

Emotional labour and contextual performance amongst Ghanaian preschool teachers: the mediating role of emotional exhaustion

Emotional
labour and
contextual
performance

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Abstract

Purpose – Emotions are an important aspect of work performance but are often overlooked, especially amongst preschool teachers whose work environment is laden with emotional job demands. The present study aims to examine the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the relationship between emotional labour and contextual performance.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a cross-sectional design, data were obtained from 288 preschool teachers in the Tema Metropolis in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. The study's hypotheses were tested using structural equation modelling with maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 21.0.

Findings – The structural equation modelling analyses revealed that deep acting had a direct positive relationship with contextual performance, whereas the direct relationship between surface acting and contextual performance was not statistically significant. Furthermore, deep acting and surface acting were indirectly related to contextual performance via emotional exhaustion.

Practical implications – The study's findings underscore the need for educational institutions and managers to create a supportive environment for teachers engaging in emotional labour, and to ensure that emotional labour is not overburdening teachers.

Originality/value – The study contributes to the literature on teachers' engagement in discretionary behaviours by elucidating emotional exhaustion as a linking mechanism between emotional labour and contextual performance in a non-Western context. This is one of the few studies to link emotional labour to contextual performance in the educational context.

Keywords Emotional labour, Emotional exhaustion, Contextual performance, Preschool teachers, Ghana

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Teacher-child interactions play an important role in children's development at the preschool level. The presence of emotionally and behaviourally supportive teachers can help develop children's social and emotional skills (Grosse *et al.*, 2022; Mortensen and Barnett, 2015). However, preschool teachers often encounter emotionally challenging situations (Stark and Bettini, 2021; Yin, 2016), which makes emotion management an important element in enhancing quality teacher-child relationships (Taxer and Gross, 2018). As noted by Wang *et al.* (2019, p. 664), "although teachers may express genuine emotions in class, they nevertheless often routinely fake or hide emotions to either facilitate or not impede student development". Thus, to be effective on the job, preschool teachers often engage in emotional labour (Zhang *et al.*, 2020), which refers to the conscious regulation of emotions to meet job requirements and organisational goals (Hochschild, 1983). Past research has shown that preschool teachers experience a high degree of emotional labour due to the nature of their work. For instance, preschool teachers often handle children's externalising behaviours such as impulsivity and hyperactivity (Friedman-Krauss *et al.*, 2014a; Yu *et al.*, 2023; Zhang *et al.*, 2022). Child behaviour



and stakeholder expectations can induce teacher stress and overtax teachers' cognitive and emotional resources (Friedman-Krauss *et al.*, 2014b; Kariou *et al.*, 2021).

The impact of emotional labour has been examined across different individual and organisational outcomes (e.g. Hsieh *et al.*, 2016; Hülsheger and Schewe, 2011; Kariou *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2019). In particular, emotional labour has been shown to have both positive and negative effects on employee work performance. On the one hand, emotional labour can be a source of stress for preschool teachers (Qi *et al.*, 2017), as it requires them to effortfully regulate their emotions to provide quality care to their children. This can result in burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and ultimately, poor work performance (Hülsheger and Schewe, 2011; Kariou *et al.*, 2021). On the other hand, emotional labour can improve preschool teachers' job performance by enhancing positive emotions (Grandey, 2000). For instance, some studies suggest that employees who engage in emotional labour experience increased job engagement and job satisfaction (Hsieh *et al.*, 2016; Yin *et al.*, 2019), whilst other studies have linked emotional labour to increased customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (e.g. Wang, 2019).

Although previous studies have enhanced our understanding of the effects of emotional labour on teachers' job performance, there remain a number of issues that need to be addressed. First, previous research on the link between emotional labour and job performance has focused predominantly on task performance, which is based on technical aspects of a job that require an employee's physical and mental abilities specified in the job description (Motowidlo *et al.*, 1997). Few studies have researched the link between emotional labour and contextual performance (Hülsheger and Schewe, 2011), especially amongst preschool teachers. In addition, limited research exists on the mechanisms through which emotional labour influences work performance. Moreover, previous studies on the organisational consequences of emotional labour mostly originate from Western and Asian countries. Relatively few studies have examined the impact of emotional labour on employee well-being and job outcomes in Africa in general and Ghana in particular (e.g. Asumah *et al.*, 2019; Lartey *et al.*, 2019; Ntim *et al.*, 2023). Drawing on data from preschool teachers in Ghana, the present study examines the relationship between emotional labour and contextual performance and whether emotional exhaustion mediates this relationship.

