

Teachers' Emotion Regulation Strategies in Online Teaching Mode

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Abstract. Online teaching mode has been prevalent during the COVID-19 period, which brings both advantages and challenges for teachers. The challenges associated with online teaching have resulted in negative emotional experiences for teachers and led to adverse consequences. However, there is limited research on how teachers use emotion regulation strategies in online teaching environments. Drawing on Gross's emotion regulation model, this study evaluates the applicability of two major emotion regulation strategies (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) in the context of online education. The findings indicate that traditional emotion regulation strategies are partially effective but also have certain limitations. Consequently, this paper proposes mindfulness as an emerging emotion regulation strategy that holds promise for addressing the challenges in online education. It emphasizes the significance of understanding teacher emotions in online teaching and provides suggestions and directions for future research.

Keywords: Online teaching mode; emotion regulation strategies; mindfulness.

1. Introduction

Since 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak has infected millions of people all over the world [1]. To curb the quick spread of COVID-19 infections, nations across the world have enforced comprehensive lockdown measures. In particular, most schools announced complete closures and switched to online teaching [1]. Online teaching mode is a method of delivering education where learning materials and interactions between teachers and learners are mainly conducted through digital platforms and the Internet [2]. The transition from traditional teaching mode to online teaching mode has brought both opportunities and challenges to the field of education. The main benefits of online teaching for teachers include the convenience and flexibility of teaching [2]. Specifically, online education eliminates the necessity of commuting, enabling teachers to teach from the convenience of their home. They also have the flexibility to determine their preferred teaching schedule. All these help them to have their preferred teaching schedule and effectively oversee instructional material.

However, teachers face significant challenges due to their lack of prior experience and proficiency in online teaching [3]. This mainly includes teachers' unfamiliarity with technology, increased heavy workload, and difficulties in teacher-student interaction. As a consequence, teachers' mental health and well-being are greatly affected. A significant number of teachers experienced symptoms of anxiety, despair, and stress, particularly emotional burnout, in the face of several challenges [4]. These negative emotions will affect the quality of online teaching, thereby diminishing classroom teaching outcomes and students' academic performance. Therefore, it is worthwhile to explore teachers' emotion regulation (ER) strategies to effectively meet their emotional needs.

ER refers to all conscious or unconscious attempts to modify any emotional experience, whether it be positive or negative, and it encompasses several mechanisms [5]. ER strategies can be categorised into two main types: antecedent-focused emotion regulation, which takes place before the emotion is created, and response-focused emotion regulation, which occurs after the emotion is created [5]. Cognitive reappraisal (antecedent-focused) and expressive suppression (response-focused) are two typical strategies used by teachers to control their feelings. The former strategy (i.e., changing the cognitive perception of a situation) is linked to favourable results, whereas the latter (i.e. suppressing emotional responses) tends to have negative effects [6]. Teaching is a demanding

occupation, and employing suitable strategies to regulate emotions can potentially mitigate the risk of teacher burnout [7]. Hence, it is crucial to assess the efficacy of the emotion regulation tactics employed by teachers.

The majority of studies focus on the use of cognitive evaluation and expressive suppression strategies in conventional teaching mode. However, little is known regarding teachers' approaches to regulating their emotions in online teaching methods, particularly in the post-pandemic era. Following the pandemic, online teaching encounters greater obstacles compared to face-to-face teaching. Examining teachers' ER strategies across different modes can contribute to a more significant decrease in instructors' stress and emotional fatigue.

To elucidate the effectiveness of emotional regulation in traditional teaching versus online teaching modes, this paper employs Gross's model of Emotional Regulation (ER). Furthermore, it aims to evaluate the suitability of these practices in the context of online education. Additionally, the study explores innovative strategies to help educators navigate their emotions within this evolving framework and suggests potential areas for future research.

2. Challenges Faced by Teachers in Online Teaching Mode

2.1. Unfamiliar with Online Technology

The first challenge is the technology issues that teachers may encounter, which decrease the effectiveness of online education. The majority of teachers lack proficiency in using various online teaching platforms and tools, such as Zoom, Blackboard, and Skype [8]. This will result in several problems in class. For instance, some tutors do not know how to use Zoom to assign students into groups to conduct group conversations, which decreases the interaction in class. Sometimes, teachers are also susceptible to unreliable internet connections, and when live lessons are disrupted, it takes them plenty of time to come back to class. Consequently, this results in a waste of teaching time, and teachers are unable to adequately cover the curriculum within the allotted timeframe. The underlying causes of these issues lie in the fact that teachers only possess extensive familiarity with face-to-face teaching mode inside the classroom setting, while they are deficient in relevant training in terms of the use of online platforms or software. As a result, these factors will significantly diminish the teaching quality of online courses and erode teachers' confidence in their teaching abilities. Teachers are also frustrated with the online education experience. Overall, their lack of experience with online teaching platforms and channels has brought challenges for them, which impacts their emotions significantly.

