The role of teacher patience in the implementation of assessment for learning (AfL): Vignettes from a writing classroom

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This article discusses a qualitative case study on the role of teacher patience in teachers’ implementation of assessment for learning (AfL). The study was conducted in a Chinese university English writing classroom. Data were collected throughout the semester and included the teacher’s reflections and assessment practices, the reflections and interview excerpts of 18 students, and field notes. The study found that teacher patience emerged at times when students failed to meet the teacher’s expectations, and actively conditioned and fortified the teacher’s implementation of AfL. However, in interacting with contextual variables inside and outside the classroom, teacher patience also demonstrated its dynamic features, waning and then recovering, with its mitigated power passively sustaining the teacher’s AfL. This study affirms the importance and acknowledges the complex fluctuation of teacher patience in sustaining AfL. Therefore, it is suggested that training in patience be made a part of teacher education programs so that student teachers could develop the patience needed to grapple with the complexity of teaching during assessment practices and in other teaching settings.
**Introduction**

While the definition of *assessment for learning* (AfL) varies among scholars (Swaffield, 2011), AfL is generally understood as teachers’ use of assessment information to promote students’ academic success (Gioka, 2007; Swaffield, 2011). That is, AfL involves teachers’ communication and implementation of assessment criteria as well as their continuous adjustments to meet students’ diverse needs in a way that benefits their ability to learn (Jonsson et al., 2015). As the focus is placed on the needs and learning process of the students, the methods of assessment are not test-driven (Swaffield, 2011). The practical value of AfL has been profiled by many studies conducted in diverse settings, such as in the teaching of physics (Tolgfors, 2018), biology (Marshall and Jane Drummond, 2006), English as a foreign language (EFL; Wang et al., 2020), and English as a second language (ESL; Sardareh et al., 2014).

However, AfL may not yield desirable outcomes in as timely a manner as expected by teachers, requiring constant adjustment by teachers to achieve the desired effects (Brown et al., 2018; Jonsson et al., 2015). For example, students may be too constrained by diverse contextual variables (e.g., their limited knowledge repertoire) to keep pace with the demands of their teacher’s assessment practices (Jonsson et al., 2015).

The concept of teacher patience involves teachers calmly dealing with challenging or unsatisfactory situations and delayed outcomes (Viganı, 2017; Yılmaz and Güner, 2017). It is believed that patience can bridge the gap between what one (e.g., a teacher) is doing and one’s failed goals by mitigating negative emotions and galvanizing action (Gökçen et al., 2020). Thus, teacher patience merits attention when it comes to implementing AfL.

Teacher patience, however, is not comprehensively addressed in the context of teaching processes, let alone regarding AfL. In previous studies, teacher patience was considered only with regard to statistical analysis or theoretical modeling in various educational settings (e.g., Gökçen et al., 2020; Viganı, 2017). The scarcity of research on the role of patience in a practical teaching context may be because patience is a part of teaching that is taken for granted. Although previous studies have not specifically profiled patience, they sporadically pointed out that a loss of patience can have a negative effect on teaching practices (Weber-Schwartz, 1987; Willard-Holt, 2001), including assessment practices (Brown et al., 2018). Given that AfL has been espoused as a core component of classroom teaching (Swaffield, 2011), this gap in the research points to the importance of further analysis of teacher patience as it pertains to AfL.

This study intends to fill this gap by exploring the patterns of teacher patience in the process of AfL implementation, including how the construct of patience changes over time, if at all, and its interactions with assessment practices. In doing so, this study hopes to shed light on the role of teacher patience in assessment practices and to highlight the importance of incorporating this construct in teacher education programs.

**Literature review**

**AfL and its applications in educational settings.** A key premise in research on teachers’ use of AfL is that the effective use of assessment information will support students’ learning (Swaffield, 2011). Empirical research on this premise has also supported the use of AfL at different levels, such as in secondary schools (e.g., Jonsson et al., 2015) and in universities (e.g., Jamil et al., 2018).

One theme unearthed in the literature is the strategies adopted for the implementation of AfL. For example, Marshall and Jane Drummond (2006) illustrated a secondary history teacher’s adoption of teacher-student dialogs when implementing AfL.

In the interaction, the history teacher tried to mediate the students’ understanding of history topics and encouraged peer assistance to support the students’ autonomy. AfL strategies adopted by teachers (including teacher feedback or teachers’ adoption of peer feedback) in many other contexts, such as in secondary mathematics classrooms (Hodgen and Marshall, 2005) and EFL classrooms at the university level (e.g., Xu and Harfitt, 2019), have also been studied. The emphasis on AfL in education literature is understandable, as teachers’ use of AfL underscores their cyclical efforts to collect information to (re-)create student-centered instruction within and outside the classroom (Black et al., 2004; Zhang, 2020).

