

# A Study on the Current Situation of Emotional Labour Strategies Used by Pre-service English Teachers

## Taking a Normal University in Xinjiang as an Example

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### ABSTRACT

As the division of emotional labor becomes more refined, research on the emotional labor of the profession about teaching is gradually increasing. Pre-service English teachers possess dual roles as “teacher” and “student”, which make their emotional work during the teaching practicum process more complex. This study takes 100 pre-service English teachers as the research subjects, and employs questionnaire and interview to explore the following two research questions: (1) What is the current situation of emotional labor strategies employed by pre-service English teachers to regulate their emotions in their teaching practicum? (2) What are the factors that affect the use of emotional labor strategies by pre-service English teachers? The findings of the study showed that: (1) Pre-service English teachers’ emotional labor was generally at a moderate to high level, specifically the expression of naturally felt emotion got the highest score, followed by deep acting and finally surface acting. (2) Factors influence the use of emotional labor strategies by pre-service English teachers mainly come from three aspects: individuals and organizations and society.

**Keywords:** *Pre-service English teachers, Emotional labour, Strategies.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of emotional labour was first introduced by the American sociologist Hochschild in the early 1980s, (Hochschild, 1983). Later, emotional labour was regarded as a new type of labour in addition to physical and mental labour. The specificity of the teaching profession requires emotional management in schools, and emotional teachers' experiences and expressions are governed by rules of emotional expression. (Brotheridge, 2006). Pre-service is an important stage in the growth of teachers. Teaching internships provide teachers who are about to entering the workforce with the opportunity to integrate theory into practice and are a key component in developing initial teaching skills. (Cheng Xiaotang & Sun Xiaohui. 2010). Learning to teach involves complex cognitive activities and strong emotional experiences, and pre-service teachers have roles both as students and teachers in their internships,

which can lead to emotional dilemmas due to role conflict. Therefore, the development of emotional competence is as important as the development of knowledge and skills in pre-service teacher education. (Zembylas, 2004). Most of the domestic research on emotional labour focuses on in-service teachers (Gu Haibo, Xu Yannan, 2021), while there is a relative lack of research on the emotional labour of pre-service teachers, and the existing research focuses on their identity and professional development, ignoring the importance of emotions. Therefore, it is necessary to focus more on the emotional labour of teachers who are about to entering the workforce to help them understand emotional changes and enhance their self-identity and teaching beliefs through emotional management.

Based on the current situation, this study attempts to achieve the following goals. First, this study will explore emotional labour strategies on the basis of emotion regulation theory in order to

better grasp the emotional labour dynamics of pre-service English teachers in Xinjiang. Moreover, this essay will explore the factors affecting pre-service English teachers' use of emotional labour strategies and conduct a comprehensive and systematic analysis of these factors to make pre-service English teachers aware of the importance of emotional labour. In addition, this paper will make some basic suggestions for pre-service English teachers to enhance their beliefs in teaching and improve the quality of teaching.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Questions

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive inquiry into the use of emotional labour strategies by pre-service English teachers from the following two issues.

- 1. What is the current situation of pre-service English teachers' employment of emotional labour strategies to regulate their emotions in their teaching practicum?
- 2. What are the factors that affect the use of emotional labour strategies by pre-service English teachers?

### 2.2 Research Participants

#### 2.2.1 Participants of Questionnaire

In terms of the questionnaire for this study, the participants in this study (N=100) consisted of undergraduate and postgraduate students from a normal university in Xinjiang who had completed teaching practicum in different regions. The sample consisted of 5 males (5%) and 95 females (95%), including 20 pre-service English teachers (20%) from key schools and 80 pre-service English teachers (80%) from ordinary schools, with the vast majority of them being postgraduates (53%) and 47 undergraduates (47%).

