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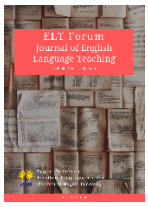

Language lecturers' job-related emotions, emotional intelligence, and outlook on academic life

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Abstract

Academic work can put a lot of pressure on professors, which can trigger emotional distress. This study attempted to shed light into how a group of language teachers deal with emotions produced by job stress in their academic settings. The objective was to find out how they coped with job-related stress and emotions and whether these impacted their emotional framework, their sense of satisfaction, and their expectations of academic growth. To collect the data, a mixed methods approach was used. Interviews were carried out after two surveys were administered to professors from two universities: one in Brazil and the other in Mexico. The findings point out to mixed feelings on the part of the participants. The feel happy and take pride in working for a university; however, feelings of inadequacy, pessimism, anxiety, discouragement, and stress sometimes set in because of strong competition and difficulty to earn a full-time position.

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INTRODUCTION

Emotions are ubiquitous in our everyday life. Yet, attempting to talk about or describe actual emotions can be a daunting task, as no description is likely to represent how someone truly feels. As Cowie et al. (2012) claim, assuming that actual emotions can be accurately described is, at best naïve. Nevertheless, drawing from psychology and neuroscience, Cowie (2005) reports that our daily emotions can be regarded as signposts that point in the direction of a certain state. On their part, Bielak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2021) argue that they are adaptive devices that can contribute to our blossoming and growth but can also become a disadvantage. Anxiety, for example, can boost our energy to fight possible dangers or run away from them. Experiencing enjoyment of satisfying work can contribute to a sense of flourishment (Bielak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2021). On the other hand, negative emotions often work against us and weaken us.

Sutton (2005) points out that "positive emotions (such as happiness and satisfaction) involve pleasure and occur when one is making progress toward a goal. Negative emotions (such as anger and disgust) indicate that goals are thwarted or personal concerns are heightened" (p. 229). Sutton (2005) emphasizes that two different individuals, two teachers faced with a student cursing, for instance, can view a given event from different angles because their goals and concerns are also diverse and, therefore, their appraisals of such of such event differ. Thus, one teacher may feel one teacher may become angry, perceiving the event as a demeaning or offensive, whereas another teacher may feel sad, perceiving this as a sign of parental neglect (Sutton, 2005).

Likewise, in the context of foreign language teaching and learning, Richards (2020) asserts that "teaching and learning a second language are emotionally charged activities" (p. 1). Thus, uncontrolled anxiety can interfere with our capacity to either learn the target language or teach it successfully (Bielak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2021). Since teaching a language is not just an academic, cerebral activity, but also involves social interactions Visotskayaa et al. (2015) point out that a professor who possesses personal qualities such self-comprehension and psychological self-knowledge and skills can cope effectively with emotional matters at work and thus prevent emotional distress. Teachers' emotions can shape the way they teach and, at the same time "can influence learners' willingness to make use of what they have learned" (Richards, 2020, p. 1). Thus, mastering teaching involves two dimensions; learning how to communicate content and managing the emotional elements of teaching (Richards, 2020). But this is not always the case, Visotskayaa et al. (2015) highlight that universities and professors have been exposed to educational reforms that devalue intellectual work and its significance. This can result in high emotional tension, which may lead to emotional burnout, as the social and cultural values traditionally associated with teachers' work also become depreciated (Visotskayaa et al., 2015). The authors go on to point out that emotional and professional burnout in the teaching area and other professional spheres has reached a mass character. Emotions play a significant role in how we go about teaching and learning a language (Richards 2020).

In the presence of increasing feelings of dissatisfaction and fatigue in the teaching professional, Visotskayaa et al. (2015) point to emotional factors as the culprit, warning us that this can lead to crises at work, exhaustion, and, ultimately, burnout. To make matters worse, emotional distress can be manifested in the form of physical disorders, such as headaches and insomnia, as well as psychological and behavioral symptoms, such as boredom, irritability, soreness, and lack of enthusiasm and confidence.

There are emotional regulation (management) strategies that can help us cope with these symptoms of emotional tension, but a first step is that educators increase awareness of the importance of managing and regulating their emotions. In this respect, research can go a long way in shedding light on the connection between successful emotional management, positive outcomes and emotional growth in language learning contexts (Arnold, 2021). That is the purpose of this study.

