

Work Concerns and Teacher Effectiveness in China: The Moderating Role of Cultural Norms

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the moderating role of school cultural norms between work concerns and teacher effectiveness among young teachers in private universities in Shandong Province, China. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a survey method with 380 respondents. Work concerns were categorized into self-concern, task-concern, and impact-concern, while teacher effectiveness was assessed through instructional planning and strategies, assessment, and learning environment. Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) was conducted to determine the direct effects of work concerns and the moderating role of school cultural norms. Findings reveal that work concerns ($\beta=0.607$, $p<0.001$) and cultural norms ($\beta=0.075$, $p<0.001$) significantly enhance teacher effectiveness, explaining 65.1% of the variance ($R^2=0.651$). However, the interaction effect is negative ($\beta=-0.197$, $p<0.001$), suggesting that school cultural norms moderate the positive influence of work concerns. These results highlight the importance of considering cultural moderation when designing strategies to enhance teacher effectiveness. The study contributes to understanding the mechanisms affecting teacher performance and provides practical implications for improving teaching quality in private universities.

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Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to understanding how work concerns influence teacher effectiveness and the critical moderating role of school cultural norms. The findings offer insights for policymakers and educators in private universities, emphasizing the need to align cultural norms with teacher support strategies to enhance instructional quality.

1. Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, private universities in Shandong Province have emerged as vibrant contributors to academic excellence and innovation (Liu, 2023). These institutions are pivotal in nurturing future leaders, fostering critical thinking, and advancing knowledge frontiers. However, the success of private universities is intricately linked to the quality of their teaching faculty, particularly the young teachers (Ye, Zhu, & Lo, 2019). Understanding the factors that influence the teaching effectiveness of these teachers is therefore crucial for enhancing educational outcomes and fostering a conducive learning environment.

Teacher effectiveness, a multifaceted construct, encompasses the ability of teachers to design engaging lesson plans, create supportive learning environments, and conduct rigorous assessments that foster student growth (Steinert et al., 2016; Stronge, 2018). It is influenced by a myriad of factors, including individual teachers' work concerns and the school cultural norms within which they operate (Day, Sammons, & Stobart, 2007; Firestone & Pennell, 1993). Work concerns refer to the personal, professional, and pedagogical priorities that drive teachers' teaching practices, while institutional cultural norms embody the shared values, beliefs, and behaviors that shape the overall teaching and learning environment (Shuyan & WenZe, 2024).

Previous research has examined various aspects of teacher effectiveness, such as the impact of teaching methods (Seidel & Shavelson, 2007) and the role of technology in the classroom (Özgenel & Mert, 2019). Yet, there is a dearth of studies specifically focusing on the interplay between work concerns, institutional cultural norms, and teacher effectiveness among young teachers in private universities in Shandong Province. This gap in the literature underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to the success of these educators, particularly in the context of a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive higher education landscape (Yang & Prasansaph, 2024).

This study aims to address this gap by exploring the impact of work concerns and school cultural norms on the teacher effectiveness of young teachers in private universities in Shandong Province. By conducting a quantitative analysis of survey data collected from these teachers, we seek to identify the specific dimensions of work concerns that are most influential and the extent to which institutional cultural norms moderate these relationships. Our findings will contribute to the body of knowledge on teacher effectiveness in private universities, providing valuable insights for policymakers, administrators, and educators alike.

Moreover, this study has practical implications for enhancing teaching quality in private universities. By identifying the factors that promote or hinder teacher effectiveness, we can inform strategies to support young teachers in their professional development, thereby fostering a more conducive learning environment and ultimately improving student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). As such, this research serves as a timely and important contribution to the ongoing discourse on teacher effectiveness in the higher education sector.

1.1. Research objectives

This study aims to examine the impact of work concerns on teacher effectiveness and further investigate the moderating role of school cultural norms in this relationship. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Investigate the direct effect of work concerns on teacher effectiveness.
- ii. Examine the direct effect of school cultural norms on teacher effectiveness.
- iii. Analyze whether school cultural norms moderate the relationship between work concerns and teacher effectiveness and determine the direction of the moderation effect (enhancing or weakening).

1.2. Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, this study addresses the following key research questions:

- i. Do work concerns significantly affect teacher effectiveness?
- ii. Do school cultural norms have a direct effect on teacher effectiveness?
- iii. Do school cultural norms moderate the relationship between work concerns and teacher effectiveness?

