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How do language teachers' emotions matter? Examining the relationships between emotion regulation strategies, teaching enjoyment, resilience, and work engagement in the multilingual context

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study adopted a quantitative research design involving 208 language teachers of Chinese as a second language (CSL) to explore the associations among emotion regulation strategies, teaching enjoyment, teacher resilience, and work-related outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach: To narrow this gap, self-report questionnaires were developed and voluntarily completed by university language teachers in China. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze the collected data.

Findings: The results of structural equation modeling revealed that reappraisal strategy was positively correlated with teaching enjoyment and resilience while suppression demonstrated negative impacts. Moreover, as language teachers chose to adopt reappraisal strategy, they were more likely to experience greater teaching enjoyment and contributed to a higher level of resilience in challenging conditions, which in turn enhanced their commitment and engagement. Conversely, the use of maladaptive strategies, such as expressive suppression, undermined teachers' teaching enjoyment and negatively impacted teacher resilience, leading to reduced work engagement and higher turnover intention.

Originality/value: This study extends emotion research in language education by underscoring teachers' emotion regulation in cross-cultural classrooms. Additionally, the findings provide valuable insights for designing targeted interventions and teacher programs aimed at fostering emotion regulation and work engagement.

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Emotion regulation; teacher emotion; reappraisal; suppression; work engagement; turnover intention

1. Introduction

Teaching multilingual students poses significant emotional challenges and responsibilities for language teachers, also in the context of Chinese as second language (CSL), which demands a lot of effort and determination to offer emotional support and sustain proactive engagement for positive consequences in the teaching profession

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(Kwon, Kupzyk, and Benton 2018; Zhang and Gao 2024). A good deal of research has demonstrated that language teaching is emotionally demanding, indicating that high-quality language teachers need emotional competence to display some emotions and suppress other damaging emotions (Geng, Yu, and Yuan 2023) in ways that support teacher interpersonal functioning and well-being (Gross and John 2003). In this regard, language teachers face heightened emotional exhaustion and job challenges which are affected by the cognitive demands of teaching non-native learners, institutional pressures for outcomes, the intercultural dynamics of language education, as well as curriculum reform (Han et al. 2024; Yang, Shu, and Yin 2022). These job demands shape them into active agents in regulating emotions to foster optimum learning atmospheres, in such a way that individuals exercise considerable efforts to control when and to what extent they experience distinct emotions.

Emotion regulation (ER), 'a sequence of transactional emotional episodes within a social event or scene' that may dampen, intensify, or simply maintain emotional states (Gross and Feldman Barrett 2011), has received considerable attention among language teachers (Han et al. 2024). Notwithstanding a number of studies on the construct of ER and its predictive merit on L2 variables, for instance, language learners' grit (Shafiee Rad and Jafarpour 2023) and growth language (Dong 2024), little research has been conducted to explore teachers' ER strategy factors and their consequences in teaching multilingual students, particularly in the CSL context where teachers encounter a complex web of emotional and professional dilemmas. Additionally, an expanding body of literature has offered valuable insights into the role of positive emotions in enabling language learners to explore learning opportunities and thereby enhance their language proficiency in the light of positive psychology, leaving teachers' resilience as an unexplored realm.

To address these gaps, the ultimate aims of the current study are outlined in the above-mentioned background, emphasizing the ways in which Chinese language teachers employ different strategies to perform ER and examine the sub-constructs of ER strategies, which help to expand the emotion research agendas. Moreover, we intend to provide a closer examination of the effect of teachers' ER on teachers' experienced emotions and engagement, which is also a crucial factor for success in the teaching profession.

2. Literature review

2.1. Teacher emotion regulation

Teacher emotional regulation, as a fundamental contributor to teacher emotions and well-being (Gross and John 2003), can be understood as the ability and process by which individuals exert influence on their emotions, entailing how they experience, express, and manage emotional responses in different situations. In other words, emotional regulation strategies refer to the ways individuals manage what emotions to experience, when to experience, and how to express (Zeng et al. 2025), serving to (1) initiate, maintain, and inhibit emotional responses; (2) adjust the intensity, duration, and expression of emotions; (3) align emotions with personal goals, social expectations, and situational demands. In the relevant literature, as core concepts from emotional labor theory (Hochschild 2012), surface acting (e.g. faking unfelt emotions) and deep

acting (e.g. the intentional alteration of inner emotional states to align with desired emotions) providing a critical approach to emotional regulation. Later, Gross (1998) proposed two broad levels of emotional regulation strategies, antecedent-focused and response-focused strategies, based on the timing of emotional arousal stage. Antecedent-focused regulation indicates individuals employ strategies before triggering the emotional response to prevent or modify the emotional reactions at their roots. On the contrary, response-focused regulation refers to individuals adopting strategies after the emotional response in order to manage the emotional expression. In the current study, cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, two most reported factors from both antecedent-focused and response-focused strategies were recruited to broaden our understanding of emotional experience and expression in language teaching (Lee et al. 2016). On one hand, cognitive reappraisal, a more adaptive emotional regulation strategy, involves individuals reinterpreting the meaning of a situation for the purpose of altering its emotional influences and reducing psychological impact (Gross and John 2003). This reappraisal process enables them to maintain emotional balance by reframing stressful or challenging experiences in a more constructive way. On the other hand, expressive suppression refers to the attempt to hide or reduce observable emotional expressions while experiencing the inner emotional state. This maladaptive strategy targets the display of emotion rather than its underlying causes, often leading to negative emotions and emotional exhaustion (Zeng et al. 2025).