As countless situations and events can stress out professors emotionally, the sources of emotional distress that may have an impact on professors' performance, their outlook on academic life, and their expectations for growth and development, there were four aspects that were considered for this piece of research. The reasons for choosing these ones, and not others, were that, in conversations and interactions with faculty, their most common causes of complain and discomfort and well as satisfaction—also found in the literature reviewed (below)—were, precisely that the financial security and the contractual conditions of the participating professors were less than adequate. Additionally, it has been expressed that collegiate work, understood as cooperative interaction among professors involving faculty meetings, department discussions, board meetings,

and general assemblies, often ends up being a waste of time, as little, if anything, is usually accomplished. There have also been complaints about lecturing, which has to do with professors' daily interaction with the students. The most common cause of dissatisfaction is the students' lack of commitment to their degree. And then there are the professors' perspectives for promotion, recognition, growth, and professional development that many at the university find dim and distant. It is not uncommon to find professors who have been working at the university for over twenty years or more and have not got a full-time position, with their chances of getting one being bleak.

Coping successfully with the stress produced by all these elements requires a high degree of emotional intelligence, which must be understood as both, the ability to use, understand, and regulate one's own emotions, and the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions in others.

Rodríguez et al. (2018) report that, even though, within the time span of 20 years, several authors have concerned themselves with the subject of emotions and emotional labor and have contributed to the understanding of organizational and individual factors that help us understand the problem, the authors underscore the need for more research in the field, as studies on the repercussions of emotions and emotional labor on mental health are still scarce in the literature.

In view of this, to get an insight into how the participating language teachers cope with emotions produced by job stress in their academic settings, this study focused on how these emotions could affect their teaching, their outlook on academic life, and their perspectives for professional growth and development. The objective was to find out how they managed job-related stress and emotions and whether they impacted their emotional framework, their sense of satisfaction with the academic life, and their expectations of academic development and growth.

The hypotheses to be confirmed or disproved were that the participants could manage their job-related emotions appropriately, that their emotional intelligence level at work would be good enough to help them cope with job-related stress, and that these two elements afforded them a positive outlook on their academic life, helping them handle drawbacks and hindrances in advancing their careers.

Literature Review

Within the Mexican context, the literature on professor emotions in academic settings is scarce. The issue of emotions, as related to academic settings, has been researched by Rodríguez et al, (2018) in relation to emotional labor and job stressors. They point out to a close relationship between such stressors and problems of anxiety and depression in professors and teachers. In educational settings, reforms, working conditions, high demand, lack of organizational support, and lack of motivation in students have been found to be related to job-related health problems such as anxiety and depression.

Others, in Mexico, have also looked into the realm of emotions, but from different angles: in relation to the connection between emotional competence and academic performance of Mexican university students (González & García, 2013); the onset of negative emotions such as anger, irritability, and sadness, as well as an increase of stress, anxiety, and depression, with the context of the Covid-19 pandemic (Melchor Audirac et al., 2021); and the description of stressors, role changes, emotional reactions, and risk of suicide in university students as a result of the isolation that ensued the Covid-19 pandemic (Campas et al., 2020).

As for Brazil, Barcelos (2015) has reflected on the relationship between beliefs, emotions, and identities with the aim of shedding light on how these factors overlap, which may help us understand better language learning and teaching. Other works on emotions and language teaching with the Brazilian context include Barcelos and Aragão (2018) where they explore studies conducted in Brazil that report on teachers' emotions and feelings and how they relate to their beliefs. The authors acknowledge a wide variety of emotions that teachers experience and a complex and dynamic interaction with their beliefs and practices.

Gandhi de Godoy and Barcelos (2021) looked into language teacher educators with the aim of investigating their beliefs and emotions about language teacher education. They concluded that mental health education is needed to help both professors and would-be teachers deal with their emotions. Having investigated the problem closely, Gandhi de Godoy and Barcelos (2021) assert, like Rodríguez et al. (2018), that few studies have focused on language teacher educators, or on their beliefs and emotions. It can be added that there are even fewer studies pertaining language lecturers'

job-related emotions, emotional intelligence and outlook on academic life, esp., in Mexican and Brazilian higher education settings, which highlights the pertinence of this present study

As for the broader context, authors like Ryu and Fan (2022) have investigated job stress with a focus on financial issues. On this note, McCloud and Bann (2019 have warned us about mental health problems and monetary difficulties. In the case of higher education, Winefield & Jarrett (2001) document that many universities around the world have been limiting access to tenured positions, which means job security for many professors can no longer be taken for granted, as can be the case of, at least, one of the two universities where this study took place. There, working under six-month contracts may sometimes bring about fear of not having a job next term around. Prospects for promotion and the way the university is managed can also be a source of anxiety. Winefield & Jarrett (2001) point out that anxiety happens more often in junior academic staff, that is, professors who have fewer years of experience than in their senior colleagues.

Trends in university administration have meant that control is more and more in the hands of senior management at the expense of academic staff (Winefield at al. 2003). This, combined with a decrease in funding and an increase in accountability has resulted in higher demands on teaching staff, more than on administrative staff, and therefore, higher levels of stress in faculty (Winefield at al. 2003). But it does not stop there; Winefield at al. (2003) point out that, in recent years, there has also been an increased expectation that professors should be responsible for attracting external funding, which means that academic staff, particularly in the area of humanities, should also develop entrepreneurial skills.

