

# Effects of Emotional Labor on Organizational Citizenship Behaviors of Secondary Vocational Teachers: A Cross-Level Moderation Intermediary Model

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## Abstract:

This article aimed to study the connection between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behaviors. Emotional labor as a mental behavior to control emotional attrition has received much attention in scholarly practice. Existing research revolves around the role of organizational citizenship behavior as a direct influence on emotional labor, but lacks an examination of the specific mechanisms by which emotional labor acts on organizational citizenship behavior. This study explored the mechanisms of emotional labor's impact on organizational citizenship behavior through a cross-level study of data from 350 secondary vocational teachers. This study finds that emotional labor significantly and negatively affects organizational citizenship behavior. The study also clarifies that the psychological contract mediates emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior. Organizational support positively moderates the mediating effect of the psychological contract on the relationship between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior.

**Keywords:** Emotional labor; psychological contract; organizational citizenship behavior; organizational support

## Introduction

As highly emotional workers, teachers need to make more emotional efforts than other professionals (Han, 2022). Secondary vocational teachers engage in an educational approach that places equal emphasis on moral education and skills, with any educational behavior that is conducive to students' physical and mental health and ability development expected to be encouraged. Consequently, secondary vocational teachers will face more diverse environments and situations during their teaching efforts. These secondary vocational teachers need to present emotional expressions that are appropriate to their status as a teacher, and the effort expended in this control of emotions is emotional labor. Secondary vocational teachers' educational behaviors are not always within rational control of emotions, and the stress of emotional control also affects internal beliefs and positive behaviors, which in turn harms improving organizational performance and eventually manifests itself in lowering individual organizational citizenship behaviors (Ma & Zhong, 2021). As a rather backward region in central and western China, secondary vocational teachers in Inner Mongolia are in urgent need of improvement in terms of mental health and dedication to their work. This situation makes it

imperative to strengthen the professionalism of secondary vocational teachers, enhance the sense of educational mission, and motivate teachers to devote themselves to education (Ministry of Education & Ministry of Finance, 2021). In response to the foregoing requirements, the primary purpose of emotional labor, in terms of two dimensions: work-focused emotional diminished and employee-focused surface acting, was to examine the effects of emotional labor on the organizational citizenship behaviors of secondary vocational teachers.

Emotional labor is an essential factor influencing teachers' organizational performance, and existing research shows that the analysis of the mechanisms influencing teachers' organizational citizenship behaviors is not well established (Li et al., 2022) Partial studies focus only on the direct relationship between the two while ignoring the changes in the psychological level of the individual during the influence (Shen, 2021). Therefore, the mediating mechanism between the two variables, emotional labor, and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior (Tong & Li, 2022), needs to be addressed to better clarify the mechanism of emotional labor (Chuayounan, 2022). The concept of psychological contract can be introduced as a mediating variable in conjunction with the professional characteristics of teachers, love for their work and enhancing their sense of educational mission.

In addition, social exchange theory is a common application to study the behavior of individuals in organizational behavior towards organizational performance (Gao & Huang, 2022) Organizational support is a key extrinsic factor influencing the relationship between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior (Qiu & Li, 2022). A high sense of organizational support promotes teachers on positive emotional alignment, recognition of work requirements and standards, and more proactive behavior (Deng & Jiang, 2022). Therefore, the study will examine whether organizational support serves as a moderator of the relationship between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior.

Based on this, there is a need to assess the mechanisms by which emotional labor influences organizational citizenship behavior through psychological contracts among secondary vocational teachers. Drawing on previous research, this paper examines the effects of emotional labor on psychological contracts and organizational citizenship behaviors from the individual teacher perception level. Also, to explore the moderating effect of organizational support on the relationship between emotional labor and psychological contract from the organizational level to enrich the understanding of the effect of emotional labor. Consequently, among the above-mentioned improvements at the individual teacher perception level and the organizational level, this study expects to enhance organizational performance and improve the positive work behavior of secondary teachers at the practice dimension.

## Research Objectives

1. Identifying the impact of emotional labor on organizational citizenship behavior.
2. Demonstrating that the psychological contract mediates between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior.
3. Demonstrating that organizational support plays a moderating role in the relationship between emotional labor and psychological contract role.
4. Organizational support moderates the mediating effect of the psychological contract between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior.

