# Exploring the contribution of interpersonal emotion regulation to pre-service EFL teachers' sustainable professional development and wellbeing

Miaomiao Wang
Yongxiang Wang (Corresponding author)
*Nanjing Normal University, China*

**ABSTRACT:** There is a large body of research endorsing the role of interpersonal skills and emotion regulation in English as a foreign language teachers' professionalism and psychological states. However, scant research has been done on pre-service EFL teachers' interpersonal emotion regulation (IER) and the way it can contribute to their sustainable professional development (SPD) and sense of wellbeing. To bridge the gap, this qualitative study examined the perceptions of 34 Chinese pre-service EFL teachers regarding such an interplay using a semi-structured interview. The results of content and thematic analysis revealed that IER strategies used by pre-service EFL teachers had different contributions to their SPD and wellbeing by establishing 'a supportive learning environment', 'strong class-room rapport', 'interpersonal communication', and 'emotional literacy'. Furthermore, it was indicated that the participants used different activities and practices to regulate and balance their IER strategies to gain SPD and wellbeing including 'self-oriented', 'other-oriented', and 'professional development' activities. The study ends in a discussion of the findings and presents a number of conclusions and future lines of research considering the impact of interpersonal emotions and their regulation on EFL teachers' professionalism and wellbeing.
**Keywords:** pre-service EFL teacher, positive psychology, interpersonal emotion regulation, sustainable professional development, teacher wellbeing

**Explorar la contribución de la regulación emocional Interpersonal al desarrollo profesional sostenible y el bienestar de los profesores de EFL antes de servir**

**RESUMEN:** Hay un gran cuerpo de investigación que respalda el papel de las habilidades interpersonales y la regulación de las emociones en el profesionalismo y los Estados psicológicos de los profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera. Sin embargo, se ha realizado escasa investigación sobre la regulación emocional interpersonal (IER) de los profesores de EFL en formación y la forma en que puede contribuir a su desarrollo profesional sostenible (SPD) y sentido de bienestar. Para cerrar la brecha, este estudio cualitativo examinó las percepciones de 34 profesores chinos de EFL con respecto a tal interacción usando una entrevista semiestructurada. Los resultados del análisis de contenido y temático revelaron que las estrategias de IER utilizadas por los profesores de EFL en formación tuvieron diferentes contribuciones a su SPD y bienestar al establecer "un entorno de aprendizaje de apoyo", "fuerte relación en el aula", "comunicación interpersonal" y "alfabetización emocional". Además, se indicó que los participantes utilizaron diferentes actividades y prácticas para regular y equilibrar

sus estrategias de ia para obtener SPD y bienestar, incluyendo actividades "autoorientadas", "orientadas a otros" y "desarrollo profesional". El estudio concluye con una discusión de los hallazgos y presenta una serie de conclusiones y futuras líneas de investigación considerando el impacto de las emociones interpersonales y su regulación en la profesionalidad y el bienestar de los docentes de EFL.

**Palabras clave:** pre-servicio de profesor de EFL, psicología positiva, regulación emocional interpersonal, desarrollo profesional sostenible, bienestar del profesor

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A voluminous body of scholarship certifies that second/foreign language (L2/FL) education is one of the most emotional jobs all around the world that is governed by inner feelings (Derakhshan, 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2023). Since the field involves teacher and learner psychology, there are no emotion-free zones in the process of teaching or learning an L2 (Derakhshan *et al.*, 2023; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2021). To succeed in this profession, L2 teachers have to be competent in pedagogy, assessment, and emotion management (Derakhshan *et al.*, 2023). However, as pinpointed by the proponents of positive psychology (PP) and the affective turn to applied linguistics, the psycho-affective side of L2 education bears an increasing importance, as L2 teachers have to cope with an array of psychological and affective factors at once (Mercer, 2020; Seligman, 2011). This demands them to regulate their emotions and those of their pupils effectively (Wang & Ye, 2021). To this end, teachers are expected to use different techniques to control, change, stop and regulate classroom emotions induced by inner and outer factors (Wijaya, 2021). Research shows that teachers' emotional regulation skills have a considerable impact on their pedagogical efficacy and professionalism (Deng *et al.*, 2022; Wang & Ye, 2021). The indisputable role of emotion regulation in interpersonal interactions in the classroom has also been underscored in the literature (Xiao & Tian, 2023). This shift from intrapersonal to interpersonal emotion regulation (IER) foregrounded educators' skills to influence other individuals' emotions via proper strategies (Nozaki & Mikolajczak, 2020). IER highlights the social exchange of perceived emotions and modifying them in case they are negative stressors (Zaki & Williams, 2013).

