Teacher Anxiety and Resilience as Socio-ecological Experience: A Critical Ethnography of Early-career English as an Additional Language Teachers in Post-pandemic Ontario, Canada

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education
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Abstract

This critical ethnographic study investigated the anxiety and resilience experiences of English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers in Ontario, Canada during their early careers after the pandemic. The study drew on literature regarding the TESOL profession’s precarious nature, resilience and anxiety concepts, pandemic impacts on language education, and debates on native-speakerism. It employed four-level theoretical frameworks, including the theories of critical praxis (Freire, 1970), reflexivity (Byrd Clark, 2020), ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner,1979), and the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), for its design and implementation. Four pre-service and three in-service English language teachers participated, providing weekly reflective journals for 12 weeks followed by a semi-structured interview.

Findings showed that pre-service EAL teachers primarily felt anxious due to academic English skill challenges, peer pressure, limited practical teaching exposure, and concerns about time management and future prospects. Their resilience was enhanced by factors such as growth mindset, written reflections, academic resources, peer support both within and outside the TESOL program, institutional wellness and career services, and hands-on teaching experiences. In contrast, in-service EAL teachers reported unstable working conditions, specific teaching hurdles, and perceived ineffective managerial support as major anxiety sources. Their resilience was linked to coping mechanisms like perspective shifts, reflective journaling, student relationships, peer interactions, institutional workshops, and stable immigration status.

This study’s primary contributions encompass a shift from mainstream anxiety research in the field of applied linguistics to a socio-ecological view of both EAL teacher anxiety and resilience.
Additional aspects of research significance underscore the effectiveness of online reflective journals and interviews for exploring teacher emotions, heighten EAL teachers’ awareness of and preparation for early-career transition challenges, and offer critical insights for teacher educators, teacher preparation programs, and policy makers in Ontario, Canada to better support early-career EAL teachers.

**Keywords:** TESOL, English as an additional language, teacher anxiety, teacher resilience, pandemic, praxis, reflexivity, socio-ecological systems, community of practice
Summary for Lay Audience

This research looked into the anxiety and successful adaptation experiences of teachers in Ontario, Canada who speak and teach English as an additional language. This was especially for those teachers who started their careers since the pandemic. The study was informed by previous research publications on topics such as English language teachers’ insecure work conditions, how the pandemic affected language teaching, and discussions on whether being a native English speaker matters in teaching. The research used different theories to understand these topics better. Research participants included seven teachers. Four of them were still in training, while three were already teaching. These teachers kept a diary for 12 weeks and then had an interview.

Findings showed that teacher trainees were mainly worried about their English skills, their peers’ academic performance, not having much real teaching experience, and concerns about managing their time and job prospects. However, they became stronger by having a positive mindset, writing reflections, getting support from their peers, and actual teaching experiences. Those more experienced teachers were concerned about their job security, teaching challenges, and lack of support from their management. They coped with such concerns by changing their outlook, writing about their feelings, connecting with students, attending workshops, and having a stable legal status in Canada.

This study is important because it sees the major worries and strengths of these teachers from a broader perspective, focusing on the role of complex social environments. It also highlights the value of online diaries and interviews to understand teachers’ feelings. This research can help
teachers understand their emotional and professional experiences better and give important feedback to teacher educators, program developers, and administrators.
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Equally important, I would like to convey my heartfelt appreciation to my research participants. Without their research participation, this dissertation would not have been possible. Their commitment to 12 weeks of reflective journaling and their participation in interviews have enriched this work with enlightening data. I commend their courage in sharing their multifaceted and emotionally charged experiences, and hope that their participation has been beneficial to their early careers.

I am grateful to TESL Ontario for their kindest assistance as well. By distributing my call for participants via their official channel, they played a crucial role in connecting me with some of the most outstanding early-career EAL teachers with whom I have had the privilege to work. Their support was essential in recruiting these participants and deepening my insights into their emotional and professional experiences, thus contributing to the completion of this dissertation in its present form.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved grandfather, who tragically passed away in January 2023 following China’s abrupt shift from its zero COVID policy.
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List of Acronyms

CLB: Canadian Language Benchmarks
EAL: English as an Additional Language
ECC: English Conversation Circle courses
EFL: English as a Foreign Language
ESL: English as a Second Language
IELTS: International English Language Testing System
L2: Second or Foreign Language
LINC: the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada programs
OIPS: Online Interview & Presentation Skills courses
PBLA: Portfolio Based Language Assessment
STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
TESOL: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
Chapter 1: Introduction

Humans consistently undergo emotional fluctuations in their daily lives. Under the psychological constructionist viewpoint, emotions are not just reactions to external stimuli; they are complex responses constructed in the human mind. These responses are influenced by factors such as social interactions, perceptions of one’s environment, and individual physical states (Russell, 2003). In other words, emotions are inherently contextual, being shaped by both the immediate surroundings and broader societal forces; they can also impact these very environments. In today’s world, fraught with uncertainties like the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions, and environmental challenges, understanding emotions in depth becomes increasingly vital. Such understanding, especially in the context of specific environments, is not only key to effective social navigation but also crucial for maintaining overall well-being.

In response to the escalating uncertainties previously mentioned, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals have set forth a transformative agenda for 2030. A key goal within this framework highlights that “Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being at all ages is essential to sustainable development” (United Nations, 2022, para 1). In this context, well-being can be viewed as a fundamental human right, necessitating its systematic cultivation in various societal sectors, including education. It is imperative that both teachers and students are able to attain a satisfactory level of well-being, as this is crucial for their optimal functioning (Sulis et al., 2023).

Similar to other psychology-relevant constructs, well-being remains “intangible, difficult to define, and even harder to measure” (Thomas, 2009, p. 11). While some scholars might view well-being purely in terms of physical or mental health, this doctoral study adopts a critical socio-ecological lens, and emphasizes the subjective experience and evaluation of life events
(Diener & Ryan, 2009) while seeking human emancipation and flourishing. More specifically, my present study explores the subjective well-being of EAL (English as Additional Language) teachers in post-pandemic Canada by focusing on their experiences related to anxiety and resilience. This exploration thus seeks to gain deeper insights into language teacher wellbeing.

Equally important, there is a need to clarify that terms such as anxiety and resilience in this study do not refer to clinical or medical contexts. The present study does not aim to diagnose or treat research participants or to label their emotional experiences as positive or negative, but to explore these emotional states as part of the broader landscape of subjective wellbeing, always in relation with and influenced by an individual’s socio-ecological contexts.

Subsequent sections will outline the research’s problems, gaps, objectives, questions, significance, my own relationship and positioning to this research, and dissertation structure.

1.1 Research Problems and Rationale

The recent global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on education, with language teachers particularly confronting heightened anxiety. A US-based study by Kush et al. (2022) highlighted that teachers, compared to other professionals like healthcare workers, displayed increased anxiety levels during this period. Similarly, studies in Canada have demonstrated that teachers, whether pre-pandemic or amidst it, experienced heightened stress and negative emotions relative to the broader workforce (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, 2020; Ontario College of Teachers, 2006). This trend extends to language teachers, as evidenced by studies from MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer (2020) and The British Council (2020).
Several scholars, including Mercer (2020), point out that language teachers might confront even greater emotional challenges than their counterparts in other disciplines. These challenges are not solely due to pandemic-induced stresses, such as transitioning to emergency remote teaching (Gao & Zhang, 2020; Farrell & Stanclik, 2021). They also encompass pre-existing issues unique to language teaching, including but not limited to adopting high-energy instructional techniques (Gkonou et al., 2020), navigating precarious work conditions (Breshears, 2019), and managing student-driven anxiety (Gkonou & Miller, 2019). Specifically, for early-career teachers of English as an additional language, they might grapple with self-perceived inadequacies in their English proficiency (Horwitz, 1996).

Such multifaceted anxieties contribute to significant challenges, including teacher burnout and attrition (Nayernia & Babayan, 2019). To combat this, there is a rising call for resilience, especially in the initial stages of a language teacher’s career (Farrell, 2012). After all, resilience is pivotal for teachers to maintain emotional stability, deliver effective pedagogy (Kelchtermans, 2011), and ensure students attain optimal learning outcomes (Herman et al., 2020). The World Economic Forum (2023) even identified resilience as a core skill for global workers in 2023. Given the present research context, it becomes paramount to scrutinize the intertwined dynamics of language teacher anxiety and resilience in these unprecedented times.

1.2 Research Gaps

Historically, applied linguistics fields have been dominated by cognitive and technicality-focused variables (Prior, 2019). This dominance resulted in a prevalent emphasis on the technical dimensions of language teaching (Lemarchand-Chauvin & Tardieu, 2018) and an under-emphasis where “emotions are the elephants in the room - poorly studied, poorly understood, and
seen as inferior to rational thought” (Swain, 2013, p. 195). While foundational studies in applied linguistics have examined topics such as affective filter theory (Krashen, 1982), motivation (Gardner, 1985), and anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), overall research on emotions remains limited in scope, thereby leaving many gaps to be filled. As asserted by the Douglas Fir Group (2016, p. 36), “emotion and affect matter at all levels.” This statement rings especially true for teachers, as “emotions are part of the very fabric that constitutes the teacher’s self” (Teng, 2017, p. 118).

Recognizing that this area of research is still evolving, the present study aims to address some of the existing paradigmatic, methodological, and contextual gaps as follows.

Although anxiety remains a prominent topic of individual differences in second language (L2) acquisition research, there are paradigmatic and methodological gaps to be narrowed. Beginning with seminal works in the 1970s (Scovel, 1978), the field saw a surge in publications related to L2 anxiety during the 1980s (e.g., Horwitz et al., 1986). Much of this early research predominantly utilized positivist scales, such as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986), often treating anxiety as a fixed trait. In their recent publication, MacIntyre and McGillivray (2023) highlighted limitations of these scale-based measurements, noting that “Traditional ID scale items summarize emotional reactions, but details of the dynamics of changes within specific emotions over a brief time frame are lost, as are developmental changes within a person over a long period of time” (p. 5). Furthermore, such scale items might not fully capture anxiety triggers that are context-specific and personally meaningful (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2022). Given these insights, recent advancements in anxiety research have adopted complexity theories to better understand anxiety reactions (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) and to investigate how anxiety coexists with other emotions,
such as enjoyment (Boudreau et al., 2018). Despite these innovative approaches, the bulk of research still leans heavily on conventional methodologies and perspectives.

Equally important, applied linguistics has seen limited exploration of positive psychology constructs, particularly resilience. Positive psychology, introduced to the field roughly a decade ago (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012), is defined as the “science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions” with the objective of enabling humans to thrive in the social environment (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). Notably, this rapidly expanding field examines both negative and positive emotions (Dewaele et al., 2019; Seligman, 2011; Simard & Zuniga, 2020). While some research within positive psychology has probed into the roles of anxiety and enjoyment in second language acquisition (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), there is a noticeable dearth of empirical studies on resilience, especially in the context of teacher resilience (Gu, 2018; Masten et al., 2012; Ungar, 2012). Moreover, critical ethnographic studies that examine the nuances of racialized teacher resilience are conspicuously absent (Robertson et al., 2015).

In the context of Canadian research, there is also an evident lack of studies centered on the resilience practices and processes of English language teachers. While there exists substantial literature on language teacher stress and resilience in EFL settings, such as Iran and Indonesia (Entesari et al., 2020; Rizqi, 2017), Canadian studies predominantly focus on aspects such as professional identities, development (Amin, 1997; Faez, 2011; Hodge, 2005; Soheili-Mehr, 2018), and self-efficacy (Faez & Valeo, 2012; Valeo & Faez, 2014). However, a comprehensive focus on teacher resilience within the Canadian context is conspicuously absent.
1.3 Research Purposes

This study aims to explore the under-researched area of early-career anxiety and resilience among English as an Additional Language teachers in Ontario, Canada. The main objectives are to provide a comprehensive understanding of their experiences, elucidate the sources of their anxieties, and explore the strategies they employ to build resilience in their professional lives.

1.4 Research Questions

Research on teacher career development frequently recommends stratifying studies based on career stages (England, 2020; Fuller, 1969). This differentiation arises from the understanding that teachers’ professional and personal priorities evolve throughout their careers (Day, 2017; Goodson, 2008; Sulis et al., 2023). Given this evidence-based recommendation, it is crucial to distinguish between pre-service and in-service early-career English language teachers. For the purposes of this study, ‘early-career’ language teachers are defined as those with less than five years of practical teaching experience. Pre-service teachers are identified as individuals who are either currently undergoing their initial teacher education or have completed it but have not yet started teaching. In contrast, in-service teachers have completed their training, are certified, and are actively employed in teaching roles. To address the unique needs and circumstances of these two distinct groups, the present study has formulated two sets of research questions as presented below.

(1a) What types of early-career teacher anxiety are socio-ecologically experienced by pre-service English as an Additional Language teachers during post-pandemic times?
(1b) What types of early-career teacher resilience are socio-ecologically experienced by pre-service English as an Additional Language teachers during post-pandemic times?

(2a) What types of early-career teacher anxiety are socio-ecologically experienced by novice in-service English as an Additional Language teachers during post-pandemic times?

(2b) What types of early-career teacher resilience are socio-ecologically experienced by novice in-service English as an Additional Language teachers during post-pandemic times?

1.5 Research Significance

This study is poised to significantly enrich the field of applied linguistics, particularly concerning the experiences of EAL language teachers. The insights revealed could be instrumental for teachers, language school administrators, and policymakers, providing guidance on optimizing teacher wellbeing and professional growth. The specific contributions of this research are as follows:

(1) Methodological Expansion: This study extends the traditional boundaries of SLA research, which has often concentrated on foreign language anxiety. Instead, it examines teacher anxiety and resilience using a socio-ecological perspective.

(2) Promotion of Qualitative Approaches: By leveraging qualitative ethnographic methodologies, specifically online reflective journals and interviews, the research emphasizes the depth and richness these approaches bring. They allow for close exploration of participants’ experiences and emotions over sustained periods of time.
(3) Awareness and Advocacy: The study seeks to highlight the principal anxieties relevant to teaching, underscoring the need for stakeholders to recognize and address the significance of bolstering teacher resilience.

(4) Professional Empowerment: The findings aim to empower early-career EAL teachers by enhancing their self-awareness. This fosters a sense of security, connection, and support within their profession.

(5) Educational Change: The results advocate for the inclusion of critical socio-emotional education within language teacher training programs, both within Canada and on a global scale.

1.6 My Positionings in relation to This Study

   Educational research is inherently value-laden as decisions from research design to data interpretation are often influenced by a researcher’s personal experiences and societal contexts (Flick, 2006). Therefore, it is pivotal to disclose my personal connections to the study, illuminating my motivations behind this inquiry. My longstanding passion has been teaching English to speakers of other languages. This enthusiasm, combined with my firsthand experiences with early-career teacher anxiety, resilience, and the complexities of juggling multiple roles in Ontario’s teaching landscape, propelled me to study this research topic. My graduate studies also fueled this interest, exposing me to a vast literature on the challenges faced by the TESOL profession in Canada. Direct interactions and observations with EAL teachers in Ontario, both before and during the pandemic, further validated these concerns. Consequently, I sought to comprehensively understand the socio-ecological dimensions of anxiety and resilience among EAL teachers in order to empower emerging professionals, including myself. Please note:
A more detailed exploration of my positionality within this research will be presented in Chapter 3, entitled Methodology.

1.7 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation unfolds over seven main chapters.

Chapter 1, as presented above, introduces the background and objectives of the study.

Chapter 2 offers a comprehensive review of literature, touching upon the precarious nature of the TESOL profession, insights into language teacher anxiety and resilience, pandemic influences, and historical discussions around native-speakerism. It also presents the theoretical framing/conceptualization for this study.

Chapter 3 details the research methodology. This includes the justification for the critical ethnographic research design, my own complex researcher positionings, information about participants and context, data collection techniques, analysis strategies, and ethical considerations.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings. Specifically, Chapter 4 centers on pre-service English language teachers, while Chapter 5 focuses on in-service ones.

Chapter 6 discusses the findings by contextualizing them with the research questions and relevant literature.

Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation, providing a summary of the study, its implications, limitations and future research directions, as well as final researcher reflections.

The dissertation ends with references, appendices, and a copy of my curriculum vitae.
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framing

This chapter reviews the existing body of literature pertinent to the chosen research topic. Firstly, I examine the TESOL profession in Canada, which has been described as precarious (Breshears, 2019). To better understand what constitutes precarity, two primary interpretations are reviewed—precarity as an employment status and as a subjective experience. Next, I illustrate the multifaceted nature of language teacher anxiety by discussing its types, sources, effects, and coping strategies. Subsequently, I interrogate the concept of teacher resilience, introducing various definitions and socio-ecological strategies to foster resilience. The fourth section spotlights some of the latest research findings on language teacher anxiety and resilience during the pandemic. Then, I engage with the continually evolving discussions around native-speakerism. Through this comprehensive literature review, I aim to illuminate the multilayered contexts surrounding the present study, encompassing the ‘where’ (TESOL profession in Canada), the ‘what’ (language teacher anxiety and resilience as the two central concepts), the ‘when’ (pandemic-era findings), and the ‘who’ (English as an Additional Language users). Lastly, I discuss the guiding theoretical frameworks and their relevance to the present study.

2.1 The Precarious Profession of TESOL and Two Conceptualizations of Precarity

The TESOL profession in Canada has been commonly described as precarious (Breshears, 2019). This review section first examines the manifestations of precarity in English language teaching. Subsequently, it explores broader research areas to offer two distinct perspectives on precarity—as an employment status and as a subjective experience.


2.1.1 The Precarious Profession of TESOL

English language teaching as a precarious profession has been researched for more than three decades. In the early 1990s, Auerbach (1991, p. 1) captured the following realities in ESL contexts.

A fact of life for ESL educators is that we are marginalized; college ESL instructors are often hired as adjunct faculty on a semester by semester basis to teach non-credit preparatory courses in academic skills centers. Elementary ESL teachers teach in pull-out programs, traveling from school to school and setting up shop in closets, corridors, and basements. Adult educators teaching survival ESL have to work two or three jobs in order to survive; jobs with benefits, living wages, and any measure of security are few and far between.

More recently, after reviewing Canada-based literature, Breshears (2019) found that there has been little improvement in the employment conditions for language teachers in Canada. Many teachers continue to face precarious employment characterized by “part-time and temporary work, low wages, unpaid work hours, and multiple job holding” (Breshears, 2019, p. 26). A survey involving 1,327 ESL teachers in Ontario also indicated that only 37% of them held full-time positions (Valeo, 2013). This was largely attributed to the scarcity of full-time positions and overall low pay scales (Valeo & Faez, 2014). Consequently, teachers are compelled to seek employment across various sectors; some teachers are forced to work extra hours without additional pay, a phenomenon termed as magic time (Kouritzin, Nakagawa, Kolomic, & Ellis, 2021). Moreover, the dominant discourse often portrays English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teaching as deficit, which leaves teachers vulnerable to judgments about their professional value (Surtees, 2019). As a result, many English language teachers experience uncertain, insecure, and
vulnerable feelings (Lewchuk et al., 2017), which in turn can have detrimental effects on their well-being and teaching effectiveness.

For novice English language teachers, precariousness can also be felt when there is a misalignment between what they learned during their education and the actual demands of their teaching job (Farrell, 2012). Research shows that many teachers experience reality shock (Veenman, 1984) or transition shock (Corcoran, 1981) in their initial years of teaching, which is a critical period of time for professional development (Farrell, 2009) as they decide whether to continue or leave the profession (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). This shock may stem from the transition in identity from being a student to becoming a practicing teacher and also the shift in routine from academic coursework to fulfilling actual teaching responsibilities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Farrell, 2016). It is imperative that teacher training programs include practical experiences that equip student teachers with the skills needed to manage classroom discipline, accommodate diverse student needs and learning styles, modify inappropriate learning materials (Mann & Tang 2012), and navigate socio-cultural and political factors (Farrell, 2016). England (2020) further proposed that pre-service teachers need to learn “what is it and how to do it, how to interview for a job you want, finding a mentor, learning how to collaborate, identifying a research topic area of interest, using personal network to find and develop service opportunities” (p. 109).

Unfortunately, mainstream language teacher education programs tend to prioritize the teaching of technical skills (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017) using an outcome-based (Anderson, 2015) or “training-transmission” model (Borg, 2015, p. 5). As a result, student teachers are less likely to “prepare for and respond to the unpredictable events, relationships and learning opportunities of the lesson itself” (Anderson, 2015, p. 229). For student teachers who come from international
backgrounds, their authentic needs are sometimes overlooked in language teacher education programs, given certain programs’ inadequate support for their development of linguistic and cultural knowledge necessary for English language teaching (Faez, 2010). Lacking such knowledge to some extent has led to their difficulties in securing full-time jobs.

2.1.2 LINC Programs

Among various sub sectors of English language teaching in Canada, the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program stands out for its national impact. Established in 1992, the LINC program has evolved into the largest federally funded initiative aimed at enhancing adult immigrants’ English language proficiency (Fleming, 2007). Over time, its mission has transitioned from solely improving newcomers’ linguistic and cultural skills to preparing them for employment and participation in Canada’s multicultural activities (Guo, 2015). Despite its success in equipping new immigrants with improved English language and cultural competence, an official report indicated that the program has faced challenges in recruiting and retaining proficient teachers, mainly due to the reliance on short-term contracts (IRCC, 2010).

For LINC teachers who are currently working in the program, various professional and financial aspects are identified as sources of stress, including but not limited to “isolation, lack of job security, lack of professional development, underfunded programs, continuous intake, low wages, and problems with professional accreditation” (Haque & Cray, 2007, p. 637). Additionally, these teachers have voiced pedagogical concerns about the usefulness of adopting portfolio-based language assessment (PBLA) in their instruction (Abdulhamid & Fox, 2020; Desyatsova, 2020). Another noteworthy challenge they face is the recent increased use of
blended teaching, which caters to both virtual and in-person learners (Sturm et al., 2018). The demand for such teaching has imposed significant time pressures on LINC teachers and introduced technical difficulties (Shebansky, 2018).

2.1.3 Precarity as Employment Status

While the challenges faced by LINC teachers, such as job insecurity and pedagogical concerns, illustrate the practical aspects of precarity in the TESOL field, it is also crucial to understand precarity from a wider lens. Often used in sociological research contexts, the term precarity typically relates to labor studies. This term, which has been around for over five decades, originated from the French word précarité. French sociologists, such as Bourdieu (1963), began using this term in the 1970s to critically examine disparities in the social status of Algerian workers based on whether their jobs were permanent or temporary. Bourdieu discovered that casualized or precarious work was linked to unequal power dynamics and was used by dominant groups to cultivate insecurity among workers. He further expanded on this in his work entitled Job Insecurity Is Everywhere Now, where he introduced the term flexploitation (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 85) to describe how workers were normalized to accept exploitative conditions under the guise of flexible work arrangements.

In more recent years, numerous studies have focused on the concept of precarious work or employment. Scholarly sources frequently define precarious work as “employment that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker” (Kalleberg, 2009, p. 2). Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2016) and Kreshpaj et al. (2020) defined precarious work as employment characterized by high-risk factors such as low wages, potential job loss or discontinuity, limited control over working conditions, and lack of job rights.
precarious work is often found in non-standard employment conditions, which typically fall into four categories, including “(1) temporary employment; (2) part-time work; (3) temporary agency work and other multi-party employment arrangements; and (4) disguised employment relationships and dependent self-employment” (ILO, 2016, p. 7).

Mounting evidence suggests that the downsides of these forms of work outweigh their merits. Non-standard forms of employment have been found to offer flexibility that suits the needs of certain individuals who seek to expand their professional networks, maintain work-life balance, or work while continuing their education (Renard et al., 2021). Proponents, such as Mitropoulos (2006), who approached non-standard employment from an autonomist perspective, also argued that precarity is not necessarily problematic but rather a state to be embraced. However, labor rights advocacy groups identified that “in most countries with available data, temporary employment is an involuntary choice, often in places where time-related underemployment is widespread” (ILO, 2016, p. 186). They further argued that “the growth of non-standard employment (NSE) is not a natural occurrence, but the result of explicit business decisions worldwide” (ILO, 2016, p. 157). Other researchers, such as Standing (2011), suggested possible socio-ecological factors leading to precarity, including limited access to skills training and communication channels, poor managerial or governmental regulation, and outdated labor policies. Notably, precarious employment is more common among vulnerable worker groups such as women, migrants, and less educated individuals (Benach et al., 2014). It has also been linked to detrimental effects on workers’ mental health, potentially causing anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts (Jaramillo et al., 2021; Vives et al. 2011).

These growing concerns warrant close attention in an era of socio-economic uncertainties. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, employees in North America faced various challenges
such as weakening employer-employee relationships, transfer of more risks onto employees, and an increase in non-standard employment forms (Kalleberg, 2009). This was also evident in the teaching profession, where nearly 50% of new teachers in North America were found to abandon their careers (Maciejewski, 2007). In 2013, about one in four teachers with Ontario College of Teachers certification were in this situation, and novice teachers in Ontario, Canada “had to accept part-time or contingent employment rather than full-time permanent positions” (Mindzak, 2016, p. 2). The labor market trends in North America have not shown significant improvements. A recent report revealed that, despite a favorable GDP, Canada experienced a decline in employment growth and a rise in the unemployment rate during the second half of 2022 (ILO, 2023). Continued stagnation in the Canadian labor market is also expected to occur in 2023 and 2024 (ILO, 2023). This economic stagnation, combined with decreasing disposable incomes, escalating living costs, and rising inflation rates, has contributed to a sense of financial insecurity among salaried workers, particularly since 2022 (ILO, 2023). English language teachers in Ontario, Canada also felt this prospect as they reported “decreased hours, lost jobs, and fewer employment opportunities” (TESL Ontario, 2022, p. 6). These growing concerns were also reflected in some of my data findings which shall be revealed in the upcoming Chapters 4 and 5.

2.1.4 Precarity as Subjective Being

A different conceptualization of precarity pertains more to the subjective feeling of being precarious in today’s world, especially in an era marked by constant uncertainty and instability (Waite, 2009). This understanding centers on conditions that “threaten life in ways that seem to be beyond personal control” (Butler, 2009, p. i), and is characterized by the fear of losing one’s status and secure place in the world (Millar 2017, p. 5). Lorey (2012) maintained that
precariousness is an inevitable process of human vulnerability to death, thus positioning precarity as an existential issue. From an individual perspective, Standing (2011) emphasized the need to develop a “secure identity or sense of development achieved through work and lifestyle” (p. 16) to manage the sense of precarity. Puar et al. (2012) held another comprehensive discussion by discussing the social, economic, and political aspects of precarity. They noted that human precariousness largely depends on the structures of socio-economic relationships and the ability of socio-political institutions to provide sufficient protection to people, especially those most vulnerable. Similarly, Butler (2009) believed that precarity is an inherently political condition where different populations experience differentiated conditions in terms of injury, violence, and death and gain differentiated support.

Educational environments are also influenced by various precarious forces. An example of such a force is the neoliberal approach to education reforms. Influenced by this approach, school leaders are more inclined to prioritize market-centric education strategies and compete for more access to resources such as funding. However, in doing so, they may not always prioritize the student experience and/or student learning (Ewing, 2018). This approach also tends to create a sense of constraint and de-professionalization among teachers (Cody, 2019), leading to a decrease in job instability (Blair, 2018). However, it is important to note that those who face these unstable conditions can still potentially drive change. As Casas-Cortés (2021) stated, “Besides trouble, precarity movements flip vulnerability upside down in such a way that experiences of insecurity and dispossession [can] lead to initiatives of collective agency and organized resistance” (pp. 511–512). Advocacy-oriented educators have argued that these sites of struggle in education can be viewed and transformed into sites of change (Freire, 1970) where “radically new solidarities” can be formed (Fine et al., 2016, p. 511).
When studying work precarization and personal experiences of precarity, Alberti, Bessa, and Hardy (2018) and Shukaitis (2013) acknowledged the importance of both these issues. However, they also cautioned against oversimplifying or normalizing the terms precarity and precariousness. A common preconception is to view precariousness as solely negative (Mitropoulos 2006). Mitropoulos (2011) further pointed out that “analyses and political struggles around precarity often risk reinforcing the politics of Fordism… as the resurgence of emotional attachments to conservative agendas.” These insights emphasize the importance of critical evaluation of traditional political ideologies and economic structures, rather than accepting them without question.

2.2 Language Teacher Anxiety

Expanding on the discussion of precarious professional conditions impacting language educators and different interpretations of precarity, this section focuses on language teacher anxiety as a central construct in this study.

2.2.1 Types of Anxiety

2.2.1.1 General Anxiety and Foreign Language Anxiety

In the field of TESOL, researchers sometimes categorize anxiety into general anxiety and Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). In general terms, anxiety can be understood as subjective feelings, such as tension, nervousness, and fear, as human responses to certain stimuli (Spielberger, 1983). This notion of general anxiety has been relatively outdated nowadays for its lack of precision. In contrast to general anxiety, second/foreign language anxiety is termed to mean specific affective reactions in second/foreign language acquisition (Horwitz, 2001), with
various, oftentimes negative, effects on L2 users (Ghorbandordinejad & Ahmedabad, 2016). FLA is commonly experienced by second or foreign language (L2) learners and teachers of English alike, and it is important for these L2 users to be able to identify and cope with FLA effectively given its possible effects and huge affected population (e.g., 1.08 billion out of the total 1.46 billion speakers of English are nonnatives, see Ethnologue, 2023). In the next subsection, I review additional lenses for conceptualizing anxiety as concerns language teacher education.

2.2.1.2 Trait, State, and Situation-Specific Anxiety

Under another way of categorization, anxieties can be grouped into trait anxiety, state anxiety, or situation-specific anxiety. Cattell and Scheier (1960) were arguably the earliest scholars who proposed the trait-state distinction. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), anxiety as a trait means the type of anxiety that is relatively stable and can be experienced across a range of situations. It has been commonly attributed to personality features and, for that reason, it has received criticisms for its insensitivity to the relations between human responses and the environment (Mischel & Peake, 1982). In contrast, state anxiety can be understood as an immediate affective status responding to a stimulus, and examples of state anxiety typically include test anxiety, public speaking anxiety, classroom anxiety, to name but a few (Spielberger, 1983). However, this perspective also does not “capture the essence of foreign language anxiety or satisfactorily demonstrate a role for anxiety in the language learning process” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 87). In order to remedy this gap, Horwitz et al. (1986) proposed the construct of foreign language anxiety which is situation-specific. This situational perspective views FLA as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom
language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128), which is only “limited to a given context” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, p. 90). According to Horwitz et al. (1986), FLA consists of three dimensions, which are communicative apprehension, testing anxiety, and concerns about negative evaluation within the contexts of L2 classrooms. Research shows that this situational perspective has been increasingly adopted in the past decade (Halet & Sanchez, 2017).

### 2.2.1.3 Skill-Based Anxiety

Another type of anxiety source in SLA research is skill- or competence-based. After reviewing relevant literature on anxieties related to the four skills which are listening, reading, speaking, and writing, Pae (2012) found these skill-based anxieties to be independent from one another, which means that learning to manage anxiety in each skill merits close attention. Despite this, Capan and Karaca (2013) pointed out that the majority of relevant research centered on speaking and listening anxiety, with reading- and writing-related anxieties under-researched. A main reason for researchers to emphasize studying speaking anxiety can be the anxiety-provoking potential of speaking given the greater perceived difficulty of acquiring speaking as a second or foreign language compared with the other skills (Zhang & Zhong, 2012). Additional skills such as teachers’ class preparation and anxiety management skills can also have an impact on student teachers but the impact is less than that of language use (Yoon, 2012). Learners’ poor L1 skills can lead to L2 anxiety as well (Sparks, Ganschow, & Javorsky, 2000).
2.2.1.4. Identity-Based Anxiety

Some researchers, in contrast, consider FLA to be more identity-based than competence-based (Alrabai, 2015). Identity-based anxiety can be viewed as one’s concern about establishing and/or maintaining relationships with certain groups of people (Stoud & Wee, 2006). Such identities can be shaped by “the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation and the desire for security and safety” (Norton, 2000, p. 8). One commonly held assumption is that “teachers of any subject matter are expected to be experts in that area” (Horwitz, 1996, p. 367). This imagined identity to some extent can cause FLA in second language classrooms. Interestingly, some linguistically highly proficient student teachers even make linguistic mistakes on purpose because they do not want to outperform their peers and cause resentment (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). In this case, they are not worried about their instructor’s assessment of their language abilities, but worried about how they are perceived by classmates.

Another identity issue that causes anxieties relates to one’s identity as a native-or-nonnative speaker. This historically grounded native-nonnative dichotomy privileges native speakers over nonnative speakers, which is ideologically and perhaps also pragmatically oppressive to the latter (David, 2015). Holliday (2005) viewed native-speakerism as a convenient but inadequate term for understanding English language users’ identity. This native-speakerist ideology has been heavily challenged by critical and transformative approaches to second language acquisition (see more discussions in Sub-Section 2.5 Debates and Changes around Native-speakerism).

It is noteworthy that neither teacher identity nor learner identity is stable (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). Many researchers regard identity as a conflicting, contradictory, and changing site (Darvin & Norton, 2015). More specifically, Norton (2000) opposed the simplistic assumption
treat L2 learners as “motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited, without considering that such affective factors are frequently socially constructed in inequitable relations of power, changing over time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways in a single individual” (p. 5). This was also the case with the participants’ ways of identifying in this study, as upcoming analyses in Chapters 4-6 will reveal.

2.2.2 Sources of Anxiety

2.2.2.1 Sources of Anxiety to Language Teachers in General

Language teachers often face diverse stressors in their professional environment. Specifically, those in the TESOL profession must navigate precarious work conditions (Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018; Gkonou & Miller, 2017) and manage feelings of insecurity (Mercer et al., 2016). They may need to teach across international contexts (King, 2016), try to understand learners’ cultural differences (King, 2016), address learners’ disruptive behaviors (Travers & Cooper, 1996) and learners’ anxiety (Gkonou & Miller, 2017). Additional contextual challenges may include less supportive parents, poor relationships with co-workers and administrators, heavy workload and underpayment, as well as role conflict or ambiguity (Travers & Cooper, 1996). In the meantime, mainstream language schools or institutes in many parts of the world tend to expect language teachers to spare no effort to improve students’ language test scores for university admission purposes, which does not necessarily echo the teacher’s heartfelt professional goal/mission; this gap may result in teachers’ doubts and anxiety. Even personally, teachers need to manage emotions effectively by keeping calm and carrying on, so as to avoid negative influence on teaching matters (Kramsch, 2014). In this process, some have suffered from the issues of emotional labor and profession-based burnout (Loh & Liew, 2016). For
instance, Loh and Liew (2016) reported that many English teachers in Singapore were strongly unsatisfied with the value-laden subject matters and the grading of learner assignments and tests. All of these factors explain why language teaching is often perceived as an emotionally high-energy labor (Gkonou & Miller, 2017; King & Ng, 2018) where teachers may experience an emotional rollercoaster (Gkonou, Dewaele & King, 2020).

