

Emotional Labor and Contributing Factors of Novice EFL Teachers in Chinese Senior High Schools

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Abstract

This study investigates the status quo and influencing factors of emotional labor of novice senior high school English teachers in the Chinese EFL context, thereby filling the research gap in stage-specific and subject-specific relevant studies. A mixed-methods research design was adopted. Quantitative data were collected through 190 questionnaires (adapted to the specific characteristics of the target group), complemented by qualitative data from in-depth interviews with 5 carefully selected novice high school English teachers. The results indicate that the overall level of emotional labor among the participants is relatively high. Regarding strategies, teachers primarily adopt deep acting, while natural expression is the least frequent. Specifically, in surface acting, teachers tend to mask their true emotions, while natural expression is often manifested through venting or complaining. In deep acting, strategies such as cognitive reframing, perspective-taking, and intentional emotional regulation are dominant. Furthermore, the influencing factors are categorized into individual factors (insufficient professional competence, emotional intelligence, and low professional identity) school factors, including insufficient care, heavy workload, and inadequate training. Based on these findings, this study proposes targeted suggestions for teacher training programs, school management practices, and the professional adaptation of novice teachers, providing valuable references for future research on teacher emotional labor.

Keywords

Novice EFL Teachers, Senior High School, Emotional Labor, Emotional Regulation

1. Introduction

Emotional labor is not merely a peripheral aspect of education but a fundamental component of effective pedagogy. The researcher (Lang, 2026) points out that emotional labor, as the third dimension of professional dedication, plays a dual role in the knowledge transmission process, namely, it undertakes the functions of emotional regulation and relationship bonding. As Hargreaves (1998) posits, emotions are the very core of teaching, serving as the bridge between instruction and student learning. Since Hochschild (1983) first defined emotional labor as the management of feelings to create a publicly observable display, scholars have recognized it as a critical professional competency alongside mental and physical labor (Hochschild, 1983). For English teachers, this labor is even more pronounced due to the interactive and communicative nature of language education, which possesses distinct disciplinary uniqueness (Ding, 2021). However, despite the recognized importance of emotional labor, current research predominantly focuses on the general population of primary and middle school teachers. There is a significant scarcity of studies specifically targeting novice high school English teachers, leaving a gap in our understanding of how this specific group navigates the complex emotional demands of their profession. This lack of targeted research has resulted in an ambiguous understanding of the profession. Currently, the current status of emotional labor among novice high school English teachers remains unclear, and the specific influencing factors that exacerbate or alleviate their emotional burden are not well identified. Without empirical data focusing on this demographic, it is difficult to pinpoint why some novice teachers struggle with emotional regulation, leading to potential issues such as burnout and high turnover rates during their critical early career stages.

To address these limitations, the present study seeks to fill the existing regional and disciplinary research gaps. By focusing specifically on novice senior high school English teachers in Ganzhou City, this research moves beyond generic educational contexts to investigate the situational typicality of English language teaching. It offers a nuanced analysis of how subject-specific requirements and novice teacher identity interact to shape emotional labor, and thus provides new empirical evidence for the fields of English language teaching and teacher education. In line with the research purpose of examining the current state, strategic characteristics, and influencing factors of teachers' emotional labor, this study explores two core issues. The first concerns the overall status of emotional labor among novice senior high school English teachers. The second focuses on identifying the key factors that influence their emotional labor in daily teaching practice.

Answering these questions carries substantial practical significance. The findings provide actionable suggestions for improving novice teachers' emotional labor competence, accelerating their professional adaptation, and reducing the risk of burnout. This study offers school administrators evidence-based recommendations for the training and support of novice English teachers and contributes to the development of a healthier and more supportive educational environment.

2. Literature Review

The existing literature on emotional labor reveals a progressive shift from broad theoretical definitions to specific applications within educational contexts. However, a distinct gap remains regarding the nuanced experiences of novice English teachers in China. This review synthesizes the evolution of the concept, highlighting the transition from general emotional regulation to the specific challenges faced by educators in training.

2.1. The Definition and Dimensions of Emotional Labor

The conceptualization of emotional labor has evolved significantly since its inception. Originally defined by Hochschild (1983) as the process of managing feelings to produce a publicly observable display, the concept initially focused on the commercialization of human emotion. Early organizational studies viewed it primarily as a tool for service delivery rather than a psychological burden. However, the dimensionality of emotional labor has been refined over time to better capture its complexity. While earlier measurement scales mainly centered on the frequency and duration of emotional labor behaviors, Diefendorff et al. (2005) constructed a more refined theoretical framework, which distinguishes surface acting characterized by outward emotional display adjustment from deep acting featured by internal affective adjustment. This classification holds great theoretical significance, for it demonstrates that emotional labor extends beyond superficial emotional pretense and entails distinct levels of psychological engagement. Wu (2008) further adapted this framework to the Chinese educational context, adding dimensions of emotional perception and natural expression, thereby providing a comprehensive lens through which to view the emotional exertion of teachers.

Despite these theoretical advances, several limitations warrant attention. First, Hochschild's original conceptualization largely neglected the positive aspects of emotional labor, such as authentic expression or emotional satisfaction, which recent studies have begun to explore (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Second, while Diefendorff's surface/deep acting dichotomy is widely adopted, empirical evidence remains mixed regarding their distinct antecedents and consequences, particularly across occupational contexts. Third, Wu's culturally adapted framework, though valuable, relies primarily on qualitative data from Chinese teachers, leaving its cross-cultural generalizability untested. Future research should integrate physiological measures (e.g., heart rate variability, cortisol levels) to capture the hidden costs of sustained emotional regulation. Moreover, longitudinal designs are needed to examine how habitual surface acting cumulatively affects teacher well-being and retention, beyond cross-sectional self-reports. Addressing these gaps strengthens the predictive validity of emotional labor models in educational settings.

2.2. Novice EFL Teacher Emotional Labor Research

Subsequent research on emotional labor has increasingly been applied to the teach-

ing profession, recognizing that pedagogy is inherently emotional work. Studies have consistently demonstrated that effective teaching requires not only intellectual engagement but also the strategic management of emotions to foster optimal student learning outcomes. However, a notable limitation in the current body of research is its tendency to treat teachers as a homogeneous group, often focusing on the general population of primary and middle school teachers without sufficient differentiation based on subject specificity or career stage. Furthermore, while some studies acknowledge the existence of emotional rules in educational settings, they frequently fail to address how these rules manifest differently across distinct academic disciplines. Researchers (De Costa & Nazari, 2024) point out that teachers end up being emotional laborers who find themselves often having to reconcile tensions between expression of feelings—as dictated by professional circumstances—and their actual feelings. This lack of granularity results in a broad, one-size-fits-all understanding that does not fully account for the unique pressures faced by language teachers—who must navigate high levels of interpersonal interaction and address students’ communicative anxiety on a daily basis.

In recent years, research efforts have begun to address this gap by investigating the intersection between emotional labor and teacher identity, with a particular focus on early-career educators. For instance, Kocabaş-Gedik and Ortaçtepe Hart (2021) have shown that power relations and contextual factors exert substantial influence on how novice teachers construct their professional identities, leaving new educators especially susceptible to emotional pressure. In a similar vein, Liang (2019) examined rural novice teachers and highlighted that these educators must negotiate complex emotional norms originating from both internal (e.g., personal expectations) and external (e.g., institutional requirements, community expectations) sources.

Despite these progressive developments, the field still faces a critical limitation, namely that there is a shortage of dedicated measurement tools and concentrated empirical investigations centered specifically on senior high school English as a Foreign Language contexts. As Li and Liu (2021) observed, “due to the lack of quantitative measures for EFL teachers’ emotional labor strategies, Chinese beginning EFL teachers’ usage of emotional labor strategies is still in unknown state”. This is because available questionnaires and assessment instruments fail to reflect the unique disciplinary characteristics of English language teaching (Yin, 2012), such as the constant demand to sustain high-quality classroom interaction and the imperative to effectively handle students’ language-related anxiety. For this reason, further research adopting a customized methodological framework is urgently needed to examine the specific context-bound factors that shape emotional labor among novice high school EFL teachers. Such targeted research delivers practical, evidence-based insights to support these teachers’ emotional health and long-term professional development.

