



Work Ethic and Career Success in Junior Middle School Art Teachers in Shenzhen, China

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Abstract- Under the background of exam-oriented education in junior middle schools in China, art education shows marginalized characteristics as it is not an examination subject. Therefore, the career success of junior middle school art teachers has faced some challenges, and the influencing factors of their career success have become a topic worthy of discussion. Some researchers have already pointed out that work ethic have impact on career success. However, whether work ethic still affect career success within a specific group, it is worthy to further explore. Thus, this study aims to explore the influence of work ethics on career success of junior middle school art teachers in Shenzhen. This study conducted a questionnaire survey among Shenzhen junior middle school art teachers and used SPSS and Smart PIs4.0 to analyse the data. Results show that work ethic affect two dimensions of career success including career success intra-organizational competitiveness and career success job satisfaction but do not affect career success extra-organizational competitiveness among participants. Thus, this study supplements and enriches the theory of career success under the existing background of art education especially in Shenzhen, China. Furthermore, this research can guide the construction of work ethics for art teachers. For instance, put forward some suggestions to schools, educational administrative departments and administrative departments to enhance the work ethics of art teachers in Shenzhen, thereby improving their career success level. Meanwhile, for art teachers themselves, this study proposes strategies to help the group of art teachers achieve higher career success by improving their work ethic levels.

Keywords: Career Success, Work Ethic, Junior Middle School Art Teachers, Shenzhen, China.

I. Introduction

The area of art education has long been thought to be the weakest link in China's whole educational system (Guo & Su, 2023). The long-standing focus on "exam-oriented education" means that junior middle school art does not require a separate exam, and art teachers are marginalized in their profession since their prestige is lower than that of their peers in other academic subjects (Li, 2023). A significant portion of junior middle school art teachers have started to voice discontent with their job choices as time has gone on (Zhu & Kang, 2011). They have doubts about their professional identity and career choice, which ultimately results in job burnout (Li, 2023; Tang, 2010).

However, junior middle school art education is categorized as non-professional art education, which limits their professional relevance and diminishes their sense of accomplishment (Li, 2023). Shi (2021) noted that middle school art instructors' emotional management is frequently disregarded, and their social recognition and significance do not align with the extreme workload they endured. Their professional success is negatively impacted by this carelessness, which results in job fatigue, poor career self-management, and low career commitment. The academic community is now interested in learning more about the working conditions of art teachers in China as a result of this phenomena.

The current career development status of the junior middle school art teachers in China urgently needs the attention of the academic circle. So, based on the perspective of career success theory, this study aims to explore the career challenges faced by this group and their underlying mechanisms. Although existing studies show that the research on the career development of art teachers in the basic education stage mainly focuses on three dimensions: teaching practice effectiveness (Lv, 2016), professional quality construction (Gao & Hu, 2018), and sustainable development paths (Li, 2012). However, it is worth noting that no breakthroughs have been made in



the research of these key areas so far, especially in the exploration of the influencing mechanism of career success, where there are still significant theoretical gaps.

Therefore, the core objective of this study lies in constructing a theoretical model of the influencing factors of professional success for junior middle school art teachers, with a focus on the key role and mechanism of work ethic. By selecting junior middle school art teachers in Shenzhen as the subject of study, this study attempts to reveal an important theoretical issue: that is, how work ethics directly affect teachers' perception of career success. This research design not only helps to expand the existing theoretical framework of teacher development, but also provides a new explanatory dimension for understanding the special professional circumstances of the art teacher group.

II. Literature review

2.1 Career success in junior middle school art teachers in Shenzhen, China

Theoretical research on career success is usually constructed on a dual cognitive framework: first one is an objective achievement measurement system characterized by salary levels and job promotions; and second one is the subjective perception evaluation system centered on job satisfaction and self-efficacy (Ng et al., 2005). Research in the field of education further reveals that there are significant professional characteristics in teachers' perception of career success - it not only involves the identification of teaching effectiveness (Ingarianti et al., 2022), but is more deeply related to the practice of educational idealism (Fresko et al., 1997). Specifically, when educators materialize their values through professional practice, their level of work ethic and perception of career success will have a positive reinforcing effect. This dynamic relationship may present a more complex interaction pattern in the field of art education.

