

Constructing Teachers Identity: A Narrative Analysis of Chinese Teachers' Strategies in Managing Unruly Students

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The development of teacher identity and its evolution in various contexts is an increasingly focused area of research. This study examines How teachers construct their identity in discourse when dealing with unruly students. The beliefs, identities, and emotions of teachers, which are central to their professional activities, stem from their work experiences, teaching practices, and learning histories. By employing convenience sampling method, four participants offered valuable experience in dealing with unruly students. These aspects play a crucial role in shaping their classroom management strategies and decision-making processes. Through the lens of narrative analysis, the findings indicate that while teachers have diverse attitudes and strategies towards managing disruptive behaviors, they commonly utilize interpersonal skills to build rapport and foster understanding. Considering the Chinese educational context, there is a notable deficiency in research employing narrative analysis to investigate the identity construction of Chinese-English teachers faced with student misbehavior. This study aims to address this research gap by providing insights into the dynamic nature of teacher identity in challenging classroom situations.

Key words: Narrative Analysis, Chinese-English Teacher, Identity Construction, English Teaching, Unruly Students

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Introduction

In the Chinese educational system, the formation of a teacher's identity is especially important. Because of its distinct cultural, social, and institutional features, the Chinese environment offers special opportunities as well as problems for identity creation. For example, teachers' approaches to discipline and classroom management are frequently influenced by the idea of "face," which emphasises preserving social peace and respect (Hu 2002). Teachers must carefully negotiate their professional identities within this cultural context in order to uphold their authority and cultivate strong connections with their students. The significance of comprehending the emotional and cognitive aspects of teaching has been emphasised by recent research. Barcelos (2015) makes the case for an integrated viewpoint that takes into account how these components interact dynamically, especially when it comes to classroom management. Understanding how instructors create their identities via their interactions with students—especially when handling disruptive behaviors—requires an understanding of this viewpoint.

Research on teacher identity has predominantly focused on general teaching practices and professional development. Shen et al. (2009) have explored classroom disruptions and management strategies in China, finding that cultural expectations significantly influence teachers' approaches. Yet, these studies often lack a narrative perspective that captures the nuanced, lived experiences of teachers. Current study aims to employ narrative analysis to explore how four Chinese-English teachers construct their identities in the face of unruly students. By examining their narratives, this research seeks to uncover the beliefs, emotions, and identity constructs that influence their classroom management strategies and professional development. Through this approach, the study will provide a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of teacher identity in challenging educational environments and contribute to the broader discourse on teacher identity construction in multicultural and multilingual contexts.

Literature Review

According to Barcelos (2015), teachers' beliefs, identities, and emotions are intertwined and significantly influence their teaching practices and classroom management strategies. It emphasizes their dynamism and interaction in shaping teacher identity, advocating an integrative perspective for a comprehensive understanding of the complexities in teachers' practices and decision-making. This theory will help examine how teachers' beliefs about student behavior and their own professional roles shape their identity construction. Given the Chinese context, Understanding this relationship is key to comprehending how classroom events influence the construction of teacher identities, emotions, and beliefs. Thus, the focus should be on the interplay of beliefs, identities, and emotions in the classroom, emphasizing the emotions constructed through discourses and practices in classroom interactions (Barcelos 2015).

Narrative analysis

Narrative is considered the optimal method for representing and understanding experience (Clandinin and Connelly 1996). With the narration style providing a sociocultural means to interpret the experience (Bakhtin 1986; Wetherell 2012), dealing with unruly behavior is a challenging aspect of teaching. Sharing stories can foster problem-solving discussions within school communities, encompassing images of an ideal teacher, stereotypes, and expectations (Britzman 1986; Lanas 2017; Shapiro 2010). Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou (2013) applied narrative analysis to the data, aiming to explore not just the structure and function of stories, but also their creation, consumption, silence, contestation, acceptance, and their producers. The analysis focused on story content and meanings, viewing it as a window to socially situated knowledge constructions, differences, and texture of experience (Polkinghorne 1995), depending on the philosophical position.

