https://doi.org/10.37420/j.cer.2025.108

Investigating the Emotional Development of a Male Rookie English Teacher via Narrative Inquiry

Panyu Qin*
School of Foreign Studies, Zhaoqing university, Zhaoqing, Guangdong, China
***Corresponding author, E-mail: panyuq781@163.com**

Abstract:
Research on teacher emotions and emotion management represents a growing body of literature in educational studies. However, empirical investigations within the Chinese context remain limited compared to Western scholarship, with a particular scarcity of gender-specific analyses focusing on male educators. Addressing this gap, the present study employed a single-case narrative inquiry to examine the emotional experiences and regulatory strategies of a novice male English teacher in a Chinese senior high school. Findings indicate that while the participant generally demonstrated professional composure, his teaching practice was characterized by intermittent experiences of anxiety and guilt. His classroom confidence was closely associated with meticulous lesson preparation and structured pedagogy, which fostered a positive learning environment and enhanced instructional effectiveness. When encountering unforeseen student inquiries, the participant initially exhibited apprehension but subsequently developed coping mechanisms that incorporated student perspectives to navigate pedagogical challenges. Episodes of professional guilt emerged primarily from perceived instructional limitations in delivering new content and self-assessed inadequacies in demonstrative techniques such as blackboard writing. These emotional responses appear intrinsically linked to a deeply internalized sense of professional duty, which functions as a motivational driver for continuous pedagogical improvement. This study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the emotional landscape of male educators in China and provides a foundation for subsequent research into gendered dimensions of emotion regulation within Chinese educational settings.

Keywords:
male teacher; novice teacher; teacher emotions; narrative inquiry

1.Introduction

Emotion matters in teaching and knowledge of emotions is critical to understanding teachers and teaching (Day & Lee, 2011). The past decades have witnessed a spate of literature on teacher emotions and emotion management (eg. Olson et al., 2019; Winograd, 2003; Zembylas, 2004). Moreover, as reviewed by Olson (2019), some studies suggest that male and female teachers differ in how they manage their emotions while others indicate no such gender differences. Besides, novice teachers are considered “rarely prepared to manage the emotional events that are an endemic part of teaching and working within school contexts” (Schutz &

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Lee, 2014) which may partly explain the reason for a significantly higher turnover rate observed among novice teachers compared with experienced teachers, with many exiting the profession within the first three years of service (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Therefore, it is necessary to understand and interpret novice teachers' feelings in EFL teaching practice. Nevertheless, it seems that investigations on teacher emotion have seen the dominance by Western world (Uitto et al., 2015). The studies on teacher emotions and gendered differences of emotion management conducted in China are rather less and investigations into EFL novice teachers' emotions are rarely seen. The present study, in agreement with the previous ones that has shown that "gender matters to teachers' emotion management" (Olson et al., 2019), attempts to develop a close examination of teacher emotions and emotion management of EFL novice teachers. This investigation will hopefully provide a fuller picture of the EFL novice teachers' emotions and emotion management strategies.

The paper will first provide background information by reviewing previous studies on teacher emotions at home and abroad and clarifying the concept of novice teacher; second, detail a description of the methods and provide information on the participant; third, present the research findings. Finally, the conclusion and discussion will be revealed.

2.Literature review

Teachers' emotion has an influence on not only "student learning and teaching practice, but also the school climate and the quality of education" (Schutz and Zembylas, 2009). Therefore, "knowledge of teachers' emotions is essential in understanding teachers and teaching" (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). However, not until the late 1990s did the research on emotions gain "importance in teacher education" (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Many scholars have endeavored to investigate emotions and emotion management worldwide in the education domain over the past decades (eg, Hargreaves, 1998, 2000; Olson et al., 2019; Winograd, 2003; Zembylas, 2004). Their works have contributed to the demystification of teachers' emotions and the representation of emotion management strategies.

