

Factors affecting innovative behavior of young teachers in Yunnan public higher vocational colleges

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Accepted 16 October

ABSTRACT

This study explores the factors influencing the innovative behavior of young teachers in public higher vocational colleges in Yunnan Province, China. Using a quantitative approach, survey data were collected from 375 young teachers across 37 public higher vocational colleges and analyzed through multiple regression. The results indicate that several demographic variables, including age, teaching years, significantly predict innovative behavior. In addition, organizational factors such as perceived organizational innovation climate, perceived organizational support and knowledge sharing also exert strong positive effects. The findings highlight that innovative behavior is shaped by the interplay of individual factors and organizational factors. These results contribute to vocational education research and offer practical implications for policymakers and administrators aiming to foster teacher innovation.

Keywords: Innovative behavior, young teachers, vocational colleges, influencing factors, Yunnan.

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INTRODUCTION

Innovation has become a fundamental pillar of educational modernization and national competitiveness, particularly within China's rapidly evolving vocational education sector. As technological advancement and economic restructuring accelerate, higher vocational colleges must foster talent capable of creative thinking and adaptive problem-solving. In this regard, young teachers under 40 years of age are seen as the driving force behind innovation. Their enthusiasm, adaptability, and professional commitment directly impact the quality of education, the success of reform policies, and the ability of institutions to address the challenges posed by industry transformations.

Yunnan Province, located in southwest China, faces unique developmental challenges in its vocational education system. Compared with economically advanced regions like Guangdong and Jiangsu, vocational education in Yunnan has developed more slowly, with disparities in

quality and resource allocation. For example, of the 37 public higher vocational colleges in the province, only a few have been selected for the national "Double High Plan," and all are ranked at the lowest level (C). This imbalance highlights the urgent need to enhance institutional competitiveness, particularly through the improvement of young teachers' innovative behavior.

While existing studies primarily focus on industrial sectors or general higher education contexts, there has been limited research on the specific organizational climates, leadership structures, and personal factors that influence vocational teachers' innovative practices. Furthermore, despite the growing emphasis on teacher innovation within international frameworks such as those of the OECD and UNESCO, there is little empirical evidence exploring the factors that specifically promote innovation in the context of vocational education in

developing regions like Yunnan. To address this gap, the present study aims to explore the multi-level determinants of young teachers' innovative behavior in Yunnan's public higher vocational colleges.

This research draws on organizational and individual factors to offer evidence-based strategies for fostering innovation. Previous studies have explored organizational factors like perceived innovation climate, transformational leadership, organizational support, and knowledge sharing, and individual factors such as proactive personality, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction. However, few studies have examined how these factors interact within the specific context of vocational education in a developing region.

The theoretical framework guiding this study posits that organizational support mechanisms and individual psychological factors play significant roles in shaping innovative behavior. Drawing on existing research, the study investigates how organizational climate and leadership structures, as well as teachers' self-efficacy and engagement, contribute to their innovative behaviors. The findings aim to provide both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for policymakers and educational administrators looking to foster innovation in vocational colleges.

Research objective

The objective of this study is to analyze the organizational and individual factors affecting the innovative behavior of young teachers in Yunnan higher vocational colleges. The research focuses on identifying both organizational and individual aspects that contribute to the development and enhancement of innovation among this group.

Specifically, the study investigates four major organizational factors: perceived organizational innovation climate, transformational leadership, perceived organizational support, and knowledge sharing and four principal individual factors: proactive personality, teacher self-efficacy, work engagement, and job satisfaction. In addition, several demographic variables, including age, marital status, job level, teaching years, and annual income, are incorporated to explore their potential moderating or influencing effects on teachers' innovative behavior.

Through the use of descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression analysis, this study aims to identify the most significant predictors of innovative behavior and to clarify the relative contributions of organizational and individual factors. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence for developing effective institutional strategies to foster teacher innovation, thereby enhancing the overall quality and competitiveness of vocational education in Yunnan Province.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study utilized a survey research design to collect data from young teachers in public higher vocational colleges in Yunnan Province, aiming to identify factors that influence their innovative behavior. The research specifically examined the relationship between innovative behavior and eight independent variables: perceived organizational innovation climate, transformational leadership, perceived organizational support, knowledge sharing, proactive personality, teacher self-efficacy, work engagement, and job satisfaction.

Participant characteristics

The participants consisted of 375 young teachers selected from 37 public higher vocational colleges in Yunnan Province, China. According to the criteria set by Chinese educational authorities, young teachers are defined as those under the age of 40 with full-time employment status. Teachers on temporary or part-time contracts were excluded. The participants represented a variety of demographic characteristics, including age, marital status, job level, teaching years, and annual income. These demographic variables were incorporated into the analysis to assess their influence on innovative behavior.

