To SPARK While Suffering: An Existential Positive Psychology Approach to L2 Teachers' Resilient Mindset

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Abstract

Psycho-emotional studies in second language (L2) contexts often focus on a bivariate view of well-being, separating positivity and negativity. However, Existential Positive Psychology (EPP) posits that well-being inherently involves navigating suffering and hardships. Addressing a gap in applied linguistics regarding EPP-informed perspectives on teacher well-being, this study explores the resilient mindset of Iranian L2 teachers using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. Quantitatively, 157 English teachers completed an EPP-driven resilience scale measuring existential facets of the concept, including toughness, responsibility, appreciation, mindfulness, meaning, and belief. Qualitatively, interviews with 17 teachers were analyzed using the SPARK model, which renders one's resilience in disturbing moments through processing situations, perceptions, affects, reactions, and knowledge. Findings from multivariate analysis of variance and thematic analysis revealed that the teachers involved in the study exhibited moderate levels of existential resilience, with qualitative themes highlighting salient factors that contribute to shaping teachers' resilience. These insights reflected the importance of an EPP framework in understanding teacher resilience and offered insights for subsequent practical endeavors for L2 teacher education focused on resilience promotion.

Keywords: Existential positive psychology, L2 teacher resilience, positive psychology, resilient mindset, SPARK resilience

Introduction

Second language (L2) teachers rely on resilience, the capacity to manage stress and hardships, to overcome the occupational challenges and maintain well-being (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Philippe et al., 2018). Evidence suggests that resilience manifests through multiple sources, including personal characteristics such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, social support networks, and environmental resources and conditions (Arslan, 2016, 2022; Masten, 2015; Wong & Wong, 2012). However, it can also be threatened by external factors that fluctuate over time and lead to diverse consequences. Such factors include students' misbehaviors, time constraints for L2 content instruction, assessment issues, responding to various learning styles, and conforming to authoritative policies (Debreli & Ishanova, 2019; Sadoughi et al., 2024; Sun & Shek, 2012). Thus, teacher resilience has flourished as a research trend focusing on cultivating the mindset and skills that help teachers in disturbing situations (Mafukata & Mudau, 2016; Mansfield, 2020; Thompson & Dobbins, 2018). Studies have mainly relied on positive psychology (PP) tenets that tend to individuals' well-being by focusing on positive psycho-emotional strengths, including resilience (Snyder & Lopez, 2001; Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2019).

Recently, scholars have discussed that PP-driven studies might offer an unrealistic view of well-being because, based on PP, one's mental health resonates with the absence of negativity. However, in reality, mental wellness is the byproduct of transforming negativity into positivity. This premise, which PP has ignored, paved the way for the second wave of PP, also known as existential positive psychology (EPP) (van Zyl et al., 2023; Zhao & Tay, 2022). According to EPP, resilience, well-being, meaning, and virtue are the four main pillars of the individual's psyche. In other words, EPP explains psycho-emotional factors by considering the idea that hardships and negative thoughts and feelings are inevitable and sometimes unavoidable aspects of everyone's lives, and our growth starts when we learn to confront our tensions, reflect on them, learn from them, build upon them, and transcend through them (Wong, 2023a, b).

As an updated and denser conceptualization, *resilient mindset* helps individuals approach life tensions appropriately and effectively through conscious and deliberate construction and alignment of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual resources (Arslan, 2016; Arslan & Wong, 2023). As discussed through Wong's (2020) TRAMMB model of resilience, individuals with resilient mindsets enjoy a *tough* mentality, which helps them face a competitive and challenging world by reflecting confidence, control, and commitment (Gucciardi, 2020). Such individuals see themselves as *responsible* for flexible adaptation to each challenging situation of life (Arslan & Wong, 2021). They also *appreciate* the goodness in the world and the blessing of being alive (Jans-Beken & Wong, 2019); are grateful of life through *mindfulness* and embrace it through the open and clear mind (Moore, 2024). They also practice the *meaning* mindset by reflecting on beautiful, good, and meaningful aspects of experiences (Wong, 2012); and *believe* in a bright future through hope, faith, and love (Wong, 2023a, b). The other relevant framework for discussing the resilient mindset is Boniwell et al.'s (2023) SPARK model, which renders resilience by suggesting that "Everyday *situations*, as a function of individual *perceptions*, tend to trigger an emotion or *affect* (i.e., automatic emotional

responses). This leads to subsequent behavioral *reactions* and learning, or *knowledge* gained from the experience" (Boniwell et al., 2023, p. 4). Since both models have been overlooked in L2 studies, we considered them concurrently to understand L2 teachers' resilient mindset comprehensively. TRAMMB offers a framework for identifying existential sub-components, and SPARK provides a cyclical lens to analyze how teachers process and respond to stressful situations. Rather than prioritizing one model as stronger, this study treats them as complementary strengths. Thus, TRAMMB captures the internal attributes of resilience, while SPARK processes the situational and process-oriented dynamics, offering a sound basis for studying resilience in L2 teaching contexts.

Studies focusing on teachers' resilience mainly categorize risk-provoking situations by discussing the issues involved in classroom management, organizational and working conditions, and lack of social support (Belknap & Taymans, 2015; Buchanan et al., 2013). Researchers have concluded that forgiveness, humor, optimism, hope, coping strategies, mentorship support, supportive relationships, and a favorable school climate can foster teacher resilience and temperance (Chen, 2024; Ghafouri, 2024; Mansfield et al., 2016). However, the studies in this field have mainly focused on recognizing the motives that trigger teacher resilience in the general population, leading to misconceptions (Chen, 2024). Further, most studies have focused on teacher resilience through the PP perspective, leading to a meta-theoretical under-representation of resilience by ignoring its existential aspects, including toughness, responsibility, appreciation, mindfulness, meaning, and belief (Moore, 2024; Wong, 2020).

