

# Naturally felt emotions, work engagement: the moderating role of perceived organizational support

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## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to investigate whether or not emotional labor strategy (i.e., naturally felt emotions) significantly predicts work engagement (i.e., vigor, dedication, absorption) among academicians in a higher education setting. It also evaluates the role of perceived organizational support (POS) as the moderating variable between naturally felt emotions (NFE) and work engagement. This study employs a survey questionnaire, and data collected from private universities in Central Java, Indonesia. To analyze the data and test the proposed model, the partial least squares structural equation modelling approach was employed. The findings demonstrate that: i) NFE are significantly and positively related to all work engagement dimensions; and ii) POS is proven insignificant to moderate the relationship between NFE and work engagement dimensions. The results of this study complement the literature by addressing associations between NFE and work-related outcomes (i.e., work engagement), especially in the Indonesian academic context. In addition, this study also confirms the insignificant role of POS which is based on norms of mutuality between the organization and employee. Finally, the study offers recommendations and conclusions to achieve long-term objectives for higher education institutions.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Within the literature, most organizations, including higher education institutions, consider the work engagement of employees as a key success factor for an organization in a competitive environment. Employees who have high work engagement are believed to be more productive, profitable, safer, and healthier [1]. In addition, engaged employees are motivated to commit their remaining years to their current organization, which means turnover intention among employees is low [2]. Furthermore, highly engaged employees tend to be more creative and work diligently [3]. Similarly, when it comes to higher education, engaged university lecturers are perceived to be more loyal, productive, passionate and involved in the higher education institutions they are attached [4]. Therefore, no doubt engaged university lecturers are urgently required in the workplace and become the most critical component for higher education institutions to achieve organizational goals [5]. In addition, based on the existing literature, organizational support is believed to be a pivotal element in boosting employees' work engagement [6]–[8]. For this reason, higher education institutions should view the organizational support perceived by employees to improve the quality of academician work engagement.

However, in reality, enabling private university lecturers in Central Java, Indonesia to commit to a high level of work engagement is a very daunting task for higher education institutions. It is undeniable that the current workload of lecturers continues to increase over time. Lecturers in Central Java Indonesia are currently not only required to carry out the *Tri Dharma*, namely teaching, research, and community service but also perform several other activities that support the success of higher education institutions such as developing students' skills [9], doing administrative tasks [10], tutoring [11], attending meetings or participating in lecturer professional activities. This excessive workload is what makes work stress and burnout among lecturers unavoidable. A prior study reported that work stress is negatively associated with work engagement [12], [13]. In addition, as professional educators, private university lecturers in Central Java, Indonesia are also required to perform emotional labor [14]. Performing emotional labor can be an extremely draining experience for their energy, emotions and feelings [15], job dissatisfaction [16], burnout [17], and work violence [18]. If these conditions continue to persist, it will risk reducing the work engagement level of private university lecturers in Central Java, Indonesia in their work and will ultimately reduce performance.

Emotional labor is regulating emotions and expressions for organizational goals [19], [20]. Since universities are increasingly considered service institutions, and students are perceived as customers [21], the concept of emotional labor becomes important and mandatory for university lecturers. Conceptually, naturally felt emotions (NFE), as one of the emotional strategies refers to the expression of genuine emotions that do not require modification of the setting [22]. In other words, an NFE is someone who spontaneously and honestly experiences and expresses their feelings. They express emotions without feeling that they are being emotional. Nonetheless, NFE remains part of emotional labor strategies [23]. Prior empirical studies mostly reported that NFE is negatively related to stress and burnout [24], [25], and intention to leave [26]. In addition, NFE is positively linked to job satisfaction [27], and also mental well-being [28]. Furthermore, in the academic context, teaching and learning activities are more effective when university lecturers perform performing NFE [29].

