



International Journal of Education and Teaching

Publisher's Home Page: <https://www.svedbergopen.com/>



Research Paper

Open Access

The Effects of Job Demands and Resources on Rural Kindergarten Teachers' Retention Intentions in China

Linhong Shi¹*  and Jing Li² 

¹Faculty of Education, Southwest University, Chongqing, China. E-mail: shilinhong520@126.com

²Faculty of Education, Southwest University, Chongqing, China. E-mail: m14769019020@163.com

Article Info

Volume 5, Issue 2, December 2025

Received : 13 September 2025

Accepted : 06 December 2025

Published : 25 December 2025

doi: [10.51483/IJEDT.5.2.2025.142-157](https://doi.org/10.51483/IJEDT.5.2.2025.142-157)

Abstract

This study examines how job demands and resources influence retention intentions among rural early childhood educators in China by analysing survey data from 6,632 teachers across 10 provinces. Binary logistic regression showed that 67.2% of teachers intended to stay and 32.8% did not, with lower retention intention rates observed among highly educated, non-local, and on-staff teachers. The results indicate that: (1) longer working hours and role demands reduce retention, while passion for preschool education increases it; (2) job resources (i.e., salary, social security, campus environment, autonomy, and interpersonal support) significantly boost retention; and (3) resources partially mitigate high job demands, though salary and campus environment fail to buffer these effects, while social security and autonomy alleviate excessive working hours but not role demands. Recommendations to improve teacher retention include timely recruitment, rationalizing workloads, fostering professional values, and enhancing supportive resources.

Keywords: *Rural preschool education, Work demands, Work resources, Kindergarten teachers, Teacher retention*

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1. Introduction

The high-quality development of preschool education has garnered significant international attention. In the process of modernizing preschool education in China, rural education remains a pronounced area of weakness (Yang *et al.*, 2025). Teachers serve as the primary resource in rural preschool education; however, these areas have long faced persistent challenges such as teacher migration to cities and career transition. For many teachers, leaving the countryside has become a common career decision (Tang *et al.*, 2024), making the identification of factors influencing rural teachers' retention intentions a critical topic of scholarly interest.

Teacher retention intention refers to the psychological tendency and behavioural manifestation of teachers who are inclined to remain in their teaching positions over the long term, based on their professional identity and sense of responsibility (Jiang and Yip, 2024). The Job Demands–Resources Model (JD-R Model) provides a theoretical framework for analysing the factors influencing rural kindergarten teachers' retention intentions (Yin *et al.*, 2018). This model categorises the characteristics of the work environment into two core dimensions—job demands and job resources—and explains employees' work performance and psychological states through the dynamic balance between these two

* Corresponding author: Linhong Shi, Faculty of Education, Southwest University, Chongqing, China. E-mail: shilinhong520@126.com

dimensions (Bakker et al., 2023). The job demands dimension encompasses all job-related aspects that require continuous physical and mental effort, including physical exertion, cognitive load, and role-related pressure. When job demands exceed an individual's capacity or remain unresolved, they may result in adverse outcomes such as job stress and burnout (Bakker et al., 2012). In rural preschool settings, job demands often manifest as excessive workloads caused by teacher shortages, pressure from home-school communication, and conflicts stemming from holding multiple roles (Zhao et al., 2023).

In contrast, the job resources dimension includes factors that facilitate goal attainment, mitigate stress, and support personal development, encompassing both material benefits and psychosocial support (Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2013). Previous research has demonstrated that sufficient job resources not only improve job satisfaction but also strengthen organizational commitment, thereby increasing teachers' retention intentions (Qiao et al., 2017). Many existing studies conclude that high job demands and limited resources are key contributors to the resignation of rural kindergarten teachers (Sahli Lozano et al., 2025). In response, the Chinese government has implemented various policies to improve teachers' working conditions, including providing living allowances, enhancing housing security, and reducing non-teaching responsibilities. Nevertheless, 'more than one-third of rural kindergarten teachers do not intend to remain in rural areas' (Shang et al., 2020), and some even express a strong desire to resign, stating that they 'will leave as soon as there is an opportunity' (Wang et al., 2022). These findings suggest that the influence of job demands and resources on teacher retention intention may exhibit non-linear characteristics. Merely increasing job resources may not effectively counteract the negative effects of high job demands. Therefore, a deeper examination of the underlying mechanisms is required.

Based on this context, the present study explores the following questions using questionnaire data from 6,632 rural kindergarten teachers across 10 provinces in China: (1) What are the current job characteristics of rural kindergarten teachers? (2) What are rural kindergarten teachers' retention intentions? (3) Through what mechanisms do the two core job characteristics—job demands and job resources—influence retention intentions? (4) How can rural kindergarten teachers' retention intentions be strengthened?

