

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL, ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION AND JOB SATISFACTION AMONG PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

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Abstract. The quality of preschool teachers depends on the level of teachers' professional development, which determines the quality of early childhood education, and the basic prerequisite for teachers' professional development is that teachers should identify with and be satisfied with their work from the inside. To investigate the relationship between psychological capital, organizational identification, and preschool teachers' job satisfaction, the present study was conducted on 276 kindergarten teachers in Henan Province, China by using convenience sampling. The results showed that preschool teachers' scores on psychological capital, organizational identification, and job satisfaction were all above average; psychological capital, organizational identification, and job satisfaction were significantly positively correlated with each other; regression analysis showed that preschool teachers' psychological capital and organizational identification significantly predicted job satisfaction, with an explanatory predictive power of 60.3%; mediation effect analysis showed that organizational identification played a partial role in the influence of psychological capital on job satisfaction. Therefore, it is possible to provide strong external and internal support to promote preschool teachers' job satisfaction by developing psychological capital and improving organizational identification.

Keywords: *relationship, psychological capital, organizational identification, job satisfaction, preschool teachers*

Introduction

Considering the global issue of teacher shortages, it becomes imperative to delve deeper into teacher job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a multifaceted construct that reflects teachers' overall feelings and perceptions about their work, colleagues, administrators, workload, and work environment. It not only significantly impacts teacher retention rates, but it also plays a vital role in the overall well-being of educators and their students. Furthermore, it fosters school cohesion and elevates the standing of the teaching profession (Toropova et al., 2021). High levels of job satisfaction are associated with greater motivation, engagement, commitment, and overall well-being among teachers (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2018; Hansen et al., 2015). Teachers who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to collaborate effectively with colleagues, participate in professional development activities, and contribute positively to the school community (Hultell and Gustavsson, 2011). In the field of early childhood education, preschool teachers play a critical role in nurturing the cognitive, social, and emotional development of young children. However, the demanding nature of their profession, coupled with the complexities of working with young learners, necessitates a robust psychological framework to navigate the challenges effectively. Research has shown that preschool teachers' job satisfaction can directly influence their turnover intentions (Cheng and Gan, 2020). Furthermore, positive job satisfaction is also

beneficial for improving preschool teachers' psychological stress, enhancing their resilience, and thereby promoting psychological well-being; whereas negative job satisfaction not only decreases job quality and is detrimental to preschool teachers' psychological well-being but also impacts their career development path and affects the effectiveness of preschool learning activities. The exploration of potential factors influencing the job satisfaction of kindergarten teachers and their effective mechanisms is therefore imperative, to identify additional avenues for enhancing their job satisfaction.

Psychological capital, a concept rooted in positive psychology, refers to individuals' positive psychological resources such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). Positive psychology subsequently emerged, leading to increased attention to individuals' psychological states and subjective well-being. Avey et al. (2011) have discovered that the level of psychological capital can influence employee's attitudes and behaviors. It has also been shown that psychological capital promotes entrepreneurial success and that increasing psychological capital through positive counseling can facilitate the achievement of their goals (Corbu et al., 2021). In the teaching profession, psychological capital is essential as it influences teachers' beliefs in their ability to positively impact students' learning outcomes, maintain optimism in challenging situations, and bounce back from setbacks (Luthans and Youssef-Morgan, 2017). In the context of preschool education, psychological capital represents a valuable resource that empowers teachers to navigate the multifaceted demands of their profession and promote positive outcomes for young children. Related studies have shown that psychological capital mediates and moderates early childhood teachers' emotional labor and job burnout (Peng et al., 2019). As a group with a unique work environment, heavy workload, and high-pressure conditions, preschool teachers' psychological states and subjective well-being should be given more attention.

