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Researching Elementary-School Teachers' Anger, Frustration and Well-Being. An Exploratory Sequential Mixed Method Study

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Abstract

This study examines how elementary school teachers experience anger, frustration, and well-being differ across relational contexts, using an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. Qualitative interviews and quantitative analyses reveal that teachers' emotions are not isolated psychological states but arise through events embedded in their relationships with school administration, colleagues, students, and parents. This research extends previous studies – often grounded solely in psychological theories and relying on either quantitative or qualitative data – by applying Kemper's micro-sociological theory to uncover the causal complexity underlying emotion activation. Both qualitative and quantitative findings indicate that anger and frustration are generated through specific events occurring in teachers' relationships with school administration (e.g., anti-institutional behavior) and with parents (e.g., socialization patterns conflicting with school culture). These findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving teacher wellbeing should target the relational and institutional conditions, particularly the governance practices of school administration and the school-family interface, within which negative emotional states are structurally generated.

Keywords:

Sequential Exploratory Mixed-Method Study, Teachers' Emotions, Anger, Frustration, Wellbeing

Introduction

The emotional state of teachers is a critical factor that affects not only the quality of teaching practice but also their overall professional trajectory and students' learning experience (Chang, 2009). According to the literature, teachers experience a range of emotions – both positive and negative – which are influenced by the school environment, interpersonal relationships, administrative support, and available resources (Collie et al., 2015; Ritchie et al., 2023). Chen (2016) finds that positive emotions such as joy and gratitude are associated with positive feedback and collaboration, whereas negative emotions such as anger and frustration arise in contexts of pressure

and institutional deficiency. Particular importance is placed on the emotional experiences of novice teachers, who, with less than five years of experience, often face what is known as the "transition shock" – a clash between the theoretical expectations from their initial training and the realities of everyday school life (Al-Naimi et al., 2020). This period is marked by intense emotions, ambivalence, and "survival or exit" dilemmas, often resulting in high rates of professional attrition. In contrast, it has been observed that, over time, teachers' emotions are shaped by a sense of disenchantment, as their energy gradually diminishes and becomes redirected elsewhere when they enter what Huberman calls "serenity", "complaint" or "disengagement" phase of their professional life course. If this is true, then one could hypothesize that the emotions of beginners (those with less than 8 eight years of teaching experience) and experienced teachers (those with more than 17 years of teaching experience) will be different as the years pass and teachers accumulate professional experience.

In this study, we compare beginners and experienced teachers in primary schools, in order to explore whether the emotions they experience in school contexts differ or not. In addition, emphasis is placed on the contexts in which the emotions of both groups emerge. We have structured the article as follows. First, we review the empirical research which has been carried out in the field of elementary school teachers' emotions, by commenting on only research related to anger, frustration and well-being. Then, we present the theoretical background of the research by explaining the reasons why we focused only on these three emotions. Third, we provide methodological details of the exploratory sequential research design we used and then we present the main findings from this mixed method study. Finally, we discuss the added value of using this research design by bringing to light the extent to which it extends our understanding of how teachers' emotions are formed in specific contexts in primary schools.

The theoretical background of the research

The theoretical framework of this research draws upon Kemper's (1978) sociological theorizing on emotions. Two main theoretical ideas constitute the core of his approach. First, it is argued that social relations are defined by two dimensions, power and status. All social actions – particularly those involving compliance with another's wishes, expectations, or demands – occur either through coercion or voluntarily. Power relations arise when one actor enforces compliance from another, especially when the latter resists or could potentially resist in the future. In this context, power is a form of social relationship characterized by unwilling compliance. In contrast, status relations are defined by recognition and a sense of belonging. These occur when one actor complies with another's request or command not out of coercion but voluntarily, as an expression of respect or esteem. The second theoretical idea is that emotional arousal is related to the degree of congruity or incongruity between self's expectations and experience in a situation. If there is an incongruity below expectations, then three primary emotions of fear, anger or frustration are activated. If there is an incongruence that exceeds expectation, then the primary emotion of satisfaction or happiness is stimulated. Finally, when expectations and experiences are congruent, then low levels of emotion are aroused. Although the theories of these three authors are more formal and complex than this brief sketch we provided, we used these theoretical assumptions for exploratory reasons.