Language teachers may also find it difficult to develop teaching-relevant capacities. Some of the main pedagogical expectations for teachers include the needs to be fluent in the target language, lead by example for students, identify learner errors and offer timely and constructive feedback, and improvise in the classroom (Richards, 2010). Content-wise, research shows the difficulty for teachers to balance the teaching of static linguistic items and that of authentic communicative use (Kramsch, 2015). In addition to reaching adequate levels of pedagogical knowledge (e.g., language-for-teaching) and content knowledge (e.g., knowledge of the subject matter) (Richards, 2017), teachers also need to be technologically capable these days (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), especially in the times of public health crises when remote learning is required more than ever. However, across 38 countries, only 56% teachers have been formally trained in using digital technologies, and only 43% teachers considered themselves technologically prepared for teaching (OECD, 2019). Those with limited technological knowledge are likely to find it challenging to adapt to new technologically-mediated norms. To briefly summarize, reaching optimal teaching outcomes can be a potentially anxious task to language teachers when they are obliged to adopt complex socio-linguistic practices, resources, and positionings to best meet learners’ needs.
2.2.2.2 Sources of Anxiety to Non-native ESL Teachers

Apart from these, nonnative English language teachers can face additional stressors and anxieties. In Mousavi’s study (2007), almost 90% of the said group of teachers experienced stressful feelings for their insufficient self-perceived language proficiency level. This is possibly because teachers are teaching a language that they themselves are still in the process of learning (Horwitz, 1996). Practically, they could hold concerns over the potential difficulties when receiving negative evaluation results, handling unexpected technical issues (Aydin, 2016), managing classrooms and planning lessons poorly, being observed by others, and using language-for-teaching in a less fluent manner (Barahmeh, 2016; Karas & Faez, 2021).

In reality, different forms of oppression may also create anxieties. Hiring practices in the market tend to prefer native speakers over those who speak English as an additional language due to the misunderstood belief that “nativeness” represents stronger teaching effectiveness (Freeman, 2016), which was rooted in the ideology of “native-speakerism” (Holliday, 2005) and has been ongoing for decades in many countries and regions (Mahboob & Golden, 2013).

Additionally, amid the times of pandemic, people with Asian ethno-cultural backgrounds have increasingly become targets and victims of anti-Asian discrimination and hate crimes in North America. This, according to Statistics Canada (2020), applies to the Canadian context, with findings based on 43,000 Canadians’ survey responses showing that reasons for such discriminatory actions included fears and misinformation associated with the virus and community safety. In this regard, nonnative teachers of English in Canada can be affected as well.

Gender as a potential source of anxiety has also been examined in a contested manner. According to Morton et al. (1997), “Females may display higher anxiety levels prior to stressful
events because of a physiologically-based phenomenon” (p. 76). However, other studies maintain that gender is not an anxiety-provoking factor among teachers (Asrasouli & Saadat, 2014; Liu, 2008). These conflicting findings point to the need for further research.

Nevertheless, on a positive note, a teacher’s anxiety level and language teaching proficiency level tend to be negatively correlated. Gardner and Leak (1994) argued that “anxiety lessens with teaching experience” (p. 30). Many researchers (e.g., Aydin, 2016; Morton et al., 1997) echoed this and furthered that adequate training experiences can reduce FLA among teachers. For example, Morton et al. (1997) maintained that “practice teaching itself appears to be one viable intervention strategy to reduce anxiety” (p. 76).

2.2.2.3 Sources of Anxiety to L2 Learners

Because some L2 teachers may also position themselves as learners, this subsection reviews some sources of anxiety to L2 learners. In a sense, language teacher education itself can be a source of anxiety. Existing teacher education programs seem to dominantly use monolingual pedagogical approaches, with little if not none attention paid to teachers’ socio-linguistic resources and experiences (Cook, 2015). At the same time, teacher trainees may be pressured by a heavy load of coursework or the need to pass tests (Burke, 2013). For example, multilingual teachers find themselves emotionally painful and anxious when required to pass the challenging Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency tests supposedly made for native speakers. Such practices can be anxiety-provoking.

Other factors that may lead to L2 learners’ FLA include but are not limited to their own proficiency levels (Cheng et al., 1999; Liu, 2009; Pan et al., 2010; Toth, 2010), individual competitive personalities (Pan et al., 2010), learner and teacher beliefs (Xu & Li, 2010; Yan &
Horwitz, 2008), attitudes towards L2 (Mak, 2011), high teacher expectations (Kunt & Tüm, 2010), lesson implementation styles and teacher behaviors (Dewaele et al., 2008), group work (Strauss et al., 2011), and cultural factors such as physical appearance and group unity (Wakui, 2006). Strauss et al. (2011) reported that conflicting results can exist across different cases, with some research, for instance, reporting the ineffectiveness of group work while other research suggesting working with familiar partners in pairs or groups is strongly effective in facilitating language production.

2.2.3 Effects of Anxiety

When it comes to the impact of anxiety, it is possible for positive outcomes to occur “as learners experience transitions back and forth between positive and negative emotional trajectories” (Gregersen, Meza, & MacIntyre, 2014, pp. 575–576). Although research findings have been largely negative in terms of FLA effects, FLA can sometimes create benefits such as generating excitement towards future experiences (Gregersen, Meza, & MacIntyre, 2014), or serving as an alert for learners to improve investment in L2 learning (Ohata, 2005) and thus improve language performance (Scovel, 1978). A study by Park and French (2013) reported that students with higher foreign language anxiety levels gained better academic achievement in grading compared to learners who were less anxious.

However, the negative impact of FLA on L2 teachers can be equally if not more profound and is more widely documented in existing literature. Research suggests a negative correlation between teaching anxiety and teaching effectiveness (Horwitz, 1996; Williams, 1991), especially among teachers with fewer years of teaching experience. L2 teachers who are stressed out may not perform well in L2 (Ghorbandordinejad & Ahmedabad, 2016; Horwitz et al., 1986; Sener,
2015). Anxiety-driven cognitive consequences include a decline in L2 users’ performance of language reception, processing, and production (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). As a result, they are less likely to successfully control nervousness, thus making persistent errors in terms of morphology, syntax, or spelling (Horwitz et al., 1986). This explains why “those with higher levels of anxiety tend to do more poorly in their language classes” (Horwitz, 2008, p. 9). In a similar vein, high amounts of FLA can be detrimental to L2 motivation. It can undermine one’s willingness to communicate especially when it comes to speaking (Toth, 2010). In other words, L2 users under the influence of debilitating anxiety tend to avoid confronting new learning tasks (Scovell, 1978). This is likely to happen when language teachers are exposed to the conditions of emotional labor (Loh & Liew, 2016), teacher burnout (Acheson, Taylor, & Luna, 2016), and their self-doubts about their own abilities and identities (Gkonou & Miller, 2017). Reis (2015) analyzed these risks and cautioned that “if ESL/EFL students at large repeatedly encounter ESL/EFL teachers whose practices are heavily influenced by their fears and insecurities, the vicious cycle of powerlessness in the face of the NS myth is likely to continue” (p. 34).

### 2.2.4 Anxiety Management Strategies Identified from FLA Research

Among various ways of anxiety management, personal strategies have been highlighted by research. Raising awareness and acknowledging anxious feelings can be a rather crucial step (Aydin, 2016). Song (2018) rightly pointed out that receiving psychological support is not enough for one to effectively address anxiety; gaining a deeper understanding, through reflections, of why anxiety occurs in a specific context plays an equally if not more important role in this regard. This awareness-raising activity also paves the way for creating social connections. Even merely knowing that one is not alone in the process of feeling anxious can
allow L2 users to alleviate FLA levels (Phillips, 1992) and increase their willingness to take risks and use the target language for communication (Tum, 2014).

Gaining support from one’s community of practice may also help reduce teacher anxiety. In his Affective Filter hypothesis that looks at the extent to which second language learning is influenced by anxiety and other affective variables such as self confidence and motivation, Krashen (1982) suggested that learners are likely to lower their affective filter when feeling a sense of membership to a target language group, potentially contributing to better language performance.

Additionally, teacher education programs play a role in helping manage FLA. Through continuing education, teachers may reach a higher level of language proficiency and build confidence in pedagogy (Tum, 2014). Tum (2014) also highlighted the need for teacher educators to support student teachers in nonjudgmental relationship building and mutual respect (Tum 2014). Alternative practices may also include using creative and engaging activities such as creative drama (Şağlamel & Kayaoğlu, 2013), adopting cooperative learning strategies (Nagahashi, 2007), giving explicit, detailed expectations of student teachers in advance, balancing theoretical and practical learning, and providing ample opportunities for student teachers to reflect on their training and lived experiences (Barahmeh, 2016).

Furthermore, appropriate online practices tend to help manage FLA as well. In McLoughlin and Mynard’s (2009) study, student teachers were allowed to have more time to reflect and reduce speaking anxiety through online collaborative reflection practices. However, Xu (2015) cautioned that collaboration can take in two forms which can be product-oriented and problem-based, and that student anxiety levels could increase if they were unassisted in problem solving.
2.3 Language Teacher Resilience

Following the exploration of language teacher anxiety, including its conceptualizations, implications, and applications, this subsection shifts focus to language teacher resilience, another fundamental construct in this study.

2.3.1 Defining (Teacher) Resilience

To date, it is widely agreed that the notion of resilience is difficult-to-define and is strongly connected to subjective assumptions, which to a certain extent may lead to conceptualization and measurement problems (Glantz & Sloboda, 2002). Defining this very construct is not easy; some regard this defining task as situated in a “linguistic minefield” (Weare, 2004, p. 1). Overall, scholars tend to take a socio-ecological approach and define resilience as a construct that is relative, relational, developmental and dynamic, rather than innate (e.g., Rutter, 2012; Ungar, 2012, 2013). However, this construct’s specific meanings vary greatly depending on researchers’ focuses and preferences. For instance, Kim et al. (2017) deconstructed resilience into seven components, including one’s sense of satisfaction towards life, personal composure, sympathy for others, relationships with friends, strategic metacognitive adaptation, effective communication skills, and realistic optimism. Researchers have also used a number of alternate terms sometimes interchangeably, including but not limited to the concepts of emotional wellbeing (Raphael, 2000), emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), social-emotional competence (Elias et al., 1997), emotional literacy (Weare, 2004), emotional capital (Gkonou & Miller, 2021), buoyancy (Yun et al., 2018), and language teacher immunity (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2015).
Looking back on history may help clarify and better understand the construct’s conceptual meaning. Historically, early resilience researchers tended to treat resilience as trait or outcomes, or personal attributes such as one’s temperament in reaction to the surrounding environment (Anthony, 1987). This wave of conceptualization largely resulted from developmental psychological research during the 1970s to 80s when dominant resilience research emerged with a focus on individuals’ behavioral and mental illness (e.g., Werner, 1982). More specifically, this type of research looked at children with backgrounds such as extreme poverty, abusive parents, or foster families, discovering that even growing up in developmentally threatening environments, some of these youngsters showed certain signs of invulnerability (Werner, 1993). This finding was much later proven to be linked to protective factors such as individual attributes and also relationships with loved ones and the broader socio-cultural community (e.g., Wu et al., 2013).

With time, more researchers view resilience as process-based and dynamic during person-environment interactions (Rutter, 1987). Advocates of this stance believe that individuals’ resilience capacity is acquired, taught, and learned, and that such capacity can improve over time as people learn to negotiate meaning and sustain their well-being drawing on physical, psychological, and socio-cultural resources (Ungar, 2013). In other words, within this wave of conceptualization, resilience is not a trait that is possessed only by “an extraordinary few” but can be developed and socially nurtured among the “ordinary many” (Neenan, 2009, p. 7; Ungar, 2012). Under this wave of understanding, the scope of research participants has been expanded from almost exclusively at-risk youngsters to adults including teachers in culturally sensitive settings. In a study that explored the identity change processes of internationally mobilized Caribbean teachers in London, United Kingdom, Washington-Miller (2009) found that,
throughout their secondary-school teaching, the teacher participants experienced ethnocentric stages (i.e., denial, defense, minimization) over the beginning 18 months when they coped with institutional and socio-emotional issues (e.g., loss of professional status certified elsewhere, financial constraints, cultural shock and isolation). They then gradually became resilient and navigated through ethnorelative stages (i.e., acceptance, adaptation, integration) by managing to adapt to local realities and growing professional skills.

A more recent wave of scholarly efforts, in contrast, has focused on the culture- and context-specific exploration of how resilience is discursively negotiated (Ungar, 2004). A main contributor to this conceptualization is the view of resilience as “a social construction” shaped by its unique context (Ungar, 2004, p. 342). Notably, resilience research has become interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and even transdisciplinary, especially across fields of social and human sciences and educational studies (Martin, 2013). In the meantime, field-specific research on/with language teachers has also gradually received growing attention among applied linguists on the topics such as politics, ideologies and power relations in language education, the profound impact of neoliberalism on language use and social manipulation, and the increasingly salient norms of transnational mobility and bi-/multi-/plurilingualism (Hall, 2016).

Given commonly cited definitions of (teacher) resilience, three different emphases can be identified. A basic type of definition is that resilience refers to one’s bouncing back in spite of adversity. To teachers, resilience can be a force to bounce back after they experience challenging moments in their teaching career (Dworkin, 2009). Critics argue that this type of definition mainly focuses on one’s return to previous norms, also known as the status quo, but fails to take into account one’s possible adaptation and growth (Kaplan, 2007). A second type of definition, however, moves beyond the first kind by including the dimension of one’s sustained growth.
Two particular definitions have been regularly cited in research. While one defines teacher resilience as “the capacity to maintain equilibrium and a sense of commitment and agency in the everyday worlds in which teachers teach” (Gu & Day, 2013, p. 26), another similarly regards resilience as “a set of behaviors over time that reflect the interactions between individuals and their environments, in particular the opportunities for personal growth that are available and accessible” (Ungar, 2012, p. 14). In contrast, a third type of definition emphasizes one’s positive adaptation/self-protection. For example, Luthar et al. (2000) argued that resilience is ‘a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity’ (p. 543), whereas the other teacher-focused definition considers resilience to be “teacher’s capacity to protect themselves from negative and high-pressured environments around them” (Rizqi, 2017, p. 25).

2.3.2 Approaches to Becoming Resilient

2.3.2.1 Ecological Recommendations for Developing Teacher Resilience

Importantly, research has recommended sets of ways for teachers to become resilient. One of the crucial steps is perhaps individuals’ socio-emotional changes. Specifically, individuals may allow themselves to treat difficult emotions as “a golden opportunity” for learning and to relax “in the moment of sadness and longing … [and] touch the limitless space of the human heart” (Chödrön, 2016, p. 57). Alternatively, one may adopt avoidant approaches by depersonalizing anxious or unhappy moments and having faith in the moral standards of teaching (Rizqi, 2017). Likewise, Farrell (2016) suggested that gaining a sense of mission can contribute to a teacher’s identity growth and professional survival. Writing, for example, can be a powerful
way for individuals with difficult experiences to achieve these changes while facilitating self-understanding and emotional healing (Farrell, 2013; van der Kolk, 2014).

At the interpersonal level, it is essential to create and maintain continuous collegial and family networks (Rizqi, 2017). Unsurprisingly, positive and healthy social relationships can provide a space for teachers to establish and maintain a collaborative and supporting culture (Farrell, 2016). This requires teachers to be proactive and seek help when in need (Hayes, 2008); this is also where teachers’ sense of self-efficacy and agency can play a role for them to become more resilient (Farrell, 2016). Wider, institutional support can be necessary too. Research suggests that high-quality teacher training within the community of practice can make a difference to their professional well-being and development (Joseph, 2000; Rizqi, 2017).

Echoing most of these recommendations, Kostoulas and Lämmerer (2018) published a paper producing a theory that combines (a) inner strengths, (b) support structures from the outside, and (c) acquired strategies. In a case study focusing on a language teacher who was transitioning into a new phase in her career, the authors observed how language teacher resilience developed over time. This confirms the feasibility of researching teacher resilience as a process.

Another study provides a different type of ecology for nurturing teacher resilience (Johnson et al. 2016); the researchers identified five factors shaping early career teachers’ resilience, including teachers’ interpersonal relations, school culture, professional identities, teaching assignments, and policies. This work highlights that developing teacher resilience requires ecological support, and that this mission remains important for “all teachers’ emotional and practical selves but especially those in their early years whose professional sense of self and whose capacities to be resilient may not yet be fully formed” (Gu, 2018, p. 17).
There is also another spectrum that emphasizes three important resilience capacities for stakeholders to acquire, including absorptive capacities (to cope with the existing stressors’ impact), adaptive capacities (in preparation for future stressors), and transformative capacities (to change systemic issues in the environment or norms) (Béné et al., 2012). It is noteworthy that the former two capacities can take place at individual, family, and community levels, while transformative capacities tend to be carried out at community or broader societal levels (Vaughan, 2018).

### 2.3.2.2 Institutionalized Programs

A fairly recent systematic literature review by Kangas-Dick and O’Shaughnessy (2020) has specifically identified institutionally organized interventions to promote teacher resilience. The authors suggested that although individual factors can to some extent improve resilience, socio-educational factors may be more key to influence teachers in profound ways. Some of the reported interventions for in-service teachers include the Inner Resilience Program (IRP) (Lantieri et al., 2011), Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) (Jennings et al., 2017), the Achiever Resilience Curriculum (ARC) (Cook et al., 2017), School Resilience Program (Wolmer et al., 2016), Positive Education Program (Fernandes et al., 2019), and Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) (Domitrovich et al., 2016). In contrast, interventions for pre-service teachers were much less reported, with only two resources being identified including the Student Teacher Weblogging (Petko et al, 2017) and the Combined Mindfulness and Social-emotional Learning approach (Garner et al., 2018). The authors further called for the need to provide early career teachers with a sufficient “supportive network, peer support, and strong mentorship” (p. 142).
This explicit methodology to positive education has not been without criticism. A primary concern is the programs’ tendency to focus more on teaching content-based skills rather than considering the context (Ciarrochi et al., 2016). As a result, program participants may not be able to effectively identify and change the circumstances significantly impacting their wellbeing. Ciarrochi et al. (2016) further noted that such a teaching approach could place students in a vulnerable situation where they are made to feel solely responsible for change; this can lead to increased stress if the desired changes do not happen. Consequently, it may be beneficial to consider a more implicit approach by integrating positive education into the existing curriculum, thereby achieving a balance between content and context (White & Waters, 2014).

2.3.3.3 Restorative Practices in TESOL Classrooms

When discussing resilience practices and strategies, researchers at times mention the notion of restorative practices. According to the International Institute for Restorative Practices, restorative practices are about “how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making” (Wachtel, 2016, p. 2). The goals of restorative practices are to treat the human desire with empathy and dignity while building meaningful and thriving relationships (Bailie, 2019). With dual focuses on restorative justice and critical pedagogy, such practices have been increasingly and predominantly used in the studies of leadership, criminology, and sociology (Wachtel, 2016).

It was not until the recent two decades that the field of TESOL started to integrate restorative practices; such engagement was developed in order to compensate for the lack of opportunity in the profession to reflect inward for teachers themselves and/or with learners regarding biases, lived experiences, and pedagogical practices (Coney, 2016). In the TESOL
settings, restorative practices have been found to be potentially beneficial for boosting professionalism (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2005), facilitating literacy instructions and enhancing problem-solving skills (Winn et al., 2019), and promoting democratic participation (Costello et al., 2009).

One of the sample restorative practices is called the restorative circles (Costello et al., 2010), similar to Indigenous activities, such as healing circles and talking circles, commonly used among North American Indigenous Peoples for addressing excessive stress and life problems (Mehl-Madrona, 2014). In this activity, typical procedural components include opening and closing ceremony, the sharing of guiding principles and values, and circle rounds (Pentón Herrera & McNair, 2020). Throughout the process, a teacher serves as a circle keeper, instead of an enforcer, to sustain a safe environment where everyone in the circle can share authentic ideas, emotions, and concerns. Power relations in this activity are intended to be equal as well; in fact, circle processes encourage the sharing of power for participants to create consensus. While circles inevitably “are not a neutral, value free process” (Pranis, 2005, p. 24), TESOL practitioners have recognized the potential of such activities for increasing communication, restoration, and healing. To adapt this Indigenous practice into the TESOL classroom, Pentón Herrera and McNair (2020) drew on Cameron’s work (2002) and created a writing activity *Morning Pages* where learners can write freely and creatively about their ideas and experiences of living in a new country and do not need to worry about censorship and editing, or assessment of their writing skills. This enabled students’ voices to be heard, and the teacher came to learn the students’ authentic needs, interests, fears, and academic abilities. After class, the teacher would make time to write back to every student using a non-red pen and interact with the content,
without providing corrective feedback or grading the writing. Practices as such can be valuable for ESL teachers to learn and use.

2.4 Language Teacher Anxiety and Resilience in Pandemic Times

Beyond its harmful impact on physical health, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a mental health crisis globally marked by widespread anxiety and an increased need for resilience. Studies conducted in China revealed that individuals with quarantine experiences reported higher levels of anxiety compared to those without such experiences (Wang et al., 2021). Additionally, a positive correlation was found between frequent exposure to social media during the pandemic and the likelihood of experiencing anxiety (Gao et al., 2020). This finding was echoed by research in Spain, which found that less frequent engagement with COVID-19 news resulted in reduced anxiety (Fullana et al., 2020). It was also noted that certain groups, such as women, children, students, underemployed individuals, and those with previous mental health issues, were more prone to anxiety during the pandemic (Solomou & Constantinidou, 2020).

The effects of this crisis have also been observed in language education across the globe, particularly through school closures and the subsequent rise of emergency remote teaching (UNESCO, 2020). In these unprecedented times, educators needed to juggling between completing regular teaching assignments and offering care and support for language learners affected by the pandemic (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020). Their challenges as teachers primarily revolved around two areas of concern: issues associated with emergency remote teaching (Akbana et al., 2021; Gao & Zhang, 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021) and teacher wellbeing (Gregersen et al., 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021). These observations were reflected in Chen and Zhou’s (2022) literature review, where they
thematically analyzed 19 qualitative articles and identified central themes, such as teacher and learner emotions as well as language teachers’ radical changes in using technology, pedagogy, and content.

Regarding emergency remote teaching, the effects on language learners were neither entirely positive nor entirely negative (Akbana et al., 2021). UNESCO (2020) raised a concern over a digital divide between privileged and disadvantaged communities worldwide. Even within digitally privileged educational contexts, many teachers and learners in ELT contexts were unprepared for the challenge due to the previously secondary role of digital technology in teaching (Gao & Zhang, 2020; Moorhouse and Beaumont, 2020) or the lack of professional development training for language teachers compared to educators in other sectors (US Department of Education, 2019). Consequently, these teachers encountered difficulties in understanding and implementing language teaching in virtual environments (Farrell & Stanclik, 2021). Despite these hurdles, technological and pedagogical innovations did occur after a period of trial and error (Gao & Zhang, 2020), reflective practice (Farrell & Stanclik, 2021), and engagement in professional learning communities (Cowie, 2021).

A second line of research focuses on teacher mental health challenges and coping strategies. Kush et al. (2022) revealed that, compared to those working in healthcare and administrative sectors, teachers were significantly more likely to endure mental health issues amidst the pandemic; teachers instructing online were also more likely to feel distressed than those teaching onsite. By comparing language teachers’ practices across different cultures, MacIntyre et al. (2020) outlined specific stressors for language teachers, including heavy workloads, limited control to make work decisions, challenges with virtual teaching, and pay-
related issues. The British Council (2020) further identified additional stressors such as reduced learner motivation and inadequate support for pedagogy and parenting.

In addition to anxieties about teaching conditions, Pressley (2021) also found broader social factors contributing to anxiety, including concerns related to COVID-19, communication with parents, and administrative support. In another study, language teachers reported risk factors leading to insecurity, including job precarity, reduced freedom, home life, and financial concerns, along with protective factors such as teacher learning, learner cooperation, and mindfulness of time (Gregersen et al., 2021). MaIntyre et al. (2020) also reported that the use of active coping strategies by language teachers was associated with positive outcomes, while the use of avoidant coping strategies was linked to negative psychological outcomes.

2.5 Debates and Changes around Native-speakerism

Historically, there has been a prevailing ideology that favors native speakers of English, or any language. Using an innate perspective, Chomsky (1965) regarded native speakers as an “ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows the language perfectly” (p. 3). This idealized view of native speakers implies that native speakers have some kind of ‘default expertise’ (Canagarajah, 1999) and “own” English language (Widdowson, 1994), thus inherently performing better than non-native speakers. Contemporary scholarship further recognizes that “native speakerism” extends beyond mere language proficiency as it also involves cultural and pedagogical dimensions. This broader understanding is demonstrated in Holliday’s (2005) definition, which describes native speakerism as “an established belief that native-speaker teachers represent a ‘Western culture’ from which springs the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology” (p. 6).
This ideology has significantly influenced second language acquisition research and practice in subsequent decades. For instance, concepts like ‘ultimate attainment’ (Birdsong, 1992) and the ‘monolingual principle’ (Howatt, 1984) have been developed based on this belief. Moreover, native-speakerism influences practices around curriculum development, classroom teaching, teacher recruitment, and professional development (Ruecker & Ives, 2014). Central to these practices is a deficit model of education, which tends to define EAL speakers in terms of what they lack, rather than what they bring to the process of language teaching and learning.

Accordingly, EAL teachers often face professional hurdles related to native speakerism. For instance, in Ma’s (2012) comparative study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English learners in Hong Kong preferred native English-speaking teachers to non-native ones. These students perceived EAL teachers as having weaknesses such as inaccurate pronunciation and grammar usage, a lecturing teaching style, and an inability to foster an engaging and creative learning environment. In her autoethnographic study within the Canadian English as a Second Language (ESL) context, Oliveira Gomes de Lima (2022) found it difficult to get recognition for her overseas educational experiences or to protect herself from linguistic discrimination by her students and employers. To that end, foreign accents have often been linked to non-native English-speaking teachers’ (NNESTs) job-seeking difficulties and professional development challenges, as they are regarded as signs of a “permanent English learner” (Huang, 2018, p. 53).

Over time, many critics have challenged this native speaker fallacy (Phillipson, 1992). For example, Cook (2015) scrutinized the negative connotation attached to the term *non-native*, which portrays those who speak English as an additional language as linguistically incapable of achieving native-like proficiency in the target language. Similarly, Nunan (2017) observed that this native-speaker bias can position English as an Additional Language (EAL) users in deficit
ways, causing them to view themselves as inferior to native speakers. Holliday (2015) further highlighted the hegemonic nature of native speakerism and advocated for changes in the use of terminologies. However, significant challenges remain in reversing these deep-rooted ideologies that idealize or idolize native English speakers (Rajagopalan, 2005). As will be conveyed in the upcoming data findings chapters, the present study provides some evidence of native-speakerism from participants’ experiences in hiring practices and student perspectives.

Some scholars have chosen to adopt a strength- or asset-based approach when considering non-native speaker language teachers (NNSLTs). Medgyes (1992, 1999) summarized numerous strengths that NNSLTs might possess. These include their abilities to help language learners set realistic learning goals, teach effective learning strategies, clarify the workings of the target language, highlight specific learning difficulties, demonstrate empathy and sensitivity to learners’ needs and vulnerabilities, and use the students’ home languages. Research has identified that English language learners in Hong Kong appreciate their NNSLTs for their ability to use the students’ first language to foster comprehensible teaching and learning and effectively understand students’ learning needs (Ma, 2012).

Collective efforts, such as the Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNEST) movement, have also emerged to advocate for NNESTs (Braine, 2010; Kamhi-Stein, 2016). In an encyclopedia entry, Braine (2018) highlighted the institutionalization of the NNEST Interest Section within the TESOL International Association. This section’s mission is to provide non-native speakers with a platform and voice within TESOL through formal and informal gatherings, research, and increased presence in TESOL leadership roles, thereby fostering a non-discriminatory environment for TESOL professionals. Relatedly, Braine (2018) made recommendations for both native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and NNESTs. These
included continued language skill development, fostering collaboration between NESTs and NNESTs, increasing NNESTs’ engagement at conferences, in academic journals, and within professional networks, as well as diversifying the methods, contexts, and researcher identities of NNEST studies. In Canada, BC TEAL (2014) issued a position statement as well to explicitly combat discrimination in the ELT profession and supporting teachers of diverse nationalities, ethnicities, and linguistic backgrounds. While this stance is commendable, it remains to be investigated whether and how Ontario, Canada has implemented sufficient and tangible supports in alignment with this position.

2.6 Linking the Literature to the Present Study

The major review sections in this chapter have substantially informed the present study, shedding light on the key aspects of where, what, when, and who. Firstly, an in-depth examination of the concept of precarity, both in terms of employment status and subjective wellbeing, provides some ways to understand the observed precarious nature of the TESOL profession in Canada, the primary context of this research.

There are also two constructs central to this study, namely language teacher anxiety and resilience. Informed by existing literature, this study conceptualizes both constructs as situation-specific human emotions continually shaped by socio-ecological conditions. While not being exact antonyms, there exists an intricate connection between these two constructs. Adversity typically acts as a prerequisite for both emotions, with experiences of resilience often succeeding those of anxiety, potentially leading to sustained individual growth.

Additionally, recent literature has shed light on language teacher anxiety and resilience in the unique context of the pandemic, thus underscoring its timely relevance. This is particularly
crucial given the novel nature of pandemic-induced challenges and the emerging body of related literature.

Lastly, this research investigation centers on English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers. Historically labeled as ‘non-native speakers of English’, there has been a recent shift away from this terminology due to its negative connotations. Aligning with this shift, the present study employs ‘English as an additional language’ to reference this group and narrows its focus to engage with early-career EAL teachers.

2.7 Theoretical Frameworks

2.7.1 Meta Theory: Critical Praxis Theory

This study is framed using multiple levels of theories as outlined by Higgins and Moore (2000), who identified four distinct levels, including meta-theory, grand theory, middle-range theory, and micro-level theory. Meta theory stands apart by its focus on the use of “logic and analytic reasoning to examine the direction, methods, and standards of inquiry and thus it differs from the other levels of theory as its product is primarily knowledge-about-knowledge (second-order knowledge), rather than specific theoretical frameworks that explain the empirical world (first-order knowledge)” (Higgins & Moore, 2000, p. 180). Simply put, meta theory operates as a guiding framework for the subsequent three levels of theoretical thinking.

The longstanding challenges facing TESOL practitioners in Canada, including precarious working conditions and the need for resilience in the face of professional anxiety, underpin this study’s adoption of critical praxis theory (Freire, 1970) as its guiding meta-theory. This choice is not only aligned with my research questions’ advocacy-oriented nature, but also reflects my
personal teaching philosophies that have been shaped by my graduate experiences in Canada emphasizing deep engagement with critical pedagogy (Chen, 2022).

Historically rooted in the Greek term for activities performed by free citizens in both political and economic spheres (Lobkowicz, 1967), praxis in contemporary times aims to foster societal transformation through reflection and action proactively and collaboratively (Freire, 1970; Pennycook, 2022; Spolsky, 2022). In education, this approach challenges the traditional ‘banking’ model, where students are seen as “containers or receptacles to be filled by the teacher” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). Instead, it advocates for a problem-posing learning environment where students and teachers co-create meaning and develop critical consciousness. Following this approach, critical educational research must arise from its specific socio-educational context and prioritize the integration of marginalized people’s voices and experiences (Pennycook, 2022). This overarching theoretical stance, emphasizing reflexive, socio-ecological, and collaborative practices, resonates with and informs the deeper levels of theoretical frameworks applied in this study. These frameworks, introduced subsequently, aim to facilitate positive societal change within the TESOL profession.

2.7.2 Grand Theory: Reflexivity

The grand theory of reflexivity serves as another foundational concept underpinning the design of this study. Grand theories are characterized as “highly abstract theoretical systems” which, while providing general explanations for various lines of inquiry, typically do not possess a “predictive capability” (Higgins & Moore, 2000, p. 181). It is noteworthy that reflexivity has been identified as pivotal in teacher learning (Cirocki et al., 2019). The term reflexivity can be understood in various ways. While Brookfield (2017, p. 3) defined it from a positivist lens as a
“sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions” (Brookfield, 2017, p. 3), the present study aligns with Byrd Clark’s (2020) characterization of reflexivity as a social practice. This practice seeks to deepen one’s understanding of their relationships with others and their surroundings, gaining insights into “how and why we come to subscribe to and appropriate certain ways of thinking, doing, and being, and how and why we become attached to certain positionings” (Byrd Clark, 2016, p. 11). Emphasizing this perspective, the present study underscores the significance of participants’ purposeful engagement with reflexivity throughout their research activities. More specifically, the two research phases—reflective journaling and semi-structured interviews—have been structured to engage participants into profound reflections on their experiences regarding language teacher anxiety and resilience. Further details on the research design will be provided in the upcoming chapter on methodology.

2.7.3 Middle-range Theory: Ecological Systems Theory

Middle-range theories bridge the gap between broad theoretical systems and empirical testing; notably, such theories are detailed enough to guide research but may not encompass every aspect of a given research context (Higgins & Moore, 2000). Within the present study on language teacher anxiety and resilience, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory stands out as a guiding perspective, directly relevant through the planning, implementation, and analysis phases.

My literature review shows that the concept of resilience has often been investigated through a postmodern ecological lens, emphasizing that human experiences are socio-historically constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Central to this exploration is Bronfenbrenner’s (1979)
seminal work on human development and ecological systems theory. He described human
development as “the person’s evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his/her
relation to it, as well as the person’s growing capacity to discover, sustain, or later its properties”
(Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 9). A key idea within this theory is that individuals grow through
continuous interactions across multiple levels of systems, including the microsystem (e.g.,
immediate surroundings like teachers and staff), mesosystem (e.g., educational institutes),
exosystem (e.g., governmental systems), macrosystem (cultural and societal values), and
chronosystem (evolutions over time). The applicability of Bronfenbrenner’s framework to
language education research is echoed in recent studies, such as Gu (2018). Adopting this lens,
the present research aims to understand the contexts surrounding teacher anxiety and resilience,
thus shedding light on the socio-ecological foundations of these experiences.

