Chronicling emotional trajectories in early-career language teaching: A longitudinal intensive single-case Q methodology study

Abstract

This study adopts Q methodology with an intensive single-case design to document emotional states of three early-career (EC) Language Other Than English (LOTE) teachers in Thai secondary schools. The participants, including a Chinese teacher, a French teacher, and a Japanese teacher, performed a card-ranking task multiple times throughout a semester to report their experienced emotions at the time of each session. The findings suggest that EC teachers navigated their emotions through expectations, the status of LOTE education, and passion for teaching, influenced by their subjective appraisals of classroom and course events, particularly in relation to student relationships and progress. It is recommended that teacher education adopt a progressive, career-stage approach to integrating the psychology of language teachers, introducing foundational components of positive psychology at the pre-service stage and extending these through reflective practice, mentoring, and emotion regulation strategies.

Keywords: early-career teachers; emotions; Language Other Than English (LOTE); intensive-single case design; Q methodology; secondary education

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, teacher emotion research has expanded rapidly across educational domains. The importance of understanding teacher emotions lies not only in its relevance to teachers' well-being but also in its influence on students' emotions, cognitions, and behaviors

(Frenzel et al., 2014; Frenzel et al., 2021; Junker et al., 2021). Teachers often face emotionally demanding events (Cross & Hong, 2012) that generate an emotional rollercoaster of positive and negative experiences in the classroom and workplace (Gkonou et al., 2020). While recent scholarship has explored how early-career (EC) language teachers navigate and make sense of their emotions (e.g., Satin et al., 2024; Zhang & Zhang, 2024), little is known about how these emotional dynamics manifest among teachers of Languages Other Than English (LOTEs) in contexts where English is dominant, despite growing interest in teacher emotions (Gkonou et al., 2020) and well-being (Sulis et al., 2023).

EC teachers are often enthusiastic and committed at the beginning of their careers but emotionally sensitive in classroom encounters with students (Hargreaves, 1998). They face high stress from classroom challenges, potentially leading to self-doubt or even leaving the profession (Pillen et al., 2013). Their early experiences intersect with pre-existing beliefs and expectations, shaping professional identity (Zembylas, 2003) as they navigate the gap between the expectations set during their training and classroom realities (Sulis et al., 2022). While previous research has emphasized EC teachers' development and adaption, few studies have tracked their emotions over a period of time (Fraschini, 2023), particularly in language education where they remain underrepresented (Fraschini & Park, 2022).

The current study tracks the classroom emotions of three EC LOTE teachers in Thai secondary schools. LOTE teachers' practice is "often divorced from the wider sociocultural-political reality in which it occurs" (Cross, 2005, p. 1) and differs from that of English teachers. Their motivations are often personal and connected to an interest in the language and culture they teach. Although Thai policy claims to promote multilingualism (Draper & Nilaiyaka, 2014), resources and training for LOTEs remain scarce. Addressing this group of language teachers will

help fill the gaps surrounding an underrepresented group in an underrepresented context, therefore contributing to the field of language education, which is largely driven by contextually oriented research (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Moreover, the global dominance of English (Mason, 2017) has reduced learners of other languages, affecting LOTE teachers' careers and well-being (Sulis et al., 2023).

In response to calls for novel methodologies in teacher emotion research (Chen & Cheng, 2021; Frenzel et al., 2021), this study employs Q methodology with an intensive single-case design (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2012) to document LOTE teachers' emotions in the classroom over a semester. This design allows for repeated data collection to explore shifts in teacher emotions, which were treated here as short-lived states. Q methodology is known for its capability to serve as an objective means of understanding individual subjectivities, and it aligns well with appraisal theory, which posits that emotions arise from subjective judgments about a situation rather than the situation itself (Ellsworth, 2013).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Appraisal theory as a means to understand teacher emotions

Appraisals are cognitive judgements of events, suggesting that emotions and subsequent reactions stem not directly from the event itself but from an individual's assessment of that event (Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, 2009). Emotion appraisal serves as personal filter through which individuals interpret their experiences, and it is shaped by their beliefs, objectives, and values (Frenzel et al., 2015). Frenzel et al. (2020) assert that teachers constantly appraise classroom events against four principal objectives: achieving high student performance, enhancing motivation, maintaining discipline, and fostering positive teacher-student relationships. For

instance, a language teacher might support students so that they successfully overcome language learning barriers (e.g., pronunciation difficulties, vocabulary limitations), show enthusiasm for improving their language skills, adhere to classroom rules while supporting their peers, and feel at ease seeking help when necessary. The mechanism by which teacher emotions are triggered through appraisal describes a phenomenon occurring at particular moments, connecting it to perspectives on emotions that are more state-like (i.e., momentary, situational emotions that arise in response to specific events or appraisals) rather than trait-like (i.e., emotions that are more stable, reflecting a person's typical emotional patterns) (Frenzel et al., 2021). This may lead to diverse emotional experiences as outcomes of appraisals.

Many studies posit appraisal theory as path to study teacher emotions (e.g., Chang, 2020; Frenzel et al., 2020; Fried et al., 2015). Since appraisals are the subjective evaluation of episodes happening in the surrounding environment, when investigating teacher emotions, it is important to look not only at teachers' individualities, but also at the components of the surrounding educational context, such as schools, policies, colleagues, and prior experience (Simonton et al., 2021). The current study adopted appraisal theory to explore teacher emotions as a result of various events in the classroom, focusing on how they personally and emotionally interpret and evaluate these events.

