



Exploring the Emotional Labor Processes in Shaping Primary English Teachers' Professional Identity

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Abstract

Language teachers were bound to perform many kinds of different emotions, known as emotional labor (EL) proposed by Hochschild (2012), throughout their teaching experiences. However, despite the growing interest in recent years, the primary teachers' emotions have been persistently ignored. This study thus aims to explore the emotional experiences of primary school English teachers in Indonesia on how those processes contribute to their professional identity. Employing a case study design, it seeks to deepen the understanding of teacher emotions by aligning data from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews ($n=3$) with the emerging theory of Emotional Labor Process. The findings reveal the dual impact of emotional labor (EL) on teachers' professional identity. The findings reveal that emotional labor experiences, including positive and negative emotions, significantly influence the TPI of three teachers in different way. The two teachers reported to have positive emotions and effective emotional regulation which enhance teaching adaptability and classroom management. Meanwhile a teacher facing challenges in emotional control which affect different professionals' dedication to their teaching commitment. Thus, this study highlights the need for emotional management training in teacher development programs to strengthen their capacity to navigate EL and maintain their professional identity. Furthermore, creating a supportive work environment is essential for sustaining teachers' well-being and professional growth.

Keywords: *Emotional Labor, Indonesian Primary Teacher, Teacher Professional Identity, Qualitative Case Study.*

Introduction

The teachers' emotions have gained much attention in recent years because of their essentiality as the teachers' experiences (Frenzel et al., 2021; González-Calvo et al., 2019; Keller & Becker, 2020; Ritchie et al., 2023). Considerable attention has been given to this recent literature, yet the surroundings still rarely validate those emotions. Further, several experts mentioned that language teachers were bound to perform many kinds of different emotions (i.e., enjoyment, anger, and anxiety) throughout their teaching experiences (Abdul-Messie, 2023; Ritchie et al., 2023; Zhang & Jiang, 2023). Continuously, the impact of emotions on performance in the workplace, known as emotional labor (EL), such as feeling overworked and underappreciated (Abdul-Messie, 2023), was somehow burdened by teachers.

Nonetheless, emotions play an essential role in shaping the way teachers teach and, ultimately, can affect learners' outcomes and also reflect their professional development (Burić & Frenzel, 2023; González-Calvo et al., 2019). Yet, nowadays, what teachers feel during teaching and all kinds of burdens they feel are under-acknowledged, though many research implications recommend that recognizing teachers' feelings and validating their emotional labor are critical (Nazari et al., 2023; Peng et al., 2023). Remarkably, this growing scholarship has linked teachers' emotional and development processes to how they perceive themselves as teachers, underscoring the significance of understanding the relationship between teachers' emotions and their professional identity. Depicting that relationship, the construction of identity with emotional experiences was considered a "glue" (Zembylas, 2011), which is interrelated. Therefore, based on this understanding, emotional labor and the teacher's professional identity are connected as factors that coherently influence each other.

Prior to the emerging theory of teacher professional identity, it was first derived from the notion of teacher identity, which is defined as an ongoing process in which identity is not stable but dynamic and shifts over time (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beijaard et al., 2004). In particular, it not only influences the conceptions and expectations of other people but also includes broadly accepted images in society about what a teacher should know and do (Beijaard et al., 2004). In other words, teacher identity is a conception of self as a "teacher" (Kelchtermans, 1993; Mockler, 2011). Furthermore, the teacher identity then distributed into three aspects: teacher professional, personal, and institutional identity (Klin-Soren, 2013).

As a branch of TI, professional identity is defined as a complex and multi-core concept consisting of several intertwined factors, such as others' conceptions and expectations, social image, practical experience, and personal background (Impedovo, 2021). In vein, teacher professional identity refers to the set of attitudes, beliefs, values, and self-perceptions (Lu et al., 2024). It was related to teachers' understanding of their professional role and teachers' guidance of their behaviors, interactions, and decision-making as educators. In conclusion, teacher

professional identity (TPI) is a multifaceted and dynamic concept shaped by personal beliefs, social context, and practical experiences. It encompasses attitudes, values, self-perceptions, and emotional states, all guiding teachers' behaviors and decision-making processes in seeking answers to fundamental questions about their professional selves as “who they are” and “what they do.”

