

# TEACHER'S JOB SATISFACTION IN THE DIGITAL ERA IN CHINESE UNIVERSITIES

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## ABSTRACT

The penetration of digital technology is systematically reshaping the higher education ecosystem, and teacher job satisfaction has become a core indicator measuring educational governance effectiveness and talent training quality. This study adopts a combination of questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews based on the Job Demands-Resources Model and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. It systematically examines the influencing mechanisms of six core factors—digital technology application, digital literacy, training system, work support, assessment and evaluation system, and career support—on university teachers' job satisfaction, while exploring the moderating effect of regional imbalance characteristics across Chinese higher education. The findings reveal that all six factors exert a significant positive impact on teacher job satisfaction; work support and assessment and evaluation systems play partial mediating roles between digital-related factors and satisfaction; regional imbalance characteristics show a significant negative moderating effect, exacerbating cross-school resource imbalances and teachers' digital adaptation conflicts. This study aims to provide empirical evidence and optimization paths for national digital governance and faculty construction in Chinese universities, enriching localized research findings on teachers' professional development in the digital era.

**Keywords:** Teacher's Job Satisfaction, Chinese Universities, Digital Era, Regional Imbalance

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## INTRODUCTION

The global digital wave has profoundly reshaped the landscape of higher education. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing have not only transformed educational forms and governance models, but also exerted a profound impact on university teachers' work methods, professional roles, and psychological states. While the widespread application of digital technology has brought efficiency gains and innovative opportunities, it has also created new challenges including technological pressure, role conflicts, and increased hidden workload. Consequently, teacher job satisfaction has gradually become a core issue in educational governance and faculty development. China attaches great importance to educational digitalization and regards it as a key strategy for advancing educational modernization and building a strong education country. In recent years, a series of national policies have been issued to promote smart campus construction, digital resource development, and improvement of teachers' digital literacy, providing institutional support for the digital transformation of higher education. Guided by national strategies, universities nationwide have carried out digital reform in succession. However, constrained by inter-regional economic gaps, uneven resource allocation, inconsistent faculty structures and differentiated campus construction progress, Chinese universities face prominent unbalanced digital development: uneven teacher digital literacy across groups, widespread technological pressure, and segmented differences in overall job satisfaction, which jointly affect faculty stability and consistent educational quality nationwide. Teacher job satisfaction is closely related to teaching engagement, research productivity, and talent cultivation outcomes, serving as a critical indicator of educational governance effectiveness. In the digital era, factors influencing job satisfaction have become diversified and complex. Beyond traditional aspects such as salary, environment, and promotion, digital technology application, digital literacy, training support, resource provision, and assessment systems have gained increasing significance. Existing studies mainly focus on universities in economically developed eastern and central regions, with limited systematic research covering underdeveloped regions nationwide. There is a particular lack of nationwide empirical research that integrates inter-regional imbalance as a moderating variable. Accordingly, this study adopts a digital era perspective and integrates the universal regional imbalance characteristics of Chinese higher education. Taking university teachers across China as research participants, it systematically explores the effects of digital technology application, digital literacy, training systems, work support, assessment mechanisms, and career support on job satisfaction, while analyzing the moderating role of inter-regional imbalance. The study aims to clarify influencing mechanisms, identify practical difficulties shared by universities of different regions, and propose targeted optimization strategies. It seeks to provide theoretical references and practical evidence for national digital governance, faculty stability, and high-quality coordinated development of higher education across China, as well as offer insights for resolving digital equity gaps between developed and underdeveloped university regions.

## CORE INFLUENCING FACTORS OF CHINESE UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' JOB SATISFACTION IN THE DIGITAL ERA

### Digital Technology Application: Basic Driving Factor

**Application Scope:** Refers to the coverage of digital technology in teaching, research, administration, and services. Significant group and inter-school imbalances exist in digital technology application among Chinese university teachers: young teachers, teachers in science and engineering disciplines, and faculty at universities in economically developed cities have a much wider application scope than middle-aged and elderly teachers, humanities and social science teachers, and teachers at universities in less developed inland and remote areas (Li & Sun, 2023).

