k:ON – Kölner Online Journal für Lehrer*innenbildung, Sonderheft/Special Issue 6, 2026, 1–26
https://doi.org/10.18716/ojs/kON/2026.s6.1

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The Pedagogical Potential of Healthy Linguistic Risk-Taking for Promoting Well-Being

Abstract

Language learner well-being is increasingly recognized as vital for effective language acquisition. The linguistic risk-taking (LRT) initiative offers promising support in this regard but has not received the same attention as constructs like willingness to communicate (WTC). LRT encourages learners to engage with linguistic challenges by reframing risk as a manageable and meaningful part of language use. Drawing on positive psychology frameworks such as PERMA and EMPATHICS, this article explores the potential of healthy LRT, which supports well-being dimensions like self-efficacy, agency, motivation, and resilience, in particular through emotion regulation and a growth-oriented language mindset. We argue that conceptual overlap within well-being models is a strength, not a limitation, and illustrates LRT's broad relevance. Based on a literature review, this conceptual article refines the LRT construct and proposes a model for its pedagogical application.

Das *Well-Being* von Sprachlernenden wird zunehmend als entscheidend für effektiven Spracherwerb anerkannt, und die *Linguistic Risk-Taking (LRT) Initiative* birgt in dieser Hinsicht vielversprechendes Potenzial. *LRT* ermutigt Lernende, sich sprachlichen Herausforderungen zu stellen, indem es das Eingehen von Risiken als bewältigbaren und sinnvollen Teil des Sprachgebrauchs neu definiert. Basierend auf positiver Psychologie und Modellen wie PERMA und EMPATHICS untersucht dieser Artikel, wie ‚gesundes' *LRT* Aspekte des Well-Beings wie Selbstwirksamkeit, Handlungsfähigkeit, Motivation und Resilienz fördert, insbesondere durch Emotionsregulation und eine wachstumsorientierte Einstellung zur Sprache. *Risk-Taking* hat bislang weniger Aufmerksamkeit erhalten als Konstrukte wie Kommunikationsbereitschaft (*WTC*). Neuere Arbeiten von Slavkov et al. (Universität Ottawa) rücken das Potenzial von *LRT* stärker in den Fokus. Wir argumentieren, dass konzeptionelle Überschneidungen innerhalb von *Well-Being*-Modellen eine Stärke darstellen und die Anschlussfähigkeit von *LRT* verdeutlichen. Basierend auf einer Literaturrecherche präzisiert dieser konzeptionelle Artikel das *LRT*-Konstrukt und schlägt ein Modell für die pädagogisch-didaktische Umsetzung einer *LRT*-Initiative vor.

Keywords

linguistic risk-taking, healthy risk-taking, well-being, positive psychology, PERMA, EMPATHICS, resilience

Linguistic Risk-Taking (*LRT*), sprachliche Risikobereitschaft, *Risk-Taking*, *Well-Being*, Kommunikationsbereitschaft (*WTC*), Positive Psychologie, PERMA, EMPATHICS, Resilienz, Emotionsregulation

1. Introduction

A linguistic risk is an authentic, autonomous communicative act where learners are pushed out of their linguistic and cultural comfort zone through using the target language (Slavkov & Séror, 2019, p. 254; Griffiths & Slavkov, 2021, p. 129; Slavkov, 2023, p. 35). Linguistic risk-taking (LRT) can be embedded in contemporary pedagogical, psychological, and social frameworks such as positive psychology and well-being (Slavkov, 2023, pp. 33, 38). However, risk-taking has not been prioritized in applied linguistics and language teaching research and practice as much as constructs like willingness to communicate, motivation, identity or anxiety until a Canadian initiative at the University of Ottawa (Slavkov & Séror, 2019) began to spotlight the potential of LRT. Recent publications from this line of research (e.g., Slavkov, 2023) have brought attention to LRT's usefulness for *pedagogical practice*, underscoring the importance of further exploration and application of this construct, especially since the LRT construct remains underdeveloped in many respects (Slavkov, 2023, p. 37).

The essential pedagogical tool within the LRT initiative is the Linguistic Risk-Taking Passport, which was designed for the bilingual university campus in Canada (uOttawa). It lists approximately 80 risks in the format of a travel passport. Risk examples are changing one's phone settings to the target language, ordering in the cafeteria, speaking to a superior or writing an email to a professor in the L2. Whilst university students can independently complete and check off those risks, the passport itself is introduced in language classes of the university. Students can also rate risk-potential, propose new risks and share them with others (Slavkov & Séror, 2019, pp. 260–264; Slavkov, 2023, pp. 34–37). The LRT passport is also available as a digital app called *Linguistic Risk* for members of the campus of the University of Ottawa (Slavkov, 2026). For more details on how the LRT initiative works at the University of Ottawa, please see Slavkov (2026). The initiative has since been adapted for the contexts of university learners of English as a foreign language in Japan (MacDonald & Thompson, 2019), L2 learners of German in Austria (Cajka et al., 2023), as a handbook of language challenges for the European Day of Languages (European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe, 2025), in K-12 school-settings and within rehabilitation and health sciences for people that stutter (Slavkov, 2023, p. 52; Slavkov, 2020, p. 64). These examples underline the adaptation potential of the LRT initiative (Slavkov, 2023, p. 52).

In this conceptual article, we argue that the special potential of the LRT initiative lies in its contribution to language learner well-being and in its pedagogical potential for customization for different learning contexts and learner needs. The following steps are undertaken through a comprehensive literature review. We contribute to the field by clarifying our understanding of well-being and the LRT construct within language pedagogy. We do so by analyzing LRT through the lens of well-being, thus pointing out why and how LRT can contribute to prioritizing and promoting learner well-being. We

place particular emphasis on the notion of 'healthy' risk-taking (Cervantes, 2013), which necessitates further exploration and specification and may suggest directions for future research on applying LRT in real-world language classrooms.

2. Theoretical and Terminological Background

2.1 Well-Being & Positive Psychology

Like LRT, well-being is highly personal and subjective in how it is perceived by individuals (Resnik & Mercer, 2024, p. 112). Mercer (2021, pp. 14–16) argues that well-being is not only a subjective and individual experience, but also socially situated, i.e., collective and systemically determined. Therefore, working towards well-being becomes a collective responsibility in the community. In language education, such communities encompass, amongst others, teachers, learners, administrators and caretakers. If well-being is shaped and negotiated socially within communities, then Mercer & Gregersen (2023, p. 1) ask how an individual can be thought of as flourishing if others in their communities are not? Inclusive language education thus needs to address models of (language learner) well-being. Well-being is an important dimension and goal of inclusion (Piezunka et al., 2017, p. 207). Not only has it been incorporated into the UN future goals for Edu2030 and the OECD PISA profiles, but it is also accounted for in transversal curricula worldwide (Mercer, 2021, p. 14).