Furthermore, in understanding the teacher professional identity on how teacher perceive themselves in case of their belief, attitudes, and values, experts mentioned several indicators of TPI such as instructional belief, commitment, and self-efficacy (Beijaard, 2004; Hong, 2010; Lamote, 2011; Lu et.al, 2024). Those indicators are illustrated as follows:

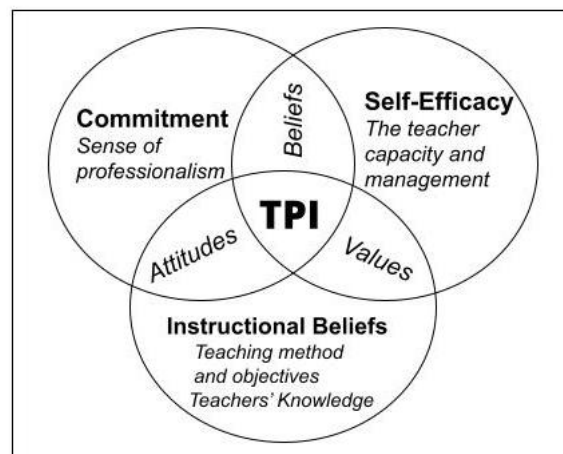


Figure 1. The indicators frameworks of Teacher Professional Identity

Henceforth, it was understood that identity evolves constantly under the influence of a range of factors, including personal factors, such as emotion and life experiences, and contextual factors, such as teaching experiences in particular contexts (Lentillon-Kaestner et al., 2018). Continuously, emotional labor is defined by Hochschild (1983) as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display." This definition encompasses two primary types of emotional displays: deep acting, in which teachers internalize the required emotions, and surface acting, in which they outwardly display emotions without genuinely feeling them (Hochschild, 1983). Deep act refers to the process of genuinely trying to feel the emotions one is required to display, thus making the act of feigning unnecessary.

This approach involves internalizing the desired emotions to create a sincere and convincing emotional expression (Hochschild et al., 2012). Meanwhile, surface act refers to the practice of disguising one's true emotions and pretending to feel emotions that are not genuinely experienced. This involves displaying emotions outwardly that do not match internal feelings, often as a way to conform to social or professional expectations. Both forms of emotional labor play a significant role

in shaping teachers' attitudes and behaviors in the classroom. Yet, empirical data mentioned that teachers often neglect their negative emotions (Wang & Burić, 2023) to manage the teaching process. Continuously, emotional understanding is somewhat important for all school-holders to consider. Within this context, teachers' emotions are also one of the factors in constructing professional identity (Hong, 2010), especially in teachers' decision-making afterward.

Moreover, drawing on this interest, teachers have been found to experience the highest levels of stress and dissatisfaction (Chaaban & Du, 2017), especially in their first year of teaching. Further, Indonesia's educational landscape has changed significantly, particularly with the implementation of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (MoECRT) regulation number 12 article 33 of 2024, which has made English a key subject for primary school students. English has long been considered a global language, encouraging its early introduction to learners in primary education, including in Asian countries like Indonesia (Sulistiyo et al., 2019).

Consequently, many English teachers were recruited to teach in primary schools. Likewise, the growing number of children learning English in schools at a young age is also a consequence of parents' encouragement (Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018). Finally, the emotional demand for English teachers, particularly primary teachers, in light of these new regulations presents an interesting area of exploration.

However, amidst growing research on the role of emotional labor among teachers, most studies have focused on the higher education level (Morris & King, 2023; Yuan et al., 2023; Li & De Costa, 2023) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Yang et al., 2022; Peng et al., 2023; Abdul-Messie, 2023), with limited attention to primary education, particularly in Indonesia. Even though there was research about teachers' identity concerning emotional experiences (Zembylas, 2011), it was unspecific to professional identity. Nevertheless, more is needed to know about the specific influence of teacher professional identity (TPI), focusing on emotional labor faced by teachers, especially teachers who teach English to children.

Meanwhile, empirical studies from different regions, such as in China, show that teachers' professional identity aligns with their emotional experiences, demonstrating the influence of social contexts (Liu & Sammons, 2021). Similarly, a study on teaching English to young learners in Iran showed that teacher emotions and identity are ecologically connected (Nazari et al., 2023). However, in teaching English to children, the primary English teachers' emotions in Indonesia have been persistently ignored even though they are crucial. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, research on primary school teachers' emotions still needs to be explored, in response to these gaps, this research will probe the growing interest in primary education in Indonesia's social and school contexts. Thus, this study elaborates a research questions on "how do emotional labor processes that

teachers experienced during teaching shape the teacher professional identity in three majors' indicators which are instructional belief, self efficacy, and commitment?"

