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The Influence of Work Motivation on Job Performance: Engagement and Burnout as Mediators

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Abstract

Based on self-determination theory, a conceptual model is proposed in which work motivation operates as the antecedent variable, with work engagement and occupational exhaustion acting as dual mediators. To test this framework, data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 469 academic staff members across 24 private higher education colleges in Jiangxi Province and analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The results demonstrate that greater levels of educators' work motivation are significantly correlated with improved job performance and that this effect is channeled through increased work engagement and reduced burnout. By elucidating these mediatory pathways, the findings deepen theoretical comprehension of how motivation drives performance and yield practical guidance for devising effective motivation and performance-management strategies within private higher education institutions.

Keywords:
Teacher's Work Motivation;
Job Performance; Work Engagement;
Job Burnout; Self-Determination Theory.

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1- Introduction

Higher education underpins national progress by nurturing highly skilled graduates, driving scientific inquiry and innovation, and fueling economic, cultural, and social advancement [1]. In this setting, lecturers and professors play an indispensable role: they mold tomorrow's thinkers and innovators, making their motivation and performance pivotal to the success of universities. Research has shown that when academic staff feel demotivated, their work quality and output suffer [2]. Conversely, a supportive institutional culture that nurtures engagement can significantly enhance both teaching and research outcomes [3]. As such, any effort to sustain and improve the excellence of higher education must begin with a clear grasp of what drives—and what hinders—teachers' enthusiasm and effectiveness.

Across the globe, the surge in demand for tertiary qualifications has fuelled rapid growth throughout the education sector [1]. Universities now tend to fall into two broad camps, public and private, but it is the latter that has seen perhaps the most remarkable expansion in recent decades [4]. As Qureshi and Khawaja [5] note, private institutions have risen to prominence precisely because they ease the strain on public campuses and introduce fresh organisational dynamics into the academic labour market. The rapid growth not only relieves enrolment strains on public universities but also provides a unique setting in which to investigate academic staff work behaviours, thereby yielding valuable insights into how institutional attributes influence lecturer motivation and performance.

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China, in particular, has encouraged the development of private higher education through policies that invite a wide spectrum of social stakeholders to contribute. Yet, this private-sector boom is far from uniform; regional disparities in demographics, economic prosperity, and local demand-supply balances continue to shape where and how these universities establish themselves. Empirical studies have shown that the central region demonstrates comparatively higher performance in public higher education investment relative to other regions [6]. Within this region, Jiangxi Province stands out for its strategic geographic location and higher-than-average national education levels, reflecting both its current strengths and future potential in higher education development [7].

Private higher education institutions occupy a vital position within the broader educational system, with teachers' motivation and performance widely recognized as key determinants of both instructional quality and institutional effectiveness [8, 9]. These factors are widely acknowledged to influence the development of higher education significantly [3]. Nonetheless, teachers increasingly contend with a range of pressures, including intensive teaching responsibilities, diverse student needs, insufficient familial support, and administrative challenges related to institutional governance [10]. Moreover, issues such as educational inequality and unequal resource distribution further impact teacher performance. Compared to their counterparts in public institutions, teachers in private higher education often encounter even greater challenges in maintaining work engagement and achieving optimal performance [11].

Although teachers' motivation and performance have garnered increasing scholarly attention, relatively few studies have directly examined the relationship between these two constructions. To date, the majority of investigations have concentrated on demographic factors, such as gender, length of teaching experience, and type of institution, to analyze work motivation [12]. By contrast, less attention has been paid to individual psychological constructs such as basic psychological needs, intrinsic autonomy, affective states, work engagement, and burnout. Similarly, although demographic, institutional, and socio-environmental determinants of academic performance have been explored [13, 14], these models often fail to capture the full complexity of teachers' behaviors and outcomes. Motivation theory has long been employed to understand student performance and well-being [15], but its application to teaching staff remains underdeveloped [16]. This research gap is especially stark in private higher education institutions, where there is a notable lack of empirical investigation into how academic staff motivation influences their professional experience, particularly in terms of teaching performance, student engagement, or vulnerability to burnout. It is, however, well established that motivation is fundamental to sustaining work engagement and forestalling burnout, both of which exert a direct influence on instructional effectiveness [17-19]. However, few inquiries have systematically examined whether work engagement and job burnout mediate the connection linking lecturers' motivational profiles to their job performance.

The present study advances a dual- pathway model in which work engagement and job burnout mediate the effect of lecturers' motivation on their professional effectiveness. To underpin this model, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a comprehensive lens, identifying three core psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, whose fulfillment is essential for optimal workplace functioning and well-being [20]. When these needs are satisfied, teachers are more likely to exhibit sustained engagement; conversely, need frustration can precipitate burnout. SDT thus connects motivational sources to observable behaviors—heightened engagement or increased exhaustion—which in turn drive job-related outcomes, such as teaching performance. By integrating these elements, our framework explicates how variations in academic staff motivation translate into concrete differences in instructional effectiveness.

Based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), a theoretical model was developed in this study, in which teachers' work motivation is identified as the antecedent variable, work engagement, and job burnout serve as mediating variables, and job performance is the outcome variable. Through this framework, the aim was to elucidate the mechanisms by which lecturers' motivation shapes their performance within private higher education, to chart the interrelationships among motivation, engagement, burnout, and performance, and to empirically verify the mediating roles of work engagement and burnout in transmitting the effects of motivation onto job performance. This research extends the application of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to the context of private higher education, providing theoretical insights into teachers' motivational behavior and offering empirical evidence to support strategies for improving teacher performance and enhancing the quality of higher education.

The main content of the rest of this article is Section 2, which provides a review of the literature on work motivation, work engagement, job burnout, and job performance. Section 3 outlines the research methodology, covering instrument design and the data collection process. Section 4 displays the outcomes of the statistical analysis. Section 5 offers a discussion and presents recommendations, covering conclusions, practical significance, and directions for future research.

2- Literature Review

2-1- The Connection Between Work Motivation and Job Performance

Atkinson & Feather [21] demonstrated that individuals with greater levels of work motivation achieve better performance on challenging tasks, with increased motivation positively correlated with improved performance. Conversely, employees with low motivation are more susceptible to stress and anxiety, which can undermine efficiency and productivity. Similarly, the findings of Riyanto et al. [2] indicate that when employees perceive their work as

meaningful and valuable, their job satisfaction and engagement increase significantly [22]. Establishing explicit objectives alongside the provision of prompt feedback and recognition can bolster employees' enthusiasm and overall performance. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), autonomous motivation represents the principal driver of enhanced job outcomes, as it cultivates intrinsic motivation and thereby fosters greater proactivity and innovation among staff [22, 23].

Empirical findings by Hajiali et al. [24] reveal that employees who experience heightened work interest and positive effect exhibit stronger motivation and superior performance outcomes. Within the SDT framework, this can be understood as the result of intrinsic motivation, which stems from self-recognition and personal fulfillment when individuals attain goals they have freely set. Such an internal drive cultivates professional pride and a positive psychological state, both of which are closely linked to greater work efficiency and enhanced job performance. In contrast, when individuals lack interest in their tasks, motivation tends to decline, while feelings of fatigue, disengagement, and apathy increase, ultimately leading to reduced productivity and a decline in work quality [25].

The SDT framework illustrates how external conditions can activate extrinsic motivation mechanisms, influencing individual behavior and performance outcomes [26]. Empirical studies have shown that employees tend to perform more effectively when provided with adequate resources, advanced equipment, flexible working hours, and a positive work environment characterized by comfortable physical settings and supportive interpersonal relationships. Conversely, workplace stressors, such as excessive task demands, poor communication, and organizational dysfunction, can hinder work efficiency, undermine collaboration, and reduce adaptability to change [27]. Work motivation triggers enhanced motivation and excitement, which improves behavioral efficiency toward reaching established targets [28].

Work motivation exerts considerable influence on job performance within the teaching profession [29]. Highly motivated teachers tend to demonstrate superior instructional quality; they are more likely to engage in thorough course planning, adopt diverse teaching strategies, foster dynamic and engaging learning environments, and maintain enthusiasm and a strong sense of professional fulfillment. Their intrinsic interest and passion for teaching often compel them to invest additional effort in lesson preparation, participate in ongoing professional development, and pursue continuous self-improvement. These behaviors contribute not only to enhanced teaching effectiveness but also to the attainment of both personal and professional goals. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed.:

H1: Work motivation is statistically associated with job performance.

The hypothesis aims to establish empirical evidence of positive work motivation effects on job performance while encouraging organizations and educational institutions to integrate motivation stimulation into management strategies to enhance job performance.

2-2- The Connection Between Work Motivation and Work Engagement

Work motivation serves as the intrinsic driving force that compels individuals to engage actively in their professional activities. Employees with high levels of motivation typically demonstrate elevated work enthusiasm, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in their tasks [30]. The core of work motivation lies in meeting needs, including internal (such as love for work and a sense of achievement) and external (such as recognition from others and status improvement) [26]. According to SDT, the satisfaction of these psychological needs reinforces the link between work motivation and work engagement, thereby encouraging individuals to invest greater energy and attention in their work [31].

