The Effect of Emotional Labor on Work Engagement among Young Administrative Teachers in Private Universities: a Moderated Mediation Model

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Abstract: The effect of emotional labor on work engagement was explored in the research. Also, the mediating role of job satisfaction and the moderating influence of perceived organizational support in the relationship are tested. Between January and May 2023, a set of self-report questionnaires was completed online by 392 young administrative teachers from private universities in Guangdong, China. The results revealed that surface acting inversely predicted work engagement while deep acting had a significant positive effect on work engagement. The mediation model test and the moderated mediation analyses were conducted through PROCESS macro program for SPSS. It turned out that job satisfaction directly correlated with work engagement and partially mediated the effect of surface acting/deep acting on work engagement. Perceived organizational support was found to moderate the effect of surface acting on work engagement, and the mediation impact of job satisfaction on the relationship between deep acting was moderated by perceived organizational support. The findings expand our knowledge regarding the effect of emotional labor on job satisfaction, work engagement and enriches our understanding of the effect of perceived organizational support on those emotional labor. Implications and recommendations for education field and further study have been offered in the end.

Keywords: Emotional labor, job satisfaction, work engagement, teachers, private universities.

1 Introduction

Given that teachers must invest a significant amount of resources into controlling their emotional states in order to fulfill the demands of their jobs, emotional labor (EL) among teachers has recently become a hot topic for research in educational psychology[1]. Also, there has been a controversy that teachers should exercise effective emotional control as service industry workers (e.g., hotel receptionists, catering staff, flight attendants) generally do. Education research has emphasized the value of EL to teachers more and more over the last two decades[2]. The work of university teacher is usually acknowledged to be a sort of EL that satisfies the requirements for work and necessitates EL because schools have historically been considered as complex professions[3]. Similarly, administrative work in private universities is a

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very emotional job, requiring those young administrative teachers to effectively manage their emotions and express emotions that are expected by others, and teachers are supposed to control their emotions and moods in accordance with the norms or policies that the organization desires[4]. In order to exhibit organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal interactions, university administrators are likely to engage in a large amount of "emotional labor," which is described as "the effort, planning, and control needed to do so."[5].

The aim of the present study was to discuss the relationship between EL, job satisfaction (JS), work engagement (WE) and perceived organizational support (POS) of young administrative teachers under 40 years old. It is hypothesized that POS of young administrative teachers in private universities is a moderating variable of the relationship between EL and WE mediated by JS. Practical guidance is provided for releasing teachers' EL stress, averting emotional dysregulation, and promoting teachers' engagement and productivity.

2 Literature review and hypotheses

2.1 The direct effect of emotional labor on work engagement

Hochschild[6] defined EL as "managing feelings and creating a publicly observable face and body display" to earn money. It's also likened to "the third kind of labor" beyond physical and intellectual labor and commonly used to describe how individuals manage their emotions by regulating in two strategies, such as deep acting (DA), surface acting (SA) during at work. Gandey[7] has also elaborated EL as a work-related duty that requires the display of specific emotions which sometimes inversely related to individual actual emotions. With that, Diefendorff et al.[8] demonstrated that most EL concepts can be achieved through three strategies: SA, DA and genuine acting. However, this study is mainly concerned with the roles and effects of SA and DA. DA is the modification of a one's inner subjective experience and, more specifically, the modification of negative emotions such as internal conflict and anxiety to improve mood. Instead, SA focuses on regulating external emotional expression. DA consumes more cognitive and emotional resources than SA, which is associated with mental exhaustion[9].

Grandey proposed an integrated model that combined work-centered EL (i.e., emotional demands of job) with employee-centered EL to conceptualize mechanisms for EL in the workplace[7]. WE which includes 3 sub-factors, covering energy, dedication and focus, is defined as a positive and fulfilling mindset associated with work[10], and it has been identified as one of the work-related factors that may be affected by EL[11]. It's revealed by other research that EL, that is, both SA and DA positively predicted WE[11]. Studies of EL and WE have generally found inverse correlation between SA and WE, and positive correlation between deep behavior and WE[12-13]. The following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: Young administrative teachers' SA is negatively related to WE.

H2: Young administrative teachers' DA is positively related to WE.

2.2 The mediating role of job satisfaction

JS was generally defined by Locke[14], as the utmost factor affecting staff' attitudes and behavior. It's usually a positive emotional state that results from an evaluation of one's job. As an extension, Mostafa & Pál[15] defined teachers' JS as the satisfaction of being a teacher and performing a specific teaching job.