Emotions in language teaching

Teacher emotions are highly contextualized, meaning that experiencing certain emotions may be triggered by teaching specific subjects. For example, Frenzel et al. (2015) found that enjoyment levels that teachers experience are dictated by their enjoyment in teaching a certain subject as well as a general tendency to find pleasure in teaching. Language teaching is emotional in nature

(Mercer & Gregersen, 2020), since language teachers' emotions can be influenced by unique factors such as teachers' own language anxiety (Benesch, 2017), language policies (Benesch, 2017), multilingual environments (Dewaele, 2010), classroom climates (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Thumvichit, 2023), workplace and institutional atmosphere (Fraschini & Park, 2021), the teacher's career phase (Sulis et al., 2023), and emotions experienced by their students (e.g., foreign language anxiety) (Becker et al., 2014), as indicated by the crossover theory (Hatfield et al., 1994), by which positive and negative emotions may cross from an individual to another in social contact. Emotions specific to language teachers, such as language teacher anxiety, have begun to receive scholarly attention since the 1990s (Horwitz, 1996). The focus on language teachers' emotions started to grow with the advent of positive psychology, leading to a rapidly growing body of research on language teachers' emotions (Dewaele et al., 2019). This trend was also supported by recent advancements in general education research, which viewed teaching as an emotion-laden process, and therefore foregrounding the importance of exploring aspects such as teachers' satisfaction, frustration, and anger, the interplay between student and teacher emotions, and emotions related to authority and educational policies (e.g., Benesch, 2012, 2017; Schutz & Zembylas, 2010).

One negative emotion often researched in relation to language teaching is anxiety (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Some major sources of teacher anxiety addressed in the literature include poor relationship with students (van Horn et al., 1999), fear of failure to control the class (Brady, 2019), dissatisfaction with class performance (Chang, 2009), and management of classroom behavior (Bullough et al., 2006). On the other hand, enjoyment is one positive emotion discussed in language teaching – foreign language teaching enjoyment (FLTE) (Mierzwa, 2019; Proietti Ergün & Dewaele, 2021). Thumvichit (2024a) found three main sources

of FLTE, namely classroom engagement, career value, and social interaction. Although enjoyment is one of the most salient (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003) and frequently experienced emotions among teachers (Frenzel & Goetz, 2007), language teachers are subject to experiencing a wide array of emotions. Apart from anxiety and enjoyment, recently the field has been addressing other teacher emotions, such as frustration (Morris & King, 2019), enthusiasm (Shao, 2023), pride (Mairitsch et al., 2023), and boredom (Pawlak et al., 2024) However, despite a growing number of studies explicitly exploring language teachers' emotions, this branch of research is still in its embryonic stage (Goetze, 2023), especially when compared to research on learners' emotions. Little is known about how LOTE teachers experience and regulate their emotions over time, or how their affective responses evolve in relation to "subjective realities," which encompass the personal meanings, professional identities, and contextual constraints that influence their teaching experiences.

A further important aspect that the field has been stressing during the past few years is that emotions in language teaching should be considered from a more dynamic perspective (Gregersen, 2020). Emotions behave as complex and dynamic systems (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, 2019) since they fluctuate along timescales (Boudreau et al., 2018), can coexist with each other (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), modify each other in a non-linear fashion (Oxford & Gkonou, 2021), result from interactions with the surrounding environment (Hiver et al., 2022), and emerge from complex cognitive, psychological, and physiological processes (Moors et al., 2013). Approaching emotions from a complex and dynamic perspective presents methodological challenges. While typical longitudinal R methodology surveys can track change quantitatively, they may overlook the dynamic nature of subjective appraisals that shape emotional experience.

Q methodology, however, provides a useful means of investigating emotions from this complex and dynamic standpoint (Fraschini, 2023; Zheng et al. 2020).

Contextual background: LOTE education in Thailand

Foreign languages have long been part of the Thai education system, formally recognized under the Basic Education Core Curriculum launched in 2008 by the Ministry of Education. This curriculum identified "foreign language" as one of the eight core learning areas to be taught over 12 years of basic education (Ministry of Education, 2008). On paper, this places all foreign languages on equal footing. In reality, however, English has taken a dominant role as the default foreign language in most schools, while other languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and French are often treated as elective or specialized courses introduced later, typically at the upper-secondary level. The status of LOTE education in Thailand varies considerably, with some languages gaining popularity and others experiencing decline.

Chinese has gained traction due to increasing economic and geopolitical ties between Thailand and China. In 2014, the Thai Ministry of Education introduced a policy initiative aligned with China's reform of Chinese language teaching in Thailand, outlining guidelines for integration across educational levels and providing institutional support to expand Chinese programs nationwide. More than 3,000 schools now offer Chinese courses, with nearly one million students enrolled, marking a sharp rise from 2003, when only 242 schools offered Chinese instruction.

Japanese language education has a much longer history. Diplomatic and economic collaboration between Japan and Thailand, especially during the post-war boom of the 1960s–1970s, helped establish Japanese as a language of interest. By 1981, Japanese had been formally

introduced into the secondary school curriculum as an elective subject. Today, Japanese is taught in many secondary schools, especially in Bangkok, where some allow students to specialize from the start. In 2021, the Japan Foundation reported that 521 secondary schools (from 515 in 2018) offered Japanese courses, enrolling over 150,240 students.

French, once regarded as a language of prestige due to historical trade and diplomatic relations with France, has seen a steady decline. In the 17th century, France was one of Thailand's most active trade partners, and French played a key role in political, commercial, and religious spheres. French reached its peak in 2005, when more than 300 secondary schools offered it (Silapa-acha, 2013), but by 2022, Alliance Française (2022) data showed only 186 schools continued instruction.