It has been a few years since Winefield at al. (2003); however, a 2023 report (Ogden, 2023) on how higher education academic staff compares with people in other professions in terms of benefits and workload confirms that, while working conditions are generally better than in some other sectors, professors rank poorly on wellbeing and mental health, with excessive workloads and expectations, all of which frequently has a negative effect in their lives. Additionally, whatever benefits universities can give professors, higher education institutions cannot extend these benefits to all the staff. Many professors, esp. staff on temporary contracts, face conditions that are far from being as good (Ogden, 2023). The report's foreword, by Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute, states that: "The lower rungs of the academic ladder are very slippery and, unlike a real ladder, the steps become much sturdier the higher up you are able to climb" (Ogden, 2023, p. 6).

Likewise, Visotskayaa et al. (2015) caution that when emotional tension affects professional activities and interaction with colleagues, there can have dysfunctional consequences. They add that emotional burnout occurrence is high in the teaching arena, and that objective and subjective emotional factors affect professors' professional work. A heavy workload arouses a feeling of dissatisfaction. Consequently, professional activity and efficiency decrease while dissatisfaction increases, and with it, the chances of developing psychological burnout (Visotskayaa et al., 2015).

Williams (2015) claims that collaboration among peers can be stressful. One of the reasons for this is that the professional autonomy that teachers used to enjoy is being challenged and replaced by collaborative efforts that must consider the different perspectives of everyone involved. This creates stress in those who must collaborate with other educators to foster educational opportunities for students. Thus, one of the effects of a collaborative environment is that teachers who used to oversee most of their educational endeavors must now put up with different approaches, strategies, and viewpoints from colleagues to make collective decisions (Williams, 2015).

Lecturing can also be a major source of emotional tension. In a study conducted by Collins and Parry-Jones (2000) with lecturers from the social work area, it was found that lecturing involves high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. The participants reported high demands and low support from the institutions, resulting in low job satisfaction and low morale (Collins and Parry-Jones, 2000). These are all symptoms of emotional exhaustion, which can cause feeling over tensed and wasted. Negative emotions experience by teaching staff may in turn also affect students. Rodrigo-Ruiz (2016) cautions that some of the areas in which students may be impacted are motivation, academic performance, discipline, and social behavior. In addition, emotions—negative or positive— can be contagious. It has been pointed out that the emotions of teachers can be passed on to the students and affect their behavior (Rodrigo-Ruiz, 2016).

A person suffering from emotional exhaustion may feel they can no longer commit to work as they used to. They may "develop negative, heartless, cynical attitude" (Visotskayaa et al., 2015, p. 772). Such negative feelings can trigger irritation outbursts and conflict, often accompanied by a

decrease in one's sense of achievement, competence, and satisfaction with oneself. As a result, self-esteem becomes lower and negative self-perception in professional aspects as well as feelings of inadequacy and indifference to work arise. This signals the presence of high emotional tension (Visotskayaa et al., 2015).

An important element is a professors' degree of job satisfaction, or rather, dissatisfaction. Henne and Locke (1985) argue that job dissatisfaction may trigger reactions that may be highly adverse to the goals of an organization. Most people seek employment that is interesting and meaningful; that gives a sense of accomplishment, growth; and that offers freedom from excessive toil and boredom, among a host of other things. However, if these expectations are not fulfilled, this will produce dissatisfaction, frustration, and unpleasant emotions (Henne and Locke, 1985).

Teachers and professors are expected to manage these emotions and how they are displayed at work. But this, consequently, may cause feelings of isolation and separation, resulting in negative emotional experiences, as emotional management and construction becomes normative behavior prescribed by emotional culture in the teaching arena (Tsang, 2019).

Unfulfilled expectations may also be the cause of ill emotions. Lait and Wallace (2002) point out that "professionals often enter their jobs with ideal and sometimes unrealistic expectations" (p. 465). Professors are no exception; we all start work at a university with expectations of growth, recognition, and promotion. We start by getting a few hours, but we expect to make part-time, and then full time, and maybe even a position of higher responsibility. However, we are not prepared for conflict between our expectations and goals, and those of the university, especially if it is a highly bureaucratic organization (Lait & Wallace, 2002).

Lait and Wallace (2002) highlight that there may be incompatibility between the bureaucratic structure of a university, necessary to keep the organization and the educational programs running smoothly—all the tasks that professors are required to do, in addition to teaching: all kinds of paperwork, rules and regulations, and other teaching responsibilities—and hopes for growth and professional development. These unmet expectations can be the source of emotional conflict and tension, as professors' sense of professionalism crashes against the realities of working in a stressful work environment (Lait and Wallace, 2002).

