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Thematic Dossier

Inner Peace in Language Teacher Education: An Intervention-Based Study

Paz interior na formação de professores de línguas: um estudo baseado em intervenção

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Abstract: This article reports on a study that explored inner peace and responds to the need to understand pedagogies of harmonies in diverse contexts (Pentón Herrera; Trinh; Park, 2026). This multi-case study examined English as a foreign language (EFL) pre-service teachers' experiences with an Inner Peace Intervention (IPI) during a practicum course in Argentina, intending to help them understand and increase inner peace. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, journal entries, and a focus group interview, and were subjected to thematic analysis. Findings indicate that participants conceptualized inner peace from a positive peace perspective (Galtung, 1996) and a eudaimonic approach to well-being (Ryan; Deci, 2001), aligning with Trinh, Reynolds, and Coda's (2024) conceptualization of harmony. Participants emphasized the importance of inner peace for language teachers, as it influences classroom actions, and reported that the IPI helped them flourish as language teachers. The article highlights the need to prioritize inner peace in language teacher education as a key indicator of well-being and teacher growth, as well as an essential element for fostering peace in broader social contexts. This calls for a shift beyond the mastery of technical aspects of language toward the integration of harmony-based pedagogies that prepare future teachers to thrive and promote peace.

Keywords: inner peace; pedagogies of harmonies; well-being; positive psychology; language teacher education.

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Resumo: Este artigo relata um estudo que explorou a paz interior e responde à necessidade de compreender pedagogias da harmonia em contextos diversos (Pentón Herrera; Trinh; Park, 2026). Este estudo de múltiplos casos examinou as experiências de professores de inglês como língua estrangeira (ILE) em formação com uma Intervenção de Paz Interior (IPI) durante um curso de estágio na Argentina, com o objetivo de ajudá-los a compreender e aumentar a paz interior. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas, entradas de diário e uma entrevista em grupo focal, e foram submetidos à análise temática. Os resultados indicam que os participantes conceituaram a paz interior a partir de uma perspectiva de paz positiva (Galtung, 1996) e de uma abordagem eudaimônica do bem-estar (Ryan; Deci, 2001), alinhando-se à conceituação de harmonia de Trinh, Reynolds e Coda (2024). Os participantes enfatizaram a importância da paz interior para professores de línguas, pois ela influencia as ações em sala de aula, e relataram que a IPI os ajudou a florescer como docentes. O artigo destaca a necessidade de priorizar a paz interior na formação de professores de línguas como um indicador fundamental de bem-estar e desenvolvimento docente, além de ser essencial para a promoção da paz em contextos sociais mais amplos. Isso exige uma mudança além do domínio técnico da língua, em direção à integração de pedagogias baseadas na harmonia que preparem os futuros professores para prosperar e promover a paz.

Palavras-chave: paz interior; pedagogias das harmonias; bem-estar; psicologia positiva; formação de professores de línguas.

1 Introduction

Pre-service language teachers often navigate intense emotions and frequent challenges as they develop the skills to teach a second language. Factors that can threaten pre-service teachers' well-being include differences between what they envision and the classroom reality, insecurities related to language proficiency, and obstacles associated with the cultural aspects of teaching (MacIntyre; Gregersen; Mercer, 2020). Moreover, the nature of the practicum course, which tends to be characterized by a stage of identity development,

heavy coursework load, and different participants involved (the mentor, the practicum supervisor, the Head of the school, the large number of students), can also trigger emotions and thoughts that can be disruptive of pre-service teachers' inner harmony. In light of these challenges, it becomes vital to reimagine language teacher education (LTE) through the lens of pedagogies of harmonies (Trinh; Reynolds; Coda, 2024), where harmony is seen not as the absence of conflict but as a dynamic process of co-creating understanding, mutual respect, and transformative growth despite tensions. In addition, taking into consideration a positive approach instead of adopting a deficit perspective (Gregersen; Mercer, 2022) in LTE, it becomes relevant to find ways for inner peace to flourish for the mere reason that inner peace is an important contributor to well-being. For example, it has been shown that inner peace correlated positively with tendencies to experience positive emotions and to find greater meaning in life (Sims; Nelson; Puopolo, 2014). Furthermore, central aspects related to inner peace include a disposition toward emotional states that facilitate peaceful relationships (Nelson, 2014), which are essential to develop in LTE, given the relational nature of teaching.

Inner peace refers to a "calm and balanced mental state and disposition, one characterized by an attitude of healthy acceptance and an absence of unhealthy grasping" (Xi; Lee, 2021, p. 436), which can be practiced and improved. One way to build inner peace among pre-service teachers is through pedagogical interventions in the practicum (Olivero; Barbeito, 2023). When framed as a pedagogy of harmony, such interventions serve not only to promote emotional balance but also to prepare pre-service teachers to become empathetic, culturally aware, and socially just educators. Interventions based on inner peace can help pre-service teachers increase positivity, manage unpleasant emotions, shape thoughts, and find deeper meaning in what they do, thereby leading them to have a successful and transformative experience in the practicum. Moreover, the incorporation of these interventions in the practicum can offer pre-service teachers principles, ideas, and techniques to blend the teaching of language and inner peace in their own classroom settings. This aligns with broader calls in language education to move beyond mastery of technical skills and to embrace pedagogies that focus on empathy, respect, and cultural awareness as essential components of teacher education.

