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A Qualitative Study of EFL Teachers' Emotion Regulation Behavior in the Classroom

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***Abstract*—This study aimed to explore the nature of emotion regulation behavior among EFL teachers. To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 EFL teachers teaching general English courses in both private language institutes and public schools in Iran. All interviews, conducted in Farsi, were first transcribed and translated into English. Then, through the use of conceptual content analysis technique, the data were scrutinized for emotion regulation strategies. Overall, five main categories, namely, Teaching Context Preference / Avoidance, Teaching Context Adjustments, Attention Direction, Reappraisal, and Reactive Strategies emerged in the interviews. The emerging categories from the conceptual content analysis corresponded, to a great extent, to the Process Model of Emotion Regulation proposed by Gross (1998).**

***Index Terms*—emotion regulation, teacher education, Gross's Process Model**

I. Introduction

Interest in studying teachers has burgeoned in the discussions of mainstream education and, to a lesser extent, applied linguistics in the last few decades. Second language teacher education profession has come to the realization that teachers play a significant role in teaching contexts (Burns & Richards, 2009) and that, as Woolfolk and McCune-Nicolich (1984) put it, "… teachers make many decisions affecting the lives of students" (p. 432) and "teachers do make a difference" (p. 433). From both theory and research perspectives, tackling different teacher variables and classroom behaviors is a logical and natural corollary of such an acknowledgment.

In the meantime, the literature in both mainstream education (e.g., Day & Leitch, 2001; Hargreaves 1998a, b, 2000; Nias, 2002; Yin & Lee, 2012) and, though not notably, second language education (e.g., Aragao, 2011; Cowie, 2011; Méndez López & Fabela Cárdenas, 2014) has witnessed an increasing interest in the studies of emotions and emotional experiences in both learning and teaching contexts in recent years. This heightened interest reflects the recognition of the fact that emotions remarkably influence both students' and teachers' lives and play a crucial role in quality teaching, educational reform, and student-teacher interaction (Cross & Hong, 2012).

Teachers indeed go through a number of emotional experiences throughout their careers where they have various types of relationship with colleagues, students, parents, administrators and other individuals related to their professional lives (Cowie, 2011). Teachers get contented with their practice when course objectives are fulfilled, they experience pleasure and a sense of satisfaction when their students succeed in performing a task, they become upset and, at times, impatient when learners are not able to understand a particular issue, they get annoyed when they see instances of misconduct, and the list goes on (Sutton, 2004). However, in addition to experiencing emotions, teachers have reported that they control, manage, and even conceal their emotions in order to accomplish a certain objective (Sutton & Harper, 2009). They attempt, for instance, to calm down when they come across a problem (Capa-Aydin, Sungur, & Uzuntirya, 2009), be relaxed when parents criticize them, or be patient with annoying colleagues (Hargreaves, 2000).

Despite a recent interest in the literature regarding the role of emotions in teaching (e.g., Day & Leitch, 2001; Hargreaves, 1998a, b, 2000; Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Kelchtermans, 1996; Lasky, 2000; Little, 1996; Nias, 2002; Schmidt, 2000; Zembylas, 2002a, b, 2003a, b), research into this area is still in its infancy in teacher education, and the EFL/ESL context is not an exception in this regard.

Moreover, from a practical point of view, most pre-service teacher education programs do not pay due attention to the interaction at play between teachers' emotions and the practice of teaching (Sutton et al., 2009). Pointing to "the disturbing neglect of the emotional dimension in the increasingly rationalized world of educational reform", Hargreaves (2000) lamented this loss along the following lines:

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Educational policy and administration, and most of the educational research community pay little or no attention to the emotions. What is at stake for them are increasingly rationalized, cognitively driven and behavioral priorities of knowledge, skill, standards, targets, performance, management, planning, problem-solving, accountability, decision-making, and measurable results (p. 812).

Furthermore, with regard to L2 education, most of the few studies on emotions have dealt with the emotional side of language learning (e.g., Aragao, 2011; Méndez López & Fabela Cárdenas, 2014), not language teaching (Cowie, 2011). Along with the renewed emphasis on emotion in language learning, emotion is expected to stand on a par with its cognitive counterpart which has dominated the field for a long time. (Bown & White, 2010). To be sure, when it comes to teachers, research in this area lags far behind. Therefore, the present study seeks to unveil the nature of emotion regulation behaviors among EFL teachers by exploring the emotion regulation strategies adopted by them in the classroom.

