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The influence of personality traits on emotional labor among college acting majors: The mediating role of emotion regulation

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between personality traits, emotional regulation, and emotional labor from the perspective of emotional labor, with the aim of enhancing the emotional competence of drama performance students in Shaanxi Province. The study sample consisted of 718 drama performance students enrolled in universities in Shaanxi Province. Data were collected using standardized electronic questionnaires, with measurement tools including the personality Traits Inventory, the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire, and the Emotional Labor Scale. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and mediation effect analysis were conducted using SPSS software and AMOS, with causal stepwise regression analysis employed to test the mediation effect. The results indicated that personality traits were significantly positively correlated with emotional labor and also significantly positively correlated with emotional regulation; emotional regulation partially mediated the relationship between personality traits and emotional labor and personality traits not only directly influence emotional labor levels but also indirectly enhance students' emotional labor performance by strengthening emotional regulation abilities. This study enriches the theoretical framework of emotional labor and emotional regulation, expands its application in drama education, and provides practical references for universities in curriculum design, emotional management, and career development counseling. It is recommended that universities focus on individual differences among students, conduct targeted emotional regulation training, and strengthen students' self-awareness and emotional expression abilities. However, the sample in this study was limited to Shaanxi Province and was cross-sectional in design. Future research may consider incorporating longitudinal tracking and multi-regional samples to further enhance the external validity and explanatory power of the study.

Keywords: Personality traits, Emotion regulation and emotional labor

1.Introduction

In the Chinese cultural context, Emotional Labor permeates almost all walks of life, and mental health problems related to emotions are equally prevalent in the society. Large-scale surveys have shown that the 12-month prevalence of common psychological disorders (e.g., depression and anxiety) in the Chinese adult population is about 9.3%, and the lifetime prevalence is as high as 16.6% (Huang et al., 2019).Emotional Labor has been shown to be strongly associated with a wide range of mental health problems, particularly in high-intensity service or performance contexts (Grandey et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2021). When individuals use Emotional Labor strategies inappropriately, they are prone to emotional dissonance, burnout, depressive symptoms, ego depletion, work-life imbalance, impaired cognitive functioning, sleep disturbances, strained interpersonal relationships, declining mental health and even physical health problems (Back, 2023).

This shows that Emotional Labor is not only an important indicator of mental health, but is also closely related to individual well-being. Further research has also found that Emotional Labor has a significant impact on individuals' physical and mental health, career satisfaction, academic Emotional Labor and engagement in learning (Tsang et al., 2021).

In the context of higher education, some scholars have found that the level of Emotional Labor of undergraduate graduates in Shaanxi Province still needs to be improved, and the emotional strengths of acting majors have not been fully exploited (Liu et al., 2021). Although acting majors usually possess strong emotional regulation and control ability, this ability has not been effectively translated into career development after graduation (Schmidt et al., 2021).

Corresponding research has also shown that performing arts students have a significant

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advantage in emotion recognition, suggesting that performing arts education may play a positive role in enhancing emotional intelligence and understanding of emotional expression (Schmidt et al., 2021). Therefore, performing arts educators should continue to focus on the development of students' emotion recognition and regulation skills (Gentzler et al., 2020).

From a broader employment and career development perspective, Emotional Labor involves multiple factors such as interpersonal relationships, overall job satisfaction, job expectations, organisational and workplace relationships, and work-life balance (Hofmann et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2023). This is also evidenced in educational contexts: for example, it has been found that teachers' approach to Emotional Labor in the classroom (e.g., emotional concealment or camouflage) significantly affects students' level of academic engagement (Buric wt al., 2021). Thus, Emotional Labor not only constitutes an important part of the work experience, but also affects individual career development and academic engagement to some extent (Hofmann & et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2023; Buric et al., 2021).

However, despite the unique advantages of acting majors in emotion recognition, expression and regulation, these abilities are not fully reflected in employment practices after graduation. Meanwhile, the problem of low employment satisfaction among graduates is still common in Shaanxi (Liu, 2018). As a discipline focusing on 'emotional experience', theatre acting education emphasises emotional expression, control and regulation, but these abilities are not effectively transformed into career competitiveness after students leave the acting major (Liu, 2020). In fact, the extent to which individuals can transform their emotional strengths into effective Emotional Labor performance often depends on their Personality Traits (e.g., extroversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, etc.) as well as their emotional regulation. It has been theorised that individual traits not only influence the way they experience emotions in social interactions, but also play a further role in the selection and effectiveness of Emotional Labor strategies by influencing their regulation style (Gross, 2015; Judge et al., 2013; Li, 2024).

For example, individuals with lower emotional stability may be more reliant on surface performances, whereas individuals with high desirability are more likely to adopt deep performances, leading to different psychological and occupational outcomes.

Therefore, it is necessary to systematically examine the relationship between Personality Traits, Emotion Regulation and Emotional Labor in the group of college students majoring in acting to reveal the psychological mechanisms that affect their employment and career development. This can not only provide new evidence to improve the theory of Emotional Labor, but also provide practical references for art education and career development support (Chen et al.,2024).

