

Exacerbate or Alleviate? The Dual-Pathway Mechanism of Job Crafting in the Relationship Between Work Motivation and Job Burnout Among Primary and junior school Teachers

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Article

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Abstract

Integrating self-determination theory and regulatory focus theory, the study investigated how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation differentially influence teacher burnout through two types of job crafting behaviors. Survey data were collected from 480 primary and junior school teachers in China. Hierarchical regression analyses and PROCESS macro analyses were used to test the hypothesized model. Results indicated that intrinsic motivation diminished job burnout through promotion-focused job crafting ($\beta = -0.13, p < 0.01$), whereas extrinsic motivation intensified job burnout through prevention-focused job crafting ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$). Furthermore, teaching experience negatively moderated these mediated pathways, with stronger indirect effects for novice teachers that attenuated as experience increased. These findings provide empirical support for career-stage-specific burnout interventions, suggesting that support strategies should be tailored to teachers' motivational profiles and professional development stages.

1. Introduction

Education constitutes the cornerstone of long-term national development, with teachers serving as the foundational force behind educational advancement. The occupational well-being of primary and junior school teachers is indispensable for fostering a high-quality teacher education system. Conversely, job burnout is a strong resistance factor that affects the construction of teachers' teams and the efficient development of education. Owing to the long-term burden of multiple role pressures and frequent emotional labor and other work requirements, teachers have become a high-risk group for job burnout (Yu, 2025). In recent years, amid multifaceted work pressures—including the “double reduction” policy, digital intelligence transformation, integrated education literacy requirements, and new curriculum reform initiatives—the prevalence of job burnout among primary and junior school teachers has grown increasingly severe. Within the broader policy context of building an educational powerhouse, advancements in science and technology, and talent cultivation, teacher burden reduction has acquired renewed strategic significance, thereby galvanizing widespread attention to the job burnout challenges afflicting primary and junior school teachers.

The antecedents and intervention strategies targeting teachers' job burnout have constituted a central research focus within this domain. Prior investigations have documented substantial individual variability in teachers' burnout levels, attributable to demographic characteristics, personality traits, and individual resources, among other factors (Li & Yong, 2010; Li et al., 2022). Intervention studies based on the perspective of individual psychological resources found that social-emotional learning skills, gratitude exercises, mindfulness and meditation interventions have a mitigating effect on job burnout (Chan, 2011; Biglan et al., 2013; Czerwinski et al., 2020).

However, Ancona and Mendelson (2014) and Schwind et al. (2021) contested these findings, arguing that there was no significant difference in burnout level before and after intervention, and even led to more serious interpersonal relationship and burnout level (Lang et al., 2020). As the research perspective expands to the organizational level and social level, scholars have proposed that the essential reason for job burnout based on the JD-R model is the mismatch between job requirements and job resources (Li et al., 2011; Agyapong et al., 2022). At the social level, the main factors inducing job burnout are insufficient social support and work-family conflict (Xu et al., 2005; Yang et al., 2015). Although existing literature has enriched the conceptual understanding of burnout etiology from multiple vantage points, the genesis of job burnout is a complex, multifactorial process, with individual-level factors consistently occupying a central explanatory role (Liu et al., 2023). Nevertheless, a critical

question remains under-examined: how do work behavior adjustments triggered by individual psychological resources shape teachers' job burnout? In the new educational context where the "new curriculum reform," "double reduction" and "education digital intelligence" continue to advance, teachers are more likely to show job crafting behaviors that independently design work content, work methods and adjust interpersonal relationships due to their job characteristics such as role flexibility and task independence (Tian, 2024). While job crafting has been empirically validated as an effective intervention for alleviating employee burnout within corporate settings (Van Wingerden et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2024), the generalizability and efficacy of this effect within the specific occupational context of primary and junior school teachers warrant further empirical verification.

To address these shortcomings, this study adopted a quantitative survey methodology to collect empirical data from primary and junior school teachers, thereby elucidating the intrinsic mechanism through which teachers' intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation, in conjunction with two types of job crafting behaviors, shape job burnout. Specifically, this study pursued three objectives. First, it examined the association between work motivation and job burnout among primary and junior school teachers, exploring whether intrinsic and extrinsic motivation differentially predict burnout. Second, a differentiated mechanism model was constructed to clarify how intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation respectively shape job burnout through promotion-focused and prevention-focused job crafting pathways. Third, years of teaching experience were introduced as a moderating variable to delineate the boundary conditions of these relationships.

The principal contributions of this study are fourfold:

- (1) By integrating self-determination theory and regulatory focus theory, this study constructed a differentiated mechanism model that elucidates the distinct pathways through which intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation influences job burnout.
- (2) This study advanced the theoretical understanding of the relationship between work motivation and job burnout by distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation and uncovering their differential effects on burnout.
- (3) This study introduced years of teaching as a moderating variable to define the theoretical boundary conditions of the relationships among work motivation, job crafting, and job burnout. By examining how years of teaching experience moderate these relationships, offering insights into the developmental dynamics of teacher motivation and well-being across different career stages.
- (4) From a practical perspective, the study clarifies intervention points for alleviating job burnout among primary and junior school teachers, yielding actionable implications for educational administrators and policymakers.

The subsequent sections of this article are arranged as follows. Section 2 formulates the research hypotheses by synthesizing relevant theoretical frameworks and prior empirical studies. Section 3 delineates the study design, sampling procedures, and psychometric instruments employed. Section 4 reports the statistical findings. The final section interprets the results, elaborates on their theoretical and practical significance, and concludes by acknowledging the study's limitations alongside recommendations for future inquiry.