Literature review

The literature review is organized around two criteria. First, it summarizes substantive findings showing that teachers' work environments and their relations within the school community activate frustration and anger and affect their wellbeing. Second, it highlights methodological limitations in this body of research. This dual approach clarifies the contribution of the present study in relation to both substantive and methodological gaps. Substantively, the literature is organized into three interconnected areas: the administrative dimension of the teaching profession, the quality of relationships with colleagues, and teacher – student relationships. Research shows that insufficient administrative support, increased bureaucracy, standardization, strict accountability, and professional isolation are associated with higher levels of stress, dissatisfaction, and emotional exhaustion among teachers. (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; Hong, 2012; Pillen et al., 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019; Weiland, 2021). The absence of guidance and support of novice teachers during the critical early years of their professional careers undermines their emotional well-being and compromises their sense of professional self-efficacy (Carroll, 2020; Esmaeili et al., 2019; Soini et al., 2010; Weiland, 202; In addition, financial insecurity, combined with limited influence over curriculum design, contributes to reduced professional satisfaction and an increased sense of helplessness. Continuous exposure to high professional demands without adequate resources can lead to exhaustion and reduce the quality of teaching (Dicke et al., 2018).

The quality of interpersonal relationships with colleagues has been shown to significantly impact teachers' well-being, strengthening their sense of belonging, self-regulation, and emotional engagement (Aelterman et al., 2007; Aldrup et al., 2017; Carroll, 2020; Collie et al., 2016; Damásio et al., 2013; Dicke et al., 2018; Dreer, 2022; Dreer, 2024; McCallum et al., 2010; Nalipay et al., 2022; Roffey, 2012; Simbula, 2010; Soini et al., 2010; Weiland, 2021). Interaction with colleagues emerged

as the second most frequently reported theme among novice teachers (Schmidt et al., 2021), highlighting the importance of the professional school environment and a culture of collaboration in daily teaching practice. A lack of collaboration or the presence of a competitive atmosphere within the teaching staff intensifies stress and isolation (Aelterman et al., 2007; Carroll, 2020; Lindqvist et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Soini et al., 2010; Simbula, 2010; Weiland, 2021).

Student behavior and the quality of teacher–student relationships are recognized in the international literature as critical factors influencing teachers' emotional state and professional well-being—especially for those in the early stages of their careers (Aelterman et al., 2007; Aldrup et al., 2017; Carroll, 2020; Collie et al., 2015; Damásio et al., 2013; Dreer, 2022; McCallum et al., 2010; Roffey, 2012; Soini et al., 2010; Weiland, 2021). Entering the teaching profession requires novice teachers to adapt to the complexity of the classroom, to build acceptance from students, to manage diverse learning needs, and to cope with the complex emotions that arise from teaching practice (Shoffner, 2011). The literature demonstrates that difficulties in enforcing discipline, classroom disruptions, and the absence of behavior management strategies generate intense feelings of frustration and anger, and, over time, lead to emotional exhaustion (Chen, 2016; Doyle et al., 2024; Schmidt et al., 2021;).

Regarding the methodological drawbacks of the existing literature, an important dimension which emerged out of the review on teachers' emotions is that a) they rely either on quantitative-based methods or on qualitatively-based methods and b) the quantitative research draws upon psychological constructs such as anxiety, self-esteem or self-efficacy (e.g. Burić & Macuka, 2018; Dreer 2024; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019; Stephanou & Oikonomou, 2018;) whilst the qualitative oriented research draws upon a phenomenological or interpretivist framework for approaching resiliency. In other words, we did not find mixed method research (MMR) which is based on sociological framework for understanding teachers' emotions through a comparative design.

In particular Pillen et al.'s (2013) MMR is focused on teachers' emotional tensions leaving unexplored positive emotions. Within the MMR design they implemented, qualitative research had a secondary role in so far as it contributed to the data construction tool while data analysis had been based only on statistical techniques. Yurtseven and Saraç's (2022) MMR explored classroom management from a psychological perspective without specifying the emotions which had been analyzed. Integration in the MMR design is not clear since data presentation relied on a traditional linear style (first the descriptives of the quantitative part and then the themes of the qualitative part) while theme construction was not transparent. Finally, Kokkinos and Stavropoulos's (2021) MMR examined teachers' pride and love in teachers' self-regulation. In this MMR design, qualitative research had a supportive role in the sense that it is used to check statistical results (for example, how teacher's emotions predict self-regulation).

