



UNDERSTANDING TEACHER-EDUCATORS' PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT IN UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS IN CHINA

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Abstract:

This study pursued to examine the motives and content of psychological contract among teacher educators participating in university-school partnerships. This case study adopted a mixed methodology. The data were collected from 61 respondents through questionnaires and interviews. While the quantitative data were analyzed by SPSS, the qualitative data were analyzed by content interpretation. The findings revealed that teacher educators' psychological contracts were mostly instigated by the need to improve theory and practice about teaching process. Also, teacher-educators perceived more fulfillments on socio-emotional aspect than transactional one indicating conducive social than economic environment in the partnership. The study recommends more collective longitudinal studies involving all key agents in order to provide full comprehension of psychological contract in university-school partnership contexts.

Keywords: psychological contract, transactional and relational contract, university-school partnership

Concept of Psychological Contract

The concept of psychological contract has been variously defined to refer the reciprocal perceptions of economic and social obligations between and across individuals in organizations (Aichinger & Barnes, 2010; Cable, 2008; Guest, 1998; Shore & Tetrick, 1994). The basis for existence of psychological contract among in all kind organizations is virtually spontaneous (Robinson & Kraatz, 1994). The psychological contract exists in duality, the *transactional contract*- derives from economic factors such as time, payment,

workload; and *relational contract* based on socio-emotional and non-monetized factors including respect, trust, commitment, fairness (Shore & Tetrick, 1994).

The dual forms of psychological contract may further manifest in triplicate states namely the *fulfilled psychological contract*- a positive emotional experience that individual builds when the promises in the organization have been implemented, *breached psychological contract*- subjective experience when an individual perceives another party has failed to fulfill adequately the promised obligations, and *violated psychological contract*- negative emotional experience produced by individual when the perceived promissory obligations have not been met (Zhang & Huang, 2009; Coyle-Shapiro, 2002).

The triplicate states of psychological contracts have differing effect on individuals' behaviors. While psychological contract fulfillment positively affects the behaviors of the individuals, (Jong, Schalk & Cuyper, 2009; Turnley et al, 2003); both breached and violated psychological contract negatively affect the behavior of individuals associated with withdrawal or engagement in anti-role behaviors such as negativism, theft, harassment, sabotage and vandalism in the organization (Zhang & Huang, 2009). Hence, psychological contract is ubiquitous in all workplace environments as all are imminently characterized by the dynamic changes and uncertainty of both economic and social factors (Krivokapic-Skoko & O'Neill, 2008; Vos, Buyens & Schalk, 2003; Robinson & Kraatz, 1994).

Concomitant to increasing interest among researchers to investigate on the causes, content and outcome of psychological contract (Ding, 2012; Shore & Tetrick, 1994), there has been a proliferation of studies on psychological contract in the world; however, many of them are skewed to the western contexts by and large in business field (Vos, Buyens & Schalk, 2003; Guest, 1998; Shore & Tetrick, 1994). Consequently, a handful of studies highlight a need for more studies on psychological contract in other contexts apart from business field and western contexts for theoretical universalization purposes (Ding, 2012; Jong, Schalk & Cuyper, 2009; Guest, 1998; Shore & Tetrick, 1994).

Typically, a study of Seeck and Parzefall (2008) deprecate the diminutive knowledge that exists on the causes of psychological contract. In the same vein, Jong, Schalk & Cuyper (2009, pp 347) have argued that "*an important route for future research concerns the performance implications of psychological contract promises and fulfillment as well as investigation of these ideas in other cultural contexts including China, to search for a universal theory of psychological contracts*".

Psychological Contract in Educational Partnerships

The partnerships between universities and schools are regarded to be efficient which provide curricular spaces for teachers' professional development, and also regarded the focal concern in the implementation of new basic curriculum reforms (Hong, 2010; Xu, 2009; Chi-shing, 2006; MoEC, 2001). In the same vein, the partnerships involve individuals from universities and schools creating social fabric system of its kind with people of diverse personalities and hence not immune to conflict of interests and personal agenda attributing to economic and social factors (Hoy & Miskel, 2005).

Also, the existent structural and functional differences among teachers from the university (university based teachers) and those from the school pose a challenge to accommodate motives and balance the benefits of the partnership (Kruger et al, 2009; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1994). While teachers from universities are said to be more oriented to theory, the school teachers are more practice oriented (Thorkildsen & Stein, 1994). Such situation either at individual level or organizational level potentially can influence development of psychological contract which may either be beneficial or detrimental on teacher educators' behavior in the partnership process, or hence affect the efficacy of the latter (Guest, 1998; Shore & Tetrick, 1994).

