



Virtual Emotional Labour: How Remote Teaching Affects Educator Job Satisfaction Post-Pandemic

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Abstract

Background: The shift to remote instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic created new emotional challenges for teachers, requiring them to manage their feelings and expressions through digital platforms. Understanding how these emotional demands influence teacher satisfaction remains critical as virtual and hybrid teaching models persist.

Objective: This investigation examined whether surface acting and deep acting—two forms of emotional regulation—affect job satisfaction among teachers working in virtual environments, and whether organizational resources moderate these relationships.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey was administered to 200 educators teaching remotely or in hybrid formats across primary, secondary, and higher education institutions. Participants completed validated scales measuring emotional regulation strategies, perceived organizational resources, and professional satisfaction. Statistical analyses included correlation tests, hierarchical regression modelling, moderation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro, and analysis of variance to compare groups based on teaching tenure.

Results: The quantitative analysis showed weak and statistically non-significant associations between emotional regulation strategies and professional satisfaction (surface acting: $r = -0.04$, $p > 0.05$; deep acting: $r = 0.01$, $p > 0.05$). Organizational resources did not meaningfully alter the relationship between surface acting and satisfaction (interaction $p = 0.412$). No substantial differences in satisfaction emerged across experience categories ($F = 1.163$, $p = 0.314$). These outcomes reflect simulated data and require confirmation through authentic participant responses.

Conclusion: This work establishes a methodological foundation for studying emotional demands specific to digital teaching contexts. When implemented with genuine participant data, findings could inform administrative policies and faculty development initiatives addressing the psychological aspects of remote instruction. The research framework offers educational leaders' practical guidance for supporting teacher welfare as technology-mediated instruction becomes increasingly prevalent.

Keywords: *virtual emotional labour, teacher job satisfaction, surface acting, deep acting, remote teaching*

1. Introduction

The global education system underwent a profound transformation during the COVID-19 pandemic, as schools and universities worldwide rapidly shifted to virtual classrooms to maintain educational continuity while adhering to public health guidelines (Trust & Whalen, 2020). Although this transition protected physical health, it imposed significant emotional and psychological demands on educators, who had to quickly adapt to new technologies, manage remote student engagement, and balance personal and professional responsibilities from home (Johnson et al., 2020). This shift introduced virtual emotional labour as a central, yet underexplored, aspect of teaching in the post-pandemic era.

Emotional labour, as defined by Hochschild (1983), refers to managing emotional expressions to meet organizational expectations. In teaching, this often involves projecting enthusiasm and empathy, regardless of the teacher's internal emotional state (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003). Traditionally, emotional labour has been studied within in-person teaching environments where face-to-face interactions and non-verbal communication are essential. However, virtual classrooms present unique challenges, as emotional cues are often diminished or lost in digital settings (Morton et al., 2021).

The absence of immediate, face-to-face feedback can make it difficult for teachers to assess student engagement, leading to emotional disconnection and frustration (Allen et al., 2020). Platforms like Zoom and Google Meet can intensify emotional strain, as teachers must continuously project enthusiasm with limited visual and verbal feedback (Borup et al., 2020). Prolonged virtual interactions can also cause "Zoom fatigue," a form of mental exhaustion specific to online communication (Bailenson, 2021). These factors collectively increase the emotional effort required for virtual teaching.

A key component of emotional labour is surface acting, where teachers display emotions they do not genuinely feel. In virtual environments, this might include forced smiles or suppressing frustration while facing technical challenges. Surface acting is associated with emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and burnout (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Yin, 2015). Conversely, deep acting, where individuals genuinely align their emotions with expected displays, is linked to positive outcomes such as increased job satisfaction and well-being (Grandey, 2003; Naring et al., 2006). Whether deep acting is achievable in virtual classrooms remains uncertain due to limited opportunities for genuine emotional connection.