The description illustrates the gap between expectations and reality. Therefore, it is necessary to find solutions to increase high work engagement among lecturers of private universities in Central Java, Indonesia. By solely focusing on NFE strategies, this study aims to investigate whether or not NFE significantly predicts work engagement among academicians. It also examines the role of perceived organizational support (POS) as the moderating variable in the relationship between NFE and work engagement.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The job demands-resources theory (JD-R theory) and organizational support theory (OST) are employed as the underpinning theory of this study. The JD-R theory highlights how resources (motivation) and demands (workload) are linked to positive outcomes (work engagement) and negative outcomes (burnout) [30], [31]. To achieve the higher education institution's goals, JD-R theory suggests that the university must increase the values of its resources that are work-related as abundant resources can withstand the impact of supply and demand on work-related (e.g. emotions). Hence, in the context of this study, university lecturer enhances their resources through emotional management to successfully cope with high job demands at work. As an occupational resource, NFE is considered to be able to enhance university lecturers' work engagement. In this case, university lecturers utilize occupational resources (i.e. NFE) to increase vigor, dedication, and absorptiveness, ultimately leading to institutional success and positive individual performance. In terms of NFE, this concept first is introduced by Ashforth and Humphrey in 1993 [23]. In simple terms, NFE is defined as an attempt to express what is felt as an authentic experience. Since there is no need to fake emotions and expressions, positive displays will appear automatically. Thus, conceptually, NFE is one expressing genuine emotions without modifying the rules [32]. According to Ashforth and Humphrey [23], deep acting and NFE are similar in that both involve real experienced emotions. NFE maximizes positive emotions, while deep acting diminishes negative emotions. Within the literature, most studies reveal that NFE strongly correlated with outputs such as job satisfaction [33], [34], organizational citizenship behavior [35], creativity [36], work-family enrichment [37], and customer loyalty and satisfaction [38].

In addition, perception of organizational support (POS) refers to employees' perceptiveness of how well their organization values their contributions and considers their welfare [39]. A high perception of organizational support increases employees' expectations of rewards [39] and employees' attachment to the organization [40]. OST suggests that organizational support creates a norm of mutuality between the organization and employees [39]. This means, that when organizational support is high, employees must reward goodwill by exhibiting positive attitudes and behaviors in the workplace. On the other hand, when an organization does not provide support, employees tend to alternate between showing negative attitudes and behaviors and exhibiting negative behaviors.

### 2.1. Naturally felt emotions and work engagement

Within the higher education context, a university lecturer who can spontaneously express their emotions following the emotions felt, brings advantages to the workplace, because expressing NFE is considered an easy process and brings positive energy and vibes to the workplace. In the context of this study, with NFE, university lecturers are not required to act out behaviors that do not follow their true emotions. In this case, university lecturers do not need to construct certain emotions to match what is expected of a professional. The university lecturers freely express their emotions and feel happy, and enthusiastic in carrying out their work. So that positive energy can be created in the workplace. In other words, NFE brings a bright side to university lecturers' engagement at work [41]. Based on this explanation, the hypotheses formulated are: i) NFE and vigor have a positive relationship (H1); ii) NFE and dedication have a positive relationship (H2); and iii) NFE and absorption have a positive relationship (H3).

### 2.2. The role of perceived organizational support as moderator

Within the higher education context, a university lecturer who has high POS will contribute more to work engagement, compared to those low in POS [42]. University lecturers are motivated to exhibit positive work-related behaviors when they feel strongly connected to the institution through support from the institution. In short, when the organizational support perceived by university lecturers is great, then they have a positive perception of organizational support and will strengthen the relationship between NFE and work engagement in the end. Based on this explanation, the hypotheses formulated are: i) POS will significantly and positively moderate the relationship between NFE and vigor (H4); ii) POS will significantly and positively moderate the relationship between NFE and dedication (H5); and iii) POS will significantly and positively moderate the relationship between NFE and absorption (H6).

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study. The framework consists of NFE as an exogenous variable, work engagement as an endogenous variable, and POS as a moderating variable. There are six hypotheses depicted in the framework. Three hypotheses represent the direct relationship between NFE and work engagement dimensions (H1, H2, H3), while the other three represent the indirect relationship with POS as the moderating variable in the relationship between NFE and work engagement (H4, H5, H6).