Based on the identified gaps in the existing literature, this study addresses two research questions. The first question concerns the current status of emotional labor

among novice senior high school English teachers, specifically the frequency and strategies of emotional regulation in their teaching contexts. This question is operationalized through the four dimensions of the questionnaire, namely emotional labor perception, surface acting, natural expression, and deep acting. The second question examines the main categories of factors associated with novice teachers' emotional labor. This question is addressed through semi-structured interviews. The influencing factors are categorized into individual factors, which include insufficient professional competence, limited emotional intelligence, and low professional identity, and school factors, which include insufficient humanistic care, heavy workload, and lack of training. These categories derive from thematic analysis of interview transcripts.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Participants

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, which combines quantitative research and qualitative research to explore the current status, manifestations, and influencing factors of emotional labor among novice high school English teachers. The quantitative research is conducted through questionnaire surveys, while the qualitative research is carried out via semi-structured interviews, and the two methods complement each other to ensure the comprehensiveness and depth of the research results.

In this design, the quantitative component describes the current status of emotional labor, including mean scores for emotional labor perception, surface acting, natural expression, and deep acting, as well as the frequency of strategy use. The qualitative component identifies categories of influencing factors through thematic analysis of semi-structured interview transcripts. The categorization of individual factors (insufficient professional competence, limited emotional intelligence, low professional identity) and school factors (insufficient humanistic care, heavy workload, lack of training) derives exclusively from interview coding and does not involve statistical testing of questionnaire data. Quantitative and qualitative findings are integrated by using the interview results to supplement and interpret the questionnaire outcomes.

A total of 190 valid novice high school English teachers (with teaching experience ≤ 3 years) from Ganzhou participated in the questionnaire survey, with an effective rate of 95%. Their demographic information includes gender (52 males, 138 females), age (23 - 25 years old accounting for 24.2%, 26 - 30 years old for 59.5%, 31 - 34 years old for 16.3%), education background (70.5% with master's degree, 28.9% with bachelor's degree), 78.4% being homeroom teachers, and 77.9% teaching in urban areas, 22.1% in rural areas (**Table 1**).

In addition, 5 novice high school English teachers (with teaching experience ≤ 3 years) from different schools in Ganzhou were selected for semi-structured interviews; their basic information covers different genders, education backgrounds, head teacher statuses, teaching locations and ages, including 1 male and

4 females, 4 with master's degree and 1 with bachelor's degree, 3 being home teachers and 2 not, 4 teaching in urban areas and 1 in rural areas, aged 24 to 31 (**Table 2**).

Table 1. Demographic information of questionnaire participants.

Teacher	Indicators	N	%
Gender	Male	52	27.4
	Female	138	72.6
Age	23 - 25	46	24.2
	26 - 30	113	59.5
	31 - 34	31	16.3
Education Background	Associate degree and below	1	0.06
	Bachelor	55	28.9
	Master	134	70.5
Head Teacher	Yes	149	78.4
	No	41	21.6
Teaching Location	Urban	148	77.9
	Rural	42	22.1
Total		190	100

Table 2. Demographic information of interview participants.

Name	Gender	Education Background	Head Teacher	Teaching Location	Age
Allen	Male	Master	Yes	Urban	26
Ella	Female	Bachelor	Yes	Urban	31
Lily	Female	Master	Yes	Urban	24
Vicky	Female	Master	No	Urban	27
Bella	Female	Master	No	Rural	29

Participants and schools were recruited through convenience sampling. Specifically, novice high school English teachers (with teaching experience ≤ 3 years) were invited to participate voluntarily via school liaisons and online teacher communities (e.g., WeChat groups for EFL teachers in Ganzhou). A total of 12 public senior high schools in Ganzhou City agreed to participate in the study. Regarding questionnaire validity, responses were considered invalid if they met any of the following criteria, such as completion time less than 120 seconds, identical responses across more than 90% of items (e.g., all "agree"), logically contradictory answers to paired reverse-coded items. Based on these criteria, 9 out of 199 questionnaires were excluded, yielding 190 valid responses (validity rate = 95%).

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was developed through several steps. First, an initial item pool

was generated based on Wu's (2008) four-dimensional framework (emotional labor perception, surface acting, natural expression, and deep acting). Of the 34 final items, 26 were adapted from Wu's original scale with wording changes to fit the senior high school English teaching context (e.g., adding "senior high school" and specific EFL classroom scenarios). The remaining 8 items were newly written by the researcher to capture English-specific situations, such as grammar teaching difficulties (Item 15), English dialogue presentations (Item 17), and oral practice activities (Items 25 & 27). All items were reviewed by two experienced high school English teachers and one applied linguistics professor to ensure content validity.

Second, a pilot study was conducted with 30 novice high school English teachers (teaching experience ≤ 3 years) who did not participate in the main survey. Based on their feedback, four items were reworded for clarity and the item order was adjusted. The pilot data showed acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.70$ for all dimensions).

After collecting the main sample ($N = 190$), reliability was re-examined. The overall scale Cronbach's α was 0.88, with sub-dimensional α values ranging from 0.76 to 0.84. Construct validity was assessed using SPSS Amos 26.0, which content validity was further confirmed by the expert panel and the pilot participants performed.

Two research instruments were used in this study for data collection. First, a self-designed questionnaire, which consists of two parts, namely demographic information collection (gender, age, homeroom teacher status, education background, teaching location) and emotional labor measurement. The emotional labor measurement includes four dimensions (emotional labor perception, surface acting, natural expression, deep acting), adopting a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Second, a semi-structured interview guideline adapted from Wu (2008) according to the research context focuses on two core themes, which contain teachers' understanding and real experience of emotional labor, and the internal and external factors affecting their emotional regulation in teaching practice. For data analysis, before formal analysis of the questionnaire data, SPSS 26.0 was used to test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire to ensure the stability and rationality of the scale. Quantitative analysis was then conducted on the questionnaire data using SPSS 26.0, mainly adopting descriptive statistics to analyze the overall situation and characteristics of emotional labor among the participants. For the interview data, the verbal content was first transcribed into text, then coded systematically, key themes were extracted, and data saturation was verified through iterative analysis, so as to supplement and interpret the questionnaire results and form a comprehensive research conclusion.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles for educational research. Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of

Gannan Normal University. Prior to data collection, all participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study, and they provided written informed consent. For the interviews, participants explicitly consented to the use of voice recording and agreed that their anonymized quotes and pseudonyms could appear in research publications. To protect participant privacy, all personal identifiers (e.g., real names, exact school names) were replaced with pseudonyms (Allen, Ella, Lily, Vicky, Bella). Questionnaire responses were collected anonymously, and no individual could be traced back to their responses. All raw data were stored on a password-protected computer accessible only to the researcher, and will be destroyed upon completion of the project. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Overall Analysis of the Emotional Labor Characteristics

The overall situation of the 190 novice high school English teachers who participated in this survey is shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Overall characteristics of teachers' emotional labor dimensions.

Dimension	N	M	SD
Emotional Labor Perception	190	4.012	0.247
Surface Acting	190	3.974	0.27
Natural Expression	190	3.842	0.507
Deep Acting	190	4.061	0.338
Total Emotional Labor Dimension	190	3.972	0.148

According to the descriptive statistics presented in **Table 3**, analysis of the mean scores across the four dimensions of emotional labor reveals that deep acting exhibits the highest average level among Ganzhou's novice high school English teachers. This is followed sequentially by emotional labor perception, surface acting, and natural expression, which registers the lowest mean score in this specific context.

The relatively high mean score for deep acting ($M = 4.061$, $SD = 0.338$) suggests that novice teachers in this sample frequently engage in genuine cognitive and emotional adjustments to align their internal feelings with professional expectations. The similarly elevated score for emotional labor perception ($M = 4.012$, $SD = 0.247$) indicates that these novice teachers possess a strong awareness of workplace emotional display rules and consciously recognize the need for emotional regulation. Surface acting ($M = 3.974$, $SD = 0.270$) also scores above the midpoint of the 5-point scale, confirming that faking or suppressing emotional expressions remains a common strategy. Notably, natural expression—reflecting spontaneous and unregulated emotional displays—shows the lowest mean ($M = 3.842$, $SD = 0.507$).

coupled with the largest standard deviation, implying greater individual variability in the extent to which teachers feel free to express genuine emotions without deliberate management. Collectively, these descriptive patterns suggest that novice high school English teachers actively engage in multiple emotional labor strategies, with a preference for deeper cognitive regulation, yet still face considerable pressure to conform to display rules through surface acting.

