

Career Self-Management and Career Success among Junior Middle School Art Teachers in Shenzhen, China

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Abstract: Under the background of exam-oriented education in China, art education has been marginalized, and the career success of junior middle school art teachers is being challenged. The influencing factors have become a topic worthy of exploration. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence on career success and career self-development among junior middle school art teachers in Shenzhen, China. This study conducted a questionnaire survey among junior middle school art teachers in Shenzhen, China. The results show that career self-management affects the career success of art teachers. On this basis, this study proposes some strategies to help the group of art teachers achieve higher career success by improving their career self-management levels.

Keywords: Career success; Career self-management; Junior middle school art teachers; Shenzhen; China

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1. Introduction

For a long time, the field of art education has been regarded as the most vulnerable component of the entire education system in China. Due to the long-term emphasis on “exam-oriented education,” there is no need for a special examination for art in junior middle school, and the status of art teachers is lower than that of their counterparts in other academic fields, thus marginalizing them in their work ^[1]. As time goes by, a considerable number of junior middle school art teachers have begun to express dissatisfaction with their career paths ^[2]. They doubt their career choice and professional identity, which eventually leads to job burnout ^[1]. Meanwhile, the art education of junior middle school is classified as non-professional art education, which leads to limited professional applicability and reduced professional sense of achievement for junior middle school art teachers ^[1]. Shi ^[3] observed that the recognition and importance of middle school art teachers by society do not match the huge work pressure they face, and their emotional management is often neglected. This negligence leads to job burnout and low career self-management and career commitment, which has an adverse impact on their career

success. This phenomenon has aroused the interest of the academic circle in the investigation of the professional situation of art teachers in China.

Therefore, it is appropriate to examine the challenges faced by the disadvantaged group of art teachers in China from the perspective of “what constitutes the career success of art teachers.” Given that the early surveys of junior middle school art teachers mainly focused on three aspects: teaching practice ^[4], quality and ability, and professional development ^[5], these key issues have yet to be resolved at present. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the influencing factors of the career success of junior middle school art teachers, aiming to expand the existing knowledge framework and have a profound understanding of the current situation of junior middle school art teachers. Therefore, this study aims to explore the influence of career self-management of junior middle school art teachers in Shenzhen on career success.

2. Literature review and research hypothesis

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

When studying the concept of career success in the academic field, we assume that career success is intrinsically linked to both salary and personal satisfaction, as these factors are important indicators of the academic career trajectory. In the context of the success of the teaching profession, various factors can usually be observed, including self-satisfaction, overall life satisfaction, self-esteem, commitment to the profession, and leadership support, all of which play a key role ^[6]. This phenomenon occurs because educators have a subjective tendency towards career success, and they mainly regard this success as a form of self-satisfaction. Those who work within the framework of idealism may demonstrate a higher intrinsic motivation to achieve career success ^[7]. Teachers often view the field of education as an idealistic pursuit. Therefore, when their values are verified through significant experiences, the realization of their career success becomes obvious.

However, the teaching training for junior middle school art teachers lacks professionalization in art education, mainly aiming to disseminate basic art knowledge to students and cultivate their art appreciation ability. Therefore, the professional relevance and achievements of junior middle school art teachers have still been greatly reduced. Meanwhile, art teachers have become a marginalized group in the education system and have experienced long-term neglect in their professional roles ^[8]. Through Fan’s investigation of local art teachers, the author believes that a key factor for the decline in the status of art teachers is the increasing pressure exerted by higher education on students, which forces many schools to shift their course time to subjects that require assessment, although they offer art courses.

For a long time, this has contributed to a widespread misunderstanding that art courses can be regarded as optional, filled in indiscriminately, and terminated at will, which has greatly reduced the enthusiasm of art teachers in the classroom, and many people have chosen to pursue other career paths. This phenomenon indicates the influence of academic viewpoints on the professional effectiveness of teachers. When art teachers experience the depletion of both internal and external incentives, they inevitably face challenges related to career success. Essentially, the current situation of art education in junior middle schools in China may, to a large extent, lead to an increase in the turnover rate of art teachers, a decrease in career commitment, and limited self-management, thereby adversely affecting their career success.

2.2. Career self-management and career success

Career success has been a subject of debate, with some confusing it with career achievement. Research defines career success as both objective and subjective outcomes stemming from an individual’s work experience ^[9].

Objective career success is externally evaluated by third parties, measured through job status, income, and promotion. Subjective career success, conversely, is an individual's internal assessment, often gauged by job and life satisfaction. It is related to variables such as career commitment, career satisfaction, career decision (all subjective), and career growth opportunities (objective) (career-invested individuals tend to experience greater subjective and objective success).