2.7.4 Micro-level Theory: Community of Practice

Micro-level theories serve as flexible frameworks, being “the least formal and most
tentative of the theoretical levels” (Higgins & Moore, 2000, p. 181). Their purpose is to
“describe, organize, and test” ideas or propositions, even when not strictly anchored within a
formal theoretical system (Higgins & Moore, 2000, p. 181). The chosen micro-level theory in
this research is Lave and Wenger’s (1991) community of practice, which underscores the role of
communal interactions play in human socialization. Such a perspective resonates closely with the
overarching principle of reflexivity. Dewey (1933) argued that reflective practice is most
effective when conducted collaboratively, as collaboration provides an avenue to critically
interrogate and challenge deeply embedded biases. Consequently, a community of practice not
only fosters socialization but also presents an environment conducive to meaningful reflective practices.

More specifically, community of practice emphasizes the journey individuals undertake as they “move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community and learn about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). This progressive integration, termed legitimate peripheral participation, sees novices evolving into core members of their respective communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). As they navigate this path, individuals refine their self-conceptions and aspirations related to their community roles (Wenger, 2010). However, communities of practice are not universally beneficial. They can perpetuate “counterproductive patterns, injustices, prejudices, racism, sexism, and abuses of all kinds” (Wenger, 1998, p. 132). Within the present study, this theory facilitates the analysis of the support novice English language teachers receive, both in addressing anxiety and in sustaining resilience. Key concepts from this theory, such as legitimate peripheral participation, mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire, are instrumental in the present study. Rather than functioning as a rigid theoretical structure, these concepts are employed to interpret the collected data contextually.

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a comprehensive review of relevant literature. It began by analyzing the precarious TESOL profession in Canada and two dominant perspectives on precarity—as an employment descriptor and as a subjective experience. The chapter then focused on multiple dimensions of language teacher anxiety by exploring its types, sources,
effects, and various coping strategies. This was followed by an in-depth exploration of teacher resilience, presenting varied definitions and emphasizing socio-ecological strategies for increasing resilience. The recent studies spotlighting the intersections of language teacher anxiety and resilience during the pandemic period were also highlighted. Additionally, the dynamic debates surrounding native-speakerism were discussed. Equally important, a link between existing literature and the present study was established to provide clarity on the nuanced contexts of the study, covering the locale (TESOL profession in Canada), the topical themes (language teacher anxiety and resilience), the temporal context (pandemic-era), and the target group (English as an Additional Language practitioners). The four guiding theoretical frameworks were discussed as well. The upcoming chapter will detail the research methodology, both complementing the theoretical framing of this study as well as elucidating the ‘how’ of this research.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter initially introduces the concept of critical ethnography, which serves as the research rationale for my study. It subsequently outlines the various elements integral to the research process. These include my positionality as a researcher and the influence it has on the study, the context and participants involved in the research, the methods used for data collection and analysis, and the ethical considerations that were taken into account.

3.1 Research Rationale: Critical Ethnography

Ethnography, as a qualitative research methodology, aims at understanding human experiences, beliefs, and cultures. In lexical-semantic terms, it can be understood as the meshing of “ethno-(people) and -graphy (describing)” (Gaulee & Jacob, 2013). It is “a descriptive, analytical and explanatory study of the culture (and its components), values, beliefs and practices of one or more groups” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 292). This type of study helps ethnographers better understand the meanings and importance of these practices for the local or even broader community (Li, 2020). According to Angrosino (2007), a distinct feature of this research lies in its long-term focus on naturalistic and personalized human phenomena, indicating the need for ethnographers to engage in observation and/or interactions over a sustained period of time.

Critical ethnographers adds an additional layer of complexity to conventional ethnography by exploring critical aspects of ethnographic research. This methodology, also known as critical theory in action (Madison, 2019), is beyond mere description or observation; instead, it aims to make visible taken-for-granted practices in the social world and foster transformative change (Lave, 2011). Although what the ‘critical’ means can be interpreted in various ways, a prevalent approach focuses on promoting greater social equity. As Madison
(2019) pointed out, “critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address
processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain” (p. 4). In this sense, critical
ethnographers prioritize the need to “understand the life perspectives of a community for its own
sake and the benefits of others” (Dennis, 2009, p. 70). With a vision of ‘what could be’ rather
than simply ‘what is’, many critical ethnographers feel morally obliged to problematize
normalized, inherently non-neutral assumptions and practices and to contribute to the changes of
the status quo for achieving greater equity and freedom (Madison, 2006; Thomas, 2003). Critical
ethnographers also work closely with community members under investigation, perceiving
themselves as learners and facilitators while striving to remain committed to “maintaining a
critically reflexive stance toward the relationships between researcher, the researched, and
knowledge production, representation, and dissemination” (Talmy, 2012, p. 1).

Given the considerations discussed, this study employed a critical ethnography research
design. With a strong inward-looking focus and a commitment of at least three months for data
collection, this ethnographic approach allowed for the acquisition of comprehensive, naturalistic,
and personalized data, particularly through the medium of reflective journals. The design also
emphasized the ‘critical’ element by encouraging participants to engage in reflexive and critical
thinking practices (Byrd Clark, 2020), enabling them to gain a deeper understanding of their
experiences, feelings, and relationships with their immediate and broader environments. Most
importantly, this study adopted a robust advocacy orientation for early-career EAL teachers in
Canada who tend to encounter emotionally charged experiences but have limited avenues to
voice their concerns. The researcher aimed to assist participants in documenting their anxiety and
resilience experiences during their early careers, thus providing insights to navigate these post-
pandemic times.
Granted, there are various ways to design critical ethnographic research. As St. Pierre (2018) explained, qualitative research has been sometimes conducted using a relatively rigid design.

Conventional humanist qualitative methodology provides a handy preexisting research process to follow, a container with well-identified categories into which researchers are expected to slot all aspects of their research projects so they are recognizable, clear, and accessible. And even though qualitative methodology still claims to be “emergent”, its concepts and categories, which have been tightened up over the years, tend to control the study. (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 603)

Such a design tends to be influenced by the dominant use of positivist-oriented methods in Western science that prioritize natural science methodologies (Hutchinson, 2011) and are “driven by logics of accountability and regulation” (Fitzpatrick & May, 2022, p. 5). Under this strong influence, even qualitative ethnographic researchers may “treat data (words in interview transcripts and field notes) as brute data and then code them out of context” (St. Pierre, 2015, p. 103). This practice, however, could be problematic given this analytical method’s misalignment with the claimed qualitative design.

Cognizant of this risk, the present study aligns with Fitzpatrick and May’s (2022) stance that “Ethnography is a process of discovery – not of a pre-existing reality or culture – but of the possibilities of theory-method when researchers are responsive, open, embodied, and curious” (p. 14). With this view, the researcher rejects a fully pre-determined approach to research design, instead embracing the possibility of getting lost (Lather, 2007) and engaging with “the provocations that come from everywhere in the inquiry that is living and writing” (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 603).
An example of this flexibility was the use of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) framework as a guiding tool for participants’ reflective journal writing, which they were not strictly required to follow due to the individualized nature of their experiences. More details about this method will be provided in the upcoming data collection section. Similarly, during the semi-structured interviews, participants were allowed to retrospectively reflect on excerpts from their previously completed journals. This approach encouraged the articulation of human experiences and interactions, embracing Fitzpatrick and May’s (2022) concept of ethnographic research as ‘a process of discovery’. Such an approach also served to redistribute the power dynamics between the researcher and participants, moving away from the traditionally superior position of the researcher (Byrd Clark, 2020) towards more equitable relationships between the researcher and the researched.

3.2 Researcher Positionality

This section details my positionality as a researcher, drawing from my experiences as a former international student and English as an additional language speaker. Ethnographers must engage with their positionality, as Madison (2019, p. 8) asserts, “we bring our belongings into the field with us”. Byrd Clark and Dervin (2014) further noted that qualitative researchers need to acknowledge their personal experiences and the potential biases they may bring to the study. As such, I discuss my own positionality and how I manage bias and maintain data trustworthiness.

Like my research participants, I am an English as an additional language speaker who completed my undergraduate degree outside Canada before pursuing a Master’s in TESOL at a
Canadian university. This shared experience provided both challenges and rewards, from navigating academic-linguistic expectations in Canada to exploring a cosmopolitan self-identity.

In retrospect, my path was characterized by academic-linguistic struggles and resilience. During my time in a Canadian pre-graduation program, I grappled with anxiety while striving to achieve an ideal IELTS score. Fortunately, with time, effort, and support, I met this goal and began my graduate studies at Western University. Academic language usage in my Canadian graduate programs presented further challenges, with terminologies to comprehend, presentations to deliver, and papers to write and publish. I managed these difficulties through deliberate practice, utilization of academic and technological resources, and communication with my mentor, instructors, and peers.

My professional identities developed alongside my academic ones, which involved additional anxiety and resilience. Initially, I did not aim to become an educator, especially during my undergraduate years in China. My reason for studying TESOL in Canada was mainly to enhance my education. However, as I delved deeper into the field through research, teaching, and services, I grew passionate about international education and engaged in more teaching-focused roles such as course instructorship, IELTS teaching, and peer mentoring. While I gained stronger expertise in meeting students’ needs, it was not easy to balance my graduate studies with part-time jobs as they demanded significant time and emotional labor.

These experiences allow me to empathize with international educators juggling linguistic, academic, and professional challenges simultaneously. I have seen peers struggle and/or thrive in the TESOL field in the face of these challenges. This has both resonated with my own experiences and fueled my interest in studying early-career English language teachers’ experiences with anxiety and resilience.
However, my personal experiences might introduce bias in the design of this study. I assumed that, similar to my own early career, the participants would likely experience anxiety and require various forms of support during their initial professional years. To mitigate this assumption’s influence, I ensured the research was open-ended, allowing participants to decide what they wanted to discuss. While prompts were provided for their reflective journals, they were not obliged to strictly follow them. To prevent unwanted influence from my presence, data collection was conducted entirely online.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I undertook a prolonged data collection period lasting 12 weeks, which included reflective journaling and a follow-up interview. This approach facilitated a thorough engagement with the data, allowing for persistent observation and consistent verification in this ethnographic research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, I had sufficient opportunities to scrutinize journal entries or interview responses in the event of potential inconsistent descriptions of a particular participant-reported experience.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, I made use of thick description as well, specifically incorporating “real qualitative episodes” (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). This practice involved the inclusion of authentic quotations derived from participants’ journal entries and interview responses. In order to provide as much contextual information as possible and facilitate readers’ comprehension, block quotes were also incorporated.

Finally, an additional strategy for increasing trustworthiness involved the demonstration of researcher reflexivity. Reflecting on my own beliefs and the methods I adopted was a key aspect of this research. By openly acknowledging the “beliefs underpinning decisions made and the methods adopted” especially within this section (Shenton, 2004, p. 72), I strived to ensure that my positionality as a researcher did not compromise the integrity of the study.


3.3 Participants and Context

The participants in this study comprised seven pre- and in-service English language teachers, all of whom self-identified as female and were in their 20s or 30s (excerpt Maria who was in her 50s). These participants, originally from Eastern Europe or East Asia, were working or studying in Ontario, Canada at the time of research participation. Their teaching experience ranged up to five years. All of them had completed a Bachelor’s degree in their home countries before moving to Canada, with only one participant, Sara, having an overseas education directly focused on English language teaching. As plurilinguals, all participants use English as an additional language.

Of the seven participants, four were pre-service English language teachers. Three of them (Alyssa, Miley, and Julie) were enrolled in a TESOL education program, while Anan had completed her TESOL education but had yet to secure a position in English language teaching. The remaining three participants (Na, Sara, and Maria) were in-service English language teachers employed in LINC programs. The participants had received varying types of TESOL education in Canada. Specifically, the four pre-service teachers were pursuing the same one-year Master’s degree program at a university in Ontario. Among in-service teachers, while Noel and Maria had completed two-year TESOL/TESL certificate programs at different universities, Sara had completed her TESFL graduate certificate at an Ontario college.

Participants were recruited through collaboration with TESL Ontario and language teacher education programs. Recruitment was carried out via email correspondence, all within the Ontario context. Prospective participants were informed about the study’s purpose, procedures, risks, and compensation. Their consent was obtained prior to their participation in the research. Each participant’s detailed demographic information, including pseudonym,
professional status, educational background, linguistic background, and country of origin, is provided in Table 3.3 as follows.
Table 3.3

*English as an Additional Language (EAL) Teachers’ Demographic Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Professional status</th>
<th>Current/TESOL-relevant education in Canada</th>
<th>Other previous education</th>
<th>Linguistic background</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>One-year Master’s TESOL program</td>
<td>STEM*</td>
<td>Mandarin, English</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miley</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>One-year Master’s TESOL program</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education*</td>
<td>Mandarin, English</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>One-year Master’s TESOL program</td>
<td>Arts Education*; Creative Media**</td>
<td>Mandarin, English</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anan</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>One-year Master’s TESOL program</td>
<td>Landscape Gardening*</td>
<td>Mandarin, English</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>In-service</td>
<td>Two-year TESOL Certificate program</td>
<td>History**</td>
<td>Mandarin, English</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>In-service</td>
<td>One-year TESFL Graduate Certificate program</td>
<td>English Language Teaching*</td>
<td>Turkish, English, French, Albanian</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>In-service</td>
<td>Two-year TESL Certificate program</td>
<td>Mathematics and physics*; Bachelor of Arts and Science; Bachelor of Education-Junior Division</td>
<td>Hungarian, Romanian, English, Spanish, Arabic</td>
<td>Romania</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes:* * means a Bachelor’s degree completed in a participant’s country of origin; ** means a Master’s degree program; China in this table refers to the People’s Republic of China.
3.4 Data Collection Methods

Data was collected individually using these two instruments: (1) weekly reflective journals that last for approximately one semester, where participants were guided to reflect on their experiences of both teacher anxiety and resilience in their socio-ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); and (2) a semi-structured interview focusing on participants’ individual reflections on their previously written journal entries (Ledger, 2021) and broader discussions of language teacher anxiety and resilience. The timeline for my data collection is detailed in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonyms</th>
<th>Duration of reflective journals</th>
<th>Dates of the interviews</th>
<th>Length of the interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa</td>
<td>September 26, 2022-December 11, 2022</td>
<td>May 2, 2023</td>
<td>00:45:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miley</td>
<td>January 23, 2023-April 16, 2023</td>
<td>May 3, 2023</td>
<td>00:49:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>January 23, 2023-April 16, 2023</td>
<td>May 13, 2023</td>
<td>01:03:03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anan</td>
<td>September 26, 2022-December 4, 2022</td>
<td>May 8, 2023</td>
<td>00:55:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>November 14, 2022-February 24, 2023</td>
<td>March 7, 2023</td>
<td>00:43:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>November 21, 2022-February 17, 2023</td>
<td>March 13, 2023</td>
<td>00:53:33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>November 21, 2022-February 13, 2023</td>
<td>March 17, 2023</td>
<td>00:41:31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.1 Reflective Journals

The method of reflective journals was used for each participant to document their experiences of language teacher anxiety and resilience. This method was chosen because
compared with other means, it allows participants to capture day-to-day, or even moment-to-moment, inner thoughts and feelings such as teacher anxiety. As Pink et al. (2016) rightly pointed out, “when seeking to research invisible sensory and affective experience – such as feelings of wellbeing or being at ease – researchers do not necessarily know exactly what they are expecting to find. Therefore, researchers often approach unseen elements of the experience by investigating how they are manifested in those routines and activities of everyday life that can be seen and discussed” (p. 26). Using reflective journals thus becomes a fitting choice. An additional strength of using this method is to help reduce biases caused by researcher presence—participants are more likely to feel safe and record naturalistic feelings when the researcher is not physically around (Rose, 2020). By engaging in this way of inquiry, participants become co-researchers who possess a strong level of agency in the present study (Dörnyei, 2007).

In terms of procedures, participants were given the following instructions before they started to create their reflective journals. In their reflective journals, participants were invited to write down their individual experiences related to early-career anxiety and/or resilience as a pre-or in-service English language teacher. Each participant was encouraged to spend up to 12 weeks producing journal entries at a private Google Docs site only accessible to herself and the researcher. Alternatively, they could email me their Word files on a weekly basis. All participants, except one, chose the first method. I also made it clear in the guidelines that there was no set requirement about the length of each journal entry. If nothing important or noteworthy happened in particular weeks, participants could skip writing for those weeks and simply leave a note such as “not applicable” or “I did not teach this week”. This reflects an event contingent design and helps capture time-sensitive events (Rose, 2020). The setup of checkpoints shows an
interval contingent design and helps remind participants of their ongoing research participation (Rose, 2020).

Detailed within the instructions, prompts for what to report were also offered for participants’ reference, which were intended to help them identify possible experiences of anxiety and resilience more effectively. Some of the prompts were as follows: (1) instructional practices (e.g., the use of language-for-teaching, pedagogical strategies, teaching content, and educational technologies), (2) social and political practices within their institution (e.g., relationships with colleagues, teacher training, administrative duties, programmatic/school policies), (3) social and political practices outside their institution (e.g., family expectations and relationships, governmental policies), (4) values, beliefs and ideologies (e.g., individualism, money-oriented values, native-speakerism), (5) time factors, and (6) any other factors that they deemed as important to the shaping of their early-career language teacher anxiety and resilience. The design of these prompts was inspired by Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological framework, conceptualizing that being a teacher is not about focusing on instructions only and that there are broader contexts and factors that can influence teachers’ practices and beliefs.

3.4.2 Semi-structured Interviews

After completing the reflective journals mentioned above, participants proceeded to the second stage of research participation, namely an individual semi-structured interview ranging from 40 to 65 minutes (as presented in Table 3.4). The interview took place using Western University’s-hosted Zoom, a video conferencing software. This digital format allowed the researcher and interviewees to easily meet without concerns over possible changes of pandemic prevention and control policies as a post-pandemic Canada took shape. Each interview was video-recorded for research analysis purposes.
An interview guide was used for the participants to better understand pre-planned interview questions. The questions consisted of three main categories, including (1) questions about interviewees’ background information (e.g., their motivation for teaching in Canada, current or desired teaching areas, previous education about language teacher emotions), (2) retrospective questions (e.g., reflections on their most impactful experiences of language teacher anxiety and resilience as well as actions taken or to be taken), and (3) beyond-retrospective questions (e.g., visions of the future self as a resilient language teacher, recommendations for improving teacher well-being services, reflections on their research participation, additional comments to add).

Notably, a design of stimulated recall was integrated in the interview especially among retrospective questions, in order to effectively elicit participants’ inner ideas and emotional reactions (Qiu & Lo, 2017) and to facilitate reflexive discussions of these thoughts and responses (Borg, 2006). These retrospective questions were designed using Ledger’s (2021) SAO+ reflective model, enabling the participants to recall and articulate the important situation, actions, outcomes, and actions reconsidered. To answer retrospective questions, each participant was given several quotes selected from her own reflective journals. Each participant could choose to elaborate on at least two given quotes (one for anxiety and one for resilience) to discuss such experience(s), depending on the perceived intensity or impactfulness of such emotional experiences and their willingness to explain. In the following table, I provide an example with one of the participants, Sara, to demonstrate how I implemented stimulated recall through the use of retrospective questions and prompts.
Table 3.4.2

*Retrospective Questions and Prompts Shown to Sara*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-given guiding questions</th>
<th>Illustrative prompts used in an interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retrospective</strong> (with reference to participants’ self-written journals)</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Among all situations in your reflective journal, which type of teacher anxiety had the biggest impact on you as a language teacher? Which one(s) had the minimal impact on you?</td>
<td><strong>Students’ acceptance/appreciation</strong>: “I did supply teaching tonight. It was a higher level class. I think what I most care about is whether the students will find me likable or not. I think I go above and beyond to keep the students attentive - what if they’re bored? I surely try my best to make everyone happy but now that I’m writing this journal, I’m thinking; you can’t make everyone happy, you’re not a pizza. Well, now I’m considering.. focusing on the teaching content or focusing on the student reactions? Tough stuff.. I need to ponder.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 9. Can you remember what was going on here? How did you deal with the given situation and emotion? | **Conflict management in the classroom**—any relevant training before?: After a lot of “That’s OK. There is a misunderstanding. You can sit anywhere you like. Nobody owns a seat.” kind of sentences, I saw that the student was just keeping on about it. At some point, I had to literally stop her, get her to listen to me, take her bag and put it on the seat she was supposed to be in. Then, I said everyone is equal, even if the other student made a mistake, she apologized several times. At some point, I yelled at her to stop and listen to me. I’m not proud of it but wow, I didn’t know what else to do. It was quieted down at the end but it could’ve been huge.
differently if you were to experience this situation again in the future?

11. Thinking of your entire process of journal documentation, have you noticed any progress or improvement, in your own levels of teacher anxiety/resilience?

Resilience

**Change of perspective:** “This year, I’m trying to ‘take it easy’ and not beat myself up too hard, as my students generally seem to be happy with the class.”

**Peer Support/Citizenship**—any impact on future teaching career?: The sweetest thing happened today. I took my citizenship oath on Dec 31, and asked for permission as my PM class conflicted with the ceremony time. To my surprise; my program supervisor (learning about it only because of my permission request, teamed up with my colleagues and) came to school today with her hands full with a gorgeous flower bouquet, a cake and coffee. Everyone at school, all my colleagues gathered in the staff room; hugged me and cheered for me. The office assistant sent a hand-made, very special pendant with maple leaves. I can’t describe how ecstatically surprised I felt. I couldn’t believe how warmly they celebrated with me. We even took a group picture! I felt so unified, seen, and grateful. They even helped me take the leftovers to my class and we celebrated there with my students for the second time. I’ll treasure this day forever.
3.5 Data Analysis

The written entries from participants’ journals were immediately available for analysis. Additionally, I manually transcribed video-recorded interviews to ensure the accuracy of the data and to avoid any potential confidentiality issues that could arise from using online transcription software. Following transcription, I carefully read through the textual data multiple times, aiming to identify and code all significant themes accurately.

Both inductive and deductive methods of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) were used to analyze the data. An inductive approach was commonly used to identify themes that emerged from both the reflective journal and interview data. Table 3.5 below shows brief examples of how I inductively coded a participant’s journal entries. To illustrate, in one particular journal entry from her Week 10 research participation, Noel detailed numerous professional obligations, including her three teaching assignments, administrative duties, work-related training, and participation in a social activity, all of which together resulted in her struggle to allocate time for her family. This led me to interpret that Noel on this specific day was experiencing a heavy workload and was finding it difficult to maintain a balance between her work and personal life. This inductive approach paved the way for me to prepare individualized prompts to be included in each semi-structured interview (similar to what was done in Table 3.4.2). Notably, a ‘top-down’ theory-directed approach was also used to see if certain reported experiences would belong to certain ecological systems as described in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological framework, as shown in these Tables in Chapter 6. This deductive approach helped to determine if and how the findings matched the existing theoretical framework, thus answering the research questions more effectively.
Table 3.5

Illustration of Inductive Coding of Noel’s Journal Entries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustrative Examples</th>
<th>Themes Initially Implied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Week 10: Feb. 06- Feb. 10**

**Feb. 06 (Monday)**  
With three online courses (OIPS, ECC-High Beginner, ECC-Literacy) to teach, one online course to study (Introduction to PBLA), some office jobs as a teaching assistant, I’m also a newly-registered Toastmasters member who has to prepare for my first public speech, I’m too busy to contribute enough time to my kids before their bedtime. Yes, they fell asleep again when I arrived home from my Toastmasters meeting tonight.

**Feb. 07 (Tuesday)**  
In my OIPS course today, one of the only two students (Yes, this attendance rate is normal right now) mentioned that he had fallen love with this course because it pushes him to analyze himself deeper and better, which touched me and reminded me of the reason why I love teaching: the sense of being helpful to others.

**3.6 Ethical Considerations**  
Because the present study involved human subjects, ethics approval was required before data collection. To ensure their voluntary participation, participants were given the letter of information and the consent form before research participation; they were able to learn the main focuses, procedures, and risks of the research, thus becoming sufficiently informed to decide...
whether to participate in this research. I made it clear to the individual participants ahead of time by reminding them of the possibilities of feeling uncomfortable, given that a main focus of this research looked at emotionally charged experiences of anxiety and resilience. I also explained to the participants that they did not have to report anything that they did not wish to share, and that they would not be judged for what they reported; in fact, some of the key aims of this research were to help them identify sources of teacher anxieties, become aware of possible coping strategies, and find ways to better navigate emotionality in their teaching career as an English language teacher. Even after the start of research participation, they were able to withdraw at any stage of research, with collected data removed. Moreover, pseudonyms of their choice were used to help protect anonymity. The ethics approval letter is attached in this dissertation’s Appendix A.

3.7 Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter utilized critical ethnography as the underlying methodology. It also discussed my positionality as a researcher, introduced the participants and the context of the study, described the two-stage data collection process, detailed the thematic approach to data analysis, and considered ethical issues. Looking forward, the subsequent two chapters will each focus on presenting and analyzing the main findings from pre-service and in-service English language teachers, respectively. These findings reflect the experiences of anxiety and resilience among the participants, as elucidated through their reflective journals and semi-structured interviews.
Chapter 4: Findings from Pre-Service English Language Teachers

This chapter presents the findings derived from reflective journals and semi-structured interviews of four pre-service English language teachers in Ontario, Canada. Three of these participants—Alyssa, Julie, and Miley—were pursuing a master’s degree in TESOL during the time of this study. In contrast, Anan had completed her TESOL education and was in the process of job hunting.

The findings are organized by reviewing each participant’s data for two primary reasons. Firstly, this structure mirrors the method by which the data was analyzed: I analyzed each participant’s anxiety and resilience experiences in full before proceeding to the next individual. Secondly, each individual’s unique socio-ecological experiences of anxiety and resilience warrant a distinct presentation, allowing for a comprehensive, coherent and in-depth understanding. Within each participant-focused section, an overview of their demographic background is provided, followed by a summary table showcasing their experiences related to language teacher anxiety and resilience. Subsequent to this summary, detailed findings from the reflective journals and interviews are elaborated upon.

On another note, in Chapters 4 and 5, I made modifications to some data for enhanced clarity. This involved correcting grammatical errors and excluding utterances indicative of speech disfluency, such as “uh” or “um.” Despite these adjustments, the integrity and authentic meaning of the participants’ responses have been preserved.

4.1 Alyssa

Alyssa, a pre-service English language instructor, was studying a one-year master’s TESOL program at a university nestled in Southern Ontario, Canada. Prior to this, she had pursued an undergraduate degree in STEM education in China. Despite her initial focus on
STEM, Alyssa quickly realized that she lacked the necessary passion and aptitude for teaching these subjects. This realization fostered a keen interest in English language instruction, prompting her journey to Canada to further her educational pursuits in this chosen area.

Her ultimate goal was to acquire the necessary skills and credentials to become an English teacher in Canada upon her graduation. Although Mandarin is her mother tongue, she is also fluent in English as a second language. Alyssa’s participation in the current research study spanned the first two semesters of her graduate journey. Through maintaining a reflective journal and answering interview questions, she expressed her manifold experiences dealing with anxiety, as well as demonstrating resilience, within her language teacher education both inside and outside the classroom. An overview of such experiences is provided in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1**

*Alyssa’s Experiences of Language Teacher Anxiety and Resilience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Journals</td>
<td>(1) Academic English reading, speaking, and writing</td>
<td>(1) Purposeful practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Difficulty in managing time and meeting deadlines</td>
<td>(2) Peer collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Uncertainty about what to do after graduation</td>
<td>(3) Self reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>(1) Peer pressure</td>
<td>(1) Purposeful practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Emerging teacher identity and associated challenge (inability to know her students well)</td>
<td>(2) Academic resources and support with teaching experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) High tuition fees for international students</td>
<td>(3) Practical teaching experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.1 Anxiety Experiences Shown in Reflective Journals

Throughout the process of recording her journal entries, Alyssa candidly documented her various academic anxieties. Reading in academic English proved to be a significant hurdle for her, as she had only been able to do this for a limited duration. At the early phase (i.e., third week) of her language teacher preparation, she noted this struggle:

*Although this is the third week of the semester, I am still unable to read English articles at a relatively fast pace; I can only complete readings the night before class, which makes it almost impossible for me to digest the new information or think deeply.*

At this stage, she heavily relied on Mandarin-English translation software to navigate her academic readings. Although such tools enabled her to comprehend the bulk of the text, she still faced a challenge in discerning the vital information from the less significant content within the readings.

As she progressed into Week 4, Alyssa observed a slight improvement in her academic English reading skills. However, she started feeling salient pressure related to coursework in the forms of English speaking and writing. With impending presentation assignments, she began to grapple with anxiety over English speaking. For instance, during her preparation for a presentation, she felt unsure about “*how to appropriately employ eye contact and body language when facing an audience*”, and she harbored fears about her mind going blank in the middle of a presentation. As for writing, data from Week 5 revealed that Alyssa found it difficult to complete a reflective writing assignment as she had no prior experience in this kind of task. As the
semester neared its close, she started facing pressing needs to plan both the content and structure and find references for her essay assignments.

Alyssa also struggled with effective time management for her assignments, which added to her academic anxiety. While working on her first essay, she did not commence in a timely manner, leaving her unable to pose insightful, probing questions in her written work. Likewise, during a group project which required the design of teaching activities for certain English language skills, procrastinated discussions among Alyssa’s group members resulted in insufficient time for collaborative writing. These experiences allowed her to realize in her Week 10 journal entry that “Done is better than perfect”.

Furthermore, Alyssa’s early journal entries revealed a hint of anxiety about her potential future. In particular, she wrote: “I feel a growing uncertainty about my future trajectory. I’m uncertain if I should seek employment or advance my education after completing this program, or whether I should remain in Canada or return to China.” This was her only mention of the fear of an uncertain future. Based on her reflective journals, it remains unclear if this apprehension was triggered by academic stress, or whether she was able to immediately formulate a plan for her next steps.

4.1.2 Anxiety Experiences Shown in the Interview

During the interview, Alyssa revealed that she grappled with peer pressure, an additional source of anxiety that significantly affected her. She confessed to an involuntary inclination to measure her learning progress and achievements against those of her peers, at least for an extended period of time. When asked to elaborate on this, she shared:
I can imagine that this (TESOL program) is a relatively easy program for some student teachers, but it is not easy for people like me who are unfamiliar with this field. Because of my prior education in STEM, I did not know much about educational theories such as task-based language teaching. In addition, some of my peers might have already encountered such content in their mother tongue, which I have not. So, compared with my classmates, it will definitely take extra time for me to read, think, and understand what these readings are talking about. This is why I think I had a moderate to high level of anxiety as to English academic readings especially in the beginning of the program.

Moving on to discuss her hands-on teaching experiences outside the TESOL program, Alyssa opened up about her anxiety concerning her emerging identity as a novice English language instructor. She mentioned that the experience of uncertainty, of not knowing precisely how her students felt or what they thought, provoked anxiety. She explained that, as a student, her focus typically revolved around her own tasks in the classroom, without the burden of worrying about others. However, as a teacher, she was compelled to shift her attention towards the learning needs of others, namely her students, who she may not fully understand. This sudden change in roles and responsibilities left her feeling overwhelmed.

Alyssa further touched upon financial anxiety. As an international student, the high tuition fees for her master’s program were a concern for her. From her perspective, international students were required to pay considerably high tuition fees to attend the one-year program. Even some of her peers, who had acquired permanent residency in Canada, only received a minuscule discount compared to other programs at the university. Alyssa voiced her belief that institutional policies should be adjusted to offer some form of financial support, alleviating students’ monetary burdens.
4.1.3 Resilience Experiences Shown in Reflective Journals

In her reflective journals, Alyssa discussed her strategies to manage academic anxieties related to English reading and speaking skills, primarily through purposeful practice and collaborative efforts. For instance, in Week 4, she noted that after weeks of independent, purposeful practice, she had reached a point where she could comprehend most technical terms and context-specific information in assigned course readings without heavily relying on translation software. Reaching out to her course instructors for guidance when she encountered difficult questions also proved to be a valuable strategy, which helped her to both gain content knowledge and enhance her reading speed.

As for improving her speaking skills, she found a presentation preparation experience to be especially rewarding, owing to the successful collaboration with her teammate. Their joint efforts spanned all stages of a 25-minute group presentation—from reading articles and crafting and editing scripts to conducting numerous rehearsals. This collective endeavor offered her a sense of community and support, reducing her anxiety about academic English speaking. Consequently, they came to deliver high-quality content confidently, manage their presentation duration effectively, and ultimately achieve a satisfactory outcome.

Self-reflection emerged as another key strategy in alleviating her anxieties. After struggling with comprehension and fluency during her academic reading, Alyssa meticulously examined her experiences and potential influencing factors. In her journals, she attributed her struggle with proficiently reading academic English articles to two primary factors: limited exposure to academic English and a lack of urgency. Similarly, she introspected on her presentation experiences, identifying the primary triggers for her speaking anxiety. These included the fear of uncertainties, such as unexpected audience reactions or other presenters’
speech performance, an inadequate grasp of the presentation content, and discomfort in an unfamiliar setting. These self-aware observations served as a crucial starting point to help her devise specific strategies for purposeful improvement in academic reading and speaking. By Week 8, Alyssa’s entries reflected a positive change; she was starting to enjoy academic reading and speaking in English and, more broadly, learning within the field of TESOL.

4.1.4 Resilience Experiences Shown in the Interview

During her interview, Alyssa offered insights into how she managed to overcome academic anxieties related to reading and speaking in the TESOL program. In the following dialogue, she expanded upon her experiences and strategies and attributed success largely to purposeful practice.

_Aide: Has your anxiety level regarding academic reading changed compared to before?

_Alyssa: After I read more, I gradually developed some ideas about the content and structure of a journal article. Additionally, I initially found it boring to read academic articles in English. But after I read more, I started to think about my interests and questions when reading an article, which made the reading process engaging and enjoyable. Slowly but surely, I found it unnecessary to figure out each and every unknown word in the text or use translation software to assist my reading; instead, I began to prefer to understand the overall meaning of the text and to guess from context if needed. Not all the unknown words are important!_

In addition to her resilience experience with academic reading, Alyssa also shared further details unmentioned in her reflective journals about speaking anxiety. She maintained that she was
afraid to do presentations at the start of attending the TESOL program. She appreciated the fact that her course instructor was considerate enough to arrange the option of group presentation to help internationally educated student teachers gradually adapt to the Canadian academic norms and collaborate with one another. Mutual support between her and her teammate also allowed her to focus on the process of gaining knowledge and become much less anxious or worried about oral presentations. For Alyssa, a pre-service teacher with limited public speaking experience, this environment drastically reduced her presentation anxiety and enhanced her confidence and proficiency over time.

Moreover, Alyssa acknowledged her academic community’s role in fostering her resilience. Despite the cognitive and linguistic challenges posed by the assignments and readings, she expressed gratitude for these resources. They provided an opportunity for her to understand the theoretical backgrounds and applications of various pedagogical approaches, which were crucial for her development as an early-career language teacher. She also found particular value in the experiences and insights shared by her classmates, who were relatively more experienced English language teachers themselves, which enhanced her understanding of the course content.

