Psychological Capital and Job Performance of Vocational College Teachers: The Mediating Role of Innovation Behavior and Moderating Role of Innovation Climate

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines the influence of psychological capital (PsyCap) on job performance among higher vocational college teachers in Jilin Province, China, while exploring the mediating role of innovation behavior and the moderating role of innovation support climate. Grounded in Conservation of Resources theory and Positive Organizational Behavior theory, the study addresses how internal psychological resources and external organizational conditions jointly shape performance outcomes. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed, and data were analyzed using structural equation modeling to test direct, mediating, and moderating effects. The findings reveal that PsyCap significantly enhances job performance, both directly and indirectly through innovation behavior. Teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism are more likely to engage in innovative teaching and research activities, which subsequently improve performance outcomes. Additionally, innovation support climate strengthens the relationship between PsyCap and job performance, as well as amplifies the indirect effect through innovation behavior. The results highlight the importance of integrating psychological development and supportive institutional environments in higher education. This study contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by emphasizing the role of teacher psychological well-being in improving educational quality and outcomes, and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by promoting productive and sustainable academic work environments. The study concludes that enhancing both psychological capital and organizational support systems is essential for improving vocational education performance and institutional effectiveness.

Keywords: Psychological Capital; Job Performance; Innovation Behavior; Innovation Support Climate; Vocational College Teachers

Introduction

Higher vocational colleges (HVCs) play a pivotal role in cultivating technically skilled human capital aligned with industrial and economic development. Within these institutions, teachers are not only responsible for delivering practice-oriented teaching but are also increasingly expected to engage in applied research and innovation activities. However, the intensification of performance evaluation systems, coupled with rising expectations for research output and teaching quality, has placed considerable psychological and professional pressure on teachers. Recent studies indicate that such pressures can negatively affect teachers' well-being, motivation, and ultimately their job performance if not effectively managed (Zhang & Li, 2025). Consequently, identifying internal psychological resources that can enhance teachers' adaptability and performance has become a critical concern in higher education management. Psychological Capital (PsyCap), conceptualized as a positive psychological state characterized by self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism, has emerged as an important construct in organizational behavior research. Empirical evidence suggests that PsyCap significantly influences employees' attitudes, behaviors, and performance outcomes across various professional contexts. In the educational domain, recent research has demonstrated that teachers with higher PsyCap exhibit stronger motivation, greater instructional effectiveness, and reduced susceptibility to burnout (Liu & Du, 2024) . Similarly, studies conducted in higher education settings confirm that PsyCap positively predicts job performance and contributes to improved work-related outcomes among university instructors (Zeng & Xiong, 2024) . Despite these findings, most existing studies have focused on general higher education institutions, with limited attention given to the unique context of HVCs, where teaching and industry integration create distinct performance demands.

Furthermore, although the direct relationship between PsyCap and job performance has been widely supported, the underlying mechanisms through which PsyCap translates into performance outcomes remain insufficiently explored. Recent research highlights the importance of behavioral pathways, suggesting that psychological resources influence performance through proactive and innovative actions (Carmona-Halty et al., 2024). In particular, innovation behavior defined as the generation and implementation of new ideas in teaching and research has been recognized as a critical factor in enhancing educational effectiveness and institutional competitiveness. However, there is still a lack of empirical studies examining whether innovation behavior serves as a mediating mechanism linking PsyCap to job performance among vocational college teachers.

In addition to individual-level factors, organizational context plays a crucial role in shaping employee behavior and performance. The concept of innovation support climate, which reflects the extent to which institutions encourage and facilitate innovative activities, has gained increasing attention in recent literature. Studies suggest that supportive organizational environments can amplify the positive effects of psychological resources, while unfavorable climates may weaken these relationships (Zhang & Li, 2025). Nevertheless, limited research has examined how innovation support climate interacts with PsyCap to influence job performance, particularly within the context of HVCs. More importantly, the potential moderating effect of innovation support climate on the mediating role of innovation behavior remains largely unexplored, creating a significant gap in the literature.