Well-being as a psychological construct has been given more priority in the field of applied linguistics and language learning in recent years. In this paper, we will refer to the multidimensional PERMA model of well-being (Seligman, 2011) as well as to EMPATHICS (Oxford, 2016a; 2016b), a model of *language learner* well-being that builds on PERMA. *PERMA* is a general model of well-being that is well-operationalized and based on evidence-based empirical research (Seligman, 2013, pp. 15–20, as cited in Marx, 2020, p. 133). Within the PERMA model, well-being consists of five elements: *P*ositive emotion, *E*ngagement, positive *R*elationships, *M*eaning, *A*ccomplishments.

EMPATHICS (Oxford, 2016a; 2016b) is a model of language learner well-being that is grounded in complex dynamic systems theory (Larsen-Freeman, 1997; Dörnyei, 2009c, pp. 195–196; the latter cited in Oxford, 2016b, p. 10), expands PERMA and relates it to the field of language learning. The acronym EMPATHICS consists of significant psychological dimensions that make up well-being and can have a positive impact on language learning (achievement and proficiency) (Oxford, 2016b, p. 10): *E*: emotion and empathy; *M*: meaning and motivation; *P*: perseverance, including resilience, hope and optimism; *A*: agency and autonomy; *T*: time; *H*: hardiness and habits of mind; *I*: intelligences; *C*: character strengths; and *S*: self factors (self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem, self-verification).

Any model of *language learner* well-being is still work-in-progress. Marx (2020, p. 134) argues that some of the explicitly mentioned dimensions of EMPATHICS are an inherent part of PERMA. She furthermore points out that the main elements of PERMA can be clearly separated, whereas the EMPATHICS elements cannot. Alrabai and Dewaele (2023) argue similarly and, building onto Oxford's EMPATHICS, propose a revised trimmed-down *E4MC* model of language learner well-being, according to which *E*mpathy, *E*motions, *E*motional intelligence, *E*ngagement, *M*otivation & *C*haracter strengths lie at the heart of language learner well-being.

It is positive that language learner models of well-being continue to be discussed and refined. For our article, we will refer to a selection of relevant dimensions of versions of the aforementioned models while analyzing how LRT can contribute to well-being.

When considering the language classroom, well-being and positive psychology are inseparable. "Positive psychology examines and promotes human well-being" (Oxford, 2016a, p. 21). Positive psychology has its beginnings in the 1998 election of Martin Seligman as president of the American Psychological Association. It represents a move away from a focus on distress, healing, pathology, disease and repairing damage. Instead, the focus in positive psychology is on positive qualities and developments in the human psyche and experience. Positive psychology takes into consideration facing difficulties, but from a perspective of well-being and exploring what is necessary for building strong, fulfilled, flourishing and thriving individuals and communities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; MacIntyre, 2016, pp. 4–5; Oxford, 2016a, p. 22). MacIntyre (2016, pp. 4–5) states that the most straightforward definition of positive psychology is one offered by Peterson (2006): "The scientific study of what goes right in life". Positive psychology relies on the assumption that strength- and resource-oriented interventions can improve the well-being of individuals and communities. Education and language are at the heart of these processes (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 5). Such interventions can take place in educational institutions such as schools through positive education (Seligman et al., 2009).

Slavkov (2023, pp. 38–40) places LRT within positive psychology by arguing that it creates enabling affective resources for language learning. LRT can achieve this by making learners aware of potential stresses and anxieties they may experience and, at the same time, facilitating a positive attitude towards challenging linguistic and social situations through reflection, ultimately contributing to positive emotions such as pride and joy. Using this argumentation as a starting point, this article provides an in-depth exploration of why and how LRT can help learners to thrive and flourish.

2.2 The Linguistic Risk-Taking Construct

Risk-Taking was initially related to language and language learning by Beebe (1983) in her review of social-psychological as well as linguistic and ESL (English as a Second Language) literature on the construct. Risk-taking has since been revisited by different authors in the field of applied linguistics and second language acquisition (Cervantes, 2013; Dehbozorgi, 2012; Dewaele, 2012; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Karimi & Biria, 2017; among others as cited in Slavkov, 2023, p. 33).

Beebe (1983, p. 39) discusses risk-taking as "a situation where an individual has to *make a decision* involving *choice between alternatives of different desirability; the outcome of the choice is uncertain*; there is a possibility of failure" (Beebe, 1983, p. 39, *emphasis added*). Such decisions can be trying out new and difficult structures the learner is unsure of or listening to input that is beyond the learner's proficiency (Beebe, 1983, pp. 46–47, 60). The LRT passport (uOttawa) lists a plethora of situations and activities that require language learners to make such decisions. Language learners face a range of potential failures, including making errors, being misunderstood, or failing to communicate effectively. These linguistic and communicative failures may lead to negative evaluations against language norms—such as being perceived as less intelligent or likable, unfavorable comparisons with peers, social discomfort, and even perceived threats to one's identity or self-concept (Beebe, 1983, pp. 44–45, 60; Slavkov, 2023, p. 33).

Risk potential exists across all four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening), although spoken interactions may overall carry more risk-value (Slavkov & Séror, 2019, p. 257; Griffiths & Slavkov, 2021, p. 129). This understanding goes beyond Beebe (1983) who originally only discussed risk-taking in spoken interactions (Slavkov, 2023, p. 37). Receptive LRT occurs when learners engage with spoken or written input that exceeds their current linguistic competence, often resulting in feelings of anxiety. This might involve, for instance, attempting to read a text or listen to a podcast that appears too advanced for their current or perceived level. In the Canadian discussion of LRT and for the purpose of their LRT initiative on the bilingual campus of the University of Ottawa, Slavkov and Séror (2019, p. 259) defined "linguistic risks as authentic everyday communicative acts that take place outside of the language classroom and involve spontaneous and meaningful second language use." For our research contexts and interests, we expand this perspective by arguing that linguistic risk-taking can take place when using and learning any second language, but also when using and learning a first language. Linguistic risk-taking can take place both inside and outside of the classroom walls and in many different domains. This may be especially true for vulnerable learners, e.g., learners with Developmental Language Disorder (Schick & Rohde, 2025; Riehemann & Eberhardt-Juchem, 2026). Especially when aiming to develop the LRT initiative for diverse learners and learning contexts, it is important to adopt a very broad and multidimensional perspective on linguistic risk-taking. Such risks need not

be conceived only in terms of potential failure but can equally involve moments of playfulness or pleasure, for example by attempting a joke, experimenting with a pun or ordering a treat in a new language. These are situations in which stepping slightly beyond one's comfort zone can be both engaging and rewarding.