#### 2.2.2 Participants of Interview

In this study, six pre-service English teachers were selected for semi-structured interviews from among the 100 who responded to the questionnaire. These six interviewees came from different regions and levels of schools in Northwest China, with different educational backgrounds and experiences, and taught at different grade levels. Therefore, these six interviewees helped to examine some of the factors that influence pre-service English teachers' use of emotional labour strategies. ("Table 1")

Table 1. Basic information of participants of interview

Name	Gender	Education attainment	Teaching phase	Practicum region	Level of schools
PST 1	male	undergraduate	junior	rural	Ordinary school
PST 2	female	undergraduate	primary	rural	Ordinary school
PST 3	female	undergraduate	senior	urban	Ordinary school
PST 4	female	graduate	senior	urban	Key school
PST 5	female	graduate	junior	urban	Key school
PST 6	female	graduate	junior	urban	Ordinary school

#### 2.2.3 Research Instruments

To address these two research questions, this study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The use of mixed research methods enabled us to gain a rich and multifaceted understanding of pre-work English teachers' emotional labour experiences, which could compensate for the problems associated with the use of a single research method. The following two research tools were used in this study: (1) a

questionnaire to investigate the characteristics of pre-service English teachers' use of emotional labour strategies in their teaching practice; and (2) semi-structured interviews to further analyse the application of teachers' emotional labour strategies and to explore the factors that influence pre-service English teachers' use of emotional labour strategies.

### 2.2.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire for this study was adapted from Zhu Shenhai (2020). Combining previous literature and scales, he developed the Emotional Labour Strategies Scale for High School English Teachers, which covers four dimensions of emotional labour, namely, surface action, deep action, natural action, and deliberate discordant action. Specifically, each dimension contains different emotional labour strategies: surface acting (SA) includes pretending (item 1, 2, 4, 11), restraining (item 5, 7, 13, 14, 17, 20), and hiding (item 32, 35, 37); deep acting (DA) includes reframing (items 16, 30, 38), refocusing (items 3, 6, 9, 12), and separating (item 29, 33, 34, 36); naturally acting (NA) includes releasing (item 8, 10, 15, 18, 19) and outpouring (item 22, 24, 26, 28, 31); and Deliberately dissonance acting (DDA) (item 21, 23, 25, 27) does not include any sub-strategies.

As the item descriptions in this questionnaire are more in line with the specific manifestations of

emotion labour that pre-work teachers may encounter during their internships, and in line with the expressive habits of pre-work teachers, the questionnaire of Zhu (2020) was adapted in this study to address the first research question of this research. However, with reference to Yin's (2012) strategies of emotional division of labour, deliberate dissimulation and hidden strategies in surface performances have not been validated by a large number of studies. Therefore, this study combined Yin's (2012) and Zhu Shenhai's (2020) dimensions of emotional labour and eventually eliminated deliberate dissimilar performances and hidden strategies from the scale. In addition, this study changed the description of "natural behaviour" to "expression of naturally felt emotions" (ENFE) because the former has the same meaning as the latter, and the latter is more acceptable for public research. Eventually, a 31-item Emotional Labour Strategies Questionnaire for Preservice English Teachers was developed for this study, and the specific item distribution and sample questions are shown in "Table 2".

Table 2. Basic information of questionnaire

Dimension		Definition	Items	Sample
SA	Pretending	Intentionally displaying positive emotions that do not correspond to actual emotions in order to carry out the teaching work smoothly	1, 2, 4, 11	T4. When there is a conflict with students, I pretend to act calm to cover up my panic
	Restraining	Intentionally suppressing their negative emotions in order to achieve teaching goals	5, 7, 13, 14, 17, 20	T7. I try to restrain my displeasure when conflict with students
DA	Reframing	Regulating emotions by changing the perception of their current situation when they encounter difficulties at work	16, 26, 31	T31. When students make mistakes, I try to convince myself that this is an opportunity to help they grow up
	Refocusing	Diverting attention to avoid negative influences which have little impact on you	3, 6, 9, 12	T3. When I feel unhappy at work, I will do something to make myself happy
	Separating	Distinguishing between "personal emotions" and "work emotions"	25, 28, 29, 30	T25. Even things do not go my way, I still stay positive at work
ENFE	Releasing	Expressing genuine positive emotion	8, 10, 15, 18, 19	T10. I feel happy when I receive recognition from students
	Outpouring	Expressing genuine negative emotion	21, 22, 23, 24, 27	T22. When there is a bad discipline in my class, I will show my anger

