

The Impact of Perceived Empowering Leadership on Work-Related Well-Being among teachers at Zhengzhou Technology and Business University in Henan, China

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the impact of empowering leadership on work-related well-being among teachers at a private university, using in-service teachers at Zhengzhou Technology and Business University as the research subjects. Teachers at private universities generally faced multiple pressures, and insufficient well-being had become a key issue affecting faculty stability and educational quality. Using a quantitative method, this study adopted a stratified convenience sampling method to select participants. Data were collected using the established Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (Arnold et al., 2000; revised by Rehman et al., 2022) and the Teachers' Work-Related Well-Being Scale (Collie et al., 2015). Reliability analyses showed good internal consistency for both the empowering leadership scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.956$) and the well-being scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.949$). Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the construct validity of both instruments. A total of 295 valid questionnaires were collected (100% response rate). Descriptive statistics showed that teachers' perceived empowering leadership ($M = 3.870$, $SD = 0.846$) and their work-related well-being ($M = 3.897$, $SD = 0.954$) were both above the moderate level. Independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA results indicated significant differences in both variables based on teaching years ($F = 8.315$, $p < 0.01$ for leadership; $F = 6.942$, $p < 0.01$ for well-being) and professional titles ($F = 5.362$, $p < 0.01$ for leadership; $F = 6.634$, $p < 0.01$ for well-being), but not based on gender or educational background. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between empowering leadership and work-related well-being ($r = 0.819$, $p < 0.01$). This study recommended that private universities strengthen empowerment and support mechanisms, increase teachers' participation and information sharing, and focus on the needs of young and early-career teachers to improve their work experience and professional well-being.

Keywords: Empowering Leadership, Teachers' work-related well-being, University Teacher

1. INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of higher education, the well-being of university teachers has emerged as a pivotal factor influencing faculty retention and educational quality. This is particularly salient in private universities in China, where teachers face heightened pressures from heavy teaching workloads, limited research support, ambiguous career paths, and performance-driven evaluations (Huang, 2025). These occupational demands erode teachers' work-related well-being, leading to burnout and increased turnover intentions—a key issue that directly threatens faculty stability and educational outcomes in private institutions.

Against this backdrop, leadership behaviors that emphasize empowerment and support have gained scholarly attention (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014). Empowering

leadership, as conceptualized by Arnold et al. (2000), includes leading by example, participative decision-making, coaching, information sharing, and showing concern for subordinates' well-being. Corporate research has consistently linked empowering leadership to positive employee outcomes (Spreitzer, 1995; Seibert et al., 2011). Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014), empowering leadership is posited to satisfy teachers' psychological needs and serve as a critical job resource.

However, research gaps persist in the context of Chinese private higher education. Most studies focus on public universities in eastern coastal regions or Western systems, leaving private institutions in central provinces like Henan largely unexamined. These universities

operate in a high-power-distance, collectivist culture that may moderate the effectiveness of empowering leadership (Rockstuhl et al., 2012). Moreover, few studies have integrated theoretical perspectives to link leadership to teacher well-being in this specific context. To address these gaps, this study takes Zhengzhou Technology and Business University in Henan as a case and

H1: There were significant differences in empowering leadership among teachers with different demographic variables.

H1-1: There were significant differences in empowering leadership among teachers of different genders.

H1-2: There were significant differences in empowering leadership among teachers of different age groups.

H1-3: There were significant differences in empowering leadership among teachers with different educational backgrounds.

H1-4: There were significant differences in empowering leadership among teachers with different years of teaching experience.

H1-5: There were significant differences in empowering leadership among teachers with different professional titles.

H2: There were significant differences in work-related well-being among teachers with different demographic variables.

H2-1: There were significant differences in work-related well-being among teachers of different genders.

H2-2: There were significant differences in work-related well-being among teachers of different age groups.

H2-3: There were significant differences in work-related well-being among teachers with different educational backgrounds.

H2-4: There were significant differences in work-related well-being among teachers with different years of teaching experience.

H2-5: There were significant differences in work-related well-being among teachers with different professional titles.

H3: Empowering leadership among teachers at Zhengzhou Technology and Business University had a significant positive impact on their work-related well-being.

Based on these hypotheses, the conceptual framework of this study (illustrated in Figure 1) links demographic variables, empowering leadership (five dimensions), and work-related well-being (three dimensions: workload, organizational, and student interaction). By conducting a quantitative survey among 295 full-time teachers, this study provides empirical

evidence to enrich the localized application of empowering leadership theory and offers actionable insights for improving faculty stability and educational quality in private universities across Henan and similar regions.

