

Assessing Emotion Labor and Regulation Strategies Among Teachers: A Qualitative Study Across Different Experience Levels

Szymon Wyrwiński ✉

University of Wrocław

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-5094-3317>

szymonwerwa@gmail.com

Abstract

Emotion labor (EL) refers to the inner emotion management, and its conceptualization marked the beginning of research in many fields, including education (cf. REF). Teachers must regulate their emotional states to meet the demands of the job, which can be a considerable source of exhaustion. Therefore, the need to identify emotion regulation (ER) strategies and assess their effectiveness is a major concern in education research. This qualitative study aimed to explore what ER strategies English language teachers with various years of teaching experience employ to navigate emotionally challenging situations in the workplace across institutional types. Gross's (2015) emotion process model (EPM) was adopted as a theoretical framework both for protocol design and deductive data analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three teachers from both private and public schools, who had 3, fifteen, and thirty years of work experience. Results show that English teachers experience negative and positive emotions regardless of years of teaching experience and work context. Yet, the findings suggest that ER strategy selection might be moderated by the institutional type and differ across teachers with different years of teaching experience. Offering pedagogical implications, the findings of the study highlight the importance of cognitive change and imply that there is a clearer distinction within the response modulation strategy, which warrants further exploration.

Keywords: emotion labor; emotion process model; second language teachers; experience level, work context

1. Introduction

Current research acknowledges that emotions play a crucial role in the process of language learning by shaping students' classroom behavior, impacting their beliefs, which affects learning efficacy (Aragao, 2011). However, most research on emotion in English language teaching (ELT) has focused on students' emotions, and this trend is regarded as the *learner-centered movement* (Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018, p. 1). Thus, exploring the teacher's perspective is an increasingly important area of focus (Cuéllar & Oxford, 2018).

Teaching is characterized by a constant exposure to a wide range of negative emotions, such as anger or frustration, which may lead to burnout (Chang, 2009; Hakanen et al., 2006; Maslach et al., 2001). Moreover, a considerable body of research has so far proven that the lack of institutional support, emotionally exhausting social interactions with students or parents, as well as the burden of establishing good relationships with them, are among the most common challenges teachers confront (Acheson, 2016; King, 2016; Loh & Liew, 2016). Also, researchers draw attention to the emotional nature of teaching since emotions affect learning efficacy (Immordino-Yang et al., 2018; Zembylas, 2005). Therefore, Mercer (2018) maintains that expanding knowledge on teachers' emotions and emotion management strategies is crucial for enhancing their job satisfaction and developing effective coping strategies.

The shift of focus initially led researchers to draw on concepts from the fields of psychology, education, and sociology. An example of this is the recognition of Hochschild's (1979) concept of *emotion labor*, defined as inner emotion management, which had significantly impacted the development of SLA emotion research (Hochschild, 1983; Gkonou & Miller, 2021). In the following sections, the study aims at examining EL and ER strategies used by teachers with varying years of teaching experience, working both in public and private schools.

2. Emotion labor and emotion regulation

EL is the overall management of a worker's inner emotional state, often including its conscious alteration, to meet the emotional requirements of a job (Blake & Dewaele, 2022; Hochschild, 1983). Nonetheless, Oplatka (2007) and Jaikla and Piyakun (2024) claim that teachers' personal and interpersonal feelings influence the level of EL. It suggests that, due to the ethical considerations of the teaching profession as well as the volition to manage emotions effectively might produce positive outcomes.

In contrast, *emotional consonance* refers to an alignment between an employee's emotional state and the emotions desired within a given work context,

thereby eliminating the need for performative emotional expression or deliberate ER strategy use (Näring et al., 2006; Blake & Dewaele, 2022). Hochschild (1983) maintains that external, societal pressures have a significant impact on one's emotional state, thereby closely linking them with the two mentioned constructs. Those norms and their frequent discrepancy with a person's emotional state constitute the idea of *feeling rules*, by means of which people gauge whether the expression of their emotions is appropriate in each situation and whether it will lead to negative outcomes (Blake & Dewaele, 2022; Hochschild, 1983).

Hochschild (1983) proposes two strategies of EL: *surface acting* and *deep acting*. Essentially, surface acting is the alteration of the outer emotional expression without interfering with the inner emotional state. Similarly, according to Abraham (1999), the incongruity between the worker's inner emotional state and the top-down institutional expectations regarding emotional expression constitute *emotional dissonance* (Chang, 2009). In contrast, deep acting is a conscious and self-induced alignment of both the inner emotional state with external expectations regarding emotional expression to generate and genuinely feel the desired emotion (Blake & Dewaele, 2022; Hochschild, 1983).