Negative effect was found among SA and JS[16-17], while DA was positively correlated with JS[18]. It's suggested that JS has become a central concern in organizational psychology research as satisfied employees can bring more efficiency to the organization.[19]. There is an important relationship between JS and employee engagement[20-21], and the further correlation analyses also proved that JS was positively related to employees' engagement[22]. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3a: JS plays a mediating role between SA and WE.

H3b: JS plays a mediating role between DA and WE.

2.3 The moderating effect of perceived organizational support

In accordance with the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory[23], individuals often rely on a variety of resources to maintain the status quo and growth, so they have to preserve and utilize the existing internal resources, explore and obtain the external resources they need. It is well known that when individuals lack internal resources, they are more likely to resort to superficial action strategies to reduce resource exhaustion and become more dissatisfied with their jobs[24]. Relevant researches have concluded that SA is more likely to undermine employees' self-authenticity and drain mental resources[25-26]. POS, considered an organization resource[24] that is regarded as an external supplementary resource that provides individuals with positive emotional cognition and experience in organizational work[27] and enhances their JS, thereby increasing their WE[28]. The perceived level of organizational support changes the impact of EL strategies on JS[29].

EL is the painstaking effort to suppress one's emotions when engaging with others at work[30], which implies that organizations should give their employees extensive support in their lives and at work, and take step to maintain their mental health and enhance happiness. Teachers who perceived supported by teaching may use less SA and more natural emotional expressions[31], which in return increase JS and engagement. Accordingly, the following hypothesis can be developed for this study. The hypothesized model is demonstrated in Figure 1.

H4a: The direct predictive effect of SA on WE and the mediating effect of JS are moderated by POS.

H4b: The direct predictive effect of DA on WE and the mediating effect of JS are moderated by POS.

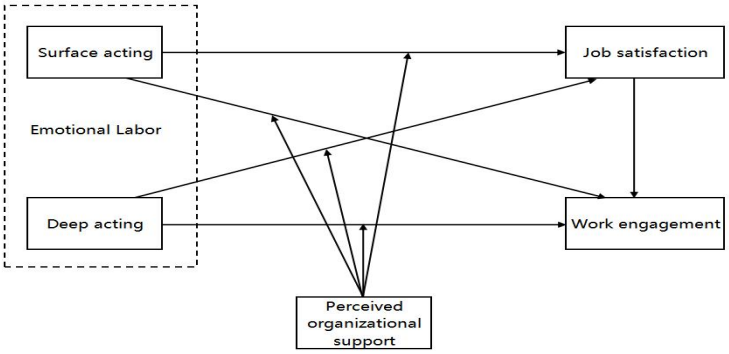

Fig. 1. Hypothetical model diagram

3 Method

3.1 Procedure and participants

Young administrative teachers of private universities in Guangdong province were convenience samples of this study. We contacted the Personnel Division of each university in Guangdong and invited the administrative teachers of those to participate in the survey voluntarily. Participants filled in the questionnaire anonymously through online collection with questionnaire instructions and filling guidance prepared in advance between January and May 2023.

400 participants were recruited to fill in the questionnaire, of which 392 questionnaires were valid and used in the following study. The sample comprised 183 males (46.7%), 209 females (53.3%). In terms of working experience, 46 teachers (11.7%) had 1 year and less work experience, 100 teachers (25.5%) had 1-3 years of work experience, 123 teachers (31.4%) had 3-5 years' experience, 85 teachers (21.7%) had 5-10 years of experience and 38 of participants (9.7%) reported 10 years and more work experience. See Table 1 in detail.

Table 1. Participants' demographics (N=392)

	Category	**Frequency**	**PCT(%)**
Gender	Male	183	46.7
	Female	209	53.3
Age	＜25	73	18.6
	26-30	167	42.6
	31-35	109	27.8
	36-40	43	11.0
Marital status	Unmarried	230	58.7
	Married with no children	53	13.5
	Married with children	109	27.8
Education	Bachelor's degree and below	161	41.1
	Master	214	54.6
	Doctor	17	4.3

Title	Vice-senior title	14	3.6
	Middle title	63	16.1
	Primary title	96	24.5
	No title	219	55.9
Tenure in current university	＜1	46	11.7
	1-3	100	25.5
	3-5	123	31.4
	5-10	85	21.7
	＞10	38	9.7

