



Emotional Labour, Burnout, and Self-Perception: Psychological Determinants of Teachers' Professional Commitment

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Abstract

As the modern education system becomes increasingly multifaceted, teachers are required to undertake a multitude of new responsibilities beyond the conventional realms of instruction; hence, educators must work with both the cognitive realm of their students and the complex social and emotional interactions with students, parents, peers, and the larger school community. The study analyzes the complex interplay of emotional labour, burnout, self-perception and professional commitment, all of which are essential psychological variables that determine whether teachers will continue effectively and actively working in their field. Emotional labour refers to the intent to regulate/manage one's own emotions to meet the demands of a professional standards. In the case of teachers, this would often mean maintaining a positive and supportive presence in the face of significant adversity, balancing one's compassion toward others with the expectation that one will be firm with individuals in a classroom setting, managing one's emotions while fulfilling one's professional roles, and a variety of other tasks. Sustained emotional regulation can create psychological strain on the educator, particularly when there is a lack of congruency between what a person feels and what they choose to express, therefore contributing to burnout. A mixed-methods research methodology was used to help illuminate both quantitative and qualitative aspects of these experiences. Quantitative data were collected from 400 teachers across urban and semi-urban schools using structured questionnaires designed to measure emotional labour, burnout, self-perception, and professional commitment. To complement this, qualitative interviews were conducted to gain in-depth insights into teachers' lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of their professional roles. Statistical analyses, including correlation, regression, and path analysis, revealed that emotional labour significantly predicts burnout and negatively affects professional commitment, while self-perception mitigates the adverse effects of burnout, serving as a protective factor that promotes resilience and sustained engagement. The study's findings emphasize the importance of institutional support, professional development programs focused on emotional regulation, and initiatives aimed at enhancing teachers' self-perception. By fostering these psychological resources, schools can promote long-term professional commitment, improve teacher well-being, and ensure high-quality educational outcomes.

Keywords: Emotional labour, Burnout, Self-perception, Professional commitment, Teachers, Psychological determinants

Introduction

Teaching is one of the most challenging psychological professions. Teaching not only requires teachers to possess the skills necessary to instruct students but also has high demands for emotional and interpersonal skills. Often, teachers are expected to always be able to demonstrate a positive, caring, and enthusiastic attitude and to do so regardless of how they are feeling personally at the time. This behaviour, referred to as emotional labour, consists of attempting to control and express one's emotions to meet the requirements of their profession. Hochschild (1983), who was the first to study emotional labour, viewed this phenomenon as being prevalent in the service sector, where service providers consistently provide a certain emotion (e.g., happiness) regardless of their own emotional situation when interacting with their clients or, in an educational setting, students and parents. For teachers, dealing with the overall burden associated with emotional labour contributes to both professional distress and occupational stress.

Burnout is typically viewed as a three-dimensional construct that includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and a lack of personal accomplishment. Much evidence exists that shows burnout negatively impacts a teacher's instructional effectiveness, job satisfaction,



and organisational commitment. Additionally, high levels of burnout are associated with a tendency to be absent from work and less engaged at work, as well as to leave the organisation, illustrating the critical importance of burnout as a predictor of teacher commitment. Emotional labour often exacerbates burnout among teachers, particularly when they engage in surface acting (i.e., modifying their outward behaviour to correspond to what is expected of them) without feeling the same way internally. Conversely, when teachers practise deep acting (i.e., aligning their internal and external emotional states), they are less likely to experience negative impacts from emotional labour on their overall well-being.

Self-perception—being the assessment one makes about themselves, their abilities, their worth as well as their competence—has become a major moderator in occupational stress research. A teacher who has developed a positive self-perception will have a greater ability to cope with emotional labour demands and, thus, will likely be able to withstand burnout, resulting in higher levels of professional commitment. Professional commitment is defined as the psychological attachment/responsibility/dedication that teachers demonstrate toward their job as a result of intrinsic motivation and loyalty to the organization. By exploring the relationship between emotional labour, burnout, and self-perception, we promote sustainable forms of professional commitment as well as the retention of teachers.

The negative outcomes attributed to prolonged emotional effort are most often demonstrated through the phenomenon of burnout, which is a multidimensional construct of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and decreased personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion represents the depletion of one's emotional resources due to chronic occupational stress; depersonalization represents the development of a detached/cynical sense toward both students and coworkers; and decreased personal accomplishment provides evidence of someone who does not feel they are accomplishing anything productive/meaningful within their profession. Extensive research demonstrates that burnout negatively affects a teacher's instructional effectiveness, satisfaction with their position, and their commitment to the institution.

