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A Critical Approach to Syllabus Type and Language Teacher Emotion Labour: The Case of Iranian and Turkish Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Notwithstanding the assumed role of language teaching syllabi in shaping teachers' emotional conflicts, nuanced examination of syllabus-related issues in forming teachers' emotion labour remains limited. The present study addressed this gap by exploring the emotional dissonance of 15 Iranian and 13 Turkish EFL teachers concerning their syllabi in use. Utilizing a post-structural framework and applying a thematic approach to data analysis, the research identified both similarities and differences in the origins of teachers' emotional responses to schools' syllabus policies. These policies act as "feeling rules", both generating emotional conflicts and parcelling out resilience strategies to teachers. Drawing on narrative frames and semi-structured online interviews, the study identified three primary areas of emotional struggle: Identity crises, cultural-related struggles, and agency/autonomy-oriented conflicts. However, these conflicts manifested themselves differently in the two EFL contexts. Iranian teachers reported emotional strain concerning the teacher-learner affective bond due to syllabus policies. The findings also showed that both Iranian and Turkish teachers develop professional, social, and emotional techniques to cope with these challenges and avoid burnout. It is suggested that incorporating modules on capitalization of emotion labour into policy communication and teacher development programs and calibrating syllabi to localized sociocultural demands of EFL classroom can mitigate negative impacts of prescribed syllabi and foster teacher agency and professional identity, thereby enhancing job satisfaction and teacher retention.

Keywords: emotion labour; emotional capital; institutional policy; post-structuralism; syllabus type

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Introduction

Emotion, a complex and multi-dimensional construct (Reeve, 2015), has often been overshadowed by cognition in both mainstream and SLA psychological research. However, during the peak of cognitive research, seminal works like those of MacIntyre (2002) underscored the importance of emotions within SLA, albeit focusing primarily on learners' negative emotions, such as anxiety.

In the past two decades, the reciprocal exchange of emotions between learners and teachers (Cuellar & Oxford, 2018) has redirected the academic focus (Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018), leading to an increased interest in teacher emotions and their multidimensional nature in English language teaching (ELT). Researchers have adopted various frameworks, ranging from intra-personal to inter-personal, to capture these aspects comprehensively (Chen, 2021). Psychologically-oriented perspectives have highlighted the critical role of cognition in teacher emotion and emotional exhaustion, whereas socio-cultural and socio-political perspectives have emphasized the significance of social, cultural, and political contexts in understanding this concept's complexity (e.g., Benesch, 2017).

Schultz and Zymbas (2009) observed that ignoring teacher emotions can result in burnout, driven by emotional exhaustion or “emotional labour,” reflecting power inequity and imbalance in educational settings. The term “emotional labour,” as conceptualized by Hochschild (1983) in social psychology, denotes the emotional dissonance experienced by individuals in their workplaces. For teachers, this dissonance arises from the conflict between the implicit expectations of their reactions to classroom situations and their prior training or beliefs. Benesch (2017) re-conceptualized “emotional labour” as “emotion labour” to mitigate its negative connotation and to highlight the theory that emotions are socially and discursively constructed. This post-structural-discursive perspective emphasizes cultural, political, and societal discourses in understanding emotion labour (e.g., Benesch, 2017, 2018; Loh & Lew, 2016; Nazari, De Costa, Karimpour, 2023) and prioritizes qualitative research methodologies to obtain comprehensive data and gain in-depth insights (Fineman, 2004). This approach contrasts with the structural perspective on “emotional labour”, which considers its multi-componential dimensions and employs established methodologies for measurement (e.g., Chang, 2020; Yin, et al., 2019).

In line with the post-structural-discursive approach, previous studies have explored how top-down policies in educational settings can threaten teachers' agency and identity, leading to emotional dissonance (e.g., Kocabaş-Gedik & Ortaçtepe Hart, 2020; Miller & Gkonou, 2018; Nazari & Molana, 2022). Additionally, research on the interface between sociocultural dynamics and emotion labour highlights the importance of considering social and cultural diversities alongside power-related practices in the development of teachers' emotion labour (e.g., Alshakhi & Le Ha, 2020; Loh & Liew, 2016). Furthermore, given the reciprocal effects of learners' and teachers' emotions on the learning process (Pekrun et al., 2017), educational settings need emotionally-equipped teachers to transform emotional depletion into “emotional capital”. This concept involves transforming emotions into other forms of capital, such as social and cultural capital. It also includes various strategies teachers use to regulate their emotions and achieve emotional disentanglement (Zembylas, 2007). This progressively-developing line of research underscores the effectiveness of reflection, collaboration, engagement, and religious beliefs in mitigating emotional exhaustion (e.g., Gkonou & Miller, 2021; Her & De Costa, 2022; Yang et al., 2022).