## Literature review

### Emotional Labor and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Emotional labor refers to the emotional regulation behavior of employees by regulating their internal feelings and external expressions to meet the requirements of the organization. Teachers must constantly smile and be patient to better perform their duties and to ensure the physical and mental growth as well as the academic quality of their students. Such a behavior, on the other hand, triggers individual stress due to the depletion of emotional resources (Sheng et al., 2022). Taking into account the significance of emotional labor and the characteristics of the emotional work of secondary vocational teachers, the analysis of emotional labor from the perspective of stress includes emotional diminution and surface acting. Emotional diminution refers to hiding negative emotions and not showing them due to the job requirements. Surface acting indicates that an emotion is not felt (e.g. happiness) but the corresponding emotion is presented (e.g. smile) (Humphrey et al., 2015). In contrast to formally organizational required behaviors, organizational citizenship behaviors are the voluntary behaviors exhibited by individuals beyond their roles and play a critical role in promoting overall organizational effectiveness and predicting employee behavioral tendencies (Su & Zhao, 2005). Organ (1988) also stated that organizational citizenship behaviors are "behaviors that are not directly or explicitly recognized by the organization's formal reward system, are developed by employees, and generally enhance organizational functioning and efficiency". Teachers' expressions of negative emotions in the course of their work can be directly perceived by students, which in turn can negatively affect organizational performance, hence the need to enhance organizational citizenship behavior is necessary (Qiu & Li, 2022). The emotional stress brought about by work makes it particularly urgent to encourage organizational citizenship behaviors among middle school teachers, which not only improves motivation and stimulates innovation, but also helps to promote the positive development of the organization (Zhang, 2016). Grandey (2000) found that when employees are required to adjust their external emotions to meet organizational norms, there is a heavy sense of exhaustion and negative emotional experiences that result in lower levels of organizational citizenship behavior.

H1: Emotional labor has a negative effect on organizational citizenship behavior.

### The Mediating Role of the Psychological Contract

Many managerial and educational behaviors and performance results of secondary vocational teachers are not explicitly regulated, to the point that they cannot be directly assessed and measured, having implicit and non-economic characteristics (Zhao et al., 2021). Therefore, to motivate teachers' organizational citizenship behavior, it is necessary to construct not only a tangible contract but also an intangible contract, i.e., a psychological contract, which is a variety of beliefs in employees' minds about their mutual responsibilities and obligations to the organization (Sha, 2021). When employees perceive a breach of the psychological contract, they perceive that the organization has reduced their obligations, and thus employees will lower their work behavioral effort accordingly, in conjunction with the reciprocity principle of social exchange theory (Phothongsunan, 2022). On the other hand, a strengthened psychological contract can help to promote pro-organizational behavior to achieve a balance in the exchange relationship. Excessive emotional labor in the work process of secondary vocational teachers can lead to emotional exhaustion, which affects the effectiveness of the various psychological contracts formed with the school (Wang et al., 2019).

H2: the psychological contract mediates the role between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior.

### The Moderating Role of Organizational Support

Notably, the emotional labor, psychological contract, and organizational citizenship behaviors of secondary vocational teachers were analyzed from the organizational and work perspectives of individual-related attitudinal behaviors. Therefore, studies that do not embrace the influence of organizational factors on teachers' behavior are imperfect, and it is necessary to explore its moderating effect on teachers from organizational support. Organizational support is an important variable in employees' psychological feelings about how the organization treats and cares for its employees and influences their work attitudes and their work behaviors (Eisenberger et al., 1986). When teachers have a high sense of organizational support, they will strengthen their psychological contract with the organization, put themselves in the organization's shoes, and not be influenced by their emotional stress, acting positively in the interest of the organization. Wen and Hou (2016) verified the moderating effect of the sense of organizational support on organizational citizenship behavior.

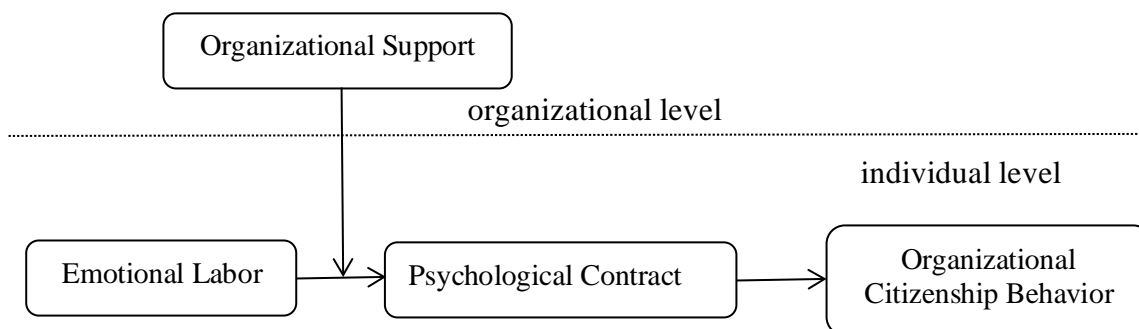
H3 is proposed: The relationship between emotional labor and psychological contract role is positively moderated by organizational support.