The present study contributes to the literature in three significant ways. First, by examining contextual performance as an outcome of emotional labour, we provide evidence on how emotional labour might influence non-job-specific behaviours that complement task performance and help the organisation thrive and achieve its goals. Unlike task performance, which is based on role-prescribed skills and activities, contextual performance is based on personality and employee motivational drives (Borman and Motowidlo, 1997). In the preschool environment, teachers' contextual performance is particularly important because it enhances the organisational culture by strengthening interpersonal relationships amongst teachers (Lev and Koslowsky, 2012). Although some studies have examined the influence of emotional labour on job outcomes such as burnout, job satisfaction and organisational commitment amongst school teachers (e.g. Kariou *et al.*, 2021; Ogunsola *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2019; Yin *et al.*, 2019), little is known about the relationship between emotional labour and contextual performance amongst teachers. Thus, this study adds to our understanding of how preschool teachers' emotional demands shape their contribution to organisational functioning within the educational context.

Furthermore, the study extends past research by examining the mechanisms through which emotional labour influences preschool teachers' contextual performance. An emotionally taxing job requires employees to exert more psychological effort in displaying the appropriate emotions, which may result in emotional exhaustion (Edwards, 2016; Qi *et al.*, 2017). Emotional exhaustion is a state of depleted energy resulting from excessive emotional demands (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). People who experience emotional exhaustion have a

low tolerance to stressful situations, are inattentive, lack motivation and experience tiredness and are less likely to invest resources to engage in contextual performance (Aryee *et al.*, 2008). Although emotional exhaustion has been studied as a mechanism linking various work stressors to myriad organisational outcomes including job performance (Aryee *et al.*, 2008; Wang *et al.*, 2023; Whitman *et al.*, 2014; Zhang *et al.*, 2022), its potential mediating role in the relationship between emotional labour and contextual performance has not been explored amongst preschool teachers.

Finally, the study extends research on outcomes of emotional labour to the African context. Although past research suggests that outcomes of emotional labour strategies may vary across cultural contexts (e.g. Nixon *et al.*, 2020), relatively few studies have addressed outcomes of emotional labour in African settings such as Ghana. In Ghana, most interventions targeted at improving the quality of early childhood education have focused on educational curricula, teacher motivation, instructional practices and the role of parents in children's learning (Wolf *et al.*, 2019), ignoring the importance of emotional regulation as a vital tool for class management and teacher performance. The emotional job demands and experiences of teachers and how contextual performance of teachers can improve classroom teaching efficiency have received little empirical attention in Ghana.

The study context

Historically, the provision of care to infants and children in Ghana was seen as the role of the family. Early childhood education was slow to develop in Ghana though the country has had one of the most robust systems of education in Africa (Dillard, 2009). Although some day nurseries existed during the colonial period and after independence, these received little financial support from the government, which limited access to early childhood education (Dillard, 2009). In tandem with a global emphasis on the importance of preschool education, collaborative efforts from government, non-governmental organisations and development partners have made early childhood education an integral part of Ghana's education system over the past two decades (Ackah-Jnr *et al.*, 2022; Wolf, 2020). The introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) policy in 2004 and the subsequent inclusion of two years of kindergarten education (for children aged 4–6 years) under the government's free compulsory universal basic education (FCUBE) scheme have contributed to a significant increase in preschool enrolment in Ghana. For example, it has been reported that the Ghana Ministry of Education recorded a net preschool enrolment of approximately 75% as of 2015–2016, although there are concerns about low quality of education and poor learning outcomes (Ntim *et al.*, 2023; Wolf, 2020).

The preschool education curriculum in Ghana emphasises holistic child development with the expectation of developing children's communication skills, familiarity with their environment, psychosocial competencies and creative abilities, amongst others (Ackah-Jnr *et al.*, 2022; Wolf, 2020). Within this framework, preschool teachers are required to employ the use of play and other creative activities in nurturing children's skills and competencies. They are also expected to create a conducive environment for teaching and learning as well as nurture children's emotional well-being. Accordingly, the role of preschool teachers' emotional management skills in implementing the curriculum cannot be overemphasised. In a recent study on parent-teacher interactions in Ghanaian preschools, Wolf (2020) highlighted the importance parents placed on teachers' ability to exercise patience as a mark of being a good teacher.

