Research Article

Research on the research motivation mechanism of young teachers in colleges and universities based on organizational support theory

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ABSTRACT

This study, based on organizational support theory, explores the relationship between young college teachers' sense of organizational support, professional identity and research motivation, with the aim of revealing their incentive mechanism. The study shows that teachers' perception of school support significantly and positively affects their research motivation, including the two dimensions of instrumental support and emotional support. The results of a questionnaire survey of young teachers from 120 universities across the country show that there is a significant positive correlation between the sense of organizational support and research motivation, and that professional identity plays a mediating role between the two. In addition, the study also found that gender differences play a moderating role in the relationship between organizational support and research motivation, and there are significant differences in the performance of male and female teachers in this relationship. Based on these findings, this paper suggests that universities should create a good organizational support environment, pay attention to enhancing teachers' sense of professional identity, and consider gender differences in policy formulation, in order to more effectively motivate teachers' research motivation and thus improve overall research efficiency and quality. The research results provide practical guidance for the research management and incentive mechanisms of university teachers, and enrich the application of organizational support theory.

Keywords: organizational support theory; young university teachers; research motivation; stimulation mechanism

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of rapid development of higher education worldwide, scientific research has become an important responsibility and evaluation criterion for university teachers[1]. As the new force of scientific research in universities, the motivation of young teachers is of great significance for promoting academic innovation and enhancing the comprehensive strength of universities[2]. The organizational support theory provides a new perspective for understanding the research motivation of teachers, emphasizing how an individual's perception of organizational support affects their work attitude and behavior[3]. By studying the relationship between young university teachers' sense of organizational support, professional identity and

research motivation, a theoretical basis can be provided for universities to formulate corresponding incentives and support policies, so as to enhance teachers' research motivation and overall research level [4].

In the international academic community, Eisenberger et al. (1986) first proposed the theory of organizational support, pointing out that the sense of organizational support has a significant impact on employees' job satisfaction, commitment and innovation[5]. Subsequent research has further explored the application of the sense of organizational support in different fields, including education. Existing research has shown that teachers' sense of organizational support is closely related to their job satisfaction, work commitment and innovation ability, especially in scientific research activities. Teachers' perceived sense of support has a significant impact on their research motivation[6]. Domestic scholars have conducted preliminary research on the relationship between organizational support and teachers' research motivation, and have found the importance of organizational support in promoting research work, including the importance of research work, the provision of resources, and emotional care[7]. In addition, the research also points out that teachers' sense of professional identity has a positive impact on their research motivation. Teachers with a high sense of professional identity often show stronger enthusiasm and commitment to research[8].

Although previous studies have provided a theoretical basis for understanding the research motivation of young college teachers, there are still some deficiencies. Existing studies are often limited to the investigation of a single variable, lacking an in-depth analysis of the complex relationship between perceived organizational support, professional identity and research motivation[9]. Although there is theoretical discussion, there are relatively few empirical studies on young college teachers, especially comparative studies across gender and disciplinary backgrounds. Existing studies have not fully considered the moderating effect of the adequacy of research resources on the relationship between perceived organizational support and research motivation, which may affect the universality of research results.

Although some studies have put forward policy recommendations, there is a lack of systematic discussion on specific implementation measures, which fails to effectively guide universities in enhancing teachers' research motivation in practice. In view of the above deficiencies, this study will systematically explore the influencing mechanism of factors such as organizational support, professional identity and research resources on the research motivation of young college teachers, with a view to providing more comprehensive theoretical support and practical guidance for universities in motivating teachers' research activities.

2. Research hypotheses

2.1. Sense of organizational support and research motivation of young teachers in higher education institutions

Organizational support refers to the overall perception of support provided by the university in the working environment of young teachers, and covers two important dimensions: instrumental support and emotional support. Instrumental support includes various resources provided by the university, such as research funds, equipment, laboratories, etc., while emotional support is reflected in the university's care, understanding and recognition of teachers. Research shows that teachers' sense of organizational support has a profound impact on their work attitude and behavior. Eisenberger et al. (1986) pointed out that there is a close relationship between enhanced organizational support and teachers' professional satisfaction, work commitment and innovation ability[10]. This finding has been further verified by domestic scholars, who believe that the sense of organizational support is an important factor affecting the research motivation of young college teachers, which is reflected in the perception of the importance of research work, the effective

provision of resources, and the manifestation of emotional care. Therefore, this paper proposes Hypothesis 1 (H1):

H1: Young university teachers' sense of organizational support positively predicts their research motivation, i.e., the higher the teachers' perceived organizational support, the stronger their research motivation.