SDT explores how situational factors influence individual behavior through three key motivational dimensions: the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, the degree of self-determination, and cognitive evaluation. The theory suggests that individuals will engage in activities they perceive as inherently interesting, challenging, or aesthetically rewarding [23]. Without these internal positive experiences, individuals typically do not actively participate unless driven by external factors such as pressure or rewards [25].

Empirical research indicates a strong association between teachers' work motivation and their level of work engagement. Oubibi et al. [32] found that when teachers' values closely align with their professional values, their job satisfaction and sense of well-being increase significantly, motivating them to invest greater effort and energy in their work. Similarly, Berkovich & Hassan [33] emphasized that work motivation represents a fundamental internal driver behind teachers' engagement in educational activities. Pourtousi & Ghanizadeh's [17] research also demonstrates that work motivation positively contributes to teachers' work engagement. As a result, highly dedicated teachers often exhibit greater vitality, increased work efficiency, and stronger professional commitment [34, 35]. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed.:

H2: Work motivation is statistically associated with work engagement.

This hypothesis aims to verify the positive impact of work motivation on work engagement through empirical analysis, provide a theoretical basis for educational institutions to develop effective teacher management strategies, and help improve the level of teacher work engagement.

2-3- The Connection Between Work Engagement and Job Performance

Individuals who are deeply engaged in their work often experience positive emotional states such as joy and pride, which enhance their ability to manage challenges, maintain focus, and improve overall job performance [25]. Employees who are fully engaged and enthusiastic can not only improve personal efficiency but also enhance team collaboration and drive overall team performance improvement [36]. Research has shown that when teachers exhibit elevated levels of vigour, dedication, and absorption, their teaching effectiveness is significantly enhanced [33]. This positive investment can improve the quality of teaching and further enhance job performance by alleviating work pressure, reducing fatigue, and increasing job satisfaction [37]. Further, for novice teachers, enhancing self-regulation, increasing active participation in work, and effectively managing workplace stress during the transitional phase can lead to marked improvements in job performance [38].

According to SDT, teachers' work engagement is reflected in their enthusiasm, persistence, and active participation in teaching-related activities. Engaged teachers are intrinsically motivated to devote time and effort toward instructional tasks and professional development, with the aim of enhancing teaching quality and, ultimately, improving job performance [17]. Teachers who are highly engaged in their work are more likely to employ innovative teaching methods to engage students' interest, which not only improves students' learning outcomes but also further consolidates their job performance [39]. Hence, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H3: Work engagement is statistically associated with job performance.

This hypothesis will be validated through empirical research, aiming to clarify how work engagement actively promotes the improvement of job performance, thereby providing a strong theoretical basis for optimising teacher management strategies in educational institutions.

2-4- Mediating Role of Work Engagement

Research has consistently shown that work motivation is a crucial determinant of job performance, with higher levels of motivation being strongly linked to improved employee outcomes across various professional contexts [28]. Research indicates that reducing work-related stress, alleviating fatigue, and elevating job satisfaction substantially enhances performance through increased engagement. Defined as an enthusiastic and dedicated approach to one's duties, work engagement thus has multiple effects on job outcomes, further bolstering overall effectiveness. [37].

The interrelationship between work motivation, work engagement, and job performance has emerged as a pivotal theme in educational research. Empirical studies indicate that the degree of an educator's engagement profoundly shapes their cognitive strategies and behavioral responses within the workplace [32]. Vibrant, proactive educators tend to mobilize teaching resources more effectively, exhibit greater task efficiency, and consistently attain instructional objectives [33]. Those who demonstrate high levels of self-regulation can persevere through challenges, maintaining focus and completing tasks with efficiency. Such findings highlight that robust work motivation not only amplifies teachers' engagement but also translates directly into marked improvements in job performance [17].

Within the SDT framework, work motivation is conceptualized as the antecedent of goal-directed behavior, and the ensuing motivational processes, most notably work engagement, exert a profound influence on work outcomes, including job performance [40]. In this framework, work motivation initiates a sequential process in which elevated motivation stimulates increased work engagement, which subsequently leads to enhanced job performance. This forms a positive developmental pathway from motivation to engagement and, ultimately, to performance. Specifically, teachers with high levels of work motivation are more likely to invest greater time and effort in their professional responsibilities, exhibit stronger work engagement, and achieve more effective teaching outcomes, thereby enhancing both their own performance and student learning experiences. Prior research supports the notion that work engagement plays a key mediating role in the relationship between work motivation and job performance. Work motivation enhances performance outcomes by fostering deeper engagement with work tasks [41]. This mediating effect not only explains how work motivation influences job performance but also highlights the significant importance of work engagement in this process. Drawing on the aforementioned research findings, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H4: Job burnout serves as a mediator between work motivation and job performance.

This hypothesis aims to clarify how work motivation can significantly improve job performance by enhancing teachers' work engagement. The research results will assist education managers in developing more effective incentive measures and training plans, improving overall teacher performance and teaching quality.

2-5- The Connection Between Work Motivation and Job Burnout

Job burnout is a professional psychological syndrome that arises due to stressors in interpersonal relationships at work. Among its components, emotional exhaustion is widely recognized as the central element. Burnout typically results from sustained high workloads, tight deadlines, and chronic time pressure [42]. When employees feel overwhelmed by their workload and struggle to complete tasks on time, they not only become physically exhausted but also experience emotional disappointment, ultimately leading to job burnout.

SDT divides work motivation into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation [23]. Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal drive that prompts individuals to engage in their work activities voluntarily, deriving satisfaction, enjoyment, and a sense of personal fulfillment from the tasks themselves [43]. This form of motivation has been shown to significantly enhance employees' self-confidence and self-esteem while simultaneously mitigating negative emotional states such as guilt, anxiety, and stress [44]. On the contrary, when external motivation (such as social recognition, rewards, or avoidance of punishment) is insufficient, employees may feel pain, disappointment, and even job burnout [45].

Research has demonstrated that the various aspects of teacher job burnout, namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, are closely associated with levels of work motivation. Teachers with high intrinsic motivation tend to approach their professional responsibilities with enthusiasm and dedication. They are generally more resilient in the face of occupational stress, thereby significantly lowering their risk of burnout [46]. Conversely, when teachers perceive their work as lacking in purpose or experience stagnation in career development, both their work motivation and sense of professional achievement tend to decline, increasing their susceptibility to burnout [47, 48]. Positive feedback and the reinforcement of successful teaching experiences have been shown to strengthen intrinsic motivation, mitigate emotional exhaustion, and reduce feelings of depersonalization [49]. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H5: Work motivation is statistically associated with job burnout.

This hypothesis aims to empirically verify the negative relationship between work motivation and job burnout. The findings are expected to support organisational managers in developing strategies to enhance employee motivation, mitigate burnout, and ultimately improve job satisfaction and overall performance.

2-6- The Connection Between Job Burnout and Job Performance

Studies have repeatedly shown a significant adverse correlation between job burnout and job performance [18, 19, 44, 50]. High-intensity work environments often lead to both physical and mental exhaustion, diminished concentration, and psychological challenges such as anxiety and depression, all of which impair employees' functional capacity and effectiveness [51]. Individuals experiencing burnout typically exhibit reduced motivation and underperformance, whereas those who remain committed and engaged tend to demonstrate higher energy levels, stronger involvement, and superior job outcomes [27]. As a core component of burnout, emotional exhaustion is strongly associated with higher error rates, poorer work quality, and increased sickness absence, all of which undermine job performance [42]. It also tends to give rise to depersonalization, in which staff grow indifferent towards their duties and colleagues, eroding teamwork and overall productivity [19]. At the same time, a waning sense of personal accomplishment saps motivation and resilience, leaving individuals dispirited and lacking confidence, a combination that further hinders performance [18, 47].

Teacher burnout poses a significant challenge in the education sector, where prolonged exposure to high-pressure environments frequently leads to profound physical and psychological exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion, a defining element of burnout, significantly diminishes educators' enthusiasm and engagement, thereby undermining their ability to manage classrooms effectively and deliver instruction with vigor [52]. The relentless demands of lesson planning, marking, and administrative duties exacerbate this strain, frequently precipitating disengagement and, in turn, eroding the overall standard of teaching. Depersonalization, another key dimension of burnout, may lead teachers to disregard students' individual needs, communicate with irritability, and display a lack of empathy—behaviors that can undermine student motivation and impair instructional effectiveness [49]. Moreover, a diminished sense of personal accomplishment reduces job satisfaction and weakens teachers' attitudes and performance [47, 53]. Skaalvik & Skaalvik's [54] findings support this perspective, demonstrating that burnout among university teachers has a detrimental impact on job performance, thereby negatively affecting educational outcomes. Hence, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H6: Job burnout is statistically associated with job performance.

This hypothesis aims to elucidate how job burnout inversely affects job performance, offering a theoretical foundation for educational managers to enhance job performance by mitigating teacher job burnout.