Culturally, Ghana is generally considered collectivistic, though there are diverse ethnic groupings in the country (Annor and Burchell, 2018). Collectivism significantly shapes emotional displays by influencing people's expression, regulation and perceptions of emotions within a group-oriented cultural context. Emotions tend to have greater interpersonal meaning in collectivistic cultures, as these cultures emphasise in-group goals

and encourage communal relationships (Matsumoto *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, the display of negative emotions in particular is considered disruptive to social cohesion and might be perceived negatively (Nixon *et al.*, 2020). The strong interpersonal meaning attached to emotions in collectivistic cultures also finds expression in preference for emotional regulation strategies that involve the suppression of negative emotions. Thus, the use of emotional regulation strategies that involve masking one's emotions (e.g. surface acting) tends to be common in collectivistic cultures (Allen *et al.*, 2014). Such strategies serve the purpose of maintaining group harmony and avoiding conflict (Matsumoto *et al.*, 2008).

Theory and hypothesis development

Conservation of resources theory

We draw on the conservation of resources (COR) theory to explicate the theoretical rationale for the study's hypothesised model indicating both direct and indirect relationships between emotional labour strategies and contextual performance (see Figure 1). The COR theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals respond to stress and how they attempt to protect and conserve their resources to cope with the situation (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). The primary premise of the COR theory is that individuals are motivated to maintain and protect their resources. Hobfoll (1989, p. 516) defined resources as "those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies". Individuals' experiences of stress emanate from threats to their resources, the actual loss of resources or failure to make significant gains in their resource investments (Hobfoll, 1989). The loss of resources predisposes individuals to more resource loss and constrains their ability to mobilise additional resources (Hobfoll, 2001). The COR theory further suggests that when individuals encounter stressful situations, the motivation to protect resources instigates active and reactive coping processes geared towards preventing further resource loss. This could manifest in withdrawal behaviours including decreased contextual performance (Halbesleben and Bowler, 2007).

Conceptualising emotional labour and contextual performance

Emotional labour is defined as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). It reflects how employees feel or act out certain emotions to meet organisationally expected emotional requirements whether or not these emotions match their truest feelings. Hochschild proposed two ways by which employees manage their emotions: surface and deep acting strategies. Surface acting can be

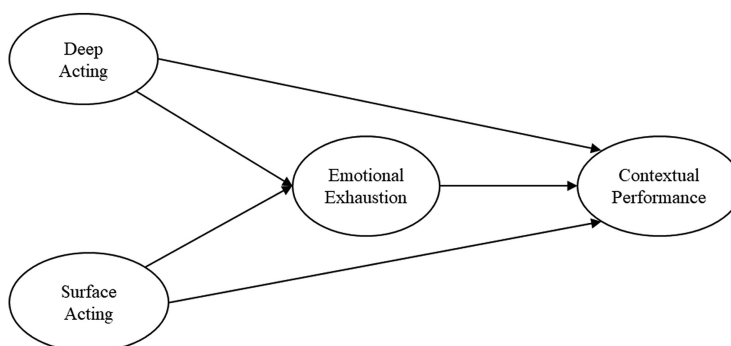


Figure 1.
Hypothesised model showing relationships between emotional labour strategies and contextual performance

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

described as inhibiting the outward signs of inner feelings (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003). In surface acting, employees suppress emotions so that other people cannot observe how they actually feel (Wang *et al.*, 2019). This means that employees using the surface acting strategy experience some form of emotional dissonance between what they actually feel and what they express thus, acting in bad faith. Conversely, in deep acting an employee attempts to change or induce feelings to match expected emotions by focussing on certain thoughts, experiences and memories that can help induce the required emotions (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003). Employees using the deep acting strategy cognitively reappraise the situation at hand and respond in organisationally desirable ways. In deep acting, employees put in the effort to realign their current felt emotions to feel the emotions required of them (Wang *et al.*, 2019).

Introduced by Borman and Motowidlo (1997), the concept of contextual performance reflects employees' behaviours or activities that may not be part of their formal job description but contribute to the social context of the organisation. Borman and Motowidlo's (1997) conceptualisation of contextual performance originally stems from three constructs: prosocial behaviours, effectiveness behaviours and organisational citizenship behaviours. Prosocial behaviours are acts that benefit other people, for example, cooperating with others, helping, sharing and volunteering. Effectiveness behaviours involve organisational commitment, organisational socialisation, and teamwork (Carlos and Rodrigues, 2016). Organisational citizenship behaviours are individual voluntary activities that do not form part of a person's work role. It has been suggested that contextual performance does not necessarily have to be discretionary but the behaviours or activities should be non-task related and may be rewarded (Motowidlo *et al.*, 1997).