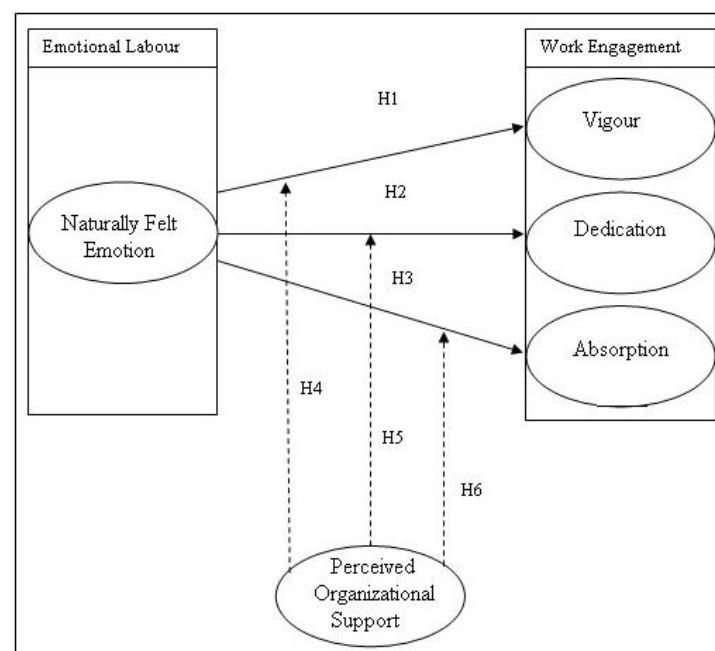


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

### 3.1. Data collection and respondent characteristics

Quantitative research with a purposive sampling technique was used in this study. There were 12 questions with a Likert scale of 1 to 5 used to obtain field data, while to analyze the data and test the proposed model, the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) approach was employed.

In addition, respondents to this study were faculty members at 37 private universities in Central Java, Indonesia. About 712 university lecturers were selected based on gender, age, and job position. The final sample consisted of 321 complete responses by stratified random sampling.

Table 1 illustrates the characteristics of respondents in this study. The gender category is divided into two types, namely male and female. In addition, the age category is divided into four age ranges, namely more than 20 years less than 30 years, more than 30 years less than 40 years, more than 40 years less than 50 years and more than 50 years. Finally, the functional position category is divided into four levels, namely Instructor, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor.

Table 1. Respondent characteristic

Respondent characteristic	N	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	147	46
Female	174	54
Age		
More than 20 less than 30 years old	96	30
More than 30 less than 40 years old	147	46
More than 40 less than 50 years old	73	23
More than 50 years old	5	1
Position		
Professor	0	0
Associate Professor	45	14
Assistant Professor	99	31
Instructor	177	55

Referring to data in Table 1, the gender profile shows that 46% of respondents are male and 54% are female. Furthermore, in the age profile, the majority of respondents' ages are in the range of more than 30 years and less than 40 years, with a percentage of 46%. In addition, in functional positions, most respondents are Instructors, with a percentage of 55%.

### 3.2. Measurement scale

The instruments used were adapted and adopted from previous literature. A pilot test was conducted by testing with five academic experts to check if there were inconsistencies in wording and items that were unclear or ambiguous, and then the questionnaire was corrected and refined. Overall, the research instruments in this study are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Research instrument

Construct	Items	Sources
Emotional labor (NFE)	The emotions I express to students are genuine The emotions I show students come naturally The emotions I show to my students match the emotions I feel	[43]
Work engagement (vigor)	At my work, I feel bursting with energy At my job, I feel strong and vigorous When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	[44]
Work engagement (dedication)	I am enthusiastic about my job My job inspires me I am proud of the work that I do	[44]
Work engagement (absorption)	I feel happy when I am working intensely I am immersed in my work I get carried away when I'm working	[44]
POS	The institution values my contribution to its well-being. The institution I work for appreciates any extra effort from me. The organization I work for acknowledges any complaints from me. The institution cares about my well-being. The institution I work for takes notice when I do my best job. The institution cares about my general satisfaction at work. The institution I work for shows a lot of concern for me. The institution takes pride in my accomplishments at work.	[45]

Table 2 illustrates the research instrument in this study. NFE was measured by adapting a questionnaire [43]. The questionnaire consisted of three items and the Likert scale used ranges from 1=never to 5=always. Factor loadings for each item show a number above 0.70 (NFE=0.792; 0.924; 0.869).

Meanwhile, work engagement was measured by an adopted [44] questionnaire. The whole dimension consists of nine items. Utilized a Likert scale, 1=never to 5=always. All dimensions show factor loadings pass above 0.70 (vigor=0.875; 0.845; 0.882; dedication=0.931 0.736; 0.830; absorption=0.806; 0.825; 0.838). In addition, POS was measured by adapting [45] 's questionnaire and the whole questions consisted of eight items. Utilized a Likert scale, 1=never to 5=always. All dimensions show factor loadings pass above 0.70 (POS=0.870; 0.763; 0.816; 0.833; 0.716; 0.810; 0.811; 0.779).

