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# Research Article

# A study of the relationship between elementary school teachers' occupational self-efficacy, emotional labor strategies and occupational well-being

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between primary school teachers' occupational self-efficacy, emotional labor strategies, and job satisfaction. A questionnaire survey was conducted with primary school teachers in a certain city, and statistical analysis methods were used to obtain the research results. Firstly, primary school teachers generally have a high level of job satisfaction, with certain demographic differences. Among them, female teachers have higher job satisfaction than male teachers, and teachers with more years of experience show higher job satisfaction. Secondly, primary school teachers have overall good occupational self-efficacy, which is positively correlated with job satisfaction. That is, an increase in occupational self-efficacy can promote teachers' job satisfaction. Additionally, primary school teachers generally adopt positive coping and expressive strategies in emotional labor. There is a certain correlation between emotional labor strategies and job satisfaction, with teachers who adopt positive coping and expressive strategies showing higher job satisfaction. Finally, occupational self-efficacy plays a mediating role between emotional labor strategies and job satisfaction. That is, the choice of emotional labor strategies is influenced by teachers' occupational self-efficacy, which in turn affects their job satisfaction. This study provides empirical evidence for understanding the job satisfaction of primary school teachers and further reveals the mechanisms of the roles of occupational self-efficacy and emotional labor strategies in influencing teachers' job satisfaction. The research results can provide relevant policies and measures for educational managers to promote the professional development and well-being of primary school teachers.

*Keywords:* elementary school educator; self-efficacy; emotional labor strategies; professional well-being; relationship investigation

## 1. Introduction

In the field of education, the professional competence of teachers directly impacts students' learning outcomes and development. The core of the teacher belief system lies in their professional self-efficacy, which is closely related to their expectations for teaching effectiveness and sustainability. Moreover, teachers are inevitably engaged in emotional communication with students in their day-to-day educational practice, and this process of emotion regulation is defined as emotional labor. The choice of emotional labor strategies has profound effects on teachers' psychological well-being and teaching performance. Professional well-being, as a key indicator of whether a teacher's career is successful, encompasses not only job

satisfaction but also dimensions of mental health. Although there is relatively abundant research on self-efficacy, emotional labor, and well-being, few studies have explored the interaction effects among these variables. Therefore, this study aims to comprehensively examine the relationship between primary school teachers' professional self-efficacy, emotional labor strategies, and professional well-being from an interdisciplinary research perspective. By combining theory and empirical methods, we hope to provide theoretical support and practical guidelines for enhancing positive experiences and job performance in teachers' careers[1].

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Occupational well-being

### 2.1.1. Conceptualization of occupational well-being

Occupational well-being refers to the satisfaction, enjoyment, and sense of fulfillment experienced by individuals in their workplace. It is an important indicator of a teacher's subjective psychological state. It is closely related to an individual's subjective feelings and emotional reactions towards their work, reflecting their overall job satisfaction and the importance of their work in their own development and well-being. In the field of education, the importance of occupational well-being is self-evident. A teacher's occupational well-being is not only closely related to their personal mental health and quality of life, but also directly affects their level of investment in education and the quality of their teaching. When teachers experience satisfaction and enjoyment, they become more invested in their teaching work and are more likely to actively address challenges and pressures in their work. Additionally, occupational well-being is closely linked to a teacher's work performance, student achievement, and school environment, and can promote positive teacher-student relationships and school development[2].

There are many complex and diverse factors that contribute to the formation and influence of occupational well-being. Factors such as an individual's values, work environment, and the challenge level of their work tasks, as well as work support and relationship quality, all have important impacts on occupational well-being. At the same time, an individual's own traits, work satisfaction, and sense of occupational self-efficacy also shape and regulate the formation of occupational well-being to a certain extent. Therefore, improving occupational well-being requires comprehensive consideration and intervention from multiple levels and perspectives. In order to better focus on and improve teacher's occupational well-being, researchers and education administrators need to recognize the importance of occupational well-being and explore relevant influencing factors and intervention strategies. Only by improving the work environment, enhancing job satisfaction, and strengthening individual's vocational competence and social support can we ensure that teachers gain a higher level of occupational well-being, making greater contributions to the development of education and the growth of students[3].

### 2.1.2. Measurement of occupational well-being

The measurement of professional well-being is an emerging field, and currently, there is no globally standardized scale specifically designed to measure occupational happiness. Hence, professionals typically rely on other indicators based on their individual needs and research objectives for assessing professional well-being. Scholars in the field of measuring professional happiness consider factors such as job emotions, job satisfaction, and turnover intention as evaluation criteria. Some scholars also analyze variables like physical health and job satisfaction as outcomes of employee happiness.

In China, research on teacher's professional well-being is ongoing. Some scholars have developed questionnaire tools to measure teacher's professional happiness. For instance, a questionnaire created by Shu

Congmin examines the professional happiness of preschool teachers, taking into account factors such as recognition and career choices. Xiaojie's questionnaire for primary school teachers consists of two parts, evaluating happiness by incorporating international facial scales and categories of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence well-being. Jiang Yan has also developed a questionnaire focused on primary school teachers' professional happiness, with considerations including career choices, colleague relationships, job emotions, job satisfaction, physical health, and a sense of accomplishment.

The introduction of these questionnaire tools has broadened the scope of assessing teacher's professional well-being and contributed to advancements in this field. However, there still remains a need for further analysis and evaluation of teacher's professional happiness. Therefore, continuous improvement and refinement of assessment tools are required to comprehensively and accurately understand and enhance teacher's professional well-being[4].

## 2.2. Occupational self-efficacy

### 2.2.1. The concept of career self-efficacy

Occupational self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence and belief in their ability to successfully complete tasks and achieve goals in a specific professional field. It is a subjective evaluation of one's own abilities, reflecting the level of confidence in their competencies and performance within a professional role. The theory of occupational self-efficacy originated from social cognitive theory, proposed by psychologist Albert Bandura. According to this theory, an individual's self-efficacy is formed and developed through four main pathways: direct personal experience, observation of others' experiences and models, evaluation of more effective physiological indicators, and interpretation of feedback and evaluations.

