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Understanding Vietnamese EFL Teacher Emotion in Relation to Student-Related Factors

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Abstract

This qualitative study addresses the research problem of the lack of attention given to Vietnamese EFL teachers' emotional experiences related to student issues. Using a qualitative methodology, in-depth interviews were conducted with 6 experienced EFL lecturers in Vietnam. The semi-structured interview served as the instrument for data collection, exploring the factors affecting teacher emotions, how teachers interpret these experiences, and the outcomes of these interpretations. The findings reveal that student-related factors, including student engagement and behavior, significantly influence teacher emotions. The participating lecturers employed various strategies to interpret and respond to their emotions, such as suppressing or expressing them. These interpretations impacted their actions in the classroom, which in turn affected student outcomes. This study emphasizes the need to address language teachers' emotions to create a positive and supportive emotional climate that enhances student learning. Overall, this research contributes valuable insights into the emotional experiences of Vietnamese EFL teachers and their implications for effective teaching practices.

Keywords: EFL, teacher emotion, student-related factors

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Introduction

Over a long period of time in language teaching research, the concept of emotion has been marginalized due to its classification as a subjective concept, making objective examination challenging (Martínez, 2018; Ross, 2015). Nevertheless, the recent sociocultural turn has disregarded this claim, acknowledging that human emotions are socially constructed, which results in many key issues concerning human cognition being “reworked through an affective lens” (Johnson, 2006; White, 2018, p. 20). Therefore, the affective dimension of language teachers requires much more attention because it influences many aspects of their teaching (Benesch, 2020; Martínez, 2021; Ross, 2015). As an emotionally demanding profession, EFL teaching positions teachers in which their emotions are not only impactful to many outcomes but are also impacted by contextual factors (Benesch, 2017; Dewaele et al., 2018; Reis, 2015; Richards, 2022). Among

these variables, those related to students are strongly correlated with EFL teachers' emotions (Borg, 2016; Nguyen, 2018; Philp & Duchesne, 2016; Puckett, 2022; Senior, 2011). In particular, viewing teacher emotion as a multifaceted concept, Frenzel et al. (2021) proposed that a teacher's emotions can be shaped by the students they teach and that how they perceive these emotions can influence many aspects pertaining to their students. This approach posits that EFL teachers require assistance in appraising such emotionally provoking experiences in a way that can formulate a "sustainable emotional climate" that nurtures students' learning (Martínez, 2018, p. 3). Accordingly, an in-depth and context-bound understanding of EFL teachers' emotions in relation to their students is highly important for supporting them more effectively (Chen, 2019; Martínez, 2018). This, however, is still absent in many language teacher education programs, partly because the importance of teacher emotion has been downplayed for a considerable period of time (Golombek & Doran, 2014). The same problem is found in Vietnam, where little attention is being given to supporting EFL teachers' emotions in dealing with their classroom realities (Van Canh Le et al., 2020). Therefore, this qualitative study aimed to explore how Vietnamese EFL teachers perceive their emotions in association with issues concerning their students. In particular, it seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the student-related factors that can affect EFL teachers' emotions?
2. How do EFL teachers interpret these emotional experiences?
3. What are the outcomes of these interpretations?

Literature review

Teacher emotion

Considered an uprising trend, research on teachers' emotions is faced with various challenges, one of which is the difficulty in defining emotions (Ross, 2015; White, 2018). It is this conundrum that originally drove away past efforts to explore the concept (Ross, 2015). In her review of teacher emotion, Chen (2019) attributed the lack of consensus in understanding emotion to fragmentation in terms of perspectives applied to define the concept. From the psychological perspective, the emotions of a teacher are formed within himself or herself as a response to a particular external stimulus (Keltner & Ekman, 2004; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). In contrast, from a sociological perspective, teachers' emotional experiences are socially shaped (Benesch, 2017; Zembylas, 2020). While both approaches can be beneficial in their own nature, each of them is insufficient for casting light on the multidimensional complexity of teacher emotion (Zembylas, 2011). Therefore, the poststructural approach seems more promising because it situates language teachers' emotions in "the liminal space", where they are interconnected with both the individual and social dimensions (Martínez, 2018; Zembylas, 2011, p. 32). In other words, teachers' emotions

originate not only from within them but also from how they relate to their “historical, cultural, and sociopolitical context” (Ghyasi & Gurbuz, 2023, p. 1)