Concomitant with the aforementioned theme, research along these lines has also highlighted factors associated with the (un)successful implementation of AfL, such as teachers’ professional knowledge, sociocultural factors (e.g., external assistance, educational policies, high-stakes exams, and the use of assisting technology), psychological factors (e.g., teachers’ beliefs and emotions), and national policies (Edwards, 2020; Gioka, 2007; Jamil et al., 2018; Marshall and Jane Drummond, 2006; Schildkamp et al., 2020; Swaffield, 2011). For example, Gioka (2007) demonstrated that some secondary biology teachers in the greater London area did not effectively communicate the assessment criteria to their students or could not effectively engage students through oral feedback due to a lack of knowledge of AfL. Gioka suggested, “We need to develop a program which aims to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to understand assessment for learning” (p. 116). In addition, Wu et al. (2021) revealed, based on a statistical analysis of responses to 402 questionnaires by 495 Chinese university EFL teachers, that some teachers did not adequately implement AfL, as shown by their insufficient efforts to make the student the center of the teaching process. The authors suggested that teachers’ incomplete alignment with AfL may be due to their existing beliefs about their authoritative power, as constructed by their culture. In the same context as that of this study, some research on AfL in English writing classrooms has explored the factors associated with AfL, such as teachers’ beliefs (Wang et al., 2020), emotions (e.g., Brown et al., 2018), and pedagogical knowledge (Zhang, 2020).

As mentioned above, some studies on AfL emphasized teachers’ actual practices, namely, what they did during the process of AfL and the factors behind their assessment practices. Teacher patience, however, has been ignored. To implement assessment practices, teachers must make constant efforts to give feedback, provide analyses, (re-)adjust classroom activities, and undertake other actions to consistently mediate the balance between instructional goals and students’ development (Zhang, 2020). As Brown et al. (2018) noted, for teachers implementing AfL, “On the other hand, there is a long-established obligation to care for and assist the student’s success” (p. 207). Given the complex and time-consuming nature of the process of AfL, teacher patience may play an important part in sustaining teachers’ efforts to implement it, which makes research on this subject essential.

**Theoretical framework**

**Teacher patience as a sociocognitive construct.** Although the definition of patience is still disputed (Svider and Frasyniuk, 2020), based on its common features (Gökçen et al., 2020; Viganı, 2017; Weber-Schwartz, 1987), teacher patience can be understood as teachers’ endurance throughout the teaching process, tolerance of the unexpected, and perseverance to the end of an instructional goal. In other words, patience manifests when teachers remain...
calm mentally and behaviorally as they wade through undesirable outcomes of their teaching until they achieve their desired outcomes. Without patience, teachers may give up or become frustrated or angry when the outcome of their teaching is not what they had planned for (Weber-Schwartz, 1987). Teacher patience is not a stabilized construct but changes according to the context. That is, a teacher’s patience in one context (e.g., their patience with one class) may not necessarily be channelled toward another (Vigani, 2017). A teacher’s patience may even be depleted when interacting with contextual variables (Weber-Schwartz, 1987). For example, teachers may run out of patience due to repeated failures to steer their teaching as expected. Contextual sensitivity also means that teacher patience, which is situationally constructed, could be developed to the benefit of their work (Willard-Holt, 2001), although patience may be partially biologically determined (McClure et al., 2004).

It should be noted that teacher patience is different from teacher adaptability. While both teacher adaptability and teacher patience are socio-cognitive constructs that can be exemplified mentally and behaviorally while interacting with the external context (Collie and Martin, 2017), teacher adaptability refers to teachers’ ability to “adapt to manage the novel and changing situations” in their environments” (Grazzera et al., 2016, p. 60). That is, teacher adaptability emphasizes teachers’ flexibility and sensitivity in taking action and responding to the changing ecology of their classroom. In contrast, teacher patience emphasizes the role of positive emotions (e.g., being dedicated, calm, and enduring) in sustaining teachers’ motivation and efforts in the face of students’ undesirable performance (Weber-Schwartz, 1987).

Compared with the number of discussions on the role of patience in contexts beyond teaching (e.g., Baumann, 2010; Gökçen et al., 2020; Schnitker, 2012), empirical research on teacher patience is limited (e.g., Willard-Holt, 2001), particularly in the area of teachers’ assessment practices. Teacher patience is often mentioned as a subordinate theme in studies focusing on teachers’ emotions during assessment practices (e.g., Brown et al., 2018). However, teacher emotion is a construct radiating from several dimensions and includes both positive and negative emotions (Zhang, 2020). Thus, teacher emotion is only vaguely related to teacher patience, in that the latter is more concerned with teachers’ calmness in dealing with unexpected classroom situations without frustration or anger while persevering in the teaching process (Gökçen et al., 2020; Yilmaz and Güner, 2017). A possible explanation for the limited number of studies on teacher patience during the teaching process or assessment practices is that teacher patience, as opposed to teacher emotion, is assumed to be an innate quality of all teachers, making it too common to be a concern. Among studies marginally related to the present study, Brown et al. (2018) used case studies to report on teachers’ emotional engagement in their assessment practices. In one of the cases reported, Egyptian EFL teachers shared that conducting assessments involved continuous regulation of their emotions, such as their frustration in seeing their students’ failure to meet the requirements and their own continuous efforts to implement the assessment (e.g., by providing extensive feedback and considering the students’ differences). Although Brown et al. reported on teachers’ emotions, they also mentioned teacher patience: “While it could be argued that patience and perseverance are behaviors, not emotions, it is clear that teachers require robust control of their own emotions so as not to give up or be angry with the learner” (p. 210). In other words, patience has been acknowledged as an important construct in countering negative scenarios encountered during teachers’ assessment practices, although the construct has not been well elaborated on in the context of teaching and other similar studies.