### 3.3. Data analysis

To analyze the data and test the hypothesis, the PLS-SEM approach was employed. Measurement is carried out in two steps, namely the measurement model and the structural model [46]. In the measurement model, the method contains convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability analysis. Meanwhile, in the structural model, the method contains, collinearity,  $R^2$ ,  $f^2$ , and model fit as also the result of testing hypotheses and descriptive statistics. Well-established validation procedures are used to measure the reliability and validity of items. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was used to evaluate construct reliability (Table 3). As a thumb rule, the satisfactory reliability coefficient value is in the range of 0.78 to 0.89 [47]. The convergent and discriminant validity measures were measured using smartPLS 3.0 software. The bootstrapping procedure was conducted to measure collinearity,  $R^2$ ,  $f^2$ , and model fit as well as testing hypotheses.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Measurement model analysis

A validity and reliability test is carried out in measurement model analysis. A validity test was conducted to see how good a test is for a particular situation, while a reliability to see how trustworthy a score on that test would be. Simply put, validity and reliability tests measure accuracy and how consistent and stable the instrument is. When average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and Cronbach's alpha (CA) are higher than 0.70; 0.50; 0.70; and 0.80, it implies that validity and reliability are secured [47]. Overall, the convergent validity and reliability test results of this study are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Convergent validity and reliability

Construct	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR	CA
NFE	NAFE1	0.792	0.745	0.897	0.831
	NAFE2	0.924			
	NAFE3	0.869			
VIG	VGR1	0.875	0.752	0.901	0.835
	VGR2	0.845			
	VGR3	0.882			
DED	DD1	0.931	0.704	0.876	0.786
	DD2	0.736			
	DD3	0.830			
ABS	ABN1	0.806	0.677	0.863	0.765
	ABN2	0.825			
	ABN3	0.838			
POS	POSU1	0.870	0.642	0.935	0.921
	POSU2	0.763			
	POSU3	0.816			
	POSU4	0.833			
	POSU5	0.716			
	POSU6	0.810			
	POSU7	0.811			
	POSU8	0.779			
Moderating effect (ME)-1	ME1	1.097	1.000	1.000	1.000
Moderating effect (ME)-2	ME2	1.097	1.000	1.000	1.000
Moderating effect (ME)-3	ME3	1.097	1.000	1.000	1.000

Source: PLS algorithm

Table 3 illustrates the test result of construct validity and reliability NFE, vigor, dedication, absorption, and POS. Referring to Table 3, the PLS algorithm test shows that all outer loadings were consistent with previous research [47] suggesting a threshold of 0.708. Also, as reported by Hair *et al.* [47] the AVE, combined reliability and CA of all constituents exceeded cut-off values of 0.50, 0.70 and 0.70. Overall, the converged validity and reliability of this study showed good results.

In addition, the Fornell-Larcker criterion is used to test the validity of the discriminant [47]. A discriminant validity test is performed to ensure that each concept in each latent model varies with the other

variables. A high discriminant validity value indicates that a construct is unique and can explain the phenomenon being measured. A construct is said to be valid by comparing the root value of the AVE with the correlation value between latent variables. The root value of AVE must be greater than the correlation between latent variables [47]. Overall, the results of the discriminant validity test for this study are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Discriminant validity

	ABS	DED	ME1	ME2	ME3	NFE	POS	VIG
ABS	0.823							
DED	0.377	0.839						
Moderating effect (ME)-1	0.012	-0.007	1.000					
Moderating effect (ME)-2	0.012	-0.007	1.000	1.000				
Moderating effect (ME)-3	0.012	-0.007	1.000	1.000	1.000			
NFE	0.328	0.324	-0.229	-0.229	-0.229	0.863		
POS	0.007	0.074	-0.340	-0.340	-0.340	0.270	0.801	
VIG	0.154	0.155	-0.129	-0.129	-0.129	0.289	0.557	0.867

Source: PLS algorithm

Referring to Table 4, the test results show the square root of the AVE is higher than the highest correlation with other latent variables. The square root of the AVE can be seen from the diagonal values and bolded values. Moreover, lateral collinearity is assessed to ensure there are no issues in the structural model. According to Hair *et al.* [47], variance inflation factor (VIF) values greater than 5 can be an indication of potential collinearity issues. A tolerance value below 0.20 can also be an indication of a potential problem. Based on the algorithm calculation, the VIF values of all constructs show values below 5 which means there are no collinearity issues.

A coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) test was performed to see how well the statistical model predicted the outcome. According to Hair *et al.* [47],  $R^2$  ranges between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating greater explanatory power. As a general guide,  $R^2$  values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are considered substantial, moderate, and weak. Overall, the  $R^2$  test results of this study are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. R-Square ( $R^2$ )

	R-square	R-square adjusted
VIG	0.338	0.332
DED	0.110	0.101
ABS	0.119	0.111

Source: PLS algorithm

Table 5 illustrates the coefficient of determination of this study. Referring to Table 5, the PLS algorithm test shows the simultaneous effect of NFE on VIG, DED, and ABS is 0.338; 0.110; 0.119 and with adjusted  $R^2=0.332$ ; 0.101; 0.111. In Table 5, it can be explained that NFE affects VIG by 33.2%; DED by 10.1% and ABS by 11.1%. Since the Adjusted  $R^2$  value of vigor (0.332) is above 0.25 and less than 0.50, the effect of NFE on VIG is categorized as moderate [48] (Table 5). Meanwhile, the adjusted  $R^2$  value of dedication (0.101) and absorption (0.111) is less than 0.25, so the effect of NFE on DED, and ABS is categorized as weak.

Moreover, the F-square ( $f^2$ ) testing was conducted to calculate the magnitude of influence between variables, whether the influence of exogenous constructs (i.e. NFE) on endogenous constructs (i.e. VIG, DED, ABS) and moderating construct (i.e., POS) is classified as small/medium/large. General guidelines for evaluating  $f^2$  suggest that values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent small, medium, and large effect sizes [47]. Overall, the size effect ( $f^2$ ) test results of this study are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. F-square ( $f^2$ )

	ABS	DED	VIG
NFE	0.135	0.117	0.037
POS	0.004	0.000	0.379

Source: PLS algorithm

Table 6 illustrates the size effect ( $f^2$ ) of this study. Referring to Table 6, the PLS algorithm shows the size effect of NFE on VIG, DED, and ABS is 0.037; 0.117; and 0.135. Since the  $f^2$  value of VIG, DED, and ABS was less than 0.15 and is categorized as small [47]. In addition, the  $f^2$  of the size effect of POS on VIG, DED, and ABS is 0.379; 0.000; and 0.004. The  $f^2$  value of the VIG dimension was categorized as large, while the ABS and DED were categorized as small.

Finally, the model fit test was conducted to understand the model used to determine whether the model fits the data or not. The value of standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and normed fit index (NFI) are used to see the model fit. General guidelines for evaluating model fit suggest that SRMR values less than 0.10 or 0.08 are considered a good fit. Meanwhile, NFI results in values between 0 and 1. The closer the NFI is to 1, the better the fit. NFI values greater than 0.9 generally indicate a good match [47]. Overall, the model fit test results of this study are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 illustrates the model fit of this study. The table shows an SMRM value of 0.088 and an NFI value of 0.719. By following a thumb rule,  $NFI=0.719 < 0.9$  does not meet the criteria for model fit. Contrary, based on the SMRM value  $=0.088 < 0.10$ , the model is fit.

Table 7. Model fit based on SRMR and NFI

Saturated model	
SRMR	0.088
NFI	0.719

Source: PLS algorithm

#### 4.2. Structural model analysis

Assuming that the measurement model passed the convergent and validity tests, the structural model analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses developed. Based on bootstrapping calculations, it indicates that NFE and work engagement are positively and significantly related. Vigor has a beta ( $\beta$ ) of 0.163, dedication beta ( $\beta$ ) of 0.339, and absorption beta ( $\beta$ ) of 0.362 with a p-value smaller than 0.05 (Figure 2). Thus, it can be concluded that based on bootstrapping analysis, NFE has a positive impact on work engagement. Hence, this provides support for H1, H2, and H3. In addition, an examination of the role of organizational perception as a moderating variable is carried out to test hypotheses H4, H5, and H6. Bootstrapping highlights that POS as a moderating construct has insignificant results. POS positively and insignificantly moderates the relationship between NFE and vigor, dedication, and absorption (Figure 2). It can thus be concluded that based on the bootstrapping analysis, POS weaken the relationship between NFE and vigor, dedication, and absorption. Thus, this rejects H4, H5, and H6.

Figure 2 illustrates the hypothesis testing results of this study. Based on the bootstrapping test, the beta value and p-value of each hypothesis are presented in the framework in Figure 2. Six hypotheses represent direct relationships and indirect relationships with POS as a moderating variable in the relationship between NFE and work engagement (H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6).