What differentiates risk-taking in a more general sense within communication (exposing one's political views in an utterance, disagreeing with others) from *linguistic* risk-taking, is that the latter specifically refers to the phenomenon that an utterance can become a risk more because of how the risk is 'packaged' linguistically (pronunciation, syntax, socio-pragmatically) than because of the actual potential for conflict in its content or context. Complexity of the communicative situation, task or content on the one hand and language on the other hand interact, of course, so that context and content can make linguistic expression or language comprehension more challenging. In our understanding of LRT, however, the linguistic en- or decoding is what adds the decisive layer to turning a situation into a linguistic risk.

The construct of 'risk' is a slippery term as it largely depends on the individual learner to assess a particular utterance as a risk, especially in the context of learners with particular challenges such as Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) or autism (Alvarez & Wolfe, 2023). From a linguistic or socio-pragmatic stance respectively, the term "risk" may be impossible to define. "[Y]ou take a risk every time you open your mouth in a foreign language, or for that matter in any learning situation where you are called on to perform" (Beebe 1983, p. 39). According to this claim, every utterance can be a potential risk. We could in this case invoke the framework of speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). However, "speech act theory forces a sentence-based, speaker-oriented mode of analysis requiring attribution of speech act categories [...]" (Brown et al., 1987, p. 10). A speaker-oriented mode of analysis may be in line with our understanding of 'risk', however a clear-cut attribution of utterances to speech acts may be difficult in learner language and, more importantly, classic speech act theory only recognizes a very limited number as bona fide speech acts. We may therefore move towards a more far-reaching socio-pragmatic construct: face. This construct was originally used by Goffman (1955; 1972) and further developed by Brown et al. (1987), who tied face up with "notions of being embarrassed or humiliated, or 'losing face'" (Brown et al., 1987, p. 61). Brown et al. exclusively focus on face with regard to (positive and negative) politeness, which they consider to be universal despite cultural differences, as well as on both maintenance and enhancement of face. Positive politeness strengthens the speakers' and hearers' positive face, i.e., the desire to be appreciated and approved of by at least some other individuals. Negative politeness is geared towards somebody's negative face, i.e., the desire to be free from impositions (Brown et al., 1987; Sifianou & Tzanne, 2021, p. 252).

We would like to adopt a less specific notion of 'face'. Politeness may be marginally relevant for our learners, especially those with DLD. In contrast to Brown et al. (1987) we are more specifically interested in what Ting-Toomey and Turogi (1998, p. 190) refer to as the "affective layer of face" (e.g., feelings of self-esteem and pride on the one hand, and embarrassment and shame on the other). Those feelings of empowerment, self-esteem and pride may be the learners' favorable experiences strengthening their (positive) face. They can be related to the well-being dimensions of (positive) emotions (PERMA, EMPATHICS, E4MC) as well as self-factors (EMPATHICS).

On the downside, the affective layer of face also includes something we would like to refer to as 'self-threats' to one's positive face (see the quote above from Beebe: "[Y]ou take a risk every time you open your mouth (in a foreign language)"). Especially for DLD learners, this may also be true for L1 utterances (Schick & Rohde, 2025). In other words, one's utterances may cause embarrassing and humiliating situations for the speakers themselves as they are derided or disapproved of by interlocutors. What counts as a self-threat to face cannot be determined on universal grounds; it is, especially in the case of children with DLD, a highly individual decision and experience. A self-threat may be caused by inappropriate language, i.e., accidental rudeness, or simply mispronunciation or incorrect and inadequate choice of vocabulary and syntax, or the use of a language variety with low prestige (again, in both L1 and L2 acquisition). Cajka and Vetter (2026) address this issue when discussing LRT in the context of minoritized languages.

However, what counts as a threat for one child may not be a risk for another. One individual may not hesitate to utter a request and may not fear any potential consequences, whereas for another it may be an insurmountable hurdle. This, in turn, follows van der Bom and Mills (2015, p. 187, as cited in Sifianou & Tzanne, 2021, p. 250) for whom face is seen as a situated and discursively negotiated phenomenon rather than as a static entity as in Brown et al. (1987), who are criticized for being preoccupied with "decontextualized acts" (Sifianou & Tzanne, 2021, p. 253). In order to do justice to potential face-threats in communicative encounters, it will be necessary to look at the individual learners and their individual challenges in concrete communicative situations.

Perceptions of risk-taking are individual and dynamic. It is difficult to establish, for example, what constitutes a moderate risk for any specific learner in any specific situation (Beebe, 1983, p. 59). In deciding whether a risk is 'worth it', learners can perceive situations and factors contributing to this very differently. Cervantes (2013, p. 433) provides the example of some students feeling more confident taking a risk with their peers rather than in the presence of a language teacher. Data from our own study, however, suggests that students with DLD may perceive a strong fear of being laughed at by peers, but also that this highly depends on any specific group dynamics (Schick & Rohde, 2025).

2.3 Pedagogical Terminology in the Context of Linguistic Risk-Taking

Since risk-taking is not a stable personality variable, but rather dynamic and influenced by situational variables such as prior experience or reward as well as the social setting (Beebe, 1983, pp. 41–42), we argue that it has the potential to be used in pedagogical practice within language learning and teaching. Similarly, Rhéaume et al. (2021, p. 1216) state that if LRT is guided and scaffolded, language competence, confidence, target language exposure and opportunity to practice can be increased (Slavkov & Séror, 2019, pp. 259–260; Griffiths & Slavkov, 2021, pp. 128–129, 132).

