Teacher Frustration and Emotion Regulation in University Language Teaching

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Abstract

Few jobs come without irritations, and foreign language instruction comes with its own particular set of frustrations which, when accumulated, can lead to stress and eventual burnout for teachers. One mechanism for reducing such frustrations is that of emotion regulation, the cognitive and behavioral strategies individuals employ to manage the emotions they experience or display. To date, no known studies have reported specifically on the in-class frustration experienced by language teachers, or on how teachers regulate their feelings of frustration. Herein, the authors discuss the experiences of seven EFL teachers at a university in Japan obtained through a series of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and corresponding stimulated-recall sessions. The authors discuss four salient thematic frustrations: student apathy, classroom silence, misbehavior in the context of relational strain, and working conditions. The results reveal that participants applied contextually-dependent emotion regulation behaviors, the success of which was often contingent on the participants' levels of confidence and control over the stressors. Thus, participants showed more success in managing pervasive low-level stressors such as apathy and silence, and more support would be welcome to aid them to manage more debilitating stressors such as student misbehavior. The authors offer suggestions for teachers, trainers and institutions on reducing frustration.

Keywords: teacher emotions; emotion regulation; frustration; Japan; burnout; stress

1. Introduction

The classroom is recognized as a source of considerable emotion and emotional labor for teachers (e.g., Hargreaves, 1998; King, 2016b; Nias, 1996; Zembylas, 2002), and the management of negative feelings plays particularly important mediating roles in maintaining classroom order, building relationships, enacting professional identities and managing psychological health (e.g., Haeussler, 2013; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Hosotani & Imai-Matsumura, 2011; King, 2016b; Sutton, 2004; Yin, 2016). Frustration is particularly salient from the perspective of well-being since it catalyzes teacher stress and burnout (Kyriacou, 2001; Lewandowski, 2003). An important system for taking control of frustration is *emotion regulation*, the repertoire of cognitive and behavioral strategies through which individuals influence the power of an emotion, its valence, its duration, and its symptoms (Gross, 2014). The fact that emotion regulation skills can continue to be learnt across careers (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017; Gyurak, Gross, & Etkin, 2011) means that reporting on the sources and regulation of frustration by experienced language teachers can be conducive to supporting teachers in the management of their psychological health.

Under the assumption that pervasive frustration is detrimental to a teacher's emotional well-being and classroom performance, and through a complexity-informed perspective (e.g., Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) that views emotional experiences and the manner in which they are managed as dynamically shaped by intrapersonal and interpersonal contexts, we herein describe the frustrations of a group of seven experienced EFL teachers working at a university in Japan. We outline the sources of frustration that the teachers experienced, the effects of their frustration, the emotion regulation goals they enacted, and the strategies they used to lower their frustration. We show some of the ways that over time the teachers have become able to manage pervasive stressors through a variety of contextually-dependent emotion regulation techniques. The participants' confidence and control over their stressors is revealed as a connecting thread throughout the discussion, and we conclude with recommendations for teachers, teacher trainers and institutions to support faculty in reducing frustration.

2. Literature review

2.1 Emotions

A dominant view of emotions is that they arise as a result of cognitive appraisals of environmental stimuli (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013; Suri & Gross, 2016), bringing with them a series of psychological experiences, physiological symptoms, expressional changes, and action tendencies (which refer to desires to act on the emotion). Additionally, emotions are subjectively labelled by individuals using feeling words such as "frustration," "anger" or "happiness," which help them to make meaning from their experiences (Scherer, 2005, 2009).

Complementing this intrapersonal perspective, there is increasing consensus that

emotions and emotion regulation practices interact across multi-dynamic levels (see King & Ng, 2018); in other words, they are shaped and constrained by micro-level factors such as a teacher's experiences, classroom history and relationships, and macro-level factors such as the surrounding institutional, social and political climates (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012; Mesquita, De Leersnyder, & Boiger, 2016). Adopting this intra and interpersonal perspective, we accept that there is a guiding sociocultural component to teachers' emotional episodes, and consequently, that their experiences and management of frustration must be examined with consideration of the surrounding contextual factors. Such contexts, as Mercer (2016) notes, are not "monolithic external variables" (p. 25) but are rather subjectively interpreted, and indeed co-constructed by teachers in a dynamic and non-linear fashion. Thus, as we will see later in the present article (Section 5.3), through the act of regulating their emotions, teachers transform their relationships and environments, influencing future emotional experiences and behavior.