2.1Previous studies on teacher emotions abroad

Although traditional opinions on teaching prioritized instructional focus, further studies has shifted the focus to the role of emotion as it was considered an emotional practice --- "emotions are at the heart of teaching" and managing emotion is essential to teaching practice (Hargreaves, 1998; Uitto, Jokikokko & Estola, 2015). Therefore, other than the subject knowledge or teaching techniques, teaching also involves the teacher's management of his or her own dynamic emotions. Researchers have noticed this and conducted many studies (e.g., Uitto, Jokikokko & Estola, 2015). Hargreaves has found that, "good teaching is charged with positive emotion" (Hargreaves, 1998). Similarly, Darling-Hammond (2001) mentioned that stress and poor emotion management was the primary reasons that displeased teachers and made them leaving their positions. In contrast, those who perform better at emotional management are more likely to "thrive" in their careers (Oplatka, 2009; Prosser, Tuckey & Wendt, 2013). Considering the significance of emotions on teachers' identity, motivation, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction, it seems that qualified teachers are expected to demonstrate better emotional regulation while negative experiences might even change teachers' career trajectories (Hargreaves, 2000; Schutz & Zembylas 2009).

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Furthermore, gender has been incorporated into the analytical framework of emotion management. Some scholars have revealed that teachers of different genders are expected to employ distinct emotion management strategies (Blackmore, 2004; Greenglass, Burke & Konarski, 1998; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998) while others held the opposite opinions, suggesting that differences didn't exist in how teachers handle emotions (Hargreaves, 1998). After a strict scrutiny and review of the "international literature (1979-2017)", R.E. Olson et al. (2019) asserted that "gender has been a long-standing focus within the literature on emotion management and teaching".

2.2 Previous studies on teacher emotions in China

In China, teacher emotion management has emerged as a focal point of educational research since the mid-1980s (Hou & Wang, 2016). According to a review by Tang (2020) who has studied "151 teachers' emotion management literature from the (CNKI) (1999~2019)", research in this area has evolved along four primary lines: one concerning early childhood teachers, another addressing primary school teachers, the other examining secondary school teachers (including junior and senior high schools), and the last line exploring teachers in higher education. A further probe into the literature reveals that few researches have paid attention to teachers' emotions in senior high schools and fewer to colleges and universities. Among the few researches invloving secondary school teachers' emotion, many haven't integrated genders into analytical frameworks. For example, He (2020) incorporated gender as one of the dimensions for random sampling, but failed to analyze the current state and problems of their emotion management in relation to gender. Similarly, Liu (2022) also listed gender as a significant a measurement indicator in the literature review and research methodology, but didn't present any analysis or findings in terms of genders. What's more, as concluded by Tang (2020), the research landscape was dominated by a limited variety of research approaches, while qualitative and mixed-methods studies remain underrepresented.

To my knowledge, a narrative study focusing on the emotions of male novice English teachers in senior high school has not been found. Nevertheless, considering the unique influence of male teachers---they serve as key contributors to deepening students' thinking, nurturing well-rounded personalities, and advancing intellectual development in high school education---the emotional experiences of male teachers deserve specific scholarly attention.

Therefore, intending to provide a fuller picture of the male teachers' emotions and emotion management strategies, this paper centers on what a male novice English teacher experienced emotionally in teaching practice and what strategies he chose to address it. The investigation will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What emotions did the male novice English teacher in senior high school experience in teaching practice?

2. What factors influenced the emotions of a male novice English teacher?

3. How did a male high school English teacher handle these emotions?

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

2.3 Novice teacher

Yu (1999) incorporated new teachers, who have just taken up a teacher job for one to two years, into the novice teacher category. Tsui (2007) proposed that novice teachers referred to teachers who have completed an induction program and obtained formal positions, and have undertaken tasks, in their first year, with similar difficulty as experienced teachers have encountered in school or educational institutions. As Zhang (2015) stated, beginning teachers must meet the following requirements: they 1) have just graduated from colleges and universities; 2) have obtained the required teacher qualification certificate; 3) have joined the ranks of teachers less than three years; 4) bear the same responsibilities as experienced teachers.

In this study, novice teachers are defined as individuals who have obtained an English teaching qualification certificate, completed pre-service training, and have formally entered the teaching profession, with no more than five years of experience teaching English at the high school level.

3.Methodology

3.1Methods

A narrative study will be employed in this paper, utilizing a semi-structured interview approach. Connelly and Clandinin (2006, P.375) maintained that "story ... is a portal through which a person enters the world. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience". Therefore, narrative inquiry can function as an effective research tool in this investigation.