Although teacher emotion regulation has long been examined by scholars, its interpersonal dimension has recently gained attention (Wu *et al.*, 2023; Xiao & Tian, 2023). So far, the conceptualization, dimensionalization, and communicative mechanism of IER have been examined in different contexts, suggesting the growth of the construct in L2 education (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022; Wang & Hemchua, 2022; Xiao & Tian, 2023). IER can influence teachers' emotions and practices as well as learners' emotion regulation (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022; Zaki & Williams, 2013). Moreover, it enables teachers to shape their professional development, which has now moved away from product-oriented courses that only prepare teachers for the pedagogical aspects of their job (Bhatt, 2021). Instead, teacher professional development (TPD) is currently seen as an ongoing practice in which teachers are constantly working on their teaching quality and expertise (Derakhshan *et al.*, 2020). TPD might be presented formally, informally, individually, or collectively (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021). It is governed both by self and others (Zepeda, 2013). To date, most of the studies on TPD have focused on the features of effective TPD programs in different contexts (Borg, 2018). Yet, little is conducted about the interface of EFL teachers'

emotions and TPD despite the fact that TPD itself is an emotion-laden practice (Gu *et al.*, 2022). Given the nature of the field of L2 education, a sustainable TPD largely relies on teachers' perceived emotions (Sokal *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2021) and psycho-affective factors like emotion regulation skills. Additionally, as TPD is affected by both internal and external factors (Cosgun & Savaş, 2019), it can be assumed that teachers' IER strategies and skills play a part in its establishment and configuration.

Another outcome of L2 teachers' IER could be their wellbeing, which is defined as one's perception of how well life is going, his/her experienced good emotions, and functionality (Tang *et al.*, 2019). Wellbeing is both the absence of negativity and the presence of positivity in human (Butler & Kern, 2016). In light of PP research, this construct received a boom of attention showing its positive contribution to and relationship with teachers' job satisfaction (Limbert, 2004), work cognition (Joo *et al.*, 2017), emotion self-regulation (Freire & Tavares, 2011), work engagement (Greenier *et al.*, 2021; Hu & Wang, 2023; Wang & Pan, 2023), career adaptability (Yang *et al.*, 2019), and work stress reduction (White, 2010). However, the interaction among IER, TPD, and wellbeing has been overlooked. Most of the studies are correlational and qualitative studies are scant in this domain. As teacher emotions and practices are linked together (Derakhshan, 2022; Derakhshan *et al.*, 2023; Estaji & Ghias-vand, 2023), it is significant to unveil the role of IER strategies in L2 teachers' TPD and wellbeing. Without knowing the interpersonal aspect of teachers' emotions and their external realization in teacher professionalism, many teacher training programs would remain tra-ditional, goal-oriented, emotionless, and dogmatic. To fill the gaps and enlighten this line of research, this study examined Chinese EFL teachers' perceptions about the contribution of IER to their SPD and wellbeing using a qualitative research design. The findings may expand PP and emotion regulation theories to TPD and L2 teacher education.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Emotion Regulation

The concept of emotion regulation refers to the use of different strategies and procedures to effectively handle and react to affective experiences (Gross, 1998). Teachers and learners regulate their positive and negative emotions to fulfill different objectives (Colombo *et al.*, 2021). Emotion regulation is a socio-affective factor and a personality feature dealing with one's emotions in a conscious or unconscious manner (Gross & John, 2003). The mecha-nism is, however, dependent on the affective stimuli. It is argued that emotion regulation strategies allow teachers to handle their own emotions and those of learners, making an optimal climate for learning in the classroom (Taxer & Gross, 2018). In regulating one's emotion, the person both strengthens his/her positive emotions and prevents/stops negative ones (Gross, 1998). As for its taxonomy, emotion regulation, in education, can be classified into *antecedent-focused, response-focused, down-regulating*, and *up-regulating* (Gross, 1998; Greenier *et al.*, 2021). Technically, antecedent-focused emotion regulation happens before or even during experiencing an emotion, while response-focused emotion regulation is a reaction to that emotional encounter (Gross & John, 2003). Moreover, in up-regulating, one aims to fortify positive emotions to improve his/her performance and gain, whereas in

down-regulating attempts are made to prevent negative emotions that damage performance (Gong *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, EFL teachers may employ savoring strategies to augment positivity or dampening strategies to diminish a positive feeling (Quoidbach *et al.*, 2010). Regardless of their typologies, emotion regulation strategies play different roles in L2 education including engagement, motivation, achievement, and positive classroom climate creation (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022). Another form of emotion regulation that highlights inter-individuality rather than intra-individuality is IER, as described beneath.