2-7- Mediating Role of Job Burnout

Job burnout has a profoundly detrimental effect on work motivation, as its core dimensions —emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment —directly impair employee engagement and performance capacity [44]. Emotional exhaustion leads to both physical and psychological fatigue, resulting in diminished motivation and a decline in interest in work. Depersonalization, characterized by detachment and a lack of empathy, undermines employees' sense of responsibility and connection to their roles, negatively affecting job satisfaction and interpersonal dynamics. A diminished sense of personal achievement likewise undermines intrinsic motivation, sapping enthusiasm

and initiative. In this way, burnout operates as a critical intermediary between work motivation and performance: its corrosive effects on motivation progressively impair an individual's capacity to deliver effectively [38]. Specifically, emotional exhaustion and diminished personal accomplishment curtail engagement, while depersonalization further weakens job satisfaction and organizational commitment, collectively leading to a marked decline in performance outcomes [18, 19].

In the education sector, teachers often endure prolonged, high-pressure workloads that lead to profound fatigue and emotional exhaustion. Such strain not only saps their instructional enthusiasm but also fosters depersonalization, evidenced by a diminished attunement to students' needs, and erodes their sense of professional achievement. In combination, these effects undermine teachers' self- confidence and overall pedagogical effectiveness [52]. Research indicates that teachers with higher work motivation are less susceptible to fatigue and tend to exhibit stronger job performance [38]. In contrast, increased occupational stress contributes to elevated fatigue, which is associated with a corresponding decline in performance. These patterns suggest that job burnout acts as a mechanism of mediating between work motivation and job performance, influencing outcomes by regulating motivational levels. Therefore, fostering greater work motivation while mitigating burnout is crucial for enhancing teachers' job performance [46, 55]. Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H7: Job burnout mediates the relationship between work motivation and job performance.

This hypothesis aims to uncover how job burnout acts as an intermediary in the connection between work motivation and job performance, offering a theoretical foundation for managers to boost performance by strengthening work motivation and alleviating burnout.

2-8- Proposed Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 illustrates how work motivation, job performance, work engagement, and job burnout are interconnected, emphasizing that work engagement and job burnout serve as dual intermediaries influencing both work motivation and job performance.

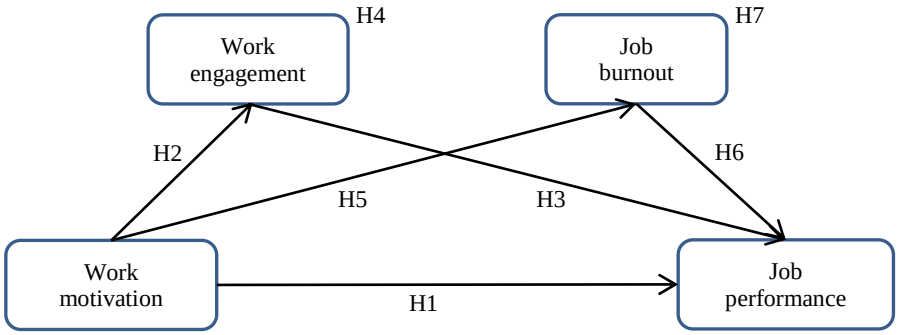

Figure 1. The Study's Conceptual framework

SDT is among the most prominent frameworks in contemporary motivation research. It delineates distinct forms of motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic types, thereby facilitating a more nuanced understanding of teachers' motivational states, ranging from autonomous, self-initiated engagement to passive, externally regulated compliance. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), teachers' work motivation encompasses both internal and external motivational drivers that shape their instructional behaviors. Within this framework, work engagement and job burnout are conceptualized as process-level indicators, capturing the behavioral and emotional responses of teachers to their professional context. Ultimately, job performance is regarded as the distal outcome of these motivational processes. The proposed conceptual model posits that teachers' work motivation influences job performance through both direct pathways and indirect pathways, with work engagement and job burnout functioning as dual mediators in this relationship.

The stronger the teacher's work motivation, the more proactive their actions are, and the better their performance tends to be. Work motivation is a significant predictor of performance outcomes, as positive motivational states promote heightened focus and sustained engagement. When teachers are highly motivated, they are more likely to invest cognitive and emotional resources into their tasks, thereby increasing their levels of work engagement—an established facilitator of improved performance [56]. Therefore, work engagement serves as a mediating mechanism through which elevated work motivation translates into superior job performance [40].

When teachers' work motivation wanes, they are prone to fatigue, which can lead to job burnout. A negative association has been consistently observed between work motivation and job burnout [47]. Job burnout can cause teachers to lose energy and interest, reduce their job performance, and negatively impact their overall job satisfaction

[54]. In this context, job burnout not only reflects a deterioration in occupational well-being but also mediates the relationship between reduced work motivation and decreased job performance. Furthermore, burnout can diminish work engagement, thereby exacerbating its detrimental effects on performance [57].

The aim of this study, grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), was to investigate how teachers' work motivation influences job performance through work engagement, as well as job burnout. By clarifying the relationships among these variables, the framework establishes a solid foundation for interpreting teacher behavior and guiding the design of targeted management interventions.

3- Research Methods

Quantitative empirical methods were employed to investigate the impact of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on teachers' performance in private higher education institutions in Jiangxi Province, China. The study focused on two aspects of performance: task performance, referring to the extent to which core instructional duties are fulfilled, and contextual performance, encompassing contributions beyond formal responsibilities. In the proposed model, work engagement, measured by vigor, dedication, and absorption, and job burnout, measured by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished feeling of personal accomplishment, serve as mediators linking each dimension of motivation to overall job performance.

This study is rooted in a positivist research paradigm (Figure 2), which privileges the objectivity and singular veracity of scientific understanding [58]. Through the acquisition and examination of extensive quantitative datasets, the aim was to subject the proposed hypotheses to empirical scrutiny and to furnish explanations underpinned by rigorous scientific evidence. The outcomes are intended to elucidate the complex interplay between teachers' motivation at work and their job performance, thereby offering evidence-based perspectives to guide pedagogical practice and to optimize managerial approaches within educational institutions.

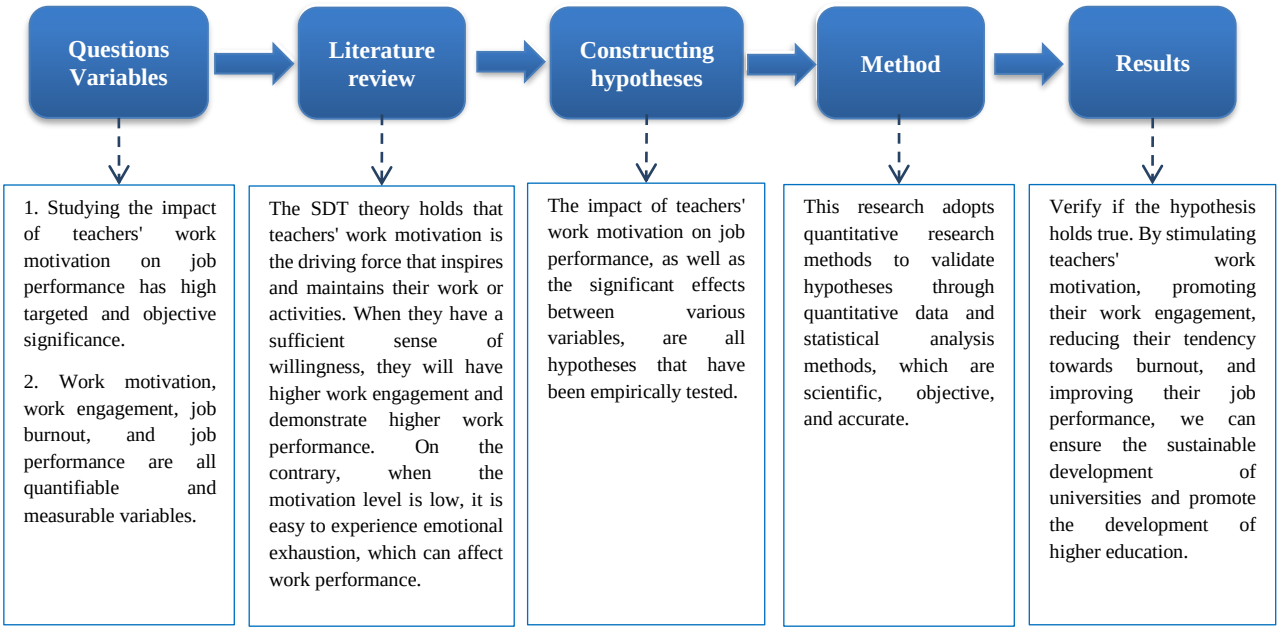

Figure 2. The Positivism Approach

3-1- Sample and Data Collection

An empirical investigation aims to focus on clearly delineated populations or phenomena, and a precise comprehension of these constructions is indispensable for robust research design and methodological rigor [59]. The clear delineation of the research population, combined with the application of suitable sampling techniques, ensures that the research questions remain pertinent and tailored to the distinctive characteristics and needs of the target cohort. The present survey encompassed 16,922 educators drawn from 24 independent higher-education establishments in Jiangxi Province. To determine an adequate sample size while preserving statistical validity within an acceptable margin of error, the Taro Yamane formula employed a widely recognized and pragmatic approach to sample size determination in the social sciences. The formula is expressed as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2} \quad (1)$$

where n = sample size; N = Population size; and e = margin of error, ranging from 0.01 to 0.1, typically taken as 0.05 [60].