Recent studies have unveiled that the predictive power of emotion regulation on several factors (Liu et al. 2025; Qu and Wang 2024). For instance, Liu et al. (2025) reported the significant relationship between emotion regulation, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being among 418 university teachers in the context of Iranian EFL learning. Seizing the significance of teacher well-being, Qu and Wang (2024) unveiled the associations between personality traits, emotion regulation, and teacher depression, indicating that EFL teachers exhibiting elevated positive emotions employed more effective emotional regulation strategies and reported reduced levels of depression among 546 Chinese EFL teachers. In the same vein, 1275 kindergarten teachers were recruited to examine the interplay between emotion regulation and work engagement, showing that reappraisal was reported to have a positive influence, whereas suppression had no significant impact on work engagement (Zeng et al. 2025). Their study linked the positive and negative emotions to teachers' use of emotion regulation strategies, in which positive emotions related to teacher efficacy through the partially mediating effect of emotion regulation. In essence, although the literature has unveiled the link between emotion regulation, emotions and work engagement, it is important to consider the role of resilience in contributing to explaining the variation of work engagement and turnover intention, which remains unexplored in the context of Chinese as a foreign language learning.

2.2. Teacher resilience

Teacher resilience refers to a teacher's ability to adapt positively and recover effectively in the face of challenges, stress, or burnout in their professions (Chu and Liu 2022; Liu and Chu 2022). It involves maintaining commitment, enthusiasm, as well as well-being (Li, Gu, and He 2019) despite pressures such as high workloads, student behavioral issues, policy changes, or emotional demands of the job. Initially, Connor and Davidson (2003)

introduced a Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), providing a psychometrically sound self-report measure with established reliability and validity. This 25-item scale comprises five factors, including (1) personal competence, high standards and tenacity; (2) trust in one's instincts, tolerance of negative affect and strengthening effects of stress; (3) positive acceptance of change and secure relationships; (4) control; and (5) spiritual influences. In addition, Campbell-Sills and Stein (2007) further constructed the 10-item measure to improve the assessment of resilience with the aid of the prior CD-RISC. Moreover, Liu and Chu (2022) introduced teacher resilience in the territory of Chinese EFL teaching and developed a tri-factorial measure entailing tenacity, optimism and coping style. In this study, teacher resilience refers to the capacity of CSL teachers to uphold effective teaching practices while navigating work-related challenges. In this study, teacher resilience is defined as the psychological quality or capacity of CSL teachers to sustain effective teaching practices while coping with professional demands and challenges (Wei, Yang, and Wang 2024).

There is a consensus on the fact that teacher resilience is a vital and multifaceted construct, linking to increased well-being and work engagement (Derakhshan, Dewaele, and Azari Noughabi 2022; Hiver 2018). To date, some studies have explored the associations between resilience and psychological individual differences (IDs), for instance, L2 grit, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and well-being (Derakhshan, Dewaele, and Azari Noughabi 2022; Ngui and Lay 2020; Proietti Ergün and Dewaele 2021). In this regard, the study underscored the value of well-being and resilience in significantly predicting foreign language teaching enjoyment in the domain of Chinese EFL learning (Wei, Yang, and Wang 2024). In the similar context, Proietti Ergün and Dewaele (2021) unpacked that teacher resilience demonstrated greater influence on teaching enjoyment among 174 teachers of Italian. However, as stated in Wei, Yang, and Wang (2024)'s study, existing research on the potential relationship between teacher resilience and enjoyment is limited, and the unique context of Chinese as a foreign language learning deserves increased attention and consideration.

2.3. Foreign language teaching enjoyment

Language teaching is a distinctive profession that entails unique emotional demands and challenges for teachers (Han et al. 2024). Teaching in a language that is not their native tongue frequently exposes language teachers to emotional challenges, often manifesting as uneasiness, self-doubt, or anxiety (Zhang, Fathi, and Naderi 2025). These emotional dilemmas guided researchers to pay more attention to language teacher anxiety or burnout (De Costa, Rawal, and Li 2018; Li 2023). However, the recent call for positive psychology highlighted the importance of positive emotions in language learning (Dewaele and MacIntyre 2016), expanding the notion of enjoyment to language teachers.

Moreover, the broaden-and-build theory, proposed by Fredrickson (2004), posits that positive emotions serve an adaptive function by broadening individuals' momentary thought-action repertoires and building enduring personal resources. The Control-Value Theory (Pekrun 2006) also posited enjoyment as a positive, activating, and activity-related emotion, confirming the advantages of achievement emotions on engagement and achievement. While there is a substantial body of evidence unveiling the merit of learners' enjoyment in language learning (Zhang, Fathi, and Naderi 2025),

little research has verified the effectiveness and influence of teachers' foreign language enjoyment, also highlighting the necessity of investigating the nuanced emotional experiences of teachers in Chinese language teaching.

