

Emotionality Among Libyan EFL Instructors: A Thematic Analysis of Emotional Experience, Perception, and Regulation Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

teacher emotion;
positive emotionality;
emotion regulation;
EFL teacher;
teacher well-being

This study investigates the emotional experiences of Libyan EFL teachers at the University of Tripoli, examining the emotions they experience while teaching, their perceptions of positive emotionality, and their emotion-regulation strategies. Using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the findings reveal a coexistence of positive and negative emotions, largely influenced by student engagement. Positive emotionality was perceived as essential for reducing anxiety, enhancing confidence, and promoting reciprocal teacher–student engagement. Teachers mainly regulated positive emotions through preparation and moderation rather than suppression, while negative emotions required different strategies. The study contributes to research on teacher emotions and highlights implications for EFL teacher training and wellbeing in Libyan higher education.

الانفعالية الإيجابية لدى مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في ليبيا: تحليل موضوعي للتجربة العاطفية والإدراك واستراتيجيات تنظيم الانفعالات

نجاح الجديدي

الملخص

الكلمات المفتاحية:

مشاعر المعلم،
الإيجابية العاطفية،
تنظيم المشاعر،
معلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة
أجنبية، رفاهية المعلم.

تستكشف هذه الدراسة الخبرات العاطفية لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة طرابلس، من خلال بحث المشاعر التي يختبرونها أثناء التدريس، وتصوراتهم لدور المشاعر الإيجابية، والاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمونها لتنظيم مشاعرهم. وبالاعتماد على المقابلات شبه المنظمة والتحليل الموضوعي، كشفت النتائج عن وجود مشاعر إيجابية وسلبية تتأثر بدرجة كبيرة بتفاعل الطلبة. واعتُبرت المشاعر الإيجابية عنصراً أساسياً في خفض القلق وتعزيز الثقة وتشجيع التفاعل المتبادل بين المعلم والطالب. كما اعتمد المعلمون على الإعداد المسبق والاعتدال لتنظيم المشاعر الإيجابية، بينما احتاجت المشاعر السلبية إلى استراتيجيات مختلفة. وتبرز الدراسة أهمية هذه النتائج في تدريب المعلمين وتعزيز رفاههم النفسي في التعليم العالي الليبي.



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Introduction

Teaching is fundamentally an emotional undertaking, and how teachers interpret and manage their daily emotional experiences shapes their instructional decisions, classroom practice, and professional wellbeing (Chang & Taxer, 2020). Emotion regulation has become recognized as central to teachers' professional lives, affecting not just individual teachers but also students, colleagues, and the broader educational context.

Over the past two decades, teacher emotion has become an established research area in second language teacher education, with scholars agreeing that effective teaching requires managing emotional dimensions alongside subject-matter knowledge (Richards, 2020). Teachers must continually interpret and negotiate their own emotional states as part of their professional development (Golombek & Doran, 2014). While emotion was historically treated as an individual trait rather than a socially shaped phenomenon (Richards, 2020), effective teaching depends on integrating both rational and emotional dimensions-the "two wings" of practice with better emotion regulation enabling fuller use of cognitive and instructional capacities (Heydarnejad et al., 2021).

This regulatory work connects to teachers' emotional labor, generally classified as preventive or responsive strategies (Sutton & Harper, 2009). Gross's (2015) model identifies five strategies: situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation (Gross, 2015). Attention deployment and cognitive change relate to Grandey's (2000) concept of "deep acting." Language teachers use these strategies to manage their own and students' emotions (Sutton & Harper, 2009), as shown in studies of teachers managing anger toward misbehavior and guiding students toward empathy. A gap exists between teachers' self-reported strategies and students' perceptions of their effectiveness (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020).

Language teaching has been characterized as an emotional profession with positive psychology's rise shifting research focus from stress and burnout toward wellbeing and positive emotion (Dewaele et al., 2019; Fathi & Mohammaddokht, 2021). Positive emotion shapes both teaching practice and learner engagement (Hagenauer et al., 2015). Studies of EFL teachers in Japan (Morris & King, 2018), Iran (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2019) confirm emotion regulation's psychological benefits, though this research remains at an early stage.