By substituting the pertinent values into the equation, the sample size is calculated as follows:

$$n = \frac{16922}{1+16922(0.05)^2} \approx 390.8 \quad (2)$$

The application of Taro Yamane's formula yielded a requisite minimum sample size of approximately 391 participants to attain the stipulated degree of precision. Ultimately, 469 valid questionnaires were secured, thereby exceeding this threshold and enhancing both the reliability and validity of the research's outcomes. To mitigate sampling bias and ensure the sample faithfully reflected the heterogeneity of the target population, stratified sampling was employed. This approach provided a proportional representation of educators across all 24 independent higher-education establishments, thereby augmenting the generalizability and robustness of the findings to the wider population of interest [61]. Furthermore, a preliminary pilot study was conducted to assess the efficacy and reliability of the questionnaire, informing necessary amendments before the main data collection phase. Subsequent statistical evaluations evidenced a high degree of internal consistency and temporal stability, thereby bolstering the rigor of the study's findings.

3-2- Measures

A questionnaire survey represents efficient, cost-effective, and widely adopted means of data collection, facilitating statistical analysis and thereby ensuring the reliability and effectiveness of the research outcomes [62]. In the present investigation, a six-point Likert scale was employed to measure the study variables, whose design is grounded in the established theoretical framework and conceptual model. Higher scores indicate a stronger degree of agreement with each statement, with one corresponding to "strongly disagree" and 6 to "strongly agree" [63].

Four principal, multidimensional constructions were scrutinized: work motivation, work engagement, job burnout, and job performance. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), work motivation was bifurcated into intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions and measured [64] via a ten-item, adapted instrument based on Trépanier et al. [63], specifically calibrated to gauge both the strength and nature of the motivational forces affecting teachers' behavior. Job performance, comprising task-related and contextual elements, was assessed using a ten-indicator, modified scale derived from Millones-Liza & García-Salirrosas [65], which also consisted of ten indicators designed to quantify teachers' work outcomes. Work engagement was evaluated using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, which assesses three facets — invigoration, dedication, and absorption —across fourteen items, thereby illuminating the depth and quality of teachers' involvement. Finally, job burnout was measured with an amended version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory–General Survey [66], encompassing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment [67] via fourteen bespoke items reflecting the specific burnout manifestations encountered by staff in private higher-education settings.

4- Results and Discussion

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 25.0 and AMOS version 26.0, facilitating a systematic and comprehensive examination of the dataset. The investigation aimed to clarify the relationship linking work motivation and job performance for educators at private higher education institutions in Jiangxi Province, China. In addition, the analysis probed the mediational functions of work engagement and job burnout within this relationship.

4-1- Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The demographic analysis revealed significant characteristics of the survey participants, who primarily attended private higher education institutions in Jiangxi Province, China, and highlighted their key demographic features.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of teachers in private higher education institutions in Jiangxi Province. The sample comprised 63.33% female and 36.67% male respondents. The predominant age groups were those under 35 years (52.23%) and 36–50 years (40.94%). In terms of professional rank, the majority held junior (36.46%) and intermediate (32.20%) titles, while only 2.13% held senior positions. Most respondents specialized in humanities and social sciences (56.08%). Work experience was relatively evenly distributed, with a larger proportion having 3 years or less (35.18%) or 10 years or more (31.34%). Regarding academic qualifications, 52.88% held a master's degree, and only 2.56% possessed a doctoral degree. Moreover, 73.13% were employed as full-time, long-term contract teachers, suggesting a relatively stable faculty structure. These demographic profiles formed a solid basis for subsequent sample analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistical on Demographic Information

Item	Options	Quantity	Percent (%)	Cumulative percentage (%)
Gender	Male	172	36.67	36.67
	Female	297	63.33	100.00
Age	Under 35	245	52.23	52.23
	36-50 years old	192	40.94	93.17
	51-60 years old	27	5.76	98.93
	61 years and above	5	1.07	100.00
Position	Assistant teacher	171	36.46	36.46
	Senior lecturer	151	32.20	68.66
	Associate Professor	69	14.71	83.37
	Professor	10	2.13	85.50
	Other	68	14.50	100.00
Academic department	Humanities and Social Sciences	263	56.08	56.08
	Science and Technology	119	25.37	81.45
	Business and Economics	83	17.70	99.15
	Medicine and Health Sciences	4	0.85	100.00
Working years	0-3 years	165	35.18	35.18
	4-7 years	104	22.17	57.35
	8-10 years	53	11.31	68.66
	More than 10 years	147	31.34	100.00
Formal highest educational qualification	Bachelor's Degree	174	37.10	37.10
	Master's Degree	248	52.88	89.98
	Doctoral Degree	12	2.56	92.54
	Other	35	7.46	100.00
Type of employment	Full-time Permanent	343	73.13	73.13
	Full-time Temporary	82	17.48	90.61
	Part-time Permanent	36	7.68	98.29
	Part-time Temporary	8	1.71	100.00

Based on the collected data, descriptive statistical analysis was performed on the measurement items corresponding to each variable to provide an initial overview of participants' responses and to examine the distributional characteristics of each construct. Utilizing a 6-point Likert scale, this analysis enabled the classification of perception levels into distinct categories according to mean score ranges, as guided by the methodology employed in previous studies [63]. This approach offered a foundational understanding of the participants' attitudes toward work motivation, engagement, burnout, and performance.

According to the descriptive statistical analysis presented in Table 2, teachers in private higher education institutions in Jiangxi Province exhibit generally positive trends across all measured variables, with some notable individual differences. Both intrinsic motivation (M = 4.838) and extrinsic motivation (M = 4.842) indicate strong overall motivational levels. Work engagement is particularly high across its three dimensions—vigor (M = 4.862), dedication (M = 4.937), and absorption (M = 4.921)—suggesting that teachers are highly involved and committed to their work. In contrast, job burnout levels are relatively low, with emotional exhaustion (M = 2.377), reduced personal accomplishment (M = 2.220), and depersonalization (M = 2.629), the latter being slightly more pronounced and warranting closer attention. Job performance is rated favorably in both task performance (M = 4.843) and contextual performance (M = 4.873), although individual variability persists. Overall, the findings reflect a workforce characterized by high motivation, strong engagement, and low burnout, contributing to effective performance while also highlighting potential areas for improvement, particularly in addressing depersonalization and individual disparities.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Each Dimension, Mean Score, and The Corresponding Perception Level

Variables	Dimension	Mean	Level of Perception
Work Motivation (WM)	Intrinsic motivation (IM)	4.838	Agree
	Extrinsic motivation (EM)	4.842	Agree
Work Engagement (WE)	Invigoration (IG)	4.862	Agree
	Dedication (DC)	4.937	Agree
	Concentration (CN)	4.921	Agree
Job Burnout (JB)	Emotional exhaustion (EE)	2.377	Disagree
	Depersonalization (DP)	2.629	Disagree
	Reduced Personal Accomplishment (PA)	2.220	Disagree
Job Performance (JP)	Task Performance (TP)	4.843	Agree
	Contextual Performance (CP)	4.873	Agree

4-2- Reliability and Validity

Following the evaluation criteria formulated by Fornell & Larcker [68], Cronbach's alpha coefficient is used to assess the internal consistency of measurement tools. Additionally, factor loading, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are key indicators for evaluating whether a measurement tool accurately measures its intended design concept. Discriminate validity may be evaluated by deriving the square root of each construct's AVE and juxtaposing these values against the corresponding inter-construct correlation coefficients.

As evidenced by the reliability and convergent validity analyses summarized in Table 3, the instruments employed in this investigation exhibit robust psychometric characteristics. Each variable achieved a Cronbach's α of 0.917 or higher, indicating excellent internal consistency and reliability. Such findings indicate that the measurement instrument is stable and faithfully captures the latent dimensions of every construct, thereby underpinning the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data obtained.