4.2. Analysis of Teacher Emotional Labor Perception

Teachers' emotional labor perception encompasses three core components, namely awareness of emotional display rules in teaching, recognition of the functional role of emotional labor, and perceived frequency of engaging in emotional regulation in the workplace. As defined by Wu (2008), this construct primarily reflects teachers' conscious need to manage and adjust their emotional states during educational and instructional activities.

Building on the descriptive results in Table 3, the mean score for emotional labor perception ($M = 4.012$) indicates that the majority of novice high school English teachers in this study not only acknowledge the existence of professional display rules but also internalize them as a necessary aspect of their work. This relatively high level of perception appears to stem from two sources. First, formal teacher education and school induction programs increasingly emphasize the emotional dimensions of teaching, sensitizing novice teachers to the need for emotional regulation. Second, the daily realities of classroom management, parent communication, and administrative expectations likely reinforce awareness of when and why emotional labor is required. However, a perception mean slightly below that of deep acting suggests that while teachers recognize the need for emotional labor, they do not always translate this awareness into effective deep acting strategies. The relatively small standard deviation ($SD = 0.247$) points to a high degree of consensus among participants, implying that emotional labor perception is a shared professional understanding rather than an idiosyncratic trait. From a theoretical standpoint, this finding supports Grandey's (2000) framework that emotional regulation begins with the appraisal of display rules; without adequate perception, subsequent surface or deep acting is not deployed strategically. Therefore, fostering emotional labor perception constitutes a foundational step in any intervention aimed at reducing the negative consequences of emotional labor among novice teachers. Future research is required to examine whether higher perception scores predict more frequent use of deep acting over time, as well as the means by which school leadership enhances teachers' awareness of display rules without intensifying psychological burden.

4.2.1. Perception of Teacher Emotional Labor Expression Rules

Two key patterns emerge regarding how novice high school English teachers perceive the rules governing their emotional expression in educational settings.

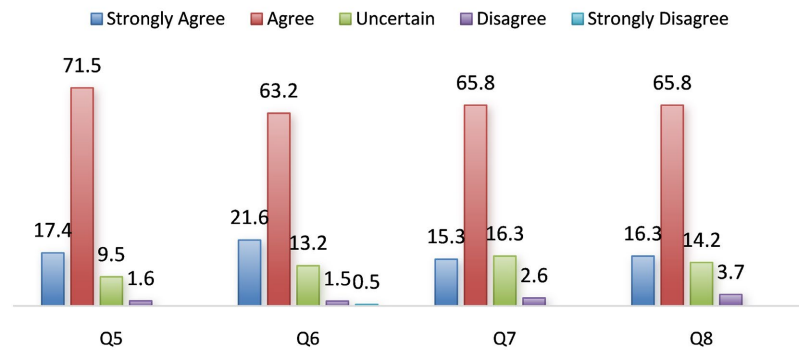


Figure 1. Mutual influence of students' and teachers' emotional states.

As visualized in **Figure 1**, titled Mutual Influence of Students' and Teachers' Emotional States, the quantitative findings demonstrate that novice high school English teachers frequently engage in deliberate emotional regulation during their professional duties, confirming the prevalence of emotional labor practices in their daily work.

For Items 6 and 7, which measure teachers' intentional display of positive emotions toward students, the majority of respondents expressed agreement. Specifically, 63.2% and 65.8% of teachers selected "agree", with an additional 21.6% and 15.3% selecting "strongly agree". Meanwhile, 13.2% and 16.3% reported being "uncertain", while only 1.6% and 2.3% selected "disagree"—notably, no participants selected "strongly disagree". These results indicate that nearly all novice teachers consciously regulate their outward emotional presentation to convey positive affect to students.

Item 8 assesses the perceived impact of different student subgroups on teachers' emotional states. Here, 16.3% of teachers selected "strongly agree" that such effects exist, 65.8% selected "agree", 14.2% reported being "uncertain", and just 3.7% selected "disagree". The overwhelming agreement rates confirm that most novice teachers recognize the influence of diverse student groups on their own emotional states in the classroom. Collectively, these findings support the conclusion that students' and teachers' emotional states exert reciprocal effects on one another during teaching interactions.

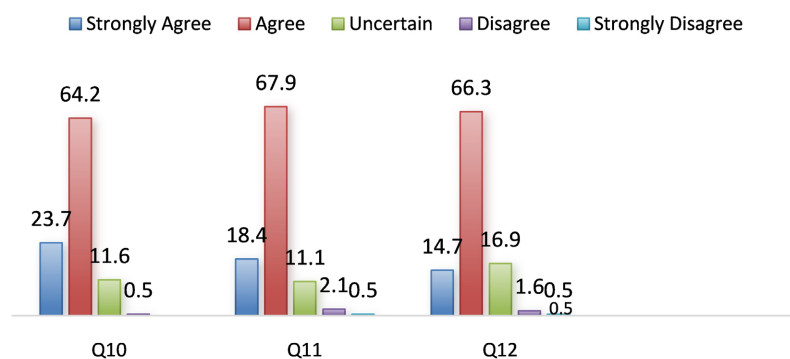


Figure 2. Teachers' regulation of their own emotions and efforts to show positive emotions.

As visualized in **Figure 2**, responses to Item 10 show that 23.7% of participating teachers selected “strongly agree”, 64.2% selected “agree”, 11.6% reported being uncertain, and a mere 0.5% chose “disagree”. These findings confirm that most novice teachers perceive displaying positive emotions toward students as a factor that enhances their professional effectiveness in the classroom.

For Items 11 and 12, strong agreement rates were also observed, with 18.4% and 14.7% of teachers selecting “strongly agree” and an additional 67.9% and 66.3% selecting “agree”, respectively. Taken together, these results demonstrate that an overwhelming majority of teachers recognize the need to actively regulate their emotional states and suppress negative effects during instructional activities.

4.2.2. Perception of Teacher Emotional Labor Functions

Teachers’ perceptions of the functional roles of emotional labor are closely intertwined with their selection of emotional labor strategies in professional practice.

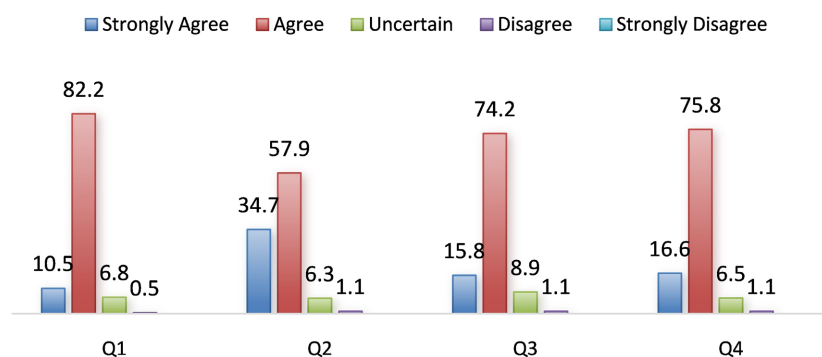


Figure 3. Teachers’ positive emotions in teaching.

As illustrated in **Figure 3**, the responses to Item 1 reveal that 10.5% of teachers selected “strongly agree”, 82.1% selected “agree”, and only 0.5% chose “disagree”. These results demonstrate that nearly all participating teachers believe personal negative emotions should be excluded from the classroom environment.

Further analysis of Items 2 and 3 yields similarly strong levels of agreement. For Item 2, 34.7% of teachers selected “strongly agree” and 57.9% selected “agree”, with merely 1.1% expressing disagreement. For Item 3, the rates were 15.8% for “strongly agree” and 74.2% for “agree”, again with only 1.1% disagreement.

It is evident that the overwhelming majority of novice teachers recognize the profound influence of a teacher’s emotional states on both student-teacher relationships and students’ own emotional states. The data consistently show that teachers view the expression of positive effect in the classroom as a key factor in fostering positive rapport with students, and they remain mindful of how their own emotional states shape students’ affective experiences throughout the teaching process.