Earlier scholarly attention has been devoted to examining the link between teaching enjoyment and teachers' work engagement. For instance, Fathi, Zhang, and Arefian (2024) explored the antecedents of work engagement among 476 Iran EFL teachers, suggesting that teaching enjoyment significantly contributed to work engagement, with grit acting as a mediator in this link. This predictive effect of foreign language teaching enjoyment on work engagement can also be found in the studies of Liu et al. (2023) and Xiao, Fathi, and Mohammaddockht (2022). Additionally, adopting a cross-lagged panel design, Zhang, Fathi, and Naderi (2025) unpacked reciprocal relationships among teacher grit, FLTE, and work engagement among 786 Iranian teachers. Their findings demonstrated that teachers reported higher levels of enjoyment at the initial measurement point reflected increased work engagement at a subsequential time, showcasing the sustained reciprocal associations between teacher enjoyment and work engagement over time. Although previous studies offered insight into teachers' emotional experiences and unveiled the relationship between teacher enjoyment and work engagement, the literature on the CSL language teachers' enjoyment is limited. In addition, despite growing interest in teacher emotions, the link between FLTE and turnover intention remains largely unexplored.

2.4. Teachers' work engagement and turnover intention

In this study, work engagement and turnover intention are conceptualized as occupational and work-related outcomes, reflecting teachers' motivational engagement with their work and their intention to withdraw from the profession. Work engagement entails a positive, fulfilling and work-related state of mind in which individuals manifest emotional, cognitive investment and demonstrate their willingness to participate in their professional tasks (Kahn 1990; Zhang, Fathi, and Naderi 2025). This higher psychological state often results in lower intention to leave and increased commitment to the profession, job satisfaction, and resilience in the face of teaching challenges (Greenier, Derakhshan, and Fathi 2021). In this sense, lower work engagement tends to correlate with burnout, emotional exhaustion, and a growing desire to leave the job or profession, which exhibits a sense of disconnect and frustration. Following this line of inquiry, Schaufeli et al. (2002) conceptualized work engagement as 'a positive, fulfilling and work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption' (74). In the realm of language teacher research, vigor represents high levels of energy, mental resilience, and persistence while teaching learners. Dedication entails a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge in language teaching. In addition, absorption interprets being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in teaching activities, often losing track of time. Conversely, serving as a form of work disengagement, turnover intention describes the extent to which individuals plan and consider leaving their profession, denoting their conscious and deliberate desires (Bradley 2007).

Empirical studies have demonstrated the sophisticated antecedents to enhance the construct of work engagement, including teacher identity, teaching enjoyment, teacher grit, job satisfaction, as well as teacher well-being (Fathi, Zhang, and Arefian 2024; Zhang, Fathi, and Naderi 2025). For instance, relying on secondary school teachers in

Namibia, Janik and Rothmann (2016) reported that work engagement was driven by a combination of low emotional exhaustion and high psychological meaningfulness and availability. Similarly, Huang and Yin (2024) unveiled the important links between paternalistic leadership, teachers' emotional labor, engagement, and turnover intention in aid of an emotional lens. Liu et al. (2023) demonstrated that teaching enjoyment, growth mindset and teacher grit directly impacted teacher work engagement among Chinese teachers. Their findings also reported that teaching enjoyment influenced work engagement through the mediating effect of teacher grit. Despite the merits in understanding language teaching, the underlying construct of teacher engagement and turnover intention remains under-researched, particularly in the Chinese as a Foreign Language context. Additionally, though some studies have unpacked the predictive factors influencing teacher engagement and their intention to leave, there is still a lack of sufficient research investigating the emotional antecedents that contribute to supporting this construct.

2.5. The present study

The ultimate purpose of this study is to enhance our understanding of the associations between teacher emotions and work outcomes via the mediating role of teaching enjoyment and resilience through the lens of investigating two general dimensions: on one hand, the extent to which teachers' emotional regulation strategies motivated their work engagement and turnover intention, and on the other hand, the way in which language teachers' varying emotional regulation strategies attributed to emotional outcomes can contribute to increased work engagement and decreased turnover intention. The decision to identify emotion regulation as a key predictor in this study stems from its substantial explanatory capacity in influencing teacher affect and work-related outcomes. Encompassing strategies such as cognitive reappraisal (reframing situations to change its emotion impact) and expressive suppression (inhibiting emotional expression), emotion regulation has been shown to influence how teachers perceive, manage, and respond to emotional challenges in their professional lives (Battaglini et al. 2023). As such, it serves as a foundational component in understanding the emotional dynamics of the teaching profession. Hence, this study attempts to confirm that within emotionally intense educational settings, especially in cross-cultural classrooms, emotion regulation plays a vital role in maintaining emotional balance, building enduring personal resources such as resilience, and upholding their professional engagement.

In doing so, drawing upon the abovementioned gaps and analysis, the current study attempts to test the following hypotheses of the relationship between ER strategies, teaching enjoyment, teacher resilience, and work outcomes (Figure 1). In detail, the proposed hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 1. (H1): Cognitive reappraisal is positively and significantly related to teaching enjoyment and teacher resilience, while expressive suppression is negatively correlated with teaching enjoyment and teacher resilience.

Hypothesis 2. (H2): Cognitive reappraisal shows a significant positive relationship with work engagement and a negative association with turnover intention, while expressive suppression demonstrates a significant negative relationship with work engagement and a positive association with turnover intention.