Our focus on teachers of Chinese, Japanese, and French reflects different stages of LOTE development in Thailand, with Chinese being fast-growing, Japanese remaining stable, and French in decline, allowing exploration of teachers' emotional trajectories organized by the subject they teach. This study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) What distinct profiles of classroom emotions can be identified in each LOTE teacher? and (2) How do these profiles reflect the teachers' subjectivities through their appraisals of professional events?

METHODOLOGY

As shown by the collection of papers in Fraschini et al. (2024), Q methodology is a flexible research approach that can be applied under different designs. In this study, we adopted an intensive single-case design, asking each participant to sort the same set of statements multiple times at different points in time, under the same condition of instruction. The focus on single participants, instead of a group, allows us to center on each of them as the subject matter (Watts

& Stenner, 2012) and to observe more in-depth their individual lives (Brown, 2019). The use of multiple sorts is needed to account for the dynamic variation of the emotions across a timeline, in our case a semester. The dynamicity of emotion in this study refers not only to shifts between positive and negative emotions, but also to transitions across different types of discrete emotions (e.g., from enjoyment to pride), rather than changes in the intensity of a particular emotion over time, as often examined in large-*n* studies. Instead, emotional change is interpreted through the subjectivity behind emotional experience. That is, this study focuses on how teachers subjectively appraise classroom events and contextual situations, which are liable to shift over time. Emotions can be treated as short-lived and momentary entities, therefore the shift in emotions itself presents the moment-to-moment changing condition under which the participants produce different sorts, depending on the different appraisal of those conditions.

Participants

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, and by the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Melbourne. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Three teachers (two females and one male; all names are pseudonyms), aged between 25 and 26, who teach LOTEs in Thai secondary schools were purposively selected based on their status as EC LOTE teachers (i.e., their teaching experience and age) working in schools where English is the dominant foreign language subject (see Table 1). As discussed in the contextual background, their emotional experiences reflected different stages in the status and development LOTE education in Thailand. This allowed us to form the basis of the study's analytical lens, in addition

to personal and professional factors: to examine how subject status and policy contexts may influence the emotional experiences of EC LOTE teachers.

It is important to note that LOTE courses are typically offered in addition to the mandatory English courses in Thai government schools and are thus often considered a third language or an additional language. All teachers participating in this study have taught for 1 to 3 years. Nutcha had three years of teaching experience and worked at a large secondary school with a strong Chinese specialization program. She completed her undergraduate degree in a teacher education program with an emphasis on Chinese language teaching at a university in Thailand and had spent a few months studying abroad in China. Thiti was the newest to the profession, with one year of teaching experience. He taught at a mid-sized school where French was offered to a small group of students (about five in each class) as an elective subject. Thiti had earned his degree in French and had visited France briefly for leisure. Munin had two years of teaching experience and worked at a mid-sized school where Japanese was offered as an elective at the lower-secondary level and as a specialized subject at the upper-secondary level. She had participated in a summer exchange program in Japan during her university years and later earned her degree in Japanese from a university in Thailand.

Table 1: Participants

Participants (Pseudonym)	Gender	Language taught	Experience (years)	Age
Nutcha	Female	Chinese	3	26
Thiti	Male	French	1	25
Munin	Female	Japanese	2	25

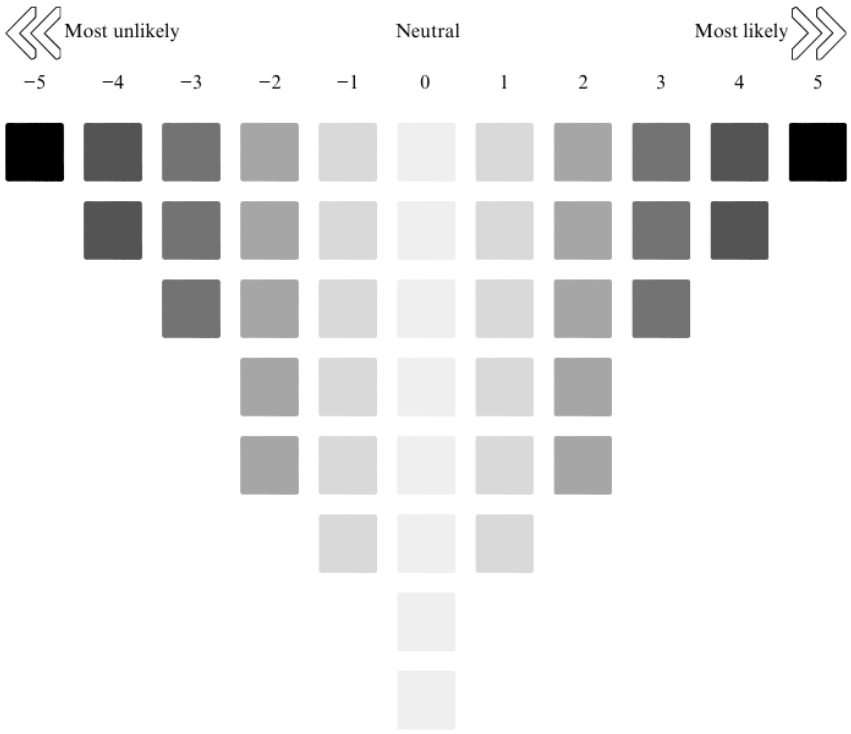
Research instrument

This study utilized the Teacher Emotions in the Classroom Q-sort (TEC-Q; Thumvichit, 2024b) as its Q set, comprising 42 statements that assess six discrete emotions: enjoyment, enthusiasm, pride, anxiety, anger, and boredom. These statements were derived from a pool of communicative materials pertaining to teacher emotions (referred to as a *concourse*) (Brown, 1980). The development of TEC-Q was based on a naturalistic approach (McKeown & Thomas, 2013), involving exhaustive literature reviews and a semi-structured interviews with 20 teachers.