2.2 Frustration

Though emotional experiences and their labelling are subjective (Scherer, 2009), frustration generally refers to the low-level negative feelings aroused when individuals are prevented from achieving goals or changing undesirable situations (Kuppens & Van Mechelen, 2007). Such feelings may be experienced as, or lead to, other negative emotions such as annoyance, anxiety and sadness (Lazarus, 1991). Frustration is frequently discussed as a precursor to anger but must be differentiated because of its qualitatively weaker action tendencies to blame external others, and to resolve the emotion (Kuppens, Van Mechelen, Smits, & De Boeck, 2003; Lazarus, 1991; Sutton, 2007).

Frustration maintains a definitional status in notions of teacher stress (Kyriacou, 2001) and has been positioned as a precursor to burnout (Lewandowski, 2003). Burnout, a widely-recognized construct, refers formally to the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and inefficacy experienced when engaged in unhealthy and prolonged emotional challenges at work (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001). It has been associated with a wide range of negative employee outcomes such as absenteeism and turnover (Ducharme, Knudsen, & Roman, 2007), job performance (Feuerhahn, Stamov-Roßnagel, Wolfram, Bellingrath, & Kudielka, 2013) and physical health (Feuerhahn et al., 2013). Significantly, and of great worry, burnout in teachers has also been shown to negatively correlate with student outcomes in achievement tests (Arens & Morin, 2016; Klusmann, Richter, & Lüdtke, 2016), and with students' perceptions of their teacher's ability to support them (Arens & Morin, 2016). For these reasons, we view frustration to be a primarily negative force within the EFL classroom that stakeholders in the industry should remain aware of and endeavor to reduce.

Unfortunately, frustration has been reported as a frequent emotion experienced by teachers (e.g., Cowie, 2011; Day & Leitch, 2001; King, 2016b; Sutton, 2007). Potential sources which have been identified are varied and include both classroom and institutional factors. Within the Japanese university EFL context, frustration has been levied at the classroom level towards student silence and general misbehavior, and at the institutional level towards working

conditions and administrative mismanagement (see Cowie, 2011; King, 2016b). Despite its importance, no known studies have yet placed frustration at their core, particularly in consideration of how teachers might manage this emotion; thus, one of the aims of this paper is to begin a dialogue on how frustration might be ably dealt with through the system of emotion regulation.

2.3 Emotion regulation

Emotion regulation defines the processes through which individuals modify the paths of their emotions (Gross, 2014). To do so, teachers must first enact an emotion regulation higher-order goal or endpoint. *Hedonic higher-order goals* are those which individuals use to reduce negative emotions and increase positive emotions, but these are not the only motives for regulation: teachers may also wish to achieve goals related to instrumental classroom needs (*performance goals*) or the perceived responsibilities of the profession (*epistemic goals*) (Tamir, 2016). When language teachers attempt to reduce their frustrations, it could therefore be because they wish to feel less negativity (hedonic), because they do not want to disturb their relationship with a student (performance) or because they feel it is their responsibility not to display it (epistemic). Of course, teachers may simultaneously achieve multiple goals through regulation, and we have previously shown that stress may arise when teachers need to achieve multiple higher-order emotion regulation goals which are in contention, such as when they are trying to balance the maintenance of warm social relationships against their epistemic notions of teacher responsibility (Morris & King, forthcoming).

 Strategies refer to the cognitive and behavioral routines that teachers apply to achieve their higher order goals. Such strategies have been categorized in various heuristic frameworks, but for this study, we adopt the classification system of the *process model of emotion regulation* (Gross, 2014; 2015a). The model asserts that emotions emerge sequentially: when attention is drawn to an event, it is then appraised, and if an emotion is warranted, it is then enacted. The process model taxonomizes strategies at four points along this emotion path. First, through *situational strategies* individuals make changes to the external world in advance of the emotion taking place. They do this (a) by choosing to pre-emptively avoid a particular stimulus, such as when a teacher chooses not to teach a particular course that they find frustrating, or (b) by modifying the environment, for example by separating two students who are misbehaving. Of course, it is not always possible to make such external changes and so teachers may also use their attention to regulate their emotions, for example, by choosing to mentally distract themselves away from a source of frustration. A teacher employing an *attention deployment strategy* like this might try to think of happy thoughts when feeling frustrated. Teachers may also apply *cognitive change strategies* to reorient the way that they appraise a particular emotional stimulus. One example might be when a teacher reinterprets a student's behavior in consideration of the student's background. Finally, teachers may regulate their frustration through *response modulation.* Such strategies are considered to be applied late in the emotion regulation process, and are those which target the symptoms and behavioral outcomes of

emotion. For example, teachers feeling frustrated may choose to take deep breaths to reduce their physiological symptoms.