### 2.2. Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

The construct of IER reflects the social nature of emotion regulation, which can be perceived as a social interaction between people (i.e., interpersonal) (Nozaki & Mikolajczak, 2020). There are four popular features in IER, namely having regulation, deliberateness, affective target, and social target (Niven, 2017). Moreover, the growing literature suggests different strategies for this type of emotion regulation including empathy, humor, listening, story-telling, agreeing, practical help, mere presence, and modeling stressful events (Lively, 2000). Additionally, IER strategies can be divided based on their underlying regulatory motives (i.e., promoting or weakening others' emotions) and resources (i.e., cognitive or behavioral) as put by Niven (2017). Particularly, cognitive strategies affect others' perceived emotions in a situation, while behavioral strategies aim to alter other individuals' feelings. Based on this conceptualization, IER strategies involve cognitive vs. behavioral improving and cognitive vs. behavioral worsening. Moving towards the social-communicative basis of IER, Zaki and Williams (2013) differentiated between intrinsic and extrinsic IER with the former concerning episodes in which a person

starts social contact to regulate his/her own emotional experience, while in the latter he/she tries to regulate others' emotions. Based on this idea, they classified IER strategies into response-dependent (another person's feedback) and response-independent. To justify its theoretical foundation, Niven (2017) drew on self-determination theory (SDT) components (Ryan & Deci, 2017) by suggesting three motivations for IER including autonomy (intrinsic vs. extrinsic), relatedness (prosocial vs. egoistic), and competence (performance- vs. pleasure-oriented). Another theory underlying IER is social learning theory, which highlights teachers' collective reflexivity, social interaction, inquiry, and working context in understanding IER (Bandura & Walters, 1997). Effective use of IER can assist E teachers in a wide range of areas including sustainable professional development (SPD) presented below.

### 2.3. Sustainable Professional Development

Teachers are significant players of education in many countries and this requires them to constantly engage in self-development via formal and informal practices (Derakhshan *et al.*, 2020). While there are numerous studies on the features of effective TPD in L2 education, the sustainability of such courses has remained unnoticed (Munandar *et al.*, 2021). The basic goal of TPD is to cause lasting influences on teachers and subsequently their pupils (Borg, 2018). This optimal outcome is realized in SPD programs that intend to raise teachers' pedagogical skills by offering them rich content about classroom engagement, active learning,

collaboration, agency, and professional identity (Munandar *et al.*, 2021). As the modern education requires highly skilled teachers, moving from traditional outcome-oriented TPDs towards SPT is a crucial segment of reformed professional development in academia (Foster & Foster, 2023). Additionally, SPD is triggered and promoted in case teachers are engaged in reflective practices (Back *et al.*, 2009). Likewise, as supported by the socio-cultural perspective, TPD is fostered and becomes sustainable if teachers willingly and continuously partake in professional learning communities that explore different possibilities and positionalities in social groups (Wenger, 1998). The goal of SPD is to develop teachers' knowledge and skills for a more sustainable future in education (Foster & Foster, 2023).

SPD highlights teachers' ability to encourage learners' action competence, empowerment, and positive initiative rather than rote learning (Lundegard & Wickman, 2007). Additionally, an education based on sustainable development promotes values (Smyth, 2005). Teachers' SPD is a long-term practice for teaching and learning effectively in line with current and future needs (Munandar *et al.*, 2021). As for its activities, SPDs can take the form of workshops, seminars, conferences, mentoring, coaching, reflective pedagogy, and peer discussion (Lundegard & Wickman, 2007). The goal of all these activities is to help teachers gain skills to fulfill professional objectives (Foster & Foster, 2023). Like other L2 education areas, SPD might be affected by internal and external factors related to teachers. Two such factors could be IER and wellbeing, yet empirical evidence is insufficient regarding this interaction.

### 2.4. Sense of Wellbeing: Conceptualizations and Dimensions

The concept of wellbeing is a positive factor related to one's health and satisfaction with his/her job, happiness, life, and physical health (Garg & Rastogi, 2009). As put by Huppert (2009), the construct of wellbeing is a combination of 'feeling good' and 'functioning effectively'. As posited in PERMA model, wellbeing has different dimensions, namely positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). The first dimension concerns one's perceived positive emotions (e.g., enjoyment, interest, resilience, optimism, hope, gratitude etc.). The second dimension, refers to a state in which the person is fully interested and involved in the given activity. As the third component, relationship refers to positive relationships that someone has with others. Next, meaning concerns sense of belongingness and fulfillment in individuals. Accomplishment refers to sense of achievement and meaningful outcomes after striving hard. As for its approaches, wellbeing is conceptualized by hedonistic and eudaimonic approaches (Diener, 2009). In the former approach, wellbeing means the presence of positive emotions, pleasure, and happiness without any negativity or pain, whereas in the latter approach wellbeing means happiness that comes from the chase of meaning, authenticity, growth, and virtue (Deci & Ryan, 2008). In other words, hedonia is 'doing what feels good', but eudaemonia is 'doing what feels right'. In PP, however, a collective approach to wellbeing is supported, meaning that both of the aforementioned approaches are warranted (Lan & Saad, 2020). Two constructs that may reflect this model are IER and SPD in that they both require positive emotions, relations, engagement, and sense of belongingness. However, research on this line of thinking is scanty.