This article intends to fill two significant gaps in the field of language education. It reports on a study that explored a highly relevant construct in the area of well-being and yet still under-researched in the fields of second language acquisition (SLA) and LTE, and it responds to the need to evaluate the impact of positive psychology-based interventions (MacIntyre; Gregersen; Mercer, 2019). In doing so, the study also contributes to emerging conversations around pedagogies of harmonies (Trinh; Reynolds; Coda, 2024) by examining how teaching approaches grounded in inner peace can foster not only personal well-being but also the development of language teachers who are capable of transforming the classroom and beyond. The purpose of the present article, therefore, is to report on a qualitative case study that examined a group of English as a foreign language (EFL) pre-service teachers' experiences with an Inner Peace Intervention (IPI) in a practicum course intended to help them understand and increase inner peace. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What was participants' understanding of inner peace as a result of the IPI in the university practicum sessions?

RQ2: In what ways did the IPI influence the pre-service teachers, according to their beliefs?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Inner Peace in Psychology

Inner peace (also named personal peace, peace of mind, and internal peace) has been historically valued by many cultures and religions, especially in Eastern societies. The pursuit of inner peace for experiencing well-being has been a core tenet in the teachings of philosophies and in religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, as well as in practices such as meditation and mindfulness. Although inner peace has also held significance as an indicator of well-being in Western societies, it is seldom addressed in modern social sciences (Xi; Lee, 2021). In the field of psychology, including the newly established area of peace psychology, scholars have claimed the relevance of inner peace. For example, Sims, Nelson, and Puopolo (2014) have argued, in their edited volume on personal peacefulness, that the study of this construct should be a central aspect in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and the biological sciences, as inner peace is seen as fundamental to mental health, emotional regulation, and overall psychological well-being.

Psychological and mental health research have traditionally focused on mental disorders and negative emotions. However, with the advent of positive psychology, which centers on the study of human strengths and virtues that lead people to flourish (Seligman; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), researchers have adopted a positive-oriented approach to studying human experiences, focusing primarily on happiness and other high-arousal positive emotions (Xi; Lee, 2021). More recently, research on low-arousal positive affect, such as serenity, harmony, and tranquility, has started to emerge, but it is still nascent (e.g., Berenbaum; Huang; Flores, 2018; Floody, 2011; Kreitzer *et al*., 2009). Such an imbalance has to do with the fact that, traditionally, research on well-being has followed a hedonic approach instead of exploring well-being from the lens of the eudaimonic approach. Whereas the former focuses on happiness and defines well-being in terms of maximizing pleasure and avoiding pain, the latter centers on holistic aspects of human flourishing, including personal growth, meaningful relationships, resilience, and contributing to the greater good (Ryan; Deci, 2001).

Within studies that have conceptualized well-being from a eudaimonic perspective, Lee *et al*. (2013) developed the construct of Peace of Mind (PoM), defined as an internal state of peacefulness and harmony, to describe the affective well-being valued in Chinese culture regarding happiness. Their work was grounded on the argument that happiness in Chinese culture is viewed differently from Western cultures, which tend to have a hedonic view of happiness. PoM has been found to be closely related to low-arousal positive affect although, according to the authors, it reflects a more complex and balanced state of mind as it includes harmony, not only a state characterized by serenity and relaxation.

Along the same line, more recently, Xi and Lee (2021, p. 436) introduced a new measure of inner peace and defined it as "a calm and balanced mental state and disposition, one characterized by an attitude of healthy acceptance and an absence of unhealthy grasping". Inner peace, as they conceive it, is composed of three distinct but dynamically related dimensions grounded in philosophic and theological traditions, including inner balance and calmness, acceptance of loss, and transcendence of hedonism and materialism.

Engaged balance implies that individuals make efforts to find and maintain inner balance or equanimity rather than merely reacting automatically to stimuli in the environment (Williams; Penman, 2012). A person with inner peace experiences his or her emotions in a balanced way. Another dimension of inner peace is acceptance, which refers to accepting losses in life and engaging with them without reacting negatively (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Related to acceptance is self-acceptance, which has been demonstrated to have a positive association with happiness, life satisfaction, feelings of positivity, and a sense of life's purpose (Ryff, 1989). Lastly, transcendence of hedonism and materialism is associated with enjoying pleasure and happiness in a balanced way, which implies "awakening from and transcending such pleasure-seeking and consumer-driven cultural norms" (Xi; Lee, 2021, p. 446).

In agreement with the aforementioned conceptualizations, according to Nelson (2014), as a personality trait, intrapersonal peacefulness can be understood in various ways. Central aspects include a tendency towards self-acceptance, self-compassion, and nonviolence toward the self; a lasting state of harmony between aspects of the self; and a disposition toward emotional states that facilitate peaceful relationships and/or are characterized by a sense of harmony. Following a multidisciplinary approach including both Eastern and Western theories, Floody (2011) designed and measured a questionnaire that reflected serenity and inner peace (Viterbo Serenity Inventory) with four interrelated components: Higher Power, which is based on spirituality and search for meaning and purpose; Harmony, which involves acceptance, wisdom, anger management, self-compassion, and forgiveness; Positivity, which involves positive emotions, gratitude, and positive coping; and Lifestyle, which refers to the pursuit of a simple life, caring for nature and relationships, and being socially responsible.