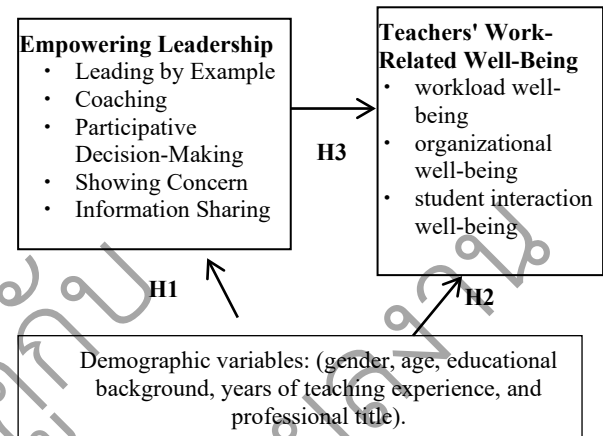


Figure 1-1 Research Conceptual Framework

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Empowering Leadership

Empowering leadership refers to a leadership model in which leaders provide subordinates with autonomous decision-making space, resource support, and development opportunities through supportive and empowering behaviors, thereby stimulating psychological empowerment and enhancing work initiative (Arnold et al., 2000). Unlike traditional directive leadership, empowering leadership emphasizes delegation over control and support over command. Arnold et al. (2000) identified five core dimensions: leading by example, participative decision-making, coaching, information sharing, and showing concern. These behaviors satisfy subordinates' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, aligning individual performance with organizational goals (Rehman et al., 2022). In educational contexts, empowering leadership has been shown to enhance teachers' organizational commitment and professional autonomy (Bogler & Somech, 2004).

Teachers' Work-Related Well-Being

Work-related well-being among teachers is defined as the sustained positive psychological state experienced by teachers in their professional activities, including teaching, research, and student interaction. Collie et al. (2015) proposed

a three-dimensional structure: workload well-being (perceptions of workload and time pressure), organizational well-being (perceptions of leadership support, institutional culture, and fairness), and student interaction well-being (sense of achievement and value gained from teaching interactions). These dimensions reflect the multifaceted nature of teachers' well-being and are sensitive to organizational management practices (Lin & Chen, 2009; Wang et al., 2011).

Theoretical Foundations

This study is grounded in three theoretical perspectives. First, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014) categorizes job characteristics into demands and resources. Empowering leadership is conceptualized as a key job resource that buffers the negative effects of job demands and triggers a motivational process leading to enhanced well-being. Second, Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) posits that satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness fosters intrinsic motivation and well-being. Empowering leadership directly satisfies these needs through participative decision-making, coaching, and genuine concern. Third, Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) suggests that when teachers perceive empowering behaviors from leaders, they reciprocate with positive attitudes and higher well-being, forming a mutually beneficial relationship.

Relationship Between Empowering Leadership and Work-Related Well-Being

Existing empirical research, predominantly in corporate settings, has consistently demonstrated a positive association between empowering leadership and employee well-being, job satisfaction, and work engagement (Spreitzer, 1995; Seibert et al., 2011; Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014). In educational contexts, studies have shown that teacher empowerment and participative decision-making enhance organizational commitment and professional satisfaction (Bogler & Somech, 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003). However, direct evidence linking empowering leadership to teachers' work-related well-being in Chinese private universities remains limited. Most prior studies focus on public universities or Western systems, leaving private institutions in central provinces like Henan largely unexamined. Moreover, the potential moderating role of regional cultural characteristics (e.g., high power distance, collectivism) has not been systematically

explored (Rockstuhl et al., 2012). Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps by investigating the impact of empowering leadership on work-related well-being among teachers at a private university in Henan, China.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study took all in-service teachers at Zhengzhou Technology and Business University in Henan Province as the research object. The university has a total of 1,229 full-time teachers. The study adopted a stratified convenience sampling method to select participants from all ten colleges of the university, ensuring representation across different academic disciplines. According to the sample size requirements of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a total of 295 questionnaires were distributed, and 295 valid questionnaires were recovered, yielding a recovery rate of 100%.