## 2.5. Previous Studies

Resting on PP in L2 contexts, recently, different studies have examined the role of teacher emotions and interpersonal skills in their classroom practices (Derakhshan *et al.*, 2023; Quoc Tran *et al.*, 2023; Yüce *et al.*, 2023). It has also been argued that EFL teachers' interpersonal skills shapes learners' emotions and achievement level (Shakki, 2023; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). Given the social-interactive as well as emotion-based nature of L2 education, EFL teachers nowadays require to be competent in managing self and others' perceived emotions (Derakhshan, 2022). Without such an interpersonal ability to regulate emotions, teachers may encounter tensions and conflicts in their classroom, which may, in turn, hurt their professional identity and performance (Ghiasvand *et al.*, 2023). Acknowledging the importance of IER for teachers, some empirical attempts have been made in EFL contexts to disclose the dimensions, influential factors, and outcomes of this form of emotion regulation (Gökdağ, 2021; Zaki & Williams, 2013). Moreover, the contribution of teachers' IER to learners' emotion regulation strategies has been reported by Bielak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2022) in Poland, which showed that teachers had used different IER strategies to bridge the gap in teacher-learner emotion regulatory skills.

Additionally, Xiao and Tian (2023) explored the role and trajectory of IER in Chinese EFL teachers' professional learning and wellbeing using a qualitative case study. The results indicated that the trajectory of IER in Chinese EFL teachers moved from the deconstruction of negative emotions/thoughts to re-construction of positive emotions and strengths. In doing that, teachers' professionalism and wellbeing improved. Although the construct of IER is gaining more attention in EFL contexts, its role in teachers' professionalism is yet a fledging line of research. This social layer of emotion regulation can affect TPD because in the current era such programs are stepping beyond cultivating simple teaching skills in trainees (Derakhshan *et al.*, 2020; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021). Instead, TPDs are now dynamic and ongoing practices directed by pedagogical, psychological, and affective factors (Borg, 2018; Gu *et al.*, 2022). It has also been argued that the sustainability of TPDs depends on teachers' emotions as much as other factors (Le Huong, 2023; Sokal *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2021). This is because TPD is not an isolated practice, but a collective one affected by teachers' inner and outer variables (Cosgun & Savaş, 2019). In their study, Gu *et al.* (2022) identified that Chinese EFL teachers' emotions affected their SPT during the COVID-19 pandemic by extending their understanding of online teaching, constructing their identities, and inspiring them to take action. Despite these initial efforts, the role teachers' IER strategies and skills the configuration EFL teachers' SPD is left unaddressed.

Another possible positive consequence of working on teachers' IER is their improved sense of wellbeing. Compared to the other two constructs in this study, teacher wellbeing has received more scientific attention. Research illustrated that EFL teachers' wellbeing is correlated with their perceived level of job satisfaction, work engagement, and career adaptability (Greenier *et al.*, 2021; Limbert, 2004; Yang *et al.*, 2019). Other studies also report a positive link between EFL teachers' wellbeing and emotion regulation skills and professional cognition (Joo *et al.*, 2017; Freire & Tavares, 2011). Likewise, White (2010) maintained that teachers' wellbeing reduces their work stress. The literature considering teacher wellbeing is limited to simple, one-shot correlations with PP and work-related constructs. There seems

to be a lack of research on the intersection of L2 teacher wellbeing and TPD. So far, the studies on EFL teachers' emotion regulation have just focused on its individual level and the interpersonal level is overlooked (Xiao & Tian, 2023). Moreover, the contribution of IER to teachers' professionalism, in general, and SPD, in particular, is a new line of research. Finally, despite the fact that the psycho-emotional basis of TPDs has been underscored in the literature (Gu *et al.*, 2022; Sokal *et al.*, 2020), little evidence exits whether EFL teachers' IER plays a role in their wellbeing or not. To fill these gaps, this study aimed to explore the contribution of Chinese pre-service teachers' IER to their SPD and wellbeing. It tried to answer the following research questions:

1. How do interpersonal emotion regulation strategies foster EFL teachers' sustainable professional learning and wellbeing?
2. What strategies do EFL teachers' employ to develop their interpersonal emotion regulation skills for a sustainable professional development and experiencing wellbeing?

