

How Are You Feeling Now? Exploring EFL Teachers' Emotional Labor, Institutional Power, and Dissonance

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Abstract—This article explored preparatory year program (PYP) teachers' emotional labor and dissonance in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting and this relates to institutional power. It also addressed issues related to the conflict between their professional training, knowledge, and beliefs and the institutional requirements. The final evaluation test of the PYP was used as an example of top-down institutional policies that may conflict with English language teachers' training and/or pedagogical preferences, thereby producing emotional labor. To illustrate these concepts, the data were analyzed from interviews with 22 EFL teachers at a Saudi university regarding their emotions toward preparing the students for the final evaluation test and the requirements of the institutional power. The results were discussed in light of the following themes: (a) orienting to feeling rules, and (b) adapting to institutional policies, teachers' preferences, and other beliefs. The findings suggested that teachers exhibited high levels of deep acting and naturally-felt emotions, which could be explained by the idea that teachers internalized their roles. In addition, they showed that teachers may resist the feeling rules of their institution's policies. This article ends with pedagogical implications and recommendations for further research on emotional labor as a tool of teacher engagement. The researcher's personal reflections and emotion(al) labor were incorporated with engagement with the participants' accounts.

Index Terms—emotional labor, dissonance, institutional power, EFL teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching involves carefully handling students' and teachers' emotions, which is considered the gateway to creating positive relationships between teachers and students (Benesch, 2020). Teachers are deeply interested in fostering classroom practices that would allow students to succeed in appropriate environments. Gkonou and Miller (2021) confirmed that the goal of teachers is to develop professional relationships with students, assist students, provide necessary support to students, and encourage students during their academic journey to take a forward step and challenge academic risks. This goal is related to Berman's (2004) concept of empathetic teaching, and to Hargreaves' view (1998) of the emotional role of teachers, who described good teachers as "emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge, and joy" (p. 835).

Research has begun to explore the vital role of emotions in the workplace from different theoretical and methodological angles (Benesch, 2017). English as a Foreign Language (EFL) scholars suggest that exploring emotions within the education field is not new, and that emotions play a vital role in shaping teachers' experience in the classroom and professionalism (Prior, 2019). Therefore, analyzing the emotional duties of preparatory year program (PYP) teachers is the key approach to understanding professionalism in classroom practice (Benesch, 2020). Therefore, preparing PYP teachers to regulate their emotions by utilizing their experience is an important step for ensuring classroom professional success, especially ingraining the knowledge that their performance is evaluated by some institutional power.

The Saudi PYP provides the first and second semesters for all undergraduate programs. Some students might be required to complete one semester of intensive English language training before starting the PYP, depending on the student's score in the admission test. Students receive linguistic, mathematical, computational, physical, and interpersonal training during their first year of university to seamlessly transition students from high school to higher education, empowering them to join the ranks of ambitious and successful students (Alkharwar & Alwazzan, 2023). Since teachers are responsible for ensuring EFL PYP students pass the final evaluation test, this study is conducted for the purpose of exploring PYP teachers' emotional labor and its relation to institutional power. Additionally, it addresses issues related to the conflict between their professional training, knowledge, and beliefs and the institutional requirements. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has explored Saudi EFL PYP teachers' reflections of teaching with regard to their emotions and well-being. This article contributes to the literature on emotional labor by posing the following questions:

1. How do PYP teachers orient to feeling rules in EFL contexts?
2. How does institutional power contribute to emotional labor?