Teachers experience diverse emotions (Xie, 2021), and those who regulate them effectively tend to flourish professionally and foster joyful classrooms conducive to learning. Positive emotion's role in teaching quality has been emphasized broadly (MacIntyre, 2016). Seligman's (2019) positive psychology framework links

positive emotional characteristics to teachers' flourishing (Dewaele et al., 2019) and creativity, with Bardach et al. (2022) finding these characteristics distinguish successful from less successful instructors.

Despite growing recognition of emotion's importance (Richards, 2020), research remains underdeveloped (Hargreaves, 2005). Existing research has focused on Japan, Iran, and China, leaving the Arab world and Libya largely unstudied, with prior work emphasizing negative emotion regulation over positive emotionality.

It is this gap that the present study seeks to address. Focusing on EFL teachers in the English Department at the College of Arts and Languages, University of Tripoli, this study explores the emotional experiences of Libyan EFL teachers, their perceptions of the role positive emotionality plays in their professional practice, and the strategies they draw upon to regulate that positive emotionality in the classroom. In doing so, the study extends the existing literature on teacher emotion regulation into an rarely-studied national and institutional context, and shifts analytic attention toward the regulation of positive emotion specifically a dimension of teachers' emotional lives that, as the literature above suggests, has received considerably less sustained attention than its negative counterpart. The study is guided by three research questions:

Q1. What types of emotions - positive, negative, or both - Libyan EFL teachers experience in their instruction?

Q2. How these teachers perceive the role of positive emotionality in their job and in student learning?

Q3. What strategies and techniques they use to regulate their positive emotionality in the classroom?

Literature Review

Emotions

Emotions received limited attention in academic discourse for much of the twentieth century due to the dominance of behavioristic and cognitive theories, only gaining significant research attention in psychology over the past two decades (Fried, 2011). The term originates from the Latin "emovere," meaning to stimulate (Hargreaves, 1998), reflecting the idea that individuals are driven by their emotional experiences. Emotions comprise affective, cognitive, physiological,

motivational, and expressive components (Buric et al., 2017). Nyklíček, Vingerhoets, and Zeelenberg (2011) frame emotion as a fundamental aspect of

human functioning that typically has adaptive value in helping individuals pursue their goals. Zembylas (2004) views emotions as relational, evaluative, and political, shaped by power dynamics within educational systems and society at large. Izard (2010) similarly describes emotions as encompassing cognitive appraisal, interpretation, neural systems, and expressive behavior, while James (1984, as cited in Gross, 1998b) characterizes them as adaptive behavioral and physiological responses triggered by evolutionarily significant situations.

Emotion Regulation

The rise of positive psychology has increased scholarly interest in emotion regulation within language instruction (Wang, Derakhshan, & Zhang, 2021), though the concept has been defined in varying ways across the literature. Thompson (1994) describes emotion regulation as the internal and external processes that monitor, evaluate, and modify emotional reactions-particularly their intensity and timing-to achieve personal goals, encompassing both the enhancement and suppression of emotional modify emotional reactions particularly their intensity and timing to achieve personal goals, encompassing both the enhancement and suppression of emotional experience. Lee et al. (2016) emphasize that how teachers manage their daily emotional experiences matters both for their personal wellbeing and their professional effectiveness.

Gross (1998) offers another influential definition, framing emotion regulation as the processes through which individuals influence which emotions they experience, when they experience them, and how they express them-though this definition centers on self-regulation rather than regulating others' emotions. Gross (2002) distinguishes between automatic emotional reactions (e.g., fear of a snake) and emotions triggered through reflection (e.g., annoyance at being underestimated). Cole, Michel, and Teti (1994) define emotion regulation as the capacity to respond to emotional demands in socially acceptable and flexible ways, allowing for both spontaneous reactions and the ability to delay them when necessary.

