The Effect of Teaching Motivation on Teacher Burnout: The Mediating Role of Emotional Labor Strategies

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Abstract. Teacher burnout poses a significant obstacle to their professional development. Teachers with differing motivations for teaching tend to adopt distinct emotional labor strategies, which may constitute a mediating mechanism influencing their levels of burnout. This study aims to explore the influence of teachers' teaching motivation on professional burnout and examine the mediating role of emotional labor strategies. Through a questionnaire survey of 310 primary and secondary school teachers, the research focuses on the mechanism by which personal utility motivation to teach, social utility motivation to teach affect perceived professional burnout. Results indicate that both social efficacy motivation and personal efficacy motivation significantly influence perceived burnout, with social efficacy motivation exhibiting a more pronounced negative predictive effect. Personal efficacy motivation significantly reduces teacher burnout through the expression of naturally felt emotions but exacerbates it through both surface acting and deep acting strategies. Expression of naturally felt emotion fully mediates the relationship between social efficacy motivation and teacher burnout, significantly reducing burnout levels. Teachers with social efficacy motivation who adopt surface acting or deep acting emotional labor strategies do not experience a significant increase in burnout. This study offers new insights into the formation mechanisms of teacher burnout and provides theoretical foundations for educational administrators to develop relevant intervention measures.

Keywords: Personal efficacy motivation, social efficacy motivation, Burnout, Emotional labor strategies, Primary and secondary school teachers.

1. Introduction

As the foremost practitioners in the field of education, teachers bear the weighty responsibility of nurturing the next generation. However, with educational policies evolving at a rapid pace, the teaching profession now faces unprecedented pressures and challenges. The phenomenon of occupational burnout is becoming increasingly prevalent, adversely affecting not only teachers' physical and mental wellbeing but also diminishing teaching quality and hindering students' holistic development. Consequently, investigating the causes of teacher burnout and developing intervention mechanisms holds significant practical importance.

In recent years, researchers have increasingly recognised that teachers' teaching motivation is one of the key factors influencing their professional burnout. Teaching motivation serves as the intrinsic force propelling educators in their professional endeavours, profoundly shaping their commitment to teaching, pedagogical practices, and instructional quality. Moreover, it constitutes the fundamental driving force behind teachers' professional development [1]. Research indicates that educators who pursue teaching driven by autonomy motivation (a core manifestation of intrinsic motivation) typically experience lower levels of occupational exhaustion [2], rendering them less susceptible to burnout.

Teachers' occupational burnout is intrinsically linked to emotional events and emotional labour within their daily work. The profession is saturated with demands for interpersonal interaction, requiring emotional expression according to prescribed standards, thereby relatively depriving individuals of autonomous control over their emotions. On the one hand, an increasing number of scholars have recognised the significance of emotions in teaching, exploring their impact on occupational burnout through the lens of teachers' emotional labour. Research by Ganizadeh indicates that teachers' effective utilisation of emotional labour strategies can significantly mitigate the onset of professional burnout [3]. Domestic scholars, drawing upon Grandy's Emotional Labour Scale for

empirical investigations, have discovered that surface acting among university lecturers correlates positively with professional burnout, whereas deep acting exhibits the opposite effect. Furthermore, the adoption of expression of naturally felt emotion strategies has been shown to effectively prevent the emergence of professional burnout among university lecturers [4]. Conversely, research indicates that employing certain emotional labour strategies consumes psychological resources, thereby inducing burnout. Existing studies have confirmed a significant relationship between emotional labour strategies and occupational burnout [5].

However, few studies have examined the mechanisms through which teaching motivation influences professional burnout, the role of emotional labour strategies in this relationship, or how interventions targeting emotional labour strategies can effectively prevent teacher burnout. This study, based on a cohort of primary and secondary school teachers in China, examines the relationship between teaching motivation and occupational burnout, with a particular focus on the mediating role of emotional labour strategies. It aims to provide insights for retaining and attracting teaching talent within the primary and secondary education sectors.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teaching Motivation and Teacher Burnout