Table 3. Results of Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis

Variable	Dimension	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor loading	CR	AVE
Work Motivation	Intrinsic motivation	IM1	0.970	0.939	0.970	0.868
		IM2		0.924		
		IM3		0.938		
		IM4		0.931		
		IM5		0.925		
	Extrinsic motivation	EM1	0.917	0.935	0.973	0.878
		EM2		0.948		
		EM3		0.937		
		EM4		0.952		
		EM5		0.912		
Work Engagement	Invigoration	IG1	0.943	0.905	0.944	0.770
		IG2		0.917		
		IG3		0.792		
		IG4		0.843		
		IG5		0.924		
	Dedication	DC1	0.957	0.947	0.957	0.849
		DC2		0.943		
		DC3		0.924		
		DC4		0.870		
	Concentration	CN1	0.938	0.880	0.942	0.764
		CN2		0.898		
		CN3		0.929		
		CN4		0.911		
		CN5		0.740		

Job Burnout	Emotional exhaustion	EE1	0.962	0.938	0.962	0.863
		EE2		0.940		
		EE3		0.926		
		EE4		0.912		
	Depersonalization	DP1	0.988	0.971	0.988	0.943
		DP2		0.976		
		DP3		0.969		
		DP4		0.967		
		DP5		0.972		
	Reduced personal Accomplishment	PA1	0.956	0.907	0.956	0.813
		PA2		0.940		
		PA3		0.937		
		PA4		0.869		
		PA5		0.851		
Job Performance	Task Performance	TP1	0.975	0.919	0.975	0.888
		TP2		0.946		
		TP3		0.945		
		TP4		0.950		
		TP5		0.952		
	Contextual Performance	CP1	0.978	0.957	0.978	0.900
		CP2		0.926		
		CP3		0.950		
		CP4		0.956		
		CP5		0.955		

Regarding convergent validity, each measurement item demonstrated factor loadings greater than 0.740, substantially above the conventional threshold of 0.50, thereby indicating strong associations with their respective latent constructs. Moreover, the CR coefficients for all dimensions exceeded 0.942, and the AVE values surpassed 0.764. These indices meet or exceed established criteria for convergent validity, confirming that the instrument accurately operationalizes the theoretical constructs of interest. Collectively, these findings attest to the consistency and dependability with which the measurement items reflect their underlying latent variables, thus furnishing compelling support for the scale's convergent validity.

As illustrated in Table 4, the square root of each construct's AVE exceeds its correlation coefficients with all other constructs, thereby confirming discriminant validity. This finding indicates that the shared variance between different constructs was lower than the variance extracted by each individual construct, demonstrating that the scale effectively differentiated among the measured variables. Therefore, the results confirm that the scale used in this study possessed strong discriminant validity.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Analysis

	IM	EM	IG	DC	CN	EE	DP	PA	TP	CP
IM	**0.931**									
EM	0.629	**0.937**								
IG	0.351	0.328	**0.878**							
DC	0.345	0.344	0.575	**0.921**						
CN	0.32	0.318	0.595	0.557	**0.874**					
EE	-0.190	-0.105	-0.167	-0.110	-0.190	**0.929**				
DP	-0.068	-0.054	-0.184	-0.098	-0.151	0.624	**0.971**			
PA	-0.247	-0.221	-0.177	-0.259	-0.160	0.494	0.405	**0.902**		
TP	0.254	0.239	0.183	0.251	0.247	-0.235	-0.057	-0.323	**0.942**	
CP	0.237	0.255	0.204	0.233	0.278	-0.193	-0.092	-0.241	0.575	**0.949**

Note: The value on the diagonal is the square root of AVE

4-3- Common Method Bias

It was identified that common method bias (CMV) may cause systematic errors in variable relationships in structural equation models. As such, Harman's Single Factor Test was used for detection [69]. Table 5 shows that the initial eigenvalues reflect the contribution of each principal component to the total variance. The eigenvalue of the first principal component was 14.479, accounting for 30.164% of the total variance, indicating that it contributes the most to the overall

data structure. A total of 10 potential factors were identified with eigenvalues greater than 1, and their cumulative variance contribution reached 89.203%, demonstrating the strong explanatory power of the principal components. After applying factor rotation, the variance contributions of each component became more evenly distributed, further supporting the robustness of the factor structure. These findings indicate that no significant common method bias was detected in the research.

Table 5. Harman's single-factor common method bias test

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	14.479	30.164	30.164	14.479	30.164	30.164	5.275	10.99	10.99
2	7.016	14.616	44.780	7.016	14.616	44.780	4.653	9.694	20.684
3	5.567	11.599	56.378	5.567	11.599	56.378	4.568	9.516	30.199
4	4.412	9.191	65.570	4.412	9.191	65.570	4.562	9.505	39.704
5	2.781	5.793	71.363	2.781	5.793	71.363	4.469	9.310	49.014
6	2.006	4.180	75.543	2.006	4.180	75.543	4.372	9.109	58.123
7	1.842	3.837	79.380	1.842	3.837	79.380	4.134	8.612	66.735
8	1.758	3.663	83.043	1.758	3.663	83.043	4.098	8.537	75.272
9	1.599	3.332	86.375	1.599	3.332	86.375	3.435	7.156	82.428
10	1.357	2.828	89.203	1.357	2.828	89.203	3.252	6.775	89.203
11	0.437	0.910	90.113						
12	0.335	0.697	90.810						
13	0.260	0.542	91.352						
14	0.249	0.519	91.870						
15	0.238	0.496	92.367						
16	0.213	0.443	92.810						
17	0.211	0.440	93.250						
18	0.188	0.391	93.641						
19	0.179	0.373	94.014						
20	0.177	0.368	94.382						
21	0.165	0.344	94.726						
22	0.160	0.334	95.060						
23	0.158	0.330	95.390						
24	0.146	0.304	95.694						
25	0.141	0.294	95.988						
26	0.140	0.292	96.281						
27	0.134	0.280	96.561						
28	0.124	0.259	96.820						
29	0.117	0.245	97.064						
30	0.116	0.242	97.306						
31	0.112	0.233	97.539						
32	0.100	0.209	97.748						
33	0.098	0.205	97.952						
34	0.094	0.195	98.147						
35	0.088	0.183	98.330						
36	0.085	0.177	98.508						
37	0.080	0.167	98.674						
38	0.078	0.162	98.836						
39	0.071	0.149	98.985						
40	0.070	0.147	99.132						
41	0.070	0.145	99.276						
42	0.063	0.130	99.407						
43	0.058	0.120	99.527						
44	0.055	0.115	99.642						
45	0.050	0.103	99.745						
46	0.044	0.091	99.836						
47	0.040	0.084	99.920						
48	0.038	0.080	100						

4-4- Hypotheses Test

4-4-1- Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was used to assess the relationship between variables. As shown in Table 6, there were varying degrees of linear correlation between the variables, and all correlation coefficients were significant at the 0.01 level. The findings show a strong linear relationship between the variables.

Table 6. Correlation Analysis

	Mean	SD	WM	WE	JB	JP
WM	4.84	0.95	1			
WE	4.90	0.71	0.417**	1		
JB	2.41	1.02	-0.185**	-0.266**	1	
JP	4.86	0.97	0.304**	0.294**	-0.239**	1

Notes：*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

SEM was conducted using AMOS software to assess the model's overall fit and to analyze the connections among the key variables based on the proposed theoretical framework. The model evaluation was conducted by analyzing both goodness-of-fit indices and path coefficients, which collectively evaluate the rationality and explanatory power of structural relationships. The constructed SEM model reflects the hypothesized pathways linking work motivation to job performance, mediated by work engagement and job burnout, as illustrated in the following structure (Figure 3):