Relationship between emotional labour strategies and contextual performance

Surface acting and deep acting are expected to demonstrate differential relationships with contextual performance. Surface acting results in a pretence where a person's felt emotions are different from their displayed emotions (Kariou *et al.*, 2021), which results in emotional dissonance. The ensuing emotional dissonance can induce stress and impair performance (Hülshager and Schewe, 2011). Surface acting also requires a constant check of emotional expressions to remain in character, which can threaten employees' mental resources (Hülshager and Schewe, 2011). The perceived threat of resource loss may lead employees to invest less in contextual performance to safeguard remaining resources (Wang, 2019). In contrast, deep acting involves effortful and conscious mental work at the onset of the emotion (Hülshager and Schewe, 2011). In deep acting, an individual tries to experience the emotion that is required and this engenders positive moods. This positive psychological state can enhance employees' satisfaction with the job and drive their willingness to contribute towards improving the functioning of the organisation (Grandey, 2000), which may have a positive influence on contextual performance.

Although the potential influence of emotional labour strategies on contextual performance has been rarely examined, evidence of the expected differential relationships can be gleaned from studies that examined other forms of prosocial and discretionary behaviours. For instance, Cheung and Cheung (2013) found that engaging in deep acting encouraged organisational citizenship behaviour amongst teachers in China. Likewise, Maneotis *et al.* (2014) found a positive relationship between deep acting and prosocial motives amongst grocery store workers. In contrast, Yue *et al.* (2016) found that surface acting decreased employees' engagement in organisational citizenship behaviour and increased deviant behaviour amongst employees. Among teachers, deep acting and surface acting were found to be negatively related to organisational commitment (e.g. Ogunsola *et al.*, 2020). Generally, though not conclusive, previous studies suggest that deep acting is associated with higher discretionary behaviours whereas surface acting is associated with reduced discretionary behaviours. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

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- H1. Deep acting will be positively related to contextual performance.
H2. Surface acting will be negatively related to contextual performance.

The mediating role of emotional exhaustion

As a form of work-related strain, emotional exhaustion “refers to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one’s emotional and physical resources” (Maslach, 2015, p. 930). Emotional exhaustion is regarded as a central component in the three-dimensional conceptualisation of burnout (Maslach *et al.*, 2001) and is indicative of “the cumulative effects of work stresses” (Gaines and Jermier, 1983, p. 568). As indicated earlier, emotional exhaustion has been found to undermine employees’ work-related well-being and performance. In particular, higher levels of emotional exhaustion have been associated with reduced engagement in discretionary behaviours such as organisational citizenship behaviour (e.g. Halbesleben and Bowler, 2007; Tourigny *et al.*, 2013) and contextual performance (Aryee *et al.*, 2008).

Although emotional labour is expected to relate to emotional exhaustion, the direction of the relationship may differ for the two emotional labour strategies. In the case of surface acting, the process of masking one’s true emotions can be mentally and emotionally draining. The COR theory suggests that continual self-regulatory efforts such as suppressing and modifying emotions can result in anxiety, inauthenticity and loss of resources, leading to strain over time (Hsieh *et al.*, 2016; Kariou *et al.*, 2021). Several studies have found positive relationships between surface acting and emotional exhaustion (e.g. Kariou *et al.*, 2021; Lavelle *et al.*, 2021; Lee and Chelladurai, 2016; Lv *et al.*, 2012; Noor and Zainuddin, 2011). Among Chinese preschool teachers, Zhang *et al.* (2020) reported a positive relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion. Similarly, amongst Ghanaian preschool teachers, Ntim *et al.* (2023) found that surface acting was associated with increased emotional exhaustion. As more resources are lost through surface acting, fewer resources remain to invest in discretionary behaviours (Aryee *et al.*, 2008).

In contrast, deep acting leads to a modification of emotions that align with the required emotions on the job. Additionally, positive emotions resulting from good interactions with clients may help replenish lost cognitive resources of employees (Rathi *et al.*, 2013). Thus, engagement in deep acting may result in less emotional exhaustion. Accordingly, studies have reported negative relationships between deep acting and emotional exhaustion across different groups of employees (Lv *et al.*, 2012; Rathi *et al.*, 2013; Wang *et al.*, 2019). Among Ghanaian preschool teachers, deep acting was found to be associated with decreased depersonalisation (Ntim *et al.*, 2023). As fewer cognitive resources are drained through deep acting, employees can channel the remaining resources to other discretionary behaviours in the form of contextual performance as a means to gain additional resources. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

- H3. Emotional exhaustion will mediate the relationship between surface acting and contextual performance.
H4. Emotional exhaustion will mediate the relationship between deep acting and contextual performance.