In the professional domain, occupational self-efficacy plays a crucial role in an individual's career development and job performance. When individuals have higher levels of occupational self-efficacy, they are more likely to have positive work attitudes and behaviors, as well as the motivation and determination to overcome challenges and achieve success. Conversely, when individuals have lower levels of occupational self-efficacy, they may doubt their abilities and lack confidence, which can impact their job performance and career development. For teachers in particular, occupational self-efficacy is of great importance. Teachers face various challenges and difficulties in their teaching roles, and only with high levels of occupational self-efficacy can they better cope with these challenges and provide high-quality education. The cultivation of occupational self-efficacy can be achieved through continuous improvement of educational knowledge and skills, gaining successful experiences, and receiving support and encouragement.

In conclusion, occupational self-efficacy is an individual's evaluation and belief in their own abilities in a specific professional field, which holds significant implications for career development and job performance. It not only influences an individual's work attitudes and behaviors but also impacts their career satisfaction and well-being. Therefore, cultivating and enhancing occupational self-efficacy is vital for an individual's professional success and happiness[5].

### 2.2.2. Measurement of occupational self-efficacy

Occupational self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence and beliefs in their abilities, goal attainment, cognitive growth, interpersonal relationships, and adaptation in the occupational domain. Measuring occupational self-efficacy can help individuals understand their level of confidence and ability in the professional field, as well as their expectations and goals for career development.

There are several widely used questionnaire tools available for measuring occupational self-efficacy. One commonly used tool is the "Teacher Occupational Self-Efficacy Questionnaire" developed by Li

Weixing, which mainly assesses teachers' self-efficacy in the occupational domain. Later, Qiao Shuang improved upon this questionnaire and developed the "Primary School Teacher Occupational Self-Efficacy Questionnaire". This questionnaire uses a 5-point rating scale, with higher scores indicating higher self-efficacy in the occupational domain. The questionnaire covers five indicators, including occupational competence self-efficacy, occupational goal self-efficacy, and others, which align with statistical conditions in the field.

Based on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, the following five indicators can be established to constitute primary school teachers' occupational self-efficacy:

1) Occupational competence self-efficacy: beliefs in one's own competence in current work.
2) Occupational goal self-efficacy: beliefs in one's ability to achieve work objectives and produce effective outcomes.
3) Growth and cognitive self-efficacy: beliefs in how well one's work aligns with their inner ideal profession and in effectiveness regarding career advancement.
4) Interpersonal relationship self-efficacy: beliefs in one's ability to establish positive colleague relationships and other social interactions[6].
5) Physical and mental self-efficacy: beliefs in one's ability to adapt to the necessary physical and mental conditions required for work task completion.

By using these assessment tools, a comprehensive understanding of an individual's level of occupational self-efficacy can be attained. This can further provide targeted training, support, and interventions to help individuals enhance their professional abilities and improve their career development. However, it is important to consider individuals' subjective feelings and beliefs when measuring occupational self-efficacy, and to integrate these tools with objective factors for a comprehensive analysis. Therefore, these questionnaire tools serve as supplementary tools and should be interpreted and analyzed in context with the individual's actual situation.

## 2.3. Emotional labor strategies

### 2.3.1. Concept of emotional labor strategies

The concept of emotional labor strategy refers to the process of managing and regulating one's emotions in a work environment. It encompasses a range of strategies and skills individuals employ to regulate the emotions they experience during work and adjust their emotional state to meet the demands of the job. Emotional labor strategies may manifest differently in various work environments, but they all involve the control and management of internal emotions while maintaining a professional image and meeting requirements. These strategies can be classified into two categories: surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting refers to the display of appropriate facial expressions and emotions that align with the expected professional image, even if they do not reflect one's true feelings. For instance, forced smiles or masking true emotions. On the other hand, deep acting involves the introspective and adaptive regulation of one's internal emotional state to meet the demands of the work environment. Typical deep acting strategies include self-monitoring, cognitive reappraisal, and emotionalization techniques.

The effectiveness of different emotional labor strategies also varies across different occupational environments. For example, in the service industry, surface acting strategies such as forced smiles can enhance customer satisfaction, but long-term use without genuine emotional expression may have negative impacts on employees' mental and physical well-being. Deep acting strategies are generally considered more effective than surface acting, as they help employees better adapt to work challenges and pressures, contributing to increased job satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment.

In conclusion, emotional labor strategies play a crucial role in the workplace. They not only help maintain a professional image but also assist individuals in better adapting to their work environment, thereby enhancing work efficiency and job satisfaction. However, it is essential to carefully analyze whether reliance on surface acting strategies alone is appropriate, as it may have negative psychological and physical consequences for individuals[7].

### 2.3.2. Measurement of emotional labor strategies

The measurement of emotional labor strategies involves a process of assessing an individual's ability to manage and regulate emotions in the workplace. In order to accurately measure emotional labor strategies, researchers have developed and utilized a variety of measuring tools and techniques. This article provides an overview of several common methods for measuring emotional labor strategies.

1) Questionnaires: Questionnaires are one of the most common methods for measuring emotional labor strategies. Researchers can develop a series of questions to ask participants about the types, frequency, and effectiveness of their emotional labor strategies in the workplace.

2) Interviews: Interviews are a method for gaining a deep understanding of an individual's emotional labor strategies. Researchers can conduct face-to-face interviews with participants to explore how they manage and regulate emotions in the workplace. Interviews allow researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of an individual's emotional labor strategies and examine their relationship with work performance and happiness.

3) Behavioral observation: Behavioral observation is a method for directly observing an individual's emotional management strategies in the workplace. Researchers can obtain information on how individuals express, inhibit, and regulate emotions by observing and recording their behavior. This method can provide objective results in measuring emotional labor strategies but also carries the risk of subjective interpretation by the observer.