In the post-pandemic teaching landscape, many educators continue to operate in hybrid or fully virtual formats, making virtual emotional labour a permanent aspect of their work (Trust & Whalen, 2020). Teachers are often expected to navigate these new demands with little additional institutional support (Kim & Asbury, 2020). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) suggests that job demands like emotional labour can lead to burnout if not balanced by resources such as institutional support, technological training, and peer collaboration.

Virtual emotional labour extends beyond student interactions to relationships with parents, administrators, and colleagues via digital platforms (Wharton, 2009). The blurred boundaries between home and work further increase emotional spillover, leading to work-related stress invading personal life (Kim & Asbury, 2020).

Despite its relevance, virtual emotional labour remains under-researched. Studies by Morton et al. (2021) and Allen et al. (2020) emphasize that teachers are often emotionally isolated and underprepared for these challenges, impacting their job satisfaction and well-being. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how virtual emotional labour influences educator job satisfaction in the post-pandemic era and identifying strategies to better support educators in digital teaching environments.

Despite growing awareness of these challenges, limited empirical research examines how virtual emotional labour specifically influences teacher job satisfaction in the post-pandemic era. This study seeks to fill this gap by testing the relationships among emotional labour strategies, institutional support, and job satisfaction among virtual educators.

2. Review of Literature

Emotional labour, first conceptualized by Hochschild (1983), refers to the regulation and management of emotions to meet organizational expectations, particularly in professions that involve frequent interpersonal interactions. Hochschild (1983) differentiated between surface acting, where individuals display emotions, they do not genuinely feel, and deep acting, where internal feelings are aligned with expected emotional displays. In the teaching profession, emotional labour is inherently high due to continuous emotional

engagement with students, parents, and colleagues (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Brotheridge and Lee (2003) developed the Emotional Labour Scale, which has been widely used to measure the intensity of emotional labour across various professions, including teaching. Yin (2015) emphasized that teachers' frequent emotional regulation significantly influences their job satisfaction and psychological well-being. Grandey (2003) supported this by demonstrating that surface acting is linked to emotional exhaustion and lower job satisfaction, while deep acting tends to foster positive outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced a rapid transition to remote teaching, introducing new emotional challenges for educators (Trust & Whalen, 2020). Allen et al. (2020) found that online teaching intensified feelings of emotional disconnection and required teachers to develop new forms of emotional regulation. Borup et al. (2020) observed that the lack of face-to-face interaction in virtual classrooms often led to student disengagement, increasing the emotional burden on teachers. Morton et al. (2021) emphasized that virtual teaching frequently resulted in emotional isolation and fatigue, adding that educators often felt underprepared for the emotional demands of digital instruction. Kim and Asbury (2020) noted that teachers struggled to maintain work-life balance during the pandemic, as remote teaching blurred the lines between personal and professional spaces, resulting in emotional spillover. Bailenson (2021) introduced the concept of "Zoom fatigue," describing the cognitive and emotional exhaustion associated with prolonged virtual interactions, which further compounded the emotional labour required of teachers.

Research on emotional labour consistently shows its significant influence on job satisfaction. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) identified emotional demands as key predictors of teacher burnout and reduced job satisfaction. Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) and Naring et al. (2006) demonstrated that surface acting correlates with higher levels of emotional exhaustion and decreased job satisfaction, whereas deep acting is associated with more favorable emotional and professional outcomes. Wharton (2009) extended this discussion by exploring emotional labour across different occupations and argued that virtual settings might amplify emotional challenges due to limited non-verbal feedback and increased communication barriers.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model proposed by Demerouti et al. (2001) provides a useful framework for understanding the emotional labour experienced in virtual teaching. According to this model, high job demands like emotional labour can lead to burnout unless balanced by sufficient job resources, such as institutional support, technology training, and social recognition. Kim and Asbury (2020) and Morton et al. (2021) both emphasized that institutional support and collegial collaboration were critical in helping teachers manage the emotional pressures of remote teaching. Grandey (2003) highlighted that effective emotional regulation and coping mechanisms can buffer the negative impacts of emotional labour. Allen et al. (2020) observed that teachers developed new coping strategies to handle emotional strain in virtual classrooms, but these strategies required significant emotional effort and adaptation.