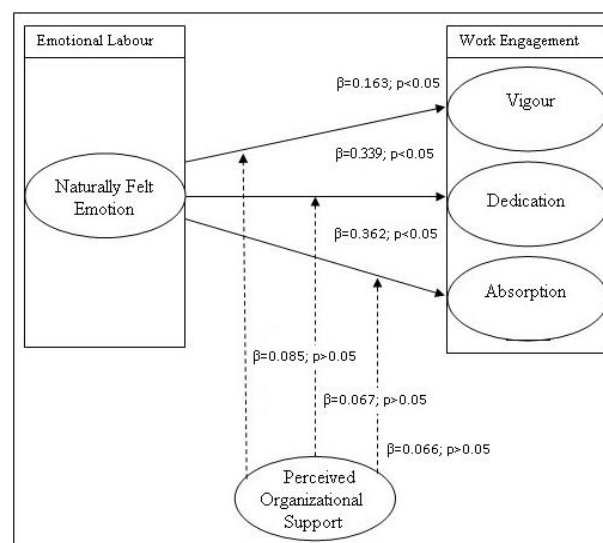


Figure 1. Structural model analysis

Referring to Figure 2, the bootstrapping calculations reveal that NFE is positively and significantly related to all dimensions of work engagement. As shown in Figure 2, vigor ( $\beta=0.163$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), dedication ( $\beta=0.339$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), absorption ( $\beta=0.362$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) and NFE are interrelated. This implies that when a university lecturer is highly engaged in performing NFE, the level of work engagement (i.e., vigor, dedication, and absorption) will also increase. In other words, H1, H2, and H3 are supported. Furthermore, H4, H5, and H6 indicate the role of POS as a moderator of the relationship between NFE and the dimensions of work engagement. A bootstrapping approach was used to evaluate the moderating effect of POS. For H4, H5, and H6, it was found that POS did not have an appreciable moderating effect on the path from NFE to vigor ( $\beta=0.085$ ;  $p>0.05$ ), dedication ( $\beta=0.067$ ;  $p>0.05$ ), and absorption ( $\beta=0.066$ ;  $p>0.05$ ). This implies that the role of POS as a moderating variable weakens the relationship between NFE and work engagement. POS has no moderating effect on the relationship between NFE and work engagement. In other words, the influence of POS on vigor, dedication, and absorption is not significant. In summary, the relationship between NFE and work engagement among university lecturers is not influenced by their level of POS.

### 4.3. Discussion

This study investigates the relationship between NFE and work engagement. This study also investigates the role of POS as a moderator between NFE and work engagement. The result showed that NFE was significantly positively related to vigor, dedication, and absorption, while, the influence of POS on vigor, dedication, and absorption is not significant. Overall, the results of the direct effect are presented in Table 8, while the indirect effect is presented in Table 9.

Table 8. Result of direct effect

	Path	Beta ( $\beta$ )	Standard deviation	T-statistic	P-value	Decision
H1	NFE $\rightarrow$ Vigor	0.163	0.051	3.187	0.002	Supported
H2	NFE $\rightarrow$ Dedication	0.339	0.058	5.854	0.000	Supported
H3	NFE $\rightarrow$ Absorption	0.362	0.049	7.410	0.000	Supported

Source: PLS bootstrapping

Table 8 shows the results of bootstrapping tests on the direct impact of NFE on work engagement. Results show that there is a significant positive correlation between NFE and work engagement. This points to the fact that the natural expression of emotion creates a true inner feeling in the university lecturer. It is these genuine emotions that tend to positively affect lecturer happiness [49], job satisfaction [50], and job performance levels [17]. This finding confirms the existing literature [51]; [52]. Thus, when lecturers naturally express positive emotions, their consistency tends to have a positive impact on organizational engagement and job satisfaction. Therefore, lecturers should encourage more natural emotional expressions, as they have been found to have a positive impact on work attitude.

Furthermore, this study confirms that university lecturers feel happier when they display genuine or natural facial expressions and gestures in front of students, colleagues or stakeholders. As a result, university lecturers feel more comfortable, enjoyable, and happy in the workplace and are more enthusiastic, dedicated, and focused on their work. Thus, the present study demonstrates that there are important associations between NFE and the work engagement dimensions of university lecturers in Central Java, Indonesia. These associations are long-term consistent with other empirical studies by Walsh [52] who reported that NFE significantly predicts dimensions of work engagement. If university lecturers' personalities and working conditions are good, the feeling of hope will naturally arise. Moreover, emotions enable lecturers to naturally experience genuine emotions and express them spontaneously and honestly when performing their duties, so university lecturers enjoy collaborating with their students because they help them achieve their main objectives in the classroom. Therefore, if a university lecturer can express her emotions naturally and without pressure, he will naturally be more enthusiastic about his work. His enthusiasm, dedication, and willingness to give naturally grow.