2.2. Professional identity and research motivation of young teachers in higher education institutions

Professional identity refers to the degree to which an individual identifies with his or her professional role, and involves recognition of the value of the profession, expectations for professional development, and an understanding of the professional mission. Research has found that professional identity has a significant impact on teachers' work commitment and innovative behavior. Teachers with a higher degree of professional identity generally display a more positive attitude towards scientific research and stronger motivation to conduct research. Therefore, this paper proposes Hypothesis 2 (H2):

H2: Young university teachers' professional identity has a positive predictive effect on their research motivation, i.e., the stronger the professional identity, the higher the research motivation.

2.3. The mediating role of sense of organizational support

Incorporating organizational support theory, the sense of organizational support that teachers feel not only directly affects their research motivation, but also indirectly affects it by enhancing their professional identity. Specifically, when teachers feel supported by the university, their professional identity tends to be enhanced, which in turn stimulates their research motivation. This sense of support makes teachers more identify with their professional role, which in turn leads to higher enthusiasm and creativity in research activities. Therefore, this paper proposes hypothesis 3 (H3):

H3: Sense of organizational support mediates the relationship between professional identity and research motivation, i.e., young university teachers' sense of organizational support affects research motivation by enhancing their sense of professional identity.

2.4. The moderating role of scientific research resources

The adequacy of research resources (e.g., funding, equipment, time, etc.) may play a moderating role between perceived organizational support and research motivation. In a resource-rich environment, the teacher's perceived organizational support can be more effectively transformed into research motivation, while in a resource-poor environment, the effect of this transformation may be limited. In other words, when teachers can obtain sufficient resource support in the research process, the impact of perceived organizational support on their research motivation will be more significant. Therefore, this paper proposes Hypothesis 4 (H4):

H4: Research resources play a moderating role between perceived organizational support and research motivation, i.e., the effect of perceived organizational support on research motivation is more significant when research resources are sufficient.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research sample

This study takes young teachers in colleges and universities nationwide as the target of the survey, focusing on the group of working young teachers. The survey population covers different types of colleges and universities, including comprehensive universities, polytechnic colleges, teacher training colleges and

vocational and technical colleges, etc., to ensure the diversity and representativeness of the sample. Specifically, the study sample will include young teachers from 120 colleges and universities across the country who are 35 years old and below, have a doctoral or master's degree, and are engaged in teaching and research in colleges and universities. The survey was scheduled from June 2024 to August 2024, and data collection was conducted using an online questionnaire. The questionnaire design included the following sections: first, a section on basic information, including gender, age, education, title, etc.; second, a section on the measurement of sense of organizational support, using a validated scale to assess teachers' perception of support from the university in which they are working; then a section on the measurement of professional identity, which was assessed using a relevant scale[11]; and finally, a section on the measurement of motivation to do research, which was assessed by using a Likert five-point scale for the scoring. To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, the research team conducted a small-scale pre-test in the pre-survey period, and selected young teachers from eight universities for questionnaire feedback and revision. Finally, the research team distributed the questionnaires to the target group through electronic questionnaires, and 800 valid questionnaires were expected to be recovered for subsequent data analysis and research.

3.2. Research tools

(1) Perceived Organizational Support Scale. This study was based on a revision of the Perceived Organizational Support Measurement Scale proposed by Eisenberger et al. (1986), which is divided into two dimensions, instrumental support and emotional support, and contains a total of 45 questions. The scale was designed to assess teachers' perceptions of the level of support provided by the university at work, including institutional support, leadership support, and colleague support. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the Sense of Organizational Support Scale was 0.951, showing good reliability.