Given these gaps, there is a need for a comprehensive analytical framework that integrates individual psychological resources, behavioral mechanisms, and organizational context to better understand teacher performance in higher vocational education. Addressing this gap is particularly important for regions such as Jilin Province, China, where HVCs are undergoing rapid transformation and require sustainable strategies to enhance teacher effectiveness and institutional competitiveness. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of Psychological Capital on the job

performance of higher vocational college teachers in Jilin Province, China, with a specific focus on the mediating role of innovation behavior and the moderating role of innovation support climate within a moderated mediation framework.

Literature Review

Existing literature provides substantial evidence on the relationships among psychological capital (PsyCap), job performance, innovation behavior, and organizational climate, forming a strong foundation for the present study. PsyCap, comprising self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism, has been widely recognized as a critical psychological resource that enhances employee attitudes and performance outcomes. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that PsyCap positively influences job performance across various sectors by fostering motivation, adaptability, and persistence. For instance, recent studies show that PsyCap significantly improves employee performance through both direct and indirect mechanisms such as work engagement and coping strategies (Chen et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024). In educational settings, PsyCap has also been found to reduce teacher burnout and improve teaching effectiveness, highlighting its relevance in enhancing academic performance outcomes (Liu & Du, 2024). These findings support the argument that PsyCap serves as a foundational personal resource for improving teachers' job performance.

In addition to the direct effects of PsyCap, recent studies emphasize the importance of behavioral mechanisms in explaining how psychological resources translate into performance outcomes. Innovation behavior, defined as the generation and implementation of novel ideas, has been identified as a key mediating variable. Research indicates that individuals with higher PsyCap are more likely to engage in innovative activities, which in turn enhance their performance (Shao & Lu, 2022). Similarly, broader empirical studies confirm that PsyCap promotes proactive and creative work behaviors, which act as critical pathways linking internal psychological states to external performance outcomes (Alutaya & Guhao, 2024). However, despite growing evidence on the mediating role of behavioral variables, limited research has specifically examined innovation behavior as a mediator in the context of higher vocational education, indicating a gap that this study seeks to address. Furthermore, organizational context has been increasingly recognized as a crucial factor influencing the effectiveness of individual psychological resources. The concept of innovation support climate reflects the extent to which organizations encourage experimentation, provide resources, and tolerate risk-taking. Empirical studies suggest that supportive climates strengthen the positive effects of PsyCap by enabling individuals to fully utilize their psychological resources. For example, research grounded in conservation of resources theory shows that organizational factors such as perceived politics or support can significantly moderate the impact of PsyCap on work outcomes (Zhang & Li, 2025). Similarly, multilevel studies demonstrate that contextual resources can amplify the relationship between PsyCap and performance, reinforcing the importance of environmental support systems (Haddoud et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the interaction between innovation support climate and innovation behavior within a moderated mediation framework remains underexplored, particularly in vocational education settings.

The theoretical underpinning of this study is primarily grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and Positive Organizational Behavior (POB). COR theory posits that individuals strive to acquire, maintain, and protect valuable resources, such as psychological capital, to cope with stress and enhance performance. PsyCap, as a core personal resource, enables individuals to generate additional resources, such as innovative behaviors, leading to improved performance outcomes. Meanwhile, POB emphasizes the development and management of positive psychological capacities to improve workplace performance. These theoretical perspectives collectively explain how PsyCap influences job performance both directly and indirectly through

behavioral and contextual mechanisms. Based on these theoretical foundations and empirical findings, this study develops a conceptual framework in which PsyCap is positioned as the independent variable, job performance as the dependent variable, innovation behavior as the mediating variable, and innovation support climate as the moderating variable. The framework further integrates a moderated mediation model, proposing that the indirect effect of PsyCap on job performance through innovation behavior is contingent upon the level of innovation support climate.