Another factor that contributed to Alyssa’s increased resilience was her involvement in volunteer language teaching. Despite the TESOL program not including practicums or placements, Alyssa utilized an opportunity after a call for English peer mentors became publicly available. Once selected, she volunteered at this university-affiliated English language center, where she offered weekly one-on-one tutorials to students with Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B1 proficiency levels who struggled with English, gradually enhancing her teaching preparedness and competence.
She also proactively began to plan her post-graduation career. Alyssa attended a university-hosted career workshop where she received personalized career planning advice and resume editing assistance. Recognizing the fast-approaching end of her semester, she decided to start searching for paid jobs, preferably within the TESOL field, such as “internships or teaching assistantships on and off campus”. Alyssa’s intent was to secure full-time employment shortly after graduation, work for an extended period, and apply for permanent Canadian residency, indicating her maturing career and life goals. These aspirations were much clearer than before when she just entered the TESOL program with fears of an uncertain future.

Alyssa also highlighted how perspective changes helped her build professional resilience. Notably, she stressed the important role of self-knowledge in managing peer pressure. During her graduate studies, Alyssa became increasingly aware of the anxiety stemming from academic competitions among her peers. In response, she chose to recognize her own strengths, listen to inner voices and develop individualized career goals, and focus less on competing with others but more on personal growth. Her participation in research further aided this self-awareness. Engaging in both written and spoken reflections allowed her to “keep track of progress in the TESOL program and have a clearer idea of tasks completed and tasks that are yet to complete”. As a result, she was able to learn more about herself and develop a clearer sense of purpose, which helped reduce anxiety.

Another strategy Alyssa employed was focusing on specifics in her learning. Acknowledging that some of her academic anxieties stemmed from procrastination and irregular sleep patterns, she started to address these challenges directly. For example, in order to complete an academic reading, she said that “I concentrate on reading the title, the abstract, the headings, and the body paragraphs of an article. If I stop reading at some point, I will try to get back to it
soon or think of some specific ways to catch up.” By making specific moves as such, she was able to maintain her focus and alleviate procrastination and academic anxiety.

Finally, Alyssa suggested improvements to the existing program. She believed that “completing a one-year program may allow student teachers to have a general understanding of the field of TESOL, but this might not be enough for us to succeed in all teaching contexts”. When asked about recommendations for improving the program, she suggested an ideal scenario in which student teachers can have at least an additional semester for them to “choose to complete either a practicum or a master’s research project depending on personal goals and needs”, thus becoming more capable language teachers.
4.2 Julie

Julie was another pre-service teacher enrolled in the Master’s TESOL program at a university in Southern Ontario, Canada. Prior to moving to Canada, she pursued higher education in arts education for her undergraduate degree and creative media for her master’s. She worked in mainland China as an arts instructor and also a teaching assistant collaborating with a native English-speaking teacher. The following subsections offer a detailed manifestation of her experiences with anxiety and resilience, which are summarized in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

*Julie’s Experiences of Language Teacher Anxiety and Resilience*

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<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Resilience</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reflective Journals</td>
<td>(1) Difficulty in learning phonetics due to limited previous exposure</td>
<td>(1) Gaining practical experiences in local communities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) Self-perceived inadequate English language proficiency</td>
<td>(2) Critical reflections provoked by course materials</td>
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<td>(3) Purposeful practice (speaking)</td>
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<td>Interview</td>
<td>(1) Difficulty in learning phonetics before achieving gains</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) Peer pressure and perfectionism</td>
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<td>(3) The need to achieve academic excellence</td>
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<td>(4) The needs to acquire low frequency and technical words in practical teaching environments</td>
<td>(4) Research participation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(5) Practical experiences outside the TESOL program (linguistic, pedagogical, emotional benefits)</td>
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4.2.1 Anxiety Experiences Shown in Reflective Journals

Julie’s anxieties documented in her reflective journals were linguistically driven. In her week 3 journal entry, Julie shared how lack of encounters with phonetics in her previous English learning influenced her learning of English listening and speaking in the TESOL program.

This semester we have a course called “Teaching Listening and Speaking Skills”. For the first 5 weeks, we focused on English segmental features and suprasegmental features, which is a big challenge for me. I started to learn English in China in grade 5 in 2003. At that time, English teaching was just being incorporated into the school teaching system in my city, and not mature enough. My teacher never taught us phonetic symbols. I even cannot tell which are vowels or consonants. So, I am very struggling in learning this course and feel worried about teaching them to my future students.

Similarly, although Julie was competent enough to teach children in both volunteer and paid capacities outside the TESOL program, she, as mentioned in the next excerpt, kept feeling anxious about her self-perceived inadequate English language competency.

I understand that the language requirements for becoming an educator in Canada are quite high, especially for a newcomer like me. This makes me anxious sometimes, especially when I cannot understand what children are talking about in some low-frequency words.

4.2.2 Anxiety Experiences Shown in the interview

When asked to elaborate on some of the anxieties she had noted in her reflective journals, Julie decided to further discuss her experience of learning phonetics in the Canadian TESOL program, an experience that provoked anxiety in her. The reason for this anxiety was her
unfamiliarity with the concept of syllables, a topic she had not covered while learning English in China. She felt that the course instructor may have presumed that all the student teachers were already proficient in this area and therefore did not cover basic topics such as vowels and consonants. Consequently, she felt the urgency to fill this knowledge gap and spent a large amount of time outside the classroom viewing phonetics tutorial videos on social media platforms such as YouTube. Fortunately, her efforts were not in vain; she managed to secure an A+ score on one of her assignments, so she knew that she was on the right path.

According to Julie’s interview responses, it was interesting that her challenging experience with learning phonetics proved to be rewarding in the end. She maintained that prior to the course, she often had difficulty understanding native English speakers, especially when they spoke rapidly. For instance, she shared an on-campus incident where she failed to comprehend an English-speaking librarian’s quick statement, “I will figure it out,” which was spoken using a weak form of connected speech. She suspected that her difficulty might have arisen from her lack of focused learning in phonetics. However, after taking the listening and speaking course in the TESOL program, she acquired crucial knowledge of English pronunciation. This knowledge made her more observant in real-life communicative situations, and she was able to comprehend others’ speech more effectively. As she put it, “my listening seems to have improved too after I learned about those suprasegmental features, such as linking and stress.” Notably, she also found that the course facilitated her improvement of English pronunciation and overall speaking skills. Therefore, despite the initial anxiety, she found this learning experience to be rewarding in the long term.

Furthermore, Julie mentioned that peer pressure and perfectionism contributed to the persistent anxiety she felt during her TESOL program. Initially, she thought that her years of
work experience in China would enable her to enjoy her life in Canada without needing to study intensely. However, her TESOL studies proved to be a reality check. She noticed that many of her classmates in the same cohort were English majors, and that they all put in a considerable effort to complete course readings, participate in classroom discussions, and fulfill assignments, even if they were already highly proficient in English. This observation pushed her to adjust her initial expectations and increased her anxiety levels. The following conversation emerged when Julie was asked to reflect on non-linguistic types of anxiety, where she made the comments on her experience of peer pressure as below.

Aide: Did you experience non-linguistic anxiety or feel anxious due to social interactions in the TESOL classroom?

Julie: There was a classmate from Korea. He and his group members were trying very hard to prepare for each group presentation. I was told that they were staying up late until two or three a.m. for consecutive four or five days, in an attempt to get an A + score for that assignment. When I saw them trying this hard, I wanted to try my best too because I did not want to fall behind.

Coming from an educational background in arts rather than language education, Julie found herself heavily anxious when surrounded by high-achieving and hardworking peers. She was particularly afraid of not being able to complete assignments or readings to the best of her ability. She explained about her ongoing academic anxiety in the following excerpt:

In the beginning, I was very slow at reading. It might take two or three hours to finish a 30-page reading. but for me, this might take much longer and probably a whole day. I felt like my first semester was completely dedicated to readings and assignments, and there
was not much time for me to relax or achieve work-life balance. I was anxious almost every day. Even if this is the third term right now, I still want to do things right, which makes me feel anxious sometimes.

Julie noted that while some classmates chose a more relaxed approach, which she referred to as a ‘Goblin mode’ (signifying a self-indulgent and less committed stance towards coursework), she did not want to adopt a similar attitude. Her rigorous approach to study might be influenced by the dominant testing culture in China, where relaxed approaches are less encouraged. Setting high standards for herself, Julie endeavored to fulfill academic commitments and managed to secure A or A+ grades for all five courses in the program so far.

In addition to her academic challenges, Julie also mentioned the anxiety associated with her perceived high expectations of English language proficiency, particularly when she was taking up teaching roles outside the program. Despite attaining an IELTS score of 7.0 and having several years of teaching experience in China—where she independently taught arts to both adults and children, and also assisted in English language teaching at a university—she felt her English language proficiency was a barrier to effective teaching in English-speaking countries such as Canada. When asked to describe her understanding of teacher anxiety, Julie explained as follows.

After all, I am not a native English speaker. I remember that when I started doing part time jobs in local institutions, I was struggling with the use of low-frequency words, such as children’s stuffed toys or glue guns for crafts. I learned these expressions when I volunteered at a museum and taught at a childcare center. If I cannot understand and use these expressions effectively, it might be hard for me to find a full time teaching job later on in Canada.
In addition to the pressing needs to acquire low frequency words, Julie also grappled with the pressure of memorizing content for her volunteer role as a museum tour guide. As revealed in the following excerpt, she was anxious about her linguistic and cultural limitations, which she felt could impact her role adversely.

*Our guests or visitors may be students from elementary schools in the whole city or even from other provinces. I remember there was a time when four or five cohorts from the United States came, and I needed to introduce some histories to them. For me, this task was kind of demanding because for native English-speaking volunteers, they may be able to memorize or paraphrase everything after a few looks with their linguistic and cultural privileges. But it takes longer for me to do so as I need to learn unfamiliar cultures and organize my language by working on sentence structures.*

### 4.2.3 Resilience Experiences Shown in Reflective Journals

Julie discovered that her community involvement outside the TESOL program was advantageous for her professional growth. In her reflective journals, she wrote about her regular volunteering at a local museum, where she acted as both a camp assistant and a tour guide. This role allowed her to conduct on-site tours for school-aged children, adults, and individuals with special needs. It also provided her with the opportunity to draw connections with her TESOL program’s course readings and gain a more profound understanding of specific scaffolding techniques. In the following excerpt, she shared an experience where she effectively taught socio-emotional skills in an art class, using Vygotsky’s theories of scaffolding and the zone of proximal development as guiding principles.
This week, I volunteered at the museum for an art camp. In the classes I taught, there was a Chinese girl who had low esteem. She apologized many times for things she did. When she painted something wrong on the paper, she said “teacher, I am so sorry I drew the wrong line/used the wrong color!”. She always felt less confident in her artwork by saying that “other classmates’ artworks are all better than mine!”. She was also not willing to try new things as she was worried about her ability and afraid of failure by saying that “I can’t draw this and that, It’s too hard, I can’t do that!”. I noticed that her low esteem held her back to develop her potential and talent – she actually did a very good job.

Then I did these to help her build positive self-esteem: (1) encouraging the student: telling her it is totally okay to draw something wrong! And more importantly, there is no right and wrong when you are painting! (2) building confidence in her abilities: giving her sincere encouragement on what she really did well and what she had accomplished. I gave her a feasible and appropriate task to provide opportunities for her success, helping her to recognize she really can do that with good performance. After she finished this, I led her to undertake a higher-level task.

Gradually, I found she built the confidence to learn new things, and she became more active and creative in her painting!

In another community engagement experience, Julie used Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory again to inform her real-life teaching. The following example showed an incident where she stepped in as an art teacher to comfort and teach a four-year-old boy about self-regulation.
This week, I worked as an art teacher at another institution. In my class, during break time, there was a four years old boy who wanted to eat candy at the reception desk. However, his mother said he was not allowed to eat candies, but the boy kept asking for the candies. His mother shouted at him and he began to cry and yell. Then his mother just left him there crying. I noticed and approached him, trying to comfort him and help him with self-regulation. I validated his feelings by telling him “it’s okay to feel upset when you don’t get what you want. I know you want candies and you feel frustrated when Mom says no.” Then, I explained why his mother said no candies. I used visual aids to show him a picture of tooth decay and told him that his mom was protecting his tooth otherwise he might feel the pain caused by tooth decay! Next, I taught him some calming techniques. We walked to the balcony to breathe some fresh air. I asked him to do deep breathing and count to ten. Then he gradually calmed down. Later, I helped him to find a problem-solving method. I encouraged him to think of other ways to satisfy his sweet tooth without involving artificial sweeteners. I said, “how about we eat some healthy fruit instead?” He then nodded and said yes. Finally, when he calmed down, I praised him for taking deep breaths and eating fruit instead of crying and yelling. He smiled happily in response to my words.

Furthermore, certain course readings, such as Curdt-Christiansen’s (2008) journal publication entitled Reading the world through words: Cultural themes in heritage Chinese language textbooks, enabled Julie to not only reflect on and increase critical awareness of ideological and political agendas hidden within English learning materials, but also envision how she might add supplemental materials with diverse perspectives to foster open and critical dialogues with her students in the future.
This week I read an article Reading the World Through Words: Cultural Themes in Heritage Chinese Language Textbooks, which let me reflect on my future teaching as a language teacher. The author explores cultural themes and social values (perseverance, filial piety, diligence and obedience, etc) embedded in the Chinese textbooks which are employed by Zhonguo School in Montreal, Canada. Although the textbooks are designed for the Chinese diaspora communities, the same contents truly resonate with what I have learned from my Chinese textbook in China, which is to teach us how to act as socially accepted “good students” and “right persons”. It is fair to say that learning words through texts laden with cultural themes does help Chinese immigrant children to construct their cultural and social identities, as well as preserve the Chinese heritage culture and traditions, but we also have to consider about that the norms and values they received are totally in contrast to the mainstream culture and society in Canada. That is because Chinese culture emphasizes obedience and respects authority while western culture pursues critical thinking and individualism. Thus it is worth it for language teachers to think carefully about how to use materials instead of just simply teaching the content.

If I am the language teacher of that school, I will provide supplemental materials such as videos, articles, given topics and stories to students with various viewpoints and perspectives. Fostering an open-minded and safe classroom environment that encourages students to have an open dialogue, and critical reflection about what they have learned or what they encountered about cultural themes in language learning.
Julie also improved her English language proficiency due to actively engaging in conversations with children while teaching craft-making. In the excerpt presented below, her deliberate learning of non-academic English expressions proved to be useful to enhance her vocabulary size and overall English speaking skills.

After this week’s work, I feel that my English language proficiency has improved gradually. When I taught children to make crafts, I actively engaged in conversations with them. During these conversations, I learned from their expressions such as: “there is a bump!”, “that doesn’t count!” and keep them in mind. Additionally, I observed their interactions and communication during outdoor activities. I learned many daily expressions. For instance, while they are playing ball games, they say, “I’m going to stretch my legs out!” or “I’m hopping.” These were the phrases I didn’t know before, as they are used infrequently. I wrote down the expressions I learned in my notebook every day and reviewed them during my commute on the bus. I believe this practice has been instrumentally valuable in enhancing my English speaking.

4.2.4 Resilience Experiences Shown in the Interview

During her interview, Julie underscored the critical importance of theoretical learning within the TESOL program. One useful principle she adopted is the approach of enabling students to have spaced repetitions to acquire a word, a strategy she has applied to her own vocabulary learning and in her part-time art teaching to children. Moreover, she expressed her appreciation for her engagement with sociocultural theories, which heightened her critical awareness about unquestioned practices in education. The excerpt below provides an example of her reflective thinking process after engaging with a course reading.
I remember I read an article, which introduces a French dominant environment where immigrant parents want their children to learn Chinese to embrace cultural heritage. The Chinese language school uses textbooks developed by the ministry of education in China and teaches Chinese using lots of ancient Chinese stories that contain outdated values, such as the stories of Grinding an Iron Rod into a Needle and Kong Rong Gave Up the Larger Pears. She came to be more sensitive about how authority uses certain narratives to control our minds. From an early age, I have been trained to be a person who obeys and cannot challenge the older generations. I am often told to make sacrifices for the sake of the greater good but not for our own good. Going back to these stories in the textbooks, why should I grind an iron rod into a needle instead of buying a box of needles? Why can’t I eat the larger pears and have to give the larger pears to others? I know respecting others is a good thing, but we receive this kind of education too much and we become afraid to express our own voices and needs. These are helpful for me to be able to teach in a culturally diverse environment.

Julie also felt a sense of mentorship within the TESOL program. She particularly appreciated the care shown by one of her course instructors on numerous occasions. An example of this was when she received a ‘B’ grade on an assignment. In order to understand how she could improve, she arranged a meeting with the instructor who patiently helped her identify areas of improvement and clarified his expectations. More than just catering to her academic needs, this instructor also demonstrated support for her professional development. The following excerpt illustrates Julie’s sharing of this experience.

He also kindly asked whether or not I adapted well to the new learning environment in Canada. I said that my current plan is to find a volunteer position this semester and find
a part-time job next semester and later on find a full-time job if possible. He provided valuable feedback by saying that “why don’t you start looking for part time jobs from now on?” I said “I was worried about my English language communication skills, so starting with a volunteer might be enough.” He encouraged me to go out of my comfort zone and keep looking. I kept him posted after I got a job. He said that he was truly happy for me, and that I should keep looking because he believed I would be able to find better jobs. He also taught me that social connections might also play an important role in job seeking, and that I may try to build a good relationship with my supervisors at work because they might be required to provide references for my next job. I really appreciated his suggestions and support. Being able to meet with somebody like him made me feel safer and well-supported.

Another significant experience contributing to resilience, which Julie did not mention in her reflective journals but discussed during the interview, was her regular participation in a wellness activity. She routinely attended a Nature/Wellness Walk, as long as it did not conflict with more pressing commitments such as imminent assignment deadlines. This event was organized by a graduate student specialized in geography, who invited participants for an hour-long walk every Friday. Usually, between five to eight people would attend the event. During the walk, the organizer would share information about the local flora and fauna they encountered. For instance, he explained the life cycle of the plants they came across or discussed the mating habits of geese. Julie particularly appreciated the organizer’s uplifting weekly invitation emails, especially when he expressed joy about the arrival of spring and the anticipation of observing baby geese and other wildlife. Additionally, this event provided a valuable social opportunity as it attracted university professors, both in-service and retired, allowing for casual interaction between activity
attendees. In brief, regular engagement with this activity enabled Julie to mitigate academic stress, maintain her physical and mental health, and forge social connections with individuals who shared similar interests.

Equally noteworthy, Julie found her participation in this research study incredibly valuable. Writing reflective journals enabled her to reflect more deeply on her experiences. As she highlighted, “If I don’t write them down, I might not be able to realize what I have been doing and the fact that I am actually learning something new.” Additionally, the interview process provided her with an opportunity to delve deeper into her experiences and gain a clearer understanding of them. As she mentioned, “before taking part in this interview, although I had these experiences, I did not even think about categorizing these experiences into linguistic, pedagogical, emotional aspects. But now, I am aware that I had these many gains!”.

When considering experiences outside of the academic setting, Julie asserted that gaining practical teaching experiences beyond the TESOL program significantly enhanced her English language proficiency. In her part-time role teaching children in before- and after-school programs, she was required to organize activities and consistently communicate with her students. The student body was diverse, including native English speakers and immigrant children from various cultural backgrounds such as Korea, Japan, Pakistan, and France. Unsurprisingly, English was their universal language of communication. Unlike in the TESOL program, where she had the luxury of time to contemplate her spoken or written responses, her work environment required immediate and effective English communication. For instance, she learned to engage with students using language-for-teaching like “what are you making?”. Actively participating in English-speaking communities undoubtedly pushed her to produce comprehensible language, thereby improving her English language proficiency.
In addition to her linguistic development, Julie also experienced meaningful professional growth off-campus, where she discovered new teaching philosophies. For example, she was profoundly impacted by her observation of a local kindergarten, where the educators employed numerous techniques to help children recognize their own strengths. Julie highlighted a particular exercise, where children were encouraged to discuss the most amazing aspect of their own bodies. This stood in stark contrast to Julie’s prior education in China, where she was seldom encouraged to express self-appreciation. Instead, the emphasis was often placed on appreciating others. Another noteworthy practice that Julie observed was the use of affirmative messages posted on a classroom door. The phrases, such as “When you enter this classroom… You are important. You are amazing. You are creators. You are explorers. You are scientists. You are readers. You are risk takers. You are special. You are a friend. You are respected.”, were designed to help children reflect on their strengths and cultivate a positive self-identity.

Julie further mentioned another inspiring message that she saw on a board: “we all have something within us that this world needs!” Reflecting on these observations, Julie contrasted the encouraging environment she observed in Canada with her educational experience in China, where she felt there was less emphasis on individual importance. Julie then mentioned another surprising observation from a childcare center, where toddlers who were not yet able to speak were nonetheless encouraged to feed themselves. While this behavior resulted in a mess in the room, with food smeared on their faces and bodies, the early childhood educators did not step in to help them eat, a practice which would have been common in China. These experiences prompted Julie to reflect on the theories she learned from the TESOL program such as asset-based pedagogy. More importantly, they challenged her to reconsider her approach to teaching, inspiring her to seek methods that are both transformative and culturally sensitive.
Julie also found her volunteer and part-time teaching environments emotionally sustaining. When volunteering at the museum, she was able to gain help from colleagues as long as she expressed the need for help—mostly linguistic or administrative. Similarly, she was surprised by the tremendous emotional support that she received in her part-time job. To illustrate, on her first day of work, Julie was 10 minutes late to get to the classroom for the before-school program for children. She was panting heavily when she reached her destination and said sorry repeatedly to the cooperating teacher in the program. That teacher was surprised to see her actions and said “Come on. This is just work. No need to apologize like this. Don’t be so serious.” As a result, she felt relieved immediately. On another occasion, she was mistaken about her schedule and did not go to work. Surprisingly, after hearing Julie’s explanation, the cooperating teacher said “I know it happens.” This made Julie feel trusted and safe and also see the possibility of working without anxiety and fear, which was very different from her previous work environment in China where she was socialized into the belief that work meant everything to her. She recalled that before working at a Chinese university, she was working at a privately owned international high school where she endured an overwhelming amount of anxiety. As a teacher, her salary would be reduced if she was late; she could not leave before 5:30 pm even if she finished her work; she could not walk slowly but had to run to the washrooms so as to save time. Demands as such made her feel like “working on a production line in a factory”. For Julie, working at university was admittedly a better experience, but work was still a big part of her life and a major source of anxiety. In most cases, it was impossible for her to prevent or manage the negative impact of work on her life or to enjoy both work and life.

Julie further identified potential areas where the TESOL program could adapt to better serve the knowledge growth of its student teachers. She highlighted that the schedule for this
program’s third semester is too packed, with each course being taught twice a week. In her opinion, this results in instructors “rushing through the material”. Moreover, Julie observed that under this setup, the number of assignments or overall workload for each course is reduced. She argued that this “may not be a good thing because assignments are a good way for students to go back to readings, search for additional references, and gain deeper knowledge”. When asked about her preferred course structure, Julie suggested that it would be more effective if the program was extended to one and a half years. This additional term could be dedicated to practical experience in the form of practicum. Julie’s elaboration of her vision for improving the TESOL program is presented in the excerpt below.

> It would be great if program leaders can build partnerships with local English language institutes or even childcare centers. I think it is important to have practical experience. We learned from course readings that language teachers may encounter discrimination or something unexpected in the workplace. Without teaching opportunities, We are less prepared to deal with such things in our future teaching career. Additionally, studying a 16 months program will make us eligible to gain a three year post graduation work permit. So we don’t need to do another program.
4.3 Miley

Miley was another pre-service teacher enrolled in the Master’s TESOL program at a university in Southern Ontario, Canada. Prior to her Canadian academic pursuit, Miley gained approximately three years of work experience in early childhood education in China, often collaborating closely with colleagues who instructed Chinese learners of English. To more effectively work with her colleagues and to independently teach English, Miley opted to broaden her education overseas by enrolling in the aforementioned program. She embarked on her graduate studies at the outset of 2023. Despite the recency of her experience, Miley’s reflective journals and interview responses reveal a wealth of encounters with anxiety and resilience. A summary of these experiences can be found in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

*Miley’s Experiences of Language Teacher Anxiety and Resilience*

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<td>(6) Critical awareness-raising activities in and outside the TESOL program</td>
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<td>(7) Wellness and career workshops at university</td>
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4.3.1 Anxiety Experiences Shown in Reflective Journals

Noteworthy anxieties identified in Miley’s reflective journals were largely centered around academic issues. Much like her fellow pre-service English language teachers, Miley expressed the significant pressure she experienced when dealing with coursework. As demonstrated in the written excerpt below, this pressure intensified during the initial weeks of her studies.

In the very beginning of the winter term, I can understand what most of the professors are saying in class, so in week 1 and week 2, I felt everything was fine except that the reading material assigned by my professor each week would take a lot of time for me to read. But starting this week, especially after I found out that our first assignment for all three classes would be due in week 5, I am starting to feel heavy pressure to complete them.

Similar to the stressful start of a semester, Miley’s anxiety did not fade away towards the end of the term due to challenging assignments she had to complete. In the following excerpt, Miley articulated her anxiety about potentially not meeting the standards for a written assignment.

This week marks the final week of the term, and it has been incredibly busy for me. I had two assignments to complete for an assessment-focused course, which included a group presentation on a research article and a final paper. For the final paper, we needed to design a classroom language assessment, accompanied by a research-informed commentary. I struggled with choosing the type of assessment. I was not 100% sure about how to develop a rubric for speaking and writing assessments, or how to create appropriate tasks for listening and reading assessments. Although I participated in group
work every week throughout this course, when it came to actually designing an assessment, I felt uncertain about how to do it appropriately.

4.3.2 Anxiety Experiences Shown in the interview

During the interview, Miley discussed her academic anxiety related to oral presentations. Interestingly, her concern was not focused on her speaking skills, but rather on whether her performance would adversely affect her teammates, given that the presentation was a group assignment. This fear of negatively impacting others was intense, particularly when she encountered this task for the first time in her graduate studies abroad.

Relating back to her academic anxiety about written assignments, as already mentioned in her reflective journals, Miley provided additional details and potential causes of such anxiety in the following excerpt:

Because I did not have study-abroad experience before, it was kind of difficult for me to quickly understand writing expectations and how APA works at the very beginning. So I was certainly anxious and needed to ask my classmates or search for answers online. And then at a later time in this semester, I needed to complete final written assignments that were all due at the approximately same time, which was academically and emotionally challenging.

Miley also expressed feelings of inadequacy concerning her practical experience. She stated that regardless of whether she planned to teach in Canada or China, acquiring Canadian work experience would be beneficial for her professional development as an English language teacher. Despite having learned various theories and engaged in some pedagogical designs, she did not
feel adequately prepared to teach. Miley expressed her concerns in the following dialogue when asked to comment on the strengths and/or weaknesses of the TESOL program she was studying:

Aide: How do you perceive the TESOL program you are studying? Please feel free to discuss its strengths and/or limitations.

Miley: After reading the descriptions for all these required courses, I think it is hard for someone like me who does not have English teaching experiences to be ready within this one year time period. I think one year is kind of short for me to be competent enough to teach independently, especially when the curriculum only has mock teaching and lesson planning but does not involve practicum. I am not sure if I will be ready to teach by the end of this program. But at this time, I think I am not ready for sure. Also, I don’t think I have an in-depth understanding of each course given the limited time we have for each course. If I want to be a competent teacher, I will need to put in a lot more effort and time.

4.3.3 Resilience Experiences Shown in Reflective Journals

In Miley’s reflective journals, she wrote about experiences that contributed to the development of her language teaching expertise. A significant instance was when she designed and presented a lesson plan for teaching listening and speaking skills, as noted in her Week 7 journal entry below.

I think this course is necessary for those of us who are going to become English teachers, and the demonstration in the course is also to accumulate experience for us to become a real English teacher afterwards, and these are very necessary abilities. A good teacher is always learning to reflect and grow through experience.
Miley’s journals also highlighted moments of transformative learning where she increased her critical awareness. For example, in her Week 9 reflective journal, she discussed how course readings prompted her to consider the need to examine cultural and social knowledge within learning materials. She wrote:

Drawing from my prior experience as a kindergarten teacher, I utilized stories and picture books to structure my classroom. While kindergarteners typically lack advanced literacy skills, stories and picture books usefully contain cultural and social knowledge for children to acquire. I concur with the author’s suggestion that it is important for teachers to educate students on how to critically evaluate and comprehend the material presented in textbooks.

In her subsequent paragraph, she moved on to draw on her past experience as an early childhood educator to evaluate the potential impacts of ideological biases in textbooks on children’s mental and emotional wellbeing. She also offered her recommendations for material selection as follows.

As mentioned in the article, the selection of materials in many textbooks is strongly influenced by politics as well as social and cultural significance. The author found that literacy instruction is continually laced with political agendas and ideological purposes. Confucianism’s impact may still be observed in current Chinese children’s literature and educational materials because it was the official philosophy of numerous Chinese dynasties for the past 2000 years. The story of Kong Rong and the Pears was the most memorable story mentioned in the article. Although the major focus of the story is to teach the significance of respecting elders and caring for youngsters, I have seen that some people use this story to lecture and force their own children to do what Kong Rong did in the story. This may lead to a child hiding their true feelings in order to conform to
the adults’ expectations, which can result in mental health problems for the child if their emotions are kept ignored. As the author suggests, certain cultural values held by Chinese people should be subjected to critical analysis. I am presenting this example not to suggest that traditional Chinese stories should not be utilized, but rather to emphasize that as educators, we should carefully consider the context in which they are used and the kind of educational messages we wish to convey to children through these stories.

Relatedly, Miley in her Week 5 journal entry shared a heated online classroom discussion, which reminded her of a situation from her previous work experience in China that involved the issue of native-speakerism. Through this reflective practice, Miley became aware of the urgent need for structural change as to the said issue.

I totally agree with what the author mentioned in this article that only a determined, coordinated set of result-oriented measures has the power to disrupt the basis of the hegemonic organization. I have been working as a kindergarten teacher in a private kindergarten in a coastal city in China since 2018. At that time, we had an English teacher in every class. In my work experience, many parents would prefer English native-speaker teachers, even though this school bragged about its cultural diversity when it came to teaching English. I also got to know about the salary division of different teachers in the school. Native-speaker teachers’ salaries are the highest, in some cases even double than the salary of Chinese teachers of English. In my opinion, some of these well-paid teachers do not interact with the children in adequately supportive ways and are not as good at teaching English as the Chinese English teachers. I thought this pay arrangement was unequal and unfair and I discussed this with some colleagues. My supervisor said that it was determined by the labor market and that without offering high
salaries, the school would be unlikely to recruit enough native English-speaking teachers
and in that case, the school would be less likely to recruit enough students and it would
be difficult for a private school to continue to operate properly. The problem seems to be
a vicious cycle, and no one has a solution. Apparently, systematic efforts are required to
foster change.

Miley also expressed gratitude for the chance to delve into feminist pedagogy in one of her final
course papers. In the following excerpt extracted from her Week 11 reflective journal, Miley
shared her belief that incorporating gender-based topics into language classroom discussions can
serve as an invaluable pedagogical strategy. She believed that these topics can potentially
enhance students’ skills in using the target language and foster their ability to think critically.

This week, I worked on a final paper with a focus on social approaches to English
language teaching. In this paper, we were required to demonstrate our understanding of
one of the key concepts or notions discussed in the course readings and its implications
for future language teaching practice. I chose to focus on feminist pedagogy, as I believe
it is relevant to both our everyday lives and future teaching endeavors. I contend that in
ESL/EFL classrooms, where students come from diverse backgrounds and possess
various identities, capitals, and ideologies, discussions about gender will inevitably arise,
potentially involving controversial issues. As a feminist educator, it is crucial to maintain
heightened awareness of the “gender” topic and seize opportunities to engage in
dialogues with students when unexpected or controversial subjects emerge in the
classroom. By participating in these conversations, students can not only enhance their
language skills but also develop their critical thinking abilities.
4.3.4 Resilience Experiences Shown in the Interview

When asked about her strategies for handling academic anxiety within the TESOL program, Miley provided a variety of effective resilience approaches she had adopted. Among these, she underscored the importance of proactive measures to alleviate anxiety. Specifically, she would allow herself to experience anxiety for a short while and then take specific, albeit small, actions to alleviate this state of unease. For instance, she often chose to talk to close friends or trusted colleagues. Miley also emphasized the value of mentorship during times of severe stress, stating that a mentor’s experience and willingness to assist can be highly beneficial in resolving specific issues. She held the view that expressing personal experiences of anxiety and obtaining feedback from seasoned educators can enhance resilience. Engaging in physical activities such as walking also proved beneficial for her. In this regard, she praised Canada’s vast natural beauty and found restored peace and energy in its serene environments. Miley specifically mentioned spring as the perfect season to “go to the park, get closer to nature, breathe some fresh air, and get in a better mood.” By taking such deliberate actions, she was able to avoid becoming trapped in a cycle of academic anxiety.

Miley believed that certain critical awareness-raising activities within the TESOL program usefully contributed to her professional development. She reflected on a transformative moment when a course reading discussed the often taken-for-granted ideological influences of textbooks on learners. She asserted that many traditional stories should not be presented to children without careful scrutiny. This caution stems from the fact that ideologies embedded in ancient narratives may not align with or be appropriate for modern-day teaching. She maintained that both teachers and parents should carefully consider the values and ideologies a story might convey before sharing it with a child. Furthermore, it is important for teachers and parents to
avoid socializing those absolute ways of thinking into the beliefs of a child. These reflections demonstrate her understanding of language and literacy teaching as ideologically charged and non-neutral practices.

In Miley’s perspective, other awareness-raising activities such as writing reflective journals for this study fostered resilience. These activities increased her self-knowledge, informed future practices, and improved her English writing skills as an additional language. Miley found that writing these reflective journals provided an excellent opportunity for ongoing introspection of her experiences over several months. To exemplify, through this process, she gained a deeper understanding of herself and identified areas for future improvement. She, for example, wished she could be a stronger problem solver to be able to manage the inevitable but emotionally draining impact of anxiety. As a prolonged linguistic engagement, keeping a written record in English as an additional language also helped her gain experience and confidence in English writing.

Institutional support mechanisms, including wellness workshops, were also instrumental in strengthening her resilience. During the interview, Miley detailed an extracurricular program she had been part of since the semester’s onset. This program involved weekly discussions on topics relevant to personal well-being and thriving. She recalled that the program’s specific topics contained resilience, self-compassion, gratitude, motivation, growth mindset, note-taking, and writing habits. One online meeting particularly stood out to her, during which two professionals discussed strategies for managing anxiety associated with graduate school assignments. Miley considered the videos she watched, the lectures she attended, and the techniques she learned from this program to be invaluable resources. While these resources
might not provide immediate solutions, she believed they would undoubtedly offer emotional support and practical benefits when confronted with challenging and uncertain times in the future.