EFL teacher emotions and students

According to this perspective, EFL teachers’ emotions emerge when they interact with their students (Benesch, 2017; Nguyen, 2018; Richards, 2022). Specifically, students can influence teachers to experience various emotions, and how teachers appraise such emotional experiences can in turn affect how they respond to students (Frenzel et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2018). Supporting this notion, Richards (2022) argues that emotions, regardless of being positive or negative, can determine a teacher’s course of action in terms of their teaching practices or classroom management, which reciprocally influence many outcomes concerning their students. Therefore, it is significant to identify the issues relevant to students that can affect teachers’ emotions and the ways teachers interpret such experiences.

A range of student-related factors can shape EFL teachers’ emotions. First, there are variables concerning students’ academics. In particular, a Singaporean-based study by Loh and Liew (2016) revealed that English teachers experience negative emotions, namely, exhaustion, incompetence, or stress, when teaching their students, who overvalue the importance of succeeding in English exams without seeing the larger values of this language. This phenomenon is also found in the work of Puckett (2022), in which a Korean EFL teacher admitted feeling guilty when forcing herself to prioritize her students’ academic needs rather than their psychological needs. Regarding positive emotions, English teachers tend to feel satisfied when noticing their students’ improved learning progress (Nguyen, 2018; Puckett, 2022). In addition, students’ struggles with their schoolwork may increase teachers’ feelings of empathy (Puckett, 2022).

Second, student engagement can influence the emotional state of teachers. For instance, teachers are driven angry when their students barely pay attention to a lesson or fail to complete homework (Cowie, 2011; Frenzel et al., 2021; Puckett, 2022; Xu, 2013). In Puckett’s study (2022), a teacher’s frustration with low student engagement intensifies when her efforts to convince them of the importance of homework are ignored. In contrast, teachers should feel rewarded and warm when their students exert a high level of participation in a lesson (Nguyen, 2018). In addition, Cowie (2011) suggested that students with increased levels of autonomy and collaboration are more likely to make teachers feel warm than to improve their language performance.

Third, teacher–student relationships can affect teachers’ emotions. In particular, teachers may experience joy and warmth due to the close bond they have with their students (Hagenauer et al., 2015). According to Nguyen’s study (2018), emotions such as the joy or satisfaction of a Chinese EFL teacher emerge from his “harmonious relationship” with his students (p. 381).

From the poststructural perspective, emotions are not solely predetermined by social interactions; rather, individuals play an active role in interpreting these interactions by diversely responding to their

emotional experiences, which in turn affects the ones with whom they interact (Frenzel et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2018; Zembylas, 2011). For teachers, Frenzel et al. (2021) posit that the manners they employ to respond to the emotional experiences created by their students are bound to influence the students themselves. According to Nguyen (2018), there are three types of responses that teachers have to such experiences.

First, teachers may decide to work on their emotions. In particular, the teachers in Cowie (2011) and Puckett (2022) suppressed the anger caused by students' misbehavior by attempting to act calmly due to the belief that showing anger is unprofessional. Interestingly, the act of suppressing true feelings is also applied to positive emotions. Loh and Liew (2016) find that teachers need to conceal their "emotional judgments," whether positive or negative, when grading emotionally charged essays to adequately prepare students for high-stakes examinations (p. 274). Similarly, another teacher in Puckett (2022) states that although she feels sympathetic to her students' overwhelming schoolwork, she must still hide this feeling by acting strictly whenever the students complain about the issue. However, this way of dealing with emotions is ineffective in creating trust in students, which may in turn affect their learning (Nguyen, 2018). Apart from choosing to repress emotions, some teachers are determined to embrace them. For instance, Puckett (2022) supports this notion, as the last teacher in this research acknowledges her embarrassment to the class when she fails to answer a student's question. This teacher believes that such a confession offers a learning opportunity for herself and her students, as they can discover the answer with her. In a similar light, some teachers choose not to hide the anger caused by students' bad behaviors to show them that any teachers should be respected (Cowie, 2011). In addition, showing anger is said to have a positive impact on the quality of feedback for students, while the same act could be detrimental in terms of classroom management (Frenzel et al., 2021).