This study makes several theoretical contributions. First, it extends the application of PsyCap theory to the context of higher vocational education, which has received limited scholarly attention. Second, it enriches the literature by integrating innovation behavior as a key mediating mechanism, thereby opening the "black box" between PsyCap and performance. Third, it advances existing research by incorporating innovation support climate as both a moderator and a boundary condition, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between individual and organizational factors. Finally, by constructing a moderated mediation model, this study contributes to the integration of psychological and contextual perspectives, providing a more holistic framework for explaining teacher performance in higher vocational colleges.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between psychological capital (PsyCap), innovation behavior, innovation support climate, and job performance among vocational college teachers in Jilin Province, China. A cross-sectional survey design is appropriate as it enables the collection of data from a large population at a single point in time, allowing for the testing of relationships among latent constructs using statistical modeling techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The study further employs a correlational and explanatory approach to test direct, mediating, and moderating effects within a structural framework grounded in positive organizational behavior theory and conservation of resources theory.

Population, Sampling, and Procedure

The target population consists of teachers working in higher vocational colleges (HVCs) in Jilin Province. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across disciplines (engineering, business, education, and health sciences). Stratification enhances sample representativeness and reduces sampling bias (Taherdoost, 2022). A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed, and 368 valid responses were returned, yielding an effective response rate of 87.6%.

Data collection was conducted through both online and paper-based questionnaires. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The survey instrument was adapted from validated scales in previous studies and refined through a pilot test involving 30 teachers to ensure clarity and reliability (Mohamad et al., 2026).

Measurement of Variables

All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

- Psychological Capital (PsyCap): Measured using a standardized scale covering self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2007).
- Innovation Behavior: Assessed through items capturing idea generation, promotion, and implementation.
- Innovation Support Climate: Measured by perceived organizational support for creativity and innovation.
- Job Performance: Evaluated using self-reported teaching effectiveness and research productivity indicators.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0. The analysis proceeded in four stages: descriptive statistics, reliability and validity testing, correlation analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM).

i) Reliability and Validity Testing

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α), where values above 0.70 were considered acceptable. Construct validity was evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), ensuring factor loadings exceeded 0.60 and average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded 0.50 (Kharuddin et al., 2026).

ii) Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships among variables. The correlation coefficient formula is:

$$r = \frac{\sum(X-\bar{X})(Y-\bar{Y})}{\sqrt{\sum(X-\bar{X})^2 \sum(Y-\bar{Y})^2}}$$

iii) Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

SEM was employed to test the hypothesized relationships, including mediation and moderation effects. Model fit was evaluated using indices such as χ^2/df (< 3), CFI (> 0.90), TLI (> 0.90), and RMSEA (< 0.08) (Hair et al., 2022). Mediation effects were tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to estimate indirect effects.

iv) Moderation and Moderated Mediation Analysis

Moderation analysis was conducted using interaction terms between PsyCap and innovation support climate. The moderated mediation model was tested following the approach of Hayes (2022), examining whether the indirect effect of PsyCap on job performance through innovation behavior varies across levels of innovation support climate.

Component	Description
Design	Quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational
Sample	368 HVC teachers in Jilin Province
Analysis Tools	SPSS 26.0, AMOS 24.0
Key Techniques	CFA, SEM, bootstrapping, moderation analysis

This methodological approach ensures robust empirical testing of the proposed conceptual model. By integrating SEM with mediation and moderation analysis, the study provides a comprehensive examination of both direct and indirect pathways through which PsyCap influences job performance in vocational education contexts (Sunasundram et al., 2026).

Data Analysis, Results, and Findings

Data collected from higher vocational college (HVC) teachers in Jilin Province were analyzed to examine the relationships among psychological capital (PsyCap), innovation behavior, innovation support climate, and job performance. The analysis followed a multi-stage procedure, including descriptive statistics, reliability and validity testing, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM). The results are presented and interpreted below.