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Participants

In this study, 34 Chinese EFL teachers of different ages and teaching backgrounds were invited to attend a face-to-face interview. Of the sample, 16 were males and 18 were females. They came from Jiangsu (N = 14), Anhui (N = 9), and Zhejiang (N = 11) provinces. They majored in English Language Literature, Business English, and TESOL. Moreover, their teaching experience varied from 1-3 (N = 9), 5-10 (N = 14), 11-20 (N = 7), and above 20 (N = 4). The participants took part in the study voluntarily after explaining the goals and objectives.

### 3.2. Instruments

#### 3.2.1. Semi-structured Interview

This study used a face-to-face interview that was held during teachers' free times. The sessions were audio-taped for later transcription and analysis. Semi-structured interview was selected because the researchers wanted to ask further probing questions during interviews between fixed interview questions. All the 34 participants were interviewed one by one. There were four interview questions (Appendix) whose content validity was confirmed by two experts with PhD degrees in applied linguistics. They were also piloted with 5 teachers before final administration. It almost took 25 minutes of teachers' time to answer all the questions. The items were responded in English.

### 3.3. Data Collection

The data were collected via a semi-structured interview that was held in person with 34 Chinese EFL teachers, who were teaching different courses related to English. Initially,

the goal of the study was explained to the respondents and they were assured of ethical principles including privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Furthermore, as the researchers and the sample were meeting for the first time, there was no conflict of interest among them. The participants were asked to answer four questions about how IER affect their SPT and wellbeing. The answers were recorded by a voice-recorder. An interview guide was used during the session and probing questions were asked to get deeper ideas about the research topic. The interviews were previously scheduled based on the participants' free time. After conducing all the interviews in four months, the answers were organized into word documents and stored together for the convenience of analysis. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data after transcribing and sorting the dataset.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by content and thematic analysis. In the former methods, the frequency of occurrence of themes was calculated, while the latter dealt with a systematic extraction of common patterns in teachers' responses. Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis was employed (Figure 2). First the interviews were transcribed with the assistance of three MA students. Next, the researchers read the responses several times to get familiarize with the data. Then initial codes were constructed while reading transcripts. After that initial codes were connected to form possible themes. In the fourth step, potential themes were reviewed and combined together. Afterwards, the researchers labelled the extracted themes in a way that covered all related sub-themes and codes. Finally, the results were prepared and presented.
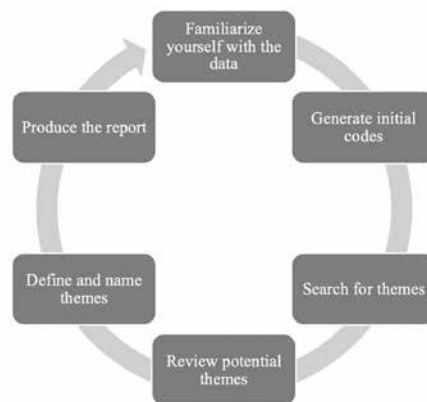


**Figure 1.** *Stages of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)*

To address rigor, the data and results were member checked by two doctoral supervisors, who confirmed the authenticity and relevance of the interview interpretations. Moreover, another researcher re-examined the data analysis phase by auditing different stages for confirmability of the findings. Transferability was ensured by explaining and presenting

full information about the participants and their demographics. Finally, it is noted that the researchers collected and analyzed the interview data during which they were reflexive. The results are presented in figures with percentages.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. The Contribution of IER to EFL Teachers' SPD and wellbeing

To answer this question, the second interview question was thematically analyzed. The results culminated in nine common themes across interviews (Figure 3). The most frequent themes regarding the impact of IER on teachers' SPD and wellbeing concerned their role in "creating a supportive learning environment" ($N = 9$), "building strong rapport and immediacy" ($N = 9$), "promoting communication, collaboration, and empathy" ($N = 8$), and "promoting emotional literacy" ($N = 6$). In support of these themes, Teacher #4 argued that IER helps teachers' professionalism and wellbeing by "*creating a positive and supportive learning environment that fosters growth, engagement, and classroom rapport. Moreover, such strategies promote healthy communication, collaboration, and empathy among colleagues, which further contributes to a supportive and thriving professional community*".
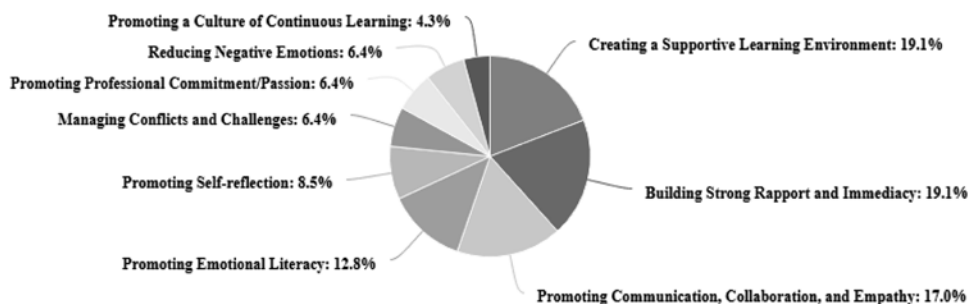