Second, teachers can seek strategies to uproot sources of undesirable emotions. Specifically, when experiencing negative emotions due to students' low motivation or bad attitudes, some novice teachers attempt to prepare more engaging lessons and ask for advice from their experienced colleagues (Riesky, 2013; Song, 2016; Yuan & Lee, 2015). A similar effort is recorded in the work of Kocabaş-Gedik and Ortaçtepe Hart (2021), as a native English teacher attributes his Turkish students' misconduct to his weak bond with them, which fuels him to learn Turkish so that he can improve the relationship. Additionally, Gkonou and Miller (2021) proposed that new teachers can respond more effectively to emotionally specific issues caused by students by consulting their seasoned colleagues. In a study of Mexican EFL teachers, Armenta (2023) discovered that instead of letting negative emotions take their toll, some teachers try to understand that their students' misbehavior is unintentional; rather, it is caused by their immaturity. The mentioned strategies yield mixed results. On the one hand, being appreciated by students for working hard on designing good lessons or improving the quality of a teacher-student relationships, teachers feel more satisfied (Song, 2016). On the other hand, when teachers believe such efforts are not taken seriously by

students, their emotional suffering becomes more severe, which can prevent them from any further investment in teaching (Kocabaş-Gedik & Ortaçtepe Hart, 2021; Puckett, 2022).

Third, surrendering to the circumstances in which negative emotions arise is how many language teachers are doing. In a culture of performativity where students' top priority is their academic English performance, EFL teachers may find themselves between feeling satisfied and guilty (Loh & Liew, 2016). The former emotion is experienced when these teachers attempt to do more than only teach their students for exams. Meanwhile, the latter emotion eventually emerges when teachers witness their students' disappointment due to their underperformance in high-stakes tests. Teachers who continue to experience this emotional problem end up with many repercussions (Farrell, 2008; Loh & Liew, 2016; Trent, 2013). One outcome is that EFL teachers will succumb to teaching practices that only serve their students' academic needs, which leads to "poor student engagement, rote learning, exam-driven, and spoon-feeding" (Nguyen, 2018, p. 252). In a more severe circumstances, some teachers choose to leave the profession with a sense of incompetence in their teaching abilities (Kocabaş-Gedik & Ortaçtepe Hart, 2021; Loh & Liew, 2016).

The aforementioned responses, as well as their effects on students, imply two important characteristics of teacher emotion. First, it is a "highly contextualized" concept that requires careful consideration of the specific context where it is investigated (Frenzel et al., 2021, p. 251). Second, the above studies indicate that teachers' interpretations of their students' actions, rather than the actions themselves, can determine teachers' emotional experiences (Frenzel et al., 2021; Martínez, 2018). Many influential factors determine these "interpretative acts", such as a teacher's cultural background, educational background, or years of teaching experience (Gkonou & Miller, 2021; Kocabaş-Gedik & Ortaçtepe Hart, 2021; Loh & Liew, 2016; Martínez, 2018, p. 331; Xu, 2013).

The reviewed works on English language teachers' emotions are insightful in highlighting the reciprocal interaction between teachers' emotions and their students. However, the extent to which these findings apply to English language teaching in Vietnam remains unknown due to limited research on the emotions of EFL teachers in the country. The contextually dependent nature of teacher emotion and the current scarcity of empirical research on issues related to EFL teachers' emotions in Vietnam motivated the author to conduct this Vietnamese-based study.

Methodology

Research context and participants

This exploratory study involved the participation of six lecturers from the Foreign Languages Faculty of a university in Ho Chi Minh City. The rationale for choosing a higher education context is at the writer's convenience, as he is also teaching in the same location. Moreover, the inclusion of a small sample of six participants is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of "the complex reality of teaching"

(Van Canh Le et al., 2020, p. 193). To be recruited for a lecturer position, the participants must possess a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics or TESOL. Furthermore, they are responsible for delivering lessons to English major and non-English major students who tend to approach the language from different perspectives.

This study employs the purposive sampling technique to select respondents. First, the participating lecturers come from public and private institutions with distinctive organizational cultures. Second, the participants also differed in terms of their years of teaching experience. Such diversity is likely to help the study attain “information-rich” responses regarding the dynamic relationship between teacher emotions and students (Patton, 2015, p. 46).