As a newcomer to Canada, Miley also discussed her steps to grow employability. She attended a series of university career workshops designed for international students aimed at enhancing their professional resilience. Through these workshops, she acquired basic strategies for job hunting in Canada, improving her CV, and excelling in job interviews. Despite the workshops being conducted online, which she felt led to a lack of genuine interactions, Miley considered these activities to be essential for maintaining resilience. She believed they could significantly assist international students in adapting to the Canadian post-graduation work environment. Meanwhile, she expressed a desire for the TESOL program she was attending to provide more opportunities for authentic teaching experiences, including but not limited to the form of volunteering. Identifying this as an area for improvement in the program, Miley was actively working on enhancing her CV and planning to apply for volunteer positions in daycare centers. Her aim was to build upon her previous experience in early childhood education and secure post-graduation employment in Canada. Alternatively, she considered teaching English to new immigrants with limited English proficiency. Miley believed that such real teaching experiences would be more beneficial than mock teaching currently included in the TESOL program, and that they would significantly boost her career preparedness for the future.
4.4 Anan

At the beginning of her research participation, Anan had just completed her graduate studies in TESOL at a Southern Ontario university in Canada and had begun a part-time role in a media company within the province. This position was temporary, serving as a bridge in her transition from a TESOL student to a full-time professional. Finding an ideal language teaching position immediately after graduation proved challenging due to socio-cultural, linguistic, and policy constraints. With time, Anan left her initial job and secured a full-time position in social media management. Her self-reported experiences of adjusting to post-graduate life revealed deep insights into early career anxiety and resilience. A synopsis of these experiences can be found in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Anan’s Experiences of Language Teacher Anxiety and Resilience

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<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Resilience</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>(1) Treating job seeking as a principled practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) Preparing for job application documents and interviews</td>
<td>(2) Reflecting on past and current experiences</td>
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<td>(3) Unsuccessful job applications</td>
<td>(3) Reaching out to trusted friends</td>
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<td>(4) Health issues</td>
<td>(4) Using career services at university</td>
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<td>Interview</td>
<td>(1) Temporary immigration status</td>
<td>(1) Gaining practical experiences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) Unsuccessful job applications</td>
<td>(2) Learning from unsuccessful experiences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(3) Time conflicts for accepting job offers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(4) Growing self-expectations</td>
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4.4.1 Anxiety ExperiencesShown in Reflective Journals

For Anan, the job search process was often fraught with anxiety. In her reflective journals, she used the metaphor of “running a marathon” to emphasize the difficulty of job hunting. Upon graduating from her master’s program, she found herself in a role that was unrelated to English teaching and divergent from her initial career goal. This misalignment between her education and job role led to frustration and anxiety. She was concerned that her TESOL training was not being well-utilized. In spite of holding a temporary job, she strived diligently to secure a full-time position that aligned with her career aspirations. Throughout this demanding search, she experienced various forms of anxiety. For instance, she was not adequately prepared to draft career application documents, given that this skill was not explicitly taught during her graduate studies. This lack of preparation heightened her anxiety when crafting cover letters and preparing for job interviews. Post-interview periods also elevated her stress, especially when she “did not receive any feedback from potential employers” or was informed that her “applications for the desired full-time positions were unsuccessful”. Under such conditions, self-doubt and anxiety were pervasive. She felt compelled to persist in her job search, even after receiving rejections from her dream company and when battling physical illness. She believed that any lapse in job-seeking could potentially prolong her search and worsen her financial challenges. According to
her, the constant pressure and lack of time for recovery made her feel added anxiety and left her emotionally sensitive and vulnerable.

4.4.2 Anxiety ExperiencesShown in the interview

In the interview, Anan revealed that her status as a temporary foreign worker in Canada had, to some extent, narrowed her job prospects. This, as she noted, could pose a risk to her job search. Specifically, she pointed out that certain teaching roles at colleges, universities, and non-profit organizations in Ontario, Canada, required that applicants must either be permanent residents or Canadian citizens. As such, she was unable to consider these positions. In the meantime, in order to obtain permanent residency in Canada via the Express Entry immigration system, she needed to secure a job with a specific title and set of responsibilities and hold this position for an extended period. Consequently, her job selection was heavily influenced by multiple factors, reducing her freedom to choose. Therefore, her temporary immigration status had in some ways shaped and even exacerbated her early career anxiety.

Anna further detailed another impactful anxiety-provoking experience, as noted in her Week 4 journal entry. She had applied for a student counselor position with high hopes of success, given the relevance of her educational background and her comprehensive preparation for this dream role. She learned that the institution was in urgent need of new employees, and the recruiter had even complimented her on both of her interview performance and the case analysis which was another part of the pre-employment assessment. Despite these positive signs, she ultimately received a rejection notification. This unsuccessful application, compounded with her ongoing health issues, provoked a range of negative emotions. These feelings included but were not limited to frustration, anxiety, self-doubt, and a diminished sense of self-worth.
Anan also added that, upon graduating from graduate school, the varied recruiting schedules of different employers often caused her anxiety. To illustrate, she had submitted applications to multiple companies simultaneously, including both her dream companies and ordinary ones. However, the earliest job offer might not have come from her most desired company. Consequently, she grappled with whether to accept the readily available job offer, and she found herself frequently questioning the appropriateness of her decisions.

Through reflection, Anan found that her escalating expectations of herself had contributed to her anxiety. The excerpt below showcases her evolving perspectives before and after studying the TESOL program. It was taken from the end of the interview when she was invited to share further comments on her experiences with early career anxiety and/or resilience.

*Before doing the master’s program, my expectation for myself was to find a job after graduation—maybe a job within my comfort zone. But with time, especially with more experiences living here in Canada and more knowledge of the job market, I began to feel that my career aspirations changed. I wanted to find a job in a relatively bigger company or a culturally diverse company, or certain teaching jobs at college or university. The desire to want more sometimes makes me feel stressed out because this seems like a never-ending process, unless I choose to care less about work, which is unlikely for me in the foreseeable future.*

### 4.4.3 Resilience Experiences Shown in Reflective Journals

Anan’s reflective journals also detailed gratifying experiences of resilience. These key moments encompassed personal, social, and institutional domains. On a personal level, adopting different ways of thinking enabled her to approach job seeking more strategically and efficiently.
For instance, she initially viewed the task of writing a cover letter as tedious and mundane, which led to her reluctance to engage with the process. However, as she accumulated unsuccessful job seeking experiences, her perspective shifted. She began to equate the process of crafting a cover letter to the academic task of writing a short essay at university. This reframing instilled in her an urgency to complete the task in a timely and organized manner, which helped her to overcome procrastination. In another instance, after much reflection, she began to approach the job hunting process as a principled research practice. She recognized the importance of making informed decisions, preparing for each task, and enhancing her English-speaking skills. Interestingly, she learned about the risk of over-preparation after an unsuccessful real-world interview and consultation with career development professionals. These examples demonstrated how Anan actively learned effective strategies for her career pursuits.

Adopting a growth mindset was also beneficial for Anan. Following frustrations encountered in her first temporary job, she reflected in her Week 1 journal entry: “no matter what job I do nowadays, there will always be some knowledge gains and more local work experience which can be helpful for my future career development.” This mindset served to sustain hope and provide emotional support for her. Moreover, Anan recognized the importance of understanding what she wanted or did not want in her career. Surprisingly, she quit her first job in Week 8 to explore additional career opportunities, such as volunteering for educational institutions. She expressed her immediate sense of relief after leaving the job, as outlined in the following excerpt.

*After the job ended, I could finally look for a job boldly, relaxed and without any concerns. I felt a sudden sense of liberation, and I started editing videos, taking pictures,*
photographing, and writing again to record my thoughts and ideas about my life in Canada.

On another positive note, during her exploration of career options, Anan received significant social support from her trusted friends. She valued their advice, such as the suggestion to move beyond third-party job-posting platforms and to directly visit the websites of her target companies. Additionally, most, if not all, of her friends shared that they had submitted between 100 and 200 resumes over a period of at least 2 months before successfully securing a job. These insights were extremely helpful and she implemented them in her own career pursuits when relevant.

At an institutional level, Anan found the university’s career services beneficial, as noted in her Week 2 and Week 4 entries. These services provided advice on improving career application documents and offered free practice in mock interviews. By leveraging these resources, she was able to not only tailor her resume and cover letter to meet the specific job requirements, but also sharpen her interview skills.

4.4.4 Resilience Experiences Shown in the Interview

Gaining practical work experience was crucial for Anan in benefiting her early career. After finishing her coursework in the TESOL program, her initial job search focused exclusively on English language teaching roles. However, she could only secure a temporary position at a summer camp, which did not offer opportunities for continued employment or secondments once the summer ended. In the following month, she needed to find local employment not necessarily in English language teaching to maintain her financial independence. Despite this career prospect, Anan believed the knowledge she gained during her graduate program is widely applicable. She
saw English language teaching as a form of intercultural communication, a skill that can enhance her performance in any job involving language use in Canada. As such, she pursued opportunities in social media as a temporary transition. While she had been working in the social media industry for a while, Anan kept being interested in English language teaching roles, specifically content and language integrated teaching. Her career aspirations included teaching courses related to tourism or social media management in Ontario colleges. In preparation for this potential transition, apart from her full-time job, she was volunteering for a non-profit organization, managing their social media accounts on Instagram and Facebook and creating posts to inspire viewers’ kindness. According to Anan, this volunteer opportunity had been beneficial in improving her English language and intercultural communication skills. She believed these skills would support her long-term career goals.

Anan further shared several strategies to combat early career anxieties. According to her, one essential step is managing expectations. Specifically, she reflected on her high expectations for herself and considered the need to adjust these expectations, preparing for the possibility of unsuccessful outcomes and even the worst-case scenario. In this way, if such situations occurred, she could more readily cope with her anxiety and frustration, allowing her to quickly bounce back from adversity. Anan also stressed the importance of learning from mistakes and finding solutions. For instance, following an unsuccessful job search experience, she realized the value of referrals and the need to use a broader array of tools to facilitate her job application process. She learned to use the Indeed platform as a search engine and to submit job applications directly through institutions’ websites. The importance of asking the right questions to the right person was another lesson Anan learned, instead of seeking advice from those without relevant work experience. Her engagement in well-being activities was also mentioned. Anan began practicing
Pilates once or twice a week and more recently started to practise meditation occasionally. These activities helped reduce anxiety and navigate through challenging times.

Anan’s participation in this research, particularly the initial stage of writing reflective journals, played an important role in boosting her emotional and professional resilience. In the following excerpt, she noted that through this process, she developed a renewed understanding of anxiety, became cognizant of an expanded array of career options, and learned to utilize her past experiences to inform her current and future decisions.

This practice is going to benefit my growth in the future. I may encounter similar situations like the one I wrote in Week 4. By keeping a journal, I may be able to let off anxiety and think deeply to come up with possible solutions. More specifically, I came to learn that it is normal for one to face anxiety especially for international students who are just about to enter the workplace, and that we should not focus on one negative outcome, become stuck in self-doubts, and lose faith in ourselves. This awareness definitely helped me become a more resilient person. In addition, when I have these journal entries in hand, it will be easier for me to look back at the previous experience and find solutions if I encounter similar situations in the future. Also, in this process of documenting, I developed some new ideas for my career planning, including some roles that I have not tried to apply but could apply in the future. I later on wrote down some descriptions of these ideas and even included some further notes on required certificates and skills for me to gain. This is a wonderful research practice. Moreover, I learned to realize that anxiety is not bad. A mild level of anxiety may push me to grow in the workplace because it means that I don’t accept where I am at, I care about growth, and I believe that I can perform better.
Anan further reflected on the career advice she received from her friends and career-related resources she leveraged throughout her journey, providing more detailed insights into how she tapped into a broad array of social resources. This is captured in the following excerpt.

*I reached out to alumni from my program or professionals who were in the industry that I was looking at. Then I tried to understand the prospect of a given industry or possible directions that might work for me. In this way, I understood the availability of jobs, whether or not they were fitting for me, and even got a referral which could be a lot of help. Additionally, I used social media to assist my job search. For example, I explored relevant posts made by content creators on YouTube or Xiaohongshu (a Chinese equivalent to Instagram), especially those posts about employment opportunities, improving one’s employability, or authentic personal experiences in finding a job. From these posts on social media, I learned to make different CVs for different positions and to prepare for interviews. Additionally, I turned to university career services for career profile editing and mock interviews, which would be available for recent graduates within the first year after one graduated. These steps allowed me to be 90% ready for submitting an application and handling behavioral questions in a job interview.*

In addition, Anan shared more specific feedback on how her program could be enhanced. She pointed out that, as the program does not result in TESOL certification, it would be beneficial for faculty or staff members to provide guidance regarding the selection of either TESL Ontario or TESL Canada certification, as well as which certification program to pursue. This would equip student teachers with a clearer understanding of their professional development trajectories. Furthermore, Anan commented on the current structure of the program, suggesting an extension of its duration from 12 to 16 months. This would increase the likelihood for international
students to secure a three-year, as opposed to a one-year, post-graduation work permit in Canada. Such an extension of stay would facilitate employment prospects and the acquisition of Canadian work experience for international students like her. She then proceeded to share her ideas about how this additional semester could be utilized, with reasons given.

This additional semester might be used for practicum, for example. Right now, many of us in this program practically have no real-life teaching experience, unless we find part-time jobs or seek volunteer opportunities by ourselves. As far as I know, Canadian companies value local work experiences very much. This lack of teaching experience is not that helpful for us to get a job after graduation. I have submitted more than a hundred applications, but have only received a few invitations for job interviews. But if I have some practical experience, I might be able to adapt more effectively to the Canadian job market and be professionally competitive.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the experiences of four pre-service English language teachers in Ontario, Canada, detailing their struggles with anxiety and their resilience strategies. Key sources of anxiety included academic concerns, specifically in English reading, speaking, and writing, and challenges in time management and meeting deadlines. Participants also expressed unease regarding peer pressure and their post-graduation futures. Moreover, limited practicum opportunities within their programs and obstacles in securing external teaching roles exacerbated their anxiety. In terms of resilience, many emphasized the value of purposeful practice, academic support, and practical teaching exposure. Reflective practices, whether through personal journals or spurred by course materials, emerged as crucial. Collaborative efforts, such as peer
interactions, communications with instructors, and participation in research and wellness programs, provided additional layers of support. In navigating their careers, a structured approach to job applications, drawing insights from personal and peer experiences, and utilizing university career services proved beneficial. The next chapter will expand the focus on anxiety and resilience by including the experiences of in-service English language teachers in Ontario, Canada.
Chapter 5: Findings from In-Service English Language Teachers

This chapter details findings from reflective journals and semi-structured interviews of three in-service English language teachers in Ontario, Canada, namely Noel, Sara, and Maria. All three participants were engaged in English language teaching on a part-time or full-time basis.

The structure for presenting the findings mirrors that of the previous chapter, Chapter 4. Each section is dedicated to a specific participant, beginning with an overview of their demographic background followed by a summary table highlighting their experiences with language teacher anxiety and resilience. Detailed insights from the reflective journals and interviews are then provided.

5.1 Noel

Noel, a native Mandarin speaker who learned English as an additional language, was originally from China where she completed her master’s degree. After a considerable period of time, she finally discovered her true passion and aptitude for teaching the English language. After relocating to Canada, she enrolled in a two-year TESOL certificate program at a Southern Ontario university and successfully obtained her certificate. At the time of her participation in this research, she was juggling two teaching positions, with one as a part-time LINC teaching assistant in the Greater Toronto Area and another as a LINC supply teacher in a different city within the same region. Her reflective journals offer rich and comprehensive insights into the experiences of early career anxiety and resilience for an in-service English language teacher. A summary of these experiences can be found in Table 5.1.
### Table 5.1

*Noel’s Experiences of Language Teacher Anxiety and Resilience*

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<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Resilience</th>
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<td>(1) Care for students</td>
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<td>(2) Bonding with students</td>
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<td>(3) The need to teach on short notice</td>
<td>(3) Successful teaching experiences</td>
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<td>(4) Inability to maintain work-life balance (due to professional development commitments)</td>
<td>(4) Joining communities of practice</td>
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<td>(5) Unexpected governmental inspection</td>
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<td>(6) The use of technological knowledge (blended teaching)</td>
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<td>(7) The use of pedagogical knowledge (students’ mixed levels, disagreement with the teacher, low attendance)</td>
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<td>(8) The use of content knowledge (tensions that emerge from socio-political discussions)</td>
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<td>Interview</td>
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<td>(1) Having a stable career</td>
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<td>(3) Keeping reflective journals</td>
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<td>(4) Maintaining connections with (former/current) colleagues</td>
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<td>(5) Joining supportive communities of practice</td>
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5.1.1 Anxiety Experiences Shown in Reflective Journals

Noel experienced significant stress and uncertainty due to macro issues in the language teaching profession, especially the difficulty in securing a full-time English teaching position. Despite her specialized educational background in this field and previous English language teaching experiences, she found it extremely challenging to land a full-time teaching role in Ontario, Canada. Interestingly, she was trying to transition from part-time to a full-time role within the very institute where she was already employed. This struggle was evident in her Week 3 reflective journal, where she noted:

*I applied for a full-time teaching position at an institution for the third time. They posted the same position in August, October and November respectively and never gave me a chance for an interview. I can’t believe this is the same organization that I have taught an English Conversation Circle voluntarily for more than one year, although it’s not the same site as where I volunteered. They finally recommended me to a part-time job at another site. I did and I was interviewed, but never got a result. Why is it so hard to find a full-time job as an ESL teacher in the GTA?*

By the same token, she felt that limited career advancement opportunities in her current role seemed to have negatively influenced her sense of language teacher agency. In the fourth week’s journal entry, Noel mentioned:

*My supervisor told me that she wanted me to open another English Conversation Circle (ECC) for some literacy students for the coming January. I had no reason to reject it. However, I didn’t feel so comfortable when she emphasized that my position will still be a teaching assistant rather than a teacher. Although I have no doubt I love teaching, no*
matter who the students are and what their levels are, I would like to be treated as a teacher. Why can’t I? I’m teaching (or leading?) two ECCs and a pronunciation class!

These aforementioned examples were not the only ones that provoked Noel’s anxiety as a language teacher—there were additional institutional factors leading to her heavy pressure. Noel expressed that certain aspects of her job responsibilities compelled her to work unpaid hours. She indicated this by stating, “I didn’t even get paid for voluntarily teaching (or hosting?) the ECC at the institution for more than one year.” In addition to this, she was occasionally asked to prepare and deliver English lessons on very short notice. For instance, she might receive a call at 7:30 am and be expected to start teaching at 10:00 am on the same day. While she acknowledged that such last-minute scheduling is typical for substitute teachers, she was not accustomed to this work routine and found it rather unsettling.

Furthermore, she expressed difficulties in achieving a work-life balance due to her obligations towards continuing professional education. From the following excerpt, it is evident that she wished she could have more time to dedicate to her family life. To clarify, OIPS refers to Online Interview & Presentation Skills courses.

*With three online courses (OIPS, ECC High Beginner, ECC Literacy) to teach, one online course to study (Introduction to PBLA), some office jobs as a teaching assistant, I’m also a newly-registered Toastmasters member who has to prepare for my first public speech, I’m too busy to save enough time to be with my kids before their bedtime. Yes, they fell asleep again when I arrived home from my Toastmasters meeting tonight.*

External factors unrelated to her direct workplace responsibilities, such as unforeseen inspections by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), also heightened Noel’s anxiety. In her journal entry from Week 2, she detailed an instance where an IRCC agent unexpectedly
joined their English Conversation Circle ahead of the planned inspection date. She wrote, “My supervisor was told that an agent from IRCC would join our English Conversation Circle to inspect us next week. Unexpectedly, before we had a meeting to discuss how to plan a perfect lesson, the agent joined us today.” This sudden shift in the scenario greatly unnerved her, particularly during the initial minutes in the classroom. In reflecting on this experience in her journal, she noted that as a novice teacher, she “can be totally comfortable before students but easily get stuck when being inspected or interviewed (by those with greater power).”

In her teaching-focused environments, Noel also had anxiety feelings across three domains which were technological, pedagogical, and content-related. The technological challenges she encountered were particularly evident in her struggle to implement blended teaching, a theme that consistently surfaced in her journal entries over several weeks. Specifically, Noel needed to employ a Hybrid-Flexible (HyFlex) teaching approach during the COVID-19 pandemic. This required her to simultaneously manage both in-person and online students, a task that can be particularly challenging for educators with limited technological support or training. In the following excerpt, she detailed how technical difficulties resulted in substantial waste of time that could have otherwise been utilized for instruction.

The class in the afternoon was a HyFlex one, which I liked the least, because it was so inefficient to engage both students in the classroom and those in the Teams Meeting. It was better than the first time when I taught a HyFlex class which took me more than one hour to get all the screens and cameras ready. Still, this time I wasted almost 20 minutes on internet connection and screen share. I really hope I’ll be able to get all the equipment ready before the HyFlex class begins next time.
There were many other examples related to Noel’s struggles with technological use for HyFlex teaching. In week 11, she described persistent problems, specifically her inability to efficiently use the three screens—her computer, the whiteboard, and the TV—to effectively manage both online and in-person students as she intended. She elaborated on her challenging experience as follows.

*The tech issue that bothered me yesterday became my nightmare today. As I wanted to make the online students and in-person students have some interaction, I chose to show the Teams Meeting on the TV screen, which I wish I would’ve never done. It turned out to be a disaster when I put the online students into Breakout Rooms and divided the in-person students into pairs to have a speaking activity. It took us almost one hour to find out that the students couldn’t practice the ask-and-answer dialogue in the Breakout Rooms! At the same time, the in-person students finished their speaking task early while I was struggling with how to get the online students into the speaking practice that I planned! At a certain moment, I felt so frustrated that I just wanted to run out of the classroom to breathe some fresh air and never come back! It was Valentine’s Day today, but it was my toughest day ever since I started teaching, not only because I created so many issues in the hybrid class, but also because I drove to a different teaching location and taught for 5.5 hours during the day and had another 2.5 hours of online teaching (OIPS) after coming back home in the evening.*

Noel was not the only one grappling with technological hurdles. On another occasion, several of her students also struggled to access some e-learning materials, which in turn created added anxiety to her as an instructor. In her journal entry from Week 9, she recorded:
I tried the Breakout rooms in my literacy ECC class today, and it worked! Nevertheless, I gave myself another challenge, which was much bigger than the Breakout rooms issue. I saved a set of flashcards in Ellii (an online ESL learning platform), which included some verbs/gerunds and their pictures and pronunciations, and I really wanted the students to be able to access them. However, the only way that they can gain access to this electronic material was to join a classroom I created in Ellii, and then came the disaster. As most of the students were above the age of 60, they had various difficulties creating an account and joining the class. It took me more than 30 minutes after the dismissal time to guide them and only two of them had succeeded by then, which was devastating...

Noel also faced anxieties tied to non-technological pedagogical issues. She felt significant distress and even fear due to students’ low attendance, as this could potentially result in the cancellation of her classes. In her journal entry from Week 7, she noted:

*In terms of the OIPS course, the attendance number of the four days of this week was 5,3,2,2. Although the course went well and students who stayed engaged can definitely benefit from it, it’s possible that it will be canceled due to the low attendance rate.*

The subsequent excerpt revealed a further decline in student attendance the following week, which increased her early-career teacher anxiety.

*On the first day of our second week of OIPS, there was only one student who showed up, being late for almost 40 minutes and without the camera on for the whole time. This is discouraging and I pray my class tomorrow will have better attendance. I started to worry a lot, for example, am I a good enough public speaker to teach such a lesson? How should I prepare a backup plan for CLB 4- students? What can I do if there are too few students or if this course is canceled?*
In the following weeks, despite the slightly increased student enrollment in the course she was teaching, Noel continued to worry about potential class cancellation. Noel expressed her hope for regular student attendance and the successful completion of the course as initially planned.

*Three more students were added to our OIPS course, although the result was the same for the lesson today. There was still only one student, who came late and left early. The next day, after I received the “will-be-absent” email from the only student (of OIPS) that I had expected, I thought I would have an empty “classroom” today. Fortunately, two of the three new students showed up and everything went well. I sincerely hope this course will always have students and continue till the end as planned.*

Another source of teacher anxiety came from the need to handle students’ mixed proficiency levels of the target language. To elaborate on this, Noel referred to examples of how she taught English speaking. The following example was one of the earliest indications that she began to worry about the stark differences in her students’ language proficiency levels.

*I found out that one of the students in my online English Conversation Circle had a much higher level than the rest of the class. When most others were struggling to make conversations and hesitate to form sentences, this student, who might be 80 years old, was able to ask and answer questions fluently in English, and he even made Canadian friends. So here comes the challenge, how to adjust my lesson to suit students’ different levels and needs?*

Noel’s stress level intensified when she observed two married students, who had differing English proficiency levels, both eliciting negative responses in the classroom. One student was grappling with linguistic challenges, while the other was emotionally impatient due to the repetitive learning of phonetic items he had already mastered.
When she pronounced “stuffy” without the [s] sound after I emphasized on the [ssssssss] again and again, when she pronounced [t] instead of [f] in “cough”, when she pronounced “symptoms” differently each and every time, I was really frustrated. On the other hand, her fast-learning husband seemed impatient to learn the pronunciation of the same words that he thought he had already mastered.

In addition, Noel sometimes found it difficult to plan her lessons due to her inability to control the proficiency levels of prospective students. She recounted a co-teaching experience where she had to devise backup lesson plans, a task she found cognitively challenging.

I have been given a long term supply position about Virtual Interview & Presentation Skills, which is online and around 7 hours per week. I am lucky to have a veteran teacher to co-conduct the class and she’s very generous to share all the materials that she created for the course last year. However, the biggest challenge is that I need to prepare a backup plan in case the students’ English level is CLB 1/2 instead of CLB 4 as expected, which actually happened previously. I spent the whole last week worrying about how to make a backup plan for students whose levels are below CLB 4, and eventually no plan came out. Thankfully, this problem was solved automatically because the students’ levels turned out to be high enough to understand the course content and follow the instructions.

At times, Noel also had to manage disagreements with her students. In one especially emotional experience, she found herself on the verge of tears after her students questioned the worth of her teaching.

Finally comes this day, when I cannot hold my emotions and control my tears in front of my students. I cannot even count it as a challenge from a student because this student was always calm and respectful, although what he told me made me upset: what I taught

1 2 2
measurements conversion) was not worth two days of teaching because it was too simple for adults like them who used to be engineers or doctors. The issue was, I thought I understood his point and I explained it clearly that it was not about multiplication & division but about the concept of different measurements and I just wanted to finish what was not completed yesterday. Then, he insisted that I didn’t understand him and he wanted to explain more, which made it worse... I believe it was my problem because a teacher should be ready to deal with this kind of disagreement from students every day. I need to be strong enough to bear with this unpleasant moment and handle it with a smile gracefully, which I didn’t and I hope I will next time.

Tensions also arose among students during discussions on certain topics, such as socio-political matters. In her fourth week’s entry, Noel described how she managed the situation and expressed her pedagogical confusion.

There was a discussion between students from different parts of the world. A student from Africa pointed out that what’s happening in Ukraine attracts much more attention than many other wars in Africa, Afghanistan, or the Middle East, while refugees from these areas are far more difficult to get approval of their application to come to a country like Canada. Other two students who come from Ukraine didn’t deny it but told us about their own difficulties, which is to lose everything in Ukraine and have to adapt to a totally new country without any financial support. I understand their perspectives and their reason to disagree with each other, and I also appreciate their determination to adjust their needs and wants and plans to be construction workers. However, this is a topic that deviates from what I planned, which was about CPR, and I was worrying that we were heading in a direction that could cause more controversy. Therefore, I concluded the discussion and
expressed my appreciation for their way of discussing different opinions peacefully and respectfully. Politics seems to be a controversial topic to discuss, should I avoid this topic before it starts next time?

5.1.2 Anxiety Experiences Shown in the Interview

In the interview, Noel affirmed that securing a stable, preferably full-time, job was one of her primary sources of anxiety. She voiced her concerns by saying, “When can I get a stable job? Can I have a full-time job? When can I have a group of stable students that I can teach for one year or two years?”

Noel shared her frustrations about unpaid teaching as a teaching assistant despite performing duties equivalent to full-time teaching. She felt discomfort about not being compensated for her work. She was also hesitant to voice her concerns because she did gain teaching experience and a recommendation letter from her voluntary role, which can potentially help her find a second job. When asked about whether or not she would like to navigate this situation, Noel indicated her reluctance and attributed it to possibly cultural differences and a belief in the long-term benefits of her current work.

Noel: Yes, about unpaid teaching… My position is teaching assistant, but I’m doing lots of teaching, especially the ecc. It’s real teaching and I have to plan for the course and I have to instruct it to the students and grade homework. It’s very close to full-time teaching, but I’m not actually paid. So yeah, when I think of this, I feel uncomfortable. But on the other hand, when I think of my voluntary teaching like before that, I did have volunteered at an ecc course for almost one and a half year and I didn’t get paid at all, but I’ve gained a lot from it and I got a lot of experience of how to teach seniors English,
how to teach English online, how to teach students who have low language proficiency and low technology ability. And I also got my reference letter from that organization, which was very crucial for me to get another job. So when I think of what I can gain or what I can learn from this teaching, I think maybe I shouldn’t ask too much. It is just a pre-step for my next big step, so don’t care about it too much.

Aide: So you mean there wasn’t much you could do to change the situation by, for example, negotiating with your supervisor or administration.

Noel: I had thought of that, but I think, yeah, maybe this thing is temporary and I’ll get something better in the future and so yeah, don’t ask too much. And yeah, maybe it’s a Chinese way of thinking and I don’t know if a Canadian acts like me, but I just thought ‘don’t ask too much’ because what I did today can lead to many better things in the future.

Noel also elaborated on how she might handle student conflicts differently in the future by stopping students from the beginning. She recalled a TESOL course she had taken on socio-political issues and recognized the importance of avoiding sensitive topics, like religion and politics, in the classroom.

I’ll stop them when they get started. You know, this is a sensitive topic. We’d better not discuss it in the class because we have a lot of important content to learn. We are not going to get stuck here. That would be my strategy next time.
5.1.3 Resilience Experiences Shown in Reflective Journals

Some of the main protective factors that shaped Noel’s resilience against teacher anxiety were student-related. Heartfelt care about students helped Noel navigate some of the difficult moments as a teacher.

At one moment, I suddenly realized that I must be the one who changes the atmosphere of the class. If I can’t do it, no one else can. I can fill the class with smiles and laughter with my energy and positivity, even if it’s a boring reading & writing lesson, even if it’s so difficult to make my instructions understood, even if none of the students online liked to engage in the class, even if no student took my suggestion seriously to create a special getting-well-soon card based on their own culture. I believe that “If you smile at your students, your students will smile back at you.”

Bonding with students in the classroom significantly contributed to Noel’s development as a resilient teacher. The unexpected inspection by IRCC served as a prime example, which highlighted the crucial role played by Noel’s students in sustaining teaching effectiveness. As Noel stated, “I completely forgot about the presence of the inspector as the entire class proceeded smoothly, with all the students actively participating and feeling relaxed while practicing dialogues.” Additionally, Noel’s ability to communicate in some students’ first language helped establish a foundation of trust. In her Week 1 journal entry, she wrote, “During the break, I had a lengthy conversation with this couple to alleviate my frustration. I consider it a privilege to be able to converse with them in their first language and enjoy pleasant interactions from time to time.” Noel perceived this connection as highly significant by stating that “It is commonly believed that establishing a bond with students is challenging for supply
teachers. However, even during my last visit, which lasted only two days, I felt a bond with the students, albeit perhaps not as profound as in a longer-term class.”

Successful teaching experiences boosted Noel’s confidence as well. In the excerpt below, she mentioned a student who thanked her for her teaching.

*In my OIPS course today, one of the only two students (Yes, this attendance rate is normal right now) mentioned that he had fallen love with this course because it pushes him to understand himself deeper and better, which touched me and reminded me of the reason why I love teaching: the sense of being helpful to others.*

In another similar example, she wrote about how she implemented culturally responsive teaching successfully.

*After I figured out that the students, who happened to be all muslims, share the same important holiday Eid Mubarak, I came up with an idea of letting them create a card and write “Happy Eid Mubarak” to one of their classmates. They had fun writing the card, especially when they were asked to draw pictures with colored pens. Yes, adults are similar to children, who like singing and drawing!*

Wider socio-cultural support also mattered in fostering Noel’s teacher resilience. She introduced a type of meeting that gave her a sense of support and community.

*I joined a Toastmasters meeting introduced by the co-teacher from my new course. It’s the best speech-practice meeting I could ever imagine, and I see a future me who can speak in public confidently (in English and not confined to my teaching classrooms), which I never did and I’m heading to!*
Career advancement can also enhance teacher wellbeing. In her Week 12 journal entry, Noel expressed her happiness when notified that she might get a permanent teaching position at one of her existing teaching locations. This meant that her hard work became recognized and rewarded.

*I might be given a regular teaching job because both of the only two class teachers are resigning in March! Although I’ll surely miss them, I finally got my chance.*

*Coincidentally, I’m going to finish the PBLA training this week and get my certificate, which is required for starting this new position. I thanked my supervisor after she told me about this news, and she said that I earned it. Yes, I did my best to give one-to-one pronunciation instruction to the 80-year-old student, and I also tried so hard to make my two ECC courses interesting and engaging. I earned it and my effort is acknowledged!*

**5.1.4 Resilience Experiences Shown in the Interview**

In the interview, Noel seemed to be fully aware of the precarious aspects of language teaching in Ontario, Canada. She believed career stability is important to fostering teacher resilience.

*In order to pursue your dream as a teacher, you have to overcome the first years. Or overcome the instability of the first several years of teaching. As long as you overcome this, you can be more open and resilient and then you can get what you want. What I want is a stable job, like a full-time job.*

As demonstrated through her interview responses below, Noel also had a clear vision for her career. She apparently considered various possibilities, such as pursuing a master’s degree program and teaching at university-affiliated English language programs.
Na: I might be given and it’s very likely like 99% I might be given at least a contract job at the end of this month, because some of the teachers resigned at one of my workplaces and. I think it is a big step for me to get at least one stable class from Monday to Friday and I’m so glad that I can get this position and also I am considering applying for the applied linguistics masters program at York and because it’s a one year program, and if I want to apply for a job in a college like an EAP teaching job in a college, I need that applied linguistics master’s degree. And I’m also considering it. But yeah, one day when I was chatting with one of the teachers at TCCSA, he mentioned that yes, you have the chance to get a college job like in the college. But yeah, you have to analyze the pros and cons, like in a college environment or in the EAP environment for the college students. They’re young. They are vigorous. They’re interesting, but they need a fast pace and you need to prepare the course very very intensively.

