

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF TEACHER MOTIVATION AND JOB SATISFACTION IN HIGHER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: A CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Teacher motivation and job satisfaction are critical determinants of institutional sustainability in higher vocational education, particularly amid industrial upgrading and digital transformation. This article conducts a systematic and critical review of existing literature on teacher motivation and job satisfaction in vocational education contexts, with the aim of identifying theoretical fragmentation and empirical gaps. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and the Job Demands–Resources model, the review reveals that prior studies often treat job satisfaction unidimensionally and lack integration of psychological, organizational, and technological factors. Based on these findings, the paper proposes a multidimensional theoretical framework in which job satisfaction is reconceptualized as a five-dimensional outcome embedded within institutional governance conditions. The framework integrates four interconnected domains: (1) psychological and motivational drivers, (2) compensation and welfare systems, (3) leadership and organizational culture, and (4) technological adaptation and digital integration. The study offers a context-sensitive model tailored to vocational education reform and provides directions for future empirical validation.

Keywords: Teacher Motivation, Job Satisfaction, Higher Vocational Education, Institutional Governance, JD-R Model, Literature Review

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INTRODUCTION

Higher vocational education occupies a strategic position in national economic restructuring, industrial modernization, and regional development. In rapidly developing regions such as Chongqing, vocational colleges are expected to cultivate technically skilled professionals capable of supporting intelligent manufacturing, digital services, and innovation-driven industries. These systemic transformations reshape not only institutional governance structures but also teachers' professional roles and motivational conditions. Teachers in higher vocational colleges perform multifaceted roles, including classroom instruction, enterprise collaboration, curriculum co-design, applied research, skills competition guidance, student career mentoring, and technological integration. Such role expansion intensifies job demands while simultaneously redefining professional identity. Teachers are no longer solely transmitters of knowledge but are increasingly positioned as applied researchers, industry partners, and innovation facilitators. This structural transformation significantly alters how teachers interpret professional success, institutional recognition, and long-term career sustainability. Despite a growing body of literature examining teacher motivation and job satisfaction in educational contexts, limited studies have provided an integrated framework that simultaneously captures psychological, organizational, and technological factors specific to vocational education. Existing research tends to treat job satisfaction as a unidimensional construct or apply general education models without sufficient contextual adaptation. This article addresses this gap by conducting a systematic and critical review of the literature, with the aim of synthesizing existing knowledge, identifying theoretical and empirical limitations, and developing an integrated framework suited to the vocational education context.

METHODOLOGY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

To ensure transparency and replicability, this review followed a systematic literature review approach. The search was conducted in the following databases: Web of Science, Scopus, ERIC, and CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), covering publications from 2010 to 2024. The search strategy combined keywords related to teacher motivation, job satisfaction, vocational education, and institutional governance. The search strings included: (“teacher motivation” OR “teacher job satisfaction” OR “teacher well-being”) AND (“vocational education” OR “technical and vocational education” OR “higher vocational colleges”) AND (“institutional governance” OR “leadership” OR “compensation” OR “digital transformation” OR “professional development”). Inclusion criteria were: (1) peer-reviewed empirical or theoretical studies; (2) focus on teacher motivation or job satisfaction in vocational or technical education contexts; (3) publications in English or Chinese; (4) studies providing clear methodological or theoretical contributions. Exclusion criteria were: (1) studies focused solely on general education without relevance to vocational contexts; (2) conference abstracts or non-peer-reviewed reports; (3) studies without explicit focus on motivation or satisfaction. A total of 86 studies met the inclusion criteria after screening. These were analyzed thematically to identify dominant theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, methodological approaches, and gaps in the literature. The following sections present the results of this critical synthesis, organized around key theoretical perspectives and thematic areas.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN EXISTING RESEARCH