We experience emotions in relation to numerous areas of our lives. Emotions tend to be short-lived fleeting outbursts of passion, whereas feelings tend to be more long-lasting sentiments Farnsworth (2024); and, in evolutionary terms, emotions are adaptive devices. For example, negative emotions, such as anxiety, can stimulate our bodies to expend extra energy necessary to combat or escape from dangers (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Positive emotions, such as enjoyment, also play an important role by sustaining actions which contribute to our flourishing, such as satisfying work. However, emotions can also work to our disadvantage, in the same way in which physical pain—which is a generally a helpful mechanism alerting us to malfunctions of our body parts—is sometimes debilitating (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In the context of language education, a prime example is foreign language anxiety, which often interferes with successful L2 learning.

METHODS

This study adheres to a mixed methods approach as it integrates qualitative and quantitative data. The rationale behind choosing a mixed methods research design for this study was that it offered an opportunity to understand intricate emotional issues, such as anxiety, dissatisfaction, frustration (but also feelings of happiness and pride) as experienced by professors in their work environment, from the perspective of both qualitative and quantitative data (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). This offered additional advantages, such as allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the issue from different angles, an evidence-based approach to the findings, increased validity of the conclusions, as well as a greater involvement of the participants, giving them a sense of ownership and agency (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018).

Context and participants

The study was carried out with participants from two large public universities, one in Mexico and the other in Brazil. The former is located in the state of Veracruz, and the latter in the state of Minas Gerais. They both are recognized, nationally and internationally, as leading higher education institutions. At the time, the participants were assigned to the School of Foreign Languages and the Department of Literature, respectively. Both schools offer language programs that focus, at the undergraduate and graduate level, on some of these languages: English, French, Portuguese,

Spanish, as well as on linguistics and, in the case of the school in Brazil, literature, The objective behind including participants from two different contexts was to assess whether job-related emotions did, or did not, differ significantly from one culture to another. As Sutton (2005) points out, individuals (professors, teachers, students) from different cultures may view events taking place in their academic settings from diverse outlooks, thus, they will experience different emotions regarding common problems. This is yet another reason for analyzing what could result in divergent emotions stemming from different cultural perspectives, in the hope that this may lead to better cultural understandings. By extending the study to another context, it was felt that the findings could be regarded as being applicable to other settings. However, generalization of the results was never one of the goals. Likewise, as pointed out in the literature review below, the work on the subject produced in these two Latin-American settings is rather limited. Thus, I aimed to contribute to the understanding of the problem within these local contexts.

The professors who participated in this study were selected using the convenience sampling method. The reason for this course of action was that it offered significant practical advantages over other processes (Golzar et al., 2022). First, a highly representative sample was invited to participate, which was expected to help in enhancing the generalizability of the findings, although that was not one of the research objectives. The criteria for selecting the sample were to include bilingual language teacher educators working for large public universities, in different work environments, and under different working contracts. Another benefit was that the sample was readily available. This helped reduce the time needed and costs. The professors were asked to participate in the study voluntarily, and if they demonstrated consent, they were added to the sample (Golzar et al., 2022).

The participants' ages ranged from early 30s to late 40s. In the sample, there were 12 women and four men. Three different nationalities were also represented, as there were participants from Brazil (31.2%), Mexico (62.5%), Belgium (6.3%). They were all language teachers. They all held a master's or a PhD. The professors who specialize in English language teaching accounted for 56.2% of the sample. Those whose main focus is French language made up 37.5% of the sample. Only one professor specializes in teaching Portuguese as a foreign language. She represented the remaining 6.3%. Half of them held a full-time position whereas the rest were working part-time and/or under a contract. Where the participants were quoted, pseudonyms were used to safeguard confidentiality and the anonymity of the professors and the people they mentioned.

Data collection and processing

Three instruments were used to collect data, two surveys and an interview. The surveys helped in documenting the participants' perceptions and beliefs about their work (Paradis et al., 2016) and about they saw themselves in terms of their emotional intelligence (EI). The interview was used to gather information from the participating individuals on how they managed their own feelings and emotions at work. A structured format was used, as it was considered that it would produce richer, more in-depth data to complement the information yielded by the surveys (Paradis et al., 2016). Four of them were invited to be interviewed.

The professors interviewed were those whose answers in the surveys offered a wider diversity regarding their emotional management, their relationship with peers and authorities, and their overall outlook on academic life. The interview questions also focused on the participants' perceptions regarding the self-assessment of their emotional intelligence, as well as their feelings and emotions regarding their interactions with colleagues and authorities, as well as their outlook for the future growth and academic development.

