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VISUALISING TEACHER ANXIETY AND IDENTITY IN THE SOUTH KOREAN CONTEXT

ABSTRACT

In South Korea, elementary school teachers are increasingly experiencing anxiety due to intensified emotional labor, heightened parental expectations, and shifting sociocultural perceptions of the teaching profession. While prior research has examined teacher stress from psychological and institutional perspectives, less attention has been given to how anxiety is expressed and interpreted through multimodal and reflective practices within specific sociocultural contexts. This study explores how teachers visualize and reflect upon their anxiety through art-based expression and dialogue, and how these processes relate to their professional identity. Adopting a qualitative multimodal design, the study integrates narrative inquiry, visual analysis, and dialogic interaction. Four in-service elementary school teachers participated in structured art-based activities and reflective dialogues. Data were collected from visual artworks, reflective writings, and recorded dialogues, and analyzed using thematic analysis with multimodal integration. The findings indicate that participants' anxiety is shaped by external expectations, emotional suppression, and identity-related tensions. The limitations of this study include the small sample size ($n = 4$) and the exploratory nature of the research, both of which limit the transferability of the findings. Therefore, the interpretations presented here should be understood as context-specific insights rather than generalizable conclusions. Art-based expression functioned as a reflective medium, enabling participants to externalize and reinterpret their emotional experiences, while dialogue facilitated shared understanding and relational meaning-making. Rather than generalizing beyond the study context, the findings provide insight into how anxiety is experienced and negotiated within a specific sociocultural setting. This study contributes methodologically by demonstrating the value of integrating visual and dialogic approaches in qualitative research on emotional and identity-related phenomena. It also suggests implications for teacher education and professional development by highlighting the importance of reflective and expressive practices.

Keywords

Teacher anxiety; Multimodal inquiry; Visual art expression; Educational dialogue; Teacher identity.

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1. Introduction

Anxiety is a significant psychological phenomenon in modern society, influencing both individual well-being and broader social dynamics. In educational contexts, teachers' emotional states play a critical role in shaping teaching practices, student experiences, and institutional environments. Despite extensive research on anxiety across psychological and social domains, its manifestation within the teaching profession—particularly in relation to identity and sociocultural context—remains underexplored.

Within the sociocultural context of South Korea, teaching has traditionally been regarded as a highly respected profession shaped by Confucian values emphasizing education, moral responsibility, and social contribution. However, rapid social and economic changes, combined with increasing educational competition, have transformed the nature of the profession. Educational achievement is widely perceived as a key pathway to social mobility, resulting in heightened expectations from parents, students, and society. Consequently, teachers are expected not only to support academic success but also to address a growing range of social, emotional, and administrative demands.

Although teaching remains a relatively stable and prestigious occupation, teachers increasingly report experiencing emotional exhaustion, professional stress, and anxiety. Entry into the profession requires completion of an accredited teacher education program and success in a highly competitive national recruitment examination, reflecting the high standards associated with the profession. However, the increasing complexity of teachers' responsibilities has raised concerns regarding their emotional well-being and professional sustainability.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these pressures. The rapid transition to online instruction increased teachers' workloads while simultaneously expanding parental involvement in educational processes. As expectations from families grew, many teachers experienced heightened emotional labor, professional uncertainty, and increased responsibility for student well-being. These conditions contributed to elevated levels of burnout, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion among teachers (Park & Kim, 2023).

These social conditions have drawn attention to the cumulative pressures experienced by teachers and the increasing emotional demands associated with the profession. Broader social tensions and increasing emotional demands have also contributed to heightened levels of anxiety among teachers (Pals & Koenigsknecht, 2022). Recent highly publicized cases involving teacher suicide have drawn attention to the cumulative effects of occupational stress, emotional exhaustion, and anxiety within the teaching profession. According to a psychological autopsy conducted by the Korean National Forensic Service, the teacher's death was associated with accumulated school-related stress, including student guidance issues, conflicts among students, parental intervention, and administrative burdens associated with the digital information system

the Nice Student and Parent Service¹ (KBS News, 2023). These developments have drawn public attention to the cumulative pressures experienced by teachers and the emotional demands associated with the profession. In recent years, several highly publicized cases involving teacher burnout and psychological distress have intensified national discussions concerning teachers' rights, well-being, and working conditions. Consequently, teacher anxiety can no longer be understood solely as an individual psychological issue but must also be examined as a sociocultural phenomenon shaped by institutional structures, professional expectations, and public perceptions.