Similar to Hochschild's (1983) sociological accounts of emotional management, cognitive researchers have also been extensively exploring the concept of ER, defined as psychological, behavioral, and cognitive efforts to control emotions in a given context, such as the workplace, as an unchecked emotional expression may hinder job performance (Gross & Thompson, 2007; Hochschild, 1983). In fact, teachers are required to display positive emotions to sustain a supportive classroom atmosphere, thereby creating a favorable learning environment (Taxer & Gross, 2018). Additionally, ER benefits not only the instructor, but also the student since teachers can regulate their emotions to foster conducive learning environments (Taxer & Gross, 2018). Gross (2002) proposed a distinction between *suppression* and *reappraisal* ER strategies. Reappraisal involves altering the interpretation of an emotionally challenging situation or modifying the relationship with the environment to produce a desired response. Suppression, on the other hand, involves preventing oneself from expressing emotions. However, research reports negative outcomes of prolonged suppression, such as cognitive resources exhaustion (Gross, 2002; see also Chang, 2009, p. 210). A great deal of studies has linked suppression of emotions and related techniques, such as surface acting, to correlate positively with emotional exhaustion. This, consequently, increases the likelihood of burnout (Carson, 2007; Chang, 2009, p. 210). Chang and Taxer (2020) focused on the use of teachers' suppression and reappraisal to manage student misbehavior. They concluded that practicing reappraisal on a regular basis can help teachers deal with discomfort in class. Their findings also revealed that suppression strategies were adopted as frequently as reappraisal by teachers (Chang & Taxer, 2020).

Despite slight differences in research focus, several pioneering studies provide an insight into the challenges teachers face due to both external factors, such as the unsupportive nature of higher institutions, and internal factors, such as the emotional burden of motivating students (Blake & Dewaele, 2022). Firstly, Acheson et al. (2016) conducted a study on FL teachers in high school in the US state of Georgia. The analysis of interviews revealed that teachers faced great challenges related to motivating students due to the unsupportive nature of the community and institution, and negative attitudes toward the subject. As a result, instructors were required to exert great effort to motivate their students and establish good relationships with them. The emotional exhaustion reduced their efficacy, which potentially could lead to burnout. In a similar vein, King (2016) interviewed five EFL teachers in Japan, reporting that they often used surface acting and detachment to manage their emotions or even suppress their feelings to maintain a positive learning environment. Also, administrative tasks were perceived as burdensome and created a sense of discomfort. Finally, Loh and Liew's (2016) study in Singapore identified several aspects of teaching that teachers struggled with. Most notably, the discrepancy between teachers' pedagogical beliefs and parental or institutional expectations drained instructors' emotional resources. Additionally, teachers were found to struggle with grading students' work as they had to reconcile the standardized curriculum with the emotional load of assessing individual papers (Loh & Liew, 2016).

3. Emotion process model and regulation strategies

The recognition and acknowledgment of ER processes in view of teachers' health benefits sparked the growing interest in this area of research (Gross, 2015). Gross (2015), drawing on the *cybernetic/control system*, developed the *emotion process model* (EPM), introducing five general emotion regulation strategies. According to EPM, ER operates as an interaction of different valuation systems, by means of which the discrepancy between the perceived state and the desired state is reduced through negative feedback. Furthermore, it operates at three levels: *identification*, *selection*, and *implementation*. ER is, thus, the interaction of *first-level valuation system*, understood as the one generating an emotion, and the *second-level valuation system* (Gross, 2015). The model proposes five types of ER strategies: *situation selection*, *situation modification*, *attentional deployment*, *cognitive change*, and *response modulation*. Firstly, situation selection is a strategy adopted *a priori* as it involves avoiding or approaching certain situations to generate a particular type of emotion. Secondly, situation modification is a conscious effort to modify aspects of situations that generate negative emotions. Thirdly,

attentional deployment is the redirection of focus from emotionally burdensome situations to manage the emotional state. Next, cognitive change, subsumed under the concept of reappraisal, involves interpreting a situation in a manner that does not harm the emotional state. Finally, the response modulation strategy encompasses both faking and suppressing emotions and is employed once either a negative or positive emotion is generated (Chang & Taxer, 2020: pp. 2-3; Gross, 2015).

