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THE MODERATING ROLE OF INDIVIDUALISM-COLLECTIVISM CULTURAL DIMENSION IN THE EFFECT OF EMOTIONAL LABOR ON EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION: A STUDY ON TEACHERS

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Abstract

Studies examining the influence of culture within the emotional labor (EL) literature remain limited. Among the few studies that look at how cultural traits—especially individualism-collectivism—affect the link between EL and burnout, researchers usually define EL in two ways: surface acting and deep acting. This study, in contrast, approaches EL as a three-dimensional construct by also incorporating genuine emotions. The research looks at whether the cultural traits of individualism and collectivism affect how surface acting, deep acting, and genuine emotions relate to emotional exhaustion (EE). Based on data collected from 123 teachers employed at a private educational institution in the province of Balıkesir, the findings reveal that surface acting correlates favorably with EE, whereas both deep acting and genuine emotions correlate adversely with it. The study finds that the impact of EL on EE is the same, regardless of whether the teachers lean more toward individualism or collectivism.

Keywords: *Emotional labor, Emotional exhaustion, Burnout, Individualism-Collectivism, Teachers.*

DUYGUSAL EMEĞİN DUYGUSAL TÜKENMEYE ETKİSİNDE BİREYCİLİK-KOLEKTİVİZM KÜLTÜR BOYUTUNUN DÜZENLEYİCİ ROLÜ: ÖĞRETMENLER ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

Öz

Duygusal emek yazınında, kültürün etkisini inceleyen araştırmalar halen sınırlı sayıdadır. Duygusal emeğin tükenmişlik üzerindeki etkisinde bireycilik-kolektivizm kültür özelliğinin düzenleyici rolünün ele alındığı söz konusu bu sınırlı sayıdaki araştırmalarda duygusal emek, yüzeysel davranış ve derinlemesine davranış olmak üzere iki boyutlu olarak ele alınmaktadır. Diğer çalışmalardan farklı olarak bu çalışmada ise duygusal emek üç boyutuyla ele alınmaktadır. Böylece yüzeysel ve derinlemesine davranış ile birlikte doğal duyguların tükenmişlik üzerindeki etkisinde bireycilik-kolektivizm kültür boyutunun düzenleyicilik rolünün bulunup bulunmadığı da incelenmektedir. Balıkesir ilindeki bir özel eğitim kurumunda çalışmakta olan 123 öğretmenden elde edilen verilere dayanan araştırma sonucunda; yüzeysel davranışın duygusal tükenmişliği pozitif, derinlemesine davranış ve doğal duyguların ise negatif yönde etkilediği belirlenmiştir. Bireycilik-kolektivizm kültür özelliğinin düzenleyici rolü ile ilgili olarak ise, öğretmenlerin duygusal emek davranışlarının duygusal tükenmişlikleri üzerindeki etkisinin, sahip oldukları bireycilik-kolektivizm kültür özelliğine göre değişmediği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Duygusal emek, Duygusal tükenme, Tükenmişlik, Bireycilik-Kolektivizm kültür boyutu, Öğretmenler.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, the growing importance of the service sector has intensified competition within it. The quality of service, customer satisfaction, and the ability of service organizations to achieve their goals largely depend on the efforts and commitment of employees who engage in direct and often face-to-face interactions with customers. Naturally, emotions play a critical role in this process. As a result, employees are anticipated to employ their emotions to enhance consumer pleasure (Basım and Beğenirbaş, 2012). The process through which employees synchronize their emotional expressions with the standards established by their organization while interacting directly with customers is referred to as emotional labor (EL) (Işık et al., 2016). EL encompasses surface acting, deep acting, or genuine emotions. Surface acting involves the employee modifying outward emotional expressions to comply with display rules, even when these expressions do not reflect their true feelings (Eroğlu, 2014). In contrast, deep acting emerges when the employee endeavors to honestly experience the emotions required by the organization—often by empathizing with the customer and placing themselves in the customer's position (Basım and Beğenirbaş, 2012). Genuine emotions, or naturally felt emotions, refers to the spontaneous and sincere expression of emotions that arise naturally from within the employee (Basım and Beğenirbaş, 2012).

Burnout, alongside job satisfaction, is considered one of the most salient consequences of EL. Burnout is a psychological syndrome observed particularly among employees in people-oriented professions such as education and healthcare (Çetin et al., 2011). It manifests in three dimensions: Emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. EE represents the core stress part of burnout, marked by diminished energy levels and a perceived depletion of emotional resources (Maslach and Goldberg, 1998). Several scholars have identified EE as the most critical and central dimension of burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1993; Ünlü & Yürür, 2011; Tayfur & Arslan, 2012). Accordingly, the present study assessed burnout primarily through the EE dimension. Empirical findings generally indicate that while surface acting is positively associated with the EE (Grandey, 2003; Hwa, 2012; Basım and Beğenirbaş, 2012), deep acting (Hwa, 2012) and genuine emotions (Basım and Beğenirbaş, 2012) are negatively associated with it.

Individualism-collectivism is one of Hofstede's culture dimensions. Individualism-collectivism denotes the extent to which individuals are integrated into groups. In collectivist cultures, individuals are closely integrated into robust, cohesive in-groups that provide protection in return for unconditional loyalty (Hofstede, 2011). The core assumption of collectivism is that group affiliation connects individuals and generates mutual obligations. Conversely, the fundamental assumption of individualism is that individuals are autonomous and independent of one another (Oyserman et al., 2002). Research that examines the intersection of culture and EL has explored how individualism-collectivism influences the relationship between EL and burnout. But these studies have yielded mixed findings. For instance, a study by Lu and Guy (2019) suggested that the individualism-collectivism cultural dimension does not have a major impact on the employees' EL experiences. However, some other studies (Allen et al., 2014; Newnham, 2017; Mastracci and Adams, 2019; Humphrey, 2023) indicated that the correlation between surface acting and burnout is more pronounced in those with a predominantly individualistic mindset.