Through empirical data analysis, this study aims to answer the following questions: what is the relationship between Personality Traits and Emotional Labor among acting majors; and to what extend does Emotional Regulation play a mediating role in this relationship. Exploring these questions will help to deepen our understanding of the mechanism of Emotional Labor, and also provide theoretical support and practical insights for the education of theatre acting majors in Shaanxi Province in terms of enhancing the quality of talents and promoting the career development of graduates.

2.Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

Personality traits

Personality Traits refers to the relatively stable characteristics that an individual exhibits in his or her way of thinking, feeling and behaving. Currently, most mainstream research uses the Big Five model of personality to describe them, including Extraversion, Responsibility, Agreeableness, Openness to Experience, and Neuroticism (Soto et al., 2017).

These personality traits not only determine how individuals perceive and respond to Emotional Labor, but also indirectly contribute to job performance, burnout, and subjective well-being by influencing the choice of emotion regulation strategies (Judge et al., 2013; Anglim et al., 2020).

Research has shown that different personality traits are significantly associated with emotion regulation

styles. For example, individuals high in neuroticism are more likely to use maladaptive regulation such as repression and rumination, whereas those high in responsibility or pleasantness are more likely to use positive strategies such as reappraisal and concentration (Gross, 2015; Kusev et al., 2019; Tackman et al., 2023).

The influence of individual traits on patterns of emotion regulation and their adaptability is particularly significant in occupational settings with high levels of Emotional Labor, such as healthcare, education, and service industries (Brotheridge et al., 2002; Wu et al., 2019; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2025). Further research found that high extraversion and responsibility were effective in buffering the negative effects of surface performance, whereas high neuroticism significantly increased the risk of burnout.

Further theoretical developments have also emphasised the interaction between personality, emotion regulation and well-being, with Kuper et al. (2023) proposing the Personality-Activity-Well-being (PAW) framework, which suggests that personality not only influences the use of regulation strategies, but also determines the effect of these strategies on well-being (Bleidorn et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, studies of medical and health service professionals have found that non-cognitive factors such as personality traits, behavioural styles and emotional intelligence are important predictors of career development (Louwen et al., 2023; Extremera et al., 2020). Research in the field of education and performing arts has similarly confirmed that personality traits not only influence students' Emotional Labor burden, but also play a moderating role between mental health and academic performance through emotional intelligence.

Recent empirical studies have further validated the complex relationship between Emotional Labor, Burnout and Emotional Intelligence through meta-analysis and Structural Equation Modeling, highlighting the key role of emotion regulation (Chen et al., 2024; Hu et al., 2021). In addition, large-scale longitudinal studies have also shown that emotion regulation as a mediating variable significantly explains the long-term predictive effects of personality traits on Emotional Labor outcomes.

Emotional regulation

Emotion regulation refers to "the processes by which individuals influence what emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them" (Gross, 1998). Researchers categorize emotion regulation into distinct strategies, including: situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation (Gross, 1998, 2015).

Situation selection involves choosing contexts based on anticipated emotional experiences within them (Gross, 2015)—predicting which emotions might arise in specific situations. This strategy is particularly crucial for acting majors, who often need to proactively select rehearsal or performance tasks/environments that stimulate emotional expression to enhance role immersion and avoid detrimental emotional interference. Research indicates this strategy holds significant relevance in education, service industries, and performing arts, where practitioners must proactively avoid or embrace specific emotional contexts within dynamic interactive environments (Aldao et al., 2010; Doré et al., 2016). In performing arts and creative processes, drama students can more effectively employ emotional regulation strategies—including avoidance, approach, and self-development strategies—by selecting specific artistic contexts (different types of performance exercises or creative themes) (Brown et al., 2017; Fancourt et al., 2019). Recent empirical research further indicates that selecting performance activities aligned with personal interests (situational choice) significantly enhances emotional states and stage performance (Chang & Chen, 2024).

Situational adjustment refers to the deliberate modification of circumstances to alter emotional influence (Gross, 2015). During theatrical act training and rehearsals, students frequently employ this strategy by adjusting rehearsal pacing, vocal tone, and body language to shape both personal and collective emotional atmospheres. For instance, Chinese university students significantly enhanced social confidence and emotional regulation through scene and tempo variations during improvisational theater training (Hu et al., 2024). Artistic creation also provides a platform for contextual shifts, enabling effective emotional expression and

regulation (Restrepo et al., 2022).

In group improvisational music therapy, environmental changes helped college students improve emotional regulation and reduce depressive symptoms (Zhang et al., 2022). Furthermore, participation in arts training programs significantly enhances college students' mental health, creative experiences, and social connectedness, indirectly reflecting how arts training strengthens emotional resilience (Agres & Chen, 2025). These studies complement practices in educational and medical settings that improve emotional experiences through contextual adaptation, collectively underscoring the central role of contextual adjustment strategies in arts education (Cutuli, 2014).

