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"I felt the whole world was against me!": a qualitative study of novice teachers' anger expression and regulation

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how novice teachers engage with the emotion of anger in their professional work. We generated 155 Chinese teachers' written reflections on how they felt, expressed, and regulated anger. The study revealed three findings: 1) the primary sources of the teachers' anger were related to students; 2) the majority of teachers tended to express anger destructively; 3) some teachers lacked emotional competence to regulate anger. The intensifying emotional labour in the teaching profession, the professional prematurity of novice teachers, and the stringent emotional rules in Chinese schools jointly contributed to the identified patterns. This study generates new insights into novice teachers' anger-related experiences, highlights the socio-cultural dimension of teacher anger, and suggests practical implications for supporting teachers in making sense of and acting on anger more consciously and effectively.

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Introduction

Teaching is an emotionally charged profession, and at all educational levels, teachers experience and express a variety of emotions, both positive and negative, in their everyday interactions with students, parents, and colleagues (Chen and Cheng 2021; Hargreaves 2001). Among the wide array of emotions embedded in teachers' daily work, anger is a prominent type, which often surfaces with other unpleasant feelings such as frustrations and guilt when teachers feel obstructed in achieving their work-related goals or face unfair treatment in their specific work environment (Prosen and Vitulic 2019; Taxer, Becker-Kurz, and Frenzel 2019). As reported by Sutton (2007), anger can bring about a lasting negative experience with physical sensations such as increased heart rate and diastolic blood pressure, which can be detrimental to teachers' self-efficacy, social relationships, and mental health.

Although previous studies (e.g. Burić and Frenzel 2019; Prosen and Vitulic 2019) have shed light on the complex and multi-layered nature of teacher anger in relation to teachers' cognitive appraisal, psychological state, and motivational tendencies, they

mainly focused on the perspectives of experienced teachers with relatively limited attention to new teachers as they transition from university study into school teaching. In the field of teacher education, an extensive body of literature has depicted the novice phase of teaching as a “rocky road” featured by cognitive challenges, emotional dissonance, and identity tensions (Hong 2012; Trent 2016). Without adequate teaching experience and school-based support, new teachers are likely to encounter negative emotions, particularly anger, directed at students, parents, and school leaders. On the other hand, current teacher education programmes, at both pre- and in-service stage, tend to be dominated by a cognitive, technical orientation with an overt emphasis on knowledge building and skill training (Goodwin and Low 2021). As a result, new teachers often feel perplexed and struggling in the face of a wide range of emotions that arise from their daily work. Over time, such emotions (especially the negative ones) may have an eroding effect on their sense of commitment and result in a high rate of teacher attrition as observed in many educational settings such as Australia and the United States (Newberry and Allsop 2017). To help novice teachers make sense of and cope with complex and potentially negative emotions, it is necessary to explore their expression and regulation of anger as a commonly experienced type of emotion in daily practice. To this end, the present study sets out to investigate how a group of Chinese novice teachers of English express and regulate their anger (if any) in the first year of their teaching. The study can generate insights into the integration of an emotional lens into current pre- and in-service teacher education programmes, where new teachers can be emotionally prepared to confront the challenging reality of teaching and seek continuous learning in their situated work environments.

Literature review

Understanding teacher emotions

In the field of teacher education, research on teacher emotions has grown steadily over the past 30 years, yielding valuable insights into how teachers perceive and react to different types of emotions as well as the multiple impacts of emotions on their teaching beliefs, mental well-being, and continuing development (Chen and Cheng 2021). Another critical line of inquiry (e.g. Kurki et al. 2016; Trigwell 2012) has also examined the emotionality of teaching, i.e. how different emotions are created, experienced, and channelled into constructive learning behaviours of students through deliberate classroom instruction and tasks.

One central theme that emanates from the large bulk of studies is the emotional intensity and labour in teaching, which can take a toll on teachers and lead to their emotional exhaustion and burnout (Chang 2009). Emotional labour generally refers to the deliberate efforts made by teachers to control and regulate their feelings in line with institutional requirements and social expectations and norms (Hochschild 1983). As documented in Hong (2012), although teachers are prone to stress due to heavy workloads and time demands, anger and disappointment in dealing with negative relationships, as well as dissonance felt over perceptions and reality of being a teacher day in and day out, they may not be able to process and regulate such emotional experiences, thus constituting a major source of emotional labour in their daily work. This can be

attributed to certain explicit or implicit emotional rules, which, according to Zembylas (2002, 200), “delineate a zone within which certain emotions are permitted and others are not permitted” in line with complex power relations in hierarchical social systems (Zhou 2017).

Therefore, despite the intense emotions flowing through their mind and body, teachers may have to control and suppress certain ones given the prescribed emotional rules in their situated work contexts (Lee and Yin 2011). One distinct example is Shapiro’s (2010) study, which reported how teachers tried to hide their negative emotions in front of colleagues and students in schools, because such sentiments were considered inappropriate due to the culture of “classic professionalism” which prohibited the revelation of personal vulnerabilities and imperfection and thus created a “human-teacher dichotomy” (p. 619) in education. Similar findings can also be found in Yuan and Lee (2016), which shed light on the inextricably intertwined relationship between teachers’ emotional labour and emotional rules in different educational settings.