Teaching motivation refers to the intrinsic psychological inclinations held by teachers during instructional activities and professional development. It encompasses the reasons and objectives underlying teachers' engagement in teaching work, as well as the positive attitudes and behavioural tendencies manifested in their pedagogical practice. In an international assessment conducted by the OECD, teaching motivation was categorised into personal efficacy motivation and social efficacy motivation. The research findings indicated that social efficacy motivation exhibits a positive correlation with job satisfaction and teachers' self-efficacy. Burnout refers to psychological symptoms arising from prolonged exposure to stressful stimuli in the workplace, typically manifesting as physical and mental exhaustion, emotional depletion, cynical detachment towards one's duties, diminished sense of efficacy, and reduced sense of accomplishment [6]. Teaching motivation is a significant factor influencing professional burnout and has a direct predictive effect on it [7]. Based on self-determination theory, scholars have conducted cluster analyses of teachers' teaching motivations. Their research indicates that teachers with autonomous motivation place greater emphasis on teaching, exhibit higher levels of enthusiasm, and experience a deeper sense of fulfilment from educating students. They are more willing to invest in teaching, often deliver higher quality instruction, demonstrate greater job satisfaction, and are less prone to professional burnout. Conversely, teachers who pursue external motivation exclusively often fail to genuinely engage with teaching, are reluctant to invest time and effort, and are more prone to dissatisfaction and burnout [8]. According to self-determination theory, the most ideal type is characterised by high intrinsic motivation coupled with low controlled motivation and low disengagement. Such teachers place greater emphasis on teaching, possess heightened enthusiasm, are more willing to dedicate themselves to their work, experience greater job satisfaction, and are less susceptible to professional burnout [9] [10]. Whereas teachers driven by controlled motivation or demotivation place greater emphasis on external honours and rewards, often failing to perceive the meaning and value of teaching itself. They are more likely to prioritise research or other duties over teaching, thereby compromising educational standards and becoming prone to dissatisfaction and professional burnout [11]. It means that when teachers choose the profession out of affection for their pupils, a passion for teaching, and a willingness to contribute to educational development, they are more likely to engage in educational activities with a positive attitude and experience lower levels of professional burnout. Conversely, teachers drawn to the profession by high salaries and generous benefits are more prone to burnout when the anticipated rewards fail to match their efforts, leading them to resign or change careers [12].

In conclusion, teachers driven primarily by social utility motivation tend to approach their work with enthusiasm and a sense of mission. They are better equipped to tackle challenges proactively,

actively seeking out new teaching methods and pedagogical concepts to continually enhance their instructional standards and educational quality, thereby reducing the risk of professional burnout. Conversely, educators primarily driven by personal utility motives are more susceptible to issues such as teaching apathy and reliance on monotonous methodologies due to factors like work pressure and perceived unfair remuneration, ultimately leading to professional burnout.

H1: Teachers motivated by social utility are less prone to professional burnout, whereas those driven by personal utility are more likely to experience it.

2.2. Teachers' Teaching Motivation and Emotional Labour

Teaching is a labor that is rich in emotional activities, and the level of emotional labor and the strategic choices made by teachers have a significant impact on the teaching effectiveness and the learning environment of students. Hochschild's emotional labor strategy categorizes the emotional expression of teachers during the teaching process into two types: deep acting and surface acting.Deep acting refers to the teacher's ability to experience and express emotions that meet professional requirements through changes in cognition and attitude. Surface acting, on the other hand, involves the teacher only displaying emotions that meet professional requirements in outward behavior, with no change in the teacher's genuine emotional experience [13]. However, some scholars argue that expression of naturally felt emotion is particularly suitable for teaching, suggesting that this strategy involves teachers conveying genuine emotions during instruction. Yin later confirmed and supported the effectiveness of the three emotional labor strategies—deep acting, surface acting, and expression of naturally felt emotion—used by Chinese primary and secondary school teachers in his research [14]. Teachers who engage in deep role-playing demonstrate high professional competence and self-regulation in emotional management. Such educators actively confront and address their own negative emotions, employing effective cognitive regulation strategies—such as cognitive restructuring and problem-solving techniques—to transform negative states into positive emotional conditions. They bring this positive energy into their teaching, engaging students with enthusiasm and a constructive attitude while offering constructive guidance and motivation. This positive emotional expression not only fosters a favourable classroom atmosphere but also stimulates pupils' interest and motivation in learning, thereby enhancing both academic performance and psychological wellbeing. In contrast, teachers who engage in superficial role-playing demonstrate certain shortcomings in emotional regulation. They often perceive deep processing of emotions as a burden and lack recognition of the importance of emotional management. In selecting emotional labour strategies, they may adopt superficial approaches, favouring shallow emotional regulation techniques such as simple suppression or feigning. This approach risks emotional regulation during teaching. For instance, they may display negative emotions like impatience, indifference, or anger in the classroom. Such negative affect not only undermines the teacher's own instructional effectiveness but also adversely impacts students, potentially reducing learning motivation and increasing anxiety levels.