It is clear from the preceding that the psychological contract mediates the relationship between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior, and that organizational support has a positive moderating effect on emotional labor and the psychological contract. According to Podsakoff et al. (2000), when employees perceive that the organization recognizes their values and work, they will engage in their work with a positive attitude and thus become more motivated to think about the organization and reduce negative work behaviors. Based on the principle of mutuality, Lin et al. (2006) proposed that a sense of organizational support motivates employees to work and that the mediating effect of the psychological contract between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior may be influenced by organizational support. When teachers were in a position of higher levels of organizational support, the psychological contract was diminished by the negative influence of emotional labor, thus making the role of the psychological contract in conveying emotional labor pressure on teachers' organizational citizenship behaviors weaker.

This leads to the H4: Organizational support moderates the mediating effect of psychological contracts between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior.

### Conceptual Framework

This study constructs a conceptual framework, as shown in Fig. 1.



**Fig.1 Conceptual framework**

## Research Methodology

### Research Subjects

Some secondary vocational colleges with insufficient comprehensive competitiveness and low attractiveness will be gradually integrated or abolished in the future development of the education industry. Considering the future development of secondary vocational schools and policy support, it is reliable and feasible to select high-quality secondary vocational schools in the series of "Hu, Bao, E, Wu four areas' vocational education" as the sample scope. (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Human Resources, & Social Security and Ministry of Finance, 2018).

The study used a random sampling method to issue questionnaires to teachers in four secondary vocational schools in the Hu, Bao, E, and Wu regions of Inner Mongolia, with a total of 400 copies. A total of 376 questionnaires were collected, with a return rate of 94%, of which 350 were valid, with an efficiency rate of 93.1%. There were 157 male teachers (44.9%) and 193 female teachers (55.1%) in this study. 68 (19.4%) were under 30 years of age, 133 (38%) were 31-40 years of age, 105 (30%) were 41-50 years of age, and 44 (12.6%) were over 51 years of age. Marital status of 285 was married (81.4%) and 65 unmarrieds (18.6%). Education in college and below are 63, accounting for 18%, 210 undergraduates, accounting for 60%, and 77 masters and above, accounting for 22%. 137 (39.1%) majored in educational subjects and 213 (60.9%) in vocational and technical subjects. Among the professional titles in the sample, 7 have no title, accounting for 2%, 94 have junior titles, accounting for 26.9%, 142 have intermediate titles, accounting for 40.6%, and 107 have senior titles, accounting for 30.6%. The number of teaching years was 59 (16.9%) for 5 years and below, 115 (32.9%) for 6-10 years, 38 (10.9%) for 11-15 years, and 138 (39.4%) for more than 15 years. In summary, the sample is representative.

### Measurement

The scales used in this study were all from developed and established scales of existing studies, and the questionnaire was based on a Likert scale, ranging from completely disagree to completely agree, with a theoretical neutral value of 3 points for each of the measurement items involved.

The Emotional Workload Scale uses Brothridge and Grandey's (2002) Emotional Workload Scale, which includes two dimensions, Emotional Diminished and Surface Acting, and consists of six question items. Emotionally diminished Cronbach's alpha value of 0.77 and surface acting Cronbach's alpha value of 0.74 indicates that the reliability of both variables was met.

The Psychological Contract Scale was adopted by Liu, Liu and Yu (2008) to develop the Psychological Contract Scale, which includes two dimensions of merit and loyalty and consists of eight question items. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.72 for superior performance and 0.81 for loyalty represent adequate reliability for both variables

The Organizational Support Scale is based on Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) Organizational Support Scale, which consists of six questions. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.882 for the scale as a whole indicates that reliability is met.

The Organizational Citizenship Behavior Scale (OCBS), developed by Farh et al. (1990), was adopted and includes two dimensions of general conformity and proactivity,

consisting of nine question items. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.87 for the scale as a whole indicates that reliability is met.

Given that demographic variables may influence organizational citizenship behavior to some extent, demographic variables such as gender, age, education, job title, and years of experience of secondary teachers were selected as control variables in this study.