3.2 Measurement

Emotional labor

This study used the EL scale developed by Diefendorff et al.[8] which consists of 14 items in 3 dimensions. Feng et al.[32] revised the EL scale into 2 dimensions (e.g., DA and SA) covering 11 items from Diefendorff et al.'s[8] scale, and using university teachers as research samples to explore the reliability and validity of the scale in China. It's shown that the Cronbach's α for SA and DA were 0.76 and 0.72, respectively. In relation to the context of private university in China and the particularity of this study, we adopted the 11 items EL scale on a 5-point Likert scale. In this study, the Cronbach's α for SA and DA were 0.960 and 0.964.

Perceived organizational support

Eisenberger et al.'s[33] scale was adopted to measure POS. Li et al.[34] modified the expression of a few items in the scale of Eisenberger et al.[33] to make it suitable for the specific situations, excluded two reverse questions that has already been reflected in the scale and finally used 7 items on a 5-point Likert scale to measure. In this research, Cronbach's α = 0.958.

Job satisfaction

Moè et al.[35] applied An Italian version of the Satisfaction With Life Scale(SWLS) proposed by Diener et al.[36] that was adapted for teachers and denoted the JS scale with the internal reliability of the scale Cronbach's alpha = 0.84. The scale is constituted of 5 items that are measure on a 7-point scale. In this study, Cronbach' s alpha = 0.967.

Work engagement

Schaufeli et al.[10] proposed the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) consisting of 3 dimensions (e.g., vigor, dedication and absorption). Zhang et al.[37] then developed the Chinese version of UWES. Based on the purpose of the study, the scale was deleted and modified to measure the WE of young teachers in universities, thus a 9-item WE scale was developed for this study, which had an internal reliability of Cronbach's alpha = 0.980. All items are scored on a 7-point scale.

4 Results

4.1 Reliability and validity

SPSS 24.0 and AMOS 25.0 are used for data analysis. Table 2 and Table 3 show data reliability and validity, Figure 2 demonstrates the confirmatory factor analysis results. It's reported that CMIN/DF = 3.563, RMSEA = 0.081, CFI = 0.942, TLI = 0.937, IFI = 0.942. Table. 2 lists the standardized loadings derived from the CFA. As shown in Table 2, the AVE values of each construct were all above 0.5, implying that data had convergent validity, with the correlation coefficient between the constructs almost below the square root of AVE, which ensured that the data had good discriminant validity. At the same time, Cronbach's Alpha and CR of each construct exceeded 0.7, and the data reliability was good.

Table 2 Data reliability and validity.

Factors	Items	Standardized loadings	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
SA	sa1	0.918	0.960	0.9606	0.7773
	sa2	0.875			
	sa3	0.83			
	sa4	0.861			
	sa5	0.902			
	sa6	0.929			
	sa7	0.852			
DA	da1	0.921	0.964	0.9663	0.8777
	da2	0.922			
	da3	0.951			
	da4	0.953			
POS	pos1	0.907	0.958	0.9594	0.7718
	pos2	0.925			
	pos3	0.9			
	pos4	0.823			
	pos5	0.857			
	pos6	0.888			
	pos7	0.845			
JS	js1	0.918	0.967	0.9693	0.8633
	js2	0.948			
	js3	0.961			
	js4	0.89			
	js5	0.927			
WE	we1	0.956	0.980	0.8896	0.5667
	we2	0.911			
	we3	0.9			
	we4	0.919			
	we5	0.917			
	we6	0.927			
	we7	0.919			
	we8	0.942			
	we9	0.907			

Factors			Correlation and square root of AVE				
	M	SD	WE	JS	POS	DA	SA
WE	38.714	15.054	**0.753*** **				
JS	21.434	8.858	0.992	**0.929*** **			
POS	23.469	7.995	0.971	0.985	**0.879*** **		
DA	13.010	5.681	0.943	0.959	0.947	**0.937*** **	
SA	22.186	8.665	-0.902	-0.913	-0.891	-0.895	**0.882*** **

Table 3. Results of confirmatory factor analyses.