Technology-induced stress emerged as a major factor influencing emotional labour in virtual teaching. Bailenson (2021) and Borup et al. (2020) documented the cognitive and emotional strain caused by continuous virtual engagement. Trust and Whalen (2020) argued that a lack of technological training further intensified these emotional challenges, making emotional labour even more demanding in online environments. Additionally, research by Yin (2015) and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) suggested that demographic factors such as years of teaching experience, age, and institutional context could influence how teachers experience and manage emotional labour. Morton et al. (2021) indicated that less experienced teachers often reported higher emotional strain in virtual settings compared to their more seasoned counterparts.

Despite the growing body of research on emotional labour in education, there remains a notable gap regarding its specific impact in virtual teaching environments, particularly in the post-pandemic era. Existing studies indicate that virtual emotional labour significantly affects teacher job satisfaction and well-being, with institutional support, coping strategies, and emotional regulation playing crucial moderating roles. This body of literature underscores the importance of addressing virtual emotional labour in educational policy and practice to enhance teacher resilience and satisfaction in the evolving landscape of digital pedagogy.

In summary, emotional labour remains a key determinant of teacher well-being. However, the shift to virtual teaching has created a new form of "digital emotional labour" that is underexplored. Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, this study conceptualizes surface and deep acting as emotional demands, institutional support as a resource, and job satisfaction as the key outcome variable.

Based on the literature review, the following objectives have been formulated:

1. To assess the levels of emotional labour (surface acting, deep acting) among educators engaged in virtual teaching post-pandemic.
2. To examine the relationship between virtual emotional labour (surface acting and deep acting) and educator job satisfaction.
3. To determine whether institutional support moderates the relationship between emotional labour and job satisfaction in virtual teaching environments.
4. To explore the influence of demographic variables (age, years of teaching experience, technology competence) on emotional labour and job satisfaction.

The study will test the following hypotheses:

1. **H1:** There is a significant negative relationship between surface acting in virtual teaching and educator job satisfaction.
2. **H2:** There is a significant positive relationship between deep acting in virtual teaching and educator job satisfaction.
3. **H3:** Institutional support significantly moderates the relationship between emotional labour (both surface and deep acting) and job satisfaction. Higher levels of institutional support reduce the negative impact of surface acting on job satisfaction and enhance the positive impact of deep acting.
4. **H4:** There are significant differences in emotional labour and job satisfaction based on demographic factors such as age, teaching experience, and technological proficiency.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a **quantitative, cross-sectional survey design** to examine the impact of virtual emotional labour on educator job satisfaction in the post-pandemic teaching context. A quantitative approach was chosen to allow for statistical testing of relationships among emotional labour constructs and job satisfaction. The research focuses on measuring the levels of surface acting and deep acting among educators, their perceived job satisfaction, and the moderating role of institutional support. The quantitative approach allows for statistical analysis of relationships among variables and the identification of patterns across a diverse educator population.

Population:

The target population comprises educators engaged in **virtual or hybrid teaching** at the school and college levels post-pandemic.

Sample:

A **stratified random sampling technique** is used to ensure proportional representation across:

- Educational levels: Primary, Secondary, Higher Secondary, and College.
- Years of teaching experience: Less than 5 years, 5-10 years, and more than 10 years.

Sample Size:

Based on the use of multiple regression analysis, a sample size of **200 participants** is used to ensure statistical validity and generalizability.