To recapitulate, the contribution of our research concerns the following literature gaps we brought to light:

- There are few MMR examining both negative and positive emotions of elementary school teachers from a sociological point of view,
- The MMR design we implemented treats both parts equally during research design and data analysis
- Finally, we emphasize the comparative dimension of this topic by comparing the negative and positive emotions of novice teachers with those who are experienced.

Research questions

This study focuses on anger, frustration, and well-being for two reasons. First, anger and frustration are considered primary emotions in sociological theories of emotion, meaning they influence both individuals' psychological functioning and their everyday social and role relations. Second, since the literature on teachers' emotions lacks theoretical explanations of the contexts shaping positive emotions, we also examine this dimension by focusing on teachers' well-being. Well-being is not treated here as a purely psychological state but as a relational outcome emerging from teachers' social contexts. Current definitions support this view. For example, Soini et al. (2010) and Carroll (2020) argue that pedagogical well-being, as part of teachers' professional well-being, is linked to school administration, workload, and resources, and is shaped through relations with parents, colleagues, and the broader school community. This relational understanding of well-being aligns with the sociological orientation of our theoretical framework. However, given the wide range of definitions in the well-being literature, any strict operationalization risked narrowing the concept. For this reason, the research design refers more broadly to "positive emotions" when constructing the data collection tools.

Having this in mind, the research questions were the following:

1. Are there any differences between novice and experienced teachers regarding the contexts in which these three emotions are felt?

2. What are the social contexts within the school environment that shape novice and experienced teachers' feelings of frustration, anger, and well-being?

3. How do different school-related contexts shape teachers' emotional experiences of anger, frustration, and well-being?

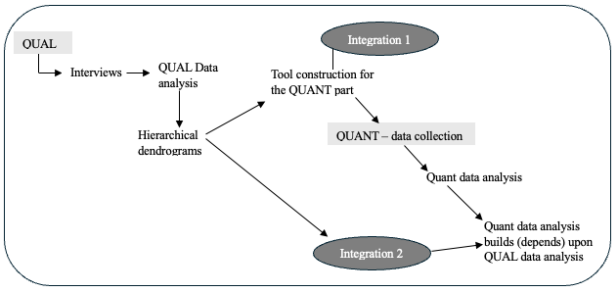
We compare beginner and experienced primary-school teachers' frustration, anger, and wellbeing to explore Huberman's hypothesis that teachers' emotions gradually change over the course of their careers, as energy declines and is redirected during the "disengagement" phase. However, this study is not designed to test this hypothesis. Rather, it adopts a sociological understanding of emotions as an exploratory framework to identify the contextual conditions under which teachers' emotions are activated.

Methodology

Research design

To address these research questions, we employed an 'exploratory' sequential mixed methods research (MMR) design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). We were careful to avoid the common misconception that, in such designs, the qualitative phase merely serves as a preliminary step for the quantitative phase, which then dominates the analysis and interpretation. While we emphasize the sequential structure of this MMR design, we afford equal weight to the qualitative component (Bazeley, 2012). Specifically, the qualitative component contributes directly to explaining the research questions. In this respect, we emphasize only the sequential dimension of the MMR design, as the role of the qualitative phase – whether it serves to generate explanatory insights or to refine quantitative findings – ultimately depends on the methodological and epistemological orientations of the researcher(s). Following the standard procedure for the sequential design (Bazeley, 2018), the qualitative phase was conducted first and used to inform the development of questionnaire items for the subsequent quantitative phase. Importantly, the integration of methods extended beyond instrument development: quantitative data were cross-checked with the qualitative findings during the final stages of analysis. This allowed the quantitative results to be contextualized and interpreted in greater depth through the qualitative insights. In this way, integration informed not only the construction of the data collection instrument but also the analytical process. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the MMR design, and the following sections detail its individual components.

Figure 1.
Visual presentation of the MMR design



Sample

In line with the research questions, the study focused on two target populations: novice and experienced researchers who work as teachers in one of the largest prefectures in Greece, encompassing both major urban centers and rural areas. In this study, 'novice' teachers are defined as those with less than seven years of teaching experience, while 'experienced' teachers are those with more than twenty years of service. Regarding the age range of the two groups, novice teachers were under 30 years old. In Greece, graduates from pedagogy departments typically begin working as substitute teachers within one or two years after graduation and usually obtain a permanent position within two to three years. Experienced teachers, defined as those with more than twenty years of service, were generally over 50 years old. Our objective was not to obtain a sample representative of the broader population, but rather to form two internally homogeneous groups suitable for comparison, through which explanatory hypotheses could be developed. To this end, we employed snowball sampling for the qualitative component of the research. Specifically, two of the authors, who are themselves elementary school teachers, initiated contact with novice and experienced teachers across the prefecture. These initial participants then referred additional novice and experienced colleagues, resulting in a total of 22 interviews (11 per group). All interviews were transcribed, and participants' anonymity and informed consent were ensured in accordance with ethical research standards.