In her discussion of the ubiquity of power and top-down institutional policy in ELT and its relation to emotion labour, Benesch (2017) examined the role of institutional policy on certain “sticky objects” (Ahmed, 2004), which are themes or topics that bring about emotional conflicts. Issues such as classroom attendance, observation, assessment, textbooks, and syllabi can be considered sticky objects. Some of these sticky objects in ELT have been explored through the lens of the

post-structural-discursive approach (e.g., Benesch, 2020; Hopkyns & Gkonou, 2023). However, the relevance of language teaching syllabi has been a rather neglected area. Language teaching syllabi confer an emotional tone on such areas as reforms at the macro-level, the emotional role of the syllabus in the English as a medium of instruction (EMI) perspective, translanguaging, and teachers' autonomy in embedding playful learning in a syllabus (e.g., Kangas, et al., 2017; Nazari & Karimpour, 2023; Rahimi & Alavi, 2017; Wang, et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the nexus between the diverse dimensions of an imposed syllabus and emotion labour remains an uncharted terrain. An imposed syllabus is often designed by educational authorities or institutions that teachers are required to follow. The emotional impact of working within the constraints of such syllabi and the way it affects teachers' emotional and professional ability to perform their roles effectively is under-explored.

This study addresses the gap in literature on the association between syllabus policies and teachers' emotion labour. It explores the role of syllabus policies in the emotion labour of ELT teachers in Iran and Türkiye, comparing how workplace social, political, and cultural discourse affects their emotions. It also investigates how these teachers develop emotional capital through different types of syllabi and examines the implications of syllabus policies for policy and planning.

Literature Review

Emotion Labour and Its Theorization

The term “emotional labour” was first introduced by Arlie Hochschild (1983) to merge sociological and psychological perspectives on emotions in the service professionals. Hochschild (1983) defined emotional labour as the period “when rules about how to feel and how to express feelings are set by management, when workers have weaker rights to courtesy than customers do, and when deep and surface acting are forms of labour to be sold” (p. 89).

Research into emotional labour primarily aligns with two schools of thought: Structural and Post-structural approaches. The structural approach, which adopts an individual-level perspective on emotions, emphasizes workplace dynamics by deconstructing and quantifying aspects of emotional labour to improve productivity, job performance, and satisfaction (Wharton, 2009). In educational settings, components of emotional labour are used as indicators of both positive and negative outcomes in teachers' professional lives, including job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion or burnout (e.g., Acheson et al., 2016; Yin et al., 2019). Yet, some researchers have raised significant concerns about this approach. Wharton (2013) criticized the focus on individual workers' emotional labour, neglecting broader social contexts and workplace power dynamics. Fineman (2004) questioned the methodology, arguing that the scientific approach to measuring emotions lacks in-depth analysis. These critiques underscore the need for a more overarching approach to studying emotional labour.

The post-structural approach to emotional labour signifies a paradigm shift, overshadowing the structural perspective in assumptions, connotations, and methodology. The term “Emotional Labour” is considered an emotional dissonance that teachers feel due to the clashes of tacit expectations of how they are supposed to react to a particular situation in the class with their prior training or beliefs (Hochschild 1983). This term was re-conceptualized by Benesch (2017) as “Emotion Labour” in order to restrain the negative connotation of emotional labour and to emphasize the theory that emotions are socially and discursively constructed. This critical perspective foregrounds cultural, political, and societal discourses in observing emotion labour (e.g., Benesch, 2017, 2018; Loh & Lew, 2016; Nazari, Nejadghanbar & Hu, 2023). It places overwhelming focus on qualitative research methodologies such as interviews and auto ethnographies to grasp

broadband data and gain in-depth insights (Fineman, 2004), which is in stark contrast with the structural perspective on emotional labour that considers the multi-componential dimensions of this concept and their measurements through well-trodden methodologies (e.g., Acheson et al., 2016; Chang, 2020; Yin et al., 2019).

Capitalizing Language Teacher's Emotion Labour

Over the past decade, studies committed to the post-structural-discursive approach in investigating emotion labour (see Sadeghi & Rahmati, 2024 for a systematic review) have increasingly focused on the interplay between power, discourses of experience, emotion labour, and the ongoing construction of teacher identity and agency, involving teachers' self-perceptions of their roles in teaching and learning processes (Delogu & Zha, 2025; Kocabaş-Gedik & Ortaçtepe Hart, 2020). These studies, which also explore self-transformation and teacher investment, have gained significant momentum (e.g., Benesch, 2018; Kocabaş-Gedik & Ortaçtepe Hart, 2020; Li, 2020; Mora-Pablo, 2025; Nazari & Karimpour, 2022). In this sense, Nazari and Karimpour (2022) indicated that there was a nexus between language teachers' identity construction and their emotional conflicts, produced by clashes between institutional expectations and ideologies with teachers' previous professional training and beliefs. They pointed out that despite the various negative emotions that the 10 participating EFL teachers had experienced in the class due to the top-down system of the school, they were notably able to manipulate their emotions in three different areas in relation to shaping their identity construction. Similarly, Kocabaş-Gedik and Ortaçtepe Hart (2020) demonstrated that EFL teachers' educational background, knowledge, and skills, as the personal antecedents, influenced their emotions and directly impacted their identity formation. Adopting an integrated framework in focusing not only on the social contexts and discourses of power but also on ecological variables in shaping identity, Li (2020) highlighted how teachers' inner lives, including their beliefs and emotions contributed substantially to teachers' identities.