High agreement across all four items (90.6% - 92.7% combining “strongly agree” and “agree”) indicates that novice high school English teachers overwhelmingly endorse the functional necessity of emotional labor in their professional roles.

Item 1 (92.7% agreement) reflects a widely held belief that negative personal emotions must be suppressed in instructional settings, aligning with Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional display rules as institutionalized norms. Despite minor data transcription inconsistencies, Items 2 and 3 collectively demonstrate that teachers view emotional labor not merely as a constraint but as a strategic tool for enhancing teaching effectiveness and managing classroom dynamics. The near absence of disagreement (0.0% for Item 1 and minimal for others) suggests a strong consensus on the essential functions of emotional labor for student engagement and relationship building. Item 4 further reinforces that novice teachers perceive emotional expression as a deliberate pedagogical resource. Theoretically, such functional perceptions are critical because they shape whether teachers engage in surface acting or deep acting. The strong endorsement of emotional labor's positive functions in this sample suggests that these novice teachers are more inclined toward deep acting, which is consistent with the overall deep acting mean ($M = 4.061$) reported in Table 3. However, an overly functional perception without adequate coping skills paradoxically increases emotional exhaustion, as teachers feel compelled to continuously perform positive emotions even when psychologically depleted.

4.2.3. Perception of Teacher Emotional Labor Frequency

Teachers' perceptions of the functional roles of emotional labor are closely intertwined with their selection of emotional labor strategies in professional practice.

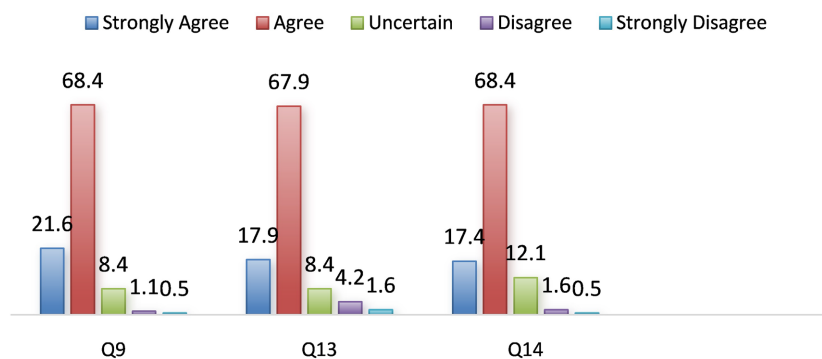


Figure 4. Teachers' frequency of interaction with students.

From the data obtained in Figure 4, in Question 9, 21.6% of teachers strongly agree, and 68.4% agree. It is evident that 90% of teachers agree or strongly agree. In Question 13, 17.9% of teachers strongly agree, 67.9% agree, 8.4% are unsure, and only 5.8% disagree or strongly disagree. In Question 14, 17.4% of teachers strongly agree, 68.4% agree, 12.1% are unsure, and only 2.1% disagree or strongly disagree. Therefore, it is observed that novice high school English teachers have a high frequency of interaction with students in the classroom, and outside of class, teachers spend a considerable amount of time with students. It is evident that the emotional states of teachers are closely related to their interactions with students.

Expanding upon these findings, the consistently high agreement rates across all

three items—ranging from 85.8% to 90% when combining “strongly agree” and “agree”—indicate that novice teachers perceive their daily professional lives as characterized by frequent and sustained emotional engagement with students. Such frequent interactions, both inside and outside the classroom, inherently demand ongoing emotional regulation, as each encounter carries the potential for unexpected disruptions, disciplinary challenges, or affective demands (Hochschild, 1983). The slight variation among items is noteworthy. Question 9, which likely refers to in-class instructional interactions, yields the highest combined agreement (90%), suggesting that the structured environment of classroom teaching is where emotional labor frequency is most acutely perceived. By contrast, Questions 13 and 14, probably capturing extra-curricular or informal student contacts, show marginally lower but still substantial agreement rates (85.8% and 85.8% respectively). The relatively higher “uncertain” proportions for Q13 (8.4%) and Q14 (12.1%) appear to reflect individual differences in how novice teachers interpret or recall out-of-class interactions, or variability in actual workload as homeroom teachers. Given that high interaction frequency, in the absence of adequate coping resources, escalates emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2000), these results imply an urgent need for targeted interventions that help novice teachers manage the cumulative emotional load of frequent student contact. Future research could examine whether specific types of student interactions (e.g., disciplinary versus supportive) differentially moderate the relationship between interaction frequency and emotional labor strategy selection.

4.3. Analysis of Teacher Emotional Labor in Surface Acting

4.3.1. Surface Situations of Teacher Emotional Labor

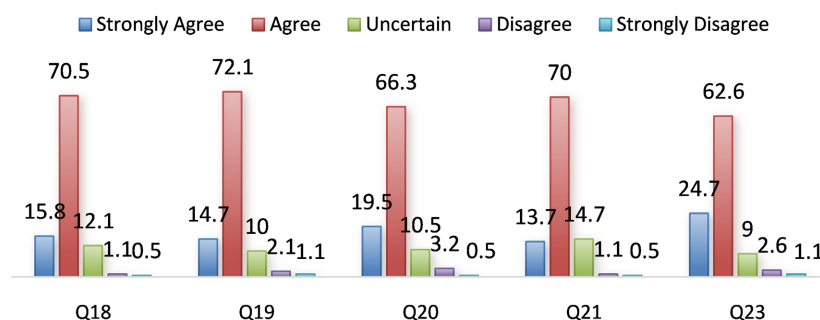


Figure 5. Surface acting strategies across various stressful teaching scenarios.

Based on the data presented in **Figure 5**, the following patterns emerge across the survey items. For Item 18, which addresses the context of teaching supervision and classroom observation, 15.8% of novice teachers selected “strongly agree”, 70.5% selected “agree”, 12.1% reported being uncertain, and only 1.6% expressed disagreement or strong disagreement. This indicates that an overwhelming majority of teachers would rely on surface acting strategies to manage their emotional states during supervisory evaluations.

Item 19 explores the scenario of teaching while experiencing personal physical

discomfort. Here, 14.7% of teachers strongly agreed, 72.1% agreed, 10% were unsure, and just 3.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These results suggest that when teachers feel unwell, they use surface acting to conceal negative emotional states and avoid disrupting the learning environment.

For Item 20, which describes teaching while concerned about an ill family member, the response pattern was similar, with 19.5% strongly agreeing, 66.3% agreeing, 10.5% uncertain, and only 3.7% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This finding demonstrates that even when facing family-related stress, teachers choose surface acting strategies to regulate their emotional states and maintain continuity in their teaching duties.

Finally, Item 21 examines the context of frequent in-service training, with 13.7% of teachers selecting “strongly agree”, 70% selecting “agree”, 14.7% reporting uncertainty, and only 1.6% expressing disagreement or strong disagreement. In this scenario, the majority of teachers reported using surface acting to mask negative emotional states related to the additional workload.

Taken together, the survey results consistently show that novice high school English teachers are likely to employ surface acting strategies when faced with situations such as supervisory observations, personal illness, family health concerns, and frequent professional training. As [Li and Liu \(2021\)](#) found, beginning EFL teachers in China employ surface acting as a primary strategy to meet professional expectations and situational demands. Consistent with [Ma et al. \(2023\)](#), teachers’ surface acting is triggered by the presence of display rules that mandate the suppression of negative emotions in professional settings, which offers a theoretical account for the contextual triggers identified in the present survey.

4.3.2. Surface Strategies of Teacher Emotional Labor

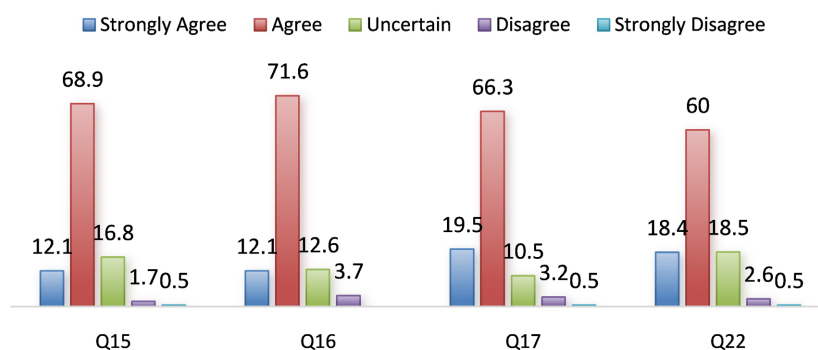


Figure 6. Surface acting strategies in grammar teaching.