Slavkov (2023) refers to LRT as a "*pedagogical practice*" (p. 33) and an "*approach* to language teaching and learning (supplementing classroom instruction)" (p. 49, *emphasis added*). Through this, he initiates the recognition of the importance of LRT for language teaching. When discussing LRT in practice in the context of the University of Ottawa, Slavkov (2023) furthermore uses the term LRT *initiative* (p. 34) for the larger institutional framework and attitude centering around the LRT passport, with the goal of encouraging university students to seize opportunities of using their L2. The term *tool* is used for the LRT passport specifically (Slavkov, 2023, p. 34). Slavkov (2023, p. 37) also refers to the passport as a *pedagogical resource* and research tool.

> The linguistic risk-taking approach to language teaching and learning is not meant to replace classroom teaching, but to supplement it, offering an anchor into real-life applications, which can potentially lead to a higher degree of autonomy and life-long commitment to continued language learning. [...] The implications of this approach can be far-reaching as interested practitioners and institutions around the world can use the experience and the model presented here and design their own linguistic risk-taking initiatives, adapting the passport tool to their individual contexts. (Slavkov, 2023, p. 52).

For the time being, we refer to Linguistic Risk Taking as a *pedagogical initiative*, differentiating from Slavkov's (2023) term pedagogical approach, as we believe 'approach' typically refers to a broader theoretical concept, such as a philosophy or belief system reflecting theories on language and language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 22). Approaches do not prescribe specific teaching actions in a teaching scenario (Anthony, 1963; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). An approach would be positive psychology, for example, while LRT can be seen as one way of enacting such an approach. LRT is also in line with action-oriented approaches such as TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching; Slavkov, 2023, p. 36; Griffiths & Slavkov, 2021). Some risks can even be considered a task or a special subcategory of task that has to entail a dimension of experiential learning and emotion-regulation thus moving beyond cognitive learning (Griffiths & Slavkov, 2021, p. 135; Slavkov, 2023, p. 36).

We acknowledge that LRT may well develop into an approach at some point in the future, especially with it being further developed and validated all over the world (Slavkov, 2020, p. 64).

> Thus, additional validation of linguistic risk-taking as an approach with a positive impact on language learning and maintenance is expected in the future from other languages and contexts both in Canada and in other corners of the world (Slavkov, 2020, p. 64).

LRT initiative, then, refers to the general lived attitude and encouragement in the environment or at an institution that enables learners to take linguistic risks. Just like Slavkov, we use the term *pedagogical tool* for the LRT passport and the *Linguistic Risk* app. A pedagogical tool here is understood as any resource (strategy, method, material) used by educators to facilitate learning and improve students' language competence as well as well-being. As tools within the LRT initiative, the passport and the app enable learners to engage in autonomous LRT experiences. They would need to be complemented with *pedagogical guidance* to actively support students. Slavkov (2026) found that a combination of *Linguistic Risk* app use, course instruction, and guidance appears to help ensure that learners benefit from an LRT initiative. Building on Griffiths and Slavkov (2021), we view autonomous LRT and the need for ongoing reflection and support as part of a continuous cycle. The following figure summarizes and visualizes our use of pedagogical terminology regarding LRT (Fig. 1).

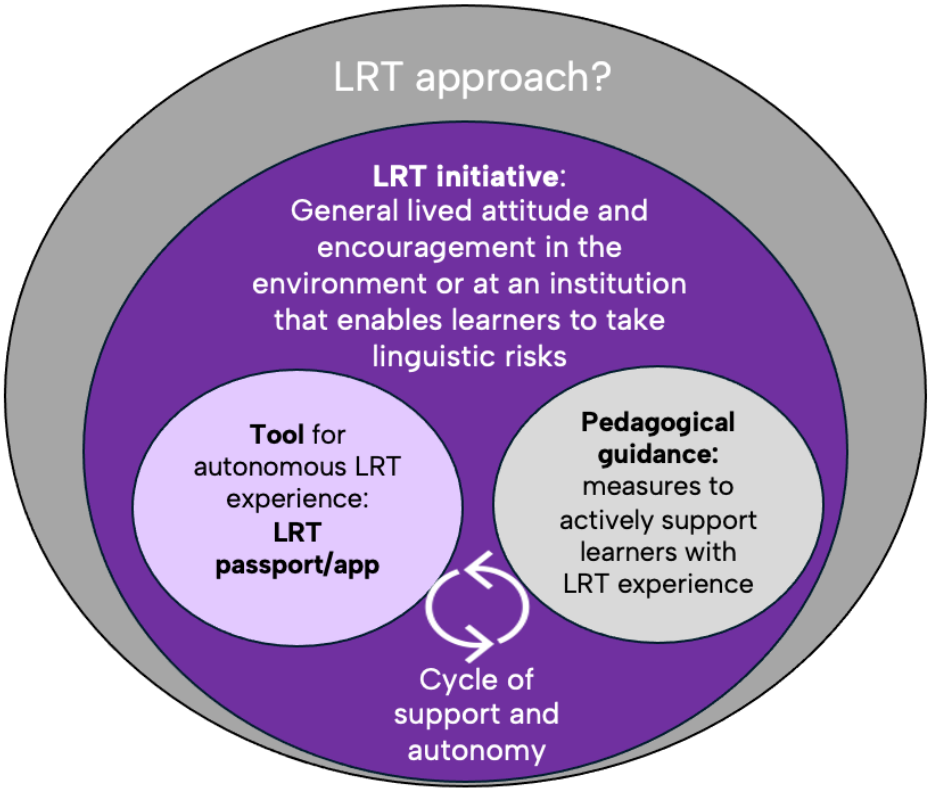

Fig. 1: Modeling the LRT initiative

Slavkov et al. link the notion of LRT to different significant pedagogical notions such as autonomy, authenticity, gamification and task and content-based teaching (e.g., Slav-

kov, 2023, p. 39; Slavkov & Séror, 2019, pp. 257–259). Most of the risks listed in the Canadian passport focus on L2 use outside the classroom in the French-English bilingual context of Ottawa (Slavkov, 2023, pp. 36, 52). LRT pursues the goal of bridging the gap between the classroom and the real world by encouraging learners to experiment with the target language not just in, but especially beyond, the classroom walls (Cajka et al., 2023, p. 208). It is *conscious* linguistic risk-taking in real-life situations that has first been recognized as a promising supplement to classroom instruction within the Canadian initiative (Slavkov & Séror, 2019, p. 259). Slavkov (2023, pp. 36, 52) refers to the LRT passport as a tool for raising awareness and helping learners manage both their emotional responses and the learning opportunities that arise from engaging in LRT. Thus, it is fair to conclude that in order for LRT to be conscious, pedagogical guidance and an accompanying LRT tool are required.