Classroom Conflict Management

Destructive behaviors such as selfishness, chatting during instruction, and hyperactivity, which disrupt class proceedings, are common in three Chinese regions (Shen et al. 2009). Such misbehavior can degrade the learning environment, undermine teacher authority, and reduce learning opportunities (Fields 1999). Giallo and Little (2003) define destructive behavior as any classroom behavior that impedes a student's learning, the learning of others, or the teacher's ability to effectively and efficiently perform their duties. Wideen et al. (1998) highlight the challenge for teachers in establishing close, warm relationships with students. Such relationships can enhance students' academic and behavioral performance (Roorda et al. 2017). However, stressful relationships can lead to increased teacher anger, potentially reducing their competence and job satisfaction (Hagenauer, Hascher, and Volet 2015).

2.3 Teacher Identity in the Chinese Context

Recent studies in China have provided insights into the complex interplay between teacher identity, emotions, and classroom management. For instance, Shen et al. (2009) explored how Chinese teachers manage classroom disruptions and found that cultural expectations significantly influence their strategies. The concept of "face" in Chinese culture, which emphasizes maintaining social harmony and respect, often leads teachers to adopt indirect and subtle approaches to discipline (Hu 2002).

Liu and Jackson (2008) examined the anxiety experienced by Chinese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students and its impact on their participation in class. The study revealed that teachers' perceptions of student behavior are closely linked to their own anxieties and identities, highlighting the need for teachers to develop strong emotional resilience and adaptive strategies.

2.4 Recent Studies

Numerous studies over the past decade have examined the identity shift of language teachers in foreign language studies (Farhad Ghiasvand, Kogani, and Nemati 2023; Nazari, Miri, and Golzar 2021; Barkhuizen and Wette 2008). Many teachers face emotional challenges, internal conflicts, and professional hurdles (Leeferink et al. 2018), with some research discussing the struggles of new teachers in reconciling their experiences with identity demands. Mambu (2017) explored novice teachers' identity construction through a narrative analysis of two final-year English language education undergraduates. The narratives revealed that student cooperation was crucial in overcoming teachers' fear, and a teacher's sense of agency as a debater could enhance classroom management. Conversely, Habibi et al. (2018) found that a multilingual learning environment and low teaching performance could contribute to classroom misbehavior, based on narratives from eight English teachers.

Recent studies have made new findings. Chamberlain, Scales, and Sethi (2020) conducted a thematic analysis of stories from 8 middle and high school teachers in the U.S., identifying narratives of power in challenging student-teacher relationships. The study suggested that teachers could reduce conflicts and mend relationships with students by delegating authority to them. Diniaty et al. (2021) analyzed the prospect of the Child-Friendly School (CFS) program in an Islamic senior high school using quantitative-descriptive research. The results indicated that teachers who assertively discipline are more likely to gain students' respect. Farhad Ghiasvand, Kogani, and Nemati (2023) examined professional identity conflicts, identity creation, and management strategies among 30 EFL teachers through semi-structured interviews. The study found that "teaching philosophy/ideology mismatch" and "mismatch between personal and professional self" were the main causes of identity conflicts for both inexperienced and seasoned instructors. These conflicts affected the teachers' emotional state and educational performance, influencing their identity building.

Research gap:

While the interplay between teachers' beliefs, emotions, and identities has been extensively explored, there is a notable lack of studies employing narrative analysis to understand this dynamic relationship in managing unruly students. Narrative analysis, which provides a discursive and interactive means to understand experiences, has been underutilized in this area (Li 2020). This methodological gap is significant because narrative analysis can offer deep insights into how teachers construct their identities through their stories and experiences with disruptive behavior. Secondly, the unique cultural context of China, with its specific educational practices and cultural expectations such as the concept of "face," significantly influences how teachers manage classrooms and construct their professional identities (Hu, 2002; Shen et al., 2009). There is a need for studies that address this specific demographic to better understand the cultural nuances and contextual factors that affect their identity construction.

