

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS AT X PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN SHANDONG PROVINCE, CHINA

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the relationship between organizational support and professional development of instructors at X Private University in Shandong Province, China. It analyzes how different background variables (gender, educational background, professional title, and years of teaching experience) affect organizational support and professional development, and investigates the correlations between their respective dimensions. Using a questionnaire survey method, data was collected from 294 teachers at a private university in Shandong. Descriptive statistics, difference analysis, and correlation analysis were employed to compare demographic variables and examine the relationship between organizational support and professional development. Results indicated significant differences in organizational support and professional development across teachers of different genders, professional titles, and teaching experience. Professors showed significantly higher levels of organizational support and professional development than assistant professors ($p < 0.001$), and teachers with over 15 years of experience demonstrated significantly better professional abilities than those with 1-5 years ($p < 0.05$). Gender differences were less pronounced, and educational background differences were non-significant ($p > 0.05$). Organizational support and professional development were positively correlated ($r = 0.577$, $p < 0.01$), with value identification being the strongest predictor and a strong link between work support and professional ability. Based on these findings, it is recommended to enhance the professional development system through school management optimization, teacher - focused strategies, and policy-making efforts. Specific recommendations include creating multi-level support mechanisms, improving all-dimensional support systems, and establishing sound institutional safeguards and incentive mechanisms. These findings provide theoretical and practical references for improving faculty development in private universities.

Keywords: Organizational Support, Professional Development, University Instructors

Introduction

Against the dual backdrop of global educational digital transformation and the enhancement of higher education quality, the professional development of university instructors has become a core driver of educational quality assurance (UNESCO, 2020). China's "Education Modernization 2035" explicitly proposes the strategic goal of building a high-quality, professional, and innovative teaching staff. However, private higher education institutions face more severe teacher-development challenges due to uneven resource distribution and weak institutional support (Ministry of Education, 2022). Organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) indicates that the sense of support from institutional guarantees, resource supply, and emotional care directly impacts teachers' work engagement and development willingness (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Yet, most existing studies focus on public higher education institutions, with a lack of empirical testing on the mechanism of organizational support and professional development among private - institution teachers. Studies show that resource guarantees and caring environments significantly enhance teachers' professional abilities (Ahmed et al., 2014). There are differences in needs at various career stages: new teachers prioritize material support, while experienced teachers value participation in decision-making (Blau, 2017). The sense of support in private higher education institutions is significantly lower than in public ones, mainly due to disconnected training and uneven resource distribution (Li, 2013). The turnover rate of teachers under 45 years old in private institutions is significantly higher than in public institutions (Wang, 2020), and the annual training duration per teacher is less than 60% of that in public institutions (Cao, 2019). As a province with a large higher education sector, Shandong's private - institution teachers are typical. However, studies indicate that their sense of organizational support is below average, particularly in the aspect of concern for interests (Zheng, 2023). There is also an imbalance in the development of teaching abilities and weak independent innovation capabilities. The relationship between support mechanisms and professional development requires in-depth analysis (Wang & Liu, 2018). Therefore, this study uses Institution X in Shandong as a sample to explore the relationship between organizational support and teachers' professional development under regional culture, expanding the application scenario of indigenous organizational support theory. A comprehensive analysis of the impact of organizational support on the professional development of university teachers has positive significance and value for the development of individual and collective teachers, as well as for the advancement of educational undertakings.

Research Objectives

(1) To examine the current status of organizational support and professional development among faculty at Private University X in Shandong Province, China.

(2) To analyze differences in organizational support and professional development among faculty at Private University X in Shandong Province, China, across different background variables.

(3) To clarify the relationship between organizational support and professional development among faculty at Private University X in Shandong Province, China.

Literature Review

Research on Organizational Support

Conceptualization and Theoretical Foundations, Perceived Organizational Support refers to employees' perception of the extent to which their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. First proposed by Eisenberger et al. (1986), this construct encompasses the fulfillment of employees' social, emotional, and economic needs. Crucially, POS arises from organizations' voluntary provision of resources rather than external pressures (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Grounded in Social Exchange Theory and reciprocity norms, employees perceiving organizational support develop obligations to reciprocate, thereby enhancing work engagement and organizational commitment (Wang, 2018). Existing research reveals two definitional orientations. This study adopts an integrated perspective for university instructors, defining POS as their perception of institutional recognition of work efforts and professional value, along with institutional concern for personal well-being and development needs (Zhang, 2022; Xu, 2024).