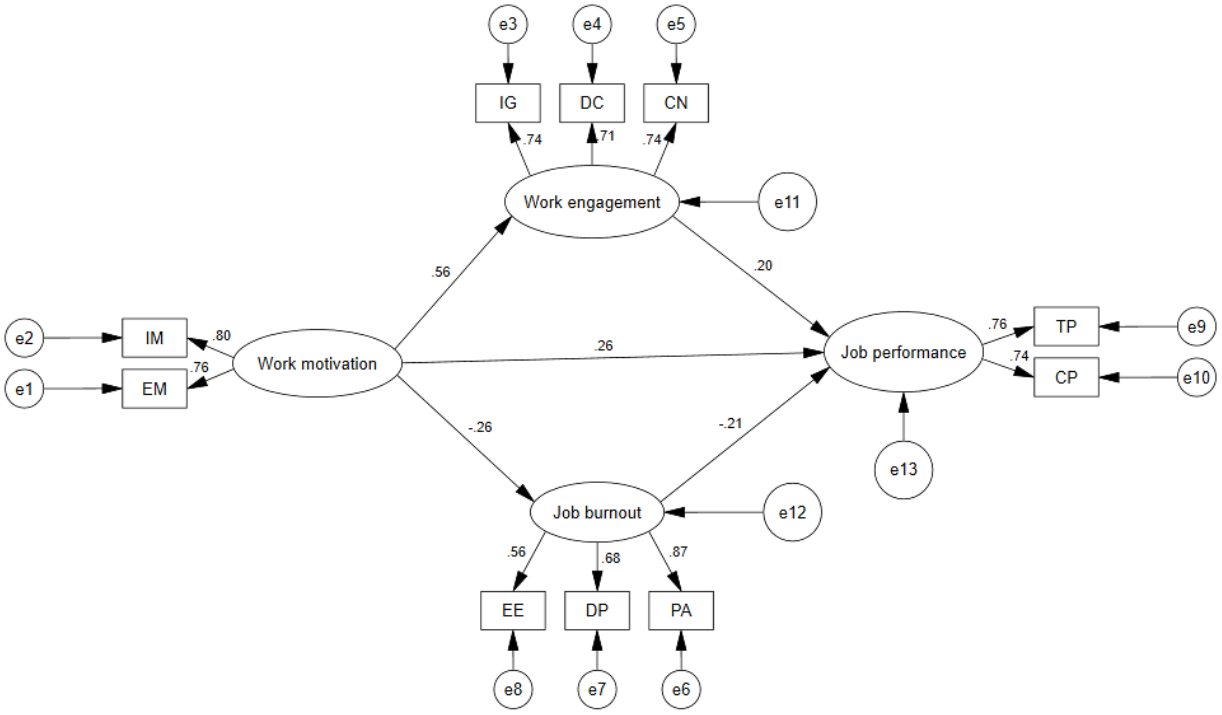

Figure 3. The Structural Equation Modelling

4-4-2- Model Fitting Experiment

Model fitting tests were conducted to evaluate the consistency between the theoretical framework and the empirical data, thereby confirming the rationality and effectiveness of the proposed structural model. As presented in Table 7, all model fit indices met or exceeded commonly accepted thresholds. The CMIN/DF value was 3.721, well below the maximum acceptable value of 5, indicating a satisfactory level of model parsimony. Both the RMR and the RMSEA were 0.076, falling under the 0.08 cutoff, suggesting a good approximation of model fit. Additionally, the goodness-of-fit indices—including GFI (0.953), AGFI (0.915), NFI (0.921), IFI (0.941), TLI (0.911), and CFI (0.940)—all exceeded their respective recommended benchmarks, demonstrating robust model adequacy. Taken together, these results confirm that the structural equation model matches the observed data closely and accurately represents the hypothesized relationships among the variables, thereby supporting the theoretical model's scientific validity and practical applicability.

Table 7. Goodness-of-Fit for the Structural Equation Modelling

Fitness Index	Critical Value	Test Data of First order	Fitness Judgement
CMIN/DF	<5	3.721	Yes
RMR	<0.08	0.076	Yes
GFI	>0.8	0.953	Yes
AGFI	>0.8	0.915	Yes
NFI	>0.9	0.921	Yes
IFI	>0.9	0.941	Yes
TLI	>0.9	0.911	Yes
CFI	>0.9	0.940	Yes
RMSEA	<0.08	0.076	Yes

4-4-3- Path Analysis

Path analysis was employed using AMOS software to calculate the path coefficients (estimates), which were employed to assess the intensity and orientation of the causal relationships among independent and dependent variables. This method allowed for a detailed examination of the immediate and mediated effects within the structural equation model, providing empirical evidence for the hypothesized relationships in the theoretical framework.

According to the results analysis in Table 8, the hypotheses proposed in this study are supported by empirical data, revealing the multifaceted relationship among work motivation, work engagement, job burnout, and job performance.

Table 8. Latent Variable Path Coefficient

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	SE	t	P	Result
H1	WM→JP	0.263	0.084	3.126	0.002	Yes
H2	WM→WE	0.456	0.054	8.376	***	Yes
H3	WE→JP	0.245	0.097	2.517	0.012	Yes
H5	WM→JB	-0.335	0.076	-4.395	***	Yes
H6	JB→JP	-0.164	0.049	-3.373	***	Yes

Note: *p <0.05. **p <0.01. ***p < 0.001

The first hypothesis is supported, demonstrating that work motivation has a significant positive impact on job performance (β = 0.263, p = 0.002). This suggests that higher levels of work motivation can enhance employees' enthusiasm and creativity, leading to improved task completion and performance outcomes, findings consistent with prior research [24, 28].

The second hypothesis confirms that work motivation has a positive influence on work engagement ($\beta = 0.456$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that motivated employees are more likely to exhibit high levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work. This aligns with previous studies suggesting that motivation strengthens employees' identification with and the value they place on their work [17, 31]. This result further confirms the key driving role of work motivation in employee work behavior.

The third hypothesis posits that work engagement has a significant impact on job performance ($\beta = 0.245$, $p = 0.012$), supporting the notion that engaged employees are more efficient, focused, and productive [33, 34]. Work engagement not only reflects employees' enthusiasm and focus on their work but may also enhance job performance by improving work efficiency and quality. Based on previous findings (hypotheses H1 and H2), a more comprehensive causal relationship chain was established: work engagement serves as a key mediating variable between work motivation and job performance, further revealing the mediated impact mechanism of work motivation on job performance through work engagement.

The fourth hypothesis confirms that work motivation (WM) has a marked inverse impact on job burnout (JB) ($\beta = -0.335$, $p < 0.001$), Meaning that increased work motivation corresponds to decreased levels of job burnout. Job burnout is a negative psychological state resulting from prolonged work pressure and psychological fatigue. Improving work motivation may reduce the occurrence of job burnout by enhancing employees' positive emotions and psychological resilience [46, 47]. This result underscores the pivotal role of work motivation in mitigating job burnout.

The fifth hypothesis confirms that job burnout (JB) has a significant inverse impact on job performance (JP) ($\beta = -0.164$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that the higher the level of job burnout, the lower the job performance. Job burnout may lead to a decrease in employee work efficiency and a decline in work quality, triggering a negative attitude towards work, which in turn negatively impacts job performance [19, 51]. This result further highlights the detrimental impact of job burnout on job performance.

In summary, this study reveals a complex and interconnected relationship among work motivation, engagement, burnout, and performance. Work motivation not only exerts an immediate influence on job performance but also affects it indirectly via the intermediary effects of work engagement and job burnout. These results offer valuable theoretical insights and practical implications, suggesting that organizations aiming to enhance job performance should prioritize strategies that boost work motivation, as this can simultaneously foster engagement, reduce burnout, and ultimately lead to improved employee outcomes.

4-4-4- Intermediary Effect Test

The parameter estimation values provided by AMOS software were utilised to more accurately estimate the confidence intervals of each coefficient and analyse the mediating effects of work engagement and job burnout on the connection among work motivation and job performance through mediation tests. As shown in Table 9, the intermediating effect of WM on JP was explored, revealing the complex impact mechanism of WM on JP through WE and JB.

Table 9. Analysis of Mediating Effects

Path	Effect type	Effect	SE	95% Confidence interval		p
				LLCI	ULCI	
WM→JP	Total	0.416	0.066	0.282	0.541	0.001
WM→JP	Direct	0.241	0.091	0.060	0.419	0.007
WM→WE→JP	Indirect	0.122	0.051	0.031	0.224	0.013
WM→JB→JP	Indirect	0.053	0.023	0.019	0.114	0.000

The overall impact of work motivation on job performance was 0.416, with a standard error of 0.066 and a 95% confidence interval of [0.282, 0.541]. The confidence interval did not include 0, and the P-value was 0.001, indicating that work motivation had a statistically significant positive impact on job performance. This overall effect comprehensively reflects the effect of work motivation on job performance through various pathways, including direct and indirect effects.

The straightforward effect of work motivation on job performance was 0.241, with a standard error of 0.091 and a 95% confidence interval of [0.060, 0.419]. The confidence range did not include 0, and the P-value was 0.007. This finding suggests that work motivation has a direct, positive effect on job performance; that is, enhancing work motivation can lead to improved job performance. This result highlights the crucial role of work motivation in improving job performance; even without considering other mediating variables, work motivation itself still has a significant impact on job performance.

The analysis revealed that the indirect effect of work motivation on job performance, mediated by work engagement, was 0.122, with a standard error of 0.051 and a 95% confidence interval of [0.031, 0.224]. Since the confidence interval does not include zero and the p-value is 0.013, this mediating effect is statistically significant. These results suggest that work engagement acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between work motivation and job performance. Specifically, greater levels of work motivation led to increased work engagement, which subsequently enhances job performance [32, 40]. The significance of this indirect pathway underscores that work engagement is not only a key mechanism through which motivation influences performance but also represents a strategic point of intervention for organizations. By actively cultivating employee engagement, organizations can more effectively convert motivational resources into measurable improvements in job performance.

The mediated effect of work motivation on job performance through job burnout was 0.053, with a standard error of 0.023 and a 95% confidence interval of [0.019, 0.114]. The confidence range did not include 0, and the P-value was 0.000. This suggests that job burnout mediates the relationship between work motivation and job performance. Specifically, improving work motivation can reduce employees' levels of job burnout, thereby having a positive effect on job performance [38, 46]. This mediating effect was statistically significant, indicating that the negative impact of job burnout on job performance could be effectively alleviated under the influence of work motivation. As a result, by reducing burnout, organizations can further enhance their employees' job performance.

5- Discussion and Conclusion

5-1- Discussion

This research employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore the fundamental pathways by which work motivation influences job performance, with a particular emphasis on the intermediate roles of work engagement and job burnout. The results demonstrate that work motivation exerts not only a substantial immediate positive influence on job performance but also mediated effects via two distinct mediating pathways. Work engagement serves as a positive

mediator, enhancing the impact of motivation on performance by promoting greater employee involvement and dedication. In contrast, job burnout functions as a negative mediator, weakening the positive impact of motivation by contributing to emotional exhaustion and reduced work effectiveness. All proposed hypotheses were empirically supported (see Table 10), underscoring the multifaceted nature of the connection between work motivation and job performance.