Data collection

In this study, data collection spanned four months. Participants completed a Q sort every five or six days, resulting in a total of 24 sorts collected from each participant. Participants might not have completed the sort on the same day, but nevertheless there was no more than a difference of a few days. Prior to collecting data, all participants joined a meeting with the purpose of illustrating the study's objectives, the nature of the data collection, and the instructions for participation. Participants were encouraged to assess their own emotions through each Q sort and were informed that their emotions in this study are considered dynamic entities rather than static traits. Therefore, each completed Q sort should reflect their emotional experiences as it happened at the time of sorting. The instruction given to the participant was to sort the statements, each time, depending on what extent each of them was representative of their emotions at the time of sorting. All Q sorts were conducted on an online platform, where participants dragged and dropped the 42 statements on a sorting grid, ranging from −5 (most unlikely) to 5 (most likely), with 0 indicating a neutral attitude (see Figure 1). At the completion of the semester, each participant submitted 24 Q sorts.

Figure 1: Forced-distribution sorting grid



Data analysis

Data were calculated using Ken-Q Analysis Desktop Edition (version 2.0.1). Inverted factor analysis was conducted to identify common patterns across Q sorts. Each participant's set of Q sorts was analyzed separately. Factor extraction was based on the baseline criteria that each factor must have an eigenvalue greater than 1 (McKeown & Thomas, 2013) and at least four Q sorts must load significantly onto a single factor (Brown, 1993). Principal component analysis and varimax rotation were performed to extract and rotate factors. After several rounds of inspections, we were convinced to opt for a two-factor solution for each participant because fewer Q sorts were excluded compared to other solutions and all sets achieved a strong solution threshold – above 35% of the total variance (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

After factors were rotated, a significant loading was determined using the formula recommended by Brown (1980) for $p > .01$:

$$\text{Threshold} = \frac{2.58}{\sqrt{N}}$$

As such, any Q sort with a loading value of ≥ .40 (rounded up from .39) was deemed significant. Factor loadings are illustrated in Table 2. Subsequently to all Q sorts and their preliminary analysis, a semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant, asking them to justify their Q sorts, and focusing on the emotions experienced in the period indicated by some of the sorts most representative of each factor (those with highest factor loadings). The interviews lasted about 40 minutes each. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview data were categorized into different themes in accordance with emerging factors. For example, in Nutcha's case, her responses were grouped under positive emotions arising from (1) classroom interaction and (2) students' progress, in line with her defining Q sorts. It is important to note that the interviews served to support interpretation rather than to function as a full qualitative dataset in its own right. The interviews were used to clarify and contextualize the defining Q sorts, rather than to introduce new thematic categories, as in qualitative studies.

Table 2: Factor loadings

Q sort	Nutcha		Thiti		Munin	
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2
1	.4775	.6722	.3417	–.4971	**.6092**	.5439
2	**.4725**	.2633	.2463	.1561	.4259	**.6915**
3	.0565	**.5703**	–.0234	**.7537**	.501	**.7763**
4	.2916	**.5914**	.1152	.3574	.4685	**.6989**
5	–.2597	–.1249	**.4936**	–.1746	.5327	**.6997**
6	–.1579	**.5528**	.1491	.3794	.5193	**.6917**

7	.0321	.1256	.243	.3678	.4843	**.7737**
8	.2452	**.7066**	.0088	**.5546**	.3686	**.8201**
9	.3491	**.5431**	.0728	**.774**	.0676	**.8851**
10	.5524	.5536	–.0136	**.6382**	.3151	**.7991**
11	.1656	**.7095**	–.0549	**.6557**	.1585	**.8897**
12	.345	**.608**	.135	.3929	.3038	**.7756**
13	**.7532**	.193	**.583**	–.4259	**.6081**	.3874
14	**.7744**	.1504	.4797	–.6554	**.7613**	.4637
15	**.7588**	.2329	**.6253**	–.1427	**.8384**	.3675
16	**.4189**	.1423	**.5296**	.3876	**.902**	.21
17	**.5958**	.2763	**.6639**	.4633	**.8205**	.2241
18	**.8082**	.1429	.509	.6612	**.8647**	.2742
19	**.7298**	.4053	**.8117**	.2205	**.8562**	.2558
20	.7034	.5068	**.7443**	.345	**.7945**	.4332
21	**.7522**	.3646	**.7038**	.0013	**.8374**	.3577
22	**.8253**	–.0083	**.6648**	.0537	**.8463**	.3141
23	**.7126**	–.0127	**.7233**	.3597	**.775**	.4369
24	**.8653**	.2072	**.7986**	–.0412	**.9031**	.3103
Significant loading	12	7	11	5	13	11
Variance (%)	32	18	24	20	43	35

Note. Boldfaced values indicate statistical significance ($p < .01$).

RESULTS

All three participants exhibited a clear emotional shift around the midpoint of the semester. For each participant, it is clearly visible that the sorts associated with Factor 2 characterize the first part of the semester, while the sorts associated with Factor 1 define the second part. Therefore, this section illustrates the factors in chronological order, discussing first Factor 2 for each participant. The positioning of each statement is provided in parentheses, with the factor number designated by "F" (i.e., F1, F2), the statement number by "S" (e.g., S9), and the statement value by its position on the sorting grid, ranging from –5 to 5. The interpretation was mainly guided by the statements placed at the extreme ends (see https://www.iris-database.org/details/nIINA-uMcge).

