



Emotional Labor in Cross-Cultural Adaptation: Exploring the Construction of Socio-Emotional Competence of College Student Volunteers Teaching in Ethnic Minority Areas

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Abstract. China have taken priority to education in ethnic areas, while volunteer teaching by students at colleges plays a necessary role in it. This study shows and explains the socio-emotional capacities of college students in cross-cultural volunteering teaching. Also, it focuses on the influences of emotional labor and acculturation. By qualitative examination, the whole research is under the acculturation background, based on in-depth interviews and case studies in Tongliao City and Hinggan League, and reveals noticeable features of college student volunteers in emotional labor, such as role multiplicity and cultural dependency. What's more, the study probes into obvious periodic challenges during acculturation. It is further pointed out that interactions between emotional labor and acculturation are a pivotal way to build socio-emotional capabilities. Among them, the construction of a sense of meaning, improvement of communication abilities, and maintenance of emotional extroversion and stability are typically important. To enhance the effect of volunteer teaching and improve college students' competence in volunteer teaching, it is urgent and necessary to foster the socio-emotional capacities of college student volunteers.

Keywords: social emotional capability, college student volunteer, volunteering teaching, acculturation, emotional labor

1 Introduction

With national emphasis on the development of ethnic minority areas, volunteer teaching activities by college students have gradually become an important way to promote the equalization of educational resources and strengthen national unity. Emotional labor, proposed by sociologist Hochschild, refers to the process by which an individual manages and regulates his or her emotional expression in order to meet the requirements of a professional role¹. Cross-cultural adaptation, on the other hand, is a dynamic process that involves individuals learning, adapting, and ultimately integrating in a new cultural environment². For volunteers teaching in ethnic minority areas, the attributes of teaching activities determine that they are bound to exert considerable emotional

labor in the teaching process³. The regional characteristics of ethnic minority regions determine the necessity of cross-cultural adaptation in the face of new cultural environments⁴.

In the past research involving college student volunteers in teaching, though it covers a wide range of research topics, it still mainly focuses on the influencing factors of the effectiveness of teaching activities and related suggestions, and there are relatively fewer research on volunteers' individual emotional ability and feelings, and they are concentrated on the exploration of the application level⁵. Emotional labor theory as an important perspective for studying service industries (e.g., teachers, customer service staffs, etc.) through emotional factors⁶. The main body of student volunteers is seldom mentioned⁷. Existing research on the social-emotional competence of college student volunteers have been limited to colleges and universities⁸. In the cross-cultural context of ethnic minority areas, the attributes of emotional labor in teaching are also complicated, and the emotional experience of individuals is also different from the general emotional experience of teaching. Some studies in recent years have also shown that in the process of teaching in ethnic minority areas, the importance of the emotional and psychological dimensions has gradually come to the forefront, and the emotional experience of teachers in communication with ethnic minority primary and secondary school students has a significant impact on the effectiveness of education⁹. Problems such as culture conflicts, adaptability challenges, and emotional distress in teaching in ethnic minority areas have also been pointed out continuously¹⁰. Therefore, it is especially necessary to explore the characteristics and influence of emotional factors of college student volunteers, the subject of action in this cross-cultural context, by combining mature theories.

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology and conducts a field survey of college student teaching volunteers and primary and secondary school students receiving teaching services in Tongliao City and Hinggan League of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region through in-depth interviews and case studies, combining the perspective of emotional labor theory with the information around the volunteers' emotional communication ability, emotional labor experience, cross-cultural adaptation process, and how these factors affect the effect of teaching and personal development. Collecting and analyzing. Through this study, we intend to reveal the psychological mechanisms of college student volunteers in the process of teaching in ethnic minority areas and provide theoretical basis and practical guidance for improving teaching strategies.

