An Exploratory Investigation on Psychological Empowerment Among Chinese Teachers

Jin-Liang Wang, Da-Jun Zhang

Abstract—The present study was designed to assess the level of psychological empowerment among teachers from six provinces in China, to determine if differences exist in the level of psychological empowerment based on demographic variables, and to examine the effects of psychological empowerment on school work performance. The participants were 1272 teachers (460 men and 812 women). The selected demographic variables included age, sex, tenure, and school type. The results showed statistically significant differences in empowerment among teachers based on selected social variables and showed that psychological empowerment is positively related to school work performance.

Index Terms—Psychological empowerment, teachers, performance

INTRODUCTION

China is now undergoing its fourth educational reform, which emphasizes the cultivation of teachers’ subjective consciousness and promotes teachers’ sense of self-determination. School-based management, to a large extent, has met the requirements of the current educational reform and has afforded valuable experiences for the reform. School-based management proposes that schools should provide their staff with a sense of self-determination, share power with teachers, and encourage teachers to participate in school management. Namely, schools must empower their teachers. Therefore, with China’s educational reform spreading across the entire nation, psychological empowerment of teachers has been attracting increased attention as an important concept from both researchers and school managers. With this in mind, this study explored psychological empowerment as perceived by Chinese teachers and its influence on work performance to understand the development of psychological empowerment among Chinese teachers and provide specific directions for school management.

We have good reasons to conduct the current study. First, to our knowledge, no studies have been conducted to explore the psychological empowerment phenomenon among Chinese teachers, which has limited our understanding on this issue. Second, when compared with other professions in China, teaching is a profession that is in more need of empowerment. Chinese teachers often perceive themselves as having little control over their work, and most teachers call their headmasters boss because they must obey the orders unconditionally. This can result in an increased negative work attitude and behavior among teachers (e.g., job burnout and absence from work). Third, as it has been suggested in the literature, individuals’ feelings of being empowered (namely, psychological empowerment) is of importance to the success of school-based management [1-2] and to its organizational performance [3-4]. Although the present educational reform emphasizes the transfer of power from the top level to the lower level, it is still unknown whether teachers feel genuinely empowered. In other words, if the educational reforms intended to develop leadership responsibilities in teachers are to succeed, it is critical to understand the extent to which all teachers perceive their schools as empowering workplaces. Moreover, the effects of psychological empowerment on organizational performance need to be clarified because the less-developed economy of China may lead Chinese employees to pay more attention to salary than to perceived empowerment [5].

Empowerment has been an important research topic in the field of organizational psychology for more than 20 years. Empowerment is a process through which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over issues of concern to them. It is a multilevel construct in which each level of analysis is interdependent with the other levels. Psychological empowerment refers to empowerment at the individual level of analysis [6]. According to Zimmerman [7], psychological empowerment is a construct composed of three interrelated components: 1) an intrapersonal component, which includes cognitive appraisals of control, competence, determination, and motivation [8-9]; 2) an interactional component, composed of critical skills and knowledge [7]; and 3) a behavioral component, including participatory, change-oriented behaviors in formal and informal contexts and organizations [10]. It has been suggested that these three components are positively correlated with one another [9, 11]. The intrapersonal component includes cognitive appraisals and perceptions because they are a basic element that provides
people with the initiative to engage in behaviors that influence the desired outcomes [12]. Individuals who do not believe that they have the ability to achieve goals are unlikely either to learn about what it takes to achieve those goals or to do what it takes to accomplish them. The interactional component suggests that people are aware of behavioral options or choices to act as they believe appropriate to achieve goals that they set for themselves [7]. To exert control over their organization, members must first understand their options in a given situation. Decision-making, problem-solving, and leadership skills are significant elements for the interactional component, which may be improved in organizations in which members are encouraged to be involved in decision-making. These skills can help individuals become independent, enable them to control events in their environments, and make them their own best advocates. Thus, the interactional component is the bridge between the interpersonal component and the behavioral component [7].

Zimmerman [7] showed that individuals scoring higher on the three components tend to believe that they are able to influence a given context (the intrapersonal component), understand how the system works in that context (the interactional component), and exhibit behaviors that exert control in the context (the behavioral component).