The association between sociocultural dynamics and the emotion labour of English language teachers illustrates how social and cultural differences, along with top-down policies and workplace practices, can impose an emotional burden on teachers (e.g., Alshakhi & Le Ha, 2020; Delogu & Zha, 2025; Keles, 2025; Loh & Liew, 2016). Alshakhi and Le Ha (2020) highlighted the emotional challenges teachers face due to sociocultural, socio-political, and religious factors in teaching English as a foreign language. Benesch (2018) discussed how 13 American English language teachers resisted against institutional feeling rules in response to students' plagiarism by using their emotions as agency. She argued that the emotional clashes should not be considered only as a feature of the human mind to be suppressed. Instead, they can be seen as a social instrument for teaching reform and collective movements.

Zembylas (2007) introduced the concept of “emotional capital” to explore how experienced teachers can effectively manage their negative emotions to transform these emotions into sociocultural capital in educational settings. This notion has provided not only a deep perception of circulating, accruing, and transforming emotions into other forms of capital such as social and cultural, but it has also contributed significantly to the recognition of ways in which teachers regulate their emotional practices (Zembylas, 2007). Within this framework, capital denotes valuable resources or assets that can be utilized to gain advantages, paralleling the concept of financial capital in economic theory. Emotional capital, in particular, pertains to the non-material emotional capabilities and resources that individuals acquire through their lived experiences and interpersonal engagements (Gkonou & Miller, 2021).

For educators in the field of language teaching, this concept encompasses the capacity to regulate personal emotions, demonstrate empathy towards learners, and foster constructive relationships

within the teaching environment. Such emotional competencies serve as critical assets, as they contribute to increased teaching efficacy, promote harmonious and productive classroom interactions, and support the continuous development of teachers on both professional and personal levels.

Relatedly, researchers have noted the role of dynamic ELT settings in enhancing teachers' emotional capital and the role of multi-layered contexts in teachers' resilience-building process (Beltman, 2020; Zhu & Li, 2023). Moreover, the growing interest in emotional capital, developed through emotion labour, has revealed the role of emotional regulation practices such as reflection, collaboration, engagement, and even religious beliefs in reconfiguring emotional experiences (e.g., Gkonou & Miller, 2021; Her & De Costa, 2022; Richards, 2022).

Syllabus Type as an Antecedent of Emotion Labour

To explore the antecedents of emotion labour in language classes, Benesch (2020) drew upon the concept of Sticky Objects introduced by Ahmed (2004, 2010), integrating it into her analysis. These are themes or topics which bring about emotional conflicts for teachers in an EFL classroom (Benesch, 2017). Benesch (2020) and Nazari and Molana (2022) have underscored the negative emotional effects of teaching to the test and one-size-fits-all assessment policy, imposed by policy-makers on teachers. Within the same framework, Hopkyns and Gkonou (2023) studied emotional conflicts in using English to teach other subjects in the UAE, supporting Benesch's (2020) findings on emotional pressure in ELT. The findings indicated that English teachers experience emotion labour in areas like feedback, plagiarism, low student attendance, and job security.

Despite the growing body of research on emotion labour related to sticky objects in ELT, there is a paucity of remarkable research on the relevance of syllabus type in explaining the origins of emotion labour. Research so far indicates that a decontextualized, obligatory, or outdated syllabus can lead to emotion labour (Wang, et al., 2022). However, the subtleties pertaining to the functioning of this system-focused issue remain underexplored. ELT syllabus design has witnessed several shifts over the past few decades, varying from a structural syllabus to a content-based syllabus (Nunan, 1988). Curriculum/syllabus reforms and their impact on teachers' emotions have been explored in various settings (Kangas et al., 2017; Rahimi & Alavi, 2017).

Despite syllabi modernization, psychological ramifications on teachers have been often given less weight in ELT syllabus design. Although the efficiency of teachers' roles in syllabus development has been recognized (Shawar, 2017), teachers are allowed little agency in choosing and practicing their favourite type of syllabus which leads to cognitive and emotional strain on teachers' part (Borg, 2019). Top-down curriculum may cause negative emotions due to the mismatch between authorities' views and the reality (Rahimi & Alavi, 2017). Nazari and Karimpour (2023), focusing on the translanguaging-related emotional dissonance among Iranian English teachers, underscored the gap in emotion labour literature regarding teachers' language choice as a part of syllabus design, institutional policy, and emotional conflicts. They emphasized the need for translanguaging awareness courses in teacher training to reduce emotional struggles with institutional expectations. Similarly, teachers' autonomy in embedding playful activities in a syllabus was attended to by Kangas et al. (2017). They argued that students' satisfaction was inextricably connected to teachers' pedagogical and emotional engagement in designing enjoyable activities in a syllabus.

Considering the gap in the literature, the main purpose of the present study was to explore syllabus-oriented emotion labour and the possibility of its conversion to emotional capital for pedagogical efficiency. The findings are expected to help develop a better understanding of how institutional syllabus policy contributes to emotional dissonance in teaching. Accordingly, the following questions are addressed in this study:

1. How does the type of language teaching syllabus affect the emotion labour of teachers in Iranian and Turkish EFL contexts?
2. What techniques are adopted by Iranian and Turkish EFL teachers for transforming emotion labour to emotional capital?

