

Teachers' emotions and subjective well-being: The mediating role of emotional labor strategies*

Irena Burić, Zvezdan Penezić, Ana Slišković, Ivana Macuka, Izabela Sorić
Department of Psychology, University of Zadar, Croatia



INTRODUCTION

Research on **teachers' emotions** conducted over the past years clearly indicate that emotions are core components of teachers' lives (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Teachers experience a wide variety of both positive and negative emotions in relation to their professional roles and activities. For example, teachers may feel joy and satisfaction when students learn and make progress, frustration and anger when students misbehave or helplessness when, in spite of all the efforts invested, students refuse to engage in learning activities.

Teachers interact with different people in their work and experience a range of different emotions related to their students, colleagues, supervisor or principal, parents or educational system. However, since interactions with students are regarded as the most powerful in terms of evoking emotions (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003), in this study we focused on **emotions which teachers experience in relation to their students**.

Furthermore, teachers are obliged to follow particular emotional display rules when managing their emotions, i.e. they must perform **emotional labor**. Two primary strategies of emotional labor that employees use to regulate their emotions are **surface acting** and **deep acting** (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). *Surface acting* involves a process through which outward expressions are altered, while *deep acting* is an effortful process through which employees change their internal feelings to align with expectations of work role displays (Grandey et al., 2013).

Emotions and emotional labor as correlates of teachers' well-being

Teachers' emotions have important role in explanation of their cognition, motivation and relationships with students (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003), as well as of effectiveness or quality of their teaching which is seen through students' achievement (Day & Gu, 2009; Frenzel, 2014; Frenzel, Goetz, Stephens & Jacob, 2009). Furthermore, there are important links between teachers' emotions and teachers' sense of professional identity, commitment, and **well-being** (Day & Gu, 2009; Zembylas, 2003), emotional exhaustion and burnout in teachers (Chang, 2009), and turnover (Macdonald, 1999).

Emotional labor performed by employees, depending on the nature of the emotional labor, may result in: increased emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, physical health, turnover, role ambiguity, and conflict, and reduced levels of personal accomplishment, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and personal authenticity (Grandey, 2006). Research generally showed that surface acting is more consistently problematic for employee **well-being** than deep acting (Grandey, 2003, 2011).

THE AIM of this study was to examine relationships between teachers' emotions, emotion labor strategies and well-being, i.e. to test the mediating role of emotional labor in explaining the relationship between teachers' emotions and well-being.

METHOD

Procedure and participants

The study was conducted at the end of the school year on the sample of 391 elementary school teachers employed in 32 schools located in 19 different towns and municipalities mostly located in central and eastern regions of Croatia (297 were female, 82 were male, and 12 did not indicate their gender). On average, the teachers were 41.73 years old (SD=10.31) and had 15.05 years of teaching experience (SD=10.92). Teachers filled out self-report scales measuring their emotions, emotional labor strategies and different aspects of their well-being.

Instruments

- **Teachers Emotions Questionnaire** (TEQ, Burić, Macuka & Slišković, 2016) aimed at assessing teachers experience in relation to their students (**joy, pride, anger, exhaustion, helplessness**).
 - **Emotional Labour Scale** (ELS; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003) measuring **surface and deep acting**. Three indicators of well-being:
 - **Scale of Positive and Negative Experience** (SPANE, Diener et al., 2009), from which we focused on **positive experience**
 - **Satisfaction with Life Scale** (SWLS, Diener et al., 1985)
 - **Job satisfaction** (Judge et al., 2001)
- Cronbach alphas for all measures were satisfactory (Table 1).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for all measures, and correlations between used measures are reported in Table 1.

In order to answer the research question, and by using SEM techniques, two competing models were tested:

- 1) Emotional labor strategies partially mediate the relationship between emotions and well-being; and
- 2) Emotional labor strategies fully mediate the relationship between emotions and well-being. Based on the results presented in Figure 1, and Table 2 & 3, it can be concluded that emotional labor strategies partially mediate the relationship between emotions and subjective well-being of teachers. However, only two specific indirect effects are statistically significant: negative emotions on well-being via surface acting, and positive emotions on well-being via deep acting.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients between examined variables

	Joy	Pride	Exhaustion	Anger	Helplessness	Surface acting	Deep acting	Positive experience	Life satisfaction	Job satisfaction
Joy	1	-.64**	-.03	-.09	-.00	-.10	-.21**	.32*	.32*	.24**
Pride		1	.08	-.02	.00	-.03	-.31**	-.20**	-.20**	-.24**
Exhaustion			1	.65**	.60**	.32**	-.05	-.39**	-.25**	-.51**
Anger				1	.72**	.30**	-.10	-.31**	-.22**	-.43**
Helplessness					1	.34**	-.17**	-.33**	-.17**	-.44**
Surface act.						1	-.18**	-.27**	-.25**	-.31**
Deep act.							1	.23**	.12*	.28**
Positive exper.								1	.43**	.62**
Life satisf.									1	.50**
Job satisf.										1
M	4.81	4.52	2.89	2.41	2.77	2.42	3.63	3.85	4.79	5.49
SD	.38	.59	.86	.79	.75	.66	.77	.58	1.29	.90
α	.82	.87	.88	.76	.80	.60	.80	.87	.85	.82

Note: N=391, **p<.01, *p<.05

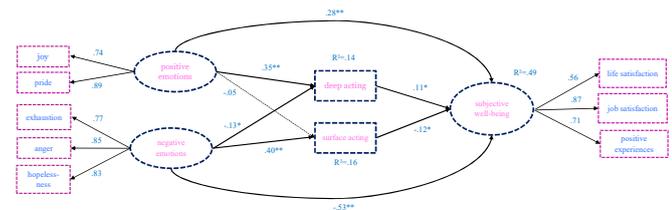


Figure 1. Partial mediation model

Table 2. Model fit indices

	Measurement model	Full-mediation model	Partial mediation model
χ^2	54.15*	180.68*	98.81
df	17	30	28
CFI	.97	.88	.96
TLI	.95	.83	.94
RMSEA	.075	.113	.068
90% C.I.	(.053 - .098)	(.098 - .130)	(.050 - .086)
SRMR	.036	.109	.037

Table 3. Test of indirect effects

Indirect effect	B	95% C.I.
Negative emotions—well-being	-.062**	[-.108, -.012]
Negative emotions—surface acting—well-being	-.048**	[-.091, -.005]
Negative emotions—deep acting—well-being	-.015	[-.034, .004]
Positive emotions—well-being	.045*	[.014, .087]
Positive emotions—surface acting—well-being	.006	[-.000, .021]
Positive emotions—deep acting—well-being	.040*	[.001, .079]

*p<.05 **p<.01; Note. Estimates of indirect effects were obtained based on bias-corrected bootstrap method (N=2000).

CONCLUSION

The obtained results clearly indicated better fit of the partial mediation model to the data; emotions explained the variance of well-being both directly and indirectly via emotional labor strategies. Moreover, the direction of the associations among variables in the model were as expected. Teachers who experience more positive emotions use deep acting to a greater extent and have higher levels of subjective well-being. On the contrary, teachers who experience more negative emotions, use more surface acting and less deep acting in order to manage their emotions, and report lower levels of subjective well-being. Finally, more surface acting was associated with less well-being and vice versa.

Contact mail :
buric.irena@gmail.com
zvezdan@unizd.hr

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