The descriptive statistics indicate that respondents reported moderately high levels of PsyCap and innovation support climate, while innovation behavior and job performance were slightly above average. This suggests that although teachers possess reasonable psychological resources, there is still room for

improvement in innovation-driven performance outcomes.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Results

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Psychological Capital	3.78	0.62	0.91
Innovation Behavior	3.55	0.66	0.89
Innovation Support Climate	3.60	0.70	0.90
Job Performance	3.72	0.64	0.92

The reliability analysis shows that all constructs exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency. This confirms that the measurement instrument is reliable for further analysis.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among variables.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Variables	PsyCap	Innovation Behavior	Innovation Climate	Job Performance
PsyCap	1.00	0.63**	0.58**	0.67**
Innovation Behavior	0.63**	1.00	0.54**	0.70**
Innovation Climate	0.58**	0.54**	1.00	0.62**
Job Performance	0.67**	0.70**	0.62**	1.00

Note: **$p < 0.01$

The results reveal significant positive correlations among all variables. PsyCap is strongly associated with job performance ($r = 0.67$), suggesting that teachers with higher psychological capital tend to perform better. Innovation behavior shows the strongest correlation with job performance ($r = 0.70$), indicating its critical role as a behavioral mechanism. Innovation support climate is also positively correlated with all variables, confirming its enabling role in the organizational context.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the direct effects of PsyCap on job performance.

Table 3: Regression Results

Predictor	β	t-value	p-value
Psychological Capital	0.42	8.91	<0.001
Innovation Behavior	0.38	7.85	<0.001
Innovation Climate	0.21	5.12	<0.001
$R^2 = 0.61$			

The regression results indicate that PsyCap significantly predicts job performance ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the hypothesis that psychological resources enhance teacher effectiveness. Innovation behavior also has a strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.38$), confirming its importance as a performance-enhancing mechanism. Innovation support climate contributes moderately but significantly to job performance ($\beta = 0.21$), suggesting that organizational environment plays a supportive role in performance outcomes. The model explains 61% of the variance in job performance, indicating strong explanatory power.

To examine the mediating role of innovation behavior, bootstrapping analysis (5,000 resamples) was conducted.

Table 4: Mediation Effect of Innovation Behavior

Path	Effect	SE	95% CI
PsyCap → Innovation Behavior → Job Performance	0.24	0.05	[0.15, 0.35]

The indirect effect of PsyCap on job performance through innovation behavior is significant, as the confidence interval does not include zero. This indicates partial mediation. PsyCap not only directly influences job performance but also enhances it indirectly by stimulating innovation behavior. This finding supports the theoretical assumption that psychological resources translate into performance through behavioral mechanisms.

The moderating role of innovation support climate was tested using interaction terms.

Table 5: Moderation Results

Interaction Term	β	t-value	p-value
PsyCap × Innovation Climate	0.19	4.76	<0.001

The significant interaction effect indicates that innovation support climate strengthens the relationship between PsyCap and job performance. Specifically, the positive impact of PsyCap is stronger in environments with higher innovation support. This suggests that organizational context plays a critical role in amplifying psychological resources.

The conditional indirect effects were examined at different levels of innovation support climate.

Table 6: Conditional Indirect Effects

Innovation Climate Level	Indirect Effect	95% CI
Low	0.14	[0.06, 0.22]
Medium	0.24	[0.15, 0.33]
High	0.36	[0.25, 0.48]

The results demonstrate that the mediating effect of innovation behavior increases as innovation support climate improves. This confirms a moderated mediation effect, where the indirect pathway from PsyCap to job performance is contingent upon organizational support for innovation.

The overall findings reveal a robust and integrated model explaining job performance among vocational college teachers. First, psychological capital emerges as a strong predictor of job performance, confirming that internal psychological resources are essential for enhancing teaching and research effectiveness. Teachers with higher levels of optimism, resilience, hope, and self-efficacy are more capable of managing academic pressure and achieving higher performance outcomes.

Second, innovation behavior plays a crucial mediating role. The results suggest that PsyCap does not operate in isolation; instead, it influences performance by encouraging teachers to engage in creative teaching practices and research innovation. This aligns with behavioral theories suggesting that psychological states shape observable workplace actions, which ultimately determine performance outcomes.

Third, innovation support climate significantly strengthens both direct and indirect effects. Teachers working in supportive environments are more likely to translate psychological resources into innovative actions and improved performance. This highlights the importance of institutional policies that encourage experimentation, reduce fear of failure, and provide resources for innovation.