2. Theory and hypothesis development

Teaching motivation represents a central component of teachers' psychological resources, guiding the direction of their professional development and the degree of effort they invest in achieving goals (Han & Yin, 2014). As a key psychological variable, teaching motivation influences teachers' active learning behaviors (Mercer & Alexander, 2008). Grounded in self-determination theory, teaching motivation is categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Furthermore, integrating regulatory focus theory with motivation orientation, Bindl et al. (2019) delineated job crafting into promotion-focused and prevention-focused approaches.

2.1. Primary and junior school teachers' work motivation and job burnout

This study investigates the differential effects of intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation on job burnout among primary and junior school teachers. Prior research has established work motivation as an effective predictor of teachers' job burnout (Lu et al., 2012). Self-determination theory (SDT) offers a theoretical framework for understanding these differential effects. SDT posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness constitute three fundamental psychological needs. When these needs are satisfied, individuals experience intrinsic motivation; when thwarted, extrinsic motivation emerges (Deci & Ryan, 2008). When teachers perceive that their basic psychological needs are effectively satisfied, their intrinsic motivation is fortified, supplying a strong driving force for achieving work goals (Liu et al., 2025). Teachers driven by intrinsic motivation engage in their work due to intrinsic interest or a sense of value derived from the work itself (Wang et al., 2024). Such teachers actively pursue the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—enabling them to adapt more effectively to changing work demands and achieve sustained person-environment fit. Furthermore, intrinsically motivated teachers tend to form positive relationships with students; the sense of achievement derived from student growth serves as a protective factor against job burnout (McLean et al., 2019). Conversely, when teachers' basic needs remain unmet, extrinsic motivation is activated (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Extrinsically motivated teachers rely on non-work factors such as rewards, punishments, income, promotion, and job stability, tending to adopt behaviors that secure rewards or avoid criticism (Ariani, 2017). Under these conditions, psychological need satisfaction is continuously suppressed, leading to increasing emotional exhaustion and alienation, and consequently, more severe burnout. Previous research has confirmed that expert teachers demonstrate significantly higher intrinsic motivation and lower job burnout compared to proficient teachers (Lian, 2004). Similarly, McLean et al. (2019) found that employees with extrinsic motivation exhibited higher levels of burnout. Based on this evidence, intrinsic motivation, stemming from need satisfaction, is expected to reduce job burnout, whereas extrinsic motivation, arising from need frustration, is expected to exacerbate it. This study hypothesizes that intrinsic motivation negatively predicts job burnout, while extrinsic motivation positively predicts job burnout among primary and junior school teachers.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): Intrinsic work motivation is negatively associated with job burnout among primary and junior school teachers.

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): Extrinsic work motivation is positively associated with job burnout among primary and junior school teachers.

2.2. The mediating role of facilitating job crafting

Job crafting refers to the proactive self-regulatory behaviors that employees engage in to shape their work experiences. Drawing upon regulatory focus theory, Bindl et al. (2019) categorized job crafting into promotion-

focused and prevention-focused forms. Promotion-focused job crafting involves proactive behaviors aimed at achieving growth, improvement, and aspiration, such as ability enhancement, skill development, and task mastery. In contrast, prevention-focused job crafting involves proactive behaviors aimed at avoiding negative outcomes and fulfilling responsibilities (Fong et al., 2021). Job crafting manifests through four pathways: task crafting, relationship crafting, skill crafting, and cognitive crafting (Bindl et al., 2019). Among these, cognitive crafting does not involve behavioral changes but rather reflects how employees reinterpret their tasks, colleague relationships, and the fit between their skills and work requirements.

Work motivation serves as a crucial psychological variable influencing teachers' proactive professional behaviors during their professional development (Lu et al., 2012). Integrating regulatory focus theory, Bindl et al. (2019) posited that promotion-focused and prevention-focused job crafting behaviors are underpinned by individual differences in intrinsic and extrinsic work motivations. Specifically, intrinsic motivation propels teachers to pursue basic psychological need satisfaction, manifesting a promotion focus orientation. These teachers perceive new challenges and work goals as opportunities for "hope and ambition" (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). They actively expand their work content, engage in new projects, participate in training and self-directed learning to develop skills for meeting educational challenges, and proactively build positive relationships with colleagues and expand their interpersonal networks (Qi & Wu, 2016). Research has established a significant negative relationship between promotion-focused job crafting and job burnout through multiple mechanisms. First, promotion-focused job crafting reduces burnout by enabling teachers to modify their work content and enhance their sense of control over work (Wang et al., 2025). Second, continuous skill development facilitates dynamic adaptation to work demands, fostering personal and job resources that promote career achievement (Wei et al., 2023). Third, promotion-focused job crafting significantly increases work engagement, which in turn reduces job burnout (Qi et al., 2016). Therefore, this study proposes that intrinsic motivation negatively predicts job burnout through promotion-focused job crafting among primary and junior school teachers. The following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): Intrinsic motivation positively predicts promotion-focused job crafting among primary and junior school teachers.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): Promotion-focused job crafting mediates the relationship between intrinsic motivation and job burnout, such that intrinsic motivation reduces job burnout by promoting promotion-focused job crafting behaviors.