The case of Nutcha (a Chinese teacher): from enjoyment to pride

Enjoyment and pride emerged as the dominant factors in the analysis of Nutcha's Q sorts. Factor 2 was loaded with seven Q sorts. This factor was defined by enjoyment in interacting with students (F2, S2, 5) who brought diverse perspectives to the classroom (F2, S5, 4). This emotional state was found mostly in the first half of the semester.

Excerpt 1: The classroom was alive from day one. Everyone was up for getting involved in the activities, and it felt like they were really open with me. […] Like, for example, when we talked about creating Chinese signs to put up around school – in the bathroom, the cafeteria. […] My students are all pretty much at the same level [beginner], you know, so they tend to stick together. And the goal here isn't to turn them into fluent Chinese speakers. I just really want them to like the language and have a good time. (Nutcha)

As seen in Excerpt 1, Nutcha explained why interacting with students was the source of enjoyment. Her experience clearly demonstrated that Factor 2 focuses on the connection and collaboration with her students. Her sense of enjoyment was also fostered by her relaxed expectation in learning Chinese. Instead of heavily focusing on building a certain level of proficiency, such an environment gave her some room for flexibility, in which students were encouraged to experiment with the language in ways that traditional environments might not permit. This could be the reason she reported having fun participating in classroom activities with her students (F2, S4, 4). Moreover, since almost all her students were beginners, helping

them improve and seeing them apply the knowledge, even just a little, made her feel proud (F2, S17, 3; F2, S16, 3).

On the other hand, 12 Q sorts were significantly associated with Factor 1. Most of these Q sorts were completed in the second half of the semester, extending all the way to the end. Nutcha's sense of pride increased as she saw her students making use of the knowledge obtained in her class (F1, S16, 5) and witnessed the progress of low-performing students (F1, S17, 4). This was considered rewarding when her methods led to successful learning outcomes (F1, S18, 4).

Excerpt 2: Seeing their progress after all our hard work is truly worthwhile. I came to realize that some of my students have started to correctly write some Chinese characters and words. […] Although the progress is quite slow, I feel really proud of what we have achieved together. […] Yes, there's this one student who comes to mind. His Chinese was very close to zero at the beginning. But over the semester, I noticed some improvements. At the very least, he took it more seriously and became more active. […] I have tried different techniques and used real [authentic] materials. I'm not sure which one worked best; I will just keep experimenting and see what is best for them. (Nutcha)

The strong sense of pride that emerged in the latter half of the semester is well justified, as it stems from the students' progress and enjoyment in teaching. Pride became even more pronounced when the progress was a direct result of the teacher's own efforts.

Excerpt 3: It's like having conversations with my students; there are always new ideas. [...] I don't usually ask right/wrong questions which they don't like. Instead, I encourage them to speak by asking them to share their own ideas. They seem to open up to me. […] I can really feel that they are positive about learning Chinese and started to enjoy it a little bit. This makes me very happy. (Nutcha)

This excerpt not only confirms positive interaction as a catalyst for emotional engagement but also highlights the pedagogical strategies that promote enjoyment in learning.

The negative end of the grid in both factors was characterized by the absence of anxiety and boredom. At first, it became clear that she was less worried about timelines (F2, S26, –5), her competence (F2, S22, –4), and keeping up with new teaching method (F2, S25, –4), as her teaching was unfolding as planned. As the semester progressed, she did not find the textbook boring (F1, S37, –5) and was not bored while teaching the same content over and over (F1, S36, –4). She also noticed that her students recognized her effort (F1, S29, –4).

The case of Thiti (a French teacher): anxiety in the mix

Thiti's case exhibited two mixes of emotions, both featured by a feeling of anxiety. Factor 2 contains five Q sorts. All Q sorts for this factor were completed in the first half the semester. Thiti felt frustrated because his students did not put forth their best effort in learning (F2, S35, 5), and he felt that his efforts were overlooked by his students (F2, S29, 4), leading to his lack of confidence in teaching (F2, S22, 3).

Excerpt 4: Many of them chose this course [elective] because they thought it would be easier than other courses. [...] They came in without any effort or desire to truly learn the language. [...] Honestly, I expected them to be more active regardless of language abilities [...] Perhaps it's me who is unable to manage this situation. I even feel worried about going to class these days. (Thiti)

Excerpt 4 reveals a sense of frustration and anxiety. Thiti notes that his students in general selected the course with the assumption that it would be less challenging than others, which led to a lack of effort and genuine interest in learning the language. Despite low expectations, he still hoped to see some level of engagement and effort from the students. This situation suggests a disconnect between the students' motivations and the educational objectives, leading him to self-reflect and question his ability to effectively manage and motivate the class. These feelings were accompanied by discomfort in addressing students' misbehavior (F2, S23, 4) and repeated mistakes (F2, S33, 3).

In a different vein, Factor 1 comprises 11 Q sorts. Late in the semester, a feeling of self-doubt intensified (F1, S22, 5); however, he took pride in being able to assist low-performing students (F1, S17, 4) and realized the usefulness of his lessons (F1, S16, 4).

Excerpt 5: I started to let things go a little bit. […] The uncertainty remains, but at least they have started to put in some effort and show progress. [...] At this point, my expectations were not high, and I chose to focus on their attitude, ensuring they enjoyed their time. [...] I recall a few students asking me about French terms they

> encountered elsewhere, which suggested to me that they might be getting serious about learning French. (Thiti)

Excerpt 5 reflects a shift in his strategy toward a more lenient approach as the semester progresses. Despite ongoing anxiety about his own teaching abilities, Thiti reported a positive change: students beginning to engage with the work and showing signs of progress. This change in student behavior leads Thiti to adjust his expectations, focusing less on academic achievement and more on fostering a positive attitude and enjoyable learning environment. This 'delayed pride' appeared as a result of his coping mechanism, which involved adjusting his expectations.