Conceptualising teacher anger

Among the commonly and frequently experienced emotions in teachers’ daily work, anger has received much attention in the field of teacher education (Lee and Yin 2011; Prosen and Vitulić 2019). Teacher anger generally refers to an intense feeling of annoyance, displeasure and hostility (Alia-Klein et al. 2020). It can be conceptualised as a complex and multi-faceted construct, consisting of various emotional components – subjective, cognitive, social, expressive, and motivational (Burić and Frenzel 2019). Anger normally occurs through individuals’ interpretation and appraisal of a given situation based on their personal experiences and dispositions (e.g. confidence and self-esteem) as well as their social relationships with others (e.g. students and colleagues) in situated contexts (Berkovich and Eyal 2021). For instance, in the face of students’ misbehaviour in classroom teaching, experienced teachers who have handled disruptive students may be less likely to feel angry given their familiarity with such problems and their self-confidence in classroom management. In some cases where teachers have established a trusting relationship with students, anger may also be unlikely to manifest as the teacher may take students’ occasional misbehaviour lightly and focus on students’ overall learning. In addition, as a negative and often intense emotion, anger is also expressive and motivational as it can be manifested in varying ways and further transformed into concrete actions with social consequences. In school settings, there are a variety of factors, such as student misbehaviour, uncooperative colleagues, and educational policies, that can trigger feelings of anger, and how teachers perceive, express and manage such feelings is therefore a high-stakes business which may exert significant impacts on different aspects of their professional practice and social interactions (Burić and Frenzel 2019; Cowie 2011).

Recognising the intricacy and potential influencers of anger on teacher well-being and student learning, there have been numerous studies on how it is perceived, expressed, and regulated in the fields of psychology, communication, and education. In general, anger can be expressed and communicated in both destructive and constructive ways in a given situation. Destructive anger display can be direct, threatening, and hostile (also known as distributive aggressive anger), which can take the forms of yelling, criticising with the use of abusive language, and throwing objects (McPherson and Young 2004). On the other hand, destructive

anger can also be expressed in an indirect manner (also known as passive aggressive anger) through silent treatment, cold/dirty looks, and leaving the scene. As opposed to destructive anger display, individuals may react to their feelings of anger with calmness instead of resorting to aggressive measures, which may exacerbate the situation. Guerrero (1994) coined this as integrative assertive anger, involving a range of communicative acts such as the direct articulation of feelings and thoughts without blaming others, fair analysis and discussion of the situation, as well as listening to other people's side of the story. Such acts may reduce the tension brought by the negative feelings of anger and help individuals explore constructive ways to resolve the conflict and accomplish their personal goals. Furthermore, in some social scenarios where anger may be evoked, individuals may have to fake calmness and indifference without revealing their true feelings. In other words, they are not able to express and communicate anger in either destructive or constructive ways but instead suppress their emotions in line with prescribed social expectations and norms.

In the educational field, many scholars (e.g. Burić and Frenzel 2019; Prosen and Vitulić 2019) have stressed the need for teachers to adopt assertive, constructive strategies to manage and communicate their anger. This, however, requires the development of their emotional regulation ability, which refers to their consciousness and knowledge of using various strategies and resources to control and regulate how they feel and act in emotionally infused situations in order to promote goal attainment (Ivcevic and Brackett 2014). Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, and Knight (2009) proposed a series of regulation strategies that can help teachers analyse, understand, and process the myriad emotions that may occur in their everyday work. These strategies can be preventative, such as modifying situation (i.e. taking pre-emptive measures to avoid certain emotions) and attention deployment (i.e. direct one's attention to other tasks or people), with an aim to prohibit negative emotions from becoming fully developed. Some strategies are also responsive at behaviour (e.g. physically withdraw, pause, and deep breath) and cognitive dimensions (e.g. reflect, visualise, and talk to others), which can be activated to cope with specific emotional experiences.

As far as anger is concerned, previous studies (e.g. Burić, Penezić, and Sorić 2017; Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, and Knight 2009) have reported that teachers tend to use a variety of regulation strategies, such as situation avoidance and modification (e.g. avoiding talking to the students), attentional deployment (e.g. focusing on students' overall progress rather than momentary poor performance), reappraisal (e.g. evaluating the meaning of the situation), as well as behavioural strategies (e.g. stepping back and breathing). These studies also speak to the importance of teachers' reflective awareness and abilities in guiding them to confront and tackle complex and taxing situations and emotions with a critical and analytical lens (e.g. Yuan and Lee 2016; Chang 2009). In other words, without being overwhelmed by anger and other related negative emotions, reflective teachers can actively try to interpret "what is occurring?", "what might come next?" or "what should I be doing?" and explore constructive ways to express and regulate their emotions to facilitate students' learning and their own continuing development (Schutz et al. 2006).

The teaching context in China

Recent studies (Fried, Mansfield, and Dobozy 2015; Hong and Zhang 2019) have highlighted that teachers' emotions, including anger, can be qualitatively influenced by contextual factors. The teaching context in China, where the present study was

conducted, has displayed several distinctive features. First, as rooted in Confucianism's emphasis on education, Chinese teachers have been enjoying high social and moral status in the history of China. Teachers are traditionally regarded as students' "half-parents" who devote their sweat, heart, and emotion to educating the next generations. Such a belief is well reflected in the Chinese idiom "一日为师, 终身为父 (*yi ri wei shi, zhong shen wei fu*; even if someone is your teacher for a day, you should regard him or her like your parent for the rest of your life)" that is still being widely used in today's China (Shi and Li 2009).