Taken together, the studies marginally related to the present study on teacher patience in relation to teacher assessment practices suggest a close relationship between teacher patience and AFL. Because AFL is commonly implemented in classrooms, the research gap on teacher patience needs to be urgently filled. As such, the question that guides this study is: How is teacher patience involved in the process of AFL? This study is significant because it profiles the teacher patience construct, which has been taken for granted in classrooms and highlights its neglected role as a factor in teachers’ assessment practices.

Methodology

This study explored the role of teacher patience in assessment practices in a classroom setting. To achieve this, a case study approach was used (Yin, 2011). A case study approach profiles a detailed understanding of a phenomenon in relation to its context.

Research context. This research was conducted in an English writing classroom at a Chinese university. This site was chosen because it provided the researcher full access to data sources related to AFL (e.g., on teaching practices and students’ work). The researcher received the ethical approval of the university for the conduct of the study and strictly observed the university’s ethical framework. The participants were recruited by speaking to them in person, and all those chosen gave their written informed consent to participate in this study. Before commencing this study, the researcher confirmed that the class teacher implemented AFL.

The course focused on how to write informative texts. According to the departmental requirements, the teacher (on whom additional information is given in the next subsection) had to teach four subgenres of informative texts: exemplification, cause and effect, classification, and compare and contrast. The department also expected AFL to be implemented in the classroom. Thus, teacher feedback, for example, was expected to be given in tandem with instruction on writing. However, the type of feedback and the number of rounds of feedback was left to the teacher’s discretion. Similar to the AFL implementation in other contexts (e.g., Brown et al., 2018; Swaffield, 2011), in this study, it was primarily up to the teacher to implement AFL, with limited or almost no external assistance. The ecology of the classroom conditions made it an optimal site for considering whether patience had an impact on the teacher’s actual practices.

Participants. The background information of the teacher and the students were appropriate for a case study focusing on teacher patience and assessment practices. The teacher, Corey (a pseudonym), had been teaching English writing for almost 3 years by the time the study started. He was born and raised in China. Echoing the principles and demands of the department, he believed in “the importance of AFL and endeavors to teach my students using AFL,” as stated in his written reflections (in the “Data collection and analysis” subsection). However, based on his previous experiences, he was aware that “it was often a struggle that challenged my patience” (Corey’s written reflections).

Corey’s AFL process comprised the following procedures. The first procedure was the design of the guidelines for the assessment. Corey’s assessment focused on two levels: grammar, which included collocations and punctuation marks, and the students’ meaning-making or the interaction between the students’ language resources and their content representation (Humphrey and Macnaught, 2016). The meaning-making level was particularly important, as ESL/EFL students typically have a vague knowledge of writing at the meaning-making level (Zhang,
The profiles of the student participants are presented in the next paragraph. To help them better navigate meaning-making, Corey’s assessment involved communication with the students through in-class teaching and teacher feedback and focused on the following three levels (Humphrey and Macnaught, 2016; Symons et al., 2017; see also Zhang, 2020). The first level was ideational meaning (the general meaning of a topic), which included the use of topic-related nouns and logical words (e.g., “because”) to convey meaning. The second level was interpersonal meaning (the tone or stance of the writing), which included the appropriate regulation of evaluative language, reporting words, and the source of information, as well as hedging words. The third level was textual meaning (the flow of the writing), which included the use of conjunction words (e.g., “however” and “on the one hand”) and the monitoring of lexical resources (e.g., synonyms, antonyms, and hypernyms) in sentences. To effectively enact Afl, Corey carefully made observations while teaching and wrote reflections during class breaks and after class. He carefully analyzed the students’ responses to feedback and considered their independent writing while listening to their comments about their learning. Thus, Corey followed the requirement of Afl to center on students’ individual needs while conceptualizing writing as a meaning-making process.

The 18 students in Corey’s class were second-semester university students. As is typical of EFL students, they had only been exposed to instructional practices in which language accuracy or overall clarity of content was emphasized (Zhang, 2020). This means that it would be difficult for them to meet the goals of their teacher’s Afl, which would take a toll on his patience. Focusing on the students also contributes to the value of the case study by yielding valuable insights into English writing instruction.