In contrast, the negative end of the spectrum was initially characterized by enjoyment and anxiety. Early in the semester, due to the negative emotions mentioned above, Thiti reported a lack of enjoyment (F2, S5, –5; F2, S4, –4; F2, S3, –4). As time passed, these feelings were replaced by a reduction in anxiety about teaching methods (F1, S25, –5). However, despite some positive emotions, a degree of self-doubt persisted (F1, S15, –4).

The case of Munin (a Japanese teacher): enthusiasm as a driving force

Munin's case is represented by two emotional states, both of which are characterized by a high level of enthusiasm, accompanied by enjoyment and pride. Eleven Q sorts were associated with Factor 2. Initially, Munin was proud to see her students apply the knowledge (F2, S16, 5) and eager to connect lessons to the real world (F2, S13, 4).

Excerpt 6: I want to explore how we can apply what we learn in the classroom to real-life situations. [...] Seeing that our lessons have a tangible impact on their real-life use

> of the language is fulfilling. [...] I am looking forward to trying new approaches, such as using Facebook pages or songs [authentic materials]. This could enhance their learning experience and provide more meaningful connections to the language in their everyday lives. (Munin)

This excerpt reflects Munin's attitudes centered around the practical application of classroom knowledge to real-world contexts. She found fulfillment in observing the direct impact of her teaching on her students' ability to use the language in their daily lives. Her emotions appeared to be influenced by the success of the curriculum. She also reported feeling enthusiastic about improving her lessons (F2, S8, 3) and learning students' progress (F2, S14, 4), and enjoyment of different students' contributions in the classroom (F2, S5, 3).

Excerpt 7: I think there is room for improvement in our lessons. When we develop a good lesson with effective activities and materials, we can use it for a long time without having to make big changes every semester. I may be tired at first, but in the end, it is definitely worth the effort. [...] Seeing students improve is what I most want to see. If they show progress, it will make me very happy. (Munin)

This excerpt illustrates Munin deeply invested in both the effectiveness of the curriculum and the personal growth of her students. Her emotions and motivation were closely tied to the educational outcomes achieved through the curriculum. It is clear that she recognized the value of creating robust lessons that, despite the initial effort required, offer enduring benefits, reducing the need for frequent revisions.

Factor 1 comprises 13 Q sorts. It is evident that positive emotions remained later in the semester. In addition to an increased enthusiasm for enhancing the lesson (F1, S8, 5), her enjoyment began to surface as she reported joy in teaching (F1, S1, 4), interacting with (F1, S2, 4), and doing activities with students (F1, S4, 3).

Excerpt 8: I tried different activities and made sure they were easy for students. I don't expect them to be able to speak Japanese overnight, but I'm okay with them improving little by little. [...] We talked about some Japanese manga, which is a personal interest of mine and the students seem to like it too. (Munin)

Excerpt 8 illustrates how Munin adjusted her teaching and made use of shared interests as a foundation for promoting positive interactions with students. This common interest not only made the learning experience more enjoyable but also fostered a more relaxed classroom atmosphere.

Since her emotions were predominantly positive, especially enthusiasm and enjoyment, the negative end of the spectrum was characterized by negative emotions. Initially, she did not feel disrespected by her students (F2, S32, –5), bored with the monotony of doing the same thing over (F2, S40, –4), and challenged by having to address students' misbehaviors (F2, S34, –3; F2, S23, –3). Later in the semester, it is noticeable that the boredom has further decreased (F1, S36, –5; F1, S40, –4; F1, S37, –4).

DISCUSSION

This study presents the results of an analysis of three LOTE teachers' emotions over the course of a semester. Overall, the results suggest that throughout the period, each participant experienced a shift of emotions, as a result of the interactional processes (Junker et al., 2021) and the interactive dynamics (Frenzel, 2014) inherent to classroom teaching. In this section, we discuss emerging aspects and events that explain their classroom emotions.

Navigating emotions through expectations

Teachers often face high expectations and responsibilities to implement new ideas into practice (Buchanan, 2015). As implied by all participants, their expectations play a crucial role in shaping their practices and emotions. In LOTE education, especially in Thailand where English is the only mandated foreign language, both the expectations placed on LOTE teachers and their own expectations regarding students' language proficiency may not be as high as those for English. English is compulsory and significantly influences students' future educational prospects, whereas many LOTE courses are offered only as electives. Consequently, LOTE teachers may adopt a more flexible approach and might not anticipate immediate outcomes. Focusing on building a positive attitude toward the language as a primary goal, rather than immediate language proficiency, can lead to positive emotions and a more engaging learning environment. As Warner and Diao (2022) point out, LOTE teachers in the U.S. often take on a nurturing role as a strategic response to the marginal status of their subject and the need to sustain student interest. In this study, a similar pattern is visible: since LOTE classes in Thailand are often offered as electives and not tied to major academic milestones like English, teachers often rely on building strong relationships and supporting students emotionally to sustain interest and

create a positive classroom atmosphere, rather than focusing solely on academic achievement or language proficiency outcomes.