Empowered individuals have more resilience, creativity, and initiative in their work, are more committed to and more satisfied with their jobs, exhibit organizational citizenship behavior more frequently, and have a healthier mental state [13-17]. In the educational domain, it has been shown that teachers with higher levels of psychological empowerment are more confident in their teaching skills, believe they have more impact on their work, feel more determination in their work, and are more likely to think that they can produce valuable ideas [1]. Moreover, studies have found a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and work performance [18]. Spreitzer [19] proposed that individuals with a high level of psychological empowerment perceive their work as meaningful and believe they have competence and an impact on their work, which leads to proactive behaviors in their work situation. According to Deci and Ryan [20], self-determination can enable individuals to be more interested in their work and to be optimistic even when difficulties arise. When individuals perceive little self-determination from their work, they tend to feel helpless. Spector [21] argued that employees tend to understand their jobs better than their supervisors, and therefore, the employees are more likely to recognize the factors influencing work performance and to know how to resolve the issue. When self-determination is offered to employees, they can then complete their work more effectively [22]. Regarding motivation, Thomas and Velthouse [4] found that when employees have more self-determination about how to complete their work, they have higher work motivation and finish the task more effectively. The influence of psychological empowerment on work outcomes in Chinese context has been examined in previous studies [23-25]. For example, Aryee and Chen [24] found that empowerment positively associated with organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and task performance. Li, Li, Shi, and Chen [25] found that psychological empowerment has positive influence on organizational commitment and job satisfaction and has negative influence on job burnout. However, most of these studies were done with samples of enterprise employees. As a profession of humanistic service, school’s environment is much different from enterprises whose main goal is to gain profits. It has been argued that psychological empowerment may vary across different contexts [7]. Therefore, we need to investigate the influence of psychological empowerment on work outcomes with a sample of teachers. Specifically, we will examine the effect of psychological empowerment on teachers’ work performance.

I. PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of the study was 1) to assess the level of psychological empowerment among primary and middle school teachers in six provinces in China, 2) to determine if differences exist in the level of psychological empowerment based on selected teacher and school characteristics, and 3) to assess whether there is a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and work performance. Specifically, the answers to the following questions and hypothesis were to be examined:

1. What is the level of psychological empowerment among middle and primary school teachers on each of the following psychological empowerment subscales and their factors: psychological empowerment feeling subscale (including factors of self-efficacy, self-determination, impact, and status), psychological empowerment skill subscale (including factors of communication skills and decision-making skills), and psychological empowerment behavior subscale (including factors that influence teaching and decision-making participation), and overall?

2. Is there a difference in the scores of psychological empowerment among middle and primary school teachers, based on the following teacher and school characteristics: gender, age, tenure, and school type?

3. The dimensions of teachers’ psychological empowerment will be positively related to work performance.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The data for this study came from 1500 teacher respondents randomly selected from primary and secondary schools in six provinces in China. Overall, 1272 usable responses (460 men and 812 women) were obtained, resulting in a response rate of 84.8%. Of the total 1272 participants, 573 (45%) were in high schools, 996 (55%) were in middle schools; 460 (36%) were in key schools, 812 (64%) were in non-key schools; 222 (17%) had a tenure of fewer than 5 years, 272 (21%) a tenure of 6-10 years, 221 (17%) a tenure of 11-15 years, 168 (13%) a tenure of 16-20 years, 158 (12%) a tenure of 21-25 years, 157 (12%) a tenure of 26-30 years, and 125 (10%) a tenure of more than 31 years.

B. Measures
Psychological empowerment: To assess psychological empowerment among middle and primary school teachers, the Psychological Empowerment for Teachers scale, developed by Wang and Zhang [26] was used. Based on Zimmerman’s theory of psychological empowerment [7], Wang and Zhang developed a 44-item scale for the measurement of teachers’ psychological empowerment. The scale was composed of three subscales, including the subscale of psychological empowerment feeling, psychological empowerment skill, and psychological empowerment behavior, with each subscale encompassing their own factors. Specifically, the psychological empowerment feeling subscale includes four factors 1) self-efficacy (e.g., “I possess the teaching skills to accomplish my task”), 2) self-determination (e.g., “I can decide how to carry out my teaching”), 3) impact (e.g., “I have a professional impact on my colleagues”), and 4) status (e.g., “I am respected by my colleagues for my outstanding teaching”). The psychological empowerment skill subscale includes two factors: decision-making skills (e.g., “I know how to persuade my supervisors to accept my ideas”) and communication skills (e.g., “I can express my ideas clearly to others”). The psychological empowerment behavior subscale includes two factors: influencing teaching (e.g., “I improve my teaching methods”) and decision-making participation (e.g., “I take part in school meetings to set goals for our school”). Participants responded to the items on a 5-point Likert-type scale as follows: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. The coefficient alpha for the psychological empowerment scale was .80. The coefficient alpha coefficients of the three subscales were .88, .76, and .71. The coefficient alpha for the eight factors ranged from .69 to .81. The two-week retest reliability of the three subscales were .81, .72, and .75, respectively.