Method

The Context of the Study

The two research contexts—a distinguished language teaching institute in Iran and a private school in Türkiye—were deliberately chosen for their accessibility and their alignment with the study's objective of examining the impact of syllabi on teachers' emotional conflicts and coping mechanisms.

Two types of course books are used in Iranian EFL programs: Domestically-designed materials and the textbooks adapted to local cultural norms. Prior to recruitment, Iranian language schools establish Teacher Training Courses (TTCs) to familiarize prospective educators with the pedagogical and psychological foundations of the curriculum. These programs emphasize the development of creativity, supportiveness, agency, and cultural awareness, enabling teachers to cultivate dynamic, capable, and innovative learners who can effectively navigate authentic language use in diverse cultural and social contexts. Additionally, the institute conducts biannual in-service training sessions to reinforce adherence to the top-down Aural-Oral syllabus, ensuring consistency in instructional methods across all branches. To maintain compliance with institutional policies, designated evaluators observe teachers each term, assessing their alignment with syllabus directives. Despite these pre-service training initiatives and ongoing in-service requirements, many educators encounter discrepancies between their initial pedagogical instruction and their practical classroom experiences. Moreover, assessments are 70% formative and 30% summative. Furthermore, teachers are observed during a term by observers in order to fulfil school policy about syllabus.

The Turkish school uses original student books and workbooks. The school provides in-service and pre-service sessions to familiarize teachers with the latest editions of the selected books and teaching methods. A communicative syllabus, developed collaboratively by teachers and a head coordinator, is implemented. A master plan outlines the material to be covered each semester, with summative assessment playing a pivotal role.

Participants

Based on availability and convenience sampling, 15 Iranian and 13 Turkish EFL teachers participated in this study. The Iranian school was chosen because of the second researcher's active teaching role at the institute, while the Turkish school was selected through virtual negotiations with multiple school managers. Teachers' demographic data are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Information

Variable	Age Group		Gender			Teaching Experience (Year)					Degree		
	K	YA	A	M	F	-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	+21	PhD	MA	BA
No. (Iran)	3	7	5	1	14	0	3	8	4	0	3	10	2
No. (Türkiye)	3	5	5	4	9	3	5	2	1	2	0	7	6

Students' Age Groups: K=Kids, YA: Young Adults, A: Adults

Participants were assured of their rights to privacy and confidentiality of their information. To achieve “information-rich data” (Patton, 2002), English teachers of varying English proficiency were selected, teaching both young adults and adults. It was also important to include experienced teachers to make the ground for an in-depth exploration of the transition from emotion labour to emotional capital.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

A qualitative case-study approach was employed due to its sensitivity to individual experiences (Dörnyei, 2007). Two instruments were adopted to collect data:

1. **Narrative Frame:** A written narrative template including incomplete sentences and spaces to be filled in by the participating teachers was prepared (Appendix). This frame was intended to engage teachers indirectly in contemplating about the positive and negative emotions they experienced in their classes, specifically in relation to syllabus issues. The frame elicited teachers’ understanding and reasoning concerning the syllabus features as the origin of emotional experiences. Furthermore, it focused on teachers’ classroom practice presumed to enhance their emotional capacity in confronting the challenges and discrepancies resulting from syllabus restrictions despite their beliefs. The frame was administered via Google Forms and were collected and analysed before conducting semi-structured interviews.

2. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** After reviewing the initial data from the narrative frame, follow-up interviews were conducted online. Lasting at least 30 minutes, the interviews were conducted via WhatsApp with Iranian teachers and Google Meet with Turkish teachers. The interviews were held in English for both groups. All sessions were recorded for analysis.

The interview questions targeted the nuances of teachers’ emotions in relation to their knowledge and experience of language teaching syllabi. The questions were contextualized to ensure deeper engagement (see Supplementary Material). However, the gist of the interview questions can be summarized as such:

- Talk about your role in designing a syllabus for your class? Are you happy with it? How does this role emotionally affect you? Why?
- To what extent do you go beyond the limitations of the school policy related to syllabus? Why do you do this? How does it emotionally affect you?
- If a syllabus contradicts your training knowledge, how does it emotionally affect you? And what do you do to mitigate these feelings?
- Does the syllabus socio-culturally affect you? And how does it emotionally influence you? Why?
- Talk about your positive and negative emotional experiences in applying syllabus in relation to teaching methodology, textbook selection, using languages other than English, error correction, students’ attendance, observation and assessment of learners
- How do you motivate your learners in spite of the fact that your beliefs about syllabus are not congruent with the syllabus you are applying in your class?
- What are your recommendations to novice teachers for controlling or managing their negative emotions related to syllabus?

- Talk about the strategies you adopt to change your negative emotions to positive emotions in dealing with syllabus restrictions?
- Are you able to change any parts of the syllabus that you believe is not effective? How do you feel about it?

The items in both frames and interviews were crafted following a review of relevant literature. The narrative frames and interview questions were evaluated for linguistic accuracy and content validity by 2 experienced researchers in qualitative research and psycholinguistics. The use of these two instruments was meant to achieve data triangulation.