In contrast, looking at the current situation of professional development of art teachers in the basic education stage in China, the path to achieving career success faces structural obstacles. The current teacher training system shows an obvious tendency of "de-professionalization" that art education courses mostly focus on imparting basic skills (Fan, 2016), while neglecting the cultivation of core professional qualities such as art education philosophy and curriculum development. The direct consequence of this training model is that the group of art teachers falls into a vicious circle of "ambiguous professional identity cognition - low recognition of subject value - reduced work ethic". What is even more serious is that in the curriculum ecosystem oriented towards further education, the art discipline has continuously encountered institutional marginalization - 62.3% of the sample schools have the phenomenon of art class hours being crowded out by main subjects (Ministry of Education's Art Education Monitoring Report, 2022), leading teachers into a professional development predicament of "curriculum virtualization - lack of teaching effectiveness - weakened perception of career success".

This study specifically examines the dual-path depletion mechanism of career success perception. The absence of exogenous incentives due to the marginalisation of disciplinary status, characterised by imbalanced resource allocation and a lack of assessment mechanisms, contrasts with the endogenous dynamic exhaustion stemming from a deficient professional development support system, exemplified by inadequate continuing education opportunities and the absence of a teaching and research community. This dual attenuation of internal and external incentives may manifest as a coupling effect of the lack of work ethics and the weakening of the perception of career success. The construction of this theoretical model will provide a new analytical framework for solving the career development predicament of art teachers.

2.2 Work ethic and career success

The term "work ethics" originated several centuries ago among some intellectuals after the Reformation. These intellectuals oppose the practice of social welfare and claim the importance of individualism. They firmly believe that all people, whether rich or poor, must take full responsibility for their own destinies. Therefore, they emphasized the importance of hard work regarding work ethics. That is, through hard work, people can improve their living conditions. In the field of education, teaching methods significantly influence the development of work ethic. Especially in the East Asian education system, work ethic is often used to emphasize discipline and academic performance, which contributes to economic competitiveness (Baumann & Hamin, 2018).



In fact, some theorists and researchers have noticed the role of work ethic in the field of career success. Many studies have proved that work ethic are positively correlated with job satisfaction, performance and personal well-being, thereby leading to career success. For instance, Panigrahi and Al-Nashash (2019) conducted a study with bankers as respondents, demonstrating a significant positive correlation between the work ethic of bank employees and their job satisfaction. The research results show that as the emphasis on work ethic increases, employees' job satisfaction will also increase. This supports a hypothesis that improved work ethics can lead to higher job satisfaction. Meanwhile, the study found that work ethic has an important impact on individual well-being and also on organizational performance. In other words, those employees who consider their working environment ethical are more likely to repay with higher commitment and effort, thereby achieving higher job satisfaction. This highlights the mutual nature of work ethic and job satisfaction.

Isnaeni et al., (2020) found that spiritual leadership and work ethic are related to job satisfaction and performance. The research finds that spiritual leadership has a positive impact on job satisfaction, while at the same time, work ethic also has a positive impact on job satisfaction and performance. This highlights the significance of integrating spiritual values and work ethic in human resource management for enhancing performance. Meanwhile, Sofyanty et al. (2021) adopted quantitative methods such as multiple linear regression analysis and took 75 employees as the research subjects to study the impact of job satisfaction and perceived organizational support on employees' work ethic in the Ministry of Industry of Indonesia. Research shows that job satisfaction and perceived organizational support have positive and significant impacts on both collective and partial work ethic. Enhancing job satisfaction and organizational support can improve the work ethic of employees in the Ministry of Industry of Indonesia.

Therefore, this research proposes the below hypotheses:

H1: There is a positive relationship between work ethic and career success intra-organizational competitiveness among Chinese junior middle school art teachers.

H2: There is a positive relationship between work ethic and career success and extra-organizational competitiveness among Chinese junior middle school art teachers.

H3: There is a positive relationship between work ethic and career success and job satisfaction among Chinese junior middle school art teachers.

III. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopted a quantitative research design method to conduct a questionnaire survey among junior middle school art teachers in Shenzhen, China. After obtaining the approval of the Institutional Review Board, we contacted the participants. The researchers sent the link of Wenjuanxing to the participants via wechat. When the participants open the link, the consent information appeared and then they can complete the questionnaire.

The career success scale adopted in this study was translated, compiled and developed by Wang and Long (2009). This scale includes three dimensions of career success: Internal competitiveness of career success (CSIOC), external competitiveness of career success (CSEOC), and job satisfaction of career success (CSJS). The scoring method of the scale is the 7-Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 7 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Verified by relevant studies, the Cronbach's α coefficients were 0.739 (CSIOC), 0.753 (CSEOC), and 0.85 (CSJS) respectively, indicating that the reliability and validity of this scale were both within the acceptable range.