Population and sampling

The study population comprised 5,976 young teachers across all public higher vocational colleges in Yunnan Province as of August 2022. To ensure representativeness, a random sampling method was employed. Institutional rosters of young teachers from each college were obtained, and participants were selected systematically using a fixed interval method. The sample size was determined using the Yamane formula (1967) with a 5% margin of error, yielding a minimum required sample of 375 respondents. Surveys were administered electronically, and all participants voluntarily participated after providing informed consent.

Data collection method

The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire designed to measure both the independent and dependent variables. The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to indicate their level of agreement with each statement, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The items were carefully developed based on the study's objectives and

theoretical framework, ensuring scientific rigor and practical applicability.

The questionnaire had three sections:

Demographic information: This section collected data on age, marital status, teaching years, and annual income, helping to provide contextual support and allowing for the control of demographic variables in later analyses.

Independent variables: This section included 69 items measuring organizational and individual factors. Organizational factors such as perceived innovation climate, transformational leadership, perceived organizational support, and knowledge sharing were included, as well as individual factors like proactive personality, teacher self-efficacy, work engagement, and job satisfaction.

Innovative behavior: The final section contained 16 items designed to measure innovative behavior, based on the theoretical models of Scott and Bruce (1994) and De Jong and Den Hartog (2010). This section assessed stages such as idea exploration, generation, championing, and implementation. Teachers rated statements based on their actual teaching and research experiences.

Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity tests were conducted to ensure the quality of the research instrument. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with the overall value found to be 0.900, well above the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Bolarinwa, 2015). Each subscale also demonstrated strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80 for organizational factors, individual factors, and innovative behavior.

For validity, content validity was assessed through expert evaluations from specialists in educational management, psychology, and vocational education. Construct validity was examined using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity, both of which indicated that the dataset was suitable for factor analysis (KMO = 0.85, $p < 0.001$). Item validity coefficients were all above 0.7, confirming that the instrument effectively measured the intended constructs.

Data analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used to analyze the collected data, with SPSS version 21 as the primary analytical tool.

In the descriptive analysis phase, frequency and percentage analyses were conducted to summarize

participants' demographic characteristics, including age, marital status, job level, teaching years, and annual income. This provided a clear overview of the sample and supported the interpretation of subsequent regression results.

For the inferential analysis, a multiple linear regression was performed to assess the relationships between the dependent variable (innovative behavior) and the independent variables (organizational and individual factors). To check for multicollinearity among the predictors, variance inflation factors (VIFs) were calculated. The VIF values are qualified; it is suitable for multiple regression analysis.

The regression analysis provided both unstandardized and standardized coefficients, illustrating the strength and direction of the influence of each predictor on innovative behavior. Model fit indicators, such as R, R², adjusted R², and the F-statistic, were also used to assess the overall explanatory power of the model.

RESULTS

Demographic data

This section presents the descriptive analysis of the demographic characteristics of the respondents, providing an overview of the sample composition and helping to contextualize the findings of this study. A total of 375 valid responses were collected from young teachers working in 37 public higher vocational colleges across Yunnan Province. As shown in Table 1, the demographic distribution reflects the general characteristics of young teachers within Yunnan's vocational education system.

With respect to age, the majority of respondents (71.47%) were between 30 and 39 years old, while 28.53% were below 30 years of age. This distribution indicates that most participants were in the mid-stage of their teaching careers, possessing several years of professional experience but still within the "young teacher" category as defined by national educational standards. The relatively large proportion of teachers under 40 years old demonstrates the strong presence of young professionals in Yunnan's vocational education workforce, which is consistent with the government's emphasis on rejuvenating the teaching staff through talent introduction and training programs.

Regarding marital status, 84.53% of the respondents were married, 12% were single, and 3.47% were divorced. This suggests that the majority of participants had established family responsibilities, which may influence their attitudes toward innovation, work stability, and professional development. Married teachers often balance work and family obligations, which could affect their time allocation and engagement in innovative practices.

In terms of job level, most respondents (73.07%) did not

hold any administrative position, while 25.07% served at the section level and only 1.86% held department-level or higher positions. This pattern indicates that the majority of young teachers are primarily engaged in teaching and research activities rather than administrative duties. However, a small portion of teachers already occupying middle management roles may possess greater decision-making authority and opportunities to lead innovative projects within their institutions.