Another feature is the growing tension between education reform and school realities that imposes extra pressure on teachers (OECD 2016). Due to historical, economic, and political conditions, a dominant discourse featured by standardised curricula, test-driven instruction, and fierce competition for high-quality education has been formulated in Chinese schools (Liu, Keeley, and Sui 2020). Such a discourse has functioned as a double-edged sword: while it has contributed to Chinese students' top-ranking performance in international testing programs, it also cost Chinese students and their teachers more time, intellectual input, and emotional labour for the better performance.

The third feature is China's hierarchical governance system (Tang 2018; Zhou 2017). Studies in the sociology and political sciences have characterised China's governance of education and other public sectors as hierarchical (e.g. OECD 2016; Zhou 2017). The governance system has a pyramid-shaped structure with the central government at the top while the provincial, prefectural, county, and township governing bodies function at different levels. The essential logic of the system is to execute the ideas and directives from the upper-level governments. As a result, individuals usually engage with the system by looking "upwards". They are held accountable for the seniors at the same level or the leaders at a higher level in the system (Zhou 2017). A severe consequence to the ground-level actors is that they are usually overloaded with and overwhelmed by various directives from different actors at the same and upper levels of the governance system. Novice teachers in this study mainly work at the ground level and usually work under various and many requirements but possess limited power to negotiate. These disadvantaging conditions would amplify novice teachers' emotional experiences in such a hierarchical system.

To date, despite a steady growth of research interest in teacher anger, scant attention has been paid to how novice teachers perceive and respond to anger at the beginning stage of their career. Informed by the existing literature on teacher emotions (particularly anger expression and regulation) and drawing on the approach of critical incident analysis, the present study was thus designed to fill this void by addressing three research questions: (1) What are the sources of anger experienced by novice teachers? (2) How do they express their anger? (3) How do they regulate their anger?

Methods

Research design

This study is part of a larger research project on teacher emotions in the Chinese context. We chose qualitative research as the overarching research methodology with the assumption that the phenomenon of novice teachers' engagement with anger is

highly complex and situational. Qualitative research as a powerful research methodology for unpacking complex social phenomena in contexts is thus an appropriate methodological choice for the present study (Lather 2006). We used critical event analysis – a specific method of qualitative research – to examine teachers' emotional experiences with a particular focus on teacher anger. A critical event is the "right mix of ingredients at the right time and in the right context" (Woods 1993, 102), and it can have an impact on the narrator, and this impact can be positive or negative. Guided written reflection was used to help teachers recall their critical emotional events. Through guided written reflection on their emotion-related critical events, teachers have an chance to rethink, examine, and understand the sources and effects of their emotions and how they regulate their emotions. In this way, the prevalence of anger among novice teachers can be identified and the sources of their anger and their regulation strategies can be clearly demonstrated, which can effectively answer the research questions.

Data generation

Using a convenience sampling strategy, we recruited 400 teachers of the English language who were "easily accessible to the researcher" (Palinkas et al. 2015, 536) to generate rich and in-depth data. These English teachers had just graduated from a four-year pre-service language teacher education program in a normal (teacher education-oriented) university with one year of teaching experience in different schools in China. Because of the relatively large number of research participants and their different locations, research data were generated from their written reflections. A research invitation and a reflective frame designed by the researchers was emailed to the teachers. After receiving the reflective frame, the teachers had one month to write and return their reflections (in Chinese) via email, which comprised the database for the present study. 320 teachers replied and agreed to take part in this study on a voluntary basis. When these novice teachers were asked to reflect on and write about their emotional experiences in their teaching lives, 155 of them (143 female and 12 male) reported anger as one of the most frequent emotions in their daily practice. In line with our research questions, these 155 pieces of reflections were included in this study, totalling around 206,700 words.

The reflective frame mentioned above consists of two sections. In the first section, the participants were asked to provide general information about their professional backgrounds with regard to their teaching grades and school types. Because of the characteristics of time, challenge and change of critical events (Webster and Mertova 2007), the second section provides three main guiding questions to help the teachers recall their critical emotional events as well as their coping strategies in their teaching practice: (1) What were the emotional events that impressed you the most in your first year of teaching? (2) How did you feel in such events and what were the sources of your emotions? (3) How did you deal with the emotions and what were your reflections if any? Overall, with the assistance of the reflective frame and an extended period of time, it is believed that the participants can deeply reflect on and (re)construct their lived emotional experiences to shed light on the research questions.

Data analysis

We analysed the data in the following four steps. First, the data pool of this study was established. We read through all the participants' written reflections to identify the participants' emotion-related critical incidents (Tripp 2011). Among the 155 participants, 151 reported one critical incident, while the other four reported two or more. To ensure that each participant made an equal contribution to the data pool, we selected one of the critical incidents of those four participants that we considered aligned with the focus of the study the most for further analysis. As a result, we successfully teased out a total of 155 critical incidents from the data pool, one from each participant.

Second, we coded each of the critical events independently. We used our conceptualisation of teacher anger as a reference to mark the chunks of data in a critical incident that were respectively related to "source of anger (Berkovich and Eyal 2021)", "anger expression (Guerrero 1994; McPherson and Young 2004)", and "anger regulation (Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, and Knight 2009)". Next, we compared the coding results across the critical events (i.e. the participants) and used a combination of inductive and deductive analysis to search for and organise the themes for answering the research questions. For the first research question about the source of anger, we inductively analysed the related chunks of data, and this effort produced six sources of anger, including "Students", "Colleagues", "Self", "Parents", "School Leadership", and "Curriculum". For the second and third research questions, we drew on the existing typologies of anger expression (e.g. Guerrero 1994; McPherson and Young 2004) and regulation (e.g. Burić, Penezić, and Sorić 2017; Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, and Knight 2009) as an analytical reference and delved into the related chunks of data to inductively analyse and identify more nuanced strategies under the general types of anger expression and regulation. This step led to a range of specific anger expression strategies (e.g. openly criticising students, leaving the scene, articulating feelings in public) and regulation strategies (e.g. reliving the incident, attention deployment, seeking social support) exercised by the participants in daily practice.