Dimensions and Scale Development, POS has evolved from a unidimensional affective construct (McMillian, 1997) to multidimensional frameworks including instrumental and emotional support. Scale development for instructors demonstrates progressive refinement: Chen & Liao (2006) expanded dimensions to affective, instrumental, supervisor, and colleague support; Samra & Hussain (2021) categorized dimensions into leadership style, recognition, information, and school climate; Guo (2009) established a five-dimensional framework (emotional support, instrumental support, supervisor support, fairness, colleague support) for Chinese university instructors; Ling et al. (2006) proposed a culturally-grounded triad: work support, value recognition, and benefit concern; Guo (2023) adapted Ling's scale by replacing "company" with "school" for educational contexts; Zheng (2023) validated the reliability and validity of Ling's three-dimensional scale for university instructors; Wang (2018) developed an affective-institutional-material support framework emphasizing academic autonomy. The multidimensional evolution of POS reflects cultural, industrial, and group-specific influences. Multidimensional frameworks demonstrate superior applicability in culturally specific contexts, with localized scales exhibiting enhanced psychometric properties. This study employs the three-dimensional scale validated by Zheng (2023).

Effects and Impact, Within higher education, organizational support significantly enhances instructors' job satisfaction (Wang & Zhou, 2022), professional competence development (Miao, 2011), and teaching efficacy (Ahmed et al., 2015; Kshetree, 2021). By fulfilling instructors' needs, it directly improves job satisfaction and performance outcomes, demonstrating significant positive correlation with performance and cross-cultural universality (Chinomona & Sandada, 2014).

Research on Professional Development of University Instructors

Conceptual Connotations, Professional development, defined as a continuous process throughout one's career, aims to achieve both individual and higher education-related values (Xu & Sun, 2020), marking a shift from skills training to holistic development (Bao & Yang, 2018). Its origins date back to Hoyle (1980) definition, with China's Ministry of Education outlining its policy-based essence. It is fundamentally an ecological process driven by lifelong learning, reflective practice, and identity reconstruction (Xu, 2017).

Dimensions and Scale Development, Current research on professional development dimensions for university teachers has established a multi-dimensional framework, with scale development closely tied to dimensional theories. Research trends show a move towards integrated and systematic dimensions, with an emphasis on group-specific, dynamic, and cross-cultural scale development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Zhang (2022) integrated individual and organizational development based on organizational support theory. Scales for private-college teachers focus on professional efficacy, beliefs, and vision (Ma, 2019), while those for ethnic universities include a cultural adaptation dimension (Suoni, 2020). Zhou (2023) digital-transformation scale adds international cooperation, and Li (2022) stressed the need to align with local evaluation policies and cultural contexts when comparing Chinese and US scales. This study, set in a private university in Shandong, China, uses Wu (2021) refined four-dimensional scale: professional affection, knowledge, ability, and spirit.

Improvement Strategies, Zhang (2022) proposed building a service system based on organizational support theory, viewing organizational support as key to overcoming professional-development bottlenecks. However, current practices show significant gaps (Li, 2016). Educational digitization offers innovative paths but poses challenges (Zhou, 2023), and future efforts should focus on developing collaborative learning environments (Bautista et al., 2022).

The Relationship Between Organizational Support and Teachers' Professional Development

Empirical evidence indicates that organizational support boosts professional development through three pathways: Direct impact: It directly elevates professional competence by offering material resources (Wang, 2018). Mediation: Value recognition enhances professional affect by bolstering occupational identity (Xu, 2024). Moderation: Professional title and teaching experience significantly influence the effectiveness of support. Professors, with accumulated academic capital, are more likely to translate organizational support into developmental outcomes (Bourdieu, 1986). The direct of organizational support on professional development is underpinned by a fusion of social exchange theory (Blau, 2017) and organizational support theory (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Key dimensions include material resources (Ma, 2018), institutional evaluation (Zhang, 2022; Ruan, 2024), and emotional support (Wang, 2018). However, existing research has limitations, such as unclear differentiated dimensional impacts. In terms of mediation and moderation, organizational support exhibits both roles in professional development. But studies are often confined to single educational

phases, focus on individual traits for moderating variables, and lack in-depth exploration of cognitive variables in mediating pathways (Dağlı & Kalkan, 2021; Zhou & Fan, 2019; He, 2020; Guo et al., 2023; Wang & Huang, 2023).