Therefore, this shortage of inquiries becomes the source from which the present study obtains its significance. Firstly, the study sheds light on the existential aspects of L2 teachers' resilient mindset, which the field knows less about. Secondly, based on the SPARK framework, it provides a more context-dependent explanation of the factors that shape L2 teachers' responses in disturbing situations. The findings would provide insights into the facets of teachers' resilient mindset, which call for more investment and enlightenment. Also, the study would be fruitful to the field by helping educators and future researchers design proper resilience-promoting strategies, identifying the most salient situations, perceptions, affects, reactions, and knowledge base through the SPARK model. The endeavor is essential yet overlooked in L2 teaching contexts (Daniilidou, 2023; Mansfield, 2020; Mercer, 2021; Ungar, 2012).

Literature Review

Existential Positive Psychology

Around two decades ago, PP was introduced as a branch of general psychology and found its way into various disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, anthropology, politics, and language education (Snyder & Lopez, 2001; Wang et al., 2021). PP indicates that well-being can be studied, described, and discussed from two viewpoints. The hedonic view emphasizes life satisfaction, while the eudaimonic view highlights self-actualization (Snyder & Lopez, 2001; Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2019). While these views are often complementary in theory, their

implications might raise tensions in practice, as the hedonic focus on immediate happiness can conflict with the eudaimonic pursuit of long-term fulfillment, which may involve challenges or discomfort that do not align with short-term pleasure (Diener et al., 1999; Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2019).

Existential Positive Psychology (EPP), as a more realistic version of PP, emphasizes self-transcendence, which involves facing hardships in pursuit of a balanced, dialectical pathway between suffering and growth (Reischer et al., 2020). EPP promotes sustainable well-being and mature happiness, enabling individuals to endure life tensions (Reischer et al., 2020). Unlike PP, which often treats well-being and ill-being as distinct (Iasiello et al., 2020), EPP recognizes their interconnectedness, co-valence, and dialectical interplay (Wong et al., 2023; Zhao & Tay, 2022). Further, PP neglects how negative experiences can drive motivation, effort, and awareness (Strack et al., 2017), processes well-being as the absence of negativity (Engber, 2017), and overly prioritizes satisfaction (Klein et al., 2018; van Zyl et al., 2023). In contrast, EPP acknowledges that happiness and mental health fluctuate based on situational interpretations and individual attitudes (Iasiello et al., 2020; Zhao & Tay, 2022).

In this vein, EPP challenges PP by questioning its limited interpretations of well-being for the sake of a more nuanced, reality-based, and dynamic conceptualization of the concept by considering that well-being-driven factors such as grit, resilience, recovery co-exist next to ill-being indicators like anxiety, and depression (Oxford, 2016; Seligman, 2011). In doing so, EPP advocates that individuals truly live a happy life when they learn to embrace unpleasant feelings and thoughts, maintain their engagement despite failures, forgive for improved relationships, self-decentralize and transcend from egotism, and accomplish through sacrifice and overcoming turmoil (Kaufman, 2021; Reisher et al., 2021; van Zyl et al., 2023). EPP highlights that merely labeling the notions as 'positive or negative' does not mean that the outcomes will always be positive or negative. For instance, optimism as a positively-branded notion might not always function as a positive factor (Lomas et al., 2021; Wong, 2012; Wong & Wong, 2012). Also, EPP asserts that negative factors can contribute to well-being by triggering people to choose meaning and growth over hatred and bitterness and managing unwanted consequences of hatred and anxiety to achieve a happier and healthier life (Strack et al., 2017).

Resilient Mindset

Resilience is the capacity to handle stress and overcome challenging circumstances (Connor & Davidson, 2003). It involves not just enduring tough times but also thriving after facing hardships, including traumatic experiences (Philippe et al., 2018). Research highlights resilience as a key psychological strength which contributes to persistence and determination in difficult situations (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; MacIntyre et al., 2019). Resilience theory suggests that the concept acts more as a shield against stress than a remedy, closely tied to protective traits that help counter workplace pressures and tensions (Thompson & Dobbins, 2018).

Recently, scholars have operationalized a more flexible, dynamic, and reality-based version of resilience and have called it *resilient mindset*. As noted earlier, based on Wong's (2020) TRAMMB model, a resilient mindset enables the individuals to persevere the challenges through toughness, responsibility, appreciation, mindfulness, meaning, and believe. Specifically, a person with a resilient mindset approaches life tensions deliberately and consciously by relying on physio-psychological, spiritual, and social resources (Arslan & Wong, 2023). Resilience promotes well-being (Pretsch et al., 2012), and understanding its role in reducing symptoms like anxiety, distress, and burnout has been an inspiring research trend, especially in language teaching contexts (Benesch, 2018; MacIntyre et al., 2019).

In a cross-cultural study, Wang et al. (2022) interviewed 18 Chinese and 15 Iranian EFL teachers, finding that personal factors significantly shape teachers' resilience. This finding was also reported by Brassington and Lomas (2020), who reviewed 33 studies involving 10,741 participants and concluded that resilience training boosts well-being in high-stress jobs. Examining 450 Iranian EFL teachers, Derakhshan et al. (2022) showed that resilience, grit, and well-being strongly influence teaching enjoyment, suggesting that tending to resilience empowers L2 teachers with preventive mechanisms beneficial for their occupational stress and challenging situations. Moreover, the growing body of literature on L2 teacher resilience indicates that highly resilient teachers are more inclined to the flourishing of well-being-related factors like grit, emotional intelligence, and self-efficacy (Mansfield, 2020). They also have higher potentiality to detach from ill-being symptoms such as burnout and despair (Mansfield, 2020; Peters & Pearce, 2011). Recent studies on L2 teachers' resilience consistently reflect Mansfield et al.'s (2016) claims noting that resilient teachers benefit more from well-being and work engagement.

