

Subjective Social Status on Rural Small-scale School Teachers' Retention Intentions in China: The Mediating Role of Profession Identity and the Moderating Role of Educational Belief

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Abstract: The Stability of rural small-scale school teachers (RSSTs) is key in the growth of rural education. The subjective social status of RSSTs should be examined regarding their intentions to remain. In this research, a survey was conducted on RSSTs in five provinces in central and western China, and a generalised structural equation model was employed. Other variables of professional identity and educational beliefs were introduced as mediating and moderating variables in the regression model. The results showed that the subjective social status of RSSTs had a positive impact on retention intent. In addition, the association between subjective social status and retention intentions was partially mediated by professional identity, and educational beliefs moderated this relationship in a positive way. Nonetheless, the educational beliefs' moderating role in professional identity and retention intentions was shown to be insignificant. It is proposed that they should strive to enhance the subjective social status of RSSTs, increase the connection between professional identity and retention intentions, and improve their educational belief to promote their willingness to work in and stay at rural small-scale schools.

Keywords: Rural Small-scale School Teachers-Subjective Social Status-Retention Intentions-Professional Identity-Educational Belief.

1. Introduction

In China, education is a pivotal element in enhancing national wealth, human life, and talent and intellectual availability to the rural resurgence, a policy initiative of promoting social justice (Zhang & Sun, 2023). Owing to years of low job satisfaction and education resources, rural education has found itself vulnerable to several issues, which is a weakness of the Chinese education system (Wang et al., 2023). In order to improve the quality of education and drive the high-quality expansion of

basic education, cautious distribution of educational resources is essential, targeting rural, remote, poor, and ethnic areas. With the changing education system in China, numerous rural schools have been closed down or merged together as a result of population change. However, there are unique institutions, called small rural schools, which survive. These schools are located in village-based primary schools and teaching points in the economically disadvantaged rural districts, with an average population of less than 100 students. Geographical, economic, and social limitations of small-scale rural schools feature limited classes, educators, and students, and an unbalanced teacher structure (Araya et al., 2012).

Small-scale schools are numerous in the countryside, although small. According to the 2022 National Education Statistical Bulletin in China, 149,100 ordinary primary schools of the country are recorded, including 76,900 small-scale rural schools, comprising more than half of the total. Under the development strategy of basic education in China, it is anticipated that rural small-scale schools will still have a critical role in serving the educational responsibilities in the remote regions. Rural small-scale school teachers (RSSTs) play an important role in the rural education sector, and there is a necessity to mitigate the living conditions of these teachers and their retention intentions. Although RSSTs play a critical role in rural education, they are a vulnerable group that deserves the respect of society, as per the Chinese goals of educational equity. Teachers are considered the key to the success of educational institutions, and the quality of teachers is the major factor that distinguishes the success of schools and the ones that underperform (Feng & Sass, 2017). The recruitment and retention of competent teachers in rural areas, however, is not an easy task due to factors such as historical barriers, geographic isolation, insufficient economic incentives, and the lack of societal focus. Even simple positions in small rural schools are hard to fill, which hinders their development and adversely influences the quality of education and future opportunities of students (Goodwin, 2023).

Unlike those in urban settings, some Rural School Teachers (RSSTs) in rural settings experience anxiety in their careers and personal lives, which prevents the realisation of educational equity. Rural educators typically have to work too long hours, some of which go beyond the legal boundaries (Allen et al., 2021), which results in little personal free time (Wang, 2023). Small school rural teachers face even greater workloads due to their limited number in the schools that can be overwhelmed with numerous other teaching duties (Griva & Joeques, 2003) and additional responsibilities like keeping students safe on and off campus and performing administrative duties (Toropova, Myrberg & Johansson, 2021). Moreover, the teachers of small-scale schools in rural areas earn less income compared to their colleagues, who work in urban areas, which makes it hard to remunerate them to a satisfactory level (Nguyen, 2017). Absence of the required systems and conditions that facilitate professional growth, lack of high-quality education resources and opportunities (Fairman et al., 2023) contribute to a lack of educational equity and equal development of urban and rural education. RSSTs are under a lot of work pressure due to high work demands, low support levels, and large workloads, which may negatively affect their physical and psychological well-being (Borrelli et al., 2014). As a result, this pressure is able to influence the content of education and teaching, hinder the healthy growth of rural educators, and lead to a high turnover rate.