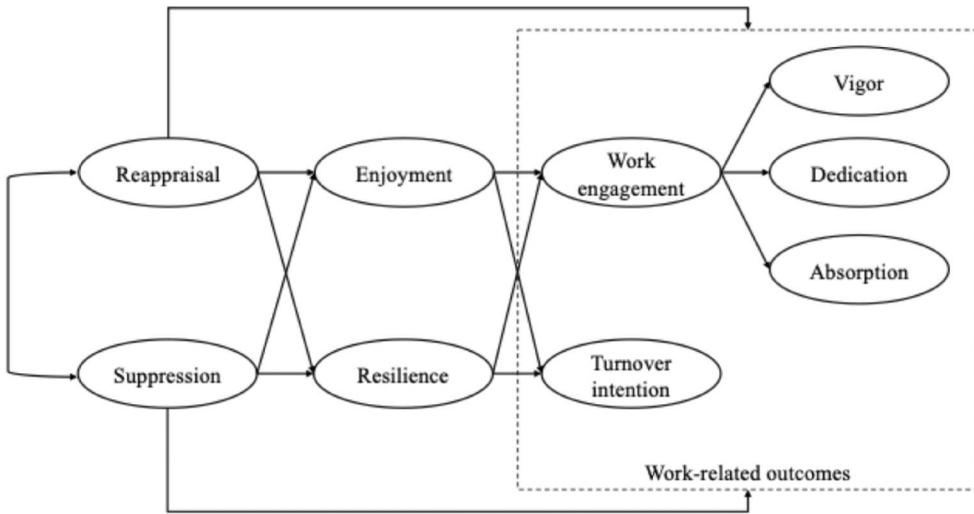


Figure 1. The hypothesized model to test the associations between emotion regulation, enjoyment, resilience, and work-related outcomes.

Hypothesis 3. (H3): Teaching enjoyment is positively associated with work engagement and negatively associated with turnover intention.

Hypothesis 4. (H4): Teacher resilience predicts work engagement positively and significantly while influencing turnover intention negatively.

Hypothesis 5. (H5): Emotion regulation (ER) strategies significantly affect work engagement and turnover intention through the mediating roles of teaching enjoyment and teacher resilience.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Prior to embarking on distributing questionnaires that evaluated teachers' varying levels of emotion regulation, experienced emotions, resilience, and work-related outcomes, invited teachers were informed about the purpose and expected duration of the current study. Following this procedure, more information concerning the anonymity of received data and the willingness to withdraw at any time was also explained to participants to ensure the confidentiality of their responses. In this regard, a convenience sampling method was employed in this study, which included 208 language teachers from Chinese universities, with 163 (78.4%) females and 45 (21.6%) males. The demographic survey revealed that the average age was 32.9 years ($SD = 7.34$), with 150 (72.1%) teachers under the age of 30. Among the participants, the average teaching experience was 6.38 years, with 151 (72.6%) teachers having less than three years' experience in teaching CSL, who aim at enhancing students' Chinese language proficiency, deepening their understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture, and fostering intercultural communication skills.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Emotion regulation scale

To gauge participants' use of emotion regulation strategies in the context of Chinese language teaching, we employed Gross and John (2003)'s emotional regulation questionnaire (ERQ), which includes two subdimensions, i.e. reappraisal (6 items, sample item: *I control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I'm in*) and suppression (4 items, sample item: *I control my emotions by not expressing them*). Invited teachers were asked to complete the survey by indicating their level of agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Relying on Hair et al.'s (2010) criteria, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for reappraisal and suppression showed excellent reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.914$ and 0.806 respectively). To test the construct validity, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) result demonstrated acceptable model fit for the emotion regulation scale ($\chi^2/df = 1.529 < 3$; CFI = $.984 > .900$; TLI = $.979 > .900$; RMSEA = $.051 < .080$; SRMR = $.035 < .080$).

3.2.2. Foreign language teaching enjoyment scale

Language teaching enjoyment was assessed using the 9-item short form of the foreign language enjoyment scale (S-FLES) developed and validated by Proietti Ergün and Dewaele (2021), which includes three factors, namely the teacher's role in creating a positive environment (3 items, sample item: *We form a tight group*), personal enjoyment (3 items, sample item: *In class, I feel proud of my accomplishments*) and social enjoyment (3 items, sample item: *The students are supportive*). Adopting a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), the S-FLES measured each teacher's self-reported enjoyment in teaching Chinese to international students. Previous studies have substantiated the S-FLES's internal consistency and justified its sound convergent and discriminant validity. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for overall teaching enjoyment and its three subdimensions demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .918, .810, .783$, and $.783$, respectively). In addition, CFA unveiled good validity in the context of CSL ($\chi^2/df = 2.066 < 3$; CFI = $.972 > .900$; TLI = $.963 > .900$; RMSEA = $.072 < .080$; SRMR = $.036 < .080$).

3.2.3. Teacher resilience scale

This study evaluated university CSL teachers' resilience using a 10-item CD-RISC scale adopted from Campbell-Sills and Stein (2007). This scale is designed to measure psychological resilience, assessing individuals' ability to cope with stress and adversity.

Participants responded to each statement using a 7-point Likert scale, indicating their degree of agreement, with options ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with an overall Cronbach's α of $.934$, showing acceptable internal consistency. Moreover, the CFA results unpacked that teacher resilience scale ($\chi^2/df = 2.454 < 3$; CFI = $.962 > .900$; TLI = $.951 > .900$; RMSEA = $.074 < .080$; SRMR = $.040 < .080$) in CSL context demonstrated satisfactory model fit.

