



An exploratory study on the interplay between Teachers' Wellbeing, Emotional Regulation, and Work Engagement

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Teachers' wellbeing plays a crucial role in fostering high-quality educational environments and positive outcomes for students, teachers, and the educational community. Previous studies show that teachers' emotional regulation strategies, particularly cognitive reappraisal, positively affect wellbeing (Braun et al., 2020). Additionally, work-related factors, such as work engagement and working conditions, also play a significant role. This study explores wellbeing among 443 teachers, examining its relationship with emotional regulation strategies, and work engagement. Data was collected using the Mental Health Continuum (Fonte et al., 2020), Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003), and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Sinval et al., 2018). Results showed that teachers exhibit medium-high emotional wellbeing, medium psychological wellbeing, and medium-low social wellbeing. Cognitive reappraisal and work engagement, particularly vigor and dedication, positively predicted wellbeing, while emotional suppression negatively predicted all dimensions of wellbeing. Findings highlight the importance of promoting emotional regulation and work engagement to enhance teacher's wellbeing.

Keywords: wellbeing, teachers, self-regulation, work engagement.

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Introduction

It is undeniable that educational contexts play a fundamental role in promoting students' wellbeing, with teachers serving as key agents in cultivating positive learning environments (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). However, teaching is an emotionally demanding profession, requiring daily management of complex emotions (e.g., Wang & Burić, 2023). Consequently, understanding how teachers regulate these emotional demands is essential to supporting their overall wellbeing and, in turn, fostering students' wellbeing (Braun et al., 2020; Heydarnejad et al., 2021) academic success (e.g., Brown et al., 2023), and inform school policies and interventions. Among the factors that can influence, constrain, or mediate teacher wellbeing, the literature highlights amongst others, personal characteristics, such as emotional regulation strategies (e.g., Ao et al., 2023; Braun et al., 2020), as well contextual factors, such as work-related conditions (Zhou et al., 2024). Previous research demonstrated a strong link between teachers' wellbeing and their emotional regulation strategies, particularly cognitive reappraisal, which modifies emotional responses early on to reduce both the experience and expression of emotions, and emotional suppression, which acts later by limiting only the outward expression of emotions (Gross & John, 2003; Heydarnejad et al., 2021). More specifically, wellbeing is positively associated with work engagement, as teachers with higher levels of wellbeing tend to experience reduced burnout and distress, diminished turnover intentions, and enhanced job satisfaction and commitment, ultimately allowing them to remain engaged and teach more effectively (Zhou et al., 2024).

The present study aims to explore the wellbeing of Portuguese teachers and examine the relationships between teachers' emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing, their work engagement and emotional regulation strategies. Specifically, it aims to investigate the levels of emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing among Portuguese teachers and how are these dimensions of wellbeing are related to work engagement and emotional suppression and cognitive reappraisal strategies.

Methodology

Participants

Participants included 443 Portuguese teachers ($M_{\text{age}} = 52.43$, $SD = 21.76$; 80% female), teaching at different levels of education (9.5% in preschool; 23.9% in elementary school; 43.5% in middle school; 25.9% in secondary school). A voluntary response sampling procedure was used. All schools in Portugal were contacted and school-directors were asked to disseminate the study. Participation was voluntary, data collected was anonymous and participants were informed of the study goals, and their rights, in accordance with ethical standards from General Data Protection Regulation and APA. Data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed to schools nationwide.

Measures

Measures included three self-report questionnaires, namely, the *Emotion Regulation Questionnaire* (Gross & John, 2003) to assess the use of cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression amongst participants. The two subscales presented adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$ cognitive reappraisal; $\alpha = .65$ emotional

suppression. The *Mental Health Continuum – Short Form* (Fonte et al., 2020) was used to evaluate the participants' level of emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. Internal consistency in the present study was adequate ($\alpha = .87$ emotional wellbeing; $\alpha = .88$ psychological wellbeing; $\alpha = .84$ social wellbeing). Finally the *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (Sinval et al., 2018) collected information on the participants' vigour, absorption, and dedication at work. Internal consistency in this study was adequate ($\alpha = .91$ vigour; $\alpha = .83$ absorption; $\alpha = .87$ dedication).