2.2. Increase in Heavy Workload

The second challenge that arises from the rapid process of digital change is the increased heavy workload on teachers. More precisely, this change frequently requires teachers to redesign curriculum outlines and modify instructional approaches to adapt to the online environment [9]. This implies that teachers do not only depend on verbal lectures and textbooks to convey information, but also make use of online animations, videos, or other interactive techniques to attract students. As a result, teachers need to allocate additional time to class preparation. In addition, teachers may be required to address the various demands of their students besides their online teaching responsibilities. An example of this situation is the overwhelming influx of emails that teachers receive from students, encompassing both significant information and superfluous messages [1]. They need to promptly respond to student queries and manage online discussions. This imposes heavy stress on teachers, thereby hindering their ability to effectively balance their work and personal lives. In general, an excessive workload might result in adverse emotional responses such as despair or anxiety in teachers, impacting their mental well-being.

2.3. Difficulties in Teacher-student Interaction

A further challenge brought by online teaching is the difficulty in teacher-student relationship interaction. Traditional interactions between teachers and students make communication easier due to the inclusion of gestures and facial expressions to express their feelings [10]. However, in the context of online environments, teachers and students are physically separated, depriving teachers of the ability to visually monitor students and offer prompt feedback using non-verbal cues like eye contact. A common phenomenon is that teachers ask questions, but there are no students who respond. This occurs due to the reluctance of several students to turn on their cameras or microphones [11]. Another reason is that numerous students assert that the act of sitting alone in front of a computer has a negative influence on their emotions, diminishing their enthusiasm and motivation for interpersonal interactions [10]. The absence of immediate interaction might pose challenges for teachers in evaluating students' comprehension, emotional state, or level of involvement in real time. This also makes teachers also experience feelings of alienation and isolation. In summary, the difficulties and frustrations experienced by teachers stemming from low levels of student participation in online instruction are substantial.

3. Gross's ER Strategies in Online Teaching Mode

3.1. Antecedent-focused ER Strategies

It is crucial to suggest some ER strategies to help teachers in the online teaching mode. Cognitive reappraisal is one of the main strategies of antecedent-focused ER strategies. It can be defined as an attempt to reinterpret an emotionally stimulating circumstance in a way that its meaning and emotional impact shift [5]. Specifically, when individuals encounter significant difficulties and there is a high likelihood of failure, cognitive reappraisal involves reframing the situation in a way that perceives it as a chance for personal development [4]. Teachers can attempt to alter the emotional effect of a situation by modifying their assessment of the scenario. For example, the study discovered that under conventional teaching mode, some teachers would take a whole picture view to reassess students' education, rather than expressing sympathy or desire towards their underperformance [12]. In other words, teachers will continue to have faith in their students even if they are having difficulty academically, viewing this as part of the students' longer-term development process. Through the implementation of this approach, teachers can effectively manage their emotions, leading to a decrease in stress and dissatisfaction about misbehavior in class. Teachers who employ cognitive reappraisal techniques likely to experience lower levels of emotional tiredness [6]. Therefore, this emotion regulation strategy has been widely used in traditional teaching mode and is considered effective under traditional teaching.

Despite the enormous difficulties teachers face throughout COVID-19, this strategy has been shown to assist them in coping with negative feelings under online teaching mode. Firstly, teachers will look on the bright side when they are faced with unfamiliar and new forms of instructional technology. When teachers become aware of the benefits of various platforms and how to use them correctly, they will enhance their teaching flexibility, thereby eliminating the current anxiety of being unfamiliar with technology [13]. Secondly, when confronted with a higher volume of tasks, they perceive it as a chance to refine their abilities or innovate their teaching methods. They hold the belief that they possess additional time for consideration and can utilise online resources to provide higher-quality feedback for students [13]. This mitigates their anxiety and boredom in the presence of a heavy workload and reactivates their motivation to work. Moreover, when teachers are faced with a scenario in which students display a lack of interest in participating during class, they choose to redefine it as a period of adjustment for students to the new teaching model. They expressed optimism regarding the students' progress while simultaneously upholding their dedication and enthusiasm for teaching [14]. Nevertheless, certain studies indicate that cognitive reappraisal may only yield positive results up to a certain level of stress experienced by teachers [4]. Teachers may still experience

weariness and burnout when their cognitive reappraisal skills are insufficient to cope with increasing stress levels [4]. Although cognitive reappraisal can help reduce teachers' own negative emotions under the new teaching mode, it may become ineffective in certain situations. Therefore, it is necessary to suggest novel emotion management tactics to effectively assist teachers in managing emotional demands.