Work performance: The work performance in this study included two parts: personal work performance and organizational performance. Personal work performance was measured by a single dimension scale, the Teachers’ Personal Performance scale developed by Wu [27]. It includes four items (α=.82), such as “My performance is recognized by my school.” School organizational performance was measured by one item: “How do you evaluate your school’s organizational performance?” All items in our survey were measured using a five-point scale ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

To answer the two research questions, a variety of analytical procedures were used. Specifically, to answer question 1 and determine the level of psychological empowerment among middle and primary school teachers, the descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation, and range were used. To answer question two and determine if differences exist in the level of psychological empowerment based on selected demographic characteristics, a series of MANOVAs were employed.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and range for teachers on each of the empowerment factors are presented in Table 1. The results showed that 1) the overall score of psychological empowerment was mid-level (the full score is 5.0), with a score of 3.7, while a further analysis showed that 88.13% teachers indicated a score above 3.0; 2) the mean score on the factor of influencing teaching and self-efficacy was above 4.0, and the mean scores on the other factors were above 3.0. The ascending order of mean scores on each dimension were as following: impact, decision-making skills, decision-making participation, self-determination, status, communication skills, self-efficacy, and influencing teaching.

<p>| TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics for the Empowerment Subscales (N = 1276) |
|-----------------|---|---|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making skill</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making participation</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-determination</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skill</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing teaching</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment feeling</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment skill</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment behavior</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall score</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 2 sought to determine whether there was a difference in the level of psychological empowerment based on selected characteristics. To answer this question, a series of MANOVAs were conducted. The first demographic variable examined was gender. According to the requirements for MANOVA, the overall test should be conducted first, with Wilks’ Lambda as its index. The Wilks’ Lambda=0.91 (F=4.33, p<0.001) in the present study indicated a statistically significant difference in the level of psychological empowerment based on gender. A further independent t test revealed that, except on the dimension of impact, there were significant gender differences on seven factors and on the overall score of psychological empowerment (p<.01). These findings are presented in Table 2.

As presented in Table 2, female teachers reported higher scores on self-efficacy, self-determination, status, communication skills, and influencing teaching behavior (p<0.05), while male teachers reported higher scores on decision-making skills and decision-making participation behavior (p<0.05).
The second characteristic examined was age. The teachers were asked to identify their age as 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, 51-55, or 56-60 years. The Wilks' Lambda=0.860 ($F = 4.68, p = 0.001$) indicated that there were significant differences between different age groups in scores of self-efficacy, status, communication skills, decision-making participation behavior, and influencing teaching behavior. Multiple comparisons indicated that 1) on the self-efficacy factor, scores increased with age; 2) on the status factor, teachers in the 21-25 years of age group experienced the most rapid increase, after which it improved slowly; 3) on the communication skills factor, teachers in the age groups 26-30, 31-35, and 36-40 years reported higher scores than those in the 20-25 years age group, and no statistically significant difference was found between the other groups; and 4) it was shown that scores on the influencing teaching factor increased with teachers' age, and no significant difference was found between groups.

**Table 2 Gender difference in factors of psychological empowerment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Male Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Female Mean (SD)</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>3.95 (.69)</td>
<td>4.03 (.75)</td>
<td>-1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-determination</td>
<td>3.54 (.85)</td>
<td>3.77 (.79)</td>
<td>-4.89***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>3.25 (.78)</td>
<td>3.19 (.88)</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>3.66 (.72)</td>
<td>3.75 (.77)</td>
<td>-2.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skill</td>
<td>3.90 (.73)</td>
<td>3.99 (.77)</td>
<td>-2.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making skill</td>
<td>3.48 (1.06)</td>
<td>3.28 (1.05)</td>
<td>3.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making</td>
<td>3.55 (.92)</td>
<td>3.37 (.94)</td>
<td>3.44**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participation</td>
<td>3.97 (.84)</td>
<td>4.17 (.74)</td>
<td>-4.47***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing teaching</td>
<td>3.69 (.62)</td>
<td>3.70 (.56)</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3 Age difference in factors of psychological empowerment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>21-25 Mean (SD)</th>
<th>26-30 Mean (SD)</th>
<th>31-35 Mean (SD)</th>
<th>36-40 Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Over 41 Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Post Hoc F (Sig.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>3.85 (.75)</td>
<td>4.04 (.67)</td>
<td>4.03 (.73)</td>
<td>4.06 (.67)</td>
<td>4.08 (.74)</td>
<td>5.19 (0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: SE=Self-efficacy; SD=Self-determination; CS=Communication skill; DMS=Decision-making skill; DMB=Decision-making participation behavior; ITB=Influencing teaching behavior