Results

Participants reported medium-high levels of emotional wellbeing ($M = 13.98$, $SD = 3.07$), medium levels of psychological wellbeing ($M = 27.58$, $SD = 5.89$), and medium-low levels of social wellbeing ($M = 13.78$, $SD = 4.79$). Regression analyses (Table I) showed that both emotional regulation and work engagement significantly influenced teachers' wellbeing. Specifically, the use of cognitive reappraisal was a positive predictor of teachers' emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing ($\beta = .110$, $p = .007$, $\beta = .175$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .131$, $p = .004$, respectively). Contrarily, the use of emotional suppression was a negative predictor of a teacher's emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing ($\beta = -.115$, $p = .005$, $\beta = -.147$, $p < .001$, $\beta = -.147$, $p < .001$, respectively). Vigour positively predicts teachers' emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing ($\beta = .469$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .337$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .431$, $p < .001$, respectively), while work dedication positively predicts emotional and psychological wellbeing ($\beta = .200$, $p = .009$, $\beta = .409$, $p < .001$). Absorption at work negatively predicts psychological wellbeing ($\beta = -.129$, $p = .037$).

Table I

Predictors of teachers' emotional, social and psychological wellbeing

	Emotional wellbeing			Psychological wellbeing			Social wellbeing		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Constant	5.823	.975		10.519	1.829		3.338	1.684	
Gender	-.341	.300	.035	.656	.563	.046	1.345	.518	.118**
Age	.005	.005	.039	.008	.010	.032	.008	.009	.041
Total service	-2.940	.001	-.002	.001	.001	.040	.000	.001	-.007
Cognitive reappraisal	.303	.112	.110**	.926	.211	.175***	.558	.194	.131**
Emotional suppression	-.341	.121	-.115**	-.841	.227	-.147***	-.678	.209	-.147**
Vigour	1.227	.161	.469***	1.701	.303	.337***	1.748	.279	.431***
Absorption	-.070	.189	-.023	-.741	.354	-.129**	-.172	.326	-.037
Dedication	.592	.225	.200**	2.335	.422	.409***	.437	.388	.095
Total Model	<i>R</i> ² = .445***			<i>R</i> ² = .474***			<i>R</i> ² = .310***		
* <i>p</i> <.05. ** <i>p</i> <.01. *** <i>p</i> <.001.									

Discussion

This study shows that both cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression are predictors of teachers' emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. Cognitive reappraisal emerged as a positive predictor, and emotional suppression as a negative predictor. This is consistent with previous literature highlighting cognitive

reappraisal as an adaptive regulatory mechanism (Braun et al., 2020) that diminishes burnout (Chang, 2020), depression and anxiety (Yin et al., 2018). Conversely, emotional suppression has been associated with heightened emotional exhaustion or perceived professional vulnerability (Gross & John, 2003).

Work engagement emerged as a significant predictor, with vigour positively influencing all dimensions of wellbeing and dedication emotional and psychological wellbeing. Findings reinforce previous research showing that engaged employees experience greater wellbeing due to more positive emotions at work (Paulík, 2020). The strong effect of vigour suggests that work energy and enthusiasm contribute to overall wellbeing, whereas dedication, i.e. sense of purpose and commitment, may be particularly relevant for emotional and psychological wellbeing (e.g., Zhou et al., 2024).

Overall, the study highlights the significance of advocating for the promotion of cognitive reappraisal strategies in interventions aimed at fostering teachers' wellbeing (Zhou et al., 2024). Additionally, addressing social support structures in educational settings that foster positive work engagement may contribute to improving social wellbeing among teachers. Study limitations include the use of self-report questionnaires, which are efficient but prone to bias. The sample, mostly female and older teachers, reflects the demographics of the teacher workforce in Portugal but limits generalisability to male and early-career teachers. The focus on Portuguese teachers offers contextual insights but restricts broader applicability. Finally, we acknowledge that the study focused only on two specific aspects related to teacher wellbeing, and didn't include other factors (e.g., teachers' self-efficacy, school climate, workload, student characteristics) that may affect teachers wellbeing. This was also a cross sectional study and while statistical associations provide meaningful insights, longitudinal research is still necessary to determine temporal precedence and examine potential bidirectional effects between these constructs.

Nevertheless, this study reinforces the centrality of emotional regulation and work engagement in promoting teacher wellbeing. By integrating these findings into intervention efforts and expanding future research to include longitudinal and context-sensitive approaches as well as other key factors impacting teacher wellbeing, educational stakeholders can more effectively support the psychological health and professional sustainability of teachers.

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