Attentional deployment refers to an individual's strategy of regulating emotional responses by intentionally focusing on internal or external stimuli (Gross, 2015). In theatrical performances, students often shift their attention from anxiety and stage fright to specific performance tasks—such as concentrating on line delivery rhythms, physical movements, or character motivations—before taking the stage, thereby effectively reducing tension. Empirical research supports this mechanism: in public speaking contexts, attentional control significantly buffers anxiety's detrimental effects on performance (Jones et al., 2011); systematic attentional training not only enhances high school students' emotional regulation abilities but also improves their focus during learning processes (Mrazek et al., 2022); simultaneously, attention training and meditation interventions have been shown to improve individuals' emotional regulation levels (Wadlinger & Isaacowitz, 2011).

Moreover, in high-stress environments, redirecting attention toward external targets reduces cognitive load and maintains optimal performance (Bell & Hardy, 2009). These findings align with research by Blanco et al. (2023), further indicating that attention shifting not only enhances focus but also plays a crucial role in stabilizing emotions and boosting performance under high-pressure conditions.

Cognitive change refers to the process by which individuals alter their emotional responses to specific situations by changing their evaluation of those situations (Gross, 2015). In performance training, theater students often employ cognitive reappraisal to reframe stage anxiety, such as viewing it as an opportunity to release emotional energy rather than merely a source of stress. Among emotion regulation strategies, cognitive reappraisal is regarded as one of the most fundamental and effective methods. Empirical research has demonstrated that cognitive reappraisal significantly enhances individuals' engagement, well-being, and performance satisfaction (Hu et al., 2014; Jiang et al., 2016; Webb et al., 2012). Recent studies further reveal that this strategy not only enhances performers' emotional resilience and mental health (Zhao et al., 2021) but also alleviates high-pressure experiences during training and performances (Bono et al., 2013; Liu & Wang, 2021).

Moreover, cognitive reappraisal proves equally effective across cultural contexts in stage performance and educational settings, correlating positively with heightened positive emotions, improved social adaptation, and increased life satisfaction (Morawetz et al., 2017; Troy et al., 2022).

Response modulation refers to the psychological, experiential, and behavioral processes that alter emotional responses (Gross, 2015). Expressive suppression, as one such strategy, may serve as both a character-building technique and a psychological burden in drama performance training. A longitudinal study found that adolescents who frequently employed expressive suppression were more prone to depressive symptoms (Larsen et al., 2013). In contrast, drama-trained students exhibited lower rates of expressive suppression, with act training potentially reducing reliance on this strategy (Goldstein et al., 2013). Classic psychological experiments demonstrate that while expressive suppression curbs outward emotional expression, it simultaneously elevates physiological stress (Gross & Levenson, 1993). Research further indicates that cognitive reappraisal, as a pre-emptive regulation strategy for coping with emotional stress, offers greater adaptive and psychological benefits than expressive suppression (Butler et al., 2015; Morrison & Heimberg, 2013; Liu & Wang, 2021).

Research on teachers also provides valuable insights. For instance, Taxer et al. (2018) found that teachers possess instrumental and affective emotion regulation goals. To regulate their own and students'

emotions and reduce negative feelings, teachers often employ multiple strategies, with response regulation (particularly suppression) being the most common. Overall, emotion regulation promotes positive work performance and psychological well-being among teachers (Zhang et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2023). Concurrently, international research indicates that teachers' emotional regulation abilities not only influence classroom management and the emotional atmosphere among students but also significantly impact teachers' job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Brackett et al., 2010; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Chen et al., 2023).

However, the effectiveness of different strategies varies. Existing research has found that cognitive reappraisal strategies can directly and positively predict an individual's sense of engagement and mental health, whereas suppression strategies cannot (Hu, Linmei et al., 2016). Similar findings have been replicated across cross-cultural studies and among college students: cognitive reappraisal is typically positively associated with mental health, positive emotions, and academic success, whereas suppression strategies may diminish the authenticity of interpersonal interactions and overall well-being (Gross & John, 2003; Butler et al., 2007; Cutuli, 2014). Recent research further supports the positive effects of cognitive reappraisal: for instance, a meta-analysis involving nearly 30,000 participants found cognitive reappraisal highly correlated with resilience ($r \approx 0.47$) (Wang et al., 2024); behavioral experiments demonstrated that flexible use of cognitive reappraisal strategies significantly alleviates stress (Li & Chen, 2024).

Among college students, cognitive reappraisal interventions effectively reduced depressive symptoms, with this effect partially mediated by enhanced self-efficacy for emotional regulation (Zhang & Sun, 2025). Research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic further indicates that cognitive reappraisal enhances mental health, whereas expressive suppression correlates with poorer psychological well-being (Liu et al., 2025). Additionally, prospective studies reveal significant associations between cognitive reappraisal and higher well-being alongside lower loneliness, underscoring its value as a core emotion regulation strategy (Johnson et al., 2024).

Emotional labor

Emotional labor was first proposed by Hochschild (1983) to describe the process by which service industry employees regulate and express emotions aligned with societal expectations to meet the emotional demands of their professional roles. She defined emotional labor as “the process of managing emotions as part of one's job,” viewing it as the “third form of labor” following physical and mental labor (Hochschild, 1983). The core of this concept lies in individuals regulating their inner feelings and outward expressions under organizational demands to achieve social interaction goals.