More broadly, emotion regulation involves the physiological, behavioral, and cognitive strategies people use to manage emotional experience effectively (Gross, 2014), shaping which emotions are felt, when, and how they are expressed (Zheng et al., 2022). Like other self-regulation skills, emotions can be deliberately managed to serve educational goals through specific ER strategies (Gross, 2014; Li, 2021). Thompson (1994) reiterates this as the intrinsic and extrinsic processes individuals use to evaluate and control emotions in pursuit of specific purposes.

In educational contexts specifically, emotion regulation refers to the processes instructors use to up- or down-regulate emotions in fulfilling their professional responsibilities (Gong et al., 2013). Karabay (2019) notes that teachers who effectively express positive emotions while mitigating negative ones build stronger bonds with students, a point echoed by Littleton (2021) regarding effective communication both inside and outside the classroom. Talbot and Mercer (2018) similarly argue that overcoming negative emotions like anger and anxiety protects teachers' professional success.

Gross's (1998) Process Model of Emotion Regulation outlines five sequential stages: situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. Emotions are understood to develop gradually rather than instantaneously, allowing regulation to occur at multiple points in this process (Sutton & Harper, 2009; Gross & Thompson, 2007). The first four stages are preventive, occurring before an emotion fully emerges, while the fifth-response modulation-is responsive, addressing how an emotion is physically or behaviorally expressed once it arises (Gross & Munoz, 1995; Gross, 2014).

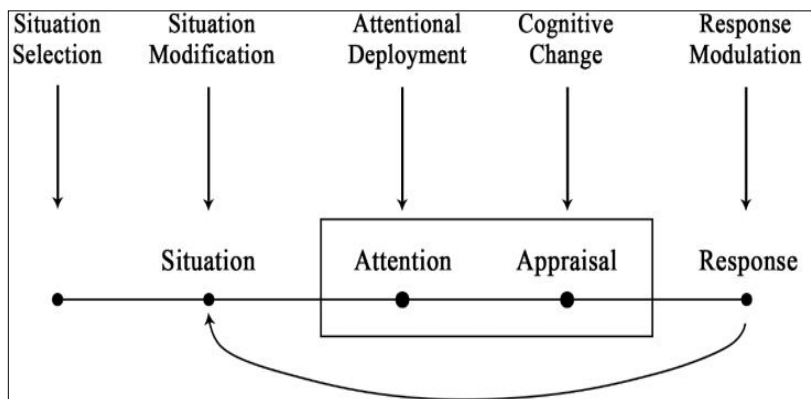


Fig. 1: Gross's Process Model of Emotion Regulation

Emotion Regulation Strategies

Teaching involves a wide range of emotions that influence cognition, motivation, self-efficacy, memory, pedagogical choices, professional identity, and ultimately student learning. Teachers are generally expected to express pleasant emotions while down-regulating negative ones (Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000), avoiding both overly intense and overly muted emotional displays (Chen, 2020). Qiu (2011) proposes classroom strategies-building curiosity and enjoyment, managing anxiety

that support student emotional regulation, while Tao and Zhou (2024) advocate varied strategies including psychological matching, communication, and avoidance at both individual and group levels.

Grandey's (2000) emotional labor model links cognitive reappraisal to deep acting and suppression to surface acting; deep acting aligns internal feelings with outward expression, while surface acting modifies expression without changing internal feelings. Grandey and Melloy (2017) later expanded this framework, encouraging exploration beyond the deep/surface acting dichotomy, noting its implications for job satisfaction, self-efficacy, resilience, emotional intelligence, and creativity.

Positive Emotion

Language teaching involves both positive and negative emotional experiences for teachers and learners alike. While educational psychology historically emphasized negative states like anxiety and stress, the emergence of humanistic and positive psychology (PP) shifted attention toward positive emotion (MacIntyre et al., 2019), without denying negativity's existence (Wang et al., 2022). Sociocultural and poststructuralist perspectives frame emotions as socially embedded rather than purely individual traits (Zembylas, 2003), and positive emotionality rests on three pillars: positive experiences, personal characteristics, and institutions (MacIntyre et al., 2019). Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden-and-Build Theory further supports how positive emotions foster development and performance.

