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Emotional Labour, Job Satisfaction, and Burnout Among Academicians

Akademisyenlerde Duygusal Emek, İş Doyumu ve Tükenmişlik

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Abstract

Academicians have responsibilities primarily related to teaching, but in order to progress in their academic careers, they must conduct research, participate in scientific conferences, contribute to scientific knowledge through publications, and also fulfill administrative duties. Therefore, emotional labor is an inseparable part of academic life. This review aimed to address the concepts of emotional labour, job satisfaction, and burnout among academicians.

Keywords: Academician; burnout; emotional labor; job satisfaction; nursing education

Öz

Akademisyenlerin başlıca sorumlulukları öğretimle ilgili olmakla birlikte, akademik kariyerlerinde ilerleyebilmek için araştırmalar yapmalı, bilimsel toplantılara katılmalı, yayınlar aracılığıyla bilimsel bilgiye katkıda bulunmalı ve idari görevleri yerine getirmelidir. Bu nedenle, duygusal emek akademik yaşamın ayrılmaz bir parçasıdır. Bu derleme, akademisyenlerde duygusal emek, iş doyumu ve tükenmişlik kavramlarını ele almayı amaçlamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Akademisyen; duygusal emek; hemşirelik eğitimi; iş tatmini; tükenmişlik.



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Introduction

Labour is defined as expenditure of physical or mental effort especially when difficult or compulsory (Merriam-Webster, 2025). Emotional labour, which is the invisible aspect of labour, refers to the effort related to the management and regulation of emotions in human relations (Hochschild, 2012).

The service sector is an economic sector that consists of activities aimed at meeting customer needs rather than providing a physical product. The service sector is labor-intensive, cannot be stored or transferred, is intangible, does not result in a material product, involves simultaneous production and consumption, and is based on a mutual relationship between service providers and consumers (Sayım & Aydın, 2011). Particularly, growth in service sectors such as information technology, finance, healthcare, education, tourism, and trade has generated significant demand for services across a wide spectrum (Çapık & Dulupçu, 2025). Therefore, the performance and service quality of institutions and organizations are directly linked to customer satisfaction. Since customer satisfaction is influenced by the attitudes and behaviors of service providers and employees, workers are expected to exhibit professional conduct aligned with organizational goals and effectively manage their emotions. One of the fundamental pillars of the service sector is education, which plays a crucial role in the sustainable development and competitiveness of countries. Higher education services, as part of the education sector, contribute to economic growth by equipping individuals with academic knowledge and professional skills. In particular, higher education is recognized as a key driver of innovation, technological advancement, and social development by cultivating a highly skilled workforce (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2014)

Emotional labour is intensely experienced in academic activities that provide education and training services requiring face-to-face interaction. According to the Law of Higher Education No. 2547, published in 1981, academic personnel, following their undergraduate education, are responsible for specialising in their field through postgraduate studies, conducting scientific research, publishing, participating in academic events such as congresses and symposiums, and engaging in education and consultancy activities for associate, undergraduate, and postgraduate students. Therefore, during face-to-face interaction, academicians experience emotional labour both as learners and teachers (Newcomb, 2021).

The emotional labour strategies experienced by academicians can influence not only their classroom interactions (Han, Yin, Yang & Wang, 2021; Hao, 2024; Zheng, Geng, Gao & Xiang, 2024) but also their professional satisfaction and overall well-being. In particular, depending on the type of emotional labour employed, academicians may experience increased job satisfaction or face a heightened risk of burnout. In this context, examining the impact of academicians' emotional labour experiences on job satisfaction and burnout levels is of great importance.

This review will explore the concept of emotional labour in academia and discuss its effects on academicians' job satisfaction and burnout levels.

Emotional Labour Concept

Emotional labour was first introduced in the book entitled *"The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling"* written by American sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild. Hochschild (2012) defined emotional labour as the regulation of emotions to produce a publicly observable facial and bodily display expected from workers in alignment with organisational goals. According to her, service is a "performance," employees are "actors or actresses," customers are the "audience," and the workplace is the "stage." Hochschild (2012) stated that emotional labour had two sub-dimensions, namely surface acting and deep acting. The first sub-dimension of emotional labour indicates surface acting, hiding real emotions, and acting like feeling or experiencing emotions that are not actually felt. Through surface acting, individuals modify their external appearance to conform to expected expressions. In this sub-dimension, emotions do not emerge spontaneously; rather, some level of intervention is required to express them. The individual perceives the displayed emotion not as part of them but as something externally attached to their face or body. In surface acting, the person does not genuinely experience the emotion but instead pretends as if they do (Hochschild, 2012). Grandey (2000) suggested that surface acting may occur as a reaction to an event. These strategies allow teachers to conceal their true emotions through surface acting and emotion regulation (McRae & Gross, 2020). For instance, a teacher may feel frustrated by a student's noncompliance and have an urge to yell but instead chooses to redirect the student with a steady voice and calm expression. Similarly, a teacher may want to laugh out loud at a child's humorous comment in class but instead adopts a stern expression and refocuses the class on the instructional activity (Stark & Bettini, 2021). These techniques help teachers effectively manage their emotions while maintaining a professional demeanor in the classroom (Waldbuesser, Rubinsky & Titsworth, 2021).