In summary, existing research suggests that many measuring tools for emotional labor strategies demonstrate good reliability and validity. For example, Gross and John's "Emotion Regulation Questionnaire" includes multiple sub-scales for both surface and deep strategies and is widely used in the field of emotional labor research. While these measuring tools provide effective means of assessing emotional labor strategies, it is important to strike a balance between objectivity and subjectivity in the measurement results. Additionally, due to the complexity of emotional labor, ongoing research is necessary to further improve and develop more comprehensive and accurate measuring methods[8].

### 2.4. Research on the relationship between emotional labor strategies, occupational self-efficacy and occupational well-being

### 2.4.1. A study of the relationship between occupational well-being and occupational self-efficacy

The themes of vocational satisfaction and professional self-efficacy are of great significance in the field of teaching. Research has shown a close correlation between professional self-efficacy and vocational satisfaction among teachers. Professional self-efficacy refers to teachers' confidence and belief in their ability to successfully accomplish teaching tasks and facilitate student learning. When teachers believe in their capacity to effectively instruct students and improve their learning performance, it enhances their vocational satisfaction. A study found that teachers' confidence in their teaching abilities and professional knowledge is positively associated with vocational satisfaction. Teachers who approach their work and students' progress with a positive attitude, as well as establish good teacher-student relationships, consequently augment their job satisfaction and sense of happiness.

Emotional labor strategies are also closely linked with teachers' professional self-efficacy and vocational satisfaction. Research indicates that how teachers manage and regulate their emotions during the process of emotional labor directly impacts their professional self-efficacy and vocational satisfaction. Utilizing positive and effective emotional labor strategies helps to enhance teachers' emotion regulation abilities, increase their self-efficacy, reduce work stress and negative emotions, and ultimately elevate their job satisfaction. Additionally, studies have discovered that teachers' vocational satisfaction is strongly associated with their relationships with students and colleagues. When teachers are able to establish positive relationships with students and receive recognition and support from them and their colleagues, their vocational satisfaction is enhanced. Conversely, teachers who experience a lack of positive teacher-student relationships and cooperative support from colleagues often encounter lower levels of job satisfaction.

To summarize, vocational satisfaction is closely correlated with professional self-efficacy. Positive evaluations and confidence in one's teaching abilities, as well as the adoption of positive and effective emotional labor strategies, aid in enhancing vocational satisfaction among teachers. Additionally, establishing positive relationships with students and colleagues is key to improving vocational satisfaction. Therefore, educational institutions and administrators should prioritize the cultivation of teachers' professional self-efficacy, support teachers in employing appropriate emotional labor strategies, and provide effective support and collaboration opportunities to enhance teachers' vocational satisfaction[9,10].

### 2.4.2. A study related to occupational self-efficacy and emotional labor strategies

Occupational self-efficacy and emotional labor strategies are two important variables in the field of teaching. Occupational self-efficacy refers to a teacher's confidence or belief in their ability to achieve desired educational goals and manage the educational environment in the classroom. Emotional labor strategies refer to the strategies teachers adopt to manage their emotions in their work. Research has shown a close relationship between occupational self-efficacy and emotional labor strategies.

First, there is a correlation between occupational self-efficacy and emotional labor strategies. Effective emotional labor strategies and a strong sense of occupational self-efficacy are mutually reinforcing, enabling teachers to better manage their emotions and improve their job performance. Some studies suggest that teachers who employ positive and effective emotional labor strategies can enhance their occupational self-efficacy. In fact, teachers can enhance their occupational self-efficacy by implementing effective emotional labor strategies to cope with work-related stress and negative emotions, such as surface acting or deep acting, actively addressing work-related pressure, and meeting work goals. Conversely, adopting ineffective emotional labor strategies, such as emotional suppression, can decrease teachers' work efficiency and job satisfaction and lower their occupational self-efficacy. The use of ineffective emotional labor strategies can lead to self-doubt in teachers' abilities, increase the cost of executing work tasks, and reduce work enthusiasm. Finally, occupational self-efficacy and emotional labor strategies significantly impact teachers' job performance[11]. High resilience strategies significantly affect reducing teacher fatigue and improving their performance and creativity in work. Additionally, utilizing appropriate emotional labor strategies and enhancing occupational self-efficacy can increase teachers' job satisfaction and professional well-being, improving their job performance and teaching quality.

In conclusion, there is a close relationship between occupational self-efficacy and emotional labor strategies, both of which significantly influence teachers' job performance and job satisfaction. Educational institutions and administrators need to pay attention to teachers' emotional labor strategies and occupational self-efficacy, providing them with appropriate work environments and learning opportunities to help optimize their emotional management strategies and improve their occupational self-efficacy. This will

contribute to enhancing teachers' job performance and satisfaction, ultimately improving students' learning outcomes[12].

### 2.4.3. A study related to occupational well-being and emotional labor strategies

Occupational happiness and emotional labor strategies are two important variables in the work of teachers. Occupational happiness refers to the positive emotional state that teachers have towards their work and life, which is one of the ultimate goals that they pursue in their work. Emotional labor strategies refer to the emotional management strategies that teachers adopt when facing different emotions in their work. There is an important relationship between these two variables.

Firstly, emotional labor strategies are related to occupational happiness. Research has shown that adopting incorrect emotional labor strategies can lead to teachers feeling tired, dissatisfied, and stressed. For example, if teachers adopt surface emotional labor strategies such as emotional suppression, it will increase their psychological costs and lower their occupational happiness. Using deep strategies, such as expressing emotions and using positive strategies to deal with emotions, can reduce the probability of teachers feeling tired and dissatisfied and increase their job satisfaction. Secondly, occupational happiness is also related to the choice of emotional labor strategies. Adopting proactive emotional labor strategies, such as expressing emotions and using positive strategies, can improve teachers' self-perceptions and job satisfaction, thereby enhancing their occupational happiness. At the same time, correct emotional labor strategies can also reduce teachers' psychological pressure and anxiety, thereby increasing their work motivation and happiness. Finally, occupational happiness and emotional labor strategies have an important impact on teachers' work performance. Good emotional labor strategies can help teachers better cope with work stress or negative psychological reactions and improve their work performance. At the same time, higher occupational happiness can motivate teachers to fulfill their job responsibilities more actively and effectively and improve the quality of education[13].