This study adopts a multimodal qualitative approach to examine how anxiety is experienced and interpreted by elementary school teachers within this context. Specifically, it explores how teachers express and reflect on their anxiety through art-based activities and dialogue, and how these processes relate to their professional identity in the sociocultural context. To address this aim, the study integrates narrative inquiry, visual analysis, and dialogic interaction as a multimodal methodological framework. This approach enables access to emotional experiences that may not be fully captured through verbal data alone, offering a more comprehensive understanding of anxiety as both a psychological and sociocultural phenomenon.

The study focuses on three objectives: (1) to examine sociocultural factors contributing to teacher anxiety, (2) to explore how anxiety relates to teacher identity, and (3) to investigate the potential of art-based expression and dialogue as reflective tools. By situating teacher anxiety within a multimodal and sociocultural framework, this study seeks to contribute not only empirical insights but also methodological implications for qualitative research on emotional and identity-related phenomena.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Causes and Psychology of Teacher Anxiety

Teacher anxiety is a widespread psychological phenomenon that significantly affects both individual well-being and educational practice. Elevated levels of anxiety may negatively influence classroom management, instructional effectiveness, and teachers' capacity to support students' emotional needs (Gannoun & Deris, 2023). As a result, understanding the causes and manifestations of teacher anxiety has become an important area of educational research.

A growing body of international research indicates that teachers frequently experience higher levels of occupational stress and anxiety than many other professional groups.

¹ The Nice Student and Parent Service is the core of the National Education Information System (NEIS), a large-scale network connecting the Ministry of Education, 17 metropolitan and provincial offices of education, 174 district offices of education, and over 10,000 schools in South Korea. This system enables various education-related functions by providing students and parents access to educational administrative information.

A systematic review by Agyapong et al. (2022) reported substantial prevalence rates of burnout, stress, anxiety, and depression among teachers worldwide. Identified risk factors included demographic characteristics, years of teaching experience, class size, job satisfaction, workload, and organizational conditions.

While quantitative studies have provided valuable information regarding the prevalence and correlates of teacher anxiety, they offer limited insight into how anxiety is experienced, interpreted, and negotiated within specific sociocultural contexts. Consequently, qualitative approaches are needed to explore the lived experiences underlying statistical trends and to better understand the social and cultural dimensions of teacher anxiety (Shin & Lee, 2022).

Research examining the sociocultural dimensions of teacher anxiety remains relatively limited. However, findings from the Global Teacher Status Index provide useful insight into public perceptions of the teaching profession across different national contexts (Park, 2023). South Korea ranks highly in terms of social respect for teachers, while simultaneously exhibiting comparatively low levels of trust and student-reported respect. These seemingly contradictory findings suggest that teachers operate within a complex environment characterized by both social recognition and heightened scrutiny.

Such contradictions indicate that teacher anxiety cannot be fully understood without considering the broader sociocultural context in which teaching occurs. Accordingly, qualitative research is needed to explore how teachers interpret these competing expectations and how such experiences shape their professional identities and emotional well-being.

2.2 The Role of Artistic Expression Activities and Dialogue in Revealing Anxiety

Bishop (2002) interprets anxiety as a fleeting psychological state, indicating that it lasts briefly until the threat fades or becomes bearable. This suggests that the externalization and reflection of emotional experiences may facilitate greater self-awareness and emotional regulation. Art-based expression has increasingly been recognized as a valuable approach for exploring emotional experiences that may be difficult to articulate through conventional verbal communication. Visual forms of expression can provide access to internal psychological states, enabling individuals to externalize emotions, reflect upon their experiences, and construct new meanings. In this sense, artistic expression functions not only as a creative activity but also as a reflective and interpretive process.

Previous studies have suggested that creating visual representations of emotional experiences can promote self-understanding, emotional awareness, and psychological insight (Rhee, 2020). Through the process of transforming abstract feelings into visual forms, individuals may gain greater clarity regarding the sources and meanings of their emotional experiences. Such processes are particularly relevant when examining anxiety, which is often characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty, and difficulty in verbal expression.

Uncertainty in art-based expression may provide a productive space in which individuals can express previously unarticulated feelings, reflect on themselves, and imagine possibilities beyond their immediate circumstances.