The second sub-dimension, deep acting, means focusing on the regulation of inner emotions to express the desired emotions. In deep acting, the individual tries to act out or experience an emotion expected from him/her by either triggering emotions or using imagination (Hochschild, 2012). In this sub-dimension, emotions do not emerge automatically. Intervention is necessary for the emergence and feeling of emotions. The individual sees the emotion he/she exhibits with conscious mental work as 'his/her own.' In deep acting, the individual tries to experience the emotion. He/she does this either by directly activating the emotions or by using his/her imagination and visualising that emotion (Hochschild, 2012). In deep acting, the employee believes that he/she really feels the emotions he/she expresses (Gross, 1998). Grandey stated that deep acting can be exhibited throughout the day. In addition, she stated that according to Gross's understanding of emotional labour, the individual first pretends deep acting, and if he/she fails, he/she prefers to pretend surface acting (Grandey, 2000).

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) defined emotional labour as the demonstration of expected emotions in organisational service roles and introduced a third sub-dimension, namely genuine acting, which refers to the expression of authentic emotions. Genuine

acting involves naturally experienced emotions that are displayed by workers with minimal effort.

Emotional labour helps us understand how employees manage their emotions and its effect in the workplace. Similarly, the concept of job satisfaction is also crucial for understanding employees' overall attitudes toward their work and their motivation (Lee, Lee & Chung, 2019).

Job Satisfaction Concept

Job satisfaction is defined as 'employees' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their jobs' (Davis, 1982). Barutçugil, on the other hand, described job satisfaction as the feeling experienced as a result of the overlap of the work done with the needs of the employee and his/her own value judgements (Barutçugil, 2004).

Job satisfaction occurs when employees obtain the results they expect from their work (Mengenci, 2015). Since a large part of life is spent in workplaces, being satisfied with the work done affects people considerably. While the mental and physical health of the individual who is satisfied with his/her job is positively affected, this effect is reflected in his/her family and social life and work environment (Tatar Baykal & Ercan Türkmen, 2014). Job satisfaction leads to individual happiness and contributes to the effective functioning and performance of the organisation (Lee et al., 2019). In addition, high job satisfaction leads to success and organisational commitment, while low job satisfaction leads to intention to leave the job (Tatar Baykal & Ercan Türkmen, 2014).

Job satisfaction is examined in two dimensions: intrinsic job satisfaction and extrinsic job satisfaction. Intrinsic job satisfaction focuses on factors related to the internal characteristics of the job, such as achievement, recognition, and promotion. In contrast, extrinsic job satisfaction consists of factors related to the external characteristics of the job, such as working conditions, salary, and relationships established in the workplace (Weiss, Dawis, England & Lofquist, 1967; Sinniah et al., 2022; Choksi, Patel & Solanki, 2024).

Job satisfaction is influenced by individual factors such as age, marital status, number of children, gender, and emotional intelligence, as well as institutional factors, such as academic title, workload, and social support (Bulutlar & Başkaya, 2015; Çelikkalp, Temerito & Bilgiç, 2019; Lee et al., 2019).

Chosen professions are important not only for meeting needs or maintaining life but also for psychological aspects, particularly in terms of job satisfaction (Bayar & Öztürk, 2017). Academicians, who define their professional status as 'self-actualization,' express their satisfaction with their profession through the 'fulfillment it provides' (Edwards & Ashkanasy, 2018). From an individual perspective, academic work contributes to academicians' happiness, their perception of themselves as esteemed individuals and their personal development. From an institutional perspective, academic work supports scientific advancement. Consequently, academicians' contributions to societal development, and their ability to generate benefits lead them to perceive their work as meaningful. Additionally, their roles in teaching and training experts contribute to their positive perception of their profession. However, economic concerns can completely reverse this positive perception (Balci,

Erdeveciler & Altınsoy, 2019). Moreover, as academicians prioritize their academic work, they often experience work-family conflicts. As a result, increasing workload and work-family conflict levels reduce their job satisfaction (Çelikkalp et al., 2019). However, low job satisfaction and a disrupted work-family balance can lead to a sense of burnout among academicians over time. In particular, increasing workload and economic concerns reduce academicians' motivation toward their profession, accelerating the burnout process (Kim, Maijan & Yeo, 2025).