High levels of burnout among teachers tend to lead to increased absenteeism, decreased engagement with their students, and possibly leaving the profession; thus, burnout represents a strong indicator of occupational commitment. Burnout interacts maybe in complex ways with emotional labour. Surface acting – or changing how one externally displays affection towards students without altering the emotion felt internally – has the tendency to create more strain on the individual and to contribute to higher levels of burnout. The opposite of surface acting, deep acting – or realigning one's feelings towards students to match that of their employment requirements – appears to mitigate much of the negative psychological impact of emotional labour and supports their well-being while enhancing their occupational commitment.

Another primary psychological factor influencing the teaching profession in regards to emotional labour and burnout is self-perception, which is how an individual views their capabilities and/or value in a professional setting. Self-perception serves as a moderating variable for the experience of occupational stress where teachers who possess a positive self-perception have demonstrated a greater ability to effectively cope with the emotional demands of their occupation through adaptive coping strategies and reasonably maintain their intrinsic motivation and occupational commitment despite facing stress or burnout.

Evidently, low levels of self-image may exacerbate the negative effects of emotional labour and the dangers of burning out by decreasing professional engagement and increasing the likelihood of becoming disengaged or leaving. Professional commitment is a complex concept that includes three dimensions: emotional attachment to the job; commitment to occupational obligations; and loyalty to one's profession. It encompasses both an intrinsic desire to work with students and an external commitment to complying with institutional expectations. Thus, it is necessary to consider how emotional labour, burnout, and self-perception function together to understand how to promote professional commitment.

This research aims to study the psychological factors that underlie educators' professional commitment by analysing the correlations between emotional labour, burnout, and self-



perception. The use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to measuring the main variables and exploring how teachers experience each of these variables will help create a comprehensive picture of how emotional labour, burnout, and self-perception interact. The results of this study will be useful in developing support systems, professional development programs, and strategies for retaining talented educators. Additionally, educators will be able to use the findings to build positive self-perceptions and learn how to effectively manage their emotions in order to maintain their professional commitment and engagement in the long-term. Through this examination, the study contributes to the broader discourse on occupational well-being in education, highlighting the critical role of psychological determinants in shaping the quality, effectiveness, and sustainability of teaching as a profession.

Review of Literature

Brotheridge and Lee (2020) conducted a study of the Emotional Labour Scale in an educational setting, and their findings indicated that many times teachers used both surface acting and deep acting to fulfil their job requirements. They also determined that high levels of surface acting are highly correlated with teacher emotional exhaustion, which affects the level of teacher job satisfaction; whereas teachers who utilized deep acting demonstrated more authentic and connected relationships with their students. Likewise, Choi and Lee (2020) have studied emotional labour in the teaching profession and reported that the teachers who frequently manage their emotions have higher levels of burnout and are less committed to their profession. This study illustrated the duality of emotional labour in that it can be a necessary part of creating a harmonious classroom; however, it can also have a significant psychological toll. Burnout in teachers was consistently seen as a significant contributor to professional commitment. In an investigation of burnout in high-stakes educational environments, Lee and Kim (2020) established that emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation were primary predictors of decreased engagement and professional efficacy. In addition, Luo and Chen (2020) have conducted a study of urban school environments and found that emotional regulation demands have a direct impact on teacher burnout; thus, highlighting the importance of coping mechanisms in reducing stress.

This review systematically examined studies from Hu, Li, and Wang (2022), Wang, Chen, and Ma (2021), and Zhou and Chen (2022), which all focused on factors that contribute to emotional labour and how its impact may vary across early-career teachers. High levels of emotional labour correlate with high rates of teacher burnout; however, resilience and adaptive strategies can reduce the harmful impacts of burnout on teachers, underscoring the role that personal psychological resources can play in sustaining a teacher's professional engagement. Wang, Chen, and Ma (2021) conducted exploratory research comparing types of coping strategies used by teachers experiencing emotional labour and showed that teachers using proactive emotional regulation and problem-solving coping strategies had lower levels of teacher burnout which helped to maintain professional commitment to teaching. Zhou and Chen (2022) compared urban school context to that of rural school context with respect to emotional labour and teacher burnout; they found that teacher burnout also served as a mediator between emotional labour and professional commitment as the exhaustion caused by occupational stressors (e.g., emotional labour) related to teaching affects a teacher's level of commitment to their work differently depending on the environmental context in which the teacher works.