Finally, we calculated the frequency and percentage for each source of anger and each type of anger expression and expression. The frequencies and percentages together constituted a characterisation of the general patterns of the participants' anger-related experiences during their first year of teaching. Our purpose of counting the frequencies and calculating the percentages was to use numerical data as a complement to shed light on the group-level patterns of the participating novice teachers' anger-related experiences because "numbers are integral to qualitative research, as meaning depends, in part, on number" (Sandelowski 2001, 230).

Research trustworthiness and ethics

To enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings, we purposively had the first two authors analyse the data independently. The two other authors provided critical feedback on the results throughout the analysis process. After comparing and contrasting the results of the two independent analyses, we elevated the converging results to be the main body of findings. As for the diverging results, all four authors reanalysed the data,

discussed the meanings and interpretations of the results, and made collective decisions on how to enrich and finalise the research findings.

Before research activities commenced, we obtained ethics approval for the study from one of the authors' universities. In conducting the research, we adopted multiple measures to protect participants' safety, privacy, and confidentiality. These included seeking informed consent from the participants, anonymising individually identifiable information in the dataset, and restricting access to the data.

Findings

In response to the research questions, we report the findings in three sections delineating the multiple sources of the new teachers' anger as well as the expression and regulation of their anger in complex school environments.

The primary sources of teacher anger were related to students

The analysis shows that most of the teachers encountered anger when interacting with students, accounting for 81.3% (N = 126) of all the anger incidents identified from the dataset (see Table 1 for the summary of different sources). For instance, 102 teachers reported the feelings of anger in the face of students' disruptive and disrespectful behaviour within and outside the classroom, while some teachers (N = 24) also attributed their anger to students' lack of motivation and limited progress in academic learning. This finding concurs with previous research results (Burić and Frenzel 2019; Taxer, Becker-Kurz, and Frenzel 2019) that student-teacher relationship constitutes the major cause of teacher anger in school settings.

In addition, as suggested by Table 1, other sources of anger were also identified through our analysis, including uncooperative colleagues (N = 12; 7.7%), irresponsible parents (N = 8; 5.1%), hierarchical school leadership (N = 5; 3.2%), and rigidly structured curriculum (N = 3; 1.9%). In other words, our study reveals a variety of situational factors within and outside the classroom that could trigger feelings of anger. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the participants responded to the stimulating factors with a calm mind and tried to explore solutions to improve the situation. For instance, 16 teachers talked to the misbehaved students to remind them of the importance of maintaining classroom discipline, and 23 teachers also consulted experienced colleagues and school leaders to tap the possibility of revising the existing curriculum structure. It was when their efforts did not pay off and their personal goals became blocked that they started to experience anger as an emotional response to the situation where they "felt stuck and

Table 1. The summary of different sources of anger (N = 155).

Sources	Frequency	Percentage
Students	126	81.3%
Colleagues	12	7.7%
Self	12	7.7%
Parents	8	5.1%
School leadership	5	3.2%
Curriculum	3	1.9%

lost" (T73). The following quote from T81 well illustrates this point in the new teachers' interaction with students in the classroom:

A student was late, and he just entered the classroom without saying anything when I was teaching. I thought I would talk to him when the class ended. However, towards the end of the lesson, he started to chat with others and made a lot of noise. I walked to them and tried to ask them to be quiet and focus on the lesson. They just laughed. I felt very angry but I did not say anything. After class, I went back to my office and immediately cried.

(T81)

Following a similar logic, the feeling of anger also emerged in some teachers' interactions with their colleagues. For instance, T16 shared that one senior colleague often brought her son to work. When the senior colleague was teaching, she always asked T16 to babysit her son in the staffroom. As a new and green teacher, T16 said she had tons of assignments to mark, but it felt tough to say no. Once the senior colleague's son wet himself, she returned and blamed T16 for being careless. T16 got so mad and felt that her whole body was trembling. This incident showed that the novice teachers' heavy workload, unfair social encounters, and limited power to negotiate with senior colleagues jointly triggered anger in the novice teachers.

More interestingly, the analysis shows that a few participants (N = 12; 7.7%) described themselves as a critical source of anger in their professional practice. Such self-directed anger, often associated with feelings of guilt and regret, derived from their self-reflections on how they teach and develop in the situated schools. For instance, T9 recounted a classroom scenario in which a student volunteered to answer a question but did not get it right. Without showing sympathy and support, T9 told the student to "think twice before speaking up" in the future. Reflecting on this incident after the lesson, T9 started to feel regretful about her response, which might demotivate and even hurt the student, and her feelings further morphed into anger towards herself.

Furthermore, in 11 critical incidents, the participants shared mixed sources that caused anger in their daily practice. One vivid example is T39 who scolded a student who used vulgar language in the class. Then the student brought his parent back to the school and accused him of "bullying" in front of the school principal. T39 became very angry with the difficult parent and student, and to make things worse, the school principal took their side and asked him not to scold students in the future. The lack of school support thus exacerbated his anger:

I was thinking about quitting at that moment. I was not strong enough to deal with such ridiculous student, parents and school principal. I felt the whole world was against me!