Although there are precedents indicating that LOTE teachers may experience several negative emotions (Fei et al., 2023), EC teachers in this study reported experiencing a range of positive emotions. In the case of Nutcha, for example, she promoted a more relaxed environment in which her students felt included and enjoyed various aspects of language learning (e.g., making Chinese signs), leading to her enjoyment in interacting with students and then a sense of pride in students' progress. Similarly, the delayed pride was also observed in Thiti's case. Despite feeling somewhat anxious throughout the course, Thiti adjusted his expectations to better align with the realities of French teaching in Thailand. This adjustment helped him recognize and appreciate students' improvement, ultimately leading to a feeling of achievement as he witnessed their development with the language. His shift toward a more lenient approach and focus on students' enjoyment reflects a coping mechanism to reconcile his expectations. This can be explained by Day's (2018) notion that the capacity and agency of EC teachers to adapt to educational complexities through relationship-building enables them to both survive and thrive. The manifestation of resilience takes place at the juncture where an individual EC teacher interacts with the educational context (Mansfield et al., 2014). That is, LOTE education requires EC teachers to adjust their expectations to some extent to maintain a positive classroom atmosphere.

The emotion shift experienced in the weeks following the mid-semester exam (around Sort 12 for all participants) is notable and it is worth discussing. It is possible to argue that the post-exam period prompted teachers to engage in self-reflection, using the results of the mid-semester assessments to evaluate their own practice. For example, Nutcha's case illustrates how

positive emotional shifts can be influenced by perceived student progress. While she did not explicitly identify exam results as a trigger, the abrupt shift occurring in the week after the exam suggests that her emotional trajectory may have been organized by observing student progress through the exam outcomes. In contrast, the disappointing outcome of the mid-semester exam can be considered at the origin of the frustration and feelings of self-doubt experienced by Thiti. The self-evaluation of the mid-semester assessment produced, in the case of all three participants, conservable effects that lasted until the end of the semester. It is evident, therefore, that teacher self-reflection on their own practice is crucial. In this regard, we recommend that teacher training courses or professional development workshops support teachers in processing the emotional implications of assessment results. As Thiti's case clearly indicates, when faced with discouraging outcomes, teachers should be taught how to deal with the emotional fallout, reappraising the event as an opportunity to develop better teaching, understanding better the students, and ultimately for more professional growth.

Teacher emotions in response to the status of LOTE education

Although the status of LOTE education in Thailand is officially considered equal to that of English, with identical objectives (Ministry of Education, 2008), the reality often tells a different story. The pioneering study by Acheson et al. (2016) stands out as one of the limited research efforts that have explored the emotional labor of LOTE teachers in the U.S., considering the peripheral position of LOTE courses. They found that these teachers often experience a heavy load in trying to motivate students and put in considerable effort to combat negative emotions in the classrooms. Although the status of LOTE education in the U.S. and Thailand is not the same, both contexts acknowledge the marginal position of LOTE subjects within the broader

curriculum. This often results in limited institutional support, making it more difficult for teachers to sustain student engagement. Consequently, LOTE teachers may feel unsuccessful in motivating learners, which can lead to feelings of self-doubt, emotional exhaustion, and burnout. This well justifies Thiti's feeling of self-doubt across the semester. The elective nature of his French courses possibly contributed to these challenges and the difficulties LOTE teachers face in motivating students who may perceive LOTE learning as optional rather than essential. Adding to this challenge, Thiti had only about five students in each class, suggesting that the course did not attract wide interest among the student body, further promoting the marginal status of the subject and potentially undermining his sense of professional efficacy.

As mentioned above, teachers continuously appraise classroom events based on students' performance, motivation, discipline, and the quality of the teacher-student relationship (Frenzel et al., 2021). Considering these components and the status of LOTE education, LOTE teachers may largely rely on the quality of teacher-student relationships, which are more controllable than other factors, as sources of positive emotions. At the beginning of the semester, Thiti evaluated his students' performance and motivation, which led to frustration as he observed his students struggling with engagement and lacking enthusiasm for the subject matter. As such, he began to doubt his own teaching quality. This introspection led him to seek ways to better connect with his students. Some previous research found that EC teachers face more emotional challenges compared to their experienced counterparts (e.g., Brunsting et al., 2014) and thus they concentrate on establishing positive relationships with students to mitigate the adverse impact of negative emotions (Mashburn et al., 2006). In both Munin's and Nutcha's case, the relationship with students had a beneficial impact on their emotions. The results confirmed that the relationship they built with the students is one of the causes of their joy of teaching and stepping

into the class. Additionally, both teachers also confirmed that a further teacher emotion, pride, was born out of seeing students make academic progresses, in other words seeing students being able to use the language with more proficiency.

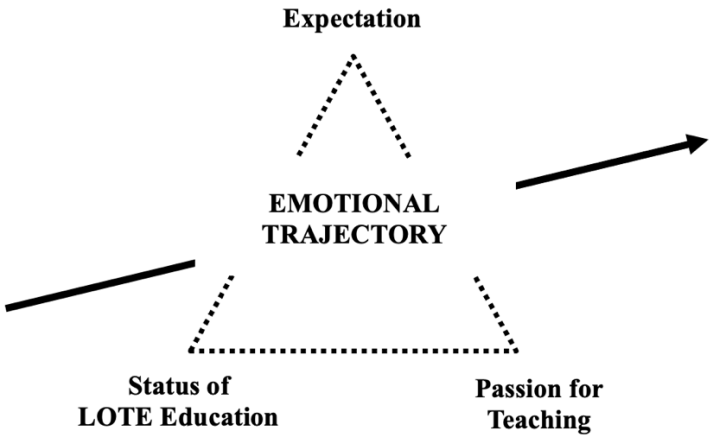
EC teachers as enthusiastic experimenters