Although the process model is reductionist (like all heuristics), it has many positive attributes: it recognizes that emotion regulation practices and their adaptability must be interpreted within specific contexts (see Gross, 2015b); it offers a cohesive account of the ways that individuals make changes to their external environment, their internal mental processes and their behaviors; it is both proactive and reactive, being able to describe not only the systems of frustration reduction, but also the effects of frustration on the regulation of other emotions; and through recent temporal modifications, it provides for the many ways that individuals apply emotion regulation across wide timescales (see Quoidbach, Mikolajczak, & Gross, 2015). In sum, the process model offers a cohesive view of emotion regulation fitting with our dynamic, contextual understanding of teacher emotions.

3. Research question

The data being discussed in this paper emerged as part of a larger and more general project focusing on the emotion regulation of teachers working at a university in Japan (Morris & King, forthcoming). That project probed three general areas of emotion regulation: the participants' higher order emotion regulation goals, the strategies they employ, and the contextual factors guiding their behaviors. Initial analysis of that data set revealed that frustration was the most commonly cited negative emotion experienced, and this revelation prompted the researchers to investigate in more detail. Herein, we therefore consider the following question: What sources of frustration do a group of EFL teachers at a university in Japan report, and how do they regulate their frustrations?

4. Data collection and analysis

Data was collected from seven teachers (three female, four male) working full time in the English Skills department of Morizaki University (a pseudonym). Morizaki University is a private institution located in a metropolitan area on the main island of Japan which specializes in languages, cultural studies and linguistics. The English Skills department employs more than 50 full time non-Japanese teachers, and is responsible for providing integrated EFL skills classes to all first and second year undergraduate students, regardless of their major. The participants originated from the USA, the UK or New Zealand, and were trained to the master's level in TESOL, international culture or applied linguistics. To ensure sufficient sociocultural knowledge of the working context, participants were chosen through a purposive sampling technique (Dörnyei, 2007); thus, they were all experienced career teachers (mean = 12 years) who had taught in Japan for an extended period of at least 3.5 years (mean = 7 years). Biographical data about each teacher is included in Table 1, which has been kept somewhat ambiguous to protect the participants.

Table 1. Participant Background Information

Pseudonym	M/F	Years teaching	Years teaching in Japan	Qualifications
Anthony	M	6-10	6-10	MA. General TESOL Certificate.
Colin	M	6-10	3.5	MA. Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA). Advanced TESOL Certificate.
Dorothy	F	10-15	6-10	MA. CELTA.
Elliot	M	15+	6-10	MA.
Grace	F	15+	4-5	MA. CELTA. Elementary school teaching qualification.
Peter	M	10-15	10-15	MA. General TESOL certificate.
Rose	F	6-10	4-5	MA. General TESOL certificate. High school teaching qualification.

The tenets of a grounded-theory based approach (Hadley, 2017) were employed to collect data iteratively from participant to participant over a six-week period in the final semester of the school year at Morizaki University. Each participant took part in a semi-structured interview, class observation and follow-up stimulated recall session (Gass & Mackey, 2017). The goal of the initial interviews was to investigate the teachers' general use of emotion regulation. Follow-up observations and stimulated recall sessions then contextualized the testimonies, provided detailed accounts of event-specific incidents of emotion regulation and contributed independent observations of behavior. Written consent was obtained from all teachers and students involved in the study.

We as the researchers conducting this study are both experienced language teachers with extended tenures in the Japanese tertiary context. These shared experiences with participants almost certainly afforded advantages with regards to contextual awareness and trust, but care had to be taken to balance this emic position with our etic position as "researchers" rather than "teachers." While we attempted to record events objectively we acknowledge that our backgrounds could also act as "cultural baggage" (Holliday, 2007, p. 141) within our collection and analysis.

One of the issues that we encountered early on in the research process was the relative difficulty of eliciting descriptions of emotion regulation from participants, who had perhaps not previously considered this dimension of their work explicitly. We thus sought advice from other research (e.g., Gross & Richards, 2006; Sutton, 2004) and began the initial interviews by asking participants to recall a recent time when they had regulated an emotion when teaching. We also provided participants with examples of emotion regulation from our own classrooms where necessary, both as a tool for illustrating the kind of data we were interested in, as well as acting as an offer of good faith to build trust. Lines of questioning in the interviews explored participant emotion regulation experiences, including the antecedents of the emotions, the emotion regulation strategies employed, and the influential contextual factors.

Observed lessons were audio recorded, and the observer took semi-structured notes on incidents during which they reasonably perceived the teacher was experiencing an emotion. Details were recorded of the participants' behaviors and interactions, as well as general notes on the lessons. As has been discussed in literature on best practice, follow-up stimulated recall

sessions took place within 24 hours of the class (Gass & Mackey, 2017). Therein, participants were asked to comment on their emotions and emotion regulation during moments of interest from the observed class.