(T39)

Overall, contextually induced and self-targeted anger emerged when the new teachers were trying to make sense of their teaching practice and continuing development through trial and error. The occurrence of teacher anger resulted from the interaction between internal sense-making and external stimuli such as social relationships (e.g. students, colleagues and parents) and institutional norms and structure.

The majority of teachers tended to express anger deconstructively

In different situations where anger arose, the teachers chose to express their feelings in diverse ways. Table 2 presents the various forms of anger expression adopted by the participants.

To start with, the majority of the participants (N = 76; 49.0%) adopted a confronting and destructive type particularly in dealing with student-related anger during classroom teaching. This type of distributive aggressive anger (Guerrero 1994) was displayed by openly criticising students with behavioural problems and even yelling at them and throwing objects with intense emotions. T66 gave a vivid account below:

During the evening self-study period, one student was just doodling on a piece of paper. Then I asked him to work on his homework, but he ignored me. I kept on asking, and in the end, I got so angry that I asked him to get out of the classroom if he did not want to study. Then the student just left and slammed the door. I got more furious and threw my book at the front desk.

(T66)

As another type of destructive anger, passive aggressive anger (N = 13; 8.4%), however, was reported much less frequently in the teachers' narratives. In other words, only a small number of teachers chose to leave the scene or gave silent treatment to their students. This might be related to the social, contextual nature of anger expression (Kuppens et al. 2007). In classroom settings, the teachers were bound by their professional responsibilities to fulfil the lesson objectives and cover the stipulated teaching content. Therefore, when they experienced anger in challenging situations (e.g. students' misbehaviour), they might prefer to address the problem in an efficient and cost-effective manner by directly confronting students, whereas the passive aggressive style (e.g. leaving the classroom) might be time-consuming and cause more disruption to the lesson. Another reason could be attributed to the traditional, hierarchical relationship between teachers and students in Chinese schools (Zhou 2017), which thus allowed the participants to adopt a comparatively intense approach to expressing their anger in classroom teaching. This was corroborated by the finding that no teachers claimed to display distributive aggressive anger in front of their colleagues and school leaders in their narratives.

In addition, 27 teachers (17.4%) reported their display of integrative assertive anger (Guerrero 1994) in order to navigate conflicting situations and improve their work effectiveness. This type of anger expression entailed the teachers' open articulation of their feelings with critical analysis as well as elicitation of views and perspectives from others who had caused their anger. For instance, T33 shared her attempt to hold a genuine and open conversation with all the students in the class. In the conversation, she admitted her feelings of anger and frustration caused by their lack of motivation and disciplinary

Table 2. The distribution of different types of anger expression (N = 155).

	Types of anger expression	Frequency	Percentage
Destructive	Distributive aggressive anger	76	49.0%
	Passive aggressive anger	13	8.4%
Constructive	Integrative assertive anger	27	17.4%
	Hidden and suppressed anger	39	25.2%

problems, while she also invited the students to share their thoughts and feelings. As she described in the narrative, this was a moment of “heart-to-heart” communication as she sincerely hoped to understand the students, who also sensed her genuineness and openness. As she further reflected,

It was an impulsive decision. I was so angry that I just let all of my feelings out in a calm and honest manner. I felt so much better after our communication. It not only made my anger and anxiety disappear, but also improved my relationship with students. They started to see me as a genuine and trusting person and I also develop a better understanding of their learning struggle and difficulties.

(T33)

This quote shows that anger, when expressed appropriately and constructively, can be channelled and transformed into a positive source of learning for both teachers and students in classroom contexts. Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned about their expression of integrative assertive anger when interacting with colleagues and school leaders. On the contrary, 26 teachers chose to hide and suppress their anger derived from collegial relationship and school management, with only 13 participants reporting their attempts to hide anger in front of students. Such disparity seems to suggest the teachers might intentionally shift their styles of anger expression depending on the specific situations and people involved. Their suppression of anger during their socialisation with colleagues and school leaders might speak to the implicit emotional rule in many Chinese schools, where anger together with other negative feelings are perceived as signs of incompetence and lack of professionalism. Also, it might be related to their status as novice teachers in the school who lacked confidence and self-efficacy to fully express their views and feelings. Thus, they felt constrained in their anger display which might be perceived as “inappropriate” and “out of line” in the eyes of experienced colleagues and school leaders (T55). As T23 shared,

I tried very hard to calm myself even though I thought what the school principals said was outrageous. How can he blame me for the students’ poor performance? We all know this is a challenging class with serious discipline problems and I just took over the class one month ago. However, as a new teacher, I am in no position to argue with him. I just told him I would try harder in the future. I do not want him to see me as an uncooperative and unprofessional teacher.

(T23)

The above quotes thus reveal the emotional labour experienced by new teachers when they had to suppress and hide their anger due to potential power differentials and emotional rules in school settings. However, as pointed out by previous research (e.g. Yuan and Lee 2016; Zembylas 2002), such emotional labour can take a toll on teachers in terms of their teaching efficacy and commitment, which thus required appropriate processing and regulation, as presented in the following section.

Some teachers lacked emotional competence to regulate anger

34 out of 155 teachers (21.9%) did not show evidence of anger regulation in their narratives. In other words, these teachers experienced and expressed their anger in specific situations during their first year of teaching, but they might lack emotional

Table 3. The distribution of different strategies of anger regulation (N = 121).