As for resilient mindset, Arewasikporn et al. (2019) studied the impact of positive affect on resilient thinking and shared enjoyment of 191 middle-aged adults and found that feeling good and having a positive outlook is part of a resilient mindset. Similarly, Hansen et al. (2021) found that people with less resilience were more likely to experience physical and mental health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, Arslan and Coşkun (2023) noted that a resilient mindset helps individuals reduce the connection between COVID-related stress and depression. Since resilient mindset has been an overlooked concept in resilience-based studies, Arslan and Wong's (2023) study led to the development of resilience mindset scale, the reliability and validity of which have been verified in a population of 327 adolescents and youths.

Within educational contexts, especially in the L2 domain, resilient mindset has yet to be considered. The main reason for this drawback is that principles of EPP have been entirely ignored in psycho-emotional studies conducted in L2 contexts, and the majority of the studies in this field have tried to profile the links between teachers' or learners' resilience to other cognitive or emotional factors like grit, and enjoyment (Brassington & Lomas, 2020; Derakhshan et al., 2022).

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary frameworks: Wong's (2020) TRAMMB model and Boniwell et al.'s (2023) SPARK model, which together provide a robust lens for examining L2 teachers' resilient mindset. As noted earlier, the TRAMMB model conceptualizes resilient mindset through six existential sub-components, including toughness, responsibility, appreciation, mindfulness, meaning, and belief. These factors are believed to help individuals properly manage their physio-psychological, spiritual, and social resources (Arslan & Wong, 2023; Wong, 2020). In the present study, the TRAMMB model helped us envision and measure resilient mindset quantitatively.

We also drew upon the SPARK model, which stems from cognitive-behavioral therapy and discusses resilience as a dynamic process where "everyday situations, as a function of individual perceptions, trigger emotions or affect, leading to behavioral reactions and learned knowledge" (Boniwell et al., 2023, p. 4; Boniwell & Ryan, 2009). The SPARK components offer a cyclical approach to understanding how individuals process and respond to stress, with studies confirming its effectiveness in designing resilience interventions (Boniwell et al., 2023; Figure 1). The SPARK model helped us design and implement the interview and analyze the qualitative findings. The rationale for using SPARK includes (a) its foundation in extensive resilience literature, ensuring credibility and validity (Boniwell et al., 2023), (b) its ability to provide concrete insights into L2 teaching dynamics, (c) its multidimensional approach to resilience, and (d) its flexibility in analyzing resilience factors individually or collectively. To best of our knowledge, despite its utility, the SPARK model has not been considered in L2 teaching research.

Figure 1

Schematic of SPARK model of resilience
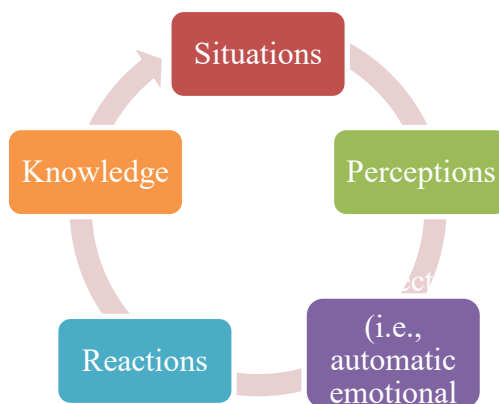
Collectively, we sought two overlapping yet parallel goals: (a) to compare existential aspects of L2 teachers' resilience and (b) to identify and elaborate on the most salient factors that contribute to shaping L2 teachers' resilience-based responses to occupational challenges. The first objective helps the field, or at least Iranian language education context, in favor of a better understanding of L2 teachers' strengths regarding resilient mindset and plan on educating pre-service and in-service teachers and promote their resilience. In doing so, the second objective of the study would be fruitful since it offers the means through which researchers and educators can be more explicit and vocal while reflecting on resilience, resilience-triggering situations, and resilience-promotion strategies. Thus, we focused on finding the answers for the following questions:

1. To what extent do L2 teachers exhibit existential sub-components of resilient mindset?
2. How do L2 teachers shape a response to stressful situation?

Method

Design

In this study, we followed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, which intends to "have the qualitative data help explain in more detail the initial quantitative results" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 355). The quantitative phase comprised having the participants fill out the resilient mindset scale (Arslan & Wong, 2023). This phase helped us obtain the required data to profile the existential aspects of L2 teachers' resilient mindset and see how their existential resilience subcomponents differ. Qualitatively, we used semi-structured interviews until reaching a satisfactory saturation point (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013)—the trial that enabled us to obtain a more subjective view of teachers' responses to stressful situations. Since the study obtained data from human subjects, all teachers involved were fully briefed about the study objectives and researchers' expectations and were informed about ethical issues, including anonymity and confidentiality.

Context and Participants

A total of 157 Iranian EFL teachers (67=male, 90=female) with age ranging from 21 to 46 years (M= 30) and mean teaching experience of 5 years participated in the study and answered the questionnaire. Of these, 113 teachers worked in state schools, 44 in private, and 120 in both state and private schools. The respondents were contacted through convenient sampling method which permits the inclusion of the individuals based on availability and ease of access. In the qualitative phase, 17 of them participated in the interview. The inclusion criteria for the qualitative phase were (a) having the least means on the resilience scale, (b) willingness to participate in a focus group structured interview while knowing about being categorized as low-resilience teacher, (c) having the experience of teaching in public schools, since they host challenges which might not be perceived in private sectors (e.g., overpopulated classes, insufficient materials, possible inter-personal conflicts with colleagues, heterogeneous learners).

Materials and Instruments

Resilient Mindset Scale (RMS)

RMS is a 5-point, 6-item Likert scale ranging from 0 (*almost never true*) to 4 (*almost always true*) designed and validated by Arslan and Wong (2023) and is based on EPP perspectives and addresses six existential aspects of individuals' resilient mindset by dedicating one item to their personal competence, control, trust in instincts, stress management, tolerance of negative affect, acceptance of change, secure relationships, and spiritual growth. The scale developers also reported on the factor analysis process and convergent-divergent validation of the scale by establishing links between resilient mindset and thriving, subjective academic well-being, and internalized behavior inventory (Arslan & Wong, 2023). The scale also aligns with Wong's (2020) TRAMMB model of existential resilience, which included toughness, responsibility, appreciation, mindfulness, meaning, and belief. The results of the multi-trait multi-method matrices reported by Arslan and Wong (2023) verified that the scale strongly and positively links to well-being and positive functioning while negatively predicting psychological distress. Prior to the study, the reliability of the scale was tested in the pilot phase and its content validity was checked by two experts in general psychology and applied linguistics.