The data was analyzed initially using the data analysis software QDA Miner and subsequently by hand. To begin, the data was coded descriptively (Saldaña, 2016) and incidents pertaining to frustration were highlighted. In determining which incidents qualified as frustration, we considered the participants' own labelling of their emotions, which has been previously noted to be an accurate and relevant way of categorizing feelings (Scherer, 2005). Each of these filtered extracts were subsequently analyzed through cycles of initial and axial coding (Saldaña, 2016). Four pertinent thematic sources of frustration were revealed which are discussed below with reference to the extant literature: (1) student apathy, (2) classroom silence, (3) misbehavior stemming from relational breakdown, and (4) working conditions.

5. Results and discussion

5.1 Student apathy

It is well established that the Japanese learning context is replete with complex motivational issues for teachers to navigate (see Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009; Sakui & Cowie, 2012; Ushioda, 2013), and indeed six of the participants reported that a general malaise exhibited by some of the students at Morizaki University was a perpetual frustration that had caused much stress during their tenures. Such apathy was reported symptomatically: consistent failure to complete homework, "crappy excuses" (Colin) for missed deadlines, unexplained absences, tired students, and an overall "laziness" (Peter) towards language learning were particularly salient themes. Over time, participants reported some success in the reduction of such frustrations, which tended towards more palliative solutions (Kyriacou, 2001). That is to say, that teachers had more success in reducing their emotional responses to the stressors than to eliminating the stressors themselves.

Rose's frustrations with apathy were to a high degree informed by her training experiences during her master's course a few years prior, which had imbued a commendably strong desire to serve her students. Her employment at Morizaki University was her first employment post MA, and when she began, Rose reported complex bidirectional feelings. While she accepted that some students "don't rise to meet the challenge," she reported feeling "a lot of frustration" at her own efforts within the classroom: "Maybe I didn't give them the skills or I didn't explain things clearly, or like what went wrong with my teaching that they couldn't meet my expectations?" Of course, directing frustration towards one's own teaching could be a potentially rewarding source of reflection, but such martyring to the cultural myth that "everything depends on the teacher" (Britzman, 1986, p. 449), and continued negative assessment of one's teaching ability is liable to lead over time to reduced self-esteem, of which stress is a potential consequence (Kyriacou, 2001). As Rose spoke about her current position on this matter, however, it became clear that her negative emotions had recently begun to be

alleviated through the cognitive change strategy of *reappraisal*, a process through which an individual comes to change the way they appraise emotional stressors:

> I can look at it more objectively I hope, where I can see "OK. Oh I didn't teach that well"… but I can also look at it where it's like "OK. I planned it out very clearly. I've given you clear instructions."

It became clear through her testimony that over time, Rose has shifted the burden of responsibility for learning away from herself to include the students' own actions, and in doing so, she has begun to view her own teaching in a more positive light. While multiple contextual sources may influence an individual's ability to reappraise, for Rose, it was the mediating support of her more experienced colleagues:

> It's been a lot of like discussions that has made me realize this…. (Other teachers) have like some perspective…another teacher told me like "teaching is not a one way street"… support them as much as you can but ultimately it's up to them.

Reappraisal was also observed to play other roles in dealing with apathy, particularly in consideration of how a student's circumstances influence a teacher's emotion regulation. It has been previously observed that teachers are more likely to respond negatively to apathetic attitudes when such behavior is perceived to be under a student's control (Reyna & Weiner, 2001). In other words, teachers are more likely to feel frustrated by students who they feel have chosen to be apathetic rather than those negotiating external difficulties or commitments. Thus, like participants in King (2016b), the teachers at Morizaki University reported that over time their increased understanding of the sociocultural realities of their students' lives mediated their ability to reappraise their students' behaviors, and it was useful to observe that the participants spoke compassionately of their students' personal lives. This observation was particularly true for how the participants spoke of those students in their first and final years at the university. For freshman, teachers empathized with students finding their feet as increasingly independent young adults in a new school, while for fourth year students, teachers were sensitive to the difficulties of the time consuming and pressurized job hunting system in Japan. Thus, Anthony spoke of feeling the need to "coddle" the freshman students since "they've got enough on their plate as it is without a lot of emotional stuff … coming from their teacher," and Colin "buffered" his introduction of a class project to fourth years with an apology for assigning it.