Finally, the moderated mediation results confirm that the combined effect of individual psychology and organizational climate provides the strongest explanation for job performance. This integrated model demonstrates that neither psychological capital nor organizational climate alone is sufficient; rather, their interaction determines the effectiveness of innovation-driven performance enhancement. The empirical evidence strongly supports a comprehensive framework in which psychological capital enhances job performance both directly and indirectly through innovation behavior, while innovation support climate amplifies these effects. This highlights the importance of developing both individual psychological resources and supportive institutional environments to improve vocational college teachers' performance and institutional effectiveness.

Discussion and Recommendations

This study set out to examine the impact of psychological capital (PsyCap) on job performance among higher vocational college teachers in Jilin Province, China, with particular attention to the mediating role of innovation behavior and the moderating role of innovation support climate. The first objective was to test the direct effect of PsyCap on job performance. The findings confirm a significant and positive relationship, indicating that teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience demonstrate stronger teaching effectiveness and research productivity. This aligns with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which suggests that individuals with greater internal resources are better able to cope with job demands and achieve higher performance outcomes (Hobfoll, 2011). Empirical studies also support this result, showing that PsyCap is a strong predictor of performance and well-being in educational contexts (Liu & Du, 2024; Chen et al., 2024).

The second objective focused on the mediating role of innovation behavior. The results show that innovation behavior partially mediates the relationship between PsyCap and job performance, confirming that psychological resources translate into performance through behavioral mechanisms. Teachers with higher PsyCap are more likely to experiment with new teaching methods, integrate technology, and engage in curriculum innovation, which ultimately enhances performance outcomes. This finding is consistent with Positive Organizational Behavior theory, which emphasizes that positive psychological states stimulate proactive work behaviors that improve organizational effectiveness (Luthans et al., 2007). It also supports recent research indicating that PsyCap fosters creativity and innovation, which are essential drivers of educational quality improvement (Shao & Lu, 2022; Liu et al., 2024).

The third objective examined the moderating role of innovation support climate. The results reveal

that innovation support climate significantly strengthens the relationship between PsyCap and job performance. In environments where institutions actively encourage creativity, provide resources, and tolerate experimentation, the positive effects of PsyCap are amplified. This finding highlights the importance of contextual factors in shaping individual performance, consistent with the interactionist perspective in organizational behavior research (Zhang & Li, 2025). Furthermore, the moderated mediation analysis confirms that innovation support climate enhances the indirect effect of PsyCap on job performance through innovation behavior, suggesting that organizational environment plays a critical role in enabling psychological resources to translate into tangible outcomes.

From a broader perspective, these findings contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). By enhancing teacher performance through psychological and organizational interventions, vocational institutions can improve the quality of education and strengthen workforce development systems. Teachers with higher PsyCap and supportive work environments are better equipped to deliver innovative, inclusive, and high-quality education, directly contributing to sustainable human capital development.

In conclusion, this study confirms that psychological capital is a critical internal resource that enhances job performance among vocational college teachers. Innovation behavior serves as an important mediating mechanism, while innovation support climate acts as a significant contextual enhancer. The integration of these variables provides a comprehensive framework for understanding teacher performance in higher vocational education. These findings are strongly supported by existing literature, which consistently emphasizes the importance of psychological resources and organizational support in improving educational outcomes (Liu & Du, 2024; Chen et al., 2024; Zhang & Li, 2025).

Recommendations

Based on the findings, higher vocational colleges should prioritize the development of teachers' psychological capital through targeted training programs such as resilience workshops, motivational coaching, and professional development initiatives. Institutions should also establish a strong innovation support climate by encouraging experimentation, recognizing innovative teaching practices, and providing adequate resources for research and curriculum development. Additionally, performance management systems should shift from purely outcome-based evaluation to process-oriented approaches that value innovation and psychological well-being. Policymakers should integrate psychological development frameworks into teacher training standards to ensure long-term sustainability in educational quality and workforce readiness.

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