Greenhaus *et al.* ^[10] defined career self-management as “the process by which individuals develop, implement, and monitor” ^[9,11,12]. In the study by Hirsch and Koen ^[13], they also adopted this definition. In the social-cognitive model of career self-management, Lent and Brown ^[14] focused on “adaptive occupational behavior,” which they defined as “the behaviors people use to help guide their career (and educational) development.” In fact, Wang and Wanberg ^[15] argued that career self-management should be viewed as an umbrella term that includes the various cognitive and behavioral activities that shape an individual's career development and career transition, and determine how an individual handles expected and unexpected career events, challenges, and career transitions.

According to the existing literature, career success can be divided into two dimensions: subjective career success and objective career success. Based on this, researchers delved deeply into the relationship between career self-management and subjective career success as well as objective career success, and found that career self-management is mainly related to subjective career success. Shepard ^[16] once proposed that individuals would follow the “path of the mind” throughout their careers to achieve success at the psychological level. King ^[17] held that through the long-term and effective application of professional self-management behaviors, individuals can complete their career development tasks and achieve the expected career outcomes. Quigley and Tymon ^[18] further proposed that when career self-management stems from intrinsic career motivation, that is, essentially from career meaning, choice, ability, and progress, successful career self-management will lead to subjective career success, and this hypothesis was verified in their research.

Furthermore, in the field of the teaching profession, the importance of professional self-management is equally significant. Derakhshan *et al.* ^[19] emphasized that continuous professional development (CPD) and teachers' perception of research are important components of career success. Teachers who actively engage in professional development and research activities are more likely to achieve a higher sense of professional accomplishment, highlighting the significance of professional self-management and lifelong learning for teachers' career development and outcomes.

Therefore, this research proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Career self-management positively and significantly influences career success intra-organizational competitiveness (CSIOC).

H2: Career self-management positively and significantly influences career success extra-organizational competitiveness (CSEOC).

H3: Career self-management positively and significantly influences career success job satisfaction (CSJS).

3. Methods

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 in order to measure the relationship between career success and career self-management of participants. In terms of career success, this study adopted the career success scale translated, compiled, and developed by Wang and Long. This scale adopts the 7-Likert scale, ranging from 1 to

7 (strongly disagree to strongly agree), and includes three dimensions of career success: career success intra-organizational competitiveness (CSIOC), career success extra-organizational competitiveness (CSEOC), and career success job satisfaction (CSJS). Verified by relevant studies on this scale, its reliability and validity are acceptable, manifested as their Cronbach's α coefficients being 0.739 (CSIOC), 0.753 (CSEOC), and 0.85 (CSJS), respectively.

The career self-management scale is derived from the revision and translation of the research results of Noe ^[20], Zikic and Klehe ^[21] by Weng ^[22]. This scale adopts the 5-Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). This scale also has good reliability and validity, which is reflected in the fact that the questionnaire includes three dimensions, namely career exploration, career goal setting, and career strategies. The internal consistency coefficient of career exploration is 0.86, the internal consistency coefficient of career goal setting is 0.83, and the internal consistency coefficient of career strategies is 0.78. However, researchers have shown that the comprehensive measurement of career self-management (including all three dimensions) has a stronger predictive validity for career outcomes than any single dimension. For instance, De Vos *et al.* ^[23] analyzed career self-management as a general dimension in their research. Therefore, this study also analyzes career self-management from an overall perspective, hoping to comprehensively capture career self-management behaviors and their impact on career outcomes.

3.2. Data analysis

There was a total of 263 valid data in this study. The SPSS 29.0 statistical software tool was used to conduct descriptive statistical analysis on the 263 observed data (**Table 1**). Besides, for using SPSS 29.0, this research is part of the research on career success among junior middle art teachers in Shenzhen, China.

In this study, the gender distribution of the respondents clearly shows a tendency that the proportion of females is higher. Among the 263 respondents, 175 were female, accounting for 66.50% of the total sample. Male respondents accounted for 33.50%, totaling 88 people. Meanwhile, the age distribution of the respondents shows a characteristic dominated by young people, especially those aged 25 to 35. Furthermore, in terms of the educational background of the respondents, 66.2% of them have a bachelor's degree, indicating that the overall educational attainment of the sample is relatively high.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics ($n = 263$)

Dimension	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
CSIOC	1.00	7.00	5.011	1.317	-0.487	0.150	-0.163	0.299
CSEOC	1.00	7.00	5.148	1.133	-0.581	0.150	0.933	0.299
CSJS	1.00	7.00	4.565	1.333	0.049	0.150	-0.597	0.299
CSM	1.09	5.00	3.720	0.600	-0.045	0.150	1.322	0.299

Through descriptive analysis, the mean dimension of CSIOC is 5.011, the standard deviation is 1.317, the skewness is negative, and the kurtosis is close to normal. The mean value of the CSEOC variable is 5.148, and the standard deviation is 1.133, indicating moderate negative skewness and positive kurtosis. The mean value of CSJS is 4.565 with a standard deviation of 1.333. The data shows that the kurtosis is negative and the skewness is almost zero. Meanwhile, the mean value of CSM is 3.720, and the standard deviation is 0.600, indicating that the skewness is the smallest and the kurtosis is high.