As illustrated in [Figure 6](#), responses to Item 15 show that 12.1% of teachers selected “strongly agree”, 68.9% selected “agree”, 16.8% reported being uncertain, and only 2.2% expressed disagreement or strong disagreement. These findings indicate that, in grammar classes where some students struggle to keep pace, most teachers tend to hide their genuine emotional states.

For Item 16, 12.1% of teachers strongly agreed, 71.6% agreed, 12.6% were unsure,

and only 3.7% disagreed. The data reveal that many teachers adopt performative displays of anger when students underperform, aiming to emphasize the seriousness of the situation.

Item 17 shows a similar pattern, with 19.5% of teachers strongly agreeing, 66.3% agreeing, 10.5% uncertain, and only 3.7% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This suggests that teachers often simulate enthusiasm during classroom instructional activities to maintain engagement.

Finally, responses to Item 22 show that 18.4% of teachers selected “strongly agree” and 60% selected “agree”, meaning 78.4% of respondents believe in expressing institutionally required emotions during lessons. Collectively, these results demonstrate that the vast majority of teachers rely on surface acting, such as feigning emotions or concealing their true emotional states, to meet classroom expectations.

Across both the table and figure data, a consistent pattern emerges in which novice high school English teachers rely heavily on surface acting strategies in a variety of challenging classroom and professional contexts. Whether responding to external evaluations, personal or family stress, or everyday instructional challenges, they tend to manage outward emotional displays to align with perceived professional norms and protect the learning environment.

To conclude, the survey findings reveal that novice high school English teachers primarily adopt two surface acting strategies in their emotional labor, namely concealing their genuine emotional states and performing simulated displays of anger. Although the above data indicate that novice teachers often employ surface acting strategies, this does not mean that they are merely passive recipients of the system. As the researchers (Diao & Cheng, 2026) pointed out such strategies reveal emotional labor as the management of feelings through which agency is both constrained and enabled, moving beyond a resistance-compliance binary. This indicates that novice teachers are not simply “compliant”, but are engaging in complex and active negotiations under the constraints of the system. This is more evident in the deep acting strategies.

4.4. Analysis of Teacher Emotional Labor in Natural Expression

4.4.1. Natural Situations of Teacher Emotional Labor

Wu (2008) observed that most survey items originally designed to capture natural expression strategies centered on negative classroom scenarios. In these contexts, teachers recognized that natural expression would not yield significant educational benefits, and thus opted instead for surface acting or deep acting strategies. Consequently, these natural-situation items were removed from the final scale. Follow-up interviews with novice high school English teachers further revealed that they tend to rely on natural expression when faced with specific, low-stakes classroom challenges, such as students displaying inattentiveness, feigning understanding of unmastered content, or achieving below-expected academic results.

Expanding upon these findings, the distinction between high-stakes and low-stakes situations is crucial for understanding when novice teachers permit them-

selves to express emotions authentically. In high-stakes negative scenarios—such as public criticism from parents or administrative evaluations—natural expression is perceived as professionally risky, leading teachers to suppress genuine feelings. Conversely, in low-stakes scenarios like minor student inattentiveness or modest academic underperformance, the potential consequences of unfiltered emotional display are minimal, allowing novice teachers to vent or express frustration without fear of serious repercussions. This situational contingency aligns with the emotional regulation framework proposed by Grandey (2000), wherein individuals continuously appraise contextual cues to decide whether to engage in surface acting, deep acting, or natural expression. Moreover, the fact that teachers consciously avoid natural expression in negative classroom contexts suggests they have internalized professional display rules that prioritize maintaining a positive learning atmosphere over personal authenticity. However, over-reliance on suppression in even moderately negative situations cumulatively increases emotional exhaustion, especially when low-stakes incidents occur frequently. Therefore, while natural expression is appropriate for trivial daily disruptions, novice teachers require training that helps them recognize when low-stakes situations truly permit authenticity without compromising professional standards.

4.4.2. Natural Strategies of Teacher Emotional Labor

The survey's Items 24 - 26 were designed to assess teachers' use of natural expression strategies. The results show that novice high school English teachers frequently rely on venting, seeking support, and expressing complaints when engaging in unfiltered emotional labor. These survey findings are consistent with insights from the interviews, as elaborated below.

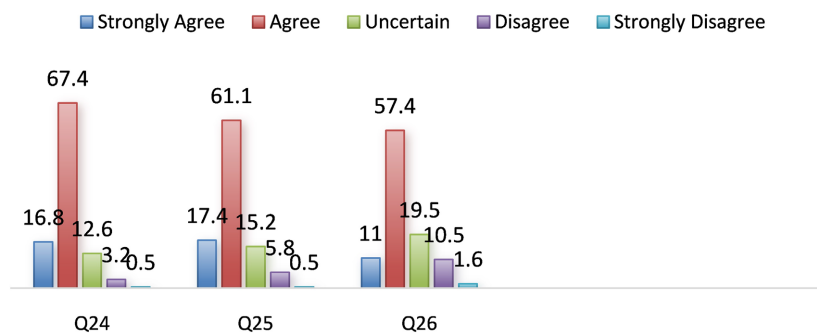


Figure 7. Teachers' use of natural strategies in emotional labor.

As shown in **Figure 7**, responses to Item 24 indicate that 16.8% of teachers strongly agree and 67.4% agree that praise for student progress is genuine. This confirms that most teachers perceive such expressions of positive emotion as authentic. For Item 25, 17.4% strongly agree and 61.1% agree that emotions displayed during student interactions are largely sincere. In contrast, responses to Item 26 show 11% strong agreement and 57.4% agreement, with 31.6% selecting uncertain, disagree, or strongly disagree. Compared to Items 24 and 25, fewer teachers view their emotional states in this context as genuine, suggesting that some withhold their true

feelings in certain classroom situations. Follow-up interviews further confirmed that many teachers choose to adopt surface acting or deep acting strategies in specific instructional scenarios.

The descending authenticity across Items 24 - 26 reveals a nuanced hierarchy in novice teachers' natural expression. Wan and Tian (2025) clarified that teachers' naturally felt emotions arise not from pure spontaneity but from goal-directed adaptation to display rules, which underpins the differential authenticity across contexts. Item 24 (praise for student progress) yields the highest agreement (84.2%), as celebrating student achievement aligns with professional satisfaction. Item 25 (general student interactions) shows lower authenticity (78.5%), indicating some need for measured regulation. Item 26 (broader/ambiguous context) produces the lowest authenticity (68.4%) and the highest dissent (31.6%). Stark and Bettini (2021) systematically documented how teachers' perceptions of emotional display rules are shaped by multiple contextual factors, including school culture, school level, and momentary physical location, providing a theoretical foundation for the finding that natural expression is modulated by situational demands. The 31.6% of teachers who doubt their emotional genuineness likely resort to surface or deep acting, consistent with the relatively high deep acting mean ($M = 4.061$). Interview insights show that venting, support seeking, and complaining occur mainly in private peer settings, not in front of students. Such peer-directed natural expression serves as a healthy release mechanism, buffering the negative effects of sustained surface acting. However, chronic venting or misdirection toward students or parents risks damaging professional relationships. Thus, while natural expression suits low-stakes challenges, schools should offer structured emotional debriefing (e.g., peer support groups) to channel venting constructively. Future longitudinal research could examine whether the authenticity gap between praise (Item 24) and general contexts (Item 26) widens with experience, indicating a progressive emotional suppression effect.

4.5. Analysis of Teacher Emotional Labor in Deep Acting

4.5.1. Deep Situations of Teacher Emotional Labor

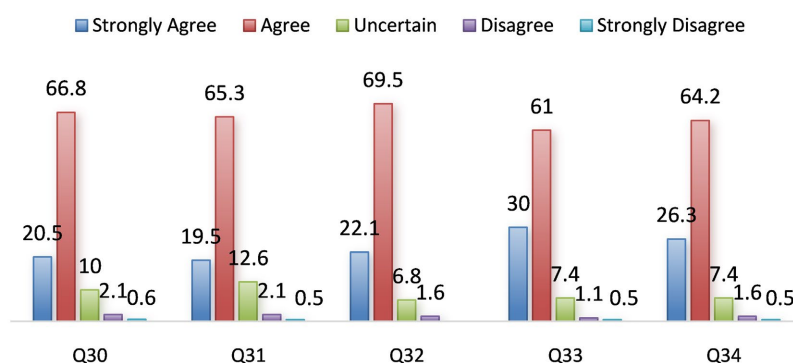


Figure 8. Teachers' use of deep acting strategies.