Concerning teaching experience, 48.27% of the respondents had between 6 and 10 years of teaching experience, 36% had less than 6 years, and 15.73% had more than 10 years. This reveals that nearly half of the sample consists of teachers in their professional growth phase, who have gained a solid foundation in teaching practice while remaining open to adopting new methods and ideas. Meanwhile, teachers with over a decade of experience may contribute through mentorship and practical innovation based on accumulated expertise.

As for annual income, the largest group of respondents

(40.53%) reported earning between 120,001 and 140,000 RMB annually, followed by 32.53% earning between 100,000 and 120,000 RMB. Smaller proportions earned between 140,001 and 160,000 RMB (11.20%), between 160,001 and 180,000 RMB (7.47%), and above 180,000 RMB (8.27%). This income structure reflects the general pay scale of public vocational colleges in Yunnan Province, which remains relatively moderate compared with universities in more developed regions. However, the existence of a small group with higher income levels may reflect differences in professional rank, research involvement, or external project participation.

The demographic data reveal a young workforce, professionally active and largely focused on teaching responsibilities. These characteristics provide an important context for understanding how organizational support, individual motivation, and experience shape innovative behavior among young teachers in Yunnan's vocational colleges.

Table 1. Demographic information.

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
Below 30	107	28.53
30-39	268	71.47
Total	375	100
Marital status		
Single	45	12.00
Married	317	84.53
Divorced	13	3.47
Total	375	100
Job level		
None	274	73.07
Section-level	94	25.07
Department level and above	7	1.86
Total	375	100
Teaching years		
Below 6	135	36.00
6-10	181	48.27
Above 10	59	15.73
Total	375	100
Annual income		
100,000-120,000 RMB	122	32.53
120,001-140,000 RMB	152	40.53
140,001-160,000 RMB	42	11.20
160,001-180,000 RMB	28	7.47
Above 180,000 RMB	31	8.27
Total	375	100

Relationship between research variables

This study employed multiple linear regression analysis to examine the factors influencing innovative behavior among young teachers in Yunnan's public higher vocational colleges. The overall regression model was found to be statistically significant, $F = 34.437$, $p < 0.001$, with a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.744. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.554, and the adjusted R^2 was 0.538, indicating that the model had a good fit and strong explanatory power. This means that approximately 53.8% of the variance in innovative behavior among young teachers can be explained by the combined effects of the included independent variables, demonstrating the robustness of the model.

Regarding organizational factors, three variables: perceived organizational innovation climate ($\beta = 0.262$, $p < 0.001$), perceived organizational support ($\beta = 0.408$, $p < 0.001$), and knowledge sharing ($\beta = 0.409$, $p < 0.001$) showed significant positive effects on innovative behavior. These findings suggest that when teachers perceive their institutions as open, supportive, and conducive to innovation, they are more likely to engage in creative teaching and research practices. A favorable organizational climate not only encourages experimentation but also enhances teachers' sense of belonging and psychological safety, allowing them to take initiative in generating and implementing new ideas. In contrast, transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.050$, $p = 0.302$) did not exhibit a significant effect, indicating that leadership style alone may not directly determine teachers' innovative engagement when other contextual supports, such as institutional climate and peer collaboration, are already in place.

In terms of individual factors, teacher self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.115$, $p = 0.046$), work engagement ($\beta = 0.083$, $p = 0.025$), and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.216$, $p = 0.001$) were all found to significantly and positively influence innovative behavior. This indicates that teachers who possess stronger confidence in their teaching abilities, greater enthusiasm for their work, and higher satisfaction with their professional environment tend to display more initiative and creativity in both teaching and research. These results align with prior research emphasizing the importance of psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation in fostering innovation. However, proactive personality ($\beta = 0.005$, $p = 0.891$) was not statistically significant, suggesting that personality traits alone may not be sufficient to predict innovative behavior without supportive environmental and motivational conditions.

With respect to demographic variables, age ($\beta = -0.386$, $p < 0.001$) had a significant negative relationship with innovative behavior, suggesting that younger teachers are generally more open to change and experimentation. Meanwhile, job level ($\beta = 0.325$, $p = 0.001$) and teaching years ($\beta = 0.467$, $p = 0.001$) showed significant positive effects, indicating that professional experience and higher positions within institutions may provide teachers with greater autonomy and confidence to engage in innovative practices. Conversely, annual income ($\beta = -0.322$, $p = 0.004$) demonstrated a significant negative effect, implying that as teachers' income levels increase, their innovation motivation may decline, possibly due to a shift in focus from professional exploration to economic stability. Marital status was not found to be statistically significant, suggesting that family responsibilities have a limited direct impact on innovation in this context.