II. Review of the Related Literature

A. Background

Emotions have taken center stage in psychological studies only within the last twenty years and had been, to a great extent, neglected in academic circles due to the dominance of behavioristic and cognitive paradigms (Fried, 2011). Nyklíček, Vingerhoets, and Zeelenberg (2011) define emotion as "a basic phenomenon of human functioning, normally having an adaptive value enhancing our effectiveness in pursuing our goals in the broadest sense" (p. 1). Emotions are also considered by James (1984) as "adaptive behavioral and physiological response tendencies that are called forth directly by evolutionarily significant situations" (cited in Gross, 1998b, p. 272). Two prominent roles of emotions have made them quite relevant to social-psychological studies focusing on different aspects of humans' everyday lives (Denollet, Nyklíček , & Vingerhoets, 2008), educational and professional issues being no exception. These roles have been recognized at inter-personal and intra-personal levels. At the inter-personal level, emotions function as a useful aid which let others know about one's conditions and the goals behind particular demeanor (Frijda, 1986). At the intra-personal level, emotions are of paramount importance since they bring into light what is actually of significance to us as our life values, which functions as a key element in making sound decisions (Bechara, Damasio, & Damasio, 2000). Moreover, they assist us in managing contextual impositions (Denollet et al., 2008).

Recent conceptualizations of emotions regard them as "processes involving multiple components arising from experiential, behavioral, and physiological systems" (Sutton & Harper, 2009, p. 390). Emotion regulation, in a sense, entails making effort to either consciously or unconsciously manage or modify any of such processes (ibid). Theorizing about emotion regulation dates from almost a century ago and is rooted in analytic studies on psychological defensive strategies and the 'stress and coping' practice which have paved the way for current research on emotion regulation in both kids and adults (Gross, 2002). Generally speaking, it is hypothesized that emotion regulation is a key determinant of good health and effective performance (Cicchetti, Ackerman, & Izard, 1995). The educational discourse community has now come to the understanding that emotions are, undoubtedly, integral to any educational system. New insights into the nature of student and teacher emotional behaviors have been provided and, as a corollary of such realization, our understanding of how emotions can be regulated has been improved (Fried, 2011). The current scientific and intellectual inquiry into teachers' emotion regulation "is built on the empirical results and theoretical models of the psychological research that assumes everyday emotion regulation is typically adaptive" (Sutton & Harper, 2009, p. 389). Now, for instance, it is known that emotion regulation has relationship with desirable educational results (e.g., Boekaerts, 2002; Gumora & Arsenio, 2002).

B. Definitional Issues

In spite of the development of a seemingly shared set of notions to define emotion regulation, the literature indicates that emotion regulation means different things to different people. Thompson (1994) defined emotion regulation as "the extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions, especially their intensive and temporal features, to accomplish one's goals" (pp. 27–28). Based on this definition, emotion regulation entails not only the maintenance and enhancement of emotional excitement but also the inhibition and control of such experience. Moreover, since emotion regulation mostly occurs in a social context, emotion regulation involves two pathways: a) the processes which are the result of internally acquired skills to self-regulate emotions and b) the various external factors which intervene and influence one's emotion regulation.

From a rather different perspective, Cole, Michel, & Teti (1994) define emotion regulation as "the ability to respond to the ongoing demands of experience with the range of emotions in a manner that is socially tolerable and sufficiently flexible to permit spontaneous reaction as well as the ability to delay spontaneous reactions as needed" (p. 74).

In yet another different definition, Gross (1998b) believed that emotion regulation "refers to the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (p. 275). This definition puts emphasis on self-emotion regulation and ignores regulating others' emotions. Emotions can be automatic, for example when we are frightened by a snake and retreat from it. They can be also triggered upon reflection and consideration, such as when we get annoyed after a person tries to underestimate our potentialities (Gross, 2002).

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Koole (2009) saw emotion regulation as an avoidance strategy. He enunciated his idea about emotion regulation along the following lines in which he defines emotion regulation:

… as the set of processes whereby people seek to redirect the spontaneous flow of their emotions. In a broad sense, emotion regulation refers to the set of processes whereby people manage all of their emotionally charged states, including specific emotions, affect, mood, and stress. Emotion regulation determines how easily people can leave a given emotional state. It can thus be distinguished from emotional sensitivity, which determines how easily people can enter an emotional state. (p.29).

As evident, each theoretical definition has focused on some aspects of emotion regulation that, in turn, will lead to a model which takes a slightly different angle on emotion regulation. In the following section a detailed description of some of these models will be provided.