The work ethic scale compiled and developed by Wang et al.(2009) in this study. This scale used the 5-Likert scale to measure the respondents' degree of agreement with the statements (from strongly disagree to strongly agree), including five dimensions: work ethic, job significance, diligence and dedication, positive progress, and interpersonal harmony. It has been verified that the internal consistency coefficients of each dimension of work ethic are all 0.70 higher than the recommended value, and the internal consistency coefficient of the overall questionnaire is 0.85. Moreover, through exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis, the results show that the fitting index of the five-factor work ethic model is superior to that of other competing models and reaches the ideal level, verifying that this work ethic questionnaire has good structural validity. The research hypotheses and measurements are formulated based on a second-order construct of the work ethic scale, in

alignment with the principle of parsimony, thus ensuring the hypotheses achieve a high degree of conceptual clarity and efficiency. It was found that the reliability and validity of the second-order model were all within the acceptable range.

3.2 Data analysis

A total of 263 valid data were analyzed using the SPSS29.0 and Smart-PLS statistical software tools. Analysis of respondents' background found that more than half of them is in young age, particularly concentrated in the 25-35 age group (66.2%). Meanwhile, the female tendency was obvious, accounting for 66.5% of the participants. Furthermore, the majority of respondents held a bachelor's degree (66.2%), followed by a master's degree or above (31.9%), indicating that the sample had a relatively high level of education.

Table 3.1 Descriptive Statistics (N=263)

Dimension	Min Statistic	Max Statistic	Mean Statistic	SD Statistic	Skewness Statistic	SE	Kurtosis Statistic	SE
MCSIOC	1.00	7.00	5.011	1.317	-.487	.150	-.163	.299
MCSEOC	1.00	7.00	5.148	1.133	-.581	.150	0.933	.299
MCSJS	1.00	7.00	4.565	1.333	0.049	.150	-.597	.299
MWEPE	1.50	5.00	3.922	0.677	-.507	.150	0.736	.299
MWEWS	1.75	5.00	4.013	0.609	-.301	.150	0.486	.299
MWEDD	1.00	5.00	2.883	1.068	0.060	.150	-.735	.299
MWEP	1.00	5.00	3.776	0.737	-.943	.150	2.178	.299
MWEIH	2.00	5.00	4.169	0.524	-.360	.150	1.435	.299

Notes: CSIOC (Career Success Intra-organizational Competitiveness), CSEOC (Career Success Extra-organizational Competitiveness), CSJS (Career Success Job satisfaction), WEPE (Work Ethics Professional Ethics), WEWS (Work Ethics Work Significance), WEDD (Work Ethics Diligence and dedication), WEP (Work Ethics Proactive), WEIH (Work Ethics Interpersonal Harmony)

Through descriptive analysis, the mean value of CSIOC was 5.011, the standard deviation was 1.317, showing negative skewness, and the kurtosis was close to normal. The mean value of CSEOC was 5.148, and the standard deviation was 1.133, showing moderate negative skewness and positive kurtosis. The mean value of CSJS is 4.565, the standard deviation is 1.333, showing negative kurtosis and almost zero skewness at the same time. The mean value of WEPE was 3.922, the standard deviation was 0.677, showing a moderate negative skewness, and the kurtosis was positive. The mean value of WEWS is 4.013, the standard deviation is 0.609, the skewness is negative, and the kurtosis is positive. The mean value of WEDD is 2.883, the standard deviation is 1.068, the skewness is close to zero, and the kurtosis is negative. The mean value of the WEP range is 3.776, and the standard deviation is 0.737, showing significant negative skewness and peak degree. The mean WEIH is 4.169, the standard deviation is 0.524, the negative skew is slight and the kurtosis is relatively high. Overall, these dimensions exhibit varying degrees of skew and kurtosis, indicating different distributions and variability of the data.

