



Embedding emotion regulation in social justice-oriented teacher development: insights from Iranian EFL teachers

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of a social justice-oriented teacher education course that incorporated explicit emotion regulation (ER) training on Iranian EFL teachers' ER strategies and perceptions of classroom justice. Forty-three teachers participated in a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. In the quantitative phase, analyses showed clear post-intervention increases in teachers' use of engagement-oriented ER strategies, particularly cognitive change, situation modification, attentional deployment, and response modulation, while situation selection showed no notable change. Teachers' perceptions of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice also improved substantially. The qualitative phase identified four themes: growing self-awareness of emotions and triggers, intentional use of engagement strategies, strengthening fairness and transparency in classroom interactions, and persistent challenges in managing negative emotions under institutional pressures. Overall, the findings indicate that embedding ER strategy training within justice-oriented teacher education can enhance teachers' emotional competence and their enactment of fairness, while underscoring the need for sustained institutional support to maintain these gains.

Keywords: Emotion regulation, social justice, teacher education, classroom justice, EFL teachers

Introduction

The promotion of social justice in educational settings has been increasingly recognized as a crucial element in fostering equitable learning environments where all learners have the opportunity to thrive (Banegas & Sanchez, 2024; Sabbagh & Resh, 2016; Sadraei et al., 2024).

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), teachers responsibilities extend beyond language instruction to include the creation of inclusive, fair, and caring classroom climates that support students cognitive and socioemotional growth (Gkonou & Miller, 2017; Lotfi Gaskaree et al., 2025; Noddings, 2013; Taati Jeliseh, Valizadeh, et al., 2025). Classroom justice, operationalized through distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions, encompasses fairness in resource allocation, transparency and consistency in decision-making, and respectful interpersonal relationships (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004; Rasooli et al., 2019; Zohrabi & Xodabande, 2024). However, implementing these principles in EFL contexts, especially in environments influenced by diverse learner backgrounds and sociopolitical dynamics, can present considerable emotional challenges for teachers (Banegas & Sanchez, 2024; Moradi et al., 2024; Shakib Kotamjani et al., 2025). These challenges underscore the need to consider the emotional dimension of social justice-oriented teaching (Salmani Ghasemzadegan et al., 2025).

The enactment of social justice in the language classroom is often accompanied by heightened emotional demands, as teachers navigate tensions arising from institutional constraints, student diversity, and sociocultural expectations (Chamani et al., 2023; Kiyangfar et al., 2025; Moradi et al., 2024; Nazari & Karimpour, 2023; Taati Jeliseh, Koleini, et al., 2025). Teachers' ability to manage these demands is closely linked to their emotion regulation (ER) skills, which refer to the processes individuals use to influence the intensity, duration, and expression of emotional experiences (Gross, 2015b). In educational contexts, effective ER supports professional well-being, strengthens relational quality, and enables teachers to respond constructively during challenging moments (Ghanizadeh & Royaei, 2015; Nazari et al., 2024; Taxer & Gross, 2018). Recent scholarship increasingly recognizes that classroom fairness is shaped not only by teachers moral commitments but also by the emotional conditions under which pedagogical decisions are made (Berry, 2008). Emotions influence how teachers interpret student behavior, evaluate perceived inequities, and enact or withhold caring and transparent practices (Lotfi Gaskaree et al., 2025). In this sense, emotional competence becomes a practical resource that allows teachers to uphold their justice-oriented values consistently, particularly when situational pressures risk compromising fairness.

Despite the growing interest in both social justice instruction and teacher emotion research, these areas have rarely been integrated in empirical investigations. Existing studies on EFL teachers justice perceptions have demonstrated that targeted justice-oriented training can enhance distributive, procedural, and interactional fairness (Estaji et al., 2023). However, these interventions primarily emphasize conceptual understanding and pedagogical enactment strategies, with limited attention to the emotional capacities required to sustain justice-oriented practice under pressure. This creates a gap in the literature concerning how ER competencies can operate alongside justice principles to support more stable and resilient enactment of fairness in real classroom conditions.

Addressing this gap requires attention to the affective underpinnings of justice-oriented pedagogy. When teachers face emotionally charged situations, such as contested grading, conflict among students, or institutional constraints, their ability to regulate emotional responses can determine whether fair treatment, transparency, and care are upheld (Sadraei et al., 2024). Integrating ER training with social justice-oriented professional development may therefore enhance not only teachers psychological resources but also the consistency and depth of their justice enactment (Moradi et al., 2024). The present study responds to these conceptual and operational gaps by examining the effects of a teacher education course that integrates explicit instruction on social justice principles with ER strategy training grounded in Gross process model. The study investigates changes in teachers' perceptions of classroom justice and their reported use of ER strategies before and after the intervention, while also exploring their

reflections on how the training influenced classroom practice. Through a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, this research aims to illuminate the role of emotional competence in supporting the enactment of justice and to demonstrate how ER-oriented preparation may enrich existing models of social justice teacher education.

Literature Review

Theoretical Backgrounds

Emotion regulation (ER) refers to the processes individuals use to influence the emotions they experience, when they experience them, and how these emotions are expressed (Gross, 2015). In educational contexts, ER is not merely an intrapersonal skill but a core professional competence that allows teachers to navigate the dynamic and often emotionally charged nature of classroom life (Taxer & Gross, 2018). The present study draws on Gross's process model of ER, which conceptualizes regulation as occurring at different points in the emotion-generative process. The model comprises five categories of strategies: situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. Situation selection involves approaching or avoiding particular situations to influence the likelihood of certain emotions occurring. Situation modification refers to altering aspects of a situation to change its emotional impact. Attentional deployment concerns directing focus toward or away from specific aspects of a situation to shape emotional responses. Cognitive change involves reinterpreting the meaning of a situation to alter its emotional significance, while response modulation targets the experiential, behavioral, or physiological components of emotion after it has been generated.

Although originally conceptualized as a general psychological model, these five stages are directly relevant to justice-oriented pedagogy because teachers' decisions about fairness, transparency, and care often unfold through emotionally charged interactions (Banegas & Sanchez, 2024; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004; Noddings, 2013; Rasooli et al., 2019; Sabbagh & Resh, 2016). For instance, situation selection becomes visible when teachers anticipate potentially inequitable classroom moments and choose to address emerging issues early rather than avoiding them. Situation modification aligns with efforts to adjust instructional arrangements, participation formats, or grading procedures to reduce perceived inequities. Attentional deployment supports teachers in redirecting focus toward student perspectives during tense exchanges, thereby preventing premature judgments. Cognitive change is particularly central to justice enactment, as reappraising student behavior or institutional constraints enables teachers to interpret situations through more empathetic and equitable lenses. Response modulation shapes how teachers express emotions during conflict, allowing them to communicate fairness and respect even when experiencing frustration. Together, these mappings illustrate that ER is not external to justice-oriented practice but embedded in the moment-to-moment work of enacting fairness.