In addition, a 5-point Likert scale is employed to rate each item ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). The higher the grades are, the more emotional strategies teachers employ in their daily work. In addition, this study conducted a small-range pilot study. A total of 30 pre-service English teachers who had undergone, or were undergoing teaching practicum were selected to

answer the present questionnaire. The statistical result showed that the Cronbach alpha was 0.924, which indicates the questionnaire is reliable. Besides, the questionnaire with a KMO value of 0.898, and the result is at a significant level ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus the validity and reliability of the questionnaire can be ensured.

### 2.2.3.2 *Interview*

This study employed a semi-structured interview method to conduct individual interviews with six pre-service English teachers. The interviews generally covered the teachers' emotional cases in their teaching practice and the reasons for emotional regulation. These two areas contained a total of five questions to define the factors influencing pre-service English teachers' use of emotional labour strategies.

According to Zhu Shenhai (2020), the factors influencing student teachers' use of emotional labour strategies include three main levels: individual, organization and socio-culture. The above classification provides an analytical framework to address the second research question of this research. During the actual interviews, follow-up questions will be elicited based on the participants' responses, so the questions will vary according to the actual situation. ("Table 3")

Table 3. Coding framework

Three Level Coding	Two Level Coding	One Level Coding	Typical Quotation	Emotional Labor Strategies
Factors Influencing Emotional Labor Strategies	Individual Factors	Emotional intelligence	I hope to influence students through positive emotional expressions.(PST6-I-3)	Releasing
		Teachers' belief	I believe teachers and students can profit from each other, if students point out my mistake in class, I won't feel humiliated but rather delighted (PST2-I-3)	Reframing
		Self-identity	I was just an intern without any right to say anything. Even if I am helpless, I will not say it.(PST4-I-4)	Restraining
	Organizational Factors	Students	I am very happy and excited when the students get good grades on the test or makes progress. (PST1-I-2)	Releasing

## 3. RESULTS

This chapter reports on the current status of pre-service English language teachers' use of emotional labour strategies in their teaching placements and provides a detailed analysis and discussion of the differences in their demographic variables. In addition, the factors contributing to pre-service English teachers' use of emotional labour in their teaching placements were explored through the analysis of interview data. The above two analyses aim to answer the two research questions mentioned above.

### 3.1 *The Overall Situation of the Use of Emotional Labor Strategies*

#### 3.1.1 *Gender Differences*

A total of 100 pre-service English teachers were selected for this study, of which only five were male. Due to the extreme imbalance in the number

of males and females, only descriptive statistics were used in this study to explore the current status of the use of emotional labour strategies by male and female pre-service English teachers.

According to the survey, the mean values of emotional labour strategies of male pre-service English teachers were generally higher than those of female pre-service English teachers. Besides, male pre-service English teachers generally had higher mean values for emotional labour strategies than females, indicating that they used more emotional labour strategies in their teaching practice. In addition, males and females had the highest mean values for the releasing strategy (male = 4.400, female = 4.316) and the lowest mean values for the outpouring strategy (male = 3.320, female = 3.158), which suggests that there is a statistically significant similarity between male and female pre-work English language teachers in this study in terms of their use of emotional labour strategies.

### 3.1.2 Educational Attainment Difference

Considering that both undergraduate and postgraduate teacher training students participated in this study. Accordingly, this study wished to verify whether there were differences between undergraduate and postgraduate students in the use of emotional labour strategies in teaching.

There is an extremely significant difference between undergraduates and postgraduates in the use of pretending strategy ( $P < 0.01$ ), with postgraduates using pretence strategies at a higher mean than undergraduates, which suggests that postgraduates are able to consciously restrain or regulate their negative emotions and try to show positive emotions in their teaching practice, which leads to the smooth running of teaching. In particular, the mean difference between undergraduates and postgraduates is the largest in the use of restraining strategy ( $MD = 0.988$ ), which also indicates that postgraduates are more adept at regulating negative emotions.