Evidently, there is a need to understand the perceptions of educators on the mutual and reciprocal obligations in the partnership processes in order to resolve tensions among educators (Shen, 2010). Therefore, the need to employ psychological contract perspective framework to understand individual perceptions on economic and social settings as moderated by their motives is imperative (Vos, Buyens & Schalk, 2003; Guest, 1998).

The adoption of psychological contract perspective is essential to shed light on teacher educators' experiences which define content of their psychological contracts (Rossner & Cummins, 2012; Coyle-Shapiro, 2002; Ravid & Handler, 2001). Evidently, there are rampant claims in China over some of the schools and school teachers often being reluctant to engage in partnerships with university faculties for various reasons (Xu, 2009). The latter present a dearth of knowledge to what entails the behavior and a basis for the need to conduct a research to understanding the interplay of factors and resultant impact on the teachers behavior, and psychological contract in particular.

Conceptual framework

The Psychological Contract Models (Ding, 2012; Guest, 1998; Shore & Tetrick, 1994) assume there are inevitably inherent motives which linearly lead to the developed

content of psychological contract of individuals in work places as result of economic or socially structured factors, which form a basis for their consequent behavior.

According to Guest (1998), the consequent performance behavior of individuals is a product of developed psychological contract as a function of the *causative motives* (i.e. organizational climate, human resource policy and practice, experience, expectations and motives, and alternatives), and the *conceived content* (fairness, support, trust and delivery of deal). In the same vein, the psychological contracts involve generic human cognition and social processes; hence, psychological contract model ensue the ecological perspective which accounts the context- university-school partnerships- from which teachers develop their psychological and whose effect can be understood through resultant content behavior manifested (De Vos, Buyens & Schalk, 2003; Shore & Tetrick, 1994).

Purpose of the Study

Many studies on teachers' psychological contract in China have focused on school teachers and only handful focused on teachers from colleges and universities. The study pursued to examine motives and content of psychological contract among teacher educators in partnership projects in China. Hence, this study was guided by two major research questions:

- (i) What factors influence engagement of the teacher-educators' into university-school partnerships? and
- (ii) How teacher-educators' perceive economic and social contexts of the university-school partnerships?

Study Context

The population of the study included teacher-educators from schools from one Normalⁱ University participated in university-school partnership project. The sample included 61 teacher educators involved in university school partnership project.

ⁱ Translated from Chinese word *Shifan* meaning Teacher model, literally *University For Teacher Training Xudong* & (Xue, 2006)

Research Methodology

The study employed case study integrating mixed approach to collect and analyze both numerical data and verbatim responses, and hence to overcome the trade-offs of each approach (Christensen, 2012; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Wiersma & Jurs, 2004; Tellis, 1997).

The self-administered and 5-point rating scales questionnaires were distributed to the 61 respondents. The perceptions in the analysis of the first question were assessed by assigning numerical value to each rating 'Strongly Agree' = 1; 'Agree' = 2; 'Disagree' = 3; and 'Strongly Disagree' = 4 (Bordens & Abbot, 2008)., then the means were calculated for each item were finally divided into 'high' (1 to 2.99), 'moderate' (3.0 to 3.99) and 'low' (4.0 to 5) to achieve the agreement ratings.

Similarly, in the analysis of the second question the responses for "Strongly Agree=1" and "Agree=2" were reduced to category "Fulfillment" within mean score range of 1.00-2.99, responses for "Disagree=4" and "Strongly Disagree=5" were reduced to form "Violated contract" with mean score range of 4.00 to 5.00; however for "Neutral" responses remained and represented "Breached Contract" with mean score of 3.00-3.99. Both of the latter transformations were essential to accommodate rating of factors and specific states of psychological contract (Lyonga, 2015).The profile information of respondents included gender, qualification, specialization, work experience, and whether respondents have participated in partnerships before.

The reliability of questionnaire items was determined by Cronbach's alpha at .84. The data collected through questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively by *Statistical Package for Social Sciences* (SPSS Version 17) to compute means and standard deviations, frequencies and percentages, and correlations. Also, the content analysis approach was used to analyze qualitative data.

Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents a synopsis of demographic characteristics of the respondents. A total of 61 teacher-educators participating in university-school partnership project were involved in the study; 13% of the respondents were male and 86.9% were female; Also, 27% had doctorate degree and 72.1% had master degree; In terms of subject specialty, 18.1% specialized in Mandarinⁱⁱ, 11.8% in English, 8.6% in Sciences, 11.4% in Mathematics, and 50% in Curriculum and Pedagogy; 77.1% of the respondents had 10 years work experience, 18.1% had 20 years working experience, and only 4.9% had

ⁱⁱ Standard Chinese *Lingua Franca*

more than 20 years' work experience. While 57% of the respondents had participated in USP's, 42% had not participated in partnerships before.

Table1: Profile of Study Population

Characteristics of the Respondents	Number (n)	Percentages (%)
Gender (n=61)		
Male	13	13.1%
Female	48	86.9%
Education Qualification (n=61)		
Doctorate Degree	17	27.9%
Masters Degree	44	72.1%
Subject Specialty (n=61)		
Mandarin	11	18.1%
English	7	11.8%
Sciences (Chemistry, Biology and Physics)	5	8.6%
Mathematics	7	11.4%
Curriculum and Pedagogy	31	50.1%
Work Experience (n=61)		
1-10 years	47	77.1%
11-20 years	11	18.1%
Above 20 years	3	4.9%
Partnership Experience (n=61)		
Participated Before	35	57.4
Not Participated	26	42.6

Findings and Analysis

General findings on teacher-educators' perceptions of factors which influenced their engagement in USP's are presented in Table 2 below. The mean (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) were also computed and agreement ratings presented in Table 3 below.

Table 2: Factors Influencing Teacher Educators Engagement in USP's

Factor Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
Compliance to the superior	18%	11%	11.5%	29.8%	29.6%
Extra payment	11.5%	26.2%	41%	19.7%	1.6%
Credit in the teaching course requirements	14.4%	15.6%	21.3%	22.1%	26.6%
Extending profession network	26.2%	45.9%	23%	4.9%	0%
For promotional opportunities	13.1%	24.6%	31.1%	27.9%	3.3%
For enriching research experience	47.5%	45.9%	1.6%	4.9%	0%
Improve theory and Practice for teaching	59.7%	36.1%	2.6%	1.6%	0%
Career development	45.9%	41%	11.5%	1.6%	0%
To share teaching experiences	44.3%	26.2%	27.9%	1.6%	0%

The findings from *Table 1* above show majority of teacher-educators agreed by 29% (n=18) that *compliance to superiors* influenced their engagement in the partnership; 37% (n=22) were motivated for *extra payment*; 30% (n=18) of the teacher-educators engaged in partnership project to *acquire credits*; 72.1% (n=44) teacher-educators agreed that they participated in the partnership project for *extending their professional network*; 37.7% (n=23) teacher-educators agreed to have motivated for *promotional opportunities*. Apart from that, 93.4% (n=57) of teacher-educators agreed that they anticipated to *enrich their research experiences*. 95% (n=58) of teacher-educators anticipated that partnership will *improve theory and practice for teaching process*; about 86.9% (n=53) of teacher-educators were motivated to participate in partnership project for *career development*. Lastly, 70.5% (n=43) of teacher-educators agreed that their participation was for *sharing teaching experiences*.

Table 3: Teacher-educators Agreement Ratings on Factors for Engagement in USP's

Factor Items	M	SD	Agreement Rating
Compliance to the superior	4.18	.90	Low
Extra payment	4.74	.96	Low
Credit in the teaching course requirements	4.95	.82	Low
Extending profession network	1.07	.83	High
For promotional opportunities	4.44	.08	Low
For enriching research experience	1.64	.75	High
Improve theory and Practice for teaching	1.54	.70	High
Career development	1.69	.74	High
To share teaching experiences	1.87	.88	High

Table 3 shows statements and respective ratings teacher-educators' general perceptions of factors influencing their engagement into USP's. While the need to *improve theory and practice for teaching* show the highest mean and hence this indicates teacher-educators' highest rating on the item, extra payment factor showed the lowest, indicating lowest rating among teacher-educators. Also, moderate influence was rated in two factors, compliance to superiors and extension of professional network. Moreover, for other items including crediting the teaching course requirements, for promotional opportunities, for enriching research experience, Career development, and sharing of teaching experiences, were rated high, indicating they had also highly influenced teacher-educators to engage in USP's

To determine teacher-educators psychological content developed during partnership process, six factors three of each representing the Transactional and Relational contract were considered, including time, Payment, Workload, Member

recognition, parent institutional support, and partner institutional support as presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Content of Faculty Members' Psychological Contract