The growing interest in inner peace in the field of psychology has led to the exploration of this construct in relation to other widely explored variables, such as character strengths and emotion regulation. In recognition of the importance of finding new ways to improve inner peace for enhancing individuals' well-being, Niemiec (2021) has recently proposed a call for a new area of study for positive psychology in the realm of peace and character strengths. Chérif, Niemiec, and Wood (2022) investigated inner peace with respect to character strengths through two studies following a cross-sectional approach. The first study investigated individuals' perceptions of relevant strengths for inner peace, identifying 13 out of the 24 strengths known in positive psychology as most crucial: love, kindness, creativity, gratitude, perspective, spirituality, humor, honesty, hope, curiosity, love of learning, appreciation of beauty and excellence, and perseverance. The second study examined the relationships between character strengths and inner peace by drawing on observed associations among character strengths and measures of inner peace, revealing hope, zest, and gratitude as primary strengths significantly associated with harmony in life and serenity.

In a quantitative study involving measures that covered different dimensions of well-being, including hedonic, eudaemonic, and ill-being, Sikka, Revonsuo, and Gross (2023) explored the relationship between PoM and trait emotion regulation through two separate studies with participants from Finland and the U.S. The study focused on the use of cognitive reappraisal (changing the way a person thinks about the situation or distancing themselves from the situation) and expressive suppression (trying not to convey what one is feeling) as emotion regulation strategies (Gross, 2014). The findings, as expected, indicated that individuals with higher levels of PoM tend to make use of cognitive reappraisal with more

frequency and expressive suppression with less frequency compared to those individuals with lower levels of PoM. These results imply that learning how to use adaptive strategies may be central to enhancing PoM. In alignment with other scholars (e.g., Lee *et al*., 2013), the authors argue that another relevant aspect to achieving PoM involves acceptance of both positive and negative experiences.

2.2 Inner Peace in Language Education

Over the past 15 years, the field of language education has witnessed a growing interest in the area of peace and peacebuilding (e.g., Kruger, 2012; McNair; Pentón Herrera, 2022; Ortega, 2019; Oxford, 2013; Oxford *et al*., 2021; Pentón Herrera; Trinh; Park, 2023). The urgent need for peace in today's world and the power of language to unite or divide individuals and communities have led scholars and practitioners to explore ways to build peace via language education.

Although still incipient, the dimension of inner peace in particular is becoming a focal point in the literature due to the emotional nature of language learning and teaching and because inner peace has been associated with teacher flourishing (Olivero; Barbeito, 2023), learning performance (Chen *et al*., 2025), and increased learner well-being (Zhou; Dewaele; Lotchman, 2021). The pioneer study by Zhou, Dewaele, and Lotchman (2021) in the field of SLA indicated that inner peace, or Foreign Language Peace of Mind (FLPOM), emphasizes self-control and emotion regulation. In addition, it was demonstrated, as shown in psychology research, that FLPOM is indicative of a low-arousal positive emotional state typical of Chinese culture. Inner peace has also received increased attention because it is known to be the core of the other dimensions, encompassing social and environmental levels (Oxford, 2013).

Despite its novelty in the field of language education, it is important to note that the literature on affective factors, which expanded as a result of the social (Block, 2003) and emotional turns (White, 2018) as well as the advent of positive psychology (MacIntyre; Gregersen, 2012), has paved the way for introducing inner peace. Similarly, humanistic, holistic (Miller *et al*., 2018; Stevick, 1990), and contemplative learning (Lin; Culham; Edwards, 2019), as well as positive psychology theory (Seligman; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), have contributed core principles and techniques for incorporating teaching approaches for building inner peace.

Oxford's (2013) work on peacebuilding in language education has been highly influential to recent literature on inner peace in the context of LTE (e.g., Barbeito; Sánchez Centeno, 2021; Olivero, 2017; Olivero; Barbeito, 2023). Oxford's (2013) understanding of peace is based on positive peace (Galtung, 1996), which involves the presence of love, positive relationships, respect for human rights, and conflict resolution. Inner peace, defined from this positive perspective, is characterized by harmony and serenity achieved by working with internal conflict, for example by regulating one's emotions and by accepting losses, instead of associating inner peace with the mere absence of conflict, which would be linked to what is known as negative peace (Galtung, 1996). As Gregersen and MacIntyre (2021) state, a positive approach to exploring peace – the one framed in the present study – implies thinking of what invites peace, rather than thinking of what prevents it. Inner peace is strongest when different aspects of the self are in equilibrium (Olivero, 2017), a view that aligns with Nelson's (2014) conceptualization of inner peace as a lasting state of inner harmony. Furthermore,

Oxford (2013) emphasizes that peace is multidimensional, encompassing inner, social, and ecological dimensions that influence each other bidirectionally.

The multidimensional nature and positive conceptualization of peace offer a solid foundation through which to understand and adopt pedagogies of harmonies, a framework that integrates the inner dimension of peace while also considering the relational, cultural, and social dimensions of harmony in language education (Trinh; Reynolds; Coda, 2024). Pedagogies of harmonies seek to transform conflict and diversity into opportunities for connection, understanding, and well-being. In this sense, peacebuilding approaches are understood as a form of pedagogies of harmonies, as they emphasize both personal and social transformation. Integrating pedagogies of harmonies into LTE provides a transformative approach to fostering inner peace, impacting both the individual and the social context, helping bridge the well-being of individuals and communities.