In addition to the variations in the emotional labour-burnout-professional commitment relationship based upon school context, self-perception and related constructs (such as self-efficacy and perceived competence) have been reported to buffer or moderate this relationship between emotional labour, burnout, and professional commitment. Sharma and Verma (2020) found that teachers who had a positive self-perception were able to implement adaptive coping strategies to reduce their levels of burnout, thereby remaining engaged in their work as teachers. Zhang, Li, and Hu (2021) reported that a teacher's self-perception acted as a significant buffer against the negative effects of occupational stress on professional



commitment and resulting teacher motivation in response to high emotional demands. Moreover, Xu and Zhao (2020) showed that teachers' self-perception had a moderating effect on how emotional labour affected their wellness, while Zhao and Sun (2020) found that using emotional regulation skills along with having a positive self-perception supported continued engagement in the profession. Li, Zhang, and Liu (2021) found that teachers' self-perception was correlated to their likelihood of using deep acting versus surface acting, which helped to reduce their burnout and increased their intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction. Xiao, Li, and Sun (2021) reported that resilience and self-perception were interrelated for teachers who perceived themselves to be competent in their profession and continued to demonstrate a commitment to their work despite working in high-stress environments.

Multiple studies discussed the impact of institutional support and environmental factors on shaping teachers' professional commitment. Kim and Park (2021) reported that school-level support moderated the relationship between burnout and professional commitment, especially for those teachers with a positive self-perception, as well as for those who received adequate mentorship or collegial support. In a study of teachers in Vietnam, Nguyen and Hoang (2021) confirmed that the negative impact of emotional labour on professional commitment could be reduced in the presence of supportive structures (e.g., professional development programs or collaborative networks).

According to Wu and Zhang (2022), job stress and emotional labor had a significant negative impact on the career commitment of Chinese secondary school teachers and that institutions may alleviate these negative effects through structured interventions. Similarly, Yang and Liu (2022) found an association between emotional intelligence (as a type of psychological resource) and decreased levels of teacher burnout as well as an increase in career commitment among teachers, providing strong support for the need for targeted intervention efforts. Liu et al. (2022) provided additional evidence demonstrating that teachers who received interventions for improving self-perception and emotional regulation achieved substantial improvement in their well-being and degree of professional engagement.

The literature supports that emotional labor is a central component of teaching, but creates significant negative psychological costs (i.e., burnout). This relationship indicates that burnout negatively impacts career commitment of teachers; however, self-perception, resilience, emotional intelligence, and support from the organization are critical moderating and buffering factors. The studies demonstrated the importance of both a teacher's ability to continue to maintain career commitment and their reliance on the available support from the organizational structures when implementing coping strategies and developing self-perception skills. Collectively, the findings provide evidence that interventions that build teacher self-perception, develop adaptive emotional regulation skills, and provide systemic support for teachers will improve their well-being and sustain their commitment to the profession, thereby forming a solid basis to support the current research.

Objectives

- To examine the psychological determinants of teachers' professional commitment, focusing on the roles of emotional labour, burnout, and self-perception.
- To investigate the extent to which emotional labour influences burnout, explore the mediating effect of burnout on the relationship between emotional labour and professional commitment, and assess the moderating role of self-perception in these dynamics.
- To identify actionable strategies that can enhance teacher well-being and sustain professional engagement.

Research Methodology

A mixed-methods research design was employed to comprehensively examine the research questions. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 400 teachers across urban and semi-urban schools in North India, purposely selected to ensure diversity in school type, size, and discipline focus. The survey instruments included established scales: the Emotional Labour Scale adapted from Brotheridge and Lee (2020), the Maslach



Burnout Inventory (MBI) for teachers, a validated Self-Perception Inventory, and a Professional Commitment Scale tailored for educational settings. Reliability analyses yielded Cronbach's alpha values above 0.85 for all instruments, confirming internal consistency.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 teachers selected via stratified random sampling to explore lived experiences, coping strategies, and perceptions of professional commitment. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis to complement quantitative findings and provide nuanced contextual insights.

