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Impact of motivation and incentives on job performance and job satisfaction: An empirical study on dance teachers' career development

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Abstract

In the evolving landscape of arts education, teachers encounter a distinctive combination of emotional labour, creative demands, and institutional uncertainty. This study examined the influence of motivation and incentive mechanisms on job performance and job satisfaction among arts educators in China, with dance teachers serving as the focal case group. Guided by Self-Determination Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, a conceptual framework was developed to integrate intrinsic psychological needs with extrinsic organisational rewards. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was employed using a structured questionnaire distributed to teachers in private arts institutions. Correlation and regression analyses were conducted to assess the relationships between intrinsic motivation, extrinsic incentives, job performance, and job satisfaction. The results highlight the significant roles of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors in shaping professional engagement and well-being. These findings provide practical insights for the development of sustainable human resource practices and motivation-sensitive policies in the growing arts education sector.

Keywords: Arts education, Job performance, Job satisfaction, Motivation, Quality job.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, China has placed strong emphasis on aesthetic education, positioning it as a key component of students' holistic development. National education policies, such as the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era [1], actively promote the integration of arts education—including music, dance, visual arts, and drama—into the general curriculum. The goal is to foster not only students' aesthetic appreciation, but also their creativity, imagination, and cultural confidence. Guided by these strategies, the arts education sector, particularly the extracurricular training market, has experienced rapid growth. Rising household incomes, shifting parental expectations, and increasing demand for personalised and quality-oriented education have all contributed to the expansion of non-academic enrichment programs. Parents, especially in urban and second-tier cities, are increasingly willing to invest in their children's artistic development as a complement to academic achievement.

According to iResearch [2], the value of China's children's arts training market reached RMB 298.94 billion in 2022, with an expected annual growth rate of 11.6% from 2023 to 2025. The overall arts training market is projected to exceed RMB 110.6 billion in 2024, maintaining a yearly growth rate of more than 10%. Among different fields, dance education has become one of the fastest-growing and most popular areas, attracting people of all ages and valued for improving physical movement, artistic skills, and socio-emotional development. Between 2021 and 2022, the government introduced the "Double Reduction" policy, which limited after-school tutoring in academic subjects and redirected attention toward non-academic programs. This shift created favourable conditions for the growth of arts education. Dance, which was not restricted by these regulations, expanded rapidly, and many new institutions—including private dance schools—emerged to provide programs for children, adolescents, and adults using diverse pedagogical approaches.

Despite this expansion, the sector faces significant structural and human resource challenges. By 2024, more than 110,000 registered dance training institutions existed in China, most of them small and privately operated. Many depend on individuals or small teams with limited training in teaching methodology or educational psychology, leading to considerable variation in instructional quality and professionalism. Dance teachers, similar to many other arts educators, often do not receive formal preparation for teaching. While some come from performance backgrounds or attend short courses, these pathways are insufficient for long-term teaching careers. Many teachers work under flexible or freelance contracts, resulting in unstable incomes, limited career progression, and weakened professional identity. Such conditions reduce their motivation to remain in the profession or to continuously improve their teaching [3]. Consequently, high turnover, inconsistent standards, and widespread job dissatisfaction threaten the sustainability of the sector [4].

Motivation and incentives have therefore become key to improving teaching quality, job performance, and job satisfaction in the arts education sector. Studies demonstrate that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation strongly influence teachers' engagement and well-being [5, 6]. Intrinsically motivated teachers are more likely to devote effort to lesson planning, supporting students, and professional development, which in turn enhances student outcomes [7]. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) [5, 8] intrinsic motivation thrives when individuals' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met. In educational contexts, teachers who experience autonomy, confidence in their skills, and collegial support are more likely to remain committed, manage stress effectively, and find satisfaction in their work. Supporting this, Klassen and Tze [9] found that higher confidence and independence among teachers improved job performance and emotional well-being across different cultural settings. Herzberg [10] also provides insight, distinguishing between hygiene factors (e.g., salary, working conditions) and motivators (e.g., achievement, recognition, growth). While hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction, only motivators foster genuine engagement and satisfaction [4].