2.3. The mediating role of prevention-focused job crafting

Extrinsic motivation activates teachers' prevention focus orientation (Ma et al., 2022). Under extrinsic motivation, teachers tend to perceive various work pressures—especially novel challenges—as controlling evaluations or threats. Consequently, they engage in prevention-focused job crafting, adopting failure-avoidance behaviors as coping mechanisms to maintain psychological well-being. Specifically, in prevention-focused job crafting, primary and junior school teachers exhibit several characteristic behaviors. They focus on safer, more comfortable work tasks by reducing or simplifying complex responsibilities to avoid performance losses, thereby alleviating emotional tension and reducing continuous emotional consumption. They concentrate on maintaining professional competence in their areas of strength while developing skills to prevent negative work outcomes and minimize failure risks. Additionally, they maintain relationships with a small circle of trusted colleagues while avoiding or reducing interactions with difficult coworkers (Bindl et al., 2019). Research has demonstrated that prevention-focused job crafting significantly exacerbates job burnout through multiple pathways. First, although

prevention-focused job crafting may initially increase workload (Rudolph et al., 2017), the returns are insufficient to offset the effort invested, leading to heightened emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Harju et al., 2021). Second, simplifying work complexity reduces individuals' sense of work meaning and increases developmental uncertainty, triggering anxiety, decreased work engagement, and deepened emotional exhaustion (Wang et al., 2025). Third, the inhibitory effect of prevention-focused job crafting on resource acquisition activates a resource loss spiral (Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2019), progressively intensifying job burnout.

Therefore, this study proposes that external motivation positively predicts job burnout through prevention-focused job crafting among primary and junior school teachers. The following hypotheses are advanced:

Hypothesis 2c (H2c): External motivation positively predicts prevention-focused job crafting among primary and junior school teachers.

Hypothesis 2d (H2d): Prevention-focused job crafting mediates the relationship between external motivation and job burnout, such that external motivation exacerbates job burnout by increasing prevention-focused job crafting behaviors.

Heading 2.4. The moderating role of years of teaching experience

The effects of work motivation on job burnout may be conditional rather than uniform. This study incorporates years of teaching experience as a moderating variable to examine these conditional effects. Teaching experience has long served as a key indicator of teachers' professional development and competence (Huberman, 1995). As teaching experience accumulates, teachers undergo significant professional development: their instructional skills become more refined, their capacity to cope with work-related stress strengthens, they advance in professional rank, and their personal resources expand. Research has demonstrated that teachers with extensive experience (more than 15 years) exhibit significant advantages in professional identity, work initiative, and job performance compared to their less experienced counterparts (fewer than 15 years) (Cheng & Zhu, 2023). Moreover, teaching experience is closely associated with job burnout levels (Cai & Zhu, 2013). Therefore, this study further examines how the effects of work motivation and job crafting on job burnout vary across different career stages among primary and junior school teachers.

Years of teaching experience serve not only as a temporal marker of teachers' careers but also as a reflection of their evolving work demands, available resources, and personal resource allocation patterns. Throughout teachers' professional lifecycle, work demands follow an inverted U-shaped trajectory—initially increasing and then decreasing—while work resources and personal resources generally accumulate over time. Early-career teachers often experience a resource deficit characterized by "high job demands and low personal resources" (Collie et al., 2020). As teaching experience accumulates, teachers' resource base gradually expands, and experienced teachers enter a state of resource abundance characterized by "low work demands and high personal resources." For early-career teachers in a state of resource deficit, those driven by intrinsic motivation tend to engage in promotion-focused job crafting when confronting high work demands. Through actively adapting to their environment, exploring innovative teaching methods, and building meaningful teacher-student relationships, these teachers effectively navigate work tasks, experience stronger feelings of achievement and work meaning, and consequently benefit from significant burnout mitigation. Conversely, teachers driven by extrinsic motivation perceive that under resource-deficit conditions, satisfying their basic needs becomes more challenging and obtaining rewards less likely. This perception triggers prevention-focused job crafting, initiating a short-term resource depletion cycle that exacerbates job burnout. For experienced teachers in a state of resource abundance, rich teaching experience may

paradoxically lead to a "career plateau" phenomenon when further breakthroughs in teaching skills and professional abilities become difficult to achieve (Hui & Cao, 2010). Simultaneously, teachers' sense of achievement and satisfaction from routine work may exhibit hedonic adaptation or habituation, suggesting that the beneficial effect of promotion-focused job crafting on reducing burnout is attenuated. For experienced teachers with extrinsic motivation, two mechanisms operate. First, as accumulated work and personal resources enable effective responses to work demands, incremental anxiety decreases, and the resource depletion associated with prevention-focused job crafting is effectively buffered. Second, teachers who have accumulated substantial professional capital (e.g., professional title advancement, reputation) tend to evaluate work pressures through a more rational "cost-benefit" lens, reassessing the value of extrinsic incentives. This manifests as a weakened exacerbating effect of prevention-focused job crafting on job burnout. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 3a (H3a): Years of teaching negatively moderates the mediating role of promotion-focused job crafting in the relationship between intrinsic motivation and job burnout. Specifically, the negative indirect effect of intrinsic motivation on job burnout via promotion-focused job crafting is stronger among teachers with less teaching experience.

Hypothesis 3b (H3b): Years of teaching negatively moderates the mediating role of prevention-focused job crafting in the relationship between extrinsic motivation and job burnout. Specifically, the positive indirect effect of extrinsic motivation on job burnout via prevention-focused job crafting is stronger among early-career teachers.