In today's globalized work environment, understanding cultural differences in emotional expression in the workplace is undeniably important. A more profound understanding of how cultural variations influence EL is crucial for enabling service employees across different cultural contexts to meet the expectations of their customers and organizations more effectively. However, an examination of EL literature indicates that cross-cultural studies remain relatively limited (Allen et al., 2014). In this context, we expect the present study, which investigates the moderating effect of individualism-collectivism on the link between emotional labor (EL) and emotional exhaustion (EE), to significantly contribute to EL literature.

Another distinguishing feature of this study is that it deals with emotional labor in three dimensions. Specifically, the other studies explained above examined EL in two dimensions while investigating the moderating effect of individualism-collectivism on the relationship between EL and burnout. Thus, this study expands the cultural studies that define EL solely in terms of surface and deep acting by incorporating the dimension of genuine emotions.

It is believed that the results of this study will benefit organizations and managers in understanding and managing the impact of culture on employees' emotional labor behaviors. Additionally, according to the research findings, the recommendations made for future research on the relationship between culture and EL are also considered to be valuable for researchers.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. Emotional Labor

Hochschild (1983), who first presented the notion of emotional labor (EL), defines it as "the management of emotions to produce facial and bodily displays observable by others." She distinguishes between two types of emotion regulation in the EL process: surface acting, which is adjusting emotional expressions to adhere to display norms, and deep acting, which requires altering internal feelings to conform to those rules. Hochschild also emphasizes that organizational control over highly personal emotions is often met with resistance by employees, as it may result in stress and emotional exhaustion (EE) (Grandey, 2000).

In contrast to Hochschild's perspective, Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) claim that what customers perceive directly are not emotions themselves, but rather behaviors aligned with display rules. As such, they place greater emphasis on observable behavior rather than internal emotional processes in the EL framework. Moreover, they suggest that emotions can sometimes naturally align with organizational display rules without requiring regulation. Based on this perspective, they introduced a third dimension to EL—genuine emotions—and proposed a three-dimensional model.

Morris and Feldman (1996) characterize EL as the exertion, strategizing, and regulation required to convey feelings that are deemed desirable by the organization during interpersonal exchanges. Their approach differs from earlier models by focusing more on contextual and job-specific characteristics. According to their framework, EL comprises four dimensions: the frequency of emotional display, attentiveness to display rules, the variety of emotions required to be expressed, and emotional dissonance. Organizational rules force individuals to express emotions that conflict with their true feelings, causing emotional dissonance (Morris and Feldman, 1996).

Grandey (2000) combines earlier ideas about EL (i.e., Hochschild, 1983; Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Morris and Feldman, 1996) and describes it as the regulation of feelings and expressions to meet the objectives of an organization. In her model, the regulation of expressions corresponds to surface acting, while the regulation of internal feelings corresponds to deep acting.

2.2. Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion (EE) is one of the burnout dimensions. Although psychiatrist Freudenberger is recognized as a pioneer in burnout research, the most prevalent description of burnout today was introduced by Maslach (1981). Burnout is a psychological syndrome observed particularly among employees in people-oriented professions such as education and healthcare (Çetin et al., 2011). It manifests in three dimensions: EE, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

EE represents the core stress part of burnout, marked by diminished energy levels and a perceived depletion of emotional resources. Excessive workload and interpersonal conflicts in the workplace are among the primary causes of this dimension. Individuals experiencing EE often feel they lack the energy to face others or to return to work the next day (Maslach and Goldberg, 1998). Depersonalization reflects the interpersonal dimension of burnout. It is marked by emotionally detached or excessively distant responses toward others. Employees displaying depersonalization often adopt a cynical attitude toward customers, colleagues, or the organization itself (Çetin et al., 2011). Reduced personal accomplishment reflects the self-evaluation aspect of burnout. The factors leading to EE and depersonalization may also diminish one's sense of achievement, lead to feelings of inadequacy, and result in a tendency toward negative self-assessment (Maslach and Goldberg, 1998; Çetin et al., 2011).

Various individual and situational factors can contribute to the onset of burnout syndrome. Individual factors include demographic characteristics, personality traits, and work-related attitudes. Situational factors influencing burnout include organizational, job-related, and occupational characteristics (Maslach et al., 2001). Regarding occupational characteristics, professions that are human-centered and involve direct face-to-face interaction—such as healthcare, social services, and education—pose a higher risk for burnout due to the intensity of customer interactions (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993). These job demands also bring the concept of EL to the forefront. In this context, surface acting, one of the sub-dimensions of EL, has been frequently identified as a key contributor to burnout (Ünlü and Yürür, 2011).

2.3. Individualism-Collectivism

Hofstede initially categorized “national culture” into four dimensions: individualism–collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity–femininity. In later research, he added two additional dimensions—long-term versus short-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint—resulting in a six-dimensional cultural framework (Hofstede, 2011).

