

# The Impact of Emotional Labor on Job Satisfaction of Special Education Teachers: The Mediating Effect of Professional Identity

Fang Zhong

*Faculty of Education and Human Development, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, 999077, China*

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**Abstract:** This research focuses on special education teachers (SETs) and utilizes scales measuring emotional labor, professional identity and job satisfaction to analyze a group of 221 educators in the field. The primary objective is to establish a stronger theoretical foundation for improving job satisfaction among these educators by examining the impact of emotional labor on their overall job satisfaction and the mediating role of professional identity. The findings reveal that: (1) there is a significant negative correlation between surface acting and job satisfaction, while deep and natural acting, emotional labor and professional identity all tend to correlate favorably with job satisfaction; (2) professional identity is crucial in mediating the connection between emotional labor and job satisfaction for SETs. Consequently, it is essential to underscore the significance of professional identity in efforts to boost job satisfaction within this group.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

As stated in the China Disabled Persons' Federation's issued report, over 85 million individuals in China are disabled overall (The China Disabled Persons' Federation, 2010). For these special groups, special education can improve their ability to a certain extent, enable them to better adapt to and integrate into society, and live in society with more dignity, which is of great significance to them, their families, and even the whole society.

In this context, the Chinese Ministry of Education has issued a series of policies, including the action plan for advancing and improving special education during the 14th five-year plan and the protection and development plan for the disabled over the same period (The China Disabled Persons' Federation, 2023). These policies aim to create better conditions for the disabled and to promote the comprehensive development of special education. In this process of development, special education teachers (SETs) are pivotal, yet they are facing great challenges. The majority of special students have physical and/or intellectual disabilities. Compared with the non-disabled peers, they demonstrate more impaired cognitive abilities and are more prone to various emotional and behavioral problems. Furthermore, the speed of special students' acquisition of knowledge and skills is very slow, which can result in a sense of

teacher accomplishment being elusive. At the same time, the students of special education are complex, including children with physical disabilities, children with intellectual disabilities, children on the autistic spectrum, and so on. Compared with the students of general education, they are more vulnerable and sensitive. Moreover, in the eyes of the public, SETs are often erroneously considered to be "nannies". These characteristics require that they need to invest more care and encouragement than teachers in general education to support the development of students' abilities, and they must also dedicate more effort and emotional labor to cope with pressure and meet work expectations. Research shows that emotional labor significantly affects both educators and students. Effective emotional labor promotes education, but emotional resource consumption affects teachers' physical and mental health, and teachers' negative emotions in turn affect students (Hong et al., 2022). At present, the emotional health problems of SETs in China are serious, and the prevalence of psychological issues reaches 25.63%, significantly exceeding that of regular primary and secondary educators (Xu, 2004). This situation seriously affects the team dynamics of SETs, underscoring the need for more nuanced attention to their emotional labor.

Hochschild first put forth the notion of emotional labor in 1979. It refers to the psychological process in which individuals show reasonable emotions in

accordance with organizational requirements in order to promote the smooth completion of tasks (Hochschild, 2019). From different research perspectives, different scholars have also put forward different definitions. At present, the academic community generally believes that emotional labor includes three dimensions, namely, surface acting, deep acting and natural acting. Surface acting is known as the suppression of authentic emotional reactions to meet organizational expectations. Deep acting refers to individuals adjusting their emotions through self-regulation and expressing feelings that the organization deems appropriate (Hochschild, 2019). Natural acting, on the other hand, is defined as the authentic expression of personal feelings (Diefendorff et al., 2005). The present study aligns with the three-dimensional theory, which categorizes acting styles as surface, deep, and natural, and divides the emotional labor of SETs into these three distinct dimensions.

As is widely acknowledged, the emotions that individuals experienced inside are not always consistent with the expectations of organizations. In the workplace, individuals typically seek to express positive emotions. However, individual emotions are inherently variable. When such emotions deviate from the organizational requirements, people must adapt their feelings to conform to the organization's expectations. The larger gap between a person's feelings and their emotional expression, the more emotional labor the individual needs to pay. As demonstrated by extant research, surface behavior in emotional labor has a detrimental impact on emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction (Zhang & Zhu, 2008). Xu and Liu, taking teachers as research objects, showed that emotional labor had an adverse association with occupational burnout, and was positively correlated with teaching efficacy. Emotional labor also played an intermediary role in teaching efficacy and teacher job burnout (Xu & Liu, 2011). In the investigation into the emotional labor undertaken by SETs, Zhou observed that these educators consistently exhibited a substantial degree of emotional labor (Zhou, 2016). Ger pointed out that the emotional labor and surface behavior of SETs had a significant positive predictive value for emotional exhaustion, natural behavior exhibited a significant negative predictive value for emotional exhaustion, and deep behavior demonstrated no significant impact on emotional exhaustion (Ger, 2022).