Current Status of Faculty Development at Private University X in Shandong

Private University X in Shandong is among the province's first pilot institutions for applied undergraduate education (2021) and a designated cultivation unit for professional master's degree programs (2017). The institution currently employs 1,205 full-time faculty members. Through its dual-track internal cultivation and external recruitment system, it has established a systematic faculty development support framework: Designed pre-service training for new instructors; Cultivated internationally certified trainers through FDW teaching workshops to prepare talent for institutional ISW programs; Enabled core faculty to participate in provincial-level specialized training; Incorporated teaching competition outcomes into its recognition system, establishing three-tier honors: Young Teaching Talent, Distinguished Teacher, and Master Educator; Leveraged platforms such as two Huang Danian-style teaching teams to facilitate faculty engagement in provincial/ministerial research projects and regional applied cultural studies; Invested ¥205 million in infrastructure to support national/provincial teaching quality enhancement projects.

However, research (Ma, 2018; He, 2023) indicates persistent challenges: uneven distribution of research resources, delayed policy implementation, and societal evaluation biases. Notably, insufficient emotional support exists for female and junior faculty (Ma, 2019), while the efficacy of special funding requires improvement.

As a representative private institution in Shandong, University X's faculty development practices reflect common challenges during applied higher education transformation. This case study aims to explore optimized faculty development pathways, providing transferable models for peer institutions to enhance regional higher education quality.

Methodology

This study focused on teachers at a private higher education institution in Shandong, China. With 1,025 teachers as of 2025, the sample size was determined to be 280 using Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table. We distributed 300 questionnaires to teachers across different schools, ranks, educational backgrounds, and teaching experience at this institution. A total of 294 valid responses were collected, representing a 98% valid return rate and meeting statistical requirements.

Instruments The organizational support scale was adapted from Zheng (2023) Organizational Support Scale for College Teachers, featuring 18 items across three dimensions: work support, value recognition, and concern for interests. This scale combines international elements with Chinese cultural adaptations and has demonstrated good reliability and validity among Chinese college teachers.

For assessing professional development, we used Wu's (2021) Professional Development Scale

for College Teachers, which includes 22 items covering four dimensions: professional affection, knowledge, ability, and spirit.

Results

Demographic Analysis of Questionnaire Participants

This study targeted teachers at a private higher education institution in Shandong, China, with 294 valid questionnaires recovered, achieving a 98% valid return rate. The statistical results for gender, professional title, etc., are shown in Table 4.1. The gender distribution indicated that 25.51% were male teachers and 74.49% female, with male teachers significantly underrepresented. In terms of professional titles, lecturers constituted the largest group (51.36%), followed by associate professors (23.47%) and teaching assistants (20.07%). This reflects a predominance of mid-young teachers, with only 28.57% holding senior titles (associate professor or above), indicating relatively low academic accumulation. Regarding educational background, master's degree holders accounted for the majority (74.15%), with less than 10% holding a bachelor's degree, highlighting the institution's emphasis on academic qualifications. In terms of teaching experience, teachers with 1-5 years of experience were most prevalent (39.46%), followed by those with 6-10 years and over 15 years (26.87%), revealing a mix of a large number of newly-recruited and a certain proportion of experienced teachers.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Organizational Support and Professional Development among University Instructors

(1) Utilizing descriptive statistics, this study quantified the organizational support status for instructors at Shandong Private University X. As presented in Table 1, the overall organizational support mean score indicates a moderately high level ($M=3.68$), with all dimension scores exceeding the intermediate threshold. Among these dimensions, Work Support scored highest ($M=4.06$), followed by Value Recognition ($M=3.80$), while Benefit Concern registered relatively lower ($M=3.19$). These results demonstrate moderately high organizational support levels among instructors at Shandong Private University X.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Organizational Support