Scholars investigated how teachers appraise challenging situations at the workplace as forms of emotional management (Clará, 2017). Two concepts that have received considerable scholarly attention are *resilience* and *self-compassion*. Clará (2017) defines resilience as a teacher's ability to manage adverse situations effectively. Resilience is also performed with an interplay of both contextual factors and personal traits (Hu, 2023, p. 2; Mansfield et al., 2012). Alternatively, Neff (2003b, see also Hu, 2023) notes that self-compassion draws on the Buddhist ideas, encompassing practices, such as mindfulness, to recognize emotions as an inherent part of the human experience, and to develop self-understanding. (Hu, 2023; Neff, 2003b). The impact of both concepts has been actively investigated in EL research.

Self-compassion has been examined extensively by many researchers. For example, self-compassion has been shown to have a positive impact on well-being in many areas of life by protecting the ego, reducing stress in threatening situations, or enabling one to use effective coping techniques (Baker & McNulty, 2011; Chishima et al., 2018; Tandler et al., 2019). In addition, Moé and Katz (2020) claim that the acceptance of one's imperfection increases the likelihood of taking corrective actions, thus observing that teachers who promote this type of behavior are generally happier and more satisfied. In like manner, Hu (2023) conducted a study on 71 Chinese teachers, employing the resilience scale developed by Wag-nild and Young (1993). The study aimed to identify factors that could aid in creating teacher programs promoting self-compassion to enhance teachers' resilience as a prerequisite for managing challenging situations in the workplace. The findings seem to suggest that the practice of self-compassion, along with employing ER strategies, may equip teachers with key instruments to manage their emotions. The study also emphasizes the importance of balancing two strategies: hiding negative emotions and amplifying them to motivate students. While the former helps maintain a positive learning environment, the latter fosters students' motivation. In fact, a positive learning environment enhances motivation, reduces stress, and, eventually, leads to better learning outcomes (Hu, 2023). All in all, effective EL strategies, self-compassion, and the recognition of their importance in the classroom environment are key findings of ER research.

Several studies have been conducted to examine the impact of positive emotions on students' learning outcomes (Hu, 2023). For example, Shafiee Rad

and Jafarpour (2022) investigated how the presence of positive emotions contributed to higher achievement in writing skills. Notably, their study focused on key factors, such as *well-being* defined broadly as the sense of happiness and a high level of life satisfaction, and *grit* which is persistence and determination to achieve goals (Nalipay et al., 2022; Shafiee Rad & Jafarpour, 2022; Teimouri et al., 2020). The researchers inferred that learning abilities can be enhanced by sustaining a positive learning environment. The study also acknowledges the importance of positive emotion interventions and their positive effects on student wellbeing (Shafiee Rad & Jafarpour, 2022; see also Hu, 2023, p. 4).

Another strand of studies focused on the negative aspect of emotions in the classroom environment. For instance, Morris and King (2018) examined teacher frustration with experienced language teachers, identifying four primary sources of frustration: student apathy, classroom silence, relational breakdown, and misbehavior, as well as working conditions. The study concluded that there is not a single solution to these stress-inducing factors, yet the self-perceived ability to handle stressful situations is a key predictor of effective emotional management (Morris & King, 2018).

4. Research aim and questions

The present study aimed to investigate the extent to which teachers with different levels of work experience face emotionally challenging situations in the workplace and explore how they navigate them both on an intra- and interpersonal level. The primary focus of the study was to explore whether there were any differences in EL among teachers with different levels of work experience and across work contexts. Thus, the research questions were as follows:

- RQ1: What negative emotions do teachers with different levels of work experience in their teaching practice? Are there any differences in the ways teachers express them in class?
- RQ2: What positive emotions do teachers with different levels of work experience in their teaching practice? Are there any differences in the ways teachers express them in class?
- RQ3: To what extent does work experience and context impact the selection of ER selection? How is ER strategy selection impacted by years of work experience and work context?

Besides the three main research questions, the study also attempted to answer one complementary research question:

RQ4: What are the external factors that influence teachers' negative and positive emotional experiences and ER selection of teachers with varying years of experience and across work contexts?

5. Method

5.1. Participants

The sample consisted of three Polish teachers of English. The participants, all of whom are active vocationally, represent three different levels of teaching experience. The participants varied also in terms of their education level, languages they learned, age, gender, and work experience. The first participant (T1) was a private school English teacher with 3 years of work experience. He was an undergraduate (BA) student pursuing a master's degree and had a B1 level of Russian according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Additionally, he was learning Lithuanian. The second participant (T2) was an English and German teacher working in both private and public schools, with fifteen years of work experience. They were English and German teacher, holding a postgraduate degree (MA) in German and BA degree in English. T2 had studied Czech before. Finally, the third participant was an English teacher at a public school and a university professor with thirty years of work experience (T3). They had a PhD in English Studies and had learned Spanish and German in her past. All the participants were handed out consent forms and agreed to have the information provided by them processed and used for the purposes of this study. Also, all participants were fully informed of their right to withdraw at any time.