In summary, emotional labor strategies and occupational happiness are two major variables that affect teachers' psychological state and work performance. Correctly adopting emotional labor strategies can alleviate teachers' work pressure and negative psychological reactions, improve occupational happiness and satisfaction. However, incorrect emotional labor strategies may lead to teachers feeling tired, dissatisfied, and stressed. Educational managers and institutions should attach importance to the importance of emotional labor strategies and occupational happiness, and provide teachers with positive professional support and psychological development to help them enhance their emotional management abilities, improve occupational happiness and satisfaction, and thus improve their work performance and educational quality.

## 3. Research design

### 3.1. Purpose of the study

The present study aims to investigate the occupational well-being of primary school teachers and its associated psychological factors, in order to provide useful insights for enhancing job satisfaction among teachers, promoting the improvement of educational quality, and informing policy decisions by educational administrators.

To begin with, we will examine the overall status of occupational well-being among primary school teachers. Through a questionnaire survey administered to a representative sample, we will gain an understanding of teachers' self-assessment and subjective experiences regarding their work. This encompasses evaluations and satisfaction levels regarding job content, teaching environment, interpersonal relationships, and compensation, enabling a comprehensive assessment of the overall occupational

well-being among primary school teachers[14].

Furthermore, we will analyze the variations of emotional labor strategies, occupational self-efficacy, and occupational well-being across different demographic variables. We will focus on the relationships between factors such as gender, marital status, educational level, and years of teaching experience with the aforementioned variables. Through such analysis, we can better comprehend potential differences and tendencies in occupational well-being among diverse groups, offering valuable reference points for educational policy-making.

Thirdly, we will verify the associations among emotional labor strategies, occupational self-efficacy, and occupational well-being. These factors mutually influence each other in the context of teachers' work. By examining the connections between them, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the composition and influencing factors of teachers' psychological states. Specifically, we will explore these relationships through statistical analyses and seek potential moderating effects among these factors.

Lastly, we will examine the mediating effect of occupational self-efficacy on the relationship between emotional labor strategies and occupational well-being. Teachers often face various challenges in their work, which can sometimes lead to negative emotional reactions and a decline in job satisfaction. Occupational self-efficacy may serve as an important moderating variable influencing both emotional labor strategies and occupational well-being. Therefore, we will test its mediating effect on these two variables, aiming to better understand its impact pathways and mechanisms on occupational well-being.

## 3.2. Research assumptions

The following assumptions are made in this study:

Assumption 1: Primary school teachers experience a high level of occupational happiness. Through the investigation of primary school teachers, we conjecture that they can derive satisfaction and joy from their work, and have a strong sense of recognition and love for their career.

Assumption 2: There are significant differences in emotional labor tactics, professional self-efficacy, and occupational happiness among primary school teachers based on demographic variables such as gender, marital status, and education level. We speculate that primary school teachers may exhibit different emotional labor tactics and levels of professional self-efficacy and that these differences may affect their occupational happiness[15].

Assumption 3: There is a significant positive correlation between emotional labor tactics, professional self-efficacy, and occupational happiness among primary school teachers. We infer that as the level of emotional labor tactics and professional self-efficacy increase, the primary school teachers' occupational happiness will correspondingly increase.

Assumption 4: Professional self-efficacy plays a mediating role in the relationship between emotional labor tactics and occupational happiness of primary school teachers (as shown in **Figure 1**). We speculate that professional self-efficacy will affect the way teachers choose and respond to emotional labor tactics, thereby affecting their occupational happiness. Specifically, a higher level of professional self-efficacy will encourage teachers to adopt a more positive emotional labor strategy, which will further enhance their occupational happiness.
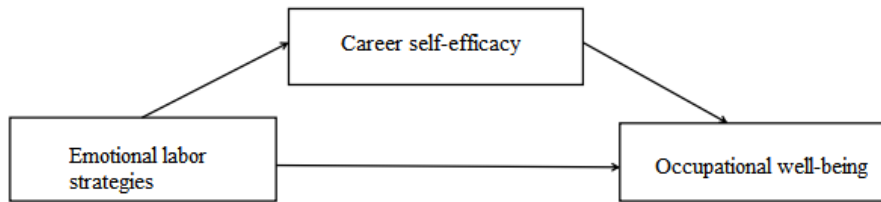
**Figure 1.** Brokering role.

Through an integrated investigation of primary school teachers' emotional labor strategies, professional self-efficacy, and occupational well-being, we aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among these variables and provide specific guidance and recommendations for enhancing the professional satisfaction of primary school teachers. Simultaneously, we also aspire to furnish educational institutions and policy makers with significant insights into the working environment and support for primary school teachers, with the ultimate goal of improving their work conditions and quality of life. Detailed research design, data collection, and analysis methods will be elucidated in subsequent chapters.

### 3.3. Research target

The focus of this study is on primary school teachers in a selected city in China. There are six primary schools included in the study, comprising two district-level schools, two city-level schools, and two oil field schools. A total of 280 primary school teachers were surveyed as part of this research. Data on their emotional labor strategies, professional self-efficacy, and job satisfaction were collected through a questionnaire. Prior to the survey, we obtained the list of teachers with the assistance of school leaders and the research team to ensure the inclusion of every teacher in our study. From the sample of 280 primary school teachers, a random selection was made to distribute the questionnaires, resulting in a total of 260 responses, yielding an actual response rate of approximately 93%. Among these, 246 responses were considered valid, resulting in an effective response rate of 94.6%, meeting the general standards for quantitative research and enabling an accurate representation of the overall situation of primary school teachers. Please refer to **Table 1** for a breakdown of the demographic characteristics of the primary school teachers.