3.2.4. Work engagement scale

Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova's (2006) work engagement scale was adopted to measure the level of language teachers' positive, fulfilling, work-related psychological state, which

comprises three subdimensions, namely vigor (6 items), dedication (5 items), and absorption (6 items), each reflecting a different aspect of work engagement. Teachers assessed their responses toward their work by indicating their level of agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In order to tailor the scale to the context of Chinese language instruction, we modified the items by prefacing them with the prompt, '*Looking back on the past three weeks of work ...*'. This study displayed Cronbach's alpha coefficients for overall work engagement, vigor, dedication, and absorption, and the results demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .938, .899, .838, \text{ and } .844$ respectively). The model fit for work engagement was also acceptable ($\chi^2/df = 2.118 < 3$; CFI = .933 > .900; TLI = .921 > .900; RMSEA = .073 < .080; SRMR = .049 < .080), indicating good construct validity.

3.2.5. Turnover intention scale

In the present study, we adopted the Bradley (2007) scale to measure an individual's intention or likelihood to leave their current job or organization, which captures thoughts, plans, or desires related to quitting or seeking employment elsewhere. It includes three items, for instance, *I've recently been thinking about resigning from teaching, transferring to another school, and pursuing a new and different profession*. Respondents were asked whether they had recently considered seeking a transfer to another school, resigning from teaching, or pursuing a completely different occupation. Similarly, they completed the questionnaire by indicating their level of agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 represented 'strongly disagree' and 7 represented 'strongly agree'. Additionally, the results of the CFA demonstrated good validity in the domain of CSL, with fit indices indicating an acceptable model fit. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency and convergent validity, with Cronbach's $\alpha = .833$, composite reliability (CR) = .834, and average variance extracted (AVE) = .628.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

Following the acquisition of informed consent from all participants, the third author distributed an electronic questionnaire link to teachers who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The survey was administered through the online platform Wenjuanxing (<http://www.wjx.cn/>), ensuring convenient and secure data collection. It took invited teachers approximately 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Prior to conducting the SEM analysis, data screening was carried out to ensure the accuracy and completeness, which included checking for missing values, assessing normality, and identifying outliers. Following this, CFA was conducted using AMOS 28.0 to examine the construct validity of the measurement scales for emotion regulation, language teaching enjoyment, teacher resilience, turnover intention, and work engagement within the context of CSL teaching. The factor loadings of the items were also calculated, and the results exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.4. Subsequently, a close examination of consistency reliability, descriptive statistics, and bivariate correlation was performed using SPSS 26.0. Finally, to answer questions, structural equation modeling (SEM) was utilized in AMOS 28.0 with maximum likelihood estimation to test and investigate the impact of emotion regulation, language teaching enjoyment and teacher resilience on work-related outcomes (i.e. work engagement and turnover intention). The

model fit was evaluated against fit indices such as the Chi-Square (χ^2/df), which should be less than 3.0; the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), which should be higher than .90; and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root-Mean Residual (SRMR), which should be lower than .08 (Kline 2016). The indirect effects were evaluated by bias-corrected 95% confidence interval using 2000 bootstrap samples.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

Table 1 represented the descriptive, correlation and validity analysis of the examined variables, including means, standard deviations, correlation matrix, consistency reliability, and convergent validity. In terms of emotion regulation, participants had a high level of reappraisal emotional strategy, whereas the mean value of suppression strategy was below 3.0. In addition, language teachers showed high levels of teaching enjoyment ($M = 5.82$, $SD = 0.92$) and teacher resilience ($M = 5.70$, $SD = 0.87$) in teaching Chinese, and exhibited a higher level of work engagement ($M = 5.82$, $SD = 0.78$) in comparison with their turnover intention ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 0.97$). Regarding the correlation matrix, the variables examined in this study were significantly correlated with each other. Suppression strategy was negatively related to teaching enjoyment, resilience and work engagement.

4.2. The structural equation model

To test the proposed hypotheses, SEM was performed to investigate the relationships between variables. The proposed model (Figure 2) showed good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.578 < 3$; CFI = .902 > .900; TLI = .901 > .900; RMSEA = .053 < .080; SRMR = .079 < .080) and the results of the model are detailed in Table 2.

The results displayed CSL teachers' usage of the cognitive reappraisal strategy significantly and positively predicted teaching enjoyment ($\beta = .602$, $p < .001$), and teacher resilience ($\beta = .497$, $p < .001$), while expressive suppression influenced teaching enjoyment ($\beta = -.24$, $p = .001 < .01$) and teacher resilience ($\beta = -.185$, $p = .024 < .05$) negatively,

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, correlation, reliability, and validity of the variables.

