Research Article

The impact of university teachers' perceived emotionally intelligent leadership on work performance: The mediating role of work passion

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the mechanism by which perceived emotionally intelligent leadership influences the work performance of university teachers, with work passion as a mediating variable. Based on the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, this study employed a questionnaire survey method targeting teachers from four universities in the central and eastern regions of China. A total of 478 questionnaires were distributed using a convenience sampling method. The study utilized scales for perceived emotionally intelligent leadership, work passion, and work performance. The results indicate that perceived emotionally intelligent leadership has a positive impact on the work performance of university teachers in the central and eastern regions of China; teachers' perceived emotionally intelligent leadership positively influences work passion; teachers' work passion positively affects work performance; and teachers' work passion plays a significant partial mediating role in the relationship between perceived emotionally intelligent leadership and work performance.

Keywords: Perceived emotionally intelligent leadership; teacher work performance; work passion

1. Introduction

With the continuous development and changes in the global economy, human resources have become a key driver of organizational success[1]. Work performance is directly related to the success of organizations, individual career development, and the effectiveness of team collaboration[2]. In every institution of higher learning, the work performance of teachers is a crucial consideration for the development of the school[3]. Researching the work performance of university teachers is of great significance for improving the quality of higher education[4]. Work performance is not only a reflection of teachers' individual capabilities and values but also a key factor in promoting the continuous development of higher education.

In the workplace, leaders influence the behavior of their members because they are seen as representatives of the organization[5]. The behavior of leaders can impact the behavior of their members[6]. Research indicates that leaders play a crucial role in enhancing work performance through various means, such as stimulating work motivation, setting clear goals, providing effective support, promoting teamwork,

offering constructive feedback, and encouraging innovation[7]. Therefore, it is possible to explore the relationship between perceived leadership and the work performance of university teachers from the perspective of perceived leadership[8,9].

Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (EIL) is a leadership theory developed and refined by American scholars Shankman and Allen[10] by integrating the concepts of Emotionally Intelligent (EI) and Leadership. Emotionally intelligent leadership refers to the ability of leaders to effectively identify, understand, utilize, and manage emotions during management and leadership processes[11]. Research has found that promoting and establishing EIL is crucial for creating a positive emotional atmosphere and driving organizations to higher levels of development[12]. Shankman and Allen[11] pointed out that leaders not only need to possess good intellectual qualities and professional skills but also need EIL to handle interpersonal relationships, solve problems, inspire team potential, promote teamwork and innovation, and improve work efficiency and performance. Universities, as a special type of organization, have work performance that includes not only teaching standards and research outcomes but also involves student development and campus culture construction [13]. Therefore, research on EIL can help university leaders better manage emotional climate, foster positive teacher-student relationships, and enhance teaching quality and work performance [14].

In the current era of neoliberal educational reform, higher education institutions are increasingly driven by performance-oriented management frameworks that emphasize measurable outcomes, rankings, and efficiency[15]. Although such approaches aim to enhance institutional competitiveness and accountability, they may inadvertently overlook the humanistic and relational dimensions of education—particularly the emotional and ethical needs of both faculty and students[16]. This study focuses on emotionally intelligent leadership to emphasize attentiveness, relational responsibility, and the promotion of individual well-being within educational communities.

The Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) is a widely applied theory in the fields of organizational behavior and leadership research[17,18]. Traditional leadership models typically view leadership as a universal phenomenon that can be uniformly applied throughout an organization[19]. In contrast, the LMX theory posits that leadership styles within each leader-follower relationship may vary. Due to the limited time, energy, and resources of leaders, this can affect the extent to which followers are integrated into the leader's inner circle and gain access to valuable resources and opportunities[20]. The exchange between leaders and members plays a crucial role in shaping employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, and performance, and organizations can implement strategies to enhance the quality of these relationships[21]. The work performance of university teachers is influenced by the nature of their relationship with leaders, and the quality of this relationship can affect job satisfaction, commitment, and overall performance[22]. Establishing good leader-teacher relationships is of great significance for promoting the long-term development and stability of schools[23]. Leaders need to develop personalized strategies to build and maintain good leader-teacher relationships based on the characteristics and needs of different teachers. By investing time and effort to build trust with teachers, provide support, and offer development opportunities, leaders can foster positive exchanges with them[24]. Applying the LMX theory to explore the relationship between Emotionally Intelligent Leadership and the work performance of university teachers in the central and eastern regions of China brings a fresh perspective to the research and practice of leadership.