To test the significance level, in this study, the bootstrapping function of SmartPLS 4.0 was used to generate the *t*-statistics of all paths to test the three research hypotheses^[24]. Hair *et al.*^[25] found that an estimated path coefficient close to +1 indicates a strong positive correlation. The closer this value is to 0, the weaker this relationship becomes. **Table 2** shows the evaluation of the structural model of the research hypothesis. It can be seen from the table that the value range of the path coefficient is between 0.278 to 0.404.

Table 2. Structural model assessment for direct relationship

Hypothesis	Path	Beta	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	5.00%	95.00%
H1	CSM -> CSIOC	0.278	0.088	3.171	0.001	0.141	0.429
H2	CSM -> CSEOC	0.404	0.087	4.630	0.000	0.260	0.548
H3	CSM -> CSJS	0.336	0.074	4.544	0.000	0.218	0.461

The results also show that CSM has a positive effect on CSIOC ($\beta = 0.278$, $P = 0.001$), CSEOC ($\beta = 0.404$, $P = 0.000$), and CSJS ($\beta = 0.336$, $P = 0.000$). Because the assumed *t* values are all greater than 1.645. Furthermore, the columns Upper Limit (UL) and Lower Limit (LL) in the table represent the 95% confidence intervals of the beta coefficient, which do not contain zero value; hence, H1, H2, and H3 are supported.

4. Findings and discussions

This study investigated the influence of career self-management on the career success of junior middle school art teachers in Shenzhen, filling the gap in this research field. Furthermore, this study has discovered strong evidence to support the three proposed research hypotheses. That is, career self-management has a significant positive impact on the career success intra-organizational competitiveness, career success extra-organizational competitiveness, and career success job satisfaction of junior middle school art teachers in Shenzhen.

Firstly, the mean values of CSIOC, CSEOC, and CSJS indicate that the perception of their own competitiveness and job satisfaction among junior middle school art teachers in Shenzhen, China, is generally positive, but there is still room for improvement. The mean value of career self-management indicates that the overall level of teachers' career self-management is at a medium level, and there is potential to further improve this aspect to further enhance career success.

Among the three dimensions of career success, career self-management has the greatest impact on career success extra-organizational competitiveness, followed by job satisfaction, and then career success intra-organizational competitiveness. This means that art teachers can gain more external recognition and personal career satisfaction through effective career self-management.

The research results simultaneously confirm the positive and significant impact of career self-management on all dimensions of career success. This indicates that art teachers who engage in more career self-management activities are more likely to enhance their competitiveness within schools or educational institutions. They may actively seek opportunities for professional development, participate in internal competitions or activities, and thereby gain recognition and better positions within the organization.

For career success extra-organizational competitiveness, the research finds that career self-management is closely related to teachers' ability to stand out outside their direct workplace. Teachers who manage their careers well can build professional networks, participate in external art-related activities, or obtain additional certificates, all of which can help enhance their external competitiveness.

Career self-management also has a significant positive impact on career success job satisfaction. When art teachers play an active role in managing their careers, they are more likely to find meaning and a sense of achievement in their work. This might be because they can better combine their work with their personal career goals, thereby obtaining a more satisfactory work experience.

5. Implications and recommendations

However, it is important to pay attention to the background in which these findings are situated. Junior middle school art teachers in China are facing many challenges. The long-term emphasis on “exam-oriented education” has marginalized art education and art teachers. The lack of professionalization in the training of art teachers has further exacerbated this problem and reduced the professional relevance and achievements of art teachers. Despite these challenges, the positive relationship between career self-management and career success indicates that an individual’s efforts in career self-management can still have a substantial impact.

Therefore, based on the above findings, this study puts forward some suggestions. For example, colleges and universities should recognize the importance of promoting art teachers’ career self-management. They can offer resources like career counseling, goal-setting, and network strategy workshops, and access to professional development opportunities to enhance art teachers’ competitiveness and the quality of art education. For policymakers, they should focus on factors affecting art teachers’ career success. Since career self-management can offset some negative impacts of the educational environment, policies should be made to encourage and support art teachers’ self-management efforts, such as providing incentives for professional development and recognition programs.

Based on these findings, further research should explore the mediating factors or antecedents that affect the career success and career self-management of art teachers and study potential solutions. Furthermore, in future research, it is also possible to consider including respondents from different regions of China to expand the scope of the research population, enhance the universality and representativeness of the research results, and increase the power of statistics.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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