Many scholars who have tended to equate it with mobility and turnover have

researched the topic of teacher retention, but the scholarly research has been carried out in a foreign context. The first model proposed to explain teacher retention was by Chapman (1983), with a lot of research conducted on the factors that contributed to the intentions of the teachers to remain. The influence of the demographic, organisational, and professional features was discussed in some previous studies, as demonstrated in the research by Mafora (2013), Opoku et al. (2020), Van den Borre, Spruyt and Van Droogenbroeck (2021), and Ingersoll and Tran (2023). Nevertheless, the studies on teachers in small rural Chinese schools are inadequate. The retention intentions of teachers are a good predictor of their chances of leaving school, which is the behaviour of the satisfied teachers who are ready to stay in the school that they serve (Tett & Meyer, 1993). In the rural underdeveloped regions, the role identity of teachers is different, as the traditional Chinese culture views education as a significant part of life and teachers as the highest possible authority, similar to heaven, earth, monarch, and relatives. Nevertheless, this conservative culture is fading because of the rising market orientation in the teaching field (Liu, 2020). In small rural schools, educators tend to cope with conflicting traditional and modern market cultures, which is why it is necessary to examine how social status can influence their intentions to remain.

The professional identity is an important element when it comes to showing the professional appeal of rural teachers, so research has shown that the intention to leave a teaching job in the rural environment depends on the professional identity of rural teachers (Wang, 2023). Furthermore, the social status of an individual within his or her profession plays a significant role in shaping the professional identity, and thus, it is worth examining the relationship between the social status and the professional identity in influencing retention intentions. In addition to the intentions of the teachers to stay, their beliefs in education serve as a direct motivation for the involvement of the teachers in educational and teaching activities to satisfy their psychological needs. These convictions are positively associated with the long-term retention intentions (Maaranen et al., 2019). The research problem of interest is to examine how social status influences the retention intention of rural small-scale school teachers. And we shall also consider what impact professional identity and educational beliefs have on this relationship, which provides insight into the mechanisms involved.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis

2.1. Subjective Social Status and Retention Intentions

One of the most popular notions in sociology is social status, and the term can be associated with the social hierarchy of individuals or groups in the social stratification system (Kahraman & Çelik, 2020). This notion embraces both objective social status (OSS) and subjective social status (SSS). The economic and social status of an individual is measured by income, education, and occupation of a person in comparison to others based on socioeconomic status or objective Social Status. The Subjective Social Status, on the other hand, is a significant environmental perception that determines the behaviour of a person. It is the subjective evaluation of a social position of an individual, comparing it with those of others, considering the impressions of the past, present, and future social position (Ostrove et al., 2000). It

should be mentioned that objective social status implies the division of the objects of the study into different social classes in terms of economic income, occupation, and the level of education of people. In contrast, people that ultimately determines human behaviour (Xu & Wang, 2015) relate subjective social status to the psychological state and perception of the external world. As a kind of subjective perception, which is led by objective social status, subjective social status is an aspect of the psychological thinking of individuals.

The social status of teachers according to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Recommendations on the Status of Teachers covers many facets, including, identity of teachers, respect given to teachers, the importance of the roles, and the degree of authority they possess. Another aspect behind this definition is the consideration of the factors such as working conditions, salary, and other material benefits, as compared to other professional cohorts. Subjective social status has been selected as a measurement to understand the social status of individuals in this study, because subjective social status is more effective than objective social status in the analysis of subtle social data (Goodman et al., 2003). Besides, the subjective social status is more or less related to the retention intention, meaning that they have a common psychological orientation. Research has found that rural teachers who have weaker subjective social status are likely to quit their jobs because of the scarcity of resources (Hammett, 2008). Also, there exist empirical studies indicating that clarifying the subjective social status of rural teachers may positively affect their intentions to stay at the rural location, which fosters the stability of rural educators (Yuan & Bai, 2021). As a result, the given study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Subjective social status has a positive effect on the retention intentions of RSSTs.