Recent research in applied linguistics and teacher psychology has shown that teacher's ability to effectively deploy ER strategies is linked to reduced burnout, enhanced well-being, and improved relational dynamics (Ghanizadeh & Royaei, 2015). However, studies focusing on ER in EFL contexts remain relatively scarce, and most do not explicitly situate their findings within the process model (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022). Moreover, building on broader scholarship on emotional labor in education, studies argue that teachers' emotional experiences are shaped by institutional power relations, professional norms, and sociopolitical expectations (Benesch, 2018; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Kiyanfar et al., 2025; Nazari & Molana, 2023). This literature suggests that ER in teaching is not merely individual self-management but also a response to structural demands that shape how teachers are expected to feel and act. Integrating insights from emotional labor scholarship helps situate ER within the sociopolitical

dimensions of justice work, reinforcing that teachers' attempts to enact fairness are influenced not only by personal emotional competence but also by institutional pressures and ideological expectations (Sadraei et al., 2024). Taken together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive and contextually grounded rationale for examining ER within justice-oriented teacher development. The process model offers a structured lens for understanding how teachers regulate emotions at different points in justice-related interactions, while emotional labor scholarship frames these regulatory efforts within broader sociopolitical dynamics (Gross, 2015a). This integrated framework guides both the design of the intervention and the interpretation of how teachers' ER strategies may evolve alongside their perceptions of classroom justice.

Social Justice in Language Education

Social justice in education is concerned with ensuring equitable opportunities, fair treatment, and the empowerment of all learners, regardless of their social, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds (Sabbagh & Resh, 2016; Banegas & Sanchez, 2023). In language education, the concept extends beyond linguistic proficiency to encompass the development of critical awareness, the dismantling of discriminatory practices, and the cultivation of inclusive classroom environments (Kong, 2022). The classroom justice framework proposed by Chory-Assad (2002) and further developed by Rasooli et al. (2019) outlines distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions of fairness that shape learners' evaluations of equity in instructional processes, interpersonal treatment, and outcome allocation. For the purposes of the present study, these dimensions function as the conceptual foundation for understanding how teachers interpret and enact fairness in everyday pedagogical encounters rather than as constructs requiring repeated definitional elaboration across sections. These dimensions collectively contribute to shaping the learners' sense of fairness and belonging, both of which are critical for engagement and achievement.

In EFL contexts, where students often represent diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the enactment of social justice principles is both urgent and challenging. Teachers are called upon to address inequities in access to learning resources, respond sensitively to individual student needs, and create a participatory environment where all voices are valued (Estaji & Zhaleh, 2021). However, these ideals can be difficult to sustain in practice due to institutional constraints, large class sizes, exam-oriented curricula, and sociopolitical pressures (Banegas & Sanchez, 2023; Moradi et al., 2024). Although justice is grounded in ethical commitment, its enactment emerges through teachers' situated judgments and emotional responses to complex classroom dynamics (Kiyanfar et al., 2025; Sadraei et al., 2024). When faced with conflict, resistance, or contested evaluations, teachers' emotional appraisals influence how they interpret student behavior and whether they are able to sustain equitable decision-making under pressure. This view positions emotional competence as a practical condition that supports the realization of justice-oriented intentions in pedagogical practice, rather than as a replacement for justice as a moral principle.

Despite these challenges, empirical studies show that targeted professional development can enhance teachers' capacity to enact social justice in the classroom. Estaji and Zhaleh (2022), for instance, demonstrated that explicit training significantly improved EFL teachers' perceptions of procedural, interactional, and overall classroom justice. However, previous studies of this nature have focused primarily on conceptual and behavioral dimensions of fairness, with limited attention to the emotional capacities teachers require to sustain justice enactment across varied and at times emotionally demanding classroom situations. This distinction highlights the unique contribution of the present study, which integrates emotion regulation as a complementary component of justice-oriented teacher development.

Emotion Regulation and Social Justice in Teacher Education

Research on emotion regulation in educational contexts has consistently highlighted its role in enhancing teacher effectiveness, professional satisfaction, and resilience. Studies in EFL settings show that effective ER reduces burnout and fosters positive teacher-student relationships (Ghanizadeh & Royaei, 2015). For example, Hu (2023) found that teacher self-compassion, ER strategies, and emotional labour approaches were significant predictors of resilience in the EFL context, emphasising the protective role of ER in emotionally demanding environments. Similarly, Fathi and Derakhshan (2019) reported that ER, alongside teacher self-efficacy, significantly predicted lower levels of teaching stress among Iranian EFL teachers. However, most of these studies have examined ER as a predictor of other variables, rather than evaluating the effects of explicit ER training interventions for teachers.

The empirical literature on social justice in teacher education has likewise demonstrated the value of targeted training but has not fully addressed the role of emotion regulation in supporting justice-oriented practice. Estaji and Zhaleh (2022) conducted a four-session online justice training course for EFL teachers, finding significant gains in perceptions of classroom justice across distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions. Teachers also expressed appreciation for the enactment strategies they learned. Nazari et al. (2023) explored the relationship between teachers' care and social justice instruction, showing that care, collective engagement, and emotional awareness were critical for justice enactment. However, in both studies, while the emotional dimension of justice work was acknowledged, explicit ER training was not a central component of the interventions. At the same time, emotional labor scholarship argues that teachers' emotional practices emerge from interactions between professional expectations, institutional norms, and sociopolitical conditions (Benesch, 2018). This perspective positions teacher emotion as a contextual and relational phenomenon rather than an individualistic or purely psychological process, suggesting that efforts to enact fairness are shaped by both ethical commitments and affective pressures embedded in classroom and institutional life.