Methods

Design and participants

We adopted a cross-sectional design, which is useful for collecting large data within a short period and also provides a means of assessing people’s thoughts, opinions and feelings as well as analysing the associations amongst variables. Participants for the study were 288 preschool teachers recruited from 40 schools within the Tema Metropolis in the Greater Accra

region of Ghana. We first selected schools within the study location that run early childhood education programmes. The convenience sampling technique was then used to select preschool teachers to respond to a structured questionnaire. The convenience sampling approach was adopted because participation in the study was based on the availability and willingness of the preschool teachers.

As shown in Table 1, most of the participants (84%) were females. The majority of the participants had Montessori training, an important qualification for caretakers at the preschool level. Only a few of the participants (8%) had a university degree. Close to half of the participants (48.3%) had taught for up to four years. Also, the highest number of students per class was 38, and the majority of the participants had a class size of between 2 and 20 students.

Data collection procedure

Ethical approval (DREC/006/18–19) was obtained from the Departmental Research and Ethics Committee, Department of Psychology, University of Ghana. We subsequently obtained permission from the selected preschools to conduct the study. The teachers in the selected schools were also briefed on the nature and purpose of the study and teachers who agreed to be participants were given the questionnaire packs by the second author to complete and submit to the school administrator/front desk in sealed envelopes to be picked up by the researchers. The questionnaires had a cover page detailing the purpose of the

Variable	Frequency (<i>n</i> = 288)	Percentage (%)
<i>Sex</i>		
Female	243	84.4
Male	45	15.6
<i>Age (years)</i>		
18–25	60	20.8
26–30	92	31.9
31–40	96	33.3
41–50	32	11.1
50+	8	2.8
<i>Educational level</i>		
JHS/SHS/O-Level	46	16
Diploma/HND	82	28.5
Montessori Training	115	39.9
University Degree	22	7.6
Teacher Training Certificate	23	8
<i>Years of teaching</i>		
1–2 years	72	25
3–4 years	67	23.3
5–6 years	41	14.2
>6 years	108	37.5
<i>Class size</i>		
2–20 pupils	230	79.9
21–38 pupils	58	20.1

Note(s): JHS = Junior High School; SHS = Senior High School; O-Level = Ordinary Level; HND = Higher National Diploma

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

Table 1.
Demographic
characteristics of
respondents

study, estimated time for completion and contact information of the researchers. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity of information. We obtained written informed consent from teachers prior to their participation in the study. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and participants were free to withdraw from the study at any point. Of the 350 questionnaires distributed, 321 were returned. Thirty-three incomplete questionnaires were excluded, leaving 288 for analysis, which represents an effective response rate of 82.3%.

Measures

Emotional labour was measured using an adapted version of [Brotheridge and Lee's \(2003\)](#) emotional labour scale. The emotional labour scale is a 15-item self-report instrument on a five-point Likert scale that measures six aspects of emotional displays: the frequency of display, intensity and variety of display of emotions, the length of interaction and surface and deep acting. In this study, we made use of items measuring surface acting and deep acting. Specifically, surface acting was measured with two items whilst deep acting was measured with three items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the deep acting and surface acting subscales in this study were 0.82 and 0.88, respectively. Sample items include; "I hide my true feelings in order to perform my job" (surface acting) and "I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display to others" (deep acting). Higher scores reflect higher levels of emotional labour.

Emotional exhaustion was measured with the five-item emotional exhaustion subscale from the Maslach Burnout General Inventory ([Bakker et al., 2002](#)). The construct was measured on a six-point Likert scale with scores ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). Higher scores reflect higher levels of emotional exhaustion. In the present study, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81 was obtained for this scale. A sample item on this measure is "*I feel used up at the end of the day*".

Contextual performance was measured with a 15-item scale developed by [Van Scotter and Motowidlo, 1996](#). The instrument measures employees' involvement in actions that enhance cooperation, teamwork and positive social interactions as well as behaviours that demonstrate their effort and commitment to the organisation. A sample item for this measure is "*I take the initiative to solve work problems*". Each item was rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Higher scores reflect a higher level of engagement in contextual behaviours and vice versa. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale in this study is 0.95.

Covariates. Age (0 = 18–30 years; 1 = more than 30 years), sex (1 = female; 2 = male), level of education (0 = pre-tertiary; 1 = tertiary), years of teaching (0 = 1–4 years; 1 = More than 4 years) and marital status (0 = single; 1 = married) were included in the study to account for their potential influence on contextual performance. The potential influences of these variables on emotional exhaustion (e.g. [Ntim et al., 2023](#)) and contextual performance (e.g. [Aryee et al., 2008](#)) have been reported in some previous studies.