Individualism–collectivism denotes the extent to which individuals are integrated into groups. In collectivist cultures, individuals are closely integrated into robust, cohesive in-groups (such as large families) that provide protection in return for unconditional loyalty (Hofstede, 2011). The core assumption of collectivism is that group affiliation connects individuals and generates mutual obligations. Collectivist societies are characterized by social units that share a common fate, goals, and values (Oyserman et al., 2002). A strong sense of belonging to the in-group is central to collectivism (Astakhova et al., 2014). Key collectivist values include children’s loyalty to their parents, conformity, sociability, and the willingness to prioritize communal welfare over individual wants (Singh et al., 2015). Conversely, the fundamental assumption of individualism is that individuals are autonomous and independent of one another (Oyserman et al., 2002). In individualistic cultures, interpersonal relationships are tenuous, and individuals are anticipated to prioritize their own welfare and that of their immediate family (Hofstede, 2011). In individualistic societies, people tend to prioritize personal autonomy and achievement, focus primarily on themselves and close family members, and maintain relatively loose ties with their wider social environment (Astakhova et al., 2014).

Whether individualism and collectivism represent two opposite poles of a single continuum or are distinct constructs that can coexist within the same individual has been a subject of debate in cross-cultural research. Hofstede conceptualized individualism and collectivism as opposing ends of a single dimension. However, Singelis et al. (1995), in developing the INDCOL scale to measure this cultural dimension at the individual level, treated individualism and collectivism as independent constructs or syndromes that can simultaneously exist within a person. The INDCOL scale proposes a four-factor structure by incorporating horizontal and vertical dimensions alongside individualism and collectivism (Wasti and Erdil, 2007). While horizontal individualism encompasses the understanding of autonomous individuals and emphasizes equality, vertical individualism includes the understanding of autonomous individuals only with the acceptance of inequality, meaning status differences. While horizontal collectivism emphasizes seeing oneself as part of the community and equality, vertical collectivism emphasizes seeing oneself as part of the community but accepting inequality, highlighting hierarchical differences among community members (Singelis et al., 1995; Wasti and Erdil, 2007).

2.4. The Effect of Emotional Labor on Emotional Exhaustion

The emotional burden generated by EL can lead to psychological outcomes that negatively influence employees’ attitudes toward their work. Burnout, alongside job satisfaction, is considered one of the most salient consequences of EL. Empirical findings generally indicate that surface acting, the behavioral dimension of EL, is positively associated with the EE and depersonalization dimensions of burnout while being negatively associated with the dimension of personal accomplishment. Conversely, deep acting, which involves modifying one’s internal emotional state, is positively related to a sense of personal accomplishment (Humphrey, 2023). More detailed findings regarding the correlation between the sub-dimensions of EL and those of burnout can be summarized as follows:

Grandey's (2003) study involving 131 administrative assistants at a university revealed a positive correlation between surface acting and EE. A study conducted by Hwa (2012) with 137 hotel employees revealed a positive correlation between surface acting and EE, whereas deep acting exhibited a negative correlation. Basım and Beğenirbaş (2012) studied two groups of teachers (n=152 and n=273) while adapting Diefendorff et al.'s (2005) Emotional Labor Scale for Türkiye. Their findings indicated that surface acting correlated with increased EE and depersonalization, while deep acting was associated with lower "reduced personal accomplishment". Additionally, the expression of genuine emotions was linked to lower levels of all three burnout aspects. Similarly, Can Yalçın (2012) found negative relationships between both deep acting and genuine emotions and all dimensions of burnout in a doctoral dissertation involving a sample of 393 teachers.

Based on these findings, the first research hypothesis of the current study is formulated as follows:

H1: EL has an effect on EE.

H1a: Surface acting has a positive effect on EE.

H1b: Deep acting has a negative effect on EE.

H1c: Genuine emotions has a negative effect on EE.

2.5. The Moderating Role of Individualism-Collectivism in the Relationship Between Emotional Labor and Emotional Exhaustion

Studies examining the moderating effect of individualism–collectivism on the association between EL and burnout have yielded mixed findings. For instance, a study by Lu and Guy (2019), which included 517 public sector employees from China and the United States, suggested that the individualism–collectivism cultural dimension does not have a major impact on the employees' EL experiences. In other words, EL was experienced similarly across individualistic and collectivist cultures (Humphrey, 2023). However, a study (Allen et al., 2014) conducted with 511 service sector employees from shopping malls, restaurants, hotels, and call centers in China and the United States found that the positive correlation between surface acting and burnout was more pronounced in the individualistic U.S. sample compared to the collectivist Chinese sample. Similarly, Newnham (2017), in a study involving 734 hotel employees in the Philippines and Australia, concluded that the positive impact of surface acting on burnout was more pronounced among individuals with individualistic cultural orientations. Mastracci and Adams (2019), in their cross-national study of 1,050 public sector employees from the United States, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Taiwan, and China, found that surface acting contributed less to burnout in collectivist cultures than in individualistic ones, while deep acting was more effective in reducing burnout in collectivist contexts. In a meta-analysis conducted by Humphrey (2023), based on 175 studies, it was also observed that the individualism–collectivism cultural dimension has an important impact on how people perceive EL experiences. Specifically, individuals in individualistic cultures were found to be more sensitive to the adverse consequences of EL—both surface and deep acting—such as EE.

Considering the research findings outlined above, the moderating influence of individualism–collectivism on the EL–burnout relationship can be interpreted as follows: Individuals in collectivist cultures tend to have more experience in adjusting their emotions to meet external expectations, as they prioritize social harmony and avoiding interpersonal conflict. Because emotional regulation is perceived as serving social purposes, it is not considered a threat to one's personal authenticity. As such, surface acting may be less harmful to employee well-being in collectivist cultures compared to individualistic ones (Allen et al., 2014).