2.2. Mediating Effect of Professional Identity

Social identity theory is one of the frameworks that describes the way in which people group society according to certain criteria, create identity of groups, and find personal satisfaction and external validation (Tajfel, 1978). When people come and become members of a group, they feel like they belong and they recognise the support and importance that the group provides. This will create a sense of dedication to their group work and a feeling of purpose and responsibility to their duties. The main aim of the theory is to explain how the identity of your group members that an individual has influences his or her social cognition, attitudes, and behaviour.

People in social lives always aim at getting, or keeping, a positive social identity that is expressed in the professional world by having a robust professional identity. According to Creed, Kaya and Hood (2020), professional identity is a way a person feels about objective, social value, and other elements of his or her occupation. It shows the extent to which one incorporates his or her occupation into the self-concept and the congruence of professional values. Thus, when a person is not able to belong to a group, it proceeds to perceive the assistance that a group provides and think about his/her values and feel a sense of meaning in his/her work. Because of this, they can take actions to resolve this disconnection, leaving the group being a prominent course of action.

A number of studies have found that there is a great correlation between subjective

social status perceptions of teachers and professional identity. Yip, Saito and Diamond (2024) investigated the topic of teacher mobility and career change and discovered that subjective social status, as perceived by a teacher, plays a significant role in shaping professional identity. Similarly, in the same research, Liu (2023) performed narrative research on the topic of rural special post teachers, where he notes that the subjective status of these teachers has declined, and this further affected their sense of identity and their professional identity. Professional identity in teachers has been identified in the literature as an important predictor of turnover intention. Gaziel (1995) found that there is a negative relationship between the professional identity of teachers and work pressure, work intention to quit, and turnover intention. On the other hand, Hong (2010) highlighted a positive link between the turnover intention and professional identity of teachers. The scope of professional identity possessed by a teacher plays a significant role in deciding whether one remains in their current job or not. In addition, Alexander, Wyatt-Smith and Du Plessis (2020) recommended that the teaching profession have the potential to affect the outlooks of teachers on retention, with negative societal constructs being a risk factor to retention. As a result, the hypothesis of this work is as follows:

H2: Professional identity plays an mediating role between social status and retention intentions of RSSTs.

Educational belief, a motivational variable that shapes the career selection, cognition, and action of teachers, is a spiritual factor that helps one to stay dedicated to the profession. Educational belief is a component of personal belief systems in rural teachers since personal backgrounds and external interventions into the personal system, like professional ideals, teacher-student relationships, shape it and the structure of subject knowledge (Lv & Feng, 2018). As Li and Xing (2019) emphasised, teachers with higher educational conviction had a greater likelihood of committing to a teaching career, which contributed to the creation of a social environment, respected teachers, and promoting their social status. The authors also stressed the need to identify teachers as social entrepreneurs, which would produce social innovation and enhance the professional level of teachers (Bates et al., 2024). They have discovered that this recognition has the potential to have a positive effect on pre-service teacher recruitment and teacher retention through a mixed research method.