Analytical strategy

The hypothesised relationships were tested simultaneously using structural equation modelling (SEM) with a maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 21.0. The analyses were performed in three steps. First, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the distinctiveness of the study constructs. To enhance the ratio of items to latent constructs and to minimise problems with correlated error variances, item parcels were created for latent variables that had more than four items following recommended procedures ([Matsunaga, 2008](#)). Accordingly, contextual performance was modelled with three parcel indicators and emotional exhaustion was modelled with two parcel indicators, whereas surface acting and deep acting were modelled with item-level indicators. A four-factor measurement model,

representing the latent variables in the study was specified. In the second step, descriptive statistics and correlational analyses were conducted to examine means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations amongst variables in the study. In the final step, the hypothesised direct and indirect structural relationships were tested.

In both the CFA and test of the hypothesised structural model, model fit was assessed based on the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). We followed recommended cut-off points for good model fit indices: RMSEA and SRMR should be less than 0.05, whereas GFI, CFI and TLI should be at least 0.95 (Byrne, 2010; Hu and Bentler, 1999).

Results

Measurement model

The results of the CFA (Table 2) indicate that the hypothesised four-factor measurement model fitted the data well ($\chi^2(29) = 68.64, p < 0.001$; GFI = 0.96; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.97; SRMR = 0.033, RMSEA = 0.069). The standardised factor loadings for parcel-level and item-level indicators ranged from 0.76 to 0.95. The average variance extracted (AVE) values for the constructs ranged from 0.62 to 0.85, which are above the recommended threshold of 0.50 for convergent validity (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Discriminant validity was largely supported as the AVEs were greater than their corresponding maximum shared variances (MSV) for each construct, except for deep acting (AVE = 0.62; MSV = 0.66).

To address the issue of common method bias, we conducted an additional CFA with a common latent factor linked to all the indicators of the four latent factors. The results showed that the addition of the common latent factor did not result in any change in model fit compared to the hypothesised measurement model. This suggests that common method bias was not a significant concern in this study.

Bivariate correlations amongst study variables

Prior to estimating the structural model, the bivariate correlations amongst variables in the study were examined (see Table 3). Deep acting had a significant positive correlation with contextual performance ($r = 0.52, p < 0.05$) and a negative correlation with emotional exhaustion ($r = -0.54, p < 0.05$). Conversely, surface acting was negatively correlated with contextual performance ($r = -0.54, p < 0.001$) and positively correlated with emotional

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Sex	1.16	0.36	–								
2. Marital status	0.42	0.49	–0.11	–							
3. No. of students	15.65	6.46	0.09	0.03	–						
4. Educational level	0.36	0.48	0.03	–0.02	0.04	–					
5. Age	0.47	0.50	–0.06	0.51	–0.03	0.09	–				
6. Years of teaching	0.52	0.50	–0.08	0.29	0.02	0.13	0.34	–			
7. Deep acting	3.59	1.16	–0.12	0.25	0.11	0.02	0.19	0.56	–		
8. Surface acting	2.56	1.36	0.08	–0.26	0.00	–0.04	–0.25	–0.57	–0.69	–	
9. Emotional exhaustion	3.24	1.30	0.05	–0.13	0.08	–0.05	–0.11	–0.45	–0.54	0.56	–
10. Contextual performance	4.68	1.12	–0.07	0.24	–0.07	0.08	0.22	0.41	0.52	–0.54	–0.52

Table 2.
Means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations amongst variables in the study

Note(s): Absolute correlation coefficients ≥ 0.11 are significant at the 0.05 level (one-tailed); SD = standard deviation

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

exhaustion ($r = 0.56, p < 0.001$). There was a significant negative correlation between emotional exhaustion and contextual performance ($r = -0.52, p < 0.001$). Among the demographic variables, marital status ($r = 0.24, p < 0.05$), years of teaching ($r = 0.41, p < 0.05$) and age ($r = 0.22, p < 0.05$) were significantly correlated with contextual performance. Thus, preschool teachers who were married, older than 30 years, or had taught for more than four years were more likely to engage in contextual performance compared to their respective counterparts. These demographic variables were therefore included in estimating the structural model to account for their influence.