Ultimately, this study aims to enhance the understanding of Indonesian primary English teachers' emotional experiences and how the professional identity shaped while navigating emotional labor. Furthermore, the findings may provide insights into designing teacher training programs that incorporate emotional labor awareness and offer guidelines for school administrators to support teachers' emotional well-being, thereby fostering a healthier and more productive teaching environment.

Method

To elicit the emotional experiences of primary school teachers, this study employed a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2013) and was conducted using a case study methodology (Yin, 2017). This approach prioritized the exploration of real-life experiences within their natural context, acknowledging the limited control researchers have over these environments. Additionally, the framework was aligned with the two processes of emotional labor: deep acting and surface acting (Diefendorf & Gosserand, 2003; Hochschild et al., 2012). The research was guided by two research questions, focusing on teachers' emotions and their impact on professional identity. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews.

This research focused on primary English teachers in Indonesia. They are still in their first or second year of teaching, aged between 23 and 35. The study aimed to understand how these teachers' emotional experiences happened while teaching and, more importantly, how these emotional labor processes contribute to their professional identity. A total of 11 participants were initially selected through online questionnaires, and 3 participants were ultimately chosen using purposive sampling for in-depth interviews that conducted one by one using the voice recorder. Continuously the recording then being transcribed as the data. The purposive sampling ensured the selection of participants who best represented the research focus. All selected participants were required to be teaching English as their primary subject, either in primary schools or English courses. The researcher will also consider ethical issues, including maintaining confidentiality, ensuring voluntary participation, protecting participants' identities, and respecting their right to withdraw from the study.

The researcher utilized questionnaires and interviews for the data collection technique. The questionnaire consisted of (1) emotional labor experiences and (2) teachers' professional identity. It was designed to guide teachers in reflecting on their emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and instructional practices related to teaching English in primary education. All instruments were adapted from previous studies

and developed into open-ended questions. The emotional labor instruments were adapted from the Emotional Labor Scale (ELS) developed by Gaan (2011), which includes 9 items: four related to deep acting and five to surface acting. For professional identity construction, the instruments were adapted from the Questionnaire on Perceived Professional Identity among Teachers (QIPPE) by Lentillon-Kaestner et al. (2018) and Chan et.al. (2008).

The researcher analyzed the data using the qualitative data analysis framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which consists of four steps: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion. Lastly, the triangulation of data and methods was performed during the data condensation process to ensure the reliability of the findings to avoid the bias.

Results

The results of this study highlight the process of emotional labor experienced by teachers during their teaching practice. This includes both their positive and negative emotional displays, the factors influencing these emotions, and the strategies they employ to regulate them. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the interplay between the emotional labor processes and the construction of professional identity among primary English teachers. This construction is explored through three key indicators: instructional beliefs, commitment, and self-efficacy. Henceforth, these results outlined into two subthemes as follows:

Primary English Teachers' Emotional Labor Processes During Teaching

The primary English teachers experience a range of positive emotions during the teaching process, including joy, happiness, satisfaction, enthusiasm, pride, and gratitude. These emotions often arise as part of the deep acting process, where teachers genuinely feel these emotions in connection with their professional roles during teaching practices. For instance, two teachers shared that they felt genuinely happy when interacting with their students, highlighting the authentic and fulfilling nature of their emotional experiences in the classroom.

“During teaching, I feel happy and excited. I really enjoy the moment when I can share my knowledge with students (R1); I feel happy because every meeting with students always brings its own joy (R3)”

Moreover, the teachers express feelings of pride and gratitude when they receive appreciation, as mentioned in the interview data. This highlights the genuine feelings that teachers experienced during teaching. These emotions further emphasize the deep connection teachers have with their roles, showcasing their authentic emotional engagement in the classroom.

“I feel so proud, especially if I am praised, of course I feel loved and also grateful (Int.R1-FAW/2); Overall, the more obvious one is joy, cheerfulness, enthusiasm, and sincerity, there is also pride if I can teach well (Int.R2-MK/3)”.