The scarcity of research combining ER training with social justice-oriented teacher education suggests a clear gap in applied linguistics scholarship. While there is evidence that ER supports teacher well-being and professional functioning (Taxer & Gross, 2018; Hu, 2023) and that justice training can improve teachers' fairness perceptions and classroom practices (Estaji & Zhaleh, 2022), the integration of these two strands remains underexplored. Within this broader landscape, the present study examines ER as a complementary resource that may help teachers sustain justice-oriented pedagogies in emotionally and institutionally demanding contexts. By bringing ER training and social justice preparation together, the study contributes to a more comprehensive model of teacher development that encompasses conceptual understanding, ethical orientation, and emotional competence. Moradi et al. (2024) further point out that social justice promotion itself can be a source of emotional tension for teachers, reinforcing the need for interventions that explicitly address both conceptual and emotional competencies. Addressing this gap is essential for developing sustainable justice-oriented pedagogies in EFL contexts, where both linguistic and sociopolitical complexities heighten the emotional demands placed on teachers.

Current Study

The reviewed literature demonstrates that while social justice-oriented teacher education can enhance EFL teachers' fairness perceptions and enactment strategies (Estaji & Zhaleh, 2022), and while emotion regulation skills are critical for sustaining professional well-being and effective classroom practice (Taxer & Gross, 2018; Hu, 2023), these two strands have rarely been

combined in a single intervention. Existing studies in the Iranian EFL context have primarily focused on conceptual preparation and practical enactment strategies for classroom justice but have not incorporated systematic training in the emotional competencies that support teachers moment-to-moment ability to maintain fairness under pressure. As a result, the literature has not yet examined how justice-oriented professional development might be strengthened when instructional principles are paired with explicit ER strategy training. This omission is notable given that the enactment of social justice principles often provokes strong emotional responses, requiring teachers to navigate complex affective and interpersonal challenges (Nazari et al., 2023; Moradi et al., 2024). Without targeted ER training, teachers may struggle to manage these challenges, potentially limiting the consistency and depth of their justice-oriented practices. In the Iranian EFL context, where teachers often work under exam-oriented curricula, institutional constraints, and diverse learner needs, the integration of conceptual and emotional preparation in teacher education may be particularly valuable.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the effects of a teacher education course that integrates explicit instruction on social justice principles with training in ER strategies, drawing on Gross's (2015) process model. By merging these domains in a single intervention, the study extends prior justice-oriented professional development work by shifting the focus from conceptual understanding alone to a more composite model in which teachers develop ethical orientation, pedagogical strategies, and emotional resources concurrently. The course aims to improve teachers' perceptions of classroom justice and their use of ER strategies, while also capturing their reflections on the applicability and impact of these skills in practice. By adopting a mixed-methods design, the study seeks to provide both quantitative evidence of change and qualitative insights into teachers' experiences, offering a comprehensive understanding of the outcomes and perceived benefits of such integrated training. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Does participation in the course lead to significant changes in Iranian EFL teachers' emotion regulation strategies?
2. Does participation in the course lead to significant changes in Iranian EFL teachers' classroom justice perceptions?
3. How do teachers describe their experiences of emotion regulation strategy use and social justice enactment after completing the course?

Method

Research Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to investigate the effects of a social justice-oriented teacher education course incorporating emotion regulation training on Iranian EFL teachers' emotion regulation strategies and classroom justice perceptions. The quantitative phase used a pre-test–post-test design to measure changes in teachers' scores on the Process Model of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (PMERQ) and the Teacher Classroom Justice Scale (TCJS). The rationale for selecting this design lies in its capacity to document measurable change patterns and subsequently allow qualitative data to provide explanatory depth regarding how teachers interpreted those changes in practice. The qualitative phase explored teachers' reflections on their experiences after the course through semi-structured interviews. Qualitative sampling continued until thematic saturation was reached, identified at the point when additional interviews yielded no new conceptual categories. This mixed-methods structure enabled integrated interpretation of statistical and experiential dimensions of the training's impact.

Participants

The participants in this study were 43 Iranian EFL teachers working in private language institutes in Kerman Province, Iran. Their teaching experience ranged from 2 to 15 years, with an average of 8.4 years (SD = 3.1). The sample included both male (n = 18) and female (n = 25) teachers, all of whom held at least a bachelor’s degree in English language teaching or a related field. All participants completed the pre- and post-test questionnaires on emotion regulation and classroom justice. For the qualitative phase, a purposive subsample of 12 teachers from a private institute in Rafsanjan was selected to ensure diversity in gender, age, and professional experience, as these factors can influence both emotion regulation and perceptions of classroom justice. Eligibility criteria included teaching intermediate or upper-intermediate EFL classes and willingness to attend the training sessions and participate in both phases of data collection. To acknowledge their participation, teachers received remuneration equivalent to their regular class teaching rate. This subsample included six female and six male teachers, ranging in age from 24 to 41 years and with teaching experience from 2 to 15 years. Eight held or were pursuing a master’s degree, and four had completed a bachelor’s degree. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the qualitative subsample.

Table 1. Demographic information of the qualitative subsample (n = 12)

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience (Years)	Highest Degree
T1	F	24	2	BA
T2	M	26	3	BA
T3	F	28	5	MA
T4	F	30	7	MA
T5	M	32	9	BA
T6	F	27	4	BA
T7	M	35	12	MA
T8	F	33	10	MA
T9	M	38	15	MA
T10	F	29	6	BA
T11	M	25	3	BA
T12	F	41	14	MA

Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect data in this study: the Process Model of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (PMERQ), the Teacher Classroom Justice Scale (TCJS), and a semi-structured interview protocol. Each instrument was selected to ensure alignment with the study’s research questions and to provide complementary quantitative and qualitative evidence.

Process Model of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (PMERQ). Teachers' use of emotion regulation strategies was assessed with the Process Model of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (PMERQ; Olderbak et al., 2023). The PMERQ is grounded in Gross's (1998, 2015) process model of emotion regulation and consists of 45 items measuring ten specific strategies. These strategies are distributed across the five stages of the model and include both engagement- and disengagement-oriented forms of regulation. Items are rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Because all participants were EFL teachers with high English proficiency, the original English version of the PMERQ was administered without modification. The scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across multiple studies and internal consistency reliability in the present sample was also high (Cronbach's α values ranged from .81 to .93 across subscales).

Teacher Classroom Justice Scale (TCJS). Teachers' perceptions of classroom justice were measured using the Teacher Classroom Justice Scale (TCJS) (Estaji et al., 2023). The instrument includes 18 items rated on a five-point Likert scale assessing distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. The English version of the scale was used, again based on participants' professional English proficiency. The TCJS was specifically designed for the Iranian EFL context and has shown robust psychometric quality. Reliability coefficients for the current sample were strong (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$ for distributive justice, .92 for procedural justice, and .94 for interactional justice).