		RA	SP	ENJ	RS	TI	WE
Descriptive statistics	M	5.86	2.78	5.82	5.70	1.99	5.82
	SD	.83	.87	.92	.87	.97	.78
	Min	2.00	1.00	1.33	1.40	1.00	1.65
	Max	7.00	6.25	7.00	7.00	6.67	7.00
Correlation matrix	RA	.804	-.453**	.654**	.537**	-.463**	.640**
	SP		.716	-.458**	-.360**	.367**	-.430**
	ENJ			.748	.714**	-.551**	.723**
	RS				.767	-.582**	.658**
	TI					.792	-.607**
	WE						.729
Consistency Reliability	Cronbach $\alpha > .70$.914	.806	.918	.934	.833	.938
Convergent validity	CR > .70	.916	.808	.919	.934	.834	.950
	AVE > .50	.647	.513	.559	.588	.628	.531

Note: Reappraisal = RA; Suppression = SP; Enjoyment = ENJ; Resilience = RS; Work engagement = WE; Turnover intention = TI; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; the bold values along the diagonal represent the square roots of the AVE; **. p -value < .01 (two-tailed).

supporting Hypothesis 1. Concerning the link between emotion regulation and work outcomes, cognitive reappraisal influenced work engagement positively and significantly ($\beta = .242, p = .006 < .01$), but the impact of cognitive reappraisal on turnover intention was not significant ($\beta = -.101, p = .361 > .05$). In addition, expressive suppression was not significantly associated with work engagement or turnover intention, rejecting Hypothesis 2. CSL teaching enjoyment significantly and positively predicted work engagement ($\beta = .384, p < .001$), but it showed no significant influence on turnover intention ($\beta = -.182, p = .084$), rejecting Hypothesis 3. On the other hand, CSL teacher resilience significantly and positively predicted work engagement ($\beta = .258, p < .001$) and negatively predicted turnover intention ($\beta = -.405, p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 4.

4.3. Mediation analysis

To test Hypothesis 5, a bias-corrected bootstrap test was performed. The results of the mediation analysis (Table 3) demonstrated that the indirect effects of reappraisal strategy on work engagement via the mediation of enjoyment [effect = .214, 95% CI (.053, .425), $p = .006$] and resilience [effect = .118, 95% CI (.025, .259), $p = .012$] were significant, as the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval did not contain zero. Moreover, the indirect effects of reappraisal strategy on turnover intention via resilience were also significant. On the other hand, the indirect effects of suppression strategy on work engagement through the mediation of enjoyment [effect = $-.108$, 95% CI ($-.325, -.015$), $p = .015$]

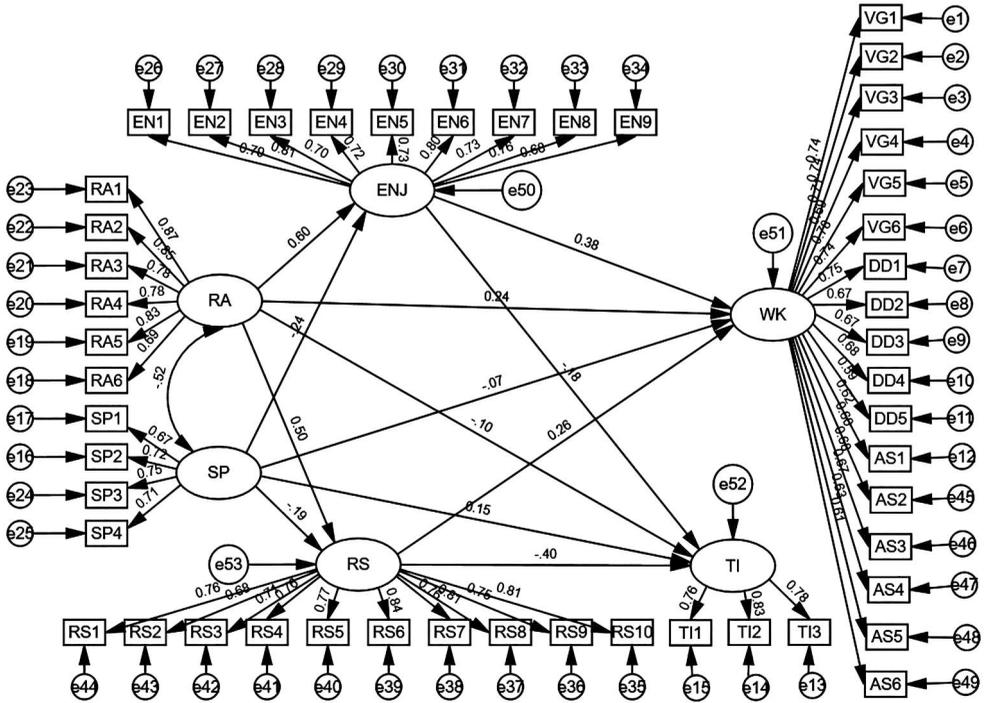


Figure 2. The standardized estimated structural paths from emotion regulation to work engagement and turnover intention.

Table 2. Path analysis results.

paths	Standardized Coefficient	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standard error	t	p
RA→ENJ	.602	.611	.078	7.840	***
RA→RS	.497	.458	.075	6.104	***
SP→ENJ	-.24	-.307	.095	-3.232	.001
SP→RS	-.185	-.216	.095	-2.259	.024
ENJ→WE	.384	.351	.079	4.431	***
ENJ→TI	-.182	-.172	.100	-1.729	.084
RS→WE	.258	.258	.067	3.883	***
RS→TI	-.405	-.420	.090	-4.649	***
RA→WE	.242	.224	.081	2.764	.006
RA→TI	-.101	-.097	.106	-.913	.361
SP→WE	-.069	-.081	.080	-1.004	.315
SP→TI	.147	.177	.108	1.637	.102

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

and resilience [effect = $-.056$, 95% CI ($-.204$, $-.004$), $p = .027$] were significant. Additionally, the indirect effects of suppression strategy on turnover intention via resilience were significant [effect = $.091$, 95% CI ($.003$, $.256$), $p = .040$].