Although the teachers had been successful in reappraising the backgrounds of first and final year students, far more frustration was levied at the apathy of the sophomore year group. Rightly or wrongly, there was an overarching mood that second year students should have "gotten over some of the stuff that causes freshman problems" (Dorothy). Colin in particular, appeared to be highly stressed by his sophomore students, his frustrations worn on his sleeve when he claimed that "they've just lost the will to live." It has been previously noted that within the Japanese context, teachers report a tacit epistemic need to be energetic, and to enact

such a goal, teachers tend to *suppress* their negative emotions and *exaggerate* their positive emotions in front of students (King, 2016b); yet Colin reported feeling exhaustion from this emotional labor. Thus, to reduce his affective load, Colin had reported a third kind of response modulation: that of *genuine expression.* He explained:

> I'm not gonna be overly enthusiastic with a group of students that are not giving anything back…. you're spending quite a lot of emotional energy on trying to create a good atmosphere, but if it's wasted I don't see the point.

It appears that Colin, tired of the "motivational burden" (Acheson, Taylor, & Luna, 2016, p. 529) he feels from teaching passive students, has shifted his emotion regulation goals away from performing, towards hedonic protection of his own well-being. There is a sense here of what Newberry and Davis (2008) have called an "economic view" (p. 1983) of the teacher-student relationship: that Colin only gives emotionally what he expects to receive, a potential signal of the emotional distancing that may be attributed to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). It should be acknowledged, however, that Colin reported not starting out feeling such stress. It was instead the prolonged frustrations from his inability to move his sophomore students into action which led to changes in his emotion regulation behavior, and ultimately to him dropping the course: in follow-up correspondence, Colin reported that he had decided not to teach sophomore students in the proceeding school year, an act which itself is a situational strategy of emotion regulation, and likely a positive decision for his long-term well-being.

5.2 Classroom silence

Linked in many ways to issues of apathy, silence was discussed in its varying forms as a source of frustration by all seven of the participants. A pervasive feature of language classrooms in Japan (King, 2013), silence has been attributed to a multitude of originating sources such as anxiety, language ability and a desire to resist a rigid educational system (see King, 2013; Smith & King, 2018), and it became clear from the testimonies that the participants' interpretations of the meaning behind their students' silence was a factor in their emotion regulation strategy choices. Similar to apathy, many of the participants had come to successfully manage their frustrations over time, though in contrast to the palliative solutions discussed in Section 5.1, participants reported tackling both the sources of silence itself as well as their own emotional reactions to it.

Grace, who even after more than four years in Japan still felt ongoing frustration at the "cliché" of student silence, spoke engagingly about her attempts to manage this stressor. Although she had a reflective view of her students' silent behavior, noting that she expected it, understood it, and knew that at times she was the cause of it, she still found it "really frustrating that it takes so long to get comfortable enough to take the risk." One recent source of annoyance that Grace returned to numerous times during her testimony was the silent behavior of a particular class who refused to greet her: "Someone comes in (and I'm) like

'hey!' and they'll walk right past with their headphones on." Grace acknowledged that cultural disparity may play a role in her feelings since throughout her own education, standing and greeting teachers when they entered the room was the prescribed behavior; however, she also noted it was only one particular class where this issue occurred, and it perhaps cannot be coincidence that her relationship with this class was strained. Although she noted that the lack of greetings was "not the biggest issue in my life," it was clear that Grace felt ongoing frustration and had made efforts to balance her hedonic emotion regulation goal of reducing her stress with her epistemic duty to act as "the adult in the room" and model appropriate emotional behavior to the students. Grace therefore reported the response modulation strategy of suppressing her frustrations during these incidents, and the cognitive change strategy of *rationalizing* (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014), or excusing the students' behavior, reminding herself that "they're still eighteen, nineteen, still learning these things."

Unlike the "extremely rude" behavior of that particular class, Grace assessed the silent behavior of her first-year students as language anxiety, and her efforts to help the students with this issue were paying dividends on her emotional well-being. Grace reported to spending "a lot of time this semester getting them comfortable." To this end she took time to meet the students one-on-one, wrote speaking prompts on the whiteboard, gave grammar structures for activities and ensured there were more opportunities for shorter conversations. Although it may seem that Grace's behavior is simply a model of good teaching, from an emotion regulation perspective Grace is exhibiting a particularly powerful situational strategy known as *proactive coping* (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997), whereby individuals build resources affording them the ability to anticipate and manage future negative emotions. In this case, her efforts to scaffold her students' work and build their confidence have the added effect of reducing her frustration. When asked about the success of such behavior, Grace was resolute: "It's put me back in control.... Everybody's kind of got to a comfort level again." Grace's comments on silence throughout her testimony echo the conclusion that it is perhaps not student behavior itself which fuels feelings of frustration in teachers, but a lack of confidence in resolving such issues (Chang, 2013).