Interviews. The semi-structured interview protocol was designed to capture teachers' reflections on their use of emotion regulation strategies and their enactment of social justice after the training (Appendix). The interview guide consisted of 14 open-ended questions addressing participants' experiences of the course, their application of ER strategies, and their perceptions of fairness in the classroom. The guide was reviewed by two experts in applied linguistics to ensure clarity and content validity. Interviews lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and were audio-recorded with consent.

Procedure

The study was conducted over a period of approximately three months, following a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach. In the pre-intervention phase, participants attended a debriefing session outlining the study objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations. After providing informed consent, they completed the Persian versions of the Process Model of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (PMERQ) and the Teacher Classroom Justice Scale (TCJS). This was followed by scheduling of the post-intervention interviews to ensure availability.

The intervention phase consisted of a ten-session teacher education course, with each session lasting 90 minutes. The course integrated explicit instruction on social justice principles with training in emotion regulation strategies. The social justice component was based on the principles outlined by Estaji and Zhaleh (2021b), covering equity, equality, need, ethicality, consistency, bias suppression, correctability, accuracy, voice, reasonableness, propriety, caring, respect, timeliness, justification/sufficiency, and truthfulness. The emotion regulation component followed Gross's (1998, 2015) process model, operationalised through training activities adapted from LeBlanc et al. (2020), including expressive writing, mindfulness techniques, cognitive reappraisal exercises, and cue-controlled relaxation. Each session included approximately 20 minutes of theoretical input and 70 minutes of practical application, in which participants discussed emotionally challenging scenarios, shared prior experiences, and explored regulation strategies appropriate to different stages of the emotion process model.

In the post-intervention phase, participants again completed the PMERQ and TCJS to assess changes in their ER strategies and classroom justice perceptions. Semi-structured interviews

were then conducted to explore teachers' reflections on their use of ER strategies and social justice enactment after the course. Interviews were held in a quiet room at the institute, lasted 30–40 minutes, and were audio-recorded for subsequent transcription and thematic analysis. This combination of pre- and post-intervention measures with qualitative follow-up allowed for the triangulation of data and a richer understanding of the course's impact.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the Process Model of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (PMERQ) and the Teacher Classroom Justice Scale (TCJS) were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 28. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and score ranges, were calculated to summarize the data. To address RQ1 and RQ2, paired-samples t-tests were conducted to compare pre- and post-intervention scores for the overall scales. Effect sizes were computed using Cohen's *d* to provide estimates of the magnitude of change. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006) following a six-phase approach. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and, where necessary, translated into English. The analysis began with repeated reading of the transcripts to ensure familiarity with the data, followed by the generation of initial codes that captured meaningful units relevant to emotion regulation strategy use and social justice enactment. Codes were then collated into potential themes, which were reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure coherence and distinctiveness. To enhance trustworthiness, two experienced researchers independently coded 20 percent of the data, and inter-coder agreement was calculated. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. Member checking was also conducted by sharing thematic summaries with participants for confirmation and feedback.

Results

Findings for First Research Question

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the ten components of the Process Model of Emotion Regulation (PMERQ) across the pre-test and post-test. As shown in the table, participants reported higher mean scores after the intervention on most engagement-oriented strategies, while improvements in disengagement-oriented components were less consistent. The largest gains were observed in situation modification–engagement ($M_{pre} = 19.47$, $SD = 2.35$; $M_{post} = 25.37$, $SD = 2.95$) and attentional deployment–engagement ($M_{pre} = 12.98$, $SD = 1.54$; $M_{post} = 17.02$, $SD = 2.59$). Situation selection–engagement also improved markedly from $M = 13.37$ ($SD = 1.46$) to $M = 15.79$ ($SD = 2.65$). By contrast, disengagement-oriented strategies such as situation modification–disengage decreased slightly from $M = 14.51$ ($SD = 2.93$) to $M = 12.60$ ($SD = 1.71$), suggesting that the training steered teachers away from reliance on avoidance and suppression. These results indicate that the course was particularly effective in strengthening adaptive engagement strategies, especially those involving active modification of classroom situations, cognitive reframing, and directing attention constructively.

Figure 1 illustrates the pre-test and post-test mean scores for the five combined domains of the Process Model of Emotion Regulation. The visual pattern shows that the intervention had little effect on situation selection, where pre- and post-test scores remained nearly identical. By contrast, notable increases were observed in situation modification, cognitive change, and response modulation, with cognitive change showing the largest improvement. Attentional deployment also increased moderately, reflecting a shift toward more adaptive focus and redirection strategies. Taken together, the figure confirms that the training primarily strengthened

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for emotion regulation subscales before and after intervention

Subscale	Pre-test M (SD)	Pre-test Min–Max	Post-test M (SD)	Post-test Min–Max
Situation Selection – Engage	13.37 (1.46)	12–16	15.79 (2.65)	12–21
Situation Selection – Disengage	18.09 (2.57)	15–24	15.65 (2.51)	11–20
Situation Modification – Engage	19.47 (2.35)	14–22	25.37 (2.95)	21–30
Situation Modification – Disengage	14.51 (2.93)	8–19	12.60 (1.71)	9–15
Attentional Deployment – Engage	12.98 (1.54)	10–17	17.02 (2.59)	12–22
Attentional Deployment – Disengage	14.65 (2.76)	10–20	13.14 (2.48)	9–18
Cognitive Change – Engage	17.74 (2.79)	13–23	22.81 (2.84)	17–28
Cognitive Change – Disengage	8.30 (1.94)	5–12	7.88 (1.80)	5–12
Response Modulation – Engage	9.23 (2.19)	6–13	11.37 (2.04)	7–15
Response Modulation – Disengage	8.81 (1.92)	5–13	8.14 (1.65)	6–12

Note. Scores are summed within each subscale. PMERQ items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree).