Globalization, technological advancements, and increasing economic uncertainty have made the workplace more complex and challenging. People's attitudes and motivations towards work are important for individual career development and organizational performance[25]. Work Passion (WP), as a positive work emotion, refers to a strong interest in, engagement with, and enthusiasm for one's work or profession, and

plays a key role in improving work performance[26]. In the education sector, work passion is of great significance for promoting teachers' personal career development and enhancing teaching effectiveness[27]. The importance of work passion for teachers' teaching and performance is self-evident, making it particularly important to ensure and enhance teachers' work passion[28].

Research indicates that work passion is influenced by multiple factors, including personal characteristics, work environment, and organizational factors[29]. A positive organizational culture and leadership style can foster the development of work passion [30]. A leader who is supportive and empathetic can create a comfortable work environment, and can cultivate and maintain teachers' professional enthusiasm, thereby enhancing teachers' job performance and work passion[31]. Hao et al.[32] found that leadership behaviors promote work performance through both harmonious and obsessive work passion, indicating that work passion has an indirect mediating role between leadership behavior and work performance. Kessi et al.[33] argued that leadership has a significant impact on employees' work performance and may enhance work performance by promoting work passion. Stein[34] discovered that emotionally intelligent leadership can inspire individuals' passion through emotional intelligence and create shared goals within the organization, thereby improving organizational and individual work performance. Therefore, considering work passion as a mediating variable between emotionally intelligent leadership and work performance can help to better understand the mechanism by which EIL affects teachers' work performance, and provide effective leadership training and management strategies for schools.

This study is based on the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory and employs a questionnaire survey method for empirical research. It aims to explore the impact of university teachers' perceived emotionally intelligent leadership on work performance, as well as the mediating role of work passion. The study seeks to provide empirical evidence for university managers to adjust their leadership styles and develop effective incentive policies in a targeted manner, thereby enhancing teachers' work passion and performance. This will promote more humanized and effective management practices and improve performance management strategies for university teachers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Leader-Member exchange theory

The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, proposed by Graen and Uhl-Bien[35], is a leadership theory that explains and measures the quality of work relationships between leaders and employees within an organization. Traditional leadership theories assume that leaders treat all team members in a homogeneous manner. In contrast, the LMX theory acknowledges the diversity and uniqueness in these interactions[18]. A fundamental proposition of the LMX theory is that each manager tends to adopt different leadership styles for their subordinates[36]. In turn, each specific relationship and corresponding leadership style leads to differentiated responses and attitudes from subordinates, including different performance behaviors[37].

The core concept of the LMX theory is that leadership is more effective when leaders and followers can develop mature partnerships and thereby gain the many benefits that these relationships bring[35]. The LMX theory focuses on the binary relationships between leaders and individual followers, rather than organizational groups [38]. The LMX theory posits that there are differences in the relationships between leaders and different employees. Due to time constraints, leaders can only build special relationships with a part of their subordinates and maintain relative stability, forming a continuum of quality from low to high. Based on the closeness of the relationship between leaders and members, organizational members are divided into "in-group members" and "out-group members"[39]. In the framework of the LMX theory, the

characteristics of the relationship are mutual trust, respect, and obligation, while low-quality exchanges lack these elements. Followers in high-quality relationships are "in-group members," while those who experience low-quality relationships are "out-group members"[38]. In summary, the LMX theory provides a theoretical framework to help explain how the exchange relationships between leaders and members are formed, developed, and influence organizations[40].