2 Characteristics and Effects of Emotional Labor

2.1 The Multiplicity of Emotional Labor Roles

The emotional labor that college student volunteers undertake in the process of interacting with minority students is complex and unique. Interaction with minority students is the most direct emotional labor in the teaching activities. Volunteers need to understand and adapt to the cultural background of the students in a short time, establish trust and respect, and show enough patience and empathy to meet the learning and emotional needs of the students. In addition to direct interactions, volunteers must also deal with

external pressures from multiple actors. For example, the volunteers' colleges and universities may have expectations of their performance and hope that they can reflect the school's social contribution and spirit in the process of teaching; the commissioning unit of the mission and the local management unit will put forward specific requirements and standards for their work, which may be different from the volunteers' personal concepts of education, resulting in a conflict of roles; and the expectations and attitudes of the students' parents also have an impact on the volunteers, who have their own views on the educational outcomes of their children. The expectations and attitudes of students' parents will also have an impact on volunteers, who have their own expectations of their children's educational results and may distrust or belittle volunteers or not recognize their teaching methods and results.

This requirement for multiple role-playing makes it necessary for volunteers to frequently switch between roles in the course of teaching, and this frequent switching is often accompanied by the need for emotional regulation, leading to the risk of emotional exhaustion. As well as due to the fact that most volunteers teach for a relatively short period of time, except for a few year-long teaching programs, there is a certain degree of severance between volunteers and the traditional role of a teacher, and this discontinuity in roles makes it difficult for them to fully adapt to and delve into these roles within a limited period of time, which in turn creates confusion about their identities. In the constant role switching and emotional investment, volunteers may feel the blurring of their self-worth and identity, and become confused about the roles they play and how to balance the internal and external expectations brought by these roles.

Volunteer WYL: "It's quite hard to balance the expectations. The schools and the organizations that entrust us don't have much direct management and there is a student assistant who keeps touch with us, but they also have their own standards and outcomes that they want us to produce. Every time I prepare lessons and activities, I have to find ways to make sure that these meet their standards. On the other hand, the parents and local teachers were initially not so sure about us, as they thought we were just here to show the kids around and teach them the basics. I feel quite frustrated sometimes."

2.2 Cultural Dependence of Emotional Labor Benefits

In cross-cultural contexts, the emotional labor undertaken by volunteers is significantly affected by cultural differences, a phenomenon that is particularly evident in their interactions with minority students. The cultural dependence of the benefits of emotional labor is reflected in the fact that volunteers must deeply understand and adapt to the cultural background of the recipients to ensure the effectiveness of emotional communication, and such adaptation includes metaphors and contextual meanings in verbal expressions as well as the correct interpretation of non-verbal symbols such as body language and facial expressions, for example, body language and facial expressions. Since the cultural framework shapes the way in which individual emotions are expressed and interpreted, cultural differences in this communication process are not only direct communication barriers, but also affect the accuracy of emotional expression and interpretation. Because emotional labor essentially involves the recognition,

understanding, expression, and regulation of emotions, its effectiveness is greatly limited by the depth of participants' understanding of each other's cultural backgrounds.

Therefore, the cultural dependence of the benefits of emotional labor makes volunteers often need a “breakthrough” in the process of teaching. That is, to break through their own understanding of cultural differences, and to be able to learn and flexibly apply this understanding in practice, bridging the cultural gap by adjusting their own ways of expressing and responding to emotions. This adjustment is also a dynamic and two-way process, which involves not only the volunteers' adaptation to the culture of ethnic minority students, but also how to guide the students to understand and accept the volunteers' emotional expression. Therefore, in educational activities in a cross-cultural context, emotional labor is not only a means of emotional communication, but also a catalyst for the development of individual socio-emotional competence.

Volunteer LLS: “I realized that idioms learning is quite a challenge. I used to try to use those ready-made idiom stories to stimulate their interest. After class a few kids came up to me and said, 'Sister teacher, I don't understand the story you told me.' Then they dragged me to play some local games, and I wondered if there was something wrong with my method. Later I let them play and memorize, and used their games to explain the idioms, and it worked a little better.”