Based on the aforementioned empirical evidence and theoretical reasoning, the second hypothesis of the study is proposed as follows:

H2: The individualism–collectivism cultural dimension moderates the effect of EL on EE.

The research model, developed in light of the above hypotheses and empirical findings, is presented in Figure 1. In this model, EL (comprising surface acting, deep acting, and genuine emotions) is defined as the independent

variable, the individualism–collectivism cultural dimension as the moderating variable, and EE as the dependent variable.

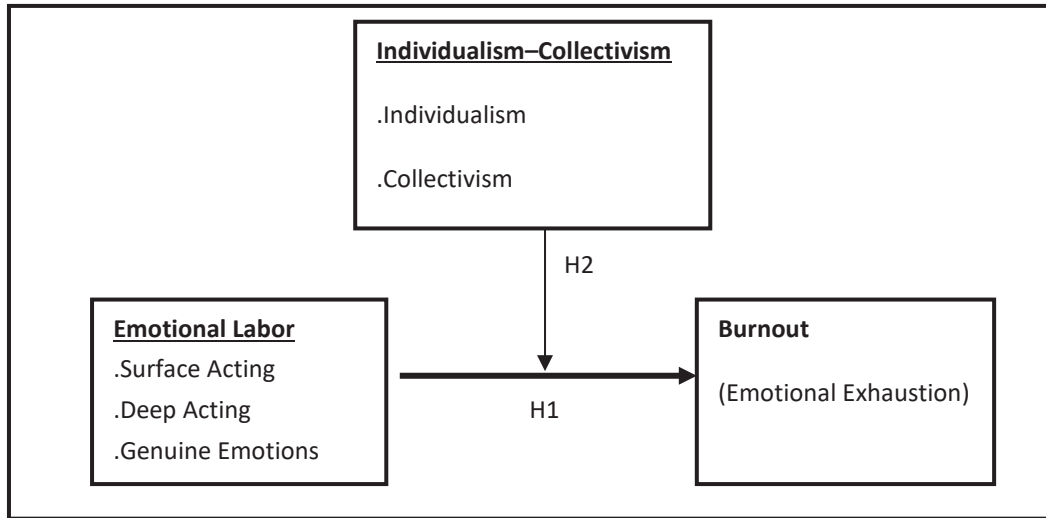


Figure 1: Research Model

3. METHOD

Designed as a quantitative study, this research employed a correlational survey model to examine the hypotheses concerning the links between emotional labor (EL), burnout, and the cultural dimension of individualism–collectivism. The study adopts a cross-sectional design with respect to its temporal scope. Since the entire population was accessible due to its manageable size, a sampling method was not employed. Data for the study were obtained via face-to-face interviews employing a Likert-type questionnaire. The research was conducted between April 21, 2025, and May 8, 2025, under the ethical approval granted by the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Balıkesir University, decision number 2025/03-45 dated March 28, 2025.

3.1. Participants

The study population comprises teachers employed at the preschool, primary, middle, and high school levels within a private educational institution situated in Balıkesir province. During the period in which the study was conducted, the total number of actively employed teachers at this institution was 176. As the entire population was accessible due to its manageable size, no sampling method was employed, and efforts were made to reach the entire population based on voluntary participation. Using the formula developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) [$s = \frac{X^2NP(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + X^2P(1-P)}$], the minimum number of valid responses required to represent a population of 176 was calculated to be 121. Upon completion of the data collection process, a total of 123 valid questionnaires were retrieved for analysis. The majority of the 123 participants were women (78%) and married (61.8%). In terms of age, 39% were between 31 and 40 years old, while 32.5% were in the 18–30 age group. Regarding professional experience, 30.9% of the participants had 16 or more years of service, whereas 22% had less than 5 years of experience. Additionally, 42.3% of the participants had been working at the institution for three years or more, while 24.4% had been working for less than one year. Most of the participants were primary school teachers (40.7%), followed by high school (24.4%), middle school (22.8%), and preschool teachers (12.2%).

3.2. Measurement Tools

3.2.1. Emotional Labor Scale

In this study, the Emotional Labor Scale originally developed by Diefendorff et al. (2005) and adapted into Turkish by Basım and Beğenirbaş (2012) was employed. The version adapted for teachers by Basım and Beğenirbaş (2012) measures EL across three subdimensions using a total of thirteen items in a 5-point Likert format (1 = Never, 5 = Always): six items for surface acting (e.g., “I put on an act in order to deal with students in

an appropriate way”), four items for deep acting (e.g., “I try to actually experience the emotions I have to show to students”), and three items for genuine emotions (e.g., “The emotions I display toward students are genuine”). According to Diefendorff et al. (2005), the reliability coefficients (Cronbach’s alpha) for the subdimensions of the original scale were 0.92, 0.85, and 0.83, respectively. In the Turkish adaptation study by Basım and Beğenirbaş (2012), reliability coefficients for the subdimensions ranged between 0.83 and 0.88 across two different teacher samples, while the overall reliability of the scale was reported as 0.80 in both samples. Factor analysis confirmed the scale’s factorial structure, with acceptable fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 2.502$, RMSEA = 0.074, GFI = 0.931, CFI = 0.952, AGFI = 0.886).

Confirmatory factor analysis results from the current study also supported the three-factor structure of the scale ($\chi^2 = 101.820$, $\chi^2/df = 1.756 < 3$, CFI = 0.95 \geq 0.95, IFI = 0.947 $>$ 0.90, GFI = 0.891 $>$ 0.85, RMSEA = 0.079 $<$ 0.08). Additionally, the reliability coefficients (Cronbach’s alpha) were found to be at acceptable levels: 0.880 for surface acting, 0.836 for deep acting, 0.810 for genuine emotions, and 0.798 for the overall scale.