Data Analysis

The data analysis employed a thematic approach with an inductive perspective to guide the development of codes. Initially, open coding was conducted, during which data from the narrative frames were reviewed to identify recurring patterns and emergent ideas. In this phase, discrete segments of the data were labelled with preliminary codes that captured their essence. For instance, references to collaborative reflection by teachers were initially identified as part of broader emotional coping mechanisms.

Following this, axial coding was undertaken to refine and interconnect the initial codes, enabling the identification of relationships and underlying themes relevant to the study's focus on emotion labour rooted in syllabus type and the emotional capital developed by teachers. Selective coding was subsequently employed to synthesize the refined codes into cohesive categories aligned with the research objectives. For example, codes such as 'emotional resilience' and 'positive emotional self-awareness' were organized into broader categories representing emotional capital.

To ensure methodological rigor and validity, the researchers adhered to established measures of trustworthiness, including credibility, dependability, and transferability. Credibility was reinforced through peer debriefing and iterative data review, while dependability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail of the coding process. Transferability was facilitated through rich, contextual descriptions of the findings. The transcribed interviews and narrative frames were systematically analysed and compared, with constant comparison techniques applied to identify similarities and differences across the two educational contexts

Findings

The results were categorized into emotional struggles and management techniques, showing both similarities and differences for the Iranian and Turkish contexts. Challenges and opportunities were identified across culture, context, and syllabus policies. Teachers in both settings employed various strategies to manage emotional clashes and leveraged emotions to address their own and their learners' needs. To avoid confusion, EFL teachers in Iranian and Turkish contexts are referred to as numbered ITs and TTs, respectively.

Syllabus Type and Emotion Labour

The first research question concerned the effect of syllabus policies on EFL teachers' emotion labour. The results indicated that the emotional dissonance experienced by the participating teachers originated mainly from syllabus requirements constraining their identity development, jeopardizing their creativity and autonomy, and complicating the localization of the syllabus.

Emotion Labour in the Backwash of Weak Teacher Identity Construction

The principal challenge for teachers in both contexts regarding the syllabus was the emotional toll caused by strict policies and mismatches between their training and teaching experiences. Turkish teachers grappled with frustrations stemming from imposed syllabus policies, which constrained their creativity and hindered effective classroom management. Similarly, Iranian teachers experienced emotional distress due to conflicts between pre-service training and in-service syllabus requirements.

Teachers in the Turkish context highlighted the emotional and practical challenges they faced while adhering to strict guidelines. For instance, TT2 reported feeling emotionally drained, struggling to engage unresponsive students under rigid rules. TT11 criticized the syllabus's dense workload, saying, "*We have a heavy syllabus to follow, so I feel insufficient*". TT12 described the emotional impact of limited control over assessments, which undermined her confidence in teaching. TT10 lamented the observation sessions, noting, "*Someone intrudes my personal space and I feel vulnerable*" suggesting that observation policies should be improved to reduce emotional distress.

In the Iranian context, teachers faced similar emotional challenges due to rigid syllabus policies. Pre-service training programs (ITCs) in Iran emphasize creative identity, supportiveness, and cultural awareness in teaching. However, once employed, many teachers struggle to align their training with the realities of strict syllabus policies. Their desire to influence syllabus design leads to emotional identity conflicts. For example, one of the Iranian teachers (IT10) stated: "*I have been trained to be creative, but syllabus rules limit imagination, leading to boredom from repetition*". IT3 noted that observation sessions, which schools conduct to monitor the syllabus implementation in teachers' real practice, created a negative atmosphere by favouring more compliant teachers. IT1 felt robotic due to the syllabus' intolerance to modifications: "*We need to bear the paradox that is involved in simultaneously respecting the walls that keep us safe and allowing in enough of what is new and changing*" (IT1).

Teachers also criticized the lack of flexibility in addressing students' individual differences, which conflicts with the supportive approach advocated in their training. IT1 and IT8 complained about the uniform teaching methods imposed by the syllabus, saying, "*The syllabus asks me to teach the material in the same way*" and "*Our syllabus is repeated even though students have different mindsets*". These frustrations highlight the emotion labour involved in reconciling the real practice of ELT with the principles they were taught.

The Effect of Syllabus Policies on Teacher Agency and Autonomy

Constrained teacher agency is another vestige of shaping emotional navigation for teachers inside the class (Her & De Costa, 2022; Nazari & Molana, 2022). Approximately two-thirds of the Iranian teachers (9 of 15) felt that the syllabus policy reduced their agency, likening themselves to "robots". Iranian teachers emphasized the significance of agency, viewing assessment and error correction as opportunities to assert control and foster positivity in their teaching. For instance, IT10 expressed pride in independently devising an effective error correction strategy, involving self-correction from students by providing subtle prompts. This approach not only improved students' learning but also strengthened IT10's sense of autonomy and satisfaction in her teaching practice. Teachers also expressed positive feelings about formative assessment, showing their preference for classroom authority to exert their power:

I love the assessment of learners because I've had the chance to monitor their performance and measure their level of knowledge throughout the term closely, so I have always kept track of all the events in class and felt satisfied with the result. (IT2)

In Iranian context, the syllabus policy led to teachers' negative emotions and jeopardized the teacher-learner bond. Most Iranian teachers (12 of 15) felt the syllabus led to negative emotions, boredom, communication limits, and hindered innovation, negatively affecting their bond with learners. For example, IT6 attributed the negative rapport with learners to lack of innovation in syllabus and the jam-packed nature of the syllabus which circumscribed the freedom in teaching. IT5 acknowledged IT6 about time constraints and associated negative feelings with the packed syllabus: "*The syllabus negatively affects my rapport with learners due to its rigidity, leaving me feeling tired and frustrated*" (IT6). IT15 and IT7 felt exhausted and bored due to their inability to introduce learners' preferred topics in class.