The first survey (adapted from Goleman, 1995) aimed at gauging their emotional intelligence. The goal was to get the participants to think about how different elements of emotional intelligence might apply to them (Goleman, 1995). This included a) the ability to recognize their own feelings and understand their emotional responses; b) the ability to stay focused when powerful emotions took over them and take responsibility for their own actions and decisions; c) the ability to use their emotions to guide them to their objectives, overcoming setbacks and obstacles, while taking the initiative; d) the ability to sense and understand other people's feelings and use this skill to help them handle their emotions for successful teamwork; and) the ability to influence and inspire positive emotions in others in order to develop leadership and teamwork skills (Goleman, 1995).

A second survey (which I designed) sought to explore possible sources of emotional distress at work that might have an impact on the participants' feelings and emotions. Like the interview, the questions focused on different aspects of the job. This had to do with the participants feeling either

happy, satisfied, and proud of their job, or, on the contrary, having to cope with feelings of frustration, boredom, irritation, and tiredness. The participants' relationship with peers and school authorities was also explored. The aim was to find out if the professors felt that there was a sense empathy, consideration, trust, and friendliness at work, or if distrust, negativity, and isolation were often perceived as common emotions perceived in their academic community. The last topic to be explore was that of emotions stemming from their relationship with the university, as an institution, and their perspectives on academic growth. The goal was to find out how satisfied they felt with what the university demanded from them, their own expectations, their perspectives for development.

The interviews were carried out after the information from the surveys was collected. It was necessary to collect the data in this order, as, first, the most suitable candidates for the interview had to be identified. Four professors, two from Brazil and two from Mexico, were invited to be interviewed and accepted willingly. They work, respectively, for different universities. For the interviews, there were only six questions. The participants were interviewed using the ZOOM platform. All the interviews were recorded. Then they were transcribed to carry out the analysis. As for the analysis of the data emerging from the interviews, once again, patterns were identified and categorized to fit into five categories: a) a self-assessment of the participants' emotional intelligence, b) their emotions and their teaching, c) their emotions and their relationship with their peers, d) their emotions and their relationship with university authorities, and d) their attitudes and perceptions towards their job as university professors and their expectations for growth and development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

As explained above, 16 professors participated in two surveys. The EI questionnaire was useful in getting an insight into the participants' emotional intelligence, or EI, (assessed using Goleman's 1995 emotional intelligence questionnaire). The professors' EI was rated as falling into two large categories: high and low, with different levels. For the high end, the different degrees of EI were a) very high, b) high, c) good, d) average, and e) limited.

At the very high level, a professor would have full "capacity for recognizing our own feelings, and those of others, for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions well in ourselves and our relationships" (Goleman, 1998, p. 316). They would manage successfully the five different aspects of EI; namely, self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating oneself, empathy, and social skill. At the lower end, the different echelons were a) below par, b) deficient, c) weak, and c) poor. The lower a participant went down the scale, the less capable they appeared to be to manage their feelings and those of others and cultivate socially healthy relationships. Those participants who scored as displaying weak or poor EI were likely to see themselves as lacking emotional intelligence.

The professors scores ranged from below par to high, depending how they saw themselves in terms of the emotional intelligence. The scores that dominated were those of good (37.5%) and average (37.%). Only one participant considered herself to have a high level of EI. Likewise, only one participant scored below par, while 12.5% seemed to believe that their emotional intelligence is acceptable but somehow limited. In general, as far as the five aspects of emotional intelligence are considered, the majority of the participants scored on the high end of emotional intelligence management, with only one participant somewhat behind, but following closely.

No differences were observed regarding EI between professors from different academic degrees. Professors of French, English, and Portuguese positioned themselves, as a group, at the average echelon of emotional management. As for differences depending on the participants' universities, the results indicate that both Mexican and Brazilian rated themselves as having an average level of emotional control. Likewise, no difference was observed across the sexes. Age did not seem to be a deciding factor, as no significant variations were noticed between the participants in their 30s and those in their 40s

The findings also revealed that the participants scored high in terms of self-awareness. However, for the rest of their EI skills (managing emotions, motivating oneself, empathy, and social skills), they ranked at the average level. Another finding to be aware of is that there were no perceived differences between full-time and part-time professors with respect to their EI.

For the second survey (managing emotions at work), the questionnaire was convenient to attempt to explore sources of emotional distress that might have an impact on professors' emotional

framework, their outlook on academic life, and their expectations for growth and development. As with the EI survey, the participants' ability to cope with emotional distress was also rated as falling into two large categories: high and low, with different levels of skill. Once again, for the high end, the tiers were: a) very high, b) high, c) good, d) average, and e) limited, whereas, at the lower end, the different echelons were a) below par, b) deficient, c) weak, and c) poor. Once again, the lower a professor scored down the scale, the less happy, satisfied, and capable of coping with their feelings, job environment, and university policies. At the very high level, an individual would have full capacity to cope with job-related emotional issues, and to recognize and manage successfully their emotions—and those of others—as triggered by their teaching responsibilities, and the relationship with their peers and university authorities, having a clear idea of the present and future academic goals.