3.2Data collection

Three formal semi-structured interviews were conducted roughly once a week through WeChat voice connection. Each formal interview lasted for about 20 to 30 minutes and was recorded. The transcript was also produced after each interview. The researcher used a free online tool to transcribe the interview provided by iFLYTEK (https://www.iflyrec.com/). Any improvised conversation was welcomed. Voice messages or texts, with relevant statements, sent by the male novice teacher were also analyzed with contexts provided for further understanding. In the whole process, Mandarin was used as both the researcher and the interviewee were born and raised in mainland China. It could help them focus on the questions themselves.

Before the interview, the participant are informed of every detail of the whole process to ensure that he understands the purpose of his involvement and that he agrees to the conditions of his participation. Moreover, the interview outline concentrating on research questions was designed based on the existing research. During the interview, the male novice teacher was asked to recollect his emotions during teaching practice and strategies to deal with them. After the interview, the materials were reorganized before further coding. The research conclusion is grounded on the teacher's original statements with the participant's consent.

3.3Participants

The participant, Li Qi (pseudonym), is a 27-year-old male novice English teacher. His hometown is H province. But he went to a university located in N province. During his university studies, he was trained to

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

be an English teacher. He has been working as an English teacher for three years in a prefectural-level city in N Province since graduation.

The participant was purposefully selected for three reasons. First, the participant and researcher have received a similar training program for future teachers. The program consisted of theories and practice, which were arranged in the third year. Second, the participant and researcher have been familiar with each other for five years at the university. Furthermore, they have been in contact with each other, talking about their lives and work from time to time. Third, the participant himself was interested in this study and was willing to be part of it. What's more, the participant was able to understand the study to some extent.

As a researcher, the researcher has also worked as an English teacher for about two months, so the researcher is able to relate to the participant's emotions. Besides, the researcher has been trained to be a qualified researcher for about a year.

4.Research findings

4.1'I'm very relaxed'

Before his involvement in teaching practice --- working as an EFL teacher, Li Qi participated in the student union at the university. He has been working as the vice-chairperson for two years, which has provided an opportunity for him to practice skills of leadership. Such experience might lay a firm foundation for his successful class management and emotional control. It is worth mentioning that he also accepted professional training for future teachers at the university. The combination of student union experience and professional program might have prepared him both in theory and practice. Therefore, he was "relaxed" even when he made his professional debut before the class.

Another reason for his statement "I'm very relaxed" lies in effective lesson planning. By utilizing online resources, he watched demonstration lessons from seasoned professors and acquired the knowledge of efficient lesson planning. In this way, he used existing resources to assist himself in teaching practice and reduced the instructional burden. For example, when he has difficulty designing a lesson for grammar, he would resort to other teachers. Besides, in his opinion, "teaching material is easy to prepare" as he has access to online resources. In other words, effective lesson planning is helpful to remove his emotional burdens.

The third reason for his staying stable in emotion is that he believes there is an interplay between the teacher's emotion and the students' emotions. In fact, he thinks a teacher can "definitely" identify students' emotions by examining their states in the classroom. It seems that emotional control is so important to him that it is close to teaching competence.

Immersion in relaxed states contributed to his successful instruction. As he mentioned, "If the teacher is relaxed, then the class will be relaxed" and "teaching goals can be easily achieved". If he were relaxed, better interaction with students would be possible and the task of imparting knowledge could also be simplified. "Only if you keep your own emotions stable, can you motivate the class to be stabilized". He not only plays the role of a teacher but also acts as a leader in emotion controlling --- he directed the class towards a positive atmosphere.

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

4.2Guilty

4.2.1 Guilty for not being experienced enough

Over the three years, while teaching students from Grade One to Grade Three, the participant was consistently required to adapt to new textbooks and instructional materials, which presented ongoing pedagogical challenges. He reported that when teaching two classes within the same grade level, his delivery was more refined in the second class, an unintentional discrepancy he attributed to the effect of "practice." This self-identified variation in teaching performance appears to have elicited a sense of unease, as he expressed dissatisfaction. The participant may engage in unconscious self-critique for perceived inequity in his instructional practice.

4.2.2 Guilty for not being a good model

Teachers are widely expected to serve as models observing the codes of conduct (Gao, 1998; Zhang & Zhu, 2008). In alignment with this norm, the participant, Li Qi, perceived himself as a role model for his students. This self-perception explained his feelings of guilt upon recognizing that his blackboard writing lacked aesthetic appeal. Notably, in this instance, he did not invoke his customary maxim, "practice makes perfect." This omission suggests that he may view the improvement of his blackboard penmanship as a particularly intractable challenge, one not easily overcome by practice alone.

