

Enhancing the Wellbeing of English Teachers at the Tertiary Level in Vietnam – Technological Support for a Smooth Transition from Novice to Experienced Teachers

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Abstract

Part 1: Overview of the Study

It has been argued that a supportive community is necessary for sustainable wellbeing in the ELT (English language teaching) field. While some teachers regard CALL (computer-assisted language learning) as an advantage to language teaching and learning, others may perceive it as a threat, which eventually makes them feel reluctant about its implementation into their teaching practice. As long as this gap exists, any effort to implement CALL into teaching English may not be able to welcome desirable outcomes. As such, this presentation reports an investigation into the extent to which CALL affects language teachers' wellbeing. In particular, focusing on the context of English education in Vietnam at the tertiary level, novice and experienced teachers' perspective toward CALL and its influences on their wellbeing were examined using semi-structured interviews. After the interviews were transcribed by the researcher, the data were analyzed using the line-by-line coding and memo technique proposed by the Ground Theory Approach. Together with an outline of the procedure of analyzing the data, the presentation also provides findings obtained from two stages of coding (i.e., initial coding and focused coding). Overall, the findings suggest that CALL may have influenced teachers' wellbeing differently, depending on their teaching experience. As a result, the presentation hopes to provide the audience with practical insights to handle stress and sustain wellbeing. It is hoped that language teachers may be able

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to utilize these recommendations to improve their wellbeing independently, based on their teaching experience.

Part 2: Relevance to the Theme

This study represents a motivated transition in terms of three sub-themes, which are teacher education, the roles of teachers, and the roles of technology. In terms of teacher education, the study provides not only educators but also policymakers with useful insights from teachers' perspectives. From the results, they have more resources to create a comprehensive training program to support the wellbeing of both newly in-service teachers and those who have experience in language teaching but lack the competence with technology to implement CALL. The study also casts light on the roles of teachers in CALL and how they can help bring happiness to the teaching profession, specifically the transitional roles of novice and experienced teachers. Last but not least, the findings from two different generations of language teachers may also be of great help to those who seek to learn about the roles of CALL in a language classroom. Depending on their experience with teaching and implementation of CALL, both teachers and teacher trainers may find the presentation meaningful, as they may understand the roles of CALL more thoroughly, which may bring more innovation into their teaching practice and training programs, especially those that focus on language teachers' wellbeing.

Keywords: Teacher wellbeing, CALL, Mid career, Early career, Professional development

Introduction

Dörnyei (2018, xix) laments that teachers are not just a factor that has an impact on the learners' successful journey. They are "the most important [factor]" that plays a crucial role in any education system. Nonetheless, the teaching profession has not yet seen teachers as individuals (Dörnyei, 2018; Mercer, 2021). Similarly, Mercer (2021) mentioned that "essentially, the entire ELT community needs to see any threats to individual well-being as a collective community issue" (p. 19). CALL may also be interpreted as a threat to language teachers' wellbeing if they are not supported clearly, which eventually may make teachers feel reluctant to welcome technologies into their practice. However, with sufficient support, CALL may become a useful tool for teachers. Besides the anxiety of teaching a non-native language, other technological difficulties may also affect Vietnamese teachers' wellbeing if there is insufficient support. As such, focusing on language teachers in Vietnam, this study examined the extent to which CALL affects language teachers' wellbeing in the early-career and mid-career stages.

Table 1. Participants' background information

Participants	Teaching Experience	Educational Background	Contract
T1	More than 8 years	Master's degree	Full-time
T2	More than 8 years	Bachelor's degree	Part-time

Methodology

This study is part of a PhD project studying language teachers' wellbeing in Vietnam and Japan. The primary approach is qualitative, with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) used as the main method of investigation for this paper. Charmaz (2014) suggested that with this approach, the participants' accounts from interviews can be analyzed thoroughly and the research can be immersed in the data. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Vietnamese ELT teachers at university. The interviews were carried out in Vietnamese. Interview data were transcribed and revised interactively by the researcher. Table 1 provides the background information of the two teachers in this paper.

