The mediating role of emotional dissonance in the relationship between teacher's emotional labor strategies and occupational well-being

Nasrin Arshadi, Saleheh Piryaei

Abstract

Emotional dissonance resulting from an employee's emotional labor strategies is usually considered to lead to negative employee's outcomes such as reduced occupational well-being. The purpose of this research was to test the effects of emotional labor strategies (surface acting, deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotions) on occupational well-being considering the mediating role of emotional dissonance. The sample of this research consisted of 150 high school teachers in Isfahan who were selected by stratified random sampling method. The instruments which used in this study were Teacher Emotional Labor Strategy Scale (TELSS), emotional exhaustion subscale in Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and occupational well-being scale. Structural equation modeling (SEM) through AMOS-22 was used for data analysis. The results indicated that, emotional labor strategies relates significantly to emotional dissonance, and emotional dissonance relates negatively to occupational well-being. In addition, emotional dissonance mediated the effect of emotional labor strategies on occupational well-being. These findings could be explained by differences in the nature of various emotional labor strategies. Implications for teaching and teacher education are put forward.

Key words: emotional labor strategies, emotional dissonance, occupational well-being

Introduction

Recently, emotions in teacher's work has turned into a topic of much curiosity about educational research. Emotions plays a significant role in teacher's development (Yin & Lee, 2011), teacher's satisfaction, and the formation and transformation of teachers’ identity or self-understanding (Yin, Lee, Zhang & Jin, 2013). Sutton & Rafaeli (1988) argued that emotions are generally viewed as intra-psychic states due to factors such as job characteristics, stress, and relationships with supervisors, or compensation. According to Martínez-Iñigo, Totterdell, Alcover & Holman (2007) these intra-psychic states of emotions are an important requirement in a number of jobs and play a role in influencing work-related outcomes. Results of several researches have indicated that the ways teachers emotionally feel the context of teaching significantly connect with the ways they approach their teaching. Positive emotions associated with a student-focused teaching approach and negative emotions will lead to transmission approaches (Trigwell, 2012). Hosotani & Imai-Matsumura (2011) stated that teachers consider emotional expression in front of students as a skill, and high quality teachers can effectively use emotional competence on teaching.

Emotional labor, namely employees’ emotional performance, is a moderately new subject of request examined following the late 70s, began by Hochschild (1979, 1983). Diversified researches attempted to set up in any conceptual clarity to the idea of emotional labor by simply
defining its process, antecedents and organizational implications. Hochschild’ (1983) stated that there are three criteria for work that requires emotional labor strategies, (1) teaching requires face-to-face contact between teachers and others, especially students; (2) teaching requires teachers to produce some emotional state (e.g. joy, fear, excitement or anxiety) to students or other people around them; and (3) there is a degree of external control over teachers’ emotional labor, which usually comes in the form of cultural expectations or professional norms (Winograd, 2003). In other words, emotional labor process involves a consistent comparison between the emotional displays of oneself and the institutionalized display rules. If an inconsistency between emotion’s display and display rules is detected, emotion-regulation strategies in the form of surface acting and deep acting are adopted (Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau, 2010). So, emotional labor as an important element of teachers’ work in a school or classroom isn’t easily identified because emotional rules in many cases are disguised as ethical codes or professional norms (Fried, 2011).

Hochschild’s primary conceptualization, focused on the unfavorable effects of emotional dissonance, has dominated the literature on emotional labor. Emotional dissonance is a wide discrepancy between felt and expressed emotion “analogous to the concept of cognitive dissonance” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 90). This discrepancy arises when the people's emotion display as part of their job performance do not match the emotions they feel (Pugh, et. al, 2010). Emotional dissonance may cause faked emotional responses, cause internal tension, and thereby creating job dissatisfaction (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002).

According to Morris & Feldman (1996), emotional labor is defined as the effort, planning and control required for the organization’s desired emotions to be reflected in the interpersonal process (Bayram, Aytac & Dursun, 2012). Emotional labor has been traditionally viewed as a supply of negative psychological outcomes such as for instance low job satisfaction, job stress, emotional exhaustion, depression, and self-alienation (Constanti & Gibbms, 2005). Some specific strategies are required for teachers to regulate their emotions and feelings when working. According to the emotional labor theory, emotional labor is just a big element of employee's performance because certain jobs require employees to show certain emotional strategies (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