Aide: Courses in colleges can be like for can be pressured by standardized testing.

Noel: Yes, yes, that’s pressured, very stressful, and can be very fast paced. Yes this is, this is a cons and You know in a LINC classroom. Yes, it’s not very highly paid, but it’s usually stable and you don’t need much time to prepare for the course and do the assessment after the course is over. Yes, there are pros and cons and I have to analyze it first and rethink it if this is really something I need if I don’t need a college job. I just use the LINC class and there are many options too. I’m not sure now that it’s one of my considerations.
Aide: And also, have you also considered teaching English in university affiliated language programs?

Noel: Yeah, yeah, maybe. But that also requires a master’s degree, apply linguistic master’s degree too. And maybe a PhD now, because a PhD is the least thing that I want to do now. I can get a master’s degree, but I’m not determined to get a PhD.

Moreover, Noel considered writing reflective journals a useful practice for self-reflection and self-improvement, especially in her initial phase of teaching career. She provided reasons as follows.

Ah yes. I think I’ve written something in the end. Maybe I will never write such a detailed teaching journal every day in the future. To rethink the journey that I’m doing, this teaching journal, I think it’s a very good way to reflect on myself. I have written about my ups and downs like the one that I was crying about. Sometimes when you have time to write it down and your thoughts will be deeper and clearer, and then sometimes when you’re too busy, it just gets through or gets over that stage and you never think of it and it’s maybe less healthy, yeah. When you write it down, it’s more, um, helpful for you to rethink yourself, including what I did wrong or what I could have done better and what I should do in the future. When you write it down, you think of those things. But when you don’t write it down and maybe you just pass it, forget it and you don’t get much improvement of yourself. So I think that self reflection is very important, especially in my first year of teaching. And I think I’m very thankful that I can be pushed to complete this teaching journal.
Staying connected with fellow TESOL training peers, to some extent, also helped Noel sustain her determination to pursue a career as an English language teacher. In the following dialogue, Noel mentioned the work experiences of some former classmates and specifically highlighted one individual who shared a similar passion and found joy in language teaching. This person’s positive experience served as a source of hope for Noel regarding future career prospects in the field of language teaching.

Noel: I know some of my classmates’ status now. I know two classmates who are as passionate as me, both of them got a teaching position and there are some other classes that I don’t know about, but I know some of them are just getting the TESOL certificate as a backup because they were learning other majors. Some of them are not sure if they want to be a teacher or not. But the one I know who’s determined to be a teacher and they are a teacher now, yeah, and one of my classmates works two jobs. Now she works as a teller in TD bank and also a teacher at a private language school. She mentioned that the bank gives her a much higher pay, but it’s so stressful there and so competitive.

Aide: Even more stressful than being a teacher?

Noel: Yeah, yeah, more stressful and it’s not interesting for her. I think what she likes is the teaching job, although she as a language teacher is paid much less, yes, but...

Aide: Teaching involves more communication with students?
Noel: Yeah, more communication with students, which can be always interesting. And they bring in their different stories from their different backgrounds, right? And I think with this passion, she will finally get a well-paid full-time teaching job one day. I believe so.

Joining social groups helped Noel become less anxious and more resilient as well, given her increased confidence at public speaking. When asked to explain more about this toastmasters club that she mentioned in the reflective journals, Noel introduced this organization’s nature and what people would normally do during gatherings.

It’s a Nonprofit platform and there are lots of clubs by self-organized clubs everywhere and you can find clubs near you and then you send a request to join the club as a guest. And then if you get the reply, you join it. If you like the club you can pay the membership fee and formally join the club and attend the club every week. Usually it’s a meeting every week and there are online clubs, in person clubs, and hybrid clubs like both online and in person clubs. My co-teacher brought me to a Hybrid club which was fantastic but their in-person meeting is located at a place that is so far from where I live. So I found I just searched the club near me and I sent the request and I got a reply and I entered and I joined an in person club, which is like ten minutes drive away from my home and I’ve been there several times at that club. The atmosphere is super friendly and people there are so motivated to improve themselves and it is also a very good way to make friends with the local community and especially local people, I mean, people who grew up in Canada. This club is very diverse and maybe half of them are native Canadians and half of them are immigrants. But anyways, all those people are willing to learn from each other and willing to share their experiences. And during the whole meeting, there is a
formal process where people take different roles every time. Like this time you’re the chair and I’m the timer who counts the time and someone will do the speech and someone will do the evaluation for their speeches. There’s also a role called toastmaster who can just say something pleasant and just inspire all the people here, like let’s make a toast and have a drink. Yes, this is a super super great experience and if you’re interested you can find a club near you and observe them as a guest and then join one I really, really liked.

Specifically, Noel valued its flexibility in location and delivery mode of the social meetings, which initially drew her to the club. Even more appealing was the opportunity for communication with both local Canadians and immigrants. This exposure enabled her to familiarize herself with public speaking, thus benefiting her expressive competence as an early-career in-service English language teacher.
5.2 Sara

Sara, a multilingual individual from Turkey, is highly proficient in Turkish and English languages, with beginner-level skills in French and Albanian. Influenced by family members who were teachers, Sara always had a desire to pursue a teaching career. Before moving to Canada, she had already gained some teaching experience. At the time of her involvement in this research, she was in her third year of teaching ESL to adults at a public school board in Ontario, Canada, primarily instructing a low-level adult ESL/LINC class. A summary of her language teacher anxiety and resilience experiences can be found in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Sara’s Experiences of Language Teacher Anxiety and Resilience

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<th>Resilience</th>
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<td>(1) Changing perspectives (taking it easy)</td>
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<td>(2) Teaching on short notice</td>
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<td>(3) Difficulty in finding a supply teacher and preparing backup lesson plans</td>
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<td>(6) Teacher relations</td>
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<td>(7) Procrastination and perfectionism</td>
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<td>Interview</td>
<td>(1) Students’ acceptance</td>
<td>(1) Changing perspectives</td>
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<td>(3) Income gaps compared with colleagues who work in another province</td>
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<td>(4) Bonding with students (trying to think in students’ perspectives,)</td>
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5.2.1 Anxiety Experiences Shown in Reflective Journals

Despite having prior teaching experience overseas, Sara expressed in her Week 1 journal entry that she occasionally found herself rushing through activities due to time constraints within language teaching classrooms in Ontario, Canada.

*I think I feel like I should teach everything but there’s not enough time! I find myself racing through the passing minutes and overlooking some signs from the students. I tend to stop at those moments to reflect on what has happened. I try to plan my day/week but always end up tweaking it and slightly diverting from my targeted outcome.*

In Week 3, Sara reflected on the negative impact of being asked to teach on short notice, although she did not provide specific examples of her affected language use or instructional mistakes in the given excerpt. To clarify, CLB refers to the Canadian Language Benchmarks; CLB 6 almost equates to a band score of 5.5 in IELTS.

*I did supply teaching on short notice today and I must say, I’ve realized that I’m able to use the language better and with fewer mistakes when I feel less pressured. This is a class I’ve come to know and it’s a stage-2 class (CLB 6) which could easily be daunting for me.*

On another occasion, Sara faced not only the pressure of finding a supply teacher to cover her leave but also the added responsibility of creating backup plans in case her students were absent.
Taking a day off & still having to spend a lot of time finding a supply and providing them with a lesson and all the other details. Not that easy. As the winter shows its relentless face more and more these days, I have fewer and fewer students in class which throws me off with my lesson plans. I have to have plans B, C, D in my back pocket.

Classroom management can sometimes be emotionally charged too for teachers like Sara. In her Week 12 journal entry, Sara reflected on a regretful experience where she managed student conflicts relatively poorly and she became so anxious that she lost composure and yelled at a student. She also summarized the lessons she learned from this instance.

The most unusual thing happened today. I have a new student in class. She is an elderly woman. Earlier this week, she had told me she gets sick sitting in front of the window where the heater is blowing and I let her sit on the other side. Today, she was going to that designated place and another student (a dominant character) asked her if she was going to sit there. (Because her friend was sitting there before and I gave that place to the new student) The new student took it too personally and was too offended. She got defensive and said a lot of things in her first language. I tried to calm her down but she got too defensive and was about to lose it. The other one, however, tried to apologize a few times and tried to say she didn’t mean anything bad. The others in class told me that the elderly lady was saying things like “I’m your mother’s age. Okay, you throw me there. I’m not worthy. We are equal.. etc.”

The thing is, it was obvious that it was a bad day for her and she misunderstood OR took it too seriously and resented the question. I want to evaluate my reaction though. First, I thought I’d be able to calm her down easily and take her to the designated seat. However,
she wouldn’t stop. After a lot of “That’s OK. There is a misunderstanding. You can sit anywhere you like. Nobody owns a seat.” kind of sentences, I saw that the student was just keeping on about it. At some point, I had to literally stop her, get her to listen to me, take her bag and put it on the seat she was supposed to be in. Then, I said everyone is equal, even if the other student made a mistake, she apologized several times. At some point, I yelled at her to stop and listen to me. I’m not proud of it but wow, I didn’t know what else to do. It was quieted down at the end but it could’ve been huge. My take from this incident: always be prepared for such conflicts in class and act more calmly AND take that student to office or somewhere else until everybody calms down. I’ll definitely share this with the support instructor on Monday.

Additionally, Sara expressed genuine concerns over whether she gained her students’ acceptance, or in her own words “whether the students will find me likable or not”. Despite her clear understanding of her teaching objectives, she remained worried, at least for a certain period of time, about how her students would react to her teaching. In her reflective journal writing, she questioned herself: “I think I go above and beyond to keep the students attentive - what if they’re bored?”

Sara’s teacher anxiety also occurred when (over)thinking about her relationships with colleagues, particularly in a co-teaching setting. In a Week 4 journal entry, she expressed her anxiety and fear regarding interactions with more experienced teachers.

Most of the instructors have a regular volunteer in their classes. A colleague suggested that I have one as well, since it’s a great idea for a low level class. My concern is: What if the volunteer teacher is a retired, seasoned teacher that might dominate the class? Me being a new teacher and a non-native English speaker gets me thinking if this idea will
ease my job or make it harder for me. One more person to fit into the activities/daily plans? The same goes with accepting an intern for a couple of weeks during the year.

Her perceived procrastination was another factor closely associated with her early-career teacher anxiety. The following excerpt presents a moment when she grappled with complex thoughts before ultimately succumbing to procrastination.

*I should book an appointment with the PBLA (Portfolio Based Language Assessment) lead about my questions and concerns but I tend to delay it. She is a very nice/understanding person but to be honest, I still hesitate. Why? I might sound unprofessional/insufficient. I know this is the point when you’re asking for help but well.. I need to prepare all my questions well-structured. I must talk about “a non-native English teacher” aspect of things but it might take pages. Maybe another day.*

Relatedly, Sara referred to herself as a perfectionist and attributed her anxiety to her perfectionistic tendencies especially when preparing teaching materials. As evident from the provided excerpt, she exerted significant effort in adapting pre-packaged materials to effectively cater to her students’ needs.

*As ESL/LINC instructors in Ottawa, we do not follow a certain curriculum/book. We have to create our own lessons/modules OR there are some ready-made level appropriate modules we can use. This week, I’ve started to use a ready-made module for exactly the level I’m teaching. (CLB 1L/2L) I’ve come to realize that I’ve been pushing myself too hard to be able to “adapt” the material to my students' level.*
5.2.2 Anxiety Experiences Shown in the interview

During the interview, when prompted to delve into her experiences of anxiety documented in reflective journals, Sara elaborated on her pursuit of her students’ acceptance. She expressed a sense of inadequacy as a non-native English speaker when teaching higher-level classes.

Another thing is being a non native speaker gives you a big anxiety from time to time, especially with higher level classes. And since they’re adults, some of them could be, you know, really big people, where they come from and you know, they are mature human beings and you don’t know what you’re going to be faced that day, so this actually was one of my biggest concerns first. So I tried really hard to make them feel I am enough. In this esl teaching program, I am one of the youngest teachers and. As we go to the higher level classes, well, the age. Well, no, I cannot really generalize it, but. The student age is not very young, right? So some of them are retired, some of them are here for some. I don’t know. For some professions. Or they just immigrated after they have done everything in their country. So it is really difficult. Like a really complicated audience you have. So that’s why I was seeking acceptance, for sure.

Sara also conveyed her anxiety regarding the additional workload and unpaid hours she experienced as a language teacher both in Ontario, Canada, and abroad. The provided excerpt illustrates her perception that such circumstances are considered normal for teachers, leaving her feeling powerless to alter the status quo.

As a part time teacher I am getting paid for three hours a day. But the time that I put in this job is almost double because you have to prepare and after that you have to reflect. You have to check student work, you have to talk to them because these are newcomers
and for some of them English is the least of their concerns while they are trying to survive here in any sense, so you have to talk to them. Some of them have really bad days sometimes. And so actually, yes, we are dealing with human beings here and they have lots of issues. So definitely I think we double the time that we’re paid for actually. I am not complaining very much because this is the essence of this job. It’s the essence of this job. I knew this before when I was teaching overseas, well, it was more or less the same.

Interestingly, Sarah then moved on to share her observation of her colleagues’ earnings in the province of British Columbia, Canada, in comparison to those in Ontario, with differences highlighted in the next excerpt.

Well, the authorities also consider you to be working within those three hours of class, but they should, I think, consider the fact that if you are a teacher, you always have a before and after time. So this is kind of weird to me because I think this is kind of specific to this province because some of my colleagues worked in different provinces and they told me that “We were more motivated by the payment because we got three hours of class, but we were getting paid for maybe four hours a day.” I think it was in BC, I guess. So, well, it definitely will give a greater motivation to the teacher in my opinion. So these unpaid hours can cause anxiety as well. Whatever you work for it and however experience you get, you will always have to work more than you are paid. So yes, it is going to be an issue for some time I think.

5.2.3 Resilience Experiences Shown in Reflective Journals

Adopting the strategy of shifting perspectives proved to be a beneficial approach for Sara in her self-care routine as an in-service English language teacher. In her Week 1 journal entry,
where she acknowledged her habit of rushing in the classroom, Sara expressed her determination to alter self-expectations. She noted, “This year, I’m trying to ‘take it easy’ and not beat myself up too hard, as my students generally seem to be happy with the class.” This new outlook allowed her to cultivate a sense of inner peace, thus reducing anxiety in her daily teaching tasks.

Celebrating teaching-relevant accomplishments was another key measure that assisted Sara in strengthening her confidence and self-efficacy. This, in turn, facilitated her long-term development as a language education professional. An excerpt from her Week 2 journal exemplified her acknowledgement of personal success after she took the initiative to assist a supply teacher in effectively preparing a lesson.

I had a doctor’s appointment, so I had to find a supply teacher and provide her with a lesson and all the necessary info which includes LOTs of details. After all, I did a really good job navigating the process: asking the support instructor for help with the door key / projector, making copies of the lesson, giving the classroom routine details and the teacher didn’t have any issues - it was smooth. Maybe it was her capability, but I wanted to give myself a pat on the back: cause she is a lot older than me and has lots of different teaching experience. Still, I was in charge and I’m proud of myself!

For Sara, it was vital to be able to teach in a non-judgemental environment where instructional freedom was ensured. As shown in her Week 3 reflections, this atmosphere was instrumental in helping her maintain emotional safety and manage challenges when instructing a high-level class.

I felt at ease with them as I taught this class before and considering I didn’t have much time to prepare to teach this class, it was clear that both the students and I were happy and satisfied at the end. Why? Although this was a high level class with a good possibility
of challenges for me, I wasn’t observed by anyone or I wasn’t judged (at least this was how I felt).  

The role of Sara’s professional teaching community was also significant, as it facilitated the celebration of positive personal events. An excerpt from her Week 10 reflective journal illustrated this point by describing a gathering of colleagues that sparked a range of positive emotions in her, including but not limited to surprise, happiness, and gratitude.

*The sweetest thing happened today. I took my citizenship oath on Dec 31, and asked for permission as my PM class conflicted with the ceremony time. To my surprise; my program supervisor (learning about it only because of my permission request, teamed up with my colleagues and) came to school today with her hands full with a gorgeous flower bouquet, a cake and coffee. Everyone at school, all my colleagues gathered in the staff room; hugged me and cheered for me. The office assistant sent a hand-made, very special pendant with maple leaves. I can’t describe how ecstatically surprised I felt. I couldn’t believe how warmly they celebrated with me. We even took a group picture! I felt so unified, seen, and grateful. They even helped me take the leftovers to my class and we celebrated there with my students for the second time. I’ll treasure this day forever.*

Similarly, during challenging times, such as when Sara was deeply affected by news of natural disasters impacting her home country, her colleagues and students provided crucial emotional support. This unity and support within her community were evident in her Week 11 journal entry, where she highlighted how the collective support helped her navigate through these difficulties.

*On February 6, two huge earthquakes struck my home country, Turkey, and I wasn’t myself for the whole week. Although my family and friends are safe, millions of people are not. However, kindness shown during these difficult times is worth sharing. A lot of*
colleagues and students asked me how my family was and how sorry they were. I’m grateful for this kindness. However, I had to go on survival mode and didn’t plan much. Just followed some ready made materials. This is life, and I understand that you have to find ways or develop a mechanism to keep going even on the lowest level of energy.

This quote powerfully underscores how Sara persevered in her professional role, even when operating on minimal emotional reserves. Sara’s resilience was not only sustained by the emotional support she received from colleagues and students but also by her self-enacted “survival mode”. This coping mechanism was particularly vital in confronting the profound grief and shock stemming from tragic natural disasters.

5.2.4 Resilience Experiences Shown in the Interview

During the interview, Sara chose to elaborate more on her changing perspective on perfectionism. As presented in the excerpt below, she shared how she, with the support of her supervisor, came to realize the importance of prioritizing self-care, setting work-life boundaries, and not being overly self-critical.

I think my perspective is changing in this sense because... I don’t know if I am one of those people who call themselves perfectionists or not. But if I am to do something, I want to do it as I was told and word by word. It could be too tiring, draining sometimes. So I think I’ve realized it because, you know, with time and with more and more experience, you get to change your perspective, of course, inevitably. There was a change in my perspective in terms of trying my best, but leaving it at that... ... In the morning I was going very early to class and in one of our staff meetings, our supervisor, well, she is the best really. She really helps. So she told us that “Okay, so if you really need time for
marking papers and stuff, whatever, just dismiss the class half an hour early. That’s fine. You’re working as a part-time teacher so that’s okay. Take care of yourself.” You know, it was really supportive and she said “okay it’s not a big deal. Do your best, but don’t beat yourself up too much on this.” So I think after that point, slowly, yes, it doesn’t mean that I’m just filling up my time and then stop when the clock turns twelve, whatever. I don’t do that. But if it is my out-of-office hours, for example, sometimes students email me for things that I need to look at for the exams, I tended to reply to everything immediately, but I’m not doing this anymore. I think I am also starting to respect myself because this is the change of perspective I could say, like “Do your best. Try to do quality work, but that’s it. Don’t push too hard”.

Additionally, Sara’s observation of other colleagues who faced similar challenges and actively sought help, more or less, enabled her to manage feelings of anxiety and inadequacy. Upon deep reflections, she realized that her own procrastination was not the main issue but rather a by-product of her anxious or precarious feelings. By acknowledging this, she was able to understand the root causes and work towards addressing it.

I was procrastinating a lot in the beginning, but even a few months, I think, made a difference. Right now it has been almost 2.5 to 3 years, so I see more and more examples of other teachers in the meetings who also have questions. They also don’t know. They are also seeking help. And they don’t just wait for the help to come to themselves, but they are taking an initiative and they ask, sometimes people laugh. It is not in a bad way, of course, but they are taking it easy. And I think the procrastination of mine was not a problem itself, but it was a result of my, let’s say, maybe anxiety, maybe that sense of being. Well, I don’t want to say, yeah, I want to try to choose my words carefully here. So
that sense of being inadequate... Because of that, I guess I was tending to procrastinate more so.

Reaching out to others when necessary was also crucial to resilience building. Sara acknowledged that feelings of anxiety or burnout can occur in any profession. She highlighted that she was confident in navigating these difficult feelings because she can openly discuss these issues with her colleagues and find support from her program supervisor.

Well, I think in every profession there are these possibilities, of course. But this doesn’t lead me to feel insecure, actually, because yeah, I share with my colleagues if, you know, there are such things that you’re about to burn out or, you know, like. Well, it is more or less people, those teachers feel the same way and you can see from their comments when we talk in the staff room. So, yeah, I accept that from time to time definitely. It makes you feel like you’ve had enough or you can’t go on anymore. Yes, of course, difficult days definitely come, but I know that there is always help out there and our program supervisor she’s very supportive. She’s always there for us. We can feel it. So, no, I would say no, I think. It would be unfair if I say yes.

Sara also found it rewarding to bond with students, which contributed to her success and resilience as a language teacher. She felt that it was important for her to think in her students’ perspectives to better understand their needs and concerns. In doing so, she gained trust from her students, as shown in the following example where she was teaching a literacy class for culturally diverse students who have never been to school or learned the English alphabet.

This year I am teaching a literacy class which means a bunch of people from different countries who have never been to school, who have never learned the English alphabet,
who have never acted on their own. So it definitely creates a different bond between the teacher and the students. So it is rewarding.

After I think like a year or so, I think I am doing better right now because, um, I kind of learned to look from the students’ perspective because I was just looking from my perspective like, okay, am I looking too young to them? Am I going to look like this? Maybe too new to the country or will my teaching satisfy them or such? I think now I have been trying to look from their perspective because whatever happens I am the designated teacher to teach them and they kind of trust you. There can be different people with different intentions but no, not many actually. And they trust you. You just have to sound and you just have to seem professional. This is what I am. Even if I panic sometimes I am learning to take it easy and not panic too much. So I think it was kind of in an alarm mode at the beginning, this student acceptance thing. But now I think I am getting really better at this.

In the next excerpt, Sara reiterated the importance of building trust and bonding with students. She pointed out that sharing her own vulnerabilities and anxieties with students helped create a sincere connection and elicit positive responses from students, which proved to be an effective way for her to cope with teacher anxiety.

_I think I’ve explored that. Trusting your students and just sharing your vulnerability if you feel vulnerable or anxious. Well, sometimes your mind just goes blank. It happens to human beings. But I think I’ve come to understand that you have to share this with your students and when they feel the sincerity they respond very well, they respond positively. So it kind of calms you down... For example, now I am telling them if I feel something different that happens in class, like difficult to manage. I immediately share this with_
them and they always have something to say, like a supportive thing possibly. So yeah, the relationship between you and your students and you and your coworkers. I think these are my ideal ways of managing my stress and anxiety.

According to Sara’s interview responses, professional development activities, especially the ones related to teacher wellbeing, can also make a difference to her resilience building. She considered these encountered activities generally beneficial and frequent enough.

Every month, I’m not sure if it is every month or every two months, we have a professional development day for sure. We don’t teach that day and we just have meetings and it is actually wonderful because they pair us up with the, you know, teachers teaching the similar levels. We kind of update each other on how we’re doing and also there is always an extra presentation to the general staff. For example, the latest one was about taking care of yourself. It was wonderful. Everybody loved it. They even shared resources with us, like how to seek help if you feel burned out. It was, yes, it was much needed, I think, and these professional development days, I really benefit from them. So yes, I think they were once a month or once in every two months, I’m not sure. But yes, they are kind of often enough.

When asked if she can share more details about this well being-focused session and its perceived usefulness, Sara moved on to provide the following responses. She highlighted a useful approach of taking a moment to say ‘stop’ and regaining strength before continuing in the face of socio-emotional adversity.

Sara: Yes, on the most recent professional development day, the general topic they presented to everyone in our program was teacher wellbeing. I think a psychotherapist from somewhere I don’t remember right now, but he came to give a presentation about it
and he even shared the resources with us, you know, the links to the websites and where we can find them for us and for our students. So it was really helpful, first of all, because it was targeted to us. I mean, that presentation was not for the general audience. It was teacher-oriented. And that’s why it was really helpful. For example, he gave us some activities to feel better. If you feel it’s too much, if you feel drained, sometimes you cannot go on anymore. So he gave us some tips and leads on this as well. It was the first time that I have seen such a thing and it was valuable. I think I have benefited from that a lot. I keep it on my computer and yeah, with higher level classes I can share with them as well. So yeah, it was really beneficial, definitely.

Aide: Would you be able to specify activities he recommended? Maybe like Yoga or meditation?

Sara: Yeah, with breathing techniques, let’s say, like try to have a blank mind and take a deep breath and, um, kind of disconnect yourself from that place that is not poisonous to you because it becomes poisonous sometimes. You try to disconnect and then when you feel better, you come back and you manage better. So yes, I don’t specifically remember, but there were also some examples like little stories, I think some examples. So the thing is, I think you just have to say ‘stop’ to yourself and maybe kind of get some extra strength in your body and then you can move on.

When invited to reflect on other kinds of external supports or resources for her professional growth, Sara discussed additional benefits of PD days and the necessity of on-site teaching in
post-pandemic times. It was highlighted that being able to share experiences, positive or negative, with others can provide valuable support and reassurance.

Well, okay, first of all, these days that we have mentioned on PD days, professional development days, consist of a few parts. For example, there’s a technology part to it, there is a part of sharing your experiences to it, and there’s another general topic that is chosen for that week specifically. So, yes, in every part of that PD day, I think they are really big external supports to me.

Yes, in post pandemic times, definitely. During the pandemic, we were alone, we were isolated, we were teaching from home in front of the computer. We didn’t know what everybody else was doing. So I think the best support right now is to be in school with others sharing whatever you have, positive or negative and. Like, it really helps you. And it really supports you because you have a chance to see that almost everyone has been there and. Yeah, I feel like it’s a great support just to be present personally with other people and other students and other resources changes.

When asked about her gains from research participation, Sara brought up some of the benefits of doing reflective journals, especially in terms of her mindfulness of what had happened, what was happening, and what would happen in her teaching environments. In other words, keeping a journal provided a sense of awareness and allowed her to capture significant events or thoughts..

Sara: First of all, it really made me aware of what I am doing and how I’m progressing, or if I am progressing, or if I’m changing my perspective, if I am developing some sense of different ideas along the way, or if I am getting any better. To be honest, I didn’t write
daily, but every day when I go to school it was in my mind that “okay, today I’m looking for some info”.

Aide: Like intentionally?

Sara: Definitely. So I was aware, like I wasn’t lost in what I was doing. Um, something happens, for example, and I think “okay, this is something I’m going to put in my journal”. So yeah, it gave me a sense of awareness for sure. And another thing is it was for a few months—two or three months maybe, I think it was not for a short time. It kind of showed me my progress. For example, I was reading from the beginning myself and thought “oh, poor me, I was so anxious. I was just seeking help there”. But now I see that yeah, there is an improvement there so it made me aware for sure.

Furthermore, as described in the excerpt below, Sara indicated that her current immigration status in Canada has enriched her perspective, potentially facilitating her career advancement by uncovering new opportunities. This sentiment resonates with feedback from other participants, particularly pre-service EAL teachers such as Alyssa, Miley, and Anan who planned to gain permanent residency in Canada.

Well, I think now first of all, it’s a big relief. And I think maybe at some point in the future it is going to lead me to seek for different branches of teaching, I think. So with citizenship, yes, I think I will be. For example, in Ontario, you need to be a member of OCT or Ontario College of Teachers to teach at the elementary, secondary, and high school levels. I don’t have that. For example, this is one of my first plans. I think it seeks citizenship, I’m not sure, but this could be one of the things you need, so it will definitely
give me a broader perspective to think about my future. It’s not necessarily a big change of career. But I can branch out, I think.
5.3 Maria

Originally from Romania and with prior experience teaching mathematics and physics, Maria speaks Hungarian as her first language and Romanian as her second. She also speaks English fluently, understands a bit of Spanish and Arabic, but her proficiency in French is limited. Among all the research participants in this study, Maria’s career trajectory in Canada was the most complicated.

She migrated to Canada many years ago, initially enrolling in an ESL program before pursuing a college program in early childhood education. However, her post-graduation work experience as an early childhood educator was notably precarious. She faced instability in her work routines and salary, as she was on a supply list for an extended period of time, always awaiting calls from potential employers. In an effort to be more financially independent, she enrolled in an English as a Second Language teacher preparation course in Canada.

Later, she discovered that in order to be certified to teach in Ontario, she needed to have a bachelor’s degree earned within the province. As a result, she undertook additional courses to obtain her bachelor’s degree in Ontario. Finally, she became qualified to work as a LINC teacher instructing adult immigrants in Southern Ontario. Additionally, she taught at an after-school program for students in Grades 2 to 9. A summary of Maria’s experiences with anxiety and resilience can be found in Table 5.3.
Table 5.3

Maria’s Experiences of Language Teacher Anxiety and Resilience

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<th>Data Source</th>
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<td>(1) Students’ positive reactions</td>
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<td>(2) Heavy teaching workload</td>
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<td>Interview</td>
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5.3.1 Anxiety Experiences Shown in Reflective Journals

Maria considered her accent to be one of the biggest sources of her anxiety at the beginning of her teaching career. She wrote about a previous incident in her Week 1 journal as follows. To clarify, a level-4 in CLB means high beginning proficiency level, almost equating to a band-4.0 in IELTS.

*I was teaching level 4 and one of my students approached my manager telling her that she does not want to have a teacher who has an accent. This was a shock to me. I remember how upset I was about my accent at the beginning of my career. I kept researching how to get rid of it until I learned in one of my university classes that If you learn a new language after your teenage years, you will have an accent.*
Maria also experienced considerable anxiety due to an extensive amount of teaching assignments. The requirement to conduct blended learning presented continuous challenges. In one of her earliest journal entries, she commented,

*We returned to in-person teaching in April of 2022 (three days in class and two days online), but the anxiety persisted. The pressure comes from maintaining the blog for online students, hosting Messenger classes on online days, preparing material for in-person students, and correcting homework for online students.*

This demanding situation remained difficult to manage, even after several months. She admitted,

*I’ve never felt so overwhelmed. We resumed classes on January 9, 2023. While most of my students (20 in the morning and 20 in the afternoon) attend classes in person, I still need to keep my blog updated in case someone misses a class. We continue to have online classes on Mondays and Thursdays.*

She wrote about a sense of helplessness when dealing with technological aspects of teaching in Week 8 journal entry. More specifically, the following excerpt showed how technical issues affected the teacher and students alike.

*Some things that make online learning difficult sometimes are weak internet connections, students not having proper equipment, lack of technical knowledge, etc. It is hard to teach when the wifi is lagging or voices echo. For the older students it is hard to work on their phones and even to participate in the online classes. This struggle also affects the teachers. Sometimes I feel powerless... when I don’t know how to help them. The older people can give up easily if they do not feel strong support.*
5.3.2 Anxiety Experiences Shown in the interview

In the interview, Maria reflected on her previously documented anxiety about online teaching during the pandemic. Beyond struggling with unfamiliar technologies, her aspiration to teach effectively heightened her anxiety. Additionally, she faced pressure from administration when trying to select the most suitable instruction platform for her students.

*The anxiety didn’t come for me not knowing what to do, the anxiety came from wanting to do the best. You know? I’m a perfectionist, so I hate it when I don’t do something well. So the anxiety came from that one. There were so many things I wanted to do. The first thing was the Messenger, and then correcting the homework on messenger. I figured it out. I sent it out to my students. I explained how to go through everything. But then. It was very hard to correct their stuff. And I’m lucky because I had an iPad because it’s easier to just touch it and put the check marks and write on it than on the phone and the laptop. Again, I copied their homework and I put it in there and then I had to connect with the mouse.*

*That’s not easy stuff. So the main anxiety actually was that. I worked about eight to ten hours a day just to figure out everything at the beginning. Not that I wanted. But then? It was just too much to figure out because they wanted us to go on Microsoft Teams. So I spent hours and hours because that’s what our boss wanted to do, to do it on Teams. So then I was watching YouTube and everything about how to do it and I figured it out. But I was anxious because I wanted to perform well and because my boss said, oh you figured it out. I tried to figure it out. I did figure it out. But it didn’t work for the students because the low level students, most of them, needed an email address. So then I told them no, this won’t work. So then we abandoned it and then. They wanted different things and then finally I simmered it down to the things that worked for me for the lower levels. I told*
other teachers, so most of the teachers for the lower levels stuck with Messenger and Facebook because of me.

Immediately after providing this interview response, Maria moved on to discuss the overwhelming workload she had been grappling with since April 2022, where her responsibilities included both completing blogs for online students and teaching in-person students simultaneously. She further reflected and commented on the significant amount of time she had invested in learning virtual pedagogical methods independently during earlier stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We came back last year in April. And then the problem was that we had the blog, one of the colleagues who was a resource teacher, she already had every classroom blog already. So we had to take over that one, we had to learn that one, that was another anxiety that added to it, because we had to know how to do the blogs. You had to learn it, but she told us and then when we came back to blended teaching, the problem was we had the same amount of hours, but now you had to prepare for class for those three days and then you had the two Monday and Friday that I still had to do the blog. Because if they missed the class or if something happened, or we had a couple online students, they had to have that too. So that was lots of pressure on us coming back and keeping both online and in class at the same hours. So that’s why I said I was overwhelmed.

But at the beginning of this whole COVID situation, I’m telling you I was on the computer eight to ten hours just to find out what works and to learn about everything. And then finally the messenger came up with the messenger room. That was a very good thing for me. Now I can have like up to 50 students online and we have classes together. That made things easier.
When asked whether or not she received adequate support or resources provided by her school in the pandemic, Maria expressed her disappointment at management and her own ways to gain support from another colleague, as shown in the excerpt below.

No, no. It was a huge chaos. We had no technical support, not at all. I was never a big tech person, but now I learned so much during those two years and everybody’s coming to me. But we had no technical support, not much, nothing. That was really not easy. And then sometimes we had like, oh, let’s share what everybody does. And then they did share some of the links they were using, but not too much. I was lucky that I had one colleague, that we were online every single day. So if I knew something, I shared it. If she figured something out, she shared it with me. But that support, like from the organization, they just said, “oh, we support you, we support you”, but it was basically nothing. “Do whatever you want, it’s fine.” And I could just not do whatever I wanted. I had to do something that worked.

Relatedly, in the following dialogue, Maria mentioned insufficient wellbeing services for teachers like her. She elaborated on this point by referring to an instance where she felt the lack of care from management when she needed a break the most, which explained why it was challenging for her to open up about her concerns and anxiety to the management.

Aide: Have you ever participated in any kind of teacher well-being or wellness services within or outside your institution?

Maria: I think we did. After we went back to in-person teaching, we had some mental health workshops. Yes, we did, but I can’t recall the name of it. Yes, we did, like the
organization had a couple of times... They did have help like that. They had a guest speaker. Yes.