3. Is there conflict between teachers' professional training, knowledge, and beliefs and the institutional requirements?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Background of Emotional Labor

Educational research views emotions as part of a cognitive approach that depicts emotions as purely psychologically phenomena with two main categories: positive and negative (Benesch, 2020). In the case of English language teaching, positive emotions enhance the learning process, whereas negative emotions hinder the learning process. Thus, the goal of cognitive research is to manage and regulate emotions to achieve positive ones (Dewaele et al., 2018). Benesch (2020) called this process "emotional regulation, self-regulation, emotional literacy, and emotional intelligence" (p. 3). However, this cognitive framework neglects to consider the effect of power relation on emotions, resulting in cognitive bias. Zembylas (2005) introduced a discursive approach to teachers' emotions that considers the effect of "power, agency, and resistance" (p. 936), describing emotions as discursive processes that are affected by social events, conventions, and norms and formed by culture, power, and ideology. Consequently, emotions should be interpreted within the context of cultural, social, and economic states that can affect teachers' emotions and cause fatigue, exhaustion, or undesirable feelings.

B. Emotional Labor

Hochschild (1983) was the first to discuss to the role of emotional regulation as a part of a job. Hochschild defined emotional labor as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (p. 3), requiring workers to regulate emotions to influence the emotions, attitudes, and behaviors of others. He identified two ways of managing expressions and feelings: surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting occurs when employees regulate their performance without affecting their inner feelings (i.e., expression of emotions that are not actually felt), whereas deep acting happens when employees adjust their internal feelings to be consistent with required rules (Hochschild, 1983, p. 275). Along with this view of emotions, Benesch (2017, 2018a) discussed language teachers' emotion in her poststructural approach, indicating that emotions are not psychological states, but rather effects of engagement with institutional power that are shaped by feeling rules.

Feeling rules is another term introduced by Hochschild (1979) that refers to the "conventions by which people judge whether their feelings are appropriate in particular situations or not" (p. 39). Gkonou and Miller (2021) confirmed that feeling rules shape language teachers' emotions and the way these emotions manifest, clearly revealing the role of power in establishing valued emotions in school environment. This is supported by Zembylas's (2003) definition of teacher emotions, who asserted that teachers' emotion is shaped by social and political experiences. Following Hochschild (1983), several emotional labor studies have explored the concept, scope, and consequences of emotional labor in different workplaces (e.g., Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Brief & Weiss, 2002; Nias, 1996; Van Manen & Kunda, 1989; Zapf, 2002; Zembylas, 2003). Ybema and Smulders (2002) and Briët et al. (2005) presented the term suppression, which refers to a person attempt to obscure negative emotions such as sadness, anger, or frustration. Other scholars (e.g., Briët et al., 2005; Martínez-Iñigo et al., 2007; Zammuner & Galli, 2005) used the term emotional consonance, in which the emotions felt by an employee are totally compatible with what the job requires. Hochschild (1983) named this passive deep acting.

The use of the term emotional labor has extended to include the language teaching and learning areas. Many researchers employed the term when analyzing teachers' emotions (e.g., Benesch, 2017, 2018a; Cowie, 2011; Gkonou & Mercer, 2017; Gkonou & Miller, 2021; Loh & Liew, 2016; Song, 2018). Some researchers examined teachers' emotional responses to institutional power (e.g., Alshakhi & Le Ha, 2020; Benesch, 2020; Dewaele, 2018; Gillies, 2011; Miller & Gkonou, 2018; Nazari et al., 2023). For example, Benesch's (2017, 2018) research highlighted some issues related to the effect of unequal power relations on the emotional labor of teachers, especially in cases where teachers struggle with the feeling rules that contradict their own beliefs, values, and professional training. He discussed the notion of "dissonance between feeling rules and professional training and/or ethics" (p. 2). In other words, the author showed how emotion labor results from dissonance between institutional policies and teachers' professional training and other beliefs. Thus, the author encouraged people to view emotions as results of political power that are controlled by institutional policies by stating, "Emotion labor can serve to signal a problem requiring attention and an area in need of reform" (p. 5). It's a useful framework for recognizing and understanding the ways in which academia makes teachers feel constantly conflicted, compromised, and dehumanized (Benesch, 2017). In the same vein, Benesch (2018b) explored the emotional labor of teachers who experienced struggles resulting from institutional power related to plagiarism and student attendance, as well as instructional practices involving high-stakes literacy testing and responses to student writing. The author adopted a qualitative method to analyze teachers' responses, describing the resulting emotions as "useful signals . . . about whether current conditions are favorable or not" (p. 61). The author concluded that teachers may struggle with the feeling rules of their institution's policy while experiencing emotion labor.

