

# Teaching Dilemmas and Incentive Strategies of University Young Teachers: An Expectancy Theory Perspective

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## Abstract

As an important academic human resource in universities, young teachers undertake the responsibility of cultivating innovative talents for the country. From the perspective of expectancy theory, this study analyzes the teaching dilemmas of young teachers in universities from three aspects: expectancy, valence, and instrumentality. Based on results, specific suggestions are proposed to stimulate the teaching enthusiasm of young teachers, including establishing a scientifically reasonable assessment system to balance the relationship between teaching and research; optimizing the salary and welfare system of young teachers to motivate their teaching initiative; and enriching training and development programs for young teachers to enhance their teaching abilities.

**Keywords:** teaching; incentive; expectation; young teachers

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## 1. Introduction

As an important human resource for talents training and discipline construction in universities, young teachers have become a backbone for the development of higher education (Zou, 2023). In recent years, young teachers undertook relatively high assessment pressure under the "Up or Out" system in Chinese universities (Tian & Jiang, 2022). Young teachers show less interest in teaching and passive passion for scientific research (Chen & Fan, 2022). How to improve the teaching environment for young teachers and enhance their teaching enthusiasm has become an urgent issue for university management. Incentive is an important way to improve efficiency (Xie, 2017). Based on the expectancy theory, this paper points out the main problems existing in the incentive management of young teachers in Chinese universities from three aspects: valence, expectancy and instrumentality, and then puts forward the incentive strategies. In terms of valence, the expected rewards for young teachers are less attractive, and the incentive mechanism is not perfect. So they are difficult to meet complex needs of young teachers. In terms of expectancy, there is a lack of obvious connection between the efforts and work performance of young teachers. Unclear work rules affect work enthusiasm. In terms of instrumentality, excellent work performance cannot be accurately and efficiently transformed into corresponding material or spiritual rewards, which leads to the gradual loss of work enthusiasm.

## 2. Expectancy Theory

The expectancy theory, also known as the "expectancy-value theory," was proposed by the psychologist and behavioral scientist Victor Vroom in his book "Work and Motivation" in 1964. Vroom's theory of expectancy assumes that people are rational and three conditions should be met to motivate employees: firstly, employees believe that effort can lead to performance; secondly, employees see and believe that performance leads to rewards; and thirdly, the rewards must be valuable to the employees themselves. Vroom believed that people always crave to meet certain needs and achieve certain goals. Before the goal is achieved, it manifests as an expectation, and the goal, in turn, acts as a motivating force for the individual. It can be expressed by the following formula:

$M$  (Motivational intensity) =  $V$  (Valence) \*  $E$  (Expectancy) \*  $I$  (Instrumentality)

In this formula,  $M$  represents motivation level, which represents the intensity of an individual's work.  $V$  represents valence, which represents the degree of satisfaction an individual derives from achieving a goal.  $E$  represents expectancy, which is the likelihood of achieving the goal.  $I$  represents instrumentality, which is an individual's estimation of the relationship between performance and rewards, or the belief that completing a task will lead to a reward. This formula shows that high positive valence, high expectancy, and high instrumentality will result in strong motivation.

The expectancy theory requires managers to pay attention to performance management and compensation management issues. Managers must establish realistic and feasible goals that are challenging but achievable through employee effort. At the same time, managers should focus on employees' working conditions, reduce their work obstacles, and help them achieve their work goals. In terms of compensation management, managers

should design a compensation system that is both fair and competitive, establishing a connection between job performance and rewards while also designing individualized compensation modules to meet the development needs of different employees.

### **3. Teaching Dilemmas of Young Teachers in Universities**

#### *3.1 Valence*

Valence is the attractiveness of people to perform an activity and the various outcomes associated with it. For young teachers, the valence of input into teaching activities mainly refers to the realization of teaching objectives and the attractiveness of various results related to them. Some scholars have studied the influence of various potential rewards on teacher motivation, and believe that extrinsic motivation mainly includes obtaining tenure, becoming a professor, obtaining a higher salary increase, obtaining an administrative position, and reducing teaching burden. Intrinsic motivation includes achieving peer recognition, gaining students' respect, and satisfying individual needs (Chen et al. 2006). Overall, personal development and increased salary and benefits are the two primary demands of young teachers.