χ^2/df	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	TLI
3.563	0.081	0.942	0.942	0.937

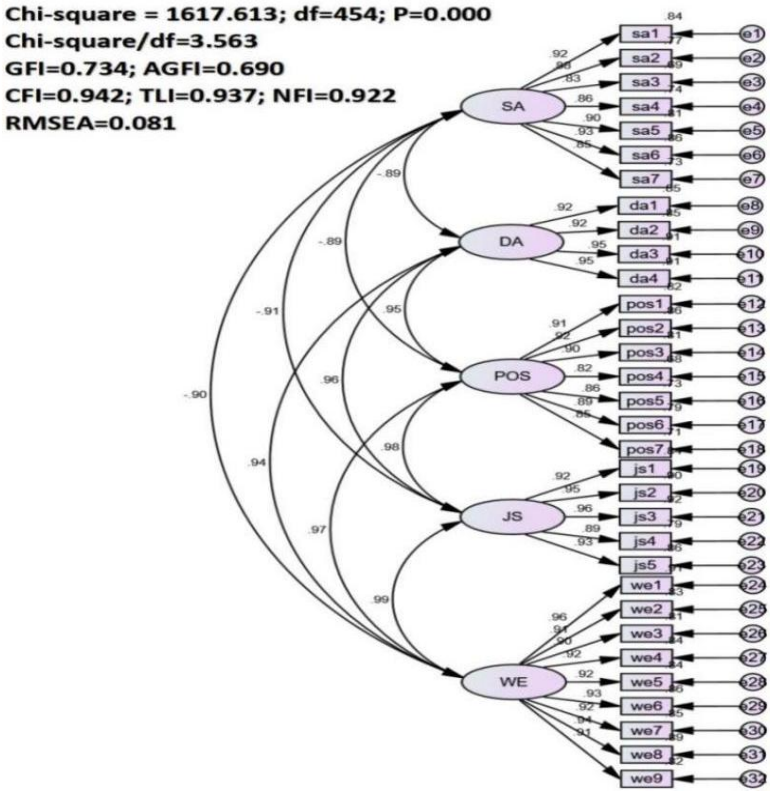

Fig. 2. Measurement models.

4.2 Hypothesis testing

The mediating effects of the two paths of JS in the relationship between SA/DA and WE were tested separately[38], controlling for gender, age, and work experience. As shown in Table 4, SA was a negative predictor of WE (β = -1.473, t = -33.8644, P＜0.001), and remained a significant direct predictor of WE when the mediator variable was included (β = -0.1679, t = -33.8644, P＜0.001). SA has an adverse predicted impact on JS (β = -0.8695, t = -35.3025, P

＜0.001), while JS has a significant positive predictive effect on WE (β = 1.4711, t = 25.4712, P＜0.001). In addition, the upper and lower bounds of the bootstrap95% CI for SA as a direct effect on WE and the mediating effect of JS do not include 0 (Table 5). The results show that SA can not only inversely predict WE in direct, but also predict WE through the mediating effect of JS. The direct effect (-0.1679) and the indirect effect (-1.3051) accounted for 11% and 89% of the total effect (-1.473), respectively.

Second, DA was a significant positive predictor of WE (β = 2.3948, t = 40.8237, P＜0.001), and remained a significant direct predictor of WE when the mediator variable was included (β = 0.3005, t = 3.3493, P＜0.001). DA has an evidently active effect on JS (β = 1.42375, t = 45.0884, P＜0.001), and JS has a positive impact on WE (β = 1.4711, t = 25.4712, P＜0.001). In addition, the upper and lower bounds of the bootstrap95% CI for DA as a direct effect on WE and the mediating effect of JS do not include 0 (Table 5). The results show that DA can not only predict WE directly, but also predict WE through the mediating effect of JS. The direct effect (0.3005) and the indirect effect (2.0943) accounted for 13% and 87% of the total effect (2.395), respectively. In other words, H1, H2, H3a and H3b are supported.

Table 4. A mediation model test of JS.

	WE		**WE**		**JS**	
	β	**t**	**β**	**t**	**β**	**t**
Sex	-0.249	-0.6686	-0.0515	-0.073	0.1316	0.3292
Age	0.2302	0.6954	1.5214	2.4435*	0.8602	2.4399*
Work	-0.205	-0.8069	0.1518	0.3156	0.2377	0.8726
SA	-0.1679	-3.5608***	-1.473	-33.8644***	-0.8695	-35.3025***
JS	1.5011	31.6947***				
R-sq	0.9426		0.7931		0.8084	
F	1267.147		370.9258		408.2638	
Sex	-0.2776	-0.7442	-0.2926	-0.4797	-0.0102	-0.031
Age	0.1679	0.5064	0.6443	1.19	0.3238	1.1112
Work	-0.2141	-0.8411	-0.0609	-0.1464	0.1041	0.4649
DA	0.3005	3.3493***	2.3948	40.8237***	1.4237	45.0884***
JS	1.4711	25.4712***				
R-sq	0.9424		0.8455		0.8707	
F	1262.2171		529.413		651.5164	

Table 5. Total, direct and indirect effects.

