

Exploring the Influence of Emotional Control on the University Graduates' Job Performance in Guangdong, China

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the impact of emotional regulation on job performance among university graduates in Guangdong, China. Emotional regulation is assessed through three key dimensions: stress resistance, optimism and emotional control. The study explores the relationship between graduates' emotional regulation abilities and workplace performance, particularly amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings reveal that effective emotional regulation significantly influences graduates' job performance, aiding them in coping with challenges, managing stress, and maintaining a positive work attitude. Notably, emotional regulation is particularly crucial for graduates in Guangdong, a region characterized by diverse industries and intense competition. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, emotional regulation proves to be essential for adapting to uncertainties and maintaining productivity. The study suggests that enhancing emotional regulation skills can improve graduates' workplace competitiveness, offering valuable insights for success in the competitive job market, especially during uncertain times like the COVID-19 pandemic. Educational institutions and employers can contribute by providing emotional management training and support to improve graduates' emotional regulation skills, thus enhancing their career prospects.

Keywords: Emotional Regulation, Job Performance, university graduates, stress resistance, optimism, emotional control

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the way we live and work has fundamentally changed around the world. The epidemic has had a broad and far-reaching impact on society as a whole, including a significant impact on university graduates and their performance at work in Guangdong Province, China (Zheng et al., 2022). The epidemic has had a major impact on the education system, job market and economy of Guangdong Province, forcing college graduates to face unprecedented challenges. Against this background, it becomes particularly important to study the impact of affective regulation on the job performance of college graduates in Guangdong Province (Ao & Li, 2023).

First, the COVID-19 epidemic has caused universities and graduates in Guangdong Province to face tremendous adaptability pressure. Schools have been forced to adopt online education methods, which has limited the interaction between students and teachers and challenged the quality of education. College graduates completing their studies in this environment may have

faced psychological stress and emotional distress, which may affect their ability to regulate emotions.

Secondly, COVID-19 has had a severe impact on the job market in Guangdong Province. Due to the impact of the epidemic, companies have had to take measures such as working remotely and reducing employee recruitment, resulting in a decrease in employment opportunities. This makes college graduates in Guangdong Province face more intense competition and need to have higher emotional regulation capabilities to cope with pressure and setbacks at work.

In addition, the emotional regulation ability of college graduates is crucial to their career development and job performance. Emotional regulation involves the ability to deal with emotions and emotions, including skills in emotional recognition, self-regulation, and coping with stress. In a work environment full of uncertainty and challenges, emotional regulation abilities can help college graduates adapt and cope better and improve job performance.

Therefore, it is of great significance to study the impact of emotion regulation on the job performance of university graduates in Guangdong Province. Understanding the relationship between emotion regulation and job performance can help develop better training and support plans to help college graduates better cope with post-pandemic career challenges. This study will help deepen our understanding of college graduates' career preparation and performance in special circumstances and provide strong guidance for higher education and employment policies in Guangdong Province.

1.2 Research questions and research objectives

1.2.1 Research problem

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a profound impact on the job performance of Guangdong University graduates, and emotional regulation may play an important role in this process. Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of emotion regulation on the job performance of Guangdong University graduates, especially considering the factors of the epidemic, and examine the following issues:

(1) How has the COVID-19 epidemic affected the employment and career development of Guangdong University graduates?

(2) What are the emotional states and emotion regulation strategies of Guangdong University graduates when facing the epidemic?

(3) Is there a relationship between emotion regulation strategies and graduates' job performance, especially in the context of the epidemic?

(4) Does emotion regulation have a positive or negative impact on the career achievement, job satisfaction and career adaptability of Guangdong University graduates?

1.2.2 Research objectives:

The main goal of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on the job performance of Guangdong University graduates and the role of emotional regulation in it. To achieve this goal, we will employ both quantitative and qualitative research methods to answer the research questions posed above. The specific research objectives are as follows:

(1) Describe the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on the employment and career development of Guangdong University graduates, including changes in employment rates, salaries, career choices, etc.

(2) Analyze the emotional state and emotion regulation strategies of Guangdong University graduates when facing the epidemic, including ways of coping with anxiety, stress and frustration.

(3) Explore the association between emotion regulation strategies and graduate job performance, including measures of job performance, job satisfaction, and career adaptability.

(4) Identify the positive and negative impacts of emotion regulation on the career achievements of Guangdong University graduates in the context of the epidemic, in order to provide relevant suggestions and guidance.

By studying these issues, we hope to provide Guangdong University graduates with better emotion management strategies to improve their job performance and provide more insights into employment challenges during the epidemic, thereby helping graduates better adapt to changing changes professional environment.

2. Emotional Regulation

The four main components of this topic are: (1) definition; (2) the theory of emotional regulation; (3) dimension; and (4) measurement.