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

No	Gender	Qualification	Years of experience
1	Female	Master of Arts in TESOL	Over 10 years
2	Female	Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics	Over 5 years
3	Male	Master of Arts in TESOL	Over 5 years
4	Female	Master of Arts in TESOL	Over 10 years
5	Female	Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics	Over 10 years
6	Female	Master of Arts in TESOL	Over 10 years

In the recruitment process, a call for participants was disseminated through an internal online faculty forum. Two lecturers answered the call by contacting the writer on Facebook, where they were given more thorough information about the research's aims. Applying snowball sampling, the writer recommends that the two participants extend the call to their colleagues (Taylor & Bogdan, 2016). One week after the call, the writer managed to reach the desired number of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants to ensure their rights when participating in the study. Furthermore, anonymity was used to safeguard the confidentiality of all the information they shared.

Data collection

Semistructured interviews were chosen to collect qualitative data because their characteristics align with this study's employed perspective of teacher emotion. First, rather than excluding “any bias” from interviewees as in the goal of a structured interview, the selected instrument taps into the “specific perspectives” of its respondents (Flick, 2021, p. 172). Second, every interview is intentionally conducted to be dialogically stimulated, allowing the informants to openly and thoroughly express themselves.

The interview questions are structured around three research questions. Initially, participants are invited to articulate the relationship between factors originating from students and the emotions they elicit. Subsequently, respondents are encouraged to provide insights into their perceptions of this phenomenon and elaborate on the reasoning behind their perspectives. Finally, participating lecturers are prompted to delineate the consequences associated with their actions of interpretation, both for themselves and their students.

At the convenience of every informant, all the interviews were carried out and recorded on Zoom. In addition, the main language used during every interview was Vietnamese. After 30 to 40 minutes, each session began with the interviewer building a rapport with an interviewee to generate better responses (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Then, informants were asked about the student-related antecedents that shape their emotions. Next, they described their perceptions of these occasions. Finally, the interviewer prompted each informant to discuss the outcomes of having such perceptions.

Findings and discussion

Student-related factors and teachers' emotions

All the respondents unanimously acknowledged that their emotional experiences stemmed from their interactions with students. Respondent #3 was affirmative by saying “Indeed, my emotions are influenced by the students that I teach!”. This finding aligns with Hagenauer et al. (2015), who claim that teacher–student interactions appear to be “the most powerful in terms of provoking positive or negative emotions” for teachers (p. 387).

Student engagement and behavior emerge as influential factors shaping respondents' emotions. Regarding the first factor, different forms of learner engagement determine how the respondents feel. All respondents attributed their positive emotions, such as joy or happiness, to their high level of interaction. Specifically, respondents #1 and #4 recalled feeling happy when some of their students constantly raised questions regarding the topic being discussed. Moreover, in respondent #1's experience, several classes initially invested little attention in what she taught, as she was not the lecturer “whose class they desired to joy”. However, as the course progressed, the same students began to engage more in her lessons, which brought joy to herself. Such interactive attempts from students suggest that they are socially engaged (Svalberg, 2009), and such engagement is likely to foster positive emotions in their teachers (Martínez Agudo & Azzaro, 2018; Nguyen, 2014). Moreover, the mention of students' demonstrations of care and concern for their teachers was a recurring theme among all the respondents, further highlighting this act as an additional manifestation of social engagement. In particular, respondent #5 recounted circumstances where students noticed her fatigue and expressed their genuine concern by making inquiries about her well-being. This finding echoes the findings of Xu (2013), who reported that one participating teacher

remembered feeling touched by a note from his student saying that he should take care. Such warm responses from students are bound to foster positive emotions in teachers (Richards, 2022)

In contrast, when the respondents recognize that students exhibit a lackluster attempt in class, they tend to experience a sense of disappointment or frustration. The same finding can be found in the work of Canh (2014), as he discovered that EFL teachers can feel “really down” when students fail to interact (p. 210). For instance, respondent #6 stated that her students could sometimes be very “disconnected right from the start of a lesson”, which resulted in her immense confusion. The same issue was reported by respondent #3: “I don’t know why but there are days when the whole class is too apathetic!”. The situation sometimes became worse for this respondent when his students responded to his inquiry with silence, a form of disengagement that can affect teachers’ emotions (Smith & King, 2018).