Structured interview

The qualitative component of this study consisted of five focus group interview questions (see Appendix) designed to explore L2 teachers' resilient mindset through the lens of the SPARK model (Boniwell et al., 2023). Each question aligned with a specific component of the framework, including situation, perception, affect, reaction, and knowledge to systematically investigate how teachers process occupational stressors. Accordingly, the first question focused on accounts of stressful classroom situations. The second and third questions shed light on teachers' perceptions and emotional responses, to capture the cognitive and affective dimensions of resilience. The fourth question examined teachers' behavioral reactions, while the fifth question explored the knowledge gained by teachers after dealing with the challenges.

Procedure

We collected the data in two phases. In the quantitative phase, 157 EFL teachers recruited through convenient sampling answered to six questions of the RMS. Answering the first research question, we initially checked the assumptions of normality and reliability through estimating skewness and normality along with Cronbach's alpha. Further, we checked the mean average across the six components of the RMS (i.e., toughness, responsibility, appreciation, mindfulness, meaning, and believe) to evidence the extent to which L2 teachers reflect the existential components of resilient mindset. To test the significance of the means between six components of the RMS, we ran Multivariate Analysis of Variances (MONOVA).

The qualitative phase of the study helped us to elicit the required data for the second research question. In this phase, we interviewed 17 teachers up until satisfactory saturation point, where no new themes or sub-themes emerged in the answers. The respondents were interviewed in Google Meet platform, and they answered to five questions in one-on-one online sessions. For ease of answering, they were also permitted to submit their responses via recording through Telegram or WhatsApp platforms. In either case, we transcribed the answers and followed the six-step process of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clark (2006) (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Thematic analysis process (Braun & Clark, 2006)
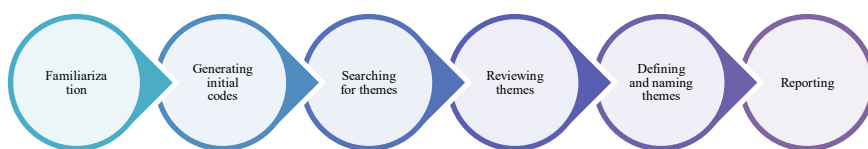
In the initial stage, we reviewed the transcribed data multiple times, noting down early observations that informed the emergence of the initial codes. We also systematically identified and coded notable aspects of the data across the entire dataset. In the third step, we grouped codes into potential themes, and in the fourth step, we refined these themes to develop a thematic map for the analysis. We continued refining until the themes were clearly defined and categorized. Finally, we compared the themes with existing literature and compiled the report. Since the study relied on SPARK model of resilience for analyzing the factors that shape the teachers' responses to stressful situations, we followed the afore-mentioned process for each sub-category of the SPARK model, including situations, perceptions, affect, reaction, and knowledge.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data analysis was conducted to assess the extent to which L2 teachers exhibit existential sub-components of resilient mindset. Normality of the data was confirmed through skewness and kurtosis indices. The reliability was established with a Cronbach's alpha of .709, indicating acceptable internal consistency. We also used Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to examine differences in mean scores across the six RMS components (toughness, responsibility, appreciation, mindfulness, meaning, and belief). Bonferroni post-hoc tests were also conducted to identify specific differences and significance testing (Gray & Kinnear, 2012; Pallant, 2016).

Qualitatively, two external coders familiar with the Braun and Clark's (2006) six-step framework of the thematic analysis and EPP were recruited to ensure the rigor of the thematic analysis. The analysis was deductive, guided by the SPARK components to identify themes shaping L2 teachers' responses to stressful

situations. Coding was performed manually to ensure detailed interpretation, along with MAXQDA 2020 software for data organization and visualization. Notably, coding was conducted independently, and discrepancies were resolved through negotiation. Inter-rater agreement showed that the findings enjoy .83 Cohen's Kappa, which is a perfect agreement based on Landis and Koch (1977). The credibility of the findings was also checked through the member-checking process in which respondents reflected on the generated categories and themes (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). Regular debriefing sessions were held to ensure alignment with the research objectives and to minimize subjective bias. To further address potential bias, we maintained a reflexive journal throughout the coding process, which helped us to track the coding process through documenting decisions, reflections, and possible biased influences on the coding process. The procedures aligned with Nassaji's (2020) outlines for qualitative research features.

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Results

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Quantitative Results

Results of normality indices (i.e., skewness and kurtosis) fell between ±2; thus, the assumption of normality was fulfilled. Checking the reliability of RMS, we used Cronbach's alpha method, which showed acceptable reliability index (α = .709, N= 6). Table 1 shows the Iranian EFL teachers' means on six variables. They had the highest mean on meaning (M = 2.85). This was followed by responsibility (M = 2.77), toughness (M = 2.73), belief (M = 2.63), mindfulness (M = 2.56), and appreciation (M = 2.54).

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for six tests

Prepared	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Toughness	2.73	.074	2.58	2.87
Responsibility	2.77	.082	2.60	2.93
Appreciation	2.54	.098	2.34	2.73
Mindfulness	2.56	.078	2.41	2.72
Meaning	2.85	.068	2.72	2.98
Belief	2.63	.079	2.47	2.78

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to assess differences in the mean scores of Iranian EFL teachers across six subscales of the Resilient Mindset Scale (RMS; toughness, responsibility, appreciation, mindfulness, meaning, and belief). The MANOVA results, shown in Table 2 (F (5, 152) = 4.15, p = .001, partial η^2 = .120, indicating a moderate effect size), revealed significant variations in the teachers' mean scores on these subscales. The moderate effect size suggests that while the differences are not substantial, they are significant enough to merit consideration, indicating that the existential aspects of resilience, as measured by the RMS, may differ in their significance or emphasis among EFL teachers. Notably, the partial eta squared effect size should be interpreted using the thresholds: .01 = weak, .06 = moderate, and .17 = large (Gray & Kinnear, 2012; Pallant, 2016).