Data collection and analysis. In the process of the data collection, the researcher remained at an unobtrusive distance, refraining from interfering with the classroom-based activities. The data were collected from three sources. The first source was Corey’s reflections on his teaching process as the course progressed, which he wrote for 100 min every Wednesday, immediately after his class that day. He did not write his reflections for this research; instead, it was a natural and habitual part of his work, which he used to document his teaching activities. During the semester, he wrote approximately 16 reflections on his assessment experience, with each reflection averaging 1800–2500 words. The researcher also wrote field notes on Corey’s instructional practices, which recorded his key practices. The second data source was each student’s four reflection papers (averaging 300 words each, as part of the course work) on their experiences with the teacher’s assessment practices. Having his students write reflections was a predetermined component of Corey’s teaching. Each student’s four essays and their actual responses to the assessment practices, namely, the records of their essay revisions, were also collected. The third data source was the 30-min interviews that the researcher conducted with individual students at the end of the semester. The student data provided added information on the teacher’s patience in relation to his assessment practices.

The data analysis began with inductive thematic analysis (Baskarada, 2014; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The written data (e.g., the students’ and teacher’s reflections), along with transcribed interviews, were jointly read multiple times. The teacher’s reflections and the researcher’s field notes were also deductively coded, informed by the theoretical framework of this study (i.e., teacher patience as a sociocognitive construct) and by relevant literature (e.g., Gökçen et al., 2020; Weber-Schwartz, 1987). The codes used to locate information on teacher patience included expressions synonymous or antonymous with the following lexical resources: frustration, endurance, adaptations, tolerance, and perseverance.

By combining inductive and deductive analysis, initial subcategories were unearthed, including (1) the occurrence and recurrence of teacher patience, the teacher’s activation of patience, and failure of assessment practices; and (2) the teacher’s Afl process. The codes and categories were further expanded by referring to literature on assessment practices or teacher patience (e.g., Brown et al., 2018; Edwards, 2020). Then, all the subcategories were combined into appropriate categories (e.g., changing patience over time, the interaction of the teacher’s patience with the students’ responses, and the complexity of Afl), yielding the themes discussed in the following section (see Table 1 for the sample coding scheme). Before finalizing the data collection, the themes were negotiated with a colleague to minimize discrepancies.

Findings
This study revealed that teacher patience played a role in sustaining assessment practices. However, teacher patience was not activated immediately but midway through the assessment practices. In the process, teacher patience was also enacted contextually, either augmenting or weakening its power to sustain the assessment practices. Ultimately, teacher patience, as a contextually sensitive construct, was demonstrated to be dimly and passively sustaining assessment practices.

The midway emergence of patience as a context-sensitive construct in regulating assessment practices. As Corey began to implement Afl, his patience was not immediately exercised as a supportive factor. He noted, “Initially, I just carried out my assessment practices, teaching and giving feedback as I regularly do.” He also wrote, “This is what I should do. Since the

| Table 1 Sample coding scheme. |
|--------------------------------|
| Codes | Teacher patience | Afl |
| Frustration | Student reaction |
| Persistence | Teacher feeling |
| Calmness | Teacher assistance |
| Tolerance | Teacher reflection |
| Subcategories | The occurrence of teacher patience | Students’ failure to meet instructional goals |
| The recurrence of teacher patience | Students’ improvement |
| The sustaining power of patience | Adjustments made to refine students’ learning |
| The temporary collapse of patience | Negative emotions toward students’ work |
| Categories | Changing patience over time; the interaction between teacher patience and student response; the need to address the complexity of Afl; the dynamic trajectory of Afl; the contextual factors in relation to teacher patience |
department assigns the course to me every spring semester, I take it seriously.” Apparently, what initially sustained Corey’s assessment practices was his awareness of his responsibilities, not his patience. In class, he explained how writing is conceptualized as a meaning-making process, observed the students’ responses, and gave explanations when necessary (field notes). After the class, he gave feedback on the students’ essays while analyzing their progress (field notes). This normative practice was particularly illuminated while Corey was grading the first draft of the students’ first essay. As shown in the field notes, Corey corrected the students’ grammar and meaning-making practices in detail. For instance, after the students’ completion of the first essay, Corey reminded them of the importance of consistent use of noun phrases in constructing ideational meaning, as many students had deviated from the topic. Regarding this intensive work, he wrote:

At this time, I do not feel overloaded or anything else. It is more like what I need to do, especially because this is the very beginning of the semester. Problems I’ve found with their writing are also important and need to be clarified in class or in their own essay.

Thus, in line with AfL and as a responsible teacher, Corey was connecting the information he collected from his students to inform his teaching and feedback to further benefit his students.