3. Healthy Risk-Taking: Pedagogical LRT through the Lens of Well-Being

Linguistic Risk-Taking can contribute to language learner well-being if it constitutes healthy risk-taking. The term healthy risk-taking was first introduced by Cervantes (2013), although earlier work (e.g., Beebe, 1983; Oxford, 1992) had referred to different aspects of this notion. It is an important construct as it highlights a key challenge in researching and promoting linguistic risk-taking.

Without using the term healthy risk-taking, Beebe (1983, pp. 58–59) discussed the difficulty of determining an abstract ideal level of risk-taking. While high risks increase the likelihood of failure, low risk-taking is neither realistic in real-life situations in societies that value risk-taking, nor is it conducive to educational success. When discussing the importance of when and how to take risks, Oxford (1992, p. 38) argues that moderate and intelligent risks are more advantageous than taking either no or reckless, uninformed risks.

Healthy risk-taking necessitates pedagogical guidance of LRT experience. Cervantes (2013, pp. 432–433) discusses three aspects that contribute to healthy risk-taking by referring to Gledhill & Morgan (2000): 1. Fostering positive relationships in the sense that learners, peers and the language teacher need to bond on an affective level. 2. A classroom environment and a comfortable atmosphere that is advantageous to risk-taking, which can include aspects like furniture, decoration items and visuals that encourage risk-taking 3. A teaching sequence that fosters risk-taking by ensuring learners feel prepared to take risks through clear instructions and practice opportunities beforehand.

Furthermore, Cervantes (2013, p. 433) highlights the role of the teacher in facilitating healthy risk-taking. As LRT is all about attempting and possibly failing, the

teacher needs to be supportive of any attempt, no matter the outcome for the student. It needs to be clear for the class that risk-taking and therefore also possible errors or failure of any kind are valued in a general climate of tolerance. The following analysis of LRT through the lens of well-being aims to further define the characteristics of healthy risk-taking.

3.1 Tuning in with Emotions: LRT as Awareness-Raising and Managing Tool

What is new and highly relevant about the Canadian approach to LRT is the emphasis on reframing LRT as a path to awareness of positive emotions such as language learning enjoyment, hopefulness and achievement. In line with Slavkov (2023, pp. 38–39), we argue that this is one of the main reasons why LRT can contribute to well-being in language learning. It is also when LRT can be considered healthy.

In the initial stages when learners step out of their comfort zone, they might experience negative emotions such as discomfort and anxiety due to the uncertainty of the outcome and the possibility of failure. Overcoming such fears and negative emotions and taking a linguistic risk, however, can lead to positive emotions and experiences of empowerment, joy, pride and confidence (Slavkov, 2023, p. 33). On the one hand, this can be due to taking the risk and experiencing a positive outcome, e.g., by getting your intention across or by successfully understanding others. On the other hand, a risk can make a learner proud even if the attempt was unsuccessful. This would be the case because they ventured out of their comfort zone, 'faced their demons' and overcame their fears and worries. Experiencing the freedom to communicate one's own ideas can be perceived as a high gain situation (Beebe, 1983, p. 62).

Positive emotions are at the heart of well-being within the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) as well as of EMPATHICS (Oxford, 2016a; 2016b) and E4MC (Alrabai & Dewaele, 2023). They can enhance well-being and have a beneficial role in language learning (Khajavy & Vaziri, 2024, p. 155). One important pillar of LRT is fostering a focus on positive emotions (Slavkov, 2023, p. 37). Marx (2020, p. 134) argues that positive emotions influence the development of a learning foundation referred to as broadening (Frederickson, 2001). Broadening means opening up to learning opportunities which enables learners to take in and process new information and experiences (Marx, 2020, p. 134). LRT can thus contribute to broadening.

Both, language anxiety as well as language enjoyment are an inherent part of language learning (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). It is therefore important to acknowledge and to 'normalize' negative emotions as a natural part of language learning and as something every language learner experiences at times. Marx (2020, p. 135 by referring to Eynde & Turner, 2006) points out that negative emotions can also be beneficial for language learning as they can lead to a focus on problems that can be important for solving tasks. Marx (2020, p. 136) concludes that while positive emotions play an important part

in any learning process, they are merely a part of the complex network of learning. LRT is of particular relevance, then, as it reflects this complexity in that it accounts for both positive as well as negative emotions and experiences. LRT thus fits well into the 'positive and negative emotions phase' in current research on emotions in language learning (Dewaele & Li, 2020, pp. 2–4), in which the relationship between negative and positive emotions as well as a wider spectrum of emotions that may influence language learning are explored (Almukhaild & King, 2023, pp. 60–61). Almukhaild and King (2023, p. 61) provide an overview of this more nuanced and expanded research into different emotions (Tab. 1):

Studies	Positive emotions	Negative emotions
Boudreau et al. (2018); Dewaele & Alfawzan (2018); Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014, 2016)	enjoyment	anxiety
Lie et al. (2021); Nakamura et al. (2021); Pawlak et al. (2020)		boredom
Pavelescu & Petrić (2018)	love, enjoyment	
Ross & Stracke (2016)	pride	
Teimouri (2018)		guilt, shame
MacIntyre & Vincze (2017)	joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love	anger, shame, contempt, disgust, embarrassment, guilt, hate, sadness, feeling scared, and being stressed
Piniel & Albert (2018)	pride, contentment, comfort, relaxation, enjoyment	anxiety

Tab. 1: Emotions in prior L2 literature (Almukhaild & King, 2023, p. 61)

Oxford (2016b, p. 16) also addresses complex combinations of mixed emotional responses in language learning situations that cannot be reduced to just one or two emotions.

According to Slavkov (2023, p. 36), LRT can have both an awareness-raising and managing function regarding emotions. He points out that risks are slightly different from tasks or a special subset of them as they have to entail this emotional dimension of learners becoming aware of and managing their own emotions. With respect to well-being, the teacher's role would be to help their learners transform negative emotions

into learning opportunities with positive outcomes and/or emotions. This can entail understanding that failing to communicate can mean learning to communicate (Beebe, 1983, pp. 44–45).