The specific questionnaire adopted in this research consisted of two established scales. The first was the Empowering Leadership Questionnaire originally developed by Arnold et al. (2000) and revised by Rehman et al. (2022). The original scale comprised 17 items across five dimensions: leading by example, participative decision-making, coaching, information sharing, and showing concern. The original scale demonstrated good reliability, with an overall Cronbach's α of 0.88 and dimensional coefficients ranging from 0.83 to 0.87. In the present study ($N=295$), the overall Cronbach's α of the empowering leadership scale was 0.956, and the Cronbach's α coefficients of the five dimensions were 0.910 for leading by example, 0.887 for participative decision-making, 0.844 for coaching, 0.838 for information sharing, and 0.923 for showing concern.

The second was the Teachers' Work-Related Well-Being Scale developed by Collie et al. (2015). This scale consisted of 16 items across three dimensions: workload well-being, organizational well-being, and student interaction well-being. The original scale reported an overall Cronbach's α of 0.89, with dimensional coefficients of 0.85 for workload well-being, 0.84 for organizational well-being, and 0.82 for student interaction well-being. In the current sample, the overall Cronbach's α was 0.949, and the dimensional coefficients were 0.870, 0.878, and 0.815, respectively.

Confirmatory factor analysis provided further evidence for the construct validity of both scales. For the empowering leadership scale, the five-factor model demonstrated good fit indices

($\chi^2/df = 2.07$, GFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.04), with an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.68 and Composite Reliability (CR) of 0.84. The three-factor model of the teachers' work-related well-being scale also fitted the data well ($\chi^2(101) = 280.90$, RMSEA = 0.055, CFI = 0.94), with factor loadings for each item on its corresponding dimension ranging from 0.51 to 0.92. All these indicators demonstrated that the instruments employed in this study possessed sound psychometric properties and were appropriate for use in the context of Chinese private higher education institutions.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Among the 295 respondents, 145 were male (49.2%) and 150 were female (50.8%). Most teachers were aged 26–35 years (40.0%), followed by those aged 36–45 (31.5%), 46–55 (16.6%), 25 or below (7.1%), and 56 or above (4.7%). The majority held a master's degree (65.8%), with doctoral (23.7%) and bachelor's (10.5%) degrees following. Regarding teaching experience, 39.0% had 4–10 years, 23.1% had 3 years or less, 20.0% had 11–15 years, 11.9% had 16–20 years, and 6.1% had 21 years or more. In terms of professional titles, 48.5% held junior titles, 32.2% intermediate, and 19.3% senior. Table 1 presents the detailed demographic information.

Table 1. Basic personal information of teachers (N=295)

Variable	Category	Numbers	Percentage
Gender	Male	145	49.20
	Female	150	50.80
Age	25 years or below	21	7.10
	26–35 years	118	40.00
	36–45 years	93	31.50
	46–55 years	49	16.60
	56 years or above	14	4.70
Years of Teaching Experience	3 years or less	68	23.10
	4–10 years	115	39.00
	11–15 years	59	20.00
	16–20 years	35	11.90
Educational Background	21 years or more	18	6.10
	Bachelor's Degree	31	10.50
	Master's Degree	194	65.80
Professional Title	Doctoral Degree	70	23.70
	Junior Title	143	48.50
	Intermediate Title	95	32.20
	Senior Title	57	19.30

4.2 Demographic Differences

Independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences by gender or educational background for either variable ($p > 0.05$). However, significant differences were found by age ($F = 6.909$, $p < 0.01$ for leadership; $F = 8.455$, $p < 0.01$ for well-being), years of teaching experience ($F = 8.315$, $p < 0.01$ for leadership; $F = 6.942$, $p < 0.01$ for well-being), and professional title ($F = 5.362$, $p < 0.01$ for leadership; $F = 6.634$, $p < 0.01$ for well-being). Post-hoc comparisons consistently showed that older, more experienced, and senior-title teachers reported significantly higher scores than their younger, less experienced, and junior-title counterparts.

Table 2. Summary of ANOVA Results for Perceived Empowering Leadership by Demographic Variables

Variable	F	p	LSD
Gender	$t = 0.740$	.460	n.s
Age	6.909	.000**	5>4>3>2=1
Educational Background	0.219	.804	n.s
Years of Teaching Experience	8.315	.000**	5>4>3>2=1
Professional Title	5.362	.005**	3>2=1

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; n.s.=not significant.

Age groups: 1=25 years or below, 2=26–35 years, 3=36–45 years, 4=46–55 years, 5=56 years or above.

Years of Teaching experience: 1=3 years or less, 2=4–10 years, 3=11–15 years, 4=16–20 years, 5=21 years or more.

Professional title: 1=Junior, 2=Intermediate, 3=Senior.