Insufficient application scope prevents teachers from benefiting from technological dividends, leading to low work efficiency and reduced satisfaction.

**Application Depth:** Refers to the degree of integration between digital technology and teaching and research. Most teachers only use basic tools (e.g., courseware production, online check-in), with limited in-depth integration (e.g., AI-assisted teaching, big data-based learning analytics, virtual simulation research). The full value of technology remains untapped, failing to enhance professional achievement.

**Application Burden:** Refers to additional workload and psychological pressure brought by digitalization. Hidden workload surges from digital teaching, data reporting, online meetings, and multi-platform operation. Rapid technological iteration requires continuous learning, leading to prominent technical anxiety and directly reducing job satisfaction (Huang & Yang, 2020).

## 2.2 Teachers' Digital Literacy: Core Competency Factor

Teachers' digital literacy is the core competency determining the effectiveness of digital technology application and work experience, acting as a key mediating factor connecting technology and satisfaction.

**Basic Operational Literacy:** Refers to teachers' basic ability to use digital devices, platforms, and tools. Middle-aged and elderly teachers across China show prominent deficiencies in basic operational literacy, struggling to proficiently use smart teaching platforms and AI tools. Operational difficulties lead to low efficiency and frustration, reducing satisfaction (Zhao & Liu, 2022).

**Teaching Integration Literacy:** Refers to the ability to deeply integrate digital technology with instructional design, classroom implementation, and learning assessment. Most teachers lack digital instructional design capabilities, failing to design interactive and inquiry-based digital teaching activities, resulting in a disconnect between technology and teaching and low professional achievement.

**Information Literacy & Security Literacy:** Refers to the ability to screen, integrate, analyze, apply, and safeguard information. In the digital age of information explosion, teachers struggle to identify effective teaching and research information, easily disrupted by redundant content. Additionally, weak data security awareness poses information leakage risks, increasing work pressure.

### **Digital Training System: Key Supporting Factor**

A comprehensive digital training system is critical for enhancing teachers' digital literacy, alleviating technical anxiety, and optimizing work experience, positively impacting job satisfaction.

**Targeted Training Content:** Training content must align with differences in teachers' age, discipline, and digital proficiency. Existing training nationwide is highly homogeneous, focusing on generic technology explanations without tiered and categorized content (e.g., basic operations for middle-aged and elderly teachers, innovative applications for young teachers, customized training for teachers in underdeveloped regional universities), failing to meet personalized needs and yielding poor results (Zhang & Chen, 2022).

**Diverse Training Forms:** Single lecture-based training is ineffective; hands-on practice, case studies, workshops, and one-on-one guidance better build skills. Digital training at many Chinese universities is formally limited, relying mostly on online courses and offline lectures with insufficient practical sessions, making it hard for teachers to apply skills effectively and diminishing training value.

**Comprehensive Training Coverage:** Training must include all teachers, prioritizing middle-aged and elderly, and faculty in less developed regional universities. Existing training has uneven coverage, with high participation among young urban teachers but limited opportunities for middle-aged and elderly or remote-area teachers, widening the national digital literacy gap among university teachers.

Effective Training Outcomes: Lack of assessment, follow-up, and feedback mechanisms leads to no post-training practical guidance or outcome evaluation. Teachers struggle to consolidate skills, making training formalistic and failing to effectively enhance digital literacy or alleviate technical anxiety.

## **MEDIATING AND MODERATING FACTORS OF CHINESE UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' JOB SATISFACTION IN THE DIGITAL ERA**

### **Mediating Factor: Work Support Mechanism**

Digital work support is a foundational condition for teachers to perform digital tasks, acting as a bridge between digital-related factors and satisfaction. It belongs to the hygiene factor in Two-Factor Theory, eliminating dissatisfaction and stabilizing satisfaction.