Though some recent research explored the issue of emotional labor quantitatively, most analyzed the issue qualitatively to examine the responses of participants precisely. Benesch (2020) examined teachers' responses to institutional power, using high-stakes literacy testing as an example of institutional policies that may oppose English

language teachers' training and/or pedagogical preferences, thereby producing emotion labor. The researcher analyzed teachers' responses and suggested that it is an honor to view emotional labor as part of teacher activism instead of a psychological obstacle. In another recent study, Alshakhi and Le Ha (2020) explored the emotional labor of native-English-speaking teachers in Saudi Arabia, examining their struggles, difficulties, emotions, and attempts to communicate their emotions. As transnationally trained academics, the researchers added their own reflections on emotional labor while they communicated with the teachers. The study encouraged teachers to be more tolerant and to engage themselves with the boundaries of Saudi religion and traditions to become more understanding of their culture. Gkonou and Miller (2021) discussed the issue of emotional capital and its relation to language teachers' emotional labor, as well as the role of reflection in understanding their emotional experiences. They interviewed 25 higher education teachers working in institutions to elicit their experiences. The analysis of teachers' narratives showed that teachers believe that they demonstrated the emotions that the institution prefers. The researchers explained how emotional capital emerged through emotional labor, and confirmed that emotional capital is related to power relations. In the same vein, Nazari et al. (2023) examined teachers' emotional labor during online teaching. The teachers' narratives indicated that online teaching had a strong effect on teachers' emotions, which was reflected in their surface and deep acting.

The previous literature review discussed emotional labor from different perspectives and resources. Up to now, no study has tackled the topic of emotional labor of EFL teachers from PYP and its relation to institutional power, or explored how the final evaluation test that is conducted at the end of the PYP may conflict with English language teachers' training and/or pedagogical preferences, thereby producing emotional labor.

C. Preparatory Year Program in Saudi Arabia

The duration of the PYP is a minimum of one year, divided into two regular semesters that represent the first and second semesters of all undergraduate programs. Some students might be required to pass one semester of intensive English language program before joining the PYP program, depending on their achievement in the admission test. At the end of the PYP, students will be assessed through the final evaluation test, which is comprised of all the elements in the courses that they studied during that year. Students' score on the final test determines her/his promotion to the first university academic level, according to the following grades:

- D grade or above in the first and second level courses of English.
- D grade or above in the first and second level courses of mathematics (students who would like to join Engineering, Computing, Interior Design, or Architecture programs must earn a C grade or above in their math courses; Alkhawar & Alwazzan, 2023).

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

Data were collected from interviews with 22 PYP English language university teachers: 20 full-timers, and 2 part-timers with over 7 years of teaching experience. The researcher invited all PYP teachers from different Saudi universities to participate in a larger study examining language teachers' emotions via official email. At the beginning, 28 teachers completed the anonymous online questionnaire and addressed the demographic questions. Of these, 22 teachers participated in follow-up, semistructured interviews with the researcher. The focus of this study is to analyze the qualitative interview data provided by PYP teachers.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

	Number of participants
Full-time/part-time	Full-time: 20 Part-time: 2
Academic qualifications	MA: 18 PhD: 4
Educational training	Yes: 12 No: 10
Years of teaching experience	8 years: 3 9 years: 7 10+ years: 12

B. Interviews

In 2022, upon finishing the second semester, teachers were contacted to participate in interviews. The researcher prepared some questions while considering the theoretical background of the study to examine the teachers' emotions, perceptions, experiences, and reactions towards teaching. During the interview, she showed interest in the participants' stories and created a friendly atmosphere to allow them to speak freely and to attain the maximum benefit from the interview before analyzing the data. During a video phone call (using Google Duo), which took about 60–70-min, the participants received questions regarding emotional labor and institutional power related to the requirement to prepare the students for the final evaluation test: (1) Do your students have to pass the final evaluation test in order to qualify

for the first academic level? If so, what are your feelings toward this test? (2) Do you feel that this test has a positive or negative effect on your teaching?