However, research has cautioned against the over-reliance on extrinsic incentives, particularly when they conflict with intrinsic values. Ryan and Deci [11] note that excessive external rewards, such as rigid performance-based bonuses, may undermine intrinsic motivation by creating pressure, competition, or loss of autonomy. In China's private arts education sector, where employment is often informal and fragmented, this issue is particularly salient. Recent Chinese studies highlight the importance of motivational alignment. For instance, Li [3] found that teachers' job satisfaction in private dance studios in second-tier cities was significantly predicted by the congruence between institutional reward systems and teachers' personal goals and values. Li [3] reported that performance bonuses temporarily boosted productivity but did not improve job satisfaction unless paired with recognition, autonomy, or collegial trust. Similarly, Zhao, et al. [12] emphasised that satisfaction among arts educators depends on balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, while Zhao, et al. [12] linked disengagement, emotional exhaustion, and attrition to environments that suppress autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Since teaching in the arts is emotionally, creatively, and relationally intensive, intrinsic motivations such as passion, pedagogical commitment, and personal growth are critical for sustaining quality instruction [13].

Against this backdrop, the core problem addressed in this study is the lack of a holistic, motivation-sensitive incentive framework within private arts education institutions in China's second-tier cities. Current strategies often emphasise financial incentives that are transactional and enrollment-driven, offering limited opportunities for professional development or psychological fulfilment. This misalignment between institutional incentives and teachers' motivational needs undermines long-term engagement and retention. Using dance teachers as a representative case group, this research investigates the interplay between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic incentives and their collective impact on teaching performance and job satisfaction. By applying Self-Determination Theory [5, 8] and Two-Factor Theory [10] the study aims to provide actionable insights for talent management and institutional design in China's arts education sector. In doing so, it also contributes to the advancement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, which highlights teacher motivation, well-being, and professional development as critical dimensions of inclusive, equitable, and sustainable education [7, 14, 15].

2 Method

2.1. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design to investigate the relationships between intrinsic motivation, extrinsic incentives, teaching performance, and job satisfaction among dance teachers in private institutions. Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire administered at a single time point. The focus was on examining statistical associations rather than establishing causality.

2.2. Population and Sampling

The population comprised dance instructors employed in private extracurricular dance institutions across China, including centres for children, adolescents, and adults within the commercial arts education sector. Fifteen institutions were purposively selected, with 10 instructors from each, yielding a sample of 150 teachers.

A stratified sampling approach combined with online platform distribution was used. The questionnaire was designed and hosted on Wenjuanxing, a widely used Chinese survey platform, and disseminated via professional WeChat groups, online forums, and through cooperating institutions. This approach ensured efficient access to a geographically dispersed professional population.

For sample size, the minimum target was 150 valid responses, considered adequate for descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analyses. Larger samples were incorporated if response rates permitted to strengthen statistical power.

For the inclusion criteria, participants were required to: (a) be currently employed in legally registered private dance institutions in China; (b) have at least six months of continuous teaching experience; and (c) be aged 20 years or older. All participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed.

2.3. Instrument Reliability and Validity

The survey instrument underwent expert review by three academics in educational psychology, arts pedagogy, and teacher development to ensure content validity. A pilot test with approximately 150 dance teachers was conducted to evaluate clarity, time requirements, and item sequencing. Feedback informed minor revisions.

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values ≥ 0.80 considered acceptable. Items with low alignment were modified or removed. Where feasible, exploratory factor analysis was employed to confirm construct validity. All items were drawn from established research tools. No personal data were collected, and responses were securely stored for research purposes only.

2.4. Data Collection

The final questionnaire was administered via Wenjuanxing. Distribution channels included WeChat groups, online teacher forums, and direct institutional invitations. Data collection lasted one week following ethical clearance from the host university. An informed consent statement appeared on the first survey page; continuation signified voluntary consent. No identifiable data were recorded.

2.5. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS Version 26.0. Descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation) summarised sample characteristics and variable distributions. Pearson correlation analysis assessed the relationships between intrinsic motivation, extrinsic incentives, teaching performance, and job satisfaction.