Although emotions and beliefs are recognized as crucial in shaping teacher identities, the existing literature does not sufficiently explore how these factors interact in the face of classroom challenges, particularly with unruly students (Hagenauer, Hascher, and Volet 2015; Barcelos 2015). Furthermore, studies on classroom conflict management often focus on strategies and outcomes but do not deeply explore how these conflicts influence teachers' identity construction. The dynamic nature of teacher identity in response to classroom disruptions, and how teachers' expectations of students and their own roles evolve through these interactions, remains insufficiently examined (Chamberlain, Scales, and Sethi 2020; Farhad Ghiasvand, Kogani, and Nemati 2023)

Research Questions

This study aims to fill these gaps by using narrative analysis to explore how Chinese-English teachers construct their identities while managing unruly students. It will provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between teachers' beliefs, emotions, and professional roles in a culturally specific context. By focusing on narrative inquiry, this research will capture the lived experiences of teachers, offering rich insights into the complexities of teacher identity construction in classroom challenges. Therefore, this study intends to solve these questions:

RQ 1. How do the four Chinese teachers define their roles when dealing with unruly students?

RQ 2. What are the teachers' expectations toward unruly students, and how do they identify their students?

Method

Participants

Convenience sampling was used to select four participants, all Chinese-English teachers with an average of four years of teaching experience. The participants included Zhou and Su, who teach exam-oriented skills at a private English training institution, and Chen and Wu, who teach junior English classes at private schools. Detailed demographic information for each participant is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of four English teachers

Participant	Nationality	Subject	Workplace	Age of students	Years of Teaching
Su	China	Public English exam-oriented training	Educational institution	19-21	3.5
Zhou	China	Junior high school English	Educational institution	14- 16	2
Chen	China	Junior high school English	Private school	14- 16	5
Wu	China	Junior high school English	Private school	14- 16	6

Data Collection and analysis

Data were collected over two months using online semi-structured one-on-one interviews conducted in Mandarin to ensure participants could freely express their ideas (Mann 2011). Interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient times, and audio recordings were made with participants' consent. The interviews were then transcribed and verified by a PhD candidate in translation to ensure accuracy. To maintain high-quality data and enhance the study's validity and reliability, we minimized stylistic inconsistencies through group discussions (Kvale 2015).

The data were analyzed using a qualitative research approach combined with narrative analysis, guided by Barcelos' (2015) theory on the interplay between teachers' beliefs, identities, and emotions. We followed Block's (2017) advocacy for narrative-based research to understand teachers' real and imagined worlds through their stories. To answer the first research question, we divided each teacher's story into three phases:

Pre-teaching Phase: How their beliefs and past experiences influenced their initial teacher identity.

1. **Teaching Phase:** How they constructed and negotiated their identities while dealing with unruly students.

2. **Post-incident Reflection Phase:** How these experiences impacted their future expectations and identity development.

For the second research question, we used narrative analysis to examine the teachers' future expectations of unruly students, focusing on their strategies for managing classroom behavior and the influence on their professional identities.

Findings

Stories of four Chinese teachers dealing with unruly students

Su: An adult English teacher at an institution

Su, an English teacher in southern China, instructs adults aged 19-21, mainly college students aiming to transition to university for a bachelor's degree. She observes that her students have weak foundational English skills. In class, while most listen and take notes, their responses to questions vary.

a. Phase 1: Constraining students' performance "... my tolerance for this kind of thing, basically zero."

Su's experience with unruly students involved phone use during class. Despite their weak English skills and inability to answer all questions, some students would start using their phones about twenty minutes into the lesson.

