

The emotional landscape of efl teachers in the online learning environment: A conceptual review

*Hoàng Quốc Thịnh**

**TS. Khoa Ngoại ngữ, HV Ngân hàng*

Received: 16/04/2024; Accepted: 26/04/2024; Published: 15/5/2024

Abstract: *The shift from traditional classrooms to online learning environments has significantly impacted EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers. This conceptual review explores the emotional experiences of EFL teachers in online settings, synthesizing existing literature and theoretical perspectives. Key themes include factors influencing teacher emotions, the impact of emotions on teaching and learning, and strategies for managing emotions. The review highlights the need for institutional support and professional development to enhance teachers' emotional well-being and effectiveness. Future research directions are suggested to address gaps in the literature.*

Keywords: *Online learning, English as a Foreign Language*

Introduction

EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching has traditionally occurred in physical classrooms, where teachers interact face-to-face with students. However, the recent shift to online learning environments has introduced new dynamics that significantly affect EFL teachers' emotional experiences. Emotions play a critical role in teaching, influencing both teachers' well-being and their effectiveness in the classroom (Hargreaves, 1998). This review aims to synthesize existing research on EFL teachers' emotions in online settings, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing these emotions, their impact on teaching and learning, and strategies for managing them.

Literature Review

Overview of Teacher Emotions

Emotions are integral to the teaching profession, affecting teachers' motivation, job satisfaction, and interactions with students (Schutz & Zembylas, 2009). Theories such as emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) and affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) provide frameworks for understanding how teachers experience and manage emotions. Emotional labor involves managing one's emotions to fulfill professional roles, which can be particularly challenging in the teaching profession.

EFL Teachers' Emotions in Traditional vs. Online Settings

In traditional classrooms, EFL teachers often experience a range of emotions, from joy and satisfaction when students succeed to frustration

and stress when faced with challenges (Chang, 2009). The transition to online teaching has altered these emotional experiences. Online environments can exacerbate feelings of isolation and frustration due to technological issues and reduced face-to-face interaction (Moorhouse, 2020). However, they can also offer flexibility and new opportunities for creativity and engagement (Kearney, 2013).

Factors Influencing EFL Teachers' Emotions in Online Environments

Several factors influence EFL teachers' emotions in online settings. Technological challenges, such as unreliable internet connections and unfamiliarity with digital tools, can lead to frustration and stress (König et al., 2020). Student engagement and interaction also play a crucial role; low participation and lack of immediate feedback can diminish teachers' sense of accomplishment and connection (Rapanta et al., 2020). Institutional support, including access to resources and professional development, is essential for mitigating negative emotions and enhancing teachers' confidence and effectiveness (Johnson et al., 2020). Additionally, personal factors such as work-life balance and individual resilience influence how teachers cope with the demands of online teaching (Day & Gu, 2014).

Technological Challenges

Technological issues are a significant source of stress for many EFL teachers in online environments. Problems such as unreliable internet connections, unfamiliarity with new digital tools, and technical glitches can lead to significant frustration (König et

al., 2020). Teachers may find themselves spending excessive time troubleshooting technical problems, which can detract from their teaching time and reduce their overall satisfaction. Furthermore, the rapid pace of technological change means that teachers must continually update their skills, which can be overwhelming (Trust et al., 2017).

Student Engagement and Interaction

Another critical factor influencing EFL teachers' emotions in online environments is student engagement and interaction. In a traditional classroom setting, teachers can easily gauge students' understanding and engagement through non-verbal cues and direct interactions. However, in an online environment, these cues are often absent or harder to interpret (Rapanta et al., 2020). This lack of immediate feedback can lead to feelings of isolation and uncertainty for teachers. When students are disengaged or fail to participate actively in online classes, teachers may feel a sense of failure or frustration (Moorhouse, 2020).

Institutional Support and Professional Development

Institutional support plays a crucial role in shaping EFL teachers' emotional experiences in online environments. Access to resources, technical support, and professional development opportunities can significantly mitigate negative emotions and enhance teachers' confidence and effectiveness (Johnson et al., 2020). Schools and educational institutions must recognize the unique challenges of online teaching and provide adequate support to address them. Professional development programs that focus on building digital competencies and emotional resilience can be particularly beneficial (Trust et al., 2017).

Personal Factors

Personal factors, including work-life balance and individual resilience, also influence EFL teachers' emotions in online environments. The blurring of boundaries between work and personal life in an online teaching setting can lead to increased stress and burnout (Day & Gu, 2014). Teachers must often juggle multiple responsibilities, including managing their own families while teaching from home. Individual resilience and coping strategies play a crucial role in determining how teachers navigate these challenges and maintain their emotional well-being (Beltman et al., 2011).