C. Models of Emotion Regulation

Different models have been proposed for explaining emotion regulation. The Hot/Cool System of emotion regulation put forward by Mischel and colleagues (e.g., Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999; Mischel & Ayduk, 2004) equals regulation with "willpower". The model uses a 2-system framework consisting of hot and cool systems to explain the nature of emotion regulation processes. The cool, "know" system (Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999) is "cognitive, complex, slow, contemplative, and emotionally neutral. It consists of a network of informational "cool nodes" that are elaborately connected to each other, and which generate rational, reflective, and strategic behavior" (Sutton & Harper, 2009, p. 391). It is the very mechanism which helps individuals to remain calm in the face of intensive emotional disturbances. By contrast, the hot, emotional "go" system "is specialized for quick emotional processing and responding on the basis of unconditional or conditional trigger features" (Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999, p. 4). In other words, the hot system is in charge when quick and simple processing of emotion is required. The hot system is composed of hot "spots" which emerge and develop in the initial stages of life, and in the early childhood the hot system indeed predominates. The hot system is negatively correlated with age and it gives way to the cool system when individuals reach adulthood. That is to say, the cool system becomes more and more sophisticated after infancy to the effect that the number of cool "nodes" corresponding to the hot "spots" soar dramatically. Sutton and Harper (2009) extended this dual system to teaching along the following lines:

According to this model teachers who successfully regulate their emotions change the "hot" representation of the immediate situation to a cool one by ignoring the stimulus (e.g., ignoring mild misbehavior of students), distracting themselves (e.g., thinking of a serene place when trying not to laugh at a student's inappropriate joke), or reframing the meaning of the stimulus (e.g. reminding oneself not to take students' misbehavior personally). At high levels of stress, the cool system becomes dysfunctional, leaving the hot system to dominate cognitive processing making emotion regulation difficult. Teachers working in particularly stressful environments may have more hot spot dominance than teachers working in less stressful environments (p. 391).

Based on this model, teachers' work experiences can have a crucial role in how successful they could be in handling emotional situations. By the accumulation of work experience, teachers would be able to develop more cool nodes and as a result their behaviors would be more dominated by the cool system. By contrast, less experienced teachers more often than not undergo higher levels of stress and anxiety and consequently are less prone to make use of the cool system when they experience emotional trajectories (Sutton, 2004).

Another model of emotion regulation which has been put forth by Baumeister and colleagues (e.g., Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998; Schmeichel & Baumesiter, 2004) is called the Resource or Strength Model. This model is based on the idea that self-regulation in general and emotion regulation in particular "takes energy or inner resources but that self-regulatory strength is a limited resource" (Sutton & Harper, 2009, p. 392). It is believed that the employment of more emotion regulation strategies can whittle away the regulatory resources available to a person making it gradually more difficult to be effective when trying to regulate emotional behaviors (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007). Some relevant questions are raised here in this regard. How would it be possible for teachers to avoid the depletion of resources? What factors might help teachers in order to restore strength? While interacting with students, colleagues, parents, and other school staff, teachers are always engaged in emotion regulation and as a consequence they inevitably have to tap into their regulatory resources. While resting is said to be a first physiological solution (Sutton & Harper, 2009), research studies on the strength or resource model point to the fact that motivation can positively contribute to the revitalization of the eroded resources (Muraven & Slessareva, 2003). Therefore, the implication for the teaching profession is that "teachers who are sufficiently motivated may be able to overcome their depleted self-control resources and successfully regulate their emotions even in taxing situations" (Sutton & Harper, 2009, p. 392).

Gross (1998b) proposed a more complex, elaborate and process-oriented model of emotion regulation (Fig. 1). He has elaborated on five emotion regulatory processes including: situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. These five emotion regulation processes have been integrated into a model called the Process Model of Emotion Regulation (see Figure 2.3.). The theoretical philosophy behind the model is that emotions are complicated mechanisms that mature with the passage of time and that regulation of emotion can take place at five stages between the arousal of an emotional reaction and its manifestation (Sutton & Harper, 2009). As its point of departure, the model relies on the modal model of emotion which determines the order of the processes at work in emotion generation (Gross, 2014), each of which functions as a prospective point for emotion regulation

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(Gross & Thompson, 2007). With the exception of response modulation, the rest of these processes are "preventive", i.e., what happens before the emotional reaction is thoroughly activated. The response modulation process, by contrast, is "responsive" and includes the adjustment of behavioral and physiological emotional reactions (Gross & Munoz, 1995). Simply put, in this process model of emotion regulation, "a particular situation is selected, modified, attended to, appraised, and yields a particular set of emotional responses" (Gross, 2014, p. 8).