1.3. Research hypothesis

H1: Work concerns have a significant positive effect on teacher effectiveness.

H2: School cultural norms have a significant positive effect on teacher effectiveness.

H3: School cultural norms significantly moderate the relationship between work concerns and teacher effectiveness.

H3a: Higher levels of school cultural norms enhance the positive impact of work concerns on teacher effectiveness.

H3b: Lower levels of school cultural norms weaken the positive impact of work concerns on teacher effectiveness.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, the role of private universities in China's education system has gained significant attention, particularly in Shandong Province (Zhou, Liu, Tian, & Li, 2018). The role of educators in higher education has garnered significant attention, particularly with regard to their effectiveness and the factors influencing it. The study of teacher effectiveness has been a cornerstone in the field of education research, particularly in exploring factors that influence the quality of instruction and student outcomes. In the context of private universities in Shandong Province, China, the present literature review aims to examine the relationship between work concerns, as the independent variable, and teacher effectiveness, as the dependent variable, with school cultural norms serving as a potential moderating variable. This review draws on existing research from various disciplines, including education, psychology, and sociology, to provide a comprehensive understanding of these constructs and their interactions.

2.1. Teacher Effectiveness

Teacher effectiveness is the ability of a teacher to impact student learning and development positively. It involves the capacity to create an engaging and supportive learning environment, deliver effective instruction, assess student progress, and foster academic growth and achievement (Akram, 2018). Teacher effectiveness is a multifaceted construct that encompasses various aspects of teaching performance (Sabharwal & Miah, 2024). In this study, it is operationalized through three dimensions: teaching plans and strategies, learning environment, and assessment.

- i. Teaching Plans and Strategies: Effective teachers develop clear and comprehensive teaching plans that align with learning objectives and utilize various instructional strategies to engage students (Borich, 1988).
- ii. Learning Environment: A positive learning environment is characterized by a supportive atmosphere that fosters creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking among students (Pickett & Fraser, 2010). Teachers play a crucial role in creating and maintaining such environments.
- iii. Assessment: Effective assessment practices involve using a variety of methods to measure student learning and providing meaningful feedback to promote growth and improvement (Hooda, Rana, Dahiya, Rizwan, & Hossain, 2022).

2.2. Work concerns

Work concern refers to the various concepts and theories that revolve around the nature of work, its impact on individuals and society, and the factors that influence work-related attitudes and behaviors (Perreira, Berta, Ginsburg, Barnsley, & Herbert, 2018; Rahiman & Kodikal, 2017). This can include workload, work-life balance, professional development opportunities, classroom management concerns, collaboration, and other relevant factors. In this research, work concerns refer to a teacher's "emotions, doubts, thoughts and reflections about a particular issue or task." In the early 1970s, Fuller pointed out that teachers' concerns go through four stages of development: No Teaching Concerns, Concerns about Self, Concerns about Task, and Concerns about Impact.

Work concerns have been identified as critical factors influencing the performance and satisfaction of educators (Guoba, Žygaitienė, & Kepalienė, 2022). Within the context of this study, work concerns are conceptualized as comprising three main dimensions: self-concern, task-concern, and impact-concern (George, Hall, Stiegelbauer, & Litke, 2006).

- i. Self-Concern: Self-concern refers to the extent to which individuals are preoccupied with their personal needs, emotions, and aspirations in the workplace. Studies have shown that self-concern can either motivate or hinder teachers' performance depending on how it is managed (Baranik, Zhu, Wang, & Zhuang, 2022; Hall, 1985).
- ii. Task-Concern: Task-concern focuses on the individual's commitment to fulfilling their professional duties and responsibilities effectively. It is often associated with a strong work ethic and a desire to achieve excellence in teaching and research (Harini, Suyahmo, & Handoyo, 2018).
- iii. Impact-Concern: Impact-concern relates to the teacher's perception of the significance and impact of their work on students, colleagues, and the broader educational community. This dimension emphasizes the sense of purpose and contribution teachers feel towards their profession (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

2.3. School cultural norms

School cultural norms embody common values, beliefs, and behaviors, and form the entire teaching and learning environment (Deal & Peterson, 2016). It is a multifaceted concept and has a profound impact on student engagement, achievement, and social-emotional development. School cultural norms, as a contextual factor, have been recognized as having a significant impact on teacher behavior and effectiveness (Hargreaves, 2001). These norms encompass a set of shared values, beliefs, and behaviors that guide the actions of all members of the school community.