5. Discussion

This study unpacked that CSL teachers' usage of cognitive reappraisal, as a type of adaptive emotion strategy, had a direct and positive effect on work engagement. This suggests that teachers who exercised more agency to reframe how they think about a situation in a positive way are more attentive to the profession and are more likely to feel energetic, dedicated, and absorbed in their work. This finding aligns with previous research (Greenier, Derakhshan, and Fathi 2021; Zeng et al. 2025), indicating the positive relationship between cognitive reappraisal and work engagement. For instance, Zeng et al. (2025) reported that reappraisal influenced work engagement positively among 1275 Chinese kindergarten teachers. As highlighted in Gross and John (2003), reappraisers are more likely to experience increased positive affect and reduced negative affect, leading to improved well-being. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that cognitive reappraisal enables teachers to manage stress effectively, sustain emotional equilibrium, and derive greater meaning from their work, which in turn, fosters higher levels of work engagement, characterized by increased energy, dedication, and absorption in their professional responsibilities.

Contrary to the positive effect of cognitive reappraisal on work engagement, our study confirmed that teachers' use of expressive suppression had no direct effect on their work engagement, in line with previous studies (i.e. Zeng et al. 2025). In this regard, the

Table 3. Indirect paths.

Indirect effect	Estimates	p	95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
RA→ENJ→WE	.214	.006	.053	.425
RA→RS→WE	.118	.012	.025	.259
RA→RS→TI	-.192	.001	-.366	-.074
SP→ENJ→WE	-.108	.015	-.325	-.015
SP→RS→WE	-.056	.027	-.204	-.004
SP→RS→TI	.091	.040	.003	.256

present study contributed to the emotion regulation literature by extending its investigation to the context of CSL education. In particular, the act of suppressing and hiding genuine emotions is mentally exhausting, demanding constant self-regulation, effort and often giving rise to feelings of inauthenticity and emotional disconnection from students or colleagues (Taxer and Frenzel 2015). These accumulated and unresolved emotions may contribute to elevated psychological pressure and heightened stress, leaving teachers with less energy to invest in teaching tasks. Teaching Chinese to non-native speakers involves linguistic and cultural misunderstandings, and teachers may feel pressure to act as cultural ambassadors, representing not just the language but also Chinese values and behavior. In this cross-cultural environment, the frequent need to suppress emotions may amplify the cognitive and emotional burden, negatively impacting work engagement. However, to protect their professional standing and increase the likelihood of future promotion, some teachers choose to hide their true emotions and refrain from expressing emotions that deviate from perceived expectations, ultimately resulting in the display of surface-level emotions at work and a superficial lower level of work engagement. Additionally, cultural norms can buffer this impact. In the context of the current study, emotional restraint is culturally valued and expressive suppression may be more normalized and less psychologically costly, thus minimizing its negative impact on their engagement.

The current finding of this study, that teaching enjoyment positively influenced work engagement among CSL teachers, is on par with the tenets of the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson 2004), which highlights how positive emotions broaden individuals' thought-action repertoires and build enduring personal resources. These results corroborated previous research (Fathi, Zhang, and Arefian 2024; Xiao, Fathi, and Mohammaddockht 2022), indicating that teaching enjoyment acted as a resource that helps increase work engagement. More specifically, conducting a cross-cultural comparison study, Azari Noughabi et al. (2024) investigated the relationship between foreign language teaching enjoyment and work engagement in both Iranian and Chinese samples, emphasizing the predictive role of teaching enjoyment in enhancing work engagement.

On the other hand, this study revealed that teacher resilience positively predicted work engagement, aligning with findings from some prior studies (Wang and Pan 2023; Wilcox and Lawson 2018; Xie 2021). The reason was that resilient teachers can cope effectively with the daily stresses and challenges of teaching, which helps them stay motivated and invested in their profession. In this regard, teachers who effectively cope with the challenges inherent in language teaching often experience a strong sense of satisfaction, which in turn contributes to elevated levels of work engagement (Demir Polat and İSken-der 2018). Another possible justification is that resilient teachers are more adept at regulating their emotions, which helps them sustain their teaching energy (S. Li 2023b), ultimately resulting in higher levels of work engagement and lower levels of turnover intention. In this regard, more resilient teachers performed better in handling occupational stress and setbacks, which reduces the emotional exhaustion that often leads to thoughts of quitting. Notably, the findings also revealed that teaching enjoyment exerted a more substantial effect on work engagement in comparison with the influence of teacher resilience.

The findings revealed that enjoyment and resilience are two important variables which positively mediated the association between emotion regulation strategies (i.e. cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) and work-related outcomes (i.e. engagement and

turnover intention), which appreciates the novelty in the field of CSL teaching. Initially, the results indicated that teachers who performed more cognitive reappraisal strategies tended to experience more enjoyment in language teaching, which in turn fosters greater work engagement. In view of this finding, when teachers reinterpret stressful teaching moments more positively, they are more likely to experience satisfaction and enjoyment in language teaching, which fuels teachers' commitment to the profession. What is more, the mediation role of teacher resilience indicated that teachers with a higher level of cognitive reappraisal strategies demonstrated a greater capacity to bounce back from difficulties and cope effectively with adversity in the face of job-related challenges, contributing to greater work engagement and a lower intention to leave the profession. This indirect pathway suggests that emotion regulation strategies, like reappraisal, may play a foundational role in shaping both psychological resources and occupational outcomes in educational settings (Ding 2022).