Burnout Concept

Burnout is defined as 'a state of failure, exhaustion, loss of energy and strength due to excessive workload, or the depletion of an individual's internal resources as a result of unmet demands' (Freudenberger, 1974).

According to Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001), burnout is considered 'the emotional stress experienced by employees due to work-related interpersonal interactions, leading to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Burnout is not a condition that develops suddenly or in a short period; rather, it progresses over time, initially leading to emotional exhaustion, followed by depersonalization, and ultimately resulting in a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. Since 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) has characterized burnout as a syndrome resulting from chronic, unmanageable workplace stress (World Health Organization [WHO]2019; Bianchi & Schonfeld, 2023). It is commonly observed in professions that involve close interaction with people, particularly when individuals struggle to cope with stress, preventing them from working efficiently (Özgür Güler & Veysikarani, 2019).

In human-centered professions, such as education and healthcare, the interaction between individuals and their work environment leads to both psychological and physical exhaustion. Burnout, which initially emerges at the individual level, eventually affects family and work life as well (Tatar Baykal & Ercan Türkmen, 2014).

In academia, individual and institutional factors influence academic performance and contribute to stress. Individual factors include low job satisfaction, fear and anxiety related to work and life, irritability, impatience, ambition, and excessive competitiveness. Institutional factors, on the other hand, include unfair distribution of teaching loads, excessive workload, inadequate salaries and wage disparities, lack of time for family and social life, pressure to complete tasks within a fixed timeframe, exclusion from decision-making processes, failure to accommodate requests in course scheduling, and insufficient research opportunities (Aydın, Üçüncü & Taşdemir, 2011; Gökgez & Altuğ, 2014). In addition to these factors, the 'publish or perish' expectation and competitive, success-driven environments in academia are significant sources of stress (Sinniah, Al Mamun, Md Salleh, Makhbul & Hayat, 2022). Especially for doctoral students and early-career researchers, the academic environment can be even more stressful (Edwards & Ashkanasy, 2018). As a result, prolonged stress, if not managed effectively, can lead to burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Burnout is influenced by individual factors, such as gender, number

of children, age, marital status, and emotional intelligence, as well as institutional factors, such as academic title, social support, workload, and the department where one works (Yücebalkan & Karasakal, 2016; Lee et al., 2019).

Burnout in academicians can develop due to personal, work-related, and student-related factors. The degree of physical and psychological fatigue and exhaustion experienced by an individual is defined as personal burnout, while burnout related to work and students is referred to as work-related burnout and student-related burnout, respectively (Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen & Christensen, 2005; Alves, Oliveira & Paro, 2019; Bianchi & Schonfeld, 2023).

Burnout and job dissatisfaction among academicians negatively affect student success, the quality of education, the efficiency of the institution, and relationships with colleagues. Therefore, reducing burnout and job dissatisfaction among academicians is extremely important (Kavurmaci, Tan & Bahcecioglu Turan, 2022).

Emotional Labour and Its Effect on Job Satisfaction and Burnout in Academia

According to Grandey (2000), who defined emotional labour as the process of regulating both emotions and the way they are expressed for corporate goals, burnout and job satisfaction are considered aspects of individual welfare.

According to Hochschild (2012), the conflict between employees' genuine emotions and the emotional expressions they are expected to display in service delivery is defined as emotional incompatibility, which in turn triggers stress. Surface acting leads to emotional dissonance, which may cause employees to feel inauthentic and hypocritical (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 2012). According to Grandey, this situation may be because employees do not like to feel fake or display surface acting for a long time. This is because the effort of employees to suppress their real emotions and express their unreal, that is, fake emotions, results in stress. In addition, Grandey stated that the service performance of employees decreases with surface acting (Grandey, 2000).

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) stated that emotional labour increases the expectations of service recipients for good service, while triggering emotional dissonance and self-alienation in employees. According to Hochschild, Ashforth, Humphrey and Grandey, not showing their real emotional expressions, especially deep acting, leads to self-alienation in employees (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 2012). Hochschild stated that this situation can be experienced as a result of employees' inability to manage their emotions. In addition, emotional dissonance and self-alienation can weaken personal welfare (Hochschild, 2012). Therefore, burnout, which is included in personal well-being (Grandey, 2000) increases, and job satisfaction decreases with emotional dissonance due to surface acting and deep acting. Morris and Feldman also stated that surface acting causes burnout and decreased job satisfaction in employees due to emotional dissonance (Morris & Feldman, 1996).