Compared with previous research, the potential contributions of this study to the field are primarily reflected in two dimensions. Firstly, in terms of theoretical innovation, this study extends the classical JD-R model. Traditional theory suggests that job demands exert a negative influence primarily through the process of 'health impairment' (Demerouti et al., 2012). However, the present study reveals that moderate and reasonable job demands—such as those related to professional ethics—can significantly enhance rural kindergarten teachers' retention intentions. These findings confirm that, within specific organizational and cultural contexts, job demands can exert both depleting and motivational effects, offering valuable insights for refining theories of teacher career development. Secondly, this study verifies the moderating role of job resources in the negative relationship between high job demands and retention intentions. It was found that social security and job autonomy attenuate the adverse effects of overtime work on retention intentions, thereby providing an empirical basis for optimizing policy interventions under conditions of limited resources.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants and Procedure

Using a convenience sampling method, this study targeted rural kindergarten teachers from 10 provinces, including Guizhou, Yunnan, Guangxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Chongqing, and Sichuan. The first section of the questionnaire collected demographic information and data related to job demands and job resources. The second section contained 16 scale-based questions focused on the campus environment, job autonomy, and interpersonal support. The overall scale exhibited good reliability and validity, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.864 and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test values of 0.907 ($p < 0.001$). The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('very inconsistent') to 5 ('very consistent'). Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used to reduce the dimensionality of the data. The KMO value for PCA was 0.96 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the 16 items were suitable for factor analysis. The cumulative variance explained by the rotated components was 76.67%, and confirmatory factor analysis supported the rationality of the three extracted common factors.

The survey was conducted from October 2023 to March 2024. With the consent of participating kindergartens, a total of 7,150 questionnaires were distributed, and 6,632 valid responses were collected, yielding a validity rate of 92.8%. Among the valid responses, 4,511 were from teachers in public kindergartens and 2,121 were from teachers in private kindergartens.

3. Variable Selection

3.1. Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study is rural kindergarten teachers' retention intentions. It is measured by the response to the question: 'Are you willing to remain in the countryside to teach?' Responses were coded as follows: not willing to stay = 0, willing to stay = 1.

3.2. Independent Variables

The core independent variables are job demands and job resources. Drawing on the JD-R model scale (Demerouti et al., 2001) and the categorization proposed by Chinese scholars Qi Yajing and Wu Xinchun regarding the job demands and resources of primary and secondary school teachers (Qi et al., 2016; Wu and Qi, 2021), this study classifies the job demands faced by rural kindergarten teachers into the following categories: (1) Challenging demands (average daily working hours): These demands may cause pressure and difficulty but can also foster personal growth, skill enhancement, or career fulfilment. (2) Hindering demands (role demands): These demands consume personal resources and do not contribute to professional development or satisfaction. (3) Developmental demands (passion for preschool education): These reflect intrinsic motivation and support the development of knowledge, skills, and professional identity.

Job resources are categorised as follows: (1) Protective resources (salary, social security, campus environment): These help mitigate career instability by fulfilling teachers' immediate needs. (2) Growth resources (job autonomy): These enable professional decision-making and adaptability. (3) Motivational resources (interpersonal support): These promote intrinsic motivation by fostering emotional recognition and a sense of belonging.

To investigate the moderating effect of job resources on the negative relationship between job demands and retention intentions, the study constructs interaction terms between job demands and job resources. During variable operationalization, the following procedures were applied:

First, average daily working hours and role demands were dichotomised. According to Article 36 of China's Labor Law, the maximum legal weekly working hours should not exceed 44 hours, which corresponds to a daily average of approximately 9 hours. Teachers working more than 9 hours per day were coded as the high working hours group (=1), while those working 9 hours or less were assigned to the reference group (=0). Teachers with multiple roles (e.g., 'teaching + management' or 'teaching + caregiving') were coded as the high role demands group (=1), while those with a single role were set as the reference group (=0).

Second, categorical job resource variables (e.g., social security, salary) were binarised. Subgroups were established based on the 75th percentile of monthly income (4,001 yuan). Teachers earning 4,001 yuan or more were classified as the high-salary group (=1), while those earning 4,000 yuan or less formed the reference group (=0). Teachers receiving both social security and a housing provident fund were assigned to the full social security group (=1), while those with only social security or without either were coded as the reference group (=0).

Interaction terms—such as 'complete social security × high role demands' and 'campus environment × high role demands'—were constructed to examine whether various types of job resources can effectively buffer the adverse effects of high job demands on teachers' retention intentions.

3.3. Control Variables

Based on previous literature, the following variables were included as controls to account for potential multicollinearity: marital status, educational background, staffing, and local residency. Detailed coding information is presented in Table 1.

4. Model Construction

As the dependent variable is dichotomous, this study employs a binary logistic regression model for analysis. The basic form of the regression equation is as follows:

$$\text{Log}_{it}(P) = \ln(P/1-P) = a + \sum \beta_j X_i + \varepsilon \quad \dots(1)$$

In this model, teachers who expressed an unwillingness to remain in their positions serve as the reference group. Let P represent the probability that a teacher intends to stay in the position; then $P/(1 - P)$ denotes the odds ratio—defined as the ratio of the probability of retention intention to that of non-retention intention. The term X_i refers to the explanatory variables affecting retention intention, including job demands, job resources, interaction (moderating) variables, and control variables. The coefficient β_j represents the magnitude of influence of each explanatory variable on the dependent variable.