PP's integration into applied linguistics has promoted affect-centered pedagogy also strengthening teachers' interpersonal and communication skills (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021) and revitalizing L2 education by centering emotion in learning (MacIntyre et al., 2019).

Methodology

Participants

The study drew on a sample of thirteen (13) Libyan EFL teachers employed at the Faculty of Arts and Languages, Department of English. participants were selected on the basis of their active teaching experience within the department, ensuring that all accounts reflected first-hand, current classroom practice rather than hypothetical reflection. As instructors working within the same institutional and department context, participants shared a broadly comparable professional environment. All

participant agreed to take a part in the study, and their interviews were treated with strict confidentiality.

Instruments

Semi-structured interviews

In order to explore how Libyan EFL teachers' perceptions of positive emotionality and how they regulate it, the researcher employed a WhatsApp semi-structured interview conducted in English Language. the interviews made up of two sections. The first section focused on basic background information about the teachers – their gender, field of study, and how much teaching experience they had. The second section include three open-ended questions asking about how EFL teachers perceive positive emotionality and how they regulate it. the interviews were audio recorded for later thematic analysis. The interview questions themselves were adapted from Zhang and Wang (2024).

Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a methods chosen for its capacity to combine a consistent of guiding questions with flexibility to pursue points of interest as they arose in each participant's account. Rather than being conducted face-to-face or through a live online call, the interviews were carried out asynchronously via WhatsApp voice messages, a decision made in response to participants' demanding schedules and limited availability for real-time sessions. This format allowed teachers to respond at a time convenient to them without requiring simultaneous participation from the researcher.

The interview process followed a consistent exchange structure: the researcher sent each question as a voice message, and the participants responded in kind with a recorded voice message. Based on the content of each response, the researcher then either posed a follow-up or probing question to seek clarification or elaboration, or move on to the next question in the interview guide. This back-and-forth voice-message exchange preserved the interactive, responsive quality associated with semi-structured interviewing, while adapting the format to the practical constraints faced by the participants.

Data Analysis

The findings derived from the thematic analysis of interview data collected to explore instructional experiences in the classroom, with particular attention to the types of emotions experienced, the perceived role of positive emotionality in teaching and learning, and strategies instructors employ to regulate their emotions.

The analysis follows the six-phase thematic analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clark (2006), which involves the steps illustrated in figure 1:

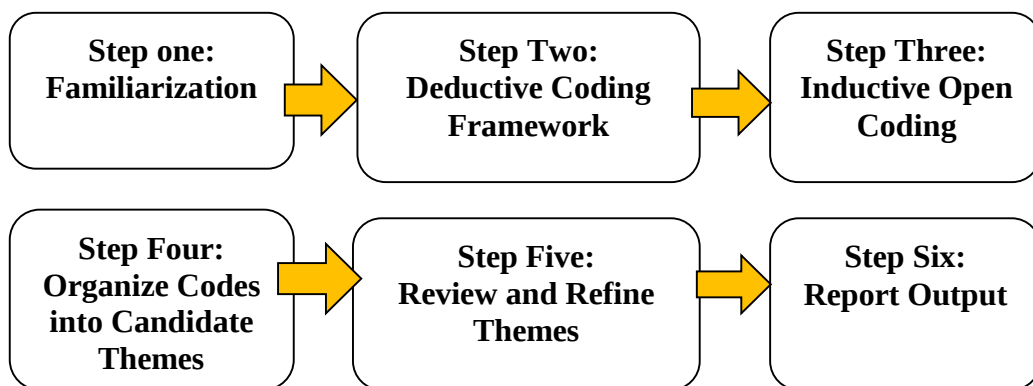


Fig. 2: Thematic analysis stages

The coding process combined a deductive framework, structured around the interview questions themselves, with inductive open coding to capture patterns emerging directly from participants' language and experience that not anticipated in advanced. Thirteen participants (P1-P13) responded to the questions addressed in the interview; codes were grouped into boarder thematic categories on the basis of shared meaning, and each candidate theme was reviewed against the coded extracts to ensure both internal and coherence and clear differentiation from related themes.