	Strategies of anger regulation	Frequency	Percentage
Responsive	Reappraisal	33	27.3%
	Seeking social support	28	23.1%
	Behavior strategies	14	11.6%
Preventive	Modifying situation	27	22.3%
	Attention deployment	14	11.6%
	Situation avoidance	10	8.3%

competence to interpret and regulate such feelings to improve their teaching practice and/or social relationships. For the majority of teachers, apart from their anger display as reported above, their emotional engagement did not end there but proceeded to further regulation. As shown in Table 3, a variety of preventive and responsive strategies were reported, with reappraisal (N = 33; 27.3%) being the most frequently used, followed by seeking social support (N = 28; 24.2%), modifying situation (N = 27; 22.3%), attention deployment (N = 14; 11.6%), behaviour strategies (N = 14; 11.6%), and situation avoidance (N = 10; 8.3%).

In terms of reappraisal, 33 teachers described their critical analysis of the causes of and their reactions to the feelings of anger, which led to new insights about classroom teaching and discipline management. One illustrative excerpt is presented below:

Reflecting on the emotional breakdown (i.e. crying after the class) caused by my anger brought by students' misbehaviours, I realised it was partly because I felt my authority as a teacher was challenged and I lost my face in front of students. This was actually a silly thought. They are adolescents and I am an adult. I shouldn't have projected my sense of insecurity on them. I should act more maturely and sensibly in the future. (T80)

Thus, facilitated by their self-reflections on students and themselves as new teachers (e.g. their sense of authority), the teachers transcended the specific incidents charged with anger and developed a richer understanding of how to manage and motivate students, who constituted the major source of anger in daily work.

Some teachers also tried to relive the incident in which they had encountered anger and imagine how they would cope differently in similar situations in the future. For example, T23 mentioned her reflective imagination after she had "lashed out" in the class in dealing with students' repeated language mistakes in their writing. T23 reported that after coming back from the classroom, she tried to recall what had happened with the students. She realised it was not worth her time lashing out for such a small matter. In her school, based in a rural town, students presented little interest in English and received insufficient training. Instead of criticising them, T23 considered it would be more meaningful if she had used the time to give students detailed instruction and conduct some consolidation tasks.

While the teachers engaged in "reappraisal" through active reflection and imagination, they also tried to communicate with their colleagues, friends, and family members about the feelings of anger they experienced at work. Such informal communication provided an outlet for the teachers to "blow off steam" (T3) and seek emotional comfort. As T3 reflected,

I went mad and blamed the students for their low learning motivation, which affected the ranking of the class in the final exam. Then I felt bad and became angry with myself because some of the students were actually trying very hard. All these angry feelings built up, so I shared them with another young colleague who told me that she had the same experience before ... Just having someone listen to you is important, as we cannot bottle up all these feelings, which may drive us crazy. (T3)

In other words, the teachers' negative emotions became validated through social interactions, which "reduced the heat" (T117) and created room for them to engage in further reflections. Meanwhile, they also received concrete suggestions from their significant others on how to react to and improve the situation that caused anger. A group of teachers, for instance, recounted their engagement with their mentors assigned by the schools, who not only gave guidance on their teaching skills and performance, but also offered suggestions on how to express the feelings of anger in a non-threatening and constructive manner (e.g. by openly analysing the incident with students without finger pointing).

In addition to the two responsive strategies, i.e. "reappraisal" and "seeking social support", some participants also resorted to a preventive strategy - "modifying situation" - that allowed them to take pre-emptive actions to avoid the negative situations where anger might occur. T112 provided a detailed account of her attempt at situation modification:

Some students always played with their phones in the class and they showed little interest in English. This used to make me very mad and I once confiscated some students' phones and asked them to stand at the back of the classroom. As I gradually came to know students better, I adjusted my teaching. For instance, I tried to introduce more interesting topics related to music and sports and designed more collaborative activities. Things have changed as they (students) became more motivated and attentive, and this spared me from losing my temper in the class. (T112)

As reflected in the two narratives, the teachers critically analysed the causes of their past anger-related experience and tried to come up with concrete strategies to modify situations in assigning homework and organising classroom tasks to prevent the occurrence of anger and meet students' learning needs. This suggested a combination of both "reappraisal" and "modifying situation" that worked collaboratively to help the participants regulate anger and enhance their teaching effectiveness.

Furthermore, a small number of teachers (N = 14; 11.6%) also adopted attention deployment by focusing on students' overall performance or positive sides to manage their feelings of anger. For example, according to some teachers, in challenging moments filled with anger and frustrations, they would remind themselves about the "good days" (T44) when students were cooperative or "touching moments" (T66) when students expressed their appreciation of the teachers' hard work. This could help them "resist the urge to act out" (T55) and move forward with their teaching plan. A few teachers (N = 10; 8.3%) also adopted the strategy of situation avoidance based on their past encounters with anger. As T7 mentioned,

I used to be very angry and upset about their [students'] learning motivation. I tried to talk to them in groups and individually, but they showed little sign of making improvement. I felt very tired, so I decided not to care anymore. I told myself not to think or talk about this topic with them again. They can just do whatever they like. (T7)

T7's sharing was representative of the experiences and views of all the teachers in this group, who developed a protective mechanism to elude negative emotions (including anger) associated with their work. Behind their use of such a strategy was the heavy emotional labour faced by new teachers, which could be so overwhelming that pushed them to care less about their students and teaching.