The notion of job satisfaction was first proposed by scholars as early as the 1930s. According to Hoppock, job satisfaction is the feeling of a certain degree of satisfaction that employees get from work

and is the subjective response of individuals to the work situation (Hoppock, 1935). Specifically, satisfaction at work is of great importance, signifying a satisfying or favorable emotional condition experienced by employees in their professional environment. A high level of job satisfaction indicates that individuals are more able to obtain positive emotional experience at work and are more willing to engage in work, while a low level of job satisfaction can result in a range of adverse behaviors, including resignation and early retirement (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Consequently, enhancing job satisfaction among SETs is imperative for maintaining their professional stability. In previous studies, there are many factors exerting an influence on job satisfaction, including job return, leadership, work collaboration, age, gender and other factors. In addition, extant research has identified emotional labor as a contributing factor diminishing job satisfaction (Cheung et al., 2011). Xiong's research further demonstrated that the emotional labor performance of SETs, including emotional weakening and surface acting, had a detrimental effect on job satisfaction (Xiong, 2019).

Professional identity is defined as the individual's perspective on the goals, societal values and related aspects of their chosen profession. Teachers' professional identity reflects the overall cognition and attitude of the teaching profession formed in the process of teaching. For SETs, Chai and Wang mentioned in their research that compared with ordinary schoolteachers, the professional identity of special educators was relatively low (Chai & Wang, 2014). In the study of professional identity, scholars have indicated that it exerted a notable influence on job satisfaction. The correlation between professional identity and job satisfaction is such that a person's heightened sense of professional identity is positively associated with increased job satisfaction. Teachers exhibiting robust professional identity perceive their profession as valuable and meaningful and derive satisfaction from it. In contrast, teachers with a diminished sense of professional identity experience negative emotional responses in their professional endeavors, subsequently influencing their overall job satisfaction (Ostad et al., 2019). Additionally, studies further demonstrated that professional identity partially mediated the connection between teachers' emotional labor (surface acting) and their intention to resign and as teachers' tenure increased, surface acting exerted a more pronounced effect on their professional identity (Hong et al., 2023). In the research on preschool teachers, Wei et al. also highlighted that the professional identity of preschool

teachers would influence the emotional labor strategies they employ, predominantly natural acting and deep acting (Wei et al., 2021).

At present, despite the increasing research conducted by scholars on the subject of emotional labor, the overall volume of studies in this area remains modest. Furthermore, the number of studies focusing on SETs as research participants is limited. A select group of scholars have conducted relevant research in this area. However, research examining the correlation between emotional labor and its associated variables, along with the intermediate process mechanism, remains underdeveloped. Similarly, there is a scarcity of studies specifically examining emotional labor in SETs and its potential ramifications on job satisfaction. Furthermore, the intermediary processes of emotional labor influencing job satisfaction remain inadequately investigated. To address these gaps in knowledge, the current study aims to utilize a sample of SETs as the research population to explore how emotional labor influences their job satisfaction and introduce the notion of professional identity as a potential mediator to ascertain whether it functions as an intermediary in the connection between job satisfaction and emotional labor. This study's findings are not only beneficial to the enhancement of the extant research system in the domain of special education but also serve as a catalyst for the relevant departments to accord greater importance to the mental well-being of SETs, thereby enhancing their satisfaction towards job and ultimately promoting the advancement of special education.

In conclusion, this paper proposes the hypothesis that the emotional labor undertaken by SETs exerts a notable impact on their satisfaction at work, and professional identity acts as a mediating factor in the process of emotional labor affecting job satisfaction. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed model of this research.

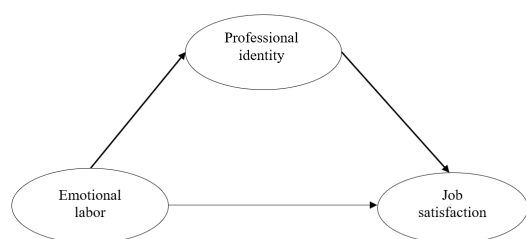


Figure 1: Mediating role model of professional identity (assumed).