Results and Discussion

Teachers' Perceptions of Positive Emotionality

Teachers' perceptions of positive emotionality form the first focus of this analysis. These perceptions are drawn from participants' responses to the interview's first and

second questions. These two questions offer a fuller picture of how teachers understand positive emotion: not only what it feels like and what triggers it, but also what they believe it accomplishes for themselves and their students.

Question One: Types of Emotions Experienced in Instruction

Participants were asked what types of emotions – positive, negative, or both – they had experienced in their instruction. Across the sample, five themes emerged:

Theme 1: The Coexistence and Fluctuation of Positive and Negative Emotion

Participants consistently described their emotions not as fixed, but as shifting between positive and negative depending on the lesson, relationship, or career stage. Most opened by affirming they experience both: P1 stated both are "expected in teaching," while P13 confirmed experiencing "both feelings...positive and negative." P8 went further, noting the two emotions "can coexist within the same professional activity" rather than simply alternating. P12 illustrated this as a recurring daily pattern within a single lesson, describing a demotivating dip early in class, "as if what I done in previous lecture went in vain".

Theme 2: Student Responsiveness as the Central Emotional Trigger

Student engagement, participation, and academic outcomes emerged as the most frequent trigger for both positive and negative emotions. Nine of thirteen participants described their feelings as closely, almost automatically, tied to visible student behavior. P2 described this mechanically: active participation produces positivity, passivity produces negativity, adding that visible understanding makes "the classroom... in fire." Academic results had a similar effect-P10 described watching students achieve goals as bringing rising happiness, while P13 showed the same pattern, with both emotions stemming from student comprehension, participation, and behavior. This consistency across participants suggests that teachers' emotional states are shaped less by personal mood or disposition and more by continuously reading and responding to what unfolds in the classroom with students.

Theme 3: institutional and structural source of negative emotion

A smaller group of participants attributed negative emotions to sources beyond the teacher-student relationship, including administrative workload, quality-assurance processes, class size, and physical classroom conditions. P5's negative emotions stemmed largely from bureaucratic pressures related to national quality-assurance requirements. P11 pointed to classroom conditions, noting that heat without air conditioning reduces enthusiasm and creates negative learning vibes. P2 contrasted

class sizes across career stages, describing large classes as less conducive to emotional connection than smaller ones. Though less prominent than Theme 2, this theme matters because it shows negative emotion can originate from institutional systems rather than solely from classroom relationships.

Theme 4: Emotional Labor, Control, and Its Limits

A fourth theme looked at how participants tried to manage the way they showed emotion in the classroom, including moments where that visibly broke down. Only two participants, P2 and P7, talked openly about losing emotional control, but both described actual behavioral consequences. P2 said, "*I couldn't control my anger and then I continued teaching with power and strength in the classroom...after 30 minutes...I apologized to them*". P7 described something similar, reaching "*a level of kind of anger, and this...affects even the lesson plan*." P2's response also showed a real tension between how they actually felt and what they thought teaching required of them, stating, "*I want to teach because I have to teach...not because I'm interested and feeling happy in my teaching to my students*." Looked at alongside Theme 1, these responses illustrate the coexistence of positive and negative emotion and less from than the mostly positive emotion examples found elsewhere in the data.

Theme 5: Positive Emotion as Fuel for Teaching Practice

Even though this theme was not the focus of Q1, several participants brought up on their own how positive emotion keeps them motivated. P7 described these emotions as ones that "*motivate me to continue improving my teaching practices*," while P9 described positive emotion as giving "*the fuel to continue delivering the knowledge the way I learned to do*."