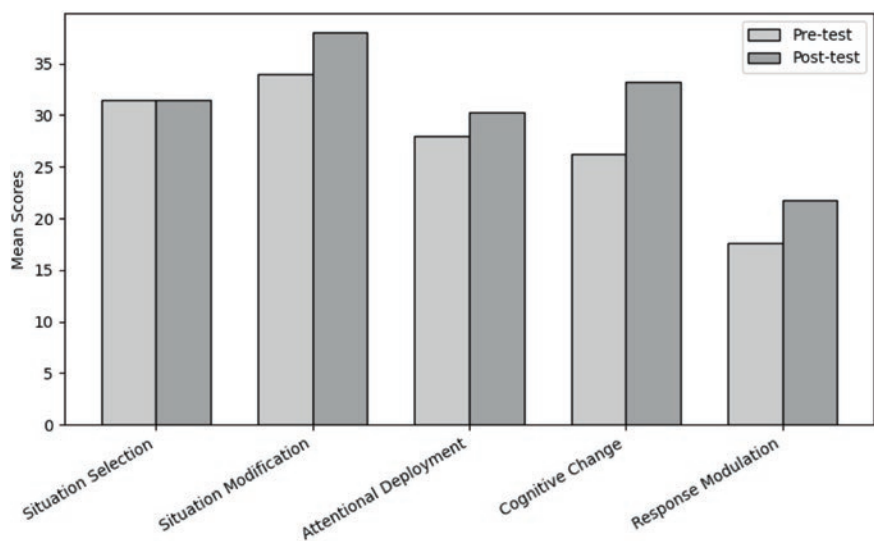


Figure 1. Pre-test and post-test mean scores for emotion regulation subscales

teachers’ use of engagement-oriented strategies that involve reinterpreting situations, modifying classroom conditions, and regulating responses, while strategies related to avoidance or selection of situations remained largely unchanged.

A series of paired-samples t-tests were conducted to examine whether the intervention produced significant changes in teachers’ emotion regulation strategies across the five domains of the process model. As shown in Table 3, significant improvements were found in situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation, with effect sizes ranging from medium ($d = 0.54$) to very large ($d = 1.48$). The largest increase occurred in cognitive change, indicating that teachers became markedly more able to reappraise and reinterpret classroom situations. Situation selection, however, showed no meaningful change ($p = .976$, $d \approx 0.00$), suggesting that the training had limited influence on teachers’ use of avoidance or approach strategies. Overall, the results confirm that the course substantially enhanced teachers’ use of adaptive engagement strategies central to Gross’s process model of emotion regulation.

Table 3. Paired samples t-test for emotion regulation combined scores

Subscale	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	t(42)	p	Cohen’s d
Situation Selection	31.47 (3.03)	31.44 (3.42)	−0.03	.976	−0.00
Situation Modification	33.98 (2.72)	37.98 (3.19)	6.32	.000	0.96
Attentional Deployment	27.98 (3.12)	30.28 (3.01)	3.53	.001	0.54
Cognitive Change	26.26 (2.71)	33.23 (4.28)	9.68	.000	1.48
Response Modulation	17.63 (2.37)	21.79 (2.61)	6.70	.000	1.02

Note. Cohen’s d interpreted as small ≈ 0.20 , medium ≈ 0.50 , large ≥ 0.80 .

Findings for Second Research Question

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics for the three components of the Teacher Classroom Justice Scale (TCJS) as well as the total score. Increases were observed across all three dimensions of classroom justice. Distributive justice improved from $M = 12.33$ ($SD = 1.70$) at pre-test to $M = 16.37$ ($SD = 2.58$) at post-test. Procedural justice rose from $M = 21.23$ ($SD = 3.04$) to $M = 28.70$ ($SD = 3.47$), while interactional justice increased from $M = 23.16$ ($SD = 1.66$) to $M = 30.30$ ($SD = 2.17$). The overall classroom justice score rose from 56.72 ($SD = 5.16$) to 75.37 ($SD = 5.12$), suggesting broad-based improvements in teachers’ fairness perceptions across distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions.

Figure 2 illustrates the pre-test and post-test mean scores for the distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions of classroom justice. The visual pattern shows that the intervention led to improvements across all three domains. The most pronounced increase occurred in procedural justice, reflecting teachers’ greater emphasis on transparent and consistent decision-making after the training. Interactional justice also rose substantially, indicating heightened sensitivity to fairness, care, and respect in teacher–student interactions. Distributive justice demonstrated

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for classroom justice subscales and total score before and after intervention

Subscale/ Total	Pre-test M (SD)	Pre-test Min–Max	Post-test M (SD)	Post-test Min–Max
Distributive	12.33 (1.70)	10–16	16.37 (2.58)	10–20
Procedural	21.23 (3.04)	17–26	28.70 (3.47)	22–35
Interactional	23.16 (1.66)	21–25	30.30 (2.17)	27–34
CJ total score	56.72 (5.16)	49–66	75.37 (5.12)	67–85

Note. Scores are summed within each subscale of the TCJS (1–5 Likert scale).

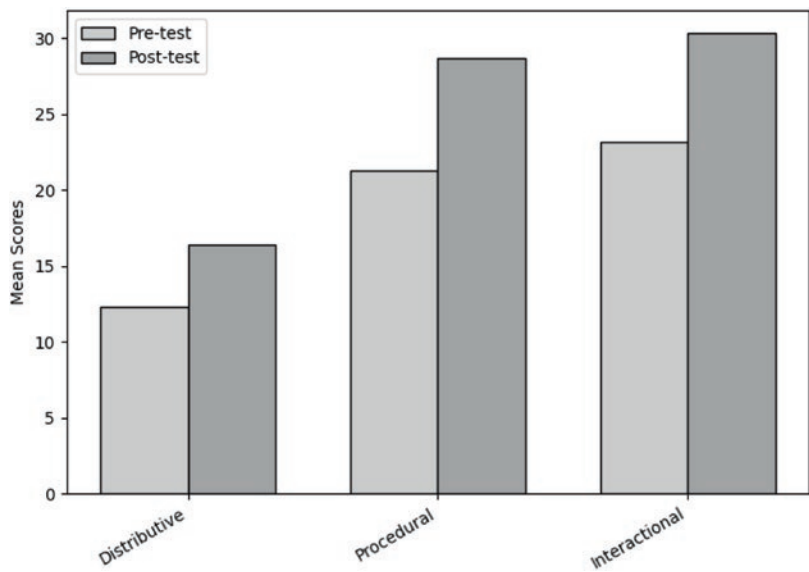


Figure 2. Pre-test and post-test mean scores for classroom justice subscales

steady improvement as well, suggesting a stronger orientation toward equitable grading and resource allocation. Together, these results confirm that the intervention enhanced teachers’ fairness perceptions comprehensively, particularly in areas where transparency and respectful communication are central.

Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether the intervention produced significant changes in teachers’ perceptions of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. As shown in Table 5, improvements were statistically significant across all three dimensions. Procedural justice showed the largest increase, $t(42) = 18.54$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.83$, reflecting a very large effect. Distributive justice also increased significantly, $t(42) = 7.90$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.20$, while interactional justice rose substantially as well, $t(42) = 17.41$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.65$. These results indicate that the training was highly effective in enhancing teachers’ fairness perceptions, with particularly strong effects for procedural and interactional justice.

Table 5. Paired samples *t*-test for classroom justice subscales

Subscale	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	t(42)	p	Cohen’s d
Distributive	12.33 (1.70)	16.37 (2.58)	7.90	.000	1.20
Procedural	21.23 (3.04)	28.70 (3.47)	18.54	.000	2.83
Interactional	23.16 (1.66)	30.30 (2.17)	17.41	.000	2.65

Note. Cohen’s d interpreted as small ≈ 0.20 , medium ≈ 0.50 , large ≥ 0.80 .

Findings for Third Research Question

To address the third research question, which examined how Iranian EFL teachers described their experiences of using emotion regulation strategies and enacting social justice after completing the training course, the qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Four major themes emerged: (1) *growing self-awareness of emotions and triggers*, (2) *intentional use of engagement strategies*, (3) *strengthening fairness and transparency in the classroom*, and (4) *ongoing challenges in managing negative emotions*. These themes provide nuanced insights into the ways teachers made sense of the intervention, highlighting how improvements in emotion regulation supported their justice-oriented practices while also revealing areas where difficulties persisted. Table 6 summarizes these themes, their descriptions, and representative participant quotes.

Theme 1: Growing Self-Awareness of Emotions and Triggers

Participants consistently described how the course increased their ability to recognize and monitor their emotions during classroom interactions. Many explained that before the training they reacted automatically to student behavior or institutional pressures, often without realizing how emotions shaped their responses. After the training, however, teachers reported that they could identify emotional triggers earlier, pause before reacting, and reflect on why they felt the way they did. This emerging self-awareness was viewed as a foundational step toward regulating emotions more effectively.

“I noticed that I get anxious when students ask too many questions at once, and in the past I would just shut them down. Now I recognize the anxiety and remind myself to slow the pace” (T3).

“I can feel when irritation starts to build in me, especially during grading discussions. Being aware of that feeling helps me not to let it take over” (T7).

“Before this course, I never thought about what made me angry in class. Now I can see the exact moments that trigger me and prepare myself” (T9).

“I realized that much of my frustration comes from my own stress outside class, not from the students. Becoming aware of this difference helps me act more fairly” (T11).

“When I sense I am about to lose patience, I stop myself and ask, why am I reacting like this? This reflection calms me down” (T6).

These reflections show that teachers gained a heightened sensitivity to their emotions and the sources of those emotions. Rather than being carried away by frustration or anxiety,

Table 6. Themes, descriptions, and representative quotes on teachers’ experiences of emotion regulation and classroom justice

Theme	Description	Representative Quotes
Growing self-awareness of emotions and triggers	Teachers reported heightened recognition of their emotional responses, particularly in situations involving student behavior or fairness dilemmas. They described becoming more attentive to early signs of frustration or anxiety, which allowed them to intervene before emotions escalated.	<i>“I used to react without thinking when students questioned my grading, but now I notice my feelings before speaking” (T3). “After the course, I realized how quickly I get stressed, and I try to pause and breathe before responding” (T6).</i>
Intentional use of engagement strategies	Participants highlighted a shift from avoidance and suppression toward adaptive, engagement-focused strategies such as reappraisal, problem-solving, and perspective-taking. They linked these strategies to more constructive responses in challenging classroom interactions.	<i>“When a student doesn’t participate, I now try to see it as a chance to understand their situation instead of thinking they are disrespecting me” (T4). “I tell myself this problem can help me grow as a teacher, and that changes how I feel” (T9).</i>
Strengthening fairness and transparency in the classroom	Teachers emphasized that regulating their emotions enabled them to be more consistent, transparent, and respectful in classroom management. They described clearer communication of rules, more equitable grading, and increased sensitivity to students’ perspectives.	<i>“I now explain my grading criteria more openly, so students see I am being fair” (T2). “Even when I am upset, I try to show care and respect, which makes students trust me more” (T12).</i>
Ongoing challenges in managing negative emotions	Despite improvements, some teachers acknowledged persistent struggles with suppressing negative emotions or avoiding difficult conversations. They highlighted the need for continued practice and institutional support to sustain justice-oriented practices under pressure.	<i>“Sometimes I still avoid conflicts when I feel too tired, even though I know it is not the best choice” (T1). “I can reframe situations, but in heated moments, I still hide my feelings instead of addressing them” (T5).</i>

they described being able to pause, notice physical and cognitive signs of stress, and evaluate whether the emotion was proportional to the situation. This deeper awareness enabled them to separate their personal stress from classroom events, which in turn supported calmer and more equitable responses. The accounts suggest that developing self-awareness provided the groundwork for teachers to apply other emotion regulation strategies, making it a crucial first step in sustaining justice-oriented teaching practices.

Theme 2: Intentional Use of Engagement Strategies

Participants described a deliberate shift toward engagement-oriented strategies after the course, emphasising active problem solving, cognitive reframing, and constructive confrontation in emotionally charged moments. Teachers indicated that they now approached difficult interactions as situations to be addressed rather than avoided, and they reported using practical steps such as clarifying expectations, negotiating solutions, and reinterpreting events to reduce emotional strain and sustain equitable practice.

“I try to face tense moments directly and ask the student what we can do to fix the situation instead of leaving it for later” (T1).

“I now reframe a challenging behaviour as feedback about my instruction and look for an adjustment I can make” (T2).

“In a disagreement, I start by summarising the student’s concern and then propose a concrete plan so the issue does not linger” (T5).

“When a task goes wrong, I tell myself it is an opportunity to learn what was missing and I redesign the activity for the next class” (T8).

“Rather than delaying hard conversations, I schedule a short meeting, state the issue calmly, and invite the student to suggest one workable step” (T10).

“If I feel a conversation is heating up, I focus on the part that is constructive and steer us toward a solution we can both accept” (T12).

These accounts indicate purposeful deployment of engagement strategies in the moment of difficulty. Teachers reported confronting problems promptly, reinterpreting events in less threatening terms, and proposing specific actions to resolve tensions. The data show movement from avoidance or suppression toward active regulation through reappraisal and conflict resolution, reflecting intentional strategy use that aligns with the course emphasis on practical enactment in real classroom conditions.