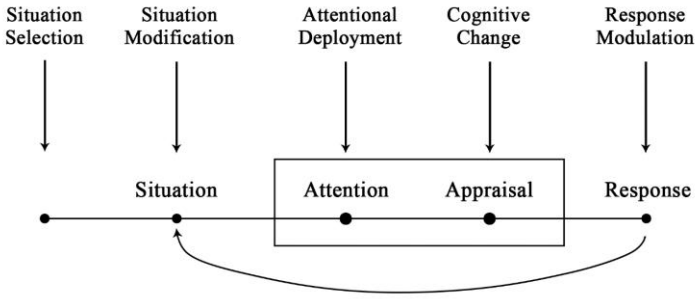

Figure 1. The Process Model of Emotion Regulation

The next preventive process or strategy of emotion regulation in this model is cognitive change which "refers to modifying how one appraises a situation so as to alter its emotional significance, either by changing how one thinks about the situation or about one's capacity to manage the demand it poses" (Gross, 2014, p. 10). Cognitive change may be employed to enhance the emotional arousal, to decline it, or even to transform the nature of the emotion itself (Gross, 2002). Resorting to self-talk, e.g., saying to oneself, "These are just children," is an example of a cognitive change strategy use among teachers (Sutton, et al., 2009). By contrast, response modulation emerges a posteriori, i.e., after response inclinations have been fully activated (Gross, 1998b). It "refers to influencing physiological, experiential, or behavioral responding as directly as possible (Gross & Thompson, 2007, p. 15). A classic example of response modulation includes concealing one's distress and discomfort after failure in a test (Gross, 2002). However, the scholarship in this area is still insubstantial and more studies are needed to be conducted to increasingly enhance our knowledge of this concept in educational settings. Therefore, the present study, prompted by the rarity of research on emotion regulation in L2 education, would be a small step forward in filling the gap and shedding more light on a concept most crucial to the practice of language teaching.

III. Method

A. Participants

The participants who took part in this qualitative study were 18 English language teachers teaching general English courses in both private language institutes and public schools in Iran. The purposive sampling technique, in which participants with particular pre-specified criteria are chosen (Ary et al., 2010; Farhady, 1995), was used to select these participants. An attempt was made to draw a demographically diverse sample of ELT teachers by considering a variety of criteria such as teachers' age, gender, years of teaching experience, teaching context, field of study (major), academic degree, learners' age, and proficiency level of students. To cover a full range of characteristics, therefore, the teachers were heterogeneous in terms of these criteria.

The age range of the 18 participating teachers in this study was between 22 and 41. Of these 18 participants, nine were male and nine female. With respect to their academic degrees, eight of the teachers had a BA/BS degree, five of them had an MA/MS degree, and one a PhD degree. The number of teachers who had studied English at university was 15 in contrast to the three teachers whose field of study (major) had not been English at university. Regarding years of teaching experience, there were six novice teachers (with less than three years of teaching experience) and twelve experienced teachers (having more than three years of teaching experience). Furthermore, in terms of teaching context, 13 of the teachers taught at private language institutes while five taught at both private language institutes and public schools in Iran. They were teaching English learners from different age groups and proficiency levels. In order to make sure that the interviews would yield a multitude of teachers' emotion regulation strategies, certain combinations of these characteristics and features were determined prior to select a diversified sample of teachers.

B. Instrument

Interview, as one of the most primary, practical, and worthwhile means of exploring a person's thoughts, attitudes, knowledge, and feelings about a phenomenon (Groom & Littlemore, 2012), was used in this study. The interview type used in the present study was semi-structured in the sense that specific questions were asked in an informal situation from all of the participants but not necessarily in a predetermined order (Flick, 2009). The interview questions were first derived from a comprehensive review of the related literature. Then some minor modifications were made to suit the questions to ELT context. The interview was divided into two sections, namely, warm-up and main questions. A complete explanation about the development of interview questions will be proposed in the following section.

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C. Procedure

First, an interview schedule was prepared by the researcher. The schedule included a set of open-ended questions to evoke response. The interview questions were divided into two parts: warm-up questions and main questions.