Aide: Do you think that’s enough? Or can they be improved?

Maria: You know what? It is one thing to have a workshop and discuss everything like “Oh, we are open to everybody’s everything” But then there is another thing. When that workshop goes away, you get your paperwork, whatever, and then you’re still afraid to approach management because you never know... It’s helpful in getting the information. But if you still don’t feel like that kind of carrying around from the management, then was it helpful? Like you did get information. I remember they taught us how to calm ourselves and how to deal with certain things. Now that I think about what was going on, we always had that probably once a year. We have such a thing, but. But if the management doesn’t really open up. They said this one day. “Oh, you can open up and you can tell me whatever you want and we’ll support you”. But then other times you get in trouble for the same thing then I don’t know. I just can’t open up. Like if you say something... One day I wanted to go on vacation and I needed a couple of days. Manager said, “Why don’t you go in the summer?” And I said: “I needed a couple of days. Everything was not left behind” Like I had my lesson plan, everything for the supply. And he said “you have to go when we are off”. But I don’t need a mental break in the summer. I need a mental break in December when I feel exhausted, I feel depressed because of the weather. I just want to go back. And “no”. So I think that Okay, you give me this workshop once a year, twice a year, and we know how to deal with it and everybody’s so
nice, but when it’s gone, the whole thing is gone. And everybody is scared to say anything like. That’s not normal. So that’s why I said the only way to deal with my anxiety is just doing what I have to do, teach and don’t worry about other things because then I will be very anxious

In another part of the interview, Maria also mentioned some financial anxieties in her workplace, such as the unstable source of income throughout the year and lack of pension, similar to other research participants’ articulations.

*Unfortunately, we don’t teach for twelve months. We won’t work twelve months. We are off in the summer. So basically we work only eight months and under four months we have to be on employment insurance. It sucks, but other than that, I just love my job. I love my students. The other thing that I feel is that we don’t have a pension. And then you have basically no pension from work, just the CPP, which is very little. So that’s about it.*

5.3.3 Resilience Experiences Shown in Reflective Journals

In her Week 1 journal entry, as depicted in the excerpt below, the positive reactions from her students significantly helped alleviate Maria’s anxiety about her accent.

*Later on I realized that having my “accent” actually was a ‘bonus.’ Amazingly many of my students told me that they understand me better than native speakers (for some reason). These students were mostly low level students (Literacy- Level 3).*

Support from her supervisor also played a vital role in enabling her to teach in a less anxious manner. When faced with negative feedback about her accent, Maria sought assistance from her manager. Interestingly, following their conversation with the client, she reported, “*after the*
manager talked to the client, everything turned out fine. The client ended up liking me so much that she was the one to volunteer to clean the board all the time.”

Bonding with students appeared to be another resilience-enhancing experience for Maria. As specified in an excerpt from her Week 3 reflective journal, Maria found it beneficial to share her own past learning and emotional experiences with her students.

Being an ESL student a long time ago actually creates a special bond with my adult students. I understand their frustrations and difficulty better because I experienced many of those. The interesting fact is that I attended the same language school as I’ve been working at. One of the teachers at that time became my colleague. :) I can share my stories with my students when they feel sad and encourage them. I was just telling them today that after I came to Canada, I cried for six months for my grandmother. Many of them agreed and said that they felt the same at the beginning.

5.3.4 Resilience Experiences Shown in the Interview

Bonding with students was one of the most significant experiences that fostered resilience for Maria and her students. By opening up about her own experiences of feeling low and experiencing separation from her family, Maria was able to offer hope and understanding to her students. She acknowledged her students’ feelings and emphasized that they were not alone in their struggles. Drawing from her own learning experiences, Maria shared practical advice on a range of topics, such as managing finances and navigating banking systems. To establish a trustworthy and supportive relationship, she made the effort to learn a few words in her students’ languages. Overall, as shown in the following excerpt, her willingness to share and support her students forged a meaningful bond between them:
Yes. Yes, I always do. Sometimes students, you know, maybe back home, a few of them had a college or university degree or some of them basically finished high school. But they are a little bit higher, educationally, like others. I teach level two right now. So they are kind of bummed out that they cannot speak English. They don’t get it at first, especially at the beginning and I always tell them, “listen, look at me. I came a long way. I was a student here and look, I’m a teacher now.” And then I keep telling them, and sometimes they are down. Like just sharing what I went through, showing them that I succeeded and I’m doing fine now. I think it gives them hope, like in a way that, “oh, maybe I can succeed. Maybe I can do it, too”. I saw depressed students and I said: “you know what, don’t worry about it. This will get better. You have to get out, come to school and then it will be easier than staying home”. I keep telling them that for six months I cried, I cried for my grandma. Nothing else. Like, it’s not easy. So once they see that you understand them, you validate their feelings, they feel like “oh, it’s not only me who’s feeling like this”. I said I was depressed, like for six months. I will never forget that I was doing the dishes and I cried like I thought that my heart would break. And then they said “yes teacher. Yeah, me too. My family!” And I said, “Listen, I have no family here. I left everybody behind. I thought that I would never see my grandmother again”. And then I keep telling them, “you know what, even with the money, I have to write down everything. I still have the book”. I said “look, I still have this notebook that if something was more than a Dollar, I wouldn’t buy it. We went to food basics and they said yeah teacher. By just sharing what I went through, they realized that, okay, if she’s fine, I will be fine. And then all the things that I figured out on my own, I keep telling them about banking, what’s the best way. Sadly, when I came to Canada, I didn’t have many people who really
wanted to share these things. Like it’s almost like they want you to go through the hard way. Like, oh, if I did it, why not you? But then I figured then whatever that worked for me, I don’t mind sharing. I like to help people also. I think they feel that, they come to school, and they tell me things like that. They know that I won’t go and gossip about it, but I will help if I can. So we have this really trustworthy relationship. And I saw the accent too. I think I always learned a couple words in their languages and then that makes them so happy seeing that I say this or that in Arabic, you know, especially the new students when they come they say in Arabic, thank you or congratulations or whatever. And then “oh teacher, you speak Arabic!” I said “no, I just know a couple of words.” But just showing that you are willing to make that relationship with them, the bond that makes a huge difference.

Maria also mentioned a trusted colleague whose presence and interactions made her feel a sense of community and validation. As presented in the excerpt below, their conversation helped her realize that she was not alone and she found agreement on various matters.

I have support from colleagues. Yes, I already told you that I had this colleague. And she’s European, she has the same kind of mentality like I do. So sometimes you were thinking, oh. Is it only us or? I asked her “Do you think it is normal that they don’t help us?” And because I felt like we were not helped at the beginning, like just sending you an email, oh we support you, but everybody could do whatever if there was no clear guidance, nothing. Who does what, figure it out and do it. And then I asked her, what do you think? So at least I felt that I’m not the only one who’s thinking that way, and we agreed on many, many things, and that was a really helpful thing to do. Well, she was the one who actually saw what I’m doing online, how many things I’m doing online.
Equally important, she participated in professional development activities as a volunteer. In the next excerpt, she mentioned that the presence of supportive individuals who were willing to share their experiences was seen as highly helpful.

Actually, I’m volunteering now for TESL Ontario dialogue, so. Just taking part in some of these workshops and seeing how other people manage and what they do and what works and what doesn’t work, and just filtering out the one that works for you. I think that’s really helpful. Like Tutela, webinars now we are doing the TESL dialogue I just had. I just hosted the TESL dialogue very recently. I volunteered for it. And, just seeing that there are other people around us that you could reach out and get more information and resources and there are still nice people to share stuff with, I think that’s really helpful.

Focusing on teaching-relevant matters and keeping psychological distance from certain sources of anxiety both helped Maria maintain a manageable level of anxiety and sustain her resilience, as illustrated in the following accounts.

I try to come up with a plan. I always have a plan that I do this way, and then if I follow up, then my anxiety will be less. So the more I know that we have the routine, the more I know how to teach and what to teach and what platforms to use and what works and what doesn’t. Then my anxiety is manageable. I just have to concentrate on my students and what I’m teaching and then, it is manageable, if I start thinking about, like, outside factors at work, then I would be way more anxious, but I said I just have to concentrate on my teaching, my job, what I’m doing the best, and then it’s manageable. But if I would open up my mind and see what other people do around me, then my anxiety would be way higher. So I’m just trying to keep away from everything.
Relatedly, the need to form a routine was also noted as a key piece of her advice for other early-career English language teachers.

*I was anxious because at the beginning you have to figure out how to teach and what to teach and do the lesson plans and everything. At the beginning, we had to do that. But then once you are in the routine. Some people are still nervous. Like even if their English is their first language, they are still nervous about teaching. But if you are in the routine, if you know what you are doing, then that goes away and then you just forget about your accent and it doesn’t really matter. You concentrate, then you are a teacher and that’s it.*

Last but not least, participating in the present study helped enhance Maria’s resilience as well. Through this practice, she was able to reflect on ups and downs and her progress in her professional journey and also to help others such as the researcher, thus feeling a sense of accomplishment and happiness.

*I think it was nice writing the journal because it made me think about how far I came and I’m really happy that I helped you, hopefully. Yes, definitely, because I really like to help people and I know that it’s very important to give back. I got help from other people on the way here. So I think it’s very important and just reflecting on my whole journey from the beginning. It feels good then I feel that I did good, which is very important to me. Because that’s my main purpose. I love to teach. I love my students, I love people, so. Yes, the whole research thing made me feel good.*

5.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the experiences of anxiety and resilience among three in-service English language teachers in Ontario, Canada. The teachers encountered various challenges,
including teaching-focused aspects (e.g., blended teaching, classroom management), institutional obstacles, (e.g., unsupportive administrations, inadequate wellness services), and structural issues (e.g., the difficulty in obtaining full-time positions, constrained salaries, unpaid hours, the demand to teach with little preparation time). On the resilience front, these teachers cultivated professional resilience through individual endeavors such as adopting new perspectives and maintaining reflective journals. They also drew upon resilience from bonding with students and peers, garnering success in teaching, immersing themselves in teaching activities, participating in professional communities, and tapping into professional development resources. Notably, immigration status emerged as a significant resilience factor. The next chapter, Chapter 6, will further discuss these findings in relation to the research questions and relevant literature.
Chapter 6: Discussions

This study illuminates the distinct experiences of anxiety and resilience among pre-service and in-service English language teachers. The disparity between pre- and in-service language teachers’ experiences is likely influenced by the unique contexts, priorities, and identities associated with each role. As Goodson (2008) pointed out, teachers at different career and life stages have unique “centers of gravity” (p. 35). It is therefore crucial to examine these experiences separately. In the four ensuing sections in this chapter, I explore pre-service and in-service teachers’ anxiety and resilience, and demonstrate how each link with and inform relevant literature.

6.1 Pre-service Language Teacher Anxiety

Farrell (2016) observed that transition shock can occur when language teachers transition from pre-service to in-service status. The present study finds this transition shock equally prevalent when linguistically and culturally diverse students engage with an unfamiliar educational context—TESOL teacher preparation education in Canada. This shock manifests within the pre-service English language teachers’ varied anxiety experiences, which I have summarized in Table 6.1 below and then discuss each key finding in more detail and depth.
### Table 6.1

**Early-career Anxiety Socio-ecologically Experienced by Pre-service EAL Teachers**

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<td></td>
<td>schedules; Temporary immigration status</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time factors</td>
<td>Assignment deadlines</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncertain future career</td>
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### 6.1.1 Academic English Skills

In this study, all pre-service student teachers, except for Anan—who had already completed her studies in TESOL—expressed various anxieties related to their academic English proficiency. These concerns were multifaceted and highly individualized, mainly encompassing difficulties in academic English reading and speaking. Alyssa found academic reading challenging, especially when understanding unfamiliar words and distinguishing crucial information from less significant content. Julie’s anxiety, in contrast, focused on her reading speed, which she found painfully slow—it took her an entire day to complete a mere 30-page reading when she entered the program. Additionally, she found the study of English phonetics,
especially the “*segmental and suprasegmental features*”, to be demanding. Similarly, Miley expressed her anxiety over reading speed and how she crammed before the class. Linguistically rooted, yet highly specific to each individual, these representations of anxiety underscore the importance of personalized approaches to English academic literacy development in pre-service teacher education programs.

It is worth noting that such anxiety was not solely linguistic; it was also shaped by their unfamiliarity with the Canadian TESOL program’s assignment types. For instance, due to a lack of previous training, Alyssa was initially unsure about “*how to appropriately employ eye contact and body language when facing an audience*” during her preparation for an oral presentation. Additionally, she struggled with a reflective writing assignment due to a lack of prior experience. Likewise, Julie, who had not received systematic training in English pronunciation, found learning and teaching it challenging; this experience aligns with previous studies indicating that even though pronunciation is viewed as a crucial instructional area (Buss, 2016; Nagle et al., 2018), English language teachers from certain EFL contexts may not receive sufficient training (Georgiou, 2018; Murphy, 2014).

These findings suggest a misalignment between pre-service language teachers’ previous experiences and the demands of their TESOL education, illustrating the need for more culturally sensitive academic and linguistic support for international student teachers. While the student teachers in this study had learned English for many years, their experience differed significantly from the academic English communication required in Canada. Before coming to Canada, they had limited encounters with reading academic articles or giving presentations in English, and their prior education may have under-emphasized productive skills in speaking and writing. Once these international student teachers joined the Canadian TESOL program, they were
transitioning into a role as ‘boundary spanners’ who needed to bridge gaps between various languages, cultures, and localities. This role transition can be likened to what Wenger (2010) described as a socialization process that requires “realignment” and “becoming a certain person” in the target community (p. 181). Successfully navigating the process of crossing cultural, linguistic, and identity boundaries demands considerable time and effort from the student teachers.

As Horwitz (1996) observed, student teachers are teaching a language that they themselves are still learning. This can lead to many teachers who speak English as an additional language feeling insecure about their pronunciation (Murphy, 2014) and a general sense of inadequacy about their English proficiency, even among those who demonstrate high competence in academic English. This phenomenon of language teachers grappling with self-doubt about their linguistic capabilities and self-identity is well-established in the literature (Gkonou & Miller, 2017). Such feelings are known to potentially impact their wellbeing adversely (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to provide student language teachers with adequate linguistic and cultural support to foster their higher proficiency and confidence in English language teaching (Faez, 2010).

6.1.2 Peer Pressure

The study further identified peer pressure as a significant social factor influencing pre-service teachers. Alyssa, who had a background in STEM education, experienced considerable anxiety at the semester’s onset due to perceived competition with peers who previously majored in English. Similarly, Julie, who studied arts during her undergraduate years, felt overwhelmed by her colleagues’ intense preparation efforts for an oral presentation assignment. These findings
suggest that TESOL teacher preparation programs foster a space where people with shared goals construct identities in mutually and socially influencing ways (Wenger, 1998). However, conflicts in belief systems or learning styles may influence some members’ identity construction. For example, pre-service teachers like Alyssa and Julie might defensively employ their imagination when they perceive these differences as threats to their identity, such as experiencing peer pressure. This response reflects how they navigate and adapt to challenging situations in their professional journey.

6.1.3 Lack of Practical Teaching Experience and Career Readiness

Another significant source of professional insecurity and anxiety was the lack of practical teaching experience in the TESOL program, which impacted their professional development as pre-service English language teachers. While some participants had prior teaching experiences, none had independently taught English before joining the TESOL program. Without this experience, they reported high anxiety levels when they began teaching English outside the TESOL program. For instance, Alyssa faced transition shock and anxiety when unfamiliar with her tutee, and Julie struggled with low-frequency words and common expressions used by her students. Apparently, the TESOL program they enrolled in did not effectively prepare them for dealing with such emergent issues during actual teaching.

This issue necessitates a need to provide pre-service EAL teachers with real-life teaching opportunities. Mock teaching experiences in TESOL teacher training can help student teachers to develop useful abilities for real-world teaching contexts (Faez & Valeo, 2012). However, such practice does not completely mirror the authentic teaching environments, potentially generating feelings of precariousness (Byrd Clark, 2012, 2016; Farrell, 2012). Particularly, those who
graduate without adequate practicum or placement experiences often find themselves lacking “a repertoire of pedagogical routines to cope with unexpected events during a class” (Mann & Tang, 2012, p. 481). Moreover, without authentic teaching experiences, student teachers miss out on the opportunity to interact with and gain constructive feedback from experienced language teaching professionals who are ‘fuller participants’ in the target community of practice (Wenger, 1998). As such, these graduates may be more vulnerable to experiencing transition shock at the beginning of their teaching careers (Farrell, 2012). Without adequate teacher support, this shock can lead to feelings of reduced self-efficacy in their initial professional roles and, consequently, a decreased motivation to continue in the teaching field (Nguyen & Yang, 2018).

Therefore, profession-oriented programs should provide student teachers with ample situated learning opportunities. Practicum opportunities, for example, can equip student teachers with language teaching-relevant knowledge of “what matters and what does not, what is important and why it is important, what to do and not to do, what to pay attention to and what to ignore, what to talk about and what to leave unsaid” as related to language teaching” (Wenger, 1998, p. 81). Equally important, pre-service teachers should have resources to develop skills for job interviews, mentor identification, collaboration, research topic identification, and use of personal networks for service opportunities, all of which are necessary to shape their employability as prospective teachers (England, 2020). In this way, they are more likely to navigate potential barriers such as job searching, limited job positions, intense competition (TESL Ontario, 2021), thus achieving a smoother transition into their professional teaching career.
6.1.4 Time Factors

Time constraints also played a significant role in pre-service language teachers’ academic anxiety. With approaching deadlines, Alyssa, Julie, and Miley found it challenging to complete course readings due to the tasks’ urgency, their reading speed, and unfamiliar words. Alyssa felt that time constraints hindered her ability to thoroughly digest new information or think in depth, while Miley was stressed by having to complete three final assignments concurrently. For these student teachers, it appears that this anxiety was largely debilitating for a specific period of time (Gardner, 1985). Having more time would have enabled more thorough and less hurried academic work.

Interestingly, such anxiety seemed to diminish over time. Alyssa and Julie both felt their academic reading abilities improved with several weeks’ practice, which made reading anxiety more manageable later in their research participation. In line with MacIntyre and Gardner’s (1994) study, learners experienced debilitating anxiety during and immediately after the task, but this effect faded as they familiarized with the task and made improvement. This indicates that anxiety status changes over time, and students who engage in productive struggle may reap long-term rewards (Bjork & Bjork, 2011). Therefore, it appears reasonable to consider “subjectivity and agency as a subject-in-process, and as the effect and redeployment of power, rather than as something fixed” (Zembylas, 2022, p. 7).

Although student teachers’ academic anxiety about time constraints did diminish, this reduction should not be taken for granted and a deeper exploration is required. Existing literature has explored time-related emotions among academics, portraying time (management) norms in neoliberal universities as associated with one’s sense of precarity (Shahjahan, 2020). However, less is understood about the relationship between time and emotions from the perspective of
international EAL student teachers. In this light, the present study problematizes current time expectations for student teachers in their TESOL program. Without considering student teachers’ learning paces and styles and task urgency across different courses, these expectations operated under the neoliberal logic of “individual responsibility and choice” (Burke & Manathunga, 2020, p. 663) and emphasized students’ full accountability for meeting imposed deadlines for assignments, revealing student teachers’ limited power compared to course instructors’.

Additionally, the study found that concerns about future developmental trajectories added to the pre-service teachers’ anxiety. Alyssa, for example, expressed notable anxiety about her career path, such as deciding whether to pursue employment or continue her education after TESOL studies, and whether to stay in Canada or return to China. These concerns highlight her difficulty in forming a clear vision of her future self, reflecting a sense of insecurity and a need for guidance. In this context, Konttinen (2022) advocated for the value of a ‘community of practice’ in promoting teacher development. Specifically, fostering peer support to improve post-graduation employability could be an effective strategy. This process could involve colleagues and mentors in a TESOL cohort sharing resources (shared repertoire), maintaining ongoing communication (mutual engagement), and collectively working towards the common goal (joint enterprise) of successful career transition.

### 6.2 Pre-service Language Teacher Resilience

As shown in Table 6.2, pre-service English language teachers were able to draw upon a range of resources and support to navigate challenges and thrive in their professional development.
### Table 6.2

*Early-career Resilience Socio-ecologically Experienced by Pre-service EAL Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-ecological Systems</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Focusing on specific areas of self-growth: improving academic and general English language proficiency; developing a growth mindset; Purposeful reflections: writing reflective journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
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<td>Beyond-institutional</td>
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### 6.2.1 Individually Driven Practices

*Focusing on Specific Areas of Self-growth*

Purposeful emphasis on personal growth areas tends to help shift focus away from negative emotions such as anxiety, thus promoting resilience. In Alyssa’s case, previously, she faced significant anxiety around academic reading and oral presentations. As she gained experience, she began focusing on areas requiring improvement. For example, she listened to her
inner voices, recognized her strengths, and developed individualized career goals. This refocusing away from competition and towards personal growth exemplifies the crucial role agency plays in professional development (De Costa, Rawal & Li, 2018).

Anan’s experience provided a further example. Following unsuccessful interviews, Anan reframed temporary work experiences as learning opportunities, which helped mitigate feelings of frustration and anxiety. This reframing, combined with her expansive view of job hunting and ongoing improvement of her English-speaking and interview skills, facilitated achievement of short-term career goals and financial independence. These experiences illustrate how hope for the future can help manage ongoing anxiety and maintain wellbeing (MacIntyre et al, 2022).

**Purposeful Reflection**

Reflection, whether provoked by external factors or initiated internally, may positively influence professional growth. In this research, writing reflective journals played a key role in pre-service teacher participants’ cognitive, emotional, and linguistic development.

In line with previous research, these practices facilitated self-transformation by prompting reflection on personal experiences (Johnson 2009). By maintaining a private online journal, the pre-service teachers engaged in a thorough examination of their weekly experiences related to anxiety and resilience. This process involved deep thinking and cognitive engagement, enabling them to gain insights into challenging and anxiety-inducing incidents. As a result, they achieved enhanced self-knowledge and self-awareness. As Farrell (2013) pointed out, writing has an inherent mechanism for people to reflect because individuals need to think before writing and can reflect further after writing. Notably, participants commonly employed both the approaches of *reflection-for-action* and *reflection-on-action* (Farrell, 2021). Reflection-for-action
refers to anticipatory reflection where individuals think about future actions. For instance, Miley, through this method, was able to develop a deeper comprehension of her strengths and weaknesses, highlighting areas she intended to work on. On the other hand, reflection-on-action pertains to retrospective contemplation on past experiences. An exemplar of this was Julie, who found that journaling allowed her to analyze and derive meaning from her previous interactions and events (Farrell, 2021). As she noted, “If I don’t write them down, I might not be able to realize what I have been doing and the fact that I am actually learning something new.”

Additionally, maintaining reflective journals offers benefits both emotionally and linguistically. From an emotional perspective, journaling enables participants to identify and analyze their feelings, promoting self-awareness of emotions that might otherwise go unnoticed. For example, Miley found that journaling helped her to develop stronger problem-solving skills, thereby managing the emotional impact of anxiety. This practice contributed to a heightened sense of control and agency, encouraging participants to take responsibility for their personal growth (Dvoržáková & Pavlíčková, 2016). On the linguistic front, journaling has also shown its merits. Miley observed an increase in her confidence with English writing, attributed to the consistent practice of journaling in her additional language. This prolonged engagement with linguistic expression offered her invaluable practice and enhanced her proficiency in English writing.

6.2.2 Peer Support

In both the TESOL program’s setting and broader contexts, peer support noticeably contributed to pre-service participants’ resilience building. This observation aligns with Le Cornu’s (2009) assertion that peer support is “central to both the learning communities model
and to the development of resilience” (p. 721). Within the present study, one prominent manifestation of peer support is seen in the form of programmatic mentorship. Such mentorships can be established among student teachers themselves or between student teachers and teacher educators.

Alyssa’s collaborative work during a group presentation preparation serves as a successful example of peer support. Specifically, Alyssa and her team members formed a joint enterprise, working towards a shared goal with collective accountability. They engaged mutually and used all available linguistic and cultural resources to create an impactful presentation. As Goodwin (2005, p. 615) articulates, “close relationships act as important ‘social glue’, helping people deal with the uncertainties of their changing world”.

Mentorship also proved beneficial in student-teacher relationships. Such relationships create an apprenticeship of observation, allowing student teachers to learn closely from experienced educators. For example, when Alyssa confronted difficult academic questions, reaching out to her course instructors for guidance became a valuable strategy. It not only helped her gain content knowledge but also enhanced her reading speed. Julie also initiated contact with one of her course instructors, enabling her to establish a closer and supportive relationship within the professional learning communities (Wenger, 1998). This contact provided situated learning opportunities and nurtured “growth-fostering relationships” (Jordan, 2007, p. 83).

Mentorship outside the TESOL program has also been identified as a critical component in teacher development. For instance, Anan as a TESOL graduate actively sought career guidance from trusted friends and professionals. In a similar vein, Julie’s experience with her workplace mentor highlights the positive impact of such relationships. Her mentor chose to encourage rather than punish her for being late, which cultivated an environment of trust and
support. This aligns with the observations of Cavanagh et al. (2012) who emphasized the necessity of collective efforts in fostering a caring culture that supports wellbeing. Teachers who receive empathy and understanding from their supervisors are less prone to burnout and more likely to experience higher job satisfaction and engagement (Brunetti, 2006; Eldor & Shoshani, 2016). Additionally, such supportive environments can significantly boost teacher morale (Howard & Johnson, 2004), thereby playing a crucial role in both teacher development and retention.

6.2.3 Programmatic Academic Resources and Assignments

Furthermore, culturally responsive academic resources and assignments within the TESOL program were found to be instrumental in enhancing teacher knowledge among most pre-service teachers in this study. Participating in technical and critical activities during TESOL studies allowed them to experience legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where early-career practitioners gradually gain fuller expertise.

Notably, various activities contributed to the enhancement of the participants’ technical-linguistic skills. For instance, group presentations were particularly beneficial for Alyssa, who valued the opportunity to collaborate and learn alongside other international students. Julie, on the other hand, found a vocabulary-focused TESOL course effective, especially the spaced repetition strategy for vocabulary learning, and also improved her pronunciation through a listening and speaking course. Meanwhile, Miley discovered that lesson planning and presentation assignments were instrumental in developing her essential pedagogical skills. Supporting this observation, Liu’s (2014) study in Taiwan suggests that technical activities, such
as lesson planning, not only enhance teacher expertise and confidence but also play a role in reducing their anxiety levels.

Some course readings, such as the one by Curdt-Christiansen (2008), further increased student teachers’ critical awareness of ideological and political agendas within English learning materials. Student teachers began to envision how they might supplement materials with diverse perspectives to foster open and critical dialogues with their students in the future. Since pre-service teachers’ beliefs are heavily influenced by their learning experiences and particularly difficult to change (Borg, 2006; Holt-Reynolds, 1992), it is vital for them to move beyond their previous experiences by developing critical awareness of such experiences (Wright, 2010) and different ideologies related to their profession (Morgan, 2016).

The process of identity transition, which Pennycook (2001) described as “a constant ongoing negotiation” (p. 149), can be especially complex for international student teachers. This complexity was evident in the experiences of participants in this study—international students from China, a culture traditionally perceived as collectivist and hierarchical, studying TESOL in Canada. They encountered dynamic and continuous shifts in their identities (Wu & Chen, 2018); this was particularly pronounced when they constantly compared their teaching and learning experiences in Canada with those in China. This ongoing formation and transformation of their identities underscore the necessity of adapting and modifying educational materials to meet the unique needs of student teachers (Short et al., 2018).
6.2.4 Institutional Support

*Wellness Activities*

Participants in this study also reported that engaging regularly in activities hosted by the institution, such as wellness walks and recreational programs, played a pivotal role in sustaining their resilience. As exemplified by Julie, her weekly involvement in these events helped alleviate her academic stress, promoted both her physical and mental well-being, and allowed her to forge meaningful social connections. Similarly, Anan made use of the university’s recreational spaces, engaging in Pilates and meditation sessions on a weekly or biweekly basis. While the effectiveness of such activities is beyond the scope of this research, the participants’ experiences echo Ratey and Hagerman’s (2010) assertion that consistent physical activity, when undertaken judiciously, can assist individuals in managing symptoms of anxiety and fatigue, ultimately fortifying their resilience.

*Career Services*

Additionally, several participants highlighted the crucial role of institutional career support in their professional growth. For example, Alyssa received personalized career planning advice and resume editing assistance at a university-hosted career workshop. Miley and Anan similarly benefited from a series of career workshops for international students, where they learned essential strategies for job hunting in Canada, improving their CVs, and performing well in job interviews. Such experiences encouraged them to take responsibility for their professional growth. De Costa et al. (2016) described this proactive approach as *self-entrepreneurship*. They argued that “[An] entrepreneur should not necessarily be understood in the narrow sense as
someone who starts her own business. Most, if not all, identities (e.g. employee, educator, student and citizen) nowadays tend to be filtered through the lens of entrepreneurship” (p. 695).

### 6.2.5 Practical Experience Outside the TESOL Program

All these pre-service language teachers recommended an extension of the current one-year TESOL program to include a practicum term. They argued that such an addition could not only boost their employment prospects by qualifying them for a three-year post-graduation work permit, but also provide them with invaluable supervised teaching experience. Practicum refers to the “systematic directed observation, supervised teaching practice and progressive teaching responsibilities which contribute to experience and competence in the primary roles of the English- as- a- second- language teacher” (Norris, 1977, p. 34). This experience is a key element in their transition from learners to teachers (Espinoza, Nuñez, & Degollado, 2021; Papi & Khajavy, 2021). As Wenger (1998) pointed out, “becoming good at something involves developing specialized sensitivities . . . that are brought to bear on making judgements about the qualities of a product or an action” (p. 81). In other words, authentic teaching practice allows teachers to develop an intuitive feel for pedagogy, which can help them to make sound pedagogical decisions.

Regrettably, the current structure of their TESOL program, without opportunities for practicum, hindered student teachers from developing such pedagogical sensitivities and judgements. As such, some of the pre-service teacher participants in this study, such as Alyssa and Julie, found their own ways to teach in the real world. Their self-initiated practicum offers a critical opportunity for deliberate practice. As Ericsson et al. (1993) pointed out, deliberate learning happens when participants “attend to the task and exert effort to improve their
performance” and “receive immediate informative feedback and knowledge of results of their performance” (p. 367). Through socially mediated deliberate practice, pre-service teachers in the TESOL program, such as Julie, bridged the gap between theoretical learning and field-based teaching practice. This integration of theory and practice, also known as praxis (Freire, 1970), can profoundly enhance emerging language teachers’ sense of pedagogical preparedness and self-efficacy (O’Neill & Stephenson, 2012). It is during authentic practical teaching that student teachers learn to navigate emotional labor, increase emotional reflexivity, and sustain well-being in professional development (Song, 2021).
6.3 In-service Language Teacher Anxiety

Similar to Sulis et al. (2023), my study also found that in-service English language teachers seem to have role-specific anxiety experiences that are largely different from pre-service teachers’. Primary concerns include their precarious job status, technological and student-related issues within the classroom, and insufficient management support.

Table 6.3

*Early-career Anxiety Socio-ecologically Experienced by In-service EAL Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-ecological Systems</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching-focused factors</td>
<td>Pedagogical: students’ mixed proficiency and age levels/students’ disagreement with the teacher/students’ low attendance/students’ acceptance and appreciation; Technological: blended learning; Content: student tensions that emerge from socio-political discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional factors:</td>
<td>Less supportive management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ineffective workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond-institutional factors</td>
<td>Precarious work status: part-time/on-call work, multiple job holding, low incomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.3.1 Precarious Work Status

This study confirms the precarious nature of the TESOL profession in Ontario, Canada. Factors contributing to this precarity include contractual part-time or on-call employment, the necessity of multiple job holding, and insufficient incomes. This precarity parallels the precarity of the TESOL profession in broader Canadian contexts, as demonstrated in previous studies.
(Auerbach, 1991; Breashears, 2019). The resultant negative effect on teacher wellbeing seems existent (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020).

Many participating teachers expressed challenges related to part-time, on-call work, and the need to hold multiple jobs. According to TESL Ontario’s (2021) recent report, this was a persistent issue in the Ontario English language teaching profession where approximately 56% of teachers either worked part-time (22%) or held contractual, volunteering, or additional non-full-time positions (34%). For instance, Noel, an in-service language teacher in this study, spent over a year seeking full-time employment within her LINC program, during which she taught part-time and held multiple jobs to sustain herself financially. Such precarious employment can be attributed to short-term arrangements common in language training programs like LINC, which are freely available to students. Given the freedom students have to discontinue these programs, teachers often seek external employment to ensure financial stability.

This structural condition contributed to Noel’s heavy workload, teaching three online courses and studying one course simultaneously. Her experience is akin to Simbürger and Neary’s (2016) concept of taxi professor, a term denoting the academics juggling of teaching assignments across multiple locations. This excessive workload hindered Noel’s ability to balance work and personal life, leading to persistent anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and potential burnout—consequences identified by previous research (Benesch, 2020; Mercer, 2020). Such problems necessitate collective solutions such as establishing supportive professional communities.

Another pressing concern for in-service EAL teachers was insufficient incomes. Noel, for example, described her dissatisfaction by stating, “the pay was not that good”. Similarly, Sara voiced her discontent regarding her compensation as a part-time teacher, noting that, “as a part-
time teacher I am paid for three hours a day. But the time I put into this job is almost double.”

Maria also discussed the absence of pension benefits and reliance on social insurance during non-teaching periods. These accounts mirror the broader issue of low compensation within the teaching profession as evidenced in the TESL Ontario member survey report (2021). According to this report, 74% of full-time teachers and 85% of their part-time counterparts reported annual earnings below $60,000.

Granted, teachers often do not enter the profession expecting significant financial rewards, as supported by research that salary is not the primary factor influencing teacher retention (Han, Borgonovi, & Guerriero, 2018). Nonetheless, the compensation teachers receive can shape their perceptions of appreciation (Varkey Foundation, 2018) and the value attributed to their profession (Fiske et al., 2016). Inadequate compensation can result in feelings of frustration, negatively affecting their “morale, thus ultimately reducing productivity” (Troman, 2000, p. 350). This sentiment is further underscored by Mercer’s (2020) findings, which emphasize that financial difficulties can heighten feelings of job insecurity and adversely impact teacher wellbeing.

6.3.2 Classroom Challenges

Blended Teaching

The adoption of the Hybrid-Flexible teaching mode presented significant challenges for teachers like Noel and Maria, leading to considerable anxiety. This method required them to concurrently manage in-person and online students. Technological issues and substantial workload, such as multiple screen use, students’ difficulty accessing learning materials, and creation of online student blogs, rendered teaching an overwhelming task. Particularly, Maria
shared her experience of heightened anxiety during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, spending over eight hours daily to identify effective strategies for her emergency remote teaching.