The logistic regression model is expressed as:

$$P/(1 - P) = \exp(\beta + \sum \beta_j X_j + \varepsilon) \dots(2)$$

This expression quantifies how the odds of retention intentions change in response to variations in each independent variable, holding other variables constant. The output odds ratio (OR) indicates the impact of an independent variable on the odds of an event occurring, while controlling for all other variables. An OR value greater than 1 implies that the corresponding variable increases the probability of retention, while an OR less than 1 suggests a decreased likelihood of remaining in the profession.

5. Results and Analysis

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

Among the 6,632 valid samples, 67.2% of rural kindergarten teachers indicated a willingness to remain in their current positions, while 32.8% expressed an unwillingness to stay. This shows that more than one-third of rural kindergarten teachers are not willing to continue working in their current roles.

As shown in Table 1, 73% of teachers reported working more than 8 hours per day on average, and 50.2% of teachers were responsible for ‘multiple jobs,’ such as combining teaching with administrative or caregiving duties. These figures

Dimension	Variable Name	Variable Type	Measurement Definition and Coding Description
Outcome variable	Retention intentions	Dichotomous variable	0 = not willing to stay, 1 = willing to stay
Job demands	Average daily working hours	Ordered multicategorical variable	1 ≤ 8 h (27.0%), 8 h < 2 ≤ 9 h (46.2%), 9 h < 3 ≤ 10 h (24.3%), 4 > 10 h↑ (2.5%)
	Role demands	Demands multicategorical variable	1 = teaching + childcare (30.9%), 2 = teaching + management (8.4%), 3 = management + leading classes (10.9%), 4 = full-time teacher or childcare teacher (49.8%)
	Passionate about preschool education	Ordered multicategorical variable	1 = very much not in line (0.6%), 2 = not in line (0.7%), 3 = unsure (7.8%), 4 = in line (63.2%), 5 = very much in line (27.7%)
Job resources	Monthly actual salary	Ordered multicategorical variable	1 = 2000↓ (31.2%), 2 = 2001–3000 (43.3%), 3 = 3001–4000 (14.3%), 4 = 4001–5000 (6.6%), 5 = 5001–6000 (2.3%), 6 = 6001↑ (2.3%)
	Social security and provident fund payment	Multi-categorical variable	1 = Social security, no provident fund (27.4%), 2 = Social security, provident fund (37.9%), 3 = Nothing at all (34.7%)
	Campus environment	Continuous variable	Factor Score, M = 0.01, SD = 1
	Interpersonal support	Continuous variable	Factor Score, M = -0.01, SD = 1
	Job autonomy	Continuous variable	Factor Score, M = -0.04, SD=1

Table 1 (Cont.)			
Dimension	Variable Name	Variable Type	Measurement Definition and Coding Description
Moderating variable	Social security completeness* High role demands	Categorical variable interaction term	(Social security provident fund complete = 1) × (Role demands ≥ 2 = 1)
	High monthly actual salary* High role demands	Categorical variable interaction term	(Monthly take-home pay ≥ 4001 = 1) × (Role demands ≥ 2 = 1)
	Campus environment* High role demands	Continuous-categorical variable interaction term	Campus environment × (Role demands ≥ 2 = 1)
	Interpersonal support* High role demands	Continuous-categorical variable interaction term	Term interpersonal support × (Role demands ≥ 2 = 1)
	Job autonomy* High role demands	Continuous-categorical variable interaction term	Term job autonomy × (Role demands ≥ 2 = 1)
	Social security completeness* High working hour demands	Categorical variable interaction term	(Social security provident fund completeness = 1) × (High working hour demands > 9 = 1)
	High monthly actual salary* High working hour demands	Categorical variable interaction term	(Monthly real wage ≥ 4001 = 1) × (High working hour demands > 9 = 1)
	Campus environment* High working hour demands	Continuous-categorical variable interaction term	Campus environment × (High working hour demands > 9 = 1)
	Interpersonal support* High working hour demands	Continuous-categorical variable interaction term	Interpersonal support × (High working hour demands > 9 = 1)
	Job autonomy* High working hour demands	Continuous-categorical variable interaction term	Job autonomy × (high work hour demands > 9 = 1)
Control variables	Staffing	Dichotomous variable	0 = Non-permanent staff (68.0%), 1 = On-staff (32.0%)
	Educational	Attainment ordered multicategorical variable	1 = Junior high school and below (6.7%), 2 = High school or junior high school (13.0%), 3 = Junior college (47.7%), 4 = Bachelor's degree and above (32.6%)
	Marriage	Multicategorical variable	1 = Unmarried (22.3%), 2 = Married without children (4.7%), 3 = Married with children (70.5%), 4 = Divorced (2%), 5 = Widowed (0.5%)
	Whether local or not	Dichotomous variable	0 = No (19.7%), 1 = Yes (80.3%)

suggest that rural kindergarten teachers generally experience a heavy workload and significant job-related pressure. From the perspective of job resources, 74.5% of teachers reported a monthly salary below 3,000 yuan, and 62.1% lacked full social welfare coverage. These data indicate an overall inadequacy in protective-type resources available to rural kindergarten teachers. In terms of kindergarten infrastructure, the average score for the garden environment was slightly above the overall mean, reflecting a gradual improvement in rural kindergarten conditions and a growing level of teacher satisfaction in this area. However, scores for interpersonal support and job autonomy were slightly below average, indicating that motivational and growth-oriented resources remain relatively insufficient.

