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Writing Teachers' Emotion(s) and Agency in a Professional Development Course

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growth of research on teachers' professionalism, little is known about writing teachers' emotion(s) and agency in professional development courses. The present study addressed this gap through a two-stage project that first explored seven English language teachers' emotion and agency construction in a teacher education course centering on argumentative writing and then followed these processes post-course in relation to their writing instruction. Analyses of semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, classroom observations, and post-class discussions in different study stages revealed that the teachers experienced initial emotional apprehension and assumed agency, emotional tensions and challenged agency, and enhanced agency through developing emotionality. The findings identify the multiple phases of the writing teachers' agency development from assumed to challenged and to enhance agency, with emotions playing a key mediating role in the process. These findings offer implications for teachers and teacher educators on how to leverage writing emotions and agency to elevate the quality of writing instruction.

چکیده

علیرغم پیشرفت پژوهش بر روی کار حرفه ای معلمان، اطلاعات کمی درباره چگونگی تاثیرگذاری دوره های آموزشی بر روی احساسات و عاملیت معلمان مهارت نوشتاری در دسترس است. هدف پژوهش کنونی بررسی این شکاف تحقیقی در بافت یک پروژه دومرحله ای بود. در مرحله اول، احساسات و عاملیت هفت معلم زبان انگلیسی در یک دوره آموزشی با تمرکز بر روی مهارت نوشتاری استدلالی بررسی شد. در مرحله دوم، همین مراحل در بعد از دوره آموزشی در کلاسهای درسی معلمان بررسی شد. تحلیل مصاحبه ها، نوشتارهای انعکاسی، مشاهدات کلاسی و مصاحبه های بعد از کلاسی نشان داد که معلمان ابتدا نگرانی احساسی و عاملیت فرضی، سپس تنش های احساسی و عاملیت به چالش کشیده شده، و در نهایت عاملیت تقویت یافته و درک احساسی متقابل را تجربه کردند. در این میان، احساسات نقش موثری در اشکال مختلف عاملیتی معلمان ایفا کردند. این یافته ها به معلمان و تربیت کننده معلمان کمک میکنند که بهتر از عواطف و عاملیت های نوشتاری برای ارتقای آموزش نوشتاری استفاده کنند.

1 | Introduction

Over the past decade, research on writing teacher education has received increasing attention (e.g., Lee 2018; Nazari and Alizadeh Oghyanous 2023; Ngo 2018; Worden 2019; Yigitoglu and Belcher 2014; Yu et al. 2020). This growing scholarship has highlighted the role of sociocultural, disciplinary, and institutional factors in teachers' engagement in and embracing of educational courses. It

has been recurrently argued that in developing their professional competencies, writing teachers are likely to experience wide-ranging personal fluctuations that complicate their effective development and that these factors should be of focal attention in writing teacher education courses (see Lee 2018). One such factor, which has recently attracted much empirical attention, is teachers' emotions. The significance of emotions in teacher professional development has been well documented (e.g., Barcelos et al. 2022; Benesch 2017; Nazari and Karimpour 2023; Song 2016). Recent research on writing teachers (e.g., Geng et al. 2023; Yu et al. 2021) has also shown that they are likely to experience emotional fluctuations that could profoundly influence their writing practices embedded in institutional particularities.

As a concept that is directly linked to teacher practices (Miller et al. 2018; Tao and Gao 2021), agency bears on various aspects of writing teachers' work, including how they deliver writing instruction, provide feedback, and assess student writing. However, the agency dimension of writing teachers' professional work is under-researched. Following the same line of thinking, previous research (e.g., Nazari et al. 2024; Benesch 2018; Miller and Gkonou 2018) has shown that teachers' emotions and agency are interconnected processes fundamentally shaping their professional growth but have rarely been contextualized in teacher education courses, let alone those for writing teachers. The present study set out to fill this gap through a two-stage project that focused on Iranian writing teachers' emotional work and agency development. To this end, we not only examined the under-researched area of writing teachers' emotions and agency but also explored how teacher education could help teachers navigate their agency from a longitudinal perspective. This research perspective adds value to the present study by producing findings that can help teacher educators better connect teacher education courses to writing teachers' actual instruction.

1.1 | Writing Teachers' Professional Development

Writing is a key skill for students and academics in various spheres of education (Habibie 2022; Hyland 2006, 2016). The exponential growth in international communications and the centrality of writing in interpersonal transactions for different purposes underscore the necessity of paying heed to writing (Lee 2018; Olsen 2009; Olson et al. 2018; Worden 2019). Furthermore, the multifaceted nature of writing, which does not lend itself to a clear-cut definition (Slomp 2012), alongside the limited knowledge about the professional development of writing teachers, calls for a much-needed exploration of how writing teachers develop expertise in teaching writing, how they conduct their pedagogical practices strewn with challenges, and how they develop a writing teacher identity (Derewianka 2020; Hirvela and Belcher 2024; Weigle 2005; Yigitoglu and Belcher 2025). According to Lee (2018), research on writing teachers' development has mainly revolved around three themes: (1) sociohistorical factors shaping writing teachers' professionalism, (2) interrelationships between writing beliefs and practices, and (3) the possible impact of teacher education on writing teachers' professional development. Similar themes have been reflected in empirical work on how beliefs and contextual demands shape writing teachers' professional performances (e.g., Karaca and Uysal 2023; Liu 2024). These themes also informed the present study's data collection, with the role of context, pedagogical practices, and teacher education featuring prominently in our examination of writing teachers' emotions and agency development.