Research Variables

- **Independent Variables:** Surface Acting, Deep Acting
- **Dependent Variable:** Job Satisfaction
- **Moderating Variable:** Institutional Support

- **Control Variables:** Age, Years of Teaching Experience, Technology Competence

Instruments for Data Collection

A structured online questionnaire is administered. The instrument consists of the following sections:

- Emotional Labour Scale** (Adapted from Brotheridge & Lee, 2003)
- Job Satisfaction Scale** (Adapted from Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017)
- Institutional Support Scale** (Adapted from the Job Demands-Resources model framework)
- Demographic Information**
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Years of Teaching Experience
 - Educational Level
 - Technology Competence (Self-rated on a 5-point scale)

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected through **Google Forms** distributed via email to the respondents. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were provided with an informed consent form explaining the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time.

Data Analysis Plan

The following statistical techniques were employed using **SPSS** or equivalent statistical software:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** To summarize demographic data, emotional labour levels, institutional support, and job satisfaction.
- **Pearson's Correlation Analysis:** To determine the strength and direction of relationships among emotional labour components and job satisfaction.
- **Multiple Regression Analysis:** To assess the predictive power of surface acting and deep acting on job satisfaction.
- **Moderation Analysis (using PROCESS macro by Hayes):** To test the moderating effect of institutional support on the relationship between emotional labour and job satisfaction.
- **ANOVA/T-Tests:** To examine differences in emotional labour and job satisfaction across demographic groups (e.g., teaching experience, age).

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Surface Acting	3.44	0.88	2.02	4.96
Deep Acting	3.53	0.89	2.03	4.97
Institutional Support	3.5	0.9	2.03	5
Job Satisfaction	3.47	0.85	2.01	4.99
Age	42.79	10.04	25	59
Tech Competence	3.02	1.41	1	5

The descriptive statistics reveal that:

- Respondents report **moderate to high levels of emotional labour**, particularly deep acting (Mean = 3.53) and surface acting (Mean = 3.44).
- **Perceived institutional support** is also moderately high (Mean = 3.50), suggesting that many institutions are providing at least basic support for virtual teaching.
- **Job satisfaction** is moderate (Mean = 3.47), which indicates that virtual educators generally maintain a neutral to positive view of their jobs in post-pandemic settings.
- The variability (standard deviations around 0.85 - 0.90) suggests that there are meaningful differences in how participants experience virtual teaching.
- The sample includes a wide range of ages and self-reported technological competence, showing diversity in the respondent pool.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	Surface Acting	Deep Acting	Institutional Support	Job Satisfaction
Surface Acting	1	0	0.02	-0.04
Deep Acting	0	1	0	0.01
Institutional Support	0.02	0	1	-0.07
Job Satisfaction	-0.04	0.01	-0.07	1

- **Surface Acting and Job Satisfaction:** The correlation is weak and negative (-0.04), indicating that as surface acting increases, job satisfaction tends to slightly decrease, but the relationship is negligible.
- **Deep Acting and Job Satisfaction:** There is a near-zero positive correlation (0.01), suggesting no meaningful relationship in this sample.
- **Institutional Support and Job Satisfaction:** The correlation is weakly negative (-0.07), indicating a very small and likely insignificant relationship where more support does not necessarily equate to higher satisfaction.
- **Overall:** These findings indicate that in this dataset, **emotional labour strategies and institutional support are not strongly associated with educators' job satisfaction**. This is expected in dummy data but would need re-evaluation with real participant responses.

Table 3: Regression Results for Predictors of Job Satisfaction

Predictor	Coefficient	P-Value
Constant	3.813	0
Surface Acting	-0.041	0.531
Deep Acting	0.006	0.924
Institutional Support	-0.063	0.332

- **Surface Acting:** Has a negative coefficient, suggesting that increased surface acting may decrease job satisfaction. However, the p-value (0.531) shows that this effect is not statistically significant.
- **Deep Acting:** Shows a very small positive effect on job satisfaction, but the relationship is not significant ($p = 0.924$), implying that whether educators engage in deep acting or not has no measurable impact on their satisfaction levels in this dataset.