As shown in Table 2, there were significant inter-group differences ($p < 0.01$) in terms of marital status, education level, local residency, and staffing in terms of intention to remain. In contrast, the differences in retention intentions across gender and ethnicity were not statistically significant.

Table 2: Comparison Between Demographic Characteristics of Rural Kindergarten Teachers' Retention Intentions

Variable	Variable Explanation	Willing to Stay		Not willing to Stay		χ^2	P
		Number	%	Number	%		
Retention intentions		4,456	67.2	2,176	32.8	0.143	0.706
Gender	Male	126	2.8	58	2.7		
	Female	4,330	97.2	2,118	97.3		
Marital status	Unmarried	893	20.0	586	26.9	51.562***	0.000
	Married without children	194	4.4	118	5.4		
	Married with children	3,265	73.3	1,409	64.8		
	Divorced	84	1.9	51	2.3		
	Widowed	20	0.4	12	0.6		
Ethnicity	Han	2,153	48.3	1,070	49.2	0.429	0.513
	Ethnic minority	2,303	51.7	1,106	50.8		
Education	Junior high school and below	309	6.9	133	6.1	12.279***	0.006
	High school or junior college	620	13.9	244	11.2		
	College	2,089	46.9	1,073	49.3		
	Bachelor's degree and above	1,438	32.3	726	33.4		
Whether local or not	No	944	21.2	361	16.6	19.530***	0.000
	Yes	3,512	78.8	1,815	83.4		
Staffing	Non-permanent staff	2,829	63.5	1,678	77.1	127.673***	0.000
	On-staff	1,627	36.5	498	22.9		

Note: *, **, *** represent significant levels $p < 0.1$, $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, respectively.

5.2. Influence of Job Characteristics on Rural Kindergarten Teachers' Retention Intentions

5.2.1. Influence of Job Demands on Rural Kindergarten Teachers' Retention Intentions

The regression results of Models (1), (2), and (3) demonstrate that the influence of job demands on rural kindergarten teachers' retention intentions is relatively robust. Regarding challenging job demands, longer average daily working hours are associated with lower retention intentions. Concerning hindering job demands, teachers experiencing fewer

role demands exhibit the strongest retention intentions. Specifically, holding ‘multiple jobs’ significantly and negatively predicts teachers’ willingness to stay. In Model (1), the difference in retention intentions between ‘management + teaching’ teachers and those serving exclusively as full-time teachers or caregivers is not statistically significant. However, when control variables are included in Model (2), the result becomes significant: ‘management + teaching’ teachers are 0.8 times less likely ($p < 0.1$) to remain than their single-role counterparts. The predictive effects of staffing status, education level, marital status, and local residency remain unchanged across models.

Regarding developmental job demands, a strong passion for preschool education positively predicts retention intentions. In the sample, 90.9% of rural kindergarten teachers reported a passion for preschool education. The higher the degree of this intrinsic motivation, the stronger the teachers’ intention to remain in their roles.

In summary, overtime work and high role demands negatively predict retention intentions, whereas the ethical and intrinsic commitment to preschool education significantly enhances willingness to stay. Therefore, job demands do not uniformly exert negative effects on teachers’ retention intentions; under certain conditions, they may have positive, motivating impacts.

5.2.2. *Effect of Job Resources on Rural Kindergarten Teachers’ Retention Intentions*

The regression results from Models (1), (2), and (3) indicate that campus environment, interpersonal support, and job autonomy significantly affect rural kindergarten teachers’ retention intentions. In Model (2), which includes control variables such as staffing status, education, marital status, and local residency, the following findings are observed: for each one-unit increase in the campus environment score, the probability of retention increases by 28.5% ($e^{0.251} - 1 \approx 0.285$); for each unit increase in interpersonal support, retention increases by 28.2% ($e^{0.249} - 1 \approx 0.282$); and for each unit increase in job autonomy, retention increases by 38.5% ($e^{0.326} - 1 \approx 0.385$).

The influence of monthly actual salary on retention intention weakens when control variables are added, as seen in Model (2). However, the general trend remains: higher monthly salary levels and more comprehensive social security benefits (including housing funds) are associated with stronger retention intentions.

5.2.3. *Moderating Effect of Job Resources on the Relationship Between Job Demands and Retention Intentions*

To assess moderation, the study includes interaction terms between job demands (role demands, average daily working hours) and job resources in the regression model, as shown in Model (3). The results reveal that monthly actual salary and campus environment—as protective resources—do not demonstrate a significant moderating effect. Their interaction terms are not statistically significant, suggesting that these factors do not effectively buffer the negative effects of job demands.