	Effect	**BootSE**	**BootLLCI**	**BootULCI**	**Effect ratio**
SA→JS→WE					
Total effect	-1.473	0.046	-1.562	-1.38	
Direct effect	-0.1679	0.0471	-0.2605	-0.0752	11%
Indirect effect	-1.3051	0.0569	-1.4139	-1.1936	89%
DA→JS→WE					
Total effect	2.395	0.061	2.28	2.513	
Direct effect	0.3005	0.0897	0.1241	0.4768	13%
Indirect effect	2.0943	0.0991	1.8949	2.2849	87%

The moderated mediation effects of POS and JS on the relationship between surface/DA and WE was tested, and results (details in Table 6 and Table 7) indicated that POS positively moderated the effect of SA on WE ($\beta_{SA*POS-WE}$= 0.0135, p < 0.05, 95% CI [0.0029, 0.0242]), and the effect of DA on JS ($\beta_{DA*POS-JS}$= 0.0132, p < 0.05, 95% CI [0.0027, 0.0237]). The plot for conditional impact of POS on the relationship between DA and JS, SA and WE was represented in Figures. 3. Table 7 illustrated that higher POS weakened the association between SA and WE, the conditional effect of POS on the relation between SA and WE was higher at the high level of POS (βsimple slop = -0.1112, p < 0.05, 95% CI [-0.2069, -0.0155]), and significantly lower at the low level of POS (βsimple slop = -0.3277, p < 0.001, 95% CI [-0.4925, -0.1628]). That is to say, with the increase of POS level, the prediction effect of SA on WE showed a gradually increasing trend. However, the indirect association between SA and WE via JS was insignificant. Results illustrate that POS only moderates the correlation between SA and WE, so H4a is partly supported.

In relation to DA, the conditional effect of POS on the relation between DA and JS was lower at the low level of POS (βsimple slop = 0.4624, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.3250, 0.5998]), and significantly higher at the high level of POS (βsimple slop = 0.6735, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.5434, 0.8037]). That is to say, with the increase of POS level, the prediction effect of DA on JS showed a gradually increasing trend. However, the direct effect between DA and WE was not significant. Results show that POS only moderates the relationship between DA and JS, that is the indirect association between DA and WE through JS. These findings partly confirmed H4b.

Table 6. Moderated mediation analyses.

	JS			**WE**		
	β	**se**	**t**	**β**	**se**	**t**
Sex	0.6926	0.2464	2.8108**	0.0368	0.3659	0.1005
Age	0.7165	0.2168	3.3049***	0.439	0.3232	1.3584
Work experience	-0.3082	0.1686	-1.8277	-0.362	0.249	-1.4538
SA	-0.2814	0.0331	-8.4895***	-0.2194	0.0531	-4.1325***
POS	0.783	0.0379	20.6451***	0.2491	0.0809	3.0775**
JS				1.2342	0.0749	16.4732***
SA×POS	-0.0018	0.0037	-0.4876	0.0135	0.0054	2.4972*
R-sq	0.9282			0.9464		
F	828.9138			968.2572		
Sex	0.5276	0.2451	2.1523*	0.0046	0.3713	0.0124
Age	0.5545	0.2158	2.5697*	0.3321	0.3276	1.0137
Work experience	-0.3236	0.168	-1.9259	-0.3194	0.2542	-1.2569
DA	0.568	0.0531	10.6917***	0.2023	0.0911	2.2209*
POS	0.6966	0.0389	17.8852***	0.2777	0.0793	3.4997***
JS				1.2802	0.0767	16.6847***
DA×POS	0.0132	0.0053	2.4811*	-0.012	0.0081	-1.4803
R-sq	0.9297			0.945		
F	848.9991			942.5197		

Table 7. Direct and indirect effects at different levels of POS control.

