

Research on Improving the Job Attitudes of Young Chinese University Teachers from the Perspective of Psychological Capital

Qing Xin

School of Economics and Management, Guangxi Normal University, Guilin, China

Abstract: *As the main force for the future development of universities and colleges, young teachers play critical roles in higher education. Young teachers in universities undertake the task of training professional talents and scientific research, which is conducive to the enhancement of national comprehensive strength and economic and social development. However, young teachers are generally under too much pressure and heavy ideological burden. Passive emotions may have a negative impact on their job attitude. Psychological capital is based on the positive psychological paradigm, focusing on the positive aspects and advantages of people, reflecting individual confidence, hope, optimism and perseverance for the future, and focusing on the ability of individuals to manage themselves in the face of future adversity. From the perspective of psychological capital, this paper puts forward strategies and suggestions to improve the job attitudes of young teachers in Chinese universities and colleges.*

Keywords: *Job Attitudes, Psychological Capital, Young University Teachers*

1. Introduction

Young teachers refer to full-time teachers in colleges and universities under the age of 40, whose development is still in its infancy. According to statistics, the number of young teachers under the age of 40 in China's colleges and universities has exceeded 860,000, accounting for 63.3% of the total number. University teachers are important drivers of youth success in academic achievement and future employability^[1]. As the backbone of university faculty, they generally undertake too much task of teaching and scientific research. Besides, young teachers need to face with many other events as raising children, supporting parents and families, and so on, which are time- and energy-consuming. A survey shows that 72.3% of young teachers in China think their pressure is high, and 36.3% of them think it is too much high. Nearly 60 percent of university teachers work more than 50 hours a week, far more than the national limit of 40 hours. Young university teachers in China also have a nickname, "green peppers", showing their anxiety and about themselves' career development, living standard, and so on. These negative emotions unable form a positive incentive and also unable play a positive reinforcement effect on the job attitudes and behavior of young teachers. Psychological Capital (PsyCap) is a positive personal resource that can enhance energy and motivation^[2]. From the perspective of psychological capital, this paper will study the ways to improve the job attitudes of young teachers in colleges and universities.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Job Attitudes

The concept of attitude is "a mental tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor". Therefore, job attitudes are defined as "evaluations of one's job that express one's feelings toward, beliefs about, and attachment to one's job" ^[3]. Contemporary definitions of work attitudes focus on the affective and cognitive components of attitudes and argue that both can directly influence the way people approach tasks and what makes them persist in their work^[4].

2.2. Types of Job Attitudes

Within the field of organizational behavior, there are five types of job attitudes, as job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational commitment, perceived organizational support (POS) and employee

engagement.

2.2.1. Job Satisfaction

Hoppock, an American psychologist, put forward the concept of "job satisfaction" for the first time in his book *Job Satisfaction* published in 1935. Job satisfaction is an attitude, emotional reaction and approving feeling of workers to environmental factors in physical and psychological aspects, that is, personal subjective response to environmental factors. Greenhaus and Wormley (1990) made job satisfaction more precise as the degree to which workers are satisfied with their wages and the speed of their job advancement^[5]. Young teachers in universities have low job satisfaction because of their low salary levels and poor job promotion prospects.

2.2.2. Job Involvement

Lodahl (1965) ^[6]proposed work engagement and defined it as the degree of psychological commitment of employees to their work, which is expressed as the importance of work in their minds. Kahn^[7]argues that employees are likely to be engaged in their work when they have sufficient emotional and psychological resources. Li considers that "teachers' work engagement" refers to teachers' love and enjoyment of their work, which is mainly manifested by concentration, active exploration, and dedication^[8].

2.2.3. Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment, also known as "organizational affiliation" and "organizational loyalty," was developed by the American sociologist Becker. Cook and Wall (1980) identified identity (pride in the organization and internalization of organizational goals), loyalty (emotional attachment and belonging to the organization, expressed as a strong desire to remain a member of the organization), and involvement (willingness to work for the organization), loyalty (emotional attachment and belonging to the organization, expressed as a strong desire to maintain organizational membership) and involvement (willingness to invest personal effort in the organization) as the three main components of OCOM^[9]. It was concluded by Allen et al. that affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment are the three dimensions of organizational commitment^[10]. On this basis, it has been shown that organizational affective commitment can significantly affect university faculty performance^[11].

2.2.4. Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

A sense of organizational support is an employee's overall perception that the organization values his or her contribution and is concerned about employee well-being^[12]. A high level of organizational support is an important source of external work for individuals. Lin believed that the sense of organizational support can directly predict the endogenous and autonomous motivation of college teachers and college administrators should optimize the organizational environment to enhance the sense of organizational support of teachers^[13].