Theme 3: Strengthening Fairness and Transparency in the Classroom

Another theme concerned teachers’ efforts to connect their improved emotion regulation with fairness and transparency in their classroom practices. Many participants explained that being able to regulate emotions made them less reactive and more deliberate in communicating expectations, grading consistently, and showing respect to students. They highlighted fairness not only as an outcome of justice training but also as something sustained through their improved emotional control.

“I now explain the grading system clearly at the beginning, and I notice students feel less anxious because they know what to expect” (T4).

“I try to give the same amount of attention to all students, even when I am tired, because I know fairness depends on consistency” (T6).

“When students complain, I listen carefully and explain my reasons calmly instead of taking it personally” (T9).

“I share my expectations openly, and I ask students if they think these rules are reasonable. This makes them feel respected” (T11).

“Even when I disagree with a student, I remind myself to stay calm and show care, because that is what builds trust” (T12).

These accounts demonstrate how emotion regulation provided teachers with the stability needed to enact distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Teachers reported that

transparency in communication and consistency in actions were more achievable when they managed their own frustration or fatigue. They described fairness as something enacted not only through rules and grading but also through patience, respectful listening, and sensitivity to students' feelings. This suggests that emotion regulation served as a resource that enabled teachers to act in line with their justice values even in challenging circumstances.

Theme 4: Ongoing Challenges in Managing Negative Emotions

Although participants reported significant improvements in emotion regulation, they also acknowledged ongoing difficulties in applying strategies consistently. Several teachers noted that in moments of high stress or institutional pressure they still fell back on avoidance or suppression. Others highlighted how external demands, such as large class sizes or exam requirements, limited their ability to enact justice principles even when they recognized their emotions. These accounts reveal that while progress was evident, challenges persisted in sustaining regulation across all situations.

"Sometimes I avoid confronting a conflict when I feel exhausted, even though I know it would be better to address it directly" (T1).

"I still catch myself hiding my frustration from students instead of dealing with it openly" (T3).

"When I have too many classes in one day, I lose patience more easily and forget to apply the strategies" (T5).

"Even with training, the pressure from the institute makes it hard to be fair all the time" (T7).

"I know how to reframe situations, but in the heat of the moment I sometimes react automatically again" (T8).

These reflections highlight the limits of short-term training in transforming deeply ingrained emotional habits and illustrate the influence of structural factors that constrain teachers' ability to act on their justice-oriented intentions. Teachers indicated that while they valued the strategies learned, fatigue, workload, and institutional policies often undermined their ability to apply them consistently. This suggests that emotion regulation is not only an individual skill but also a practice shaped by broader teaching conditions, requiring ongoing support to be fully sustained.

Discussion

The first research question examined whether participation in the teacher education course that incorporated explicit ER training led to measurable changes in Iranian EFL teachers' use of emotion regulation strategies. The quantitative findings showed that teachers reported significant gains in engagement-oriented strategies, particularly cognitive change ($t(42) = 9.68$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.48$), situation modification ($t(42) = 6.32$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.96$), and response modulation ($t(42) = 6.70$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.02$). Attentional deployment also improved moderately ($t(42) = 3.53$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.54$). These strategies are well established as adaptive resources that enable teachers to reframe challenges, sustain positive emotions, and respond constructively to student needs rather than react defensively to stressors. The consistency of these findings with Gross's (2015) process model underscores the value of interventions that target specific points in the emotion-generative sequence. At the same time, it is important to interpret these changes as evidence of developmental shifts rather than causal effects of the intervention, since alternative explanations such as increased professional awareness during

the study period or pre-existing tendencies toward reflective practice cannot be fully ruled out. One likely explanation for the observed improvements is the course's integration of conceptual instruction with scenario-based practice, which helped teachers link theory to classroom realities and facilitated transfer of skills. In contrast, disengagement-oriented strategies such as suppression and avoidance showed little or no improvement, suggesting that entrenched habits are less susceptible to short-term training. The absence of meaningful change in situation selection is also notable and may reflect contextual constraints in Iranian EFL institutes, where teachers have limited autonomy over class composition, curricular expectations, or scheduling, leaving little room for proactive avoidance or restructuring of teaching situations. This pattern aligns with prior research indicating that reappraisal and problem-focused approaches are more sustainable in educational contexts than suppression, which is often associated with emotional exhaustion and negative relational outcomes (Taxer and Gross, 2018).

The second research question focused on whether the course shaped teachers' perceptions of classroom justice. The results demonstrated significant improvements across distributive ($t(42) = 7.90, p < .001, d = 1.20$), procedural ($t(42) = 18.54, p < .001, d = 2.83$), and interactional justice ($t(42) = 17.41, p < .001, d = 2.65$). These findings indicate that the intervention produced comprehensive gains in fairness perceptions. Improvements in distributive justice suggest greater sensitivity to equitable resource allocation and grading practices, while gains in procedural justice reflect increased commitment to transparency, consistency, and ethicality in decision-making. Interactional justice, marked by respectful and caring teacher–student relationships, also rose substantially. These outcomes are consistent with previous research demonstrating the benefits of explicit justice training (Estaji and Zhaleh, 2022) but extend the literature by showing that embedding ER training magnifies these effects. Although emotion regulation may support teachers' ability to enact justice-oriented commitments, it should not be understood as replacing the ethical grounding of justice itself; rather, ER provides emotional and cognitive resources that help teachers uphold their moral and pedagogical obligations in demanding situations. Teachers who could regulate their emotions more effectively appeared better equipped to sustain equitable practices even when faced with institutional or interpersonal stressors, echoing earlier findings that emotional competence supports justice enactment under pressure (Nazari et al., 2023; Moradi et al., 2024). However, the extent to which these improvements are sustained may depend on culturally specific institutional pressures, such as exam-driven pedagogies, managerial oversight, and heavy workloads, which can limit teachers' agency and place persistent emotional demands on their practice (Chamani et al., 2023; Sadraei et al., 2024).