Patience, however, remained hidden until Corey felt significant disappointment in his students’ responses to his implementation of AfL. Such disappointment occurred particularly after his students repeatedly failed to meet his expectations for their writing practices, which included their responses to his feedback. Corey noted, “It is like they cannot navigate meaning-making well even after my several attempts to help them with revision. Most of the students echoed Corey’s frustration. Student 5 noted in the interview, “Again and again, I just did not do a good job of applying the knowledge that was delivered.”

One explanation may be that the delivered knowledge was somewhat different from what the students had learned before. As Student 7 noted in one reflection, “My previously accumulated knowledge of writing and the relevant assessment practices was not that advanced. It was basically about structure and content organization.” The focus on the dialectical connection between language resources and meaning was new and challenging for the students.

Regarding the students’ repeated failures, Corey noted:

I understand that the students may take an even longer time to digest the information, but I do feel a bit disappointed in comparison with how I felt in the early part of the semester. I get a bit tense when I see students make mistakes again and again.

Corey was caught in a situation in which he felt a clash between what his students should know and how they were behaving. As the field notes showed, in the latter half of the semester, his students made mistakes similar to those that they had made in the first half of the semester. The clash caused Corey to feel disappointed, which tempted him to give up. He noted, “I could be disappointed [with] this, although I had similar experiences in the first half of the semester. I just want to give up grading these essays. And I don’t want to see them anymore.” This disappointment was closely linked to the relationship between Corey’s expectations and his students’ poor performance.

Corey’s disappointment was exacerbated by the students’ “good” performance in class. In class, especially midway through the course, the students reacted well to Corry’s instruction on writing as a meaning-making process, which made Corey believe that they had mastered the delivered knowledge (field notes). Corey noted, “When I found that they did well in class, I thought they would do better in their writing.” The positive assessment information that he collected from the classroom gave him high expectations of his students. He added, “The gap in the students’ writing practices then made me really disappointed, and I wanted to put their work aside.” The unexpected results led him closer to the point of giving up.

The positive performance of the students in the class was understandable. As Student 7 noted in a reflection, “We are just practicing orally what is being learned. We can imitate it mechanically.” In other words, in class, the students’ good performance was generated by mechanical imitation, which made the assessment information collected by Corey misleading and which made him disappointed with his implementation of AfL.

A few days after being disappointed and ceasing to give feedback, Corey’s patience was activated internally and externally and strengthened his determination to mediate his assessment practices. He noted, “I do feel frustrated. I did want to give up. But I need to hold on.” This initial activation of his patience seemed related to his previous experiences of coping with disappointment. He noted, “Learning is a cyclical and continuous process … and I need to remind myself of this, based on my past teaching and own learning. I have to be persistent.” The clash between his disappointment and his awareness that it takes time and energy to bridge the gap between teaching and expected learning galvanized his patience, giving him the confidence to resume his assessment practices. As he further wrote, “After several days, I sat in front of my laptop again, grading the students’ work, while I reminded myself to have peace of mind again.” His patience was also solidified by his professional identity. He wrote, “What I am experiencing is not an excuse for me to give up. I need to endure these negative experiences. As a teacher, I need to keep going. This is what a teacher should do.” In sum, during Corey’s assessment practices, his patience did not surface immediately but was contextually activated as a response to the undesirable context he was in. His patience emerged when he was giving feedback in an out-of-class assessment, as opposed to in-class teaching where the assessed students projected positive information.

The in-the-moment power of patience in buttressing AfL. When patience began to be needed in Corey’s assessment practices, as mentioned above, its power seemed to lie in two aspects. The first was that patience served as a power source for Corey’s investment in giving intensive feedback according to his meaning-making perspective. The students, in their essays, often made logical fallacies, such as jumping to conclusions or misusing causal relationships. Their tone was also inappropriate, and they failed to use appropriate modal verbs to adjust informational assertiveness. As Corey noted, “Given this situation, I had to read each student’s paper carefully, multiple times, in order to help diagnose their meaning-making. It is not an easy job. And patience is now sustaining me.” Corey had to enact his feedback comprehensively and intensively to help his students connect what they knew with what they could write. The construct of patience was helping Corey power through his journey of assessment practices in which the students had to conceptualize writing as a meaning-making process but were not adroit in applying their newly accumulated knowledge.

Patience also helped Corey to survive multiple rounds of giving feedback, especially pertaining to his students’ repeated mistakes, such as in grammar mechanics and meaning-making. In the students’ first essay, they responded to Corey’s feedback, such as regarding run-on sentences and the overuse of commas. However, the same issues occurred in the first version of the students’ second essay. In terms of meaning presentation, while Corey commented on Student 7’s tone appropriateness in her first
version of Essay 2, the student’s revision was no better in the resubmitted version. According to Corey, “These writing issues could have been avoided following a round of revision, especially grammar issues, as they were not that complex.”