Hochschild (1983) proposed two primary emotional labor strategies: surface acting and deep acting. The former involves altering external behavioral displays—such as facial expressions and vocal tone—without changing genuine emotional experiences; while the latter involves altering internal feelings through cognitive reappraisal to achieve emotional congruence. Research indicates that surface acting is closely associated with negative outcomes such as emotional exhaustion, job stress, and role conflict, whereas deep acting is more conducive to promoting emotional congruence, enhancing job satisfaction, and strengthening organizational commitment (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011).

Furthermore, Diefendorff et al. (2005) introduced “naturally felt emotions” as a third strategy. This occurs when an individual's internal feelings naturally align with organizational demands, allowing for effortless expression without deliberate regulation—considered the most ideal state in Emotional Labor. Recent research increasingly integrates these strategies through an emotional regulation lens (Grandey & Melloy, 2017).

As Emotional Labor Theory continues to expand, researchers have increasingly applied it to the educational field, particularly focusing on the teaching profession. Teachers must manage and regulate their emotional expressions in daily interactions with students, parents, and colleagues to maintain classroom order and achieve educational objectives (Taxer & Frenzel, 2015). Within education, Emotional Labor is widely used to analyze teacher burnout, teaching efficacy, and teacher-student

relationship building. Research indicates that frequent use of surface acting strategies among teachers can lead to emotional exhaustion and decreased job satisfaction, while deep acting and natural emotional expression are more conducive to maintaining teaching enthusiasm and psychological well-being (Frenzel et al., 2015). Recent research reveals that teachers' Emotional Labor intensity has significantly increased, particularly in new environments like online teaching, with surface acting strategies showing a significant positive correlation with occupational burnout (MacIntyre et al., 2020).

In recent years, research on emotional labor has expanded further into the fields of arts education and performance training. Drama students frequently immerse themselves in roles, mobilize and regulate emotions during their learning process, and the training itself embodies the practical characteristics of emotional labor. Although drama emphasizes the free expression of emotions and creativity, its essence still involves deep control and social regulation of emotions (Niemi & Multisilta, 2016). Some studies indicate that students participating in performing arts programs demonstrate superior cognitive reappraisal and emotional expression abilities, along with enhanced emotional recognition and regulation skills (Goldstein et al., 2009). A recent review further suggests that narrative theater training effectively enhances participants' empathy and theory of mind abilities (Goldstein & Winner, 2023).

However, the transferability of Emotional Labor skills remains a challenge. Research indicates that while act training improves students' emotional regulation skills, whether these skills translate into practical advantages in high-emotional-load professions such as education, counseling, or management requires further longitudinal empirical validation. Additionally, within China's demanding educational context, teachers must simultaneously manage multi-source emotional stressors, placing heightened demands on emotional regulation (Yin et al., 2020).

In summary, Emotional Labor—as a form of work integrating emotional management and social functional adaptation—has emerged as a crucial perspective in educational research and arts education studies. Its manifestation among drama performance students not only concerns the development of performance skills but may also influence psychological adaptation and role transitions in their future career paths. Therefore, in-depth exploration of Emotional Labor's strategic choices and psychological effects holds significant practical implications for enhancing educational quality and cultivating interdisciplinary artistic talents.

This study will employ a multi-strategy framework grounded in Emotional Labor, focusing on empirical analysis from the perspectives of surface acting, deep acting, natural emotional expression, and emotional regulation. This approach aims to comprehensively reveal the underlying mechanisms and influence pathways of Emotional Labor.

The following hypotheses were developed based on the conceptual model in Figure 1.

H1: Personality Traits affects Emotional Labor.

H2: Personality Traits affects Emotional Regulation.

H3: Emotional Regulation affects Emotional Labor.

H4: Emotional Regulation mediates the relationship between Personality Traits on Emotional Labor.

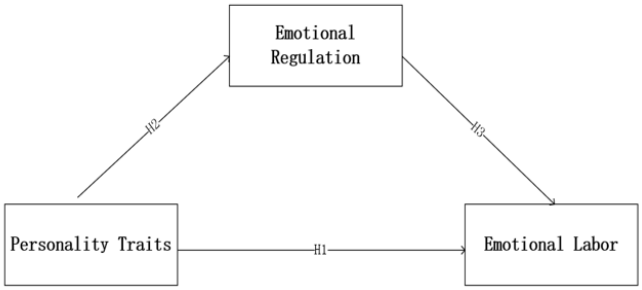

Figure 1: Conceptual model

3.Methods

The subjects of this study were undergraduate students majoring in drama performance at five universities in Shaanxi Province. To ensure the feasibility and representatives of the sample, the study employed a combination of convenience sampling and stratified sampling for sample selection. Specifically, five universities were first selected based on convenience and accessibility.

Subsequently, within each university, a stratified random sampling technique was employed based on grade level to ensure representation across all academic years. Ultimately, 718 valid questionnaires were collected, all from students majoring in drama performance. It should be noted that while this approach enhances representativeness within the accessible population, the initial convenience sampling stage may limit the generalizability of the findings to all drama performance students beyond the sampled province and institutions.