The warm-up questions included background questions and questions which probed into the participants' views of their personalities, their beliefs about their teacher self, and the teaching career. These 'opening' questions were used to allow the interviewees to feel comfortable about the interview context; plus they triggered lengthy responses from the interviewees (Richards, 2003) about their teaching philosophy and personality which indirectly contributed to the main topic of the interview. The main questions were related to the main topic under investigation, i.e., teacher emotions and emotion regulation. Formulating the main questions involved a thorough search of the background research on teacher emotion regulation, followed by the specification of question categories. The categories reflected the general topics of inquiry. The categories included: concerns about students, feelings before and after class, memorable events in the teaching practice, experiencing feelings of anxiety, anger, frustration etc., and the strategies used to regulate emotions. As such, the categories were formed in advance of the data collection by thoroughly reviewing the literature. Next, questions related to each category were developed to get the required information. In order to obtain reliable data, an attempt was made to devise appropriate questions based on the related literature. A substantial body of the main questions was devised by consulting Sutton (2004) who developed her interview questions based on some core questions used in some life span studies. These questions have been subsequently used in studies on emotion regulation in teachers in one way or another (e.g., Jiang, Vauras, Volet, & Wang, 2016; Arizmendi Tejeda, Gillings de González, & López Martínez, 2016). Therefore, the main interview questions were a combination and modification of the interview questions employed in the above-mentioned inquiries as well as the ones developed and grouped by the researchers. The wording of the questions were in a way so that they would deal with a single point at a time while providing the necessary data. Moreover, the questions were structured and ordered in a way to boost the interviewees' motivation, interest, and willingness to respond. This is achieved by moving from general questions about the participants' general outlook on their career and its merits and demerits to more specific questions addressing the strategies that teachers usually adopted in emotional encounters in their classes. A scenario-based approach was employed by asking the participants to fully describe the emotional encounters they had experienced in their classes.

The first draft of the interview questions was reviewed by two experts and was slightly modified. Since the interviews were of a semi-structured type, different probes were used during the interview process depending on the flow of the interviews and the participants' responses (Richards, 2003). Quite in line with an underlying feature of interview research which demands that the interviewer get involved in active listening when the interview is conducted, the researcher employed a number of active listening strategies in the interviews. These strategies included the repetition of the interviewee's utterances for clarification purposes, summarizing, paraphrasing, and even remaining silent whenever necessary. In the course of preparing the interview questions and conducting the semi-structured interviews, leading and biased questions were avoided as much as possible.

After making appointments with the participants of the study, the interview was carried out by one of the researchers. The interviewees responded to 20 open-ended interview questions in a face-to-face talk between the interviewer and the respondents. The semi-structured interviews lasted from 45 to 75 minutes. The language of the interview and the setting at which the interview was conducted were adjusted in accordance with the priorities of the respondents. The language of the interview was Persian, and the interviews were carried out at either the English language institutes or schools the participants taught in. The rationale behind choosing the Persian as the language of the interview was that the participants felt more at ease with their mother tongue. The interviews were audio recorded and later on transcribed for data analysis purposes.

D. Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews in this study, "conceptual content analysis" was used as the data analysis technique. Conceptual content analysis is "a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding" (Stemler, 2001, p. 1). During the content analysis, the heterogeneous English language teachers' responses to the interview questions were systematically checked for identifying their textual-thematic features using two coding techniques: descriptive and In Vivo. Descriptive coding "summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (Saldana, 2015, p. 70). On the other hand, In Vivo coding is the actual word or phrase mentioned by a participant in the recorded data (ibid). In the next step of the analysis, categories were created and labeled– a step considered as the core feature of qualitative content analysis. A category refers to a group of content that shares a commonality (Krippendorff, 2004) and often includes a number of sub-categories. An example of descriptive and In Vivo coding and their related categories based on the content analysis of the data are as follows:

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TABLE 1
AN EXAMPLE OF AN INITIAL (FIRST CYCLE) & FINAL (SECOND CYCLE) CODING FRAMEWORK

Interview transcript	*Initial coding framework*	*Final coding framework*
Teacher: *I get along well with female students, however I prefer boys' classes because they are really lively and active in the class.*	LEARNERS' GENDER (Descriptive Coding)	Teaching Context Preference / Avoidance
Teacher: *Before the class I always think of the teaching aids and materials I need to take to class and use in that session. And if there is something wrong or they are not ready I have to think of an alternative solution.*	ANOTHER TOOL (In Vivo Coding)	Situation Modification

This qualitative analysis technique helped to discover the underlying patterns built into the participants' responses and thus provided evidence of the strategies for regulating emotions by English language teaching (ELT) teachers.

At the same time, to check the inter-rater reliability of the qualitative content analysis, i.e., coding and category creation/labeling, a colleague familiar with the research analytic framework, was asked to re-inspect 25% of all the transcribed data. This reexamination has been considered a helpful procedure to obtain more reliable results and findings (Gass & Mackey, 2000). The results of this second round of content analysis showed 91% of consistency between the researcher's analyses and those of the outside examiner.

All interviews, conducted in Persian, were first transcribed and translated into English by one the researchers. Then, a professional translator thoroughly checked 20 percent of the translated interviews to confirm accuracy.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The interview transcripts were carefully scrutinized for strategies adopted by the participants to regulate their emotions. Although some categories had been already identified in the literature, care was taken not to confine the analyses just to those suggested categories. In other words, to discern the strategies utilized by ELT teachers to regulate their emotions in the class, an inductive data-driven approach was applied. The following is a detailed description of those strategies.