**Figure 2.** *IER and EFL Teachers' Perceived SPD and Wellbeing*

Additionally, another respondent stated "*IER strategies promote communication, helping construct the reliable and strong relationship with students and colleagues. They also secure a friendly atmosphere that protects the learning initiative and sustainability*". (Teacher #11). Other less frequent themes included the potential of IER in "promoting self-reflection" (N=4), "promoting professional commitment/passion" (N=3), "reducing negative emotions" (N=3), "managing conflicts and challenges" (N=3), and "promoting a culture of continuous learning" (N=2). The following extracts represent these themes:

*Regulating interpersonal emotions in the class is of positive significance to the <u>professional development</u> of teachers in that <u>it makes them able to improve teaching quality by doing self-reflection</u>. It also promotes their mental health and happiness* (Teacher #17).

*By prioritizing emotion management and interpersonal emotion regulation skills, <u>teachers can sustain their passion and commitment for teaching</u> and continue to grow professionally in<u> a healthy and fulfilling manner</u>* (Teacher #13).

*When frustrated in my profession, interpersonal emotion regulation strategies help me <u>to get out of negative emotions faster</u>. They reduce <u>negative emotions like stress and anxiety</u> and bring more happiness to my job* (Teacher #10).

*Teachers, who effectively regulate their interpersonal emotions, in a positive environment, <u>can better navigate challenges and conflicts</u>. This leads to improved job development, satisfaction, and well-being* (Teacher #27).

To conclude, the results of interview data showed that Chinese pre-service teachers all agreed with the contribution of IER strategies to their professional development and sense of wellbeing. They most frequently argued that IER is beneficial for SPD and wellbeing as it can "create a supportive learning environment", "build strong rapport and immediacy", "promote communication, collaboration, and empathy", and "promote emotional literacy" on the part of teachers and learners. By establishing a positive classroom climate and emotional literacy for EFL teachers, IER could also prevent/reduce their perceived "negative emotions" and "conflicts and challenges". Other contributions pertained to the potential of these social-interpersonal skills in "promoting professional commitment/passion and self-reflection". In simple words, teachers' IER skills and strategies fostered and enhanced their SPD and wellbeing in several ways.

## 4.2. Strategies to Develop IER for SPD and Wellbeing Purposes

The third and the fourth interview questions were analyzed to answer this research question, which aimed to unpack the activities and strategies that Chinese EFL teachers used to regulate their IER for SPD and wellbeing purposes. The results provided eight common strategies across the participants to balance and regulate their IER for experiencing SPD and sense of wellbeing (Figure 4). The most frequent strategies included "doing self-reflection and self-control (N=10), "communicating and connecting with colleagues and students" (N=10), "seeking feedback and help from others" (N=9), and "doing self-care by relaxation and exercise" (N=9).
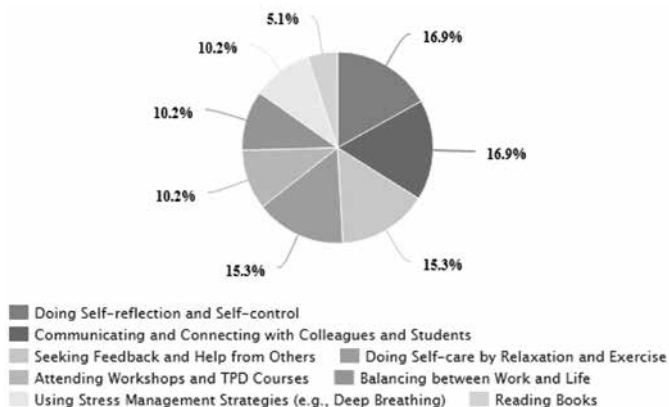
**Figure 3.** *Practices to Regulate IER for SPD and Wellbeing Purposes*

To represent the abovementioned themes, a participant suggested that "*for my profes-sional development and mental wellbeing, I continuously do self-reflection and self-control practices to manage my interpersonal emotions. I also actively seek feedback from both students and colleagues to gain insights into how my emotions may impact others. These experiences provide me with valuable tools and strategies for regulating my emotions in the classroom to constantly improve*" (Teacher #31). Likewise, some interviewees supported the idea of consulting with experienced colleagues by declaring "*it is a good idea to connect and collaborate with fellow teachers or mentors, who can provide guidance, share experiences, and offer emotional support to us to learn their ways for regulating interpersonal emotions in the classroom*" (Teacher #4). Another common technique related to leisure and relaxation exercises that would promote self-care and wellbeing was discussed. In this respect, a teacher mentioned "*I consistently nurture my hobbies and engage in self-care activities outside of school to relax and rejuvenate. I mean, I make time for activities that help me unwind and relax, such as exercise, hobbies, and spending time with loved ones*" (Teacher #8).