Some studies suggest that emotional labour strategies play a mediating role in teachers' teaching motivation.Through effective emotional labour strategies, teachers can better manage their emotions, leading to a significant enhancement in their teaching motivation. Teachers must engage in emotional labour within their daily work to comply with the emotional display rules of the teaching profession. Research has found that the relationship between intrinsic motivation and deep role-playing is positive; an increase in intrinsic motivation is associated with positive changes in deep role-playing. There are studies indicating that intrinsic motivation and emotional labour exhibit a complex relationship: intrinsic motivation exerts a significant negative influence on surface behaviour, meaning that teachers with higher intrinsic motivation display fewer instances of surface behaviour. Conversely, intrinsic motivation exerts a significant positive influence on genuine behaviour, meaning that teachers with higher intrinsic motivation exhibit more instances of genuine behaviour [16].

H2: Teachers motivated by social utility tend towards expression of naturally felt emotion and deep role-playing, whereas those motivated by personal utility tend towards surface role-playing.

2.3. Teachers' Emotional Labour Strategies and Burnout

As members of the school staff, teachers must invest considerable effort and emotional commitment in their educational and teaching duties. Due to the unique nature of their profession, they are particularly susceptible to burnout. Hochschild posits that different emotional labour strategies exert distinct influences on job satisfaction and occupational burnout, with deep acting correlating positively with job satisfaction and surface acting correlating positively with occupational burnout. Research indicates that teachers' emotional labour influences both their affective experiences and cognitive evaluations of their work. Should educators prove unable to regulate their emotional expressions and behaviours effectively, this may lead to emotional exhaustion and heightened psychological stress. Consequently, their cognitive assessments and affective experiences of work may be adversely affected. Such negative affective experiences and cognitive evaluations further exacerbate teachers' sense of professional burnout. By analysing teachers' emotional labour strategies through segmentation, stratification, and categorisation [17], Tian Guoxiu has revealed the operational mechanisms and strategic types of teachers' emotional labour. The findings indicate that superficial role-playing leads to greater psychological strain, requiring more time for recovery after working days and potentially contributing to occupational burnout. In contrast, deep role-playing entails lower psychological strain and facilitates easier recovery [18]. Some findings indicate that surface acting exhibits a low positive correlation with occupational burnout, whilst deep acting and natural behaviour demonstrate a significant negative correlation with occupational burnout [19]. When teachers adopt superficial role-playing as a labour strategy, they must deliberately display emotions at odds with their genuine feelings. To some extent, this can be viewed as a drain on internal resources such as cognition and emotion, potentially leading to professional burnout. Conversely, when teachers engage in deep acting, they need not expend additional energy suppressing or masking their genuine feelings. They may either express authentic emotions or promptly adjust and proactively regulate their state to match the required professional affect, completing teaching tasks with enthusiasm. This approach facilitates resource acquisition and compensation, maintaining equilibrium in psychological and emotional resources at work, thereby reducing professional burnout [20]. It follows that teachers practising surface acting typically exhibit lower job satisfaction and are more prone to professional burnout [21] [22]. In contrast, those engaging in deep acting often demonstrate higher job satisfaction and are less susceptible to burnout [22] [23].

H3: Teachers employing surface acting as an emotional labour strategy are more prone to occupational burnout, whereas those adopting deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotion as their emotional strategy are less susceptible to occupational burnout.

2.4. Our research

Although the aforesaid research has greatly enriched the theoretical framework in this field, it also exhibits several shortcomings. For instance, studies have failed to establish a direct link between teaching motivation, emotional labour, and occupational burnout, lacking an analysis of the mechanisms through which teaching motivation influences burnout. While some research has addressed mediating variables (such as self-esteem and professional identity), it has not comprehensively explored other potential mediating factors, such as emotional labour. This paper aims to investigate how educational motivation influences professional burnout by affecting the selection strategies of emotional labour, thereby examining the mediating role of emotional labour and revealing the underlying mechanisms. It seeks to provide targeted strategies for educational administrators to assist teachers in adopting more effective emotional labour strategies, thereby reducing professional burnout. This approach not only retains more teachers but also attracts greater numbers to the teaching profession.

3. Research method

3.1. Research subjects

This study targeted primary and secondary school teachers, distributing 310 questionnaires to educators across various schools in central China. Among respondents, 35 were male teachers (11.3%) and 275 were female teachers (88.7%); Teachers holding qualifications at or below college level numbered 63 (20.3%), while those with bachelor's degrees or higher accounted for 247 (79.7%). Regarding professional titles: - 232 teachers held Level 3 or no title (71.9%) - 24 held Level 2 titles (7.7%) - 34 held Level 1 titles (11%) - 20 held senior titles (6.5%).