As shown in Figure 8, responses to Item 30 reveal that, when facing an unpleasant

incident before class, 20.5% of teachers strongly agree and 66.8% agree that they make efforts to adjust their inner emotional states, with only 2.7% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This demonstrates that the vast majority of teachers actively regulate their internal emotional states in such situations.

For Item 31, which addresses the scenario of being assigned non-instructional responsibilities, 19.5% of teachers strongly agree and 65.3% agree, while only 2.6% disagree or strongly disagree. This pattern indicates that teachers proactively re-frame these tasks through cognitive restructuring to approach them with a positive mindset.

Item 32 examines the context of frequent errors in students' dictation exercises, with 22.1% of teachers selecting "strongly agree" and 69.5% selecting "agree", and just 1.6% expressing disagreement. The results show that novice high school English teachers believe that rational analysis of student errors and patient guidance are more conducive to student learning outcomes.

In Item 33, which describes the scenario where parents question a teacher's competence, 30% of teachers strongly agree and 61% agree. Combined, these responses indicate that 91% of teachers believe maintaining a rational and calm demeanor is the optimal response to parental misunderstanding.

Finally, responses to Item 34 show that, when conflicts with parents or colleagues arise, 26.3% of teachers strongly agree and 64.2% agree, meaning nearly 90% choose to remain rational and avoid bringing personal emotional states into the classroom.

Collectively, these findings confirm that teachers regularly navigate various non-instructional tasks and personal matters outside the classroom. When students face learning difficulties, most teachers prioritize their students' needs, ensuring that negative personal emotional states are not transmitted to them.

4.5.2. Deep Strategies of Teacher Emotional Labor

Analysis of survey Items 27 - 29 reveals that novice high school English teachers primarily employ three methods to adjust their genuine emotional states during deep acting, namely cognitive reframing, perspective-taking, and intentional emotional regulation.

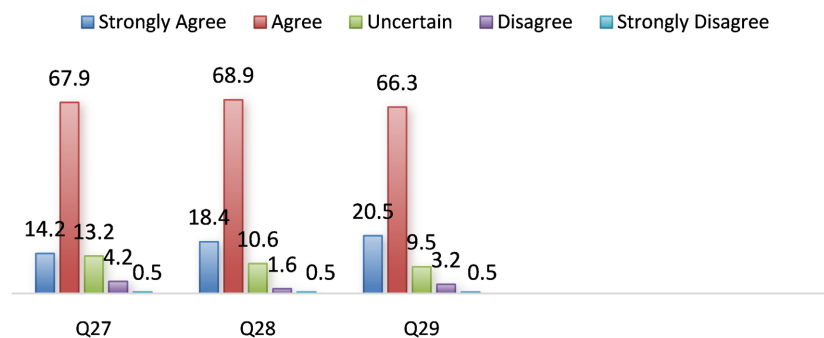


Figure 9. Teachers' specific methods of deep acting strategies.

As shown in **Figure 9**, responses to Item 27 indicate that 14.2% of teachers

strongly agree and 67.9% agree, while 13.2% are uncertain and 4.7% disagree or strongly disagree. This pattern confirms that teachers frequently use perspective-taking, such as empathizing with students to understand their emotional state experiences, as a core deep acting strategy.

For Item 28, 18.4% of teachers selected “strongly agree” and 68.9% selected “agree”, suggesting that the majority of teachers engage in subconscious emotional regulation as part of their emotional labor practices. Responses to Item 29 show that 20.5% strongly agree and 66.3% agree, demonstrating that perspective-taking is a dominant approach teachers use to align their emotional states with professional expectations.

Collectively, these findings indicate that teachers proactively engage in emotional labor through deep acting, which often involves cultivating and expressing genuine positive emotional states that support effective instructional practices.

Expanding upon these survey results, the consistently high agreement levels across all three deep acting items—ranging from 82.1% to 87.3% when combining strongly agree and agree, which specifically addresses perspective-taking, yield a combined agreement of 82.1% (14.2% strongly agree + 67.9% agree), with only 13.2% uncertain and 4.7% disagreeing. This relatively high endorsement confirms that perspective-taking is a readily accessible and frequently used deep acting technique among novice teachers, likely because it aligns with the pedagogical value of understanding student needs. Item 28, which captures subconscious or habitual emotional regulation, shows an even higher combined agreement of 87.3% (18.4% + 68.9%). The elevated endorsement of subconscious regulation appears to reflect that with repeated practice, some deep acting becomes automatic, reducing cognitive effort over time—a phenomenon consistent with the concept of habitually deep acting (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Notably, Item 29 has the highest “strongly agree” proportion (20.5%), suggesting that a substantial subset of novice teachers consciously and deliberately work to transform their emotional states. The low percentages of uncertain and disagree responses across all three items (ranging from 4.7% to 13.2% uncertain, and 4.7% to 5.0% disagree) indicate a strong consensus regarding the use of deep acting strategies. From a theoretical standpoint, the preferential use of deep acting over surface acting—as suggested by the higher mean score for deep acting ($M = 4.061$) compared to surface acting ($M = 3.974$) in **Table 3**—implies that novice teachers in this sample are not merely complying with display rules superficially but are actively trying to align their genuine emotions with professional expectations. However, the fact that a non-negligible proportion (approximately 13% for Item 27) remains uncertain about their use of perspective taking suggests that some novice teachers lack explicit training in cognitive reframing techniques. Therefore, while novice teachers demonstrate a commendable inclination toward deep acting, structured professional development focusing on specific deep acting methods—such as role-play scenarios for perspective-taking and guided practice in cognitive reappraisal—could further strengthen their emotional regulation repertoire.

4.6. Analysis of Factors Influencing Teacher Emotional Labor

Drawing on questionnaire data and interview insights, this study categorizes the individual-level factors influencing emotional labor among novice high school English teachers into the following categories.

4.6.1. Insufficient Professional Competence

Teachers' professional competence directly influences their emotional regulation and emotional states. Interview findings indicate that novice high school English teachers typically possess strong subject-matter expertise, with advanced proficiency in English. However, many lack foundational knowledge in educational theory and psychology—particularly in areas such as adolescent psychological development. This theoretical background proves critical for developing effective coping strategies in classroom management and parent communication contexts. Additionally, novice teachers often lack formal training in classroom management, a skill closely tied to emotional labor. Effective classroom management supports a stable, positive emotional climate, thereby reducing the burden of emotional labor. During interviews, participants frequently described challenges with classroom discipline that directly impacted their emotional well-being.

One specific manifestation of this professional deficit appears in the domain of managing student disengagement. The following excerpt from Allen illustrates this point.

“Classroom management is especially challenging with high school students, who face heavy academic pressure and demanding schedules. Students falling asleep in class is a frequent issue, and even after waking them, their engagement remains low. In these moments, I am unsure how to proceed, which causes significant stress.” (Allen)

Allen's account empirically substantiates the link between insufficient classroom management knowledge and heightened emotional labor. Faced with student disengagement—specifically, students falling asleep and remaining unresponsive after being awakened—Allen reports uncertainty about appropriate intervention strategies. This uncertainty directly triggers stress, demonstrating that the absence of structured coping mechanisms transforms a routine instructional challenge into an emotionally taxing event. The inability to enact effective strategies forces Allen into sustained surface acting, as he must maintain a composed teaching demeanor without internal resolution. This finding aligns with the quantitative results reported in Section 4.3.1, where the majority of novice teachers (86.3% agreeing or strongly agreeing in Item 18) admitted using surface acting during challenging instructional moments. Allen's case further shows that the absence of professional competence not only increases the frequency of surface acting but also amplifies its emotional cost, as the teacher remains uncertain about how to resolve the underlying pedagogical problem.