Statistical analyses included Pearson correlation to examine bivariate relationships, multiple regression to identify predictive effects, and path analysis to assess mediation and moderation hypotheses. SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 24.0 were utilized for quantitative analyses, ensuring robust statistical validation.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected from 400 teachers across urban and semi-urban schools were subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analyses to explore the relationships among emotional labour, burnout, self-perception, and professional commitment. Preliminary data screening confirmed that all variables met the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity, allowing the use of parametric statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics revealed that the mean scores for emotional labour ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.62$) and burnout ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.71$) were moderately high, while self-perception ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.64$) and professional commitment ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.59$) indicated generally positive self-assessments and commitment levels among teachers. These preliminary results provided a foundation for further inferential analyses.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for all study variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
Emotional Labour	3.82	0.62	0.87
Burnout	3.45	0.71	0.89
Self-Perception	3.76	0.64	0.86
Professional Commitment	3.68	0.59	0.88

Emotional labour, burnout, self-perception, and professional commitment all demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.85, indicating reliable measurement instruments suitable for subsequent correlation and regression analyses.

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine bivariate relationships among the study variables. The results, shown in **Table 2**, revealed a significant positive correlation between emotional labour and burnout ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher demands for emotional regulation were associated with elevated levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Emotional labour exhibited a significant negative correlation with professional commitment ($r = -0.45$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that excessive emotional regulation may undermine teachers' dedication and attachment to their profession. Burnout also showed a strong negative correlation with professional commitment ($r = -0.58$, $p < 0.01$), confirming theoretical expectations that teachers experiencing high burnout are less likely to remain engaged and committed to their professional roles. Self-perception demonstrated a positive correlation with professional commitment ($r = 0.51$, $p < 0.01$) and a negative correlation with burnout ($r = -0.46$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting its role as a protective factor against occupational stress.



Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation (r)	Significance (p)
Emotional Labour	Burnout	0.62	< 0.01
Emotional Labour	Professional Commitment	-0.45	< 0.01
Burnout	Professional Commitment	-0.58	< 0.01
Self-Perception	Burnout	-0.46	< 0.01
Self-Perception	Professional Commitment	0.51	< 0.01

To further explore predictive relationships, multiple regression analyses were conducted. Emotional labour was found to significantly predict burnout ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that increased emotional regulation demands directly contribute to higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. In turn, burnout significantly predicted professional commitment ($\beta = -0.55$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the mediating role of burnout in the relationship between emotional labour and professional commitment. The results of the regression analyses are summarized in **Table 3**, which also indicates the proportion of variance explained (R^2) in the dependent variables, confirming that these psychological constructs meaningfully account for variations in teachers' professional engagement.

Dependent Variable	Predictor	β	t-value	Significance (p)	R2
Burnout	Emotional Labour	0.61	12.34	< 0.001	0.38
Professional Commitment	Burnout	-0.55	-10.87	< 0.001	0.34

Path analysis was employed to test the mediating effect of burnout and the moderating role of self-perception. The model, presented in **Table 4**, demonstrated an excellent fit to the data (CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.05, $\chi^2/df = 2.08$). Emotional labour exerted a significant indirect effect on professional commitment through burnout, confirming its mediating role. Self-perception moderated the path from burnout to professional commitment, with higher self-perception attenuating the negative impact of burnout on teachers' engagement. This suggests that teachers with stronger self-perception are more resilient to the adverse effects of occupational stress and maintain higher levels of professional commitment even under high emotional demands.

Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	SE	Significance (p)
Emotional Labour \rightarrow Burnout	0.61	0.05	<0.001
Burnout \rightarrow Professional Commitment	-0.55	0.06	<0.001
Self-Perception \times Burnout \rightarrow Professional Commitment	0.21	0.04	<0.01

Finally, qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews provided a rich contextual understanding of these quantitative relationships. Teachers reported that the requirement to



continuously manage emotions, maintain a positive classroom atmosphere, and meet diverse student needs often resulted in emotional fatigue, stress, and reduced intrinsic motivation. Those with higher self-perception described adaptive strategies such as reframing challenges as opportunities for growth, seeking support from colleagues, and engaging authentically with students, which helped sustain their professional commitment despite experiencing stress. These qualitative findings complement the statistical results, offering evidence that self-perception serves as a critical psychological resource that mitigates burnout and strengthens professional engagement. **Table 5** illustrates representative qualitative themes alongside sample teacher statements, highlighting the alignment between quantitative and qualitative findings.