## 2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Object

The SETs in public special education schools in Guangdong Province were selected as the research objects in this paper. The cluster sampling method was employed to conduct online and offline questionnaire surveys. This study distributed a total of 250 questionnaires, and 232 were retrieved. Subsequent to excluding the invalid responses (i.e. those completed in less than 60 seconds or contained conflicting data, or were repeated), a final count of 221 valid questionnaires were obtained. This resulted in the recovery rate of 95.3%. The demographic details of the teaching staff are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Basic information of survey samples (n=221).

category		number	percentage
gender	male	83	37.6%
	female	138	62.4%
head teacher or	yes	101	45.7%
	no	120	54.3%
professional title	no professional title	38	17.2%
	junior professional title	70	31.7%
	intermediate professional title	90	40.7%
	senior professional title	23	10.4%
age	20-30 years	66	29.9%
	31-40 years	93	42.1%
	41-50 years	53	24.0%
	over 50 years	9	4.1%
education background	college degree or below	15	6.8%
	undergraduate	174	78.7%
	master's degree or above	32	14.5%
specialty	special education	141	63.8%
	nonspecial education	80	36.2%
seniority	less than 5 years	72	32.6%
	5-10 years	51	23.1%
	10-15 years	29	13.1%
	over 15 years	69	31.2%
state system	in	174	78.7%
	out	47	21.3%
monthly income	below 5000 yuan	27	12.2%
	5000-8000 yuan	82	37.1%
	8000-10000 yuan	75	33.9%
	above 10000 yuan	37	16.7%

## 2.2 Research Tools

### 2.2.1 Emotional Labor Scale

J.M. Diefendorff's emotional labor questionnaire was used for measurement (Diefendorff et al., 2005). The questionnaire comprises three dimensions: natural, deep and surface acting, with 3, 4, 7 items respectively. The Likert scale was employed in this study to award scores from 1 to 5, where 1 signifies "completely unqualified" and 5 denotes "fully qualified". The confirmatory factor analysis results indicated that the fit indices were acceptable ( $\chi^2/DF=3.74$ ,  $RMSEA=0.048$ ,  $P<0.05$ ,  $CFI=0.92$ ,  $IFI=0.92$ ). In this paper, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values for the three components were 0.921, 0.886, and 0.848, and the  $\alpha$  coefficient of the whole scale was 0.774. In the three sub-scales, it was demonstrated that the higher the score of a sub-scale, the more subjects adopted the strategy.

### 2.2.2 Teacher Professional Identity Scale

The teacher professional identity scale employed in this study was compiled by Wei Shuhua (Wei et al., 2013). The scale comprises 18 items, which are divided into four dimensions: role values, behavioral propensities, job values and sense of belonging. The alpha coefficient of each factor ranges from 0.72 to 0.86. The correlation between each factor is low and medium (0.20-0.55), and the correlation with the total scale is high (0.58-0.81). All correlations reach statistically significant levels. The scale employs a Likert 5-point scoring system, ranging from 'completely unqualified' to 'fully qualified', with points allocation of 1-5 (1=completely unqualified, 5=fully qualified). Scores that are higher on the scale are indicative of elevated levels of professional identity. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this study's scale is 0.916, suggesting a high degree of reliability.

### 2.2.3 Teacher Job Satisfaction Scale

The teacher job satisfaction scale was developed by Zhu Linghui (Zhu, 2011). A 5-point Likert scale was used for scoring, where 'extremely dissatisfied' received a score of 1 and 'extremely satisfied' received a score of 5. The overall scale consists of 10 items of four factors: cognition of work itself, cognition of work welfare security, cognition of job promotion prospect and cognition of work interpersonal environment. The  $\alpha$  coefficient of each factor ranges from 0.68 to 0.80, with the total scale demonstrating an  $\alpha$  coefficient of 0.901, which indicates that the scale demonstrates good reliability.

## 2.3 Data Statistics and Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis and variable relationship assessment of the questionnaire were performed using SPSS27.0 software. Initially, the descriptive statistical analysis was employed to examine the respondents' demographic composition, including gender ratio, age ratio, etc. Secondly, this study used mean analysis to statistically analyze the average level of teachers' emotional labor, professional identity and job satisfaction variables. In addition, this study also studied whether there is a significant link between emotional labor and professional identity. The regression analysis was used to verify whether teachers' emotional labor had an important impact on job satisfaction. Finally, the study utilized stepwise regression to analyze the mediating effect of teachers' professional identity.

