

Factors Influencing the Turnover Intention of Rural Preschool Teachers in the Context of Rural Revitalization: An Analysis Based on a Moderated Mediation Model

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Abstract: *The retention of teachers is critical to the development of rural preschool education in China. We conducted a sample survey of 3790 rural kindergarten teachers from 22 counties (or cities) of 10 provinces and examined the effects of work stress and job apathy on the turnover intention of rural preschool teachers using the work stress, job apathy and turnover intention scales. According to the research findings, work stress can significantly predict rural kindergarten teachers' turnover intention; job apathy plays a mediating role between job stress and teacher turnover intention, and the indirect effect is greater than the direct effect; Bianzhi membership can moderate the direct effect of work stress on teacher turnover intention and the mediating effect of job apathy.*

Best Evidence in Chinese Education 2022; 11(2):1523-1527.

Doi: 10.15354/bece.22.ab005.

How to Cite: Wang, T., Li, M., Liu, S., & Zhang, X. (2022). Factors influencing the turnover intention of rural preschool teachers in the context of rural revitalization: An analysis based on a moderated mediation model. *Best Evidence in Chinese Education, 11(2):1523-1527.*

Keywords: *Rural Preschool Teacher, Turnover Intention, Work Stress, Job Apathy, Bianzhi, Membership*

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Conflict of Interests: None.

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Introduction

The development of high-quality education is essential to rural revitalization and preschool education has a perennial effect on the overall development of rural students. A stable preschool teacher supply is an essential prerequisite for the progress of rural preschool education. Nevertheless, the loss of rural kindergarten teachers has become a prevalent concern of the community, and retaining preschool teachers in rural nursery schools is getting increasingly difficult. Numerous studies revealed that the high turnover rate of rural preschool teachers is mainly due to high job pressure and that heavy work burden leads to their negative emotional reactions. In addition, rural kindergartens employ a large number of teachers without *Bianzhi* (a system of officially budgeted posts in China) membership, who feel underpaid compared with their colleagues with the membership. Scholars have reached agreement that rural preschool teachers' turnover intention is affected by work pressure and job apathy as well as the disparity in *Bianzhi* membership among them. To further clarify the relationships among work pressure, job apathy, *Bianzhi* membership, and rural preschool teachers' turnover intention, this study used job apathy as a mediating variable and *Bianzhi* membership as a moderator variable to examine the effect of work stress on teacher turnover intention, with the objective of offering recommendations to policy makers on how to retain rural kindergarten teachers.

Research Methodology

The research team conducted a sample survey on rural kindergarten teachers from 22 counties (or cities) in China's 10 provinces in August 2020, using online questionnaires. A total of 3,790 valid questionnaires were recovered. Rural preschool teacher work stress scale, job apathy scale, and turnover intention scale were adopted as measurement tools. SPSS24.0 and AMOS20.0 were utilized for data analysis, which followed four steps: first, to use Amos20.0 to test the common method biases between various research dimensions; second, to employ SPSS24.0 to test the reliability and validity of the teacher work stress scale, job apathy scale, and turnover intention scale; third, to construct structural equation modelling to test the direct and mediating effects among the variables of work stress, job apathy, and teacher turnover intention; and fourth, to use PROCESS to test the moderated mediation model.

Research Data

The Common Method Bias Test

There were no significant common method biases between the research dimensions, and the coefficient estimation incurs no errors affecting the authenticity of research results.

Convergent Validity, Composition Reliability and Discriminant Validity

There was a positive correlation between work stress and rural preschool teachers' turnover intention ($r = 0.568$, $p < 0.001$); work stress was positively related to rural preschool teachers' job apathy ($r = 0.372$, $p < 0.001$); There was a positive correlation between job apathy and teacher turnover intention ($r = 0.288$, $p < 0.001$).

The Direct Effect Test

The non-standardized regression coefficient of the effect of work pressure on rural preschool teachers' turnover intention was 0.59 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the former had a positive influence on the latter.

The non-standardized regression coefficient of the effect of work stress on job apathy was 0.39 ($p < 0.001$), signaling that the former had a positive effect on the latter.