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Table 2

Multivariate tests for six components of resilient mindset

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Pillai's Trace	.120	4.159	5	152	.001	.120
Wilks' Lambda	.880	4.159	5	152	.001	.120
Hotelling's Trace	.137	4.159	5	152	.001	.120
Roy's Largest Root	.137	4.159	5	152	.001	.120

Bonferroni post-hoc comparison tests were conducted to provide a detailed analysis of significant differences among the Resilient Mindset Scale (RMS) subscales (Table 3). Accordingly, the EFL teachers' mean score on toughness ($M = 2.73$) showed no significant differences with (a) appreciation ($M = 2.54$, $MD = .191$, $p > .05$), (b) mindfulness ($M = 2.56$, $MD = .166$, $p > .05$), or (c) belief ($M = 2.63$, $MD = .102$, $p > .05$). These results were consistent across other subscales; however, the EFL teachers' mean score on meaning ($M = 2.85$) was significantly higher than on mindfulness ($M = 2.56$, $MD = .284$, $p < .05$).

Table 3

Pairwise comparisons tests for resilient mindset sub-components

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
(I) Tests	(J) Tests				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Toughness	Appreciation	.191	.120	1.000	-.166	.549
	Mindfulness	.166	.094	1.000	-.114	.445
	Belief	.102	.094	1.000	-.178	.382
Responsibility	Toughness	.038	.098	1.000	-.254	.331
	Appreciation	.229	.105	.456	-.084	.542
	Mindfulness	.204	.080	.172	-.034	.441
Mindfulness	Belief	.140	.087	1.000	-.120	.401
	Appreciation	.025	.112	1.000	-.309	.360
	Toughness	.121	.094	1.000	-.161	.403
Meaning	Responsibility	.083	.080	1.000	-.155	.321
	Appreciation	.312	.110	.074	-.014	.639
	Mindfulness	.287*	.077	.004	.058	.515
Belief	Belief	.223	.080	.086	-.014	.460
	Appreciation	.089	.112	1.000	-.243	.422
	Mindfulness	.064	.083	1.000	-.183	.310

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

**Qualitative Findings**

Figure 3 illustrates the main themes obtained through qualitative analysis, which aimed to provide a better view of factors that shape the language teachers'

response to stressful situations by relying on the SPARK model of resilience, which permits the identification of stress-provoking situations, individuals' perceptions of the situations, their immediate feelings and affect, reactions, and the knowledge they obtained from their tense experiences. Notably, a summary of excerpts for each theme has been included in Appendix B. The description of each aspect is as follows:

Figure 3

Thematic map of SPARK model among L2 teachers
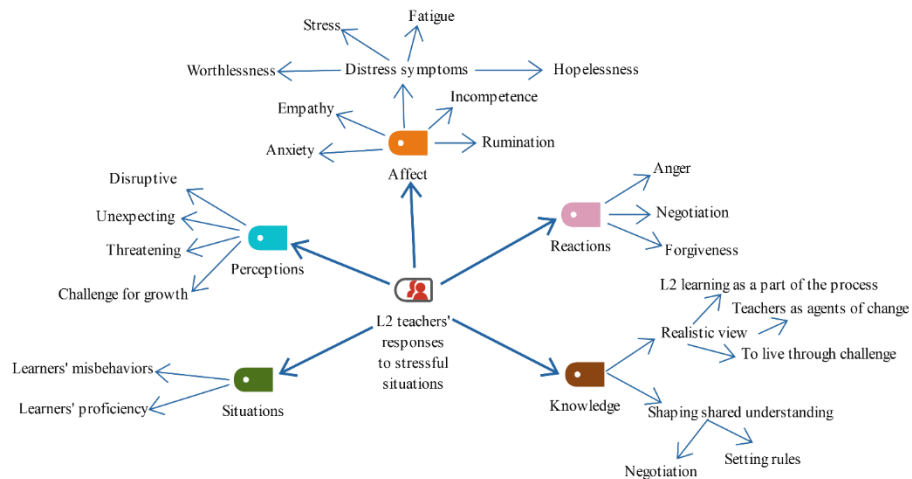
Situations

Learners' misbehaviors and proficiency issues emerged as the two most frequent factors in the situation category. Specifically, two main situations seemed challenging for teachers. Regarding learners' misbehaviors, teachers asserted that this factor takes two forms: misbehaviors toward teachers and interpersonal conflicts with classmates, as reflected in the following extracts:

> I was teaching an advanced English class for adult learners in an evening program. The class comprised diverse students, including professionals, immigrants, and international students. One evening, a heated debate arose during a discussion on cultural stereotypes. Two students, from different cultural backgrounds, began arguing intensely, with the conversation escalating into personal attacks. Other students became visibly uncomfortable, and the class atmosphere grew tense. (T15)

Teachers also believed that learners' low performance is challenging and exposes them to a mixture of bad feelings and thoughts, including a sense of incompetence and inefficacy, especially in classes with heterogeneous students. As the following teacher asserts:

In the third month of the term, Amir, a new student and immigrant from a Middle Eastern country, joined my advanced English class. Unlike the other students who were already proficient in English, Amir struggled with basic sentence structures and vocabulary. The school administration placed him in my class due to a scheduling conflict, despite his lower proficiency. The other students were preparing for English proficiency exams like IELTS and TOEFL. This situation created a significant imbalance in the class dynamics, as Amir required more foundational instruction, while the others needed advanced practice. (T4)