2.2. The impact of perceived emotionally intelligent leadership on teacher work performance

Veshne and Munshi[41] found that emotional intelligence is a strategy that leaders can use to enhance subordinate engagement and develop subordinate work performance. Leaders with high emotional intelligence have a positive impact on followers' work outcomes [42]. Lam and O'Higgins[43] conducted a study with a sample of all management and non-management employees from two construction companies in Shanghai, China, involving 746 participants. Their findings indicated that perceived emotionally intelligent leadership has a significant and positive impact on work performance. Altındağ and Kösedağı[44] also found through empirical research that cultivating managers with high emotional intelligence can effectively improve individual work performance, and that individuals' perceived emotionally intelligent leaders have a positive effect on individual work performance.

In the field of education, the work of university teachers involves complex teaching and research tasks, which can be highly stressful[45]. When leaders are able to accurately understand the emotional states of teachers and provide support or encouragement at the right time, teachers feel more cared for and understood[46]. This emotional support can effectively alleviate teachers' work stress, increase their job satisfaction, and thereby enhance their work performance. Additionally, university teachers, in the long-term tasks of teaching and research, are prone to feeling confused or demotivated due to heavy tasks and diversified assessment criteria[47]. Leaders with emotional intelligence can understand the professional challenges and psychological needs of teachers, offer more opportunities for growth and guidance on career development paths, and help them rediscover the meaning and direction of their work [48]. This enhancement of professional identity can further stimulate teachers' work motivation and thus improve their work performance.

In summary, emotionally intelligent leadership has a positive predictive effect on work performance. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Perceived emotionally intelligent leadership among university teachers in the central and eastern regions of China has a positive impact on teacher work performance.

2.3. The impact of perceived emotionally intelligent leadership on work passion

Leaders with high emotional intelligence are adept at establishing supportive relationships with team members, which can enhance employees' sense of belonging and intrinsic motivation[49]. By demonstrating empathy and understanding of employees' emotions, leaders with high emotional intelligence can create a positive work atmosphere that encourages employees to fully engage in their roles, thereby increasing work passion. In addition, emotionally intelligent leadership is skilled at managing conflicts and promoting constructive communication within the workplace, which can further ignite employees' work passion[50]. By facilitating open dialogue and resolving interpersonal conflicts in a sensitive manner, these leaders cultivate a sense of psychological safety among team members, allowing them to express their ideas and concerns without fear of retaliation[51]. Such an environment fosters collaboration and creativity, enabling employees to derive greater satisfaction and a sense of achievement from their work tasks, thereby enhancing their overall work passion[52].

Emotionally intelligent leaders are able to recognize and respond to the emotional needs of teachers and provide emotional support. This support helps teachers feel more confident and motivated when facing heavy teaching and research tasks[53]. By understanding the psychological state of teachers and providing timely affirmation and encouragement, leaders can effectively reduce work stress and evoke positive emotions in teachers[54]. These positive emotions can be transformed into enthusiasm for work, making teachers more engaged in teaching and research activities[55]. In addition, emotionally intelligent leadership can create a positive work environment and enhance teachers' sense of belonging and team spirit [56]. Especially in knowledge-intensive organizations such as universities, teachers often face the pressure of working independently. A leader who can inspire positive emotions and promote cooperation will make teachers more willing to demonstrate creativity and initiative in their work, thereby showing more work enthusiasm [57]. Based on the above, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Perceived emotionally intelligent leadership among university teachers in the central and eastern regions of China has a positive impact on work passion.