(2) Career identity scale. Career identity was measured using the Career Identity Scale developed by Li Hua et al. (2017), which contains three dimensions of understanding of career value, career development expectations, and career mission, totaling 30 questions. The scale was used to assess the degree of teachers' identification with their professional roles. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.918, with high reliability[12].

(3) Research Motivation Scale. Research motivation was measured using the Research Motivation Scale developed by Chen et al. (2015), which is divided into two dimensions, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and contains 25 questions. The scale was designed to assess the sources of teachers' motivation in research activities, including enthusiasm for research work and expectation of external rewards. In this study, the scale had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.934 with good reliability[13].

(4) Research Resources Assessment Scale. To assess the adequacy of research resources, this study used a self-developed research resource assessment scale covering four dimensions of funding, equipment, time and support services, with a total of 20 questions. The scale was used to measure the resource support available to faculty members in the research process. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.902, showing good reliability.

3.3. Analyzing ideas

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between young university teachers' sense of organizational support, professional identity and research motivation, and to analyze the mediating role of organizational support and the moderating role of research resources (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. Dimensional reliability analysis scale.

variant	Dimension/questionnaire item	Number of questionnaire items	Cronbach's α	Reliability Assessment	Validity analysis
Perceived organizational support	Tool Support	25	0.951	favorable	Validated scales were used covering institutional, leadership, and coworker support.
	Emotional support	20			Including teachers' perceptions of emotional support ensures that the content is comprehensive.
professional identity	Understanding of professional values	10	0.918	your (honorific)	The scale covers the identification of professional values and ensures the validity of the measurement.
	Career development expectations	10			Reflects teachers' expectations for future professional development.
	Understanding of professional mission	10			Emphasize teachers' identification with their professional mission.
Research Motivation	intrinsic motivation	12	0.934	favorable	The scale measures faculty enthusiasm and interest in research.
	extrinsic motivation	13			Including expectations of external rewards ensures the comprehensiveness of motivational sources.
Research resources	capital	5	0.902	favorable	Self-developed scale covering the effectiveness of financial support.
	installations	5			Measuring Faculty Accessible Equipment Support in Research.
	timing	5			Evaluate the amount of time faculty have at their disposal for research activities.
	Support Services	5			The inclusion of various support services provided by the school ensures that the resource assessment is comprehensive.

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive analysis

This study began with a descriptive statistical analysis of the sense of organizational support, professional identity, and research motivation of young teachers in higher education. The results showed that young university teachers in the sample had a high level of sense of organizational support (M±SD=4.35± 0.58), indicating that teachers generally felt support from the university. In addition, the mean value of professional identity was 4.29 (SD=0.62), indicating that teachers had a strong level of identification with their professional roles. The mean value of research motivation was 4.22 (SD=0.60), indicating that teachers possess a high level of motivation in research activities.

To further explore the effects of different background variables (e.g., gender, age, title, etc.) on the sense of organizational support, professional identity, and motivation to conduct research, this study used independent samples t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test for differences[14]. The specific results are as follows:

In the analysis of gender differences, there were significant differences between male (n=420) and female (n=380) teachers in the three variables of sense of organizational support, professional identity and

motivation to do research (see **Table 2**). In particular, the mean value of male teachers' sense of organizational support was 4.45 (SD=0.56), which was significantly higher than that of female teachers, which was 4.25 (SD=0.59), with a variance value of 0.20 and a Sig value of 0.002; in terms of professional identity, the mean value of male teachers was 4.35 (SD=0.61), while that of female teachers was 4.23 (SD=0.63), with a variance value of 0.12, and a Sig value of 0.045; in research motivation, the mean value of male teachers was 4.30 (SD=0.58) and the mean value of female teachers was 4.15 (SD=0.62), with a difference value of 0.15 and a Sig value of 0.018.