The professors scores also ranged from limited to high, with only 18.7% of the participants considering themselves as having a limited capacity to deal with job-related emotions, whereas 31.3% considered themselves to be average regarding their emotional management at work. Another 25% scored as having good control over their emotions, while 25% viewed themselves as outstanding in relation to how they dealt with their emotional setting. Overall, it can be highlighted that none of the participants seemed to be on the low end in terms of how they handled their emotional academic life. The professors with an apparent limited emotional control represented the smallest group.

Some differences were observed between professors from different academic degrees. A group score for the professors of English and Portuguese was that of possessing an average level of emotional management, whereas the participants in the French department scored slightly higher at this. The other difference was that out of the 25% of professors with the highest scores, three quarters of that percentage corresponded to the French department. As for differences depending on the participants' universities, the results indicate that both Brazilian and Mexican university teachers were rated as having a good-to-average level of emotional control. The participant from Belgium also fell within this range.

Regarding the different sources of job-related emotional distress, some significant variations were observed. While the participants seem to be good at managing the emotional load related to their teaching and their relationship with the school authoritie, comparatively, they went one level down in terms how they perceived the university environment, in general. They acknowledged that their handling of stress and emotions generated by the university context was not outstanding, but only average. As for their relationship with their peers and how they managed emotions produced by the daily interaction with their colleagues, they went two levels down. The participants seemed to consider this aspect of their work as only tolerable.

In relation to this, the female participants scored lower than their male counterparts, which suggests a difference across gender lines. This would be consistent with a report by McLaughlin (2022) indicating that, according to a survey administered to therapists in England, most of their clients attending therapy are women. As for Mexico, the 2022-2023 report on mental health (Consejo Nacional para la Seguridad y la Justicia de la Ciudad de México, 2023) indicates that 74% of the people seeking psychological assistance were women. Likewise, 83% of the people taking therapy at the Centers for Emotional Recovery managed by the Citizen's Council for Security and Justice in Mexico City, were also women.

The information provided by the interviews was consistent with that of the surveys and complemented the data with qualitative input and details that could not be obtained otherwise. The participants: Sunshine and Peter, from Brazil, and Malak and Swifty, from Mexico, were asked to rate themselves, on a scale from one to 10, in terms of their ability to recognize their own feelings and those of others and manage them adequately. Most of them gave themselves a high mark.

Sunshine, one of the youngest, focused on her capacity to handle her emotions appropriately. She shared that she is into emotionally management, which most likely helps her a lot to get a grip of her emotions so as not to lose control.

> *"I consider myself emotionally intelligent. I work a lot with myself, like talking to myself. If I have a problem. I think 'Should I be worried about this?' 'How should I un-feel this?? I tend to self-regulate, you know."*

On her part, Malak, unlike Sunshine, focused, instead, on her ability to recognize other people's feelings. She takes pride in her ability to read other people's body language and know how they are feeling.

> *"I always pay attention to how people say things and whether they are moving their hands or the kind of words they use. Nine out of 10 times I can notice when a person is sad even though they are not saying that. So, I think that I'm pretty attentive to that kind of details: whether they feel tired or sad, or they are very happy, or they are just bored. I think I can notice that. So, I don't know, I would say that 9, perhaps."*

All the female participants shared that they had taken or were taking therapy, some of them for years, and agreed that this had taught them to manage their emotions. Once again, this was only acknowledged by the female interviewees.

In another part of the interview, the participants discussed the impact of their emotions on their work as foreign language professors. They were consistent in pointing out that their emotions affected their work, and that feeling good or bad would affect their teaching However, they also pointed out that they always made an effort so as not to let emotions overwhelm them.

Swifty shared that she even changed her emotional framework when she was teaching English. She was more extroverted when talking to the students and tried to share her passion and motivation for the language.

> *"And I think that, in order to show that, I need to project a positive, charming, and extroverted personality. That's why in some internal way I just switch my personality at some point. I don't even plan to change it; it just comes naturally, as a second nature, you know. From my perspective I think that it is positive because if my students perceive that I enjoy what I'm doing, they may feel more motivated to learn the language.*"

The opposite, however, may also be true. Happy, productive classes can influence our mood and make us feel good. Peter, for example, shared the following:

> *"If I see that my students enjoy, even slightly, a new activity or topic in class, I feel happy and push myself into trying, even more, new, possibly exciting things. Otherwise, if something didn't go as planned, I might be tempted to try again. If another poorly received activity or topic happen in a certain group, I can lose the desire to try something else, as I would feel afraid of another rejection."*

The relationship with their colleagues was where most of the participants expressed conflicting emotions, deeming it as tense, as something that might cause them to feel hurt, to watch their comments, or to avoid some people. The participants agreed that that relationship with their colleagues conveyed an emotional load that affected them and their work.