By referring to research on positive psychology with respect to language anxiety (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012b), Slavkov (2023, pp. 38–39) argues that an explicit approach to LRT can lead to a more positive attitude toward demanding social and linguistic situations and to their acceptance as a natural part of using and learning language. This can be achieved by raising awareness and reflecting on potential stressors that can pose a threat to learners' well-being, on the one hand, but also on subsequently encouraging them to discover the pleasurable aspects of language use and learning, on the other hand. This can eventually enable learners to move away from a negativity perspective, de-emphasize the expectance of failure, and increase their resilience and well-being.

In this context, emotion regulation and meta-affect may be of relevance. They refer to awareness and control of affect. Bown and White (2010, p. 434) point out that meta-affect is rather unexplored in comparison to metacognition (awareness and control of cognition). They see self-regulation of affect as the psychological self being "involved in overcoming self-doubt, managing different forms of anxiety, or generating positive emotions, for example, to enhance language achievement" (Bown & White, 2010, p. 434).

An explicit approach to LRT as a pedagogical approach has the potential to provide the context and incentive for learners to experiment with meta-affect. We argue that pedagogical guidance of LRT experiences can empower learners by supporting the development of "learner-initiated processes and strategies which manage and change affect in a productive way to enhance achievement" (Bown & White, 2010, p. 434). We consider linguistic risks to be learning opportunities closely linked to the potential of developing meta-affect, affect-regulation and affective strategies. Learners need to be empowered to take charge of their affective experiences and conditions so that they can participate in healthy linguistic risk-taking.

In a recent study by Slavkov (2023) involving 554 learners of English and French using the LRT Passport, participants reported a range of positive experiences, not only related to language learning but also to their overall well-being and life satisfaction (p. 46). The study concluded that the passport helped learners develop strategies to manage anxiety and suggested that the initiative could empower both language learning and broader life experiences (p. 51). In another study, Slavkov (2026) explored the socio-emotional gains of LRT based on quantitative and qualitative data from university students on a bilingual campus. Learners reported benefits like new discoveries, feeling satisfaction, enjoyment or experiencing personal growth, which Slavkov interprets as indicators of overall well-being. These findings provide evidence that the LRT initiative helps learners take charge of their affective experiences.

3.2 Growth Mindset, Self-Efficacy & Future Language Self (Motivation)

If we define LRT as learners being pushed out of their linguistic and cultural comfort zone (Griffiths & Slavkov, 2021, p. 129), the question arises as to when this push leads them into the space "where the magic happens" (Slavkov, 2020, p. 47), that is, where they can learn and grow, rather than where they experience overwhelming anxiety, panic or frustration. Healthy LRT would mean for a person to challenge themselves beyond their current abilities, but not so much that they become overwhelmed. This can be linked with the notions of fixed and growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) that Rhéaume et al. (2021) discussed within the context of LRT. These mindsets guide people in their lives in terms of behavior, interpretation and their perceptions of themselves. With respect to language learning, a fixed mindset can, for example, mean that learners believe they either possess a talent for language learning or they do not. Having a growth mindset, on the other hand, would mean that learners believe in the positive effect of effort, experience and work in language learning (Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Khajavy et al., 2021). Promoting healthy LRT should thus entail promoting a growth mindset so that learners seek adequate challenges and learn and bounce back from setbacks (resilience).

> When people view ability as something that can be improved, then developing that ability (by taking on challenging learning goals) can become more important, effort may be seen as a tool in this process, and setbacks can more readily be seen as information about the learning process. When this happens, persistence can be sustained. (Dweck & Yeager, 2019, p. 5)

We believe that an explicit LRT initiative has the potential to offer a way of transmitting a growth mindset, and that a growth mindset can, in turn, promote LRT—an interplay that still necessitates research.

Rhéaume et al. (2021, p. 1217) emphasize that learners can move from a fixed to a growth mindset and that an encouraging or limiting inner voice can play a role in that. They suggest countering a limiting inner voice by setting goals within motivational frameworks such as the ideal L2 self (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015) that helps learners cultivate visions of their desired future language selves. Future self guides have a major motivating function (Dörnyei, 2009b, as cited in Oxford 2016b, p. 63) and are part of the complex self-concept (Rubio, 2014; Oxford, 2016b, p. 63). They are furthermore linked with self-efficacy beliefs, i.e., the extent to which individuals assess their chances of succeeding in a particular task in a given context (Oxford, 2016b, p. 27). Both self-concept and self-efficacy are covered by the EMPATHICS model (Oxford, 2016b).

We believe that the study by Rhéaume et al. (2021) suggests that pairing LRT with visions of future language selves holds the potential to promote positive self-efficacy beliefs and a growth language mindset. In their study, Rhéaume et al. (2021) based their pedagogical scaffolding of LRT in French as a second language (intermediate level) amongst university students at the University of Ottawa on the theoretical constructs of

mindsets and goal setting (S.M.A.R.T. goals). The study comprised 13 one-semester courses taught over the course of five semesters. The courses offered explicit addressing of LRT alongside awareness-raising for mindsets through self-questioning, reflections, S.M.A.R.T. goals and a visualization of the ideal L2 self. Through participatory action research methodology, the authors explored 296 student perspectives through an anonymous student survey and one teacher perspective through teacher self-reflections in a log. The student surveys were administered in a cyclic fashion at the end of each teaching cycle and, in line with participatory action research, evolved over time (as did the pedagogical guidance). According to the authors, the pedagogical activities as well as the teacher guidance offered a passage from self-images based on fixed to growth mindsets. The survey results reveal that the activities had a positive impact on students' LRT. Students were empowered to step out of their comfort zones while engaging in LRT. This study offers important insights into pedagogical strategies of promoting healthy LRT based on mindsets and the ideal L2 self. Its findings should be taken into consideration when tailoring pedagogical guidance of LRT to different learning contexts in future research.

In another study, Sadoughi and Hejazi (2024) investigate the possible mediating or moderating role of LRT and learning experience with regard to growth language mindset and willingness to communicate (WTC). In a quantitative approach, they conducted questionnaires with 392 intermediate Iranian EFL learners, aged 15-30, chosen through multi-stage cluster sampling from eight private language institutes. The questionnaire included items measuring demographic features, growth language mindset, WTC, LRT and L2 learning experience. The authors concluded that LRT mediates the association between growth mindset and WTC. According to them, growth mindset positively impacts LRT, which then ultimately enhances WTC. In other words, learners who view L2 use more optimistically—as something enjoyable—who perceive challenges as less threatening, and who see themselves as having more control over learning through practice and effort, are more willing to engage in LRT. A growth mindset means possessing more cognitive and psychological resources that make learners more resilient and comfortable when engaging in LRT. This, in turn, leads to higher willingness to communicate. These results further underline the importance of actively building a growth mindset in learners as part of LRT initiatives, thereby ensuring healthy LRT.