Excerpt 1

Su: *"I usually don't take away students' phones during class. The institution asks students to turn in their phones, but I sometimes allow them to take photos of notes on the board or PPT for later reference. This way, they can write them down after class. However, some students are very involuntary. I get very annoyed, especially when I hear the phone's sound. My tolerance for this is basically zero. When I heard the sound last time, I said, 'Don't let me hear the sounds' in front of everyone."*

Excerpt 1 illustrates Su's approach to managing student behavior. Though she doesn't enforce the institution's no-phone rule, she allows students to photograph notes, indicating her expectations. This leads to conflict when phones ring in class, triggering her "annoyed" and "zero tolerance" attitude.

b. Phase 2: Confused about students' performance "... they don't know how to be students"

Su's students face significant pressure from the competitive university qualifying exam, which they have only one chance to take. The high training fees also pose a financial burden for some families. Despite these challenges, Su expects her students to take their studies seriously and ensures they understand each section of her class.

Excerpt 2

Su: *"Although I may be a strict teacher, I usually try to liven up the class atmosphere or introduce other topics for a break from the dull environment... We grew up believing students should listen carefully in class. However, these students act as if they can do whatever they want. So, I don't know what the problem is."*

In Excerpt 2, Su tries to engage students by varying classroom activities. However, her remark that "I don't know what the problem is" reveals a disconnect between her efforts and the students' behavior. Despite considering external pressures and adjusting the classroom atmosphere, Su observes that students feel they can "do whatever they want," highlighting a contrast between her expectations and their actual behavior, leading to her confusion.

c. Phase 3: Making conscious changes "... the behavior may be wrong for a teacher because the students and teachers are equal."

During the interview, Su described her approach to handling phone noises in class. Initially, she would calmly request, "Don't let me hear the sounds." However, if the noise persisted, she would rebuke the students loudly. Su reflected on her actions and discussed the changes she attempted to implement.

Excerpt 3

Su: *"I always think the behavior may be wrong for a teacher because students and teachers are equal... It is definitely not the right thing to do, so I have reflected on that. I also tried to emphasize classroom discipline for the first five minutes before class, telling them, 'Don't turn on your phone.'... I did this because I didn't want to rebuke them in class, which would lead to their rejection of me, my class, and English."*

Su reflected on her practice of rebuking students loudly. In Excerpt 3, she attempted to influence behavior by restating classroom discipline for five minutes before class to address phone use. Her efforts extended beyond managing phones, addressing the teacher-student relationship and the value students place on English, informing her future expectations for unruly students (see 5.2.1).

Zhou: A young-teenager English teacher at an institution

Zhou, who teaches English to students aged 12 to 15 at a summer institution, focuses on word meanings, phonetics, and simple grammar. Despite her overall positive experience, she acknowledges some mischievous students in her class.

a. Phase 1: Annoyed by students' poor classroom performance *"they really made me feel irritated to deal with"*

In Zhou's narrative, classroom disruptions were caused by a few overly active students. Despite their solid English knowledge and accurate answers, these students, termed "destroyers of classroom discipline" by Zhou, would answer questions without raising their hands, denying other students the opportunity to participate.

Excerpt 4

Zhou: *"Sometimes an unruly student does not mean bad grades—instead, they are students who don't want to cooperate with teachers. To a certain extent, they are the destroyers of classroom discipline. They often hindered me; for example, when I wanted to complete a teaching task or activity smoothly, they kept making trouble, which just annoyed me. I don't want to encounter such problems with students in class. They really made me feel irritated."*

Zhou's use of "irritated" reflects her feelings towards unruly students. Her primary concern was maintaining class flow and task completion, and the disruptive behavior of these "destroyers" of classroom discipline conflicted with her teaching goals.

b. Phase 2: Stopping students' inappropriate classroom performance *"if I didn't call your name, please don't answer any questions"*

In her narrative, Zhou suggested that disruptive students might seek teacher attention, disrupting class dynamics. She believes such behavior is disrespectful to other students, depriving them of equal participation opportunities. Zhou advocates for an inclusive classroom environment where every student has an equal chance to engage, rather than a few dominating the discourse.

Excerpt 5

Zhou: "... because I knew they could answer, but others couldn't, so I asked them to let others have more opportunities. However, they kept interrupting any questions I posed during class. I was angry and said, 'I hope you can keep quiet in the next class, and if I didn't call your name, please don't answer any questions.'"

