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Quality of Teacher's Life: Why do teachers leave the profession?

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Abstract

In China, the number of private higher education institutions (HEIs) has been increasing rapidly in recent times. However, an upward trend is noticed among teachers leaving the HEIs. As teachers' life constitutes both personal and work life, this micro-level study paper examines 100 teacher turnover decisions by examining personal and institution factors based on the Two-Factor Theory. Using ANOVA and independent-t-test, it examines how teacher's demographic factors affect their decision to leave the institution. The study hopes to contribute to policymakers understanding on teacher turnover so as to mitigate this phenomenon by improving their job satisfaction and quality of life.

Keywords: Teacher Turnover; Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); Two-Factor Theory; Job Satisfaction, Quality of Life

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1.0 Introduction

Teacher turnover refers to the behavior of teachers leaving their current school (Nguyen et al., 2020). Current studies have never stopped elaborating on this topic as it concerns students, teachers, educators, and policymakers. Substantial studies are proving the harm of teacher turnover on students' learning achievements, education institutions' reputation, and the sustainable development of the whole educational system (Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). As a noble occupation, the teacher has become the focus of research for scholars, and research fields, which vary from pedagogy and psychology to management. Previous studies tried to describe and understand the process of teaching and learning, with emphasis on students and their learning. However, issues related to teachers, such as teacher development, evaluation, training, retaining and turnover, have attracted increasing attention in recent years. Among these fields, teacher turnover (Maryam et al., 2021; Räsänen et al., 2020; Rajendran et al., 2020; Adnot et al., 2017) are exhaustively expounded, and a large portion of these studies attempt to improve teacher quality of life. (Jiang & Zhang, 2017; Toulabi et al., 2013).

1.1 Problem of Study

In China, private higher education institutions(HEIs) account for 25% of the entire HEIs, while teachers in private HEIs account for 20% of teachers from the whole higher education system (Ministry of Education of the Peoples' Republic of China, 2021). Recent studies show that an increasing number of teachers in private HEIs have the tendency to leave the educational sector (Zhao & Zhou, 2022),

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which threatens the teaching quality and development of HEIs in China to a great extent. In order to retain qualified teachers in private HEIs, and mitigate adverse effects brought by high teacher turnover rates, studying factors that contribute to teacher turnover is critical both practically and theoretically.

1.2 Objectives of Study

In this study, teacher turnover in China's private HEIs is examined using the Two-Factor Theory. It first explains factors that contribute to teacher turnover by drawing upon current studies. Then, a quantitative study is conducted to examine the difference in teacher turnover intention based on teachers' demographic information. This paper ends with analyzing results from the study and suggesting directions for future research.

The research objectives are as follows:

RO1: To determine the levels of the turnover intention of teachers in China's private HEIs within one year, two years, five years, till retirement and till getting another job.

RO2: To examine whether there are any significant differences in teacher turnover intention in China's private HEIs based on teachers' demographic factors.

RO3: To examine the relationship between job satisfaction and teacher turnover intention in China's private HEIs.

2.0 Literature Review

In this section, Two-Factor Theory is used to explain teacher turnover. Variables that affect teacher turnover are categorized into two broad types, namely personal and institution factors. Even though the two types contain numerous factors of teacher turnover, only these two parts are discussed in this paper based on the Two-Factor Theory.

2.1 Two-Factor Theory

Proposed by Frederick Herzberg, the Two-Factor Theory is frequently used to explain employees' behavior and decisions in their work. According to this theory, there are two sets of factors that work independently, which are motivators and hygiene factors. The former refers to factors that lead to job satisfaction, including recognition, personal growth, and achievement. The latter refers to factors such as payment, supervision, vacation, and working conditions, which lead to job dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1959). This theory has found its application in studying employee turnover in different working contexts, and its practical implications for management are profound.

In the educational context, teacher turnover has been studied from the perspective of Two-Factor Theory. In order to retain high-quality teachers and ensure teaching quality, academic institutions are always trying to examine what causes teachers to leave or stay. In Malaysia, scholars have studied factors that cause lecturer turnover in private HEIs, and report that job autonomy, satisfaction, and compensation are closely related to lecturers' intention to leave. However, job security and supervisor support do not significantly contribute to lecturers' turnover (Rathakrishnan et al., 2016). In another study that determines factors that affect teacher satisfaction among excellent teachers in Malaysia, personal growth and supervision are found to be significant in determining whether teachers are satisfied with their work. Results in this study are quite contrary to the findings in Rathakrishnan's (2016) study, which is probably due to the different levels and regions of academic institutions. However, it is believed that providing proper rewards and autonomy for teaching staff in Pakistan's HEIs can help to reduce the teacher turnover rate (Khan et al., 2021). In China's private HEIs, low salaries, few professional development opportunities, and authoritarian leadership are found to predict teacher turnover (Zhang, 2021). On the whole, the gratification of both motivators and hygiene factors is critical to motivating teachers in HEIs to stay.