3.3 Autonomy, Agency, Engagement, & Authenticity

Healthy risk-taking also requires and promotes a level of learner agency and autonomy. Learners have to make independent decisions in uncertain situations by taking risks of their own choosing. These decisions will affect the outcome. Agency is the departure point for autonomy in language learning (Benson, 2007, p. 30, as cited in Oxford 2016b), as it refers to volitional actions and behavior to affect outcome (Oxford, 2016b, p. 39).

This ultimately can lead to independence from external care and guidance, as the self assumes responsibility for care and direction—one understanding of behavioral autonomy (Oxford, 2016b, p. 40).

As learners assume more responsibility for their own learning, they assign meaning and authenticity to the tasks and activities they choose to engage with in the context of LRT. Through the LRT initiative, learners become social actors who are encouraged to independently engage in authentic language use. Linguistic risks are genuine real-life communicative activities, situations and experiences that can encompass authentic production, reception, interaction or mediation (Slavkov, 2023, p. 36). At the University of Ottawa, the LRT initiative encourages students using the LRT passport and app to select the risks they decide to engage in. Instead of having risks assigned by their language teacher or determined by their proficiency level, learners are free to make their own choices. This reflects the principle that effective linguistic risk-taking is personal. Learners are given the freedom to choose, which helps them avoid risks that might trigger anxiety while also avoiding ones that feel trivial or boring. This supports the selection of balanced, thoughtful risks.

Griffiths and Slavkov (2021, p. 133 by citing Littlewood, 1999, p. 73) point out that no learner can have a teacher by their side at all times and throughout life. The required level of autonomy in LRT can be a challenge for learners and will therefore require (initial) pedagogical guidance and support for healthy LRT. Teachers can take on the role of guides and motivators in the process of discovering learning opportunities through LRT, but do not occupy a central role (Slavkov, 2023, p. 39). Learner autonomy is a pivotal goal in language teaching and so is viewing learners as engaged agents that take responsibility for their learning process and become independent language users. Engagement—defined as involvement on a behavioral, cognitive and emotional level—is another key element of well-being in PERMA (Seligman, 2011). LRT requires and promotes engagement on all these levels (behavioral, cognitive, emotional). Higher learner engagement in ELT can lead to higher classroom enjoyment and higher achievement, self-efficacy, motivation, interest, and enjoyment (Mercer, 2019, p. 644; Khajavy & Vaziri, 2024, p. 155). Learners with high self-efficacy, in turn, show agency and autonomy by employing learning strategies (Oxford, 2016b, p. 62).

3.4 Meaning & Social Relationships

As we have seen, meaning can be found in experiencing autonomy and agency during LRT—an idea we will relate to Oxford's notion of being responsible in the present moment (Oxford, 2016a, p. 28; 2016b, p. 20). Successful language learners choose contexts, tasks and materials that are meaningful in an agentic way (Oxford, 2016b, p. 18). LRT offers them this space/freedom for agency and autonomy as they select risks of their own choosing.

Meaning in the well-being debate goes beyond that. Humans are goal-seeking creatures that construct meaning and seek personal purpose. Meaning refers to a) seeing a greater purpose and relevance for oneself in life, b) adopting a perspective that views life as extending beyond the current moment, and c) discovering sense in one's experience—i.e., becoming aware of one's self-worth and the value of other aspects in life, resulting in directing energies accordingly (Oxford, 2016a, p. 28; Oxford, 2016b, pp. 18–24). We argue that LRT can contribute to finding meaning in language use and language learning. It offers learners opportunities to experience language use as genuine communication, as a means of expressing one's own needs, thoughts, and desires, and as a means to form and maintain social relationships (e.g., friendships). Positive relationships that are shaped by support and feelings of connectedness are another key element of well-being within the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011; Khajavy & Vaziri, 2024, p. 155). Oxford (2016b, p. 20) also points out the significance of social relationships in reaching meaning. Slavkov (2023, p. 52) mentions language socialization and using acquired language skills from the classroom in real-life situations involving real relationships (friendships, love) as one of the goals of the LRT initiative. LRT's potential for constructing meaning, building relationships and exercising autonomy suggests its broader value within well-being-oriented language teaching.

3.5 Character Strengths

Regarding healthy LRT, another highly interesting aspect of well-being are character strengths. Character strengths are part of psychological dimensions that can have a positive impact on well-being and language learning (EMPATHICS, Oxford, 2016a, p. 26). Twenty-four cross-culturally recognized character strengths are classified within positive psychology and subsumed by six universal virtues (Values in Action (VIA) Institute's Inventory of Strengths, cf. MacIntyre, 2016, p. 7; Oxford, 2016b, pp. 57–60). The character strengths are not fixed and include for example bravery, creativity, curiosity and the love of learning—all of which can be assumed to be linked to healthy LRT experiences. A strengths- and resource-oriented approach to learning and teaching would place emphasis on, and cultivate, character strengths. This does not mean that problems, difficulties and negative emotions such as language anxiety are ignored. Rather, learners are encouraged to take linguistic risks despite those barriers or difficulties while utilizing their character strengths and virtues (e.g., the virtue of courage) as protective shields (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 8; Oxford, 2016a, p. 22). Drawing on MacIntyre (2016, pp. 8, 11), we argue that healthy linguistic risk-taking from the perspective of well-being and positive psychology may mean that learners can capitalize on their individual character strengths to decide when (not) to push and expand their linguistic and communicative boundaries. Ideas for pedagogical activities are already offered in the literature (e.g., Seligman et al., 2009; Piasecka, 2016) and they entail students writing narratives

in which they reflect on moments when they were at their best and identify character strengths they possessed and used at the time. While some activities aim at making learners aware of the different character strengths they possess, others focus on supporting learners in developing character strengths they do not yet possess. Such activities can be paired with LRT quests, with preceding class discussions in which students reflect on how they can activate and expand their strengths during LRT. If character strengths were to be fostered alongside LRT, learners could be empowered to independently engage in healthy risk-taking, ultimately enabling them to emerge from such challenging linguistic and communicative situations strengthened rather than weakened. We believe that further exploration of an explicit approach to character strengths alongside LRT seems promising.