These processes align with the theory of emotional labor process, which teachers face. Besides, Scherer (2005) defined emotions as a series of synchronized changes in response to a significant external or internal stimulus (Richard, 2022). For instance, teachers may feel proud of their students' success because it aligns with their professional goals. Therefore, this regulation occurred because the teacher's ability to manage their emotions was referred to as deep acting, which resulted in the emotional displays themselves (Hochschild, 2012). On the other hand, when a teacher felt angry, they might have gotten upset, raised their voice, experienced a faster heartbeat, felt the urge to shut the classroom door, and thought about how their students were breaking the rules.

These responses were also referred to as an emotional labor process after the teacher had the emotional display. These emotions were categorized as negative emotional displays. Furthermore, the primary English teachers experience a range of negative emotions during teaching, including frustration, sadness, anger, disappointment, fatigue, boredom, and even panic. For instance, one teacher noted feeling annoyed and unable to focus when dealing with students who are difficult to manage. Another described feeling of demotivation and discouragement.

“If in class when the children are noisy or difficult to talk to, I still can't escape from the feeling of being tired, annoyed, angry, or stressed, even though we as teachers already try to separate personal feelings when teaching (Int.R2-MK/3).”

Thus, negative emotions often occurred as types of emotions that could not be easily expressed. Aligning with these findings, this was referred to as surface acting, where teachers regulated their experienced emotions into desired emotions due to the display rules surrounding them (Hochschild, 2012). Hence, deep acting was often associated with genuinely felt positive emotions, while surface acting was commonly linked to negative emotions that were regulated to appear as positive ones. For example, the three teachers stated in both their questionnaires and interviews that although they experienced negative emotions, they felt the need to remain professional. Therefore, they regulated their emotions into positive displays, such as trying to keep smiling.

“Even though inside I may feel irritated or unfocused, I try to keep smiling and show a positive attitude (R10); When it comes to being tired, obviously there is, sometimes I feel angry too, but I usually endure it. Just gently remind them with a smile (Int.R17-RH/3); Sometimes I felt disappointed too, but I just didn't show it ... (Int.R8-MK/8)”.

Basically, all types of emotional labor processes, whether deep acting or surface acting, are influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors refer to teachers' intrinsic or original emotions, while external factors involve external stimuli or actions that impact the emotional labor process, such as the expectations and norms related to emotional display rules. External factors primarily involve interactions with students, colleagues, and the broader teaching environment. Positive emotional displays are often linked to students' behaviors, such as moments when student's express appreciation or actively engage with the teacher, especially when the students understand the materials well.

"When they showed interest and understanding of the material, I delivered it was the time I felt proud, especially when I was able to help them (R3)".

Yet, negative emotional displays often emerged, particularly when classroom conditions were challenging. Disruptive student behavior, lack of engagement, and chaotic classroom environments evoked feelings of frustration, irritation, or anger.

"...there are children who are busy shouting. Well, I wanted to get angry originally, but I couldn't (Int.R8-MK/6); depending on the class, if the children are crowded, especially if the material presented is not easy, it requires concentration and understanding to the students, well usually I will be a little frustrated (Int.R1-FAW/1)".

Furthermore, there were certain behaviors that teachers exhibited as part of emotional labor regulation. For instance, when they felt angry, they would take a deep breath, think positively, or step back to reflect more clearly on what to do or simply to calm themselves.

"In terms of emotional regulation, I usually leave the class for a moment to get a drink or if not, sit down first to plan a new strategy, then I teach again more calmly (Int.R2-MK/11); the way is I position myself first. Where am I? What is my role? Oh, I'm working as a teacher, then I try to stick to my role and think positively (Int.R1-FAW/5)".

These regulation strategies help teachers maintain both positive surface and deep acting processes. However, the emotional labor process is dynamic and develops over time. Teachers with more experience and knowledge tend to navigate emotional labor more effectively than novice teachers. Moreover, those who excel in managing their emotional labor often demonstrate greater professionalism, higher job satisfaction, and improved teaching quality. Consequently, the more teachers understand and reconcile with their emotions, the better they can regulate themselves ultimately strengthening their professional identity.

The Interplay Between Emotional Labor and the Dynamic Aspects of Primary English Teacher Professional Identity

The findings reveal a strong connection between the emotional labor processes experienced by primary English teachers and the construction of their professional identity. These processes both deep and surface acting, do not occur in isolation but actively shape and are shaped by the teachers' professional roles. This interplay is most evident in the dynamic aspects of their instructional beliefs, commitment to teaching, and self-efficacy. Teachers' emotional regulation strategies, influenced by both internal feelings and external expectations, play a critical role in this relationship. However the display rules didn't directly affect the internal feeling. Henceforth, by managing their emotions effectively, teachers can adapt to the challenges of teaching, which, in turn, reinforces their professional identity. Conversely, when emotional regulation becomes difficult, it may negatively affect their beliefs, commitment, or sense of self-efficacy. As the dashedline which form each of the EL and TPI showing that both variables are influencing each other.