**Table 1.** Status of specific demographic indicators of elementary school teachers.

| Demographic variables | Classification | Number of persons | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sex | Male | 39 | 15.9 |
| | Female | 217 | 84.1 |
| Marriage | Unmarried | 60 | 24.4 |
| | Married | 186 | 75.6 |
| Educational attainment | Middle school teacher | 12 | 7.7 |
| | Undergraduate | 212 | 67.1 |
| | Master and above | 22 | 25.2 |
| Age | 20–25 | 16 | 6.5 |
| | 26–30 | 73 | 29.7 |
| | 30–35 | 53 | 21.5 |
| | 36–40 | 42 | 17.1 |
| | 40–45 | 36 | 14.6 |
| | 46 and above | 26 | 10.6 |
| Years of working | 0–2 years | 60 | 24.4 |

| experience | 3–5 years | 38 | 15.4 |
| | 6 to 10 years | 38 | 15.4 |
| | 11 to 15 years | 25 | 10.2 |
| | 15 years and above | 85 | 34.6 |
| Position | Subject Teachers | 144 | 58.5 |
| | Classroom teacher | 96 | 39.0 |
| | Administrative Cadre | 2 | 0.8 |
| | Others | 4 | 1.6 |
| Title | Ungraded Teachers | 54 | 22.0 |
| | Second Grade Teachers | 102 | 41.5 |
| | First Grade Teachers | 37 | 15.0 |
| | Senior Teachers | 49 | 19.9 |
| | Senior Teacher | 4 | 1.6 |
| Type of school | District Schools | 83 | 33.7 |
| | City Schools | 106 | 43.9 |
| | Oilfield Schools | 57 | 22.4 |

**Data source:** questionnaire survey.

### 3.4. Research tools

### 3.4.1. Occupational happiness scale

This study utilized the "Primary School Teacher Occupational Well-being Questionnaire" developed by Qiao Shuang. This document primarily explores four domains: emotional support, achievement display, job recognition, and job attractiveness, comprising a total of 16 items. The internal consistency of the overall questionnaire and different domains was calculated in this study. The internal consistency coefficient of the total scale was approximately 0.79, while the internal consistency coefficients of the four domains ranged from 0.702 to 0.813, generally aligning with the requirements of reliability measurement.

### 3.4.2. Occupational self-efficacy scale

This study involved updating the questionnaire originally developed by Li Weixing, resulting in the creation of the "Primary School Teacher's Occupational Self-Efficacy Questionnaire." The scoring method for this survey utilizes a 5-point scale, with higher scores indicating a greater level of occupational self-efficacy. The internal consistency coefficients for measuring different domains of the survey range from 0.73 to 0.87, and the overall internal consistency coefficient for the entire survey is 0.86. The requirements for this survey align with statistical and research standards.

### 3.4.3. Emotional labor strategies scale

This questionnaire, titled "Emotional Labor Survey for Primary and Secondary School Teachers", was developed by the renowned professional Liu Yanling. It encompasses three domains: surface acting, passive deep acting, and active deep acting, with a total of fifteen questions. The Likert five-point scoring method was employed, whereby higher total scores indicate a greater emphasis on the use of emotional labor strategies. In this study, the internal consistency coefficient ($\alpha$) of the scale was found to be 0.672, indicating good reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Moreover, the questionnaire has demonstrated favorable fit indices through confirmatory factor analysis.

### 3.5. Data collection and statistical analysis and processing

This study utilized the method of questionnaire survey to collect data on primary school teachers' emotional labor strategies, vocational self-efficacy, and occupational well-being. Prior to data collection, we ensured the smooth progress of the study through communication and negotiation with primary school leaders. The detailed questionnaire included scales on emotional labor strategies, vocational self-efficacy, and occupational well-being. In the process of data collection, we carefully planned the questionnaire survey process and schedule to ensure that teachers had sufficient time to think and respond carefully. We provided a thorough explanation of the purpose and confidentiality of the survey, as well as necessary assistance and guidance as needed.

The collected data underwent a series of statistical analysis procedures. Firstly, we performed data cleansing and organization to exclude invalid or missing data. Then, we conducted descriptive statistical analysis using statistical software to calculate indicators such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage to understand the basic characteristics and distribution of the sample. Subsequently, we employed statistical methods such as correlation analysis and regression analysis to explore the relationship between emotional labor strategies, vocational self-efficacy, and occupational well-being. Specifically, we conducted a mediation analysis with vocational self-efficacy as the mediating variable to explore the mechanism of the role of vocational self-efficacy between emotional labor strategies and occupational well-being. In addition to quantitative analysis, we also conducted qualitative analysis by organizing and summarizing interview content from some teachers to complement and enrich the results obtained from quantitative analysis. The qualitative analysis mainly focused on teachers' subjective experiences and individual differences in emotional labor strategies and occupational well-being. Finally, we will interpret and discuss the results based on the statistical analysis. We will test research hypotheses, compare differences between different demographic variables and variables, and delve into the relationship between emotional labor strategies, vocational self-efficacy, and occupational well-being. Through these analyses, we hope to provide targeted suggestions and measures for the professional development and well-being enhancement of primary school teachers[16].

Through the collection and statistical analysis of data, this study will provide vital information and in-depth understanding of primary school teachers' emotional labor, vocational self-efficacy, and occupational well-being, contributing to a better understanding of their job satisfaction and work quality. Additionally, the research findings will offer valuable insights and inspiration for educational institutions, policy-makers, and teachers themselves.

## 4. Research findings

### 4.1. Analysis of the current situation of elementary school teachers' professional happiness

The professional satisfaction of elementary school teachers serves as a significant criterion in assessing their job contentment and overall happiness. In this study, in order to gain a more profound understanding of the current state of professional happiness among elementary school teachers, the researchers utilized a job satisfaction scale specifically designed for this purpose, subsequently analyzing and summarizing the obtained results. Based on the utilized job satisfaction scale, which employed a 5-point scoring system, the professional happiness scores for elementary school teachers ranged from 6 to 118, with an average score of 64.75. Referring to the descriptive summary data presented in **Table 2**, the four key elements pertaining to professional happiness are emotional support, demonstration of achievements, work recognition, and job attractiveness[17].