For the quantitative component, we used a combination of cluster sampling and snowball sampling. Initially, we consulted administrative records listing all elementary schools in the prefecture and identified two distinct clusters: one consisting of schools located far from the prefecture's capital (rural), and the other composed of schools situated nearby (urban). This clustering was motivated by two considerations: first, the differing working conditions in urban and rural settings were expected to influence teachers' emotional experiences; and second, novice teachers were more likely to be assigned to rural

areas, whereas experienced teachers were typically found in urban schools. Subsequently, we targeted specific schools within these clusters and, leveraging connections established during the qualitative phase, distributed the questionnaire to teachers both in person and via Google Forms. In total, we collected 173 completed questionnaires, of which 88 were from experienced teachers (77,8% were men while 43,8% were women) and the remainder from novice teachers (22,2% were men while 56,2% were women).

For both strands of the research, all necessary ethical requirements were observed. Specifically, in the qualitative strand, participants were informed about the details of the study prior to the interviews, and the interview guide was shared with them in advance. They provided informed consent, and pseudonyms were assigned to ensure confidentiality. After each interview, transcripts were returned to participants, allowing them to review the content and request any corrections related to confidentiality. Participants also had the right to withdraw at any point, in which case their transcripts were excluded from the analysis. Regarding the quantitative strand, participants were informed about the research objectives, and all questionnaires were completed anonymously.

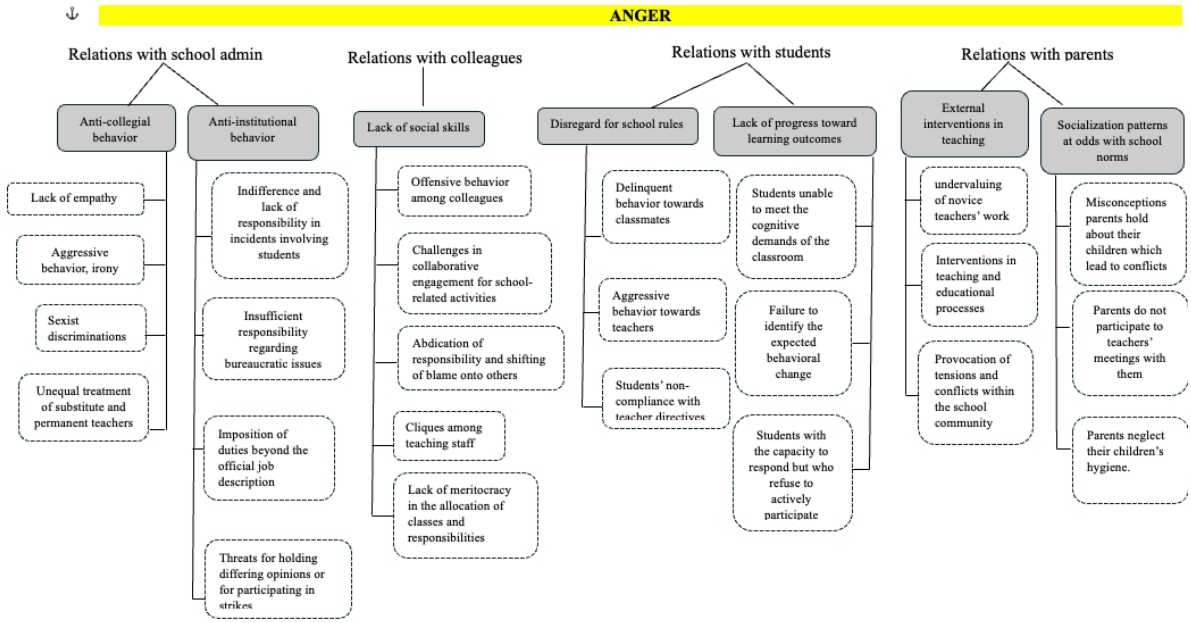
Data analysis of the qual part.