Silence of course does not merely refer to situations where students do not oralize their thoughts, but it can also encompass those situations when students choose to communicate in their L1 when they were expected to communicate in the L2. The use of such "pragmatic silence" (Jaworski, 1993; King, 2013) was a particularly salient frustration for four of the participants. While the dogma of limiting the use of L1 has continually been questioned (see for example Auerbach, 1993; Butzkamm, 2003), it is not the remit of this paper to take sides on the debate; nevertheless, it is important to note that the teachers' explanations for their frustration towards Japanese use were multifaceted. Participants felt frustration when Japanese was used pervasively, when it was used for communicating on topics unrelated to class content and when it was distracting for other students. It was also noted that frustrations were less informed by Morizaki University's institutional policy limiting L1 use than they were by the sense that students were not making active use of their limited opportunities to speak English. As Dorothy noted, "when you ask them 'do you want to improve your English?' They will say

'yes!' … but yet they still go into Japanese."

Teachers reported regulating their frustration towards L1 use through a range of emotion regulation strategies that were applied dynamically across their careers. Elliot, for example, revealed in his interview that he had "given up on policing" Japanese, describing it as "something that's really hard to control." When asked whether this was always the case, Elliot dissented and admitted being stricter when he began his tenure at Morizaki University due to an implicit institutional pressure. He vividly recalled being advised in a training session to use the threat of homework as a punishment for persistent offenders; yet, mediated through the process of reappraisal, Elliot felt increasingly that this conservative position did not sit well with him in the on-the-ground dynamics of the classroom. Elliot had therefore moved towards more open discussions of the benefits of increased L2 communication with the students instead:

> I'd rather just rationalize it with them and say, "Look. This is your time. You or your parents are paying a lot of money for you guys to be here, and I understand you don't have a lot of opportunities, so hey, let's try and use this time."

When questioned about the success of his more agentive L1 policy, which, like Rose in Section 5.1, had shifted the balance of responsibility towards the student body, Elliot offered mixed feelings. He noted that often Japanese was "endemic," but he felt positive about his strategy from the perspective of his well-being: "I don't know if (I now feel) frustration because I don't let it bother me so much." Elliot's testimony reveals again the way that teachers, when experiencing sustained frustration, may prioritize their hedonic emotion regulation goals over more instrumental ones, particularly if they feel a lack of control over student behaviors.

Elliot, however, was not the only person to find his own path through the institutional prescription of the L2-only classroom. Peter, who perhaps spoke most ardently of the positive role of the L1 in his teaching, felt that any frustrations at Japanese use were initially managed by his own language learning experiences and later by his teacher training, which informed him of the various potential benefits of its use. Peter felt he had cultivated an ability to confidently "pick his battles" and systematically attend to or ignore L1 use. When asked how he decided when to act, he responded that his key guiding question was: "Is it essential for me to engage in a potential conflict now?" He noted that "translation's a skill" so in situations where students were preparing to perform in English or when they were researching for a discussion using L1 websites, it was not necessary to interject. Instead, it was those situations when Japanese was "spreading like a virus" that warranted his attention. In the language of emotion regulation, Elliot here is *selectively ignoring behavioral transgressions* and this has been reported to aid well-being and avoid disturbing classes (Sutton, 2004; Yin, 2016). What sets Peter's use apart from Elliot's above is his informed use of this strategy, which has given him a high level of self-efficacy over the issue.

5.3 Relational breakdown and misbehavior

While apathy and silence were the most pervasive frustrations for the teachers at Morizaki University, perhaps the most debilitating was the lack of control of negative classroom behaviors in the face of fractured student-teacher relationships. Language teachers have been noted to have unique social responsibilities (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017), which demand that they take seriously their role in crafting warm relationships which are conducive to risk-taking, and classroom atmospheres that are friendly, safe and positive. Unfortunately for the participants, the complexity of balancing this sociality with appropriate discipline meant that it was difficult for them to predict and ultimately take charge of behavioral transgressions, leading to emotion regulation which was highly reactive and variable.

While all seven participants recalled students with whom their relationships were strained, it was perhaps Colin who had been having the most salient ongoing frustrations. Colin described his problematic student as "very good at speaking" but "incredibly lazy, petulant and doesn't listen to any instructions." Colin was frustrated that the student repeatedly spoke over him when giving instructions to the class, disturbed other students and used his mobile phone during lessons. Each of these transgressions may seem like minor issues; but Colin reported an epistemic belief that behavioral management should not be needed at the tertiary level, and when we consider that these behavioral issues had continued for almost an entire year, his extreme frustration becomes clear.