Indeed, Corey was justified in saying so, as his students did not make the same mistake consistently across the same essay but only in some places. For example, while Student 1 had run-on sentences in a particular paragraph, she did not have them in other parts of her essay. Similarly, while Student 7 did not respond well to Corey’s feedback on tone appropriateness in one paragraph, she did a thorough job in other paragraphs. Corey noted, “I guess it was just a learning process, so I will let time tell. I have to give this feedback again and again in some students’ essays.”

Indeed, in the interview, Student 7 commented, “I basically knew what I should do, but I could not do it well in line with the teacher’s expectations when I wrote independently.” The students continued to struggle with applying the best presentation of meaning-making, although, through the in-class instruction, they realized that writing should be a meaning-making process. Corey’s patience was temporarily activated in a paradoxical setting in which he understood learning to be a challenging process but thought that the students should have performed as well as he had expected.

Patience was also a power source when Corey interacted with his students regarding their individual issues. For example, although Corey assumed that Student 2 knew the basic structure of an essay from his practice for Essay 1, his Essay 2 had a very messy structure, no topic sentence, and no thesis, and he made an argument without substantial support. Corey wrote, “Seeing this essay, I feel I am almost exploding, disappointed, and furious.” However, Corey also wrote, “After several hours that day, I told myself to be patient, as I trust my students. They work hard.” Corey’s in-the-moment disappointment was soon replaced by his determination to be patient due to his belief that there might be some unknown factor behind his students’ learning failures. He ultimately discovered that his assumption was right. The student’s abnormal performance in Essay 2 might have been due to his unfamiliarity with these key elements and his individual challenges in digesting the information he was receiving.

As Student 2 noted in the interview, “I did try. I did work hard.” Significant individual differences demonstrated by a few students took a big toll on Corey, who was relying on his patience to motivate him to continue his AfL practices.

In the process of implementing AfL, the power of Corey’s patience was represented in his added efforts to explore issues with his teaching and feedback giving. With his patience activated while giving feedback, Corey was able to pause and reflect on his assessment practices. He noted, “I was thinking about what else I needed to do. I cannot just do what I want to do.” He continued, “Achieving AfL does not just involve the students’ efforts and my flexible efforts, so I talked to each student after class and understood their needs.” During these interactions, the students either confirmed Corey’s conjectures regarding their poor performance or helped him identify what could be done to improve their performance the next time. Corey noted, “Through these activities, I verified my assumptions and got a better understanding of student’s individual differences and especially of their challenges in applying knowledge constructs to writing.”

As Student 13 noted in their reflection, “Like I said in [my] discussion with [our] instructor, I did not even detect the expression of inappropriate tones and used very assertive expressions.” Some students shared with Corey that their failed response to feedback was due to their unfamiliarity with writing as a meaning-making process.

Other students explained to Corey why they had failed to write and respond well to his feedback. Student 6 noted in the reflection, “Unpacking the intended meaning of [the] feedback was challenging for me, and I did not know how to respond. This was what I said to the instructor during [our] interaction.”

When interviewed, Student 8 noted, “In the interaction, I suggested that feedback not be expressed with just one word, like ‘logic.’ I would like it to be slightly more informative.”

Regarding the students’ miscellaneous concerns, especially their familiarity with writing as a meaning-making process, Corey came to realize that he needed to remain patient and tolerate the intervening factors in the process. He wrote, “I am happy that I took time to do so. This clarified things and gave me the energy to go on.” Indeed, as shown in the field notes, he tried to use simpler language in the follow-up teaching to scaffold his students’ understanding of writing in class, and to give them more informative feedback. He also helped his students analyze more samples, and they performed well on an essay with a new topic. For Essay 3, the students’ work showed fewer issues, and they responded well to the first round of feedback. Apparently, Corey’s activated patience helped him revisit his teaching and giving of feedback in relation to the students’ needs and motivated him to continue implementing AfL.

The teacher’s AfL and the collapse and reconstruction of teacher patience in response to a changing context. However, Corey’s patience did not last long; it collapsed in the middle of the semester due to several compounding factors. The first factor could have been Corey’s raising his goals after seeing his students’ temporary improvement. For the fourth essay, Corey decided to add the use of citations and referencing as part of the interpersonal meaning that the students needed to present (field notes). Corey wrote, “Since they are doing well now, I think they need to have more. And although the course did not say anything about citations/referencing, I would like this to be included in the teaching and assessment.”

Thus, the progress the students made in the early part of the semester made Corey believe that they could handle more. Unfortunately, the students did not respond well. Not only did they complain in class about the difficulty and complexity of applying citations, but they also struggled to accept that most sentences written in an essay need to be cited (field notes). Student 11 noted in the interview, “I thought that any sentence in which I didn’t exactly copy others was mine.”

Further concern arose as the students’ writing in the fourth essay was not even composed in a manner compatible with their earlier standard. For example, Student 4 provided citations only once, with her intended meaning being that the entire paragraph would be informed by this cited work. At the same time, Student 4’s sentences were not well organized in terms of textual meaning, although she usually did a good job in class in this regard.