Table 3.2 Structural Model Assessment for Direct Relationships

Hypothesis	Path	Beta	SE	T	P	5.00%	95.00%
H1	WE -> CSIOC	0.165	0.099	1.669	0.048	0.000	0.325
H2	WE -> CSEOC	-0.003	0.096	0.035	0.486	-0.165	0.151
H3	WE -> CSJS	0.142	0.067	2.109	0.017	0.027	0.248

To test the significance level, in this study, the bootstrapping of SmartPLS 4.0 was used to generate the t-statistics for all three paths. The self-service was set to a significance level of 0.05, with one tail and 10,000 sub-samples (Hair et al., 2017). Table 3.2 contains hypotheses (H1 to H3), the paths between structures, the β coefficient (β), the standard error (SE), the T value (T), the P value (P), and



the 5% and 95% confidence intervals of the β coefficient. A p value less than 0.05 indicates a significant relationship.

The results showed that WE had a positive effect on CSIOC ($\beta = 0.165$, $p = 0.048$) and CSJS ($\beta = 0.142$, $p = 0.017$), but no positive effect on CSEOC ($\beta = -0.003$, $p = 0.486$). It can be seen that the assumed t values of H1 and H3 are both greater than 1.645, while the t value of H2 reached only 0.035 which was lower than 1.645. Meanwhile, the confidence interval of the β coefficient in Hypothesis 2 is -0.165 to 0.151. This interval contains a value of 0, which means that the relationship between WE and CSEOC is not statistically significant at a confidence level of 95. Therefore, in this study, except for Hypothesis 2, the other two hypotheses regarding the direct relationship are both supported.

IV. Results and Discussion

This study investigated the influence of work ethic on the career success of junior middle school art teachers in Shenzhen through a questionnaire survey, filling this gap in the research field. The main findings are as follows: (i) work ethics have a significant positive impact on the intra-organizational competitiveness and job satisfaction dimensions of career success; and (ii) work ethics have no significant impact on the extra-organizational competitiveness dimension of career success. This indicates that art teachers with higher work ethics are more likely to demonstrate strong competitiveness within the organization and have higher job satisfaction, while work ethics do not significantly promote art teachers to obtain competitive advantages outside the organization.

Research results which found that work ethic has an impact on career success intra-organizational competitiveness indicated that art teachers with strong work ethics often show higher work dedication, actively participate in teaching practice and organizational activities, and are more likely to be recognized by the organization, thus enhancing their intra-organizational competitiveness. This is consistent with the view in the literature that work ethics are positively correlated with job performance (Isnaeni et al., 2020). In the context of exam-oriented education, although art disciplines are in a marginalized position, teachers with good work ethics can still strive for more development opportunities within the school through their own efforts, such as participating in teaching research projects and giving demonstration lessons.

The research results also simultaneously confirm the positive and significant impact of work ethic on career success and job satisfaction. Work ethics reflect teachers' recognition and commitment to the teaching profession. When teachers fulfill their professional responsibilities with a high sense of ethics, they will obtain a sense of achievement and satisfaction from their work, which is in line with the conclusion of previous studies that work ethics can improve job satisfaction (Sofyanty et al., 2021). Facing the pressure of marginalized disciplines, teachers with strong work ethics are more likely to maintain a positive attitude, focus on the educational value of art itself, and thus maintain higher job satisfaction.

However, research shown the lack of relationship between work ethics and career success extra-organizational competitiveness might be due to the fact that the career success extra-organizational competitiveness of art teachers may be more affected by factors such as the social recognition of art education and the school's external evaluation system, rather than just the individual's work ethics. In the current educational environment, the marginalized status of art disciplines makes it difficult for teachers to fully demonstrate their professional value outside the organization, even if they have high work ethics.

V. Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

This study confirms the specific impact of work ethics on the two dimensions of career success of art teachers, especially highlighting its differential impact on career success intra-organizational competitiveness and career success job satisfaction, which supplements and enriches the existing career success theory in the context of art education.

First of all, this research can guide the construction of art teachers' work ethics. For example, schools and educational administrative departments can strengthen the cultivation of art teachers' work ethics by carrying out work ethic education and establishing ethical evaluation mechanisms, so as to improve their intra-organizational competitiveness and job satisfaction.



Then, for educational administrations, it can help strengthen policy support for art education through increasing investment in art education to improve the evaluation system for art disciplines, and reduce the phenomenon of art class hours being occupied by main subjects, so as to provide a good institutional environment for art teachers.

Last but not least, for art teachers themselves, this research helps enhance their professional awareness and work ethics. It can actively recognize the value of art education, establish a sense of professional mission, and improve work dedication and responsibility through continuous learning and practice. Meanwhile, art teachers can pay attention to their personal professional development planning by actively seeking external development opportunities, participating in various professional competitions and training activities, and improving their comprehensive quality and extra-organizational competitiveness.

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