Similarly, the mean scores of the other six strategies used by graduate students were higher than those of undergraduate students, except for the confabulation strategy, which suggests that graduate students are more capable of applying a variety of emotional labour strategies in their teaching practice because they have more knowledge and practical experience in teaching. Meanwhile, there is no significant difference between graduate students and undergraduates in the use of emotional labour strategies. The mean difference between undergraduate and graduate students in terms of "refocusing" and "separating" was minimal ( $MD = 0.230$ ,  $MD = 0.230$ ), suggesting that undergraduate and graduate students are well differentiated in terms of their personal lives and internship experiences. When faced with stress or unpleasantness from internships, they can take certain measures to flexibly divert their attention so that their personal lives are not negatively affected.

### 3.1.3 Teaching Phase Differences

In order to further identify whether there is a difference in the use of emotional labour strategies by pre-work English teachers, a one-way ANOVA was conducted on 100 participants in this study. The results of the one-way ANOVA indicated that there was no significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ) in the use of emotional labour strategies by pre-service English teachers at different stages of teaching. However, in terms of the mean scores of the overall

data, the releasing strategy was most frequently used by pre-work English teachers at all three stages ( $M = 4.300$ ,  $M = 4.365$ ,  $M = 4.273$ ), and the least frequently used was the outpouring strategy ( $M = 2.295$ ,  $M = 3.200$ ,  $M = 3.226$ ), which suggests that pre-service English teachers are more willing to authentically display their positive emotions and to regulate their negative emotions through surface or deep behaviours, where pretending ( $M = 3.719$ ,  $M = 3.527$ ,  $M = 3.480$ ) and refocusing ( $M = 3.183$ ,  $M = 3.826$ ,  $M = 3.829$ ) were the more common sub-strategies used by pre-work English teachers.

In terms of teaching phases, in addition to "releasing" being the most common strategy used by pre-work English teachers at all three stages, pre-work English teachers at the primary schools level also frequently used "separating" ( $M = 3.781$ ), pre-service English teachers at the middle school level more frequently used "refocusing" ( $M = 3.826$ ), and pre-service English teachers at the high school level did the same. In conclusion, pre-service English teachers at all three levels were more likely to use deep acting.

### 3.1.4 Region Differences

There is a gap in educational resources between urban and rural areas, but with government and policy support, this gap is gradually narrowing. This section uses an independent samples t-test to figure out whether pre-service English language teachers interning in urban and rural areas use different emotional labour strategies.

There was a significant difference in the use of the strategies of pretending ( $p < 0.05$ ) and releasing ( $p < 0.01$ ) by pre-service English language teachers in each of these two districts. In addition, it can be inferred from the mean values of each strategy that rural pre-work English teachers ( $M = 3.583$ ) were more adept at using the pretending strategy than urban pre-work English teachers ( $M = 3.505$ ). In the releasing strategy, urban pre-service English teachers ( $M = 4.443$ ) scored higher than rural pre-service English teachers ( $M = 4.169$ ). In addition, both rural and urban pre-work English teachers' mean scores in the outpouring strategy were lower than those of the other strategies, which further proves that pre-service English teachers with less teaching experience are usually not good at expressing negative emotions directly in their teaching practice, but rather make sure that they are expressing their emotions appropriately by trying to feel the emotions required by the teaching situation.

### 3.2 School Differences

To explore whether there are differences in the use of emotional labour strategies among pre-work English teachers when they are assigned to different types of schools, this section was analysed using the independent samples t-test. The results showed that there was no huge difference in the use of emotional labour strategies by pre-service English teachers in different school types ( $p>0.05$ ). However, pre-work English teachers in both ordinary and key schools showed a higher frequency use of deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotion. Among them, the mean values of refocusing and separating both reached more than 3.7, and the mean value of releasing even exceeded 4. This indicates that pre-work English teachers in both ordinary schools and key schools were able to use certain deep acting to regulate their emotions from the inside and to ensure that their inner emotions and expressions of emotions were constant. In addition, the lowest mean for outpouring also indicates that pre-service English teachers are less likely to express their negative emotions in their teaching practicum.