5.2. Procedure and data collection instrument

The study adopted the qualitative approach to explore the nature of emotions and ER strategies employed by the participants with varying levels of teaching experience in both private and public educational institutions. The study utilized semi-structured interviews conducted online via Microsoft Teams. The respondents were selected using convenience sampling and purposive methods as the teachers had to represent different work experience levels. The questions were based on Gross's (2015) EPM. Each of five questions included in the protocol corresponded to a particular ER strategy from the model. Other questions concerned ER strategies used by teachers during stressful situations at work which were presumed to lead to emotional exhaustion, including classroom management, institutional pressures,

and work overload (see Appendix A). The interview was conducted in Polish and audio-recorded via Microsoft Teams. The transcript of an interview was then translated into English by the researcher and subjected to analysis. The translation of the data may have influenced the interpretative decisions during the analytical process.

5.3. Data analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2021) principles of *reflexive thematic analysis* (TA) to answer research questions. As Braun and Clarke (2021) claim, (TA) is a data analysis method that acknowledges the researcher's subjectivity and employs *coding*, capturing recurring patterns of meaning, to ultimately construct themes. Within TA, there are two coding approaches: inductive and deductive. The inductive approach relies solely on data to derive themes. The deductive approach, in turn, uses existing theories and frameworks to establish themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). To capture literal (semantic) and hidden (latent) meanings, the hybrid-driven approach was adopted. Hybrid-driven approach warrants the adoption of a theoretical framework that guides deductive data analysis, while also allowing for inductive analysis. The responses of the participants were transcribed and manually coded. The dataset encompasses the audio recordings of interviews with the participants, each lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes, along with transcriptions totaling around 3000 words.

6. Research results

Further analysis will be divided into the following sections: teachers' emotional experiences, contextual factors and ER, institutional challenges, and work context, which respectively correspond to research questions.

6.1. Teachers' emotions

All the participants of the study recalled situations which generated both positive and negative emotions. Yet, negative emotions were referred to more frequently, and they ranged from anxiety, frustration, anger, stress, sadness, disappointment, and discouragement.

Negative emotions were attributed to various factors. T1 admits that: "*However, it's important to clarify that the frustration and anger were more related to internal emotions than the behavior of my students.*" The quote suggests that negative

emotions arise from T1's inner emotional struggles rather than external factors. It is important to mention that T1 had noted experiencing anxiety during social interactions before, which may have influenced their emotional responses in class. This contrasts with T2's perspective: *"This often happened with students or learners who clearly just didn't do anything - they didn't study, didn't want to, and acted out against me and their parents."* Similarly, T3 links their negative emotions to student misbehavior, administrative work, or interactions with parents. While T2 and T3 linked them to external factors, T1 maintains that they result from their internal emotional struggles. All in all, there is noticeable difference in the attribution of negative events in class, which may be attributed to lower work experience. Furthermore, the quotes seem to stress the complexity of self-referential processes, implying that the cognitive effort might put even great pressure on an instructor. Thus, shorter work experience can be considered a significant individual variable influencing ER strategy selection.

The frequency of experiencing negative emotions also varied across all participants. T1 admitted to experiencing negative emotions at least once a week (*"it seems to me that I think it happens even once a week."*) Similarly, T3 stated that *"I think that teachers, including myself, experience them regularly. Every teacher faces smaller or bigger difficulties every day"*, whereas T2 reported to experience them once a semester (T2: *"It definitely happened once per semester."*) The observed differences in the frequency of experiencing negative emotions may be attributed to personal variables or an array of other temporal and contextual factors.

Apart from negative emotions, the data indicated several positive emotions that the participants experience regularly, such as satisfaction. For instance, T2 responded: *"Of course. This is probably the greatest success for any teacher – when we see that the work we've put in brings results, especially seeing the outcomes of that work."*, whereas T1 states that *"I often feel such (positive) emotions when my students manage to achieve something, especially when they unexpectedly give a good answer."* Similarly, T3 expressed a sense of fulfillment seeing the positive results of her work. More notably, positive feedback is appreciated when it comes from a colleague: *"And then when someone tells me that my students are well-prepared, that they know what they're doing, that they are independent, it gives me great satisfaction."* These responses suggest that positive emotions might be connected to reappraisal and may arise in encounters with social appraisal. Also, positive emotions may occur independently from negative emotions without a dichotomous relationship between them. This is reinforced by the fact that the comments on positive emotions appeared when the participants were asked about faking emotions. It might follow that, according to the respondents, answering affirmatively to questions about faking emotions would presuppose the absence of the positive ones. Yet, all teachers explicitly pointed out their presence.