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Common Method Deviation Inspection

The Harman single factor method was employed to determine the existence of any potential serious common method bias. The analytical results indicate that nine factors possess eigenvalues exceeding 1, with the first factor representing 29.195% of the variation. This ratio is below the essential standard of 40%, signifying minimal common methodological bias within this research (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

### 3.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis of Variables

In this paper, the mean, standard deviation, and inter-variable correlations were analyzed through statistical assessments. The outcomes are presented in Table 2. Among the three sub-dimensions of emotional labor (surface, deep and natural acting), a notable negative correlation has been observed between surface behavior in emotional labor and teachers' job satisfaction ( $r=-0.211$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). In contrast, deep and natural acting exhibit a substantial positive correlation with teachers' satisfaction towards job ( $r=0.338$ ,  $p<0.01$ ;  $r=0.257$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). In addition, the correlation coefficients of emotional labor, teachers' professional identity and job satisfaction are 0.233 and 0.605, respectively, indicating strong positive correlations. In the demographic variables, gender, education background

Table 2: Statistical descriptions and correlation assessments of the variables (n=221).

	gender	age	education background	specialty	seniority	state system	professional title	surface acting	deep acting	natural acting	emotional labor	professional identity	job satisfaction
gender	1												
age	-.0102	1											
education background	.152*	-.159*	1										
specialty	0.001	0.058	-0.003	1									
seniority	0.088	.797**	-.156*	-.0034	1								
state system	-.0031	-.239**	-.210**	0.092	-.271*	1							
professional title	-.0033	.670**	-0.028	-.0089	.738**	-.258**	1						
surface acting	-.0038	-.419**	.137*	-.0039	-.357**	0.028	-.311**	1					
deep acting	0.012	-.0091	-0.069	0.02	-.0067	-0.064	0.095	.172*	1				
natural acting	.264**	0.1	0.075	0.092	0.082	-0.051	0.087	-.512**	0.089	1			
emotional labor	0.125	-.271**	0.079	0.038	-.225*	-0.053	-0.084	.470**	.831**	.270**	1		
professional identity	0.063	0.124	-0.057	0.107	.133*	-0.098	.253**	-.259**	.347**	.508**	.342**	1	
job satisfaction	-.243**	0.061	-.208**	-.0023	-.0043	-0.038	.161**	-.211**	.338**	.257**	.233**	.605**	1
M	1.62	2.02	2.08	1.36	2.43	1.21	2.44	2.27	3.04	3.76	3.02	3.92	3.32
SD	0.485	0.839	0.456	0.482	1.236	0.41	0.896	1.056	1.14	0.895	0.562	0.641	0.781

Note: \* signifies significance at  $p < 0.05$  (two-tailed); \*\* signifies significance at  $p < 0.01$  (two-tailed).

and professional title have demonstrated statistically significant correlations with the dependent variables. Consequently, these variables will serve as control variables in the subsequent analysis of mediation effects.

### 3.3 Mediation Analysis

To test the mediation model, this study employed the SPSS27.0 process plug-in to analyze the variables. Taking gender, education background and professional title as control variables, this study has examined how professional identity acts as a mediator in the connection between emotional labor and job

satisfaction. The findings indicate that emotional labor has the potential to predict one's professional identity ( $\beta = 0.419$ ,  $SE = 0.074$ ,  $p < .000$ ) and professional identity is a predictor of job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.739$ ,  $SE = 0.066$ ,  $p < .000$ ). However, emotional labor does not predict job satisfaction. This model is a complete mediation model (see Table 3). The direct effect value is 0.107, accounting for 26.35% of the variance, and the intermediate effect value is 0.300, accounting for 73.65% (see Table 4). The relationship model for each variable is illustrated in Figure 2.