These instances mirror global findings of increased teacher anxiety due to the abrupt transition to online teaching during the pandemic (Reimers et al., 2020). As suggested by Moser and Wei (2021), language teachers teaching online during the pandemic often felt “marginalized, untrained, and emotionally overworked” (p. 26). Their lack of experience and skills in online teaching and interaction, coupled with the sudden demand for self-care and student care during this period, contributed to this heightened anxiety. Without sufficient expertise in online teaching, their professional identities can be challenged (Hanson, 2009), causing them to reposition themselves as students (Richardson & Alsup, 2015). Notably, this challenge was situated in the pandemic context that significantly increased the teaching workload, proving especially difficult for perfectionistic teachers such as in-service participants in this study who struggled with the gap between “the situation-as-is and the situation-as-preferred” (Schaap et al., 2021, p. 2).

Student-related Issues

Additionally, all three in-service teachers expressed that students’ absences and unfavorable responses were significant sources of anxiety. Noel’s experiences of low student attendance rates align with previous findings of high dropout rates among LINC students, often exceeding 22% (IRCC, 2010). Furthermore, Noel reported instances of students questioning the value of her teaching and debating about Canadian immigration systems, which eroded her self-confidence. Sara expressed similar concerns about her students’ opinion of her and her non-native English speaker status when teaching high-level classes. In one extremely stressful event,
she was so anxious that she shouted at a student, reflecting her difficulty managing classroom conflicts and suggesting a need for improved classroom management skills.

These experiences underscore the emotionally demanding nature of language teaching (King & Ng, 2018) due to intercultural tensions, emotional labor (Dewaele & Wu, 2021; Gkonou et al., 2020; King & Ng, 2018), and energy-intensive methodologies (Borg, 2006). As shown in previous studies, supportive student responses can bolster teachers’ confidence (Nahal, 2010, p. 9), whereas negative reactions can hamper teachers’ classroom control (Mann & Tang, 2012) and overall wellbeing (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020).

The in-service participants appeared to lack adequate pre-service training in managing classroom conflicts. Noel, for instance, considered avoiding socio-political topics in the future, indicative of an avoidance approach to pedagogy. While this might seem as a simple approach for novice in-service teachers, Marlina (2014, p. 14) argued that “language teaching in general or programs that specialize in teaching linguistic and cultural pluralism should not isolate themselves from socio-political questions”. Instead, it is both possible and beneficial to teach real-world experiences and controversial issues relevant to students (Gallo, Link, & Somerville, 2019). When possible, language teacher education programs should foster a safe space for classroom participants to “problematize or inquire into those questions, political evils, and temptations; and to envisage versions of a world that is ‘not yet’, or alternative possibilities for organizing social life” (Marlina, 2014, p. 14). According to Palmer et al. (2019), these challenging discussions can be viewed as productive discomfort and transformed into learning opportunities, eventually enhancing student teachers’ abilities to deal with similar kinds of topics in their future teaching career.
6.3.3 Insufficient Institutional Support

This research shows that communities of practice (CoP) can sometimes become sources of conflict, adding complexity to the prevailing view of CoP as supportive environments for shared goal attainment (Fracchiolla, Prefontaine & Hinko, 2020). Indeed, communities of practice are not inherently “an emancipatory force” (Wenger, 1998, p. 85). While CoP members can offer and receive support, they may also encounter difficulties and tensions (Wenger, 1998). As warned by Wenger (1998), “Communities of practice should not be romanticized; they can reproduce counterproductive patterns, injustices, prejudices, racism, sexism, and abuses of all kinds. In fact, I would argue they are the very locus of such reproduction” (Wenger, 1998, p. 132).

Lack of adequate institutional or administration support can induce anxiety and negatively impact wellbeing (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Maria’s experiences well-exemplified this issue. During the initial stages of emergency online teaching prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, she received minimal technical support from her institution and even had to fight for the right to use a perceived useful digital platform for her students, rather than adhering to the administrators’ choice. As Alzaanin (2021) found, teachers’ wellbeing is supported when they have the autonomy to make decisions. Without such autonomy, teachers like Maria are less likely to sustain their wellbeing.

Maria’s challenges did not end with the struggle for technical support and autonomy. In another distressing situation, Maria experienced a denial of her request for leave when she needed it the most, leading to feelings of powerlessness and anxiety that significantly threatened her wellbeing (De Costa, Li & Rawal, 2020). Moreover, she felt that wellness-focused workshops, while potentially informative, had questionable impact on teacher wellbeing due to
their infrequency and administrators’ indifference. Literature suggests that many professional development workshops are insufficiently organized and do not connect well with teachers’ actual routines and needs (Birman et al., 2007). As Stigler and Miller (2018) asserted, “because teaching is a complex cultural system, training just the teacher, in a time and place divorced from the ecology and culture in which they operate, is highly unlikely to improve the performance of the system as a whole” (p. 1196).

These experiences led Maria to distance herself from administrative dealings and concentrate on her teaching practices and student interactions. In a tightly-coupled CoP like Maria’s, administrators hold significant power and can negatively influence teachers’ emotions (Moos, 2005), undermining the relational trust crucial for successful schools (Day et al., 2011). It is important to build relational trust between teachers and administrators as it “reduces the sense of vulnerability when staff take on new tasks” and “creates a moral resource for school improvement” which affects teacher motivation, commitment and retention (Fullan, 2003, p. 42). Therefore, administrators as power holders should foster a positive organizational culture that enables the development and maintenance of trust among school leaders, teachers, and students (Greenier et al., 2021).

6.4 In-service Language Teacher Resilience

As summarized in Table 6.4, in-service English language teachers found the following areas of experiences important for improving their teacher resilience, such as self-initiated practices, student-driven resilience, peer support, institutional workshops, as well as a stable immigration status.
### Table 6.4

*Early-career Resilience Socio-ecologically Experienced by In-service EAL Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-ecological Systems</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-initiated</td>
<td>Having a sense of purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing self-compassion</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing reflective journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students-driven</td>
<td>Bonding with students: using students’ first languages,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>organizing culturally responsive activities, sharing lived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>experiences and vulnerabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer support</td>
<td>One-to-many communities of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One-on-one communities of practice</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-professional communities of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>Workshops for growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond-institutional</td>
<td>Immigration status</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### 6.4.1 Self-initiated Practices

*A Strong Sense of Purpose*

Importantly, maintaining a strong sense of purpose helped in-service English language teachers navigate anxiety. This sentiment was evident across all in-service participants’ responses. For instance, Noel stated that a teacher’s positive attitude can influence students: “*If you smile at your students, your students will smile back at you*”. Sara and Maria also expressed deep passion for teaching and genuine care for their students. These testimonies align with the characterization of teaching as an ‘altruistic vocation’ (Schwarz & Alberts, 1998, p. 155), where ethical and moral drivers powerfully guide teachers in forming relationships with students.
(Hollie, 2012; Nias, 1989; Noddings, 1992; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013). As teachers, they understand that “teaching is more than a job” (Nieto, 2003, p. 128); it is a “service to others” where they gain “personal satisfaction in the rendering of that service” (Hansen, 1995, p. 3). Teachers may view teaching-related difficulties and complexities as “sources of interest in the work, rather than barriers or frustrating obstacles to overcome” (Hansen, 1995, p. 144), especially when effective support systems are in place. This morally driven mindset enables teachers to master challenges instead of giving up when faced with setbacks (Bandura, 2000). As shown in the existing literature, a strong sense of purpose helps improve resilience (Gu & Day, 2013; OECD, 2005), supports wellbeing (Pines, 2002; Roffey, 2012), fuels passion for teaching (Gu & Li, 2013; Nieto, 2015), and fosters positive relationships with learners (Lavy & Bocker, 2018).

Cultivating Self-compassion

For early-career English language teachers, learning self-compassion is a crucial yet potentially time-consuming process. Over time, Sara learned to “take it easy” and not be too hard on herself, especially after becoming familiar with routines in her teaching and receiving positive reactions from her students. Following difficult conversations with administrators, Maria came to distance herself from those powerful administrators’ opinions, as a way to exercise self-care and grow her resilience. Such becoming aligns with research showing that teachers can experience significant shifts in their early career beliefs (Zessin et al., 2015). In doing so, they are more likely to treat themselves with a more humane view and develop self-compassion (Neff, 2011), thereby reducing anxiety and boosting happiness, resilience, and wellbeing (Zaki, 2020; Zessin et al., 2015).
Employing Reflective Journals for Growth

In-service participants also confirmed that reflective journaling was an effective method for building resilience and managing anxiety. They noted three main benefits of this practice. First, it can serve as a record of important experiences. As Noel explained, “when you write it down, it’s more helpful for you to rethink yourself, including what I did wrong or what I could have done better and what I should do in the future”, facilitating a clearer trajectory for her professional growth. Sara and Maria also acknowledged this method’s ability to record their ups and downs in professional progression. Given such evidence, reflective writing tends to be a worthwhile practice for teachers to consider using because as Dewey (1933, pp. 78–79) argued below, learning comes from reflection on experience, not experience alone.

information is an undigested burden unless it is understood. It is knowledge only as its material is comprehended. And understanding, comprehension, means that the various parts of the information acquired are grasped in their relations to one another—a result that is attained only when acquisition is accompanied by constant reflection upon the meaning of what is studied.

A second key benefit of this practice is enhanced awareness. Sara mentioned that writing reflective journals enabled her to purposefully look for things in reality that could be put into her journal, which would have otherwise been ignored. This mindfulness allows individuals to be constantly aware of what happens in the surrounding environment and critically examine their taken-for-granted assumptions and practices (Kayi-Aydar 2015).

Lastly, journaling can serve as a form of resistance. By documenting her anxiety over heavy workload, Maria expressed dissatisfaction with her precarious working conditions. This helps readers of reflective journals “examine the everyday lives of people who navigate
inequitable social systems, materials, and structures” (Anders & Lester, 2019, p. 925) and understand what precarity looks like in real life. As noted by bell hooks (1999), “writing can function as a form of political resistance without in any way being propagandistic or lacking literary merit. Concurrently, writing may galvanize readers to be more politically aware without that being the writer’s sole intent” (p. 16).

6.4.2 Student-driven Resilience

Building strong bonds with students was identified as another key theme in promoting resilience among in-service participants. Three elements were found to play a crucial role in creating these bonds, namely the judicious use of students’ first languages, culturally responsive activities, and teacher’s personal experiences and vulnerabilities.

For instance, Noel reported that using students’ first languages in class helped her build trust. This was further aided by culturally responsive pedagogy, like organizing activities to celebrate the Eid Mubarak holiday. In sharing her own language learning journey and life advice as a former international student, Maria offered emotional support to her students. This led to the building of a trusting relationship, which ultimately helped reduce her own anxiety. Similarly, Sara’s openness about her vulnerabilities in front of her students fostered sincerity and received positive responses from her students. All these instances confirm that positive bonds with students enhance teachers’ workplace satisfaction and wellbeing (Acton & Glasgow, 2015; Cherkowski, 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009; Spilt et al., 2011).
6.4.3 Peer Support

Workplace communities of practice can provide essential peer support. For Sara, knowing she had a supportive supervisor helped cultivate a sense of safety. During difficult times, such as natural disasters in her home country, both her colleagues and students offered emotional support. Furthermore, observing how her colleagues navigated similar challenges provided her with additional strength. This is consistent with other research’s findings that maintaining positive relations with colleagues contributes to resilience (Spilt et al., 2011).

One-on-one connections with colleagues can also make a difference to resilience building. At a pandemic time when institutional support was largely absent, Maria found solace in communication with a trusted colleague to collaboratively find technological solutions for pedagogical purposes or simply chat with one another to maintain socio-emotional connections. Such interactions proved to be helpful in combating feelings of anxiety and isolation. This shows the value of having critical friends at work, especially during crises when shared suffering can lead to deeper connections and mutual support (Zaki, 2020, p. 588). This collective understanding of challenges and co-creation of knowledge can help renegotiate their positions in an unknown situation.

Beyond professional communities, non-professional social groups can also be beneficial. For instance, Noel found participating in a specific interest group helpful in building her proficiency and confidence in public speaking, thus reducing anxiety. These findings show that social activities can be sites of both linguistic and emotional transformation. As such, joining a wisely chosen community of practice can help teachers “transform themselves, becoming more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially integrated and healthy individuals” (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 1369) and become more self-efficacious (Luthar & Brown, 2007).
6.4.4 Institutional Workshops

Well-organized institutional workshops often play a crucial role in enhancing language teachers’ wellbeing and professional development. For instance, Sara highlighted the benefit of one such workshop where she learned about wellbeing practices. These practices, such as learning to disconnect from negative feelings when needed, empowered her to engage more personally with people, students, and resources. Maria shared a similar experience by noting how her volunteer experience at TESL Ontario fostered interactions with supportive colleagues who were equally willing to share their own experiences. Such opportunities to connect with like-minded professionals were viewed as highly beneficial by both teachers.

This aligns with findings from Bower and Carroll (2017), who found that workshops, through facilitating communication and collaboration, can help teachers improve self-confidence and professional efficacy. A similar trend was noted in the OECD’s 2012 report, which pointed out that active participants in professional learning communities often exhibit higher levels of self-efficacy. These less formal professional communities provide a supportive, non-anxious environment that allows teachers to deepen their field-specific knowledge and “move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community and learn about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). Ideally, this supportive networking can signify a positive school culture (Brady & Wilson, 2021) and foster sustained teacher wellbeing (Spilt et al., 2011).
6.4.5 Beyond-institutional Factor: Immigration Status

A stable immigration status can also significantly bolster resilience for in-service English language teachers, a factor often underrepresented in research. For instance, Noel took more than a year to secure a full-time teaching position, underlining the importance of permanent immigration status for early career English teachers from international contexts. Without this protective factor, these teachers face additional stress, as they must first secure permanent residency in Canada before seeking desired jobs in English language teaching. The risk of their visas expiring before finding a suitable job can increase their anxiety. However, once permanent residency is attained, teachers enjoy greater freedom in choosing job positions. In Sara’s case, achieving permanent residency status in Canada positively impacted her career growth. It expanded her perspective about careers and allowed her to explore different branches of teaching.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the anxiety and resilience experiences for both pre-service and in-service English language teachers. For these pre-service teachers, the key experiences that contribute to anxiety include academic English skills, peer pressure, a lack of practical teaching exposure, and time management. On the other hand, factors contributing to their resilience include a growth mindset and written reflections, programmatic academic resources and assignments, and peer support both within and outside the TESOL program. Additionally, institutional wellness and career services, along with opportunities for practical teaching beyond the institution, play a crucial role.

Early-career in-service English teachers, on the other hand, often encounter anxiety due to structural precarious work conditions, teaching-related issues, and insufficient support from
management. However, their resilience is fostered through individual efforts such as a shift in perspective, reflective journaling, successful bonding with students, peer support from communities of practice, institutional workshops, and achieving stable immigration status.

This research underscores that both groups, pre-service teachers within TESOL education programs and in-service teachers in Ontario’s LINC programs, can experience a multitude of anxiety triggers and resilience factors. The early career stage is particularly fraught with potential disruptions and self-reflections as these educators transition into unfamiliar roles and develop new identities (Gu & Benson, 2014).

Another key observation that came through in this study is the individualized, subjective nature of anxiety and resilience. As Pennington and Hoekje (2014) argued, “ELT as a field and individual programs where English language teaching takes place can be viewed not as unitary enterprises but as an ecology” (p. 172). These experiences are shaped by a complex web of socio-ecological interactions and power dynamics (Ding & Evans, 2022; Gkonou & Miller, 2021), such as previous educational experiences, relationships with students, colleagues, and supervisors, program structure, institutional resources, socio-political conditions, job market demands, and task urgency. The early-career anxiety and resilience experiences of EAL teachers are thus dynamic, context-dependent, changing, and in a constant state of ‘becoming’ (Byrd Clark, 2009; Price & McCallum, 2015).

Lastly, this study highlights the gaps in support systems for pre-service and in-service teachers in their studies and teaching roles, respectively. The lacking of supports spans academic, linguistic, pedagogical, professional, and emotional aspects. As such, tailored socio-ecological supports are vital for nurturing more resilient teaching professionals. This is particularly
important, given that teacher well-being can profoundly influence teaching practices (Dewaele, Franco Magdalena, & Saito, 2019) and student performance (Mercer, 2018).

In the next chapter, I conclude this study by revisiting my research questions and findings, followed by some key implications, limitations and future directions, as well as the researcher’s final reflections.
Chapter 7: Conclusions

7.1 Research Summary

While informed by the theories of critical praxis (Freire, 1970) and reflexivity (Byrd Clark, 2020), and community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), this dissertation primarily employs Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory as the key theoretical framework to conduct its critical ethnography examining early-career English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers’ socio-ecological anxiety and resilience in the post-pandemic era. The study collected data from four pre-service and three early-career in-service EAL teachers. Participants maintained weekly online journals for up to 12 weeks and completed a semi-structured Zoom interview.

For the pre-service EAL teachers, the research questions were:

(1a) What types of early-career teacher anxiety are socio-ecologically experienced by pre-service English as an Additional Language teachers during post-pandemic times?

(1b) What types of early-career teacher resilience are socio-ecologically experienced by pre-service English as an Additional Language teachers during post-pandemic times?

In addressing the first research question, findings showed that the predominant sources of anxiety for pre-service teachers encompassed challenges in academic English skills, peer pressure, insufficient practical teaching experience, and struggles with time management and future plans. As for the resilience aspects, the study found that a variety of factors, including a growth mindset, written reflections, academic resources, peer support both within and beyond the TESOL program, institutionally offered wellness and career services, and opportunities for hands-on teaching, significantly bolstered their resilience.
Turning to the novice in-service EAL teachers, the research was guided by these questions:

(2a) What types of early-career teacher anxiety are socio-ecologically experienced by novice in-service English as an Additional Language teachers during post-pandemic times?

(2b) What types of early-career teacher resilience are socio-ecologically experienced by novice in-service English as an Additional Language teachers during post-pandemic times?

Relevant findings revealed that the early-career in-service teachers’ anxieties were largely rooted in unstable work conditions, specific teaching-related challenges, and a perceived lack of robust support from management. On the brighter side, their resilience stemmed from an array of sources, such as individual coping strategies (e.g., shifts in perspective, the therapeutic habit of journaling), positive relationships with students, peer support, enriching institutional workshops, and a stable immigration status.

Of finding-based contributions, this research offers a timely and nuanced portrayal of the socio-ecological anxiety and resilience experienced by EAL teachers in a post-pandemic Canadian landscape, spanning various stages of their professional paths. Research findings emphasize the persistent precarious state of both pre-service and in-service EAL teachers’ professional trajectories in Ontario, Canada and underscore the urgency of cultivating more supportive environments for these educators. This study also sheds light on under-explored factors that induce existential anxiety among early-career language teachers. These factors range from structural issues in TESOL programs, peer pressure, and time constraints, to the significant impacts students and administrators have on language teacher wellbeing. In addition, this
research reveals the multifaceted roles, both advantageous and challenging, that communities of practice play.

From a methodological perspective, this study broadens the scope of SLA research, which has traditionally been anchored in foreign language anxiety, by exploring teacher anxiety and resilience through a socio-ecological lens. The research further demonstrates the potential of qualitative ethnographic research that utilizes fully online reflective journals along with interviews. This approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of participants’ experiences and feelings over extended periods of time.

Regarding the benefits for research participants, the opportunity to meticulously document and introspect on their professional journey proved to be an enlightening experience, fostering enhanced self-awareness and insights into their professional interactions (as well as my own). A more comprehensive discussion on the implications and limitations of this research will follow in the subsequent sections.

7.2 Implications

In a thought-provoking UNESCO opinion piece, Sen (n.d.) reinterpreted the proverb ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ as ‘it takes a child to raise a village’, highlighting the transformative potential of children as changemakers. Drawing parallels with this perspective, this research extends the idea to EAL teachers. It posits that the early-career experiences of anxiety and resilience among EAL teachers are shaped by socio-ecological systems, and that these teachers possess the capacity to significantly influence communities of practice. According to Day and Gu (2014), building resilience is a collective endeavor, not just the responsibility of individual teachers. Pun and Thomas (2020) also highlighted the necessity for powerful
stakeholders to take teachers’ concerns seriously. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the significant roles individual teachers, educators, and language education institutes play in addressing and transforming the challenges inherent in the precarious TESOL profession.

Teachers should develop their emotional reflexivity, enabling them to effectively utilize available resources for professional growth. This development can be supported through various activities such as writing reflective journals, engaging in nature walks, fostering self-compassion, actively participating in peer engagement, and receiving robust institutional support. Nevertheless, as Carver et al. (1989) emphasized, it is problematic to assume the value of some coping strategies over others. It is therefore necessary for individual teachers to take into account the specific anxiety situations and choose what works best for them. Equally important, they should also seek volunteering and employment opportunities for hands-on experience. In doing so, they are able to learn by doing and experience authentic demands of the teaching profession.

For teacher educators, three key considerations stand out. First, teacher educators need to create tailored learning materials for pre-service teachers coming from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. An autobiographical reflexive approach may be used when appropriate to design pedagogical materials and activities (Chen & Byrd Clark, 2023). For example, activity participants could be encouraged to reflect on and write about the availability and nature of English teaching positions in their home country and in Canada, considering whether these roles are precarious or thriving. Furthermore, incorporating a self-assessment element can enable participants to identify and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in English teaching, as well as to understand how these skills have developed over time. This approach not only aids student teachers in critically understanding their professional landscape but also provides teacher educators with an avenue for reflective practice. As Golombek and
Doran (2014) pointed out, “the iterative nature of writing and responding to reflection journals enables, even compels, teacher educators to engage in their own processes of self-reflection” (p. 110). Notably, the effectiveness of this assignment is heightened when it remains ungraded (Golombek, 2015). This ungraded approach aligns with the methodology employed in the reflective journaling component of the present study. Equally important, Canada- or Ontario-specific resources can be prepared in advance and shared with student teachers at class. More specifically, it would be useful for student teachers to become aware of the existence of the latest development of TESL Ontario career center, which can help them bridge the knowledge gap in finding an English teaching job in Canada.

Second, teacher educators need to address student teachers’ emotions and anxiety, potentially through positive psychology approaches. Given that emotions such as anxiety and resilience are underrepresented in mainstream TESOL education, it is important to increase student teachers’ critical emotional reflexivity (Chen & Byrd Clark, 2023; Zemblyas, 2013). For example, teacher educators may arrange some sessions on positive psychology to help student teachers realize the nature of peer pressure and learning opportunities associated with it. Once student teachers gain deeper insights into their own emotions and emotional contexts, they will be able to teach relevant strategies to their students in the future. Possible themes for teaching, according to Chen and Byrd Clark (2023), may include 1) Representation, construction, and normalization of emotions in (language) education and beyond, 2) Interrelations between emotional experiences, professional realities, and social (in)equities, and 3) Resources for empowering the self and others.

Third, enhancing university TESOL programs by facilitating their accreditation with organizations like TESL Ontario or TESL Canada could significantly bolster professional
development opportunities for student teachers. Integrating meaningful practicum experiences is a key aspect of this. It is crucial for program leaders to establish partnerships with language institutions that can offer practical teaching experiences. By incorporating such practicum or placement opportunities into the curriculum, possibly with an extended semester as per student teachers’ preference, TESOL programs can facilitate a smoother transition for students into their teaching careers. This approach not only helps mitigate the early-career transition shock, as noted by Farrell (2012), but also creates a mutually beneficial situation for both the students and the programs. For student teachers, specific advantages include gaining hands-on teaching experience under supervision, accessing mentorship, and progressing towards ESL teaching certification.

For English language teaching organizations in Ontario Canada, they should extend their support beyond basic well-being workshops to more comprehensive measures. In light of this study’s findings, recommended institutional-level actions include designing professional learning activities that align with teachers’ interests and needs, offering clear career progression opportunities, ensuring timely approval of teacher leave, and establishing mechanisms for consistent student enrollment and attendance. Implementing initiatives and policies that enhance teachers’ control over their work environment is crucial (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Such an approach could not only make the teaching profession more appealing but also positively impact student learning (OECD, 2020). Furthermore, centralized organizations like TESL Ontario can address the expressed needs of English language teachers. This could involve introducing career development strategies, incorporating skill-based and multimodal teaching methods, expanding job posting options, and creating TESL-focused forums (TESL Ontario, 2021).
7.3 Limitations and Future Directions

The results of this study, while insightful, are not exhaustive and should be viewed within their context. The experiences of anxiety and resilience explored represent those of a specific group of English language teachers at particular times and may not reflect the realities of all TESOL practitioners. In terms of future research aiming for broader generalizability, two approaches may be considered. First, it would be helpful to develop a way of ensuring participants have a relatively more unified understanding of ‘anxiety’ and ‘resilience’ through pre-study briefings. Second, it could also be beneficial to adopt quantitative methods, such as developing or adapting existing scales to measure early-career anxiety and resilience in EAL teachers. These strategies could contribute to creating a widely applicable, emotionally responsive curriculum for a diverse range of EAL student teachers.

Further exploration is also warranted to unpack the construction and change of emotions. As Chen and Byrd Clark (2023) pointed out, it would be important and perhaps meaningful for EAL teachers to understand the representations, construction, and normalization of an emotional construct, be it anxiety or resilience. This exploration can include a wider range of emotions—from love and hope to boredom and burnout—and consider their interactions within the context of social (in)equities, including but not limited to (anti-)racism, (anti-)classism, and other similar factors, thus equipping EAL teachers with critical emotional reflexivity which could help them navigate emotionally charged experiences in their teaching career.

Additionally, this study was limited by its sample size, consisting exclusively of female pre-service teachers of Chinese origins and in-service teachers in LINC programs. Future research would benefit from a more diverse participant pool, including EAL teachers from varied international settings, different career stages, non-publicly funded programs, and diverse gender
identities. Furthermore, examining the experiences of alumni of Canadian TESOL programs who pursue careers in international ELT settings could provide valuable insights. The inclusion of native English-speaking language teachers in future studies could also offer a comparative dimension. Finally, to enrich the trustworthiness of the data, non-teacher participants could also be involved in further research, including these EAL teachers’ teacher educators, students, and workplace supervisors.

Although this research highlighted self-initiated strategies for managing anxiety and resilience among early-career EAL teachers, it did not implement direct interventions. Future studies could investigate the efficacy of resilience-building strategies identified in this study, such as reflective journaling, nature walks, and professional workshops, as well as unexplored methods such as mindfulness practices or collaborative reflections by participating in focus groups. Scrutinizing the effectiveness of specific wellness interventions could provide valuable insights into supporting EAL teachers’ emotional well-being and professional development.

7.4 Researcher Reflections

Reflecting on this research study, I gained significant insights from my participants and the research process itself. My key learnings contain a greater awareness of the challenges faced by both pre- and in-service EAL teachers, along with effective coping and resilience strategies. I was particularly struck by the unexpected intensity of peer pressure that pre-service EAL teachers experienced and their active pursuit of practical teaching opportunities. I also realized the precarious and anxiety-inducing nature associated with in-service English language teaching, where a strong sense of mission and advocacy for students can often help drive sustained professional growth despite career adversities. This observation has deepened my understanding
that teaching is more than instructional or pedagogical—it is profoundly influenced by socio-ecological factors. As I engage in teaching commitments within Canadian higher education, these realizations resonate with me much more deeply.

Another significant insight from this research is the need for a reflexive perspective in understanding the constructs of anxiety and resilience, thus avoiding simplistic binary ways of thinking. I learned that anxiety is not always detrimental; it can stem from socio-ecological factors and transform into a catalyst for growth under the right conditions. Likewise, the mere presence of communities of practice does not inherently yield positive results for language teachers. It is the negotiation of meaning and power within these communities that can determine their effectiveness.

Finally, there is an urgent need for structural changes within the TESOL community. Immediate support for TESOL practitioners requires evolution in language teacher education programs across the domains of content, pedagogy, and support mechanisms. A curriculum that is both emotionally and professionally responsive, and grounded in real-life contexts, appears to be essential. In the post-pandemic world, this might involve curricula that reflect and address transition challenges for early-career EAL teachers, in particular. For instance, student teachers intending to work in Canada could benefit from training in the integration of blended teaching and strategies for assisting them with navigating complex geopolitical landscapes. Such a forward-thinking approach would ensure that student teachers are thoroughly prepared to effectively integrate digital technologies into their classroom, while simultaneously addressing the dynamic emotional and professional requirements of immigrant and refugee learners.
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http://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.2.6.1099-1107


Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Date: 19 September 2022
Tr. Dr. Julie Byrd Clark
Project ID: 121270

Study Title: Teacher anxieties and resilience in post-pandemic times: A critical ethnography of non-native early career ESL teachers in Ontario

Short Title: ESL teacher anxieties and resilience

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: October 7 2022
Date Approval Issued: 19/Sep/2022 10:58
REB Approval Expiry Date: 19/Sep/2023

Dear Dr. Julie Byrd Clark,

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals and mandated training must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.

Documents Approved:

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No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCP02), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Kelly Patterson, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randall Graham, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).
Appendix B: Reflective Journal Guidelines

Weekly Reflective Journals

At this stage of research participation, you are asked to write weekly reflective journals for up to 12 weeks at this private Google Docs site. In your reflective journals, you are invited to write down your experiences related to early career anxiety and/or resilience as a pre- or in-service English language teacher. While some participants may choose to write about 100-200 words per week, there is NO set requirement about the length of each journal entry. In certain weeks, if nothing important/noteworthy happens, you may feel free to skip writing for those weeks and simply leave a note such as “not applicable” or “I did not teach this week”.

If you don’t know where to start, you are encouraged to reflect on some of these aspects:

1) your instructional practices (e.g., the use of language-for-teaching, pedagogical strategies, teaching content, educational technologies);
2) social and political practices within your institution (e.g., relationships with colleagues, teacher training, administrative duties, programmatic/school policies);
3) social and political practices outside your institution (e.g., family expectations and relationships, government policies);
4) values, beliefs and ideologies (e.g., individualism, money-oriented values, native-speakerism);
5) time factors
6) or anything else that you deem as important to the shaping of your early career teacher anxiety and resilience.
Appendix C: Interview Guide

Background

1 Could you please briefly introduce yourself? Where do you originally come from? What languages do you speak? What kind of education did you receive in your home country and/or in Canada? How long have you lived in Canada?

2 Why did you want to become a pre- or in-service English language teacher in Canada?

3 What specific courses do you (wish to) teach?

4 Have you ever received formal education about career development, or teacher/learner emotions (e.g., L2 motivation, anxiety)? Please explain.

5 What does teacher anxiety mean to you?

6 What does teacher resilience mean to you?

7 What do you think of the TESOL profession (program) in Ontario, Canada? Would you describe the profession as sustainable and rewarding? Or precarious and insecure?

Retrospective (with reference to participants’ self-written journals)

8 Among all situations in your reflective journal, which type(s) of early career anxiety/resilience had the biggest impact on you as a language teacher?

9 Can you remember what was going on here? How did you deal with the given situation and emotion?

10 What would you do differently if you were to experience this situation again in the future?

11 Thinking of your entire process of writing reflective journals, have you noticed any progresses or improvements, in your own levels of early career anxiety/resilience?
Beyond retrospective

12 What are your ideal ways of managing early career anxieties? Do you feel satisfied about your current style of anxiety management? In the future, what personal steps would you like to take to foster an ideal coping style? What external supports, resources, or changes (e.g., interpersonal, professional, emotional, policy) should be in place to help you build early career resilience in post-pandemic times?

13 Have you ever participated in any well-being/wellness services within and outside your institution? If yes, were they helpful? To what extent can they be improved? If no, why?

14 What have you learned from your participation in this research? Please explain.

15 Is there anything else that you would like to add that was not mentioned in this interview?
# Curriculum Vitae

**Name**  
Aide Chen

**Degrees**

- PhD, Educational Studies (in the field of Applied Linguistics)  
  Western University, Canada 2019-2023

- MA, Educational Studies (in the field of Applied Linguistics)  
  Western University, Canada 2017-2019

- MPEd, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages  
  Western University, Canada 2016-2017

- BA, Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages  
  Zhejiang Normal University, China 2011-2015

**Selected Publications**

**Book Chapters**


**Book Reviews**


**Journal Editorials**

1–4.


MA Thesis


Selected Presentations


candidates’ use of psychoeducational reports. In C. Crooks (Chair), *Summer Studentship Research Day*. Centre for School Mental Health, Western University, London, ON, Canada.


Chen, A. (2019, May 31). *From GSPP to graduate programs at Western: My narratives*. York University English Language Institute, North York, ON, Canada.


**Teaching**

Higher Education

EAP Professor, Fanshawe College, Canada
Reason and Writing (1030-63), School of Language and Liberal Studies 2023
Reason and Writing (1032-61), School of Language and Liberal Studies 2023

Teaching Assistant, Western University, Canada

Graduate Courses

9687L: Critical Discourse Analysis for Education, Faculty of Education 2021
9687A: Contemporary Approaches to Pedagogy, Faculty of Education 2020

Undergraduate Courses

5439S Supporting English Language Learners, Faculty of Education 2022
5439Q Supporting English Language Learners, Faculty of Education 2021
English for Academic Purposes
Teaching Assistant, York University, Canada
Research Writing, York University English Language Institute 2016
Academic Communication, York University English Language Institute 2016

K-12 Teaching
Chinese & English Language Teacher, International Department
Ningbo Huamao Foreign Languages School, Ningbo, China 2014

Services

Editorship
Publication Team Member, Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies 2020-2023
Managing Editor, Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education 2023
Associate Editor, Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education 2022
Associate & Senior Copyeditor, Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education 2019-2021

Conference Facilitation
Drafter & Translator of the SOLVE Declaration, SOLVE Conference 2021, International Security & Conflict Analysis Network (iSCAN), Austria 2021
Committee Co-Chair, the 12th Robert Macmillan Symposium in Education (RMSE), Western University, Canada 2020-2021
Committee Chair, the 11th Robert Macmillan Symposium in Education (RMSE), Western University, Canada 2019-2020
Conference Ambassador, the 2019 International ACAC Conference, Western University, Canada 2019
Committee Member, TESL London Professional Development Committee, The 2019 TESL London Spring Conference, Canada 2018-2019

University and Community Involvement
Graduate Student Representative, Teacher Education Design Group, Faculty of Education, Western University 2022-2023
Peer Mentor (PhD), Faculty of Education Mentorship Program, Western University 2020-2023
Graduate Student Representative, Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada 2020-2021
Peer Mentor (Master’s), Faculty of Education Mentorship Program, Western University 2019-2020

Career Profile Advisor, Western Employment Resource Centre, Western University 2018-2020

Presentation Facilitator, Violence Prevention Program, Western University 2018