Peacebuilding in language education provides not only a theoretical foundation but also practical guidance for designing pedagogical interventions in LTE. Recent work has focused on pedagogical interventions with the aim of preparing pre-service teachers to be peacebuilders. Olivero and Oxford (2019) employed an innovative peacebuilding intervention to raise awareness of peace and help pre-service teachers weave peace activities into their teaching practices. The findings from the multiple case study indicated that inner peace-focused activities facilitated mindfulness, emotion regulation, and increased optimism. The participants highlighted the importance of enhancing inner peace as a foundation for broader peacebuilding efforts. Barbeito and Sánchez Centeno (2021) emphasized the importance of incorporating positive psychology activities in the initial stages of LTE, in particular those aimed at building inner peace and emotion regulation during oral production. Similarly, Olivero and Barbeito (2023) offered a sample of positive psychology activities that have been used in LTE with the purpose of helping future teachers regulate their emotions and enhance well-being and inner peace. Although they have not made explicit reference to inner peace, Brierton and Gkonou (2022) and Mercer and Gregersen (2020) have addressed aspects that are crucial for building inner peace in the profession in their practical books on well-being for language teachers. Entire chapters have been devoted to the importance of teachers' beliefs, emotions, motivation, and relationships, as well as the relevance of developing a mindful attitude, which have proven to be highly useful for the design of pedagogical interventions for inner peace in LTE.

The reviewed literature shows that inner peace is still a novel construct in psychology and language education research. Researchers are only beginning to elucidate its characteristics, complexities, implications, and interrelationships with other constructs, which reflects a need for furthering the conceptualization of inner peace to better understand human flourishing and teacher well-being. In addition, it becomes important to engage in research into pedagogical interventions aimed at enhancing inner peace. The existing work centers mainly on empirical studies measuring the construct of inner peace or on literature highlighting the value of interventions and practical ideas to cultivate inner peace. Consequently, there is an urgent need for empirical studies to evaluate the impact of pedagogical approaches in enhancing inner peace. Likewise, there is a need to examine how inner peace interventions can contribute to the development of teachers who are able to make transformations beyond the classroom setting, in broader social dimensions.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The methodological design of this study is based on a case study and narrative inquiry. Through case study research, it is possible to obtain a refined perspective of the participants' lived experiences in their own contexts (Duff, 2008). Narrative inquiry is also a powerful tool in LTE because it offers the possibility for teacher development. When pre-service teachers verbalize (and relate) their perceptions, feelings, and behaviors about their experiences, narrative inquiry may disclose what is often implicit (Johnson; Golombek, 2011). The narratives in this study not only serve as research instruments but are likely to be approaches for teacher self-reflection (Barkhuizen, 2022).

3.2 Setting

3.2.1 The EFL Practicum

This course is offered in the fourth and last year of the English Teacher Training Program at the National University of Río Cuarto. It lasts one semester, and it includes two-hour theoretical meetings in which the supervisor and pre-service teachers discuss and reflect on current theories and approaches about the teaching of EFL at the elementary level. Practicum course requirements involve discussion of theories of foreign language education, reflective journal entries, written quizzes, one microteaching lesson with a peer, written reports on classroom observations, and a month of English in-school experience at a public elementary school (which includes writing lesson plans and teaching classes). The pre-service teachers are required to form pedagogical pairs for their teaching practice. Each pair is assigned to teach every day for a month (two weeks each person) in the elementary school, and also conduct observations on their peers' lessons. As the 2022 practicum cohort consisted of only three students, they formed a pedagogical trio instead of a pair.

A Chair of two professors (one being the author of the present article) teaches the university practicum sessions and supervises lessons. The practicum course is highly reflective, and it embraces a holistic approach. In addition, since 2016, this course has included specific pedagogical interventions based on peace (Oxford *et al*., 2021) and well-being (Mercer; Gregersen, 2020) (see the section *Intervention* for a detailed description).

3.2.1.1 The Intervention

The three-month university practicum sessions (14 weeks) incorporated an inner peace intervention (IPI), which aimed at increasing pre-service teachers' inner peace, and understanding of inner peace, through specific activities. The intervention was based on positive psychology theory, and it also drew on elements of holistic (Miller *et al*., 2018) and contemplative (Lin; Culham; Edwards, 2019) learning. Moreover, the activities were implemented experientially (Kolb, 1984), which means the participants had concrete opportunities to experiment by enacting inner peace and reflecting on their experiences with

such activities. Some of the activities were designed for this study and others were adapted from Mercer and Gregersen (2020) and from education websites. The activities addressed different aspects that are central for inner peace, such as self-acceptance, serenity, mindful attention, awareness of thoughts and emotions, gratitude, and character strengths. The implementation began the first week of the semester and ended the last week, including a total of nine sequences of activities (see Table 1 for examples of activities). The length of the sequences varied, ranging from 10 to 40 minutes. Whereas some practicum sessions did not include specific inner peace activities, the whole course embraced the principles of a positive psychology approach with the purpose of helping pre-service teachers to flourish.