In addition to these themes, the results pointed to the importance of "attending workshops and TPD courses" and "balancing between work and life", as reiterated six times each in the dataset. To regulate emotions, reach a SPD state, and experience wellbeing, the teachers argued "*an effective strategy is to engage in professional development opportunities, such as workshops or courses, focused on emotional intelligence, effective communication, and ways to develop teachers' skills in regulating interpersonal emotions*" (Teacher #26). Maintaining a balance between one's work and life was also reported to foster SPD and wellbeing in that this demarcation "*makes teachers recharge better, form a healthy mindset, and avoid emotional burnout*" (Teacher #18). Furthermore, the results of interview analysis demon-strated that "using stress management strategies like deep breathing, mindfulness exercises, and imagination" and "reading books" could play a facilitating role in SPT and wellbeing of pre-service EFL teachers. The participants stated "*some practices like deep breathing and meditation distracts one's attention from the hard emotional situation and help him/her react more calmly and rationally in the moment*" (Teacher #22). Finally, to understand, handle,

and respond to classroom emotions it was suggested that "*reading psychology and teaching books about emotions is a good alternative to achieve SPD and wellbeing*" (Teacher #7).

In sum, this research question indicated different activities and practices that EFL teachers had used to manage their IER for the purpose of achieving SPD and experiencing wellbeing in their job. The most frequent strategies were "doing self-reflection and self-control, "communicating and connecting with colleagues and students", "seeking feedback and help from others", "doing self-care by relaxation and exercise", "attending workshops and TPD courses", and "balancing between work and life".

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study examined the contribution of Chinese EFL teachers' IER to their SPD and sense of wellbeing using a qualitative design. The findings revealed that teachers' IER fostered and enhanced their SPD and wellbeing in several ways. More specifically, it could do so by "creating a supportive learning environment", "building strong rapport and immediacy", "promoting communication, collaboration, and empathy", and "promoting emotional literacy" in both teachers and learners in the classroom. The findings echo the social and interactive basis of IER in the context of SPD and wellbeing. This is consistent with SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and the social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1997) in that IER reflects the 'relatedness" component of SDT and the socio-interactional essence of human development and learning that appear in context, as posited in the social learning theory. Moreover, the findings concur with Zaki and Williams (2013), who contended that IER is governed by one's extrinsic episodes by which the person regulates emotions in contact with others. The social target of IER can also justify these findings as claimed by Niven (2017). Another justification could be the interpersonal communication skills of EFL teachers in this study, which might cause them to see IER, SPD, and wellbeing from an interpersonal, prosocial perspective. This interpretation is in line with Xie and Derakhshan (2021), who examined the contribution of different positive interpersonal communication abilities in the context of L2 education and reported various contributions for each construct. Furthermore, the facilitating role of IER to TPD and wellbeing is empirically consistent with previous research (e.g., Deng *et al.*, 2022; Sokal *et al.*, 2020; Xiao & Tian, 2023). It seems that the participants had a high level of awareness and knowledge of the social and emotional nature of L2 education in a way that they saw emotions connected to various aspects of their profession. This is in tune with Xiao and Tian's (2023) study in China, which approved the role of teacher emotions and IER in shaping their SPD and wellbeing.

This study also demonstrated that IER could prevent "negative emotions" and "conflicts and challenges" and promote "professional commitment/passion" and "self-reflection". The findings corroborate those of Bielak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2022) and Gu *et al.* (2022), who maintained that TPD is an emotional practice that is affected by teachers' emotions and emotion regulation strategies. Since IER can establish interpersonal proximity and rapport in the classroom (Xiao & Tian, 2023), it is able to remove negative emotions and conflicts (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022). A reason could be the influence of positive relationships on teachers' perceived emotions and practices. This reflects the third component of PERMA model that highlights social-relational factors (e.g., IER). An explanation for the

impact of IER on professional commitment and performance of the participants could be their professional identity in social interactions that may involve conflicts. The connection among emotions, professionalism, and reflectivity of teachers is in accord with the nature of L2 education, which is multi-layered including intrapersonal and interpersonal domains. Another finding was that the participants used different activities and practices to regulate and balance their IER to achieve SPD and wellbeing. They mostly suggested "doing self-reflection and self-control, "communicating and connecting with colleagues and students", "seeking feedback and help from others", "doing self-care by relaxation and exercise", "attending workshops and TPD courses", and "balancing between work and life". These practices substantiate the idea that the three constructs of IER, SPD, and wellbeing are directed by factors related to the individual, others, and context.