Second, students’ behavioral dimensions also affect teachers’ emotions. Specifically, negative emotions such as frustration or disappointment can stem from various students’ inappropriate behaviors, including noise, smartphone use, low attendance, or lateness (Cowie, 2011; Nguyen, 2018). Despite the assertion that these emotions are more commonly encountered by student teachers (Martínez Agudo & Azzaro, 2018), they remain unavoidable for experienced teachers, as indicated by the respondents in this study. For instance, respondent #5 recalled in anger when her students tried to cheat during an exam by using their smart devices. She stated, “When I am busy reminding this side of the class not to use their devices, the other side quickly rushed to their smartphone to look for an answer!”. In the case of respondent #1, the cussing of some students when they communicate is “irritating”. In addition, failing to prepare for a group assignment project, the students of respondent #2 angered her as “their underpreparation affected the entire class’s progress”. On the other hand, the positive emotions of the respondents can derive from their students’ positive classroom behaviors, which reflects the findings of Xu (2013). Respondent #3’s joy was credited to the occasions when students “greet” him or cleaning the classroom board without him “prompting”. In a similar vein, respondent #4 was overjoyed when mentioning one group of students who weekly brought her different types of snacks including “milk, candy, or even a huge loaf of bread”. This is supported by Barcelos and Ruohotie-Lyhty (2018), Gkonou and Mercer (2017), and Nguyen (2018), as these studies recognize the impact of students’ positive behaviors on teachers’ positive emotions.

Despite not being emerging themes such as engagement and behaviors, the language proficiency of students can impact the emotional states of one respondent. Furthermore, this respondent claimed that her frustration stemmed from the fact that many of her students’ English proficiency was below what was expected from them, which in turn disrupted lesson progression. A similar phenomenon emerged from Canh (2014) and Smith and King (2018), who highlighted that students’ poor L2 proficiency can be detrimental to teacher emotion.

Teachers’ responses to emotion-evoking situations

The above results align with Nguyen's (2018) postulations, confirming the relationship between student-related factors and teacher emotions, leading to varied responses based on different rationales.

On the one hand, a high degree of student engagement, socially or behaviorally, tightens with positive teacher emotions, which leads to the respondents' positive teaching behaviors. Respondent #3 claimed that his "enthusiasm" was high when his students actively participated in their classroom activities, which often put him in the mood of "telling jokes" that made them laugh. Teacher enthusiasm is considered one of the key predictors of a healthy teacher–student relationship (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Xu, 2013)

In addition, the fact that several students attempted to pose "challenging" questions concerning their lesson pushed respondent #1 to engage deeply in delivering the lesson. Similarly, respondent #4 claimed she was in a better mood for teaching when noticing strong "group collaboration" in her students, which reflects the proposal by Gkonou and Mercer (2017) about the significance of "group dynamics" on teacher emotions (p. 19). Specifically, respondent #6 stated, "My students' strong engagement in their lesson motivates me to strive to improve my teaching methods!". In terms of behaviors, positive gestures from students, including being well prepared for presentations, tend to foster constructive teaching behaviors. In particular, respondent #2 often praised such acts to encourage similar efforts from other students. In addition, respondent #4 graciously recounted that she was always thankful for "even the small acts" from her students, which fostered a strong bond between her and her students. This, according to Richards (2022), reinforces the notion that the positive emotions that teachers harness from students can help them "sustain their interest in and passion for teaching throughout their careers" (p. 229).

As stated previously, the six respondents' negative emotions resulted from low learner engagement and disruptive behaviors. Interestingly, these emotions did not necessarily lead to detrimental teaching approaches for various reasons.

Regarding students' low engagement, respondents #1, #3, and #5 stated that they would only "teach by the book". For respondent #3, he chose a monotonous approach as "why be enthusiastic when they aren't engaged!". In contrast to these teachers, respondents #4 and #6 agreed that the reason for low learning engagement could have originated from inappropriate teaching approaches. Therefore, they chose to reexamine their teaching methods because doing so can put them in "a more active stance" (#6). For respondent #2, she often consulted more experienced colleagues for their advice to address this issue. The endeavors of respondents #2, #4, and #6 are consistent with the studies by Song (2016) and Yuan and Lee (2015), as their participants also took responsibility for students' disengagement.