A. Teaching Context Preference / Avoidance

The most salient point that almost all participants of the study referred to was the fact that they preferred some teaching contexts over others in order to be emotionally more responsive and effective in their classes. While admitting that they were not usually given a choice as to which teaching contexts they preferred, some teachers mentioned that, if possible, they preferred to keep their distance from some teaching contexts. In the interviews they enumerated a number of factors they deemed highly important in their efficacy to regulate their emotions. One determining factor which was frequently referred to in the interviews was the age group of the learners. In the following extract, Teacher 4 (T 4)[1] displays her preference to avoid a certain age group, namely kids:

Extract 1

Teacher 4 (T4): Considering that I'm in my late 30s, I don't think I can teach kids' classes and if given a choice I prefer to steer clear of them. I also don't like to teach those classes in which students are just radiating negative energy.

Another factor which some teachers referred to with regard to teaching context preference was the students' gender. Some teachers found themselves emotionally more at ease with the students from one gender rather than the other. When asked why she preferred to teach male students, T 15 explained that they tended to be more lively compared to their female counterparts who are generally more lethargic in the class:

Extract 2

Teacher 15 (T15): I get along well with female students, however I prefer boys' classes because they are really lively and active in the class. Nobody's feeling sleepy. They display a lot of exuberance. I feel I can teach them better compared to female students; there is a feeling of lethargy in girls' classes.

Still another factor which came up in the interviews related to teaching context preference was the students' proficiency level. Some teachers regarded themselves emotionally more competent to teach a certain proficiency level. A teacher, for example, said that due to level adaptation difficulties, he found himself hopelessly inadequate when he was made to teach lower level classes.

Extract 3

Teacher 11 (T11): I am at a loss in lower levels. I really find it difficult to adapt my language to these levels and this makes me frustrated in the class. So, I've talked to the Institute's supervisor and begged him to offer me upper-intermediate or advanced classes only.

A subject which also surfaced in the interviews with teachers who were teaching mainly at school was tutoring as an English teacher. As it can be seen in the following extract for T 7 being hired as a tutor to one's own school students is negative to teachers' professional image and can diminish their standing among the students.

Extract 4

Teacher 7 (T 7): I always refuse to act as an English tutor. I think it's beneath your dignity as an English teacher. I don't feel comfortable in these situations at all.

[1] To preserve the anonymity of the participants a code (1-18) was assigned to each participant.

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These extracts apparently indicate that teachers obviously have a preference for the teaching contexts probably because they find themselves emotionally more capable in some teaching situations rather than others, to deal with the students. To put it another way, teachers prefer to stay in their emotional comfort zone so that they minimize the emotional labor required to put in to regulate their emotions. Therefore in anticipation of a possible emotional conflict, they select a situation which most perfectly suits them.

B. Teaching Context Adjustments

The second most frequently reported strategy was employing a set of practices to make some minor alterations to the teaching context in advance to improve the emotional atmosphere of the classroom. As an example, one of the teachers used some short inspirational videos and interesting clips related to the topic of the lesson in order to effectively combat possible boredom in his classes.

Extract 5

Teacher 8 (T 8): It's really a bad feeling when you notice that the students are bored and not paying enough attention to the class. So, I usually take some educational clips and inspirational videos to my classes. Whenever I feel that the students are beginning to get bored I play those short videos and this has proved to help them refresh. Then we continue with our lesson plan.

Another practice referred to in the interviews to refresh the class and lighten the atmosphere from time to time was playing games. This was more often reported by teachers who were teaching kids. They said that games could reenergize the students and this in turn will lead to a more positive atmosphere which is conducive to language learning and teaching.

Extract 6

Teacher 18 (T 18): When I have a class with kids, in advance I think of some games to play in the class. They become bored very quickly, and this may make you feel bad. Games will do the trick.

C. Attention Direction

Another strategy commonly utilized by the participants in anticipation of emotional encounters with the students, was directing their attention so that they would be able to adequately prevent undesirable emotions to be stirred up. The most frequently used technique in this category was turning a blind eye to a misbehavior observed in the class. For instance, referring to classroom management aspects of teaching, one teacher said that she generally decided to overlook the misbehavior of those students who could become a bit of a handful in the class instead of having a spontaneous emotional reaction.

Extract 7

Teacher 5 (T 5): Once I remember one of my students was misbehaving in the class. Seeing a student misbehaving in the class makes me angry, so I just decided to turn a blind eye to his behaving badly. And it worked. This is a strategy that I generally use and think it's effective in the majority of the cases.