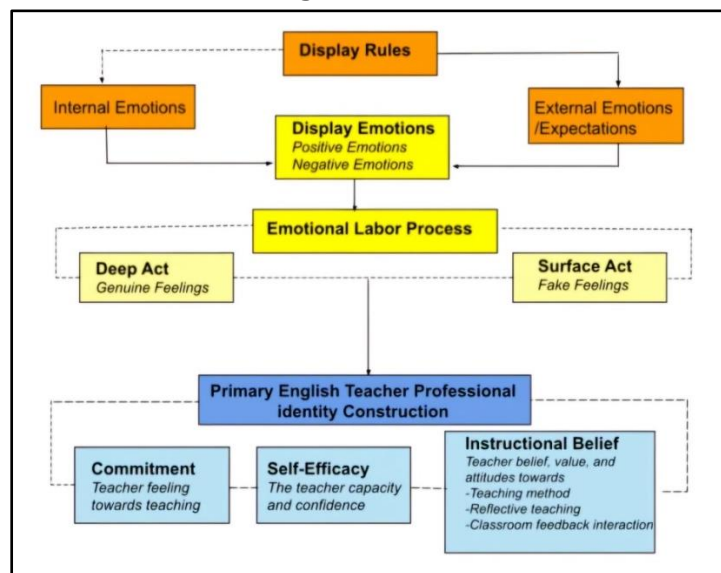


Figure 1. The Causation of Emotional Labor Processes in Shaping Teacher Professional Identity

The process of emotional labor significantly influenced how teachers perceived their professional identity. When teachers were required to display certain emotions, they often regulated their internal feelings to align with the expected emotional expressions or display rules around them. This regulation of emotions, in turn, impacted their beliefs, attitudes, and values toward teaching. For instance, their instructional beliefs were reflected in the teaching methods they used. Teachers who were better at regulating their emotions tended to show more flexibility in adapting their teaching strategies to various classroom conditions.

"I once gave them an exercise, told them to write something, they didn't want to, they didn't do it. So, the learning process didn't work. So, I changed the method to singing. So instead of writing, I changed it to songs (Int.R1-FAW/12); before changing the learning method, I observe for a while, according to the students' abilities and learning styles, then after getting an idea I try to change it according to the class's needs (Int.R1-FAW/10); In fact, if there is no adjustment, the learning objectives will be difficult to achieve (Int.R1-FAW/11)".

In contrast, teachers with lower emotional regulation tended to avoid making flexible changes to their teaching methods, as they feared it might cause confusion. This need for preparation arose from their focus on regulating their emotions during teaching. Although they still incorporated some variation in their approach, they required more preparation before each lesson.

"Well, regarding changing methods suddenly in class, I never do it, at most if it is not conducive I just use ice breaking (Int.R3-RH/13); I still have to choose a learning method that suits the students I teach, so I use different methods, but I still arrange them beforehand (R3)".

Furthermore, emotional labor enhanced their teaching capacity, including their ability to manage the classroom effectively and their confidence in using media or delivering instructional materials.

"I think it's pretty good. It's just that I'm aware that there are still many shortcomings. This self-confidence also comes from experience. As a new teacher, I feel that my self-confidence is still lacking, and class control is also difficult. But along with experience and the many conditions that have been experienced, I feel that it is getting better, especially with the improvement in emotional control (R1, R2, R3)".

Besides, these emotional experiences had a genuine impact on teachers' commitment to teaching. When teachers experienced joy, it strengthened their commitment.

"I tend to choose being a teacher because it aligns with who I am and my role, and I have made peace with all the challenges that come with it (R1, R2).

However, when they felt overwhelmed, their commitment tended to decrease.

"if a more promising job opportunity arose, I would consider leaving my position as a teacher (R3)."