2.2.5. Employee Engagement

Kahn (1990)^[7]put forward the concept of employee engagement for the first time, and points out that employee engagement is the degree to which organization members put their physical, cognitive and emotional input into their work roles. W.C. Kuo et al. argued that organizational and leadership behaviors are critical for enhancing employee engagement^[14].

2.3. Psychological Capital

Luthans et al. defined psychological capital as the state of positive psychological development of an individual^[2], which appears in the form of "HERO" (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) that formulate a strong personal derive for doing well^[15]. People high in PsyCap are optimistic, hopeful, resilient, and self-confident^[16]. PsyCap enables better judgment of life status, which in turn improves personal and organizational effectiveness. PsyCap helps to improve the performance of employees^[17]. Some studies have shown that psychological capital has a positive predictive effect on young teachers' professional identity. Psychological capital is one of the research perspectives to enhance the work attitudes of young teachers in universities.

3. Factors Influencing the Job Attitudes of Young Chinese University Teachers

3.1. Objective Level

3.1.1. Social and Family Pressure

Age discrimination is prevalent in China's workplace, with most positions requiring applicants under the age of 35. Applicants who cannot meet the age requirement are likely to be rejected. In Chinese society, people will set some time points for life events such as schooling and education, entering the workplace, getting married, having children, etc., and emphasize to do corresponding things in a certain period of time. Young teachers in colleges and universities spend more time on their studies than other groups, and are under greater pressure in this regard. When they enter the workforce, simultaneously they are entering the socially prescribed time range to get married and have children. Some young teachers in colleges and universities have to take part in various dating activities while adapting to their jobs, which interferes with their concentration on work. Moreover, university teachers are always given high expectations by others. Their parents or relatives do not know about the professional title evaluation and salary structure of universities, and may unconsciously exert pressure on young teachers. Pressure from social and family is unable to let young university teachers form an optimistic mindset, and will affect their job attitudes.

3.1.2. Unreasonable Goals Set by Colleges and Universities

At present, some colleges and universities attach too much importance to the improvement of academic ranking, and put pressure on young teachers to hoisting their relevant capacity. First of all, the performance goals set for young teachers are often beyond the scope of their abilities, which is not conducive to the gradual development of young teachers' academic ability. The difficulty of goal is too high, the task is too heavy. And the results are tied to salary, bonus, and even the renewal of labor contract, which naturally make young teachers anxious about their career. Anxiety, a negative emotion, cannot form a positive incentive, also cannot play a positive reinforcement effect on the behavior of young teachers. They have negative attitudes toward unreasonable tasks assigned and thus their job satisfaction was impaired.

Secondly, the unreasonable goal setting is also reflected in the target time, some universities tend to set short-term goals. However, academic research takes time. Young teachers read a large number of papers for screening and sorting theory, and the theoretical model constructed needs careful polishing. Experiments cannot be successful at one time, and it takes time to collect and analyze various data. If short-term goals are used for assessment, it is bound to make young teachers feel physically and mentally exhausted. And some of them who want to complete the performance assessment may go astray, such as falsification of experimental data and manuscript editing of papers. This is not conducive to the improvement of academic ability, but will bring unhealthy ways and customs to the academic community, and even eventually evolve into the phenomenon of "Bad Money Drives Out Good ", and those who study academics seriously cannot survive.

Thirdly, the unreasonable goal setting puts young teachers under great pressure. Some may choose to transfer this pressure and seize others' academic achievements with their own power, which is not uncommon in colleges and universities. This kind of "occupation" behavior will also exert negative influence on the university itself. The atmosphere in the research team is not harmonious, and there are estrangement and contradiction between members or between members and leaders, which makes it difficult to accomplish scientific research tasks efficiently. It can also form the butterfly effect, leading to the negative work attitude spread the whole research team. Colleges and universities set unreasonable goals for young teachers, resulting in their lack of organizational support and irritability. They devote more of their personal time to work, which is an inevitable under objective pressure. Working beyond the prescribed working hours is not conducive to the organization's training and promotion of young teachers' job satisfaction.