Moreover, some questions that were designed to uncover teachers' feeling toward the conflict between their professional training, knowledge, and beliefs and the PYP requirements were presented: (1) Did you experience any tension between the required feeling rules of teaching and your training and/or beliefs? (2) What do you usually do to help your students pass the test? (3) What are your feelings toward low-level students? (4) What are your teaching responsibilities? (5) Do you enjoy teaching? If not, what aspects do you not enjoy? (6) Can you manage your emotions during teaching? (7) What strategies do you employ to manage your feelings?

The goal of these questions is to analyze emotional labor in regards to its relation to feeling rules and the conflict between institutional demands and pedagogical preferences. In this study, the final evaluation test conducted at the end of the PYP is used as an example of top-down institutional policies that may conflict with English language teachers' training and/or pedagogical preferences, thereby producing emotion labor. During the interviews, comprehensive notes of interviews were recorded carefully. Participants were informed that all personal information would be kept confidential. The university's Institutional Review Board approved this study (638229514694193875).

C. Data Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed to be analyzed qualitatively. The researcher read the manuscript many times to understand the deep feelings and to group the discussion into appropriate themes. The first draft was coded with relevant quotations. The references to respondents' responses were labeled as Excerpt 1, Excerpt 2, etc., to avoid any type of bias and to show that the focus is on the speech, not on the identity of the speakers. Then the researcher decided to group the data into the following themes: (a) orienting to feeling rules, and (2) adapting to institutional policies, teachers' preferences and other beliefs. The discussion of the findings is accompanied with examples from the data.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Orienting to Feeling Rules

During the interviews with the teachers, it was evident that they had some hidden emotions toward their profession and their students. All of the teachers in this study revealed that they are aware of emotional norms in their university, institutional contexts, and teaching context, particularly in regard to the need to challenge situations both physically and emotionally. PYP teachers are responsible for pushing students to be successful academically and to satisfy the institutional power. Most of them (i.e., 19 out of 22) were trying to achieve excellence and professionalism by following the feeling rules that expect them to control their emotions, be honest and polite, and tell students what is appropriate. Some of these comments are mentioned in Excerpts 1 and 2.

Excerpt 1

In my relationship with my students, I try to create distance, both physical and emotionally, from challenging situations. Respect is the more important aspect of my relation with my students. At the same time, I have to be flexible so that my students get the feeling of being comfortable, secure, and trusted. Also, I focus on being professional in my craft. Professional in teaching, presenting, modeling, and dealing with students. EFL students are struggling with learning English, so building a good relationship mixed with tender emotions is necessary to facilitate the learning process.

Excerpt 2

For me, I believe in keeping a good relationship with my students with the circle of respect. I feel sympathy for low-level students, so I double the efforts with extra time since they are in the beginning of their English journey. Students are struggling with the language, fearing the final evaluation test, and new to the university rules. Thus, the role of the teacher is to provide a feeling of security and confidence, along with receiving an optimal method of teaching. I try my best to perform the expected emotions required from the institutions.

All PYP members are required to be flexible and build a sense of comfort, security, trust, and respect. Furthermore, being professional is the most important aspect of belonging to PYP staff in an EFL context. They strive to make students feel comfortable and trustful to ensure that the teaching process becomes easier and more interesting.