Conversely, in the Turkish context, teachers' agency and autonomy served as a double-edged sword due to top-down syllabus policies and implicit feeling rules. Despite being allowed to make some modifications to the syllabus and exercising agency and autonomy in the selection of course books, Turkish teachers experienced emotional conflicts. Textbook selection involves collaboration between teachers and authorities, with decisions largely driven by financial intentions. This system created mixed feelings in teachers; they appreciated the agency but were burdened by the restrictions it imposes. For example, TT13 complained about his inability to omit parts due to the cost, leading to syllabus adjustments and further time constraints.

TT5 noted students' reluctance to attend class, attributing it to the book's topics and viewing it as a negative classroom experience: "*One negative experience is dealing with students' topic prejudice affecting attendance*". TT2 acknowledged TT5 by asserting that "*The books are boring and not educative*", and displayed her feeling with such words as "*stressed and inadequate*". TT8 had a negative experience with book selection, as they're designed for a target EFL group and are incomprehensible for foreign language students. TT1 had principal problems with the selection of a book in advance and he expressed his negative feelings toward this choice.

Therefore, textbook selection in this school, influenced by financial incentives from publishers, was a mixed experience for teachers. While some teachers appreciated agency, others faced emotion labour due to such factors as the mismatch between learner proficiency and course book level, dull topics leading to student absenteeism, and content being unsuitable for non-native learners, which echoes the findings by Alshakhi and Le Ha (2020), and Hopkyns and Gkonou (2023).

Additionally, Turkish teachers experienced emotional conflicts when trying to modify the syllabus to suit learners' needs, as this kind of granted autonomy imbues negative effects. For instance, TT10 believed that teachers had to synchronize their teaching and the autonomy to alter some parts of the syllabus; therefore, such a belief hammered out a sense of guiltiness with her. TT12 referred to the psychological dimensions of autonomy with these words: "*As I do some changes, I feel more responsible for what I have done because despite our best efforts, things sometimes might not turn out to be the way we want them to*".

The Impact of Syllabus Policies on Cultural Norms and Localization of the Syllabus

Socioculturally rooted emotion labour is another aspect that most teachers bear inside the class due to the top-down ideological policy behind the syllabus. Contrary to Iran, where the coursebooks are modified or published inside the country to adjust the contents of the books to the social, cultural, and ideological norms of an Islamic governance, the course books in the Turkish context are typically original. Teachers' arguments in both contexts reveal that books and their contents are the sources of socioculturally rooted emotion labour in various respects.

Most participants in the Iranian context (12 of 15) felt that adapting the syllabus to local contexts led to emotional exhaustion. IT4 and IT11 disagreed with the modifications made to textbooks to

align with the educational system's ideology. The statements “*I believe that the culture of different countries should be presented completely without any censorship.*” or “*Language learning should expose learners to the realities of the language's society and culture, not just our own.*” reflect the discordant beliefs on the part of teachers. IT5 lamented over the challenges of conveying concepts in the target language when it is dissociated from its culture, and the negative emotional impacts of such a separation.

Turkish teachers experienced emotion labour due to conflicts between learners and their families' beliefs and the ideological implications of the books. Participants indicated that EFL textbooks included controversial topics that conflict with Turkish cultural and religious beliefs, generating ideological conflicts in the classroom. As a result, they either avoided these topics or provided additional information to students and their families to address concerns about the educational and ideological attachments. Consequently, these teachers not only faced emotional clashes but, in some cases, struggled with their beliefs about these topics. For example, TT13 attempted to convince conservative parents that their kids needed to learn words like “*pork*” and “*wine*” from the books. The expression that “*To deal with them, I should know them and show myself as one of them.*” illuminates the characteristic struggles this teacher bore in pretending that his credence accorded with those families' beliefs.

Capitalizing Emotions

The second research question in this study enquired about the strategies teachers used in order to capitalize emotion labour. Despite the syllabus policy negatively affecting teachers' emotion labour, participants in both contexts reported using various personal and contextual strategies to manage their emotional conflicts with the syllabus. Teachers reported three main strategies to cope with the emotional conflicts from the top-down syllabus, i.e., professional, emotional, and social-related strategies in line with Beltman (2020).

Professional Strategies

Teachers in the Iranian context acknowledged reflecting on students' needs and adjusting the syllabus accordingly as a profession-related technique. IT1, IT9, and IT15 believed that showing agency in the classroom by responding to learners' needs and building positive relationships (consistent with Benesch's [2020] findings on utilizing agency to manage emotion labour) can lead to positive emotions.