The conceptual model of this study is showed in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

3. Method

3.1. Participants and procedure

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to collect data from primary, junior high, and senior high school teachers across China. Between March and May 2025, questionnaires were administered through both paper-based and online platforms. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was assigned a unique identification number, and all responses were collected anonymously. Participants received financial compensation for their time. Of the distributed questionnaires, 480 valid responses were retained after removing incomplete or invalid data, yielding a valid response rate of 94.3%. The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 here]

As shown in Table 1, the sample included teachers from urban (71.0%) and township (29.0%) schools, spanning primary (42.2%), junior high (39.3%), and senior high (18.3%) school levels. The gender distribution was 26.4% male and 73.5% female. Regarding professional titles, participants were distributed across unranked (16.8%), junior (33.7%), intermediate (36.6%), and senior (12.7%) categories. In terms of educational attainment, the majority held bachelor's degrees (76.6%), followed by master's degrees (13.5%), associate degrees or below (7.2%), and doctoral degrees (2.5%). Additionally, 76.6% of participants had prior experience as head teachers, and 84.3% held tenured positions.

3.2. Measures

All constructs were assessed using well-established scales with demonstrated reliability and validity in prior research. Unless otherwise noted, all items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

1. **Job burnout.** Burnout was assessed with the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey (MBI; Maslach et al., 1997), a 22-item scale that captures three facets of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment. Responses were provided on a 5-point frequency scale anchored at 0 and 5. In this sample, Cronbach's α values were 0.938 for the full scale, 0.917 for emotional exhaustion, 0.868 for depersonalization, and 0.837 for diminished personal accomplishment.
2. **Work motivation.** The intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation were assessed using the corresponding subscales of the Motivation at Work Scale (MAWS; Gagné et al., 2010). The intrinsic motivation subscale (3 items) measures the extent to which individuals engage in work due to inherent interest and enjoyment (e.g., "Because I find this job interesting"). The extrinsic motivation subscale (3 items) measures the extent to which individuals engage in work for extrinsic rewards such as salary and job security (e.g., "I do this job for a stable salary"). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. In the present study, the Cronbach's α coefficients were 0.907 for intrinsic motivation and 0.823 for extrinsic motivation.
3. **Job crafting.** Job crafting was assessed using the measure developed by Bindl et al. (2019). The scale comprises two dimensions: *Promotion-focused job crafting* (16 items) captures proactive behaviors aimed at achieving growth and aspiration (e.g., "I try to improve my abilities"; "I try to better understand others at work"). In the present study, Cronbach's α was 0.936. *Prevention-focused job crafting* (12 items) captures proactive behaviors aimed at avoiding negative outcomes and fulfilling responsibilities (e.g., "I make sure my work is not too intense"; "I try to develop skills that can prevent negative work outcomes"). In the present study, the Cronbach's α was 0.812.
4. **Years of teaching.** Years of teaching experience were assessed by asking participants to report the total number of years they had been employed as teachers. Prior to conducting the moderation analysis, teaching experience was grand-mean centered to facilitate the interpretation of regression coefficients and reduce potential multicollinearity between the main effects and interaction terms.
5. **Control variables.** Prior research has identified several demographic and work-related factors as significant predictors of teacher job burnout. Accordingly, the following variables were controlled for in this study: Gender (1 = male, 2 = female), Teaching section (1 = primary school, 2 = junior high school, 3 = senior high school), Professional title (1 = unranked, 2 = junior title, 3 = intermediate title, 4 = senior title), Educational attainment (1 = technical junior school or below, 2 = associate degree, 3 = bachelor's degree, 4 = master's degree, 5 = doctoral degree), Homeroom Teacher's Experience (0 = no, 1 = yes), Work-family balance (1 = work interferes with family, 2 = family interferes with work, 3 = relatively balanced).

4. Results

4.1. Preliminary analyses: demographic differences in job burnout

Prior to testing the main hypotheses, we examined whether job burnout varied across key demographic characteristics using independent-samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Results are summarized in Table 2. **Regarding** gender: Job burnout did not differ significantly between male ($M = 2.51$, $SD =$

0.84) and female ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.83$) teachers, $t(478) = -1.74$, $p = 0.084$. **Concerning** professional title: A significant effect of professional title on job burnout was observed, $F(3, 476) = 4.41$, $p < 0.01$. Teachers without professional titles ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.83$) reported the highest burnout levels, followed by those with junior titles ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.88$), intermediate titles ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 0.80$), and senior titles ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 0.72$), who exhibited the lowest burnout levels. This pattern suggests that accumulated professional resources and sense of achievement associated with advanced titles may serve as protective factors against burnout. With respect to years of teaching experience: teaching experience was significantly associated with job burnout, $F(4, 475) = 8.25$, $p < 0.001$. Teachers with 3–4 years of experience reported the highest burnout ($M = 30.01$, $SD = 0.97$), followed by those with 1–2 years ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.79$). Burnout declined substantially for teachers with 5–10 years of experience ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 0.85$), remained relatively low for those with 11–20 years ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 0.70$), and increased slightly for those with more than 20 years ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 0.74$). This U-shaped trajectory indicates that both novice teachers (fewer than 5 years) and veteran teachers (more than 20 years) experience heightened burnout relative to mid-career teachers, warranting targeted intervention for these groups. Regarding homeroom teacher's experience: teachers with homeroom teacher experience ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.84$) reported significantly lower burnout than those without such experience ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.78$), $t(478) = -2.91$, $p < 0.01$. This difference may be attributable to the personal resources accumulated through homeroom teacher responsibilities and the sense of achievement derived from meaningful teacher-student relationships.