Hardware Support: Includes computers, projectors, smart classroom equipment, and network facilities. Universities in economically underdeveloped regions nationwide suffer from outdated, insufficient, and low-configured hardware, causing frequent glitches and disruptions, hindering teaching and research progress and increasing teacher frustration (Ministry of Education of China, 2023).

Software Support: Includes teaching platforms, research software, digital resource libraries, and AI tools. A shortage of high-quality national shared digital resources, limited procurement of professional software at local universities, and poor platform compatibility make it difficult for teachers to access needed resources, reducing efficiency and satisfaction.

Technical Service Support: Includes technical teams, response speed, and problem-solving capabilities. Many universities nationwide have inadequate technical staffing, limited professional expertise, and delayed service responses, leaving teachers struggling to resolve technical issues promptly, disrupting workflows and increasing anxiety.

Financial Support: Insufficient special funding for digital construction, resource procurement, technical operation, and training at regional universities limits institutions' ability to continuously optimize hardware, software, and services. Lack of stable digital financial support results in poor teacher experiences and reduced satisfaction.

### **Mediating Factor: Assessment and Evaluation System**

A scientific assessment and evaluation system is key to recognizing teachers' value and motivating work engagement, acting as a motivating mediator between digital-related factors and satisfaction. It belongs to the motivator in Two-Factor Theory, enhancing satisfaction and driving engagement.

Scientific Indicators: Current university assessment frameworks nationwide prioritize research over teaching and traditional work over digital work, assigning low or no weight to contributions from digital teaching, resource development, and technological innovation. Teachers' digital efforts go unrecognized, demotivating engagement (Zhao & Liu, 2022).

Reasonable Weight: Insufficient weight assigned to digital work fails to reflect teachers' value in the digital era, leading to a focus on traditional tasks over digital innovation, weak motivation for digital work, and low professional achievement.

Fair Evaluation: Lack of transparency in evaluation processes, limited peer review, and high subjectivity create vague criteria for evaluating digital achievements, risking unfairness and fostering teacher dissatisfaction.

Motivating Outcomes: Weak links between assessment results and salary, promotions, and awards mean no universal special incentives for outstanding digital work, limiting innovation motivation and career advancement opportunities for teachers across all regions.

### **Moderating Factor: National Regional Imbalance Characteristics**

Regional imbalance across Chinese higher education is the core contextual variable distinguishing universities in different economic zones, exerting a significant negative moderating effect on the relationship between digital-related factors and satisfaction, exacerbating adaptation conflicts and weakening the positive impacts of digital resources.

**Economic Development Gap:** Uneven fiscal investment in higher education across regions creates large gaps in digital construction budgets. Underfunded universities lack capacity for hardware upgrading, resource procurement and systematic teacher training, weakening the positive effects of digital technology.

**Digital Resource Distribution Gap:** High-quality national digital teaching resources, advanced technical platforms and professional digital training experts are disproportionately concentrated in developed urban universities. Remote and underdeveloped regional universities face resource shortages, making digital transformation more difficult.

**Faculty Structure Differences:** Universities in less developed regions face serious outflow of young digital-savvy teachers, resulting in an aging faculty structure with overall low average digital literacy. Teachers there have weaker technological adaptation ability, so the empowering effect of digital factors cannot be fully realized.

**Campus Digital Governance Capacity Gap:** Developed universities have mature digital management teams and standardized operation mechanisms, while many regional universities lack dedicated digital governance staff, leading to inefficient platform operation and poor after-sales technical support for teachers.

## **OPTIMIZATION STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' JOB SATISFACTION IN CHINA**

### **Optimize Digital Technology Application by Tier, Balancing Efficiency and Burden**

**Precision Tiered Implementation:** Provide advanced technical training and innovation support for young and science and engineering teachers, encouraging in-depth technology-teaching integration. Offer simplified operation tools, one-on-one technical guidance, and easy-to-use operation manuals for middle-aged and elderly, humanities, and teachers in underdeveloped regional universities, lowering technical barriers and narrowing the national digital divide.