The students’ underperformance seemed related to external factors. Student 16 noted in their reflection, “This was the time when other courses were starting to have midterms, and I had to prepare.”

A reflection of Student 18 read, “The use of citations and referencing took time to digest, which distracted my attention from what I had learned.” The lack of time and the complexity of understanding and applying citations distracted the students from what they had been taught and what they were being taught.

Corey also came to this conclusion, asking his students in class what had happened and receiving similar responses (field notes). However, he was very agitated when the students did not do well after his explanation in class and the first round of feedback, writing, “For the first version, I try to stand in their shoes with them. But their second version is still not good? Is it really that difficult?! I felt I could not stand it anymore.” Corey had pinned too
much hope on his enhanced teaching and assessment and did not realize his new goal. This undermined his patience, which had been bolstered earlier in the semester, and brought it to a low point.

Another reason Corey’s patience faltered was that it could not offset the intensive work involved in conducting assessments, especially in this context. Corey noted, “The intensity kind of drains me over time. It’s not that I do not want to do the assessment; I just feel I cannot hold up. It’s too tiring.” The physical tiredness that he felt from the innate intensity of the assessment practices and from his teaching of multiple courses sapped his patience. He added, “I am not just teaching this course; I’ve got other courses, too. During the middle of the semester, many assignments have to be graded. I am kind of not myself. Too tired to be that patient.” In other words, Corey’s patience was naturally eroded by the demands of teaching.

Corey did not fail to remind himself to recover from disappointing assessment practices, although he was at his lowest point in terms of patience. He noted, “While my patience almost wore out during my latest assessments, my understanding of my responsibilities of being a teacher was still constantly reminding me of what to do next.” Corey obviously wanted to re-energize his patience because of his teaching responsibilities, but the transition was a struggle. He noted:

When my patience had collapsed at this time, another side of me was still shouting at me, reminding me of my professional role. It is like many rounds of battles in my mind between giving up and picking myself up.

Corey found himself straining to overcome the context in which his patience had been reduced to almost nothing.

With renewed patience, he waded through the follow-up assessment practices. However, his patience pertaining to the assessment practices differed from his patience in the first half of the semester, particularly in terms of magnitude. He noted, “I felt that my patience was not as strong as before. It was more sustained by my obligations as a teacher than my expectations of the students.” Constant disappointment had drained his patience, and the lack of rewarding experiences had made it impossible to muster as much patience as he once had. He explained, “I am really tired now. Too tired to sustain patience. At almost the end of the semester, I have so many extra things to deal with, with piles of assignments to be graded.” Corey felt he was not physically the same as he had been in the first half of the semester and was thus failing to be as actively patient as before.

The lack of recovered patience was reflected in Corey’s somewhat passive assessment practices, which differed from those earlier in the semester. This was demonstrated in the way he graded the students’ third round of Essay 4. The essay by Student 6 had areas of inappropriate grammar and meaning-making, which required comprehensive correction by Corey. Corey wrote, “But I am flattened, with not much passion for grading. I should have used exclamation marks along with my feedback to show my disappointment.” However, he added, “I still carefully graded each essay as usual.” Corey’s diluted and passive patience did not translate into giving up but into a diminished passion for the assessment practices, unlike what he had experienced early on when he held onto his patience and invested himself in the assessment practices, even in the face of the students’ unsatisfactory performance.

Discussion and implications
This case study on teacher patience and assessment practices yielded the following findings. First, teacher patience appeared to be a power source that gradually emerged during a teacher’s assessment practices. In previous studies, the construct of patience has been sporadically mentioned in relation to teaching (e.g., Willard-Holt, 2001) and assessment literacy (e.g., Brown et al., 2018). In relation to teaching, patience was studied mostly through statistical analysis (e.g., Yilmaz and Güner 2017) or was theoretically discussed (Vigani, 2017). In contrast, the current study, by investigating teacher patience in the context of a teacher’s implementation of AfL, elaborated on teacher patience, the vitality of which was connected to the dynamics of the external context. As shown in this study, patience pertaining to the assessment did not occur immediately in the starting practices. Instead, it took time before patience was triggered by the context, becoming a power source for sustaining the assessment practices. Its power was also mitigated by its context. Thus, this study contributes to an understanding of teacher patience as a context-sensitive construct that is rhizomatically connected to the multifaceted elements in a teaching context.