The most commonly used terms of emotional labor are surface acting, deep acting, and genuine acting (Hochschild, 1983). In the context of teaching, emotional labor is primarily perceived as the process by which teachers make an effort to inhibit, generate, and manage their feelings and expression of emotions according to the normative beliefs and expectations held about the teaching profession (Yin et al., 2013, p.138). Surface acting and deep acting are two classical strategies which are most frequently discussed in emotional labor literature. Both surface and deep acting are strategies that help individuals express emotions that do not come naturally. Surface acting means that employees try to manage the visible aspects of emotions that appear on the “surface” and which can be noticed in the interactions in line with the organizational display rules while the inner feelings remain unchanged. The expectation of certain emotions by the employees is defined as “feeling rules” (Hochschild,1983) or “display rules” (Morris & Feldman, 1996), which are postulated to truly have a potential to cause emotional conflict or dissonance for employees if these emotional expectations will vary from an employees’ actual emotional inclinations (Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting may sometimes be a problematic
strategy because often more is expected than ‘superficial’ emotions. Another concept of Hochschild (1983) is “active deep acting” when individuals try to influence what they feel in order to ‘become’ the role they are asked to display. In this case, not only the expressive behavior but also the inner feelings are regulated. Active deep acting refers to the case where an employee has to spend effort to regulate emotions. This is so because there is a need to actively strive to invoke thoughts, images, and memories to induce a certain emotion (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Moreover, According Yin et al., (2013) In addition to surface acting and deep acting, some researchers (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993) suggested that expression of naturally felt emotions is a third type of emotional labor strategy because although the display of naturally felt emotions at work may be fairly common, individuals may still have to make a conscious effort to ensure that their display is consistent with the organization’s requirements.

A controversial question still exists regarding the potency of emotional labor. Morris & Feldman’s (1997) proposed that frequency and duration of emotional labor not directly impact on employee's well-being, but may do so through emotional dissonance. Zapf et al., (1999) argued that the requirement to display positive emotions, negative emotions, and sensitivity requirements are not necessarily stressful but may become so through emotional dissonance (Lewig & Dollard, 2003). However, by way of a prior study, these researchers supposed that the emotional labor's negative influence upon someone isn't emotional labor itself, nevertheless the incongruous state of emotional dissonance, which can be associated with emotional labor.

Emotional labor, “the management of emotions as part of the work role” (Diefendorff & Richard, 2003, p. 284), is believed to influence on occupational well-being (Kim, 2008). This is exactly why the measurement of emotional labor strategies, coping strategies in the event of conflict, along with influential factors have received increasing attention from researchers, causing many various ways of measurement and several emotional labor terms. In this vein, if you find incompatibility involving the emotions actually felt by the employee and the emotions displayed, various negative results ensure and will cause mental and physical dysfunctions in employees such as job burnout and perceived role stress (Bayrama et al., 2012).

However, researchers are just starting to examine various aspects of the transactions between teaching and emotion, which indicates the urgent need of more research on teacher's emotion. At this time the present study focused to examine the effect of emotional labor strategies (surface acting, deep acting, and expression of naturally felt emotions) on occupational well-being through emotional dissonance experienced in a teaching context. (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The hypothetical model of current research

![Diagram](https://example.com/diagram.png)
Method

Participants
Respondents for this research were 150 full-time high school teachers that were selected by stratified random sampling method from public high-school teachers in Isfahan. After incomplete questionnaires were eliminated, 120 questionnaires were obtained over the four-week period (a response rate of 99.2%). The majority of the employees (80%) were female, 64.5% were 20–30 years of age, and 94.8% had a community college degree. The majority of the respondents (71.3%) had worked at the current workplace for less than 5 years.

Measures

Teacher Emotional Labor Strategy Scale (TELSS): The TELSS adapted by Yin (2012) was used to assess teacher's emotional labor strategies with three dimensions of surface acting (SA, six items), deep acting (DA, four items), and expression of naturally felt emotions (ENFE, three items). This scale has 13-items with items anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). According to Yin et al., (2013) the reliability of the three emotional labor strategies was supported by high Cronbach’s alpha coefficients, ranging from .74 to .85, and the CFA results showed that the TELSS had a good data fit.

Emotional dissonance: The MBI–GS (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996) measures the three dimensions of the burnout–engagement continuum: emotional exhaustion– energy (5 items; e.g. I feel used up at the end of the workday), cynicism– involvement (5 items; e.g. I have become less enthusiastic about my work), and inefficacy– efficacy (6 items; e.g. ‘In my opinion, I am good at my job’). All items are scored on 7-point frequency scale (ranging from never to daily). Burnout is reflected in higher scores on exhaustion and cynicism and lower scores on efficacy

Emotional dissonance as mediating variable was measured using Maslach and Jackson’s (1981) nine item emotional exhaustion subscale of the 22-item Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Previous studies have evidenced the internal consistency of the emotional dissonance scale (i.e., Abraham, 1998). Emotional dissonance is measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) = “not at all” to (5) = “almost always” with no verbal labels for scale points. The Reliability of these items by using Cronbach’s alpha was equal to .91, and the Validity of emotional dissonance items were calculated using factor analysis, Was the top .85 (Talebpour, Mikaeli & Khedmatgozar Khoshdel, 2013).