Question Two: The role of positive emotions and emotionality in teaching and learning

Participants were asked what they thought of the role of positive emotions and emotionality in their job and student learning, and how these emotions influence teaching and learning. Unlike the first question, where responses were mixed and went back and forth between positive and negative, the responses here were strongly around a single point: positive emotion is not merely beneficial but essential to effective teaching and learning. Consequently, four themes stood out here:

Theme 1: Positive Emotion as a Foundational Precondition for Effective Teaching and Learning

Twelve of thirteen participants described positive emotion as genuinely essential, with little hedging compared to Q1 findings. P1 called it vital to creating a productive learning environment, while P4 was emphatic: "vital, absolutely vital." P2 offered the clearest example, describing transforming a depressed class into an engaged one within a single session, and even overcoming a poor physical space—a "messy," dusty classroom. P13 grounded this belief in human nature itself, stating "we are actually like a block of emotions." Together, these responses suggest that for most participants, positive emotion is not merely a useful tool but something teaching and learning fundamentally depend on.

Theme 2: A Shared Confidence-Motivation-Participation Pathway

Eight participants offered a consistent explanation of how positive emotion works: it lowers students' anxiety and builds confidence, which increases motivation, participation, and willingness to engage. P5 framed this theoretically, describing emotion as a "cognitive gatekeeper" that lowers the affective filter and aids processing of challenging material. Others described it experientially—P6 noted students feel more comfortable asking questions and engaging in discussions, while P10 said students can express themselves freely. This idea's recurrence across participants with different backgrounds strengthens the finding, offering the clearest explanation in the data of how teachers believe positive emotion translates into actual learning.

Theme 3: Emotional Contagion and Reciprocity Between Teacher and Student

A third theme showed that participants see emotion in the classroom as something that flow both ways, not just from teacher to student, but circulates as each side feeling into the other. P12 describes this directly: *"if the teacher or the staff member has got a positive kind of emotions, this will reflect on the students' emotions as well."* P3 offered the richest elaboration of this reciprocity, trying it into a broader personal habit of practicing gratitude and paying attention to individual students, even adjusting a lesson plan *"just to meet"* the needs of one student who was struggling. P3 described the exchange as truly two way: when students respond positively, it's *"often reciprocated because students feel motivated to give you that kind of energy back."* For P3 in particular, this back and forth seemed to be kept going through a deliberate practice of gratitude, based on the idea that *"every time students practice gratitude and feel grateful, this will eventually lead to positive attitude."*

Theme 4: Positive Emotion as a Form of Professional Sustainability and Self Protection

A forth theme, though based on more narrow evidence, framed positive emotion not as a pedagogical tool but as a form of self-protection for the instructor. This theme comes almost entirely from P8, who described positive emotion as *"essential for maintaining teaching quality, professional energy, and also the length of sustainability in the profession itself,"* and stated that these emotions help *"deal with daily pressure and prevent me from being of feeling completely exhausted or burned out."* Although this theme cannot be generalized beyond a single participant as a pattern across the whole group, it introduces a dimension – professional survival and burnout prevention – that is largely absent from the rest of the corpus and it is probably worth asking more about in future interviews.

Discussion: How the Q1 and Q2 Findings Answer Research Questions 1 and 2

Q1 findings show teachers experience positive and negative emotions simultaneously, mainly triggered by student engagement, with a smaller group citing institutional issues. This aligns with Sutton and Wheatley's (2003) findings on appraisal-dependent emotional variation and their observation that positive emotions are often understudied-relevant here since positive emotion emerged as strongly as negative emotion. The student-driven emotional trigger also matches Frenzel et al.'s (2009) finding on linked teacher-student enjoyment.

Q2 findings show teachers view positive emotion as essential, working through lowered anxiety, built confidence, and increased participation consistent with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis. The reciprocal teacher-student dynamic echoes Frenzel et al.'s (2009) findings on shared enjoyment, while a minority theme linking positive emotion to burnout protection aligns with Taxer and Gross's (2018) argument about emotion regulation supporting teacher wellbeing and career sustainability.