Although uncertainty may evoke anxiety, engaging with such anxiety through artistic expression can also become a catalyst for reflection and personal growth (Naumburg, 1995). Dialogue further extends this reflective process by enabling participants to articulate, share, and reinterpret experiences that emerge through artistic expression. In educational contexts, visual expression and dialogue can therefore operate relationally, supporting reflection and meaning-making rather than functioning solely as forms of psychological treatment.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a narrative inquiry approach integrated with visual analysis, drawing on qualitative traditions that prioritize meaning-making through lived experience and multimodal expression. Narrative inquiry is particularly suited to explore complex emotional and identity-related themes in education, allowing participants to reconstruct and reflect on their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Visual analysis adds a complementary dimension, making visible internalized psychological states through artistic expression. Through visual activities expressing anxiety, individuals differentiate their psychological situations (Yang et al., 2023). By reflecting on their own professional aspirations and life experiences, most people come to understand that fundamental human anxiety coexists with anxiety expanded into social categories, manifested through 'recognition,' 'confusion about uncertainty' and 'persistence of overreaction' (Rhee, 2020). Furthermore, the process of teachers expressing their anxiety and expanding their self-understanding through art activities positively impacts the establishment of their teacher identity.

The methodological goal of this study is to access and interpret the anxiety experiences of teachers not only through spoken or written language but also through visual and embodied forms. By reflecting on their characters, professional aspirations, and life experiences, they come to understand that fundamental human anxiety coexists with anxiety expanded into social categories, manifested through 'recognition', 'confusion about uncertainty', and 'persistence of overreaction' (Rhee, 2020).

3.1 Researcher Positionality and Sociocultural Context

This study is situated within the sociocultural context of South Korea, where teaching is traditionally regarded as a respected profession but is increasingly shaped by heightened social expectations and emotional demands. Recent public discourse surrounding teacher stress has highlighted the need to better understand teachers' lived experiences of anxiety within this context (KBS News, 2023).

As an educator involved in the training of pre-service primary school teachers in South Korea, the researcher has observed these sociocultural shifts firsthand. This professional position informed the research focus and facilitated access to participants who were actively engaged in reflective educational practices.

Teacher anxiety is associated with multiple professional and sociocultural challenges, including increasing workload, changing public perceptions of teachers, and evolving school environments (Naidoo et al., 2013).

In this study, the researcher acted as both a facilitator and an interpreter, guiding art-based activities and reflective dialogue while also engaging in the analytical process. The researcher's familiarity with the educational context enabled a deeper understanding of participants' narratives, while reflexive practices were employed to minimize interpretive bias. This positionality contributed to the design of a multimodal approach that integrates narrative, visual, and dialogue data, allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of teacher anxiety and identity within a specific sociocultural setting.

3.2 Participant Information and Ethical Considerations

Participants were recruited from a pool of in-service teachers enrolled in a university-based professional development program in South Korea. Four participants were selected from primary school teachers who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and engage in art-based and reflective activities. Selection of the participants was based on the following criteria: (1) current employment as an elementary school teacher, (2) willingness to engage in art-based activities and reflective dialogue, and (3) voluntary consent to share and analyze personal narratives. While purposive sampling was employed, the sample size remained small ($n = 4$) to allow for in-depth, case-oriented exploration.

Table 1. Research participant information

Participant	Teaching Experience	Major	Work Location
. Mrs. Lim	14	Art	metropolitan city
Ms. Lee	22	Korean Language	medium-sized city
Mr. No	3	Music	small local city
Mr. Seo	9	Physical Performance	small-town (total 20 students)

Table 1 summarizes the participants' teaching experience, academic majors, and work locations. The information from four participants is anonymized to comply with research ethics. All participants signed informed consent forms, and pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. They agreed to use their own artwork, interviews, and dialogues as research materials rather than treating the minors (students) they teach as research subjects.

This study involved adult participants only and did not include minors, vulnerable populations, or interventions involving physical or psychological risk.

All participants received detailed information regarding the study objectives, procedures, data use, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

3.3 Data Collection

The scope of research materials includes artifacts expressing participants' emotions and anxieties, visual materials derived from artistic expression activities, and dialogues and reflective writings produced during the activities. Additionally, visual expressions permitted by participants were photographed for use in this study, and dialogues occurring during expression activities were audio-recorded for data collection. Data types included digital photographs of artwork, dialogue audio recordings, and written reflective writings.