2.2 Teacher turnover

In this study, teachers who work in private HEIs in China are the subject of research. As the most populous country in the world, China has the largest higher education system in the world (official report of China Daily, 2022). There are more than 3,000 colleges and institutions in mainland China in 2021, with over 44.3 million students enrolled and 240 million Chinese individuals having completed high school education (statistics from 2022 educational statistics in Ministry of Education of the Peoples' Republic of China). Among all the HEIs in China, private HEIs account for 25%, which is also the largest in the world. However, there is a huge difference between private HEIs in China and private HEIs in other countries. In the list of Double First Class Universities, an improvement policy to promote elite universities in China, there are 140 universities nationwide, while all of these HEIs are public (Ministry of Education of the Peoples' Republic of China, 2022). The marginalisation of private HEIs in China deserves attention from both institution leaders and policymakers so as to advance the sustainable development of private HEIs in China. In recent years, studies have indicated that an increasing number of teachers in China's private HEIs are leaving or have the intention to leave the teaching profession, and the trend is going to continue in years to come (Zhao & Zhou, 2022).

2.3 Personal factors

As an employee's decision to leave the current organisation is driven by different reasons, which vary from person to person, studies on personal factors of teacher turnover are thorough in extant literature. An individual's decision to leave is primarily based on demographic (Shah et al., 2010) and personal factors (Subramaniam et.al., 2010). Some of the factors include age, gender, marital status, and number of children. Other factors include job satisfaction, health conditions, social status, and children's education. These factors are comprehensive enough to explain why a teacher leaves at a personal level. However, Nguyen and Springer (2021) posit that personal factors that contribute to teacher turnover consist of teacher characteristics and teacher qualifications. In this vein, it combines

demographic and personal factors proposed by Shah (2010), while adding teacher qualifications, which include education levels and years of experience.

2.4 Institution factors

According to the literature, there are a plethora of studies on teacher turnover from the employee turnover perspective, teachers' work-life quality, with an emphasis on the working environment, work experience, and mental health (Hart, 1994). A high rate of teacher turnover indicates serious issues inside an educational institution, and it can lead to instability and more problems (Martinez-Garcia & Slate, 2009). Hence, improving teachers work-life quality and work experience is of paramount significance for the development of HEIs. Recent studies on academic institutions' influence on teacher turnover have examined extensively occupational factors, with an emphasis on working conditions (Toropova et al., 2021), such as institution resources, student discipline, and professional development. These aspects put institution factors that predict teacher turnover in a big picture, from student features, leadership and colleague relationships, to the working environment.

3.0 Methodology

Quantitative research design is utilised to examine the level of turnover intention and the difference of teacher turnover intention based on teacher demographic information.

3.1 Participants

In this micro-level study, 100 questionnaires were distributed, but only 62 questionnaires were usable. They were teachers from a private university in Sichuan province, China. Among these respondents, 14 were males and 48 were females. A purposive sampling method was used to select teachers from different faculties in this university.

3.2 Instruments

A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed based on literature (Toropova et al., 2021; Harden et al., 2018), which consists of four parts. The first part includes demographic questions such as age, gender, marital status, and teaching experience. The second part consists of questions related to working conditions, including leadership support, student discipline, workload, institution resources, work itself, and professional development. The third part includes four questions about job satisfaction. The last part includes questions about teacher turnover intention. The reliability of the instrument is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability test results (N=62)

Sub-constructs	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Leadership Support	3	0.904
Student Discipline	5	0.936
Workload	5	0.955
Institution resources	5	0.951
Work Tt Self	4	0.942
Professional Development	5	0.944
Job Satisfaction	4	0.912
Teacher Turnover Intention	5	0.945

3.3 Data collection

In this study, the social media platform WeChat was used to collect data, through which the researcher sent the questionnaire, and respondents gave their responses. A brief introduction of this study and its aims were shown prior to the questions. Also, the time expected to finish the questionnaire was specified, which is 10 minutes. To keep in line with ethical considerations, respondents in this study were anonymous, and they had the right to be informed of the results.

3.4 Data analysis

Data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed by employing SPSS 26. Descriptive data generated was used to analyze the mean of teacher turnover intention. After that, an independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA test were used to analyze the difference of teacher turnover intention among different types of demographic factors. Finally, Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention.

4.0 Findings

In this section, the demographic information of the respondent is displayed. Then, the findings of the data analysis are explained according to the three research objectives.