With tenure as the independent variable and school type, age, and gender as the controlled variables, MANOVA was performed to examine whether there was any difference in scores of psychological empowerment among different tenure groups. The Wilks' Lambda=0.89 ($F = 2.958, p = 0.000$) indicated a significant difference in psychological empowerment between different groups. A further one-way ANOVA analysis revealed that a statistically significant difference existed in influencing teaching behavior, communication skills, status, decision-making participation behavior, the self-determination factor, and the overall score (see Table 4 for detail). Post Hoc tests showed that 1) on impact factor, the teachers in the 21-25 years of tenure group reported higher scores than those in the 11-15 years and the fewer than 5 years of tenure groups; 2) on the self-determination factor, teachers in the 21-25 years of tenure group scored higher than those in 11-15 years of tenure group; 3) on the communication skills factor, the over 30 years of tenure group scored higher than those in below 5 years, 6-10 years, and 11-15 years of tenure groups; and teachers in 21-25 years of tenure group scored higher than those in below 5 years and 11-15 years of tenure group (see Table 4 for details).

**Table 4 Tenure difference in factors of psychological empowerment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Below 5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-15</th>
<th>16-20</th>
<th>21-25</th>
<th>26-30</th>
<th>Above30</th>
<th>Post Hoc F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001
We conducted a MANOVA, with school type (key school and non-key school) as the independent variable and age, gender, and tenure as the controlled variables. The results showed that Wilks’ Lambda = 0.954 (F = 1.724, p = 0.005), indicating a significant difference in psychological empowerment between different types of schools. A further independent t test revealed a statistical difference in self-determination and communication skills between the two types of school (p < 0.01; see Table 5 for detail).

To understand the effects of dimensions of psychological empowerment on work performance, a structural model regarding the relationship between dimensions of psychological empowerment and performance was established using AMOS. Haman’s one-factor test was used to check for the potential existence of common-method variance. When the structural model was established, the model development strategy was used to establish a model that examines the relationship between dimensions of psychological empowerment and performance.

### Table 5 School type difference on psychological empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Key school M (SD)</th>
<th>Non-key school M (SD)</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Note: SE=Self-efficacy; SD=Self-determination; CS=Communication skill; DMS=Decision-making skill; ITB=Influencing teaching behavior

![Fig. 1 Structural Model on the relationship between psychological empowerment and performance](image)

Note: EF=empowerment feeling; ES=empowerment skill; EB=empowerment behavior; OP=organizational performance; PP=personal performance

Haman’s one-factor test showed that no common-method variance existed in this study. On the basis of psychological empowerment theories, combined with the modification index provided by AMOS, we modified the initial model and obtained the final model (see Figure 1). The structural model for the consequences of dimensions of psychological empowerment indicates a good fit between the model and the data ($\chi^2/df=2.318$, GFI=.996, AGFI=.978, NFI=.988, RFI=.959, IFI=.993, TLI=.976, CFI=.993, RMSEA=.046). The model was confirmed using AMOS with another sample. Moreover, the results indicate a good fit between the model and the data ($\chi^2/df=1.337$, GFI=.997, AGFI=.983, NFI=.974, RFI=.913, IFI=.993, TLI=.976, CFI=.993, RMSEA=.027). The empowerment feeling ($\beta=.18$, p < .001) and empowerment behavior ($\beta=.16$, p < .001) were significantly related with individual performance. The empowerment skill ($\beta=.18$, p < .001) and individual performance ($\beta=.11$, p < .001) were significantly related with organizational performance.

### IV. Discussion
In the present study, we have 1) assessed the level of psychological empowerment among middle and primary school teachers in six provinces in China and 2) tested if differences exist in the level of psychological empowerment based on selected teacher and school characteristics. Two questions were resolved, including an investigation of the level of psychological empowerment among middle and primary school teachers on each of the following psychological empowerment subscales and their factors; we also tested if there were any differences in the level of psychological empowerment for the eight factors among middle and primary school teachers, based on the following teacher and school characteristics: gender, age, tenure, and school quality.