While in the standard presentation of the parts of the methodology, data analysis follows the construction of data collection tool, in the sequential MMR design we implemented, data analysis of the qual part shaped the data collection tool for the quant part and for that reason we have to present it first. We applied a modified version of Template Analysis in which the transcribed interviews were coded by using as a coding framework in line with the concepts of the research questions. Then we cross-tabulated the three emotions and the ways of dealing with them with the informants while in the cells the codes of each informant were presented. As a result, we created two tables, in one the three emotions were crosstabulated with the informants and in the other the ways of dealing with positive and negative emotions were cross-tabulatd with the informants. Finally, by reading horizontally each line of the tables, we constructed hierarchical dendrograms, each of which captures the diversity of the codes. The added value of this analytic procedure is that we brough to light the relational contexts in which various events occur and in which these three emotions are activated. Gray frames denote the events and in the frames with the dotted lines, we provide the most prominent codes which capture teachers' lived experiences. For reasons of illustration, in figure 2 we provide the hierarchical dendrogram on anger.

Construction of the data collection tool

These hierarchical dendrograms formed the basis for developing the data collection tool used in the quantitative phase. We created five indexes corresponding to: (a) the three emotions and (b) the two ways of handling frustration and anger. Each index included items derived from the dotted-line frames in the dendrograms, designed to capture the four relational contexts identified during the qualitative data analysis. Table 1 presents the indexes for the three emotions, illustrating two items from each relational context due to space and word limitations. For the same reasons, we do not present findings from how sample participants dealt with frustration and anger.

Figure 2.
Dendrogram on the contexts in which ANGER is activated



As a result, we developed a research instrument consisting of (a) demographic variables (teachers' years of teaching experience and educational qualifications) and (b) the five indexes described above. The tool was piloted with thirty teachers to assess the time required for completion and to obtain feedback on the clarity of the items. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's r, chi-square tests, and t-tests were the main statistical procedures applied for analyzing the quantitative data.

Results

With regard to Research Question 1, the analysis revealed no significant differences between novice and experienced teachers in terms of the contexts in which anger and frustration were experienced. The only statistically significant difference concerned positive emotions (Table 2).

Table 1.

Sample questionnaire items as emerged from the qual strand

«I have experienced (in the last 5 years, in case that your teaching experience is more than 20 years) to a large extent anger/frustration/positive emotions with school headteacher/colleagues/students/parents...»				
	School headteacher	Colleagues	Students	Parents
Anger	Due to being assigned duties beyond my official responsibilities.	Due to unequal distribution of duties / responsibilities	Due to delinquent behavior (e.g. bullying)	Due to interference with my work (e.g. questioning or underestimating my work, interfering with teaching, etc.)
	Due to discriminatory behavior (gender, sexist, and discriminatory treatment in general).	Due to aggressive and offensive behavior towards me	Due to failure to follow classroom moral standards/ classroom norms.	Due to tensions and conflicts within the school community.
Frustration	Due to lack of teamwork and collaborative problem-solving.	Due to lack of cooperation.	Due to a lack of emotional connection with me.	Due to the limitation of their child's sociability, due to personal differences with other parents.
	Due to a lack of understanding about the workload.	Due to indifference and unwillingness to take office.	Due to inability to meet the requirements of the course and poor performance.	Due to selfish behavior and concern only for their own child.
Well-being	Due to the correct handling of critical situations with the students	Due to cooperation on school issues and a sign of professionalism.	Due to the expression of interest in the educational process and school life.	Because of the willingness to cooperate with the teacher.
	Due to the cultivation of a climate of cooperation and collective decision-making	Due to the demonstration of genuine care and respect for the students.	Because of an expression of practical love and respect for teachers.	Because they turned to me for advice (about their child and his school career).
1= Never 2= Rarely 3= Repeatedly				

Table 2.

Mean differences of Well-being between experienced and novice teachers in relation to the four relational contexts.