Occupational well-being: the occupational well-being scale by Hinkin (1998) was used to assess the occupational well-being. As suggested by Ryff’s (1989) model of psychological well-being, this scale composed of 54 items and 6 subscales include Positive Occupational Relationships (9-Items), Professional Self-Acceptance (9-Items), Job Autonomy (9-Items), Job Purpose (9-Items), Environmental Mastery (9-Items), and Job Growth (9-Items). Occupational well-being is measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) = “strongly disagree” to (5) = “strongly agree”. Results of CFA and Cronbach’s alpha coefficient showed that the 6 factors had acceptable reliability coefficients, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranging from .71 to .82 as
for the construct validity, and the CFA results showed that the original first-order factor structure had acceptable goodness of fit indices (Shultz, 2008).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations
The descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and the correlations among research variables are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surface acting</td>
<td>18.18</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Acting</td>
<td>14.24</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>.90*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of naturally felt emotions</td>
<td>6.89</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.80*</td>
<td>.92*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional dissonance</td>
<td>30.39</td>
<td>8.72</td>
<td>.93*</td>
<td>.83*</td>
<td>-.83*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational well-being</td>
<td>105.85</td>
<td>35.77</td>
<td>-.92*</td>
<td>-.91</td>
<td>.82*</td>
<td>-.97*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Correlations for Research Variables

Results of Pearson correlation analysis indicated that all three emotional labor strategies had significant relationships with and occupational well-being (-0.92, -0.091, 0.82). Also emotional dissonance negatively related to occupational well-being (-0.97) and significantly correlates with surface acting (0.93), deep acting (0.83) and expression of naturally felt emotions (-0.83) ($p < 0.0001$).

SEM analyses
The structural equation modeling (SEM) results indicated that this model was fit the data properly: (CMIN = 9.368, df= 3, CMIN/df= 3.123 ($p < 0.02$), NFI= 0.99, IFI= 0.998, TLI= 0.989, CFI= 0.998, RMSEA= 0.08). The standardized regression weights for the paths are shown in figure 2.

Figure 2. The standardized parameters of structural model, $^*p< 0.0001$, $^{**}p< 0.01$
As shown in figure 2, all paths in this model were statistically significant (p< 0.01). To determine the significance of the mediating effects, bootstrapping procedure was used. Bootstrapping procedure (using 5000 re-samples) was used to determine the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals around these effects. A confidence interval that did not span zero indicated a statistically significant effect (see Table 2).

As illustrated in Table 2 the confidence interval, with one mediator (emotional dissonance) did not span zero which indicates statistically significant mediating effect. So, the emerged pattern suggests a mediating role of perceived emotional dissonance in these relationships.

### Table 2

**Results for Bootstrapping Analysis with One Mediator: Effects on Occupational well-being**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Boot</th>
<th>Bias</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>95% Confidence interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA ➔ emotional dissonance ➔ occupational well-being</td>
<td>-1.3069</td>
<td>-1.3069</td>
<td>0.0009</td>
<td>0.0451</td>
<td>-1.3970 - 1.2172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA ➔ emotional dissonance ➔ occupational well-being</td>
<td>-1.0473</td>
<td>-1.0511</td>
<td>-0.0038</td>
<td>0.0350</td>
<td>-1.1134 - 0.9778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENFE ➔ emotional dissonance ➔ occupational well-being</td>
<td>-1.1301</td>
<td>-1.1325</td>
<td>-0.0024</td>
<td>0.0483</td>
<td>-1.2371 - 1.0436</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SA: surface acting., DA: deep acting., ENFE: expression of naturally felt emotions

**Discussion**

The purpose of the current research was to determine the mediating role of emotional dissonance in the relationship between emotional labor strategies and teacher's occupational well-being. Specifically, we found that teacher's perceived emotional dissonance mediated significantly the relationship between teacher's emotional labor strategies (surface acting, deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotions) with occupational well-being. The findings of this study is consistent with Jung & Yoon (2014), Karim & Weisz (2011), and Yin et al., (2013) findings. This study is a venture to a superior seeing about the role of emotional labor in teachers’ work. The results of this study contribute to the existing knowledge in the accompanying perspectives: the factor structure of teachers’ emotional labor strategies, the important role of emotional dissonance in teachers’ well-being, and the practice of teacher training and teacher education.