Table 2. Relationship between research variables

Variables	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
Age	-0.050	0.012	-0.386	-4.198	0.000**
Marital status	-0.069	0.079	-0.044	-0.866	0.387
Job level	0.415	0.119	0.325	3.475	0.001**
Teaching years	0.082	0.023	0.467	3.496	0.001**
Annual income (pre-tax)	-0.152	0.053	-0.322	-2.873	0.004**
Perceived organizational innovation climate	0.186	0.041	0.262	4.505	0.000**
Transformational leadership	0.046	0.045	0.050	1.034	0.302
Perceived organizational support	0.422	0.078	0.408	5.387	0.000**
Knowledge sharing	0.329	0.042	0.409	7.919	0.000**
Proactive personality	0.003	0.022	0.005	0.138	0.891
Teacher self-efficacy	0.089	0.045	0.115	2.000	0.046*
Work engagement	0.067	0.030	0.083	2.255	0.025*
Job satisfaction	0.217	0.064	0.216	3.405	0.001**

$R = 0.744$, $R^2 = 0.554$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.538$, $F = 34.437$.

The results reveal that both organizational support mechanisms and individual psychological factors are essential in fostering innovative behavior among young teachers in Yunnan's vocational education system. While institutional climate and knowledge sharing provide the structural foundation for innovation, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and work engagement act as internal drivers that sustain it. These findings underscore the need for integrated strategies that simultaneously strengthen organizational environments and enhance individual motivation to effectively cultivate innovation among vocational teachers.

DISCUSSION

This study identifies several key factors influencing the innovative behavior of young teachers in Yunnan's public higher vocational colleges. The results suggest that Perceived Organizational Innovation Climate is positively associated with innovative behavior. This finding is consistent with prior research (Scott and Bruce, 1994), which has shown that a positive organizational climate fosters creativity and encourages the generation and implementation of innovative ideas. In the context of vocational education, creating a supportive and open organizational environment is crucial to promoting teachers' willingness to engage in innovative practices. Therefore, institutions should focus on cultivating an atmosphere that embraces innovation and experimentation, which can significantly enhance teachers' ability to innovate.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) was also found to be positively related to innovative behavior, aligning with the work of Eisenberger and Rhoades (2002), who argue that employees who perceive their organization as supportive are more likely to engage in discretionary behaviors such as innovation. This suggests that young teachers who feel valued by their institutions are more likely to invest effort in creative and reform-oriented practices. This finding emphasizes the importance of organizational support in enhancing teachers' innovation, highlighting the need for administrators to foster a culture of appreciation and recognition.

Furthermore, Knowledge Sharing was shown to have a significant positive relationship with innovative behavior, which corroborates Lin's (2007) findings that knowledge exchange and collaboration are key drivers of innovation. Teachers who actively engage in sharing ideas and resources with colleagues are more likely to contribute to collective innovation within their institutions. As such, colleges should establish formal mechanisms for knowledge sharing and encourage collaborative projects, which can stimulate creative thinking and problem-solving across departments.

However, the study found that Transformational

Leadership was not significantly related to innovative behavior among young teachers. This finding differs from previous research (Bass, 1985; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000), suggesting that transformational leadership—through intellectual stimulation and empowerment—should foster innovation. The lack of significance in this context may be due to the presence of broader organizational factors such as organizational climate and support, which might be more influential in vocational education settings. In Yunnan's context, the focus may be less on leadership style and more on structural and cultural factors that enable or constrain innovation. This points to the need for further exploration of how leadership interacts with organizational factors to influence innovation, particularly in regions with unique educational and cultural characteristics.

Regarding individual factors, this study found that Teacher Self-Efficacy, Work Engagement, and Job Satisfaction were all significantly and positively correlated with innovative behavior. These results are consistent with previous studies (Bandura, 1997; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), which argue that teachers with higher confidence in their abilities and greater enthusiasm for their work are more likely to innovate. This highlights the importance of fostering positive psychological traits in teachers, such as self-confidence and motivation, to drive innovation. Educational institutions should consider providing professional development opportunities that enhance teachers' sense of efficacy and work engagement, as these are key drivers of creative behavior.

In contrast, Proactive Personality did not show a significant effect on innovative behavior in this study, which contrasts with previous findings suggesting that proactive individuals are more likely to engage in innovative behavior (Bateman and Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000). This inconsistency may be explained by the cultural and institutional context of Yunnan's vocational education system, where collective norms and institutional support might play a stronger role than individual personality traits. In this context, organizational factors may outweigh the influence of individual traits, suggesting that fostering innovation may be more effectively achieved by enhancing institutional and collaborative support structures rather than focusing solely on individual characteristics.