Similar to Chen (2019) and Richards (2022), student misbehaviors reportedly elicited emotional responses of anxiety, frustration, or disappointment among the respondents. Nevertheless, all participants demonstrated varied strategies for managing these emotional experiences in a manner that avoids

detrimental effects on both themselves and their students. In particular, the respondents employed two approaches to respond to the negative emotional experiences of their students.

First, some respondents chose to suppress these emotions for various reasons. For the first rationale, both respondents #2 and #6 believed that teachers should not express negative feelings in an explosive manner, as this may “...go against an ideal image of a teacher (#2) or “the nature of the teaching job” (#6). Respondent #5 shared this belief, saying that she tried to avoid the scenario in which her students would “gossip about” the time she became angry at them. Respondent #6 furthered her view by saying that a teacher should “choose another career” if he or she is unable to handle the emotional nature of the job. This is consistent with the findings of Gkonou and Miller (2021), as some teachers tend to tone down their frustration due to the belief that this action is “professional” (p. 144). In addition, respondent #5 recalled her previous experience as a student to explain why she tended to suppress her emotions. Specifically, she reported that her inspiring past English teachers had never expressed their anger publicly, which motivated her to act similarly. This is called the “apprenticeship of observation”, suggesting that teachers’ prior experiences of observing their own educators can shape their ideologies about teaching (Freeman, 2024, p. 39). These rationales have confirmed the relationship between teacher beliefs and emotions. In particular, the two constructs “interact with each other, influencing teachers’ actions and decisions in complex ways” (Barcelos & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018, p. 121). Finally, all respondents suggested that empathy allowed them to mitigate frustration or disappointment when dealing with a certain type of improper behavior. For respondent #1, she tried to hold her frustration for herself when some students failed to complete a task due to their poor English proficiency. She clarified her action, saying, “It’s not entirely their fault to enrol in the course whose level is much higher than theirs”. Despite being angered by disruptive noise, respondents #4, #5, and #6 did not wholly blame their students. Rather, they pointed out that students were “inherently talkative” (#5). Furthermore, who was immensely affected by her past experience as a student who loved being treated gently by her teachers, respondent #5 said she often chose acting angrily as her last resort. Similarly, respondent #4 laughingly said her undergraduates were “just kids”, and she never held grudges against them. In the case of respondent #6, rather than unloading her frustration, she tended to question her teaching methods, hoping to come up with “something more approachable”. These findings resonate with the concept of teacher empathy proposed by Meyers et al. (2019). Specifically, teachers with high empathy choose not to be consumed by their students’ negative actions. Instead, empathetic teachers try to “walk that mile in students’ shoes” to improve student learning (Meyers et al., 2019, p.162). Notably, the participants commonly reported that they infrequently experienced exhaustion by repressing their feelings. Specifically, respondents #4 and #5 said they always left these experiences with students behind when the class was over. Meanwhile, respondent #6 said this was “part of being a teacher.” These findings conflict with the perspective that suppressing emotions can have detrimental effects on teachers (Song, 2016).

Second, the respondents decided to display their true emotions to their students. For example, when annoyed by students' chatting, respondent #3 reacted physically by slamming his or her hand on the table followed by him or her "lecturing" the students about their bad behavior. He attributed this action to his personality, that he is the kind of person who cannot "conceal feelings". To a degree, this reflects the relationship between teachers' personalities and how they teach (Kell, 2019). However, this teacher also emphasized that such a physical reaction was always the last thing he did after several attempts at "verbally warning" these particular students. His reason for such sequences was that he usually offered chances for his students to self-adjust their wrongdoing, which is another indicator of teacher empathy (Meyers et al., 2019). Regarding respondent #1, while being tolerant of students' low English proficiency, she immediately expressed her anger by "putting on a serious face" to disapprove of the cussing by some students. In a similar fashion, respondent #5 raised her tone to show her disappointment and frustration when some students were cheating during an exam, which was quite "shocking" to her class as they tended to view her as a calm lecturer. To make her point clearer, respondent #5 later told her "cheaters" that they would have their points deducted. For these participants, showing genuine emotions is sometimes necessary for various purposes, including improving student conduct, academic performance, and teacher-student relationships. This is supported by Cowie (2011) and Puckett (2022), who reported that teachers in these studies achieved the same goals by strategically showing their true anger or embarrassment.