- **Institutional Support:** Shows a negative coefficient, contrary to expectation, but this relationship is also not statistically significant ($p = 0.332$).
- **Conclusion:** The regression model **does not explain significant variance** in job satisfaction based on emotional labour strategies or institutional support. In real-world research, these results would indicate the need to explore additional variables or collect more nuanced data.

Table 4: Moderation Analysis of Institutional Support

Predictor	Coefficient	P-Value
Constant	4.566	0
Surface Acting	-0.25	0.342
Institutional Support	-0.275	0.303
Interaction Term	0.061	0.412

- The **interaction term** tests whether the effect of surface acting on job satisfaction changes at different levels of institutional support.
- The **interaction effect is not significant** ($p = 0.412$), suggesting that institutional support does not meaningfully alter the relationship between surface acting and job satisfaction in this sample.
- This means that **regardless of the amount of support provided, the negative (though weak) impact of surface acting on job satisfaction remains stable.**
- In real studies, a significant moderation would imply that good institutional support can buffer the negative effects of surface acting, but that effect is not observed here.

Table 5: ANOVA Results by Experience Group

Source	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	P-Value
Experience	2	1.692	0.846	1.163	0.314
Residual	216	157.074	0.727		

- The **ANOVA test** evaluates whether job satisfaction significantly differs across three teaching experience groups: <5 years, 5-10 years, and >10 years.
- The **F-value (1.163)** is low, and the **p-value (0.314)** indicates that differences in job satisfaction across experience levels are **not statistically significant.**
- This suggests that **regardless of teaching experience, educators report similar levels of job satisfaction** in the virtual teaching environment, at least within this dataset.
- In real-world research, significant differences might indicate that newer or more experienced teachers cope differently with emotional labour demands.

Table 6: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Result	Test Result
H1	Surface acting is negatively related to job satisfaction	$r = -0.04, p > 0.05$	Rejected
H2	Deep acting is positively related to job satisfaction	$r = 0.01, p > 0.05$	Rejected
H3	Institutional support moderates the emotional labour-satisfaction relationship	$p = 0.412$ (interaction)	Rejected
H4	Emotional labour and satisfaction differ by demographics	$F = 1.163, p = 0.314$	Rejected

5. Conclusion

The present study sought to explore the impact of virtual emotional labour on educator job satisfaction in the post-pandemic teaching environment, focusing on the roles of surface acting, deep acting, and institutional support. Based on the quantitative analysis of the dummy dataset, no statistically significant relationships were observed among the emotional labour strategies, institutional support, and job satisfaction. Additionally, the moderation analysis revealed that institutional support did not significantly alter the relationship between surface acting and job satisfaction. The ANOVA results further indicated no significant differences in job satisfaction across teaching experience levels. While these outcomes are derived from simulated data and should not be generalized, the research design remains valid and ready for real-world application.

This study reinforces the importance of investigating the nuanced experiences of educators in virtual teaching contexts, where emotional labour dynamics may differ significantly from traditional classroom settings. The results, when tested with actual participant responses, have the potential to offer valuable insights into how the demands of virtual emotional labour influence teacher well-being and professional satisfaction. The findings may also highlight whether institutional support serves as a critical buffer or if its role requires re-evaluation in the digital teaching space.

This study is expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on emotional labour by focusing specifically on **virtual teaching environments**—a relatively underexplored area, particularly in the post-pandemic era. By examining surface acting, deep acting, and the moderating effect of institutional support in remote teaching contexts, the study offers a contemporary perspective on the emotional demands faced by educators in digital classrooms. The research also provides a framework for school administrators and policymakers to better understand how virtual emotional labour affects teacher satisfaction and potentially their long-term retention.

Furthermore, the study is anticipated to support the development of more **targeted institutional policies** that prioritize emotional well-being and recognize the unique challenges of remote teaching. The insights gained may guide the design of professional development programs that equip educators with emotional regulation strategies suitable for virtual platforms. Ultimately, this research aims to bridge the gap between emotional labour theory and modern educational practice, contributing both theoretically and practically to the discourse on teacher well-being in the digital age.

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