Recently, research on how writing teachers' professional profiles influence their professionalism has grown. For example, Geng and Yu (2024) made theoretical and empirical explorations of the complex, dynamic interactions between L2 writing teachers' emotions and contextual factors at macro, meso, and micro levels in a Chinese tertiary education context. In another study, Yu et al. (2021) drew on interviews, feedback comments, writing drafts, and teaching materials to uncover 27 Chinese EFL writing teachers' emotional experiences in providing feedback on students' writing. The study showed that institutional factors, students' engagement with teacher feedback or lack thereof, and teachers' own feedback beliefs greatly mediated the writing teachers' emotions. In the same context of Chinese tertiary education, Geng et al. (2023, 2) interviewed and observed 20 EFL writing teachers to probe into their emotional labor and the strategies they used to regulate their emotions. The study revealed that institutionally sanctioned feeling rules—that is, "implicit or explicit guidelines teachers adopt in assessing and managing their feelings in a given situation" —predisposed the teachers to take care of students' emotions and instrumentalize their own emotions to facilitate effective writing instruction. In a similar vein, Geng and Yu's (2024) qualitative inquiry demonstrated that the L2 writing teachers experienced a whole range of emotions colored by their personal sense-making, interpersonal transactions, and institutional particularities concerning writing instruction. Similar observations were made by Geng et al. (2025) in their report on how emotional labor served as an effective mediating factor in the participant teachers' teaching satisfaction and professional well-being. These studies have greatly advanced our understanding of how emotions feature in writing teachers' professionalism, paving the way for an emergent line of research that could be developed in greater depth.

1.2 | Language Teachers' Emotions and Agency

A growing body of knowledge is now available on language teacher emotions (Agudo 2018; Barcelos et al. 2022; Benesch 2017; Gkonou et al. 2020; Miller and Gkonou 2018) since the advent of what Pavlenko (2013) called the 'affective turn' in second language acquisition. Studies of language teacher emotions have unpacked the impact of teachers' emotional experiences on their teaching practices (De Costa et al. 2018), beliefs (Barcelos 2015; Golombek and Doran 2014), relationships with students (Li and Rawal 2018), agency (e.g., Benesch 2018; Nguyen and Ngo, 2023; Uştuk et al. 2025), sociocultural dynamics (Benesch 2017), and professional identity development (Song 2016, 2022; Wolf and De Costa 2017). Advancements in the field, though remarkable, have not yet provided a refined and expanded understanding of how emotions can partake in teachers' professional development, leaving room for more scrutiny in this regard (Benesch and Prior 2023; Gkonou et al. 2020).

As a critical element in teacher development (Benesch 2017; Schutz and Lee 2014; Zembylas 2003), teacher emotions have been generally defined as "socially constructed and personally enacted ways of being" that have the capacity to shape teachers'

judgments of, and responses to, professional incidents and phenomena (Schutz et al. 2006, 344). Given this conceptualization, the affective states of teachers are connected with discourse and practice and can play a crucial role in teacher growth through the creation of affective loops that shape teachers' sense-making processes (Benesch 2017; Song 2016). In the same vein, teachers' understandings of themselves can influence their professional development trajectory and mediate their emotional experiences throughout their teaching careers, reinforcing the argument that language teachers' emotions and practices are interconnected (Yang et al. 2021). As such, emotions can both shape language teachers' professional performativity and be shaped by their developmental processes (De Costa et al. 2018; Song 2022).

A construct closely related to teacher emotions is agency. Agency has been viewed from sociocognitive, sociocultural, and poststructural perspectives (see Kayi-Aydar 2019; Tao and Gao 2021), which explore how individual capacities, interpersonal interactions, and socioculturally defined discourse and power can inform and (re)shape teachers' agency. At the heart of agency is the doing of teaching, or teaching practices (Miller et al. 2018). The multidimensionality of agency has also been discussed in previous work on language teaching, with the emergent understanding that teachers can resist, act intentionally upon, or take the initiative to reform practices that aim for creating change (Kayi-Aydar 2015; Kayi-Aydar et al. 2019). At the same time, agency is perceived not as an intra-individual attribute but an inter-individual one constructed through moment-to-moment discursive interactions, contextual affordances, and arising contingencies in interpersonal exchanges (Ashton 2022; Vitanova 2018).

The interaction between agency and emotions of language teachers has been the focus of previous research as well. For example, Benesch (2018, 60) approached English teachers' emotional agency from the perspective of feeling rules related to plagiarism. Her findings showed that while the teachers were resisting the feeling rules implicit in their university's plagiarism policy, they also experienced emotional labor when addressing plagiarism in students' written texts. Such resistance to institutional feeling rules and emotional labor were sources of teacher agency in that they signaled engagement and could be "drawn upon to mobilize and energize teacher activism." Similarly, Miller and Gkonou (2018, 49) delved into "the co-constitutive effects of agency and emotion for language teachers." Drawing on questionnaire responses from and interviews with UK and US teachers, they found that the teachers experienced both emotional labor and emotional rewards in their relationships with students. In the context of writing instruction, Jensen (2019) explored how one pre-service teacher exercised agency in teaching 21st-century writing skills to students. The case study collected stimulated recall interviews over a semester and revealed that the teacher's narratives about herself, her beliefs, and her teaching context that were constructed in the interviews catalyzed her agency and facilitated her enactment of the chosen pedagogy. In addition, Goldsmith (2023) used interviews, journal entries, and classroom observations to explore how four mid-career teachers exercised agency in their writing instruction. The narrative inquiry revealed that teacher identities constituted significant influences on teachers' ability to exercise agency in the effective delivery of writing to their students.

1.3 | The Present Study

The extant knowledge on writing teachers, language teacher emotions, and language teacher agency points to several important threads. First, emotional fluctuations are likely to happen to writing teachers when they construct interpersonal relationships with their students, potentially leading to emotional conflicts and tensions. Second, the emotional dimension of writing teachers' work is much more likely to influence their agency, and vice versa, because both are directly connected to their daily work and are co-constitutive. Third, little, if any, research has attempted to address writing teachers' emotions and agency in teacher education courses and track their emotion and agency development over time and in relation to their actual writing instruction, revealing dynamic interactions between course participants' emotional and agency experiences.