6.2. Contextual factors and emotion regulation

The data demonstrated that ER strategies employed by participants varied to a moderate level. The data shows that teachers employ attentional deployment, cognitive change, response modulation, and situation modification to the greatest extent.

To begin with, the use of attentional deployment was observed in T1's response, who admitted that deliberately directing their focus during work helped them manage stress levels (*"...as I would put it, we try to focus on what we should be doing, which is the teaching process. In fact, these duties during the lessons help me forget about stress."*) One may also consider it merely a distraction, the preference for which may stem from prior ER implementation experience. It contrasts with T3's response to the attentional deployment item: *"No, not in the classroom. If the source of stress is the situation in the classroom, it is more related to the students' behavior."*) T3 emphasized that stressful or problematic situations in class need to be handled immediately, thereby questioning the effectiveness of attentional deployment. Likewise, T2 expressed, *"So I try to resolve all kinds of stressful situations and conflicts as they arise."* To sum up, within the present sample, the use of attentional deployment appeared to be less prominent among participants with more years of teaching experience. Perhaps, it results from greater agency or practical skills of emotional management gained through years of experience.

The responses show that participants representing all levels of teaching experience reflect on their emotions, mostly in class but during their off-duty hours as well. These responses will be considered along the lines of cognitive change. Firstly, T1 admitted that:

T1: "Maybe I was interpreting situations that happened to me at the beginning of my journey because I had the impression that maybe, I don't know, my students are somewhat satisfied and so on, but it was rather due to the fact that I simply misinterpreted the lack of enthusiasm, which is associated with certain unpleasant duties or some necessity of learning? I think so, but on the other hand, it's a process that cannot be rushed. At some point, you can understand certain things because sometimes you don't notice them."

It is evident that T1 interprets the lack of enthusiasm of the students to their favor and recognizes that the ability to understand the underlying emotions of students takes time and experience. This empathy towards students is also evident in another T1's quote regarding student misbehavior - *"I try in some sense to justify this and always keep in mind that we are talking about a child, not a responsible adult who thinks so deeply about their actions."* The data shows that T3 also displays empathy towards students *"I don't blame the student if something goes wrong – I try to understand their situation, especially in classes with*

diverse levels." Regarding T2, cognitive change is employed as a moment of reflection: *"not at this moment, but later. It's just a matter of looking at it from the other side. It's not easy, but this is the moment of reflection."* Differences were also observed in the reported temporal use of cognitive change - in the case of T1 and T3; cognitive change is used both during classes and after work, while T2 uses cognitive change solely after work.

Subsequently, teachers frequently named situations and their reactions to them that were considered situation modification. For example, T1 recalled a situation of his student's emotional outlet and the way they handled it:

T1: *"I did something similar in a situation where, for example, an 11-year-old girl in my class started crying because the task was too difficult, but overall, she is at a slightly lower level than the rest of the group. At that moment, I changed the format of the task. She had the same text, but she had to do something with it that was a bit simpler."*

The slight modification of a task to alleviate an emotional situation in class appears to have been successful. Besides, T1 admitted that he used various types of tasks and adjusts them to his students' current mood and energy level, which seems to be a conscious effort to regulate emotions of the students: *"If we've been focusing a lot on grammar exercises, at some point, we take a break for a short conversation in the second language. This is something that can also help."* According to T2's response, taking breaks in class was another good aid in regulating emotions in class T2: *"But I think that without it, things would have been worse, and my students would have been even more frustrated."* Among other strategies, T2 and T3 admitted to using penalty points and warning systems to manage student misbehavior, but only in public schools (T2: *"So, in such cases, I simply use tools that allow me to, so to speak, make the class quiet down. These include negative points, which are implemented, right?"*; T3: *"I try to grab their attention by giving warnings."*), whereas in private schools the use of positive discipline was deemed more effective according to T1 (*"When it comes to a private school, the main goal here is so-called positive discipline, meaning more use of the foreign language rather than Polish."*) The strategy referred to as *positive discipline* assumed using the target language as a form of classroom management, which could be regarded as situation modification using Gross's (2015) taxonomy. Hence, the data illustrates that there is a variance in the application of different situation modification strategies, which could be further explored in relation to institutional type.