D. Reappraisal Strategies

Another group of cognitive oriented strategies emerged in the interviews was when the teachers were undertaking a reappraisal of an emotional encounter. Employing these strategies, teachers could change their attitude towards a potentially annoying behavior in the class. The first strategy in this category was neutralization of possible bad feelings by considering or reconsidering the personality traits of the students at a certain age. One teacher said that on second thought and considering the age of the students he justified her misbehavior:

Extract 8

Teacher 9 (T 9): I can remember a time when one of my teenage students said something which I suppose was intended to make fun of me. I was about to strike back when I thought to myself that she is just a teen and this kind of behavior is natural at their age. Just this made me calm down.

The second strategy was to see what was happening in the class in a broader perspective. For example, as it is illustrated in the following extract, teachers sometimes blame the broader social and cultural context for the laziness and irresponsibility seen among the students in the educational system.

Extract 9

Teacher 3 (T 3): It is really demotivating and upsetting when you see that the students attend the class totally unprepared. They haven't even done the assignments they were supposed to. However, sometimes it clams me down when I asked myself whether they are to entirely blame for this highly irresponsible behavior or we need to put the blame, at least partially, on the broader educational and social context in which they have been raised and taught.

E. Reactive Strategies

Unlike the aforementioned strategies that are adopted by teachers in anticipation of a possible emotional experience, reactive strategies come into scene when a particular emotion is fully aroused. In response to deeply stirred emotions, the participants reported that they used a variety of different strategies to bottle them up or slightly dilute them. For example, one teacher said that in times of anger he might leave the class for a short while to let off some steam:

Extract 10

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Teacher 12 (T 12): Just recently in one of my classes some students were goofing off and not paying any attention to the lesson. For a number of times I asked them to pay attention but all was in vain. I just started to feel angry but decided to leave the class to blow off some steam.

Other teachers reported that when they felt angry with a student's misbehavior in the class or when the students have not completed an assignment they were supposed to they would keep quiet for a while rather than giving vent to their anger. This, they believed, could make the anger drain away and help them to control their emotion in a more effective way.

Extract 11

Teacher 1 (T 1): When I get angry I tend to go quiet for a while. I usually give my students an assignment to complete and will try to sit quiet for a couple of minutes until I get over it.

Table 2 illustrates the results of the initial and final coding of the transcribed interviews:

TABLE 2
RESULTS OF THE INITIAL (FIRST CYCLE) & FINAL (SECOND CYCLE) CODING

Initial coding framework	***Final coding framework***
• Learners' Gender • Learners' Age Group • Learners' Proficiency Level • Tutorial Classes	*Teaching Context Preference / Avoidance*
• Alternative Materials • Playing Games	*Teaching Context Adjustments*
• Ignoring Misbehaviors	*Attention Direction*
• Considering Learners' Characteristics • Considering the Broader Social Context	*Reappraisal Strategies*
• Leaving the Class • Keeping Quiet	*Reactive Strategies*

In addition to being analyzed qualitatively, the transcripts were also scrutinized using quantitative methods. To do so, all strategies used by the participants were tallied. Table 3 presents the frequency of use of general and specific strategies adopted by the participants to regulate their emotions in the classroom:

TABLE 3
FREQUENCY OF USE OF STRATEGIES & SUB-STRATEGIES UTILIZED BY THE PARTICIPANTS

General Strategies	***Sub-strategies***	***Frequencies***	***Overall Frequency***	***Percentage***
Teaching Context Preference / Avoidance	*Learners' Gender*	*16*	*43*	***49.43%***
	Learners' Age Group	*14*		
	Learners' Proficiency Level	*11*		
	Tutorial Classes	*2*		
Teaching Context Adjustments	*Alternative Materials*	*8*	*15*	***17.24%***
	Playing Games	*7*		
Attention Direction	*Ignoring Misbehaviors*	*9*	*9*	***10.34%***
Reappraisal Strategies	*Considering Learners' Characteristics*	*7*	*12*	***13.79%***
	Considering the Broader Social Context	*5*		
Reactive Strategies	*Leaving the Class*	*3*	*8*	***9.2%***
	Keep Quiet	*5*		

As it is evident, the most frequently used strategy is Teaching Context Preference / Avoidance. It made up just under half of the total strategies used. As discussed earlier, to keep clear of the situations which might evoke negative feelings almost all teachers reported that they considered some factors such as students' gender, age, proficiency level, and etc. They simply favored some teaching contexts over others because they thought those situations were emotionally more welcoming.

Teaching Context Adjustments and Reappraisal Strategies were almost equally popular with the participants with the frequency of use of 15 and 12 respectively. While Teaching Context Adjustments is considered a contextual and external strategy adopted be teachers to make some changes to the teaching context to make it emotionally more pleasant, Reappraisal Strategies are cognitive in nature which are put in use to alleviate the conditions.