A second pattern emerges from Emily's experience, where the lack of psychological knowledge compounds the difficulties observed in Allen's case and introduces an additional layer of emotional exhaustion.

“I teach first-year high school students, who tend to be rebellious at this age. They also know I am a new teacher, which sometimes leads to disruptive behavior. I struggle to maintain classroom discipline. Since my university degree was not in education, I often find it hard to understand students’ perspectives or psychological states, which adds to my exhaustion in managing the class.” (Emily)

Emily’s narrative reveals two interrelated deficits that extend beyond the pedagogical gap illustrated in Allen’s case. First, she explicitly lacks knowledge of adolescent developmental psychology, specifically the rebellious tendencies typical of first-year high school students. Second, the absence of a formal education degree exacerbates her difficulty in adopting students’ perspectives. Unlike Allen, whose stress originates from a discrete classroom event (student disengagement), Emily experiences chronic emotional exhaustion stemming from an inability to interpret or anticipate student behavior. Her reference to students’ awareness of her novice status adds a social evaluative dimension, intensifying the emotional labor required to preserve authority while regulating frustration. Returning to Allen’s case, a comparison shows that insufficient professional competence operates on two levels: a procedural level (lack of classroom management techniques) and a cognitive level (lack of psychological frameworks). Both levels elevate emotional labor, but the cognitive deficit produces more sustained exhaustion because it precludes proactive regulation. This finding directly supports the survey result in Section 4.6.2, where low emotional intelligence—closely related to psychological knowledge—emerges as another individual factor intensifying emotional labor. Collectively, Allen and Emily’s accounts demonstrate that professional incompetence, particularly in psychological knowledge and classroom management, does not merely reduce instructional efficacy but directly escalates the frequency and intensity of emotional labor. These qualitative insights reinforce the quantitative evidence presented in **Figure 5** and **Figure 6**, and underscore the need for targeted pre-service and in-service training in both pedagogical techniques and adolescent developmental psychology.

4.6.2. Insufficient Emotional Intelligence in Teachers

Emotional intelligence plays a critical role in how teachers manage their emotions. Some teachers respond to negative feelings by suppressing them, which has detrimental effects on their emotional well-being. Others adopt adaptive coping strategies, expressing emotions in a controlled, rational manner to preserve their emotional well-being. These differing styles are largely shaped by an individual’s level of emotional intelligence.

Furthermore, emotional intelligence directly impacts a teacher’s ability to recognize and respond to students’ emotional needs. Teachers with high emotional intelligence quickly identify when students are struggling and provide timely support, which often leads to improved academic outcomes and a greater sense of professional fulfillment. Conversely, a lack of emotional awareness results in unaddressed student needs, leading to disengagement and negative classroom dynamics.

Scholarly research confirms that individuals with strong emotional intelligence are better equipped to manage negative affect and regulate their emotional states effectively. The interviews in this study reveal that novice teachers with varying levels of emotional intelligence adopt distinct emotional labor strategies, leading to different emotional states. Excerpts from the interviews illustrate these challenges.

“Sometimes, I find it hard to regulate my own emotions. For example, small issues at home can throw me off balance, and I struggle to keep those negative feelings from affecting me at school. Even when I try to suppress them during class, they sometimes still interfere with my teaching.” (Vicky)

The excerpt exposes the persistent difficulties in emotional adjustment, even when they attempted to control negative feelings in instructional settings. As the participant described, personal matters outside school often disturb emotional stability, and negative emotions are difficult to contain completely during teaching, which indirectly undermines instructional quality. Such evidence highlights that insufficient emotional intelligence leaves novice teachers vulnerable to emotional spillover and reduces their ability to separate private feelings from professional practice.

4.6.3. Low Teacher Professional Identity

Existing research has established a significant positive correlation between teachers’ emotional labor and their professional identity (Yang, 2014). Interview findings from this study indicate that most novice high school English teachers possess a strong sense of professional identity. Many have completed formal teacher training programs, having decided early to pursue teaching as a career, and have studied foundational courses in education and psychology. However, a subset of novice teachers who entered the profession through non-traditional pathways reported a notable gap between their initial expectations and the realities of teaching. This discrepancy has been found to impact their experiences of emotional labor, as illustrated in the following interview excerpt.

“The reality of teaching is very different from what I imagined. Before entering the classroom, I had no idea the role would involve so many non-instructional tasks. Often, after hours, I’m still dealing with student and parent-related issues. Sometimes administrative work even seems to take priority over instructional work itself. I’ve even found myself questioning whether my primary purpose here is truly to educate students and share knowledge.” (Emily)

Emily’s narrative empirically demonstrates that diminished professional identity exacerbates emotional labor among novice teachers. Her expressed discrepancy between pre-service expectations and actual job demands reflects a critical misalignment in role perception. Specifically, the unanticipated prevalence of non-instructional duties—including student and parent-related issues and administrative tasks—directly challenges her internalized understanding of a teacher’s core purpose. This role conflict forces Emily to engage in sustained surface acting, as she must outwardly comply with institutional demands while internally question-

ing the meaningfulness of her work. Furthermore, her rhetorical self-questioning (“whether my primary purpose here is truly to educate students”) signals an erosion of professional identity, which prior research has shown to heighten emotional exhaustion and reduce professional identity. Consequently, this excerpt supports the theoretical assertion that low professional identity does not merely coexist with emotional labor but actively amplifies it, particularly when novice teachers encounter unanticipated organizational pressures. Addressing such identity-related gaps through targeted induction programs and realistic job previews mitigates the emotional burden associated with non-traditional entry into the teaching profession.

4.6.4. Insufficient School Humanistic Care

School humanistic care refers to the school’s commitment to honoring teachers’ professional identity, addressing their practical needs, fostering a supportive environment for growth, and safeguarding their rights and interests. This care is reflected in the emotional support extended to both teachers and students through regular dialogues and check-ins, which acknowledge their concerns, growth, and personal needs. It also encompasses investments in teachers’ professional development, such as training opportunities and career advancement paths, to enhance their motivation and engagement.

Interviews revealed that novice teachers, particularly those serving as homeroom teachers, have significant needs for such humanistic care. This need becomes especially acute when they face misunderstandings or criticism from parents, as they look to the school for reassurance and guidance. The following excerpt illustrates the profound impact of school humanistic care on novice teachers’ emotional well-being.

“I joined the profession this year, and when I first arrived, the principal and department head were very welcoming to new teachers. The warm atmosphere made me feel comfortable and valued as I began my role. However, this initial support faded quickly. Since becoming a homeroom teacher, I’ve been overwhelmed by diverse responsibilities. During that time, I really hoped the leadership could offer guidance or emotional support, but everyone was too busy to spare time for me. I struggled emotionally during that period.” (Ella)

Ella’s narrative empirically illustrates how insufficient school humanistic care directly intensifies emotional labor among novice teachers, particularly those assuming homeroom responsibilities. Her account reveals a critical temporal pattern, an initial phase of welcoming support that fails to sustain into the period of actual professional challenge. This discontinuity between early induction warmth and subsequent emotional isolation is especially consequential for homeroom teachers, who face uniquely high demands from parents, students, and administrative tasks. Ella’s explicit hope for leadership guidance or emotional support, unmet due to competing time pressures, underscores a structural gap in the school’s humanistic care system. Consequently, she reports struggling emotionally—a state that likely forces her into sustained surface acting, as she must continue to per-

form professional composure without institutional reassurance. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that perceived organizational support is a key buffer against emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2000). When such support is absent, novice teachers are left to individually manage the emotional burdens of classroom and parent interactions, thereby increasing their reliance on surface acting and elevating the risk of burnout. Ella's case thus highlights the need for schools to implement continuous, rather than merely initial, humanistic care mechanisms—such as structured mentoring, regular check-ins, and accessible emotional support channels—specifically targeting novice homeroom teachers during their first years of service.

4.6.5. The Heavy Workload of Novice Teachers

Novice high school English teachers face a broad range of professional responsibilities, including the following core tasks.

First, lesson preparation is an essential part of their instructional work. New teachers must dedicate significant time to developing content, creating materials, and designing lesson plans for each class to ensure their teaching has sufficient academic depth and breadth.