3.2.2. Emotional Exhaustion Scale

This study assessed the level of burnout among teachers using the “Emotional Exhaustion (EE)” subdimension of the Maslach Burnout Inventory—Educators Survey (MBI-ES). The use of the EE subscale was based on the fact that several scholars have identified this dimension as the most critical and central component of burnout (Lee and Ashforth, 1993; Ünlü and Yürür, 2011; Tayfur and Arslan, 2012). The full inventory includes 22 items across three dimensions measured on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (“Never”) to 6 (“Every day”) (İnce and Şahin, 2015). A representative statement from the EE subscale is “Working with students puts a great deal of stress on me.” İnce and Şahin (2015) adapted the Turkish version of the scale, reporting reliability values of 0.88 for EE, 0.78 for depersonalization, and 0.74 for personal accomplishment. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in their study indicated that the factorial structure demonstrated an acceptable level of model fit ($\chi^2/df = 4.3$, RMSEA = 0.07, CFI = 0.94, NFI = 0.93, GFI = 0.87, AGFI = 0.84).

In this study, the results from the confirmatory factor analysis for the 9-item EE subscale also showed that the structure was valid ($\chi^2 = 36.748$, $\chi^2/df = 1.750 < 3$, CFI = 0.981 $>$ 0.97, NFI = 0.957 $>$ 0.95, GFI = 0.939 $>$ 0.90, RMSEA = 0.078 $<$ 0.08). The subscale demonstrated a high degree of internal consistency, as evidenced by a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.924.

3.2.3. Individualism-Collectivism (INDCOL) Scale

This study employed the INDCOL scale, first established by Singelis et al. (1995) and subsequently converted into Turkish by Wasti and Erdil (2007), to assess participants’ cultural orientation towards individualism-collectivism. The INDCOL scale is one of the most commonly used instruments designed to assess this cultural dimension at the individual level. Its approach differs from Hofstede’s (1980) framework not only by focusing on individual rather than societal-level measurement but also by conceptualizing individualism and collectivism not as opposite poles but as distinct cultural syndromes that can coexist within the same individual (Wasti and Erdil, 2007). The INDCOL scale proposes a four-factor structure by incorporating horizontal and vertical dimensions alongside individualism and collectivism (Wasti and Erdil, 2007). However, the INDCOL scale has been subject to criticism. Due to the high correlation between the vertical individualism and vertical collectivism dimensions, Wasti (2003) excluded these two dimensions in her study, focusing only on horizontal individualism and horizontal collectivism.

In this study, taking into account the earlier criticisms of the INDCOL scale, we used the horizontal individualism and horizontal collectivism sections, each with 10 items from the INDCOL scale in a 5-point Likert format (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), following Wasti’s method. An example item from the horizontal individualism subscale is “It is important to me to be a unique individual,” while an example from the horizontal collectivism subscale is “My happiness depends very much on the happiness of those around me.” Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) initially failed to achieve satisfactory fit indices. Subsequently, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted. During EFA, two items from the individualism subscale and two from the collectivism subscale were found to have low communalities (below 0.3) and were removed from the analysis.

A second EFA was then performed on the remaining 16 items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.738, and Bartlett’s test of sphericity yielded $\chi^2 = 651.454$ ($p = 0.000$). The analysis revealed that items related to individualism loaded on one factor, and those related to collectivism loaded on a second factor. After the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was done again, showing that the two-factor model with 16 items fit the sample data adequately ($\chi^2 = 119.606$, $\chi^2/df = 1.272 < 3$, CFI = 0.955 > 0.95, IFI = 0.957 > 0.95, GFI = 0.899 > 0.85, RMSEA = 0.047 < 0.05). Furthermore, reliability coefficients (Cronbach’s alpha) were found to be satisfactory: 0.777 for the individualism subscale, 0.812 for the collectivism subscale, and 0.802 for the overall scale.

3.3. Statistical Analysis

The AMOS statistical software was employed for confirmatory factor analysis. The SPSS statistical software was used for exploratory factor analysis, as well as for correlation and regression analyses. For the regression analyses related to the moderating effect, the Process Macro application was utilized. These regression analyses were done using Model 1 in the Process Macro, with a 95% confidence level and 5,000 repeated samples (Gürbüz, 2021). A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was utilized for the regression analyses.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Correlation Analysis

The study conducted correlation analyses based on the distribution characteristics of the variables. Spearman correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationships of the two variables that did not exhibit normal distribution—specifically, the ‘genuine emotions’ subdimension of emotional labor (EL) and the ‘collectivism’ subdimension of the individualism-collectivism cultural dimension—with other variables. For the four variables that demonstrated normal distribution, Pearson correlation coefficients were used to assess their relationships with other normally distributed variables. Table 1 displays the correlation coefficients, along with the means and standard deviations of the variables. The results of the correlation analyses revealed a positive association between surface acting and emotional exhaustion (EE) ($r = 0.287$, $p < 0.01$), a negative association between deep acting and EE ($r = -0.209$, $p < 0.05$), and a negative association between genuine emotions and EE ($r = -0.331$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 1: Correlation Coefficients, Means, and Standard Deviations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Surface Acting[1]	1					
2. Deep Acting[1]	,306**	1				
3. Genuine Emotions[2]	-,408**	,266**	1			
4. Emotional Exhaustion[1]	,287**	-,209*	-,331**	1		
5. Individualism[1]	,021	,069	,231*	,139	1	
6. Collectivism[2]	-,196*	,101	,188*	-,009	,177*	1
MEAN	15,1463	13,9675	12,8780	16,6016	34,3415	32,7805
STD. DEVIATION	0,52407	0,35300	0,19200	1,15058	0,37012	0,38766
** $p < 0,01$ (2-tailed); * $p < 0,05$ (2-tailed); [1] Pearson Correlation Analysis, [2] Spearman Correlation Analysis						