Table 10. Summary of the Analysis Results

Hypotheses	Path	Relationship type	Result
H1	WM→JP	Direct influence	Support
H2	WM→WE	Direct influence	Support
H3	WE→JP	Direct influence	Support
H4	WM→WE→JP	Mediating effect	Support
H5	WM→JB	Direct influence	Support
H6	JB→JP	Direct influence	Support
H7	WM→JB→JP	Mediating effect	Support

In summary, the complex relationships among teachers' work-motivation, work engagement, job burnout, and job performance were explored. The results show that work motivation had a significant direct impact on job performance, thereby validating H1. This finding is consistent with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and with the findings of existing studies [70]. The findings confirm that higher levels of work motivation among teachers are associated with improved job performance. Additionally, the analysis supports H2, indicating that work motivation significantly enhances teachers' work engagement, a conclusion that aligns with previous research [2]. Increased work motivation stimulates teachers' intrinsic drive, leading to greater involvement and dedication in their professional roles. The study also validates H3, demonstrating that higher levels of work engagement are associated with improved job performance. This result is consistent with earlier findings [37], which demonstrate that work engagement positively influences performance by boosting efficiency, focus, and task commitment. Furthermore, H4 is supported, establishing that work engagement functions as a key mediating variable in the relationship between work motivation and job performance. This mediating role confirms that enhanced motivation contributes to improved performance primarily through increased engagement, reinforcing previous evidence [71] that work motivation promotes job performance by fostering deeper involvement in work activities.

Additionally, it was found that teachers with higher work motivation had lower levels of burnout, thereby validating Hypothesis 5. Consistent with previous findings by Antoniou et al. [72], it was suggested that work motivation was negatively correlated with job burnout. The higher the level of burnout of teachers, the lower their job performance, thereby validating H6. This finding is consistent with Fauzan et al. [49], which demonstrate the detrimental impact of job burnout on employee performance. Meanwhile, the analysis supports H7, showing that work motivation not only has a direct positive effect on job performance but also indirectly enhances performance by reducing job burnout. This aligns with earlier studies [46], indicating that increased motivation can mitigate the negative psychological and emotional effects of burnout. These findings collectively suggest that job burnout serves as a mediating variable in the relationship between work motivation and job performance. Work motivation improves performance, in part by alleviating burnout.

Therefore, work motivation not only exerts a direct influence on teachers' job performance but also indirectly impacts performance through the mediating roles of work engagement and job burnout. This study highlights that work motivation serves as a central driving force behind teachers' occupational behaviors, including levels of engagement and burnout, as well as their performance outcomes. Within the educational context, teachers' motivation plays a decisive role in shaping both how they approach their responsibilities and how effectively they perform. These findings have considerable implications for educational administrators. By strategically bolstering teachers' work motivation, institutions can not only directly enhance job performance but also secure additional gains through the promotion of greater work engagement and the alleviation of burnout.

5-2- Theoretical and Practical Significance

Rooted in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and its subsidiary micro-theories, this investigation provides a comprehensive analysis of the processes by which teachers' work motivation influences their job performance. By incorporating work engagement and job burnout as intervening variables, the study refines the application of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to the context of private higher education, thereby enhancing its explanatory power. Such theoretical synthesis deepens our understanding of the motivational dynamics underpinning teacher performance. It makes a substantive contribution to the evolution of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), affirming its relevance to both scholarly inquiry and practical pedagogy.

Firstly, the results demonstrated that teachers' work motivation exerts a statistically substantial, positive influence on job performance, corroborating the central tenet of SDT: the satisfaction of fundamental psychological requirements for self-determination, proficiency, and connection enhances internal motivation, engenders constructive behaviors, and elevates professional outcomes [23]. These findings align with the existing literature, which documents that enhancements in work motivation yield commensurate improvements in teachers' performance [2, 28].

Secondly, the study elucidated the complex interplay among work motivation, engagement, burnout, and performance, thereby extending both Basic Psychological Needs Theory and Cognitive Evaluation Theory within an educational framework. According to the former, heightened motivation imbues educators with a greater sense of autonomy and efficacy, prompting a deeper investment in lesson preparation, collaborative discourse, and student interaction—behaviors that, in turn, bolster teaching effectiveness [37]. Cognitive Evaluation Theory further posits that perceived control and confidence amplify intrinsic motivation and work engagement, thus fostering job satisfaction and performance [16]. Conversely, when personal resources are expended without adequate recognition, emotional exhaustion ensues, diminishing enthusiasm and impairing performance [52, 54]. This negative association between burnout and job efficacy underscores the deleterious effects of chronic occupational stress [42, 67, 73].

Finally, the intermediate functions of work engagement and job burnout were empirically substantiated, lending robust support to Organic Integration Theory in the educational sector. This perspective emphasizes the harmonization of organizational elements to secure efficiency and sustainable development, and our findings clarify how engagement and burnout jointly modulate the pathway from motivation to performance. Specifically, teachers' work motivation enhances job performance primarily by increasing work engagement, whereas job burnout serves as a negative mediating factor by diminishing work motivation and directly impairing job performance. This finding deepens the understanding of the mechanisms underlying teachers' work behavior and offers a critical foundation for the development of a more comprehensive and integrative theoretical framework [74, 75].

The findings of this research have significant practical guidance significance for private higher education institutions, and their practical application value is mainly manifested in the following aspects.

This study provides valuable insights for educational administrators seeking to improve teacher management practices. By elucidating the mechanisms through which work motivation affects job performance, the findings support the development of more targeted and effective incentive strategies that align with teachers' fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Specifically, promoting autonomy can stimulate greater engagement and innovation in the teaching process. Facilitating access to professional development opportunities and instructional resources can reinforce teachers' sense of competence and job satisfaction. Fostering a collaborative and supportive school culture can strengthen motivation and encourage a collective commitment to educational goals. These empirically grounded recommendations provide a robust foundation for managerial decision-making and foster the development of a more motivated, cohesive, and productive educational environment.

By delineating the intermediate influences of work engagement and job burnout in the nexus between work motivation and job performance, this investigation offers practical guidance for teachers' professional development. Practitioners can, through regular self-monitoring of engagement indicators such as pedagogical enthusiasm, sustained concentration, and congruence with their vocational aspirations, discern the drivers of their motivation and efficacy. Concurrently, a reflective appraisal of fatigue, stress, or emotional depletion enables the early detection of burnout, thereby allowing for the prompt implementation of remedial strategies. Such heightened self-awareness supports the reinforcement of engagement, the attenuation of burnout, and, consequently, the enhancement of job performance, professional fulfillment, and overall occupational satisfaction.

Moreover, this study provides a valuable reference for education policymakers, elucidating the complex interplay among teachers' motivation, engagement, burnout, and performance. It affords a nuanced understanding of educators' working conditions, including their emotional well-being, sense of professional achievement, and principal stressors, which are indispensable for designing evidence-informed, targeted interventions. In light of these insights, policymakers are urged to bolster support for teachers through strategic reforms, such as expanding access to high-quality training programs, implementing transparent and equitable promotion pathways, and providing comprehensive psychological support services. Such measures are pivotal to enhancing teachers' job satisfaction and well-being, thereby driving improved performance and underpinning the sustainable advancement of the education sector.

5-3- Research Limitations and Future Directions

Although this investigation has yielded substantive insights into the interrelations among teachers' work motivation, work engagement, job burnout, and job performance, several constraints merit acknowledgment. These limitations likewise chart promising pathways for future scholarship.

Data were collected from 469 educators at 24 independent higher education institutions in Jiangxi Province, China. While informative, the study's confined geographic and institutional purview may curtail the generalizability of its conclusions. The regional and organizational specificity of the sample restricts the extent to which these findings can be

extended to other educational contexts. To bolster external validity and enhance representativeness, subsequent research should strive to increase the sample size and encompass a broader range of institutions, including public universities and establishments from diverse regions. Furthermore, cross-cultural comparative studies could investigate distinctions in teachers' motivational profiles and performance across diverse cultural and pedagogical contexts. Such initiatives would not only validate the present results but also amplify their applicability on a global scale.

A cross-sectional study design was employed, providing a precise snapshot of the relationships among variables at a single point in time; however, by its nature, it precludes any investigation of evolving trajectories or enduring longitudinal effects. Moreover, the study did not investigate whether the strength of the mediating pathways varied across demographic groups, such as age, gender, or years of teaching experience, thereby constraining the present understanding of cohort-specific differences. Future research should consider adopting a longitudinal design to track changes in teachers' motivation, engagement, burnout, and performance over time. This approach would facilitate the examination of developmental trends, the elucidation of causal pathways, and a more thorough grasp of the temporal dynamics between these variables. Additionally, employing multi-group structural equation modeling or similar techniques would enable researchers to explore group-specific mediation pathways. Such analyses could uncover potential differences in motivational mechanisms across teacher subpopulations, thereby providing theoretical and empirical support for the development of personalized and differentiated teacher management strategies.