The extant research suggests that the nexus of emotion and agency is a pristine, yet significant, area to examine and understand in writing teachers' professional development because their co-constitutive relationship can profoundly influence writing teachers' daily work. Exploring this relationship promises to offer fresh insights because it can: (a) push the boundaries of research on second language writing and expand the literature on writing teacher development; (b) unpack how emotion and agency intersect to shape writing teachers' professional development in different contexts; and (c) inform writing teacher educators' design and development of pre- and in-service courses with a particular focus on teacher emotions, agency, and their interconnections to enhance course participants' emotion literacy and facilitate their during- and post-course professional development. The present study aimed to achieve all three objectives through a multi-stage inquiry that tracked a group of Iranian English language writing teachers' emotional experiences and agency development over time. The study addressed the following question:

How do Iranian writing teachers navigate emotion(s) and agency in a teacher education course and actual instruction on argumentative writing in their classroom?

2 | Method

2.1 | Context

The context for this study was a private language school in Iran. The school was located in a multilingual, multicultural city and promoted its context-specific policies in terms of teacher recruitment, teacher education, student advancement to higher levels, and teacher classroom observation, all being decided by school policymakers and supervisors. It enacted a curriculum that focused predominantly on developing students' four macro language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Based on personal communication (see below), the teachers often lamented the low quality of students' writing. They complained that despite pedagogical efforts to help them write better texts, their students were not making good progress in their writing. However, to develop strong competence in writing was a must for many of the students because they intended to pursue higher education in various academic fields. As the school offered

general English classes that mainly targeted oral/aural skills, writing did not receive sufficient attention from the students. The marginalization of writing could affect the teachers' attention to and emotions about their students' writing competence, thereby offering a good opportunity for this study to explore what emotions they held about students' writing skills and writing instruction, whether they had or developed agency in the teaching of writing, and how teacher education could help them manage their emotional experiences and construct emotionally anchored agency to positively contribute to students' writing development.

2.2 | Participants and Positionality

This study employed purposive sampling to select a research site and participants that we were familiar with. As the first author had worked in the aforementioned private language school, he invited teachers there to participate in this study, and seven of them (T1-T7) accepted his invitation. These participants were experienced English language teachers, with an average of six years of teaching experience. Their ages ranged from 27 to 32 years, and their gender ratio (6 females and 1 male) resulted from the pool of teachers available to the first author. Their educational backgrounds included bachelor's and master's degrees in English Language Teaching (ELT) and Translation Studies. These teachers had attended teacher education courses on writing during their BA and MA studies, but the private language school had not offered any in-service training in writing instruction since they started to teach there. This lack of previous in-service training made the teacher education course we offered to these teachers particularly welcome and valuable because it could help the teachers unpack their emotional experiences associated with writing instruction and inform their teaching practices. Since the study focused on argumentative writing based on Hyland (1990), we involved only teachers who taught the advanced proficiency level. The main reason for focusing on the argumentative genre in our teacher education course and this study was that it was a difficult but important genre to the students and, consequently, could be a very challenging genre for the teachers to teach and their students to learn. Thus, this pedagogical and research focus was a response to Lee's (2018) call that research on writing teachers should be sensitive to contextual demands (e.g., students' learning needs/challenges and teachers' related concerns).

Regarding positionality, the first author was a former colleague of the participating teachers. He had taught in the same language school for four years and was familiar with its operations and the larger sociocultural context of the city where it was located. His insider knowledge and teaching experience enabled him to make sense of the teachers' emotions and agency regarding writing instruction with depth and empathy. Furthermore, the teachers' prior familiarity with the first author also facilitated their willing participation and full engagement in the study. The second and third authors are also seasoned teachers and teacher educators who have taught English in the Iranian higher education sector, and the fourth author is an experienced researcher specializing in academic genres, including argumentative writing, and developing a growing familiarity with ELT and teacher education in Iran through previous collaborative research projects. The second and third authors are familiar with the curricula of private language schools and the general tendency for these schools to pay less attention to students' argumentative writing. As they were based in another city, they were able to share their knowledge about common practices in writing instruction and students' writing problems in language schools located in another part of Iran and assess the transferability of this study's findings to their context. Drawing on his extensive research experience, the fourth author brought a largely etic perspective to this study and made the other authors look at the familiar from a fresh perspective. The combination of our emic and etic perspectives deepened our understanding and strengthened our interpretations.

2.3 | Research Design and Procedure

Since our study focused on how teacher education could influence writing teachers' emotions and agency as well as inform their writing pedagogy, we adopted a two-stage research design. Multi-stage research designs are appropriate for inquiries that track participants' behaviors and sense-making over time (Ary et al. 2018). Such a research design suited the purpose of our study well because we aimed to first provide the participating teachers with in-service training in teaching argumentative writing and then find out how they would navigate their emotions and agency when teaching writing.

Thus, the first stage of our study centered on the teacher education course. Aware of the teachers' concerns for students' writing (as revealed in formal interviews and personal communications), we invited them to participate in a teacher education course on writing pedagogy that focused on argumentative writing. The teachers were enthusiastic about the course, and based on their preferences and needs, the course was designed to cover both theoretical and practical issues. It's 14 sessions comprised of (a) an introductory session focusing on the nature and theoretical aspects of argumentative writing, (b) a session dedicated to each of the 12 moves of argumentative writing identified by Hyland (1990), and (c) a concluding session integrating course content, evaluating course limitations, and proposing improvements for future iterations. The face-to-face course was conducted in both Persian (L1) and English. In the 12 sessions devoted to the generic moves of argumentative writing, the teachers were introduced to both theoretical information about the moves and their practical realizations in writing. This was followed by group or individual writing tasks that required the teachers to actualize their own ideas in practice by producing argumentative texts (see Worden 2019). At this stage, agency was operationalized in terms of the teachers' own engagement in drafting texts and group work focused on argumentative writing.