Lastly, teachers described some behaviour strategies they employed to regulate anger during and after the anger-infused incident. For instance, when facing anger in specific situations, some teachers reported that they would take a deep breath and practice self-talk to control and manage their feelings and make sensible decisions on how to proceed. For instance, T75 wrote that she always told herself to calm down because she needed to act as a professional. This kind of inner speech helped her curb the urge to yell at students, quickly cool down, and consider how to cope with the students and carry on with her teaching. Additionally, if the feelings of anger clung after the class, teachers would choose to participate in some non-teaching activities to "have a temporary timeout" (T97) and recharge themselves. Such activities included physical exercise, shopping, and watching a movie. In this way, the participants could create some emotional distance from the trigger of the anger, which could allow them to revisit the incident in a reflective manner and adopt other responsive (e.g. "reappraisal") and preventive (e.g. modifying situation) strategies.

One notable example is from T109, who gave a sarcastic comment (i.e. "I hope your drawing is as good as your exam result".) on a student's poor academic performance when the student was drawing pictures in the English class. T109 wrote that she felt bothered by the incident because she should not have made such a comment, but she was also angry at the students' lack of motivation in language learning. After the class, T109 went swimming because it could take her mind off the incident. She felt much better after exercise and then decided to ask her mentor to give her some suggestions on how to improve this situation. It is thus evident from T109's experience and reflection that the teacher adopted a behaviour strategy (i.e. swimming), followed by a responsive strategy (i.e. seeking social support), intending to regulate her anger and improve her teaching practice. In this sense, these strategies were not used in isolation; instead, they became integrated to shape the participants' anger management and regulation.

One last observation derived from the analysis was that the majority of the emotional regulation incidents were related to the participants' interaction with students, with only one exception in which one teacher (T63) described his reappraisal of the anger about school management:

I have been teaching one class for three semesters and helped them make good progress. I have also established a bond with the students. However, in the new semester, the principal suddenly transferred me to another class without any reason. I was overwhelmed with rage, but my colleague told me this happened a lot here and there was nothing I could do as a new teacher. I tried to practice positive thinking by telling myself to accept what I could not change and make changes to what I could. I also told them to focus on the new class and help them learn based on my past experience. I cannot hold on to my anger but have to move on and face the new situation. (T63)

This quote vividly describes how the teacher emerged out of the incident pervaded with anger through "reappraisal". Specifically, by practicing positive thinking, he adjusted his mindset with a renewed focus on his future teaching and students. However, among the

incidents that depicted anger pertinent to collegial relationships and school management, it seems that most of the teachers did not engage in systematic reflection and regulation. Similar to their reluctance to express assertive integrative anger in front of colleagues and school leaders, their lack of emotional regulation in this regard might also be attributed to their limited confidence and self-efficacy as novice teachers in the hierarchical systems in many Chinese schools. As a result, their main reaction was to suppress and hide their anger when interacting with more powerful stakeholders in their work contexts. Such an anger expression strategy failed to lead to continuous processing and regulation, which was found to be more prevalent in student-related situations.

Discussion and implications

The present study adds to the literature new insights into novice teachers' anger-related experiences, highlights the socio-cultural dimension of teacher anger, and suggests practical implications for supporting teachers to deal with anger more consciously and effectively.

First, this study identifies patterns of novice teachers' anger-related experiences that differ from their more experienced counterparts. In general, novice teachers experienced anger mainly caused by student-related reasons, expressed it more destructively, and presented insufficient awareness of and competence for regulating it. The participating teachers frequently mentioned student-related factors as the source of anger. This finding differed from previous studies on more experienced teachers (e.g. Burić and Frenzel 2019; Prosen and Vitulić 2019). For instance, Prosen and Vitulić (2019) examined the anger-related experiences of 143 teachers with an average of 16.29 years of teaching experience. Though the teachers also mentioned students as a source of their anger, the percentage was much smaller than that in this study.

For anger expression, the novice teachers in this study expressed their anger either destructively or constructively, but the former appeared more frequently. This finding resonates previous studies on teachers' anger expression (e.g. Cowie 2011; McPherson, Kearney, and Plax 2003). For instance, drawing on 301 students' perspectives, McPherson's, Kearney, and Plax (2003) study identified both destructive and constructive ways of anger expressions in their teachers' instructional practices. However, Cowie's (2011) study showed that teachers shifted from expressing their anger destructively to more constructively with the accumulation of teaching experiences. Regarding the strategies for anger regulation, we found that many novice teachers used only one form of strategy in their anger-infused critical incidents. It was even more striking that a considerable number of the participants did not report any explicit or deliberate endeavours to contain their anger. In general, not all novice teachers made conscious or explicit efforts to regulate their anger, perhaps due to their emotional, social, and professional immaturity (Cowie 2011). Even if many participants did demonstrate the intention or action of containing their anger, they mainly counted on a singular form of strategy, which might have weakened the effects of those regulatory strategies. The above findings imply the inadequacy, insufficiency, and under-preparedness of novice teachers' awareness of and capacity for dealing with their anger-related experiences.

Second, echoing several recent studies (e.g. Fried, Mansfield, and Dobozy 2015; Hong and Zhang 2019), the research findings of the present study highlight the socio-cultural

dimension of teacher anger. As mentioned above, this study was conducted in the Chinese context with several distinctive features that might have contributed to the reported patterns of novice teachers' anger-related experiences. As rooted in Confucianism's emphasis on education, Chinese teachers are traditionally regarded as students' "half-parents". When a teacher consciously or unconsciously performs the culturally scripted role of teacher-parent, they would easily take it personally and emotionally when their children-like students ignore their instruction, "misbehave", or are on the "wrong" track (Lee and Yin 2011). Thus, in addition to the participating teachers' lack of work experience, the Chinese view of teachers-as-half-parents might be a reason for the teachers to feel angry about their students and express their anger openly, straightforwardly, and bluntly at students, just like how many parents in China and elsewhere would do.