EC teachers are perceived as "resources for educational innovation and development in schools" (Leeuwen et al., 2022, p.1). In the current study, the findings indicate that EC teachers are likely to be open to experimenting with and adopting new teaching practices in order to find the best possible solutions to facilitate learning and engage those students who may lack intrinsic motivation in learning the language. For example, even seemingly minor practices, such as shifting from traditional right/wrong questioning to open-ended discussions, not only encourage participation but may also enable teachers to interact positively with students. Nutcha's approach of continuous experimentation and use of authentic materials indicates a dynamic teaching philosophy, one that is flexible and responsive to students' needs and interests. Her willingness to adapt her instruction in search of the most effective methods truly epitomized her emotional journey, as what followed were various sources of enjoyment (e.g., students' engagement, willingness to communicate) and pride (e.g., students' improved attitude toward the language, students' progress). The enthusiasm is even more articulated in Munin's case, where she was deeply engaged in the continuous refinement of her lessons and willing to try different methods, even if it meant adapting her goals to make learning easier for students. In addition to the longstanding practice of viewing teacher enthusiasm as a component of teaching behavior that affects student motivation and performance (Frenzel et al., 2018), teachers' self-reported enthusiasm is also considered as an indicator of a positive emotional stance, characterized by

teachers' enjoyment and excitement about their subject matter and the act of teaching (Kunter et al., 2008). This well justifies why enthusiasm was accommodated by enjoyment. EC teachers' readiness to improve lessons signifies a stance toward experimentation with teaching, activities, and materials. This willingness to invest effort upfront, despite the initial fatigue, is driven by a vision of creating impactful lessons that stand the test of time. In Munin's case, this approach is exemplified by her active involvement in refining her course and incorporating different activities, indicating her personalized strategy for professional learning that is closely aligned with the unique environment that she operated within.

Based on the findings, we propose a conceptual framework that explains surrounding elements of EC LOTE teachers' emotional trajectories: expectations, the status of the language they teach, and their passion for teaching (see Figure 2). These elements are interconnected and influence LOTE teachers' emotional experience. Expectations guide teachers' sense of purpose and professional direction, while the status of LOTE education frames how they perceive their work within institutional and societal contexts. Passion for teaching serves as an emotional resource that allows teachers to sustain positive emotions despite contextual challenges and emerging expectations. This framework offers a contextual insight into complex transitions across discrete emotions as well as how emotions develop over time, influenced by both external demands and internal motivations.

Figure 2: A conceptual framework of EC LOTE teachers' emotions



Pedagogical implications

The results offer a number of actionable implications for teacher education. Teacher education could adopt a progressive, career-stage approach to integrating the psychology of language teachers. At the pre-service stage, the focus could be on raising awareness of classroom events that are likely to trigger negative emotions. Pre-service teachers could also benefit from foundational components of positive psychology, such as understanding of classroom emotions, emotional appraisals, and self-reflection). Such elements could be introduced through sessions where participant discuss real-life scenarios, with the aim of teaching pre-service teachers about the importance of establishing positive connections with colleagues and students, and of acknowledging good aspects of the profession instead of denying bad episodes. Also, teacher education programs could raise awareness of the marginal status of LOTE education. Embedding discussions about policy, institutional recognition, and societal attitudes toward different languages can help pre-service teachers develop realistic expectations and adaptive coping strategies.

As teachers transition into the early-career stage, professional development could initially extend these components through reflective practice, mentoring, and emotion regulation strategies with the focus on promoting sustained emotional well-being and resilience. Reflective practice could focus on helping teachers identify emotionally charged experiences, such as adapting to changing circumstances in subject teaching. Mentoring could benefit from structured programs in which senior teachers support early-career colleagues by regularly sharing experiences in handling emotionally demanding classroom situations and discussing emerging emotionally challenging events. Emotion regulation training could be done through realistic classroom examples, allowing teachers to practice applying different emotion regulation techniques and develop constructive responses to challenges as they arise in their daily teaching practice.

LIMITATIONS

There are a couple of limitations worth noting. First, using the TEC-Q in its current form is that might not explicitly account for the multiple layers of social and ecological context (e.g., school climate, institutional culture). While the instrument focuses on six discrete emotions, it may fall short in representing the contextual complexity surrounding these emotions. For LOTE teachers, however, emotions often arise from contextual influences (e.g., limited institutional support, lower subject visibility, and the dominance of English within the curriculum). To enhance its contextual relevance, future research could adapt the TEC-Q by adding statements that address these realities (e.g., recognition of LOTE subjects, availability of teaching resources) and refining wording to reflect the sociolinguistic hierarchies in English-dominant settings. Second, participants were interviewed only once, after completing all Q sorts, due to their unavailability

for multiple interview sessions. This could be considered a limitation, as conducting interviews at multiple time points may have allowed for more immediate reflections on their emotional experiences. Interviewing only at the end carries the risk that participants may have forgotten specific details. Future research adopting a similar design could divide Q sorts into different stages, with interviews conducted in between.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we adopted Q methodology with an intensive single-case design to profile the emotional states of three EC teachers who teach LOTEs throughout a semester. The results offer several meaningful contributions to LOTE teacher education in a context where LOTEs receive only marginal attention. Among these contributions, we highlight the importance of supporting EC teachers in managing their expectations regarding students' attainment, building relationships within the educational environment, nurturing students, and developing coping mechanisms to navigate the marginal status of LOTE education. All in all, this study brings forward the subjective realities of emotional experiences that shape LOTE teachers' professional practice and well-being, and it calls for greater recognition of their emotions as an essential component of sustaining quality language education.

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