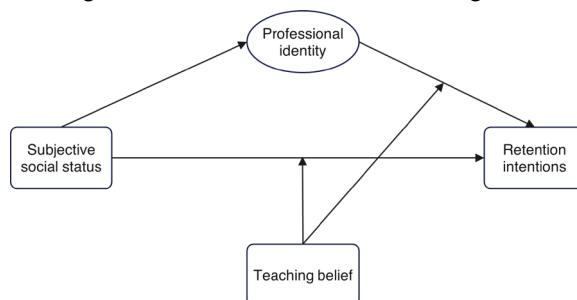
Li, Li and Fu (2022) have undertaken a study that explores the factors that influence the professional identity of teachers and found that there exists a relationship between the educational beliefs of teachers and their professional identity. The paper has shown that teachers who hold the teaching career as a means to self-worth fulfilment have had a stronger professional identity than teachers who envisage teaching as a source of livelihood. This result is in line with empirical literature that indicates that intrinsic motivation is a perfect mediator between stressors and low personal accomplishment in autonomous roles (Rubino et al., 2009). As such, we have the following hypotheses of this study:

H3: Educational beliefs play a positive moderating role in the subjective social status to enhance the retention intentions of RSSTs.

H4: Educational beliefs play a positive moderating role in the promotion of retention intentions of RSSTs by professional identity.

Based on the above discussion, the influence path model of this study is constructed, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Influence Path Model Diagram.



3. Research Design

3.1. Sample

Our research group has been dedicated to studying rural education. Through visits and investigations, we have gained insight into the work and life of rural teachers, laying the groundwork for gathering first-hand data. The data for this study were collected through a survey of teachers in rural small-scale schools. Conducted in five central and western provinces and autonomous regions in China from 2019 to 2020, including Henan, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Guizhou, and Tibet. The survey yielded a total of 1002 samples. These samples encompassed a range of demographic variables such as gender, marital status, household registration, age, teaching experience, annual income, and professional rank. The dataset comprised information on the teachers' personal backgrounds, educational beliefs, professional attributes, subjective social standing, and intention to stay. This rich dataset serves as a solid foundation for investigating teachers' motivation to remain in their current positions.

3.2. Variable Selection

Dependent Variable Retention intention, dichotomous variable. Based on the method of Molho et al. (2020), we use the item 'If re-selected, will you consider jumping out of the teacher profession' as an indicator of retention intention in a reverse scoring manner. 1 = will stay; 0 = will not stay.

Independent Variable: Subjective social status. In this study, the independent variable is subjective social status. In this item, the method developed by Adler et al. (2000) was used to show the subjects a total of ten levels of ladders, 10 representing the highest level of society, and 1 representing the lowest level of society. The subjects selected an integer from 1-10 to represent their own level.

Mediating Variable: Professional identity, latent variable. The scale was developed with reference to Fan (2023), a total of 7 questions, such as 'I think that teachers' work plays an important role in the development of human society'. The scale includes four dimensions: professional pride, professional growth, salary advantage and work-life balance. According to Likter 5 points, 1 represents 'very inconsistent' and 5 represents

'very consistent'. The higher the score, the higher the degree of professional identity. The Cronbach's α coefficient of the scale in this study was 0.729, indicating that the scale had good internal consistency.

Moderating Variable: Educational belief, dichotomous variables. We take 'you will choose to work in our school, the most important consideration is whether you love teaching and educating people' as an indicator to evaluate their educational beliefs. Based on the previous research, the above items are converted into two dichotomous variables: 0= no, 1= yes.

Control Variables: Based on previous studies, it is found that there were significant differences in the turnover intention of rural teachers in terms of gender, teaching age, educational background, marital status, professional title and personal monthly income (Callister, 2006; Smith & Handler, 1979; Viano, Rodriguez & Hunter, 2023; Wang, Wen & Zhang, 2022). In this study, the following variables were selected as control variables: gender (1= male; 0= female), marriage (1= married; 0= unmarried), household registration (Are you urban or rural ?), annual Income (What was your total personal income for the whole of last year ?), professional title (1= assistant level and below; 2= secondary; 3= first; 4= above advanced). Since the absolute number of income is larger than other variables, the income is logarithmically processed, and the function is selected as $\ln(1 + \text{annual income})$.