2.1 Definition of emotional regulation

Adjusting emotions can be either a conscious or unconscious process(Gross, 2013). Emotional regulation is unrelated to other psychological processes such as opinions and beliefs(Shydelko, 2017). Emotional regulation can be observed through subjective reports, physiological activities, and physical responses(Adolphs & Anderson, 2018). It can help individuals effectively control their emotions, enhance positive emotions, and boost their innovative capabilities(Park et al., 2022). Emotional regulation is considered a favorable aspect of one's personality. Individuals who possess emotional regulation tend to lead more content lives and strengthen their positive connections with a brand's personality(Bhalla & Pathak, 2023). According to research conducted by OECD-related scholars, emotional regulation pertains to the differences in frequency, variability, intensity, and quality of an individual's emotional skills. Altruism and enthusiasm are central to positive emotions, while anxiety and fear are central to negative ones(OECD, 2017). Educational expectations, anxiety assessments, life satisfaction, happiness, health, and emotional regulation are closely interconnected(Liu et al., 2021). Emotional regulation involves the ability to cope with negative emotional experiences and stressors, and it plays a pivotal role in emotional management(OECD, 2015; Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Therefore, this article defines emotional regulation as an individual's effective management of their emotions and actively adopting optimistic attitudes towards life.

2.2 Theory of emotional regulation

The Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) is a stress approach aimed at understanding the origins of stress and how individuals can effectively respond to it. People will invest significant effort in safeguarding their valuable resources(Hobfoll, 1989).Instances of tension and stress reactions, such as work burnout, depression, and adverse physical and mental outcomes, are more likely to occur when individuals experience resource depletions in their work environment (Hobfoll, 2000). COR is a dynamic theory. Employees pay attention to and

examine how resources change over time, driven by the motivation to protect their existing resources and acquire new ones through alternative means (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

The fundamental goal of COR theory is that individuals (and groups) put in significant effort to acquire, preserve, nurture, and safeguard their core assets. It illustrates that resources are akin to backpacks or caravans for both individuals and organizations in ecological contexts. First, employees who lack resources are prone to resource losses, while the capacity to obtain resources may be stronger. Second, the spiral of stress leads to a decrease in resources and exacerbates the cycle of resource loss. Third, the scale and pace of resource acquisition gradually increase. COR consists of four principles: the principle of primary resource loss, resource investment principle, gain paradox principle, and the principle of desperation (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

When leaders and subordinates have poor emotional regulation, subordinates are most susceptible to emotional exhaustion (David et al., 2020). When a leader experiences low emotional exhaustion, it has a positive effect on their retention rate and a negative impact on their followers. For employees with high emotional regulation, investing in their job reduces emotional fatigue and has a beneficial impact on reducing counterproductive work behaviors (Chen et al., 2020). Utilizing the COR theory to comprehend maladaptive emotional regulation in daily life, including self-blame, rumination, and catastrophizing, can contribute to reducing the risk of depression (She et al., 2021). Enhancing resources is an effective strategy to bolster employee capabilities. Improving emotional regulation skills can mitigate anxiety and concerns, which in turn enhances employee job satisfaction (Zyberaj & Bakaç, 2022). In times of low job security during a crisis, companies develop psychological capital, encompassing self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, to enhance employees' psychological flexibility and well-being (Ngo et al., 2023).

2.3 Dimension of emotional regulation

Automatic emotional regulation and conscious emotional regulation are two distinct processes that can be either consciously controlled or occur unconsciously (Braunstein et al., 2017). The overall score of the 24 neurotic personality dimensions has a negative impact on life satisfaction and positive assessments, with 20 dimensions showing significant statistical variances (Szcześniak et al., 2019).

By using a children's behavior checklist to evaluate children's emotional reactivity, anxiety, depression, and somatic complaints, researchers observed a significant enhancement in social-emotional development scores (Cosso et al., 2022). Social and emotional competence relies on emotional regulation, and the OECD utilizes "The Big Five Model" in social and emotional research. The emotional regulation dimension includes stress resistance, optimism, and emotional control. According to various studies, emotional regulation is described as in Table 2.5 (OECD, 2015, 2021; Soto & John, 2017; Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2021).