The second stage of the study focused on the teachers' own teaching of argumentative writing in their classrooms. In their first session, the teachers devoted 30 min of their classroom time to explaining the importance of argumentative writing and teaching its principles to their students. In the subsequent sessions (30 min each), the teachers asked their students to engage in individual or peer work on the different elements of argumentative writing and write key segments (e.g., evaluation, claim, support, or consolidation) of an argumentative text. At the end of the semester, the teachers asked their students to

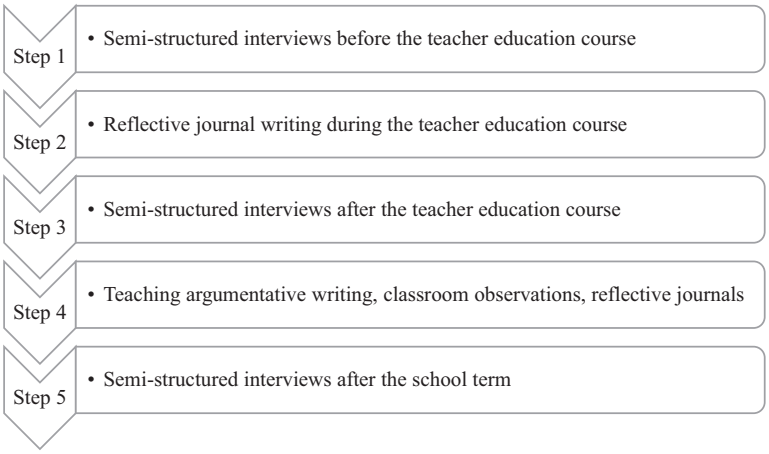

FIGURE 1 | Steps of data collection across the two study stages.

write a complete argumentative text on a controversial topic. It must be mentioned that both in the teacher education course and during the teachers' formal instruction in argumentative writing, topics that could stimulate critical discussions were selected (e.g., gender equality, student rights, social movements, environmental concerns, effects of mobile phones, etc.) to prompt the teachers' and students' critical thinking.

2.4 | Data Collection

Parallel with the stages of the study, data were collected at five junctures (Figure 1). First, we conducted initial face-to-face interviews with the teachers to collect their perceptions of argumentative writing, their experiences with students' and their own writing, the role of their feelings in writing instruction, and their expectations about the teacher education course. The teachers' responses were followed up with further probing questions, where appropriate. Each individual interview lasted around 35 min on average and was conducted in Persian.

Second, during the teacher education course, we asked the teachers to record their ongoing perceptions in reflective journals, which have been found to be useful tools for capturing developments in teachers' sense-making processes (Richards and Farrell 2005). Specifically, the teachers wrote down their reflections on the content and enactment of the course, their evolving self-perceptions and feelings, perceived problems in course design and delivery, and effective ways to contextualize argumentative writing. The foci of the reflective journals aligned with earlier scholarship (e.g., Lee 2013, 2018; Worden 2019) on effective implementation of writing courses. The teachers could write their reflections in Persian and consult the researchers where necessary.

Third, when the teacher education course was completed, we ran another round of semi-structured interviews with the teachers to gauge their overall responses to the course. The interview questions zoomed in on the teachers' understanding of argumentative writing, their emotions about writing argumentative writing and its instruction, the effects, if any, of the course on their beliefs and future perceptions, and the possible challenges that they might face in teaching argumentative writing. These considerations were motivated by the literature (e.g., Lee 2018) on how teacher education courses influence teachers' developing perceptions and practices. The face-to-face interviews lasted on average 40 min and were conducted in Persian.

Fourth, after the second-round interviews and in line with the literature (e.g., Lee 2018; Yu et al. 2020), we attempted to establish a link between the teacher education course and the teachers' writing instruction, a step often emphasized as necessary for effective teacher education courses (Freeman 2020; Johnson and Golombek 2020). Thus, at the second stage of the study, we observed the teachers' classes to find out how they enacted the introduced principles of argumentative writing, navigated instructional challenges, and responded to student questions. These classroom observations were supplemented by the copious field notes taken by the first author to capture significant classroom incidents and challenges that would be used to coach the teachers to effectively handle similar incidents and challenges in the post-observation conferences. For example, when a teacher had problems teaching the "gambit" move (Hyland 1990), we shared with him/her strategies for teaching the move. The classroom observations revealed recurrent emotional dynamics (both positive and negative) among the teachers and their students during the writing instruction, which rendered writing emotions and agency a central focus of the present investigation. We also asked the teachers to keep journals at this stage to document, in Persian, their ongoing reflections on students' responses, arising challenges, the emotional toll of teaching argumentative writing, and other relevant issues occupying their minds. The reflective journals helped to further our understanding of the teachers' ongoing emotional and agency development. They were returned to the teachers after our careful perusal and analysis.

Finally, we conducted a third round of face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with the teachers based on what we found in the second-round interviews, the classroom observations, and the reflective journals. These interviews aimed to elicit the teachers' views of argumentative writing instruction, the upsides and downsides of teaching argumentative writing, the instructional challenges encountered, the emotions that they

had toward writing and students, any changes to their self-perceptions, and their overall evaluations of the experience, all in line with the emotion and agency dimensions that the present study focused on. As in the first two rounds of interviews, we probed into the teachers' responses with follow-up questions. The one-on-one interviews, conducted again in Persian, lasted 35 min on average. All the interviews, like the first- and second-round interviews, were recorded with an audio recorder. The data were then transcribed for further analysis.