The aforementioned research participants engaged in an activity over two sessions (3 hours each, totaling 6 hours) where they practiced applying various art expression methods in elementary education settings for two weeks in 2024. This activity involved visualizing their current emotional state and the anxiety experienced as teachers through abstract color expressions. In the first session, participants were asked to create abstract paintings reflecting their anxiety using watercolors, pastels, and mixed media.

All collected data—including audio recordings of group dialogues, participants' reflective writings, and visual artworks—were first transcribed and digitized. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and participants' written reflections were compiled into textual documents. Visual data (artworks) were photographed and organized alongside corresponding participant narratives. The researcher engaged in repeated reading and viewing of all data sources to achieve data immersion, noting initial impressions and emotional tones. During this phase, analytical memos were recorded to capture emerging ideas, patterns, and potential connections across different data types. All data were transcribed and categorized for analysis.

3.4 Multimodal Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis in this study followed a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), adapted to accommodate multimodal data, including visual artworks, narrative texts, and dialogic interactions. The analytical process was iterative, recursive, and interpretive, aiming to ensure transparency and analytical rigor.

An inductive open coding process was conducted to identify meaningful units across the dataset. Coding was applied not only to textual data (narratives and dialogues) but also to visual elements within the artworks.

- For textual data, codes were assigned to segments reflecting emotional states, perceived causes of anxiety, identity-related expressions, and coping responses.
- For visual data, coding focused on symbolic elements such as color use, composition, intensity, contrast, and recurring visual metaphors (e.g., waves, fragmentation, darkness).

Each artwork was analyzed in conjunction with the participant's own explanation to avoid over-imposing external interpretation. Codes were generated both within each data type and across data types, allowing for multimodal comparison.

Following initial coding, related codes were grouped into broader categories through constant comparison. This process involved examining similarities, differences, and relationships among codes across participants and data types. Through iterative refinement, the following core thematic categories were identified:

- External Pressure and Social Expectations
- Emotional Suppression and Professional Identity
- Perfectionism and Fear of Failure
- Internal Conflict and Identity Instability
- Art as Emotional Externalization and Self-Reflection

Themes were not derived solely from one type of data but emerged through cross-modal integration, where visual, narrative, and dialogic data reinforced and expanded each other.

A key methodological feature of this study was the integration of visual, narrative, and dialogic data. This was achieved through a triangulation process, where each participant's artwork was analyzed alongside: (1) their reflective writing and (2) their verbal explanation during group dialogue. This process enabled the researcher to:

- Interpret visual elements with contextual grounding
- Validate emerging interpretations across multiple data sources
- Identify convergences and divergences between expressed and visualized emotions

Rather than treating visual data as supplementary, this study positioned it as an equally significant analytical component, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of teacher anxiety.

4. Results

The analysis revealed that participants' experiences of anxiety were shaped by interconnected psychological and sociocultural factors. Through the integration of visual, narrative, and dialogic data, three main themes were identified: (1) external pressure and social expectations, (2) identity-related emotional conflict, and (3) art as a medium for reflection and emotional processing.

4.1 External Pressure and Social Expectations

Most participants expressed concerns about student welfare, job security, and financial instability. The narratives show that teachers feel overwhelmed by physical, economic, and professional burdens. In particular, in South Korean society, teachers are sensitive to the evaluation of their students and parents, and their artworks can be seen as an expression of the burden of an individual's psychological state and socially perceived expectations (Cho, 2018).

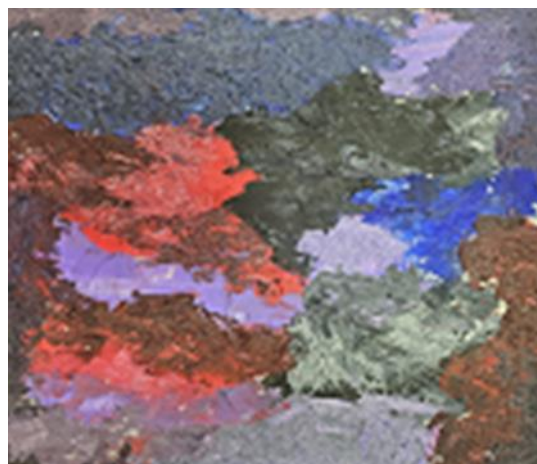


Figure 1. Ms. Lee's artwork, *My Feeling of Anxiety*

In Figure 1, the participant explained that her anxiety emerged from external circumstances that she perceived as beyond her control. She continued to explain the visual expression about her anxiety.