3.1.3. Universities Lack Flexible Management

The main reason why young teachers are not satisfied with their jobs is the strict assessment mode of colleges and universities. At present, the main assessment mode is the "Tenure-Track ", which means "Promotion or Dismissal "in China. " Tenure-Track " was spread to China from the United States, and its significance is to maintain and protect the professional stability of teachers and academic freedom. After being put forward and applied in western countries, the effect is remarkable. The job attitudes of college teachers are more positive and the staff stability is improved. In 2003, The Plan of Teacher Appointment

and Position Promotion System (Draft for Comments) was carried out by Peking University. The plan divides teachers into four levels: assistant professor, lecturer, associate professor and professor, with professors enjoying tenure, while assistant professor, lecturer and associate professor will be evaluated on a "Tenure-Track" basis. Other universities are following suit in the hope that by encouraging faculty to engage in academic research, they will help strengthen their academic backgrounds. However, with the implementation of the "Tenure-Track", the social problems brought by the system gradually appeared. For example, some universities announced the implementation and assessment results of the "Tenure-Track" teacher employment system. Especially the assessment results of Wuhan University's first teacher employment period in 2018, there is only 3% of newly recruited teachers passed the assessment.

What was originally a win-win outcome for universities and teachers has now evolved into a "sword of Damocles" hanging over young teachers, making them anxious to successfully pass the assessment period of "Tenure-Track" every day, and unable to concentrate on academic research or complete teaching tasks physically and mentally. In particular, the assessment of some universities is too strict, and there is no "buffer period" for those who are evaluated. According to the common process in China, without skipping a grade or retaking the Entrance Exam, students can enter the university at the age of 18 and generally graduate with a doctor's degree at the age of 28. In addition to the role of teachers, young teachers also have multiple social identities such as children, partners and parents. In addition to teaching and academic research, young teachers also need to support their parents, support their families and raise their children. If they are not given a chance to reassess or a "buffer period", once they fail the assessment, they are bound to have some negative emotions or even extreme thoughts. As the management of colleges and universities is too rigid, the performance assessment of young teachers is difficult to reach the standard, and they cannot get humanistic care. Therefore they tend to doubt their own ability, and it is difficult to improve their sense of self-efficacy, which is not conducive to forming a positive job attitude.

3.2. Subjective Level

3.2.1. Group Characteristics of Young Teachers in Colleges and Universities

Young university teachers refer to teachers under the age of 40. Nowadays, young teachers in colleges and universities are mainly composed of "Millennial". Millennial refer to people born after 1980s or 1990s, also called Gen Y. They grew up under the background of the One-child policy and the era of material abundance, having certain unique ideas and concepts with obvious generational differences. First of all, their material needs are increasing. The reality shows that their values are still strongly materialistic, and they are more concerned about the satisfaction of material needs, while their relative satisfaction is relatively low. Secondly, their self-orientation is more obvious. Self-orientation is not selfishness, but an emphasis on self-worth and self-presentation. They tend to think and judge from their own perspective. In addition, they do not like the "high-pressure culture", too strict management will cause their rebellious psychology. Harmonious and casual organizational atmosphere will make them more engaged in their work and have a positive attitude towards work.

3.2.2. Expectations of Young Teachers for Economic Income and Personal Development

As analyzed above, young college teachers have strong material needs and obvious self-orientation. Of course, as a knowledge-intensive group with high input of human capital, the current income of young teachers in colleges and universities is indeed very lack of competitiveness. The current high housing price and commodity price as well as the desire of young teachers for material needs deepen their dissatisfaction with the existing economic income and weaken their positive attitude towards work. Besides, they hope that in the process of completing teaching tasks and scientific research, they can get their personal value presented, and have the prospect of future development and opportunities for personal improvement. If the task and work cannot meet their expectations, their attitude will tend to be negative.

4. Psychological Capital: Suggestions on Improving the Job Attitudes of Young University Teachers in China

Psychological capital refers to a positive psychological state that an individual shows in the process of growth and development. According to the research, psychological capital has four core elements, efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience. The improvement of Chinese young college teachers' job

attitudes can be carried out based on their sense of self-efficacy, hope for the future, optimism and mental toughness.