2.5 | Data Analysis

A content analysis (Cohen et al. 2007) was conducted on the whole data set (three rounds of interviews, two sets of reflective journals, classroom observations, and post-observation discussions). The analysis was aimed at developing codes and categories with which to track the teachers' emotion and agency development. Specifically, the data analysis began with developing codes after familiarizing ourselves with the data. To facilitate this process, we treated each teacher as a separate case and coded his/her data by source and round (of interviews). For example, the first interview with Participant #1 was identified as Round 1 for T1. This way of classifying the data facilitated developing codes for each teacher across the stages. As an example, when T1 referred to her ability to actualize effective instruction in argumentative writing through emotional engagement, it was coded as "agency in effective writing instruction through emotionality". All data extracts subsumed under this code were then compared carefully to reveal that the earlier extracts reflected "assumed agency", whereas the later extracts showed actualized or increased ability to teach argumentative writing, hence "enhanced agency". This approach to data coding enabled an interactive and iterative analysis of the data, which in turn enhanced the credibility of the codes and subsequent categories generated. The codebook thus generated for each teacher provided the basis not only for engaging an integrative analysis of the whole data set but also for profiling each teacher's developmental trajectory, in line with the literature on emotion and agency development (e.g., Benesch 2018).

Next, we pooled the codes per teacher and round, together with the associated data extracts, for two further analytical steps. One was to refine, through constant comparison, the codes for all teachers at the same stage of data collection (e.g., the first interviews) to capture how they viewed their emotions and agency in relation to their professional development at a particular juncture. The other step was to engage in a diachronic analysis of the codes for each teacher across the stages and data sources, which constituted the bulk of data analysis in this study. Such an analysis had the advantages of trekking through the data from several stages and enhancing the accuracy and trustworthiness of the analysis. It should be pointed out that the classroom observations were mainly used to support and triangulate the analytical work performed on the data from the other sources, for example, by extracting incidents that bolstered or conflicted with analytical interpretations. All of these analytical processes were undertaken relative to the stages of the study in order to explore how the teachers' emotional experiences and agency took different or similar colorings in response to the teacher education course and their actual writing instruction in the classroom. In this regard, it should be noted that a new contribution of this study to scholarship on writing teachers' emotionally rooted professional development was its tracking of the participants' emotion and agency development from in-service training to actual teaching across the study stages.

After data coding was completed, we had a pool of codes that was drawn on to develop broader categories that could effectively capture the dynamics and interactions of the teachers' emotion and agency development as writing teachers. At this stage, we cross-checked the codes in order to generalize categories that could representatively profile the teachers' emotion and agency development. Through constant comparison, interactive refining, and iterative definition, we arrived at three broader categories that straddled the two study stages, which are reported below. It must be mentioned that throughout the stages of data collection and analysis, the teachers engaged in member-checking. For example, in the post-observation discussions, the field notes were shared with the teachers to ensure their accuracy. Similarly, the results of the analysis on the reflective journals were checked with the teachers to determine if we understood and interpreted their reflections accurately. Figure 2 summarizes the stages of data analysis.

3 | Findings

Figure 3 presents the three broad categories defining the teachers' emotion and agency development as writing teachers. In what follows, these categories are presented, and sample extracts are provided to illustrate, explain, and substantiate them.

3.1 | Initial Emotional Apprehension and Subsequent Assumed Agency

Before attending the teacher education course, the teachers expressed their concerns about its effectiveness. They were apprehensive that the course may not yield the desired outcomes. For example, T2 expressed her worries that the course might not contribute to bringing about significant progress in students' writing: "I am worried that the course may not influence the students' writing as much as we expect" (Interview 1). The teachers experienced emotional apprehension due to the anticipated challenges of effectively implementing course content in their classrooms due to low student cooperation: "You know, I am kind of worried that I may not be able to apply the course content in the classes because the students may not cooperate as much as they should" (T1, Interview 1).

Additionally, the teachers were concerned that they might disappoint the research team by failing to teach argumentative writing effectively: "I know that teaching argumentative writing is difficult. And I don't want to disappoint you because of ineffective actualization of the course in my classes" (T6, Interview 1). In response to these concerns and worries, we assured the teachers that the course was exploratory and that nothing untoward would happen to them even if they could not teach argumentative writing effectively in their classes.

Following this initial apprehension, the teachers started the course. During the course, the reflective journals kept by them

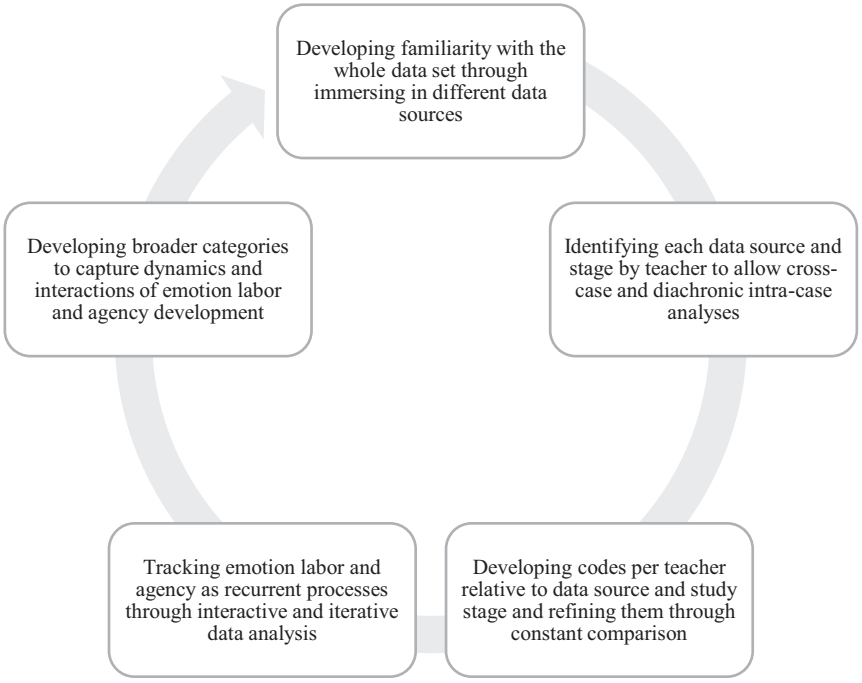

FIGURE 2 | The stages of data analysis.