**Table 2.** Descriptive summary of professional well-being of elementary school teachers.

| Factor Name | lower limit | upper bound | M | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emotional support | 8.00 | 20.00 | 16.83 | 2.30 |
| Achievement display | 6.00 | 66.00 | 16.95 | 3.83 |
| Job recognition | 6.00 | 20.00 | 16.67 | 2.45 |
| Job attraction | 7.00 | 20.00 | 16.22 | 3.57 |
| Occupational happiness | 29.00 | 118.00 | 64.75 | 7.68 |

**Data source:** questionnaire survey.

According to the data compiled in **Table 2**, the mean values of the factors contributing to primary school teachers' career satisfaction are as follows: emotional support at 16.83, achievement display at 16.95, job recognition at 16.67, and job attractiveness at 14.30. These results suggest that primary school teachers exhibit notable performance in terms of achievement display, indicating their satisfaction and pride in the accomplishments they achieve through their work. Emotional support refers to the level of emotional support and care that primary school teachers feel in their work, whereas achievement display indicates the degree to which their achievements are recognized and showcased in their work. Job recognition refers to the degree of recognition and praise they receive for their work, while job attractiveness refers to their level of interest and attraction to their work.

In summary, primary school teachers' career satisfaction displays various patterns across different factors. Notably, their career satisfaction demonstrates greater performance in terms of achievement display. However, their performance in job attractiveness is relatively low and thus warrants attention and improvement. An in-depth understanding and analysis of the current state of job satisfaction among primary school teachers can aid in developing corresponding strategies and measures to enhance their career satisfaction and level of happiness[18].

## 4.2. Analysis of differences in demographic variables of elementary school teachers' professional happiness

### 4.2.1. Comparison of gender differences in elementary school teachers' professional happiness

The (independent samples) *t*-test was used to carry out a comparison of the gender aspects of the professional well-being of elementary school teachers, and the detailed status of the Please refer to the following **Table 3** shows.

**Table 3.** The effect of gender on the professional well-being of elementary school teachers.

| Variables | Sex | M | SD | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Occupational well-being | Male | 64.92 | 7.00 | 0.155 |
| | Female | 64.71 | 7.81 | |

**Data source:** questionnaire survey.

From the above table, it is clear that: the gender factor has little effect on the professional well-being of elementary school teachers.

### 4.2.2. A comparison of marital status of elementary school teachers' professional well-being

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between elementary school teachers' professional well-being and marital status, this study used the *t*-test to examine the difference between marital status on elementary school teachers' well-being. By grouping the happiness data of elementary school

teachers, they were divided into two groups, married and unmarried, according to their marital status. Then, a *t*-test was conducted to compare the happiness scores of these two groups in order to compare the differences between the two groups. Differences in the marital status of elementary school teachers' professional happiness were indicated as shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Differences in marriage and non-marriage among elementary school teachers' professional happiness.

| Variables | Married or not | M | SD | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Professional happiness | Married | 64.72 | 7.92 | −0.099 |
| | Unmarried | 64.83 | 6.91 | |

**Data source:** questionnaire survey.

It can be seen from the above table: There is no significant difference in the professional well-being of elementary school teachers in terms of marital or non-marital status.

### 4.2.3. Comparison of differences in elementary school teachers' professional well-being on school type indicators

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the occupational well-being of primary school teachers, this study employed the *F*-test method to compare the differences in the occupational well-being of primary school teachers across different types of schools. By collecting data on the occupational well-being of primary school teachers in various school types and utilizing the *F*-test method for comparison, the analysis aims to identify variations in the occupational well-being among different school types. Based on the results of the *F*-test, we can ascertain whether significant differences in occupational well-being exist among primary school teachers in different types of schools.

Table 5. Comparison of differences in elementary school teachers' professional well-being on school category variables.

| Variables | School category | N | M | SD | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| professional happiness | City Elementary Schools | 83 | 64.42 | 8.61 | 0.489 |
| | District Elementary Schools | 108 | 65.29 | 6.83 | |
| | Oilfield Elementary School | 55 | 64.18 | 7.83 | |

**Data source:** questionnaire survey.

According to **Table 5**, it can be seen that: the professional well-being of elementary school teachers does not show large differences in terms of indicators of school categories.

### 4.3. Analysis of differences in the current status of elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy and its demographic variables

### 4.3.1. Comparison of gender differences in elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy

To gain a deeper understanding of elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy and explore the impact of gender, this study utilized t-test analysis to compare the gender differences in the professional self-efficacy of elementary school teachers. Based on the data presented in **Table 6**, we separated the professional self-efficacy of elementary school teachers into two groups according to gender, and then applied the t-test method to compare the professional self-efficacy between the male and female groups.

**Table 6.** Gender differences in elementary school teachers' occupational self-efficacy.

| Factor Name | Sex | M | SD | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Occupational Ability Efficacy | Male | 30.10 | 3.08 | 0.822 |
| | Female | 19.33 | 5.16 | |
| Occupational Task Efficacy | Male | 22.00 | 2.26 | 5.296* |
| | Female | 20.91 | 2.78 | |
| Developmental and Cognitive Efficacy | Male | 15.97 | 2.49 | 0.184 |
| | Female | 15.77 | 2.79 | |
| Interpersonal Efficacy | Male | 13.51 | 1.37 | 1.942 |
| | Female | 13.12 | 1.65 | |
| Physical and Mental Efficacy | Male | 12.97 | 1.86 | |
| | Female | 12.96 | 1.68 | |
| Occupational Self-Efficacy | Male | 108.33 | 9.85 | 1.332 |
| | Female | 105.85 | 12.73 | |

**Data source:** questionnaire survey.

Based on the above table, it can be observed that there is no significant difference in the self-efficacy of primary school teachers in terms of gender indicators. However, a significant difference exists in the dimension of occupational task efficacy, with male teachers exhibiting higher levels of occupational task efficacy than female teachers.

### 4.3.2. A comparison of marriage differences in elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy and investigate the impact of marital status, this study employed the *t*-test method to compare the differences in professional self-efficacy among elementary school teachers based on their marital status. We categorized the teachers into two groups, namely married and unmarried, and then compared their professional self-efficacy using the t-test method. The detailed comparison results are presented in **Table 7**.