From these excerpts, it was concluded that teachers exhibit lower levels of surface acting of emotional labor. PYP teachers rarely hide their real feelings or pretend to show fake emotions. Surface acting occurs when teachers regulate their performance without affecting their inner feelings (i.e., express emotions that are not actually felt), whereas deep acting happens when employees adjust their internal feelings to be consistent with required rules (Benesch, 2020). This means that they use words and body language to express their real emotions to students. Additionally, it was evident that the teachers' emotional labor for surface acting is at a lower level, but is at a higher level for deep acting. PYP teachers expressed their efforts to try to actually feel those emotions that they are required to feel. In the interview, all of the teachers expressed deep feelings of trying their best to connect successfulness, motivation, and commitment for EFL learners to help them pass the final evaluation test required for PYP, as shown in Excerpts 1 and 2. This aspect shows that PYP teachers' high levels of deep acting and naturally-felt emotions can be explained as teachers recognize these roles. The teachers' use of such behaviors is an indicator of their occupational professionalism because emotional

labor encompasses controlling real emotions and displays certain behaviors required by institutional goals (Nazari & Karimpour, 2022). The results of the analysis of the EFL teachers' interviews regarding feeling rules were in line with the results of Benesch (2020) and Gkonou and Miller (2021), who confirmed in their analysis of teachers' narratives that they believe that they performed the feeling rules that were expected from them. Additionally, most of the teachers in the researchers' studies exhibited lower levels of surface acting due to emotional labor.

B. Institutional Policies, Teachers' Preferences, and Other Beliefs

Benesch (2018a) believed that emotional labor stems from the struggle "between feeling obliged to do something and uncertainty about what to do" (p. 6). It is considered a top-down policy known as autocratic leadership in which the process is controlled by a higher institution (Alshakhi & Le Ha, 2020). In this study, a PYP institution designs an exam-driven curriculum and assessment procedure that all EFL teachers must follow. Around 10 EFL teachers (approximately 45%) found this policy contradictory to their own pedagogical knowledge and preferences to help students. The following are some recordings of teachers' experiences:

Excerpt 3

Teachers are required to follow the set curriculum and assessment prescriptions, and thus, they focus on how to perform these prescriptions exactly. I don't think I'm really enjoying such an experience with some sort of obligation.

Excerpt 4

I'm not satisfied with the way they are dictating to us what to do. Following such prescription would make us focus on what is done and what is not done. Nothing is mentioned about students' satisfaction, security, comfort, and other related emotions. Improvement is connected to satisfaction.

The quotes above reveal that teachers hardly enjoy the experience of teaching when they are required to follow the set curriculum and assessment prescriptions. The teachers confirmed that following fixed assessment rubrics provided by the top prevented them from grading the students freely. However, they were allowed to provide feedback and discussion on their grades. The teachers also stated that this type of teaching conflicted with their professional trainings.

Excerpt 5

We are taught a specific grading system and there is no way to change it, and this opposes what we were already trained to do: Share the grading system with our students. Students have the right to share their opinion with the teachers, including about the curriculum and grading system. This makes me uncomfortable.

Alshakhi and Le Ha's (2020) study supported the results of this study, with the EFL teachers expressing their dissatisfaction with the requirement to follow the set curriculum and assessment prescriptions. They commented, "Yet the teachers are required to comply with the rules and are not supposed to express their disagreement or discontent" (p. 9). This demonstrates that teachers were becoming the source of students' discomfort since they were unwilling to comply with students' preferences, creating a feeling of unappreciation for teachers because students were unable to express their frustration and discontent. Some teachers confirmed that students were unsatisfied with their grades because of the fixed rubrics, which made it difficult to answer their questions.