Question Three: Strategies for Regulating Positive Emotion in the Classroom

Participants were asked what strategies and techniques they use to manage and regulate their positive emotions in the classroom. Five patterns came out of the findings:

Proactive Pre- Class Preparation as the Dominant Technique

Once participants had room to explain themselves more fully, most of them described some kind of deliberate routine practiced before entering the classroom, aimed to aimed at putting them in the right emotional state for the lesson ahead. These routines varied in form but they all served the same function. P3 described journaling and gratitude practice before entering the class *"so that it can really put me at ease,"* while P6 talked about a similar sequence of coffee, colleague conversation, and deep breathing as *"antecedent focused emotions regulation, which we do before start the class."* P13 offered the most vivid example of this, saying a cup of coffee could shift the mood almost immediately: *"this actually helps me...my mood switches as if you are pressing a button."* P11 took this same idea into the first few minutes of class itself, using informal, non-academic warm-up chat *"to break the ice and get the students into learning vibes,"* a technique P11 said they learned on especially on days when there had not been much time to prepare the lesson. The fact that this same pattern kept showing up across such different participants.

An Symmetry Between Suppressing Negative Emotion and Displaying Positive Emotion

A second pattern showed up across four separate accounts, and it is an important one: when participants talked directly about suppressing emotion, none of them described hiding positive emotion. Instead, suppressing was reserved for negative emotion, while positive emotion was treated as something to be shown. P3 stated this point most strongly, saying suppression just does not fit with how he sees himself as a teacher: *"suppression, I don't think I do this...I never suppress...it doesn't apply to me at all because I'm not in favor of this approach."* P8 offered a closely similar response, explaining a deliberate choice not to hide enthusiasm: *"I really use it, that total suppression for positive emotions, because I want my students to see my authentic joy and passion for teaching."* P13 described the same asymmetry in more practical terms, contrasting an active effort to *"spread that positivity among my students"* with separate, harder effort to *"oppress [suppress]"* negative feeling. P11 gave the clearest, most direct version of this whole pattern: *"I do try to suppress negative emotions and release positive emotions instead."* Taken together, these four accounts indicate that, *"regulating"* positive emotion is not really about hiding it at all – it is more about giving themselves permission to show it, which stands in contrast to the much harder work of hiding negative emotion described elsewhere in this section.

Situation Modification, Attention Deployment, and Response Modulation

When participants actively managed positive emotion, it typically involved moderating intensity or timing rather than suppression. P8 offered the clearest example, preemptively modifying game rules with a "structural speed bump" to prevent excitement from escalating, and converting high-pitched praise into a "warm, grounded smile and structured feedback." P7 described a similar technique with an engaging storytelling activity, deliberately time-limiting the enthusiasm to 15 minutes so it wouldn't overtake the lesson. Both P6 and P10 used humor or brief structured pauses to bring emotionally charged moments back on track, with P10 describing this as a "pause and reset" strategy that allowed the lesson to continue without negative reactions. Across these accounts, positive emotion was not treated as something to eliminate, but as energy requiring shaping, containment, timing, or redirection rather than concealment.

Cognitive Reappraisal as a Reframing Tool

A smaller number of participants described how they interpreted a classroom moment as a way of shaping its emotion that come out of it. P5 named this directly as one of two main strategies used specifically for positive emotion, alongside adjusting the response itself, explaining that combination *"allowed me to remain an encouraging instructor while ensuring my teaching environment remain structured, objective, and academically disciplined."* P3's account of mindfulness and gratitude practice worked in a similar way, reframing the experience of expressing emotion as something safe rather than something risky: *"I don't feel scared or afraid or misjudged...that feels safe for you to just allow your feelings to navigate through."* P7 described a related kind of reappraisal during lesson planning, thinking through "what kin of positive emotion I would expect from my students" at each stage before the lesson even happened, so the emotional flow of the class was planned out rather than just reacted to in the moment.