Quantitative research methods, including questionnaire surveys and structural equation modeling analysis, were employed to reveal the relationship between variables effectively. However, there are limitations in understanding the complex interaction mechanism between teachers' work motivation, work engagement, burnout, and job performance. Although a scale with high reliability and validity was adopted, it remains challenging to fully capture the nuanced behaviors and psychological experiences of teachers through self-reported measures alone. The reliance on subjective responses introduces the potential for bias, such as social desirability or response style effects. To enhance the objectivity and depth of future research, a mixed-methods approach is recommended. Combining quantitative questionnaires with qualitative interviews would allow researchers to gather richer contextual information and gain a deeper understanding of teachers lived experiences. Such integration of methods would not only supplement the quantitative data but also afford a more comprehensive and nuanced characterization of the factors shaping teachers' motivation, engagement, burnout, and performance.

Although this study confirms the mediating roles of work engagement and job burnout in the relationship between teachers' work motivation and job performance, several important aspects remain underexplored. Private higher education institutions in Jiangxi Province—whose governance structures and performance appraisal systems often differ markedly from those of public institutions- formed the sole focus of the present study. Consequently, its findings may not be fully representative of the broader higher education landscape. Furthermore, critical questions remain unanswered: the fundamental origins and determinants of teachers' motivation, as well as the longitudinal mechanisms underlying occupational burnout, have yet to be thoroughly examined. Future investigations should, therefore, pursue two complementary avenues. First, they should address these theoretical lacunae to refine and extend existing frameworks. Second, they should broaden their empirical scope by incorporating contextual variables, such as institutional policies, organizational culture, and governance models, as moderating factors. By doing so, researchers may uncover how distinct institutional milieus shape motivational processes and performance outcomes, thereby yielding deeper theoretical insights and informing more targeted, context-sensitive strategies to enhance teacher effectiveness across diverse educational settings.

6- Declarations

6-1- Author Contributions

Conceptualization, J.Z. and S.P.; methodology, J.Z. and S.P.; software, J.Z.; validation, J.Z. and S.P.; formal analysis, J.Z. and S.P.; investigation, J.Z. and S.P.; resources, J.Z.; data curation, J.Z.; writing—original draft preparation, J.Z. and S.P.; writing—review and editing, J.Z., S.Z., and S.P.; visualization, J.Z.; supervision, S.P.; project administration, S.P.; funding acquisition, J.Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

6-2- Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

6-3- Funding and Acknowledgement

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6-4- Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

6-5- Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

6-6- Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been completely observed by the authors.

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Appendix I: Questionnaire

Dear Sir/Madam:

Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to participate in the questionnaire survey on the influence of teachers' work motivation on job performance - a study of private higher education institutions in Jiangxi province China. I plan to collect relevant data through a questionnaire survey. Your participation is crucial to this research, and I sincerely invite you to be a participant in this survey. The valuable information you provide will help me gain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the relevant aspects of this field. I kindly request you answer the questionnaire objectively and truthfully. The information collected in this questionnaire is for academic research purposes only and will never be disclosed to the public. The survey is anonymous, and your personal information will be strictly confidential. Your support is crucial to this research, and participation is voluntary. You may choose to withdraw at any time without facing any negative consequences.

I express my gratitude for the contribution you have made and thank you for your participation.

Best regards,

Jing Zeng, Doctor of Philosophy in Management

Walailak University, Thailand

Demographic Information:

Please fill out the following demographic information. Your responses will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

1. Gender:

a) Male b) Female

2. Age___ years old.

3. Position/Title:

a) Assistant teacher b) Senior lecturer c) Associate Professor d) Professor e) Other (please specify): _____

4. Formal Highest Educational Qualification:

a) Bachelor's Degree b) Master's Degree c) Doctoral Degree e) Other (please specify): _____

5. Academic Department:

a) Humanities and Social Sciences b) Science and Technology c) Business and Economics d) Medicine and Health Sciences

6. _____Years of Service in Current Institution.

7. Type of Employment:

a) Full-time Permanent b) Full-time Temporary c) Part-time Permanent d) Part-time Temporary

For each of the statements below, please respond to the items using the scale below:

1 - Strongly Disagree

2 - Disagree

3 - Slightly Disagree

4 - Slightly Agree

5 - Agree

6 - Strongly Agree

	6 - Strongly Agree	5 - Agree	4 - Slightly Agree	3 - Slightly Disagree	2 - Disagree	1 - Strongly Disagree
X1: Work Motivation (WM)						
X1.1: Intrinsic motivation (IM)						
IM1. My work is very interesting.	6	5	4	3	2	1
IM2. What I do in my work is exciting.	6	5	4	3	2	1
IM3. I have fun doing my job.	6	5	4	3	2	1
IM4. Putting efforts in this job aligns with my personal values.	6	5	4	3	2	1
IM5. When I can set goals for myself, I feel happier.	6	5	4	3	2	1
X1.2: Extrinsic motivation (EM)						
EM1. I am very clear about my career advancement goals.	6	5	4	3	2	1
EM2. I have gained approval from others for my work.	6	5	4	3	2	1
EM3. Others will respect me more for my job.	6	5	4	3	2	1
EM4. Others' evaluations of my work are motivating to me.	6	5	4	3	2	1
EM5. If I don't put in enough effort, I may lose my job.	6	5	4	3	2	1
M1: Work Engagement (WE)						
M1.1: Invigoration (IG)	6	5	4	3	2	1
IG1. At my work, I feel strong and vigorous.	6	5	4	3	2	1
IG2. With the start of a new day, I feel eager to work.	6	5	4	3	2	1
IG3. I can work for long periods without feeling tired.	6	5	4	3	2	1
IG4. Even if I feel mentally tired at work, I can recover quickly.	6	5	4	3	2	1
IG5. Even when the work doesn't go well, I always keep going.	6	5	4	3	2	1
M1.2: Dedication (DC)						
DC1. I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.	6	5	4	3	2	1
DC2. I am enthusiastic about my job.	6	5	4	3	2	1
DC3. Work has inspired me.	6	5	4	3	2	1
DC4. I'm proud of the work that I do.	6	5	4	3	2	1
M1.3: Concentration (CN)						
CN1. I always feel that time flies by quickly when I'm working.	6	5	4	3	2	1
CN2. When I am working, I forget everything else around me.	6	5	4	3	2	1
CN3. Even though I'm busy at work, I still feel happy.	6	5	4	3	2	1
CN4. I am immersed in my work.	6	5	4	3	2	1
CN5. It is difficult to detach myself from my job.	6	5	4	3	2	1

M2: Job Burnout (JB)						
M2.1: Emotional exhaustion (EE)						
EE1. Work often makes me feel burnt out.	6	5	4	3	2	1
EE2. Work often makes me feel emotionally exhausted.	6	5	4	3	2	1
EE3. I don't have enough opportunities to rest, I am drained.	6	5	4	3	2	1
EE4. I don't have enough energy for my family and friends during leisure time.	6	5	4	3	2	1
M2.2: Depersonalization (DP)						
DP1. I approach my work without a serious and diligent attitude.	6	5	4	3	2	1
DP2. I am indifferent to the inner feelings of those I work with and I serve for.	6	5	4	3	2	1
DP3. Those I work with, and I serve for often complain about me.	6	5	4	3	2	1
DP4. I often refuse the requests of those I work with and I serve for.	6	5	4	3	2	1
DP5. I frequently reprimand those I work with and I serve for.	6	5	4	3	2	1
M2.3: Reduced personal Accomplishment (PA)						
PA1. I can effectively resolve the problems of those I work with and I serve for.	6	5	4	3	2	1
PA2. I can effectively influence others through my work.	6	5	4	3	2	1
PA3. I can create a relaxed and enjoyable work atmosphere.	6	5	4	3	2	1
PA4. I feel very excited after solving the issues of those I work with and I serve for.	6	5	4	3	2	1
PA5. I have completed many meaningful work tasks.	6	5	4	3	2	1
Y1: Job Performance (JP)						
Y1.1: Task Performance (TP)						
TP1. I am capable of handling the tasks assigned to me.	6	5	4	3	2	1
TP2. I can fully carry out all of my job responsibilities.	6	5	4	3	2	1
TP3. I have the ability to solve work problems.	6	5	4	3	2	1
TP4. I demonstrate a high level of professionalism in my work.	6	5	4	3	2	1
TP5. My work performance fully meets the performance standards.	6	5	4	3	2	1
Y1.2: Contextual Performance (CP)						
CP1. I can follow instructions and work independently without supervision.	6	5	4	3	2	1
CP2. I can maintain my supervisor's decisions.	6	5	4	3	2	1
CP3. I can support and encourage colleagues at the same position.	6	5	4	3	2	1
CP4. I can pay close attention to details in my work.	6	5	4	3	2	1
CP5. I can actively solve problems in my work.	6	5	4	3	2	1