	Teaching experience	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Well-being in relation to school headteacher	More than 20 years	88	97,53	8583,00
	Less than 8 years	85	76,09	6468,00
	Total	173		
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)			,004	
Well-being in relation to colleagues	More than 20 years	88	100,03	8802,50
	Less than 8 years	85	73,51	6248,50
	Total	173		
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)			<,001	
Well-being in relation to students	More than 20 years	88	94,62	8326,50
	Less than 8 years	85	79,11	6724,50
	Total	173		
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)			,022	
Well-being in relation to parents	More than 20 years	88	98,22	8643,50
	Less than 8 years	85	75,38	6407,50
	Total	173		
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)			,001	

Specifically, the Mann–Whitney test indicated that experienced teachers reported higher levels of well-being in their relationships with colleagues, the school headteacher, students, and parents compared to novice teachers. This finding suggests that well-being is more easily articulated and experienced by experienced teachers than by their novice counterparts. Using Pearson's r to examine bivariate correlations, a distinct pattern emerged regarding the contexts in which anger, frustration, and well-being co-occurred. In particular, it showed that anger, frustration, and well-being are experienced within the same relational contexts. Specifically, teachers' relationships with (a) school administration and colleagues, (b) colleagues and parents, and (c) students and parents appear to elicit all three types of emotional experiences – anger, frustration, and wellbeing. This pattern is clearly documented in Table 3, which shows that frustration is activated within these three contexts. The same pattern applies to anger and wellbeing; however, the corresponding tables are not presented here in order to avoid overburdening the text.

Table 3.

Bivariate correlations of frustration with the four conditions

Frustration in relation to	School admin	Colleagues	Students	Parents
Frustration in relation to				
School admin		r = ,601 p < ,001	r = ,227 p < ,001	r = ,350 p < ,001
Colleagues			r = ,402 p < ,001	r = ,510 p < ,001
Students				r = ,612 p < ,001

To address the second research question, we juxtaposed the findings from the qualitative and quantitative components. For that purpose, first we created three tables, one for each emotion, and then we computed their effect sizes for the codes related to each context, according to the following line of reasoning. In the cells of the tables, the number of codes per participant is presented. At the end of each column, the total number of codes within a given context is summed vertically in the final row. By calculating the frequency of codes for each context from the inter-respondent matrix, the prevalence rate of the aggregate codes can be determined. These frequencies also serve as manifest effect sizes (Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2020), that is, effect sizes referring to directly observable content. Table 4 presents the effect sizes for anger. The same pattern holds for frustration and well-being, but the corresponding tables are not presented to avoid overburdening the text.

Table 4.

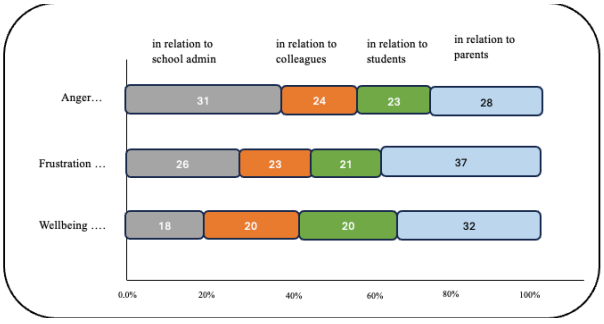
Manifest effect sizes for the contexts in which ANGER is produced

	Contexts in which ANGER is produced				
No of interviews - INSTANCES	Relations with school administration	Relations with colleagues	Relations with students	Relations with parents	Total
1	7	2	3	4	16
2	7	2	4	2	15
3	5	1	1	4	11
4	6	2	2	2	12
5	2	3	3	2	10
6	1	1	3	1	6
7	4	2	2	2	10
8	1	3	2	3	7
9	1	1	2	1	5
10	1	1	1	1	4
11	0	1	2	0	3
12	0	0	0	2	2
13	1	1	2	2	6
14	0	0	0	1	1
15	2	1	1	1	5
16	2	0	1	1	4
17	1	1	2	2	5
18	1	2	0	2	5
19	2	1	1	0	4
20	0	0	1	3	4
21	3	1	0	2	6
22	2	1	1	2	6
Total	45 (30,3%)	27 (18,6%)	34 (23,4%)	40 (27,5%)	145

An examination of the effect sizes tables indicated that the two contexts with the highest manifest effect sizes for anger and frustration are relations with school administration and relations with parents (30.3% and 27.5%, respectively, for anger – and 27.5% and 34.8%, respectively, for frustration). This pattern appears to be mirrored in the distribution of anger and frustration across the four relational contexts, as illustrated in the descriptive statistics derived from the quantitative data analysis (Figure 3). Percentages of anger in relation to contexts of school admin and parents (31% and 28% - figure 3) are almost similar to the effect sizes of aggregate codes connected with relations with school administration and with parents (30.3% and 27.5% - table 4).