Young teachers are often faced with unique challenges related to work concerns and school cultural norms (Qureshi, 2016). They are often at the start of their careers, seeking opportunities for professional growth and recognition. However, they may also face increased workloads, limited resources, and a lack of mentorship, which can hinder their effectiveness.

School cultural norms play an even more significant role in shaping the experiences and outcomes of young teachers. A supportive and inclusive culture can provide them with the necessary resources, guidance, and opportunities for growth, while a negative culture can stifle their development and lead to dissatisfaction and burnout (Salina, 2023).

2.4. Moderating Effect

As a moderating variable, school cultural norms can influence the strength or direction of the relationship between work concerns and teacher effectiveness. For instance, a supportive and collaborative school culture may amplify the positive effects of task-concern and mitigate the negative impact of excessive self-concern (Schein, 2010).

- i. Professional Development and Innovation: A culture that encourages professional development and innovation can motivate teachers to experiment with new teaching strategies and approaches, thereby enhancing their effectiveness (Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007).
- ii. Interpersonal Relationships: The quality of interpersonal relationships within the school environment, including those between teachers and administrators, also plays a crucial role in shaping teacher effectiveness (Fullan, 2015). A positive and supportive culture can foster a sense of community and trust, leading to improved collaboration and communication.

2.5. Rational

Previous studies on teacher effectiveness have primarily focused on instructional methods, classroom technology, and student engagement strategies. However, limited research has explored the interplay between work concerns, school cultural norms, and teacher effectiveness, particularly among young teachers in private universities in Shandong Province. Given the unique challenges faced by these educators in a competitive and rapidly evolving higher education landscape, a deeper understanding of these factors is essential. This study seeks to address this research gap by examining how work concerns influence teacher effectiveness and assessing the moderating role of school cultural norms.

3. Research Methods

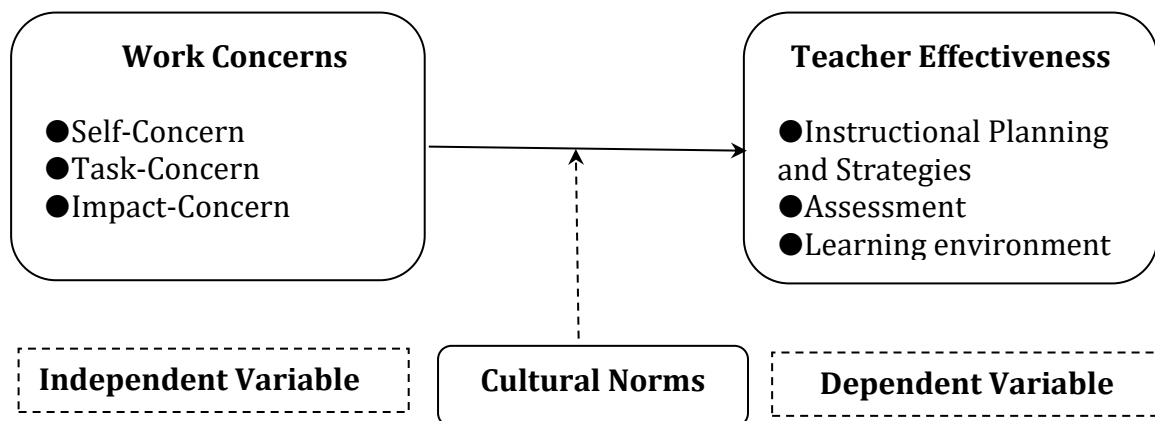
3.1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design, using survey methods to analyze the relationships between work concerns, school cultural norms, and teacher effectiveness. A structured questionnaire is administered to young teachers in private universities in Shandong Province to collect data on the research variables.

3.2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrated in [Figure 1](#) shows the relationship between specific variables in the study. Work concerns are the independent variable while teacher effectiveness is the dependent variable. The moderate variable is school cultural norms. In this study, the relationship between variables will be checked.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



3.3. Research Measurements

The questionnaire in this study is adopted and adapted from the School Culture Survey ([Sagor, 1996](#)), the Stages of Concerns Questionnaire (SoC) ([Bullard, Rutledge, & Kohler-Evans, 2017](#)), and the School Teacher Effectiveness Questionnaire (STEQ). The questionnaire shown in [Table 1](#) consisted of a total of 71 items, of which five items were demographic detail description questions and 66 questions measuring the variables.