The participants' responses highlight the prevalence of response modulation, in particular hiding emotions. T1 admitted that expressing feelings is non-pedagogical, while T2 claims that teachers should remain professional under any circumstances:

T1: *"I think this is actually an integral part of the profession."*

T2: *"Some professionalism needs to be maintained here."*

T3: *"I hide negative emotions, such as irritation, when a student's behavior becomes troublesome. Although it may make me feel upset, I have no right to lose my patience."*

All participants claimed that they did not want their negative emotions stemming from personal concerns or issues to impact the emotions of the students and the quality of their classes. However, it strikingly contrasts with the responses regarding faking emotions to which participants claimed they did not resort. Perhaps it might have been for fear of deceiving their students about either their intentions or reactions to the events in class. Therefore, these responses provide a clear distinction between hiding and faking emotions within the response modulation strategy in Gross's (2015) framework.

T1: *"It seems to me that it's not about faking emotions. It would probably refer to positive emotions, but I often feel such emotions."*

T2: *"No, no. I'm an honest guy. I don't really play guessing game."*

T3: *"I believe that someone who pretends to have emotions – like excessive excitement or amusement that isn't genuine, or outrage that isn't real – well, that's just putting on a facade, sorry. I try to be myself."*

Among other ER strategies outside Gross's (2015) ER strategies model, the participants indicated a wide range of techniques that might be linked more to their personal traits and dispositions. T2, for example, stressed the importance of sleep or cultivating hobbies (T2: *"I have the feeling that sleep is the cure for everything."*) as well as physical activity and maintaining social contact, whereas T1 put more emphasis on good lesson preparation (T1: *"Such thorough preparation helps me manage stress before classes, as it gives me a certain sense of confidence."*) Moreover, both T1 and T2 were reported to approve of consulting with either parents or colleagues (T1: *"As for the other lecturers, I think I can count on their support"*; T2: *The conflict escalated so much that it was necessary to seek the help of the school counselor."*) All in all, no specific pattern in the selection of strategies was identified outside the ER strategies model, which highlights the complexity and context-dependent nature of ER strategy selection.

6.3. Institutional challenges and work context

The collected data revealed several institutional challenges that contributed to the teachers' experience of negative emotions. Foremost, the differences between emotional experiences of teaching in private and public schools became more prominent.

The type of institution is a significant factor in EL, as higher expectations of parents and school authorities characterize private school education, impacting teachers' emotions (T1: *"My employer definitely puts some pressure on me regarding the quality of the lessons and what I do during them, as parents often contact my employer, and their expectations are usually quite high, which makes it difficult to meet them."*) In a similar vein, T2 added that: *"A state-run institution provides the comfort that... I might care a bit less."* The data revealed that private school education due to its higher standards may cause more stress on less experienced teachers:

T2: *"With 25-30 students, we are unable to provide the comfort and quality of these classes because they are too short. So, in this case, the teacher or instructor in public schools can afford to be a bit more relaxed. It seems to me that in private language schools, the groups are much smaller, which significantly improves the comfort of the lessons. We are truly able to give much more of ourselves in such settings."*

In terms of public-school teaching, according to T2, the class sizes and standardized curriculum give teachers less freedom in terms of planning classes, which might be both advantageous and disadvantageous for teachers' wellbeing: *"I believe that in private language schools, the groups are much smaller. As a result, the comfort of the classes is much higher, and we are really able to give much more of ourselves."* However, the freedom of teaching expression might negatively impact the well-being of less experienced teachers, contributing to the higher level of self-induced pressure as indicated by T1: *"I mean, I would like to ensure a high standard for the classes I teach. However, when it comes to other people, my employer definitely places some pressure on me, both regarding the quality of the classes and what I do during them."* In the case of public schools, exam preparation was a significant stress-inducing factor as expressed by T2: *"Today, you can feel the pressure a bit because, of course, we want the kids to do their best. In a way, it's also the result of our work."* The quote, therefore, implies that teachers treat the exam scores of their students as their criteria for self-assessment. More experienced participants also experienced stress related to curriculum changes manifested as the introduction of new textbooks, which could turn out incongruent with their pedagogical beliefs or require rapid adjustment (T3: *"The change of textbooks, which are not well-developed, requires the teacher to be vigilant in order to avoid making mistakes."*)

Another recurring theme found in the participant's responses was the exhaustion caused by the emotional nature of the teaching profession.