Until I first heard the word 'anxiety' in class, I think I have lived by turning a blind eye to and forgetting the feeling of anxiety. The feeling of anxiety has always been next to me, but it was an external presence for me, who always wanted to live a positive life. Then, when the water bursts in the pocket of anxiety, it often completely covers me like a rush. I think it comes from worrying about the children I have to be in charge for a year at school, whether it is a health problem or an economic problem. (Ms. Lee's dialogue.)

Anxiety is the state of being prepared or ready to react to harmful conditions (Barlow, 2004). Participants consistently described anxiety as arising from external expectations, particularly the perceived judgment of others. Concerns about evaluation by students, parents, and colleagues emerged as a central source of stress. For example, the participant Mr. No described anxiety as being closely tied to the 'gaze of others,' reflecting a heightened sensitivity to social evaluation. This indicates that anxiety was not experienced as an isolated internal condition, but as a response to ongoing social interactions and expectations (Cho, 2018).

This hypersensitive reaction to the gaze of others makes them sensitive to unfamiliar environments, which is a source of external anxiety. Participants also reported that unfamiliar situations and professional demands intensified their anxiety. One participant expressed discomfort when working in unfamiliar artistic contexts, associating anxiety with uncertainty and lack of control. These accounts suggest that anxiety is closely related to situational vulnerability and perceived competence. Mr. No's self-reflective writing during the art activity provides a context-specific account of his anxiety as a response to environmental and sociocultural pressures.

It was a day when I was working on backdrop painting in a painting class. I felt anxious because all the materials were unfamiliar and the expression technique was not familiar. I realized that I am feeling anxious even in areas I am not used to and do not know well! So, I thought, "Let's do what I can first!" and looked for the color that comes to mind by selecting blue that is thought of as depression, purple, and red that represents my angry heart. As I was working, I remembered the fear and anxiety I felt when it was dark and dark, so I continued to express my painting by squeezing black paint. However, as I was working, I felt frustrated and heavy heart continued to struggle. (Mr. No's self-reflective writing)

4.2 Identity and Emotional Suppression

The findings indicate that anxiety is deeply connected to participants' professional identity. Participants described a tendency to suppress negative emotions in order to maintain an image of competence. Visual data reinforced this theme. As shown in Figure 2, the participant represents anxiety as an 'endless wave,' reflecting recurring emotional tension. This metaphor reflects the coexistence of positive self-presentation and internal emotional instability.



Figure 2. Mrs. Lim's artwork, *Endless Wave of My Identity*



Figure 3. Mr. No's artwork, *My Feeling of Indigestion*

Similarly, as shown in Figure 3, another participant, Mr. No, expressed anxiety through fragmented and layered visual forms, describing a sense of confusion between personal struggles and professional responsibilities. These representations suggest that anxiety is closely linked to identity conflict and emotional regulation within the teaching role.

4.3 Art-Based Reflection and Emotional Externalization

All participants reported that art-based activities enabled them to recognize and express previously unarticulated emotions. The process of visualizing anxiety facilitated self-reflection and emotional awareness. Participants noted that the act of creating allowed them to externalize internal tension, making it more manageable. In several cases, participants described a shift from initial discomfort to a sense of clarity as the artistic process progressed. Dialogue played a complementary role in this process. Through group dialogue, participants shared their experiences and engaged in mutual interpretation of their artworks. This interaction contributed to emotional validation and collective understanding.

In Figure 4, Mr. Seo visualised his emotional state while experiencing anxiety.



Figure 4. Mr. Seo's artwork, *My Feeling of Anxiety*

I found myself naturally revealing my feelings of anxiety little by little through colors. The dark colors mean negative thoughts and emotions that suddenly come to mind, such as "I have something to do, but do you forget anything?" and "Did you make any mistakes in the past work?" Even if there are problems, I can solve them calmly during work and time, but when I think about the reason why I think of them even during break time, I think I keep looking for things to worry about because I am used to it and comfortable. (Mr. Seo's dialogue.)

Mr. Seo's visual expression and dialogue reveal how he reflects on the sources of his worries and attempts to understand and manage negative emotions. Importantly, the findings do not suggest that art eliminates anxiety.