Table 1: Distribution of items

Variables	Dimensions	Items
Work Concerns (IV)	• Self-Concern • Task-Concern • Impact-Concern	26 items
Cultural Norms (MV)	School cultural norms	16 items
Teacher Effectiveness (DV)	• Instructional Planning and Strategies • Assessment • Learning environment	24 items

3.4. Sample

The exact population in this study is the current young teachers in private universities located in Shandong province which is one of the top three provinces in China in terms of population. We chose young teachers from private universities in Shandong Province as our sample since Shandong is a large education province, so the researcher can also have a better understanding of the basic situation of university teachers in private universities. Young teachers typically refer to those who have recently begun their university teaching careers and are relatively young. The Chinese Ministry of Education defines young university teachers as individuals under the age of 40, with less than ten years of teaching experience, and holding a master's degree or higher. According to statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Education, there are approximately 22,500 young teachers in Shandong private universities. Based on the sample size determination table by [Krejcie and Morgan \(1970\)](#), this study selected 380 participants using a combination of cluster sampling and random sampling techniques during the data collection process. The questionnaire was administered to young teachers in private universities in Shandong Province, China, through the online platform "Wenjuanxing." A questionnaire was administered to 400 young teachers, and 380 returned responses were received. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from four private universities in Shandong province, and all participants provided informed consent before participating in the research.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data obtained from the questionnaire is analyzed based on the research objectives and hypotheses using SPSS. Multiple linear regression is used to examine the direct effects of work concerns and school cultural norms on teacher effectiveness. Moderated regression analysis (MRA) is employed to assess the moderating role of school cultural norms in the relationship between work concerns and teacher effectiveness. Interaction terms (Work Concerns $\times$ School Cultural Norms) are included to test moderation effects.

4. Results

4.1. Results of Moderated Regression Analysis

Based on the moderated effects analysis table, the variables of the three models are analyzed and elaborated. The model is to study the effect of the independent variable (TE) on the dependent variable (WC) when the interference of the moderating variable (CN) is not considered. Model 2 is mainly based on Model 1 with the addition of the moderator variable. Model 3 adds the interaction product term of the independent variable and the moderator variable to Model 2.

Check whether the F-value shows a significant change from Model 2 to Model 3 or whether the interaction term in Model 3 shows significance. If the change shows significance, it means there is a moderating effect ([Tayal, Kumar Upadhya, Yadav, Rangnekar, & Singh, 2018](#)). If there is a moderating effect in the above model, then analyze the simple slope plots to see the difference in the magnitude (slope) of the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable at different levels of the moderating variable to obtain the specific moderating effect.

The results of the moderated effects analysis table illustrated in Table 2 show that based on the interaction term work concern*cultural norms, the p-value of significance is 0.000***, and the interaction term of model 3 presents significance; It means that the moderating variable cultural norms can interfere significantly with the effect of work concern on teacher effectiveness. First, when Model 1 included only the control variables (gender, age, years of teaching experience, and highest level of education), although some of the control variables were not significant, the overall model explained about 60.2% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.602$), suggesting that the control variables influenced to some extent. Model 2 introduced the independent variables' work concerns and cultural norms based on Model 1. Work concerns had an extremely significant positive effect on teacher effectiveness ($\beta=0.608$, $p<0.001$), suggesting that the higher the teacher's work concerns, the stronger it was. Also, cultural norms had a significant positive effect ($\beta=0.075$, $p<0.001$) indicating that positive cultural norms enhance teacher effectiveness. The introduction of these two variables increased the explanatory power of the model to 65.1% ($R^2=0.651$), indicating that work concern and cultural norms are significant predictors of teacher effectiveness. Model 3 further incorporated an interaction term between work concern and cultural norms, which revealed an extremely significant negative effect of this interaction term on teacher effectiveness ($\beta=-0.197$, $p<0.001$). This suggests that there is a significant moderating effect of cultural norms on the relationship between work concern and teacher effectiveness: the enhancing effect of increased work concern on teacher effectiveness is diminished in a cultural norms environment.

The figure illustrated in Figure 2 shows the difference in the magnitude of IV versus DV at different levels (low, medium, and high) of the moderating variable in the form of a slope plot. When school cultural norms are high (+1SD, green line), the positive impact of work concerns on teacher effectiveness is weaker. When school cultural norms are low (-1SD, yellow line), the positive impact of work concerns on teacher effectiveness is stronger.