[Insert table 2 here]

4.2. Measurement model: reliability and validity

Reliability and validity were assessed using SPSS 29 and Mplus 8.3. All constructs demonstrated acceptable intrinsic consistency, with Cronbach's α coefficients exceeding 0.70. The KMO value was 0.943, confirming sampling adequacy for factor analysis. Composite reliability (CR) values exceeded 0.70, and average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the discriminant validity of the six constructs. As shown in Table 3, the hypothesized six-factor model provided a good fit to the data: $\chi^2(83) = 3070.09$, $\chi^2/df = 3.70$, CFI = 0.946, TLI = 0.922, SRMR = 0.068, RMSEA = 0.075. The six-factor model fit significantly better than all alternative models, thus providing strong evidence for the discriminant validity of the measures.

[Insert Table 3 here]

4.3. Common method bias and multicollinearity

1. **Common method bias.** Procedural remedies were implemented during data collection, including anonymous responses and reverse-coded items. Statistically, Harman's single-factor test was conducted first. The first unrotated factor accounted for 310.02% of the total variance, below the 40% threshold, suggesting common method bias was not a serious concern. Second, following Zhou and Long (2004), a latent method factor was added to the six-factor model. Compared to the six-factor model (CFI = 0.946, TLI = 0.922, RMSEA = 0.075, SRMR = 0.068), the model with the method factor showed comparable fit (CFI = 0.943, TLI = 0.909, RMSEA = 0.081, SRMR = 0.061). The changes in fit indices were minimal ($\Delta CFI = -0.003$, $\Delta TLI = -0.013$, $\Delta RMSEA = +0.006$, $\Delta SRMR = -0.007$), indicating that common method bias did not substantially affect the results (Bagozzi & Yi, 1990).

2. **Multicollinearity.** VIF values ranged from 1.10 to 2.33, all below the threshold of 3, confirming that multicollinearity was not a concern.

4.4. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for all study variables are presented in Table 4. As shown, job burnout was significantly negatively associated with intrinsic motivation ($r = -0.58, p < 0.01$), years of teaching experience ($r = -0.09, p < 0.05$), and promotion-focused job crafting ($r = -0.49, p < 0.01$). Conversely, job burnout was positively associated with extrinsic motivation ($r = 0.20, p < 0.01$) and prevention-focused job crafting ($r = 0.13, p < 0.01$). Regarding the hypothesized mediation pathways, intrinsic motivation showed a strong positive correlation with promotion-focused job crafting ($r = 0.67, p < 0.01$), and extrinsic motivation was positively correlated with prevention-focused job crafting ($r = 0.40, p < 0.01$). These bivariate associations were consistent with the hypothesized relationships and justified further examination through mediation and moderated mediation analyses.

[Insert Table 4 here]

4.5. Hypothesis testing

1. Main effect and mediating effect test

Hypotheses 1a and 1b predicted that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation would be negatively and positively associated with job burnout, respectively. Hierarchical regression analyses, controlling for gender, school level, professional title, work-family balance, and homeroom teacher experience, supported both hypotheses (see Table 5). Intrinsic motivation was negatively associated with job burnout ($\beta = -0.47, p < 0.001$; Model 6), and extrinsic motivation was positively associated with job burnout ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.05$; Model 8). H2a and H2c predicted that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation would positively predict promotion-focused and prevention-focused job crafting, respectively. As shown in Table 5, intrinsic motivation was a strong positive predictor of promotion-focused job crafting ($\beta = 0.62, p < 0.001$; Model 2), and extrinsic motivation positively predicted prevention-focused job crafting ($\beta = 0.37, p < 0.001$; Model 4). Both hypotheses were supported.

H2b predicted that promotion-focused job crafting would mediate the negative relationship between intrinsic motivation and job burnout. As shown in Model 7, when promotion-focused job crafting was included in the model, the direct effect of intrinsic motivation on job burnout remained significant but was attenuated (from $\beta = -0.47$ to $\beta = -0.39$), and promotion-focused job crafting was negatively associated with job burnout ($\beta = -0.13, p < 0.01$). These results indicate partial mediation, supporting H2b.

H2d predicted that prevention-focused job crafting would mediate the positive relationship between extrinsic motivation and job burnout. As shown in Model 9, when prevention-focused job crafting was included, the direct effect of extrinsic motivation on job burnout became nonsignificant ($\beta = 0.02, ns$), while prevention-focused job crafting was positively associated with job burnout ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$). These results indicate full mediation, supporting H2d.

To provide more robust tests of the hypothesized indirect effects and ensure the stability of the findings, we employed the PROCESS macro (Model 4; Hayes, 2017) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples to construct bias-corrected confidence intervals for the indirect effects. Results are summarized in Table 6. intrinsic motivation $\rightarrow$ Promotion-focused job crafting $\rightarrow$ Job burnout. The total effect of intrinsic motivation on job burnout was significant and

negative (effect = -0.42 , SE = 0.03 , 95% CI [-0.05 , -0.36]). The indirect effect through promotion-focused job crafting was significant (effect = -0.07 , SE = 0.03 , 95% CI [-0.13 , -0.01]), with the direct effect remaining significant (effect = -0.35 , SE = 0.04 , $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect accounted for approximately 17% of the total effect, confirming partial mediation and supporting H2b. Extrinsic motivation $\rightarrow$ Prevention-focused job crafting $\rightarrow$ Job burnout. The total effect of extrinsic motivation on job burnout was significant and positive (effect = 0.09 , SE = 0.04 , 95% CI [0.01 , 0.16]). The indirect effect through prevention-focused job crafting was significant (effect = 0.10 , SE = 0.02 , 95% CI [0.06 , 0.15]), whereas the direct effect was nonsignificant (effect = -0.02 , SE = 0.04 , 95% CI [-0.09 , 0.06]). The indirect effect accounted for the entirety of the total effect, confirming full mediation and supporting H2d.