Excerpt 5 illustrates Zhou's concern for class flow and all students' well-being. She ensures the disruptive behavior of a few doesn't overshadow the majority. Zhou advocates for other students' participation rights while maintaining a smooth classroom environment.

c. Phase 3: Self-reflection *"I was wrong because I did not stop them the first time..."*

In the interview, Zhou recounted her initial non-confrontational approach to unruly students, a tactic she now views as a misstep in classroom management.

Excerpt 6

Zhou: "I was wrong because I did not stop them the first time they behaved like that. When they first answered without permission, I should have asked whether other students agreed with them or not. I had condoned his behavior to some extent. I may have mishandled this, and I should have stopped him very strictly from the beginning and told him it was inappropriate behavior."

Zhou reflected on her past experiences of not immediately addressing misbehavior, which she now believes indirectly encouraged the disruptive students. Despite their adequate English knowledge, she regrets not considering the impact of their disruptions on the rest of the class. Her recollection reveals she didn't fully consider students when disruptions occurred, allowing these distractions to briefly influence her teaching approach.

Chen: A young-teenager English teacher at a school

Chen, a full-time English teacher for 13-15 year-olds, transitioned to online teaching from November 2022 to January 2023 due to COVID-19. She communicated with students and parents online and noted her students' lack of self-discipline.

a. Phase 1: Complaining about students' poor performance *"... they didn't turn in their homework that day, and that night I was really angry..."*

Chen grappled with students failing to submit homework on time during remote learning. The school mandated daily homework tracking by teachers. Chen noted her students' lack of self-motivation, often observing them to be "online on their phones, but offline in person."

Excerpt 7

Chen: "The most recent one was yesterday. The deadline for homework was 10 o'clock last night. However, when I checked at 11 o'clock, nearly 50% of the students had not finished their homework. They didn't turn it in, and I was really angry. I said (online), 'I've done a lot for you guys, why can't you finish your homework? I'm not going to teach you anymore.'"

Excerpt 7 portrays Chen as a strict, committed teacher who expects her dedication to be reciprocated by her students' performance. When students fail to meet her expectations, it leads to conflict, with Chen's initial response being to complain. She also expresses her frustration publicly online, stating, "I'm not going to teach you anymore," without considering the students' feelings.

b. Phase 2: Reviewing reactions to students' performance and self-reflection *"... I saw a message saying I had a bad temper."*

Chen reflected on her students' persistent failure to submit homework on time, a problem affecting all subjects. She questioned her management style, especially after expressing her anger in the online group.

Excerpt 8

Chen: "Then I looked at my Didi (an application for conducting online meetings, signing attendance, and uploading documents in China), and saw a message saying I had a bad temper. I thought I was too strict with my students. Because I checked homework at 10:01 that day, some students might have handed in their homework late because of something else. However, I should have considered this. I directly decided that 10 o'clock was a deadline, so the students who did not hand in their homework after 10 o'clock had no correct attitude, and I went to the group to scold them. I also need to reflect on my behavior because if I were a student, I might have many things to do in a day and may have homework for different subjects. Some students are still handing in their homework at about one or two o'clock. Then I began to reflect on whether I had met violence with violence."

Chen's self-reflection was prompted by feedback received after posting a complaint in the online group. She values this feedback and questions whether her management style was "too strict." Rather than opposing the students, she empathizes with their perspective, questioning if she had "met violence with violence." This shift from blaming students to recognizing her potential faults influenced her actions in the third phase.

c. Phase 3: Carrying out the communication actively *"After the communication, some students immediately corrected their performance and submitted their homework."*

After reflecting, Chen implemented a three-step active communication strategy to address late homework submissions. First, she individually communicated with students online, prompting some to correct their behavior and submit their homework. When this failed, she required the students to write a situation statement. If this step was ineffective, Chen communicated with the students' parents.