Psychological Contract Content	Fulfillment	Breach	Violation
Time well defined to fit roles in the project and own institution	64.2	29.5	6.3
Payment well defined and clearly linked to extended duties and roles	60.1	24.6	15.3
Workload well regulated in partnership to suit my institutional roles	56.9	29.5	13.6
Average	60.4	27.9	11.7
Other members recognize and value my contribution	61.7	21.3	17
I received adequate support from my institution	79.4	12	6.6
I received adequate support from partner institution	63.3	32.8	3.9
Average	68.1	22	9.2

Table 4 shows that on aspect of time factor (as duration related to complexity or requirements of the tasks) teacher-educators agreed the contract was fulfilled by 64.2% (n=39), breached by 29.5% (n=18) and violated by 6.3% (n=4); on payment (financial compensation or remuneration) showed that teacher-educators agreed that contract was fulfilled by 60.1% (n=36), breached by 24.6% (n=15), and violated by 15.3% (n=9); On the aspect of workload (amount of tasks that an individual is accountable to), teacher-educators agreed that the contract was fulfilled by 56.9% (n=34), breached 29.5% (n=18), and violated by 13.6% (n=8); On the aspect of value and recognition from others, teacher-educators agreed that other members fulfilled the contract by 61.7 % (n=37), breached by 21.3% (n=13), and violated by 17% (n=10); teacher-educators agreed parent institution had fulfilled the support contract by 79.4% (n=48), breached by 12% (n=7), and violated by 6.6% (n=4). On the aspect of support provided by partner institution, teacher-educators agreed that partner institution had fulfilled the contract by 63.3% (n=38), breached by 32.8% (n=20), and violated by 3.9% (n=2) with total mean score of 2.21 (.84).

Figure 1: Type and State of Teacher-Educators Psychological Contract

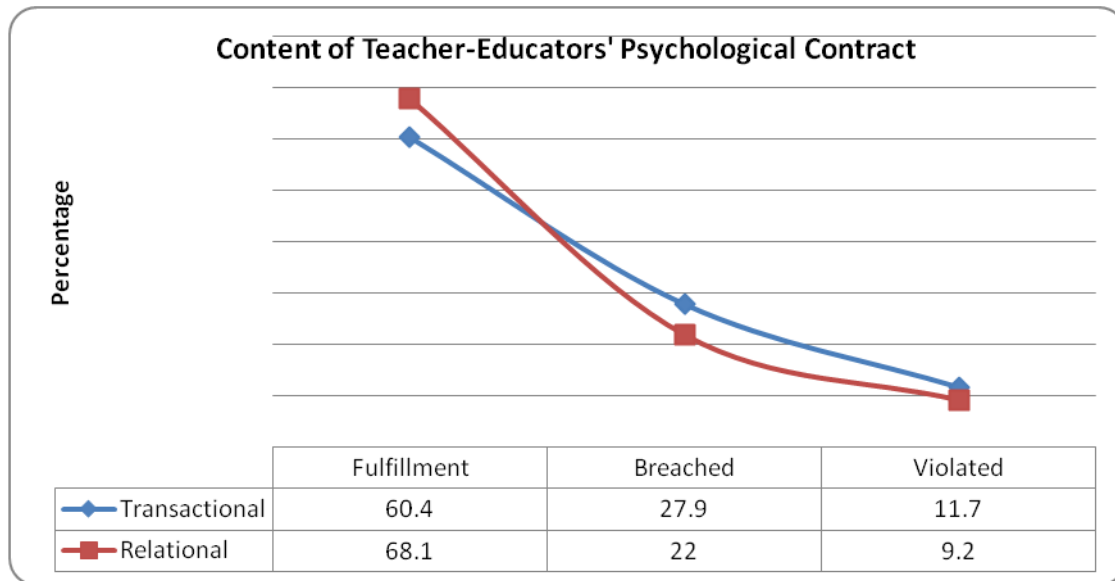


Figure 1 above show teacher-educators perceived both transactional and relation contract were fulfilled, however the relational contract factors showed more fulfillment (68.1%, n=42) than transactional factors (60.4%, n=37). While, the highest fulfillment for relational factors emanated from support of parent institutional support (79.4%, n=48), for transactional factors the highest fulfillment was from time factor (64.2%, n=39). Also, for both breach and violation of the contract factors, teacher-educators perceived that higher breach and violation was on transactional factors (27.9%, n=17; 11.7%, n=7) than relational ones (22%, n=13; 9.2%, n=6) respectively.