2.3 Singularity of Emotional Support

The study found that emotional support for volunteers was often singular and lacking. Due to several differences in cultural background and remote places, volunteers mainly seek emotional support from peers who do the same. Due to their similar age and the same experience and empathy for teaching, this peer support system constructed on the basis of common experience has a certain degree of effectiveness in providing immediate empathy and understanding but is limited by the peer group's own emotional capacity and resources. Without professional counseling or systematic emotional support training, the support that peers can provide often fails to fully meet the needs of volunteers in complex emotional dilemmas, thus limiting the continuity and depth of emotional labor. As for family or other aspects, the possible lack of knowledge and understanding of teaching as an activity by family members as well as the heterogeneity of the environment in which volunteers are embedded make the emotional comfort provided by family members ineffective and unable to directly respond to the specific challenges encountered by volunteers in the process of teaching. As a result, the quality and effectiveness of volunteers' emotional labor may be cut down because the lack of effective external emotional support.

Volunteer WMX: “You ask if there are any ways for that kind of emotional support? In fact, apart from complaining to my classmates or colleagues, I don't have much to talk about. At home, my parents didn't really know what I was doing, but only that I was going to be away for a long time. Fortunately, one of the sisters who came here took care of me quite a lot.”

3 What Builds Socio-Emotional Competence: The Interactive Benefits of Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Emotional Labor

3.1 The Construction of a Sense of Meaning: The Positive Cycle of Emotional Labor and Personal Growth

Sense of meaning, as a deep psychological experience, refers to the value, purpose, and importance that individuals feel in their activities and lives¹¹. In the emotional labor of volunteers, the construction of a sense of meaning can help volunteers achieve self-identity, which further enhances self-efficacy and promotes a positive cycle of emotional labor and personal growth. Teaching in fact provides a unique opportunity for volunteers to be directly involved in cross-cultural communication and social contribution. When volunteers realize that their work not only helps students in need of education, but also promotes understanding and respect among ethnic groups, the work of teaching is no longer just a task, but becomes a way to realize personal value and social responsibility. The establishment of this sense of meaning becomes a powerful motivation for volunteers to continue to invest in emotional labor and overcome difficulties.

The process of constructing a sense of meaning in missionary activities is a dynamic, multi-dimensional interactive process, and its construction stems from the volunteers' intrinsic cognition of the impact of their own behavior. Volunteers' investment in emotional labor changes the student's receiving education and local education on the one hand, and profoundly affects the volunteers themselves on the other. By understanding the multiplicity of emotional labor roles, integrating into the local community as individuals, and truly "freeing" themselves from their professional roles, volunteers can feel the positive impact of their own behaviors from first-hand interactions, and this direct feedback is an important source of enhancing the sense of inner meaning. In non-personal projects, the sharing of experiences and emotional support among volunteers also provides a socialization dimension for the construction of personal sense of meaning, and the common challenges and shared successes strengthen and confirm the sense of meaning in the collective. Therefore, although facing all kinds of challenges and difficulties in cross-cultural adaptation, volunteers not only improve their social-emotional ability and cross-cultural adaptation ability in the process of solving problems and receiving feedback, but also realize personal growth and self-transcendence in the process of continuous challenges, in which the construction of a sense of meaning plays a central role.

3.2 Construction of Communication Power: Emotional Communication Styles and Skills in Cross-Cultural Contexts

Emotional communication in is an important way of emotional expression, but also an important factor affecting the effectiveness of emotional labor. In the cross-cultural context, people's communication and mutual understanding are often affected by different language environments. In which the formation of cross-cultural context comes from the interaction of different customs and habits, and other cultural phenomena.