Table 1 – IPI Sample Activities

Name of activity	Purpose	Brief description
VIA Strengths Survey	To reflect on strengths and focus on what pre-service teachers bring to the Practicum	Pre-service teachers complete the VIA Strengths (Via Institute on Character, s.d.) survey at home and read their results. In class, instructor and students reflect on the importance of those strengths for teaching and for being a practicum student.
Putting things into Perspective	To help pre-service teachers reduce catastrophic thinking and be more realistic	Based on different scenarios, pre-service teachers think of the worst case, the best case, and the most likely case in each situation. Then they all reflect on how likely each outcome is, what might be within the pre-service teachers' control, and what steps they can take to influence the outcome or cope with it.
Savoring	To allow pre-service teachers to enjoy something completely (savor it) and feel joy	The instructor asks pre-service teachers to build a positive memory by taking a mental photograph of a happy past event or by bringing a picture representing a happy memory. Then she gets them to describe the memory to their classmates and to explain how they felt and why. The instructor and pre-service teachers discuss how they think savoring helps foster inner peace.
Body Scan Meditation	To focus one's attention in the present moment and raise awareness of possible tensions	The instructor asks pre-service teachers to engage in mindful breathing and follow the guided meditation. Then they reflect on their experiences during the meditation and think about the ways in which this type of activity can be useful during the practicum.
Achievements and Pride	To savor achievements, to express pride	Once the end of the practicum is near, the instructor starts a discussion on how much the pre-service teachers perceive they have achieved. After that, they make a collaborative poster where they write down their achievements and/or represent them visually and express how proud they are.

Source: The author.

3.3 The Participants

The study participants were three female students (pseudonymized as Virginia, Melanie, and Carolina), the total number of students who enrolled in the practicum course in 2022.

All participants gave informed consent to take part in the study. They were native speakers of Spanish, and their ages ranged from 21 to 22 when the data were collected. The participants expressed having previous English teaching experience in private institutes, but one of them acknowledged having had no previous experience teaching young learners. The three participants manifested being highly motivated to take the course, and two of them felt quite confident to start the practicum. These participants had taken part in a peace and social justice pedagogical intervention in the teaching methods course the previous year, which centered on key concepts related to peace and social justice, their importance in language education, as well as how classroom materials can be adapted in order to incorporate peace and social justice principles.

3.4 Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from a semi-structured interview, journal entries, and a focus group interview. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather participants' insights about inner peace based on questions that served as guides but included open-ended questions, allowing participants to elaborate (Barkhuizen; Benson; Chik, 2014). The interviews were held on campus and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each participant was interviewed at the beginning of the term, and each interview lasted from 30 to 40 minutes. They had the option to use their L1 (Spanish) or English during the interviews. The journal entries were a course requirement. Through reflections in journal entries, pre-service teachers were given the possibility to voice their beliefs about inner peace and the IPI, as well as their emotions involved in these experiences (Johnson; Golombek, 2016). Participants wrote the entries in English as homework and sent them via email. A total of four journal entries of around 400 words were collected from each participant with prompts addressing aspects such as how they envisioned themselves as EFL teachers and influential teachers from the past, their opinions on different activities from the IPI and their relevance for being a language teacher, as well as their understanding of inner peace and the ways in which inner peace can be enacted. In addition, a focus group interview was held at the end of the term to collect information about how the group of pre-service teachers thought about inner peace and their experiences with the IPI (Savin-Baden; Howell Major, 2013). The focus group interview lasted 40 minutes and was recorded and transcribed. A researcher journal also formed part of the data sources, and it was used as a supplement to the other data collection sources during the analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun; Clarke, 2021). Thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in the data. It opens up the possibility of comparing the narratives in a dataset, establishing shared themes, and highlighting individual differences. The data went through a process of inductive analysis, through which the researcher was *grounded* in the data with the purpose of discovering emergent themes. Several steps were followed for the analysis: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of codes, (3) identification of themes, (4) review of themes, (5) definition of themes, and

(6) report (Braun; Clarke, 2021). Although these steps imply a linear process, they involved various rounds of categorization and interpretation. When developing categories within themes, they were judged by two criteria: internal homogeneity (the extent to which data that belongs to the same category or theme is similar) and external heterogeneity (the extent to which differences among themes are clear) (Patton, 2002).

4 Findings and Discussion

RQ1: What was pre-service teachers' understanding of inner peace as a result of the IPI?

The three participants seem to have developed a deep understanding of the construct of inner peace as a result of the IPI in the practicum, including how to define it, its importance for being a language educator, and ways in which inner peace can be enacted. The analysis of the findings showed that the participants conceived inner peace from a positive peace perspective (Galtung, 1996). That is, an understanding of inner peace as a harmonious state not merely due to the absence of conflict, but rather one that is achieved by the presence of positive emotions and by resolving internal conflicts. Such a conceptualization also closely aligns with the principles of pedagogies of harmonies (Trinh; Reynolds; Coda, 2024), where harmony is viewed not as the absence of conflict but as a dynamic process of co-creating understanding, mutual respect, and transformative growth. The fact that participants had learned about peacebuilding and social justice teaching approaches from a positive lens the previous year, together with the positive perspective adopted in the practicum course, seems to have contributed to their understanding of inner peace.