Based on the survey of young teachers in three "double first-class" universities, it is found that young teachers mainly undertake the teaching tasks of undergraduates, but many young teachers also undertake the teaching tasks of undergraduates and postgraduates. In terms of the number of courses undertaken, more than 40% of the teachers undertake 2-3 courses a semester, and about 20% of the young teachers undertake 4 or more courses. In terms of the consistency between the curriculum and the research direction, about 40% of the teachers said that the curriculum and the research direction are not very consistent, and about half of the teachers said that the correlation between the courses they undertake is weak, which indicates that a considerable proportion of young teachers are in a state of disconnection between teaching and scientific research. In terms of teaching input, compared with the old teachers, many young teachers need to spend more time preparing lessons, correcting homework, and other things. Although teaching work is an important part of young teachers' career development, it is difficult to quantify and evaluate, and is not easily reflected in the promotion process, causing young teachers to be unwilling to invest in teaching and preferring to spend more time on research.

In terms of salary and benefits, the overall income level of young teachers who have just entered the university is lower than that of teachers who have been working in universities for many years. According to a survey, over 60% of young teachers say they face significant economic pressure, with the main source of pressure being high living costs and housing pressure, as they feel there is a gap between expected and actual salaries. Many young teachers also mentioned the problem of income imbalance between departments. More school resources flow to popular departments, and teachers in popular departments often earn more than those in basic disciplines, which to some extent reduces the enthusiasm of young teachers to work.

#### *3.2 Expectancy*

Expectancy refers to the likelihood of achieving a goal based on personal experience and judgment. For young teachers, their expectancy for teaching outcomes is related to both their teaching ability and the assessment and evaluation system in universities.

Young teachers have limited work experience and teaching experience. Most of them are not normal university students. Before entering the teaching profession, they did not have systematic and comprehensive knowledge of pedagogy theory and psychology, and their teaching theory level was limited. In addition, most young teachers do not have enough opportunities to practice teaching before their formal employment. Even if some young teachers have practical experience as teaching assistants and part-time counselors, it is difficult to effectively improve their teaching skills due to the short practice period. After the entry of young teachers, the pre-service training period is short and they start their jobs too quickly. So they cannot combine teaching theory with teaching practice well. Many young teachers cannot quickly adapt to the role change, which will also reduce their expectations of teaching output.

In addition, the assessment and evaluation system in universities, which prioritizes research over teaching, to a certain extent suppresses the enthusiasm of young teachers for teaching. The evaluation of teachers' professional titles focuses on scientific research indicators, such as the grade and number of papers and journals, the level of topics, and published works. The quantitative assessment makes many young teachers tired of pursuing the number of academic achievements while ignoring the quality. According to the teaching requirements in the detailed rules for the evaluation and recruitment of professional and technical positions of teachers in 20 "Project 985" universities, the trend of "qualified" is obvious (Zeng & Qiu, 2016). And some universities even allow teachers to replace teaching with scientific research achievements. Many colleges and universities implement a "promotion or leave" policy for young teachers, that is, if young teachers fail to achieve professional title promotion within a certain number of years (usually 5-6 years), they will be dismissed or transferred by the school. The purpose of this policy was to motivate young teachers to enhance their research ability and academic level, but it also adds an intangible pressure to young teachers, making them prioritize

meeting the quantity requirements of research, rather than focusing on teaching quality.

### *3.3 Instrumentality*

Young teachers in universities are often faced with many important expenses such as marriage, buying a house, raising children, and supporting elderly family members. For young teachers who have just entered the workforce, this undoubtedly creates a heavy economic burden. In comparison to employees with the same level of education in the corporate sector, especially those in the finance industry, young teachers' salaries and income are lower. Moreover, compared to senior teachers with higher titles and experience, such as associate professors and professors, young teachers with the rank of lecturer also have lower income.

At present, the salary structure of teachers in Chinese colleges and universities consists of post salary, salary scale salary, performance salary, and allowances. Basic salary (post salary and salary scale salary) is determined by the state, while performance salary and salary subsidy are determined independently by universities (Wang et al. 2014). The proportion of merit pay in the salary structure of teachers in colleges and universities is large, which causes teachers to be tired of applying for competitive projects and publishing papers to obtain more scientific research results, and exacerbates the utilitarian tendency of scientific research (Liu & Yang, 2017). Allowances include basic allowances and performance allowances, which are mainly related to teachers' professional titles, making it necessary for young teachers to put professional title evaluations in the first place if they want to increase their income. Simply investing in teaching to improve teaching quality cannot significantly improve their pay. Although performance subsidies are linked to teaching performance, subsidies related to teaching are mostly allocated based on the number of class hours, not on teaching quality. This leads to teachers only striving to meet the basic class hour requirements in their teaching work, rather than pursuing improvements in teaching quality.