Figure 2: Simple Slope Plot

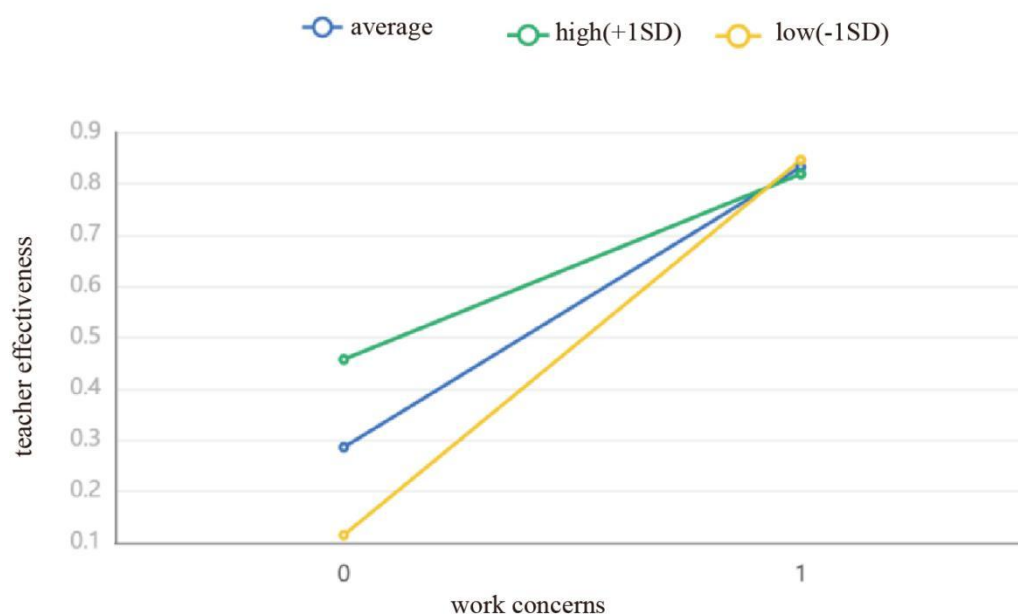


Table 2: Results of the moderating effects analysis

	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	coefficient	standard error	t	P	coefficient	standard error	t	P	coefficient	standard error	t	P
Const	0.136	0.057	2.4	0.017**	-0.049	0.061	-0.808	0.420	-0.388	0.088	-4.409	0.000***
Gender	-0.001	0.019	-0.059	0.953	-0.001	0.018	-0.039	0.969	0.004	0.017	0.203	0.840
Age	0.001	0.017	0.03	0.976	0.004	0.016	0.235	0.815	0.008	0.015	0.534	0.594
Teaching Experience	0.012	0.019	0.619	0.536	0.005	0.018	0.269	0.788	0.004	0.017	0.217	0.828
Qualification	-0.017	0.014	-1.23	0.220	-0.008	0.013	-0.576	0.565	-0.012	0.013	-0.956	0.340
Subject area	0	0.007	0.009	0.993	0.003	0.006	0.418	0.676	0.003	0.006	0.453	0.651
Work concerns	0.779	0.038	20.39	0.000***	0.608	0.045	13.449	0.000***	1.273	0.137	9.32	0.000***
Cultural norms					0.075	0.012	6.251	0.000***	0.183	0.024	7.646	0.000***
Work concerns*									-0.197	0.038	-5.138	0.000***
Cultural norms												
R ²	0.602				0.651				0.681			
adjusted R ²	0.593				0.642				0.672			
F	F (288, 6) =70.833, P=0.000***				F (7, 280) =74.521, P=0.000***				F (8, 279) =74.42, P=0.000***			
△R ²	0.602				0.651				0.681			
△F	△F (6, 288) =70.833, P=0.000***				△F (1, 280) =39.069, P=0.000***				△F (1, 279) =26.399, P=NaN			
Independent Variable: Teacher Effectiveness												

Note: ***, **, *represent 1%,5%, and 10% significance levels, respectively.