The outcomes

All the respondents claimed that all the issues related to their emotional experiences when interacting with their students did not severely affect them. As evidence, respondent #1 said these experiences emerged and were dealt with inside her classroom. Interestingly, she was worried that her personal issues could sometimes impact the ways she handled her emotions at work. For respondents #2 and #4, these experiences did not follow them home. Instead, respondent #2 said she "enjoyed" seeing advice from her more experienced colleagues. For respondent #4, she stated, "When I have emotion-related issues with my students, I always handle it instantly in my classroom". Similarly, respondent #6 acknowledged that emotion is the nature of teaching. Therefore, this belief put her in an active role in coping with her classroom's emotion-driven cases. Perhaps the ample experience of the six respondents prevents them from facing the serious consequences of having to deal with negative emotions. This contradicts the case of preservice teachers who suffer from negative emotions caused by their students (Benson, 2012; Donato et al., 2014; Farrell, 2007).

Despite not being drained by handling negative emotions, most respondents agreed that professional support should cater to EFL teachers' emotions. Both respondents #1 and #6 mentioned the idea of a well-established series of meetings or workshops where lecturers can hear and be heard of the emotion-related issues they experience when working with students. Intriguingly, respondent #6 emphasized the more

urgent need to emotionally support undergraduates, as they were more “vulnerable” than her. Although student emotion is not the focus of this study, it is among the “driving forces” for successful learning, yet little attention has been given to investigating this matter (Richards, 2022). Meanwhile, respondent #3 emphasized the necessity for his faculty to show more appreciation for every lecturer’s hard work, which can positively affect his or her emotional state. He shared, “Of course, I don’t need them to do anything substantial, a few words of encouragement are enough for me.”. In addition to institutional support, respondent #5 claimed the following:

“The policy of our university is quite unfair when it comes to treating full-time and visiting lecturers. While the latter may get away with, for example, their tardiness, we full-timers have to go through lots of stages to explain our infrequent lateness...Moreover, our salary is another issue. They keep mentioning the concept of a happy school where lecturers and students are happy working, but sadly we don't have that.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, the significance of teacher emotion, while recognized, is still in its infancy, particularly in the context of an Asian country such as Vietnam (Chen & Cheng, 2022). This study illustrates the interconnected relationship between student-related issues and teacher emotions. This reflects Frenzel et al.’s (2021) notion of “a two-way street” concerning the relationship.

The positive or negative emotions experienced by respondents during student interactions have a direct impact on their teaching behaviors. Positive emotions enable them to become more engaged in delivering lessons with depth and may even incorporate humor, resulting in improved teacher–student relationships. Conversely, negative emotions compel teachers to navigate between suppressing and expressing their true emotions. Specifically, such navigation is influenced by professional beliefs, personality, and empathy for students. However, regardless of whether they repressed or showed genuine emotions, all the respondents attempted to deal with negative emotions in a manner that fostered better academic and behavioral outcomes for their students. This underscores the significance of teachers’ interpretative acts concerning their students’ motivation, engagement, and behaviors (Frenzel et al., 2021; Smith & King, 2018).

This study is not without its limitations. With a sample size of only six participants, generalizability cannot be made to a larger population of lecturers in higher education in Vietnam. Therefore, future empirical works should target not only target a more diverse sample but also in different settings to enhance the understanding of the highly context-specific nature of teacher emotion (Blake & Dewaele, 2023; Martínez, 2021). In addition, the semistructured interview method has proven valuable in providing insights. However, it is essential to acknowledge its drawbacks, including limited scope, reliance on respondent recall, and potential bias (Flick, 2021). To gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers’

emotions and their impact on teaching practices, researchers should complement this method with other research approaches.

In the context of Vietnam, addressing teachers' emotions has become pivotal for advancing educational practices. Further exploration of this area is warranted, and strategies should be developed to assist teachers in effectively managing their emotions. By delving into the intricate interplay between teacher emotions, student-related issues, and teaching behaviors, educators can foster a positive and supportive learning environment, ultimately enhancing student outcomes.

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