The teachers revealed that they were discouraged with the prescribed curriculum and assessments and felt that they were forced to use it without adding their own ideas or adjusting them according to their students' needs. One of the teachers commented, "The most effective assessment method is the one designed to fulfill students' needs. I believe that my students need more than one evaluation method to reflect their progress in the foreign language." The interviews with other teachers revealed that students in the PYP are considered beginners, suggesting that their teachers should participate in editing the curriculum to conform with the students' current needs. Otherwise, students' motivation and participation will drop significantly. In short, teachers felt that the top-down policy was unjust and unfair. Such identification overlaps with the findings of Benesch's (2020) study, who represented emotional labor as a discourse of injustice and unfairness. In his study, the teachers revealed their rejection of the methods of standardized testing and the grading rubrics, and expressed feelings of disappointment because they believe these rules should help students, not block them.

According to Benesch (2018a), emotional labor results from dissonance between institutional policies and teachers' professional training and beliefs. As mentioned earlier regarding the institutional policy, curriculum, and grading rubrics, there is another factor creating emotional labor in this study. Almost all of the teachers who participated in this study agreed that PYP students have low English language proficiency and struggle to apply the given curriculum and assessment methods, which may contradict the students' level of proficiency. The literature examined the difficulties and obstacles that Arab learners and their teachers face and discovered that EFL learners with low proficiency found it difficult to perform tasks that required them to think in English (Ahmed, 2018; Massri, 2019; Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016). As a result, those students carried negative attitudes toward the English language. Their teachers need to be trained on how to handle such problems to overcome these challenges more effectively. In this study, the teachers explained that PYP students language proficiencies and skills were generally very low, and their vocabulary repertoire was limited and basic, which required the teachers to spend more time on word building and sentence level writing exercises. One of the teachers commented:

Excerpt 6

The curriculum and the grading rubric must account for students' low proficiency level. Some tasks and assessment rubrics should consider the different individual differences so that weak students get the chance to develop their proficiency level. We are struggling and wasting time explaining the goal of the activities.

This shows that PYP teachers experience high levels of emotional exhaustion and disappointment and low levels of motivation due to students' low proficiency levels. They expressed their concerns about PYP teaching because they provide the maximum amount of help to increase proficiency level. In this particular situation, students need more time to internalize the new language elements and employ them in different authentic tasks. In this way, the language level of students is considered an important factor to be activated in curriculum design. The findings of Alshakhi and Le Ha's (2020) study supported the findings of this study, suggesting that students' low proficiency level creates emotional labor and disappointment for EFL teachers who struggle to teach weak students, especially writing skills. Other related studies (e.g., Benesch, 2020; Miller & Gkonou, 2018; Nazari & Karimpour, 2022) reported that students' proficiency level, along with institutional policies, have a strong effect on teachers' emotions, which was reflected in their surface and deep acting.

V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

This article explained PYP teachers' emotional labor and how it causes dissonance. In this context, PYP teachers are responsible for ensuring that EFL students pass the final evaluation test. This article also addresses issues related to the conflict between teachers' professional training, knowledge, and beliefs and the institutional requirements. It should be noted that this study constitutes one of the very few attempts to discuss PYP teachers' emotional labor and well-being, showing that research into this field is still in its infancy. As such, more studies are needed to allow for more in-depth understandings of emotional labor and its relation to other factors, such as emotional capital, emotional intelligence, creativity, and motivation. Other types of participants can be employed, such as elementary lower levels teachers, who are new to the profession.

Furthermore, in this study, PYP teachers' reflexive comments on their emotional labor, dissonance, and institutional power were recorded as answers to questions that were not targeting these topics per se. Although using teachers' reflections is an effective way to detect more in-depth analysis of teachers' responses, other tools and types of questions could be used to enrich the study. It is advised that researchers approach such reflections holistically and longitudinally by considering the affective dimension and exploring how it contributes toward changing teachers' practices and experiences with emotions. As a matter of fact, the topic of reflection and emotions is often neglected in educational programs and training despite their importance in preparing teachers emotionally before and during, as stated by the 22 PYP teachers in this study (Nazari et al., 2023).

