

The Path to Enhance Career Adaptability of Novice University Teachers: The Mediating Role of Organizational Support and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract: This study examines how organizational support influences the career adaptability of novice university teachers in Guangdong, China, and the mediating role of teacher self-efficacy. Drawing on social cognitive theory and organizational support theory, we hypothesized that organizational support would positively predict career adaptability through self-efficacy. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 326 novice teachers (with 1–3 years of teaching experience) from 12 universities in Guangdong. Data were analyzed using correlation analysis, hierarchical regression, and bootstrap. Results showed that: (1) organizational support was positively associated with both self-efficacy ($r = 0.62$, $P < 0.001$) and career adaptability ($r = 0.58$, $P < 0.001$); (2) self-efficacy fully mediated the relationship between organizational support and career adaptability (indirect effect = 0.24, 95% CI [0.18, 0.31]), with a partial reduction in the direct effect from $\beta = 0.35$ to $\beta = 0.17$ ($P < 0.05$); (3) female teachers reported higher self-efficacy than males ($P < 0.05$), and teachers with 2 years of experience showed significantly higher adaptability than those with 1 year ($P < 0.05$). The findings highlight the critical role of self-efficacy in translating organizational support into adaptability, providing empirical evidence for universities to design targeted support strategies.

Keywords: Organizational support; Novice teachers; Career adaptability; Self-efficacy; Mediating role

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1. Introduction

Newly hired university teachers often face challenges in adapting to academic roles, such as teaching demands, research pressures, and relational adjustments^[3]. In Guangdong, China, where higher education expansion has increased the need for effective teacher induction, understanding how organizational support enhances career adaptability is critical for talent retention. While prior studies have shown that organizational support improves teacher adaptability^[8,9], the psychological mechanisms—especially the role of self-efficacy—remain understudied in the Chinese higher education context.

1.1. Theoretical background

Organizational Support Theory (OST) posits that employees develop positive attitudes when they perceive organizational care for their well-being and recognition of their contributions ^[5]. In education, this translates to resources like mentoring, training, and emotional support, which are crucial for novice teachers' adjustment ^[17]. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) emphasizes self-efficacy as a key mediator between environmental support and behavioral outcomes ^[1]. Teacher self-efficacy, defined as confidence in instructional and classroom management abilities ^[16], is likely to bridge organizational support and adaptability, yet empirical evidence for this pathway is limited in university settings.

1.2. Research questions

- (1) Does organizational support predict career adaptability among novice university teachers in Guangdong?
- (2) Does teacher self-efficacy mediate the relationship between organizational support and career adaptability?
- (3) Do gender and teaching experience moderate these relationships?

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

2.1. Research model

We propose a theoretical model where organizational support (independent variable) influences career adaptability (dependent variable) through self-efficacy (mediator), with gender and teaching experience as control variables (Figure 1).

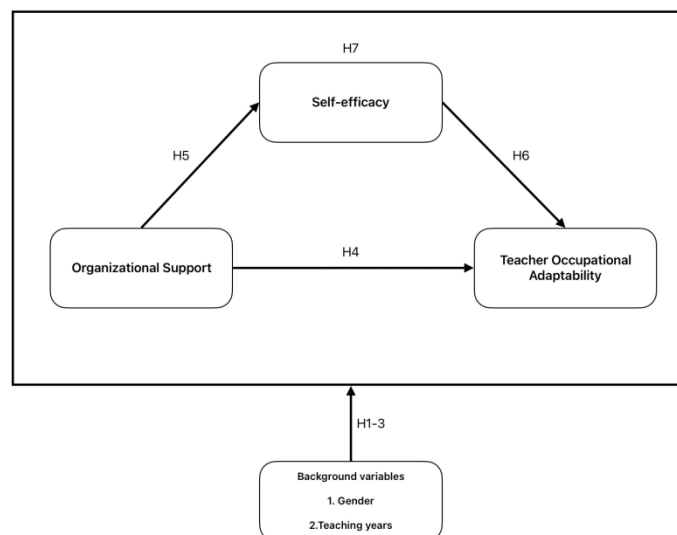


Figure 1. Organizational support → self-efficacy → career adaptability, moderated by gender & teaching experience

2.2. Hypotheses

- H1: Organizational support is positively related to career adaptability.
- H2: Organizational support is positively related to teacher self-efficacy.
- H3: Teacher self-efficacy mediates the relationship between organizational support and career adaptability.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and procedure

Data were collected from 326 novice teachers (58% female, 42% male; 1-year: 35%, 2-year: 40%, 3-year: 25%) across 12 universities in Guangdong via stratified random sampling. Inclusion criteria: teaching experience ≤ 3 years, full-time faculty in undergraduate programs.