Test of hypotheses

As shown in Table 2, the hypothesised structural model showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 (47) = 89.89, p < 0.001$; GFI = 0.96; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.97; SRMR = 0.029; RMSEA = 0.056). The standardised path coefficients for the hypothesised model are presented in Figure 2. The direct path from deep acting to contextual performance was significant and in the expected direction ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.05$). Thus, engagement in deep acting was associated with higher levels of contextual performance, in support of Hypothesis 1. However, the direct path from surface acting to contextual performance was not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.16, p > 0.05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2, which stated that surface acting would be negatively related to contextual performance was not supported. Although not hypothesised, emotional exhaustion was negatively related to contextual performance ($\beta = -0.33, p < 0.01$). Likewise, deep acting had a significant negative relationship with

Table 3. Structural equation modelling results for hypothesised measurement and structural models

Model	χ^2	df	GFI	SRMR	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Measurement model	68.64***	29	0.96	0.033	0.98	0.97	0.069
Structural model	89.89***	47	0.96	0.029	0.98	0.97	0.056

Note(s): GFI = goodness-of-fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis Index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardised root mean square residual; χ^2 = chi-square; df = degrees of freedom; *** $p < 0.001$

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

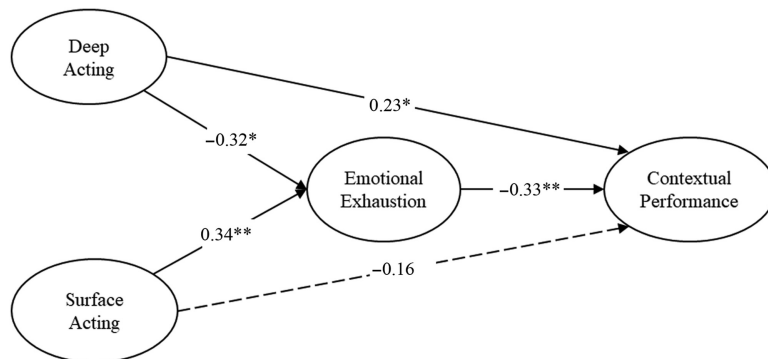


Figure 2. Final model showing standardised path coefficients

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; broken lines represent non-significant relationships and solid lines represent significant relationships; estimates for control variables are not shown

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -0.32, p < 0.05$), whereas surface acting had a significant positive relationship with emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.34, p < 0.01$).

We examined the indirect effects of deep acting and surface acting on contextual performance by creating 5,000 bootstrapped samples using the bias-corrected percentile method. The standardised indirect effect of deep acting on contextual performance was significant ($\beta = 0.11, p < 0.05$) with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.02 to 0.27. Thus, in support of [Hypothesis 3](#), emotional exhaustion significantly mediated the relationship between deep acting and contextual performance. Likewise, the standardised indirect effect of surface acting on contextual performance was significant ($\beta = -0.11, p < 0.05$) with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -0.25 to -0.02 . Thus, in support of [Hypothesis 4](#), emotional exhaustion mediated the relationship between surface acting and contextual performance.

Discussion

This study adds to the literature on antecedents of contextual performance amongst preschool teachers by highlighting the role of emotional management strategies in a sub-Saharan African context. The positive relationship between deep acting and contextual performance suggests that when preschool teachers are able to regulate emotions to fit what is expected of them, they are more inclined to engage in contextual performance. This finding supports the arguments that deep acting, as a coping strategy of emotion management, requires less investment in cognitive and emotional resources. Thus, as suggested by the COR theory ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)) deep acting may serve preschool teachers' motivation to conserve resources, which enables them to engage in interpersonal helping, obey rules and regulations, and demonstrate dedication and enthusiasm in work roles amongst other extra-role behaviours. This finding also corroborates other studies (e.g. [Chou and Cheung, 2013](#); [Rathi et al., 2013](#); [Wang et al., 2019](#)) that found a positive relationship between deep acting and workplace discretionary behaviours. The positive relationship between deep acting and discretionary behaviour may result from a sense of efficacy experienced when teachers engage in deep acting ([Cheung and Cheung, 2013](#); [Hsieh et al., 2016](#)). This sense of efficacy gradually restores the diminished mental resources and consequently enables teachers to engage in discretionary behaviours.

Contrary to expectations, the direct relationship between surface acting and contextual performance was not statistically significant. A plausible explanation for this finding may be that engaging in contextual behaviours is usually preceded by positive moods, whereas in surface acting, employees only pretend to show emotions they do not feel ([Yue et al., 2016](#)). Since employees who employ the surface acting strategy are only faking (acting in bad faith), they do not experience positive emotions and the underlying suppressed negative emotion may linger ([Brotheridge and Lee, 2003](#); [Hülshager and Schewe, 2011](#)), thereby affecting their ability to engage in behaviours usually preceded by positive moods. Thus, the pretence associated with surface acting could result in feelings of inauthenticity and general negative moods due to the dissonance experienced. Another explanation for the null relationship between surface acting and contextual performance could be cultural. In countries with higher collectivism such as Ghana, the suppression of emotions through surface acting tends to be a normative process and is thus perceived less negatively ([Nixon et al., 2020](#)). Indeed, there is evidence that surface acting tends to be weakly associated with job and well-being outcomes in collectivistic cultures (e.g. [Allen et al., 2014](#); [Nixon et al., 2020](#)).