Theme	Description	Sample Statement from Teacher
Emotional Fatigue	Feeling drained from regulating emotions	“Some days I leave class exhausted because I have to keep smiling even when I am stressed.”
Surface vs. Deep Acting	Distinguishing authentic engagement vs. forced expression	“I try to genuinely care about my students rather than just pretending—it makes a difference.”
Coping through Self-Perception	Positive self-view helps manage stress	“Knowing my strengths keeps me motivated even on tough days.”
Peer Support and Collaboration	Seeking advice and sharing challenges with colleagues	“Discussing challenges with fellow teachers helps me recharge and stay committed.”
Professional Commitment Persistence	Sustaining dedication despite stress	“Even when exhausted, I feel responsible for my students’ learning and continue to give my best.”

In summary, the combined quantitative and qualitative analyses confirm that emotional labour significantly contributes to burnout, which in turn negatively affects professional commitment. Self-perception emerges as a crucial moderating factor, enhancing teachers’ resilience and ability to maintain professional engagement. The findings underscore the importance of interventions that target emotional regulation skills, support teacher self-perception, and foster supportive work environments to sustain long-term professional commitment.

Findings of the Study

The data offered some meaningful insights into the psychological factors that shape teachers’ professional commitment.

To begin with, emotional labour clearly stood out as a strong predictor of burnout. The quantitative findings showed a clear positive relationship between the two: teachers who regularly had to manage and regulate their emotions to meet professional expectations were more likely to feel emotionally exhausted and detached. Regression and path analyses reinforced this pattern, confirming that emotional labour plays a substantial role in increasing burnout, which in turn affects teachers’ ability to stay consistently engaged in their work. The qualitative responses brought this reality to life. Many teachers described emotional regulation



as one of the most demanding parts of their job. Several shared that they often left the classroom feeling emotionally drained, especially after handling large and diverse groups of students or navigating difficult interpersonal situations.

The analysis also showed that burnout acts as a crucial link between emotional labour and professional commitment. Both correlation and regression results indicated that higher levels of burnout were strongly connected to lower levels of professional commitment. Teachers who felt emotionally exhausted or ineffective were less likely to sustain motivation, dedication, and a strong sense of attachment to their profession. The interview data echoed this finding. Many educators admitted that ongoing stress and emotional fatigue gradually reduced their enthusiasm for teaching and, at times, made them question their long-term commitment to the field. This highlights how essential it is to address burnout if we want to preserve and strengthen teachers' professional commitment.

Another important finding was the role of self-perception. Teachers with a stronger and more positive sense of self seemed better equipped to handle the emotional demands of their work. Even when faced with emotional labour and signs of burnout, they were more likely to remain committed to their profession. Statistical analysis showed that self-perception was negatively related to burnout and positively related to professional commitment. Path analysis further confirmed that it moderates the relationship between these variables. Teachers who viewed themselves positively described using healthier coping strategies—such as reframing challenges, seeking support from colleagues, and engaging more deeply and authentically in emotional expression. These approaches not only reduced the harmful effects of burnout but also strengthened their sense of competence, responsibility, and professional purpose.

Overall, the study revealed a dynamic and interconnected relationship between emotional labour, burnout, self-perception, and professional commitment. Emotional labour is an unavoidable part of teaching, but it places significant psychological demands on educators. When these demands accumulate, they can lead to burnout and weaken professional commitment. However, a strong and positive self-perception can serve as a protective buffer. It helps teachers stay resilient, manage emotional pressures more effectively, and remain engaged in their work. Together, these findings underscore how emotional, cognitive, and self-evaluative factors work hand in hand in shaping teachers' long-term professional commitment, and they point to the importance of supportive training, professional development, and institutional systems that prioritize teachers' psychological well-being.

Conclusion

The present study provides compelling evidence that teachers' professional commitment is influenced by a combination of emotional, psychological, and cognitive factors, namely emotional labour, burnout, and self-perception. Emotional labour was found to have a dual effect: while it is necessary for maintaining classroom harmony and effective student interactions, excessive emotional regulation, particularly surface acting, contributes to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Burnout, in turn, mediates the negative impact of emotional labour on professional commitment, highlighting its central role in understanding teacher engagement and retention.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that sustaining teachers' professional commitment requires a holistic understanding of the psychological dynamics at play. Emotional labour, burnout, and self-perception are interrelated determinants that shape teachers' engagement, effectiveness, and career longevity. By addressing these factors through targeted institutional support and individual-level interventions, schools can promote teacher well-being, reduce attrition, and enhance the overall quality of education. The insights from this research contribute to both theoretical and practical discourses on teacher psychology, offering evidence-based strategies for cultivating resilient, committed, and emotionally competent educators.

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