3.2. Measures

- (1) Organizational Support (POS): Adapted from Hekman *et al.* (2009), an 8-item scale measuring emotional (e.g., “My organization cares about my well-being”) and instrumental support (e.g., “My organization is proud of my work achievements”), $\alpha = 0.85$.
- (2) Career Adaptability (CAAS): Using Savickas & Porfeli’s (2012) 24-item scale with four dimensions (Concern, Control, Curiosity, Confidence), $\alpha = 0.92$.
- (3) Teacher Self-Efficacy (TSES): A 12-item scale by Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2001), assessing instructional strategy, classroom management, and student engagement efficacy, $\alpha = 0.89$.
- (4) Demographics: Gender (1 = male, 2 = female) and teaching experience (1–3 years).

3.3. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and hierarchical regression were performed using SPSS 26. Mediation analysis employed the bootstrap method (5,000 resamples) to test indirect effects.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 1 shows mean, standard deviations (SD), and correlations. Organizational support was significantly correlated with self-efficacy ($r = 0.62$, $P < 0.001$) and career adaptability ($r = 0.58$, $P < 0.001$). Self-efficacy was strongly correlated with adaptability ($r = 0.71$, $P < 0.001$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations ($n = 326$)

Variable	Mean (SD)*	1	2	3	4
Organizational support	3.82 (0.65)	—	0.62***	0.58***	−0.12*
Self-efficacy	3.95 (0.72)	—	—	0.71***	−0.09
Career adaptability	3.78 (0.68)	—	—	—	0.07
Gender (1 = Male)	0.42 (0.50)	−0.15**	−0.18**	−0.18**	—
Teaching experience (years)	1.89 (0.76)	0.10*	0.08	0.08	—

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$.

4.2. Regression analysis for mediation

Table 2 presents regression results. Model 1 confirmed H1: organizational support predicted adaptability ($\beta = 0.35$, $P < 0.001$). Model 2 supported H2: organizational support predicted self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.45$, $P < 0.001$). Model 3 included both variables: self-efficacy significantly predicted adaptability ($\beta = 0.53$, $P < 0.001$), and the direct effect of organizational support on adaptability decreased to $\beta = 0.17$ ($P < 0.05$), indicating partial

mediation. Bootstrap analysis showed a significant indirect effect (0.24, 95% CI [0.18, 0.31]), supporting H3.

Table 2. Hierarchical regression results

Variable	Model 1 (Adaptability)	Model 2 (Self-efficacy)	Model 3 (Adaptability)
Gender	−0.11*	−0.18**	−0.10*
Teaching experience	0.14**	0.09	0.13**
Organizational support	0.35***	0.45***	0.17*
Self-efficacy	—	—	0.53***
R^2	0.32***	0.41***	0.54***

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$.

4.3. Moderation effects

Gender moderated self-efficacy (females: $M = 4.08$, males: $M = 3.79$, $P < 0.01$), and teaching experience positively correlated with adaptability ($r = 0.14$, $P < 0.01$), with 2-year teachers scoring highest ($M = 3.89$) compared to 1-year ($M = 3.65$, $P < 0.05$).

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical implications

This study extends OST and SCT by demonstrating that self-efficacy mediates the effect of organizational support on career adaptability in university novices, filling a gap in educational research. The partial mediation suggests that organizational support acts through both direct resources (e.g., training) and indirect confidence-building mechanisms (e.g., mentorship), aligning with Bandura's ^[1,2] emphasis on environmental influences on self-beliefs and recent evidence from multilevel mediation models ^[9].

5.2. Practical implications

Universities in Guangdong should:

- (1) Strengthen multi-dimensional support: Combine instrumental support (e.g., teaching resource platforms) with emotional support (e.g., peer mentoring programs) to boost self-efficacy.
- (2) Target gender and experience differences: Design gender-sensitive interventions (e.g., female-focused confidence workshops) informed by cross-cultural gender efficacy research ^[12] and staggered training for teachers at different career stages ^[8,10].

5.3. Limitations and future research

The cross-sectional design limits causal inference; longitudinal studies could explore temporal relationships. Extending the sample to vocational colleges or other provinces would enhance generalizability.

6. Conclusion

This research confirms that organizational support enhances novice teachers' career adaptability primarily through self-efficacy, with gender and experience moderating these effects. The findings offer a theoretical framework for integrating support systems and self-efficacy training in teacher induction programs, contributing

to sustainable higher education workforce development in Guangdong and beyond.

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Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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