Data collection was completed between January 14, 2025, and March 15, 2025. Among the respondents, 45.9% were female and 54.1% were male, indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution. Other demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographics	Grouping	n (%)	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	342	47.6
	Male	376	52.4
Only-child or not	Yes	442	61.6
	Not	276	38.4
Age	18 and below	92	12.8
	18-20	227	31.6
	21-23	235	32.7
	23-26	164	22.8
Grade	One	157	21.9
	Two	213	29.7
	Three	209	29.1
	Four	139	19.4
Whether hold a class or school position	Yes	227	31.6
	No	491	68.4

The questionnaire comprises two sections: the first consists of seven questions surveying participants' basic information; the second section involves formal scale assessment covering the study's three core variables—personality traits, emotion regulation, and Emotional Labor—comprising 41 items in total. The personality traits questionnaire, adapted from Kritzler (2022), comprises 10 items assessing stable characteristics in social adaptation, task execution, self-regulation, and creativity. The Emotion Regulation Scale, revised based on versions by Gross (1998), Zhu (2007), and Alen et al. (2020), comprises seven items measuring cognitive, behavioural, and expressive regulation strategies employed when confronting negative emotions. The Emotional Labour Scale, referencing Gu's (2020) revised version, comprises 24 items covering four dimensions: surface acting, deep acting, feeling the emotion, and emotional disengagement. It assesses individuals' strategic tendencies for regulating and presenting emotions in social interactions or work settings. All items across the three scales are scored using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater perceived levels of the construct being measured.

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the overall scale, yielding a total explained variance of 74.3%, indicating that the measurement dimensions effectively capture the variables being measured. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.916, indicating good sample fit; the Bartlett sphericity test reached statistical significance ($p < 0.001$), further validating the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Furthermore, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed using AMOS 27.0 to rigorously test the pre-defined measurement model. The model fit indices were satisfactory ($\chi^2/df = 2.58$, CFI = .932, TLI = .918, RMSEA = .067), indicating good structural validity (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Additionally, the overall internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's α) of the scales was 0.927, indicating that the tool possesses good reliability and measurement stability.The Cronbach's α coefficients for all subscales also exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70.

This study collected data using a structured questionnaire. The scale content covered three core variables: personality traits, emotional regulation, and emotional labor. All items were scored using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated strongly disagree, 2 indicated disagree,3 indicated somewhat agree, 4 indicated agree, and 5 indicated strongly agree. Higher scores indicate that respondents perceive a higher degree of the variable.

The personality traits scale was adapted from Kritzler (2022) and consists of 10 items, aiming to assess an individual's stable traits in social adaptation, task performance, self-regulation, and creativity. Sample items are shown in Table 2:

The Emotional Regulation Scale is based on versions developed by Gross (1998), Zhu (2007), and Alen et al. (2020), comprising 7 items to measure the cognitive, behavioral, and expressive regulation strategies individuals employ when facing negative emotions. Sample items are shown in Table 2.

The Emotional Labor Scale is based on the revised version by Gu (2020), covering four dimensions: Surface Acting, Deep Acting, Naturally Emotions, and Emotion Termination, with a total of 24 items. This scale is used to assess individuals' tendencies toward strategies for regulating and presenting emotions in social interactions or work settings. Sample questions are provided in Table 2:

Table 2: The questionnaire

Questionnaire	Item	Content Design	Literature
Personality Traits	PT1	I have a keen awareness of other people's emotions.	Kritzler,2022
	PT2	In both learning and daily life, I actively care for my classmates and friends.	
	PT3	In group tasks, I complete my assignments on time.	
	PT4	I enjoy order and organization.	
	PT5	When I'm with my classmates, I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere.	
	PT6	I am good at handling social situations.	
	PT7	I enjoy hearing a variety of different ideas.	
	PT8	I have a rich imagination.	
	PT9	I can remain calm under pressure.	
	PT10	For most of the day, I feel relaxed.	
Emotional Regulation	ER1	When I encounter something upsetting, I shift my focus and try to think about the positive aspects.	Gross,1998; Zhu,2007; Alen et al.,2020
	ER2	When I feel frustrated, I talk to others to maintain a positive mood.	
	ER3	When faced with troubling matters, I adjust my mindset by engaging in activities I enjoy.	
	ER4	The emotions I display in front of others are adjusted and refined.	
	ER5	I use logical analysis to better understand problems.	
	ER6	I reframe negative events from a positive perspective.	
	ER7	When facing challenges, I have ways to regulate my emotions.	
Emotional Labor	SA1	To display appropriate emotions, I sometimes hide my true feelings.	Yang et al.,2019; Wang et al.,2022
	SA2	When someone's words make me uncomfortable, I still pretend to be happy.	
	SA3	Even when I feel exhausted, I pretend to be energetic.	
	SA4	Even when I feel upset, I pretend to be happy.	
	SA5	When I have a conflict with someone, even if I feel anxious, I still try to appear calm.	
	SA6	When I disagree with someone, I do my best to suppress my frustration.	
	DA1	Displaying appropriate emotions feels like a performance to me.	
	DA2	When faced with immense pressure, I treat it as a source of motivation.	
	DA3	Even when things don't go my way, I maintain an optimistic attitude in social interactions.	
	DA4	When others make mistakes, I consider the situation from their perspective, which helps me stay calm.	
	DA5	Even after arguing with a friend, I can still walk into the classroom and enjoy my lesson with a positive mindset.	
	DA6	Even when I'm in a bad mood, I can still engage in pleasant conversations with others.	
	ENE1	The emotions I express to children are naturally felt.	
	ENE2	Every time someone encourages me, I feel a significant boost in confidence.	
	ENE3	Even when I'm in a bad mood, I can still complete my tasks cheerfully.	
	ENE4	When someone is impolite to me, I show my displeasure in front of them.	
	ENE5	When group members arrive late for rehearsals or are absent without reason, I	