In contrast, social security and job autonomy show differentiated moderating effects. Granting job autonomy significantly mitigates the negative impact of excessive working hours on retention intentions ($B = -0.455, p < 0.05$), though it does not moderate the effect of high role demands.

Social security completeness exhibits a bidirectional moderating effect. On the one hand, it unexpectedly strengthens the negative predictive effect of high role demands ($B = -0.455, p < 0.01$), suggesting that teachers with complete social security are more likely to leave under high role stress. This counterintuitive result is consistent with the finding that on-staff teachers, who typically receive complete social benefits, are 0.7 times less likely to stay in their job than non-permanent staff teachers ($p < 0.01$). On the other hand, social security completeness significantly buffers the negative impact of long working hours ($B = 0.297, p < 0.05$), illustrating its protective function in managing quantitative workload stress.

These findings highlight the complex nature of job resources as moderators. The same resource can have markedly different effects depending on the type of job demand encountered, underscoring the need for context-specific policy interventions.

5.2.4. *The Effect of Control Variables on Rural Kindergarten Teachers’ Retention Intentions*

Staffing, local residency, and educational attainment all have significant effects on rural kindergarten teachers’ retention intentions, whereas marital status does not exhibit a statistically significant influence.

Specifically, the retention intention of on-staff teachers is 0.7 times lower ($p < 0.01$) than that of non-permanent staff teachers. This result contrasts with findings from previous studies, which indicated that ‘staffing is an important factor in attracting teachers to rural positions’ (Zhao, 2023). However, in this study, on-staff teachers showed a greater tendency to leave rural posts compared to their non-permanent staff counterparts.

Several factors may explain this discrepancy. First, it may be related to the siphoning effect driven by urban–rural disparities. Second, the result may be influenced by individual needs to care for family members, reflecting the dual trend of teacher mobility described as ‘moving toward cities’ and ‘returning to home areas’ (Wei et al., 2020). Third, it may stem from the vulnerability of the rural teaching workforce itself. In this study, 68% of the respondents were non-permanent staff teachers. Due to frequent turnover and structural imbalance in staffing, those who are on-staff may often be required to absorb increased workloads, making them more susceptible to emotional exhaustion and burnout.

Regarding residency status, rural kindergarten teachers identified as ‘local’ are 1.3 times more likely ($p < 0.05$) to express willingness to remain in their current positions than ‘non-local’ teachers. In terms of educational background, teachers with a bachelor’s degree or higher exhibit the lowest retention intentions among the surveyed groups.

Table 3 presents the logistic regression results assessing the effects of job demands and job resources on rural kindergarten teachers’ retention intentions.

Dimension	Variable	Model (1)		Model (2)		Model (3)	
		B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)
Job demands	Job demands: average daily working hours (more than 10 h)						
	8 h or less	1.139***	3.125	1.109***	3.032	1.104***	3.015
	8–9 h	0.759***	2.135	0.738***	2.091	0.736***	2.088
	9–10 h	0.415***	1.514	0.369**	1.447	0.363**	1.438
	Role demands (I’m just a full-time teacher or caregiver)						
	I’m a full-time teacher and also a caregiver	-0.278***	0.757	-0.216***	0.805	-0.312***	0.732
	I am a full-time teacher who also serves as a kindergarten manager and as logistics staff	-0.393***	0.675	-0.376***	0.686	-0.534***	0.586
	I am a kindergarten administrator and also a lead teacher	-0.125	0.882	-0.171*	0.843	-0.356***	0.700
	Passionate about preschool education (very much in line)						
	Very much not in line	-1.909	0.148	-0.272	0.762	-1.763	0.172
	Not in line	-2.236***	0.107	-1.204***	0.124	-1.228***	0.293
	Not sure	-1.941***	0.144	-1.863***	0.155	-1.856***	0.156
	Conforming	-0.559*	0.572	-0.563*	0.57	-0.56*	0.571
	Monthly actual salary (6,001 yuan and above)						
	Under 2,000 yuan	-0.873***	0.418	-0.535**	0.586	-0.491*	0.612
2,001–3,000 yuan	-0.833***	0.435	-0.453*	0.636	-0.405	0.667	