After revision, the transcribed data were analyzed in two main stages: initial coding and focused coding. In the initial coding stage, the data were coded line by line, and constant memos were taken using the comment function on Google Docs. The purpose was to generate initial codes that could help to understand the participants' stories in detail. In the focused coding stage, the initial codes generated from all participants were analyzed interactively; however, unlike the first stage, the purpose was to create overarching codes (focused codes) to help generate a theory about the process which language teachers may have undergone to build strong wellbeing. Because of space limitations, the paper provides the accounts of only two Vietnamese teachers from the initial coding stage as representatives, and the data focus mainly on the perceived role of CALL in their wellbeing.

Results

Regarding T1's interview, the initial coding stage generated 20 CALL-related codes, and "support" was the main theme, with 10 codes obtained. For T2's interview, there were eight initial codes related to technology among 266 codes generated. The main themes revolved around "support" and "mentality". The details are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Main themes of the initial CALL-related codes

CALL-Related Initial Codes	
T1	1. Technology and support (10) 2. Technology and mentality (1) 3. Technology and students (1) 4. Technology and policy (1) 5. Technology and teaching (7)
T2	1. Technology and support (4) 2. Technology and mentality (4)

Discussion

Support for the Application of Technology into Teaching for Early-Career Teachers

Data have shown that CALL might have affected several aspects of T1's wellbeing. Not only did CALL play a key role in the "support", it also affected other aspects, namely mentality, students, policy, and teaching. In particular, "teaching" and "support" were found to be the main aspects affected by CALL. For example, T1 elaborated on the benefits of having support from technology mentioning that:

But I find the LMS systems really great. Because there are many students, there must be an LMS. They need to study mainly at home for it to be effective. We just need to inspire them.

For early-career teachers, the focus might be more on teaching than on the teachers themselves. This could be because they do not have much anxiety about using technologies in teaching and know the role CALL has in the students' language-learning endeavors. Therefore, they may become worried when they cannot utilize technologies. Moreover, they may want to gain more experience to become more competent, and technologies may be one of the options for helping them with this.

More Updates on Technology for Mid-Career Teachers

On the contrary, teachers in the mid-career stage may have more concerns about updating themselves with cutting-edge technologies. This could be because they already have accumulated sufficient teaching experience to confidently handle teaching-related difficulties. T2 mentioned the workload she took on regardless of the technological training.

And it seems like it doesn't matter if the lecturer has enough time or not, whether their health is good, whether they are stable, whether they are tech-savvy or not, they have to work continuously.

Moreover, technologies are evolving every day, and it could be argued that there will always be a need to update oneself, especially for language teachers when they are in a field that interacts with younger generations (i.e., students and young teachers). As such, perhaps the need to develop teaching competency may not outweigh the need to learn new technologies in order to catch up with the youth and cope with institutional policies.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the extent to which CALL affects language teachers' wellbeing at the tertiary level. An in-depth qualitative analysis of two language teachers in the early-career and mid-career stages have shown that CALL might affect language teachers' wellbeing differently, depending on the stage they are at. With early-career teachers, CALL is likely to affect them comprehensively. In particular, how CALL is supported in the workplace could become pivotal to language teachers' mentality, their relationship with students, and their teaching competency. As such, it is hoped that institutions at the tertiary level can regularly provide teachers at this stage with more teaching practices with technology incorporated so that they can feel more confident in welcoming technologies into their practice. As regards to mid-career teachers, CALL mostly influenced their mentality, and other aspects such as teaching competency, students, policy, etc. may not be priorities. For this reason, it is suggested that university coordinators and faculties should provide teachers with more regular training on using technologies to alleviate their anxiety and help them face challenges more gracefully. This could be done by having more support groups formally and informally, particularly through communities of practice.

However, this paper has some limitations that should be noticed for future investigations. Because of the small sample size, the findings may not represent the actual situation of early-career and mid-career teachers. Future studies could consider recruiting more participants with more diversity (e.g., gender, teaching experiences, etc.) to mitigate this issue.

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