Questionnaire	Item	Content Design	Literature
		express my dissatisfaction.	
	ENE6	When group members fail to complete their tasks on time, I show my frustration to them.	
	ET1	I display the emotions required for work but do not alter my true inner feelings.	
	ET2	When I have an unpleasant interaction with someone, I do not show my displeasure.	
	ET3	In social interactions, I do not reveal negative emotions.	
	ET4	When dealing with classmates who disrupt team discipline, I pretend to be angry, though I have grown accustomed to it.	
	ET5	I feel that I could treat others as if they were inanimate objects.	
	ET6	I am able to ignore most people and things in life that make me unhappy.	Developed by the author

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of the scale was 0.916, the Bartlett sphericity test reached a significant level ($p < 0.001$), and the Cronbach α coefficient was 0.927, indicating that the scale has good reliability and validity.

This study utilized SPSS 23.0 software for statistical analysis of the data, including descriptive statistical analysis, Pearson correlation analysis, and mediation effect analysis. The mediation effect was tested using the causal steps approach proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986), which is one of the classic methods widely adopted in mediation analysis.

In terms of sample composition, a total of 718 valid questionnaires were collected, including 376 males (52.4%) and 342 females (47.6%). By only-child status, there were 442 only children and 276 non-only children. The age distribution was as follows: 92 were under 18 years old, 227 were between 18 and 20 years old, and 235 were between 21 and 23 years old. The grade distribution was as follows: 157 were freshmen, 213 were sophomores, 209 were juniors, and 139 were seniors. Among the students, 227 held class or school positions during their time at school, while the remaining 491 did not hold any positions.

Regarding variable scores, the mean and standard deviation of the main research variables are as follows: personality traits scored 21.35 (SD = 3.59), emotional regulation scored 24.73 (SD = 4.90), and emotional labor scored 21.00 (SD = 3.72). This provides a foundational basis for subsequent analysis of the relationships between variables.

In this study, the basic profile of the respondents was analysed descriptively by using SPSS 23.0 software, and the reliability and validity of the questionnaire was tested KMO test, Bartlett's spherical test. A structural equation model was constructed by Amos 27.0 to test the hypotheses.

4.Findings

Relationship between personality traits, emotional intelligence, and emotional labor

Structural equation modeling of the relationship between personality traits, emotion regulation, and emotional labor has also been referred to by some scholars as latent variable modeling (Moustaki et al.,2004). There are many metrics for determining whether a hypothesized model fits the observed data, and the evaluation of different fit metrics may be inconsistent with whether the model is supported. The researcher should follow the multiple criteria: "In the testing of hypothetical models, no single indicator value can be used as the only clear criterion, and idealized values of fit indicators do not exist". For practical application purposes, the researcher should mainly use the chi-square degree of freedom ratio <5, CFI>0.9, RMSEA<0.08 and significance as the decision basis for determining whether the model achieves the overall level of fit, because these indicators, have a more adequate basis. By looking at the model fit metrics in Fig. 2, it can be seen that the model fits the data, as shown by the chi-square fit of significance, CMIN/DF = 1.339, which is below the critical point of 5. Therefore, the model conforms to the chi-square value of the degrees of freedom. the CFI value is 0.986, which is greater than 0.9. the RMSEA value is 0.022, which is less than 0.08. therefore, the initial structural model (Fig. 2) is a valid model. As shown in Table 3, the analysis shows that hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 are confirmed.

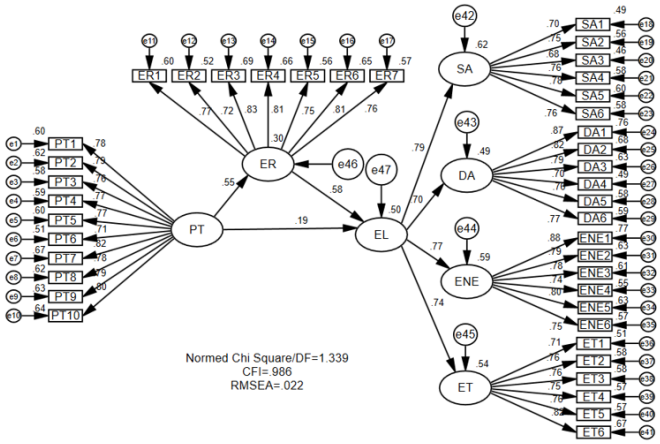

Figure 2: Structural equation model

Testing the mediating relationship of emotional regulation between personality traits and emotional labor