The findings provide insight into emotional exhaustion as a pathway through which emotional labour strategies influence teachers' contextual performance. Specifically, surface acting was found to be associated with increased exhaustion, which in turn undermined teachers' engagement in contextual performance, whilst deep acting was associated with decreased exhaustion and in turn, increased teachers' tendency to engage in contextual

performance. From the perspective of COR theory, the depletion of resources associated with surface acting culminates in increased exhaustion over time, which orchestrates a tendency amongst teachers to withdraw from discretionary behaviours to preserve resources (Hsieh *et al.*, 2016). Unlike surface acting, deep acting was found to be negatively related to emotional exhaustion, suggesting that as preschool teachers use deep acting often, they experience less exhaustion and can invest remaining resources in contextual performance. In deep acting, mental effort is required only at the onset of emotions. The beneficial nature of deep acting stems from the fact that it eventually leads to an alignment of felt emotions and expected emotions, unlike surface acting where there is a constant mental effort required to stay in “act”. Thus, “deep actors” become less exhausted and can invest energy in other behaviours and activities (Hulsheger and Schewe, 2011). These findings extend previous studies outside the educational context (e.g. Maneotis *et al.*, 2014; Rathi *et al.*, 2013) in which emotional exhaustion mediated the relationships of surface acting and deep acting with organisational citizenship behaviours.

Practical implications

The findings from the study provide relevant practical implications for stakeholders in the educational sector and other relevant institutions. Findings from the study provide evidence that the use of surface acting in teaching might have an adverse impact on contextual performance through emotional exhaustion. The findings show that teachers who engaged in surface acting were more emotionally exhausted and less likely to engage in contextual performance. The findings emphasise the risks and negative outcomes associated with surface acting and the importance of recognising and resolving them. In contrast, deep acting seems to have a beneficial influence on contextual performance by facilitating positive moods. Thus, it would be beneficial to train preschool teachers to engage in deep acting strategies such as attentional deployment and cognitive reappraisal.

The present study also highlights the need to include emotional management in the National Teachers’ Standards for teachers in Ghana, which can help teachers select the appropriate emotion regulation strategies. The National Teachers’ Standards for Ghana developed by the Ministry of Education provides guidelines on what is expected of teachers and their professional ethos. Specifically, teachers are expected to “develop a positive identity and act as a good role model for students and create a safe and encouraging learning environment for students” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 12). To maintain these standards, a teacher would have to be well-equipped with soft skills such as good emotional management.

Limitations and future research

A major limitation of our study is its cross-sectional nature and the use of self-report measures, which raise concerns about the temporal order of relations in the study and common-method bias. Although cross-sectional designs are useful for analysing associations between variables at a specific time, such designs preclude causal inferences. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial to test the relevance of interventions such as training in emotion management and emotional competence skills training to affirm whether these interventions could provide a stronger test of theory. Moreover, since emotions are complex processes experienced on a personal level, participants may sometimes provide socially desirable answers that can influence the analyses of the data. Supervisor or co-worker ratings of contextual performance in addition to self-report measures could be considered in future studies.

Additionally, as indicated earlier, data for the study were obtained from 40 different schools. Although the schools were based in the same metropolis, school-level factors such as differences in school culture, school leadership and student population might have played a role in teachers’

experiences of emotional labour and emotional exhaustion and how they shape contextual performance. However, these factors were not measured in the current study. It is suggested that future studies examine the extent to which school-level factors serve as boundary conditions for the impact of emotional labour experiences amongst preschool teachers.

Conclusion

The emotional job demands of preschool teachers are often overlooked. Findings from this study provide evidence that emotional labour is an existing phenomenon in the Ghanaian preschool work environment and has implications for teachers' job performance. Emotional labour was found to have both positive and negative effects on contextual performance. Specifically, surface acting is linked to emotional exhaustion which further undermines contextual performance. In contrast, deep acting seems to be less harmful to mental resources and teachers' job performance. Educational institutions should, therefore, strive to create a supportive environment for teachers engaging in emotional labour, and should ensure that emotional labour is not overburdening teachers. That way, these organisations can ensure that teachers are empowered to contribute effectively to sustaining healthy interpersonal relationships and organisational functioning.

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