Table 3 (Cont.)							
Dimension	Variable	Model (1)		Model (2)		Model (3)	
		B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)
Job resources	3,001–4,000 yuan	-0.515**	0.597	-0.201	0.818	-0.151	0.859
	4,001–5,000 yuan	-0.163	0.85	0.035	1.035	0.033	1.034
	5,001–6,000 yuan	-0.337	0.714	-0.236	0.79	-0.233	0.792
	Social security and provident fund contributions (nothing)						
	With social security, no provident fund	0.018	1.018	0.047	1.049	0.037	1.037
	With social security, with provident fund	0.379***	1.461	0.313***	1.367	0.507	1.66
	Interpersonal support	0.155***	1.167	0.251***	1.171	0.211***	1.235
	Campus environment	0.242***	1.274	0.249***	1.285	0.142***	1.153
	Autonomy in work	0.340***	1.404	0.326***	1.408	0.293***	1.340
Control variables	Control variables: staffing (Non-permanent staff)						
	On-staff			-0.428***	0.652	-0.424***	0.654
	Whether local (no) Yes			0.234***	1.264	0.228***	1.256
	Education (Bachelor's Degree and Above)						
	Junior high school and below			0.346**	1.413	0.328**	1.388
	High school or junior college			0.504***	1.655	0.497***	1.644
	College			0.277***	1.319	0.275***	1.316
	Marriage (widowed)						
	Unmarried			0.209	1.232	0.195	1.216
	Married without children			0.31	1.364	0.285	1.33
	Married with children			0.483	1.621	0.466	1.593
	Divorced			0.04	1.041	0.025	1.025
Moderating variables	High monthly actual salary* High role demands					0.118	1.125
	Social security complete*						
	High role demands					-0.455***	0.635

Table 3 (Cont.)

Dimension	Variable	Model (1)		Model (2)		Model (3)	
		B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)
	Campus environment* High role demands					-0.09	0.991
	Interpersonal support* High role demands					-0.032	0.968
	Job autonomy* High role demands					-0.09	0.991
	High monthly actual salary* High role demands					-0.129	0.879
	Social security complete* High role demands					0.297**	1.346
	Campus environment* High role demands					-0.069	0.933
	Interpersonal support* High role demands					-0.033	0.968
	Job autonomy* High role demands					0.154**	1.167
N		6632	6632	6632			
R ²		0.195	0.216	0.219			

Note: **,*, and *** represent significance levels of $p < 0.1$, $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, respectively, with the reference group in parentheses.

6. Discussion

Based on the survey data from the self-administered questionnaire, this paper uses a binary logistic model to examine the effects of challenging job demands, as reflected by average daily working hours; hindrance demands, as reflected by role demands; developmental job demands, as reflected by passion for the preschool education career; and protective resources, as reflected by actual monthly salary, social security and provident fund payment, and campus environment. This paper also examines growth resources, as reflected by job autonomy, and motivational resources, as reflected by interpersonal support, on the retention intentions of rural kindergarten teachers. Furthermore, it analyses the moderating effect of job resources on the negative relationship between high job demands and rural kindergarten teachers’ retention intentions. The following conclusions and insights were obtained.

7. Conclusion

The job characteristics of rural kindergarten teachers’ high job demands and low resource allocation remain prominent, and teachers’ retention intentions in the job remain low

Currently, the job demands of rural kindergarten teachers are high. Among the teachers surveyed, 73% reported that they could not get off work on time, and 50.2% were engaged in multiple roles. However, job resources cannot meet the needs of rural kindergarten teachers effectively, and there is a serious structural imbalance in staffing. The proportion of non-permanent staff teachers is as high as 68%, and non-permanent staff teachers do not have effective protection in terms of salary and social welfare. Their retention intentions are low. Although on-staff teachers account for only 32% of the sample, their retention rate is 34.6% lower than that of non-permanent staff teachers ($e^{-0.424} - 1 \approx -0.346$). Overall, more than one-third of rural kindergarten teachers reported that they did not want to remain in rural areas, and the risk of leaving their jobs is higher among those with a high level of education, non-local teachers, and those with unstable marriages. Rural kindergarten teachers in these categories face a significantly higher risk of attrition.

7.1. Job Demands Have Both Positive and Negative Characteristics

The longer the average daily working hours, the lower the willingness of rural kindergarten teachers to stay in the profession. Only 27% of the teachers in the sample comply with the eight-hour work limit stipulated in China's Labor Law, meaning that 73% exceed the legal working hours to varying degrees. Higher job demands correlate with a lower willingness to remain in the position. Excessive job demands increase both physical and psychological stress, which negatively affects retention. However, developmental job demands—specifically, passion for the preschool education profession—show a positive correlation. Among the sample, 90.9% of rural kindergarten teachers indicated that they had a passion for preschool education. The higher their degree of passion for the profession, the stronger their intention to remain in the job.

7.2. Job Resources Significantly and Positively Predict Rural Kindergarten Teachers' Retention Intentions

Job resources significantly and positively predict rural kindergarten teachers' retention intentions. The more abundant the job resources, the stronger the teachers' willingness to stay. In the sample, 74.5% of teachers reported monthly salaries of 3,000 yuan or less, and 31.2% reported salaries of 2,000 yuan or less. The number of teachers with incomplete or no social security was 62.1%. Enhancing salaries and social security for rural kindergarten teachers—particularly for non-permanent staff teachers—improving the physical environment of kindergartens, and strengthening interpersonal support are all conducive to increasing the retention intentions of rural kindergarten teachers.