The participants also conceptualized inner peace as being formed by serenity and self-compassion, which coincides with the ways in which inner peace has been defined in psychology (e.g., Lee *et al*., 2013; Nelson, 2014). In addition, their understanding of inner peace included feeling emotional comfort by engaging in meaningful relationships and in simple life activities, which aligns with Floody (2011) and Xi and Lee (2021), who consider the pursuit of a simple life, or transcendence of materialism, as an important dimension of inner peace. The participants emphasized the role of acceptance for experiencing inner peace. This is in agreement with scholars such as Lee *et al*. (2013) and Sikka, Revonsuo, and Gross (2023), who have referred to acceptance of both positive and negative experiences as an important dimension for inner peace to develop. Carolina, for example, associated inner peace with positive emotions, acceptance, and positive coping: "[inner peace] […] doesn't refer to feeling happy all the time. It refers to the fact that we acknowledge what we feel even though the things are not good or they are negative feelings, and that we learn how to deal with them" (Focus group, June 2022). The excerpt above shows that Carolina distinguished inner peace from happiness, which is in agreement with studies that have classified inner peace as low-arousal positive affect and happiness with high-arousal positive affect (e.g., Lee *et al*., 2013; Zhou; Dewaele; Lotchman, 2021). In summary, participants' characterization of inner peace (as a state of harmony involving meaningful relationships, a simple life, acceptance, and positive coping) is associated with a eudaimonic perspective of well-being (Ryan; Deci, 2001), aligning with Trinh, Reynolds, and Coda's (2024) conceptualization of harmony.

Virginia, Melanie, and Carolina expressed that inner peace is an essential quality for a language teacher. They agreed that teachers should cultivate their inner peace as it will

positively influence their behaviors, and consequently, the students, supporting the claims that teacher and learner well-being are linked (Mercer; Gregersen, 2020), and that inner peace is essential for social peace dimensions to flourish (Olivero; Oxford, 2019). Moreover, Carolina referred to the importance of languaging (Swain, 2006) when she implied that language for expressing one's feelings and state of inner peace should be taught in the classroom. In her own words: "since languages are a way of communicating, maybe we need to find a way to use language to foster this ability" (Focus group, June 2022). The participants also acknowledged the importance of inner peace in language education as a means for fostering intercultural understanding and harmonious relations, which supports scholars' claim that language education professionals should be at the forefront of building peace among its users (e.g., Kruger, 2012; Oxford *et al*., 2021; Pentón Herrera, 2020; Pentón Herrera; Trinh; Park, 2026).

Further evidence revealing the importance of inner peace for a language teacher emerged when the participants were asked to envision themselves as an EFL teacher. They highlighted strengths and characteristics that are associated with inner peace, such as being loving, caring, empathetic, patient, emotionally intelligent, kind, and respectful. Confirming this belief, when reflecting on influential teachers they have had in the past, they described them with the same characteristics. In light of this, Carolina commented: "All of the qualities I mention here are characteristics I really want to develop or improve because I know how much they marked me" (Journal entry 1, March 2022). These characteristics align with several of the strengths that the participants in Chérif, Niemiec, and Wood's (2022) study perceived as relevant for inner peace.

Throughout the intervention, the participants reflected on the various ways in which inner peace can be enacted, and they specifically contextualized it within the practicum. The three participants referred to mindful breathing as a useful technique for calming and lowering one's anxiety, and they said they had employed mindful breathing both before and after teaching a class and, in the case of Melanie, also before reading her supervisor's feedback on her lesson plans. Positive self-talk is another technique they valued and said they had used to boost their confidence right before teaching their lessons during teaching practices. In the last journal entry, Melanie expressed, "This was especially the case before teaching, when I was feeling too nervous and anxious at the same time. In this situation, I tried to take a deep breath and to do some self-talk with encouraging messages like, you can do this!" (Journal entry 4, June 2022).

Melanie and Virginia referred to taking breaks and distancing themselves from a stressful situation as useful ways of refocusing and lowering one's anxiety when writing lesson plans. In Virginia's words, "sometimes I needed to take a minute and think or do something else in order to then go back and have fresher ideas or view things from a different perspective" (Journal entry 4, June 2022).

These findings indicate that the participants associated inner peace with being able to regulate one's emotions, and that they valued and employed adaptive emotion regulation strategies (Gross, 2014). Attentional deployment (when distancing and distracting themselves from the act of planning a lesson in order to refocus) and cognitive reappraisal (when engaging in positive self-talk and mindful breathing to boost their confidence) seem to have been the strategies most frequently used. Participants' preference for such adaptive strategies holds logic, given that psychology research has indicated a positive correlation between inner peace and cognitive reappraisal strategies (Sikka; Revonsuo; Gross, 2023) and that mindful meditation can increase inner peace (Liu *et al*., 2015).

RQ2: In what ways did the IPI influence the pre-service teachers, according to their beliefs?

According to what they reported, the participants believed that the IPI in the university practicum sessions enhanced their well-being as pre-service teachers as well as increased their professional growth. Similar findings were obtained in Pentón Herrera and Martínez Alba's (2022) study, which confirmed the value of pedagogies intended to enhance pre-service teachers' well-being in LTE. The IPI provided the participants with strategies for emotion regulation, which they said they used frequently in stressful circumstances in the practicum, as was previously mentioned. Virginia said she had learned to deal with her negative thoughts and emotions and become more realistic about the possible outcomes when submitting her lesson plans thanks to the activity "putting things into perspective". In addition, the participants expressed that reflecting on their strengths as well as recognizing accomplishments helped them feel proud, which they said helped them develop perseverance and enhance their confidence about teaching. These findings align with literature in the area of positive psychology in SLA, which has explained the benefits of increasing positivity in LTE (Mercer; Gregersen, 2020).

Based on Melanie and Carolina's reflections, it seems that the IPI led to improved group work and collaboration skills, thereby illustrating the interrelationship that exists between inner and interpersonal peace dimensions (Oxford *et al*., 2021). For example, when referring to mindful breathing, Melanie commented: "sometimes when planning [the lessons] these strategies helped me to have better ideas and to be able to listen to my classmates more actively" (Journal entry 4, June 2022).