Regression assumptions were tested prior to further analysis. Normality of residuals was evaluated using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, and multicollinearity was assessed via variance inflation factor (VIF). All statistical tests adopted a significance level of $p < 0.05$. These procedures provided robust evidence on how motivational and incentive mechanisms influenced professional outcomes among private-sector dance teachers in China.

3 Results

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

3.1.1. Sample Characteristics

SPSS 26.0 was used to conduct descriptive analyses of the collected data, including demographic characteristics (Table 1). The sample consisted of 150 teachers from art schools or training centres. Females accounted for the vast majority (90%), while only 10% were male. Most respondents were under 25 years old (54%) or between 25–30 (42.67%), with only 3.33% aged 31–35, indicating a predominantly young cohort. Regarding education, 70% held a bachelor's degree and 30% a college diploma. In terms of teaching experience, 60.67% reported 1–3 years, 36% reported 4–6 years, and 3.33% reported less than one year, showing that most were in the early stages of their careers. Employment type was largely part-time (63.33%), with fewer working full time (18.67%) or on freelance/contract terms (18%). Overall, the sample was young, predominantly female, relatively well-educated, and early-career, with part-time work as the dominant employment pattern.

Table 1.
Analysis results of demographic characteristics.

Name	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative (%)
Gender	Male	15	10.00	10.00
	Female	135	90.00	100.00
Age	Under 25 years old	81	54.00	54.00
	25–30 years old	64	42.67	96.67
	31–35 years old	5	3.33	100.00
Highest education	College	45	30.00	30.00
	Bachelor’s degree	105	70.00	100.00
Teaching experience	< 1 year	5	3.33	3.33
	1–3 years	91	60.67	64.00
	4–6 years	54	36.00	100.00
Type of employment	Full time	28	18.67	18.67
	Part time	95	63.33	82.00
	Freelance/contract	27	18.00	100.00
Institution type	Art school/training centre	150	100.00	100.00

3.1.2. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Descriptive statistics for intrinsic motivation (IM), extrinsic incentives (EI), job performance (JP), and job satisfaction (JS) are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Descriptive statistics of study variables.

Name	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness
IM	1.00	5.00	3.51	0.10	-0.55	-0.43
EI	1.29	5.00	3.55	0.98	-0.71	-0.28
JP	1.00	5.00	3.38	0.96	-0.13	-0.46
JS	1.00	5.00	3.43	0.85	-0.27	-0.12

The mean values of the four variables were all moderate to high (IM = 3.51, EI = 3.55, JP = 3.38, JS = 3.43). Standard deviations ranged from 0.85 to 0.99, suggesting moderate variability across participants. Kurtosis values (–0.71 to –0.13) and skewness values (–0.46 to –0.12) were negative, indicating slightly left-skewed and flat distributions. However, all values were within ±1, meeting the assumptions of approximate normality (Figures 1). These results confirmed that the data were suitable for subsequent parametric analyses.

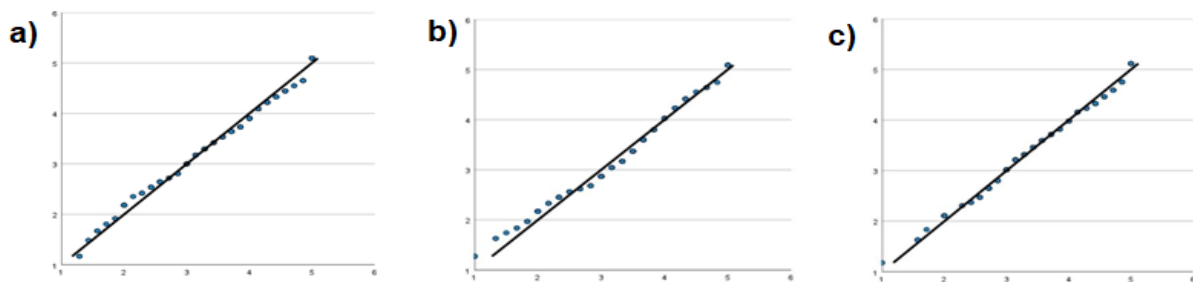


Figure 1.
Normal probability plots. a) EI, b) JP, c) JS.