Rather, they indicate that art functions as a reflective medium, enabling participants to engage with their emotional experiences and reinterpret them within a shared context.

5. Methodological Reflection

This study contributes methodologically by integrating narrative inquiry, visual analysis, and art-based expression within a multimodal qualitative research design. Rather than relying solely on verbal or textual data, this approach enabled access to teachers' internalized emotional experiences—particularly anxiety—through visual and embodied forms of expression. One of the key strengths of this study lies in its capacity to make invisible psychological states visible. While traditional narrative inquiry primarily depends on participants' verbal articulation, the inclusion of visual data allowed participants to externalize emotions that were difficult to express in language. The artworks functioned as mediating artifacts, enabling participants to reflect on their emotional states and construct meaning through both individual and collective dialogue. This multimodal process enriched the depth of interpretation and provided a more holistic understanding of teacher anxiety and identity.

5.1 Researcher's Role and Reflexivity

The researcher functioned as both a facilitator and an interpretive analyst. During data collection, the researcher guided the art activities and dialogues, creating a supportive environment for expression. During analysis, the researcher engaged in interpretive coding and theme development. To address potential bias, the researcher maintained reflexive journals and analytical memos, documenting how interpretations evolved throughout the process. The use of participants' own narratives to support visual interpretation was intended to reduce subjective over-interpretation.

5.2 Ensuring Analytical Rigor

Several strategies were employed to enhance credibility and transparency:

- Data triangulation across visual, narrative, and dialogic sources
- Iterative coding and theme refinement
- Analytical memoing to track decision-making processes
- Participant-centered interpretation, prioritizing participants' own explanations of their artworks

These procedures aimed to ensure that the findings were grounded in the data while maintaining interpretive depth. The integration of artistic expression and dialogue created a reflective and relational research space. The dialogic component facilitated emotional recognition and peer empathy, allowing participants to reframe their experiences in a shared sociocultural context.

This suggests that combining visual and dialogic methods can enhance reflexivity and support identity reconstruction, particularly in research involving emotional and experiential dimensions. This approach demonstrates methodological flexibility in addressing complex phenomena such as anxiety, which cannot be fully captured through linear or purely cognitive frameworks.

By incorporating visual, narrative, and dialogic data, the study offers a layered analytical perspective that acknowledges the embodied and socially constructed nature of emotional experiences.

5.3 Limitations of the Analytical Approach

Several limitations must be acknowledged in this study. The small sample size ($n = 4$) limits the generalizability of the findings, and the exploratory nature of the study calls for cautious interpretation. Additionally, visual data are inherently open to subjective interpretation, and the researcher's role in analyzing both visual and narrative materials introduces potential bias. Although analytical memos and iterative coding were used to enhance transparency, the interpretive process remains influenced by the researcher's positionality. Another limitation concerns the integration of multimodal data. While efforts were made to systematically connect visual, narrative, and dialogic data through thematic analysis, the process of cross-modal interpretation presents methodological challenges. Future research could benefit from more explicit frameworks for multimodal data integration to enhance analytical rigor and traceability.

5.4 The Value of Art-Based Narrative Inquiry

Despite these limitations, this study offers important methodological implications for qualitative research. It highlights the value of art-based and multimodal approaches in exploring emotional and identity-related phenomena, particularly in educational contexts. The findings suggest that such approaches can be effectively applied in teacher education, professional development, and research on emotional labor. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that integrating narrative inquiry with visual and dialogic methods provides a meaningful methodological contribution. It expands the possibilities of qualitative research by offering alternative ways to access, interpret, and represent complex human experiences that are not easily captured through language alone.

6. Final Consideration

This study explored how anxiety is experienced, expressed, and interpreted by elementary school teachers in South Korea through a multimodal qualitative approach combining narrative inquiry, visual analysis, and dialogic interaction. The findings offer insights into the ways in which teacher anxiety is not only a psychological condition but also a socioculturally constructed experience shaped by professional expectations, social evaluation, and identity-related tensions.

First, teacher anxiety in this study is closely linked to external social expectations and evaluative pressures.

Participants consistently described anxiety arising from the perceived gaze of others, including students, parents, and broader society. This aligns with previous research indicating that teaching is a profession highly exposed to social judgment and emotional labor (Agyapong et al., 2022; Shin & Lee, 2022). However, rather than generalizing this as a universal condition of all teachers, this study highlights how such pressures were specifically experienced and interpreted by the participants within the Korean sociocultural context, where teaching remains both a respected and highly scrutinized profession.