In addition, our study pointed out that expressive suppression indirectly reduced work engagement through its negative influence on teaching enjoyment. Gross and John (2003) reported that expressive suppressors were linked to worse emotional outcomes and interpersonal functioning, which were also tied to lower well-being. The reason is that, when considered as a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy, expressive suppression consumed cognitive resources and may lead to emotional exhaustion (Lim et al. 2024). While this response-focused emotion regulation strategy may help maintain classroom decorum temporarily, it often comes at a psychological cost. Therefore, this dampening of emotional expression can lower teaching enjoyment, as teachers may feel emotionally restrained and disconnected in their role, thereby resulting in decreased work engagement. In contrast, this study also investigated the link between expressive suppression and teacher resilience, which is the capacity to adapt, recover, and maintain functioning in the face of challenges (Li, Huang, and Liu 2023). The results found that frequent use of expressive suppression may inhibit the development of teacher resilience by increasing emotional burden and reducing coping efficacy (Mouatsou and Koutra 2023), leading to reduced work engagement and higher turnover intention, as teachers who feel less capable of handling professional demands were more likely to consider leaving the profession. Overall, within the CSL context, expressive suppression assumes a critical function by enabling teachers to uphold classroom authority and a professional image, avoid potential cultural misunderstandings, and foster a supportive learning environment.

6. Conclusions and implications

The findings unpacked that cognitive reappraisal left a significantly and directly impactful effect on work engagement, while expressive suppression failed to perform such an impact. The relationship between expressive suppression and work engagement was not direct, but rather operated through the mediating mechanisms of teaching enjoyment and teacher resilience. Put differently, suppressive teachers did not directly enhance teachers' commitment to their profession; yet, the effects mediated by teaching enjoyment and resilience enabled this construct to impact work engagement. Another key finding of this study was that cognitive reappraisal had a positive effect on both teaching enjoyment and teacher resilience, whereas expressive suppression exerted a negative influence on these two variables.

The findings of the current study have several implications for principals and teachers, offering both theoretical and practical insights. The interplay of enjoyment into the realm of language teaching research, as highlighted by the findings, offers a solid basis for developing targeted interventions to strengthen teacher work engagement. The integrated relationships among emotion regulation, enjoyment, resilience, and work-related outcomes underscore the importance of affective dimensions in promoting teacher well-being and professional sustainability. Additionally, by situating emotion regulation within the context of language teaching, this study enhances our understanding of how emotional experiences significantly contribute to shaping teachers' work engagement.

Practically, effective teacher retention efforts should encompass both external working conditions (e.g. pay and workload) and the enhancement of teachers' internal emotional regulation strategies. Accordingly, teacher education programs ought to include focused training on adaptive emotion regulation strategies, especially cognitive reappraisal, to better equip educators for emotional challenges in the classroom. Engaging teachers in collaborative activities that encourage the sharing of teaching strategies and authentic classroom experiences helps cultivate a supportive professional network, which in turn reinforces teachers' work engagement. Moreover, integrating mindfulness techniques and teacher well-being practices into professional development can cultivate positive emotional states, helping teachers manage stress and maintain emotional balance (Zhang, Fathi, and Naderi 2025). Equipping teachers with actionable coping strategies for handling classroom challenges and setbacks can bolster their resilience and problem-solving skills. Moreover, emotional labor in language teaching should be acknowledged and supported with resources such as counseling or peer support groups. Regular reflection activities, such as journaling or peer coaching, can help teachers develop the habit of reinterpreting difficult teaching situations constructively. In terms of educational administrators, schools should cultivate environments that actively promote positive emotional experiences for teachers. Therefore, fostering a school culture in which educators feel psychologically safe to express their genuine emotions in appropriate and constructive ways is essential. Leadership plays a critical role in establishing supportive structures, including access to mentoring, opportunities for meaningful collaboration, and readily available mental health resources. Taking together, these initiatives can enhance teachers' emotional well-being, strengthen professional relationships, and contribute to sustained work engagement and retention.

Despite the abovementioned insights, this study is subject to certain limitations that warrant further consideration. First, the sample was limited to CSL teachers based in Chinese universities, which may restrict the extent to which the findings can be generalized to broader teaching populations. Further studies should investigate the variations across different instructional and cultural contexts. Second, this study relied exclusively on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias and potential response distortion. To obtain more nuanced and comprehensive insights, future research should consider incorporating qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and case studies. Lastly, future studies are encouraged to examine other emotions (i.e. anger, frustration, and pride) alongside emotion regulation strategies to gain a more nuanced understanding of the affective mechanisms underlying work engagement. Such an approach would help clarify the predictive role of emotion

and reveal the complex relationships between emotion regulation and work intention from a holistic perspective (Pekrun 2006).

Author contributions

Jia Li, conceptualization, methodology, validation, reviewing, and editing. Yuhong Jiang, validation, reviewing, and editing. All authors have signed the statement and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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