Self-Determination Theory and Intrinsic Motivation Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has been widely applied to understand teacher motivation in educational settings. SDT posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are three basic psychological needs that, when satisfied, enhance intrinsic motivation and well-being (Deci et al., 2020). In vocational education contexts, empirical studies have confirmed the relevance of SDT. For instance, Wang et al. (2022) found

that perceived autonomy support from institutional leaders positively predicted vocational teachers' intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction. Similarly, Granziera and Perera (2022) demonstrated that competence satisfaction, particularly through structured professional development, was strongly associated with teacher engagement. However, critical analysis reveals several limitations in the application of SDT to vocational education. First, most studies apply SDT without contextual adaptation to the industry-integrated nature of vocational institutions. Vocational teachers' autonomy is often constrained by enterprise partnership requirements and externally mandated curriculum standards—factors rarely examined in mainstream SDT research. Second, the relatedness dimension in vocational contexts extends beyond collegial relationships to include industry partnerships, yet few studies explore how industry collaboration affects teachers' sense of belonging and motivation. Third, the majority of SDT-based studies in vocational settings rely on cross-sectional survey designs, limiting causal inference.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and the Intrinsic–Extrinsic Divide Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between motivators (intrinsic factors such as achievement and recognition) and hygiene factors (extrinsic conditions such as salary and working conditions). Several studies in vocational education have utilized this framework to examine job satisfaction. For example, Zhou and Li (2022) found that professional development opportunities functioned as motivators, while salary and administrative support operated primarily as hygiene factors.

Yet, critical evaluation suggests that the rigid intrinsic–extrinsic dichotomy may not fully capture the complexity of vocational teachers' experiences. In contexts where salary is tied to performance-based evaluations, compensation may carry motivational significance beyond mere hygiene. Moreover, the theory's static nature does not account for dynamic interactions between intrinsic and extrinsic factors, particularly during periods of institutional reform. As vocational colleges undergo digital transformation and accountability intensification, previously neutral hygiene factors may acquire motivational properties, a nuance often overlooked in existing applications.

Job Demands–Resources Model and Structural Conditions The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model has gained prominence in explaining teacher well-being and motivation. The model posits that job demands (e.g., workload, pressure) and job resources (e.g., support, autonomy) interact to shape outcomes such as engagement and burnout (Han et al., 2020). In vocational education, studies have applied the JD-R model to examine how high workload and performance pressure are buffered by resources such as leadership support and collegial collaboration (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2021). A critical gap in this literature is the inadequate attention to sector-specific demands. Vocational teachers face unique demands, including enterprise coordination, rapid technical skill updates, and dual-role expectations (teacher and industry liaison). These demands are qualitatively different from those in general education, yet few studies have systematically modeled them. Additionally, the JD-R literature in vocational contexts rarely examines how digital transformation introduces new technological demands that may exceed existing institutional resources, leading to technostress (Chen & Yu, 2023).

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS: KEY THEMATIC AREAS

Compensation and Welfare Systems Empirical studies consistently identify compensation as a significant predictor of teacher satisfaction in vocational education. However, findings diverge regarding the magnitude and nature of this relationship. Some studies report that salary is a primary determinant of extrinsic satisfaction (Huang & Yin, 2022), while others suggest that fairness and transparency in compensation distribution are more influential than absolute salary

levels (Song & Wang, 2023). This inconsistency points to the need for a more nuanced conceptualization that distinguishes between distributive, procedural, and interactional justice in compensation systems.

Moreover, welfare systems—including housing subsidies, research funding, and retirement security—have been found to influence organizational commitment, particularly among mid-career teachers balancing family responsibilities (Zhang & Zhu, 2024). Yet, few studies systematically examine how welfare structures interact with other governance variables such as leadership transparency or evaluation mechanisms.

Leadership and Organizational Culture Leadership is one of the most frequently cited predictors of teacher job satisfaction across educational contexts. In vocational education, studies have emphasized the importance of transformational and distributed leadership styles (Liu et al., 2021). Participatory leadership practices, such as involving teachers in curriculum reform and digital transformation decisions, have been associated with higher organizational trust and intrinsic satisfaction. Organizational culture also emerges as a significant factor. Collaborative cultures characterized by peer mentoring and interdisciplinary cooperation appear to buffer stress and enhance professional growth satisfaction (Collie & Martin, 2023). Conversely, competitive or fragmented cultures have been linked to higher burnout and reduced collegial trust. However, existing studies often treat culture as a static variable, failing to capture how reform processes dynamically reshape cultural norms.