Dimension	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
Work Support	294	4.06	0.87	High
Value Recognition	294	3.80	1.05	High
Benefit Concern	294	3.19	0.93	Moderate
Overall Organizational Support	294	3.68	0.90	High

(2) Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the overall level of professional development among teachers at Private Institution X in Shandong. As indicated in Table 2, the average score for

professional development was high ($M=4.30$), with all dimensions scoring highly. Professional knowledge and spirit had the highest average score ($M=4.38$), followed by professional affection ($M=4.33$), while professional ability had a slightly lower average score ($M=4.10$). This reflects a high overall level of professional development among teachers at this institution.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Professional Development

Dimension	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
Professional Affection	294	4.33	0.68	High
Professional Knowledge	294	4.38	0.73	High
Professional Ability	294	4.10	0.76	High
Professional Spirit	294	4.38	0.67	High
Overall Professional Development	294	4.30	0.62	High

(3) Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive correlations between all dimensions of organizational support and professional development ($p<0.01$). A moderate-strength positive association exists between organizational support and professional development, with the value recognition dimension demonstrating the most pronounced facilitative effect. The high intercorrelations among professional development dimensions indicate teachers' professional growth constitutes an integrated process with mutually reinforcing elements. Among organizational support dimensions, value recognition exhibited the strongest predictive power for professional development, while benefit concern showed relatively weaker influence, reflecting instructors' prioritization of spiritual dimensions of organizational support. The comprehensive results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis of University Instructors' Organizational Support and Professional Development

	IV1	IV2	IV3	IV	DV1	DV2	DV3	DV4	DV
IV1	1								
IV2	.682**	1							
IV3	.523**	.587**	1						
IV	.854**	.896**	.813**	1					
DV1	.438**	.581**	.386**	.532**	1				
DV2	.452**	.503**	.342**	.498**	.735**	1			
DV3	.568**	.492**	.401**	.562**	.682**	.764**	1		
DV4	.431**	.578**	.378**	.528**	.826**	.812**	.751**	1	
DV	.526**	.584**	.412**	.577**	.863**	.894**	.878**	.891**	1

** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

IV1: Work Support, IV2: Value Recognition, IV3: Benefit Concern, IV: Overall Organizational Support

DV1: Professional Affect, DV2: Professional Knowledge, DV3: Professional Competence, DV4: Professional Ethos, DV: Overall Professional Development

Discussion

Current Status of Organizational Support and Professional Development among University Instructors

This study's empirical investigation of instructors at Shandong Private University X reveals that their professional development level ($M=4.30$) is significantly higher than organizational support level ($M=3.68$). Theoretically, this outcome validates Pan (2017) Teacher Self-directed Development Theory, indicating university instructors achieve professional growth through self-motivation despite limited organizational support. Specifically:

Professional knowledge and professional ethos show outstanding performance ($M=4.38$), aligning with Ye (2001) Teacher Professional Structure Renewal Theory-hat teacher professional development involves continuous renewal and evolution of internal professional structures, where professional growth primarily manifests as spiritual awakening and elevation. These results provide empirical support for this theory. The relatively weaker professional competence dimension ($M=4.10$) warrants in-depth exploration, concurrently evidencing Li (2016) observation of higher education's research-teaching imbalance, reflecting persistent deficiencies in practical training. The high professional affect level ($M=4.33$) carries profound cultural significance, resonating with Zhang (2022) research on teachers' professional affect and revealing Chinese educators' vocational identity model where teaching is perceived as a calling. Furthermore, high inter-dimensional correlations in professional development corroborate Wang (2015) perspective that teacher professional development constitutes an integrated process with mutually reinforcing dimensions.

Work support demonstrates the highest level ($M=4.06$), followed by value recognition ($M=3.80$), with benefit concern being weakest ($M=3.19$). The low benefit concern level indicates inadequate material safeguards, potentially constraining teachers' progression toward higher-level needs. This finding provides clear improvement directions for university administrators. These results align with Wang (2018) empirical conclusions regarding Jiangsu provincial university instructors.