	Index	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
		SA-> JS-> WE			
Direct effect	**eff1(M-1SD)**	-0.3277	0.0838	-0.4925	-0.1628
	eff2(M)	-0.2194	0.0531	-0.3238	-0.115
	eff3(M+1SD)	-0.1112	0.0487	-0.2069	-0.0155
Indirect effect	**eff2-eff1**	-0.3296	0.071	-0.4856	-0.2075
	eff3-eff1	-0.3473	0.0514	-0.4541	-0.2513
	eff3-eff2	-0.3651	0.0521	-0.4666	-0.2654
		DA-> JS-> WE			
Direct effect	**eff1(M-1SD)**	0.2979	0.111	0.0796	0.5161
	eff2(M)	0.2023	0.0911	0.0232	0.3814
	eff3(M+1SD)	0.1067	0.1123	-0.114	0.3275
Indirect effect	**eff2-eff1**	0.592	0.192	0.2262	0.9568
	eff3-eff1	0.7271	0.1335	0.4648	0.9808
	eff3-eff2	0.8623	0.1098	0.6438	1.0722

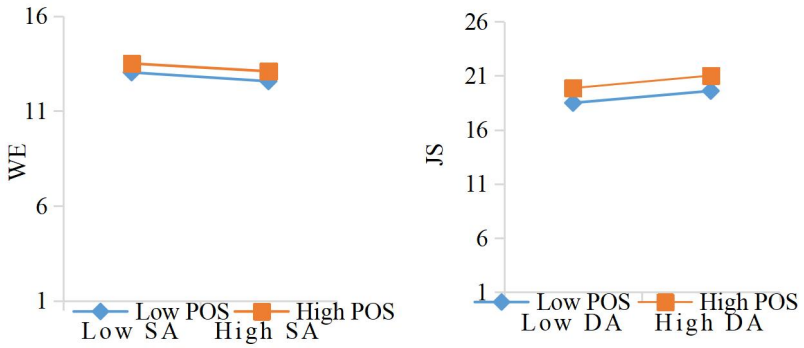

Fig. 3. Simple slope graph of the moderating effect of perceived organizational support.

5 Conclusion and discussion

Academically, emotional labour might be defined as "service with authority."[39], which means that compared to traditional service employees, teachers have greater autonomy in expressing natural emotions[40]. In this study, EL was divided into two aspects (e.g., DA, SA). However, genuine acting is also a kind of EL strategy[8]. Results of the latent profile transition analysis (LPTA) in other research have emphasized that the need to re-examine the true impact of performing EL and suggested that the high use of DA was not necessarily linked to better occupational well-being[41], while it's generally advocated that the use of DA is more associated with better occupational health compared to SA in previous studies. Different manifestations of EL, as well as the study of EL as a whole variable in the field of education management should be considered in future research directions. The results from 120 college teachers showed that JS was positively related to EL.[42]

Moreover, individual factors such as personal traits and other demographic factors like gender, work experience, marital status, job title, educational background, etc., could be put into the study of the relationship between EL and WE. Much research has focused on the individual differences that predict EL choice in service workers[7]. Age was found to be positively associated with the use of DA, but negatively correlated to SA[43]. And more importantly, future studies could focus on the longitudinal effects of EL as the longitudinal effects between SA and DA on mental health has caused for concern[44].

As shown in the above hypothetical analysis results, POS regulates the relationship between SA and WE, and the relationship between DA and JS. Colleges and universities may grant young administrative teachers more organizational support and create a fair, harmonious and co-progressive working atmosphere. In addition, different EL regulation strategies bring different effects on JS and WE, so universities can establish and provide differentiated emotion regulation guidance and effective psychological assistance based on different age groups and career stages of teacher categories. There is always a conflict between internal feelings and the show of feelings, which can result in emotional disagreement and job discontent when SA and DA are used excessively.[17]. However, teachers' choice of naturally felt emotional expressions allows them to maintain consistency between their actual feelings and their performance. Relevant administrative departments of universities are encouraged to create an organizational environment of freedom of speech, openness and tolerance, so that young teachers can dare to express themselves and remove their camouflage. The hypothetical analysis of this study show that JS is a successful mediator between SA/DA and WE. The results indicate that SA/DA can not only directly predict WEt (reverse prediction during SA), but also predict WE through the mediating effect of JS. Colleges and universities can enhance young administrative teachers' employee JS by providing them with clear career paths, upgrading salary and benefit scales, and helping in the field of teaching and research. In addition, regular team-building activities in the form of outdoor excursions and heart-to-heart exchanges can also be effective in improving JS.

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