After entering the teaching post, young teachers must devote enough time and energy to teaching, teaching-learning, teaching reflection, and teaching research if they want to do a good job in teaching (Yao et al. 2016). However, the current salary system design makes young teachers' perception of the instrumental value of teaching work low, which also affects their teaching aspirations and awareness of teaching responsibility. Whether young teachers in colleges and universities have teaching ambition and consciousness of teaching responsibility, and whether they regard teaching as an important content in their career, directly affects the level of teaching quality. Young teachers in colleges and universities do not have a strong sense of teaching responsibility and are not willing to take the initiative to carry out basic teaching training and teaching research, so it is difficult to improve their teaching ability. If the teaching abilities of young teachers cannot be effectively improved, it will inevitably have a negative impact on talent cultivation in universities.

## **4. Incentive Strategies of University Young Teachers**

### *4.1 Establish a scientific and reasonable evaluation mechanism*

The relationship between "efforts and goals" contains two meanings: first, individuals believe that certain efforts will bring certain performance possibilities; second, the likelihood that the performance achieved through efforts will be properly evaluated. Difficult-to-achieve goals often have little incentive effect on young teachers. Colleges and universities should establish a scientific evaluation mechanism, determine reasonable and achievable teaching objectives, reduce the resistance of young teachers to achieve the objectives, guide them to strive for higher teaching performance, and ensure that young teachers' teaching performance can be reasonably evaluated.

First of all, the evaluation content should be comprehensive. The assessment and evaluation of young teachers in universities should take into account their comprehensive quality, not just their scientific research output. Young teachers may not be as outstanding as middle-aged teachers in terms of teaching and scientific research results due to their short tenure, but they may dare to innovate in teaching and scientific research and benefit students in the process of getting along with them. Therefore, the evaluation content should pay attention to the contribution of young teachers to the development of students while attaching importance to the scientific research output and teaching workload.

Secondly, the evaluation subject should be diverse. Colleges and universities should establish an evaluation system with multiple subjects including teaching supervision, administrative leaders, fellow teachers, students, and teachers themselves. Teaching supervision mainly takes teaching content, teaching method, teaching design, and other aspects as evaluation criteria; Administrative leadership mainly takes subject construction, personnel training, and social services as evaluation criteria. Teachers take professional knowledge, academic communication ability, professional ethics, and other aspects as evaluation criteria. Students, as they experience education quality, can evaluate the teaching attitude and teaching effect of young teachers. In addition, at the teacher level, self-development and management service evaluation should also be carried out, to better find the problems in the teachers themselves or management, and then improve. Multi-angle and all-round evaluation are complementary to each other, which can give full play to the guiding and motivating role of assessment and

evaluation.

Finally, the evaluation program should be targeted. At present, the common phenomenon of "attaching more importance to scientific research than teaching" in colleges and universities is easy to discourage the enthusiasm of young teachers with strong teaching abilities. In the process of evaluation, classified management and assessment should be carried out, and corresponding evaluation schemes should be formulated according to the different characteristics of young teachers. This can ensure that all young teachers, whether they are teaching-oriented, research-oriented, or teaching-research-oriented, can receive reasonable evaluations, which will be conducive to enhancing their motivation.

#### *4.2 optimize the salary and welfare system of young teachers*

The relationship between "performance" and "reward" reflects the individual's expectations for performance rewards. Young teachers have made great efforts to achieve excellent teaching results, and they are full of expectations for what kind of reward or reward this level of performance can bring. According to the expectation theory, motivation may occur only when there is a visible practical connection between the teaching work and the remuneration of young teachers, and the remuneration can meet their needs. Therefore, colleges and universities should strengthen the teaching enthusiasm of young teachers through effective material and spiritual rewards, and ensure that young teachers can get appropriate and reasonable rewards, such as bonuses, promotion, promotion, praise, etc. after they achieve the expected results.

First of all, given the strong material needs of young teachers, an effective connection between teaching and salary should be established, and sufficient material rewards should be given to young teachers with strong teaching abilities and high teaching levels. Secondly, in salary design, colleges and universities should balance the relationship between scientific research and teaching, relieve the conflict between the two and promote their complementarity, so that the scientific research achievements of young teachers can serve the teaching or talent training work. Through the system design, the strong correlation between teaching and professional title promotion, reward, evaluation, performance appraisal, and income should be highlighted, to enhance the importance and influence of teaching and meet the development and achievement needs of young teachers. For example, to better motivate teachers to join the front line of teaching, some colleges, and universities set up associate professors and professors in teaching posts to improve the effectiveness of teaching activities, to encourage young teachers to develop their teaching ability. In addition, some teaching awards and honors for young teachers can be added to meet the development and achievement needs of young teachers as much as possible. The satisfaction of demands is related to the job satisfaction of young teachers. Employees who are satisfied with their jobs tend to be more loyal to the organization. On the contrary, employees who are not satisfied with their jobs generally lack loyalty to the organization and will even give up the profession(Ana et al. 2001).