[Insert Table 5 here]

[Insert Table 6 here]

(2) Moderated mediation analysis

As shown in Models 10 and 11 of Table 5, years of teaching experience significantly moderated the relationships between work motivation and job burnout. The interaction of intrinsic motivation $\times$ teaching experience was significant ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.01$), and the interaction of extrinsic motivation $\times$ years of teaching experience was also significant ($\beta = -0.09$, $p < 0.05$). PROCESS (Model 1) confirmed these moderating effects (see Table 6). The intrinsic motivation $\times$ years of teaching experience interaction significantly predicted job burnout ($B = 0.12$, SE = 0.03 , $t = 4.15$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.07 , 0.18]). The extrinsic motivation $\times$ teaching experience interaction also significantly predicted job burnout ($B = -0.14$, SE = 0.04 , $t = -3.60$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-0.21 , -0.06]). PROCESS (Model 14) was used to test the moderated mediation hypotheses (see Table 7). For the promotion-focused job crafting pathway, the promotion-focused job crafting $\times$ years of teaching experience interaction significantly predicted job burnout ($B = 0.16$, SE = 0.03 , $t = 5.23$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.10 , 0.22]). The index of moderated mediation was significant ($B = -0.10$, SE = 0.03 , 95% CI [-0.05 , 0.16]). For the prevention-focused job crafting pathway, the prevention-focused job crafting $\times$ years of teaching experience interaction significantly predicted job burnout ($B = -0.11$, SE = 0.03 , $t = -3.10$, $p = 0.002$, 95% CI [-0.17 , -0.04]), and the index of moderated mediation was significant (index = -0.04 , SE = 0.02 , 95% CI [-0.08 , -0.01]).

3. Simple slope analyses

Simple slope analyses (see Figure 2) examined the conditional effects at ± 1 SD of teaching experience. At low levels of teaching experience ($M - 1SD = 2.10$ years), the effect of promotion-focused job crafting on job burnout was stronger ($B = -0.34$, $p < 0.001$). At high levels of teaching experience ($M + 1SD = 230.04$ years), this effect was weaker ($B = -0.02$, ns). Similarly, the effect of prevention-focused job crafting on job burnout decreased from $B = 0.41$ ($p < 0.001$) at low teaching experience to $B = 0.20$ ($p < 0.001$) at high teaching experience. These results support H3a and H3b, confirming that years of teaching experience moderate the mediating effects of both promotion-focused and prevention-focused job crafting.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

5. Conclusion and Implications

5.1. Conclusion and discussion

Drawing on self-determination theory and regulatory focus theory, this study examined the mechanisms and boundary conditions through which work motivation affects job burnout among primary and junior school teachers. The findings yielded several key conclusions. First, intrinsic motivation significantly diminished job burnout, whereas extrinsic motivation significantly intensified job burnout. This finding clarifies the differential effects of different types of work motivation on teacher well-being. Second, the mediating effects of job crafting varied by motivation type. The effect of intrinsic motivation on job burnout was partially mediated by promotion-focused job crafting, while the effect of extrinsic motivation on job burnout was fully mediated by prevention-focused job crafting. This finding extends the understanding of how different types of motivation translate into distinct job crafting behaviors and thereby affect burnout. Third, years of teaching experience significantly moderated the mediating processes. For teachers with low years of teaching, the beneficial effects of intrinsic motivation and promotion-focused job crafting on burnout reduction were strongest, whereas these beneficial effects waned as years of teaching experience increased. Similarly, the detrimental effect of extrinsic motivation on burnout through prevention-focused job crafting was strongest for novice teachers and gradually subsided with accumulated experience. These findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the differential effects of work motivation types on teacher burnout and underscore the importance of treating teaching experience as a boundary condition.

5.2. Theoretical contributions

First, this study advances the scholarship on work motivation, regulatory focus, and occupational burnout by investigating how these constructs interconnect within primary and junior school settings. Although earlier studies have thoroughly examined how work motivation drives job performance, comparatively little is known about how intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation distinctly shapes teacher burnout. This study demonstrated that intrinsic motivation diminishes job burnout, whereas extrinsic motivation exacerbates it. This finding extends the discussion by Lu et al. (2012) on teachers' work motivation and its implications for burnout, enriching the theoretical understanding of work motivation and burnout and providing a foundation for targeted interventions.

Second, this study reveals the mediating role of regulatory-focused job crafting—a relatively new perspective in the job crafting literature. The findings demonstrate the complex effects of promotion-focused and prevention-focused job crafting on teacher burnout, echoing Zhang and Wu (2023) insights into the motivational and behavioral aspects of job crafting. While previous studies have primarily explained burnout mitigation through individual psychological resources (Liu et al., 2023), this study examined how regulatory-focused job crafting (cognitive and behavioral changes) triggered by psychological resources influences burnout. The results indicate that different types of work motivation shape teachers' cognition and behavior, which in turn differentially affect burnout. This expands the research on job crafting as a mediator and deepens understanding of the mechanisms through which work motivation influences burnout.