Sunshine explained that she had two jobs and that the way she related to her peers differed a lot from one place to the other. While she felt at ease, relaxed, in one of her jobs, she felt more tense and had a more distant relationship in the company of the university teachers in her department because there was a lot a rivalry there and some people did not like to see her succeed.

> *"I work at a school, too, and there I have a closer relationship with my peers, we are like friends outside the school environment. We exchange our problems, our frustrations, et cetera. At the university, on the other hand, I'm not so close to my other peers. So, of course I think that has an impact, too. I've been there for a year, and I feel that there is a lot of competition among peers. Sometimes people don't like to see you shine or see that you are great. So, I guess it's different."*

Peter also reported feeling bad with some of his colleagues:

> *"I tend to look up to peers that are more experienced than me and talk with ones on the same level as mine to check my performance. It is rare, but if somehow I have a bad experience with a colleague, I can feel deeply hurt."*

In their relationship with their colleagues, the participants highlighted, unanimously, that they always made a point of keeping away from conflict or controversy. When expressing their feelings, they would always try to be civil and focus on the positive first. They also pointed out that they preferred to be very diplomatic when expressing their views so as not to hurt anybody's feelings.

For Swifty, the main reason for this was that, as she pointed out before, some people at work took everything personally. To avoid feeling bad about a confrontational situation, she preferred to keep quiet and just observe what happened at meetings, as her opinions were often not even considered.

> *"I don't want to say something inappropriate, or something that may bother these people. I don't want to bother the wrong people because that may make the relationship worse. It is not the best, but it may lead to something worse. Sometimes, I refrain from participating in these meetings. It is kind of negative in that sense, when it comes to meetings. I'm just an observer who sees what happens in the mess that they have created, just looking at them, how they are arguing and fighting among themselves. What is the point of participating if my opinion won't be valued."*

To keep away from negativity, Malak's policy was to be respectful, no matter who she had to work with. She highlighted that, with a person she was not very close to, she would be careful in her choice of words so as not to make people feel offended.

> *"I would try to say things, and if they ask me to be honest about whatever, I would try to say things so that so they don't feel disrespected or they don't feel that I'm too harsh."*

In their relationship with the school authorities, the participants had mixed emotions; from feeling weary at times to being to people pleaser. The relationship with the authorities could be complicated at times; thus, the participants preferred to be careful when expressing their opinions, and to be very polite when asking or requesting something. On the other hand, they considered that it was very important to cooperate all the time and collaborate with the department, prioritizing its needs over their own.

Sunshine, for instance, said she had the feeling that people who were very assertive, in a non-polite way, might have difficulty in growing somehow; thus, she was careful not to cause any trouble or get into a bad or awkward situation.

> *"I try to be very cautious. If I have to send an email, for example, I have to choose the appropriate words and pay attention to how I express things so that people can understand my message or request in the best way possible."*

Because of this, she was always willing to lend a hand. At that point in her life, she was happy with what the university could offer her and was always willing to give it her time and energy.

Peter also feels that because he is not a full-time professor, he would rather be less assertive and more cooperative.

> *"I talk to any of my authorities with caution and keeping a positive image of myself."*

Despite any possible disadvantage that the participants may associate to working for a public university, the data emerging from the surveys and the interviews show that all the participants feel cheerful and optimistic about their prospects. Sunshine, for example, said she saw herself pursuing a career at the university. Peter also had high hopes of getting a full-time position at his university. He worked hard, trying to get people to see him as reliable and trustworthy. He felt confident that he could earn the respect and trust of his peers. Malak also wanted to stay at the university. She said at the beginning this was like a dream, but now it is her goal. She tried to meet expectations. Like her peers, she wanted to be recognized for her work and build a career there. The same is true of Swifty. She said she kept a cheerful attitude and felt optimistic that the hard work that she had been doing all these years was now being appreciated and, eventually, her efforts would bear fruit.

To wrap up the results, all the participants (part-time and full-time) saw themselves working for the university for many years and advancing a career there. As one of them put it, this used to be a dream job. Now, it had become their livelihood, and their future.

Discussion

As the findings revealed, all the professors that participated in the study can be considered as being emotionally intelligent. They aware of how they feel, and the reasons for that, when confronting positive or negative situations arising at work. They know how their emotions affect them and their performance. They also understand the actions that they take to be in better control of themselves.

The fact that some professors have been able to secure full-time positions cannot be attributed to their EI level. Both full-timers and part-timers scored as having good, average, or even limited emotional intelligence and management, regardless of the employment status. Thus, professors who experience conflicting emotions because of the students, the authorities, or the demands of the university have, or had, the same opportunities and probability of getting a full-time position than those who love everything about their job.