7.3. Job Resources Partially Moderate The Negative Relationship Between Job Demands and Retention Intentions

Job resources may operate through different mechanisms under various types of job demands. Monthly salary and the garden environment, as protective resources, did not show significant moderating effects. This indicates that simply expanding material resources does not directly reduce the negative impact of high job demands on teachers' retention intentions. Social security and job autonomy were found to alleviate the negative impact of overtime work on retention intentions to a certain extent. However, they were ineffective in mitigating the negative effects of high role demands. This suggests that high role demands are a critical factor contributing to rural kindergarten teachers leaving their jobs. Even with increased job resources, when teachers face excessive role demands, retention becomes difficult. Therefore, government policy and decision-making must fully consider the complex and differentiated mechanisms through which job resources interact with various job demands.

8. Countermeasures and Recommendations

Timely replenishment of teachers and rationalization of work assignments to reduce the negative effect of 'multiple jobs' on the willingness of rural kindergarten teachers to stay in the profession

This study found that excessive job demands are a primary factor contributing to the turnover of rural kindergarten teachers and that these demands are not effectively mitigated by existing job resources. Therefore, improving rural kindergarten teachers' retention intentions requires addressing the problem of their 'multi-tasking' workload.

First, urban areas in China enjoy significantly better conditions than rural regions in terms of income levels, consumer purchasing power, access to medical and educational resources, public investment, and even social and cultural development (Zhang et al., 2025). This pronounced urban-rural disparity exacerbates the continuous attrition of rural teachers (Zhu and Liu, 2020). As such, the government should establish a system to monitor the outflow of kindergarten teachers from rural areas and ensure timely replenishment of teaching staff.

Specific measures should include deepening school-local cooperation models to enhance the professional adaptability of pre-service teachers (Wen et al., 2024), removing geographic restrictions in post-service teacher mobility through urban-rural teaching exchange programs (Yan and Li, 2023), and implementing a flexible employment model based on 'regular teachers + temporary teachers' in areas experiencing teacher shortages. However, it is critical to incorporate the salaries and benefits of temporary teachers into the county-level financial support system. This would ensure that their legitimate rights and interests are protected, and the teacher replenishment mechanism becomes both effective and sustainable.

Second, there is a need to improve long-term mechanisms for reducing teachers' burdens and to foster a more focused and supportive teaching environment. 'Non-teaching affairs' refer to tasks imposed by external departments that are unrelated to core teaching duties, including supervisory evaluations, competition preparation, data reporting, social activities, and temporary assignments (Jiang, 2024). At the policy level, it is essential to refine the 'teacher workload reduction list' system (Zhang and Wang, 2024), clearly define the boundaries of administrative authority and responsibility, and strengthen institutional protections that allow schools to decline irrelevant administrative tasks.

At the managerial level, educational authorities should optimise internal governance structures by rationalizing both the time allocation and content of teachers' work (Xue and Zhang, 2024), and streamline various inspection and evaluation processes. At the organizational level, kindergartens should develop a scientifically grounded post structure. In addition to existing teaching and management positions, schools should establish appropriate teaching-support and operational roles to relieve teachers of non-instructional tasks. At the supervisory level, a regular oversight mechanism should be implemented to ensure effective burden reduction. Lessons may be drawn from Western models such as the 'Teachers' Workload Advisory Group' (ATL et al., 2003), in order to enhance the scientific rigor and targeted effectiveness of workload governance.

Strengthening value consensus and emphasizing the positive effect of professional ethical requirements on rural kindergarten teachers' retention intentions

Passion for preschool education is not only a professional demand but also a vital source of intrinsic motivation for teachers' career development. Research indicates that occupational identity significantly enhances rural teachers' willingness to remain in their positions (Wang et al., 2025). The establishment of a lasting value identity system requires the integration of pre-service and post-service development mechanisms.

First, professional values should be cultivated before entering the workforce. Studies have shown that 'the professional quality of pre-service teachers is positively correlated with the degree of teachers' professional identity' (Kim et al., 2021). In the preschool teacher education system, a 'cognitive-emotional-practical' trinity training model should be implemented.

At the cognitive level, professional value connotations can be delivered systematically through courses such as *Professional Ethics for Early Childhood Teachers* and *Interpretation of Preschool Education Policies*.

At the emotional level, methods such as educational storytelling and immersive kindergarten experiences should be used to foster deeper emotional identification with the profession.

At the practical level, tiered internship programs should be introduced, allowing pre-service teachers to understand and internalise professional values in real-world educational contexts.

Second, after entering the profession, continuous strengthening of teachers' professional spirit is essential. Research has shown that teachers' values and beliefs shape how they make professional decisions (Geron, 2025). Post-employment training and professional learning opportunities should be provided to help rural kindergarten teachers clarify and reinforce sound professional values. For example, training on 'Educator Growth Narratives' can be used to stimulate a sense of mission in education. Including child development theory and concepts of educational equity in the training content can help teachers recognise the unique significance of rural education.

In addition, incentive mechanisms should be established to support long-term value retention. Initiatives could include the creation of a Rural Education Persistence Award, tiered financial subsidies based on years of service, and priority for promotion opportunities for teachers committed to rural education. These measures help meet the professional development needs of rural teachers while reinforcing value-based motivation and commitment to their roles.