Third, this study incorporates years of teaching experience as a temporal dimension from the career life cycle into the theoretical model, examining its boundary effect in the relationship between work motivation and job burnout. This extends the theoretical boundary by identifying years of teaching experience as a critical moderator that shapes how work motivation affects burnout through job crafting.

5.3. Practical Implications

Fostering intrinsic motivation through targeted development. This study demonstrates that work motivation significantly influences job burnout, and motivation is malleable and amenable to cultivation. During pre-service teacher education and early career stages, sustained professional development programs should be implemented

to facilitate the internalization of extrinsic motivation into intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, school recruitment processes may incorporate assessments of candidates' motivational orientations, and induction programs should prioritize strategies for fostering intrinsic motivation among novice teachers.

Career-stage-specific support systems. The findings reveal that job burnout follows a U-shaped pattern across the career lifecycle, with elevated levels among both novice and veteran teachers. School administrators should therefore implement differentiated support systems that account for career-stage-specific needs. This includes prioritizing burnout monitoring for teachers at both ends of the experience spectrum and designing career-stage-appropriate resource allocation and incentive structures.

Tailored job crafting interventions. Intervention strategies should be customized based on teachers' motivational profiles and career stages. For novice teachers (with fewer than five years of teaching tenure) with intrinsic motivation, schools should encourage and reinforce promotion-focused job crafting through structured support programs encompassing task design, relationship building, skill development, and cognitive change. Such programs may include flexible task structures, incentives for teaching innovation and collaboration, and recognition systems. For veteran teachers (more than 23 years of experience), promotion-focused job crafting interventions may yield diminishing returns; instead, strategies that strengthen intrinsic motivation should be prioritized. For teachers predominantly driven by extrinsic motivation, interventions should focus on reducing reliance on prevention-focused job crafting behaviors while facilitating the gradual internalization of motivational orientations.

5.4. Limitations and future directions

This study has several limitations that merit further investigation. First, although years of teaching served as a moderating variable in this study, it is a proxy for professional tenure that reflects a composite index of teachers' professional development trajectory. Specifically, the key elements in professional development play a decisive role in the mechanism that still needs to be further explored. In addition, it is impossible to capture the time point effect of "key events" in teachers' careers (such as the sharp changes in work resources and work requirements caused by the experience of class teachers). Secondly, according to the self-determination theory, extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation is a continuous transformation process. In the long run, extrinsic motivation may also be transformed into intrinsic motivation, which exerts an influence on job burnout. The problem of its transformation conditions and transformation cycle needs to be explored in depth. In the future, multi-stage longitudinal survey data can be collected to verify this. Finally, the team-level leadership behavior and organizational-level resource variables can be included in the research model to analyze how these variables affect the relationship between work motivation, job crafting and job burnout, and to carry out cross-level research.

Declarations

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

Author Contributions

Rentao Miao: conceptualization, writing—review and editing, and revising. Yaru Su: conceptualization, investigation, methodology, data curation and analysis, review, visualization, writing—original draft, and editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

The authors report that generative AI was not used in the research or preparation of this manuscript.

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

This study was approved by the Ethics Review Committee of the School of Labor Economics, Capital University of Economics and Business (Approval No. 20250221001; Date of approval: February 21, 2025). All procedures involving human participants were performed in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Before participation, all participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the procedures, anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences. Participants indicated their informed consent by completing and submitting the questionnaire. All participants were adult teachers; therefore, no consent from legal guardians was required.

Consent for publication

All participants were informed that the data would be used for academic research and publication in aggregated and anonymized form, and they consented to participate on this basis. No personally identifiable information is included in this manuscript.

Data availability

The de-identified dataset, data-Original Questionnaire - Credamo_Survey on Career Development of Primary and Secondary School Teachers, data-Questionnaire Instructions of this study are available in the Supplementary Information files. The data are shared only in de-identified form, and no personally identifiable information is included.

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Tables

Tables 1 to 7 are available in the Supplementary Files section.