The non-standardized regression coefficient of the effect of job apathy on teacher turnover intention was 0.93 ($p < 0.001$), denoting that the former had a positive effect on the latter.

The Mediating Effect Test

Model fitness $\chi^2/df = 25.989$, GFI = 0.927, AGFI = 0.896, TLI = 0.936, cfi = 0.948, rmsea = 0.081, srmr = 0.049 was basically up to the model fitness index standard, indicating that the mediating effect of job apathy on the relationship between work pressure and rural preschool teachers' turnover intention had a good model fitness.

Besides, work stress positively predicted job apathy ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$), which in turn positively predicted teacher turnover intention ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$).

The Moderated Mediating Effect Test

The Test of Moderating Effect of Bianzhi Membership

The product term of work stress and Bianzhi membership significantly predicted job apathy and rural preschool teachers' turnover intention (job apathy: $\beta = -0.085$, $t = -3.721$, Boot 95% CI = [-0.130, -0.040]; turnover intention: $\beta = -0.085$, $t = -2.712$, Boot 95%CI = [-0.146, -0.024]); The product term of job apathy and Bianzhi membership significantly predicted teacher turnover intention ($\beta = 0.167$, $t = 4.259$, Boot 95% CI = [0.090, 0.244]). Thus, it is concluded that Bianzhi membership can moderate the effects of work stress on teacher turnover intention, work stress on job apathy, and job apathy on teacher turnover intention.

Stratified Analysis of the effects of Bianzhi Membership on Teacher Turnover Intention

As per the data analysis results, there was a significant difference in turnover intention between teachers with Bianzhi membership and those without it ($t = 3.026$, $p < 0.05$), and the turnover intention of the former was considerably higher than that of the latter. Among teachers without Bianzhi membership, the turnover rate of young teachers was relatively higher than that of other age cohorts. Among the young kindergarten teachers

in rural areas, the share of teachers without Bianzhi membership was up to 59.11%, and the majority of them (a total of 77.35%) were working in town and village kindergartens.

There was no significant difference in turnover intention among young teachers with Bianzhi membership working in the county, town and village kindergartens, whereas young teachers without Bianzhi membership working in the town kindergarten had remarkably higher turnover intention than their counterparts working in the county and village kindergartens ($F = 4.866, p < 0.05$), which shows that the difference in school location also affects the resignation intention of young preschool teachers.

The principle of “equal pay for equal work” has not been applied to rural kindergarten teachers without Bianzhi membership, who had considerably lower satisfaction in incomes, occupational status, workload, and career development potential than their colleagues with Bianzhi membership. Therefore, they tended to perceive inferiority in social status when comparing themselves to those officially employed teachers ($t = -6.918, p < 0.001$).

Conclusions and Suggestions

This study comes to the following conclusions: first, work stress are positively related to job apathy and turnover intention of rural preschool teachers, and job apathy has a significantly positive correlation with their turnover intention; second, job apathy plays a mediating role between work stress and teacher turnover intention; third, the direct correlation of work stress with teacher turnover intention and the mediating effect of job apathy are both moderated by teachers’ Bianzhi membership; fourth, the gaps in age as well as salaries and other perks contribute to the difference in turnover intention between teachers with and without Bianzhi membership.

The empirical results confirm that work stress, job apathy, and Bianzhi membership are major factors influencing the turnover intention of rural preschool teachers. In order to lower the turnover rate and ensure the supply of rural preschool teachers, local education departments should carry out an array of reforms including restricting the workload of teachers to a reasonable level, increasing salaries and compensation of teachers, creating a teacher-friendly environment, and allocating adequate Bianzhi memberships to rural kindergartens.

The Chinese version of this article has been published in Journal of East China Normal University (Education Science), 2022, 40(6):82-96. The English version has been authorized for being publication in BECE by the author(s) and the Chinese journal.

王涛, 李梦琢, 刘善槐, 张雪. 乡村振兴背景下农村幼儿教师离职倾向的影响机制研究—基于有调节的中介效应分析. 华东师范大学学报(教育科学版), 2022, 40(6):82-96.

Received: 30 June 2022

Revised: 11 July 2022

Accepted: 15 July 2022