Professional Development and Competence Growth Professional development is widely recognized as a key determinant of teacher motivation in vocational education. Studies indicate that structured training programs, enterprise internships, and certification opportunities enhance teachers' sense of competence and professional identity (Zhou & Li, 2022). Yet, critical gaps remain. First, most studies focus on the availability of professional development rather than its quality or alignment with industrial change. Second, the relationship between professional development and other satisfaction dimensions—such as social recognition—remains underexplored. Third, few studies examine how professional development systems interact with performance evaluation mechanisms to shape career advancement perceptions.

Digital Transformation and Technological Adaptation Emerging research highlights the role of digital transformation in reshaping vocational teachers' professional experiences. Studies have examined how smart manufacturing simulations, AI-assisted assessment, and digital governance platforms influence instructional practices and teacher confidence (Song & Wang, 2023). However, findings are mixed. Some studies report that adequate digital infrastructure and training enhance competence and innovation (Chen & Yu, 2023), while others caution that rapid technological mandates without corresponding support generate technostress and anxiety (Chen & Yu, 2023). A critical limitation of existing research is the tendency to treat technological adaptation as a unidimensional construct. Few studies differentiate between technology as a job resource (e.g., enhancing efficiency) and technology as a job demand (e.g., creating learning pressure). Furthermore, the intersection of digital transformation with other institutional variables—such as leadership support and evaluation systems—remains largely unexplored.

METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING STUDIES

The literature reviewed reveals several methodological limitations that constrain the validity and generalizability of findings. First, the overwhelming majority of studies employ cross-sectional survey designs, which preclude causal inference and fail to capture the dynamic nature of teacher motivation over time. Second, there is a heavy reliance on self-reported measures of job satisfaction and motivation, introducing potential common method bias. Third, few studies utilize

multi-level analytical approaches that simultaneously account for individual, organizational, and institutional factors. Fourth, the geographic focus of existing research is heavily skewed toward developed contexts or select regions in China, limiting generalizability to diverse vocational education systems. Moreover, the conceptualization of job satisfaction in existing studies is often unidimensional or adopts generic scales developed for general education contexts. This approach overlooks the distinct dimensions of satisfaction relevant to vocational teachers—such as industry collaboration satisfaction or technological adaptation satisfaction—that emerge from sector-specific role demands.

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE AND RATIONALE FOR AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK

The critical synthesis above reveals three interrelated gaps in the existing literature: **Theoretical Fragmentation:** Studies draw on diverse theoretical frameworks (SDT, Herzberg, JD-R) but rarely integrate them in a manner that captures the multidimensional nature of teacher satisfaction in vocational contexts. Each framework captures distinct aspects—psychological needs, intrinsic–extrinsic factors, and structural resources—yet a unified model remains absent. **Contextual Insensitivity:** Existing research often applies general education models without adequate adaptation to vocational education’s unique characteristics, including industry–education integration, dual professional identities, and rapid technological skill cycles. **Methodological Narrowness:** The predominance of cross-sectional, single-level, and unidimensional approaches limits the ability to test complex, dynamic, and multi-level relationships among institutional governance variables and satisfaction outcomes. These gaps justify the development of an integrated theoretical framework that: (a) synthesizes insights from multiple motivation theories; (b) conceptualizes job satisfaction as a multidimensional construct; (c) identifies institutional governance variables as structural predictors; and (d) supports empirical validation using rigorous quantitative methods.