4.2 Summary of Findings

The key findings are as follows:

i. Work Concerns Have a Significant Positive Effect on Teacher Effectiveness

Regression results (Table 2, Model 1) show that work concerns significantly predict teacher effectiveness ($\beta = 0.608$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that teachers with higher work concerns tend to demonstrate better teacher effectiveness in terms of instructional planning, assessment, and learning environment. This finding supports H1: Work concerns positively influence teacher effectiveness.

ii. School Cultural Norms Have a Direct Positive Effect on Teacher Effectiveness

In Model 2, school cultural norms positively predict teacher effectiveness ($\beta = 0.075$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that a strong school culture enhances teachers' instructional quality, learning environment, and assessment effectiveness. This finding supports H2: School cultural norms positively influence teacher effectiveness.

iii. School Cultural Norms Moderate the Relationship Between Work Concerns and Teacher Effectiveness

The interaction term Work Concerns $\times$ School Cultural Norms is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.197$, $p < 0.001$, Model 3). The simple slope analysis (Figure 2) reveals that when school cultural norms are high (+1SD, green line), the positive impact of work concerns on teacher effectiveness is weaker. When school cultural norms are low (-1SD, yellow line), the positive impact of work concerns on teacher effectiveness is stronger. This finding supports H3: School cultural norms moderate the effect of work concerns on teacher effectiveness, rejects H3a: High cultural norms do not enhance the relationship; they weaken it instead and supports H3b: High cultural norms weaken the positive impact of work concerns on teacher effectiveness.

5. Discussion

i. Work Concerns Positively Influence Teacher Effectiveness

The findings confirm that work concerns significantly enhance teacher effectiveness. This aligns with prior research suggesting that teachers who exhibit higher levels of self-concern, task-concern, and impact-concern tend to be more engaged in instructional planning, assessment, and classroom management (Abacioglu, Volman, & Fischer, 2020). Work concerns motivate teachers to refine their pedagogical strategies and actively improve student learning outcomes, reinforcing the importance of addressing teacher motivations in higher education settings. These results emphasize that young teachers in private universities face unique challenges, including high workload expectations and competitive career advancement pressures. As such, recognizing and addressing their work concerns can lead to more effective teaching practices. University administrators should consider developing support mechanisms such as mentorship programs and structured career development plans to help teachers channel their concerns into enhanced professional performance.

ii. School Cultural Norms Have a Direct Positive Effect on Teacher Effectiveness

The study finds that school cultural norms positively impact teacher effectiveness. This supports the idea that a strong institutional culture fosters teacher engagement, motivation, and commitment ([Weston, Hindley, & Cunningham, 2021](#)).

University leaders should cultivate a positive and inclusive school culture that promotes collaboration, professional autonomy, and ongoing professional development, ensuring that cultural norms support rather than constrain teachers' instructional effectiveness.

iii. School Cultural Norms Moderate the Effect of Work Concerns on Teacher Effectiveness

One of the most significant findings of this study is that school cultural norms negatively moderate the relationship between work concerns and teacher effectiveness. Contrary to expectations (H3a), higher cultural norms do not strengthen the impact of work concerns on teacher effectiveness but instead weaken it (H3b supported). This suggests that in a highly structured and norm-driven environment, teachers may rely less on their individual motivations (work concerns) and more on institutional expectations and regulations to guide their teaching behaviors. In contrast, when cultural norms are weaker, teachers may rely more on personal work concerns to drive their effectiveness.

These findings resonate with prior research on institutional culture and employee autonomy, which suggests that highly rigid organizational norms can sometimes suppress individual agency and motivation ([Gonser, 2021](#)). In highly structured environments, teachers may feel less freedom to experiment with new instructional strategies, reducing their ability to leverage personal work concerns into improved teaching performance. While strong cultural norms provide stability and alignment with institutional goals, universities should balance structure with flexibility, ensuring that teachers retain enough autonomy to apply their intrinsic motivation and work concerns in their teaching practices.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that the higher the work concern, the stronger the teacher's effectiveness. Also, positive cultural norms can enhance teacher's effectiveness. These findings concur with the research by ([Tannady & Budi, 2023](#)), who argued performance of teachers is positively and significantly impacted by organizational culture ([Tannady & Budi, 2023](#)). However, the enhancement of teacher effectiveness by increased work concerns is diminished under the moderation of cultural norms, which suggests that the cultural moderating effect needs to be fully considered when school administrators construct interventions to enhance the effectiveness of young teachers. The study's conclusions show the profound effects of work concern, cultural norms, and their interactions on teacher effectiveness, providing empirical evidence for understanding the multidimensional influences on teacher effectiveness, and valuable references for subsequent related research and educational policy formulation. However, further in-depth empirical research is required to confirm the negative moderating effect of cultural norms on the effect of work concerns on teacher effectiveness and to explore the contextual reasons behind it.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study was conducted in full compliance with ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, who were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants were also informed that the study posed minimal risk and that they had the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest concerning the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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