Excerpt 9

Chen: *"In the third step, I communicated with their parents, but the effect was not good enough because their parents may have their own busy things. The remaining 3% to 5% of the children still did not hand in their homework."*

Excerpt 9 shows Chen's preference for resolving issues directly with students rather than involving parents, finding the latter approach least effective. She discovered that using a gentler, more encouraging tone in her communication was more effective. Chen often reassures students of her belief in their potential.

Wu: A young-teenager English teacher at a school

Like Chen, Wu is a middle school English teacher instructing 13-15 year-olds in an environment impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, transitioning to online teaching in 2022. She teaches two classes, one more interactive, motivated, and competitive than the other. The latter, she observes, exhibits less engagement in teacher interaction and demonstrates passive learning progress.

a. Phase 1: Considering personal emotions and course progress preferentially *"... the unruly student would affect the teacher's classroom teaching and my mood."*

In Wu's account, she dealt with a student who, despite appearing inattentive and making faces at the camera during online class, insisted he was paying attention when confronted. Wu expressed her dissatisfaction with the student's behavior.

Excerpt 10

Wu: *"I think unruly students affect the teacher's classroom teaching and my mood. The student's reactions and performance influence the pace and progress of my class, impacting the achievement of my teaching goals. It also significantly impacts my mood and other students in the class."*

Wu's primary concern is that disruptive students hinder the attainment of course objectives. She acknowledges that her mood, affected by these students, can influence the class atmosphere.

b. Phase 2: Taking action to prove student's poor performance *"I find it challenging to manage and monitor students in an online course."*

After ineffective communication with the inattentive student, Wu refrained from blaming or complaining. Instead, she used class time to provide additional instruction, highlighting the student's earlier behavior that she found unsatisfactory.

Excerpt 11

Wu: *"I find it challenging to manage and monitor students in an online course. So I asked him to show me his textbook, and I found it blank and unmarked."*

In Excerpt 11, the student resisted Wu's reminder to pay attention, smiling at the camera. Wu inferred he was not focused on the lesson. By examining his textbook and finding it "blank and unmarked," Wu confirmed the student's inattention.

c. Phase 3: Adopting communication *"I subsequently learned that he was unsupervised at home..."*

Upon noticing the student's lack of note-taking, Wu chose not to engage extensively, prioritizing the completion of the lesson. However, she remembered her dissatisfaction and later attempted resolution by involving the parents.

Excerpt 12

Wu: *"Later, I spoke to the student's parents and informed them that the child was very unmotivated in class. I subsequently learned that he was unsupervised at home as his parents were very busy."*

In Excerpt 12, Wu addressed the student's inattentiveness by contacting the parents, concluding the poor performance was due to lack of home supervision. However, Wu's account lacks details on specific solutions or further actions taken to address the issue.

Narrations of four Chinese teachers' expectations for unruly students

Su: *"I hope they can be conscientious and take responsibility for themselves."*

Given that Su's students are adults aspiring for higher education, she expects diligence and proactivity in their studies, anticipating they will avoid distractions and address academic issues promptly. Su is committed to helping her students pass their exams.

Excerpt 13

Su: “I hope they can be conscientious and take responsibility for themselves and their own time and future, including being responsible for the money they spend. Because normally they get money from their parents. That's why I hope they can also respect their parents for making that investment for them.”

In Excerpt 13, Su's expectations extend beyond academics. She addresses unruly students as equals, viewing them as adults responsible for respecting their time, parents, and future, thus expecting maturity in their learning experience.

Zhou: “I want them to cooperate more with me and not do whatever they want.”

Zhou's narrative highlights that unruly students' lack of self-control disrupts classroom tasks and affects other students. Given their teenage years, she expects them to improve their behavior.

Excerpt 14

Zhou: “I expect that those who like to show off their knowledge can suppress themselves a little bit, then I won't spend too much time dealing with them during the class. Therefore, I won't be afraid that I have been challenged because of their misbehaviors. Apart from that, I don't need to spend too much time managing the class, so I can conduct all my teaching activities more effectively. I want them to cooperate more with me and not do whatever they want.”