2.4. The impact of work passion on teacher work performance

Song and Zhang[58] investigated the relationship between work enthusiasm and employees' work performance through a survey of 165 employees and their respective supervisors in China, and the results showed that work enthusiasm has a significant impact on work performance. Qadeer et al.[59] conducted a questionnaire survey among 210 full-time regular employees and 27 managers of a large commercial bank in Pakistan, and this paper shows that employees who are enthusiastic about their work have a positive impact on performance. Amalia et al. [60] found that in the field of education, the effect of work passion on work performance is still evident. Their survey of primary school teachers revealed that teachers' work passion has a positive and significant impact on organizational citizenship behavior and work performance.

Teachers with high levels of work passion exhibit greater creativity, proactivity, and sense of responsibility in their daily work. They are not only able to actively confront challenges in teaching and research but also provide students and colleagues with higher quality educational services and academic support[61]. Work passion drives teachers to be more innovative in teaching, to meticulously design curricula and teaching methods, and to enhance students' learning experiences and academic performance[62]. Furthermore, work passion also propels teachers to continuously explore new issues and seek breakthroughs in the field of research, thereby enhancing their personal academic achievements and, in turn, strengthening the research capabilities of higher education institutions. Additionally, teachers with abundant work passion typically possess higher levels of self-efficacy and professional accomplishment, which can effectively alleviate work pressure and burnout, maintaining high work efficiency and quality[63]. Therefore, this study makes the following hypothesis.

H3: The work passion of university teachers in the central and eastern regions of China has a positive impact on teacher work performance.

2.5. The mediating role of work passion between emotionally intelligent leadership and teacher work performance

Hao et al. [32] conducted a field survey involving 69 teams and 266 subordinates. Their data revealed that leadership behaviors influence work performance through both harmonious and obsessive work passion. Therefore, work passion plays an indirect mediating role between leadership behaviors and work performance. Kessi et al.[33] argued that leadership significantly impacts employees' work performance and may enhance it by fostering work passion. Stein[34] discovered that emotionally intelligent leadership
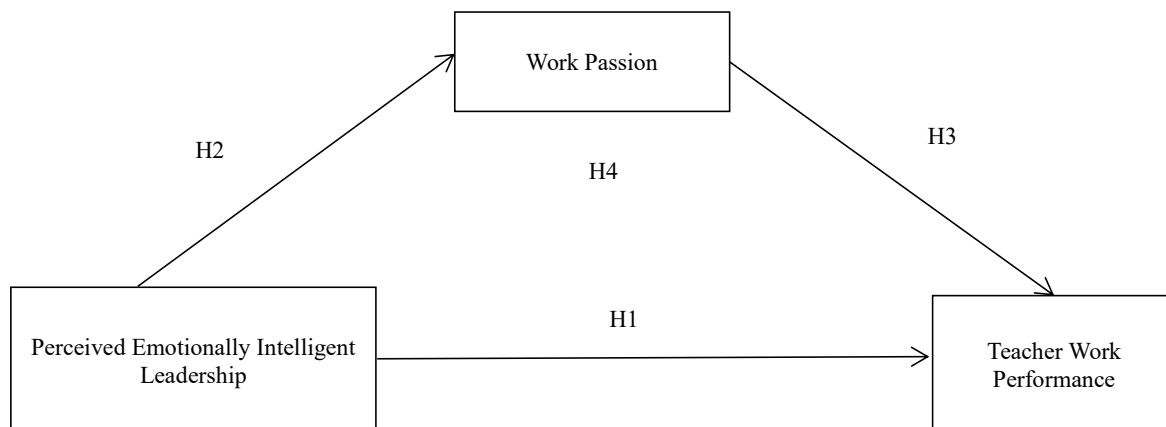
stimulates individual passion through emotional intelligence and creates shared goals within the organization, thereby improving both organizational and individual work performance.