Second, anxiety is deeply intertwined with professional identity and emotional suppression. Participants' visual and narrative expressions indicated a tendency to conceal negative emotions in order to maintain a competent teacher identity. This finding resonates with Erikson's concept of identity formation as a dynamic and socially embedded process (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022). The data suggest that, for these participants, anxiety emerges not only from external demands but also from the tension between their internal emotional states and socially expected professional roles.

Third, the findings demonstrate the potential of art-based expression as a reflective and mediating process. Through visualizing their anxiety, participants were able to externalize emotions that had previously remained unarticulated. This supports existing literature on art as a means of accessing unconscious or suppressed emotional states (Naumburg, 1995; Rhee, 2020). Importantly, the process of creating and interpreting artwork, combined with reflective dialogue, allowed participants to reframe their experiences and develop a greater sense of self-understanding. However, rather than claiming that art universally alleviates anxiety, this study suggests that art functioned as a meaningful reflective tool within this specific context and group of participants.

Fourth, the role of dialogue emerged as a critical component in transforming individual emotional experiences into shared understanding. Through structured dialogues, participants engaged in mutual recognition and empathy, which contributed to the reinterpretation of their anxiety. This finding indicates that anxiety can be understood not only as an individual psychological state but also as a relational and communicative phenomenon, shaped through interaction with others.

In relation to the theoretical framework, the findings support a view of anxiety as both psychologically experienced and socioculturally constructed. The integration of narrative, visual, and dialogic data demonstrates how emotional experiences are embodied, represented, and negotiated within specific cultural and professional contexts. This reinforces the importance of multimodal approaches in qualitative research, particularly when exploring complex and affective dimensions of human experience.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. The small sample size ($n = 4$) and the exploratory design limit the transferability of the findings. Therefore, the interpretations presented here should be understood as context-specific insights rather than generalizable conclusions.

Future research could expand this approach to diverse educational settings and larger participant groups to further examine the relationships between anxiety, identity, and sociocultural context.

Finally, the integration of visual and dialogic methods provided a richer understanding of participants' experiences than would have been possible through verbal data alone. This suggests that multimodal qualitative approaches can be particularly valuable in research on emotional and identity-related phenomena.

Beyond its empirical contribution to understanding teacher anxiety, this study offers several methodological lessons for qualitative researchers. First, visual expression enabled participants to communicate emotional experiences that were difficult to articulate verbally, suggesting that visual data can serve as a primary rather than supplementary source of qualitative evidence. Second, the integration of artworks, reflective writings, and dialogic interactions provided a form of multimodal triangulation that enhanced interpretive depth and credibility. Third, the use of participant-generated visual artefacts as mediating objects supported collaborative meaning-making between participants and researcher. These methodological insights extend beyond the specific topic of teacher anxiety and may be transferable to qualitative studies exploring identity, emotion, professional practice, and other complex human experiences. The study therefore contributes not only empirical knowledge about teacher anxiety but also a practical multimodal research framework for future qualitative inquiry, demonstrating how the integration of visual, narrative, and dialogic data can generate richer understandings of emotional and identity-related experiences.

Ethical Approval: At the time the study was conducted, formal institutional ethical review was not required for this type of educational research involving voluntary adult participants. Nevertheless, the study followed the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and established qualitative research guidelines. All participants provided written informed consent, were informed of the study purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. They were assured that participation was entirely voluntary. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study, and all identifying information was removed from visual, textual, and audio-recorded data. Given the potentially sensitive nature of discussing anxiety and professional identity, participants were allowed to omit any question they found uncomfortable and could discontinue participation without penalty. According to the institutional guidelines of the university, the study was exempt from formal ethical review because it involved voluntary participation by adult professionals in educational reflection activities.

Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained from all participants about the nature and purpose of the study prior to participation. Participants voluntarily agreed to the use of their artworks, reflective writings, and recorded dialogues for research purposes. All data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interest: The researcher declares no conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this manuscript.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI): An artificial Intelligence tool (ChatGPT) was used to support the preparation of this article, namely for language editing. The use of the tool was exclusively instrumental and did not replace critical analysis, data interpretation, methodological decisions, or the scientific responsibility of the authors, who fully assume authorship and the integrity of the content presented.

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