### 3.3 Discussion

#### 3.3.1 The Overall Situation of the Use of Emotional Labour Strategies

To explore the current status of pre-work English teachers' use of emotional labour strategies in their teaching practice, this study investigated this issue using the revised Emotional Labour Scale. A total of 102 questionnaires were collected for this study and 100 valid questionnaires were retained after screening and elimination by the researcher.

Pre-service English teachers used various strategies. The mean values of all seven sub-strategies are above the median value, indicating that pre-work English teachers are very willing to express their positive emotions authentically, while the lowest mean value of outpouring ( $M=3.166$ ) indicates that pre-service English teachers are less willing to express their negative emotions authentically compared to other emotion regulation expressions. Therefore, they are more inclined to use other emotional labour strategies such as refocusing ( $M=3.825$ ), separating ( $M=3.74$ ), and pretending ( $M=3.54$ ) to regulate, alleviate, or divert their negative emotions. In addition, the means for the full scale did not differ much and the standard deviation ( $SD=0.487$ ) was relatively low. The sub-

scale scores had larger standard deviations, indicating greater diversity in respondents' behaviours.

#### 3.3.2 The Influence of Demographic Variables on the Use of Emotional Labor Strategies

##### 3.3.2.1 Gender Differences

A total of 100 pre-work English teachers were selected for this study, of which only five were male. Due to the extreme imbalance in the number of males and females, only descriptive statistics were used in this study to explore the current status of the employment of emotional labour strategies by male and female pre-service English teachers.

According to the survey, the mean values of emotional labour strategies of male pre-service English teachers were generally higher than those of female pre-work English teachers. Besides, male pre-work English teachers generally had higher mean values for emotional labour strategies than females, indicating that they used more emotional labour strategies in their teaching practice. In addition, males and females had the highest mean values for the releasing strategy (male = 4.400, female = 4.316) and the lowest mean values for the outpouring strategy (male = 3.320, female = 3.158), which suggests that there is a statistically significant similarity between male and female pre-service English language teachers in this study in terms of their use of emotional labour strategies.

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### 3.3.2.3 *Teaching Phase Differences*

In order to further identify whether there is a distinction in the use of emotional labour strategies by pre-service English teachers, a one-way ANOVA was conducted on 100 participants in this study. The outcomes of the one-way ANOVA showed that there was no huge difference ( $p>0.05$ ) in the use of emotional labour strategies by pre-service English teachers at different stages of teaching. However, in terms of the mean scores of the overall data, the releasing strategy was most frequently used by pre-work English teachers at all three stages ( $M=4.300$ ,  $M=4.365$ ,  $M=4.273$ ), and the least frequently used was the outpouring strategy ( $M=2.295$ ,  $M=3.200$ ,  $M=3.226$ ), which suggests that pre-service English teachers are more willing to authentically display their positive emotions and to regulate their negative emotions through surface or deep behaviours, where pretending ( $M = 3.719$ ,  $M=3.527$ ,  $M=3.480$ ) and refocusing ( $M=3.183$ ,  $M=3.826$ ,  $M=3.829$ ) were the more common sub-strategies used by pre-work English teachers.

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### 3.3.2.4 *Region Differences*

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### 3.3.2.5 *School-level Differences*

In order to explore whether there are differences in the use of emotional labour strategies among pre-service English teachers when they are assigned to different types of schools, this section was analysed using the independent samples t-test. The findings showed that there was no huge difference in the employment of emotional labour strategies by pre-service English teachers in different school types ( $p>0.05$ ). However, pre-service English teachers in both ordinary and key schools showed a higher frequency use of deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotion. Among them, the mean values of refocusing and separating both reached more than 3.7, and the mean value of releasing even exceeded 4. This indicates that pre-service English teachers in both ordinary schools and key schools were able to use certain deep acting to regulate their emotions from the inside and to ensure that their

inner emotions and expressions of emotions were constant. In addition, the lowest mean for outpouring also shows that pre-service English teachers are less likely to express their negative emotions in their teaching practicum.