Discussion: Strategies for Regulating Positive Emotion in the Classroom

RQ3 findings show Libyan EFL teachers regulate positive emotionality through proactive preparation, active display rather than suppression, and moderation of intensity. Pre-class preparation aligns with Gross's (1998) antecedent/response-focused distinction and echoes Akbari et al.'s (2017) findings on Iranian teachers. The key contribution is an asymmetry suppressing negative emotion while actively displaying positive emotion-extending prior work built on Gross and John's (2003) framework and largely focused on negative emotions (Taxer & Gross, 2018; Akbari et al., 2017). This aligns with Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory, treating positive emotion as a resource to cultivate rather than suppress.

Overall, these findings answer the third research question by showing that Libyan EFL teachers in this sample regulate their positive emotionality mainly through deliberate pre-class routines before class, through selective and intentional display of positive emotion, and through techniques that shape the timing and intensity of positive emotion rather than suppress it. This pattern both confirms that Gross's (1998) process model to language teaching contexts and adds a more specific account of positive emotion focused regulation than what is found in EFL teacher emotion literature.

Conclusion

This study explored the emotional lives of Libyan EFL teachers at the University of Tripoli, examining the emotions they experience, their perceptions of positive emotionality's role, and their regulation strategies. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis.

Findings show teachers' emotional experience is dual rather than one-sided, closely tied to student engagement, and in some cases shaped by institutional pressures. Most participants viewed positive emotionality as essential-not merely beneficial-to teaching effectiveness and student learning, operating through lowered anxiety, built confidence, and increased engagement in a reciprocal teacher-student dynamic. Regulation strategies centered on proactive, pre-class preparation and moderating positive affect rather than suppressing it, revealing an asymmetry where suppression was reserved for negative emotion.

For RQ1, emotion emerged as a shifting coexistence of positive and negative states, primarily triggered by student engagement, consistent with Sutton and Wheatley's (2003) observations. For RQ2, positive emotion functioned through reduced anxiety and confidence-building, aligning with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis and Frenzel et al.'s (2009) findings on teacher-student enjoyment, while also protecting against burnout (Taxer & Gross, 2018). For RQ3, regulation strategies matched Gross's (1998) process model, with the suppression-expression asymmetry extending Gross and John's (2003) framework-representing one of the study's notable contributions.

Implications

These findings carry several implications for EFL teacher preparation and professional development. First, since positive emotionality was consistently tied to student engagement and a lowered affective filter (Krashen, 1982), training programs should treat emotional awareness and regulation as core to the job rather than incidental-many participants noted receiving extensive methodology training but none in emotional management. Second, since regulation proved largely proactive, institutions could support teachers concretely by protecting pre-class preparation time instead of scheduling back-to-back classes. Third, since positive emotion also appears to guard against burnout (Taxer & Gross, 2018), investing in teachers' emotional wellbeing may improve retention alongside classroom outcomes.

Limitations

A few limitations should be kept in mind when considering these conclusions. The sample (up to 13 participants) is appropriate for explanatory, meaning-focused of thematic analysis, but does not support the claims about how common any given theme is among Libyan EFL teachers as a whole. Data quality was not consistent across participants or questions either. Some participants answered a different research question than the one actually asked, and Q3 of the interview in particular needed a follow-up clarification round. Finally, as in all self-report interview research, participants' accounts reflect their own perceptions rather than direct behavioral observation.

Recommendations

Future research could pursue several directions. A large-scale, mixed-methods study combining interviews with classroom observation or validated instruments would help test how well these qualitative patterns generalize across Libyan EFL teachers and other subject areas. The suppression-display asymmetry, this study's most distinctive finding, warrants a study built specifically around positive-emotion regulation rather than treating it as underexplored relative to negative-emotion regulation. Future work should also examine the professional-sustainability dimension identified here, drawing on Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory to test whether accumulated positive emotion predicts teacher retention or burnout resistance within Libyan higher education specifically.

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