In conclusion, emotional labor significantly shaped teachers' professional identity. Teachers who effectively regulated their emotions tended to be more adaptable in their teaching methods and confident in classroom management. In contrast, those with lower emotional regulation avoided flexibility, requiring more preparation. Emotional labor also influenced teachers' commitment: positive

emotions strengthened their dedication, while negative emotions, such as feeling overwhelmed, decreased their commitment. This demonstrated the strong connection between emotional regulation and both teaching effectiveness and professional commitment.

Discussion

The findings of this study explored on how primary English teachers in Indonesia construct their professional identity while managing emotional labor. Drawing from the theoretical framework encompassing instructional belief, self-efficacy, and commitment, this section discusses the interplay between teachers' professional identity and their emotional experiences during teaching.

First, instructional belief was found to be influenced by teachers' perceptions of their roles, expectations, and interactions with students. Teachers demonstrated a strong orientation toward student-centered learning and a commitment to fostering meaningful teacher-student relationships. These findings are consistent with Lu et al. (2024), who argue that instructional beliefs are shaped by emotional, evaluative, and situational factors. Moreover, this study highlights that emotional connections with students significantly enhance teachers' motivation and instructional strategies, further emphasizing the role of emotional engagement in shaping instructional beliefs.

Second, self-efficacy emerged as a crucial factor in navigating the challenges of teaching. Teachers expressed confidence in their ability to manage classrooms, deliver lessons effectively, and address diverse student needs, despite occasional struggles with emotional regulation. These findings align with Bandura (1997), who defines self-efficacy as the belief in one's capacity to organize and execute necessary actions to achieve goals. Furthermore, this study contributes to the understanding of how emotional resilience underpins self-efficacy, enabling teachers to maintain enthusiasm and persistence in the face of adversity.

Third, commitment to teaching was evident in teachers' deep psychological connection to their profession. Teachers exhibited dedication to their roles, often prioritizing students' learning outcomes over personal challenges. This finding supports Van Huizen (2000), who highlights the emotional and professional dimensions of teacher commitment. Additionally, the study reveals that emotional labor, particularly deep acting, fosters a sense of fulfillment and strengthens teachers' commitment to their professional identity.

The findings also resonate with Hochschild et al. (2012), who distinguish between deep acting and surface acting in emotional labor. Teachers predominantly engaged in deep acting, internalizing emotions to create genuine and positive interactions with students. This practice not only enhanced their teaching effectiveness but also contributed to their overall job satisfaction. Conversely, surface acting, though less frequent, was associated with feelings of emotional

exhaustion and disconnect, underscoring its detrimental effects on professional identity.

Compared to previous studies, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the emotional experiences of primary English teachers in Indonesia. While prior research often focused on broader aspects of teacher professional identity, this study emphasizes the specific impact of emotional labor on instructional belief, self-efficacy, and commitment. For instance, Canrinus et al. (2012) highlight the multidimensional nature of professional identity, but this study extends their work by exploring the emotional underpinnings of these dimensions.

In summary, the findings underscore the intricate relationship between emotional labor and teacher professional identity. Emotional labor, when managed effectively through deep acting, reinforces instructional belief, enhances self-efficacy, and strengthens commitment. These insights hold practical implications for teacher training programs, which should incorporate strategies for emotional regulation and resilience-building to support teachers in their professional journeys. By fostering emotional awareness and providing resources for managing emotional labor, education stakeholders can empower teachers to navigate the complexities of their roles while sustaining their professional identity.

Conclusion

This study revealed the emotional labor experiences of primary English teachers. Teachers engaged in both deep acting, where they genuinely aligned with positive emotions such as joy and pride, and surface acting, where they masked negative emotions like frustration and anger to meet professional expectations. These emotional labor processes were influenced by both internal factors, such as intrinsic feelings, and external factors, such as interactions with students and classroom dynamics. Moreover, the findings also highlighted the role of emotional labor and the three key components of professional identity: instructional beliefs, self-efficacy, and commitment. Teachers who managed their emotions effectively demonstrated greater adaptability in their teaching methods, improved classroom management, and stronger professional commitment. Conversely, challenges in emotional regulation hindered flexibility and weakened dedication, especially under overwhelming circumstances.

Understanding the process of teacher emotional labor in shaping their identity was crucial, as it helped identify suitable programs that enhanced professional development while acknowledging teachers' emotions. Therefore, future research could explore the long-term impact of emotional labor on teachers' well-being and career sustainability. Furthermore, comparative studies across various teaching contexts or educational levels could provide broader insights into both the universal and context-specific aspects of emotional labor and professional identity construction.

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