**Table 7.** Comparison of differences in marital status of elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy.

| Variables | Married or not | N | M | SD | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Career self-efficacy | Married | 186 | 106.06 | 12.56 | 0.413 |
| | Unmarried | 60 | 106.82 | 11.71 | |

**Data source:** questionnaire survey.

As shown in **Table 7**, there is a significant difference in the marital status of elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy.

### 4.3.3. Comparing differences in elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy on school category indicators

In order to have a more comprehensive understanding of elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy and to study the effect of school category on it, this study used *F*-test to compare the differences in elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy in terms of the indicators of different school categories. According to the data in **Table 8**, we divided the self-efficacy of elementary school teachers into different school categories for comparison. By using the *F*-test method, we can analyze the differences between different school categories in terms of professional self-efficacy.

**Table 8.** Comparison of differences in elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy on school category variables.

| Variables | School Category | N | M | SD | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Career self-efficacy | City Elementary Schools | 83 | 105.48 | 11.05 | 0.426 |
| | District Elementary Schools | 108 | 107.06 | 13.00 | |
| | Oilfield Elementary School | 55 | 105.80 | 12.94 | |

**Data source:** questionnaire survey.

According to **Table 8**, it can be seen that: elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy on the school category variable does not have a significant differences.

### 4.4. Analysis of differences in demographic variables of emotional labor strategies of elementary school teachers

### 4.4.1. Comparison of gender differences in emotional labor strategies of elementary school teachers

In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of elementary school teachers' emotional labor strategies and to explore the influence of gender on them, this study used the *t*-test to compare gender differences in elementary school teachers' emotional labor strategies. We divided elementary school teachers' emotional labor strategies into two groups, male and female, based on the data in **Table 9**, and compared the emotional labor strategies between the two groups using the *t*-test method.

**Table 9.** Gender differences in emotional labor strategies of elementary school teachers.

| Variable name | School category | N | M | SD | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Surface behavior | Shiji primary school | 83 | 12.14 | 3.55 | 0.023 |
| | District direct primary | 108 | 12..04 | 6.98 | |
| | Oilfield primary | 55 | 11.95 | 3.93 | |
| Passive depth behavior | Shiji primary school | 83 | 19.18 | 2.85 | 0.032 |
| | District direct primary | 108 | 19.23 | 3.06 | |
| | Oilfield primary | 55 | 19.10 | 2.86 | |
| Active depth behavior | Shiji primary school | 83 | 24.62 | 2.92 | 3.258* |
| | District direct primary | 108 | 24.51 | 3.11 | |
| | Oilfield primary | 55 | 23.43 | 3.24 | |
| Emotional labor strategy | Shiji primary school | 83 | 55.35 | 6.98 | 0.411 |
| | District direct primary | 108 | 55.78 | 9.98 | |
| | Oilfield primary | 55 | 54.49 | 7.99 | |

**Data source:** questionnaire survey.

From the above table, it can be seen that there is no significant difference between the emotional labor strategies of elementary school teachers on the gender variable.

### 4.4.2. A comparison of marital status differences in elementary school teachers' emotional labor strategies

In order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the emotional labor strategies of elementary school teachers and to study the effect of marital status on them, this study used the t-test to compare the differences in marital status of elementary school teachers in terms of their emotional labor strategies, as shown in **Table 10**.

**Table 10.** Comparison of differences in marital status of elementary school teachers' emotional labor strategies.

| Variable name | Marital status | N | M | SD | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emotional labor strategy | Be married | 186 | 55.38 | 9.09 | 0.103 |
| | spinster | 60 | 55.25 | 6.97 | |

**Data source:** questionnaire survey.

As can be seen from **Table 10**, there is a significant difference in the marital status of the emotional labor strategies of elementary school teachers.

### 4.4.3. Comparing differences in elementary school teachers' emotional labor strategies on indicators of school type

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of elementary school teachers' emotional labor strategies and to study the effect of school type on them, this study used the *F*-test to compare elementary school teachers' indicators of different school types on their emotional labor strategies. We divided elementary school teachers into groups according to different school kinds based on the data in **Table 11**, and then used the *F*-test method to compare the emotional labor strategies between these groups.

**Table 11.** Comparison of differences in emotional labor strategies of elementary school teachers on school category variables.

| Variable name | School category | N | M | SD | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Surface behavior | Shiji primary school | 83 | 12.14 | 3.55 | 0.023 |
| | District direct primary | 108 | 12..04 | 6.98 | |
| | Oilfield primary | 55 | 11.95 | 3.93 | |
| Passive depth behavior | Shiji primary school | 83 | 19.18 | 2.85 | 0.032 |
| | District direct primary | 108 | 19.23 | 3.06 | |
| | Oilfield primary | 55 | 19.10 | 2.86 | |
| Active depth behavior | Shiji primary school | 83 | 24.62 | 2.92 | 3.258* |
| | District direct primary | 108 | 24.51 | 3.11 | |
| | Oilfield primary | 55 | 23.43 | 3.24 | |
| Emotional labor strategy | Shiji primary school | 83 | 55.35 | 6.98 | 0.411 |
| | District direct primary | 108 | 55.78 | 9.98 | |
| | Oilfield primary | 55 | 54.49 | 7.99 | |

**Data source:** questionnaire survey.

According to **Table 11**, it can be seen that: there are no significant differences in the total scores of the school category variables for the emotional labor strategies of elementary school teachers significant difference, and only in the active depth behavior dimension there is a large difference. After an in-depth comparison, it is understood that teachers of municipal elementary school have much higher scores on the active deep behavior dimension than teachers of oil field elementary school.

### 4.5. A correlation analysis of emotional labor strategies, occupational self-efficacy and occupational well-being among elementary school teachers

According to the data in **Table 12**, there is a close relationship between elementary school teachers' emotional labor strategies, occupational self-efficacy and occupational well-being. Specifically, elementary school teachers' emotional labor strategies and occupational self-efficacy show a significant positive correlation, as well as a positive correlation between occupational self-efficacy and occupational well-being.