4.2. Regression Analyzes

Table 2 presents the results of the regression analyses undertaken to assess the impact of EL on EE. To account for the influence of demographic factors, the analyses controlled for the participants’ school level of employment (i.e., preschool, primary school, middle school, or high school), which was found to significantly influence the dependent variable—EE—based on prior t-test and ANOVA results ($F = 4.617$, $p = 0.004$).

Table 2: Regression Analysis Explaining the Effect of Emotional Labor on Emotional Exhaustion

Dependent Variable: Emotional Exhaustion									
Independent Variables	B	SE	Beta	t	p	95,0% Confidence Interval for B		F	R ² (Adj.)
						Lower	Upper		
Model 1 (Independent Variable: Surface Acting)									
Constant	7,346	4,483		1,638	,104	-1,531	16,222	(2, 120)	0,067
School Level	-,101	1,132	-,008	-,089	,929	-2,343	2,140	=5,391	
Surface Acting	,628	,193	,286	3,257	,001	,246	1,010	p=0,006	
Model 2 (Independent Variable: Deep Acting)									
Constant	28,673	5,504		5,210	,000	17,776	39,571	(2, 120)	0,032
School Level	-,838	1,158	-,065	-,724	,471	-3,131	1,454	=3,009	
Deep Acting	-,709	,293	-,217	-2,419	,017	-1,289	-,129	p=0,053	
Model 3 (Independent Variable: Genuine Emotions)									
Constant	41,837	7,409		5,647	,000	27,167	56,507	(2, 120)	0,082
School Level	-,515	1,118	-,040	-,461	,646	-2,728	1,697	=6,460	
Genuine Emotions	-1,856	,520	-,310	-3,570	,001	-2,885	-,827	p=0,002	
B =Unstandardized coefficients, SE = Standard error, Beta=Standardized coefficients									

To find out how EL affects EE, three different regression analyses were done. According to the data presented in Table 2, EE is significantly predicted ($F = 5.391$, $R^2 = 0.067$, $p = 0.006$) by surface acting ($B = 0.628$, $p = 0.001$). EE is also significantly predicted ($F = 3.009$, $R^2 = 0.032$, $p = 0.053$) by deep acting ($B = -0.709$, $p = 0.017$), as well as ($F = 6.460$, $R^2 = 0.082$, $p = 0.002$) by genuine emotions ($B = -1.856$, $p = 0.001$). Whereas surface acting is positively associated with EE, deep acting and genuine emotions are negatively associated with it. These findings support the study’s first hypothesis, which posits that EL has an effect on EE.

We used the PROCESS Macro application to conduct regression analyses to test the study's second hypothesis, which posits that individualism-collectivism influences the relationship between EL and EE. In the analyses related to the moderating effect, the independent variables (i.e., surface acting, deep acting, and genuine emotions) and the moderator variables (i.e., individualism and collectivism) were centered. Additionally, as stated before, the school level at which participants were employed—shown by t-test and ANOVA results to have a significant effect on EE ($F = 4.617$, $p = 0.004$)—was considered in the analysis. The results of the regression analyses testing the moderating effect of individualism are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Explaining the Moderating Effect of Individualism

Dependent Variable: Emotional Exhaustion						
	B	SE	t	p	95,0% Confidence Interval	
Model 1 (Independent Variable: Surface Acting)						
					Lower	Upper
Constant	16,7925	3,1453	5,3390	0,0000	10,5640	23,0209
Surface Acting	3,6560	1,1351	3,2209	0,0017	1,4082	5,9038
Individualism	1,6966	1,1152	1,5213	0,1309	-0,5119	3,9051
Interaction Variable (Surface Acting x Individualism)	-0,2089	1,1264	-0,1854	0,8532	-2,4395	2,0218
School Level	-0,0719	1,1341	-0,0634	0,9495	-2,3177	2,1738
R ² =0,1003; F (4, 118)=3,2872; p=0,0136						
ΔR ² =0,0003; F (1, 118)=0,0344; p=0,8532						
Model 2 (Independent Variable: Deep Acting)						
					Lower	Upper
Constant	18,6403	3,2033	5,8190	0,0000	12,2968	24,9838
Deep Acting	-2,9473	1,1713	2,5163	0,0132	-5,2668	-0,6279
Individualism	1,8914	1,1740	1,6111	0,1098	-0,4334	4,2162
Interaction Variable (Deep Acting x Individualism)	0,2374	1,3195	0,1799	0,8575	-2,3756	2,8504
School Level	-0,7923	1,1543	-0,6864	0,4938	-3,0781	1,4935
R ² =0,0711; F (4, 118)=2,2591; p=0,0668						
ΔR ² =0,0003; F (1, 118)=0,0324; p=0,8575						
Model 3 (Independent Variable: Genuine Emotions)						
					Lower	Upper
Constant	17,8466	3,0523	5,8470	0,0000	11,8022	23,8909
Genuine Emotions	-4,5480	1,1243	-4,0452	0,0001	-6,7745	-2,3216
Individualism	2,2789	1,0976	2,0762	0,0400	0,1053	4,4525
Interaction Variable (Genuine Emotions x Individualism)	1,4102	1,0892	-1,2947	0,1979	-0,7467	3,5670
School Level	-0,5463	1,1022	-0,4957	0,6210	-2,7290	1,6364
R ² =0,1407; F (4, 118)=4,8313; p=0,0012						
ΔR ² =0,0122; F (1, 118)=1,6764; p=0,1979						