In Excerpt 14, Zhou expects students to refrain from disrupting the class and to improve their behavior. She emphasizes completing classroom tasks and views students as partners in the educational process.

Chen: “I told them in the first class that attitude is everything.”

Chen's account of unruly students suggests a need for greater self-motivation and a positive learning attitude, particularly regarding homework submission without her prompting.

Excerpt 15

Chen: “If they want to change, they must first change their attitude. I told them in the first class that attitude is everything. After the attitude change, they may show it in class, and I will pay close attention to their performance.”

Chen characterizes her students as lacking self-discipline and expects them to adjust their attitudes to improve performance. As stated in Excerpt 15, “After the attitude change, they may show it in class, and I will pay close attention to their performance.” Chen believes improved attitudes will enhance behavior and hopes to avoid addressing issues from poor performance.

Wu: “I want students to learn with joy and gain joy from their learning.”

In Wu's narrative, she struggled with inattentive students and expected them to engage actively in class interactions.

Excerpt 16

Wu: “I wish my students could focus on the class, participate in it, enjoy the knowledge it brings, and be optimistic and brave to express their ideas. I want students to learn with joy and gain joy from their learning.”

Wu's expectations extend beyond attentiveness to include enjoying the learning process. As an emotionally sensitive teacher, she emphasizes maintaining an “optimistic” mindset and active engagement in learning.

Discussion

The study delves into teachers' experiences with unruly students, revealing a common narrative structure: a conflict with students, commentary on the incident, and the resolution. These incidents invariably occur in the classroom, with some teachers sharing their standard protocols for handling misbehavior. The findings echo those of Chamberlain, Scales, and Sethi (2020), where tensions originate from students, either through refusal to complete work or behavior negatively impacting the teacher. Two recurring themes emerge: 1) teachers' self-reflection and 2) expectations for students. These themes, intertwined with the teachers' perceptions of themselves and their students, are discussed in detail.

Self-Reflection: Teachers' narratives revealed that self-reflection plays a critical role in their professional development and classroom management strategies. Su's modification of classroom discipline practices and Chen's adoption of a gentler communication style are examples of how teachers adjust their methods based on reflective practices. This aligns with Schubert (1991), who emphasizes that reflection helps teachers draw on their wisdom and anticipate challenges.

Expectations for Students: The study shows that teachers' expectations significantly influence their interactions with students. Zhou's expectation for students to cooperate and Chen's emphasis on attitude adjustments illustrate how teachers' perceptions shape their classroom dynamics. Kaplan and Owings (2013) argue that expectations shape reality, suggesting that teachers' anticipations can lead to frustration if unmet, affecting their self-perception and classroom management.

The study also underscores the intense emotional labor Chinese teachers undertake, rooted in traditional beliefs. Yin and Lee (2012) highlight the concept of 操心 (heart-consuming) labor, where teachers act as parental figures, responsible for their students' academic and personal growth. This cultural expectation influences teachers like Su and Chen, who go beyond addressing academic issues to caring deeply about their students' futures.

The findings suggest that professional development programs should include training on reflective practices and emotional regulation. Teachers need support to navigate their dual roles as educators and caregivers, especially in the context of traditional Chinese beliefs. Furthermore, Schools should consider implementing policies that support

teachers in managing classroom behaviors without excessive emotional labor. Providing resources and training on effective classroom management strategies can help alleviate the burden on teachers.

Conclusion

This study examined the roles teachers play in managing problematic students and their classroom positioning. The findings suggest varied attitudes and strategies among teachers in dealing with disruptive behaviors, with a common approach being the use of interpersonal strategies to foster understanding and strengthen teacher-student bonds. The study underscores the importance of teachers' critical reflections on unruly students, aiding them in pedagogical processes and informing future actions. However, the study's limitations include a small participant pool, limiting the representativeness of teachers' experiences. Further research is needed to explore the correlation between demographic information and classroom identity construction. A larger participant pool could provide more representative insights into the diverse experiences of Chinese teachers.

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