T1: *"I think it's about exhaustion, which is probably a widespread issue among Polish teachers in general."*

T1: *"I went through a very stressful period, and right after that, I got sick."*

T2: „Parents come in, wanting to talk, explain, and analyze. I think these are the situations that drain energy.”

T2: „This is exactly extreme exhaustion, like an energy crash, so to speak.”

T3: „Sometimes, I would say that contact with the parent is worse than with the student.”

T3: „It's not just stress but also muscle tension related to sitting at a computer or with books.”

The responses reveal various sources of exhaustion. T2 and T3 indicate that confrontation with parents is particularly challenging emotionally. While many factors may have influenced teachers' state of health, the amount of stress indicated by the participants may be indicative of greater EL regardless of instructors' experience level. Therefore, the data shows that somatic symptoms may occur as the outcome of EL. Exhaustion applied to every participant and resulted from widely attributed stress-inducing factors, with the most common ones including interactions with parents, student misbehavior, communication issues, and administrative pressures.

7. Discussion

In response to RQ1, the data indicated that frustration was the emotion which permeated the teaching experience of every participant. The respondents attributed it to different sources, both external and internal, as demonstrated by T1's responses. Most of the external factors align with the study conducted by Morris & King (2018), in which working conditions, student misbehavior, along with student apathy, were identified as the most common frustration-inducing factors. In terms of working conditions, T2 and T3 indicated that a group size was a considerable factor impeding the incorporation of an individual approach to a student. Also, teachers reported being overwhelmed with lots of administrative work, which correlates with King's (2016) findings on their burdensome nature of the teaching practice. Contrary to expectations, teachers' self-reported work-life balance did not seem to relate to their work experience. In that case, teachers also claimed that work overload was not compensated for positive work results, which are often hardly observable.

Besides, the prevalence of negative emotions had serious implications in both teachers' private and professional lives. In the professional dimension, it resulted in great stress and other negative emotions. The somatic symptoms, consequently, affect the private lives of instructors as well. The data obtained are consistent with previous findings, suggesting that constant exposure to negative emotions is an integral part of the teaching profession (Chang, 2009; Hakanen et al., 2006; Maslach et al., 2001). The negative emotions were considered to stem from demanding interactions with students, parents, standardized curriculum, or administrative work, due to which teachers hid negative emotions.

Regarding RQ2 and teachers' positive emotions, findings suggest that all participants demonstrated a great deal of empathy and patience in the face of challenges resulting from either EL experienced or classroom dynamics. The findings can be linked to the concepts of self-resilience, grit, and self-compassion. In turn, all participants acknowledged that experiencing negative emotions in teaching is natural due to the complexities of emotions and student-teacher relationships, which seems to positively impact their job performance. This is consistent with conclusions obtained by Moé and Katz (2020) where participants reflected on their job performance, the ultimate purpose of which was to take corrective actions.

Based on the data collected, teachers experienced the same negative emotions depending regardless of their years of teaching experience or work context. However, the data implies that years of teaching experience might be linked to ER strategies selection. It aligns with Diaz and Eisenberg's commentaries on EPM and its developmental applications (Gross, 2015). It appears that years of teaching experience may play a role in how teachers regulate their emotions (Gross, 2015).

Addressing, RQ3, the results may indicate that the type of institution teachers work in does not directly impact their EL. However, teachers seem to use different behavioral management strategies in private and public schools. Positive discipline is, thus, considered to be more frequent in private schools, whereas using penalty points and warning signs is more common in public schools. However, it does not mean that positive reinforcement does not occur in public institutions, yet it can be deduced that more favorable working conditions, such as group size might foster learner-centered approach, and more effective behavioral management. These findings align with Abdullah's (2020) comparative study of classroom management strategies in both sectors, supporting the view that private school instructors employ learner-adjusted teaching strategies. Similarly, Shaheen's et al. (2022) comparative study on private and public sectors observed the lack of uniform standards of teaching in public schools, which was also mentioned by the participants of this study. Greater instructor autonomy prevalent in public schools, and administrative pressures in private schools may contribute to higher stress levels.