Regarding demographic variables, Age was found to have a significant negative effect on innovative behavior, suggesting that younger teachers are more inclined to engage in innovation. This aligns with previous studies showing that younger teachers tend to be more adaptable and open to new ideas (Ng and Feldman, 2013). Job Level and Teaching Years, on the other hand, had positive effects, indicating that teachers with more experience or higher positions are more likely to engage in innovative practices. These findings support the idea that professional experience and institutional roles provide teachers with more autonomy and resources to innovate.

However, Annual Income had a significant negative effect on innovation, which may reflect a shift in focus from professional growth to economic stability as income increases.

Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for educational policymakers and administrators. First, fostering a positive organizational climate and providing organizational support are critical to enhancing teachers' innovative behavior. Colleges should invest in creating supportive environments that encourage knowledge sharing and collaboration among faculty members. Additionally, enhancing teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction through professional development and engagement initiatives could also stimulate innovative behavior. While transformational leadership was not found to be a significant predictor in this study, future research should explore how leadership styles interact with organizational factors in fostering innovation, particularly in vocational education contexts.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The geographic specificity of the sample, which focused on public higher vocational colleges in Yunnan Province, limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions or educational contexts. Additionally, the study relied on self-report data, which may be subject to response biases such as social desirability or over-reporting of innovative behavior. Future research should incorporate objective measures of innovative behavior and consider longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic nature of innovation over time. The cross-sectional design also limits the ability to draw causal conclusions, suggesting the need for future studies that examine the causal relationships between the identified factors and innovation.

Contribution to theoretical development

This study contributes to the theoretical development of innovation in vocational education by expanding the understanding of the interplay between organizational and individual factors in fostering innovative behavior. The findings support the notion that a supportive organizational environment and positive psychological factors are critical in promoting innovation. Moreover, this research offers a new perspective on the role of individual traits, such as proactive personality, in the context of vocational education, suggesting that collective organizational factors

may be more influential in certain cultural settings. Future research should further explore how contextual and cultural factors shape innovation in different educational systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, this study made the following recommendations:

Recommendations for policymakers

To promote and sustain innovation among young teachers in Yunnan's vocational colleges, policymakers should integrate innovation indicators into provincial performance evaluations and funding mechanisms. This would make innovation an essential criterion for assessing institutional quality and teacher development. An innovation funding system should be established to provide stable and equitable support, including early-career grants, interdisciplinary collaboration funds, and regional innovation projects. Such programs would encourage both individual creativity and collective innovation aligned with local economic priorities. In addition, the Department of Education should enhance inter-college cooperation through annual "Vocational Education Innovation Forums" and shared platforms for best practices. Digital management tools should also be introduced to monitor projects, ensure transparency, and strengthen teachers' trust in policy implementation.

Recommendations for vocational college administrations

College administrations should embed innovation into their institutional strategies and performance evaluation systems. Promotion and assessment should emphasize creative teaching, curriculum reform, and practical innovation rather than focusing solely on publications or seniority. Given the significant influence of perceived organizational innovation climate, organizational support, and knowledge sharing, colleges should build a supportive and collaborative culture. Establishing Teacher Innovation and Development Centers, cross-disciplinary innovation hubs, and long-term mentoring programs can help enhance communication, professional growth, and innovative capacity. These measures would not only encourage experimentation but also strengthen teachers' confidence in institutional support and innovation culture.

Recommendations for enterprises

Enterprises should act as active partners in educational

innovation. By co-developing research and teaching projects, they can transform real industrial problems into learning opportunities for teachers and students. Joint curriculum design ensures that course content aligns with current market and technological trends. Programs such as “teacher-in-industry” or “enterprise experts on campus” can promote mutual learning and continuous knowledge exchange, bridging the gap between academia and industry while improving the relevance of teaching innovation.

Recommendations for young teachers

Young teachers should treat innovation as a central part of their professional development. They are encouraged to set personal innovation goals, engage in interdisciplinary collaboration, and apply action research methods in their teaching to continuously refine and expand their creative practices. Since teacher self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and work engagement significantly predict innovation, maintaining enthusiasm, recording innovative achievements, and sharing experiences can strengthen motivation and build an internal culture of creativity. Developing advocacy and communication skills, such as presenting innovative ideas effectively and using digital tools, will also help young teachers promote their work and enhance its impact.

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Citation: Zhu, Y., Ek-lem, B., Kaewtip, S., Panyadee, C., & Naprathansuk, N. (2025). Factors affecting innovative behavior of young teachers in Yunnan public higher vocational colleges. *African Educational Research Journal, 13*(4), 435-442.