By connecting these results to JD-R theory, university lecturers no longer need to invest resources to express their emotions. This means that expressing NFE requires fewer resources because one does not need to change emotions to fit the organization's display rules, so fewer resources are invested in this process. Therefore, it is not surprising if university lecturers engaged in NFE, they feel comfortable and enthusiastic, enjoy working and have positive feelings towards the institution. Instead of being job-hoppers, university lecturers are willing to stay and make extra efforts to help the higher education institution succeed. The findings from this study are consistent with [22] who reported that displaying natural emotion is viewed positively and is not similar to emotional labor which is often perceived to have negative effects. In other words, the NFE bring positive energy to individuals. They do not need to pretend or modify any feelings



because they are already in a certain mood (i.e. good or bad) and expressing their emotions is consistent with their current state. This means that it seems more beneficial to express NFE than to act surface and deep. When it is linked with work engagement, university lecturers do not have to generate specific emotions to meet academic expectations, so acting out NFE is positively related to vigor, dedication, and absorption. In the context of this study, when university lecturers present their sincerest (true feelings) at work, they will work passionately, with enthusiasm and full of enjoyment. Hence, performing NFE enhances the university lecturers' vigor, dedication, and absorption which ultimately benefits higher education institutions such as increasing university lecturer productivity [53], [54], and job performance [55].

Based on the explanation, it can be concluded that in higher education settings, university lecturers' NFE predicts significantly all dimensions of work engagement. In this case, engaged university lecturers have more energy and are willing to take on more responsibility, resulting in better job satisfaction and performance. Higher university lecturer engagement means higher job satisfaction and motivates employees to always achieve their highest potential. Therefore, it is not surprising that engaged university lecturers bring genuine enthusiasm and passion to their work, motivating them to work hard without being told to do so to meet or exceed their goals. Awareness of the tremendous potential of university lecturers to the success of higher education institutions implies that university lecturers' natural display of emotions and work engagement should not be neglected especially in private higher education institutions as both variables can be considered as marketing tools to attract new students.

Given the clear link between NFE and employee work engagement, higher education institutions need to understand how genuine emotions can improve lecturer work engagement. By performing genuine feelings, university lecturers do not need to pretend or display fake emotions in front of their students. In other words, university lecturers do not have to fake and suppress their negative emotions. Rather than displaying fake expressions and emotions (surface acting and deep acting), university lecturers choose to express the feelings they are feeling naturally. Likewise in the university environment, by promoting positive emotions in the workplace, higher education institutions can create a more productive and enjoyable work environment while reducing the risk of absenteeism and adverse faculty turnover.

Furthermore, the indirect relationship where POS moderates the relationship will be discussed. The result showed that POS does not moderate the relationship between NFE and all dimensions of work engagement. Overall, the results of the moderating effect are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Result of moderating effect

	Path	Beta ( $\beta$ )	Standard deviation	T-statistic	P-value	Decision
H4	POSXNFE→Vigor	0.085	0.058	1.473	0.141	Not Supported
H5	POSXNFE→Dedication	0.067	0.063	1.058	0.291	Not Supported
H6	POSXNFE→Absorption	0.066	0.054	1.211	0.226	Not Supported

Source: PLS bootstrapping

Table 9 illustrates the results of a bootstrap test on the indirect effects of NFE on work engagement, using POS as a moderator. Regarding the role of POS as a moderator variable, it is known that lecturers with POS have a higher level of enjoyment ability at work, and also experience fewer signs of stress, such as fatigue or burnout [40]. The higher the university lecturers' belief in organizational support, the greater the lecturers' sense of belonging to the higher education institution and the greater their willingness to show support for the institution, reflecting a higher level of commitment. It is therefore not surprising to hypothesize that POS positively and significantly moderates the relationship between NFE and all dimensions of work engagement. Unfortunately, the findings of this study contradict other studies [56]–[58]. Although no research has been conducted in an academic context to date, most studies show that POS has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between emotional labor and work-related outcomes.

The inconsistent results of this study compound that the moderating effect of POS does not necessarily have a significant impact on the relationship between emotional labor and work-related outcomes. The inconsistent results of this study compound the inconsistencies in the existing literature regarding the moderating effects of POS on the relationship between emotional labor and work engagement. A possible general explanation for this insignificant result might be because of the characteristic of age and tenure of university lecturers in private universities in Central Java, Indonesia. Referring to the respondent characteristics data, it is known that the majority of respondents are lecturers with an age range of 30–41 years old, which includes the millennial category. As well-known that millennial employees tend to be job hopping rather than staying in an organization for the long term [59]. This job-hopping behavior indicates very low engagement of faculty members in their workplace [60]. Disengaged university lecturers have been

known to have low levels of enthusiasm, involvement, concentration, and well-being which in turn will reduce productivity and become the biggest barrier to the institutions' success [61].