4.1 Respondents' demographic profile

Demographic information of the respondent in this study consists of seven parts, as shown in Table 2. In this study, female teachers account for 77 % of the sample, which is about three times the number of male teachers. Among the four age groups, the majority (37%) of the respondents are above 51 years, and 34% are below 30 years. 61 % of the respondents are reported to have children, and

teachers who have 1 child account for 50% of the sample. In terms of occupational level, assistant lecturers and lecturers account for half of the respondents, while only 4.8% of the sample are professors. In terms of teaching experience, the majority (34%) have taught for between 4 to 8 years, followed by 9 to 15 years.

Table 2: Respondents' Demographic Profile (N=62)

No	Demographic factors	Category	Frequency(n)	Percentage(%)
1	Gender	Male	14	22.6
		Female	48	77.4
2	Age	≤ 30	21	33.9
		31-40	10	16.1
		41-50	8	12.9
		≥ 51	23	37.1
3	Marital status	Single	8	12.9
		Married	54	87.1
4	Children	Have	38	61.3
		Don't have	24	38.7
5	No. of children	0	24	38.7
		1	31	50.0
		2	6	9.7
		3	1	1.6
6	Title	Assistant lecturer	25	40.3
		Lecturer	25	40.3
		Associate professor	9	14.5
		Professor	3	4.8
7	Teaching experience	≤ 3 years	11	17.7
		4-8 years	21	33.9
		9-15 years	19	30.6
		16-25 years	5	8.1
		≥26 years	6	9.7

4.2 Teacher turnover intention

The first research objective is to determine the level of teacher turnover intention. Results of the mean of each item in teacher turnover intention part are as summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of Teacher Turnover Intention (N=62)

Items	Mean
1. It is likely that I will be working for this university/college this time next year.	3.60
2. I will be working at this university/college 2 years from now.	3.55
3. I will be working at this university/college 5 years from now.	3.56
4. I will be working for this university/college till I retire.	3.56
5. I will be working for this university/college until I get another job.	3.44

Results of mean scores can be categorised into three types, namely low (1.00 to 2.33), moderate (2.34 to 3.67) and high (3.68 to 5.00) (Thahira Bibi TKM Thangal, 2023). As these item questions are worded from the perspective of intent to stay, data is calculated in an inverse way, with higher mean scores indicating a higher level of turnover intention. Results of this study show that most of the teachers will be working at least for one more year only. However, the lowest mean score is Item 5, moderate to high level, which shows that more than half of them will work until they get another job.

4.3 Teacher turnover intention based on demographic factors

According to the second research objective, teacher turnover intention is examined among different demographic factors. An independent sample t-test and a one-way ANOVA test were conducted and the results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Teacher Turnover Intention by Demographic Factors(N=62)

Demographic factors	Turnover intention				
	Within 1 year	Within 2 years	Within 5 years	Till retirement	Till getting another job
Gender	0.500	0.247	0.560	0.389	0.115
Age	0.000**	0.017**	0.000**	0.001**	0.000**
Marital status	0.479	0.592	0.867	0.388	0.884
Children	0.164	0.155	0.038**	0.396	0.144
No. of children	0.578	0.516	0.232	0.747	0.266
Title	0.001**	0.045**	0.000**	0.006**	0.003**
Teaching experience	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**

**Correlation is considered significant when sig. below 0.05

Results in this test show that there is no significant difference of teacher turnover intention between males and females. However, there is a difference of teacher turnover intention between teachers age group below 30 years and above 51 years. No significant

difference of teacher turnover intention is found based on marital status, whether they have children, and a number of children. In terms of occupational status, teachers' level of intention to leave varies among different titles. Results indicate that there is a significant difference of turnover intention among assistant lecturers, lecturers, and associate professors. The same results are obtained in teaching experience, with a significant difference in teacher turnover intention between teachers who have taught for less than 3 years and other groups of teaching experience.

4.4 Job satisfaction and teacher turnover intention

Guided by the third research objective, this part analyzes the relationship between job satisfaction and teacher turnover intention. Results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5. Relationship between Job Satisfaction and Teacher Turnover Intention(N=62)

	Turnover intention				
	Within 1 year	Within 2 years	Within 5 years	Till retirement	Till getting another job
Pearson Correlation	-0.511	-0.416	-0.423	-0.394	-0.350
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.001	0.001	0.002	0.005

As indicated by the results, the relationship between job satisfaction and teacher turnover intention within 1 year is moderately negative and statistically significant ($r=-0.511$, sig. <0.05) (Schober & Schwarte, 2018). Hence, a lower level of job satisfaction would predict a higher level of turnover intention within 1 year. Also, there is a negative relationship between job satisfaction and teacher turnover within 2 years, 5 years, till retirement, till getting another job respectively.