University teachers bear heavy responsibilities for teaching, research, and student guidance, and are often under high levels of work stress for long periods [45]. Therefore, the emotional support and understanding provided by emotionally intelligent leaders are crucial for enhancing teachers' work passion [53]. Emotionally intelligent leaders, by recognizing and regulating teachers' emotions and providing timely encouragement and feedback, can inspire teachers' enthusiasm and commitment to their work [54]. This work passion is manifested in teachers' more proactive participation in teaching innovation and research exploration, and their positive attitude towards work challenges. When teachers' work passion is high, they are not only able to efficiently complete teaching tasks but also achieve greater breakthroughs in the field of research, leading to an overall improvement in work performance [63]. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Work passion of university teachers in the central and eastern regions of China mediates the relationship between perceived emotionally intelligent leadership and teacher work performance.

2.6. Research framework

Based on the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, this study considers perceived emotionally intelligent leadership as the independent variable and teacher work performance as the dependent variable, with work passion serving as the mediator between perceived emotionally intelligent leadership and teacher work performance. The research framework is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

3. Research method

3.1. Research subject and sampling method

This study selected in-service teachers from four universities in the central and eastern regions of China as the research subjects and employed a questionnaire survey method for data collection. The central and eastern regions of China are areas where higher education resources are relatively concentrated, covering provinces with relatively advanced levels of economic, cultural, and social development, thus offering broad representativeness and research value. The four universities surveyed in this study are University A, University B, University C, and University D. University A is located in Changsha, Hunan Province; University B is in Wuhan, Hubei Province; University C is in Chengdu, Sichuan Province; and University D is in Linyi, Shandong Province. Since the four universities are located in different provinces, this layout can effectively avoid regional biases or limitations.

In this study, electronic questionnaires were distributed to the leaders of the four universities via social media platforms such as WeChat and QQ. These leaders then disseminated the survey questionnaires through their respective work groups within the universities to collect data from the four universities in the central and eastern regions of China. The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a small pilot test was carried out, with 120 questionnaires distributed and 112 collected.

In the second phase, the formal questionnaire was distributed. A total of 500 questionnaires were sent out, with an average of 125 per university, and 478 questionnaires were returned. In terms of gender distribution, the majority of the samples were "female," with 250 individuals accounting for 52.301%. The number of male samples was 228, representing 47.699%. Regarding age, the largest group of respondents was aged "31 to 40," with 207 samples making up 43.305%. There were 129 teachers aged 41 to 50, accounting for 26.987%. Teachers aged 30 and below numbered 95, representing 19.874%. The smallest group was teachers aged 51 and above, totaling 47 individuals and accounting for 9.833%.

3.2. Research tools

3.2.1. Perceived emotionally intelligent leadership scale

This study employed the scale developed by Dulewicz et al. [64] to assess perceived emotionally intelligent leadership. The scale consists of 7 items and is unidimensional, using a Likert 7-point scale. After the pilot test, the factor loadings of the items ranged from .889 to .916. The KMO value was .939, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant. The cumulative total variance explained was 81.517%, and the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was .962.

3.2.2. Teacher work performance scale

This study assessed university teachers' work performance using the teacher performance scale adapted by Ren et al. [65], which includes 9 items for teaching performance, 4 items for research performance, and 4 items for social service performance, making a total of 17 items. A Likert 7-point scale was used. The pilot test analysis revealed that the factor loadings of each item in the teacher work performance scale ranged from .842 to .906. The KMO value was .926, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant. The cumulative total variance explained was 81.958%. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the teacher work performance scale was .933, with the Cronbach's Alpha for the teaching performance factor being .968, for the research performance factor being .936, and for the social service performance factor being .933.

3.2.3. Work passion scale

This study employed the work passion scale developed by Vallerand et al. [66], which includes two forms of work passion: harmonious passion (items 1-7) and obsessive passion (items 8-14), totaling 14 items. The two dimensions are scored uniformly in this study, using a Likert 7-point scale. The pilot test analysis revealed that the factor loadings of each item in the work passion scale ranged from .852 to .903. The KMO value was .939, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant. The cumulative total variance explained was 81.565%. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the work passion scale was .941, with the Cronbach's Alpha for the harmonious passion factor being .963 and for the obsessive passion factor being .961.