Since the standardized regression coefficients of the paths for the direct relationship between PT and ER were significantly correlated, r=0.556 (P<0.001), the standardized regression coefficients of the paths for the direct relationship between ER and EL were significantly correlated, r=0.452 (P<0.001). Therefore, ER may partially mediate the relationship between PT and EL, which needs to be tested to further determine the indirect relationship. To test whether ER mediated the relationship between PT and EL, the final SEM model was examined and the results showed that the standardized regression coefficients for the direct path relationship between PT and EL were significantly correlated. Since the standardized regression coefficients of the direct path relationship between PT and EL were significantly correlated (r=0.152, p<0.001), the mediating effect of ER between PT and EL needed to be tested to further determine the indirect relationship. the ER could act as a mediator between PT and EL. In addition, the indirect effect of unstandardized regression showed an indirect mediating effect of 0.232 between PT and EL through ER. we calculated the direct and indirect effects using AMOS. Tables 3 and 4 show in detail the mediating role of ER between PT and EL.

Table 3: Hypotheses testing

Relationship	Hypotheses	S.E	St.Reg.Weight	C.R	Sig.Level	Conclusion
ER<---PT	H1	.042	.556	13.211	***	Supported
EL<---PT	H2	.034	.152	4.473	***	Supported
EL<---ER	H3	.042	.452	10.673	***	Supported

Notes: PT=Personality Traits;ER=Emotional Intelligence;EL=Emotional Labor;***P<0.001

Table 4: Unstandardized indirect effect

	PT	ER	EL
ER	0.000	0.000	0.000
EL	0.322	0.000	0.000

As shown in Table 5, the mediator-standardized indirect effect of PT was 0.232. At the 95% confidence interval, the lower limit of the indirect effect of PT on EL was 0.232, and the upper limit was 0.430, and it did not contain a value of "0" in this interval, so ER was the mediating variable between PT and EL, and H4 was verified.

Table 5: Indirect effects analysis using 5000 bootstraps

	95% Lower Bound			95% Upper Bound			P-value		
	PT	ER	EL	PT	ER	EL	PT	ER	EL
ER	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
EL	0.232	0.000	0.000	0.430	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

5.Discussion

Using structural equation modeling (SEM), this study systematically examined the path relationships among Personality Traits (PT), Emotion Regulation (ER), and Emotional Labor (EL), with a focus on exploring the mediating role of emotion regulation between personality traits and emotional labor. Results (Table 3) indicate that personality traits exert a significant direct effect on Emotional Labor (β =

0.152, $p < 0.001$), while emotion regulation exerts a significant positive effect on Emotional Labor ($\beta = 0.452$, $p < 0.001$).

Furthermore, Table 5 indicates that emotion regulation partially mediated the relationship between personality traits and Emotional Labor (indirect effect = 0.322, 95% CI [0.232, 0.430]). Modeling questionnaire data and conducting path analysis revealed that all path hypotheses were significantly supported, demonstrating the strong explanatory power and fit of the theoretical model constructed in this study. The following sections provide detailed analysis and discussion of key path results and their theoretical implications.

The findings confirm that personality traits exert a significant positive influence on emotion regulation (standardized path coefficient = 0.556, $p < 0.001$), validating Hypothesis H1. This result aligns strongly with existing research, indicating that personality structure is a key determinant of individuals' emotional regulation methods and tendencies. According to the Big Five personality model, different personality dimensions influence the automaticity of emotion processing, resource mobilization capacity, and sensitivity to situational cues. For instance, neurotic individuals tend to adopt maladaptive emotion regulation strategies such as suppression and avoidance, while those high in conscientiousness and agreeableness are more likely to employ cognitive reappraisal, mindfulness, and positive self-reflection (Gross, 1998; Zhu et al., 2023).

Notably, the Kritzler (2022) Personality Trait Scale employed in this study specifically emphasizes stable traits in drama students related to social adaptation, task execution, self-regulation, and creativity, which provide a foundation for their selection of emotion regulation strategies. Statistical results indicate that personality traits strongly predict emotional regulation behaviors, suggesting that enhancing employees' emotional regulation capabilities within organizations hinges on understanding and identifying their personality structures.

Further findings reveal that personality traits directly influence Emotional Labor (path coefficient = 0.152, $p<0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H2. Personality traits shape employees' behavioral responses to organizational emotional norms. Individuals with high extraversion tend to display positive emotions, while those with high agreeableness are more willing to engage in deep emotional processing to comply with organizational demands. In contrast, neurotic individuals are more prone to surface acting or emotional conflict.

Notably, this study employed Gu's (2020) revised Emotional Labor Scale, which encompasses four dimensions—surface acting, deep processing, genuine acting, and emotional disengagement—providing a more refined measurement of how personality traits influence specific manifestations of emotional labor. Thus, personality traits not only influence the regulation methods themselves but may also directly shape the final forms of Emotional Labor exhibited in the workplace. This implies that when conducting job-person fit assessments, organizations should not only focus on employee skills and performance but also consider the potential impact of personality factors on work adaptation strategies.