4.3'A little flustered' facing unexpected questions

In his lesson preparation, the participant engaged with both the teaching materials and potential student questions. However, he reported that even though he attempted to anticipate students' perspectives, he could not predict all possible scenarios. When confronted with an unexpected question---a frequent occurrence during discussions of cloze test options---he acknowledged feeling momentarily "a little flustered." His documented strategy was to redirect such questions back to the student cohort, an approach he described as "sneaky." He noted that some students were "very open-minded" and would readily propose an answer. This improvisational practice served to not only preserve the teacher's instructional authority but also foster a more collaborative and positive classroom atmosphere.

4.4Curriculum reform makes teaching easier

Prior to the curriculum reform enacted in his school in August 2018, classroom instruction was predominantly teacher-centered, characterized by whole-class lecturing, student note-taking, and subsequent memorization. The reform marked a significant shift towards a student-centered approach by modularizing class time, thereby compressing the duration allocated for direct teacher instruction. To facilitate this transition, the school organized professional development for teachers, focusing on delivering effective lectures within a constrained time frame---often limited to approximately ten minutes---with the remainder of the class time devoted to student activities. Li Qi reported that this modular structure created a coherent and efficient teaching flow, which reduced his instructional burden. He described the new practice as becoming a "taolu" (a set pattern), where "all you need to do is to fill in the blank that fits in the routine," suggesting a standardized yet adaptable framework.

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

4.5Strict separation between life and work

Although the participant acknowledged the inevitable influence of personal life on professional work and the inherent difficulty in fully controlling emotions, he maintained a strong commitment to dividing the two domains. He considered it unacceptable for concerns from his daily life to interfere with his teaching. To achieve this, he employed a strategy of strict self-discipline, supplemented by physical exercise, as a deliberate method to separate his personal and professional spheres.

5.Discussion and conclusion

This study employed a narrative inquiry approach to investigate the emotional experiences and emotion management strategies of a male novice English teacher in a senior high school setting. The findings indicate that despite initial challenges, his meticulous lesson planning, supplemented by online resources, fostered a confident and composed teaching demeanor, thereby enhancing classroom effectiveness and cultivating a positive learning environment.

The analysis also revealed that the participant experienced complex emotional state, including occasional anxiety and guilt when confronting unexpected pedagogical challenges. Specifically, unanticipated questions would lead to nervous responses for the novice teacher, even though he has developed strategies to address these situations by leveraging student intellectual contributions. Feelings of guilt emerged from two primary sources: unintended consequences resulting from limited experience in delivering new content, and self-criticism regarding his board-writing techniques. These emotional responses appear to stem from the participant's strong sense of professional responsibility.

Besides, both external factors, such as curriculum reform initiatives, and internal factors, including maintaining clear boundaries between professional and personal domains, influenced the participant's development of emotion regulation strategies. The professional responsibilities he embraced seem to serve as motivational factors for his continued growth as an educator.

Based on the experience of the participant, it is suggested to offer long-term support, better online resources and assistance in teaching planning to early career teachers. Moreover, take into accountant the participant's ability in coordinating and organizing the students, which was developed as being the vice-chairperson of student union, pre-job training program that can prepare teachers for better performance and necessary skills as qualified teaching practitioners is also recommended.

This study acknowledges several limitations, including its single-participant design, limited data collection and insufficient investigation duration. Future research is suggested to incorporate more participants with balanced gender representation, various data and extended investigation duration to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of teachers emotional experiences. Additionally, considering the participant's specific educational background, the generalizability of these findings requires careful consideration in different educational contexts.

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

References

[1]Blackmore, J. (2004). Leading as emotional management work in high risk times: The counterintuitive impulses of performativity and passion. School Leadership & Management, 24(4), 439459.

[2]Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In G. C. J. Green, C. G. Camil, & P. Elmore (Eds.), Handbook of complementary methods in education research (pp. 477–487). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

[3]Day, C., & Lee, J. (2011). Emotion and teacher development. In J. A. Zembylas & M. Schutz (Eds.), Advances in teacher emotion research (pp. 3-14). Springer.