3.2. Research variables

3.2.1. Teachers' Teaching Motivation Questionnaire

This study employs the measurement methodology for teaching motivation from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), which categorises teachers' teaching motivation into two dimensions: personal utility motivation and social utility motivation. Personal utility motivation is driven by individual interests and professional needs, focusing on the direct benefits of the teaching profession to one's personal life. This manifests specifically in occupational stability, such as the secure income and safety inherent in the teaching profession. Social Utility Motivation stems from societal values and the impact on others, emphasising the social contribution of educational work. This manifests in a sense of social responsibility and professional identity, such as promoting social equity through education, assisting disadvantaged groups, and teachers' recognition of their profession's social standing. For instance, the teaching profession enables one to contribute meaningfully to society.

3.2.2. Emotional Labour Strategies Questionnaire

Teachers' emotional labour refers to the process whereby educators proactively manage their internal emotional experiences and external expressions to align with professional norms and societal expectations during teaching activities. This emotional labour encompasses three distinct strategies. Surface Acting involves teachers adjusting only their outward emotional displays to meet the demands of the teaching context, whilst their genuine inner feelings remain unaligned with their external presentation. This approach consumes significant psychological resources and, when employed long-term, may lead to emotional detachment or professional burnout. Deep Acting involves teachers actively altering their internal feelings by shifting cognition or focus, thereby aligning internal and external emotional expressions. Expression of Naturally Felt Emotion occurs when teachers internalise professional emotional norms, enabling them to naturally display contextually appropriate emotions without deliberate regulation. They may even utilise genuine emotions—positive or negative—to adjust teaching interactions. This study employs the 13-item Teacher Emotional Labour Strategies Scale (TELSS), developed by Hong Kong scholar Yin, to assess three types of emotional labour strategies: surface acting, deep acting, and expression of naturally felt emotion.

3.2.3. Burnout Questionnaire

In examining professional burnout, we primarily drew upon relevant domestic and international research, selecting indicators such as teachers' job satisfaction to gauge the current state of burnout among Chinese educators. Professional burnout constitutes a psychological syndrome triggered by prolonged occupational stress, manifesting chiefly through emotional resource depletion, interpersonal disengagement, and diminished professional efficacy. The high emotional labour demands inherent in the teaching profession frequently predispose practitioners to experiencing burnout.

4. Research Findings and Conclusions

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Correlation Analysis of Teachers' Teaching Motivation, Professional Burnout, and Emotional Labour Strategies

Table 1 indicates that expression of naturally felt emotion ($r = .281$, $p < .01$) and occupational burnout ($r = .211$, $p < .01$) exhibit a significant positive correlation, whilst expression of naturally felt emotion and occupational burnout show a significant negative correlation ($r = -.239$, $p < .01$). Deep acting demonstrates no significant correlation with occupational burnout ($r = -.032$). Regarding motivation, personal efficacy motivation showed significant positive correlations with all three emotional labour strategies (with surface acting: $r = .147$, $p < .01$; with deep acting: $r = .287$, $p < .01$; with expression of naturally felt emotion: $r = .441$, $p < .01$), while exhibiting a significant negative correlation with occupational burnout ($r = -.112$, $p < .05$). Social utility motivation similarly exhibited significant positive correlations with all three emotional labour strategies and a significant negative correlation with occupational burnout ($r = -0.204$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 1. Correlational Analysis of Teaching Motivation, Professional Burnout, and Emotional Labour Strategies

	Surface Acting	Deep acting	Expression of naturally felt emotion	Occupational burnout	Personal efficacy motivation	Social utility motivation
Surface Acting	1					
Deep acting	.598**	1				
Expression of naturally felt emotion	.281**	.680**	1			
Occupational burnout 1	.211**	-.032	-.239**	1		
Personal efficacy motivation	.147**	.287**	.441**	-.112*	1	
Social utility motivation	.124*	.309**	.469**	-.204**	.747**	1

Note. **P<.01 level, *P<.05.