3.6 Linguistic–Communicative Resilience

Resilience plays a pivotal role when it comes to well-being. Within the EMPATHICS model of language learner well-being, resilience is embedded in P-perseverance, which also includes the elements hope and optimism (Oxford, 2016b, p. 29). At the same time, resilience is linked to several other elements within EMPATHICS, for example meaning and character strengths (Oxford, 2016b, p. 30). Marx (2020, p. 133) describes the PERMA model of well-being as outlining features that characterize resilient—and therefore successful—individuals.

Resilience entails bouncing back and adapting after trauma, adversity and stress (Oxford, 2016a, p. 29). It can be defined as "'a set of competences which reflect a person's ability to successfully manage routine challenges and stressors as well as to cope with more severe negative experiences or adversity'" (Williams et al., 2021, p. 162, as cited in Ludwig & Sambanis, 2024, p. 83). There is no consensus on the nature of adversity and these stressors (Willems, 2023, p. 58). Rather, the literature identifies a spectrum of stressors ranging from daily school challenges (Smith, 2020, as cited in Willems, 2023, p. 58) to serious threats to child development (Wustmann Seiler, 2020, as cited in Willems, 2023, p. 58). There is general agreement in the resilience literature, however, that resilience is an ongoing adaptive process. This means that an individual's resilience fluctuates over time and with changing life circumstances. It can be viewed as an interaction and negotiation of individuals and their environments. From a pedagogical perspective, resilience can therefore be cultivated and practiced (e.g., Riehemann, 2024; APA, 2020; Truebridge, 2010, pp. 22, 24; Ludwig & Sambanis, 2024, p. 83).

In the context of LRT, an interesting suggestion by Petermann and Schmidt (2006) is to look at resilience as situational and context dependent rather than universal. Building on this idea of domain-specific resilience, Riehemann (2024, pp. 216–217) suggests the term communicative resilience meaning the skills and resources needed by a person to navigate challenging interactions, irrespective of their linguistic competence.

According to her, communicative resilience is based on the trust that one can master communicative barriers either independently, using one's own resources, or with the help of others. This highlights the close connection between communicative resilience and LRT. Building on this concept of communicative resilience and linking it to LRT, the definition may need to be broadened to include not only challenging interactions but also demanding linguistic tasks involving listening or reading, for example. While interactions and speaking may be at the heart of linguistic risk taking, we have clarified that LRT refers to all four skills. In the context of LRT, we would therefore like to suggest expanding the term suggested by Riehemann. We would, hence, use the term linguistic-communicative resilience referring to skills and resources required by an individual to navigate challenging linguistic and communicative tasks and situations, regardless of their level of language competence. The lower one's linguistic competences, the sooner one will face challenges in communication (e.g., when using a foreign language) (Riehemann, 2024, p. 217). Citing one of her own studies, Oxford (2016b, p. 29) states that successful language learners demonstrate resilience in particularly challenging situations.

Resilience can be approached in terms of protective resources competing with potential stressors (Willems, 2023, p. 58). One way of fostering resilience may therefore be to focus on those protective factors that can be cultivated in order to counteract stressors (Willems, 2023). Examples include supporting learners by forming meaningful relationships or working on problem solving skills. This aligns with a pedagogical emphasis of individual components of resilience that—unlike genetic factors—may be influenced by the (pedagogical) environment (Wustmann, 2021, as cited in Riehemann, 2024, p. 216). One such component is self-efficacy beliefs, which also play a central role in the EMPATHICS model (Oxford, 2016b, pp. 60–62). The different components of resilience cannot be clearly separated and are intertwined (Riehemann, 2024, p. 216; see Riehemann & Eberhardt-Juchem, 2026, for further elaboration). The existing literature already offers valuable starting points for resilience interventions in language learning contexts that future research on LRT and linguistic-communicative resilience can build on (e.g., Willems, 2023; APA, 2020).

Based on a thorough literature review and an ongoing study (Schick et al., work in progress), both Riehemann and Eberhardt-Juchem (2026) as well as we argue that healthy LRT and resilience are two sides of a coin. On the one side, learners build resilience through engaging in LRT. On the other side, resilient learners are more willing to take linguistic risks. We expect positive synergy effects when LRT and linguistic-communicative resilience are fostered alongside each other. In other words, LRT can be healthier when accompanied by pedagogical guidance that simultaneously targets the development of linguistic-communicative resilience, especially in vulnerable learners.

4. Conclusion

Our analysis reveals that many of the well-being dimensions we have addressed overlap—for example, meaning with authenticity, or self-efficacy with resilience, agency and motivation. While this overlap may still present challenges for the operationalization of well-being models such as EMPATHICS (Alrabi & Dewaele, 2023; Marx, 2020, p. 134), it seems a strength in the context of our discussion of linguistic risk-taking. It shows that LRT engages with multiple dimensions relevant to well-being in language learning, thereby enhancing its pedagogical relevance and value.

In her comprehensive chapter on EMPATHICS (2016b), Oxford outlines nine hypotheses about language learners with high well-being (p. 69). To conclude, we draw on several of these hypotheses and relate them to LRT. We believe our analysis has shown that:

- LRT can help language learners recognize and manage their emotions more effectively.
- LRT offers language learners opportunities to seek and create meaning, which can enhance their motivation.
- LRT can require and teach language learners to persevere in their learning and communication efforts; in particular, LRT and linguistic-communicative resilience may have a synergistic relationship.
- LRT offers language learners both the freedom and the responsibility to exercise agency and autonomy.
- LRT may not only draw on but also foster and raise awareness of a range of character strengths that benefit language learners both in their studies and in their lives. LRT—especially when combined with envisioning future ideal language selves and promoting a growth language mindset—can contribute to the development of positive self-efficacy beliefs and self-concepts.

We acknowledge that not all dimensions of the EMPATHICS model could be addressed in our discussion of LRT. One challenge was the model's breadth: EMPATHICS addresses numerous complex constructs and relating them all to LRT would have exceeded the scope of this article. We thus focused on a selection of relevant dimensions and constructs. Nonetheless, several aspects of well-being and LRT remain unexplored. Future research could explore aspects such as self-esteem and self-verification (Oxford, 2016b, pp. 64–68) in the context of LRT. Overall, our analysis shows that a well-being perspective on LRT seems productive and necessitates further research. Such research should contribute to the development and contextual adaptation of pedagogical tools and guidance for LRT across different learning environments (Schick & Mizelle, 2026; Schick et al., work in progress).

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