### **Data Analysis**

This study employed SPSS 26.0, Mplus 8.3, and R3.5.1 for statistical analysis of the data, including descriptive analysis, scale data quality analysis, correlation analysis, and aggregation appropriateness tests. The multilevel Structure Equation Model (MSEM) was developed by Mplus8.3 to explore the multilevel mediating effect and multilevel moderating effect (Preacher et al., 2016). Centring the total mean on team-level independent variables and group mean on individual-level independent variables resulted in better differentiation of within- and between-level effects for each variable, reduced covariance and improved estimation precision (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998). The main effect of emotional labor on organizational citizenship behavior will be explored from a cross-level perspective. The role of the psychological contract in mediating between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior, the moderating effect of organizational support on the moderating effect between emotional labor and the psychological contract, and the moderating effect on the mediating effect of the psychological contract between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior will also be investigated. The mediating effects and confidence intervals with moderated mediators were also estimated by R3.5.1 software based on the Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) simulation algorithm (Preacher & Selig, 2012).

## **Research Results**

### **Common Method Deviation**

The common method bias test uses the Harman one-way method and the control unmeasured potential method factor method to test for possible common method bias. In the Harman one-way method, exploratory factor analysis was performed on all scale items of the questionnaire (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The first factor without rotation explained 30.323% of the variance, indicating that the scale was not subject to severe common method bias. By validation factor analysis, all scales were reduced in dimension and aggregated into one factor showing the poor fit of the single factor model ( $\chi^2/df=8.365 > 5$ ,  $RMSEA=0.145 > 0.08$ ,  $CFI=0.471 < 0.9$ ,  $TLI=0.410 < 0.9$ ). Indicates no significant common method bias in the scale. The potential method of controlling for unmeasured factors was also used in the study to avoid the limitations of the Harman one-way test. The result shows that  $\Delta\chi^2=0.412$ ,  $\Delta df=1$ , and the p-value equals 0.521, suggesting that there is no serious common methodological bias in this study.

### **Discriminant Validity Test**

After building the validation factor model using Mplus8.3 and using the 7-factor model as the benchmark model, obtaining  $\chi^2/df=1.218 < 5$ ,  $RMSEA=0.025 < 0.08$ ,  $CFI=0.985 > 0.9$ ,  $TLI=0.983 > 0.9$ . All meet the fitting criteria (Kline, 2015). The best fit compared to the other models indicates good discriminant validity among the variables.

**Descriptive and Correlation Analyses**

The absolute maximum values of skewness and kurtosis for each variable in the study are 0.950 and 1.457 respectively, both less than 3. The data show a normal distribution. Emotional labor was significantly and negatively correlated with psychological contract and organizational citizenship behavior ( $p < 0.01$ ). Pearson correlation coefficients of -0.432, and -0.482, respectively. There was a significant positive correlation between psychological contracts and organizational citizenship behavior ( $p < 0.01$ ) with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.491. See Table 1 for details.

**Table 1. Results of Descriptive and Correlation Analyses**

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	3	4
1 Emotional Labor	3.110	0.835	1			
2 Psychological Contracts	3.757	0.773	-.432**	1		
3 Organizational Support	3.308	0.853	-.210**	.265**	1	
4 Organizational Citizenship Behavior	3.872	0.688	-.482**	.494**	.310**	1

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Aggregation test**

Referring to the criteria of Bliese (2000), when  $ICC(1) > 0.059$ ,  $ICC(2) > 0.60$ , and  $Rwg > 0.70$ , individual member data can be aggregated to team-level data. The results of the data aggregation test in Table 2 show that the  $ICC_1$  of emotional labor, psychological contract, organizational support, and organizational citizenship behavior are all greater than 0.059,  $ICC_2$  are all higher than 0.6, and the mean and median values of  $Rwg$  are all higher than the 0.7 criteria. It indicates that all variables meet the data aggregation requirements, and all can aggregate individual member data into team data.