3.3. Analysis Method

The research design adopted in this paper is the Generalised Structural Equation Model (GSEM) technique used in estimating the model of teacher retention intention, a dichotomous dependent variable. The GSEM enables one to investigate complex interactions among variables using a path analysis design. In comparison to the traditional SEM models, GSEM allows customising the analysis procedure to the properties of the dependent variable (continuous or categorical) when performing the regression analysis, thereby better fitting the analysis to the needs of the research.

4. Findings

4.1. Sample Description Statistics

According to the statistical description, most teachers in small schools in rural areas are females, with a majority of 63.77. The number of married teachers is way higher, at 84.93% of the population, compared to unmarried teachers. The household registration of teachers indicates that the number of teachers registering in rural and urban areas is equal. Their age distribution is as follows: the largest number of teachers are aged between 36-45 (52.7 percent of all teachers), followed by teachers under 25 and older than 55 (around 5 percent each). Regarding the teaching experience, more than a third of the teachers report having 11-20 years of teaching experience, and the proportion of teachers with less than 3 years of experience, as well as teachers with more than 30 years of experience, is about 10 percent each. The financial situation of the small rural schools is economically diverse, with almost half the teachers in those schools having to make 30,000 to 50,000 a year, and only 10% of the teachers making above 80,000 a year. In addition, most teachers are of the first and second levels.

Table 1: Sample Description Statistics (N=1002)

Variable	Type	Number	Ratio (%)
Gender	Male	363	36.23
	Female	639	63.77
Marriage	Married	851	84.93
	Unmarried	151	15.07
Household Registration	Rural	520	51.90
	Urban	482	48.10
Age (year)	≤ 25	49	4.89
	25-35	188	18.76
	36-45	528	52.70
	46-55	192	19.16
	≥ 55	45	4.49
Teaching Age(year)	≤ 3	110	10.98
	4-10	138	13.77
	11-20	352	35.13
	21-30	290	28.94
	≥ 30	112	11.18
Annual Income(ln(1+income))	≤ 3	160	15.97
	3-5	495	49.40
	5-8	230	22.95
	8-10	61	6.09
	≥ 10	56	5.59
Professional Title	Assistant level and below	131	13.07
	Secondary	377	37.62
	First	393	39.22
	Above advanced	101	10.08

With few teachers being classified as junior or senior, indicating a relatively balanced title structure.

4.2. Statistical Results of Main Variables

The value of retention intentions of Rural School-Stationed Teachers (RSSTs) in China appears to be relatively low according to the main variable description statistics presented in Table 1. Specifically, the number of individuals expressing willingness to remain in rural areas is only slightly above fifty percent. Analysis of subjective social status highlights that teachers rank at 3.721 out of 10 social classes, placing them in the middle to lower stratum. Moreover, the average level of vocational identity among teachers in small rural schools in China is moderate at 3.571. Notably, educational beliefs among this cohort are generally positioned at an upper-middle level, which is a positive finding.

Table 2: Variable description statistical table (N=1002).

Variable	Average	Standard Deviation
Subjective social status	3.721	0.072
Vocational identity	3.571	0.014
Teaching beliefs	0.746	0.014
Retention intention	0.516	0.499

4.3. GSEM Analysis Result

4.3.1. Main Effect Test

The results show that after controlling for gender, age, marriage, household registration, teaching age and annual income variables, from the main effect, subjective social status has a significant positive effect on the retention intentions ($\beta = 0.020$, $p < 0.01$), H1 is verified. This shows that improving the subjective social status is a feasible way to enhance the intention of RSSTs to stay.

4.4. Test of Mediating Effect

The results in Tab 3 show that subjective social status has a positive impact on professional identity ($\beta = 0.029$, $p < 0.001$), and professional identity can also significantly promote the retention intentions ($\beta = 0.653$, $p < 0.001$), H2 is verified. In addition, after adding the mediating variable, the influence of subjective social status on the intention to stay is still significant. This shows that professional identity plays a partial mediating role in the influence of subjective social status on the retention intentions of RSSTs. The proportion of indirect effects is 47.5%.