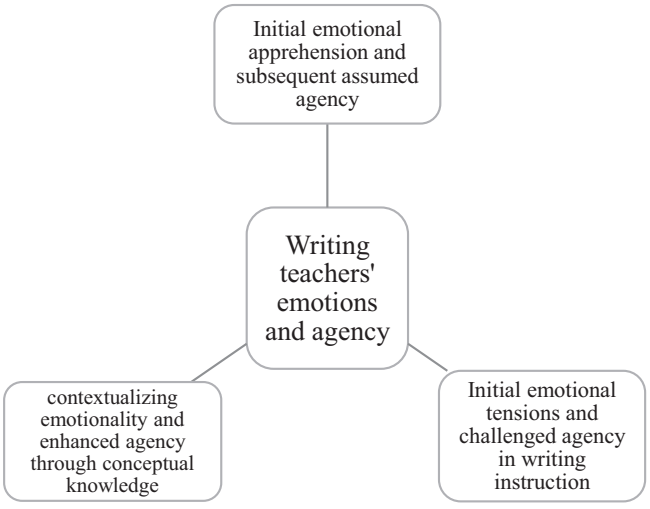

FIGURE 3 | Categories of writing teachers' emotion and agency development.

revealed that they gradually went beyond emotional tensions and came to believe in their abilities to deliver effective instruction in argumentative writing, marking their greater agency in writing instruction. As they learned more about argumentative writing and its pedagogy, the teachers assumed that they were able to teach argumentative writing effectively. This assumed agency, based on their changed self-perceptions, was later challenged when they started to teach argumentative writing in their own classrooms. The following extracts, taken from the teachers' reflective journals, evidenced their assumed agency. In the extracts, the teachers were positive about their ability to translate the course content in their own classes: "I can practice this in my classes as well" (T4); "I can teach it in my classes" (T7); "I can also help the students write critical texts" (T2). These opinions underlined their envisioned agency in teaching argumentative writing competently to their students:

> I feel that now I understand the course and its materials better. I am relieved that I can practice this in my classes as well. (T4, Reflective Journal 5)

> One special point that I like is that we practice writing based on the moves. And this is a strong point of the course that makes me believe that I can teach it in my classes as well. (T7, Reflective Journal 7)

> I had many emotional challenges initially because I thought the course may not work, but now I feel that the support that we receive and the course content are leading to good progress in my writing. Because I write in the course, I think that I can also help the students write critical texts. (T2, Reflective Journal 6)

Thus, the teachers' emotional and agency trajectories in the teacher education course featured initial concerns and uncertainties, followed by changed self-perceptions and assumed agency in teaching argumentative writing effectively.

3.2 | Initial Emotional Tensions and Challenged Agency in Writing Instruction

In the second round of interviews conducted before teaching argumentative writing in their classes[1], the teachers anticipated that they might face emotional tensions because their experiences of working with colleagues in the teacher education course would differ from their experiences with students: "One of the points that has occupied my mind is that I feel that I may experience

emotional tensions in the class because the students may resist or don't work well or don't do the activities. Such stuff is problematic" (T5, Interview 2). Similar concerns were expressed by other teachers about the differences between their own and their students' writing experiences: "I am afraid that there would be great differences between the course and the classes. You know, we [participant teachers] are colleagues [in the teacher education course] and know how to handle things, but these are children, and there are many challenges to work with them" (T1, Interview 2).

Such concerns were indeed confirmed in teaching practice. For example, during the observation of T3's class, one student asked, "OK teacher, why should we learn it?" Although T3 explained that "Well, writing is something you will need for your whole life, so you should learn it," the student was not convinced. This and similar incidents were discussed in the post-observation conference, with T3 noting that they created emotional tensions. In another instance, T5 expressed frustration in her reflective journal over her students' struggles with the moves of argumentative writing: "Sometimes I feel that either I'm an ineffective teacher or they are dumb students who can't understand how to write when I have clearly told them what to do. This is making me tired" (Reflective Journal 8). Similarly, T3 noted that her students' lack of progress disappointed her and caused emotional distress, negatively impacting her agency in writing instruction: "It sometimes bothers me when I see that some students don't cooperate well. This makes the class tense for me, and I feel disappointed by the students' poor progress" (Reflective Journal 8). These classroom experiences were thus challenging the teachers' self-efficacy in teaching argumentative writing effectively.

Instructional challenges in teaching argumentative writing moves undermined the teachers' sense of professional agency. For example, during the post-observation conference, T4 observed that her classroom experiences diverged significantly from what she experienced in the teacher education course: "I really don't understand why I can't teach the way you taught us." Similarly, T5 confided how she struggled to teach the moves and felt disengaged: "In the [teacher education] course, it was really easy, but sometimes students distract me while teaching a move, and they then don't learn it well. This makes me feel bored" (Reflective Journal 9). Such a sense of challenged agency was particularly evident in the teachers' initial reflective journals:

> I think that I explained the point to them [students] clearly, but they still had problems with it in their writing. Such experiences make me feel that I can't teach as well as required. (T1, Reflective Journal 9)

> The other day, I was teaching restatement and told the students how to do this in their writing, but some of them had problems understanding both me and the content. And the more I tried, the worse it got. For a moment, I thought that maybe I am not a good teacher, and of course I thought about the students' low mental processing as well. (T7, Reflective Journal 8)

In these extracts, reflections such as "I can't teach as well as required" and "the more I tried, the worse it got" highlighted the teachers' challenges with argumentative writing instruction and conveyed a diminished sense of agency, shaped by their self-perceptions and student-related factors. Thus, the teachers' initial forays into argumentative writing instruction were fraught with emotional tensions that challenged their teaching agency.