Table 3. Summary of ANOVA Results for Work-Related Well-Being by Demographic Variables

Variable	F	p	LSD
Gender	$t = 0.743$	.458	n.s
Age	8.455	.000**	5>4>3>2>1
Educational Background	0.040	.960	n.s
Years of Teaching Experience	6.942	.000**	5>4>3>2=1
Professional Title	6.634	.002**	3>2=1

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; n.s.=not significant. Group codes are identical to Table 2.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations for perceived empowering leadership (overall and its five dimensions) and teachers' work-related well-being (overall and its three dimensions). As shown in Table 4, the overall mean of perceived empowering leadership was 3.870 (SD = 0.846), and the overall mean of work-related well-being was 3.897 (SD = 0.954)—both above the theoretical midpoint of 3, indicating moderate-to-high levels. All dimension means ranged from 3.836 to 3.945, with standard deviations close to or slightly above 1.0.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of Key Variables

Variable	M	SD
Empowering Leadership	3.870	0.846
Leading by Example	3.914	1.031
Participative Decision-Making	3.857	0.969
Coaching	3.836	0.900
Information Sharing	3.881	0.911
Showing Concern	3.872	1.055
Teachers' Work-Related Well-Being	3.897	0.954
Workload Well-Being	3.945	0.965
Organizational Well-Being	3.873	0.999
Student Interaction Well-Being	3.862	1.043

4.4 Correlation and Regression

Pearson correlation analysis indicated a strong positive correlation between empowering leadership and work-related well-being ($r=0.819$, $p<0.01$). All five dimensions of empowering leadership correlated significantly with all three dimensions of well-being (r ranging from 0.612 to 0.746). Simple linear regression further showed that empowering leadership significantly and positively predicted work-related well-being ($\beta=0.819$, $p<0.001$, $R^2=0.671$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.670$), explaining 67.1% of the variance.

5. DISCUSSION

Perceived empowering leadership and work-related well-being among teachers were above moderate levels. This supports that empowering leadership enhances intrinsic motivation through delegation, participation, and support (Spreitzer, 1995; Arnold et al., 2000).

Significant differences were found by age, teaching experience, and professional title, but not by gender or education. Older, more experienced, and senior-title teachers reported

higher scores, aligning with career development theory (Super, 1990). As teachers grow older, accumulate experience, and advance in rank, they gain greater institutional knowledge, professional autonomy, and access to decision-making channels, which enhance their perception of empowering leadership and well-being. The lack of gender or education differences suggests that institutional policies and organizational factors outweigh individual demographic characteristics—a finding that reflects the relative uniformity of management practices and evaluation systems across these groups.

Correlation and regression analyses confirmed a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.819$, $p < 0.01$), with empowering leadership explaining 67.1% of the variance in well-being ($\beta = 0.819$, $p < 0.001$). This validates Self-Determination Theory and the Job Demands-Resources Model in the private university context. Empowering leadership behaviors—such as participative decision-making, coaching, transparent information sharing, and genuine concern—satisfy teachers' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby acting as a powerful job resource that drives a positive motivational process and directly enhances teachers' daily well-being experiences.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that empowering leadership significantly and positively predicts work-related well-being among teachers at a private university in Henan, China. Teachers' perceptions of empowering leadership and their well-being are above moderate, with significant differences by age, teaching experience, and professional title, but not by gender or education. These findings validate empowering leadership theory in the context of Chinese private higher education.

Practical Recommendations (specific and immediately actionable)

First, establish monthly faculty forums where department heads present policy changes and collect anonymous feedback before implementation. Second, implement a structured mentoring program pairing teachers with ≤ 3 years of experience with senior-title mentors, including bi-weekly coaching sessions on workload management and professional development. Third, create a transparent online dashboard that updates all teachers on curriculum

reforms, evaluation criteria, and resource allocation within five working days after any leadership decision. Fourth, offer differentiated support: for junior teachers, provide teaching load adjustments and research skill workshops; for mid-career teachers, offer leadership training and participation in academic committees; for senior teachers, recognize them as internal coaches with extra allowances. These measures can be piloted within one semester at a single college before university-wide rollout.

Future Research Directions

First, expand the sample to multiple private universities across different provinces to test generalizability. Second, employ longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs to establish causality and track well-being changes after leadership interventions. Third, incorporate mediating variables (e.g., psychological empowerment, perceived organizational support) and moderating variables (e.g., power distance, collectivism) to unpack underlying mechanisms and cultural boundary conditions. Fourth, use mixed methods (e.g., interviews with teachers and administrators) to capture contextual nuances that quantitative surveys may miss.

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