Second, this study revealed a relationship between teacher patience and assessment practices. Teacher patience was shown as a sustaining power for the teacher, especially when the assessment practices were new to the students. With patience, the teacher was able to follow through with the assessment practices, although the power of teacher patience in supporting the practices was not always of the same strength because the challenges were from diverse aspects of the teaching and learning context. Previous studies on assessment practices were more focused on what the teacher was doing (Hodgen and Marshall, 2005; Xu and Harfitt, 2019) or related factors such as sociocultural factors (e.g., Wu et al., 2021). The paucity of research on patience—except for those studies that made vague speculations on the subject, as previously discussed—might also have been due to challenges with capturing teacher patience, in that such research requires that classroom activities be tracked and that the participating teachers bravely share their experiences as a patient or impatient teachers over a long time, as was the case in this study. In other words, this finding, on the relationship between teacher patience and AfL, was made possible by its supportive EFL context and its use of qualitative methods. Had a quantitative approach been used for the de-contextualized calculation of variables, the subtlety of such findings, which depended on contextual explanations, might have been impossible. In addition, this finding on the connection between teacher patience and AfL complements our understanding of assessment practices in the writing classroom, especially in relation to teacher patience as another important construct behind teachers’ actual practices.

Third, the relationship between teacher patience and assessment was revealed to be dynamically changeable. Late in the semester, the power of teacher patience dimmed due to interactions with the external context (e.g., the teacher’s fatigue). Although the teacher’s patience was strong enough to sustain the continuation of assessment practices, its force was passive and weak. The changing relationship between teacher patience and assessment practices points to the two existing in a fluid context. This finding, in tandem with that of the preceding paragraph, points to the important but complex relationship between teacher patience and assessment. In other words, this finding adds to our understanding of the complexity of propelling power sources that impact teachers when they implement assessment practices (e.g., Brown et al., 2018), which is echoed by other studies (e.g., Wang et al., 2020). As revealed by the findings of this study, care should be taken not to diminish teacher patience and there is the need to avoid the promotion of teacher patience as the only power source for teaching practices, including, but not limited to assessment practices.

The implications of this study are as follows. First, assessment practices are important for student’s success, but they are also time- and energy-consuming for teachers (Jonsson et al., 2015). To sustain effective AfL, teachers need to develop the ability to
conjure up the necessary motivation to support themselves. Patience as a construct seems helpful in this regard. However, the construct may not be well developed in some teachers, who then develop a dislike for teaching and discard their assessment practices (Brown et al., 2018). This highlights the importance of including patience training in teacher education programs—for both secondary school teachers and prospective higher education teachers.

Second, since teacher patience is not a fixed construct but diminishes or increases in different contexts (Gökçen et al., 2020; Vigan, 2017), teachers’ regulation of patience is crucial. Teachers themselves need to re-galvanize their patience when it is waning due to frustrating teaching experiences, by considering the students’ perspective, trying to understand the root cause of their problems, and looking for different teaching strategies. Teachers could also use their sense of teaching responsibility to fortify their practices and patience, as demonstrated by the teacher in this study. In fact, patience should be a crucial part of a teacher’s professional competence. Administrators and teacher education programs need to support in-service teachers who may be experiencing contextual hindrances (e.g., a heavy course load or family pressures) and who may be losing patience with teaching such as by establishing a caring community that will help teachers maintain the patience needed for dealing with complex teaching activities.

Third, the relationship between teacher patience and assessment practices also points to the need for teachers to establish rational goals for their assessment practices. While students’ progress is a desirable outcome, it may not come as quickly as the teacher desires and may thus test the teacher’s patience. Teachers with a rational expectation of their student’s progress (Weber-Schwartz, 1987) are more likely to remain patient while following through with their assessments to the benefit of their students. Even with ample stores of patience and understanding, teachers need to keep in close communication with their students, looking for hindering factors and improving their assessment practices to meet their original goals.

Limitations of this study
While a single case study is valuable for yielding findings in the field of educational research, its limitations must be acknowledged. Although a case study approach with a singular subject is acceptable for an intensive and prolonged investigation (Yin, 2011), future studies should involve more teachers in similar contexts or a cohort of teachers with different backgrounds (e.g., language arts teachers vs. science teachers). In doing so, deeper insights into teacher practices in relation to assessment practices may be gained. In addition, the time span of this study was one semester. Conducting a similar study over a longer time span should yield additional findings, such as the dynamics of teacher patience over an extended period. Future studies could also consider whether patience is genetically determined and, if so, to what extent. Moreover, the potential relationship of patience to other socio-cognitive constructs (e.g., happiness, age, or self-determination) and the psychological and physiological aspects of the teacher could be considered. More importantly, if the assessment is conceptualized within a broader pedagogical model (e.g., with diverse contextual dimensions; see Tolgfors et al., 2022), teachers may develop positive beliefs about it and may be more disposed to use it to support individual students in the achievement of learning outcomes. Future research may explore whether patience is an integral part of such beliefs and dispositions.

Data availability
All data analyzed are contained in the paper. Please contact the author for data requests.

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**Competing interests**
The author declares no competing interests.

**Ethics approval**
Ethical approval was obtained from the School of English and International Studies, Beijing Foreign Studies University, China. All procedures performed in the study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

**Informed consent**
Before the study began, the participants were informed of the purpose and goals of the research. The participants were also told that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The consent form included detailed information on the research and contact information for further inquiries arising during the participation. All participants gave their informed written consent.

**Additional information**
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