**Table 12.** Correlation analysis between emotional labor strategies, occupational self-efficacy and occupational well-being variables among elementary school teachers.

| Variable name | Emotional labor strategy | Professional self-efficacy | Career happiness |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emotional labor strategy | 1 | | |
| Professional self-efficacy | 0.410** | 1 | |
| Career happiness | 0.312** | 0.678* | 1 |

**Data source:** questionnaire survey.

The findings of this study demonstrate a strong correlation between the emotional labor strategies, occupational self-efficacy, and professional well-being of elementary school teachers. By gaining insight into and strengthening the positive relationships among these variables, it facilitates the development and implementation of corresponding policies and measures aimed at enhancing the emotional management abilities, professional confidence, and job satisfaction of elementary school teachers. These efforts ultimately foster their work effectiveness and overall welfare.

## 5. Analysis and discussion

### 5.1. Elementary school teachers' professional well-being and professional self-efficacy

When exploring the connection between primary school teachers' job satisfaction and professional self-efficacy, the study reveals a significant positive correlation between the two. After data analysis, a correlation coefficient of 0.312 was obtained, indicating that the positive relationship between professional self-efficacy and job satisfaction not only exists at the overall level, but also in its individual dimensions. This finding is in line with the previous hypothesized hypothesis.

The results of this study align with the conclusions drawn by previous scholars, such as Li et al., which emphasize the positive impact of teachers' professional self-efficacy on their job satisfaction[19]. This confidence is manifested in teachers' belief in their ability to effectively fulfill their teaching tasks and positively influence students' learning. If teachers doubt their own teaching effectiveness and attribute students' poor academic performance primarily to external factors, such as students' family background or personal qualities, this mindset may lead to a loss of enthusiasm for teaching and a lack of patience in their work, ultimately decreasing their job satisfaction over time. Particularly when facing educational challenges, maintaining a high level of self-efficacy can assist teachers in maintaining a positive attitude, enhancing their job satisfaction and overall well-being. Consequently, this positive self-perception and emotional experience provide teachers with greater motivation, inspiring them to strive for improvement and achieve a sense of accomplishment in their educational practice.

### 5.2. Elementary school teachers' professional well-being and emotional labor strategies

The analysis indicates a strong positive correlation between the emotion labor strategies employed by primary school teachers and their professional well-being. The research data reveals a robust correlation coefficient of 0.66, suggesting that emotion labor strategies serve as powerful predictors of professional happiness. Moreover, there are evident positive associations between different aspects of teachers' well-being and their utilization of distinct emotion labor strategies.

The findings highlight the crucial role of proactive deep acting behavior in shaping teachers' professional satisfaction among the multitude of factors affecting their sense of fulfillment. This discovery supports Brothridge's theory of resource preservation, which posits that emotion labor can be perceived as a process of acquiring resources[20]. Through adjusting their own perspectives to meet the school's emotional expression

requirements, teachers enhance their sense of personal achievement and potentially elevate their level of job satisfaction. This theory differs from Zapf's theory of emotional labor, as the latter considers deep acting as an intellectually demanding process that depletes significant psychological resources. The results of this study emphasize the resource preservation theory, emphasizing the positive utilization of emotion labor strategies to assist teachers in acquiring necessary resources and enhancing their professional well-being.

In conclusion, the application of emotion labor strategies in the primary school teacher population makes a significant contribution to improving their professional well-being. Individuals who actively and attentively adjust their strategies for emotional regulation experience positive experiences and accumulate resources in their professional lives, thereby strengthening their sense of professional happiness.

### 5.3. Elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy and emotional labor strategies

The research findings indicate a significant positive correlation between primary school teachers' professional self-efficacy and emotional labor strategies. Data analysis reveals highly significant interconnections between the indicators of professional self-efficacy and emotional labor strategies. This confirms the initial hypothesis that teachers with stronger professional self-efficacy are more likely to employ deep acting in their emotional labor.

This discovery emphasizes that when teachers have confidence in their teaching abilities, they are better able to effectively manage their emotions to meet the school's expectations regarding emotional expression. Teachers with higher self-efficacy in teaching often rely less on surface acting, which involves superficially adjusting their emotions without genuinely experiencing them. This suggests that teachers who recognize the effectiveness of their teaching methods tend to use more sincere and appropriate methods of emotional expression. Their strategies in emotional labor are typically simpler and more direct, enabling them to appropriately express emotions while maintaining inner balance.

Furthermore, research shows a low correlation between teachers' professional self-efficacy and surface acting. This indicates that teachers' general perceptions and evaluations of their educational effectiveness are not strongly linked to the surface emotional labor behaviors they tend to adopt. As a result, teachers who are confident in their teaching effectiveness may exhibit more genuine emotions in front of students. This not only contributes to improving the quality of education but also fosters more positive interactions between teachers and students.

## 6. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the field of education by examining the relationship between elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy, emotional labor strategies, and job satisfaction. The findings show that elementary school teachers generally have high levels of job satisfaction, and there is a positive correlation between professional self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Furthermore, employing positive emotional labor strategies enhances teachers' job satisfaction. These discoveries have significant implications for improving teachers' professional development and well-being. Education managers can cultivate teachers' professional self-efficacy by providing a better work environment and support to help increase job satisfaction and happiness. In addition, education institutions should pay attention to training and supporting emotional labor strategies to aid teachers in better coping with emotional stress at work, thus enhancing their job satisfaction. In summary, by gaining a deeper understanding of the relationships between elementary school teachers' professional self-efficacy, emotional labor strategies, and job satisfaction, this study offers theoretical and practical guidance for improving teachers' professional development and well-being. It has remarkable value in creating a positive and healthy educational environment and achieving the goal of providing quality

education.

This survey suffers from certain limitations. The random selection of samples introduces an element of chance, and the study is confined to three primary school teachers in Dongying City, potentially overlooking the potential influence of regional and rural-urban educational environment differences on the results. Future research should expand to a broader geographical area and encompass a more diverse range of teacher populations to thoroughly explore teacher professional well-being across different educational and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the research methodology is relatively narrow, relying predominantly on questionnaire surveys to gather data, which may restrict the depth and breadth of the findings. To deepen insights into teacher professional well-being, future studies should consider incorporating various research methods, such as interviews, to enhance the complexity and reliability of the discoveries.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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