To answer RQ4, the data was analyzed using Gross's (2015) ER strategies model framework. The data revealed that every participant resorted to some type of ER strategy. There were differences observed across each of them, which might be attributed to teaching experience and work context. While all participants admitted to reflecting on both situations in class and their performance, the prevalence of cognitive change seemed to be more common among T2 and T3 who had more years of teaching experience. In other words, teachers may redirect pressure to external sources as they deepen their understanding of effective ER strategies employment through work experience. This finding may

also be confirmed by T1's admission that understanding the complexity of teacher-student dynamics takes time. It also appears to support the idea of context-sensitivity of the ER strategy use, arguing against the context-independent view of ER (Gross, 2015). The data also reveal that work experience is not the only variable to consider, as personal traits or temperament seem to play a key role in teachers' ER strategies selection. This, in turn, is exemplified by the social anxiety of T1, as a feature that constituted their psychological profile. This view aligns with Näring et al. (2012), who claim that individual regulation strategies are much more dependent on psychological factors rather than the organizational ones.

The findings also propose a strict differentiation between faking and hiding emotions, both of which are placed within response modulation strategy in Gross's (2015) model. All participants, when asked about faking emotions, resorted to positive emotions they experience in class. Whereas faking emotions was deemed ineffective regardless of age and work experience, hiding emotions is considered an integral part of the job and associated with being professional at work and pedagogically effective. Meanwhile, positive emotions may stem from both short-term situations in class and long-term job satisfaction, especially when efforts are socially appraised. Additionally, polarizing views on faking and hiding emotions may suggest that there is a clearer distinction between hiding and faking strategies.

8. Limitations of the study

One significant limitation of the study was the small sample size which influenced the generalizability of the findings. The reliance on self-reported data may have produced bias. Also, since three participants with varying academic qualifications participated in the study, with each one representing a different year of teaching experience group cohort, caution should be exercised when applying the findings of the study to other settings. Due to a small sample size, the responses may be affected by personal variables, the interview environment, and other contextual factors to a greater extent, decreasing the validity of the data. The study adopted a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews and the responses gathered may not fully capture teachers' emotions and teaching experience, as well as the data remains interpretative and context dependent. For this reason, further research on EL ought to also employ a quantitative approach with greater data triangulation, as well as more diversified and larger sample size. Also, longitudinal studies could be beneficial by additionally capturing the contextual and dynamic nature of emotions, providing more comprehensive insights. Further studies could also aim at investigating the differences in EL experienced by instructors from both private and public sectors to provide a more holistic and in-depth understanding of EL.

9. Conclusions

This study examines emotion labor (EL) and emotion regulation (ER) strategies among teachers across different experience levels and institutional contexts. The findings indicate that the participants across teaching experience levels predominantly employ cognitive change, situation modification, and response modulation. Overall, teachers primarily engage in deep acting regardless of their years of teaching experience. One of the findings of this study is the distinction between faking and hiding emotions, both of which are classified as response modulation strategy within Gross's (2015) EPM. These results also underscore the significance of promoting deep acting strategies in Hochschild's (1983) taxonomy. Work context as institutional type primarily influenced situation modification strategies, particularly in classroom management practices, yet without directly affecting overall EL levels. Despite contextual differences, teachers shared common emotional experiences, marked by high stress and a predominance of negative emotions, which explained frequent down-regulation. At the same time, teachers' engagement in self-reflection, self-compassion, and empathy highlights the central role of cognitive change and up-regulation understood as maximizing positive experiences, which is consistent with previous research on positive emotions in language education.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The following questions were used to guide the semi-structured interviews conducted in this study:

1. Have you ever experienced negative emotions related to teaching in class and/or after classes?
2. How often do you experience negative emotions?
3. What kind of emotions do you experience then? Can you name them? (Anxiety, frustration)
4. Can you recall your last stressful situation? What happened? How did you react?
5. How do you handle stressful situations in class?
6. Do you ever turn your attention away from stressors?
7. Do you try to consciously change the interpretation of a situation to manage your emotions?
8. Do you ever try to act in order to achieve a certain emotional state, such as staying calm, relaxed, or avoiding stress?
9. Do you ever try to modify the stressful situation in a way that would change the emotional impact it has on you?
10. Do you fake emotions?
11. Do you ever hide your emotions?
12. Do you have any other ways of coping?
13. Do you have any practices which help you stabilize your emotional state?
14. Do you try to help students regulate their emotions?
15. Do any somatic symptoms accompany you at work and/or after work resulting from stressful situations (fatigue, muscle tension, headaches)?
16. Do you feel pressured at work? If so, what do you think is the source of this pressure?
17. How do you rate support from your colleagues/ school authorities?
18. Do the positive results of your teaching make the effort you put into it feel worthwhile?
19. What age groups do you teach?
20. What other languages do you learn/ teach? What other languages did you learn?
21. Do you teach in a private or public school?
22. What is your education level?
23. How long have you been teaching?