Second, classroom instruction is their most direct responsibility. They apply educational theories and methodologies to implement lesson plans, delivering English knowledge and skills to students. This includes facilitating interactions, answering questions, and managing classroom behavior effectively. Additionally, student assessment is a key task that requires them to design quizzes and exams, evaluate academic performance, and promptly record and share grades with both students and parents. Beyond core instructional work, they also participate actively in school governance and activities. This includes classroom management—especially for homeroom teachers who build positive teacher-student relationships—parental communication, and involvement in school events that foster a vibrant campus culture.

Interviews confirm that work intensity significantly impacts the emotional labor experiences of these teachers. Compared to educators at other levels, high school teachers report heavier workloads and more tightly scheduled workdays.

“Since I started teaching, I’ve worked six days a week. I arrive at school at 7 a.m. to oversee morning reading. Sometimes I don’t even have time to rest at noon because, as a homeroom teacher, there are always issues to address. On top of that, I have to prepare materials for inspections, attend observation lessons, observe model classes, and participate in teaching competitions. It’s just constant and exhausting.” (Allen)

Allen's narrative provides direct empirical evidence linking excessive workload to heightened emotional labor among novice high school English teachers. His description of a six-day workweek, early morning duties, and the absence of even noon breaks illustrates a chronic pattern of time scarcity and role overload. As a homeroom teacher, he faces not only instructional responsibilities but also continuous, unscheduled student-related issues that demand immediate attention.

Furthermore, the additional professional obligations—preparing inspection materials, observing model classes, and participating in teaching competitions—represent institutionally mandated tasks that extend well beyond core teaching. Collectively, these demands create a situation of sustained high-intensity work, leaving little opportunity for emotional recovery or genuine expression. His case underscores that heavy workload does not merely increase task volume; it systematically erodes novice teachers' capacity for authentic emotional regulation, thereby intensifying the negative consequences of emotional labor. To mitigate this risk, schools should consider workload redistribution, protected non-instructional time for novice teachers, and selective reduction of extraneous evaluative activities during the induction period.

4.6.6. Lack of Teacher Emotional Regulation Skills Training

Comprehensive training in emotional regulation typically covers three core areas. First, it fosters emotional awareness. Teachers learn to recognize the range of emotional states they encounter in their work, including stress and frustration triggered by daily challenges. By developing this awareness, educators more accurately identify their emotional states, laying the foundation for effective emotional states.

Second, training focuses on emotional expression and communication skills. Participants learn to express feelings in constructive ways, rather than suppressing negative emotions or venting them inappropriately. Effective communication supports positive teacher-student relationships, reducing classroom misunderstandings and tension.

Third, it addresses emotional coping strategies. Teachers are equipped with techniques to navigate workplace challenges and stress, enhancing their emotional adaptability. These include emotional reframing, cognitive restructuring, and positive thinking, which help maintain emotional state stability and a professional mindset. Interviews with novice teachers reveal a notable lack of such targeted training in schools.

“Our school offers many training sessions each year, but they often feel irrelevant to my needs. For example, there is a clear issue with teacher burnout and low morale, yet the school has not provided specific training to address these problems. The current programs do not target our practical challenges.” (Ella)

Ella's account directly highlights the critical gap between the availability of generic professional development and the absence of targeted emotional regulation training for novice teachers. This finding aligns with Li et al.'s (2024) observation that novice English teachers in China face evident gaps in both understanding and institutional support regarding emotional preparedness. She explicitly acknowledges the presence of teacher burnout and low morale as observable problems within her school, yet notes that existing training programs fail to address these practical challenges. This mismatch between institutional training supply and teachers' emotional needs is particularly consequential for novice educators, who lack the experiential repertoire to independently develop effective coping strate-

gies. Without formal instruction in emotional awareness, constructive expression, and cognitive restructuring, novice teachers are left to manage workplace stressors through trial and error, often defaulting to surface acting as an accessible but psychologically costly strategy. This default to surface acting is particularly problematic, as meta-analytic evidence confirms that surface acting is generally not supportive of effective teaching practices and undermines teacher well-being (Wang et al., 2025). Ella's observation that training sessions feel "irrelevant" suggests that schools prioritize administrative or pedagogical content while neglecting the affective dimensions of teaching. Consequently, this excerpt underscores the need for integrating evidence-based emotional regulation modules into novice teacher induction programs, thereby equipping them with skills to navigate emotionally charged interactions with students, parents, and colleagues. This call for integration aligns with Jin et al.'s (2025) systematic review, which identified professional development as a key factor in enhancing novice teachers' coping abilities. Addressing this gap would not only reduce reliance on surface acting but also promote sustainable emotional well-being and professional retention.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Major Findings

This study employed a mixed-methods design, combining a questionnaire survey of 190 novice high school English teachers (teaching experience ≤ 3 years) and semi-structured interviews with five teachers in Ganzhou, to examine the current status and influencing factors of emotional labor among this specific population. The major findings are summarized as follows.

First, novice high school English teachers in this sample demonstrated a relatively high overall level of emotional labor (total mean = 3.972 on a 5-point scale). Among the four dimensions, deep acting exhibited the highest mean score ($M = 4.061$, $SD = 0.338$), followed by emotional labor perception ($M = 4.012$, $SD = 0.247$) and surface acting ($M = 3.974$, $SD = 0.270$), while natural expression registered the lowest mean ($M = 3.842$, $SD = 0.507$). This pattern indicates that although novice teachers frequently engage in genuine cognitive and emotional adjustments to align internal feelings with professional expectations, they also rely substantially on surface acting and perceive a clear need for emotional regulation.

Second, regarding specific strategies, novice teachers predominantly adopted deep acting techniques, including cognitive reframing, perspective-taking, and intentional emotional regulation. In surface acting, they primarily concealed genuine emotional states or performed simulated displays of anger, especially in situations involving external evaluations, personal or family stress, or routine instructional challenges. Natural expression was least frequently employed and typically occurred only in low-stakes classroom scenarios, such as minor student inattentiveness or modest academic underperformance.

Third, the influencing factors of emotional labor were categorized into two broad groups. Individual factors included insufficient professional competence (partic-

ularly in classroom management and adolescent psychology), limited emotional intelligence, and low professional identity among a subset of teachers who entered the profession through non-traditional pathways. School factors comprised inadequate humanistic care, excessive workload (e.g., six-day workweeks, homeroom responsibilities, and extraneous evaluative activities), and a notable absence of targeted emotional regulation skills training.

These findings not only confirm the high emotional demands placed on novice high school English teachers but also highlight the interaction between individual competencies and organizational conditions in shaping their emotional labor experiences. The results are generally consistent with recent literature (e.g., [Zhu & Wang, 2023](#); [Zhao, You, & Qin, 2023](#)), while extending the evidence base to the under-researched context of senior high school EFL teaching in China.

This study has three main limitations. First, the research sample was drawn exclusively from Ganzhou, which limits the representativeness of the findings for novice high school English teachers in other regions. Second, the sample size (190 questionnaires and five interviews) is relatively modest, thereby restricting the generalizability of the results. Third, the cross-sectional design precludes tracking the dynamic changes and long-term development of emotional labor among novice teachers over time. Future research should address these limitations by expanding the geographical scope, increasing sample size, and adopting longitudinal designs.

5.2. Prospects

To expand future study, researchers should include novice high school English teachers from diverse regions and increase sample sizes to enhance research validity. A longitudinal design is also needed to track the dynamic development of emotional labor over time. Furthermore, follow-up research should explore the interaction mechanisms between individual factors and school factors, and develop targeted intervention strategies for novice high school English teachers' emotional labor. For teachers, enhancing professional competence through continuous learning and reflection is necessary, as is improving emotional intelligence by means of self-emotional monitoring and regulation with reference to Gross's emotional regulation strategies. Establishing positive teacher-student relationships is equally important. For school administrators, efforts are required to create a caring, emotional atmosphere for teachers by establishing support systems, organizing emotional management training, and providing mental health resources. Democratic management should be implemented through encouraging teacher participation, granting work autonomy, and ensuring information transparency. Therefore, novice teachers need to actively enhance their professional skills and psychological qualities to better handle emotional labor. However, individual efforts alone are not sufficient. Schools must also assume organizational responsibility, establish clear rules for emotional management, and create a supportive environment to help novice teachers overcome emotional difficulties ([Qiu & Wang, 2026](#)).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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