Organizational identification is the belief that an individual is consistent or subordinate to an organization, defining their self-concept under their unique identity (Riketta, 2005). In other words, it is the psychological connection between employees and the organization, creating a psychological basis for employees to form a community of destiny with the organization. When individuals identify with the organization, they also endorse the organization's goals, put efforts toward these goals, and experience a sense of inner satisfaction in the process. Existing studies have explored the relationship between organizational identification and related variables at both the individual and organizational levels. The findings showed that organizational identification has a significant positive predictive effect on individual job motivation (Karolidis and Vouzas, 2019), job performance (Kazmi and Javaid, 2022; Abernethy et al., 2019; Tarakci et al., 2018), and job satisfaction (Bharadwaj et al., 2022; Pham, 2020). Studies also show that the more positive an individual perceives the organizational environment to be, the less emotional work they perform, and that organizational identification is effective in regulating individuals' tendency to leave (Conroy et al., 2017; Zhang and Liu, 2016) and emotional exhaustion (Zhang and Niu, 2015). Meanwhile, some studies have also verified the mediating effect of organizational identification. Yuan et al. (2016) found that organizational identification can significantly reduce the impact of organizational justice on the job satisfaction of employees in large enterprises. Uzun (2018) showed that organizational identification plays a partial mediating role in the influence of perceived supervisor support on organizational citizenship behavior and burnout among high school teachers.

High-quality and stable teachers are the core strength of education development. As a service organization, the effectiveness of preschool education largely depends on the psychological quality, external performance, and job satisfaction of preschool teachers. Preschool teachers are the key factors for the high-quality development of preschool education, and reflect the overall performance of kindergarten development to a certain extent. A review of the studies on psychological capital, organizational identification, and job satisfaction shows that although there are some studies on each factor, and there are also some studies between the two factors, the existing teacher research groups are mostly college teachers and primary and secondary school teachers, and lack of attention for preschool teachers. Therefore, this study takes preschool teachers as the object to explore the relationship between psychological capital, organizational identification, and job satisfaction, and examine whether organizational identification plays a mediating role between psychological capital and job satisfaction to a certain extent. The purpose of this study is to arouse more and more social attention to preschool teachers, strengthen the external incentive to preschool teachers, and improve their job satisfaction from the perspective of psychological capital, to promote the development of their potential.

Materials and Methods

This study utilized a convenience sampling method, selecting preschool teachers from 18 kindergartens in Henan Province, China as the survey subjects. The survey took place from October 2023 to January 2024. Before the survey, consent was obtained from kindergarten leaders and the survey participants themselves. The survey was primarily coordinated by kindergarten management personnel to ensure a centralized filling process. The researchers introduced the purpose and procedures of the study to the participants, emphasizing the confidentiality of the survey. Professional teachers filled out online platform questionnaires and submitted them. A total of 310 questionnaires were collected, and after screening (to ensure the data were filled out diligently by teachers, questionnaires completed in less than 100 seconds were excluded), 276 valid questionnaires were retained. The basic information of the participants is as follows (*Table 1*).

Table 1. Basic information of partifipants (n=276).

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	18	6.52
Female	258	93.48
Teaching experience		
Less than 1 year	59	21.4
1-3 years	78	28.3
3-6 years	69	25.0
6-10 years	25	9.1
Above 10 years	45	16.3
Marital status		
Marrid	125	45.3
Single	151	54.7
Wage level		
Less than ¥2,000	39	14.1

¥2,001- 3,000	113	40.9
¥3001-4000	74	26.8
Above ¥4,000	50	18.1

The Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-24), developed by Luthans et al. (2007), was translated and revised by Li and Shi (2003). The scale has undergone extensive testing with a large number of subjects in China and has been widely utilized among various teacher groups, demonstrating good reliability and validity in terms of psychometric indicators. The scale comprises four dimensions: self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, encompassing a total of 24 items. Some expressions have been modified to replace "leader" with "principal," for example: "I am confident that I can express my scope of work in meetings with the principal". A Likert 6-point scoring system is adopted where "1" indicates strong disagreement and "6" signifies strong agreement; higher scores indicate greater psychological capital among preschool teachers. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient in this study was 0.953 and the dimensions were 0.878, 0.894, 0.871, and 0.834 respectively, while KMO=0.945 (P=0.000<0.05).

The scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992) was used, and the scale was revised at the level of verbal expression to meet the needs of the study. It consisted of six items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "very disagree" to "very agree". Sample item: "I would be upset if I found out that the press was criticizing my kindergarten". An increased feeling of belonging to the group is indicated by a higher score. For this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.821, and KMO=0.845 (P=0.000<0.05). The Minnesota satisfaction questionnaire (short form), developed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), is a 20-item self-report measure of job satisfaction, including two dimensions, namely intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction. Items are scored from 1 (very disagreeable) to 5 (very agreeable). In this study, the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.935, and the two dimensions were 0.887, and 0.895 respectively, and KMO=0.936 (P=0.000<0.05).