Regarding how to meet the salary and benefits needs of young teachers, Dr. John. Tropman from the University of Michigan in the United States proposed a concept of self-service compensation. The self-service compensation system is highly flexible, and employees can adjust and combine according to their individual needs within the given framework of the enterprise and establish their compensation system. At the same time, with the change of their interests and needs to make corresponding changes. Colleges and universities can also determine the salary form of teachers based on full communication with teachers, highlighting the individuation and diversity of salaries. It is worth noting that no matter what kind of salary and welfare system colleges and universities adopt, they cannot deny the important position of teaching in higher education. Although the activities and functions of modern universities are more and more complex, teaching or personnel training is still the core task of universities. As universities, no matter where they are located, no matter how large they are, or how high their reputation is, all university institutions have or should have, one thing in common - the fundamental mission of educating students(Donald, 2002). Colleges and universities should establish academic concepts of teaching, foster a cultural atmosphere that attaches importance to teaching, encourage young teachers to pay attention to teaching itself, conscientiously study the dissemination of specialized knowledge of the subject as well as the study of specialized knowledge of the subject, constantly reflect on the nature of curriculum, learning, and teaching, and understand teaching activities with the spirit of inquiry(Zhou & Ma, 2013).

#### *4.3 Enrich training and development projects for young teachers*

Actively explore scientific and effective teaching and training programs to guide young teachers to establish the idea of lifelong learning. Universities can organize career planning activities for young teachers, guiding each young teacher to design a career plan and understand their career development needs so as to carry out training programs more targeted.

In terms of training forms, universities should place importance on the combination of theory and practice. They can organize subject-specific lectures and set different teaching scenarios for young teachers to practice. In

addition, they can also carry out other forms of training such as group speeches, senior teachers' demonstrations, teaching seminars, and so on. In the context of "Internet + education", colleges and universities can make extensive use of Internet platforms and WeChat platforms to conduct online training, uploading the video resources and courseware resources of training courses to the network and sharing, so that participating teachers can learn independently in their spare time. In terms of the training content, it should not only be limited to the short-term training of the four courses "Higher Education", "Psychology of Higher Education", "Laws and Regulations of Higher Education" and "Professional Ethics of College Teachers". More attention should be paid to the problems that young teachers may encounter in actual teaching, such as making teaching plans, designing teaching content, and organizing teaching activities. The young teachers participating in the training have different actual needs due to the different disciplines and entry time, so the design of the training content should be combined with the cultural characteristics of different disciplines. Universities need to change the traditional top-down training method and hold "table meetings" from time to time to create a loose and free environment for young teachers to discuss teaching or non-teaching issues.

At the same time, consideration should be given to the new requirements of current educational reforms and economic and social development. Young teachers should be guided to use innovative thinking and a development perspective to discover new information, changes, and achievements in their discipline fields and the overall educational environment.

The growth of young teachers is a continuous and gradual process, and this process involves not only teaching and scientific research issues, but also issues outside the profession. Training programs should aim at "paying attention to the all-round development of young teachers". While improving young teachers' teaching and research ability, they should also provide professional and personalized guidance for all kinds of problems raised by young teachers. Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium provides ten principles for the entry and development of young teachers. (1)The teacher understands how learners grow and develop, recognizing that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and designs and implements developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences; (2)The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and creates learning experiences that make these aspects of the discipline accessible and meaningful for learners to assure mastery of content; (3)The teacher understands and uses multiple methods of assessment to engage learners in their growth, to monitor learner progress, and to guide the teacher's and learner's decision making; (4)The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage learners to develop a deep understanding of content areas and their connections, and to build skills to apply knowledge in meaningful ways (INTASC, 2023). These principles provide the basic requirements that young teachers must meet for their all-round development. In addition to arranging different types of training programs, attention should be paid to the sustainable development of young teachers. Colleges and universities can regularly track the development and changes of young teachers using follow-up interviews, test evaluations, questionnaire surveys, expert evaluations, etc., and compile the relevant materials of each teacher into teaching archives. As a strong proof of young teachers' teaching experiences, the teaching archives capture their growth, help them reflect on themselves continuously and improve their teaching ability as the material supports.

## 5. Conclusion

According to the expectation theory, colleges and universities should design practical teaching goals for young teachers, pay attention to the progress of young teachers' teaching work, and provide timely feedback to help young teachers achieve their teaching goals. A scientific and reasonable evaluation system should be established, emphasizing the teaching contribution of young teachers and balancing the relationship between teaching and scientific research. Teaching returns should not only meet the basic material needs of young teachers but also meet their individual development needs. Only in this way can universities enhance the perception of young teachers regarding expectancy value, tool value, and goal effectiveness, thereby mobilizing their enthusiasm for teaching.

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