AN INTEGRATED MULTIDIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the critical review and identification of gaps, this paper proposes an integrated theoretical framework in which teacher job satisfaction is conceptualized as a five-dimensional dependent construct: **Intrinsic Satisfaction** — meaningful work and perceived autonomy **Extrinsic Satisfaction** — salary, benefits, and material conditions **Professional Growth Satisfaction** — career advancement, competence development, and skill mastery **Organizational Satisfaction** — trust in governance, leadership quality, and fairness of evaluation **Social Recognition Satisfaction** — professional dignity and societal respect for vocational education These dimensions are predicted by eight institutional governance variables identified in the literature: work motivation, compensation and welfare systems, leadership support, professional development opportunities, work environment quality, organizational culture, performance evaluation mechanisms, and technological adaptation. The framework assumes differentiated predictive relationships. For example, compensation systems are hypothesized to exert stronger influence on extrinsic satisfaction, while professional development opportunities more strongly predict professional growth satisfaction. Leadership support is expected to influence multiple dimensions simultaneously due to its cross-cutting governance role. Importantly, demographic variables such as teaching experience, academic degree, and professional title may moderate these relationships. Early-career teachers may prioritize professional development opportunities, whereas senior teachers may emphasize organizational recognition. This framework supports empirical

validation through multiple regression analysis and moderation testing, enabling nuanced understanding of institutional effects.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Theoretically, this framework advances teacher motivation research by differentiating job satisfaction into multidimensional outcomes embedded within governance systems. It integrates classical motivation theories with contemporary vocational reform contexts, thereby extending existing models beyond general education settings. The model also bridges micro-level psychological mechanisms and macro-level institutional governance variables, offering a systemic perspective rarely emphasized in prior vocational education research. Practically, the framework offers administrators diagnostic insights for designing targeted interventions. If empirical testing reveals that leadership support strongly predicts organizational satisfaction, leadership development programs may become a strategic priority. If technological adaptation significantly predicts professional growth satisfaction, institutions may invest more heavily in digital training systems. Furthermore, policymakers may utilize the framework to align vocational education reform with teacher support policies. Sustainable reform requires balancing accountability mechanisms with autonomy support and professional recognition. By systematically identifying institutional predictors of satisfaction, vocational colleges can enhance teacher retention, strengthen organizational stability, and promote long-term educational quality improvement.

CONCLUSION

Higher vocational education operates within complex reform environments characterized by industrial upgrading, digital transformation, intensified accountability systems, and increasing societal expectations. Through a systematic and critical review of existing literature, this article has demonstrated that prior studies, while valuable, suffer from theoretical fragmentation, contextual insensitivity, and methodological narrowness. Teacher job satisfaction in this context cannot be reduced to a simple emotional response to work conditions; rather, it is a multidimensional construct shaped by interacting psychological, organizational, and structural forces. By synthesizing insights from Self-Determination Theory, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and the Job Demands-Resources model, and by critically evaluating empirical findings across key thematic areas, this study conceptualizes job satisfaction as comprising five interrelated dimensions: intrinsic satisfaction, extrinsic satisfaction, professional growth satisfaction, organizational satisfaction, and social recognition satisfaction. The proposed framework further identifies eight institutional governance variables as structural predictors of these satisfaction dimensions, conceptualized as an interconnected ecosystem rather than independent administrative tools. This systemic interpretation carries significant theoretical implications. It challenges reductionist models that equate job satisfaction primarily with salary or workload. It emphasizes that teacher satisfaction in vocational education is deeply embedded in reform processes and industrial transformation. It provides a structured basis for empirical testing using multiple regression analysis, enabling differentiation of predictive strength across satisfaction dimensions. From a practical perspective, the framework offers strategic guidance for institutional leaders and policymakers. Rather than implementing fragmented reforms, administrators must consider the interactive effects of governance variables. Sustainable reform requires balanced alignment across motivational, structural, and cultural domains. Future empirical research in vocational colleges—particularly within rapidly transforming regions such as Chongqing—can test and refine this model, further strengthening the evidence base for human-centered educational reform. Ultimately, fostering high levels of teacher motivation and job

satisfaction is essential for building resilient, adaptive, and innovation-oriented vocational education systems capable of meeting the demands of contemporary society.

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