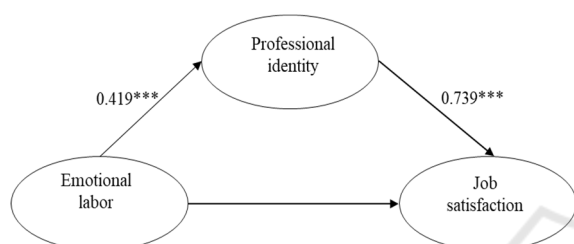


Table 3: Regression analysis of emotional labor, professional identity and job satisfaction.

	professional identity				job satisfaction			
	$\beta$	se	p	95%CI	$\beta$	se	p	95%CI
emotional labor	0.419***	0.074	0.000	[.317,.608]	0.072	0.078	0.358	[-.081,.224]
professional identity	—	—	—	—	0.739***	0.066	0.000	[.609,.869]
job satisfaction	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Table 4: Breakdown of the direct effect, the intermediary effect and the total effect.

effect name	effect value	standard error	95%CI	effect proportion (%)
direct effect	0.107	0.075	[-.042,.256]	26.35
mediation effect	0.300	0.056	[.191,.409]	73.65
total effect	0.406	0.086	[.238,.576]	100



Note: \*\*\* at the 0.001level (two-tailed), the correlation is significant.

Figure 2: Mediating role model of professional identity.

## 4 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 The Overall Situation of Emotional Labor, Professional Identity and Job Satisfaction of SETs

This study found that the emotional labor, professional identity and job satisfaction of SETs were at the upper middle level (emotional labor:  $M=3.025$ , professional identity:  $M=3.918$ , job satisfaction:  $M=3.317$ ). In comparison with regular schoolteachers, SETs are required to invest more emotional labor in their daily education due to the unique needs of children with special educational needs. Despite the challenges posed by children's reluctance to acquire knowledge and skills, and their emotional behavioral problems, teachers are expected to demonstrate understanding and acceptance, and to take appropriate measures to intervene. In addition, the study revealed that the professional identity and job satisfaction of SETs were also at the upper middle level. Firstly, the state has increased its support for the special education industry, leading to the development and diversification of the welfare system and the optimization of industry subsidies. These developments have further improved the working conditions in the special education industry, satisfied the employment aspirations of SETs to a

certain extent, and enhanced their recognition of their work. This, in turn, has contributed to enhancing job satisfaction. Secondly, SETs do not need to face the pressure of students' academic performance assessment and promotion in their work. What's more, the relatively small class size also has a positive effect on their workload and stress levels, thereby promoting the development of professional identity and job satisfaction. Finally, the majority of SETs have backgrounds in special education, psychology and pedagogy, which is an advantage in this field. This equips them with a comprehensive understanding of their professional values and a firm grasp of the relevant professional knowledge prior to commencing their duties, which in turn fosters a deep sense of professional satisfaction and a stronger professional identity in their professional practice.

### 4.2 The Correlation Analysis of Emotional Labor, Professional Identity and Job Satisfaction

The research revealed that, within the context of emotional labor, surface acting exhibited a statistically significant adverse correlation with both professional identity and teachers' job satisfaction ( $r=-0.259$ ,  $p<0.01$ ;  $r=-0.211$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Conversely, deep acting and natural acting demonstrated positive correlations with professional identity ( $r=0.347$ ,  $p<0.01$ ;  $r=0.508$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Furthermore, the findings underscored a positive correlation among deep acting, natural acting, professional identity and teachers' job satisfaction ( $r=0.338$ ,  $p<0.01$ ;  $r=0.257$ ,  $p<0.01$ ;  $r=0.605$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). These findings are consonant with those reported in prior research (Zhang & Zhu, 2008; Cheung et al., 2011; Ostad et al., 2019). Surface acting needs to suppress their own authentic emotional responses and express the anticipated unrealistic emotions of the organization. Deep acting is a conscious strategy that adjusts themselves when

expressing the emotions expected by the working environment. Natural acting, on the other hand, is an expression of authentic feelings. When individuals use the surface acting strategy, they often find themselves suppressing negative emotional behavior and falsely expressing positive emotional behavior. This false emotional expression is inconsistent with the real emotions experienced, which can lead to emotional disorder, anxiety and tension and then has a detrimental effect on the sense of identity for work and reduce job satisfaction (Zapf, 2002). Conversely, when SETs adopt the deep acting strategy, they will change their cognition, so that the inner emotions are consistent with the external emotional expression. When using the natural acting strategy, the individual expresses the authentic feelings. Internal and external consistency will not make individuals perceive imbalance, which, in turn, is conducive to improving professional identity and job satisfaction (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007). Professional identity, in this context, is defined as teachers' views and opinions on their chosen occupation. A high sense of professional identity is indicative of teachers who perceive their occupation as meaningful, valuable, and enjoyable. For SETs, a high sense of professional identity is characterized by a positive attitude towards the cause of special education, the capacity to respond proactively to professional challenges, and a greater ability to derive enjoyment and value from one's work. This, in turn, leads to higher levels of satisfaction at work.