According to participants' self-reports, the IPI seems to have facilitated teacher development as the activities provided them with useful tools not only to cope with the challenges faced when learning to teach languages, but also tools that can be of use in their personal lives. The participants said they found meaning in the activities, supporting findings from studies carried out in the same setting, which revealed the transformative capacity of peacebuilding activities in LTE (Olivero; Oxford, 2019). However, some activities during the IPI also triggered a sense of apathy because of its novel nature, which is expected when incorporating innovations in the classroom, especially when they involve holistic teaching approaches in traditional settings (London, 2013). In this light, Melanie expressed:

> at the beginning some activities were like before I started doing them I thought ok, what's this? because it's not common to do them, especially in our course of studies but then I think that some are good and we can even incorporate them in our daily life, especially when you're feeling like stressed or anxious. That is good, I think it's part of teaching itself. To teach strategies to deal with different things and not just, in our case, not just English (Focus group, June 2022).

The participants acknowledged that the different activities involving inner work enhanced self-knowledge, which led them to make informed decisions during their teaching practices. For example, they highlighted that knowing one's greatest strengths can help you decide how to exploit them in the classroom. In a similar way, becoming aware of your least developed strengths can help you take action in order to expand them. In Virginia's words: "considering that 'creativity' is one of my lowest strengths according to the VIA survey, I should be aware of this and start looking for strategies that can help me enhance my creativity"

(Journal entry 2, April 2022). This finding supports the claim in education literature that self-reflection allows learners (and future teachers) to develop more effectively by, for example, making informed decisions, engaging in innovative thought, and behaving more ethically (Bechara; Damasio; Bar-On, 2007; Farrell, 2022; MacIntyre; Gregersen, 2012).

Based on the findings, it seems that the meaning of the IPI was associated primarily with the value of the activities as tools to help participants thrive in the practicum. While participants acknowledged the importance of inner peace in fostering peace in the EFL classroom through language teaching, they mainly reflected on how the IPI has influenced themselves in their challenging practicum journeys. Importantly, however, the IPI functioned as more than a set of well-being strategies; it also modeled a pedagogy rooted in harmony, understanding, and transformation, reinforcing the potential of peacebuilding approaches, a form of pedagogies of harmonies, as a guiding framework for LTE.

5 Limitations and Implications

5.1 Limitations

Although this study was relevant for multiple reasons, it presented limitations. Perhaps a longitudinal study could have revealed deeper information in relation to the participants' experiences and conceptualizations of inner peace in the practicum course. Moreover, the data collected were based on participants' self-reports. This implies that the researcher had to trust participants' voices and had to be strategic to elicit implicit information. The third limitation identified relates to the dual role the researcher had, as she was both the person conducting the study and the teacher in charge of the implementation of the IPI. Whereas adopting an emic perspective is certainly a strength because it allows understanding the phenomena from an insider's view (Patton, 2002), it might have presented drawbacks even if the researcher tried to handle them with care. Being an insider might have led the researcher to unconsciously naturalize aspects related to context that might have been important for the study (Barnard; Burns, 2012). Moreover, the dual role might have inevitably influenced certain aspects related to power differentials. In this light, to mitigate these effects, several strategies were implemented. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were told that their involvement and type of responses would not affect their performance in the course. Second, the data collection tools prompted open-ended personal reflections, allowing both positive and critical perspectives. Also, a researcher journal was used during data analysis to make conscious interpretative decisions.

5.2 Implications

Inner peace lies at the heart of well-being and has important research and pedagogical implications, making its investigation as a discrete construct essential. Future research could explore inner peace and the interrelationships with SLA constructs that have been shown to affect well-being and teacher development. In this light, in response to Mercer's (2023) call for the need to study positive psychology constructs through a balanced lens, future research

should examine the interplay between inner peace and its counterparts, for instance, disruption, negative emotions, and stressors, as well as how these dichotomies interact. Such an interplay holds particular relevance in the case of inner peace, given that it is characterized by a state of balance. As Lee *et al*. (2013, p. 588) argued, "the process of achieving peace of mind might involve balancing between the experiences of pleasure and pain".

In addition, inner peace should be explored across cultures and contexts through a plurality of approaches and research designs. It would be important, for example, to adopt a cross-cultural perspective to examine and compare how pre-service teachers value and experience inner peace. As with every positive psychology construct, inner peace is contingent not only on personal factors but also on social conditions. Future studies could explore the ways in which variables of the social context (both micro and macro) influence learners and teachers' inner peace. It would be enlightening to examine the interrelationship between inner peace and social peace dimensions, such as interpersonal or intercultural peace. Also, in the case of LTE, it would be relevant to explore how pre-service teachers enact inner peace in their contexts of teaching, as well as their experiences and outcomes when incorporating peacebuilding approaches into the regular school curriculum.

As the present article has shown, inner peace is a novel and fertile territory for future research in the fields of psychology, SLA, and LTE. It is my hope that this study, together with others who have been pioneers (e.g., Zhou; Dewaele; Lotchman, 2021), serves as a catalyst for further literature in this area. The subfields of positive psychology and peace psychology can offer the foundations for the exploration of inner peace in the fields of SLA and LTE, with the purpose of understanding and promoting inner peace within the context of language education, as well as contributing to the literature on well-being grounded in the eudaimonic approach.

