not, number of children, married or not, etc.). It is necessary explore more characteristics of training in emotional competencies of teachers, because in this study little information has been collected.

Likewise, in future lines of research, the effect of these teaching capacities on the learning and development processes of the students should be analyzed, as is already being done in other educational stages when studying the effect of the teacher's passion for teaching on his students (Jordán and Codana, 2019).

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