4.1.2. Testing the Mediating Effects of Personal Utility Motivation, Emotional Labour Strategies, and Occupational Burnout

Table 2 analyses the relationship between personal efficacy motivation and occupational burnout. Results indicate a total effect of -0.1005, suggesting that personal efficacy motivation generally mitigates occupational burnout. The direct effect is -0.0151, yet its confidence interval [0.7750, -0.1193] encompasses zero, indicating the direct effect is non-significant. Among the three indirect pathways: - The indirect effect of surface acting was 0.0387, with a confidence interval [0.0046, 0.834] not containing zero, indicating this mediation pathway was significant; The indirect effect of deep role-playing is 0.0049, with a confidence interval [-0.0632, -0.0560] that does not contain zero, indicating this mediation effect is significant; whereas the indirect effect of expression of naturally felt emotion is -0.1290, with a confidence interval [-0.2061, -0.0465] that does not contain zero, constituting a significant mediating pathway. In terms of relative effect values, expression of naturally felt emotion exhibits a relative effect of 1.2836, indicating its contribution to the total effect exceeds 100%, making it the primary mediating mechanism. Surface acting demonstrates a relative effect of -0.3851, suggesting its direction of influence opposes the total effect. Deep acting displays a relative effect of -0.0488, indicating a comparatively minor influence. Thus, this model confirms that personal motivation significantly reduces occupational burnout primarily through the mediating pathway of

emotional labour strategies, particularly expression of naturally felt emotion, rather than through direct effects.

Table 2. The mediating effect of personal efficacy motivation, emotional labour strategies, and occupational burnout

	Effect	BootSE	95%confidence interval		The relative effect size
			BootLLCI	BootULCI	
Total effect	-0.1005	0.0506	-0.2001	-0.0009	
The direct effect	-0.0151	0.0529	0.7750	-0.1193	0.1502
The indirect effect 1 Surface Acting	0.0387	0.0201	0.0046	0.834	-0.3851
The indirect effect 2 Deep acting	0.0049	0.0298	-0. 0632	-0.0560	-0.0488
The indirect effect 3 expression of naturally felt emotion	-0.1290	0.0404	-0.2061	-0.0465	1.2836

4.1.3. Testing the Mediating Effects of Social Utility Motivation, Emotional Labour Strategies, and Occupational Burnout

Analysis of Table 3 reveals a total effect of -0.1987, indicating that the independent variable exerts a significant negative influence on occupational burnout. The direct effect stands at -0.1122, with its 95% confidence interval [-0.2265, 0.0022] encompassing zero, thus demonstrating that the direct effect is not statistically significant. Among the three indirect paths: - The indirect effect of surface acting is 0.0353, with a confidence interval [-0.0012, 0.0868] encompassing zero, indicating this mediating effect is non-significant; - The indirect effect of deep acting is 0.0055, with a confidence interval [-0.0745, 0.0663] also encompassing zero, rendering it non-significant; whereas the indirect effect of expression of naturally felt emotion was -0.1273, with a confidence interval [-0.2107, -0.0335] not containing zero, indicating a significant mediating pathway. In terms of relative effect values, expression of naturally felt emotion exhibited a relative effect of 0.6407, accounting for 64.07% of the total effect, making it the most crucial mediating mechanism; The relative effect size of the direct effect is 0.5647, accounting for 56.47% of the total effect; the relative effect sizes of surface acting and deep acting are -0.1777 and -0.0277 respectively, indicating minor influences with directions opposite to the total effect. Collectively, this model confirms that expression of naturally felt emotion plays a significant mediating role in the process whereby social motivation influences occupational burnout, while other mediating pathways are non-significant.

Table 3. The mediating effect of social utility motivation, emotional labour strategies, and occupational burnout

	Effect	BootSE	95%confidence interval		The relative effect size
			BootLLCI	BootULCI	
Total effect	-0.1987	0.0543	-0..3056	-0.0919	
The direct effect	-0.1122	0.0581	-0.2265	0.0022	0.5647
The indirect effect 1 Surface Acting	0.0353	0.0229	-0. 0012	0.0868	-0.1777
The indirect effect 2 Deep acting	0.0055	0.0352	-0.0745	0.0663	-0.0277
The indirect effect 3 expression of naturally felt emotion	-0.1273	0.0452	-0.2107	-0.0335	0.6407

4.1.4. Conclusions and Discussion

This study analysed the relationship between teaching motivation, emotional labour strategies, and occupational burnout among 310 primary and secondary school teachers, yielding the following conclusions:

1. Differentiated effects of teaching motivation on occupational burnout

Both social efficacy motivation and personal efficacy motivation significantly predict occupational burnout, though the negative impact of social efficacy motivation is more pronounced. Teachers guided by social values (e.g., prioritising student development and societal contribution) tend to employ deep role-playing and expression of naturally felt emotion strategies, thereby effectively mitigating burnout risks. Conversely, teachers driven by personal interests (e.g., career security and financial rewards) who over-rely on surface role-playing strategies are more susceptible to emotional exhaustion and burnout. These findings corroborate Ghanizadeh et al.'s conclusion that emotional labour strategies predict occupational burnout, while further distinguishing differentiated mediating pathways for emotional labour strategies under different motivational types. Notably, the core role of authentic expression in mitigating occupational burnout aligns with Yin's meta-analysis, which demonstrated significant negative effects of authentic behaviour and deep acting on occupational burnout. Moreover, these findings resonate with Truta and Töre's conclusions regarding the relationship between intrinsic motivation and emotional labour strategies, confirming the positive association between high social efficacy motivation (akin to intrinsic motivation) and both expression of naturally felt emotion and deep acting, alongside their mitigating effects on occupational burnout.

2. The Mediating Role of Emotional Labour

Emotional labour plays a crucial mediating role between teaching motivation and occupational burnout. Specifically, the expression of naturally felt emotion strategy constitutes the core mediating pathway: by internalising professional emotional norms, teachers can reduce psychological strain arising from emotional dissimulation, thereby significantly alleviating occupational burnout. Whilst surface acting may sustain professional image in the short term, its prolonged use exacerbates emotional resource depletion, becoming a potential precursor to occupational burnout. These findings resonate with previous research by scholars such as Li Jinghua on the relationship between emotional labour and work-related burnout. However, this study further incorporates motivational types into the analytical framework, revealing the mechanism whereby social efficacy motivation significantly reduces occupational burnout through expression of naturally felt emotion strategies. This addresses a limitation in prior research, which predominantly focused on emotional labour itself while neglecting its motivational antecedents.

3. Practical Implications and Intervention Directions

Strengthening social utility motivation represents the most effective approach to optimising the teacher support system. This can be achieved through professional ethics education and promoting a sense of vocational mission, thereby fostering teachers' deep-seated commitment to the educational cause and mitigating the detrimental impact of utilitarian motivations on occupational burnout. Training in emotional labour strategies plays a pivotal role. Implementing emotional management training (such as cognitive restructuring and authentic emotional expression techniques) guides teachers to reduce surface acting, enhance expression of naturally felt emotion and deep acting capabilities, and promote efficient utilisation of emotional resources. Optimising the external support environment is equally crucial. Refining school incentive mechanisms (such as reasonably reducing workloads and providing psychological counselling resources) offers institutional safeguards for teachers' emotional labour, preventing highly motivated teachers from succumbing to burnout due to environmental pressures.

This study validates the causal chain of 'motivation-emotional labour-occupational burnout,' providing theoretical support for understanding the formation mechanisms of teacher burnout while indicating intervention directions for educational management practice. Future research may further combine dynamic tracking with multi-context analysis to deepen the exploration of strategies for protecting teachers' mental health.

5. Research limitations

Although this study offers a fresh perspective on understanding the relationship between teaching motivation, emotional labour, and occupational burnout, it nevertheless presents the following limitations:

Firstly, the cross-sectional design, which relies on questionnaire surveys for data collection, makes it difficult to establish causal relationships between variables. For instance, the mediating effect of emotional labour may be influenced by other latent variables (such as personality traits or work environment), yet this study did not employ longitudinal research or experimental methods for further validation. Moreover, the absence of complementary qualitative research (e.g., interviews, observations) prevents deeper insights into the dynamic processes of teachers' emotional labour strategies and the complex motivations underlying them.

Secondly, the interaction between motivation types remains unexplored. The study focuses on the independent effects of social efficacy motivation and personal efficacy motivation, yet fails to analyse their potential interactive effects. For instance, the coexistence of high social efficacy motivation and high personal efficacy motivation may exert synergistic or counteracting effects on occupational burnout. Such complex relationships warrant further investigation.

Finally, external environmental factors were excluded from the model. The study did not account for the moderating effects of external variables such as school support, workload, or student behaviour. For instance, even teachers possessing high social efficacy motivation may experience heightened burnout when subjected to prolonged high-intensity work pressure or lacking institutional resource support—contextual factors absent from the analytical framework. Future research could deepen understanding of the mechanisms underpinning teacher burnout by expanding sample sizes, employing mixed-methods approaches, developing localised measurement tools, and incorporating multidimensional variables alongside environmental factors. This would yield more targeted intervention recommendations for educational management practice.

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