SPSS 23.0 and Process Macro software were used to analyze the data. The reliability and validity of the measurement instruments were tested and the descriptive statistical analysis of each variable was carried out. Correlation and regression analyses were used to examine the relationship between the variables, and Process Macros were applied to test the mediating role of organizational identification.

Results and Discussion

The descriptive statistics and correlation coefficient matrix for each variable are shown in *Table 2*. The mean value of psychological capital was 4.629, much higher than the median value of 3.5, indicating the high level of psychological capital of preschool teachers. The mean value of organizational identification was 3.927, which was also higher than the median value of 3, suggesting that preschool teachers have a stronger sense of identification with the organization. The mean values of intrinsic satisfaction, extrinsic satisfaction, and overall job satisfaction were above 3.5, with the highest score for intrinsic satisfaction, indicating that preschool teachers are highly satisfied with their current jobs and can derive a high level of satisfaction and fulfillment from their work. To understand the relationship between psychological capital, organizational identification, and job satisfaction, Pearson correlation analysis was applied. *Table 2* showed that there is a significant positive correlation between psychological capital and

organizational identification ($r=0.544$, $p<0.01$), and a significant positive correlation with intrinsic satisfaction, extrinsic satisfaction, and job satisfaction ($r =0.740$, $p <0.01$; $r=0.624$, $p<0.01$; $r=0.722$, $p<0.01$). Meanwhile, there was a significant positive correlation between organizational identification, and job satisfaction and the two dimensions ($r =0.637$, $p<0.01$; $r =0.645$, $p<0.01$; $r =0.559$, $p<0.01$).

Table 2. Descriptive stats and correlation matrix between variables ($n=276$).

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Psychological capital	-				
Organizational identification	0.544**	-			
Intrinsic satisfaction	0.740**	0.645**	-		
Extrinsic satisfaction	0.624**	0.559**	0.805**	-	
Job satisfaction	0.722**	0.637**	0.956**	0.943**	-
Mean	4.629	3.927	3.799	3.549	3.699
SD	0.717	0.655	0.552	0.731	0.593

Note: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$.

To further examine the explanation and prediction of preschool teachers' job satisfaction by their psychological capital and organizational identification, we conducted a linear regression analysis with job satisfaction as the dependent variable and psychological capital and organizational identification as independent variables. The results in *Table 3* indicate that both psychological capital and organizational identification entered the regression equation, with an adjusted R^2 value of 0.603, indicating that these two variables account for 60.3% of the variance in job satisfaction ($F=209.687$, $P<0.001$). Furthermore, psychological capital significantly and positively predicted job satisfaction ($\beta=0.441$, $t=11.784$, $P<0.001$), and organizational identification also had a significant predictive effect on job satisfaction ($\beta=0.309$, $t=7.649$, $P<0.001$). To test the mediating role of organizational identification in the effect of psychological capital on job satisfaction, we standardized all variables and adopted the SPSS PROCESS3.0 (Model 4) (Hayes, 2013). Parameters were estimated using the bias-corrected percentile Bootstrap technique on 5000 random samples with put-backs, with 95% confidence intervals used. The results are summarized in *Table 4*.

Table 3. Regression analysis of preschool teachers' psychological capital, organizational identification on job satisfaction.

Variable	B	t	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F
Constant	0.447	2.782**	0.606	0.603	209.687***
Psychological capital	0.441	11.784***			
Organizational identification	0.309	7.649***			

Note: *** $p<0.001$.

Table 4. Analysis of direct, indirect and total effects.

Model	Coeff.	SE	t	P	LCI	UCI
PC → JS	0.441	0.037	11.784	0.000	0.367	0.515
PC → OI → JS	0.156	0.032	-	-	0.096	0.219
Total effect	0.597	0.035	17.270	0.000	0.529	0.665

Note: PC=Psychological Capital; OI=Organizational Identification, JB=Job Satisfaction.

The results showed that the direct effect of psychological capital on job satisfaction was 0.441 ($p<0.001$), and the indirect effect of psychological capital on job satisfaction

through organizational identification was 0.156; Bootstrap CI 95% was [0.096, 0.219], excluding 0. According to Wen and Ye (2014), if the confidence intervals of the indirect effect do not include 0, the mediating effect would be significant. The total effect of the model was statistically significance ($b=0.597$; 95% CI [0.529, 0.665]). The results discovered that the psychological capital, organizational identification, and job satisfaction scores of preschool teachers basically conform to the normal distribution and are generally in the middle to high level, which was consistent with previous findings (Cheng and Gan, 2020; Yuan et al., 2016). In recent years, many policies issued have been focusing on the improvement of the quality of preschool teachers and paying attention to their psychological problems. When preschool teachers usually face things in a positive frame of mind and obtain success, the stronger the positive evaluation and identification with the kindergarten, the greater the resulting sense of satisfaction with the work environment, treatment and development opportunities, and so on.