### 3.3.3 *Factors Influencing Pre-service English Teachers' Use of Emotional Labour Strategies*

Research Question 1 found demographic vars like education, practicum region affect pre-service English teachers' emotional labour use. Prior studies mainly focus on in-service teachers, lacking validity for pre-service teachers. This section explores pre-service factors via semi-structured interviews.

In terms of individual factors, the first is emotional intelligence. The higher the level of pre-service English teachers' emotional intelligence, the more they are able to perceive and regulate their emotions, deal with teacher-student relationships through appropriate emotional expression, and create an atmosphere conducive to English learning. This is consistent with the findings of Yin et al. (2013) that there is a significant positive correlation between teachers' emotional intelligence and teachers' engagement in deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotion.

Second, it is the teacher beliefs. It has been suggested that there is an interactive, dynamic and reciprocal relationship between beliefs and emotions (Frijda, 2000). Pre-work English teachers' beliefs are closely associated with their use of emotional labour strategies. Strong beliefs motivate teachers to show more positive emotions and maintain positive beliefs through emotional labour strategies to facilitate teaching practice.

Furthermore, there is self-identity. Pre-service English teachers' self-identity in teaching practice affects their choice of emotional labour strategies. A strong sense of self-identity motivates teachers to practice a good sense of professionalism with in-depth actions, whereas a conflicting sense of identity may lead to a greater tendency to use superficial behaviors.

Organizational factors involve interactions with students, mentor teachers and peers. Pre-service English teachers use emotional labour strategies to identify or regulate their emotions when responding to student performance in order to balance friendship and authority (Ying Zhu, 2020). In their dealings with mentor teachers, pre-service teachers

use different emotional labour strategies depending on the type of mentor teachers. In addition, Goodnough et al. (2009) stated that peers, as a source of psycho-social support, also influence pre-work English teachers' use of emotional labour strategies.

Regarding social factors, traditional Chinese culture has an important influence on pre-work English teachers' emotion regulation. In the face of high power, pre-service teachers tend to mask their true emotions with superficial behaviour, a result that supports Matsumoto's (2007) view; in a social atmosphere that respects teachers, they express positive emotions with naturally felt emotions; and the traditional cultural view of the teacher motivates pre-service teachers to internalize the moral expectations of society for teachers with in-depth actions.

In addition, the employment of teaching technology also affects pre-work English teachers' use of emotional labour strategies to some extent. Although technology integration enriches teaching and learning, pre-work teachers inevitably develop negative emotions when using teaching technology. However, they were able to transform negative emotions into positive ones through deep action and face technology work with a positive mindset. At the same time, the limitations and confusions of online teaching practice also brought tension and helplessness to the pre-service English teachers, prompting them to use emotional labour strategies such as pretending to promote positive emotions to make the online course run smoothly.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, this study is to reveal the emotional labour strategies of pre-service English teachers. Based on the data analysis, the main findings of this study are as follows:

The first finding of this study was that pre-service English teachers' use of emotional labour strategies was generally moderate to high.

The second finding of this study is that the factors influencing pre-work English teachers' use of emotional labour strategies come from three main sources: individual, organizations and society. Firstly, individual factors mainly include pre-work English teachers' emotional intelligence, teaching beliefs and self-identity. Second, organizational factors are reflected in three areas: students, mentor teachers and peers. Third, social factors included



traditional Chinese culture and the use of teaching technology. In addition, the idea of respecting teachers leads pre-service English teachers to use expression of naturally felt emotions (releasing). In addition, teacher morality also affects pre-service English teachers' use of deep acting (reframing). The use of teaching technology influences pre-service English teachers to be more likely to use deep acting (reframing).

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