3.3 | Contextualizing Emotionality and Enhanced Agency Through Conceptual Knowledge

As the semester progressed, especially toward its end, the teachers demonstrated more effective implementation of argumentative writing instruction, attributable to their growing content and pedagogical mastery, improved handling of their and students' emotions, and greater student cooperation. Given that emotional tensions are integral to new experiences, T2 described how she gradually made progress and learned how to better handle the emotional tensions, attendant on argumentative writing instruction: "I feel that any new experience invokes emotional tensions and this was also the same for us, but we gradually handled it better" (Interview 3). T6 noted the importance of emotionality (i.e., developing mutual, emotional understanding) between teachers and students in enhancing pedagogical effectiveness, particularly in writing instruction: "I think that when you care about students' emotions, your teaching becomes better. This works in writing more because it is naturally a difficult skill and needs more attention" (Interview 3).

A major contributor to the teachers' emotional and agency development and more effective writing instruction was their growing awareness of the importance of emotional support for students and their efforts to provide such support. For example, T7 described how emotional support for her students enhanced her agency in the classroom, thus fostering her self-perceptions as an effective teacher: "I was wondering why my instruction didn't work the way I expected. Why didn't they learn as much as they should have? I realized that emotional support was a determining factor. So, when they made mistakes, I was more patient and tolerant of the mistakes. I feel that this caught the students' attention because I saw some of them getting motivated, and this made me feel that I was doing it right" (Interview 3). T2 also reported that providing emotional support reduced student disruptions and enhanced her ability to act agentically: "I feel that each student has their own language. I mean, you should treat each student according to what suits them. I have adopted this strategy, and the way I talk to them makes a difference in the way they see me as a supportive person" (Interview 3).

Another factor enhancing some teachers' agency was their cultivation of positive emotions toward writing in their students. As T6 noted, fostering student enjoyment of the writing process improved learning outcomes: "After the initial tensions, I found the instructional content was fine—it didn't have any problems. Their failure to learn it resulted from insufficient support. I taught as if I only saw them as machines that should copy the content from me. Now I try to relieve the students' negative emotions and encourage them to enjoy the process to make their writing better. This makes me better because they are not afraid of making mistakes" (Interview 3). Similarly, T3 also emphasized that

emotions mediated her agency as a writing teacher and her students' receptivity of the pedagogy: "Although [my students] are young adults, some of them occasionally get lazy or don't follow well, but I always try to maintain a friendly, supportive attitude toward them. I shared with them the benefits of argumentative writing for their university education and let them know that they would encounter fewer emotional challenges at university if they acquired the writing skills now. This proved useful because they gradually changed their mindsets" (Interview 3).

Another way for the teachers to augment their teaching agency was to draw on their empowering experiences in the teacher education course. The teachers mentioned in their final journal entries and interviews that the emotional support extended to them in the course made them pay more attention to such support when working with their students on the argumentative writing moves. For example, T4 observed that she was inspired by her course experiences to regulate her own emotions when students made mistakes: "I remember that I made the same mistake in the course, but [the lecturer] behaved in a way that did not make me feel ashamed. I recalled this experience immediately to keep tabs on my emotions when the student made that mistake in my class" (Reflective Journal 13). T1 also related how emotions experienced in the course prompted her reflections on her own and students' emotions: "When I was once writing my journal, the word 'emotion' caught my attention. I thought a lot about the affective support given us during the course and after the classes this semester. I felt that perhaps I should pay more attention to affect rather than just teaching the moves. I made the lessons more enjoyable by having fun with the students and likening the moves to animals in a zoo. This really worked, and I found that the students are more comfortable now" (Reflective Journal 13).

To sum up, the teachers moved from challenged agency at the beginning of their writing instruction toward enhanced agency through recognizing and contextualizing the dynamics and functions of emotions in their work, aided by their course learning experiences, reflective practices, and greater emotional literacy. Thus, emotionality was a source of teacher agency.

4 | Discussion

The findings presented above show that the teachers were able to move from emotional tensions and assumed agency before and during the teacher education course to challenged agency at the beginning of their argumentative writing instruction and finally to enhanced agency as a result of their growing emotionality toward the end of the school semester.

It was noteworthy that the teachers had initial emotional apprehension but felt some agency as a result of their positive experiences and increased knowledge about argumentative writing obtained in the teacher education course. In her discussion on writing teachers' professional development, Lee (2010, 2013) drew emphatic attention to the importance of considering teachers' pre-existing mentalities and perceptions, a point that was reiterated and elaborated in her 2018 proposal about effective education courses for writing teachers. In this study, we found that the teachers went through different emotions as their statuses (participants in a teacher education course versus classroom teachers) and contexts (the teacher education course and the classrooms in the private language school) changed, in line with the findings reported in Yu et al. (2021), Geng and Yu (2024), and Geng et al. (2025) regarding the interdependence of writing emotions with contextual factors. Their emotional tensions were also connected to their agency in writing instruction, consistent with Jensen's (2019) conceptualization of the role of agency in effective writing pedagogy, though their initial agency turned out to be assumed and subsequently challenged. What was novel about our study was that the relationship between emotion and teaching agency was tracked from a teacher education course to actual classroom instruction. Our findings showed how the very idea of attending the teacher education course created an affective burden for the teachers (mainly in the form of emotional tensions rooted in uncertainties about their ability to apply the course content in classroom teaching), but how learning about and engaging in argumentative writing in the course enabled them to envision agency in effective writing instruction and then sustain their tempered agency over time.