3.2. Response-focused ER Strategies

Expressive suppression refers to the act of restraining or inhibiting ongoing behaviour that expresses emotions [5]. It is categorised as a form of response-focused emotion regulation. To be more precise, suppressing emotions indicates that individuals conceal their genuine emotions to prevent unfavourable consequences and enhance the chances of achieving desired results [15]. Teachers also use this strategy to cope with stressful situations under traditional teaching mode. For example, several teachers stated that when students showed unacceptable behaviour in class, they would suppress their anger to uphold their authority in the presence of students [12]. Simultaneously, when some students engage in whispered conversations and display a lack of attentiveness during class, teachers may choose to disregard the students' behaviour to conceal their feelings of anger and irritation [15]. Although adopting this method may have short-term advantages and maintain teachers' concentration on the current class, it is crucial to acknowledge that persistent dependence on expressive repression can result in the internalisation of stress and eventual emotional fatigue.

Among the intricate circumstances of online education, some teachers also choose the method of expressive suppression. Faced with unknown digital platforms and a growing amount of workload, teachers may opt to internalise their feelings of stress or exhaustion and deal with it alone. Especially when teachers fail to engage and communicate with students during class, they may choose this method to hide their emotions to move the classroom forward, which can exacerbate their sadness [16]. Although suppression can enhance an individual's overall effectiveness, it fails to facilitate a transformation in the experienced emotions compared with cognitive reappraisal, resulting in unresolved or even accumulating negative emotions [17]. This is because teachers consciously set aside their emotions on the incident to avoid impacting the ongoing educational process. Hence, while suppression serves as a useful tool for teachers to regulate emotions in online teaching, over-dependence on such a strategy can deepen the impact of negative emotions [4]. In a nutshell, the use of expressive suppression in online education is not highly beneficial. Teachers should strive to maintain a balance between expressive suppression and other ways of regulating emotions to safeguard their long-term mental well-being.

3.3. Mindfulness: a New Strategy

Although expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal are not always the best ER strategies, this paper suggests mindfulness as a new approach to help teachers handle the difficulties of remote teaching. In recent years, increased focus has been placed on mindfulness and related programmes, known as mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs). Mindfulness refers to the intentional and non-evaluative self-regulation of one's attention, focused on the current moment [18]. The fundamental contents of MBI encompass the regulation of attention and emotions, the transformation of self-perception, and the use of meditation practises [19]. Mindfulness practises enable individuals to cultivate a non-judgmental state of awareness in the present now. This state of mind is beneficial for the positive reassessment and acceptance of stressful life experiences, potentially resulting in less emotional discomfort and enhanced work engagement [20]. More importantly, mindfulness has been verified to enable teachers to effectively manage their emotions while teaching. It has the potential to decrease teachers' mental health issues such as stress, improve outcomes related to well-being such as emotion control, and enhance teachers' job satisfaction [21].

Even in online education mode, teachers can use mindfulness to manage their emotional experiences. For example, teachers can take five-minute break during a class period to consciously breathe, thus calming their minds and improving their ability to communicate with pupils. This can

help them relieve stress and re-engage in discussions with students. Teachers might also use meditation as a means of processing the challenges they face during the day. Make use of introspection to overcome any negative feelings and readjust your mindset in preparation for the additional workload. This method can help teachers reduce levels of mental distress and burnout [21]. Therefore, mindfulness can be viewed as an emotion regulation strategy that has a positive impact on teachers' mental health. It can also be used in combination with other emotional tactics to help educators gain the confidence to freely express and release their feelings.

4. Conclusion

This paper uncovers the challenges faced by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the transition to online teaching, including technological inexperience, increased workload, and reduced teacher-student engagement. To assist teachers in managing the negative emotional experiences arising from these challenges, this study compares two primary emotion regulation (ER) strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. The findings indicate that cognitive reappraisal is more effective than expressive suppression in the context of online education, suggesting that employing cognitive reappraisal can lead to more positive emotional outcomes. However, there are scenarios where neither of these strategies is optimal. Therefore, this paper proposes mindfulness as a novel approach to emotion management, which has the potential to enhance teachers' mental well-being and emotional experiences. These findings have significant implications for school policies and practices, enabling educators to provide better support to teachers during times of transition. Additionally, this study contributes to the broader field of psychology by enhancing teachers' understanding of how digital environments impact emotional processes and regulation. However, it is important to note that there is no universally applicable, and teachers should develop effective emotion regulation techniques based on specific situations. Future research should explore additional strategies employed by teachers to regulate their emotions and effectively adapt to the increased teaching challenges arising from the pandemic. Furthermore, conducting longitudinal studies can help determine which strategies maintain their effectiveness over an extended period of time. These insights can offer valuable guidance to educators on effectively supporting teachers in managing their emotional challenges.

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