3.2. Reliability Analysis

Cronbach’s alpha was used to evaluate internal consistency (Table 3). All Cronbach’s alpha coefficients exceeded the 0.70 threshold, with values ranging from 0.86 to 0.90, indicating strong internal consistency. No item deletion meaningfully improved reliability, confirming that all items were appropriate and contributed to their constructs.

Table 3.
Reliability analysis.

Dimensions	Question	α coefficient with term deleted	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
IM	IM1	0.87	0.90
	IM2	0.89	
	IM3	0.88	
	IM4	0.88	
	IM5	0.88	
	IM6	0.88	
EI	EI1	0.87	0.89
	EI2	0.87	
	EI3	0.88	
	EI4	0.87	
	EI5	0.87	
	EI6	0.87	
	EI7	0.89	
JP	JP1	0.85	0.86
	JP2	0.85	
	JP3	0.85	
	JP4	0.83	
	JP5	0.83	
	JP6	0.83	
JS	JS1	0.86	0.88
	JS2	0.88	
	JS3	0.86	
	JS4	0.87	
	JS5	0.86	
	JS6	0.87	
	JS7	0.87	

3.3. Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine relationships among IM, EI, JP, and JS (Table 4). IM was positively correlated with EI ($r = 0.58, p < 0.01$), JP ($r = 0.43, p < 0.01$), and JS ($r = 0.52, p < 0.01$). EI was positively correlated with JP ($r = 0.48, p < 0.01$) and JS ($r = 0.53, p < 0.01$). JP was also positively correlated with JS ($r = 0.57, p < 0.01$). These results indicate significant positive associations among all variables.

Table 4.
Correlation analysis results. Note: $p < 0.01$.

	Average value	Standard Deviation	IM	EI	JP	JS
IM	3.51	0.10	1			
EI	3.55	0.98	0.58**	1		
JP	3.38	0.96	0.43**	0.48**	1	
JS	3.43	0.85	0.52**	0.53**	0.57**	1

3.4. Multiple Linear Regression

Regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive effects of IM and EI on JP (Table 5). The regression model explained 26.4% of the variance in JP. Both IM ($\beta = 0.23, p = 0.01$) and EI ($\beta = 0.34, p < 0.001$) had significant positive effects on JP. Multicollinearity was not a concern ($VIF = 1.50$). The Durbin–Watson statistic was close to 2, indicating no autocorrelation. Thus, both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic incentives significantly predicted job performance.

Table 5.
Regression analysis results. (Dependent variable = JP). Model summary: $R^2 = 0.26, Adjusted R^2 = 0.25, F(2,147) = 26.41, p < 0.001, DW = 1.74$.

Predictor	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficient	t	p	Collinearity diagnostics	
	B	Standard error	Beta			VIF	Tolerance
Constant	1.40	0.28	-	4.96	0.00**	-	-
IM	0.22	0.08	0.23	2.69	0.01**	1.50	0.67
EI	0.34	0.09	0.34	3.96	0.00**	1.50	0.67

4. Discussion

4.1. Workforce Characteristics and Implications for Motivation

The findings of this study reflect the unique demographic and professional characteristics of China's private arts education workforce. The predominance of young, female, and part-time dance teachers highlights the structural dynamics of the sector, which relies heavily on flexible staffing models and early-career educators [4]. These characteristics are not incidental but carry important implications for teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and retention. As Mills [16] observed, art education has historically attracted women due to its alignment with societal expectations around nurturing and creativity. However, the concentration of teachers in the early stages of their careers, with limited stability, may contribute to high turnover and reduced professional identity [4].

This workforce profile resonates with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) [5, 8] which emphasizes the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Teachers in transient, part-time roles often face limited opportunities for autonomy and long-term growth, thereby constraining their intrinsic motivation. Supporting this, Wang [4] demonstrated that autonomy-supportive environments in Chinese art schools enhanced teachers' passion for teaching, while Li [3] showed that self-realisation, rather than financial rewards, was more strongly linked to sustainable engagement. Together, these insights suggest that institutional leaders must design incentive structures that account for the demographic realities of the workforce while fostering teachers' psychological needs.