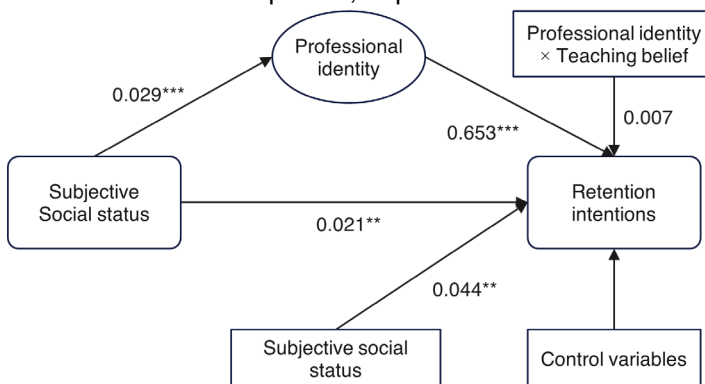
Table 3: Mediating Results in the SEM.

Mediation Effect Test	Estimate	Mediation Effect Proportion
Total effect	0.040***	-
Direct effect	0.021**	-
Indirect effect (SSS→PI→RT)	0.019***	47.5%

Note: SSS= subjective social status; PI= professional identity; RT= retention intentions.

4.5. Test for Moderation Effect

Figure 2: Path Coefficient Diagram of Mediated Moderation Model * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.



The results show that educational belief can enhance the positive impact of subjective social status on the retention intentions of RSSTs ($\beta = 0.044$, $p < 0.01$),

H3 is verified. However, educational belief does not pass the significance test ($\beta = 0.007$, $p > 0.05$) in moderating the influence of professional identity on the retention intentions RSSTs, and H4 was not established.

5. Discussion

This study utilized survey data from rural small-scale teachers to examine the associations among subjective social status, professional identity, educational belief, and retention intentions through the Generalized Structural Equation Modeling (GSEM) approach. The findings indicated a positive influence of subjective social status on the inclination of rural small-scale school teachers to remain in their current positions. Furthermore, professional identity was identified as a significant partial mediator in the relationship between subjective social status and retention intentions among RSSTs. It was also observed that educational belief had the potential to amplify the positive impact of subjective social status on teachers' retention intentions within rural small-scale schools.

Based on the above findings, along with the previous research findings, we are convinced that the subjective social status of teachers, vocational identity, and educational beliefs, among other variables, could be successfully used to predict the intention of rural small-scale school teachers to stay, which is very important in stabilising the rural teachers.

5.1. *The Relationship Between Subjective Social Status and Retention Intentions*

As the current research findings (Bridwell-Mitchell & Fried, 2020) show, the subjective social status of Rural Small-Scale Teachers (RSSTs) can be highly predictive of their retention intentions. According to the theory of social stratification, social members and groups are stratified on the basis of the possession of social resources, which to a large extent dictate their social status. Chinese social groups are more likely to be associated with the lower status of classes than those in developed countries (Liang, 2018; Xu & Zheng, 2023), and our research findings are consistent with this pattern. The urban-rural dual social structure of China is where the rural population generally has a lower social standing than the urban population, and hence the rural groups have a strong urge to elevate their living standards. Such inequality can drive the rural teachers to quit their teaching career in pursuit of a superior social position. In the rural social field, there is some competitiveness in the occupation of teacher since the reference groups around it are not usually of high social status. According to our research, the intention to be assigned to small-scale schools in rural areas among teachers can be increased by improving their social status. That is why it is essential to spread the idea of respect towards teachers and the importance of education in the whole society. There is a need to make efforts in improving the social position of teachers in small rural schools because this can strengthen their desire to remain in the rural settings. Moreover, given the fact that rural educators in China are faced with difficult living situations and with the duties of frontline teaching, their social status can be further improved by the policy development initiatives, like material support and social honorary titles.