Emotional regulation demonstrated a strong positive predictive effect on Emotional Labor performance (path coefficient = 0.452, $p < 0.001$), validating Hypothesis H3. This finding indicates that the effectiveness of emotional regulation strategies is highly correlated with an individual's ability to engage in deep emotional labor. Consistent research indicates that antecedent-focused regulation strategies (cognitive reappraisal, attentional shifting) facilitate the internalization and positive transformation of emotional experiences, thereby promoting deep emotional labor. Conversely, response-focused strategies (emotional suppression) are closely associated with surface-level emotional labor and may lead to emotional exhaustion and occupational burnout (Grandey, 2000; Angelini, 2023).

This study measured cognitive, behavioral, and expressive regulation strategies employed by individuals when facing negative emotions, based on Gross (1998) and Alen et al. (2020)'s emotion regulation scales. The effectiveness of these strategies directly influences the manifestation of Emotional Labor. This research supports the notion that employees who master more effective regulation methods can fulfill organizational emotional expression norms at lower psychological costs in high-emotional-demand occupations.

More importantly, this study validated the mediating role of emotion regulation between personality traits and Emotional Labor. Indirect effect analysis revealed that the indirect effect of personality traits on Emotional Labor through emotion regulation was 0.322, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.232, 0.430] and $p < 0.001$. Since the interval did not include zero, this indicates that the mediating effect is statistically significant. This finding was validated using the Bootstrap method (5000 samples) proposed by Hayes (2017), providing more reliable evidence of the mediating effect than the traditional Baron and Kenny (1986) approach. Path strength analysis further indicates that emotion regulation plays a partial mediating role: personality traits influence Emotional Labor both directly and indirectly—by affecting regulation strategies that subsequently shape work practices. This finding addresses previous research gaps that treated these three components in isolation, highlighting the central role of emotion regulation as a psychological mechanism variable. Theoretically, emotion regulation functions not only as a psychological strategy but also as a capacity resource. It exhibits stable individual differences and significantly predicts organizational behaviors such as Emotional Labor, service performance, and occupational burnout.

Therefore, incorporating emotional regulation into the personality-behavior pathway model contributes to establishing a more explanatory theoretical framework for personality-behavior relationships. Notably, this study is the first to validate this mechanism among drama performance students, extending the applicability of Emotional Labor theory to specialized occupational groups. First, institutions can introduce personality assessment tools during admissions or major selection phases to evaluate students' emotional regulation tendencies and potential, thereby enhancing job-person fit. Second, professional training and psychological support can increase students' use of positive emotional regulation strategies—particularly resource-oriented approaches like cognitive reappraisal and mindfulness training—to promote deep emotional labor performance, reducing emotional exhaustion and negative consequences from surface-level labor. Finally, administrators should recognize the limitations in regulatory resources and capabilities among highly neurotic students, providing personalized guidance and stress management mechanisms to alleviate psychological burdens in emotionally demanding academic fields.

Of course, despite yielding clear and theoretically valuable statistical findings, this study retains certain limitations. For instance, the cross-sectional questionnaire data cannot definitively establish directional causality; future longitudinal tracking or experimental designs could provide further validation. Additionally, environmental variables such as cultural background, occupational type, and organizational support were not incorporated into the model, though these factors may exert moderating effects on the mediating pathways. Additionally, the sample originates solely from five universities in Shaanxi Province. Although stratified sampling was employed, the representativeness of the sample may still be constrained by geographical limitations. Future research could enhance model complexity by constructing a cross-level, cross-contextual personality-Emotional Labor mechanism model.

In summary, this study confirms the partial mediating role of emotional regulation between personality traits and Emotional Labor, revealing the deep psychological pathways through which personality influences organizational behavior. This research not only enriches mechanism studies in the field of Emotional Labor but also provides theoretical foundations and practical recommendations for talent development and organizational management in art institutions. Future work should expand sample sizes, incorporate longitudinal designs, and delve into the complexity of influencing mechanisms within real-world contexts to advance Emotional Labor research from structural analysis toward a process-oriented, dynamic understanding.

6.Conclusion and Recommendations

In the Chinese cultural context, emotional labor is an essential skill and a central tool for success. Emotions guide thinking, judgment, decision-making, and sense of action, and naturally affect an individual's performance in accomplishing a task. The personality traits and emotional regulation ability of acting majors are important influencing factors of emotional labor, and it is of great significance to improve the awareness of personality trait cultivation of drama

acting majors in order to improve their emotional regulation ability and emotional labor ability, optimize the quality of professional talents, and enhance the composite ability of drama acting majors in social competitiveness.

Therefore, colleges and universities and drama performance majors should recognize its importance, improve their emotional labor ability and awareness, give full play to their professional advantages, and enhance their social competitiveness. For schools, efforts should be made in the following aspects: raising the awareness of cultivating composite talents, optimizing the talent cultivation program, strengthening teachers' cognition, reinforcing the personality trait advantages and professional advantages of drama performance majors, and strengthening supervision and assessment. As students majoring in drama performance, they should make efforts in the following aspects: to strengthen the advantages of personality traits, to understand the influence of personality traits on emotional regulation and emotional labor, and to make use of professional advantages to enhance social competitiveness.

7.Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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