**Table 2. Aggregation Test Results**

Variable	$ICC_1$	$ICC_2$	$r_{wg}$	
			Mean	Median
Emotional Labor	0.306	0.686	0.776	0.794
Psychological Contracts	0.372	0.743	0.824	0.862
Organizational Support	0.478	0.810	0.852	0.904
Organizational Citizenship Behavior	0.391	0.759	0.873	0.897

### Hypothesis Test

The study explores the multilevel mediating role of the psychological contract between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior by constructing a multilevel structural equation model through Mplus8.3. The cross-products were also constructed based on mean-centeredness to explore the moderating effect of organizational support between emotional labor and psychological contract. The study estimated confidence intervals for mediated and moderated mediated effects by R3.5.1 software based on Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) simulation algorithm, and the results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results**

Variable	Mediation model		Moderated mediation model	
	Emotional Labor	Psychological Contracts	Organizational Support	Organizational Citizenship Behavior
Intercept	4.584*** (0.551)	3.28*** (0.663)	2.956*** (0.283)	1.63** (0.47)
Gender	0.132 (0.073)	-0.082 (0.058)	0.129 (0.073)	-0.086 (0.058)
Age	0.022 (0.079)	0.027 (0.072)	0.024 (0.08)	0.026 (0.072)
Marriage status	0.001 (0.111)	0.065 (0.1)	0.014 (0.111)	0.067 (0.099)
Educational background	0.044 (0.051)	0.027 (0.044)	0.043 (0.052)	0.026 (0.044)
Profession	0.076 (0.071)	0.109 (0.063)	0.078 (0.071)	0.111 (0.063)
Title	0.062 (0.047)	0.01 (0.033)	0.069 (0.045)	0.011 (0.033)
Teaching year	0.045 (0.065)	0.051 (0.058)	0.041 (0.066)	0.052 (0.057)
Emotional labor	-0.518*** (0.142)	-0.447** (0.141)	-0.289** (0.1)	-0.287** (0.086)
Organizational support			0.165* (0.077)	
Emotional labor × Organizational support			0.273* (0.131)	
Psychological contracts		0.479*** (0.103)		0.57*** (0.113)
$\sigma^2$	0.306*** (0.027)	0.231*** (0.029)	0.309*** (0.027)	0.231*** (0.029)
$\tau_{00}$	0.161*** (0.035)	0.047* (0.023)	0.135*** (0.03)	0.049* (0.022)

\* :  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* :  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* :  $p < 0.001$  ; The content inside the brackets is the standard error.



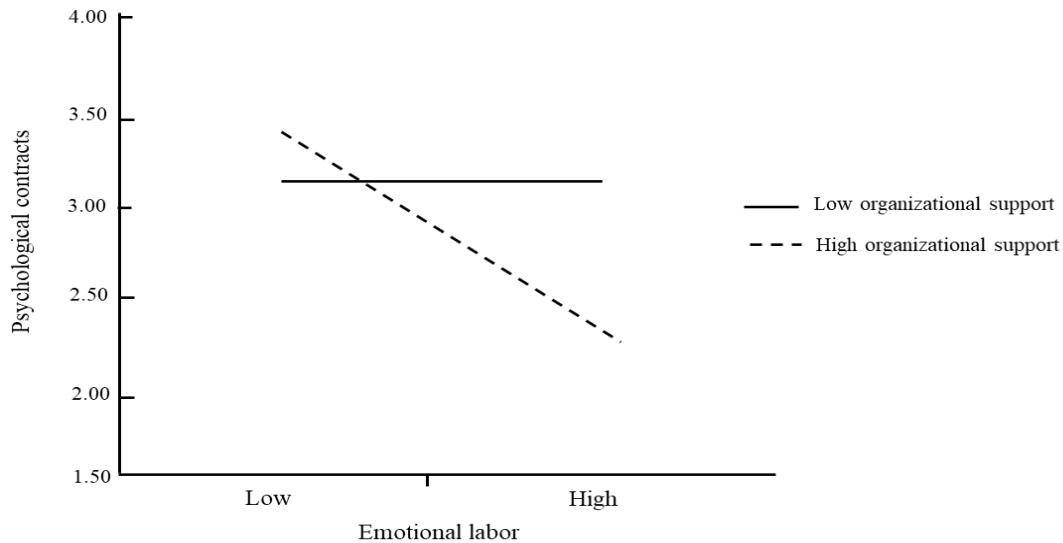
The result shows that emotional labor has a significant negative effect on organizational citizenship behavior ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $\gamma = -0.447$ ). The 95% confidence interval for the total effect of emotional labor on organizational citizenship behavior was  $[-0.997, -0.393]$ , and the 95% confidence interval excluded 0. The result indicates that the total effect of emotional labor on organizational citizenship behavior is significant with a total effect of  $-0.695$ . Therefore, it is concluded that there is a significant negative effect of emotional labor on organizational citizenship behavior, and it is concluded that hypothesis H1 holds.