Figure 3.

Quantitative distribution of the negative emotions across the four relational contexts



This distribution indicates that anger and frustration tend to be activated repeatedly and more frequently in teachers' relationships with school administrators and parents. The percentages corresponding to the three relational contexts that promote teachers' well-being are relatively close to one another, with the exception of well-being in relation to parents.

Although the integration of qualitative and quantitative data appears to corroborate the findings across both components, a more detailed and in-depth understanding of how the four relational contexts shape teachers' experiences of anger, frustration, and well-being requires further exploration. To address this question, we conducted a thematic analysis from which hierarchical dendrograms (such as that presented in Figure 1) were generated. Each dendrogram illuminates not only the four relational contexts in which anger, frustration, and well-being are experienced by teachers but also the specific events through which these emotions are activated. Table 5 summarizes this multifaceted information.

The following excerpts present an illustration of how we coded the interview material. Interviewee 17, when asked to narrate contexts of anger in school, recalled the following incidents:

> *Regarding the issue of teacher evaluation in the school, the school head didn't even ask us what our position was. The teachers' council is the one that decides on such matters. When we held a council meeting and I personally refused to participate in the Ministry's evaluation process, she started making threats and using intimidation tactics, telling us: "Are you aware of the consequences of your actions?" I replied, "Yes, we are very well aware of them." She said, "You will face disciplinary action, and there may be salary cuts."*

> *Once, in my classroom, a colleague reprimanded me in front of the students, saying in a tone: "Ms. ..., I would kindly ask you to lower your voice, because you are disturbing the lesson."*

> *I remember a time when I wanted to change a student's seat because he was talking and making noise with a classmate. I had warned them several times, but they wouldn't stop. I told him to move to the front desk, and he refused, saying to me, "No, I won't sit there." I explained the reason, but he still refused and said, "Who are you to tell me what to do?" At that point, I lost my temper and slammed my hand on the desk.*

> *One time, when two girls had a fight, the father of one of them verbally attacked me and insulted me, threatening me. I reported it to the principal and was ready to call the police.*

All these narrative fragments were coded as 'anger in relation with the admin', 'anger in relation with colleagues', 'anger in relation with the students' and 'anger in relation with parents', respectively, while in each of these codes a brief comment as to why anger happened was added. Table 5 provides a detailed account of why negative emotions – anger and frustration – are produced within specific relational contexts. For example, in their relationships with the school headteacher, teachers' anger is triggered either by uncollegial behaviors (e.g., lack of empathy or sexist discrimination) or by anti-institutional behaviors (e.g., insufficient attention to bureaucratic responsibilities). Similarly, teachers experience anger in relation to parents when parents interfere with teaching or exhibit socialization patterns that conflict with school norms. Frustration with colleagues is particularly intense when colleagues display a lack of professionalism or fail to collaborate effectively. In this way, the analysis highlights the complexity of emotional experiences by revealing the multiple causal pathways through which anger and frustration emerge. The same principle applies to well-being. For instance, teachers' well-being is enhanced when their work is recognized by parents and when they can collaborate positively with them.

These findings can be interpreted through the theoretical framework underpinning our research. Within this framework, power is conceptualized as a

Table 5.
Events in which anger, frustration and wellbeing are produced, in relation to the four conditions

	Relations with school admin	Relations with colleagues	Relations with students	Relations with parents
Events in which anger occurs	Uncollegial behaviour	Lack of social skills	Disregard for school rules	External interventions in teaching
	Anti-institutional behaviour		Lack of progress toward learning outcomes	Socialization patterns at odds with school norms
Events in which frustration occurs	Uncollegial behaviour	Lack of professionalism and collaboration	Disengagement from academic tasks	Lack of respectful and cooperative behavior
	Inability to manage school discipline		Lack of teacher–student emotional rapport	Inadequate student socialization
Events in which well-being occurs	Moral recognition of the teacher's work	Collaborative and professional behavior toward colleagues	Engagement in the academic and social life of the classroom	Recognition of the teacher's work and collaboration with them
	Fostering supportive school climate	Interest in students and in school life		