Discussion

The discussion of the factors influencing teacher educators' engagement in university-school partnerships will focus on the factors which were rated "High" by the teacher-educators. On the other hand,

The need to improve of the theory and practice for teaching has significant influence for motivating teacher-educators to engage in university school partnerships. The contention has been well explored by this study whereby the factor was rated the highest by majority of the respondents. Also the coverage of the interviews captured indicates that despite that aim of the aim of partnership project was several folds, but it provided chance to teacher educators observe students in their teaching practice in the real teaching contexts and hence reflect of their theories to improve their teaching skills. Evidently, the partnerships are regarded useful platforms for them to develop more understanding about theory and practice recently as China directs its efforts to change

teacher centered approach to learner centered approach of teaching and learning (MoEC, 2001). In the same vein, a study by Cornellissen et al (2011) revealed that university-school partnerships amongst others provide a space for teacher educators to integrate theory based knowledge and practice.

Also, other factors such as enrichment of research skills remain imperative for educators as key agents in educational reforms. University-school partnerships provide convenient and conducive environment for teacher educators to conduct research on various aspects of teaching and learning processes. Evidently, majority of respondents were junior professional and hence the project enabled them to collect data and other information for research and theory study. A study Cornellissen et al (2011) asserts that educators conceive partnerships as convenient infrastructures to develop their research skills alongside their teaching roles.

As professional, teacher educators need to search for growth path to improve in their teaching career. Evidently, not only majority of the respondents had few years of working experience but also many had not participated in partnerships before. Arguably, the partnership project was critical opportunity for them to improve their teaching skills and accumulate teaching experiences. It is well established that educators in China are daunted by the invasion of education curriculum reform and have used partnership projects to generate and improve their teaching practice (Chi-Shing, 2006). Also, a study by Kruger et al (2009) revealed that engagement in university school-partnerships positively predict teacher-educators self-efficacy for teaching better.

Moreover, sharing of knowledge among educators stand to be a core of university-school partnerships due to imminent structural and functional difference between schools and universities (Turner, 2008, Thorkildsen & Stein, 1994). While teacher-educators from universities are more oriented to theory, the school teachers are more practical oriented (Kruger et al, 2009; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1994). The gap sets forth a dearth of theory and practical knowledge and experience for both school teachers and educators respectively. University-school partnerships in such context become efficient approaches to provide teacher-educators first-hand realities of teaching practice with school-teachers) and enable them to comprehend various shortcomings of theory in teaching and learning process at school contexts. The sharing process may also involve teacher-educators and school teachers in dialogue about how to teach and about how to design a lesson and attend classroom sessions. Consistent with many studies is that knowledge and change to improve both schools and higher education institutions require collaboration between teacher-educators and school teachers to address concerns over the quality of the education by developing and

sharing their experiences within and beyond their institutions (Trent, 2012; Cornellissen et al, 2011; Kruger et al, 2009; Mosha, 2004).

The more fulfillment for relational than transactional contract indicates teacher-educators experienced more conducive socio-emotional than monetized atmosphere in the partnership process. Evidently, the spearman correlations had shown strong relationship with the relational contracts ($p=.000$; $r_s=.798$); however, the relationship between the influencing factors and the economic context of the partnership was insignificant ($p=.157$; $r_s=.260$). This indicates that relational factors are more instrumental enable teacher-educators to realize their motives in the partnership compared to the transactional factors (Mbalamula, 2013).

Parent institution plays critical part in ensuring relational contract fulfillment of the individuals in the partnership process. Evidently, in this study, relational contract fulfillment was by and large due to institutional support to teacher-educator. Analysis of the study indicates that the institutional management through meetings facilitated prepared teacher-educators for the middle school activities, but also leaders' while in the field *not to check but to see* how they were progressing was perceived not as a control but friendly encounter to share ideas with their leaders. Studies show that strong collaborative management culture is critical and important resource in partnerships to influence commitment of educators to the project which is important to make the partnership successful and effective (Kruger et al, 2009; Ainscow et al (2006).

Conclusion

The multiple factors define the range of motives for teacher-educators to engage in university-school partnerships. The realizations of these factors are reflected in the state of psychological contract developed which consequently affect their behavior in the partnership process. Arguably, relational contract fulfillment is by and large instrumental to influence positive incumbents' behavior in university-school partnerships. However, the contention does not underestimate the significance of transactional factors as other studies have shown psychological contract among university based teachers to be more transactional than relational in nature indicating both economic and relational factors are equally important to the well-rounded teacher professional growth. The study recommends for more longitudinal studies which involve all key stakeholders of university-school partnerships to have more concrete and comprehensive understanding psychological contract development and effect partnership process.

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