The deep and surface acting of employees also affect service recipients. In academia, service recipients are primarily students; surface acting affects them negatively, while deep acting can lead

to both positive and negative feedback (Lee et al., 2019).

Hochschild (2012) stated that successful emotion management through deep acting enhances job satisfaction among employees. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993), on the other hand, argued that having natural emotions and the freedom to express oneself increases personal well-being. Therefore, it is understood that displaying natural emotions also enhances job satisfaction, which is a component of personal well-being.

Studies indicate that academicians predominantly display genuine acting, followed by deep acting and surface acting, respectively (Ozturk, Bahcecik, Kumral Ozelik & Sarioglu Kemer, 2015; Yücebalkan & Karasakal, 2016; Barış Eren, 2021). It has also been found that while academicians experience high levels of job-related burnout, they have a strong sense of intrinsic job satisfaction (Yıldız, Aksu, Ünübol & Hızlı Sayar, 2020; Barış Eren, 2021; Varışlı & Bayar, 2023). This can be explained by their passion for their work, their perception of academia not merely as a profession but as a way of life, and the satisfaction they derive from it.

According to studies conducted on academicians, it has been found that surface acting increases burnout (Zhang & Zhu, 2008; Bulutlar & Başkaya, 2015; Yücebalkan & Karasakal, 2016; Lee & Vlack, 2018; Barış Eren, 2021), while natural emotions decrease burnout (Zhang & Zhu, 2008; Yücebalkan & Karasakal, 2016; Barış Eren, 2021). In their study, Bulutlar and Başkaya (2015) found that surface acting increased both student-related burnout and job-related burnout, while natural emotions decreased personal burnout as well as student-related and job-related burnout. Barış Eren (2021), revealed that surface acting increased personal burnout, student-related burnout, and job-related burnout, while natural emotions reversed this effect, decreasing personal burnout, student-related burnout, and job-related burnout. It can be explained that academicians who display natural emotions have lower levels of burnout due to acting in a way that feels natural to them, behaving authentically, and not putting much effort into suppressing or shaping their emotions. Studies have also found that deep acting decreases burnout (Zhang & Zhu, 2008; Bulutlar & Başkaya, 2015), increases burnout (Lee & Vlack, 2018), or has no effect (Yücebalkan & Karasakal, 2016; Barış Eren, 2021).

According to studies conducted on academicians, both deep acting (Zhang & Zhu, 2008; Bulutlar & Başkaya, 2015; Barış Eren, 2021) and natural emotions (Zhang & Zhu, 2008; Barış Eren, 2021) increase job satisfaction. This can be explained by employees deriving more satisfaction from their work as a result of either evoking the desired emotion or expressing spontaneous emotions. Moreover, it is thought that deep acting increases job satisfaction among academicians due to its ability to enhance positive emotions such as pleasure and pride, while reducing negative emotions like anxiety (Lee & Vlack, 2018).

Conclusion

This review aimed to explore the concepts of emotional labour, job satisfaction, and burnout among academicians. According to Hochschild (2012), institutional control over employees' emotional states leads to dissatisfaction. Emotional labour, which involves

the effort to maintain a composed and positive demeanor while interacting with demanding and high-expectation individuals, contributes to job stress and burnout. Similarly, Morris and Feldman (1996) highlight the importance of alignment between employees' genuine emotions and the emotional display rules of their profession. A lack of this alignment results in emotional dissonance, which increases burnout and reduces job satisfaction.

In academia, students can often recognize when academicians engage in surface acting by displaying inauthentic emotions. This not only negatively affects students' learning experiences but also exacerbates burnout among academicians. On the other hand, deep acting, which requires individuals to consciously regulate their emotions to align with expected expressions, fosters both personal and job satisfaction for academicians while enhancing student learning outcomes. Additionally, genuine acting allows for greater self-expression, ultimately improving personal well-being. Therefore, job satisfaction increases, and burnout decreases among academicians. Since declining job satisfaction and increasing burnout levels among academicians can directly impact the quality of education and the overall learning environment, it is essential for them to effectively manage their emotions to maintain an efficient and productive academic setting. Planning interventions are recommended to raise academicians' awareness of the concept of emotional labour and its effect on job satisfaction and burnout.

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