form of social relationship characterized by unwilling compliance, whereas status relations are defined by recognition and a sense of belonging. Status relations occur when one actor complies with another's request or command voluntarily, as an expression of respect or esteem, rather than through coercion. We argue that teachers' negative emotions arise when power is exercised over them by members of the school administration (e.g., school headteachers or principals) in ways that are unexpected or perceived as disrespectful, such as imposing irrelevant duties through hierarchical authority. In contrast, teachers' relationships with colleagues, students, and parents are predominantly status relations. Accordingly, anger often emerges when teachers feel that their work is not respected (in relations with students and parents) or that they do not belong to a community (in relations with colleagues). Similarly, frustration arises when power relations are unexpectedly invoked in interactions with school administration or when teachers perceive that their status is undermined in interactions with colleagues, students, or parents. The opposite reasoning applies to well-being, which is enhanced when status relations are recognized and respected. By applying this theoretical framework, we provide a micro-sociological explanation of emotion activation, revealing the specific social mechanisms that generate emotions while preserving the causal complexity of how emotions are shaped within school contexts.

Discussion

This study sought to explore how primary school teachers experience anger, frustration, and well-being across different relational contexts, comparing novice and experienced teachers through an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. The findings advance existing literature by illuminating how these emotions are socially embedded rather than solely psychological, and by demonstrating that emotional experiences in schools are conditioned by relational and institutional contexts.

Whereas earlier work emphasized the impact of inadequate administrative support or poor collegial collaboration on stress and burnout (Lindqvist et al., 2022; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019), our analysis reveals a more intricate relational pattern: anger, frustration, and well-being emerge within the same relational contexts, suggesting that the emotional tone of school life is produced through ongoing interactions rather than discrete situational triggers. The co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions within identical contexts points to the relational ambivalence of teachers' professional lives – a dimension rarely addressed in prior studies that tend to treat emotions as isolated psychological outcomes.

Moreover, the finding that experienced teachers report higher levels of well-being across all relational contexts nuances existing claims that professional longevity is associated with emotional exhaustion and cynicism (Hong, 2012; Huberman, 1993). Instead, the present results suggest that experience may foster emotional regulation and social competence, allowing teachers to transform potentially negative encounters into manageable or even positive experiences. This aligns with the view that emotional well-being is not a static trait but a relational achievement sustained through accumulated social capital within the school community.

The study's novelty lies not only in its findings but also in its methodological and theoretical framing. Unlike most mixed methods studies in the field (e.g., Kokkinos & Stavropoulos, 2021; Pillen et al., 2013; Yurtseven & Saraç, 2022), where qualitative data serve a secondary or confirmatory role, the present design integrates both strands in a genuinely reciprocal manner. The qualitative findings directly informed the construction of the quantitative instrument, while the quantitative results were re-contextualized through qualitative interpretation. This integrative strategy allowed for the identification of the causal configurations underlying emotional activation – something unattainable through either approach alone.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, although the sample included teachers with varying levels of professional experience, it was drawn from a specific regional and cultural context. Consequently, the findings primarily reflect the emotional dynamics of teachers within that educational environment and may not be fully generalizable to other institutional or policy contexts. Because teacher emotions are shaped by broader structural and cultural conditions, future research should prioritize cross-regional and cross-national comparisons to examine how differing educational systems influence emotional experiences.

Second, while the mixed methods design allowed for a nuanced understanding by combining quantitative and qualitative insights, the cross-sectional nature of the data captures teachers' emotions at a single point in time. As a result, the findings cannot fully account for how emotional patterns develop or change across different stages of teachers' careers. Longitudinal or ethnographic studies would therefore be valuable in exploring the evolving nature of teachers' emotional experiences and their relationship to professional trajectories.

Third, the study focused primarily on anger, frustration, and well-being. While these emotions are central

to understanding emotional strain in teaching, this focus may provide only a partial view of the broader emotional landscape of the profession. Future research should examine a wider range of emotions, including hope, pride, and compassion, to better capture the complexity of teachers' emotional lives. Despite these limitations, the findings offer useful implications for practice. The prominence of negative emotional experiences suggests the importance of school-based interventions and teacher support programs that address emotional well-being as part of professional practice. Professional development initiatives could incorporate training in emotional awareness and regulation, alongside institutional measures that strengthen collegial support and organizational responsiveness to teachers' challenges. Such approaches may contribute to more supportive and sustainable professional environments for teachers.

AI Disclosure Statement

Specific Large Language Model tool has been used in this article only for correcting syntax or grammar issues. No Large Language Model tool has been used for content creation (tables, figures) or for providing the scientific argument presented in the article.

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