From an emotion regulation perspective, Colin's responses ran the gamut of strategy types, to varying degrees of success over multiple intersecting timelines. Within individual classes, Colin reported selectively avoiding the behavioral transgressions since "if I just reacted to any of his childish behavior or petulance, I would just wind myself up to the point of being overstressed." However, when he felt his power being challenged, for example, when the student spoke over him when giving class instructions, Colin was liable to use genuine expression, raising his frustration into anger and then releasing it on the student. This strategy he found particularly problematic: While it was effective in managing the student's behavior in the moment, he reported feeling "a little bit guilty to the other students because they'd seen a side to me which I don't like to show." Colin made similar efforts to resolve his frustration over larger timescales. For example, Colin applied situational strategies to create opportunities to engage with the student in a positive manner, both in an attempt to appear approachable and to minimize long-term damage from his negative interactions, and it was also apparent that Colin had turned to rationalizing his student's behavior as a way to protect his well-being: "He is just a petulant young boy, you know, who's trying to probably show off in front of some of the girls."

Although individual students caused stifling frustrations for some of the teachers, these seemed to be overshadowed by the "feelings of dread" (Grace) that accompanied them into situations where the whole class were considered problematic. Such classes could occasionally become so stressful that the participants were forced to take action in startling ways. Elliot, for example, reported on a class full of "bad chemistry" that he had taught in the previous

year. The ongoing student disengagement and off-task behaviors, coupled with Elliot's general anxiety over teaching a new course, led to a situation which became so exasperating that Elliot one day spontaneously abandoned the class: "I just closed up my briefcase, turned off the projector and said 'OK we're done today….' I was SO frustrated … I didn't know what else to do. It was almost like a bit of a mini nervous breakdown." Grace suffered similarly from a disengaged class which she said found "everything meaningless and pointless." To attempt to address this issue, Grace gave the students the opportunity to give her written feedback on the past and future directions of the course, but their comments reinforced her frustrations: "I got a lot of negative questions …. Negative feedback ((bangs desk)). Negative questions ((bangs desk)). Meaningless ((bangs desk)). Valueless ((bangs desk)). What's the point? Don't want to do it. It's too hard. Blah, blah, blah." Such responses from the students led to an outburst of emotions in class, and Grace challenged the students to take more control of their learning:

> I let them have it ((bangs desk)). I say "this is how ((bangs desk)) I feel" because basically frustration …. "You need to decide what you want, decide what you think you're gonna do." And I left the room. Let them sort it out and then I came back.

Yin (2016) has previously described the emotional ferocity of Elliot and Grace's response modulation as *outpouring*, acknowledging that, for the Chinese secondary school teachers in his study, such displays of intense emotion could simultaneously achieve both hedonic and performance goals. Unfortunately, however, though Grace and Elliot both agreed that their emotional honesty helped to reduce their own feelings of frustration, they were less convinced of the instrumental benefits of such strategies: they reported that the students "went internal" (Grace) and that they knew "that I didn't really fully want to be there" (Elliot).

The behaviors represented herein by Colin, Elliot and Grace illustrate a number of salient points about the nature of the teacher-environment relationship. Colin's guilt for example, highlights the difficulty of managing frustrations given the cyclical nature of emotional experiences whereby, through regulatory processes, individuals cause new emotions to emerge that themselves need to be managed (Gross, 2015a). In addition, we are reminded throughout the testimonies of how individuals and their contexts are joined in a dynamic unfolding relationship (King, 2016a). The participants' emotion regulation had an impact on future student behaviors, and therefore on future emotional experiences for the teachers. Overall, what became clear throughout the testimonies was the sense that the participants were frequently at a loss for how to remedy their situations. This lack of efficacy on classroom management, which is itself a catalyst for frustration (Chang, 2013), is certainly not helped by the general lack of focused training in TESOL: five of the participants reported no formal behavioral management training across their careers. The impromptu nature of many of the approaches further illustrate that in the face of complex misbehavioral issues, maintaining conducive working relationships and atmospheres becomes an almost herculean task.

5.4 Working conditions

Of course, it is not only events within the classroom which may adversely affect the emotions of the teachers, and the working conditions at Morizaki University were raised as a source of particularly strong frustration which had a lingering negative impact on stress and emotion regulation. Teachers working in the English Skills department of Morizaki University are subject to the emotionally challenging system of limited-term employment (unfortunately common in the Japanese university context. See McVeigh, 2002; Poole, 2010). In practice, this means that after a total of six years' employment, the faculty are forced to leave the institution and seek employment elsewhere, whereupon they will be replaced by a new intake of teachers. Such unstable working conditions leave employees on the "periphery" (Poole, 2010, p. 5) of the university, generating high levels of stress, undermining professionalism and affording little enthusiasm and loyalty to institutions (King, 2016b).