Regarding the self-based activities, the participants underpinned self-reflection, self-care, self-control, and physical exercise because neither of the three constructs if concern in this study appear and operate in vacuum. Instead, their mechanism and change starts from the very person. These activities enhance positive emotions and make the person resilient in the job. Therefore, they are more likely to use IER to professionally grow. The findings agree with Nozaki and Mikolajczak (2020) and Zepeda (2013), who endorsed the role of intrapersonal factors in IER and SPD, respectively. They argued that these constructs reside at the interface of both intra and interpersonal levels. A logic to rationalize these self-based practices could be the Chinese EFL teachers' tendency for a mental-physical health before taking professional roles. Without feeling healthy and relaxed, teachers may not reach their full functionality. Therefore, the participants proposed these activities to regulate IER to gain SPD and wellbeing, which are by no means detached from one's mental states. This interpretation might be the reason for suggesting a balance between life and work by the participants. In simple words, it appears that for Chinese pre-service teachers the personal side of their job had been as important as its professional one. They highlighted a good personal life behind a good professional performance. In addition to these activities, the participants recommended other-oriented activities to balance and regulate IER to gain SPD and wellbeing, too. They defended collaboration, communication, and professional events attendance (workshops, seminars, courses) to underscore the interpersonal aspect of these constructs and other-regulation techniques. These are in agreement with Cosgun and Savaş (2019) and Xiao and Tian (2023), who reported the role of external and extrinsic factors in establishing and developing teachers' SPD, IER, and wellbeing. Theoretically, this claim is supported by the socio-cultural perspective that suggests attendance in professional learning communities that offer several possibilities and positionalities for teachers' professionalism (Wenger, 1998). To conclude, this study showed that teachers' IER contributes to their SPD and wellbeing because they are all governed by intrapersonal and interpersonal variables. However, the study did not report the mediating role of many other teacher-related factors in such interplay.

## 6. Conclusion and implications

This study revealed that EFL teachers' can draw on IER strategies in order to gain SPD and wellbeing in their profession. It also concluded that there are different profession-

al activities and practices to develop IER skills in EFL contexts ranging from self-based activates to other-directed ones. In light of these claims, it can be declared that IER is a social-interactional construct in L2 education, which is affected by teachers' interpersonal emotions and behaviors. Moreover, it is argued that SPD and wellbeing are both governed by teachers' inner and outer variables including their IER strategies. The role of interpersonal communication aspects of TPD and L2 education is highlighted in light of the findings of this study. Additionally, the findings could add a prosocial and interpersonal dimension to PP constructs and social learning theories in the context of L2 education.

Practically, the findings may inform EFL teachers about the significance of their abilities to regulate and balance their interpersonal and social emotions in the classroom and TPD programs to experience sustainability of growth and wellbeing. Likewise, the study may be used by TPD designers and presenters in that they can add an emotional and interpersonal dimension to their training courses to EFL teachers. Different techniques and strategies to regulate IER can be taught to teachers so that they can achieve SPD and wellbeing in their career. The study can also have implications for researchers, who may find this line of research interesting and try to bridge the gaps and limitations of the current study. More specifically, they can involve a larger sample size compared to the present study, which was limited to 34 EFL teachers. Future researchers can also examine the perspectives of EFL students along with those of teachers. The matches and mismatches of their perceptions of TPD and emotion regulation is an unaddressed domain. Furthermore, this study just used interviews to collect the data, while future studies can employ more tools to triangulate the data (e.g., scales, observation, narratives, journals etc.). The mediating role of demographic factors and cultural context was ignored in the present study, but future investigations can rectify this limitation and run cross-cultural studies, controlling demographics of the participants.

Further research can be done on the mechanisms and realizations of IER strategies of EFL teachers in the context of assessment, especially alternative methods like learning-oriented assessment (LOA) that entails questioning strategies and interactions (Derakhshan & Ghiasvand, 2022). The interpersonal aspect of emotion regulation in teachers' and learners' perceived emotions during assessment (Derakhshan *et al.*, 2023) and their assessment agency and literacy practices can also be a new subject for research (Wang *et al.*, 2023). Finally, the interaction and influence of other interpersonal communication skills listed by Xie and Derakhshan (2021) and PP constructs (Derakshan, 2022) on SPD and wellbeing can be explored in the future using mixed-methods designs.

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## 8. APPENDIX

**Demographic Information**

Age:

Gender:

Teaching Experience:

Major:

**Teachers' Perceptions**

1. What emotions have you experienced when interacting with your students and collegaues?

2. How can interpersonal emotion regulation strategies foster sustainable professional learning and wellbeing?

3. How do you develop your skills in regulating your interpersonal emotions in the classroom?

4. What strategies do you employ to regulate your emotions for experiencing wellbeing and sustainable professional development?