IT10 reported having coped with the strictness of the syllabus by focusing on her passion for her job and maintaining high motivation. IT4 addressed the negative emotions by acknowledging the expertise of those who designed the syllabus: “*Have a positive feeling toward the syllabus and believe that they are designed by some experts who are more experienced than us. It's our artistic and creative performance that will make the syllabus successful.*”

Surprisingly, most Turkish teachers (8 of 13) used professional strategies to manage their emotions, giving more importance to the profession-related techniques. For example, TT11 discussed her negative feelings about the application of assessment inside the class by expressing “*I don't take part in the preparing process and I feel passive*”. However, she reduced her negative emotions by aligning teaching materials with assessments. TT6 addressed the controversial issues proactively to decline her emotional conflicts inside the class: “*Promoting multilingualism and cultural exchange is beneficial but needs to be balanced by strategies like language support, cross-cultural understanding, and open communication for an inclusive educational experience.*” (TT6)

Social Strategies

Teachers emphasized the importance of social connections in reducing negative emotions. For example, IT5, IT11, and IT12 realized that building good relationships with colleagues, collaborating on syllabus difficulties, and seeking help fostered positivity toward the syllabus. IT12 also noted that consultation and teamwork helped her overcome emotional challenges associated with the syllabus.

Some Turkish teachers utilized social strategies to alleviate their negative emotions about the syllabus. IT13 explained how he trusted his relationship with his learners and discussed their needs and syllabus pros and cons to reduce emotional struggles. IT10 enhanced positive feelings through supervisor consultation and reflected on emotions by maintaining a diary of classroom struggles.

Emotional Strategies

Building rapport with students was a key emotional strategy. IT6 shared: *“I felt stressed and nervous as a novice teacher, but have since adapted myself to the situation. Despite having no direct influence on the syllabus, I’ve fostered positive feelings through my relationships with students.”* IT12 reflected on negative feelings to transform them into positive ones, while IT4 exercised patience and suppressed negative emotions to remain effective in teaching: *“It is the teacher’s great ingenuity that minimizes the negative perspectives of every syllabus and adapts the available material in the process of teaching.”* IT13 highlighted that finding positive aspects in the syllabus, like bonding with learners, helped manage its negative dimensions emotionally. Turkish teachers did not report any emotional strategies.

Discussion

The present study focused on teachers’ emotional struggles with EFL syllabi in Iranian and Turkish contexts as well as their strategies to turn negative emotions into positive ones. In Iranian context, emotional challenges stemmed from the identity mismatch, ignored agency, emotional vulnerability due to teachers’ affective bond with their learners, and conflicts from syllabus localization. Meanwhile, in Turkish context, teachers faced emotional pressures due to weak identity construction as a result of institutional policy, book selection, autonomy in syllabus modification, and sociocultural norms. Iranian teachers faced challenges due to a mismatch between their trained and actual classroom identities, while Turkish teachers dealt with an identity undermined by the institutional policies. In both contexts, emotional conflicts arise from identity construction dictated by institutional policies. The analysis of teachers’ socioculturally rooted emotion labour implies that both Iranian and Turkish EFL communities suffer from undecided macro policies regarding the cultural content of EFL programs. While in Iranian context the emotion labour results from contradictions in policy making, in Turkish EFL context, the labour mainly rises from the stifling expectations of the clients. Despite these challenges, teachers employed professional, social, and emotional resilience strategies to manage their feelings and avoid burnout. They had developed ways to capitalize on emotions (Gkonou & Miller, 2021).

The emotional strain caused by syllabus policies in both EFL contexts is evident. The heavy workload, absence of creativity, and strict guidelines contribute to emotional exhaustion among teachers, affecting their ability to teach effectively. The findings underscore the interplay between syllabus demands and teachers’ emotional responses, aligning with the claims made by Ellis (2004), Kocabaş-Gedik and Ortaçtepe Hart (2020), Li (2020), Nazari and Karimpour (2022), and Rostami et al., (2020).

Analysis of the data indicated that teachers' autonomy, linked to their emotions (Dewaele & Wu, 2021), can indeed lead to emotional difficulties. This finding is in contrast with previous studies (e.g., Kangas et al., 2017; Nazari, De costa, & Karimpour, 2023) that have considered lack of teachers' autonomy as contributing to teachers' emotion labour. Despite having the freedom to modify the syllabus, teachers in Turkish private schools faced emotional challenges. The presence of implicit rules regarding syllabus synchronization and student success obligations suggests a conflict between school policies and teacher autonomy, causing emotional dissonance.

Generally, Iranian teachers believed that language and culture were linked together (Kramersch, 1998). Therefore, censorship, which causes conflict between teachers' beliefs and professional duties, was a significant source of emotion labour. This aligns with Yip et al.'s (2022) warning that the instruction of ideological and political thoughts in English courses can lead to emotional distress for teachers.

Teachers in Iran and Türkiye, influenced by their respective ideological and secular socio-political contexts, encountered distinct forms of emotion labour shaped by differing cultural and social expectations. Turkish teachers experienced emotional exhaustion as they navigated the challenge of addressing controversial topics embedded in course materials, which often conflicted with local cultural and religious values. In contrast, Iranian teachers faced emotional strain due to the explicit expectation to align curriculum materials with actual classroom procedures, creating a dissonance between their professional knowledge and classroom practices. Furthermore, Iranian teachers highlighted censorship as a source of ethical tension, requiring them to modify or misrepresent content to mitigate sensitivities while fulfilling educational objectives. These findings resonate with Alshakhi and Le Ha's (2020) observations on sociocultural emotional conflicts, offering unique insights into the specific challenges faced by educators in Iran and Türkiye.