Perceptions

Analysis showed that teachers' initial perceptions of the situations ranged from negative to positive attitudes. For most teachers, tense situations were unexpecting, disruptive to the teaching and learning process, and a threat to their agency. Meanwhile, two of the respondents noted that they saw those situations as a means for reflection and personal growth; thus, they tried to see the bright side of the issues:

I found it out by the tone of laugh. Actually, I got nervous and deeply sorry. It was huge threat for me, because teaching was my best chance at that time, so the more mismanagement of the class, the more probability of losing my job. (T13)

Affect

The only positive theme that emerged under this category was teachers' empathy, which was mainly the byproduct of their immediate forgiveness, mindful thinking, and reflection on the situation. However, feelings like anxiety, doubt, stress, fatigue, hopelessness, worthlessness, and incompetence emerged as frequent affective factors. Additionally, teachers noted that they continued to ruminate the harsh and irreversible thoughts even after their class was finished. For instance, a teacher noted that "On my way home, I thought about whether what I said to my students was right or wrong" (T5). Likewise, another teacher said,

I thought I was like a worthless thing in the classroom and wanted to leave the class immediately. But I told myself, please be patient and try to get along with your learners, they are like your children, they really need your help. (T13)

Reactions

Negotiating classroom issues with students, although overwhelming for the teachers, was the most frequent answer in this category. Teachers believed that the number of solutions they had was limited, and they only had a few choices in tense situations. Five of them noted that challenging situations make them angry, seemingly the outcome of feeling an array of negative emotions mentioned earlier. Further, we noticed that teachers rely on their forgiveness as a solution; however, clarifying the classroom rules, trying to reconcile bonds through discussion seemed to be more effective reactions for them:

I explained kindly to him that others have the right to express their ideas and I asked him to raise his hand whenever he wanted to talk. It was a bit hard but I controlled him. Whenever I gave him a chance to talk, he talked a lot about the subject from different aspects leaving nothing for others to say. That was why I asked him to talk about a question briefly in a way to leave something for others to say. He took my advice. (T12)

Knowledge

Reflecting on the lessons that teachers learned from the tense situations, the respondents emphasized the importance of processing life and occupational event through a realistic view, which prioritizes the ideas that (1) language learning is only a part of the learning process, (2) teachers are the agents of change, and (3) to live through challenges is inevitable of everyone's life. Additionally, they asserted that determining clear classroom rules and negotiation in advance would function as resources that can help them in subsequent tense incidents:

Education is multifaceted and limiting one's mindset on teaching the subject content would lead to several issues. Our learners reflect the interplay of several personal, sociocultural, and varied backgrounds, and what we observe in one session or two, can't be considered as a proper measure for our judgments as teacher. (T14)

We cross-validated the quantitative and qualitative findings to ensure alignment and synergy of the results. The quantitative analysis showed that 'meaning' had the highest mean score among the RMS components ($M = 2.85$). This result aligns with the qualitative theme of 'reflective growth,' where teachers elaborated on their ability and preferences to obtain meaningful insights from challenging teaching experiences. Similarly, the emergence of 'empathy' and 'negotiation and forgiveness' in the interviews aligned with the quantitative findings of moderate scores on 'responsibility' ($M = 2.77$) and 'toughness' ($M = 2.73$). Teachers expressed their ability to empathize with students, which frequently resulted from a mindful and reflective approach to managing stress. Quantitatively, the scores on 'mindfulness' ($M = 2.56$) support this observation, suggesting a moderate but significant presence of this trait. The quantitative scores also highlighted 'responsibility' as a key component, with a mean score of 2.77, second only to 'meaning.' This was mirrored in the qualitative data through themes such as 'negotiation and reconciliation,' where teachers demonstrated a proactive approach to managing classroom conflicts. The participants frequently mentioned the importance of setting clear expectations and maintaining open communication, which aligns with the quantitative finding that responsibility plays a central role in not only managing stressful situations but also setting the stage for shared understanding. In contrast, the lower quantitative scores for 'appreciation' ($M = 2.54$) and 'belief' ($M = 2.63$) were reflected in qualitative themes such as 'feelings of incompetence' and 'hopelessness.' Teachers described moments of self-doubt and fatigue, particularly when faced with persistent classroom challenges or disruptive behaviors. The findings in this case suggest that while existential resilience is present among

teachers, certain components, including teachers' beliefs and appreciation mindset require more consideration.

Discussion

Informed by EPP principles, we investigated L2 teachers' resilient mindset through a mixed-methods approach and profiled the existential sub-components of teachers' resilient mindset along with several underlying themes which contribute to teaches' response in stressful situations.

Based on the SPARK model of resilience, our analysis revealed that L2 teachers mainly suffer from learners' misbehaviors and low proficiency as the two influential stress-triggering situations in L2 classes. Thus, the findings verified the results of previous studies, which reported students' dishonesty, disrespect, disobedience, rudeness, asking irrelevant questions, excessive talking out of turn, and verbal aggression as main challenges in classroom management (Debreli & Ishanova, 2019; Seli et al., 2021; Sun & Shek, 2012). Adding to the literature, our findings also revealed that learners' poor L2 performance can add to teachers' concerns. Specifically, findings showed that learners' poor performance and achievements undermine the teachers' competence and efficacy and expose them to unwanted perceptions like incompetence and stress. In line with Arewasikporn et al. (2019), we argue that tense situations, as emerged in the findings, impede L2 teachers' perceptions of feeling good and positive outlook on themselves in the classroom context. Furthermore, the findings comply with Belknap and Taymans (2015) and Buchanan et al. (2013), who discussed classroom management issues and working conditions as the main categories of risk-provoking situations.