4.1. Government: Cultivate Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy

The government needs to strengthen the training of young teachers in colleges and universities. According to the professional characteristics of young teachers, the Ministry of Education establish a set of training system, including pre-employment training and post-employment training. The government ought to put forward the directive request to the objectives, content, form and assessment of training, which makes the training of young university teachers normalized and institutionalized. Pre-employment training focuses on the following three aspects, including professional quality and concept, teaching theory and skills, information technology and application. On the one hand, professional quality and concept mean that young teachers in colleges and universities should first establish correct ideals and beliefs and always put teaching and educating in the first place. On the other hand, the cultivation of professional quality focuses on improving teachers' ability of organizing and teaching, the conduction of their influence on education, the ability of organizing and managing and the ability of scientific research. Post-employment training is by no means a systematic project for the continuous re-education of young teachers in colleges and universities and the improvement of their ability. On the one hand, we should continue to strengthen the ideological and political education of young teachers to prevent their values from becoming utilitarian. Under the influence of market economy, the young teachers need to set up a family, raise children, support the elderly, etc. However, with the heavy task, the youth teacher's salary is relatively low and the treatment is poor. In the face of outside enterprises preferential treatment, some young university teachers will inevitably be tempted. And there will be a certain degree of shaken in their professional beliefs. On the other hand, implement relevant policies, which improves the comprehensive teaching ability of young teachers in colleges and universities. Optimizing the training system can help young teachers form a sense of self-efficacy. They thus will have the ability and confidence to successfully complete the task, and then improve their attitude towards teaching and research work.

4.2. University: Improve Teachers' Sense of Efficacy and Prospect

Firstly, university ought to improve the professional title promotion system. At present, the decentralization of professional title evaluation makes universities have more autonomy. On the one hand, colleges and universities should formulate a more scientific and reasonable professional title evaluation system according to their own actual situation, breaking up the method of quota allocation and professional title evaluation only based on thesis, subject and capital. They should establish more diversified methods for evaluating professional titles, and include teaching achievements, discipline competition achievements, discipline construction achievements, innovative research achievements, etc. On the other hand, the professional title evaluation of university teachers should be strictly implemented and actively accept the supervision of the Ministry of Education, human resources and social security departments. In addition, they should offer multiple paths to promotion. There are various types of young talents in colleges and universities, who also pay more attention to freedom. If they can be provided with more promotion options, they will be more active in their work. Making young teachers in colleges and universities full of hope for their future development can improve their work enthusiasm.

Secondly, university ought to optimize the current performance appraisal model. The basic teaching workload of young teachers should be appropriately reduced. The possibility of applying other performance appraisal methods in colleges and universities ought to be discussed and put into practice. The idea of optimizing assessment should include setting reasonable target and flexible management. A reasonable goal is one of the factors that motivate the members to get better performance and can make them have a positive attitude towards their work. Assessment also needs some flexibility. The purpose of performance assessment is not to put pressure on young teachers, but to make them more focused on their work, improving teachers' professional ability, and promoting the transformation of ability into results.

Thirdly, university ought to improve the economic income of young teachers. The economic base determines the superstructure. If young teachers need to worry about their material life and livelihood, it is difficult to focus on work. Therefore, to a certain extent, colleges and universities need to improve the remuneration of young teachers and solve relevant problems for them. Once young teachers do not have to worry about income, they will not focus on their sideline and can work more wholeheartedly.

Colleges and universities can provide a platform for young teachers' personal improvement. On the

one hand, set up and implemented the tutorial system, making young teachers adapt to teaching or scientific research positions smoothly and get a higher degree of promotion. On the other hand, university should strengthen the support for the continuing re-education of young teachers, and provide policy and economic support for them about training and study. Young teachers are very concerned about their own development. If university provide them with relevant opportunities, they will face their work more seriously.

Moreover, colleges and universities should pay attention to the physical and mental health of young teachers and give them humanistic care. Relevant surveys show that young teachers generally feel great pressure and anxiety. Colleges and universities can offer special health consultants to young teachers, acknowledging the changes of their physical and mental conditions on a regular basis. University could invite qualified psychological teachers or doctors to serve as a health consultant. Cooperating with other colleges and universities to build a physical and mental health management platform for young teachers by integrating various resources is also a suitable means. After perceiving the support and care of the organization, young teachers are more willing to devote themselves to work.

4.3. Society and Family: Maintain Teachers' Optimistic Attitude

Society should take measures to curb the trend of age discrimination in the workplace, so that employees in enterprises, universities and other organizations have a more active attitude to work. Colleges and universities, in particular, need to give young teachers more time to grow and improve. Rome was not built in a day. It takes time to research and teaching for youth teacher. Society ought to appeal for the age equality, which will help young teachers to form an optimistic attitude and improve their work attitude. Besides, family members should not too often urge young university teachers to get married and have children, and allow them to live and work according to their own pace.

4.4. Personal Level: Strengthen Mental Toughness

Young teachers in colleges and universities should learn to adjust their mentality and enhance their mental toughness in the face of pressure from society, family and college work. A person with strong mental toughness will return to normal condition after being stressed and will not be crushed by setbacks. Young university teachers need to lifting relevant capacity so that they will not be troubled by external factors and their attitude towards work will not be affected. After all, there is no benefit to approach work tasks in a negative mood. If young university teachers feel psychological pressure, they can take the initiative to talk to others. According to research, deep conversation between people for more than half an hour can release bad emotions. Besides, physical exercise is also a choice. Through exercising, people will not only shape a healthy body, but also will get resistance power. It will help young teachers face pressure and improve their job attitudes.

5. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the influencing factors of the job attitudes of young university teachers in China, and puts forward suggestions for improving their job attitudes from four core elements of psychological capital, efficiency, hope, optimism and toughness. The government needs to further develop the training system for young teachers, improve their relevant abilities and cultivate their sense of self-efficacy. Colleges and universities, need to start from various aspects to improve teachers' sense of efficacy and increase their hope for their own prospects. Society and families need to be more tolerant of young teachers and give them sufficient space to maintain an optimistic attitude. Young teachers in colleges and universities also need to strengthen their mental toughness by talking with others and doing physical exercises. From the government, colleges and universities, social family and individual levels, strengthen the psychological capital of Chinese young university teachers, and then improve their job attitudes.

References

- [1] Valiente C., Swanson J., & Eisenberg N. (2012). *Linking Students' Emotions and Academic Achievement: When and Why Emotions Matter. Child Development Perspectives, (2)*, 129-135.
- [2] Luthans F, Avolio BJ, Avey JB, Norman SM. (2007). *Positive Psychological Capital: Measurement and Relationship with Performance and Satisfaction. Personnel Psychology. (3)*.541-572.

- [3] Judge T. A., & Kammeyer-Mueller J. D. (2012). *Job attitudes. Annual Review of Psychology*, (1), 341-367.
- [4] Schleicher D. J., Watt J. D., & Greguras G. J. (2004). *Re-Examining the Job Satisfaction-Performance Relationship: The Complexity of Attitudes. Journal of Applied Psychology*, (1), 165-177.
- [5] Greenhaus J.H. and Wormley W.M. (1990). *Effects of Race on Organizational Experience, Job Performance Evaluations, and Career Outcomes, Academy of Management Journal*, (33), 64-86.
- [6] Lodahl T M, Kejner M. (1965). *The Definition and Measurement of Job Involvement. The Journal of Applied psychology*, (49), 24-33.
- [7] Kahn W A. (1990). *Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work. Academy of Management Journal*, (4), 692-724.
- [8] Li Min. (2019). *A Study on the Current Situation and Causes of Secondary School Teachers' Sense of Work Engagement—an Empirical Analysis Based on Survey Data from 13 Provinces and Cities in China. Teacher Education Research* (05), 94-99.
- [9] Cook J. and Wall T. (1980). "New Work Attitude Measures of Trust, Organizational Commitment and Personal Need Non-Fulfillment", *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, (1), 39-52.
- [10] Meyer J.P., Allen N.J. A (1991). *Three-component Conceptualization of Organizational Commitment. Human Resource Management Review*, (1), 61-89.
- [11] Lv Na & Sun Hao-Cheng. (2021). *A Study on the Correlation Between Perceptions of Fairness and Research Performance in Higher Education Faculty Performance Evaluation-mediated Effect of Organizational Affective Commitment. Journal of Higher Education Research* (03), 79-86.
- [12] Eisenberger R, Huntington R, Hutchison S, et al. (1986). *Perceived Organizational Support. The Journal of Applied Psychology*, (3), 500-507.
- [13] Lin Xiaojiao. (2022). *The Impact of Perceptions of Organizational Support on University Faculty Developmental Motivation: The Mediating Role of Basic Psychological Needs. Chinese Journal of Health Psychology* (11), 1654-1660.
- [14] Guo W.-C. & Cao Q.-H. (2022). *A Meta-Analysis of Employee Engagement Research. Journal of Dalian University of Technology (Social Science Edition)* (02), 37-48.
- [15] Carmona-Halty M., Schaufeli W. B., & Salanova M. (2019). *Good Relationships, Good Performance: The Mediating Role of Psychological Capital—A Three-Wave Study Among Students. Frontiers in Psychology*, (10), 306.
- [16] Ferraro T., Pais L., Moreira J. M., & Dos Santos N. R. (2018). *Decent Work and Work Motivation in Knowledge Workers: The Mediating Role of Psychological Capital. Applied Research in Quality of Life*, (2), 501–523.
- [17] Baig S. A., Iqbal S., Abrar M., Baig I. A., Amjad F., Ziaur-Rehman M., & Awan M. U. (2021). *Impact of Leadership Styles on Employees' Performance With Moderating Role of Positive Psychological Capital. Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, (9–10), 1085–1105.