3.3. Research ethics

The implementation of ethical principles in research involves several approaches. First, a comprehensive ethical review process is established, including risk and benefit assessments, informed consent procedures, and data protection measures. Second, researchers must stay up-to-date with ethical standards and guidelines relevant to their field, including those established by institutional review boards and professional organizations. Third, ethical research requires ongoing self-reflection and peer review to ensure

that researchers remain vigilant about their ethical responsibilities throughout the research process. This study strictly adheres to the regulations and requirements outlined in the National Policy and Guidelines for Human Research proposed by the National Research Council of Thailand [67].

4. Research result analysis

4.1. Descriptive analysis

In this study, all scales used a 7-point scoring method, with a midpoint of 4. The perceived emotionally intelligent leadership scale, after descriptive analysis, had a mean of 4.709 and a standard deviation of 1.274. The results indicate that the perceived emotionally intelligent leadership among university teachers in the central and eastern regions of China is above the middle level. The teacher work performance scale, after descriptive analysis, had a mean of 4.795 and a standard deviation of 0.923. The results show that the work performance of university teachers in the central and eastern regions of China is above the middle level. The work passion scale, after descriptive analysis, had a mean of 4.904 and a standard deviation of 1.018. The results indicate that the work passion of university teachers in the central and eastern regions of China is above the middle level.

Table 1. Descriptive statistical analysis

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perceived Emotionally Intelligent Leadership	4.709	1.274
Work Performance	4.795	.923
Work Passion	4.904	1.018

4.2. Correlation analysis

Perceived emotionally intelligent leadership was significantly correlated with work performance and work passion, with correlation coefficients of .591 and .565, respectively, indicating a positive relationship between perceived emotionally intelligent leadership and both work performance and work passion. Work performance was also significantly correlated with work passion, with a correlation coefficient of .528, indicating a positive relationship between these two variables.

Table 2. Correlation analysis

	Perceived Emotionally Intelligent Leadership	Work Performance	Work Passion
Perceived Emotionally Intelligent Leadership	1		
Work Performance	.591***	1	
Work Passion	.565***	.528***	1

4.3. Regression analysis

The adjusted R^2 value of Model 1 was .348, indicating that gender, age, and perceived emotionally intelligent leadership can explain 34.800% of the variation in work performance. When the model was subjected to an F-test, it was found that the model passed the F-test (F=51.984, p < .050). The analysis showed that perceived emotionally intelligent leadership has a significant positive impact on work performance (β=.587, p=.000), thus supporting H1.

The adjusted R^2 value of Model 2 was .316, indicating that gender, age, and perceived emotionally intelligent leadership can explain 31.600% of the variation in work passion. When the model was subjected to an F-test, it was found that the model passed the F-test (F=44.996, p < .050). The analysis revealed that

perceived emotionally intelligent leadership has a significant positive impact on work passion (β=.564, p=.000), thus supporting H2.

The adjusted R^2 value of Model 3 was .277, indicating that gender, age, and work passion can explain 27.700% of the variation in work performance. . When the model was subjected to an F-test, it was found that the model passed the F-test (F=37.466, p< .050). The analysis revealed that work passion has a significant positive impact on work performance (β=.524, p=.000), thus supporting H3.

In Model 1, the β value of perceived emotionally intelligent leadership on work performance was .587, with a t-value of 15.853 and a significance level of less than .001. In Model 4, the β value of perceived emotionally intelligent leadership on work performance was .429, with a t-value of 9.965 and a significance level of less than .001, indicating a significant effect. The β value of work passion on work performance was .281, with a t-value of 6.538 and a significance level less than .001, indicating a significant effect. Additionally, compared to the β value of perceived emotional intelligence leadership on work performance in Model 1, the β value of perceived emotionally intelligent leadership on work performance in Model 4 has decreased significantly. This indicates that work passion partially mediates the relationship between perceived emotionally intelligent leadership and work performance. Therefore, Hypothesis H4 is supported, confirming that work passion has a mediating effect on the impact of perceived emotionally intelligent leadership on work performance.