Furthermore, the dominant social discourses in China, as featured by standardised curricula, test-driven instruction, and fierce competition for high-quality and higher-level education, have been formulated in Chinese schools (Liu, Keeley, and Sui 2020; OECD 2016), has not only contributed to Chinese students' top-ranking performance on international testing programmes, but also cost Chinese students and their teachers more time, intellectual input, and emotional labour for the "better" performance. Thus, compared to their experienced colleagues, these young teachers in our study were working in more constrained, demanding, and complex circumstances. Such a condition might have partly accounted for the teachers' vast outbursts, blunt expression, and insufficient regulation of anger in their workplaces (Lee and Yin 2011; Tang 2018). Another influential contextual factor was China's hierarchical governance system (e.g. (OECD) 2016; Zhou 2017). This study's novice teachers mainly worked at the bottom of the hierarchical system. They worked under various and many requirements, constraints, and blames (e.g. T39), tended to be asked by their senior colleagues or leaders to do extra work for them (e.g. T16), and possessed limited power to say no or negotiate (e.g. T23). These poor conditions must be another important reason for the reported anger-related experiences of the participating teachers.

Worthy of note is that we by no means imply that the socio-cultural factors above are the sole or even primary reasons for the participating teachers' patterns of anger-related experiences. Anger is a complex emotional experience shaped by individual characteristics, interpersonal relationships, institutional conditions, and socio-cultural contexts (Burić and Frenzel 2019). However, we argue that by zooming out to focus on the broad contexts, we have identified, explained, and highlighted in this study the socio-cultural dimension of teacher anger, which can broaden and deepen our understanding of teacher anger. A socio-culturally-embedded understanding of teacher anger is crucial for better cross-cultural communication and cooperation in education when a large and growing number of teachers and students are crossing national and socio-cultural borders to seek new possibilities. Thus, we ask future studies to attend to the socio-cultural dimension of teacher anger more explicitly in conceptualising, examining, and interpreting the phenomenon of teacher anger in their respective socio-cultural settings (Kitayama and Park 2017).

Third, the research findings suggest several practical implications for supporting novice teachers to understand and cope with anger-related experiences. The findings can help teachers notice, understand, and actively address anger-related experiences

from a more holistic and situated perspective. As reported in this study, the various ways novice teachers express and regulate anger can be directly informative for teachers. In particular, they can inform teachers to reflect on their anger-related experiences, improve the strategies for expressing and regulating anger, and explore how to improve emotional competence to teach more positively and productively at work (Burić and Frenzel 2019). The research findings also provide implications for school leaders to sustain and improve novice teachers' emotional well-being in complex institutional environments. School administrators should recognise the severe emotional challenges and stringent emotional rules that many novice teachers encounter and struggle with as they socialise into the teaching profession. When interacting with novice teachers, school leaders need to show their emotional sensitivity and adopt necessary strategies such as empathetic listening to create an open and collegial work culture where new teachers feel safe and supported to share and act on their emotions for students' learning and their professional development.

An alarming finding revealed by this study was that the novice teachers were generally under-prepared in understanding, expressing, and regulating their anger-related experiences. This finding calls on teacher educators to take action to support teachers to be emotionally intelligent and resilient in teaching. The first action would be incorporating or strengthening emotion-related contents in teacher education curricula, such as the multi-dimensionality of emotion, the scientific mechanisms of how human beings' emotions emerge, transform, and decline, and the socio-cultural dimension of anger. Another much-needed action for teacher educators would be utilising pedagogical practices that enhance teachers' emotional intelligence, such as guided critical reflection, group counselling, and meditation workshops. Once teacher educators shift the emotional dimension of teachers' work and lives closer to the foci of their work, they are more likely to prepare emotionally intelligent and resilient teachers and provide continued support to maintain and enhance teachers' emotional well-being along their career paths.

Limitations and directions for future research

This study has two main limitations. First, the research findings were generated from the participating teachers' written reflections only. While the study capitalises on the unique and powerful strengths of reflective writing in unpacking emotionally intense experiences, we would have been able to validate and enrich the research findings further if we could collect additional forms of data. Thus, one promising line of inquiry for future research is to draw on multiple data sources (e.g. interview, observation of critical events) in the research process. Second, due to the subjectivity, contextuality, and complexity of teacher anger, we could not examine the effects of different anger regulation strategies on teachers and others (e.g. students and colleagues) involved in the situation. Thus, another much-needed and valuable line of inquiry would be drawing on ethnographic and action-oriented research approaches to identify emotional rules, specify effective emotion regulation strategies, and enact those strategies to sustain and improve teachers' emotional well-being in specific contexts.

The limitations have rendered the research findings not statistically generalisable to other contexts, even though generalisability is not the primary concern of this qualitative study. Readers should be cautious in interpreting the research findings, especially when

attempting to apply the research findings to other contexts directly. We hope this qualitative study can help advance the contextually-embedded approach to understanding teacher anger and inspire future research to explore ideas, strategies, and actions for supporting teachers to engage with their emotions more consciously, effectively, and developmentally.

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