Because individuals from different cultures have similar decoding abilities for emotional expressions, emotional communication provides a natural and effective way to dissolve artificial barriers and cultural boundaries in mutual interaction¹². In cross-cultural contexts, it is necessary to evoke the ability of people from different cultures to empathize with each other through a variety of affective communication strategies, to understand each other. Studies have also shown that in the competition for selective attention, emotionally meaningful information is prioritized over non-emotional content¹³. Therefore, letting emotion pour into communication can, to a certain extent, take the lead in eliminating the gap caused by cultural differences, attracting the attention of both parties faster and better integrating into each other's context.

Language and culture are closely related, and language lays a solid foundation for the formation of culture and promotes the inheritance of culture, and it is also the communication tool and external display of different cultures. It is difficult to quickly master the skills of ethnic languages, but learning to use basic daily language, supplemented by body language and friendly facial expressions, can bring volunteers and ethnic minority students closer together. Customs are the embodiment of cultural forms with deep historical heritage and strong ethnic characteristics. Therefore, in the process of emotional communication, based on the principle of treating each other with sincerity and courtesy, it is indispensable to understand the most basic ethnic customs and taboos. Facing the gap between language and customs, we can turn commonplace objects such as scenery and food into the subject of emotional communication, thus taking a key step of mutual trust and interaction in cross-cultural context.

3.3 The Construction of Mindfulness: the Prominent Roles of Emotional Extraversion and Stability

Emotional extroversion involves an individual's tendency to actively express and share emotions in social interactions, while emotional stability is associated with an individual's ability to maintain emotional balance in the face of challenges¹⁴. Volunteers' emotional labor and emotional communication play a more prominent role compared to other elements of emotional competence. The importance of emotional extroversion in cross-cultural communication is reflected in its facilitation of emotional empathy and trust building between teachers and students. Through positive emotional communication, volunteers can reduce the gap brought about by cultural differences, thus building a more trusted teacher-student relationship, and improving the effectiveness of teaching interactions. Emotional extroversion also helps to alleviate the stress and anxiety that may arise in the process of cultural adaptation. Through the expression and sharing of emotions, volunteers can gain social support and enhance the ability of cross-cultural adaptation. The role of emotional stability in the process of teaching is reflected in the fact that it helps volunteers to effectively cope with cross-cultural challenges. This has also been demonstrated in cross-cultural adaptation research, where individual adaptation in a new cultural environment is a dynamic process involving psychological and emotional regulation¹⁵. Maintaining better emotional control and positive attitudes in the face of language barriers, pedagogical challenges, and cultural differences can

enhance the quality of teaching and learning, as well as contribute to an individual's psychological well-being and professional satisfaction.

4 Conclusions and Recommends

Colleges and universities should focus on cultivating high level and specialized teaching volunteers. Facing the problem of language barrier, national language courses can be offered, focusing on learning daily language and basic manners. Secondly, psychology and pedagogy should be included in the study, so as to cultivate volunteers who are adapted to cross-cultural contexts and good at emotional communication. Volunteer organizations should take learning ability and stress resistance as important indicators in the screening process. Volunteer organizations can provide centralized training for volunteers on local ethnic experiences and cultures, so that they can explain and experience the customs of different ethnic groups according to their own ethnicity. After the class, the feedback mechanism should be strengthened and a file of ethnic minority students should be set up so that the next batch of volunteers can quickly understand the situation of the students, thus reducing the emotional fluctuations brought about by the change of volunteers.

Volunteers need to uphold the spirit of dedication, in-depth understanding of the culture of the local ethnic groups, and actively learn the ethnic languages. At the same time to make up for their own shortcomings, the relevant departments of ethnic minority areas should strengthen and neighboring developed provinces to reach cooperation, in order to cultivate excellent teaching talent. Secondly, learning about minority languages and cultures can be included in the list of elective courses in colleges and universities, especially in universities featuring minority-related disciplines, which should play a multi-pronged role in promoting mutual exchanges among ethnic groups. Finally, for the material conditions of minority teaching, financial subsidies can be appropriately issued as an incentive, while improving the local infrastructure, and striving to create a good teaching environment for volunteers who come to teach.

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