The next two strategies which were least frequently used by the participants were Attention Direction and Reactive Strategies. They each comprised approximately 10% of the total number of strategies used.

Overall, antecedent-focused strategies (namely, Teaching Context Preference or Avoidance, Teaching Context Adjustments, Attention Direction, Reappraisal Strategies) made up about 91% of the total strategies used. The remaining 9% belonged to the Reactive Strategies which were utilized after the emotion had been fully aroused.

V. CONCLUSION

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This study delved into the emotional regulatory behavior of EFL teachers working at public (schools) and private (Institutes) sectors in Iran. The five general categories that emerged in the interviews were 1) Teaching Context Preference or Avoidance, 2) Teaching Context Adjustments, 3) Attention Direction, 4) Reappraisal Strategies, and 5) Reactive Strategies. The emerging categories from the conceptual content analysis were in line, to a great extent, with the model proposed by Gross (1998). In the first category, which is labeled Situation Selection in Gross's Model, teachers reported that they take students' age, gender, and proficiency level into account to choose a teaching context they deemed emotionally optimal. Some of the teachers also preferred public classes over tutorial ones. Almost all teachers showed a preference for some teaching contexts rather than others; they thought when they, against their will, had to teach in a context they did not like, they were bound to experience a particular negative feeling which could have a potentially detrimental effect on their teaching practice (performance). By choosing to be or not to be in a teaching context, teachers lessen the possibility of coming into contact with those negative feelings. Given the fact that in public sector (schools) teachers are not given any choice as to which kind of students they would like to teach, this strategy was reported more frequently among teachers working at institutes.

The second strategy, Teaching Context Adjustments, was adopted when teachers wanted to make some modifications in advance to the teaching context. This is classified as Situation Modification in Gross's model (1998). As reported in the interviews, since teachers thought some elements in teaching context might provoke a particular emotion they would not like to experience, they took the initiative ahead to make a change to the context that was to their emotional benefit. This can be taken as evidence that even when teachers have no choice over the teaching context they do not act passively. However, they become an agent of change to proactively make some necessary adjustments to the context.

Sometimes it seems teachers cannot exert any control over the contextual factors; that is, they can neither avoid nor change a particular teaching situation. Here, they apply some cognitive strategies to help them prevent experiencing some undesirable emotions. Through Attention Direction, teachers deliberately shift their attention from an element in the teaching context, mainly students' misbehavior, which might trigger an unpleasant emotion, and by applying Reappraisal Strategies they reexamine an emotionally charged event in order to change their opinion about it. These are called Attention Deployment and Cognitive Change respectively in Gross's Model. Cognitive reappraisal refers to a "form of cognitive change that involves construing a potentially emotion-eliciting situation in a way that changes its emotional impact (Gross & John, 2003, p. 349). As an antecedent-focused strategy, reappraisal happens beforehand and mediates before the emotional response tendencies have been completely aroused. By implication, cognitive reappraisal has the potential to effectively change the whole later emotional behavior, especially when employed to down-regulate negative emotion where it efficiently decreases both the behavioral and experiential elements of negative emotion (ibid).

The contextual and cognitive strategies are chosen in anticipation of a particular emotion. In other words, before an emotion is stirred, teachers proactively try to prevent it. These strategies have been labeled "preventative" or "antecedent-focused" in Gross's Model (1998). As it was previously elaborated on, in his model, the first group includes those regulatory behaviors which are preventive and occur a priori, i.e., before the full activation of an emerging emotion. Upon utilization of preventive strategies, people endeavor to adjust "how much or what type of emotion they experience before the onset of the emotion" (Sutton, 2004, p. 381).

On the other hand, Reactive Strategies come on the scene when the emotions start to run high. Instead of giving free rein to an unwanted emotion, teachers might decide to mitigate its undesirable effect by resorting to some strategies. In reaction to a misbehavior in the class, for instance, leaving the class and keeping quiet for a while might help teachers mitigate the effect of a negative feeling. The responsive strategies, referred to as "response modulation" by Gross, will be in effect when the emotion has been fully aroused. A representative form of response modulation is expressive suppression which entails impeding continuous emotional behavior (Gross, 1998b).

Any educational system is a system of emotions by default. As Hargreaves (1998a) puts it, "Emotions are at the heart of teaching" (p. 835). Therefore, exploring teacher emotion regulation in an ELT context potentially contributes to the field of teacher education. This qualitative study was just a small step to shed more light on the emotional aspects of language teaching. It is of paramount importance to see teaching in all its dimensions and complexities with the possible relationships among different teacher-related variables which highly influence teacher performance and behavior in the classroom setting.

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