Table 1 Dimension of emotional regulation from literature review

Dimension of emotional regulation from theory	Researchers/year	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency
optimism	(OECD, 2015), (Soto & John, 2017),(Chernyshenko et al., 2018),(Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019), (Martins-Klein et al., 2020),(OECD, 2021),(Yuan et al., 2021),(Liu et al., 2021), (Dolev et al., 2021), (Cuartas, 2022),(Liu et al., 2022),(Ngo et al., 2023), (Bhalla & Pathak, 2023).	13	38
emotional control	(OECD, 2015), (Soto & John, 2017),(Chernyshenko et al., 2018),(Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019), (OECD, 2021),(Yuan et al., 2021),(Liu et al., 2021), (Liu et al., 2022),(Fuerte-Montaña et al., 2022) ,(Ngo et al., 2023).	10	25
stress resistance	(OECD, 2015), (Cai et al., 2016), (Soto & John, 2017),(Chernyshenko et al., 2018), (Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019), (OECD, 2021), (Yuan et al., 2021),(Liu et al., 2021),(Liu et al., 2022),(Cosso et al., 2022).	10	15
negative	(Martins-Klein et al., 2020),(Bhalla & Pathak, 2023).	2	5
conscious	(Cai et al., 2016),(Braunstein et al., 2017).	2	3
resilience	(Ngo et al., 2023)	1	1

Based on theoretical investigation and the frequency chart, this article discusses three dimensions of emotional regulation: optimism (entailing positive and hopeful expectations for oneself and life in general), emotional control (involving effective methods to manage anger, frustration, and irritability when faced with challenges), and stress resistance (pertaining to the ability to modulate anxiety and calmly address problems) (OECD, 2015, 2021; Soto & John, 2017; Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2021). Positivity regarding one's future is the key element of maintaining an optimistic outlook on life. As per the theoretical analysis and the data presented in the frequency table, the dimensions of emotional regulation discussed in this paper encompass optimism (reflecting positive and hopeful expectations for oneself and life in general), emotional control (involving effective strategies for managing anger, frustration, and irritation in the face of challenges), and stress resistance (relating to the ability to regulate anxiety and calmly tackle problems) (OECD, 2015, 2021; Soto & John, 2017; Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2021).

2.4 Measurement of emotional regulation

Based on the examination of existing literature and the data presented in Table 2.1, there are three key dimensions pertaining to emotional regulation: optimism, emotional control, and stress resistance.

2.4.1 Stress resistance

Stress resistance involves managing worry and stress peacefully (Kankaraš et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Professionals exhibit lower stress resistance and more biases compared to practitioners. Short-term employees display low risk tolerance and biases in stress resistance (Rosales-Pérez et al., 2021). Millennials' social and political context contributes to their stress resilience, but job flexibility can lead to disloyalty and harm businesses (Cismaru & Iunius, 2019). Psychological capital serves as a mediator for the link between strong stress resistance and reduced employee burnout. High emotional intelligence (EQ) leaders can maintain stress resistance and decrease job dissatisfaction. High stress resistance positively correlates with job performance, significantly enhancing overall company performance (Gong et al., 2019; George et al., 2023). Robust psychological resilience is a valuable asset in challenging work environments, where employees' ability to control emotions and anxiety negatively correlates (Koteneva & Chelyshev, 2020).

Stress resistance, key for professionals, varies among groups. Millennials' social context impacts resilience. Psychological capital mediates lower stress resistance and reduced burnout. Emotional intelligence in leaders helps maintain stress resistance. Strong stress resistance boosts job performance and overall company success. Psychological resilience is crucial in challenging work environments.

2.4.2 Optimism

Optimism is characterized as maintaining a positive outlook towards both individuals and life (Kankaraš et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Optimism is considered an inherent aspect of one's personality, and it can be influenced by various environmental factors. When people face stress, adopting an optimistic perspective can alleviate their stress levels (Iacoviello & Charney, 2020). Compared to professionals, practitioners exhibit differences in their levels of optimism and tend to be more prone to bias. Additionally, employees with fewer years of job experience tend to have lower risk tolerance and a higher inclination toward optimism bias (Rosales-Pérez et al., 2021). Optimism plays a significant role in promoting both physical and mental well-being in individuals, and it can effectively reduce anxiety and stress when appropriate measures are taken (Guo et al., 2022). Research has demonstrated that optimism is positively correlated with psychological capital and inversely related to job burnout among employees. Psychological capital serves as an intermediary factor between the two. Leaders with high emotional intelligence consistently support their employees' optimistic outlook, which can mitigate job dissatisfaction. This is because optimism is significantly and positively associated with job performance, and highly optimistic employees can significantly contribute to an organization's overall job performance (George et al., 2023).

Optimism, a positive attitude towards life, influences personality and is influenced by the environment. It aids stress relief and is more prevalent in professionals than practitioners. Optimism promotes physical and mental health, reduces anxiety and stress. It correlates with psychological capital, reducing job burnout, and benefits job performance when supported by emotionally intelligent leaders.