8.1. Consolidate Protective Resources, Strengthen Growth Resources, and Enhance Motivational Resources

First, material safeguards must be reinforced by implementing a city-and-county co-management financial input system. For a long time, the financing model for rural preschool education has relied on a county-based system (Deng and Ma, 2023). However, counties that have only recently emerged from poverty generally have weak economic foundations and limited fiscal self-sufficiency, making it difficult to meet the demands of high-quality preschool education development. For example, the research sites in this study—Counties S and C—ranked at the lower end of city-wide GDP rankings in 2022. Sole reliance on county-level finances makes it difficult to support preschool development effectively. The primary flaw of the county-based input system lies in the asymmetry between the fiscal responsibilities assigned to the county government and the financial capacity granted by its fiscal authority (Wang and Song, 2019).

To address this issue, it is recommended to adopt a city-and-county co-management financial mechanism, enhancing the role of municipal finances in coordination and funding. On the one hand, this includes the establishment of special funds such as the 'Township Kindergarten Quality Improvement Plan,' which should prioritise weak counties and districts. Funds must be earmarked, protected from misappropriation or delay, and monitored to ensure they serve their intended purposes. On the other hand, fund supervision should be optimised by improving oversight mechanisms for educational finance, instituting dynamic audits, and requiring public disclosures to ensure accurate and efficient fund allocation.

Furthermore, teachers' compensation must be safeguarded. This includes strict enforcement of provisions in the Preschool Education Law regarding teacher remuneration, incorporating the salaries of temporary teachers in public kindergartens into county-level budgets, reasonably approving minimum wage standards for teachers in private kindergartens, and ensuring lawful payment of social insurance. These measures aim to improve employment security, especially for non-permanent staff teachers.

Second, rural kindergarten teachers should be empowered professionally to enhance their autonomy and sense of teaching efficacy. Studies have shown a moderately positive and significant correlation between teachers' professional autonomy and career motivation (Demir, 2023). Allowing rural kindergarten teachers to make decisions regarding teaching content, methods, and pacing within a defined framework not only stimulates enthusiasm and creativity but also fosters a sense of professional accomplishment and satisfaction. When teachers can execute their responsibilities in their own way, they are more likely to respond constructively to the challenges posed by high job demands, thereby reducing the risk of burnout (Jansen in de Wal et al., 2018).

Third, an emotional support system should be developed to improve rural kindergarten teachers' sense of professional fulfillment. First, a psychological care mechanism should be established, led by county-level education departments, to organise regular mental health workshops, group counselling sessions, and one-on-one consultations to help teachers manage stress. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) model (Walsh, 1982) can be adapted to offer free psychological support to rural teachers. Second, strengthen organizational support. When teachers feel respected, cared for, and supported by school leadership, the influence of economic factors on their career choices becomes less dominant (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Such a supportive environment deepens emotional attachment to their roles, thereby enhancing organizational commitment and retention intentions (Shi et al., 2022). Third, optimise the broader social support environment. Media outlets should be encouraged to highlight the contributions of rural teachers to improve their public image and societal recognition. Additionally, communities and parents should be engaged in kindergarten activities to foster a social atmosphere that respects and supports educators.

8.2. Limitations

This study investigates the influence of job characteristics on rural kindergarten teachers' retention intentions within the framework of the JD-R model. However, several limitations should be noted. The JD-R model emphasises the role of environmental factors and tends to treat teachers as passive recipients of environmental stimuli. It does not adequately account for the potential moderating role of individual differences. In reality, rural kindergarten teachers are not merely reactive to external conditions; their retention intentions may also be shaped by personal attributes such as past experiences, personality traits, values, and professional identity.

Due to constraints related to research indicators and data availability, this study has not yet explored the influence of these individual-level factors in depth. Future research could enrich the existing job characteristics model by incorporating individual teacher traits—such as personality dimensions and sense of professional mission—to investigate how different types of individuals respond to job demands and job resources.

Acknowledgment

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Li Jing, for his guidance and patience during the process of writing this paper. Second, I would like to thank the National Social Science Fund for its financial support of this study (Grant No. 22BSH077). Thanks is also due to all of the kindergarten teachers who participated in the survey. Finally, I would like to thank the LetPub team for their language editing, which enhanced the readability of the article.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

During the preparation of this work the authors used an AI-based proprietary language-editing tool built by Let Pub in order to improve the readability and language of the manuscript. After using this service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

Ethics

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Department of Education, Southwest University, China (Approval date: June 25, 2025). The research plan was deemed scientifically reasonable, fair, and impartial, with no ethical or legal conflicts.

Informed Consent

All participants were informed of the study's purpose and provided informed consent prior to participating in the online questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were free to withdraw at any time. No personal identifying information was collected, and all data were anonymized and used solely for academic research purposes.

Conflicts of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest are reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the National Office for the Philosophy and Social Sciences of China (Grant No. 22BSH077).

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Cite this article as: Linhong Shi and Jing Li (2025). The Effects of Job Demands and Resources on Rural Kindergarten Teachers' Retention Intentions in China. *International Journal of Education and Teaching*, 5(2), 142-157. doi: 10.51483/IJEDT.5.2.2025.142-157.