### **4.3 The Intermediary Function of Professional Identity in the Relationship Between Emotional Labor and Job Satisfaction**

Current research identified a significant mediating function of professional identity in the association between emotional labor and job satisfaction among special educators. Specifically, emotional labor can positively predict professional identity, and professional identity is positively linked with job satisfaction, but emotional labor cannot exhibit a direct predictive effect on job satisfaction. These findings show the pivotal intermediary function of professional identity in the impact of emotional labor on job satisfaction. One potential explanation for this phenomenon is that emotional labor can be understood as a complex construct, consisting of three unique dimensions: surface, deep and natural acting. Previous studies have demonstrated that in emotional labor, surface acting exerts a detrimental influence on job satisfaction (Li et al., 2022). Deep

acting requires high emotional regulation ability, while natural acting is to directly reveal genuine emotions. For special educators, due to the unique nature of the education object, the work difficulty and complexity are much higher than those of ordinary schoolteachers, and they need to often control negative emotions and behaviors, which will lead them to use more surface acting and less deep acting to regulate external emotional performance. Concurrently, the requisites of the educational profession and societal expectations necessitate that teachers consistently serve as role models for their students. They rarely employ natural acting in their work, which will weaken the impact of deep acting and natural acting on job satisfaction to a certain extent. Emotional labor, as the aggregate of the three dimensions, may not directly predict job satisfaction when influenced by other variables.

Current research indicates a direct relationship between the extent of emotional labor and the subsequent consumption of psychological resources. When individuals experience greater consumption of psychological resources than they obtain, more negative emotions will be generated at work, which will weaken the recognition of work (Liu et al., 2024). Concurrently, emotional labor has been demonstrated to precipitate job burnout. The degree of job burnout in teachers has been found to be positively correlated with the extent to which they derive enjoyment from their work and negatively correlated with their sense of professional identity (Kariou et al., 2021). Professional identity is defined as the manifestation of a person's positive attitude and degree of engagement in their occupation, reflecting the individual's recognition of the intrinsic value of their occupation and emotional preference (Blau, 1985). Teachers' professional identity is an intrinsic motivating force and prerequisite for their love and dedication to education, which can affect their conscious participation in education (Wang, 2020). The promotion of professional identity and self-worth cognition in SETs has been shown to have a positive effect on their professional practice, reducing negative emotions and enhancing positive emotions. This process has been shown to have a positive impact on job satisfaction (Lu et al., 2022). It can be posited that career identity functions as a significant intermediary factor between emotional labor and job satisfaction. A strong professional identity fosters a constant internal drive that propels individuals to engage in their work in a proactive manner. Regarding the requirements of emotional labor, individuals possess the capacity to proactively adapt and adjust their cognitive processes in a timely

manner, thereby more effectively confronting challenges in their professional environment and attaining heightened job satisfaction.

#### 4.4 Research Limitations and Prospects

This paper has some deficiencies. The first is the limitation of the scale. The emotional labor measurement utilized in this paper is derived from the seminal work of scholars from other countries outside China in the field. In future research, consideration should be given to the utilization of a scale developed by Chinese scholars and its subsequent discussion in the context of the actual work of SETs. Secondly, the research sample is limited. Due to the limitations of subjective and objective conditions, the research objects of this study are mainly SETs in Guangdong Province, and most of the respondents are female teachers, which may make the research results biased. In future research, a broader region should be targeted, and the sample distribution should be as uniform as possible. Furthermore, the influence mechanism of emotional labor on job satisfaction requires further refinement. The impact path of emotional labor on job satisfaction is complex. It is possible that other mediating variables exist. The relationship between the two is also significantly impacted by some demographic variables. In future research, scholars may wish to consider conducting longitudinal studies or exploring the role of other potential mediators.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Firstly, it is apparent that SETs exhibit relatively high levels of emotional labor, professional identity, and job satisfaction. Secondly, in emotional labor, surface acting demonstrates a significantly unfavorable correlation with teachers' job satisfaction. Conversely, deep and natural acting, emotional labor, professional identity and job satisfaction exhibit a markedly favorable correlation. Finally, professional identity serves a pivotal intermediary function between emotional labor and job satisfaction for special educators.

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