Dissonance is conceptualized as a negative affective state, and motivated by the desire to
decrease this negative affect or arousal (Carrasco, Martínez-Tur, Moliner, María Peiró & Ramis, 2014). Hochschild (1983) in Cognitive dissonance theory, asserted that when felt emotions differ from expressed emotions, tension results. Expressing emotions that are different from the emotions that are felt, “poses a challenge to a person’s sense of self” (p. 136). Indeed, Erickson and Ritter (2001) noted that because of Hochschild’s influence, “most studies of emotion management processes begin with the assumption that performing emotional labor is associated with negative mental health outcomes” (p. 148). Erickson and Ritter (2001) asserted that hiding feelings of anger harms employee well-being because it reminds employees of their lack of control over their own emotions. Moreover, Based on Festinger’s (1957) cognitive dissonance theory, pairs of cognitions that are relevant to one another can be either consonant (i.e., one naturally follows from the other) or dissonant (i.e., one is in conflict with the other). Dissonant cognitions imply the psychologically uncomfortable state of cognitive dissonance, which then leads a person to take steps to reduce this dissonance, such as avoiding information that would increase dissonance.

Goffman (1959) suggested that in every social interaction people follow some rules. There is sufficient evidence that emotional work in organizations is an essential issue and negatively impacts on psychological well-being cannot be ignored (Zapf, 2002). Also, Teaching is a form of emotional practice and emotional labor (Hargreaves, 2001) and This “people-work” or “heart-consuming job”, as described by teachers, requires strong emotional commitment and intensive interpersonal interaction (Yin & Lee, 2012). Similar to Pugliesi (1999) and Holman, Chissick & Totterdell (2002) as a laborious rather than pleasant work, teachers are obliged to closely monitor their inner feelings and to modify their emotional expressions by means of various cognitive techniques. According to Kim & Lee (2011) emotional labor had significant positive effects on employee job stress and this new stress can lead to negative psychological conditions, such as greater emotional exhaustion (Morris and Feldman, 1996). Whereas emotional dissonance is a psychological feeling momentarily perceived in work situations.

Surface acting as “faking in bad faith” (Grandey, 2003, p. 87) often found to be associated with negative outcomes in previous researches (e.g., Cheung, Tang & Tang, 2011; Karim & Weisz, 2011). So, it is positive significant predictor of emotional dissonance and indirectly impacts on teacher's occupational well-being. Moreover, consistent with Zhang & Zhu’s (2008) study, deep acting found to significantly influence on employee's outcomes. Deep acting can be seen as “faking in good faith” (Grandey, 2003) and it may lead to an increase of emotional dissonance between real emotions and rules. So as a laborious rather than pleasant work, teachers should make great efforts to closely monitor their inner feelings and to modify their emotional expressions by means of various cognitive techniques (Yin et al., 2013) and this association indirectly lead to lower occupational well-being. Indeed, Emotional labor can become dysfunctional for the worker when dissonance between felt emotions and displayed emotions is experienced. This incongruence between feelings and actions (termed emotional dissonance) may ultimately lead to lowered self-esteem, depression, cynicism, and alienation from work (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

However, Teachers using surface and deep acting strategies display emotions that do not come naturally, but expression of naturally felt emotion means authenticity of emotional expression and a consistency between emotional experience and its display (Yin et al., 2013, p.143). In the present study, expression of naturally felt emotion had significant negative effect on perceived
emotional dissonance and indirectly lead to increasing teacher's well-being at work. So, consistent with Yin et al., (2013) showing real feelings and emotions in school teachers can influence on better emotion-regulation and lower level of perceived emotional dissonance and this indirectly effects on teacher's occupational well-being or satisfaction. Therefore, teachers who would prefer to express their genuine feelings, have high occupational well-being.

Also, our findings are congruent with the arguments underlying emotional self-regulation approaches (Babakus et al., 2009) and conservation of resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989). Emotional dissonance involves an effort by teachers encounters that is very difficult to restore (Grandey, 2003), producing a loss of resources that can lead to burnout (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

Thus, diagnosis the emotional rules for teachers’ work and assisting them to internalize these professional demands on their emotions have great importance for teaching effectiveness and psychological well-being (Yin et al., 2013, p: 143). However, the emotional job demands of teaching, or emotional rules for teachers, are often neglected because of the tacit nature of them. Therefore, it is advisable for a teacher training program to make in-service as well as pre-service teachers clear about the job demands of teaching on teachers’ emotions.

### Implications and future research

In spite of its limitations, this study represents a further step in the consideration of variables pertaining to different traditions and levels of construct in understanding the well-being of teachers. The present study confirmed that emotional dissonance and emotional labor strategies are additive significant predictors of occupational well-being.

Future researches would clearly benefit from being longitudinal and multi-method designs. Equally important is the need to ground future research in this area in theories of emotional regulation (e.g., Gross, 1998) theories that specify the structure, causes and consequences of affective experiences at work (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and in theories that posit alternative mechanisms (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Thus, emotional labor is only one way that emotions might be regulated at work.

Clearly, emotional labor is a significant aspect of work experiences for incumbents of a broad range of jobs. Studies of the impact of work conditions, including the psychosocial environment, have demonstrated causal impacts on psychological and health outcomes with longitudinal data.

### References