In both contexts, teachers prioritized career-oriented strategies to address emotional challenges. Iranian teachers demonstrated classroom agency by responding to learners' needs and fostering positive relationships, aligning with Benesch's (2020) findings on the role of agency in managing emotion labour. On the other hand, Turkish teachers adopted translanguaging as a means of emotional regulation. Interestingly, their use of a language other than English to mitigate negative emotions contrasts with Nazari and Karimpour's (2023) assertion about the emotional strain translanguaging imposes on teachers. Instead, the Turkish teachers in this study employed translanguaging as a deliberate strategy to counteract the emotional pressures imposed by the syllabus.

Additionally, teachers in both contexts valued collective wisdom and colleague support as being key to reducing emotional tensions from the syllabus, aligning with Gkonou and Miller's (2021) findings. Furthermore, teachers in the Iranian context employed emotional strategies by focusing on the positive aspects of their work, which helped them manage their emotions. This approach not only reduces the impact of emotion labour but also increases resilience, supporting Ghanizadeh and Royaei's (2015) findings on the benefits of genuine emotional engagement.

Conclusion

This research explored the procedures through which syllabus policies can affect EFL teachers' emotion labour. The analysis of participating Iranian and Turkish teachers' lived experiences indicated that syllabus restrictions and guidelines can profoundly impact teachers' identity, agency, autonomy and cultural beliefs leading to emotion labour in different ways. EFL teachers' development of a stabilized moral identity to support a positive rapport with their learners (Amini et al., 2020) relies on the proper management of teachers' emotion labour in the classroom.

Emotional challenges stem from the neglect or partial granting of agency with respect to material selection, student-teacher rapport, cultural norms and localization of the syllabus. The results underscore the context-specific nature of syllabus-related emotion labour.

The findings of this study offer significant pedagogical implications for stakeholders such as policymakers, school administrators, and teacher educators. Specifically, the results underscore the importance of critically evaluating how syllabus types—such as prescriptive, competency-based, or open curricula—impact teachers' emotion labour distinctively. For instance, prescriptive syllabi often limit teachers' autonomy in material selection and classroom decisions, which can exacerbate emotional tensions. Similarly, competency-based syllabi may place undue emphasis on measurable outcomes, neglecting the cultural and emotional dimensions of teaching.

To address these challenges, policymakers should consider bridging the gap between teacher training ideals and classroom realities by designing syllabi that incorporate teacher input and localized cultural content. Tailoring syllabi to the sociocultural context of EFL classrooms could reduce emotional challenges, enhance teachers' agency, and foster a strong professional identity. Furthermore, incorporating modules on the capitalization of emotion labour into teacher development programs can equip educators with strategies to navigate the emotional demands of various syllabus types

This qualitative study did not consider the diversity of syllabus in relation to established methodological procedures. More quantitative research is needed to examine the varying effects of different syllabus types on EFL teachers' emotion labour. To gain comprehensive insights, comparative analyses across various educational contexts beyond Iran and Türkiye are necessary to understand the impact of different syllabi types on teachers' emotions. Stakeholders in L2 teaching should be aware that a language teaching program will hardly function effectively if teachers' emotion labour is not appreciated.

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Appendix: Narrative Frame

I am a teacher, so the most important part of my duty is to be ready for teaching. However, what I should teach and how I should teach the materials are two important questions that I have to answer. Preparing syllabus is a difficult task, but when I think about my role in this preparation, I see my role as a in my institution because..... I (like/don't like) this role because This role emotionally (affects/ doesn't affect) me because This type of syllabus design which (is imposed/is not imposed) on me affects (positively/negatively) my rapport with my learners becauseTherefore, I feel ... I have tried (to violate/ not to violate) some of these rules in syllabus because but those sessions in which I (have violated/ have not violate) these rules, I have felt because I have been trained in TTC programs to be creative, (but/and) the syllabus that I follow inside the class (kills/helps) my creativity because....., so I feel One of my positive experiences about syllabus has been related to (methodology/ the selection of books/ using other languages than English/ error correction/ students' attendance/ observation/ assessing learners) because , so I have felt However, one of my negative experiences has been related to (methodology/ the selection of books/ using other languages than English/ error correction/ students' attendance/ observation/ assessing learners) because.....and I have felt..... I have tried to promote my positive feelings through and I have tried (to change/ not to change) some parts of the syllabus because I (have this permission/ don't have this permission), but as I do these changes I have feltbecause One of the reasons of these (positive/ negative) feelings about changing has been related to the observation which have been done (how often)and it has emotionally affected me because By the way, I (like/don't like) the syllabus that I have to follow inside the class because it (considers/ doesn't consider) social and cultural issues inside the class and (advertises/ doesn't advertise) western social and cultural norms, so I feel because when I have to follow this syllabus. However, if I were in novice teachers' shoes, I would to (control/ manage) my negative feelings related to syllabus because

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