To find out how the cultural dimension of individualism moderates the relationship between EL and EE, three separate regression analyses were done. The data in Table 3 shows that individualism did not have a significant impact on the link between surface acting and EE (B = -0.2089, p = 0.8532 > 0.05). Similarly, individualism also did not significantly affect the relationship between deep acting and EE (B = 0.2374, p = 0.8575 > 0.05). Additionally, individualism did not significantly influence the connection between genuine emotions and EE (B = 1.4102, p = 0.1979 > 0.05). Based on these results, individualism does not have a moderating effect on the relationship between EL and EE.

The results of the regression analyses examining the moderating effect of the cultural dimension of collectivism are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Explaining the Moderating Effect of Collectivism

Dependent Variable: Emotional Exhaustion						
	B	SE	t	p	95,0% Confidence Interval	
Model 1 (Independent Variable: Surface Acting)						
					Lower	Upper
Constant	16,0248	3,2403	4,9455	0,0000	9,6081	22,4415
Surface Acting	4,0508	1,2180	3,3257	0,0012	1,6387	6,4628
Collectivism	1,4211	1,2864	1,1047	0,2715	-1,1263	3,9686
Interaction Variable (Surface Acting x Collectivism)	-0,5486	1,2263	-0,4473	0,6555	-2,9771	1,8799
School Level	0,1896	1,1686	0,1622	0,8714	-2,1246	2,5037
R ² =0,0918; F (4, 118)=2,9835; p=0,0218						
ΔR ² =0,0015; F (1, 118)=0,2001; p=0,6555						
Model 2 (Independent Variable: Deep Acting)						
					Lower	Upper
Constant	18,4435	3,2937	5,5996	0,0000	11,9210	24,9660
Deep Acting	-2,4953	1,2505	-1,9954	0,0483	-4,9717	-0,0189
Collectivism	0,6278	1,1850	0,5298	0,5973	-1,7189	2,9745
Interaction Variable (Deep Acting x Collectivism)	-0,8142	1,3532	-0,6016	0,5486	-3,4939	1,8656
School Level	-0,6950	1,1925	-0,5828	0,5611	-3,0566	1,6665
R ² =0,0522; F (4, 118)=1,6259; p=0,1723						
ΔR ² =0,0029; F (1, 118)=0,3620; p=0,5486						
Model 3 (Independent Variable: Genuine Emotions)						
					Lower	Upper
Constant	17,4123	3,1854	5,4663	0,0000	11,1043	23,7203
Genuine Emotions	-3,9905	1,1723	-3,4041	0,0009	-6,3119	-1,6691
Collectivism	0,9357	1,2183	0,7681	0,4440	-1,4768	3,3483
Interaction Variable (Genuine Emotions x Collectivism)	-0,3515	1,0220	-0,3439	0,7315	-2,3754	1,6725
School Level	-0,2930	1,1492	-0,2550	0,7992	-2,5687	1,9827
R ² =0,1047; F (4, 118)=3,4503; p=0,0105						
ΔR ² =0,0009; F (1, 118)=0,1183; p=0,7315						

To find out how the cultural dimension of collectivism moderates the relationship between EL and EE, three separate regression analyses were done. The data in Table 4 shows that collectivism did not have a significant impact on the link between surface acting and EE (B = -0.5486, p = 0.6555 > 0.05). Similarly, collectivism also did not significantly affect the relationship between deep acting and EE (B = -0.8142, p = 0.5486 > 0.05). Additionally, collectivism did not significantly influence the connection between genuine emotions and EE (B = -0.3515, p = 0.7315 > 0.05). Based on these results, collectivism does not have a moderating effect on the relationship between EL and EE.

When looking at the results from Tables 3 and 4 together, we can say that the second hypothesis of the study, which suggested that the cultural difference between individualism and collectivism affects the link between EL and EE, was not supported.