The third research question explored teachers' reflections on their experiences of emotion regulation and justice enactment after completing the course. The qualitative findings revealed four key themes: increased self-awareness of emotions and triggers, deliberate use of engagement-oriented strategies, strengthened fairness and transparency in classroom management, and ongoing challenges in regulating negative emotions under stress. Teachers emphasized that heightened self-awareness enabled them to recognize emotional triggers earlier and prevent automatic reactions that could compromise fairness. They also described a conscious shift toward reappraisal, problem solving, and constructive confrontation, which they linked to more consistent and equitable classroom practices. Improved regulation skills were further connected to greater transparency in grading and rule-setting, which helped foster student trust and reduce perceptions of bias. At the same time, participants acknowledged persistent struggles, including reliance on suppression during periods of fatigue and avoidance when institutional pressures mounted. These reflections highlight both the promise and the limits of short-term interventions, underscoring the influence of broader contextual

constraints on teachers' ability to sustain justice-oriented practices. They also reflect patterns documented in emotional labor scholarship, where teachers' efforts to manage emotions are shaped not only by psychological processes but also by sociopolitical norms, institutional expectations, and culturally situated professional identities (Benesch, 2018; Zembylas, 2021).

When the quantitative and qualitative findings are integrated, a coherent picture emerges. The statistical results confirmed significant improvements in both emotion regulation and classroom justice perceptions, while the interview data illuminated how these changes were enacted in practice. For example, the large quantitative gains in cognitive change and situation modification were mirrored in teachers' accounts of reframing student behavior and addressing conflicts collaboratively. Similarly, the marked increases in procedural and interactional justice scores corresponded to reports of clearer rule-setting, equitable participation, and more respectful communication. Both strands also pointed to enduring challenges, particularly the persistence of suppression and the impact of institutional constraints. These converging results suggest that while targeted training can initiate meaningful change, its longer-term impact depends on structural conditions that support or impede teachers' emotional and pedagogical agency. Sustained change therefore requires not only individual competence but also professional development ecosystems and institutional environments that enable teachers to enact their justice commitments over time (Zohrabi & Xodabande, 2024).

The implications of these findings extend to teacher education, professional development, and educational policy. Embedding ER training within justice-oriented curricula appears to equip teachers with both the conceptual knowledge and the emotional skills necessary for consistent enactment of fairness. This dual focus addresses a gap in applied linguistics research, where ER and social justice have often been examined in parallel rather than in combination (Estaji & Zhaleh, 2022; Hu, 2023). The findings suggest that ER may function as a complementary component of justice-oriented pedagogy, strengthening teachers' capacity to act upon their ethical commitments rather than determining those commitments themselves. These findings also suggest that justice training should move beyond abstract principles to incorporate practical tools for managing the emotional demands of equitable teaching, consistent with broader calls to integrate teacher well-being and agency into professional development (Ghanizadeh & Royaei, 2015). In EFL contexts where sociocultural diversity, exam pressures, and institutional constraints complicate equitable pedagogy (Banegas & Sanchez, 2023; Moradi et al., 2024), such integrated training may be especially valuable. More broadly, the study highlights the importance of designing professional development programs that address both conceptual and emotional foundations of teaching, producing more resilient, reflective, and justice-oriented practitioners.

Conclusion

This study examined the effects of a social justice-oriented teacher education course that integrated explicit training in emotion regulation (ER) strategies on Iranian EFL teachers' regulation practices and perceptions of classroom justice. Employing a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the study provided both statistical evidence of change and qualitative insights into teachers' lived experiences. The findings indicate patterns of development in participants' ER strategy use and fairness orientations during the study period, without implying that these shifts can be attributed solely to the intervention. The quantitative results showed substantial improvements in engagement-oriented ER strategies, particularly cognitive change ($d = 1.48$), situation modification ($d = 0.96$), and response modulation ($d = 1.02$), while attentional deployment also improved moderately ($d = 0.54$). Situation selection, however, showed no meaningful change, suggesting that avoidance and approach tendencies may be less malleable.

in short-term professional development or more constrained by institutional realities. Teachers' perceptions of classroom justice similarly demonstrated marked improvement across distributive ($d = 1.20$), procedural ($d = 2.83$), and interactional dimensions ($d = 2.65$). These patterns should be interpreted cautiously, as they may also reflect increased professional awareness, self-reflection, or other contextual influences that were not controlled for. The qualitative phase provided depth to these results, highlighting teachers growing awareness of emotional triggers, more intentional use of engagement strategies, and greater emphasis on fairness and transparency in their classroom practices. At the same time, participants acknowledged persistent challenges, including ongoing reliance on suppression in stressful moments and the constraining influence of institutional factors such as workload demands and exam-oriented curricula.

Together, these findings portray a developmental trajectory rather than definitive outcomes, emphasizing the interplay between teachers' emotional resources, their ethical commitments to fairness, and the structural conditions within which they work. The results suggest that supporting teachers in integrating ER with social justice principles can strengthen their ability to enact equitable practices, particularly in contexts where pedagogical and emotional demands intersect. However, the study's methodological constraints—namely the absence of a control group, reliance on self-report instruments, and limited sample diversity—necessitate cautious interpretation and highlight the need for more robust designs in future work. Future research should extend the duration of such interventions, incorporate classroom observations to triangulate self-report and interview data, and examine how broader institutional factors shape the sustainability of justice-oriented practices. Expanding the scope to include larger and more diverse samples across different regions would also offer a more comprehensive understanding of how ER and social justice can be integrated into teacher education worldwide. Longitudinal designs would further illuminate whether developmental patterns observed here persist over time and under varying institutional conditions.

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Appendix

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your overall experience of participating in this course?
2. What were the most important things you learned during the training?
3. Can you describe a recent classroom situation where you used an emotion regulation strategy that you learned in the course?
4. Which strategies from the training have been most useful for you in managing challenging classroom emotions?
5. Have you noticed any changes in the way you deal with stress, frustration, or conflict in your teaching since completing the course?
6. Were there strategies introduced in the training that you found difficult to apply in practice? If so, why?
7. How has the course influenced your understanding of fairness and justice in the classroom?
8. Can you give an example of a situation where you consciously applied principles of fairness, equality, or care in your teaching after the course?
9. Have your relationships with students changed in terms of fairness, care, or respect since you completed the training?
10. Which aspects of classroom justice (distributive, procedural, or interactional) do you think you have improved in most?
11. Do you feel that your ability to regulate your emotions helps you to create a fairer and more supportive classroom environment? Can you give an example?
12. How do you think emotion regulation and classroom justice are connected in your teaching practice?
13. What challenges did you face when trying to implement what you learned in the course?
14. What additional support or training would help you to further develop your skills in emotion regulation and social justice-oriented teaching?