In the title difference analysis, assistant professors (n=250), lecturers (n=320), and associate professors (n=230) differed significantly in their sense of organizational support and motivation to conduct research, but did not show significant differences in professional identity (see **Table 3**). The mean value of the sense of organizational support for assistant professors was 4.40 (SD=0.55), which was significantly higher than 4.30 (SD=0.60) for lecturers and 4.25 (SD=0.61) for associate professors, with difference values of 0.10 and 0.15, respectively, and Sig values of less than 0.05.In terms of motivation to conduct research, the mean value of the sense of organizational support for assistant professors was 4.25 (SD=0.58), which was higher than 4.20 for lecturers (SD=0.62) and 4.10 (SD=0.65) for associate professors, with difference values of 0.05 and 0.15, respectively, and Sig values less than 0.05.

The results showed significant differences between gender and title in terms of perceived organizational support, professional identity, and motivation to conduct research, and overall, male faculty members and teaching assistants generally rated higher than female faculty members and faculty members with other titles on these three variables.

Table 2. Results of the gender difference test.

variant	Male teachers (n=420)	Female teachers (n=380)	difference in value	Sig value
Sense of organizational support	4.45 (0.56)	4.25 (0.59)	0.20	0.002
professional identity	4.35 (0.61)	4.23 (0.63)	0.12	0.045
Research motives	4.30 (0.58)	4.15 (0.62)	0.15	0.018

Table 3. Results of the test for differences in job titles.

title	Sense of organizational support	Research motivation	difference in value	Sig value
Teaching assistants (n=250)	4.40 (0.55)	4.25 (0.58)		
Lecturers (n=320)	4.30 (0.60)	4.20 (0.62)	0.10	0.045
Associate Professor (n=230)	4.25 (0.61)	4.10 (0.65)	0.15	0.020

4.2. Correlation analysis

In this study, a correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between the variables of organizational support, professional identity and research motivation of young university teachers. The results of the correlation analysis are shown in **Table 3**.

The data in **Table 4** show that the correlation coefficient between the sense of organizational support and research motivation is 0.682, which is significantly positive, indicating that the sense of organizational support positively affects research motivation, and therefore, Hypothesis H1 is verified. In addition, the correlation coefficient between the sense of professional identity and research motivation is 0.759, which is also significantly positive at 1% level of significance, indicating that the sense of professional identity has a strong positive predictive effect on research motivation, therefore, hypothesis H2 is also verified.

It is worth noting that the correlation coefficient between the sense of organizational support and career identity is 0.715, which shows that there is also a significant positive correlation between the two. This result supports Hypothesis H3, which states that sense of organizational support indirectly affects research motivation by enhancing career identity.

In summary, the results of the correlation analysis showed that there is a significant positive relationship between the sense of organizational support, professional identity and research motivation, which validates the hypothesis proposed in this study.

Table 4. Correlation matrix between sense of organizational support, professional identity and research motivation.

variant	Sense of organizational support	professional identity	Research motives
Sense of organizational support	1	0.715**	0.682**
professional identity	0.715**	1	0.759**
Research motives	0.682**	0.759**	1

*Note: * indicates p < 0.05, ** indicates p < 0.01, and *** indicates p < 0.001.*

Through the results of the above correlation analysis, we conclude that both the sense of organizational support and professional identity of young college teachers have a significant positive impact on their research motivation, and there is also a significant positive correlation between the sense of organizational support and the sense of professional identity, which provides important basic data for the subsequent regression analysis and mediation effect test.

4.3. Regression analysis

In order to further analyze the relationship between the sense of organizational support, professional identity and research motivation of young university teachers, and to explore the mediating role of professional identity in this relationship, this study adopts the stepwise regression analysis method for verification. According to the results of the correlation analysis, there is a significant positive linear correlation between the sense of organizational support, professional identity and research motivation, therefore, this study establishes a linear regression model for analysis.

According to Baron and Kenny's (1986) method of analyzing mediating effects, M is a mediator variable if the independent variable X affects the dependent variable Y through the mediator variable M [15]. In this study, the sense of organizational support, professional identity and research motivation were standardized for data and then regression analysis was conducted to test the mediating effect. The specific steps are as follows: (1) Model 1, regression of sense of organizational support on research motivation [16]; (2) Model 2, regression of professional identity on research motivation; (3) Model 3, regression of sense of organizational support and professional identity on research motivation.