5.2. *The Subjective Social Status of RSSTs Indirectly Affects Their Retention Intentions Through Professional Identity*

The professional identity of the rural teacher plays a role in enhancing their quality,

job satisfaction, role conflict, and devotion to teaching (Skinner, Leavey & Rothi, 2021). This, in turn, affects their motivation to work and their involvement (Skinner et al., 2021). As the recent research suggests, the notion of professional identity has played a significant part in defining the retention intentions of small-scale school teachers in rural areas (Cai, 2020). The wish to remain in the teaching profession was observed to be linked with the increased professional identity. Furthermore, the researcher identifies professional identity as a mediating variable between the subjective social status and the retention intentions of Rural Small-Scale Teachers (RSSTs), which is attuned to the research conducted by Peng and Yu (2022). The research demonstrates that subjective social status mediates the rural small-scale school teacher's intentions to continue employment in two directions: the first linkage between direct and indirect effects of social status on retention intentions through professional identity. This brings out the role of the subjective social status in the intention to remain in the background of professional identity. It is noted, however, that the association between subjective social status and intention to stay is not linear.

This study finds that the subjective social status positively impacts the professional identity; hence, it influences the intention to stay. This relationship is attributed to work psychology and social comparison theories. The results of the study on work psychology imply that individuals are more engaged in their professional activity due to their superior social status, and the theory of social comparison proves that the perception of a higher professional level leads to the improvement of the level of emotions, self-esteem, and personal achievements. These dimensions result in superior career identity. In such a way, the subjective social status of rural small-scale school teachers can be improved, which will allow raising their retention intentions in addition to the enhancement of their professional identity in this way. The creation of a conducive environment among teachers in small-scale rural schools can be done through strategies such as the adoption of a teacher title system, improved pay structure, and an increase in the quantity of salary, among others, which will help such teachers to volunteer to serve in such schools and be in a position to grow professionally.

5.3. Educational Belief Positively Moderates the Positive Impact of Subjective Social Status on the Intention to Stay in Rural Small Schools

The study finds that educational belief could play a positive moderating role in reducing the effect of the subjective social status of teachers in rural small schools on their retention, in accordance with previous empirical results (Karakus et al., 2021). Educators who have a passion for the job show greater strength in coping with workplace stressors, which helps them strengthen their desire to stay in these environments. These results highlight the importance of educational belief as a critical factor in increasing retention rates of teachers in small rural schools. Educational belief is a set of values and beliefs. In order to develop and cement the pedagogical ideology of teachers in these situations, it is crucial to promote intrinsic motivation and develop an understanding of the immense importance of education in rural, underprivileged settings. Encouragement and protection of their teaching passion is also an important element in this context.

The moderate position of educational belief with respect to the influences of professional identity on the retention intentions of small-scale school teachers in rural areas is not significant, perhaps because of the modulatory variables of the educational beliefs of rural teachers. As it has been shown in research, these

influencing factors can be broadly divided into two aspects. To begin with, there is the influence of personal factors of teachers, including gender, age, learning experience, life experience, teaching experience, and personality traits. Secondly, it is the role of social environmental factors, which include the effect of the social and cultural value system, family processes, school climate, and workplace conditions (Xu, 2020). These influencing factors are observed as less related to vocational identity, whether looking through the individual factors of rural small-scale school teachers, or the social environmental factors.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

This study presents several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, there are regional limitations due to constraints in research funding. The research sample was restricted to rural small-scale school teachers from five provinces in the central and western regions of China. Consequently, it failed to encompass all provinces, including those housing the 10 national rural revitalization key support counties. Secondly, it is important to recognize the complexity of the influencing factors on teachers' retention intentions in rural small-scale schools. While this study delves into the impact of subjective social status, professional identity, and educational belief on teachers' intention to remain in such schools, it does not explore other significant variables. Future research endeavors will aim to address these limitations by enhancing the breadth of sample coverage and incorporating additional key variables that influence teachers' retention intentions in small-scale rural schools.

5.5. Acknowledgement

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