5. DISCUSSION

This study sought to investigate the moderating effect of the cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism on the link between emotional labor (EL) and emotional exhaustion (EE). In this context, the first hypothesis posited that surface acting would have a significant positive effect on EE, while deep acting and genuine emotions would have significant negative effects. The findings of the analyses support this hypothesis. These results are also consistent with those of previous studies (Grandey, 2003; Hwa, 2012; Basım and Begenirbaş, 2012; Can Yalçın, 2012). In summary, teachers experience emotionally positive outcomes when they make an effort to internalize the emotions they are expected to convey to their students or when they express their genuine emotions. In contrast, when teachers are required to fake their emotions—i.e., engage in surface acting—they become more prone to EE. EE, in turn, adversely impacts employee performance and ultimately undermines organizational goals. Therefore, from a managerial perspective, it is important to implement strategies that reduce the incidence of inauthentic emotional displays among employees toward clients and colleagues. Several studies (Hsu, 2012; Yoğun, 2016; Çekmecelioğlu et al., 2021) have found that organizational commitment negatively affects surface acting and positively affects deep acting and genuine emotions. Çekmecelioğlu et al. (2021) suggest that enhancing organizational commitment and employees' desire to remain within the organization can reduce the likelihood of inauthentic emotional displays. In this regard, promoting organizational commitment could be an effective managerial strategy to encourage employees to act genuinely rather than superficially. Organizational culture, management style, and employees' perceptions of organizational justice are among the key organizational factors that influence organizational commitment. According to Balay (2000), organizational culture acts as a bridge between employees' priorities and organizational goals, promotes a sense of identity among employees, and encourages participation in organizational objectives, thereby supporting organizational commitment (Gülova and Demirsoy, 2012). Employees' strong identification with the organization's values and goals constitutes the foundation of organizational commitment (Yücel and Koçak, 2016). Studies examining the effects of leadership behaviors on organizational commitment have generally found that supportive and directive leadership positively and significantly influence commitment levels (Yücel and Koçak, 2016). Moreover, enabling employee participation in decision-making processes and adopting a flexible management style are also likely to enhance organizational commitment (İnce and Gül, 2005). Perceptions of organizational justice—employees' perceptions of how fairly organizational rewards and punishments are distributed, how decision-making processes are conducted, and how interpersonal interactions occur—also play a critical role in fostering organizational commitment (McFarlin and Sweeney, 1992). A substantial body of research has consistently confirmed a positive association between organizational commitment and organizational justice (Köksal, 2017).

The second hypothesis of the study posited that the cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism would moderate the association between EL and EE. However, the results of the analyses did not support this hypothesis. These findings align with those of Lu and Guy (2019), who argued that individualism-collectivism does not significantly influence employees' EL experiences, suggesting that EL is experienced similarly across individualistic and collectivistic cultures. One possible explanation for the absence of a moderating role of individualism-collectivism may lie in the universal nature of EL as a fundamental aspect of human interaction that transcends cultural differences. As an internal psychological process, EL is shaped by how employees perceive situations, what reactions they expect from others, or both. Individual traits such as awareness of others, self-awareness, and self-regulation may thus take precedence over cultural background in determining how EL is experienced (Lu and Guy, 2019).

However, some studies present conflicting findings. For example, some evidence suggests that surface acting exerts a stronger positive effect on EE for people with individualistic cultural traits (Allen et al., 2014; Newnham, 2017; Mastracci and Adams, 2019; Humphrey, 2023), which is different from what this study found. Those studies involved participants working in sectors such as shopping malls, restaurants, hotels, and call centers (Allen et al., 2014); hotel employees (Newnham, 2017); and various public-sector service jobs (Mastracci and Adams, 2019). In contrast, the participants of the current study were teachers. This discrepancy in participant profiles may explain the divergent findings. The occupational context is crucial in the EL process, as occupational requirements refer to job-related expectations concerning emotion regulation. For example, EL requirements are high in professions such as sales, whereas they are relatively low in jobs like data entry. Such variations

in occupational EL requirements are significant for emotional regulation responses. Indeed, occupational requirements constitute one of the perspectives used by Grandey and colleagues (2013) to explain EL (Bhave and Glomb, 2016). Thus, some scholars have made a case for future research to investigate how individual- and occupational-level factors interact in predicting the outcomes of EL (Pugh et al., 2011). Some studies focusing on occupational requirements have found that working in emotionally demanding professions—those assumed to have high EL requirements—is associated with greater job satisfaction and a stronger sense of personal accomplishment (Bhave and Glomb, 2016). In their study, Bhave and Glomb (2016) also determined that the adverse correlation between surface acting and job satisfaction is influenced by occupational EL requirements. That is, individuals working in professions with high EL demands experience lower job satisfaction when engaging in surface acting compared to those in less emotionally demanding roles. In this regard, for teachers—whose every action is observed by students, who are expected to serve as role models, and who arguably carry the profound mission of shaping human development—EL requirements may differ significantly from those in other service industries. Therefore, future studies on culture and EL should also consider occupational differences and incorporate occupational EL requirements, which would provide valuable contributions to EL literature.

Alongside the findings, this study also has several limitations. We cannot generalize the results because we conducted the research with teachers from a single private educational institution operating in Balıkesir province. Future studies conducted in different sectors and diverse geographical regions would contribute to the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, due to the study being cross-sectional research, the obtained data only represent a specific time, and the results can be interpreted with limitations. A further disadvantage of the study arises from the utilization of a self-report questionnaire method, which may be influenced by social desirability biases based on participants' subjective perceptions.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the primary aim of the study was to ascertain whether the impact of emotional labor (EL) on emotional exhaustion (EE) varies depending on individualism-collectivism cultural orientation. Given the limited number of cross-cultural studies on EL, this research is considered valuable to the EL literature. Moreover, this study expands upon previous limited cross-cultural research that has defined EL solely in terms of surface acting and deep acting by incorporating the dimension of genuine emotions, which represents a unique facet of the investigation. The findings indicate that surface acting has a positive effect on EE, whereas deep acting and genuine emotions have a negative effect. Concerning the moderating effect of the cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism, it has been determined that the impact of EL on EE does not vary according to teachers' individualism-collectivism cultural characteristic.

Disclosure Statements (Beyan ve Açıklamalar)

1. The author of this article confirm that their work complies with the principles of research and publication ethics (Bu çalışmanın yazarı, araştırma ve yayın etiği ilkelerine uyduğunu kabul etmektedirler).
2. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author (Yazar tarafından herhangi bir çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir).
3. This article was screened for potential plagiarism using a plagiarism screening program (Bu çalışma, intihal tarama programı kullanılarak intihal taramasından geçirilmiştir).

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