The mediated path significance test showed a significant negative effect of emotional labor on psychological contract ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $\gamma = -0.518$ ). There is a statistically significant positive effect of psychological contracts on organizational citizenship behavior ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $\gamma = 0.479$ ). Referring to the sequential test proposed by Baron & Kenny (1986), the conclusion of the data analysis shows that hypothesis H2 holds. The data in Table 4 shows that the 95% confidence interval for the mediating effect of team innovation climate between transformational leadership and employee creativity by using the coefficient product method with simultaneous Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) test is  $[-0.386, -0.117]$ . The confidence interval excludes 0, indicating a significant mediating role of the psychological contract between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior. Furthermore, the amount of mediating effect is  $-0.248$ , and the mediating effect accounts for 35.7% of the total effect; in summary, H2 is deemed valid.

**Table 4. Mediation Effect Test based on the MCMC Method**

	Estimate	S.E.	95%LCI	95%UCI	Ratio (%)
Total Effect	-0.695	0.154	-0.997	-0.393	-
Direct Effect	-0.447	0.141	-0.723	-0.171	64.3
Indirect Effect	-0.248	0.067	-0.386	-0.117	35.7

Among the interaction terms, there was a significant positive effect of emotional labor x organizational support on psychological contract ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $\gamma = 0.273$ ). It shows that there is a significant positive moderating effect of organizational support on emotional labor and psychological contract, so H3 holds. Fig. 2 visualizes the moderating effect of organizational support on emotional labor and psychological contracts (Aiken et al., 1991).



**Fig.2 Map of the Role of Organizational Support on Emotional Labor and Psychological Contract Regulation**

From the test results, there was a significant negative effect of emotional labor on the psychological contract. Psychological contract positively affects organizational citizenship behavior, and organizational support positively and significantly moderates the effect between emotional labor and psychological contract. The data in Table 5 show that the 95% confidence interval of the mediator index with adjustment by Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) simulation algorithm test based on the coefficient product method is [0.009, 0.320] and does not contain 0. Based on the test for differences in mediating effects, the confidence intervals for differences in mediating effects at high and low levels of moderating variables were estimated by the Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) simulation algorithm, and the 95% confidence intervals for differences in mediating effects at high and low organizational support ( $M \pm SD$ ) were [0.013, 0.433], excluding 0. Therefore, H4 holds.

**Table 5. Test for Moderated Mediating Effects based on the MCMC Method**

	Estimate	S.E.	95%LCI	95%UCI
Low(-SD)	-0.269	0.067	-0.401	-0.137
Median (0)	-0.164	0.061	-0.283	-0.046
High(+SD)	-0.060	0.090	-0.236	0.116
High-Low	0.210	0.103	0.013	0.433
Index of Moderated Mediation	0.155	0.078	0.009	0.320

## Discussions & Conclusions

The results of this study indicate, first, that emotional labor significantly and negatively affects organizational citizenship behavior. When members in an organization are affected by their work environment and perceive stress caused by negative emotions, it reduces one's own organizational citizenship behavior. Second, the psychological contract mediates the relationship between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior. According to the social exchange theory, both parties follow the principle of reciprocity, and the increased emotional labor pressure of individuals will bring losses to individuals and weaken the stability

of the psychological contract, thus reducing organizational citizenship behavior which is not conducive to organizational development. Finally, by testing a mediated model of being regulated across layers, the study also revealed the mediating role of organizational support in positively regulating the psychological contract on the relationship between emotional labor and organizational citizenship behavior. Specifically, individual emotional labor stress is mitigated in high organizational support contexts. This leads individuals to identify more with the mission of their work, and the psychological contract is strengthened, further promoting individual motivation and initiative, which manifests itself in the improvement of organizational citizenship behavior.

## Knowledge from Research

Several implications exist for organizational management and secondary vocational teacher practice in this study. First, given that emotional labor acts heavily on the organizational citizenship behavior of secondary teachers, i.e., individuals become negative in their behavior at work because of the stress of emotional labor, school administrators should pay attention to the changes in teachers' emotional aspects. The stress of emotional labor can undermine teachers' satisfaction and sense of belonging to the school, and teachers may turn to adverse behaviors against the school because of the lowered psychological contract. Therefore, schools should develop specific care measures to soothe teachers' psychological stress and make them feel support from the organization. The school organization should also encourage a mutually supportive work atmosphere, enhance the empathy of managers, and in turn call on members of the organization to take positive action to help the school improve its performance.

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