Regarding the perceptions and affect components of the SPARK model, our findings revealed that L2 teachers often perceive stressful classroom situations, such as students' irrelevant questions, excessive use of mother tongue, unwillingness to communicate, and low motivation, as disruptive, unexpected, and threatening to their agency and the learning process (Debreli & Ishanova, 2019). Most teachers described these situations as harmful, while a few saw them as opportunities for growth and development, as reflected in EPP principles (Iasiello et al., 2020; van Zyl et al., 2023; Zhao & Tay, 2022). Processing the stressful situations in the L2 class through the SPARK model, we found that teachers feel anxious and incompetent while suffering from rumination of unwanted thoughts. Moreover, a range of distress-related symptoms, such as worthlessness, fatigue, hopelessness, and stress, was also identified. As noted by Masten (2015) and Wong and Wong (2012), resilience positively links to self-efficacy, self-esteem, social support, and environmental conditions and resources; however, sense of incompetence and insufficiency, as emerged in the findings, signal the idea that stressful situations would possibly adversely impact the self-confidence and self-esteem of the teachers, especially, by reflecting on the affect portion of the SPARK model, based on which L2 teachers indicated that tense situations make them feel hopeless and incapable.

The reactions component of the SPARK model indicated that most L2 teachers employ constructive strategies, such as negotiation and forgiveness for managing tense situations and welcome reconciliation (Mansfield et al., 2016; Chen,

2024). Although a few teachers admitted to occasionally losing their temper, none viewed anger or punishment as effective solutions. Teachers' empathy toward students' misbehaviors and poor performance, as noted in the 'affect' component, provided more evidence for Ghafouri (2024), who noted that forgiveness potentially leads to less fatigue, anxiety, and rumination while persevering teachers' authority. Reflecting on the findings, we see that disturbing situations can make the teachers anxious, drain their energy (i.e., fatigue), and trigger their rumination while being a threat to their authority. Thus, as a reaction emerged in the findings, teachers' reliance on forgiveness can help them detach from some of the unwanted and disturbing classroom experiences.

Finally, in the knowledge portion of the SPARK model, teachers' exposure to tense situations shaped an insight that reflected the properties of a resilient mindset. On the one hand, teachers noted that they have learned that L2 learning is just a part of the process, implying that what occurs in real-time teaching includes a series of unwanted incidents, unplanned hassles, and sometimes tense experiences. Arguably, these situations enlighten them to set rules and negotiate a shared understanding with learners. In this vein, the results reflected a reorientation in teachers' mindset, where the disturbing situations taught them to see themselves as agents of change rather than stress-ridden, incompetent individuals, irrespective of experience, gender, or other demographic backgrounds (Oxford, 2016; Reischer et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2023). Arguably, a resilient mindset functioned as a catalyst through which teachers' ill-being-related thoughts, like anxiety and distress, were recognized, analyzed, and processed into insightful, constructive, and promising thoughts, which not only helped teachers reshape their stressful thoughts but also clarified the why and how of what they do in their classroom. In the process, resilient mindset facilitates reframing, shifting the maladaptive cognitions into growth-oriented perspectives, such as viewing a classroom setback as "*valuable feedback for refining my instructional strategies*" rather than an overwhelming barrier.

The results showed that teachers do not traverse the resilience-buildup process similarly, implying that each existential sub-component of teachers' resilient mindset contribute uniquely to their ability to respond to classroom challenges. Drawing on resilient mindset literature (Arslan & Wong, 2021; Gucciardi, 2020; Jans-Beken & Wong, 2019; Moore, 2024; Wong, 2020; Wong, 2023a, b), we argue that these findings indicated that L2 teachers find purpose in teaching experiences, adapt responsibly to stressors, endure challenges through toughness, maintain optimism and empathy through belief, approach difficulties mindfully, and appreciate positive classroom dynamics despite student-related issues. However, the moderate difference between these aspects suggested that future teacher education programs could focus more on developing underemphasized sub-components such as appreciation, mindfulness, and belief through targeted resilience promotion protocols, especially by reflecting on the SPARK model results, which provided more tangible factors contributing to teachers' resilience development.

As captured by the RMS, teachers' highest rates on the meaning indicated that L2 teachers are prone to find silver linings in hardship. The claim is backed by

the SPARK analysis, where many teachers viewed their occupational challenges, like learners' misbehaviors or low proficiency, as opportunities for growth and development and reflective processing of tense situations that help them to shape a better mindset about their role as a teacher in not only their own development but also their students' future. Specifically, our findings showed that in disruptive and unexpected situations, teachers would try to maintain a sense of purpose and meaning; as mentioned by a teacher, "I have realized that my students' issues are also my problems and tending to those issues, and adding to what they should value as human beings is my responsibility" (T1).

Responsibility and toughness were ranked second and third in the quantitative results, highlighting teachers' resilience as a means of thriving classroom dynamics. Based on the SPARK findings, we argue that many L2 teachers respond to learner-related stressors by being more accountable or setting robust rules, negotiating, and a trial for shared understanding. As a result of enduring emotional tensions, teachers are likely to become more resilient since their toughness helps them endure anxiety or perceived incompetence. The close interplay between teachers' toughness and responsibility aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of a resilient mindset (Arslan & Wong, 2021, 2023; Daniilidou, 2023). Ranked lower than meaning and toughness, teachers' belief was the other sub-component of resilient mindset. Teachers mentioned that their belief in a bright future and the so-called better upcoming days honed their mindset for dealing with classroom realities in tense situations. This further justifies the emergence of empathy under the perceived affect. Likewise, many teachers demonstrated that even in peak anger or distress, forgiveness and the trial for reconciliation helped them deal with the problems—the association that undermines the dual nature of a resilient mindset, as conceptualized through the scope of EPP. Specifically, based on the findings, we argue that resilience is both a struggle and a resource for not giving up. Finally, low scores on mindfulness and appreciation suggest that these resilience dimensions may develop over time as teachers become more experienced. As emerged in the qualitative findings, teachers' exposure to stressful situations might overwhelm them with anxiety, distress, and rumination, which would, in turn, hinder their capability to practice mindfulness or gratitude.