Figures

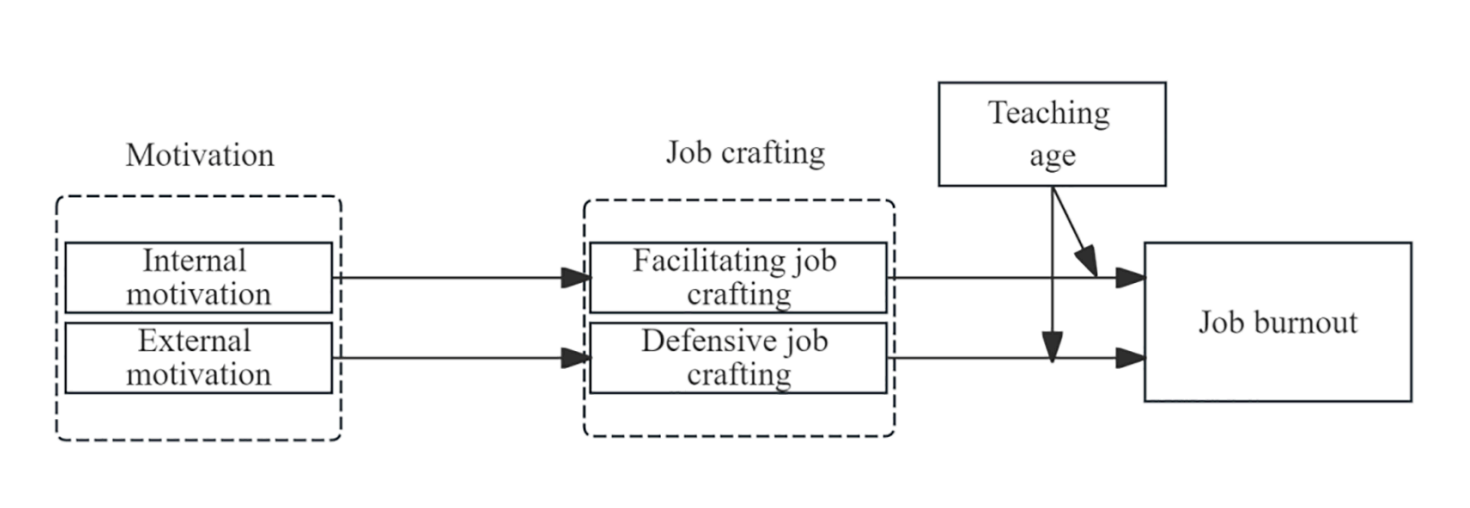


Figure 1

Research model diagram.

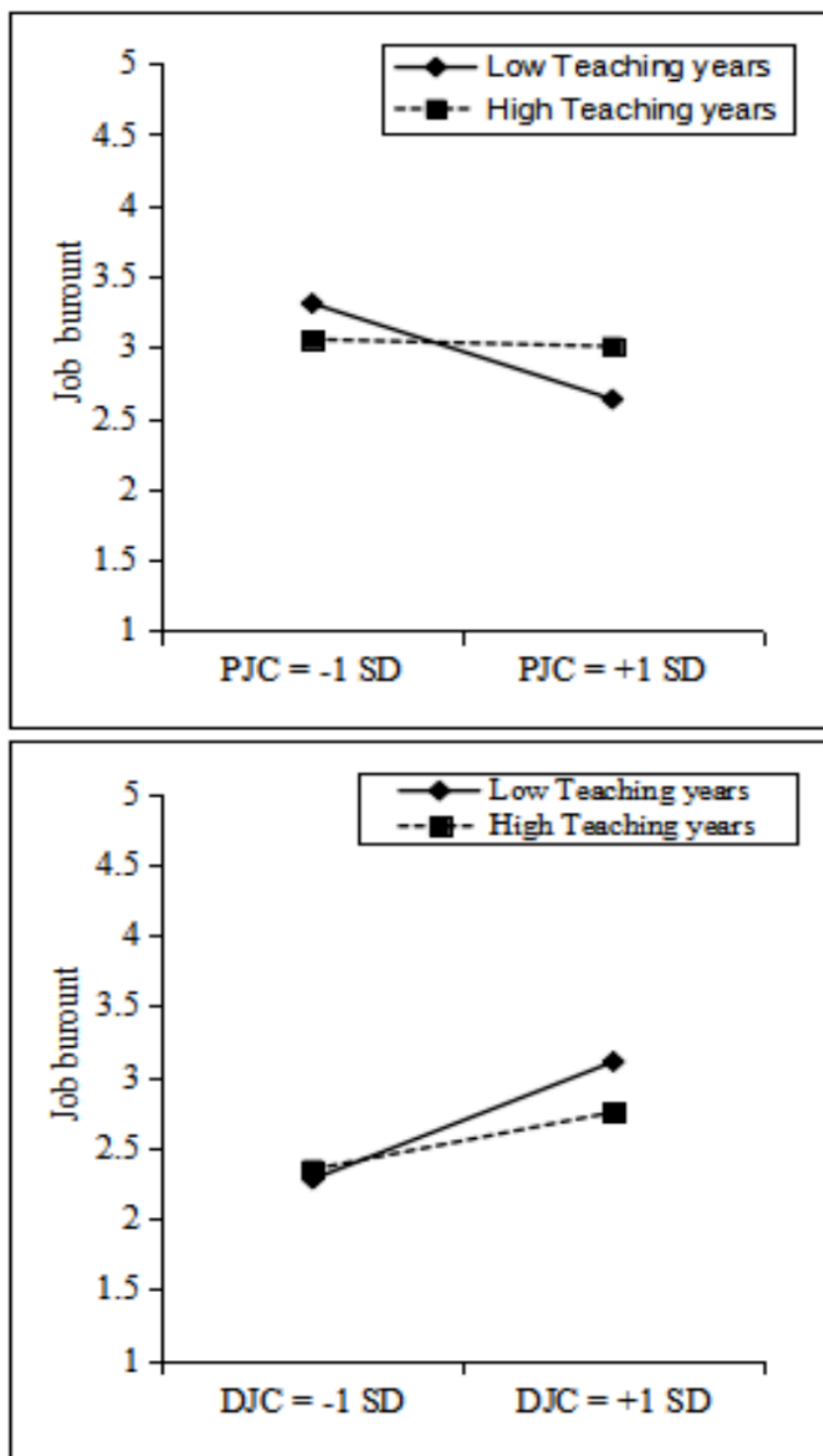


Figure 2

The interactive role of teaching experience in the associations between promotion-focused and prevention-focused job crafting and job burnout.

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- [dataOriginalQuestionnaireCredamoSurveyonCareerDevelopmentofPrimaryandSecondarySchoolTeachers.docx](#)
- [dataQuestionnaireInstructions.docx](#)
- [data.xlsx](#)
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