5.0 Discussion

In this section, the main findings of this study are discussed. First, the demographic profile of the respondent is explained. Then, the level of teacher turnover intention and its difference among different demographic factors are expounded.

5.1 Demographic factors

In this study, 77 % of the respondent are female, and the uneven distribution of the gender can be explained by the workforce of teachers in China. According to statistics, more than 51 % of full-time teachers in China's HEIs are females, and the number is still increasing (Li et al., 2023). Ages of the respondents display polarisation, with more than half of these teachers being below 30 years old or above 51. This indicates that most of the participants are young or re-employed retired teachers, which echoes the age composition of teachers in private HEIs in China, with young teaching staff being the main force of faculties (Huang, 2019). Assistant lecturers, also known as junior lecturers, account for 25% of the respondents, the same as the number of lecturers. As private HEIs in China are application-oriented, this means they have lower demand for teachers with academic titles above lecturers compared with research-oriented public HEIs. In line with the age and title composition of teachers, teaching experience among respondents has the same characteristic, with more than half of teachers whose years of teaching less than 8 years. Although it is a small sample, its demographic features basically correspond with that of the whole private HEIs in China.

5.2 Teacher turnover intention

Results of the study show that there is a moderate to high level of teacher turnover intention. Similar findings have been found in previous studies (Kang, 2023), which implies that teacher turnover in private HEIs has become an increasing concern. This is probably due to their unfavorable working conditions and low level of job satisfaction. Many studies have elaborated on the importance of working conditions for academicians in HEIs, stating that a sound working environment is critical to retain teachers in HEIs. Studies on teacher turnover also show that improving teachers' level of job satisfaction can negatively affect teachers' turnover decisions (Saiti & Papadopoulos, 2015). In this study, teacher turnover intention within 1 year is relatively high. Hence, improving the working conditions and job satisfaction for teachers in private HEIs in China is imperative.

5.3 Teacher turnover intention based on demographic factors

Results show that there is a significant difference in teacher turnover intention based on age, title, and teaching experience. These results are not surprising, as they are in line with findings in previous studies (Shah et al., 2020). In most cases, these three demographic factors are not independent among each other, as young teaching staff in HEIs are always in their beginning stage of teaching and have not had any promotion in academic rank. Therefore, it is essential to understand what contributes to the turnover intention or actual leaving behavior of young academicians in HEIs. It is reported that improving the quality of supervision, enhancing opportunities for professional and personal development, and reducing workload are important ways to retain beginning teachers (Den Brok et al., 2017).

5.4 Job satisfaction and teacher turnover intention

In line with other studies on job satisfaction and turnover intention (Ali, 2010), this study also indicates a negative relationship between the two variables. Previous studies reveal that job satisfaction is an important indicator of turnover intention (Dole & Schroeder, 2001),

which means that people who are more satisfied with their job are less likely to exit. However, results of this study only display a moderately negative relationship, and this is mainly due to the small sample size.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This paper focuses on teacher turnover in private HEIs in China, which is the largest in the world in terms of the number of teachers and students. Findings show that job satisfaction, and female teachers with caring duties are reasons teachers leave the profession. However, private HEIs in China have been put in a marginalised position compared with public HEIs. With an increasing number of teachers, it is essential for private HEIs to retain teachers to ensure teaching quality and sustainable development.

Through analyzing the demographic factors and teacher turnover intention, this study indicates that more attention should be paid to female teachers, as they account for more than half of the teaching staff in HEIs. Besides, strategies should be taken to retain novice academicians, who are more likely to leave the teaching profession compared with other teachers. This study is expected to provide a reference for researchers in this field. Besides, it contributes to the management of HEIs and policymakers in China, as private HEIs in China are getting more attention from both higher education and the wider society. By creating better working conditions and promoting teacher job satisfaction, educators and policymakers can help reduce teacher turnover and retain effective teachers, thus improving teaching quality and achieving sustainable development of private HEIs.

However, the major limitation in this study is acknowledged. As it is a preliminary study which only involves small sample size, it is difficult to generalise the findings. Besides, this study is conducted using a quantitative method with close ended questions to test teacher turnover intention, so the results may be limited.

7.0 Suggestion for Future Research

This study used a small sample size as it's a micro level study done in the Sichuan Province. Empirical studies with larger sample sizes and looking at other private universities should be done to test and generalize the results of this study. Future studies are suggested to include external factors such as workforce and school improvement policies to get a holistic understanding on what drives teachers away from teaching.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper examines teacher turnover intention and factors related to this career decision in China's private HEIs. As most of the studies focus on teachers and students in public HEIs, this paper contributes to the understanding of teacher turnover and the quality of life of teachers which are important to mitigate future teacher turnover.

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