The present study also has significant pedagogical implications. Based on participants' beliefs, the IPI has helped them thrive in the practicum. Language teacher educators should echo participants' voices and adopt positive psychology-based approaches in LTE to help create the conditions for inner peace to flourish, leading pre-service teachers to have a successful and transformative practicum experience despite the challenges that this course entails. More specifically, activities designed to enhance inner peace can be implemented experientially and embedded within existing coursework in language teacher education programs, rather than introduced as additional or stand-alone components, thereby avoiding further burden on already demanding courses. Interventions may also be tailored to different institutional contexts, with the scope and depth of holistic and contemplative approaches shaped by the characteristics, constraints, and priorities of each setting.

In addition, this study has revealed that if we are to expect that future language teachers build peace in their own teaching contexts, language teacher educators should offer concrete and systematic opportunities in LTE programs to help pre-service teachers incorporate peacebuilding, harmony-based approaches into the regular language curriculum. This can be done, for example, by helping them adapt existing classroom material to find ways to integrate the affective dimension, together with the linguistic and intercultural dimensions, into a language lesson. As is known, innovating in the classroom is particularly challenging for novice teachers, who should be offered ample guidance in the process.

6 Conclusion

This article has introduced a novel and promising construct in the field of LTE. In addition, this study has contributed to the need to evaluate the impact of positive psychology interventions. In response to the first research question (What was pre-service teachers' understanding of inner peace as a result of the IPI?), the findings indicate that the participants developed inner peace literacy as a result of the IPI in the practicum. They were able to conceptualize inner peace and become aware of its role in language education, as well as think of ways to enact inner peace. Similarly, in response to the second question addressed in this study (In what ways did the IPI influence the pre-service teachers, according to their beliefs?), it seems the major influence of IPI on participants had to do with helping them navigate the multiple challenges faced in the practicum and sustain their well-being. This article has shown that LTE can provide more than technical teaching skills to future teachers. Language teacher educators can prepare pre-service teachers to enact and cultivate inner peace, thereby helping them thrive in their professional roles. In addition, pre-service teachers can be trained to build inner peace in their own teaching contexts, making the ripples of peace larger as they influence more and more students. This study has responded to the need to explore how we can facilitate teacher learning (Mercer, 2023). Instead of taking a deficit approach to teacher education, the present article advocates for a positive-oriented and relational approach that considers affective, ethical, and transformative dimensions in LTE, thereby preparing teachers to cultivate harmony within the language classroom and beyond.

Ethics Committee Report

This study followed institutional ethical guidelines for research with human participants at the Universidad Nacional de Río Cuarto and was conducted within the framework of a research program funded by the Secretaría de Ciencia y Técnica, approved by Resolución del Consejo Superior No. 083/2020 (PPI 2020–2022). Given its nature as a classroom-based, low-risk educational study, no formal review by a specific ethics committee was sought. Most data sources were derived from regular course activities; however, their use for research purposes was voluntary and based on informed consent. Additional data (semi-structured interviews) were collected with participants' explicit consent. Participation or non-participation had no impact on students' course evaluation. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the study.

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Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions and to protect participants' confidentiality, but may be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Use of AI

The author declares that ChatGPT was used in the preparation of this manuscript in a limited way, mainly for language editing purposes in specific parts, as well as to improve clarity. Artificial intelligence was **not** used for generation of content or for any part of the research process (e.g., data analysis or interpretation of results).

Reviews

As part of the commitment made by the *Brazilian Journal of Applied Linguistics* to Open Science, the journal publishes the reviews issued regarding its published works, when authorized by all parties involved.

Review 1

This is a very well-written article that highlights some of the most fundamental aspects, often overlooked in academia. I appreciated how they included teachers' voices and demonstrated how their inner peace could influence the research community. I hope to see more articles like this in the future. Such contributions can encourage both novice and seasoned teachers to feel more relevant and cared for. The methodology, intervention, and analysis are apt and well-argued.

Reviewed on: 17/10/2025
Recommendation: Accept Submission.
Reviewer: Yasir Hussain

Review 2

- Theoretical support:

The manuscript is grounded in a strong and relevant theoretical framework, drawing on positive psychology, peace psychology, wellbeing research, and pedagogies of harmonies. Key constructs such as inner peace, positive peace, and eudaimonic wellbeing are clearly defined and well integrated with literature from SLA and language teacher education.

- Methodology:

The qualitative multi-case study design is appropriate for the research questions. Data collection through interviews, journal entries, and a focus group provides rich, triangulated data. Thematic analysis is clearly described and methodologically sound.

- Results and conclusions:

Findings are clearly presented and well supported by participant excerpts. The conclusions are consistent with the data and demonstrate how the intervention enhanced participants' understanding of inner peace, wellbeing, and professional growth.

- Writing and organization:

The manuscript is well written, coherent, and logically structured. Sections flow smoothly, and the study is easy to follow.

- Argumentation:

The arguments are clear and persuasive, with strong links between theory, methodology, findings, and discussion.

- Relevance and originality of the contribution:

The study addresses an under-researched construct in language teacher education and offers an original empirical examination of inner peace through an intervention-based approach.

- Contributions of the study to the field:

The study contributes to emerging research on teacher wellbeing and pedagogies of harmonies, offering valuable insights for language teacher education and opening avenues for future research and pedagogical innovation.

Reviewed on: 03/01/2026
Recommendation: Accept Submission.
Reviewer: Manuel Gomez Portillo