The regression results are shown in **Table 5**, and the R^2 value of the goodness-of-fit of each model is between 0.430-0.560, and all of them reach the significance level, which indicates that the explanatory power of the models is high. Through the step-by-step analysis of model 1, model 2 and model 3, the mediation effect of professional identity is significant and belongs to incomplete mediation effect, and the proportion of mediation effect to the total effect is: a*b/c=48.76%.

In order to further analyze the role of the level II dimensions of perceived organizational support in influencing career identity and research motivation, this study set up a regression equation model with perceived institutional support, perceived leadership support, and perceived coworker support as the

independent variables and grouped them by gender for comparison, and the results are detailed in **Table 6 and 7**.

The model's goodness-of-fit R^2 values ranged from 0.401-0.575 and all reached the significance level, indicating that the explanatory power of the model is high. All coefficient values reached the level of significance except for the indicator of perceived coworker support in the male teacher group, which did not reach the level of significance in Models 2 and 3. Through step-by-step analysis of Model 1, Model 2 and Model 3, the mediating effect of professional identity in the male and female subgroups is significant, and both are incomplete mediating effects. The share of mediating effect in the total effect in male teachers' group is: ab/c=50.12% and the share of mediating effect in the total effect in female teachers' group is: ab/c=49.45%.

Table 5. Regression analysis of organizational support, professional identity and research motivation.

mould	variant	Research motives	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F
Model 1	Sense of organizational support	0.672***	0.430***	0.428***	218.356
Model 2	professional identity	0.512***	0.455***	0.453***	295.672
Model 3	Sense of organizational support	0.314***	0.560***	0.558***	372.148

Table 6. Regression analysis of sense of organizational support (Level II) by gender grouping.

mould	variant	Research motives	variant	Research motives	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F
Model 1	Male Teachers Group		Female Teachers Group		0.401***	0.399***	210.698
	Perception system support	0.329***	Perception system support	0.298***	0.445***	0.444***	316.127
	Perceived Leadership Support	0.367***	Perceived Leadership Support	0.319***	0.441***	0.439***	248.944
	Perceived Colleague Support	0.045	Perceived Colleague Support	0.176***	0.463***	0.462***	340.017
	professional identity	0.512***	professional identity	0.487***	0.552***	0.550***	291.172

Table 7. Regression analysis of sense of organizational support (Level II) by gender grouping.

mould	variant	Research motives	variant	Research motives	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F
Model 1	Male Teachers Group		Female Teachers Group		0.401***	0.399***	210.698
	Perception system support	0.329***	Perception system support	0.298***	0.445***	0.444***	316.127
	Perceived Leadership Support	0.367***	Perceived Leadership Support	0.319***	0.441***	0.439***	248.944
	Perceived Colleague Support	0.045	Perceived Colleague Support	0.176***	0.463***	0.462***	340.017
	professional	0.512***	professional	0.487***	0.552***	0.550***	291.172

mould	variant	Research motives	variant	Research motives	R²	Adjusted R²	F
	identity		identity				

Table 7 *(Continued).*

5. Discussion and analysis

This study centers on the relationship between young college teachers' sense of organizational support, professional identity and research motivation, aiming to explore their motivational mechanisms. Through empirical analysis, we have drawn several important conclusions, which not only enrich the application of organizational support theory, but also provide practical guidance for research management and motivation mechanism of college teachers.

5.1. The effect of sense of organizational support on research motivation

The results of the study indicate that the sense of organizational support has a significant positive predictive effect on the research motivation of young university teachers. This finding is consistent with the findings of Eisenberger et al. (1986), which emphasized the importance of the organization in enhancing teachers' job satisfaction, work engagement, and innovation[17]. Specifically, the level of support (including resources, emotional care, etc.) that faculty members perceive from their HEIs directly affects their research motivation. This shows that when universities provide a more complete infrastructure, such as rational allocation of research resources, emotional care and recognition, it will help to stimulate teachers' enthusiasm and creativity in research. In practice, colleges and universities can enhance teachers' sense of organizational support through various ways[18]. For example, regular research exchange meetings are organized to encourage teachers to share their research results and experiences and create a good academic atmosphere; at the same time, necessary research funds, equipment and technical support are provided to ensure that teachers are not restricted by resources in the research process. In addition, the management should pay attention to the emotional needs of teachers, establish an effective communication mechanism, understand teachers' confusion and needs in time, and provide appropriate care and support. Such support will not only increase teachers' job satisfaction, but also motivate them to explore actively in the field of scientific research.