After the teacher education course, the teachers again experienced emotional tensions, and their assumed agency was significantly challenged by the classroom realities. This finding aligns with Lee's (2018) and Worden's (2019) argument that writing teachers often face (emotional) challenges in actualizing pedagogical ideas, largely due to student-related factors. Previous scholarship on writing teacher emotions (e.g., Geng and Yu 2024; Geng et al. 2023; Yu et al. 2021) also showed that cultivating effective writing pedagogy is often fraught with emotional challenges related to feedback, assessment, and student peculiarities. Furthermore, extant research on writing teachers' agency (e.g., Goldsmith 2023; Jensen 2019) suggested that writing teachers' self-perceptions mediate the enactment of their professional agency. The findings of the present study add to this scholarship in two respects. First, in practice, the teachers realized that their sense of agency during the teacher education course was only assumed agency awaiting the test of student particularities in the classroom. This finding partially corroborated Kayi-Aydar's (2015) contention that student-related factors can challenge teachers' agency potential. Second, a key factor that challenged the teachers' assumed agency was their insufficient attention to emotions' mediating role in instructional effectiveness, an oversight that they later addressed, leading to substantial improvements in learning outcomes. Thus, our findings indicate that while writing teachers may envision agentic positions for themselves as a result of participating in teacher education courses, their perceived agency will be tempered or recalibrated by classroom realities.

Toward the end of their writing instruction, the teachers used emotions as a tool to enhance their agency. Although this finding is quite novel in the context of writing teachers' emotion and agency development, Benesch (2018) has earlier reported on how teachers can use their emotional agency to tailor their instruction to contextual demands. Our findings do add to this scholarship by showing how the teachers drew on their emotional learning during the teacher education course to enhance and enact their agency in the classroom, pointing to a new and important avenue for teacher education coursework to influence classroom instruction positively. A similar point has been made by Geng and Yu (2024) when they argued that emotions deserve more attention in research on writing teacher education. In light of our findings, we

second their argument and propose that to narrow the persistent gap between teacher and student learning, research needs to focus on pre- and in-service writing teachers' affective experiences and emotional literacy in teacher education programs. Our proposal is supported by the teachers' acknowledgement that their initial struggles to teach argumentative writing stemmed partly from their earlier neglect of students' emotional needs. It is also supported by the teachers' efforts to reflect on and leverage their own emotional experiences in the teacher education course to adjust their instructional practices and enhance their teaching agency.

Last, our study offers fresh insights into the dynamics of emotionally anchored agency as a cornerstone of writing teachers' professional development. Little can be found in the literature about how to foster such agency in the context of writing teacher education courses or even in teacher education courses in general. To address this gap in our understanding, our study tracked the developmental trajectory of writing teachers' agency from initial assumed agency to challenged agency and finally to enhanced agency in response to the professional training and the dynamics of classroom realities. More importantly, the findings show the key role of emotions in this tripartite process of agency development, which adds value to the study findings by showing how writing teachers' emotional repertoire and emotionality can facilitate their professional development and empower them.

5 | Conclusion

Collectively, the findings of this study highlight the multiple phases of the writing teachers' agency development: from assumed agency during the teacher education course, through challenged agency during the early stages of translating the course content into classroom instruction, to enhanced agency brought about by reflective practice, recontextualization of their course learning experiences (especially positive emotional experiences), and growing emotionality enabling them to adopt effective emotional strategies. Across these phases, emotions featured as a significant factor, interacting with and anchoring the writing teachers' agency development.

The findings of this study offer implications for writing teachers and teacher educators. For the former, as we have observed, writing instruction involves emotional fluctuations that impact teaching agency. Writing teachers can document their emotional dynamics for reflection to better understand how their emotions are interwoven with their agency in delivering effective writing instruction. Part of their reflection may focus on what and how emotions have facilitated or inhibited their agency development. For teacher educators, a sound understanding of teacher emotions and their nexus with teaching agency can inform their design and delivery of professional development courses that model positive emotional experiences and cultivate participants' emotional literacy and capacity to draw on emotional resources in support of agency development. In particular, teacher educators can engage trainee teachers in sharing their emotions and agency in peer work and mentoring sessions to help them develop a communal sense of their emotional experiences and agency development. Furthermore, trainee teachers' own writing emotions can be mobilized to enhance their writing efficacy so that they can draw on such experiential learning to design instructional activities for their own students. Such initiatives can reduce the gap between writing teachers' own and their students' learning. They can also build strong links between writing teacher education courses and what transpires in trainee teachers' own classrooms.

While this is one of the first studies documenting the co-constitutiveness of writing teachers' emotions and agency in their professional development, we believe that further research should be conducted on a greater number of teachers to better understand the process of writing teachers' emotion and agency development. Some of the insights from this study (e.g., initial emotional tensions in teaching writing, assumed agency, challenged agency, and agency development through emotions) could inform research on teachers of other subjects and working in different contexts to explore the direction of the relationship between emotion and agency or the different routes that emotionally anchored agency development may take. Future research can also connect writing teacher education courses to students' writing development through experimental designs that measure student learning, something that the present study was unable to do. With these limitations in mind, we hope that the findings of this study can help teachers and teacher educators better understand the role of emotion and agency in instructional effectiveness in particular and professional development in general.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Endnotes

[1] Although the teachers were also teaching writing in their own classrooms during the teacher education course, we asked them to follow their usual pedagogical practices and teaching content. That is, the teachers were not segregated from their classrooms during the course and then allowed to teach writing only after completing the course. It was likely that some teachers were also teaching argumentative writing in their classes during the course, but because we asked them not to do so, we trusted them and did not ask about this anymore.

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