One of the points for reflection that can be drawn for the findings is how the question of emotions, pertaining our job as teachers, works both ways: our mood can have an impact in how we feel and behave in front of our students, but also, depending on whether our classes are either rewarding or unpleasant, they can make us feel satisfied or weary. This resonates with Richards (2020), who highlights that teaching involves positive emotions, such as confidence, curiosity, engagement, enjoyment, enthusiasm, interest, amusement, gratitude, happiness, passion, pride, and satisfaction; but also negative emotions: anger, anxiousness, boredom, concern, depression, dissatisfaction, exhaustion, frustration, envy, stress, and uneasiness.

The data indicate that the participants find it difficult to have a good relationship with some of their peers. Such interaction can be a regular source of stress if it is not managed properly. In relation to this, the participants lamented that some colleagues were unfriendly and negative. This is backed up by comments made during the interviews by all the professors, who referred to some people and groups of teachers who were difficult to put up with, took everything they said or did personally, made them feel hurt, rejected them, or just ignored them.

Because of the nature of collegial work, differences and disagreements on academic procedures were also bound to emerge. The problem, as the participants pointed out, was that dissent could often be taken personally, leading to ill will and resentment among colleagues. This evokes Visotskayaa et al. (2015) and Williams's (2015) findings. They warn us that professors' constant dealings with peers as well as the ever-growing curtailment of academic autonomy that faculty used to enjoy may lead to emotional distress and dysfunctional relationships among colleagues.

Another considerable source of emotional distress has to do with the university policies which, according to the participants, expects them to do a lot of work for free to get credit for a future competitive examination for a full-time position. Several professors also expressed dissatisfaction about excessive bureaucracy, insufficient funds to participate in projects and conferences, and for publishing. The complained about the struggle to get a full-time job and the tendency, on the part of the university, to hire a researcher rather than a professor. These reflections echo Lait and Wallace (2002) and Winefield at al. (2003) in the sense that, because of the bureaucratic academic layout, budgetary adjustments which impact university funding, and the enhanced oversight on professors' performance, higher levels of stress and anxiety are to be expected

However, with the university authorities with whom the professors have daily contact, their feelings towards them tend to be those of confidence and trustworthiness, or distrust and anxiety, depending on who is in charge. Another point to be considered in the professors' relationship with the authorities is their willingness to take on classes and responsibilities that others, esp. full-timers, might not find acceptable, such as working difficult schedules or long hours. At the beginning of their university career, when a professor has just got their foot in the door, they must demonstrate willingness to make sacrifices and readiness to collaborate with the department in order to get things done. In other words, if the person running a university department happens to exhibit the traits of toxic leadership, it is faculty that may be affected by the leader's toxicity (Klahn Acuña & Male, 2024), which may, in turn, impact their well-being, job satisfaction, group productivity and organizational commitment. However, the results of this study corroborate Klahn Acuña and Male's

(2024) claims in the sense that this has a limited influence as professor often tend to make sacrifices and adapt to academic demands.

A final point for reflection and discussion is that, as pointed out in the findings section, differences across gender lines are suggested by data indicating more difficulty on the part of the female participants to cope with emotions triggered by the daily interaction with their peers, and the fact that all the female interviewees took or are taking therapy. A possible explanation to this could be that females are perhaps more open to ask for and receive help than males.

CONCLUSION

The participants see themselves working at the university for a long time, advancing a career there, and getting recognition for their work. They feel happy and proud of this achievement. However, they are aware that this is not an easy path to walk. They sometimes feel discouraged because of strong competition. Another issue is current university policies that seem to favor researchers over lecturers. Being a good teacher is not enough anymore. Universities, in general, want to give full-time positions to people who publish regularly, participate as speakers in conferences, collaborate as peer reviewers for journals, belong to research groups and hold positions of leadership in these groups. In the case of Mexico, ideally, a full-time professor is a member of the National Network of Researchers.

This may cause feelings of inadequacy and may strip some professors of their sense of belonging, making them feel pessimistic that they might not reach their academic goals because they do not see themselves as researchers. The role of professor/researcher is something that many of the participants do not identify with. They see themselves simply as teachers. Even some full timers who got their positions some years ago acknowledged that they do not see themselves engaging heavily in research. Nevertheless, most universities are going in that direction, as they strive to earn a name as places where knowledge is produced.

As for the limitations of the study, it must be acknowledged that all surveys have their shortcomings due to the nature of the questions, the number of items, and the options offered as possible answers, The same thing is true of interviews, even though they allow the participants more freedom to express a point of view.

Standardized emotional intelligence tests have limitations. However, identifying strengths and weaknesses by means of comprehensive assessment plays an important role in predicting performance and success (Psico-smart Editorial Team, 2024). Given more time, more tests might have been administered to cross reference the results.

Finally, another limitation was that only a few professors volunteered participation in this research. Thus, the findings may only reflect the character and personality of every participant, rather than a widespread situation within the participants' working context.

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