5.2. The mediating role of professional identity

This study further explored the mediating role of professional identity between the sense of organizational support and research motivation, and the results showed that professional identity played a significant mediating effect between the two. Specifically, when teachers felt support from the organization, their professional identity was enhanced, which in turn increased their research motivation. This finding suggests that professional identity is not only the teachers' identification with their professional roles, but also an important component of their intrinsic motivation. The stronger the teachers' sense of professional identity, the higher their commitment and enthusiasm for research. Therefore, colleges and universities should focus on enhancing teachers' sense of professional identity while improving their sense of organizational support[19]. For example, through professional development training and team building, they can help teachers better understand and identify with their professional mission. Colleges and universities can design a series of career development activities, such as career planning lectures and successful case sharing, in order to help teachers clarify their career goals and values. At the same time, a positive feedback mechanism should be established so that teachers can receive timely recognition and appreciation in the process of scientific research, thus enhancing their sense of identity and belonging to their profession.

5.3. Impact of gender differences

In the gender subgroup analysis, we found some differences between male and female teachers in the relationship between perceived support and research motivation. This suggests that gender may play an important role in the way teachers perceive organizational support and its effect on research motivation. For example, male faculty had a non-significant effect on perceived colleague support, while female faculty had a more significant effect on perceived colleague support[20]. This finding suggests that colleges and universities should take gender differences into account when formulating relevant policies, and adopt differentiated support measures for faculty groups of different genders in order to stimulate their research motivation more effectively. Universities can raise teachers' awareness of gender differences and promote a gender-equal working environment through gender-sensitive training and workshops. In addition, more support and resources, such as flexible working arrangements and family-work balance policies, can be provided for female faculty to help them better cope with the challenges of research and life. Through these measures, the research motivation of faculty members of different genders can be enhanced more effectively and the overall development of research can be promoted.

5.4. Practical implications

The results of this study provide practical guidance for colleges and universities in enhancing teachers' research motivation. Firstly, universities should focus on building a good organizational support environment and providing necessary resources and emotional support to enhance teachers' sense of organizational support. By optimizing the allocation of resources and establishing a good communication mechanism, they ensure that teachers can receive timely help and support in the research process. Secondly, the enhancement of professional identity should be the focus of teacher training and development in colleges and universities to help teachers establish correct professional values and sense of mission. Colleges and universities can enhance teachers' sense of identity and sense of belonging to their own profession through career development activities and feedback mechanisms, so as to stimulate their enthusiasm for scientific research. Finally, gender differences need to be taken into account when formulating relevant policies so as to motivate different groups of teachers in a more targeted manner. By providing differentiated support measures, teachers can be more effectively motivated to conduct research, which will ultimately improve the overall efficiency and quality of research.

6. Conclusion

This study aims to explore the relationship between young university teachers' sense of organizational support, professional identity and research motivation, and to analyze their motivation mechanisms. The results of the study show that the higher the teachers' perceived sense of organizational support, the stronger their research motivation, emphasizing the importance of organizational support in enhancing teachers' work attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, colleges and universities should focus on building a good organizational support environment and providing necessary resources and emotional support. In addition, professional identity has a significant positive predictive effect on research motivation, and teachers with a stronger sense of professional identity show more positive research attitudes. Therefore, colleges and universities should pay attention to improving teachers' professional identity and helping them establish correct professional values and sense of mission in the process of teacher training and development. The study also found that the sense of organizational support indirectly affects research motivation through enhancing professional identity, which validates the application of organizational support theory and indicates that universities need to pay attention to the cultivation of teachers' professional identity while enhancing the sense of organizational support. In addition, the adequacy of research resources plays a moderating role in the relationship between

the sense of organizational support and research motivation, and the influence of the sense of organizational support on research motivation is more significant in resource-rich environments. Therefore, universities should consider the allocation of research resources when formulating relevant policies to promote teachers' research motivation.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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