With regard to the first question, the results showed that the mean scores of the eight factors were at an average level, with a mean of over 3.0. An additional analysis showed that scores on the eight factors of psychological empowerment varied, which is reflected in the fact that teachers reported a relatively higher score on influencing teaching behavior and self-efficacy, while they indicated a relatively lower score on impact, decision-making skills, and decision-making participation behavior. This situation could be explained by the current reality of education in China. Teaching is a profession that requires creativity and initiative. The development of a school, to a large extent, depends on the collective wisdom of the staff. However, teachers in China have long been accustomed to being given orders. On most occasions, they simply focus on their teaching, and they seldom are offered opportunities to participate in school decision-making activities; this lack of opportunities leads to a lack of a sense of self-determination. Another factor that limits teachers’ psychological empowerment is the large power-distance in Chinese organizations. Because they have been working in large power-distance organizations for a long time, Chinese teachers have become accustomed to accepting requirements from their superiors and they lack awareness of the relevant skills of participation in school management.

As to our second question, whether differences exist in the level of psychological empowerment based on selected teacher and school characteristics, the results revealed obvious differences in selected demographic variables. There was a significant gender difference on dimensions of psychological empowerment, except on impact and self-efficacy. The results showed that female teachers reported higher scores on self-determination, status, communication skill, and influencing teaching behavior than male teachers, while male teachers reported higher scores on decision-making skills and decision-making participation behavior. Our finding is in keeping with previous studies [28-29]. Pan and Wang [29] found that female teachers obtained higher scores than male teachers on overall scores of psychological empowerment. In a study by Scribner [30], although no significant difference was found in the overall score of psychological empowerment, an obvious difference was found in the factors of psychological empowerment. The finding that female teachers reported a higher score on self-determination and status might be explained by the different expectations of power between male and female teachers. In general, men tend to set a higher value on power than women in their work, which may lead to a lower sense of empowerment among male teachers. On factors of communication skills and influencing teaching, female teachers obtained higher scores. Our interviews with teachers found that female teachers have a higher degree of identification with their professions than male teachers, which may be caused by the occupational stereotype that women are both more skilled at and more suitable for teaching. Female teachers are usually considered to be patient, tolerant, and kind, which enables them to better communicate with students, colleagues, and parents and tend to offer more help to students. Under the influence of such expectations about social roles, female teachers perceive more self-efficacy in their teaching ability and in interpersonal communication. Male teachers indicated higher scores on decision-making skills and decision-making participation. A possible explanation for this finding might be that male teachers are more concerned as to whether their suggestions could impact school management, due to their higher power expectations. Moreover, leadership positions are usually held by male teachers, and thus they have more opportunities to participate in decision-making.

The present study found that teachers of different ages indicated different scores on self-efficacy, status, communication skills, and influencing teaching behavior. This finding is consistent with previous research [17]. Rinehart and Short [17] reported a significant relationship between age, tenure, and psychological empowerment with a teacher sample. In a sample of enterprise employees, older employees indicated higher scores on psychological empowerment than younger employees [28]. A possible explanation for our findings might be that younger teachers are less experienced in dealing with various issues in their work; therefore, they perceive themselves as having lesser status in their work and take part in decision-making less frequently. With age, they acquired more experience from practice and more relevant skills from on-the-job training, both of which can promote their self-efficacy, status, and impact.

With regard to the tenure difference, we found that there were significant differences in self-determination, status, communication skills, and influencing teaching behavior, with teachers of longer tenure reporting higher scores on these factors. This is in keeping with previous findings [17, 29]. Koberg et al. [31] and Pan and Wang [29] reported a positive correlation between tenure and psychological empowerment. Rinehart and Short [17] found that teachers’ tenure is a significant predictor of psychological empowerment. In their study, Hancer and George [28] found that employees with a tenure of 2 years or more indicated higher scores than those with a tenure of fewer than 2 years. Individuals with longer tenure are more accustomed to their work context and are more likely to experience self-efficacy and a sense of achievement from their work, contributing to a higher sense of empowerment [32].
Teachers with a tenure of 6 years or more have gradually grasped the teaching rules and accumulated rich teaching and class management experience and skills, which enable them to deal with relevant issues effectively. However, teachers with a tenure of 5 years or less are at a survival stage of the profession, and thus, they perceive low psychological empowerment from their work.