Differences in Organizational Support and Professional Development Across Different Background Variables

Data indicate that full professors significantly outperform teaching assistants in both organizational support ($M=3.88$) and professional development ($M=4.62$), $p<0.001$. These results validate Bourdieu (1986) cultural capital theory, indicating that senior faculty establish virtuous development cycles through accumulated academic capital. Further analysis reveals these disparities

primarily manifest in research resource acquisition and academic discourse power.

Compared with Zhang (2021) study on private university instructors, this research shows substantially reduced gender differences-reflecting effective gender equality policies-though professional competence disparities remain significant ($p < 0.05$). The non-significance of educational background differences ($p > 0.05$) contradicts traditional human capital theory but supports Zhang (2021) diminishing returns hypothesis of educational credentials, indicating continuous learning ability outweighs initial qualifications in predicting development levels. Under mass higher education, continuous learning ability better predicts instructor development than initial qualifications. This finding informs faculty recruitment and training policies, though the 74.15% master's degree holder sample may contribute to this pattern.

Teachers with over 15 years of teaching experience have significantly better professional abilities than those with 1-5 years of experience. ($p < 0.05$), evidencing experience's positive impact. This conclusion aligns with Zhang (2023) finding that longer-tenured early childhood educators exhibit higher professional development levels. Additionally, Li (2024) study found instructors with ≤ 3 years' experience underperforms decade-long peers across professional ethics, knowledge, and competence. These studies collectively evidence experience's positive impact.

Full professors perceive significantly greater organizational support than teaching assistants, likely attributable to senior faculty's enhanced academic influence and resource access. This mirrors Chen (2017) conclusion regarding inequitable organizational support distribution across professional ranks.

Analysis of the Relationship Between Organizational Support and Professional Development for University Teachers

The positive correlation between overall organizational support and professional development ($r = 0.577$) aligns with Ling (2006) findings. In institutions with robust institutional and cultural support, organizational support significantly boosts professional development (Wang, 2018). Conversely, support lacking emotional elements has limited effectiveness (Zhang, 2021). The high integration within professional development ($r > 0.6$) confirms Shulman's (1987) theory of teaching reasoning, where professional affection directly impacts ability and indirectly does so through knowledge.

At the dimensional level, the strong link between work support and professional ability ($r = 0.568$) supports Bandura (1997) self-efficacy theory. Resource compatibility mediates this relationship ($p < 0.01$); when work support matches teachers' actual needs above average, the correlation rises to 0.623, but drops to 0.491 otherwise. This offers a basis for precise resource allocation.

Value recognition's strong promotion of professional development ($r = 0.584$) matches Eisenberger (1986) organizational support theory. Teachers perceiving organizational value recognition show enhanced professional beliefs and self-driven development (Xu, 2020). This perception strengthens both professional affection and ability, with teachers of intermediate - level and below titles

and with less than six years of teaching experience being more sensitive to organizational support (Ma & Zhou, 2023). Chen et al. (2013) study of young university teachers found that value recognition in organizational support significantly positively impacts research ability ($p < 0.01$), echoing the high correlation between value recognition and professional affection in this study ($r = 0.581$).

Work support and concern for interests show moderate positive correlations with professional development ($r = 0.526$ and $r = 0.412$). This confirms Zhou (2023) finding that combining material and spiritual support effectively meets teachers' needs, driving internal motivation for professional growth.

In summary, this study combines quantitative analysis with theoretical interpretation. It not only confirms existing theoretical predictions but also identifies teacher-development patterns with Chinese characteristics. These insights offer valuable theoretical and practical guidance for contemporary teacher-team building and open up new directions for future research.

Conclusions

Study on the Current Status of Organizational Support and Professional Development for University Teachers

1. Teachers at Private Institution X in Shandong, China, generally experience high levels of organizational support and professional development.

2. Significant differences in organizational support and professional development exist among teachers of different genders, professional titles, and teaching experience, but not among different educational qualifications.

(1) Gender significantly impacts both organizational support and professional development, with male teachers outperforming female teachers in both aspects.

(2) Educational background does not significantly affect organizational support and professional development.

(3) Professional title significantly impacts organizational support and professional development, with the highest scores achieved by professors.

(4) Teaching experience significantly impacts organizational support and professional development, with the highest scores achieved by teachers with over 15 years of experience.

3. A significant positive correlation exists between organizational support and professional development among university teachers.

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