The results revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between preschool teachers' psychological capital and job satisfaction as well as between the dimensions, which validated earlier studies (Aydin Sünbül and Aslan Gördesli, 2021; Hansen et al., 2015), indicating that the aforementioned relationship between psychological capital and job satisfaction is also applicable to the group of preschool teachers. Psychological capital is regarded as a positive psychological quality that promotes the spontaneous growth of individual kindergarten teachers, which further contributes to the improvement of the quality of kindergarten education. Teachers with a high level of psychological capital have an optimistic mindset in their work, can actively use the resources around them to solve the difficulties in their work, and will adjust their mindset in time; for the high-pressure work environment, they can also give full play to their strengths, and have the confidence to overcome some unfavorable factors in their work (Hong et al., 2022). In the long run, with the enhancement of preschool teachers' psychological capital, job satisfaction will increase accordingly.

The study also found that preschool teachers' organizational identification has a significant positive correlation with job satisfaction. When an individual identifies with the organization, he or she will actively take the organization's goals as his or her daily goals and put in efforts to obtain internal satisfaction (Bharadwaj et al., 2022). At the same time, when an individual identifies with an organization that has positive attributes, the individual's self-esteem is satisfied, and external job satisfaction is increased. In other words, when kindergarten teachers have a high level of identification with the organization, they will be actively involved in educational practices and continuously improve their educational performance. Therefore, educational institutions should focus on improving teachers' sense of organizational identity and providing them with a good working environment and development opportunities, thus increasing their job satisfaction. Mediating effect analysis showed that organizational identification plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between psychological capital and job satisfaction, indicating that preschool teachers' psychological capital can either directly affect job satisfaction or indirectly affect job satisfaction by influencing organizational identification. Zhang et al. (2021) reached the same conclusion with Chinese residents. The higher the level of teachers' psychological capital, the stronger their identification with their kindergarten, and accordingly the more satisfied they are with their jobs. Therefore, the job satisfaction of preschool teachers can be enhanced by improving the level of teachers' psychological capital and organizational identification.

On one hand, kindergartens pay attention to the development of teachers' psychological capital. To optimize teachers' psychological capital, kindergartens should formulate differentiated management and development plans according to the psychological capital development profiles of different groups of teachers, and carry out targeted group counseling, to enhance teachers' psychological adjustment ability. In addition, it is important to develop teachers' professional confidence and optimism by fully believing in their professionalism and granting them professional autonomy. At the same time, kindergartens can develop teachers' psychological capital through changes in the organizational environment and system, such as building teachers' professional development community, enhancing their sense of organizational identification and responsibility, and then stimulating the best psychological state of teachers. On the other hand, enhancing the organizational identification is also an effective way. Firstly, kindergarten principals should go deep into teachers' groups and sincerely listen to their difficulties and needs in professional development. Secondly, there should be positive support from the organizational culture. If preschool teachers can experience safety, joy, and happiness in their work and life in the kindergarten, live in harmony with their colleagues, has mutual emotional ties, and all members share the kindergarten's value goals and work guidelines, it will be easy for them to form organizational identification and pro-organizational behavior.

Conclusion

This paper explores the relationship between psychological capital and job satisfaction of preschool teachers from the perspective of positive psychology, analyzes and verifies the role of organizational identification in the relationship, and concludes that there is a significant positive correlation between psychological capital, organizational identification, and job satisfaction of preschool teachers; and that organizational identification plays a partly mediating role in the relationship between the two. The findings underscore the importance of fostering a positive psychological state among educators, as it not only enhances their sense of belonging and attachment to the organization but also contributes significantly to their overall job satisfaction. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the interplay between psychological capital and organizational identification, highlighting how a strong sense of identification with the institution positively influences preschool teachers' job satisfaction. This provides some reference for improving preschool teachers' job satisfaction, enhancing teacher retention, fostering good teacher-child relationships, and promoting the healthy growth of young children.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research.

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