2.4.3 Emotional control

Individuals with righteous thoughts cooperate, are friendly and agreeable, care about others, and promote their well-being and family behavior. Their cognitive control and physiological changes are positive, resulting in increased empathy and emotional management (Vigouroux & Scola, 2018). Emotional control involves managing one's anger and using appropriate coping strategies when dealing with setbacks (Kankaraš et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Compared to practitioners, there are disparities in emotional control, and they tend to display more bias. Additionally, employees with fewer years of experience in the workforce have lower tolerance for risk and are more vulnerable to emotional control biases (Rosales-Pérez et al., 2021). Emotional control positively impacts both physical and mental health and can reduce anxiety and stress to an equal extent (Guo et al., 2022). Individual variations in personality and the circumstances of recent graduates seeking employment have varying levels of influence on their emotional disturbances, such as dissatisfaction and fatigue, and attention difficulties, such as academic and social activities. It has been observed that recent graduates often encounter challenges in managing their emotions (Melloy et al., 2018).

Emotional control, influenced by righteous thoughts and experience, impacts empathy and coping. Disparities exist among practitioners, and less experienced employees may struggle with emotional bias. Effective emotional control positively affects physical and mental health, reducing anxiety and stress. Recent graduates face challenges in managing emotions due to personality variations and transitional circumstances.

Gross pioneered the development of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), addressing cognitive appraisal and two emotional regulation strategies. He created a questionnaire with ten items on adult emotional regulation mechanisms, six related to recognition and re-evaluation, and four focusing on expression suppression (Gross, 1998). The research employed a stratified two-stage cluster sampling methodology. The first stage involved selecting schools, followed by sampling students. Additionally, parents, teachers, and principals completed questionnaires during student surveys (Liu et al., 2021). When it comes to measurement questions, the emotional regulation dimension comprises three skills: stress resistance, optimism, and emotional control. To assess graduates' self-perception, this study integrated test questions from various researchers, selecting three questions for each skill, as presented in Table 2.6 (OECD, 2015, 2021; Kankaraš et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2022).

Table 2 Emotional regulation operational definition, dimensions, indicators, items, and researchers/year

Variable and operational definition	Dimensions /construct	Index	Indicators	Item	Researchers /year
Emotional regulation operational definition: stress resistance, optimism,	stress resistance	modulating anxiety and response to stress	stress	1.Deal with pressure well.	(OECD, 2015, 2021; Soto & John, 2017; Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019; Zhang
			anxiety	2.Easily nervous.	
				3.Worried about many things.	
				4.Afraid of many things.	
				5.Easy to panic.	

and emotional control.	optimism	positive expectations for self and life	hope	6.Often feel sad.	et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2021).
				7.Good things will happen.	
				8.Wake up almost every day and hate.	
				9.Enjoy life.	
				10.Work happily.	
	emotional control	keeps their emotions and temper under control	mood	11.Expect bad things to happen.	
				12.Not easy to be frustrated.	
				13.Unpredictable emotions.	
				14.Even in the case of nervousness, keep calm.	
				15.Often angry.	
				16.Control anger.	

CONCLUSION

The impact of emotional regulation on the job performance of Guangdong university graduates is an important study that studies the relationship between graduates' job performance and emotional regulation in Guangdong. In this study, we explore how emotion regulation affects college graduates' performance in the workplace, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through an in-depth analysis of the correlation between graduates' emotion regulation abilities and job performance, we reached the following conclusions.

First, we found that emotion regulation has an important impact on graduates' job performance. Graduates' emotional regulation skills play a vital role in the workplace, helping them better cope with challenges, manage stress and maintain a positive work attitude. The increased instability and uncertainty of the work environment during the COVID-19 pandemic makes the ability to regulate emotions even more important. Graduates who are able to regulate their emotions effectively are more likely to perform well at work because they are better able to adapt to change and cope with difficulties.

Second, we observed that emotion regulation is particularly important for graduates from Guangdong. Guangdong is one of China's manufacturing and economic centers, with diversified industries and international employment opportunities. In this highly competitive area, graduates need to have high emotional regulation skills to cope with fierce competition and work pressure. Research shows that graduates who excel in emotional regulation are more likely to integrate into the work environment in Guangdong and achieve success.

Additionally, we found that emotion regulation is particularly important for job performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. This global crisis has brought huge challenges to the work environment and personal lives. In this context, emotional regulation skills become an even more critical factor in helping graduates cope with uncertainty, anxiety and stress. Those graduates who can effectively regulate their emotions are more likely to remain

productive during this period, maintain a positive work attitude, and adapt to new ways of working.

In summary, emotion regulation has a significant impact on the job performance of college graduates in Guangdong, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Graduates can enhance their competitiveness in the workplace by improving their emotional regulation abilities, better adapt to changes, effectively cope with challenges, and maintain a positive work attitude. This research provides college students with important insights into how to succeed in a competitive job market, especially during uncertain times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, educational institutions and employers can help graduates improve their emotion regulation skills by providing emotion management training and support, thus improving their career prospects. Next, based on the theory of structural equation modeling, the researchers used a mixed research method of first quantitative and then qualitative to further verify the correlation between the two.

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