Conclusion

Responding to the drawbacks of PP, we focused on L2 teachers' resilient mindset, an EPP-driven concept encompassing toughness, responsibility, appreciation, mindfulness, meaning, and belief. The trial theoretically justified the need for reconsidering resilience-promotion programs in L2 teaching contexts and offers a more detailed profile of L2 teachers' resilient mindset. While the quantitative results highlighted trends of existential aspects of teachers' resilience, the qualitative data provided depth and context, offering a more subjective understanding of resilience among L2 teachers, especially in Iranian context.

Some implications can be induced from the present study. Moving backward from the knowledge portion of the SPARK model to the situations wedge, scholars and teacher educators can inform L2 teachers by raising their awareness

about the lessons they can learn from tense situations. In this vein, workshops and consciousness-raising sessions can help teachers share their experiences and negotiate the protective means beneficial in L2 classes. In this regard, reverse reflection on SPARK (i.e., KRAPS) can help teachers. In other words, teachers can rely on the present findings or share similar narratives based on what they have learned from their tough experiences and gain a deeper insight into factors that can be controlled, alleviated, neutralized, and ignored during L2 teaching. Also, teacher educators can focus on subcomponents of resilient mindset to cultivate this protective mechanism among the L2 teachers, especially by considering the premise that focusing on this notion helps teachers in several aspects, including increased enjoyment, grit, well-being, and decreased ill-being symptoms (Arslan & Coşkun, 2023; Derakhshan et al., 2022; Mansfield, 2020; Peters & Pearce, 2011; Pretsch et al., 2012; Thompson & Dobbins, 2018). Our findings also implied that prioritizing the value of meaning and responsibility in teacher education programs, workshops, and reflective practices can help teachers connect their daily challenges to broader professional goals. The prevalence of anxiety, distress, and anger and low scores on mindfulness in teachers' responses imply that teacher education programs, especially in Iran, are in urgent need of including mindfulness-based practices and emotion-regulation strategies within the teacher preparation courses.

Future studies can build upon the limitations of the present study. First, the generalizability of the present findings can be improved with a larger and more diverse sample size. Highly resilient teachers could receive more attention in subsequent qualitative studies, especially considering that the participants involved in our interview had the lowest resilient scores compared to others. More robust research designs and data collection procedures can be considered while conducting future trials. Like other psycho-emotional factors, a resilient mindset is prone to change; thus, repeated measures designs can provide a better insight into how teachers' perceptions of resilience fluctuate over time.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix A
Interview questions

1. Please describe the specific stressful situation you encountered in your class. Be as detailed as possible, including the context, what happened, and who was involved.
2. How did you initially perceive this situation? What thoughts and feelings did it trigger in you? Did you see it as an obstacle, a threat, or an opportunity?
3. How did you feel? (e.g., anxious, frustrated, angry, overwhelmed, etc.).
4. How did you react to the situation? What did you do or say? Did your actions align with your own values, emotions, and thoughts?
5. What did you learn from that experience? Did it change your understanding of yourself or your teaching? How did it shape your future approach to similar situations?

Appendix B

Interview excerpts

A. Situation

One of the students walked to the window and started yelling at people in the street and calling them, while I was teaching. (T8)

I was writing something on the board in a class filled with 40 students, and one of the students said: 'headshot' and the whole class started laughing. (T10)

A student of mine saw herself as the authority of the class due to her higher age compared to mine. She used to write the translation of every word she didn't know. One time, I tried to make her aware of the benefits and drawbacks of translation in language learning. Meanwhile, another student, who was more proficient, tried to inform her about this point, but she started to quarrel. (T16)

B. Perception

I initially perceived the situation as both an obstacle and a potential threat to the classroom's safe environment. My primary concern was maintaining a respectful and inclusive atmosphere for all students. I was concerned about the immediate need to de-escalate the situation and the longer-term implications for classroom dynamics and trust. (T15)

Initially, I tried to ignore their disruptive behavior and maintain a calm demeanor. However, as time went on, I realized that this approach wasn't effective. I felt embarrassed and unable to follow my lesson plan. (T17)

C. Affect

In the heat of the moment, I felt a surge of anxiety and frustration. I was anxious about the conflict escalating further and frustrated that my carefully planned lesson was derailed. At the same time, I felt a deep sense of empathy for both Amir and Maria. Amir was clearly struggling with more than just language barriers, while Maria's frustration, though expressed inappropriately, stemmed from a genuine desire to complete the task effectively. Balancing these emotions, I took a deep breath and prepared to intervene constructively. (T4)

D. Reaction

I asked the class to review the rules and I was sure that she was listening even if not looking at us. I told them if you follow the rules in fact, you are respecting yourself and encouraged them to be on time. (T2)

Now that I think about that moment, I see that I should have gone easier on them. (T5)

E. Knowledge

I learned that nobody, even my students, is perfect and we have to appreciate the realities of life. Instead of my learners' scores, I try to reflect on their trial for growth and progress. (T3)

I learned the importance of setting clear guidelines for discussions on sensitive topics and being prepared to mediate conflicts. It reinforced the need for cultural sensitivity and proactive conflict resolution skills in the classroom. I realized the value of staying calm and composed in the face of challenges, which helped me handle the situation more effectively. This experience shaped my future approach by prompting me to incorporate regular discussions on cultural understanding and respect into my curriculum. I also developed a more robust set of classroom management strategies to handle similar situations in the future. (T4)

Education is multifaceted and limiting one's mindset on teaching the subject content would lead to several issues. Our learners reflect the interplay of several personal, sociocultural, and varied backgrounds, and what we observe in one session or two, can't be considered as a proper measure for our judgments as teacher. (T14)

The experience also deepened my understanding of the emotional dynamics in a multicultural classroom and the importance of empathy and active listening. Moving forward, I became more proactive in setting the tone for discussions, ensuring that potentially sensitive topics were handled with care and that all students felt heard and respected. I also incorporated more activities that fostered mutual understanding and empathy among students from different backgrounds. (T15)

Authors' Biographies

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