Regarding school type difference, the present study found a significant difference in scores of self-determination and communication skills factors, with teachers in non-key schools reporting higher scores than those in key-schools. The might be caused by the following reasons: key schools (especially for key middle schools) are the focus of Chinese society, owing to their high college entrance rate. Teachers in key schools are given high expectations from society, school leaders, and students’ parents. The college entrance rate becomes nearly the only evaluation standard of teachers’ performance, which leads to a rigid work system. In this situation, teachers in key schools focus only on the improvement of students’ academic scores, neglecting communication with colleagues and supervisors, and paying no attention to school decision-making management. Our interview with teachers selected from our sample also revealed a harsh requirement from their supervisors: to accomplish college entrance rates at any costs, or else be fired or punished. In this context, teachers’ taking part in activities that have no direct relationship with college entrance rate are regarded as “illegal”. Therefore, teachers at key schools seldom feel empowerment.

This study found that psychological empowerment has positive effects on work performance. These findings support our hypothesis and are in keeping with previous research [4]. The feeling of psychological empowerment has a positive effect on both teachers’ personal performances and school organizational performance. A possible explanation for this link might be that teachers scoring highly on this dimension are more likely to believe they have impact on their work, making them work more effectively and more flexibly [3-4]. McBride and Skau [33] hold that teachers with a high level of empowerment are more task-motivated and more likely to seek out new and effective teaching methods; moreover, empowered teachers are more willing to discuss work issues with their supervisors. All of these results could help improve teachers’ work performance. In the present study, the skills of psychological empowerment were found to be positively correlated with personal and organizational performance. One explanation for this is that teachers scoring highly on this dimension are skilled at communication and participating in decision-making. The skill of communicating with others can help teachers acquire new knowledge and new teaching skills from their colleagues, and to overcome the difficulties arise in their work. Moreover, effective communication with school supervisors provides teachers with more information about school work, and can help teachers better understand their achievements and limitations. Relevant studies have shown that communication within an organization is positively related to organizational performance [34-35].

Decision-making skill enable teachers to put forward their suggestions in appropriate ways, by which valuable suggestions will be taken and then improve school work. Psychological empowerment behavior has an important influence on work performance. Psychological empowerment behavior involves participating in decision-making and exerting one’s influence on school work in informal ways. The latter, to a large extent, is similar to organizational citizenship behavior. Individuals’ participation in organizational decision-making can impact their job satisfaction and work performance [36-37]. Compared with school managers, teachers tend to better understand the problems that exist in teaching. Therefore, they are more likely to find effective measures to improve performance. The influencing teaching factor involves teachers exhibiting behaviors that are beneficial to school work through informal means, such as helping colleagues with their work. These behaviors extend beyond routine work roles and are a positive supplement to the formal work system.

V. LIMITATIONS

This study has certain limitations. The study was conducted on a sample of teachers in six provinces in China; therefore, the findings in the present study may not be generalized to other teacher populations. The data were obtained through self-reporting, which might lead to avoidable social approval effects.

Future studies should build on these findings to examine additional factors that may have an influence on teachers’ psychological empowerment. Although studies on antecedents of psychological empowerment can be found in the literature, no studies have been done with a sample of Chinese teachers. Due to different power distance between the western and eastern cultures, the significant factors that may promote the development of psychological empowerment among Western samples may not be significant for a Chinese teacher sample. Hence, it is extremely necessary to conduct related studies. Moreover, in-depth studies might be necessary for the exploration of psychological empowerment among Chinese teachers, due to the fact that empowerment is a sensitive topic for them and maybe not be fully captured with self-reported method.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

Our study suggests some specific directions for school management departments to improve their teachers’ psychological empowerment. From our results, we can infer the following: first, teachers’ psychological empowerment must be given sufficient attention because it has a significant positive effect on school performance. Second, teachers’ feelings about the impact of their work are greatly in need of improvement. For male teachers, their feelings on self-determination, status, communication skills, and influencing teaching behavior must be promoted the most, while for female teachers, decision-making skills and decision-making participation behavior must be promoted the most. When taking measures to improve teachers’ psychological empowerment, school supervisors should also note that younger teachers are more in
need of improvement in their feelings of empowerment and that teachers with shorter tenures are more in need of promoting their psychological empowerment. Teachers in the key schools are still more urgently in need of improving their feelings of empowerment.

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