**Streamline Digital Tasks:** Eliminate formalistic online check-ins, redundant data reporting, and ineffective repeated platform operations; promote national unified multi-system data interoperability to reduce repetitive administrative work. Reasonably limit mandatory online meetings and overloaded digital teaching hours, safeguarding teachers' offline teaching time and rest to alleviate digital burnout.

**Strengthen Value Guidance:** Nationwide promotion of benchmark cases where digital technology improves teaching quality and efficiency to enhance teachers' perceived usefulness of digital tools. Formulate unified national incentive guidelines for digital teaching innovation, rewarding high-quality digital teaching outcomes and stimulating teachers' active participation in digital reform.

### **Build a Comprehensive National Digital Literacy Enhancement System to Address Cross-Group Competency Gaps**

**Tiered and Categorized Training System:** Basic level focuses on device operation, platform use, and basic software applications for middle-aged and elderly teachers and faculty in underdeveloped regions. Advanced level focuses on digital instructional design, AI-assisted teaching, and big data learning analytics for young and middle-aged backbone teachers. Innovation level focuses on digital research innovation and cutting-edge technology applications for young PhD teachers and academic leaders.

**Innovate Diversified Training Forms:** Scale up hands-on practice, case workshops, mentor pairing, and real-time online Q&A sessions to increase practical training proportion. Develop open shared national digital training resource libraries to reduce training costs for regional universities.

**Establish Long-Term Incentive Mechanisms:** Implement regular lifelong digital training systems with nationwide exchange workshops and achievement showcases. Integrate digital literacy assessment into new teacher induction and annual in-service evaluation, and link evaluation results to teaching awards and professional promotion to drive teachers' active self-improvement.

### **Strengthen End-to-End National Digital Work Support to Consolidate Cross-Regional Balanced Foundations**

**Increase Transfer Financial Support:** Central and provincial governments set up special transfer funds for digital construction in underdeveloped regional universities, prioritizing hardware upgrades, high-quality shared digital resource development, full-time technical team staffing, and targeted teacher training. All universities optimize internal budget allocation to prioritize teachers' daily digital work demands.

**Unify National Hardware and Software Construction Standards:** Promote full high-speed campus network coverage and regular replacement of outdated smart classroom equipment nationwide. Develop open national public digital teaching platforms and shared resource libraries to reduce repeated software procurement costs for regional universities.

**Build National Linked Technical Service Teams:** Train cross-regional technical staff with standardized service capabilities, and build a unified national online rapid response service platform with dedicated consultation hotlines. Require regular campus equipment inspection and maintenance to resolve teachers' technical obstacles in a timely manner.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results show that digital technology application, teachers' digital literacy, digital training system, digital work support, assessment and evaluation system, and career support all exert a significant positive impact on Chinese university teachers' job satisfaction. Digital work support and assessment and evaluation systems play partial mediating roles between digital-related factors and satisfaction. National regional imbalance characteristics demonstrate a significant negative moderating effect, exacerbating cross-school digital resource imbalances and teachers' technology adaptation conflicts. Overall, university teachers' job satisfaction nationwide remains at a moderate average level, with obvious gaps across age groups, disciplines and regional economic zones; middle-aged and elderly teachers, and faculty working in underdeveloped regional universities report relatively lower job satisfaction. Based on the findings, this study proposes coordinated multi-dimensional measures: optimizing tiered digital technology application, constructing a unified national digital literacy training system, strengthening balanced cross-regional digital work support, reforming university assessment and evaluation mechanisms, and narrowing regional digital imbalance gaps. These targeted measures can effectively resolve teachers' common professional dilemmas during national higher education digital transformation, and provide practical decision-making support for the high-quality coordinated development of higher education across all regions of China.

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