Table 3. Results of linear regression analysis

Variable	Model 1 Work Performance β (*t*)	Model 2 Work Passion β (*t*)	Model 3 Work Performance β (*t*)	Model 4 Work Performance β (*t*)
Male	-.061 (-1.641)	-.026 (-.684)	-.060 (-1.534)	-.054 (-1.506)
30 years old and below	-.057 (-.986)	-.058 (-.976)	-.028 (-.463)	-.041 (-.734)
31 to 40 years old	-.057 (-.877)	-.021 (-.310)	-.062 (-.906)	-.051 (-.821)
41 to 50 years old	-.027 (-.443)	.001 (.020)	-.025 (-.395)	-.027 (-.468)
Perceived Emotionally Intelligent Leadership	.587*** (15.853)	.564*** (14.849)		.429*** (9.965)
Work Passion			.524*** (13.401)	.281*** (6.538)
R^2	.355	.323	.284	.409
Adj. R^2	.348	.316	.277	.401
F-value	51.984***	44.996***	37.466***	54.276***

Note1: *** p< .001.*

Note2: *Female and age 51 and above are the control groups.*

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This study first confirmed the conclusion that teachers' perceived emotionally intelligent leadership has a significant positive impact on work performance. The central and eastern regions of China are home to a large number of high-quality educational resources and a highly qualified teaching workforce. The competition in education and the pressure on performance are relatively high in these regions. In such a context, leaders with emotional intelligence can effectively alleviate teachers' emotional tension, create a supportive environment, and thus stimulate teachers' intrinsic work motivation, enhancing their performance in teaching and research. Therefore, universities should strengthen the emotional intelligence training of middle and senior management personnel, integrate emotional management, communication skills, and incentive mechanisms into daily management, and enhance the positive guiding power of leadership behavior on teachers' performance.

The study further found that teachers' perceived emotionally intelligent leadership has a significant positive impact on their work passion. Universities in the central and eastern regions of China are generally at a critical stage of "Double First-Class" construction and subject assessment, where teachers face both heavy research pressure and teaching responsibilities, making them prone to job burnout. Against this backdrop, emotionally intelligent leadership can help teachers rebuild their professional identity and stimulate their enthusiasm and sense of responsibility by understanding their needs and providing timely feedback and recognition. Therefore, universities should encourage leaders to establish emotional connections and enhance teachers' work passion through individual care, emotional support, and positive incentives, thereby strengthening their psychological resilience in the face of complex educational environments.

Third, this study demonstrates that teachers' work passion significantly promotes work performance. In universities of the central and eastern regions, a large number of young teachers are at a critical stage of career development, and the level of their work passion directly affects the stability and development potential of the teaching staff. High levels of work passion not only help teachers to actively engage in teaching and research but also encourage them to take the initiative in curriculum development and student guidance. Therefore, universities should systematically stimulate and maintain teachers' professional enthusiasm by establishing career development pathways, providing competitive incentive mechanisms, and optimizing evaluation systems, thereby promoting their comprehensive development and performance improvement.

Finally, this study confirms that work passion partially mediates the relationship between teachers' perceived emotionally intelligent leadership and their work performance. This finding reveals the mechanism by which leadership indirectly enhances performance by stimulating teachers' professional emotions in the central and eastern universities, where high performance orientation and humanistic care are both emphasized. Therefore, school administrators not only need to possess strong emotional intelligence but also should pay attention to the dynamic changes in teachers' professional emotions and value the role of emotional motivation in performance improvement. It is recommended that universities adopt "emotional intelligence + career development" as a core element in the training of leading cadres and the support system for teachers, to form a systematic, emotional, and personalized management approach that promotes the coordinated achievement of teacher performance and university development goals.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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