As the longest serving participant, and with the end of his teaching career at Morizaki University less than 18 months away, Elliot reported finding the lack of job security increasingly frustrating and anxiety inducing, and these emotions had crept into his classroom, causing him to regulate his emotions in alarming ways. The first way in which his "bitterness" had affected his teaching was in the way he cathartically "let my frustration … be expressed in the classroom" by making denigrating remarks to students about the university. In the language of emotion regulation, this represents a form of response modulation known as *venting,* whereby negative emotions are intentionally allowed to flow outside of the presence of the source of the emotion. Such a strategy has been shown to negatively correlate with cheerfulness (Totterdell & Parkinson, 1999), and the ineffectiveness of this strategy was well understood by Elliot: when asked whether he felt his outbursts helped to reduce his frustrations he observed: "temporarily, but then guilt. The immediate onset of guilt and shame …. That's professionalism. I shouldn't be airing my personal grievances about my contract to the students."

The second way in which employment uncertainty had affected Elliot was in a more causal sense: His frustration played a role in his decision to apply the situational strategy of *emotionally withdrawing* from relationships at the university. This behavior, which he had employed over an extended period, meant that Elliot had increasingly shared less personal information with students and spent less time with colleagues in an effort to protect his well-being: "I don't like saying goodbye to people and one way I deal with that is to just kind of slowly pull away rather than just close the door at one time." It was clear from the interview that Elliot felt conflicted about this distancing: that although it helped him to better care for his emotional health, it came at the cost of the positive classroom atmosphere and rapport that sharing affords. Thus, he was conscious of the fact that his teaching had suffered as a result of his behavior, a further source of worry. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) have noted that "futurelessness" (p. 173) in the form of a lack of a professional career path has a negative impact on motivation, and it is hard not to view the effects of Elliot's frustration here as symptomatic of the distancing of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

Overall, the role of the institution has been shown to be critical in supporting teachers

to manage their emotions in a healthy manner (Haeussler, 2013), and it was certainly true that the participants desired more support in this regard. Six of the teachers reported to never having received any formal emotion regulation training throughout their careers. Moreover, and similar to other studies (e.g., Sutton, 2007), the participants reported not always being able to hide their feelings of frustration, particularly when they blossomed into anger. Sticking with Elliot, who felt particularly vulnerable to emotional outbursts:

> more information on how to handle — how to be more aware of your emotions. Especially anxiety and frustration … would be great…. I'm fully aware that I can show frustration in class ((laughs)) in times when maybe I shouldn't. When it's personal. Not related to the class.

We agree with Elliot's position, and view emotion regulation training to be a productive way that institutions can support their staff to reduce frustration and improve their emotional well-being.

6. Conclusion

This study has described four salient frustrations experienced by a group of EFL teachers at a university in Japan and considered how the participants regulated these feelings. Emotion regulation strategies were dynamically wed to the intrapersonal and interpersonal contexts of their emotions, suggesting that a "one-size-fits-all" solution to any given stressor may be untenable; however, it was also repeatedly seen that the participants' perceived control over their environment and frustrations was crucial to the perceived success of the strategies they employed.

Low-level yet pervasive stressors such as student apathy and silence appeared to have been successfully managed over time through situational and cognitive change strategies as teachers built resources through experience. Cognitive reappraisal, in particular, was found to be a powerful tool; thus, language teachers experiencing frustration may benefit from engaging with, and developing an empathetic understanding of, the socio-cultural backgrounds of their students. Equally, teachers may find they can reduce frustration by selectively ignoring classroom issues, which was seen to be effective when applied in a principled manner. Unfortunately, participants exhibited less efficacy when dealing with the more powerful stressors of classroom behavioral issues and working conditions, often relying on reactive emotion regulation decisions. Given the large range of strategies applied by participants to deal with such issues (with varying levels of success), it is advisable for teachers to develop an awareness of the wide repertoire of emotion regulation strategies at their disposal and how they may be applied adaptively.

As alluded to in Section 4, a potential limitation of this study was precipitated by the implicit nature of emotion regulation, which meant that the researchers were required to offer examples of their own emotion regulation practices during interviews. It is not clear to what degree participants were influenced by the researchers' explanations here. A second

limitation is the cross-sectional design of the study, which precluded an understanding of how participants' emotion regulation changed over the course of the school year. A longitudinal study would be a fruitful area for future research.

Although through our qualitative approach we do not aim to generalize our results to a wider population, we view a number of implications for stakeholders in the industry. Given their visible absence from the participants' histories, formal teacher training needs to include more structured classroom management and emotion regulation training. In addition, institutions would do well to assess the degree to which they are contributing in a positive or negative way to teacher stress through the conditions of their employment, particularly given the identified negative consequences of limited-term contracts on teacher well-being and teacher-student interactions. Overall, it appears there is much that language teachers already do to manage their frustrations, but so much more that could be done with the appropriate level of training and support.

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