This study links these findings to OST and shows that the role of POS as a moderator weakens the relationship between emotional labor and work engagement. This finding contradicts OST, which states that when organizational support is high, employees must reward goodwill by exhibiting positive attitudes and behaviors in the workplace. On the other hand, when an organization does not provide support, employees tend to take turns exhibiting negative attitudes and behaviors and exhibiting negative behaviors. In other words, POS enhances employees' sense of belonging to the organization, their trust in the organization, and their commitment and motivation to work, rather than weakening it.

#### **4.4. Theoretical implication**

This study yields some interesting theoretical implications. First, this study directly investigates the relationship between NFE and academic work engagement in a higher education setting. Although previous researchers have examined the issue of emotional labor in several fields, it remains very rare in an academic context. Most researchers to date have addressed the issue of emotional labor in service occupations such as nurses, waiters, and flight attendants, but not in academic fields such as university lecturers. Second, although previous researchers have examined the issue of emotional labor in several fields using different theories (e.g., display rules theory, and stress theory), JD-R theory as a theoretical foundation is very suitable and valid to explain emotional labor and work engagement in the academic context. Similarly, the OST is well suited to describe POS. Third, this study explains how genuine emotions felt by an individual can positively influence work engagement. This study shows that NFE and work engagement are crucial for higher education and play a positive role in increasing the vigor, dedication, and dedication of university lecturers in the higher education environment. On the other hand, the influence of POS on NFE and vigor, dedication, and absorption is proven not significant

#### **4.5. Managerial implication**

The findings of this study assist policymakers in higher education institutions to monitor university lecturers' work engagement and remind them of the importance of emotional labor strategies i.e., NFE in carrying out their duties as a professional educator in a higher education environment. This study looks through the lens of NFE to see what steps management can take to strengthen university lecturers' commitment and organizational goals. With a good understanding of the benefits of performing NFE, it is expected that policymakers at higher education institutions can formulate policies as well as determine strategies to achieve long-term sustainability in higher education. With a clear link between NFE and work engagement and also the role of POS as a moderator, higher education institutions need to understand how genuine emotions can improve lecturer work engagement. By performing genuine feelings, university lecturers work happily and become themselves in front of their students. In other words, university lecturers do not need to pretend in front of others. In this case, university lecturers can express what they feel, instead of displaying fake expressions and emotions. Likewise in the university environment, by promoting NFE in the workplace, higher education institutions can create an enjoyable work environment while reducing the risk of absenteeism and adverse faculty turnover.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

The concept of JD-R theory is still valid for explaining the phenomenon of work engagement. Underpinned by the JD-R theory, this study presents empirical evidence regarding the relationship between NFE and work engagement (i.e., vigor, dedication and absorption). Overall, this study provided theoretical and practical insights into why higher education institutions should be concerned about the emotional displays of their university lecturers. To maintain work engagement among university lecturers, policymakers in higher education institutions should support natural feelings and emotions as the great managing emotion strategies to enhance university lecturers' vigor, dedication, and absorption. Displaying natural emotions is expected to impact positively and achieve long-term sustainability in higher education.

Furthermore, this study has some limitations and must be acknowledged. First, this study focuses exclusively on emotional labor strategies i.e., NFEs. Further study can be developed by including two other emotional labor strategies and explaining them using various theories as a premise. Second, this study focuses only on academicians from Indonesia. Cross-culture validation of the model can be considered for further studies to expand the population and obtain more samples. Third, the COVID-19 restrictions during data collection caused researchers to be careful and less freely approach respondents. The distribution of questionnaires must be done online and takes a long time due to the slow response from respondents. Fourth, further studies may consider extending the model by adding new mediators or moderators, such as leadership




style or emotional intelligence. Thus, it will be meaningful to further study how these diverse variables would affect the emotional labor of university lecturers. Fifth, the data collection method of this study was a questionnaire distributed to lecturers to answer questions related to each construct in this study. Future studies may involve face-to-face interviews with respondents. Combining these two strategies improves the accuracy of results on emotional labor and work engagement at work, and also allows for exploration of deeper information related to perceptions of organizational support for lecturers. This will help policymakers formulate better solutions based on local conditions.

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