The sense of obligation to address teachers as frontline soldiers in the war against students' shortcomings, low proficiency levels, and motivation may cause emotional labor that negatively affects teachers' performance. The developmental stage in acquiring basic academic English skills requires a lot of patience and positive emotions and does not only rely on teaching efforts. As a result, some important pedagogical implications are offered here. First, it is evident that the PYP teachers in this study exhibit high levels of deep acting and naturally-felt emotions, which could be explained as teachers internalizing the required feeling roles. Thus, teachers' commitment to such behaviors is an indicator of their understanding of the required behaviors and the emotional norms in their university, institutional contexts, and occupational professionalism. This is because emotional labor involves controlling emotions to exhibit specific behaviors that are desired by the higher organization or institution as part of occupational success. It should be noted that the challenges that PYP teachers face double when the higher institution does not support or allow them to share their own voices, especially regarding the design of the curriculum and assessment. Participation from both teachers and students is capable of revealing unnoticed emotions, in which negative emotions were transferred into positive ones through sharing and caring. This would positively encourage comfortable feelings of confidence, value, and effectiveness in teachers from the university.

This study also signifies the importance of PYP teachers understanding the requirements of higher education institutions, the demands and needs of EFL students, and the strategies suitable for teaching low proficiency students. By doing so, most of the burden and emotional struggle will be reduced. The PYP teachers in this study found that the rubrics and assessment tools imposed by the university were unproductive due to their neglect of teachers' and students' opinions and of students' low proficiency needs. Such restrictions in this top-down structure prevented teachers from implementing any assessment tools or rubrics that appeared practical and effective. In Alshakhi and Le Ha's (2020) study, the EFL teachers experienced similar authority from the university and commented, "Experiencing such a power shift... can affect these teachers' self-esteem and professional confidence—the kind of emotion labor that ought to result in institutional change and support" (p. 12). Thus, using this type of power over PYP teachers can reduce confidence, motivation, and self-esteem, which affects their performance negatively. Therefore, this study recommends that authorities and institutions involve teachers in designing the curriculum, including assessment tools, strategies, activities, and rubrics, to fulfill students' needs of different proficiency levels and to track their progress in the language. This is related to the activism transformation that is recommended by Benesch (2020), who explored the emotional labor of teachers who suffered from institutional power that opposed their teaching and training beliefs. The researcher

analyzed teachers' responses and suggested that it is an honor to view emotional labor as part of teacher activism rather than a psychological obstacle.

The researcher of this study concluded this article with her own reflection, as she was once a faculty member of the PYP in the university. In the comments, she showed her deep support for all PYP teachers through some critical participation related to the emotional labor that she and the participants experienced.

I noticed some similarities and differences between the emotional experiences of the 22 participants and my own experience. For instance, all of us had to follow prescribed curriculum, grading rubrics, and specific instructions regarding assessments and preparing students for the final evaluation test. I agree with teachers regarding involving the staff in designing the curriculum and tracking the students' progress, which would inevitably positively transform the productive nature of the PYP. Imposing unfamiliar instructions would make the burden heavier both emotionally and physically and would barely consider the students' needs, specifically low proficiency students. PYP students need tangible support. I noticed that most Saudi students tend to be submissive and accept grades without objection, and that providing them with emotional and academic support would help them overcome many of the psychological obstacles they face in the beginning of their learning journey. Though I was one of the earliest members to teach in the PYP, I did not have enough experience to deal with the difficulties and to share my experience with others. I strive to find my own way to deal with all of the difficulties in teaching low proficiency students and following the prescribed curriculum. At the very least, current teachers are lucky because they can benefit from others' experiences to avoid stepping on the same rake again (Tahani, reflection).

This comment showed that the researcher had treated her research participants' emotions and emotional labor with support, understanding, and ethical consideration. Such reflection represented the researcher's emotional labor and that her experience undergoing the same journey as the participants. This shed light on how this type of research could encourage other researchers to share their own experiences and use their conversations as a type of support and solidarity.

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