4.2. Balancing Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation in Arts Education

A central contribution of this study lies in illustrating how both intrinsic motivation and external incentives shape teachers' professional outcomes. While financial and institutional rewards remain necessary for retention, relying solely on transactional extrinsic incentives risks undermining long-term commitment and satisfaction [11]. This is consistent with evidence from Li [3], who found that performance bonuses improved short-term productivity but did not enhance job satisfaction unless coupled with recognition, autonomy, or collegial trust. Similarly, Herzberg [10] distinguishes between hygiene factors, such as salary and working conditions, and motivators, such as achievement and growth. For dance teachers in private institutions, fair pay and stable hours help reduce dissatisfaction, but true engagement requires professional recognition, opportunities for skill development, and respect for creative autonomy [4].

The alignment of institutional incentives with teachers' intrinsic values is particularly critical in non-formal education settings. Zhao, et al. [12] found that in private dance studios, job satisfaction was significantly predicted by congruence between institutional rewards and teachers' personal goals. These findings reinforce the need for integrated motivation-sensitive frameworks that strengthen both extrinsic conditions and intrinsic fulfilment. In this sense, the present study adds to a growing body of evidence [12] that sustainable talent development in arts education depends on designing environments where teachers feel competent, autonomous, and connected.

4.3. The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Arts Teaching

Another key implication of this research is the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in shaping teacher outcomes. Teaching in the arts is not only technical but also emotional, creative, and relational [14]. Teachers must manage diverse student needs, motivate learners, and sustain their own artistic identity—tasks that demand high EI. The findings are consistent with research showing that teachers with greater emotional competence are better equipped to manage stress, build trust, and maintain motivation [9]. Moreover, Wang [4] noted that early-career educators are particularly sensitive to developmental support, suggesting that EI may help younger teachers navigate the uncertainties of part-time and contract-based work.

These dynamics highlight why emotional intelligence emerged as a particularly strong predictor of job satisfaction. As Judge, et al. [17] argued, job performance reinforces feelings of competence and achievement, which in turn contribute to satisfaction. In the context of arts education, teachers with higher EI may be more resilient to precarious employment and better able to derive fulfilment from student interactions and creative practice.

4.4. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study makes both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it extends SDT Deci and Ryan [8] and Herzberg [10] into the non-formal arts education context, illustrating how psychological needs and motivators interact with institutional constraints. It also enriches emerging scholarship on motivation in Chinese extracurricular education [3, 6] showing that intrinsic motivation and EI must be considered alongside structural incentives to understand teacher outcomes.

Practically, the results underscore the urgency for institutional leaders and policymakers to move beyond short-term financial incentives. As OECD [7] and Lewis, et al. [14] emphasize, teacher quality is central to education systems, and it depends not only on compensation but also on professional development and well-being. By creating motivation-sensitive frameworks that integrate fair pay, career pathways, recognition, and developmental opportunities, private arts institutions can reduce turnover, improve instructional quality, and contribute to sustainable growth. Such reforms are also aligned with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 [15] which advocates for inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic incentives on job performance and job satisfaction among dance teachers in China's private arts education sector. The findings demonstrated that both intrinsic motivation and emotional intelligence play significant roles in enhancing teaching effectiveness and professional

fulfilment, with emotional intelligence showing a slightly stronger effect on job satisfaction. These results suggest that while financial and institutional rewards are necessary for retention, sustainable improvements in performance and well-being rely on fostering autonomy, competence, and meaningful professional growth.

The unique demographic profile of the sample—predominantly young, female, and part-time—highlights the importance of context-sensitive incentive frameworks tailored to the realities of the arts education workforce. Over-reliance on transactional financial incentives risks undermining long-term engagement, whereas balanced systems that integrate intrinsic drivers with recognition and developmental opportunities can strengthen teacher commitment and instructional quality. Practically, the study calls for institutional leaders and policymakers to design holistic, motivation-sensitive strategies that combine fair compensation with structured career pathways and opportunities for professional growth. Theoretically, the findings extend applications of Self-Determination Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory to non-formal education, offering insights into sustainable teacher development in arts education.

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