[4]Greenglass, E. R., Burke, R. J., & Konarski, R. (1998). Components of burnout, resources, and genderrelated differences. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 28(12), 10881106.

[5]Hargreaves, A. (1998). The emotional practice of teaching. Teaching and Teacher Education, 14(8), 835-854.

[6]Hargreaves, A. (2000). Mixed emotions: Teachers' perceptions of their interactions with students. Teaching and Teacher Education, 16(8), 811826.

[7]He, Y. (2020). Research on the current situation, causes, and countermeasures of high school teachers' emotion management (Master's thesis, Northwest Normal University).

[8]DarlingHammond, L. (1997). The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

[9]DarlingHammond, L. (2001). The challenge of staffing our schools. Education Leadership, 58(8), 1218.

[10]Hou, Y., & Wang, W. (2016). A review and outlook on domestic research on classroom emotion management by teachers over the past thirty years. Contemporary Educational Science, 18, 34-38.

[11]iFLYTEK. (n.d.). iFLYTEK Speech Cloud. Retrieved July 28, 2020, from https://www.iflyrec.com/

[12]Liu, L. (2022). Research on the current situation, problems, and countermeasures of high school homeroom teachers' emotion management (Master's thesis, Northwest Normal University).

[13]Olson, R. E., Mckenzie, J., Mills, K. A., Patulny, R., Bellocchi, A., & Caristo, F. (2019). Gendered emotion management and teacher outcomes in secondary school teaching: A review. Teaching and Teacher Education,80, 128-144.

[14]Oplatka, I. (2009). Emotion management and display in teaching: Some ethical and moral considerations in the era of marketization and commercialization. In P. A. Schutz & M. Zembylas (Eds.), Advances in teacher emotion research (pp. 55-71). Springer.

[15]Prosser, B., Tuckey, M., & Wendt, S. (2013). Affect and the lifeworld: Conceptualising surviving and thriving in the human service professions. Health Sociology Review, 22(3), 318-327.

[16]Sachs, J., & Blackmore, J. (1998). You never show you can't cope: Women in school leadership roles managing their emotions. Gender and Education, 10(3), 265279. DOI: 10.1080/09540259820899.

[17]Schutz, P. A., and Lee, M. (2014). Teacher emotion, emotional labor and teacher identity. Utr. Stud. Lang. Commun.27, 169–186

[18]Schutz P. A. and Zembylas M. (2009), "Introduction to Advances in Teacher Emotion Research: the Impact on Teachers' Lives". In Schutz P. A. and Zembylas M., Advances in Teacher Emotion Research: the Impact on Teachers' Lives. Dordrecht: Springer, 2009: 3-11.

[19]Sutton, R. E., & Wheatley, K. F. (2003). Teachers' Emotions and Teaching: A Review of the Literature

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

and Directions for Future Research. Educational Psychology Review, 15(4), 327–358.
[20]Tang, Y. L. (2020). The Present Situation and Prospect of Teacher Emotion Management Research in China—Literature Measurement and Content Analysis Based on CNKI (1999-2019). Advances in Psychology, 10(7), 1006-1014.
[21]Tsui, A. (2007). Complexities of Identity Formation: A Narrative Inquiry of an EFI. Teacher. TESOL, 41(4), 657-680.
[22]Uitto, M., Jokikokko, K., & Estola, E. (2015). Virtual special issue on teachers and emotions in teaching and teacher education (TATE) in 1985-2014. Teaching and Teacher Education, 50, 124135.
[23]Xu, Y. (2018). A Methodological Review of L2 Teacher Emotion Research: Advances, Challenges and Future Directions. Emotions in Second Language Teaching, 35–49.
[24]Yu, G. (1999). Research on the current situation, problems, and countermeasures of highschool teachers' emotion management. Psychological Exploration, 19(2), 32–39.
[25]Winograd, K. (2003). The Functions of Teacher Emotions: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. Teachers College Record, 105(9), 1641-1673.
[26]Zhang, J. (2015). Research on the construction of a support system for novice teachers. Nanjing, China: Nanjing University Press.
[27]Zembylas, M. (2004). The emotional characteristics of teaching: An ethnographic study of one teacher. Teaching and Teacher Education, 20(2), 185-201.

© 2025 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group, this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)