Impact of Emotions on Teaching and Learning

Teachers' emotions significantly impact their teaching practices and interactions with students. Positive emotions, such as enthusiasm and satisfaction, can enhance teaching effectiveness and student engagement (Frenzel et al., 2009). Enthusiastic teachers are more likely to create a positive and motivating learning environment, which can lead to better student outcomes. Conversely, negative emotions like stress and frustration can hinder teaching performance and lead to burnout (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). In online environments, managing emotions is crucial for maintaining motivation and delivering high-quality instruction (Beltman et al., 2011). Teachers who experience high levels of stress may struggle to engage students effectively and may be more likely to experience burnout, which can have long-term implications for their career and well-being (Chang, 2009).

Strategies for Managing Emotions in Online Teaching

Professional Development and Training

Effective strategies for managing emotions in online teaching include professional development and training, which help teachers build confidence and competence with digital tools (Trust et al., 2017). Training programs should focus not only on technical skills but also on strategies for managing the unique emotional challenges of online teaching. Providing teachers with the skills and knowledge they need to navigate the online environment can reduce feelings of frustration and stress.

Peer Support and Collaboration

Peer support and collaboration are also vital, providing a sense of community and shared understanding (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Teachers who have a strong network of colleagues to turn to for advice and support are better equipped to handle the emotional challenges of online teaching. Schools and educational institutions can facilitate this by creating opportunities for teachers to connect and collaborate, such as through online forums, regular meetings, and collaborative projects.

Leveraging Technology to Enhance Emotional Well-Being:

Leveraging technology to enhance emotional well-being can also improve both teachers' and students' experiences (Scherer et al., 2021). Interactive and engaging tools can make online teaching more enjoyable and reduce feelings of isolation. For example, using video conferencing

tools that allow for real-time interaction and feedback can help teachers feel more connected to their students. Additionally, using multimedia resources and gamification techniques can make lessons more engaging and reduce monotony.

Self-Care Practices and Stress Management Techniques

Self-care practices and stress management techniques, such as mindfulness and time management, are essential for maintaining emotional health (Jennings, 2011). Teachers should be encouraged to prioritize their well-being by setting boundaries between work and personal life, taking regular breaks, and engaging in activities that promote relaxation and stress relief. Mindfulness practices, such as meditation and deep breathing exercises, can help teachers manage stress and maintain a positive outlook.

Theoretical Discussion

Several theories provide valuable insights into understanding EFL teachers' emotions in online environments. Emotional labor theory highlights the effort teachers put into managing their emotions to meet professional expectations (Hochschild, 1983). This effort can be intensified in online settings where non-verbal cues and immediate feedback are limited (Kearney, 2013). Teachers may need to expend additional emotional energy to project enthusiasm and maintain student engagement in a virtual environment. Affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) emphasizes the importance of specific events in shaping teachers' emotional experiences. In online teaching, events such as technological failures or successful student interactions can significantly impact emotions (Moorhouse, 2020). Positive events, such as a successful lesson or positive feedback from students, can boost teachers' morale and motivation. Conversely, negative events, such as technical difficulties or disengaged students, can lead to frustration and stress.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this review have several implications for practice. Educational institutions and policymakers must recognize the emotional challenges faced by EFL teachers in online environments and provide adequate support and resources. Schools should offer ongoing professional development programs that focus on both technical skills and emotional resilience (Trust et al., 2017). Additionally, creating a supportive and collaborative culture within schools can help teachers feel more

connected and less isolated (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Institutions should also provide access to mental health resources and support services to help teachers manage stress and maintain their well-being. Encouraging teachers to engage in self-care practices and providing flexibility in their schedules can also help reduce burnout and promote a healthier work-life balance.

Future Research Directions

While this review highlights key themes and findings, there are still gaps in the literature that need to be addressed. Future research should explore the long-term effects of online teaching on EFL teachers' emotional well-being and job satisfaction. Studies could also examine the effectiveness of different professional development interventions in supporting teachers' emotional health. Additionally, research should investigate the impact of cultural and contextual factors on EFL teachers' emotions in online environments. Comparative studies between different countries and educational settings could provide valuable insights into how cultural differences influence teachers' emotional experiences and coping strategies. Further research is also needed to understand the role of individual differences, such as personality traits and resilience, in shaping teachers' emotional responses to online teaching.

Conclusion

Understanding the emotional landscape of EFL teachers in online learning environments is crucial for improving both teacher well-being and student outcomes. This review has synthesized existing research, highlighting the factors influencing teacher emotions, their impact on teaching and learning, and strategies for managing emotions. By addressing the emotional challenges of online teaching, educational institutions can create more supportive and effective learning environments for both teachers and students. Future research should continue to explore this important area to inform policies and practices that support EFL teachers' emotional well-being in the evolving landscape of online education.

References

1. Beltman, S., Mansfield, C. F., & Price, A. (2011). Thriving not just surviving: A review of research on teacher resilience. *Educational Research Review*, 6(3), 185-207.
2. Chang, M. L. (2009). An appraisal perspective of teacher burnout: Examining the emotional work of teachers. *Educational Psychology Review*, 21(3), 193-218.