



Factors Affecting Teacher Turnover in Private Schools in Macau

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Abstract. Teacher turnover is a global issue that has not received much research attention in Macau despite studies indicating that teachers in the region experience high levels of stress and burnout. Given that private school teachers account for a significant proportion (88.6%) of the non-tertiary education system in Macau, this qualitative study focused on this specific group who voluntarily resigned from their positions. Through in-depth interviews with 13 former teachers from different kindergartens and primary and secondary schools, the research identified 15 factors under three categories causing voluntary turnover of teachers in Macau. Although school-related factors account for the most, personal reasons were the primary driver. The study's findings highlight the complex nature of teacher turnover which can be attributed to single and multiple factors, in both direct and indirect forms. The factors could also interplay in both unidirectional and mutual relationships. A conceptual framework for teacher turnover in Macau was developed to address the 15 contributing factors and the complex interplay of these factors. This study could fill the gap in the literature and serve as a valuable resource for policymakers and school leaders seeking to reduce teacher attrition rates in the region.

Keywords: Teacher Turnover; Staff Motivation; Schools in Macau.

1 Introduction

Teacher turnover is a growing concern in education systems worldwide, particularly in countries like the Netherlands, the United States, and the United Kingdom [1-4]. High-stress levels, lack of administrative support, low salaries, alternative certification, lack of motivation, communication gaps, market opportunities, workload, and limited career paths are key factors contributing to teacher turnover [5-8].

Despite its potential impact on student learning and educational inequality [9, 10], research on teacher turnover in Macau, China remains limited [11, 12]. This study aims to address three gaps in the literature:

- **Population gap:** Examining teacher turnover in the context of Macau.
- **Knowledge gap:** Exploring the absence of job switchers in teacher attrition research [13].
- **Methodological gap:** Employing a qualitative approach to understand better the complex factors influencing teacher turnover.

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Focusing on private school teachers, who comprise 88.6% of Macau's non-tertiary education teaching staff [14], this study investigates the reasons for voluntary resignation among former teachers. The research questions are:

- 1) What are the reasons for voluntary turnover among private school teachers in Macau?
- 2) Which factor(s) primarily drive voluntary turnover among private school teachers in Macau?
- 3) How do these factors contribute to voluntary turnover, and what is the interplay between personal and school-related factors in this process?

2 Literature Review

Turnover, defined as the voluntary departure of an employee from an organization [15], is a critical issue worldwide. In the context of education, turnover often refers to teachers leaving the profession, including both leavers and movers [16]. Understanding teacher turnover factors is crucial for developing effective strategies to retain talented educators and ensure a high-quality teaching workforce.

2.1 Factors Influencing Teacher Turnover

School-related factors. School-related factors significantly impact teacher turnover rates. Student demographics, such as the percentage of students with disabilities, can contribute to higher turnover rates [17, 18]. School organization and resources also play a critical role. Supportive administrators and school-level resilience factors can reduce the negative impact of factors like teacher victimization on turnover rates [19, 20]. In high-poverty schools, access to resources and organizational support are essential for increasing retention [21]. Additionally, leadership styles, autonomy, and positive relationships with colleagues and students have been found to influence teacher well-being and turnover intentions [22, 23]. Unsatisfactory administrative support, particularly for special education teachers who experience higher levels of workplace bullying, can contribute to workplace dissatisfaction and higher turnover rates [24]. Effective leadership during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can also play a crucial role in preventing turnover [25].

Personal factors. Personal factors, including burnout, job satisfaction, work-family conflict, and other personal demands, also contribute to teacher turnover. Burnout has been positively associated with turnover intention, while job satisfaction has a negative impact [26]. Work-family conflict significantly influences turnover intention, with psychological contracts and job satisfaction mediating the relationship between the two [27]. Studies have found that work-family conflict, job demands, and emotional exhaustion indirectly relate to turnover intention [28, 29]. Factors like personal health, job dissatisfaction, and work-family conflict also contribute to voluntary turnover intention [29]. Li and Yao's meta-analysis identified burnout, workload, and stress as positively related to turnover intention, while trust, professional identification, and or-

ganizational commitment were protective factors [30]. Addressing these personal factors is crucial for creating a supportive environment that reduces turnover, improves teacher well-being, and promotes retention.

Other factors. External contextual factors, salary, and career advancement opportunities also affect teacher turnover. Economic downturns and changes in state curricular policies have been linked to increased turnover rates [31]. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted teachers' physical and mental health, highlighting the need to address its impact on teacher well-being [32]. Studies have found a U-shaped relationship between teacher salary and turnover, with overqualified and underqualified teachers being more likely to leave [33]. Location and career advancement opportunities have also been positively associated with voluntary leave [34]. These findings emphasize the need for improved working conditions, compensation, administrative support, and differentiated support in government policies to address teacher turnover.

2.2 Teacher Turnover in The Chinese Context

Teacher turnover is a significant issue in China, with various contributing factors. Burnout is a major contributor to high turnover rates among primary and secondary school teachers, particularly after the COVID-19 outbreak [32]. School climate has also been shown to impact teacher retention, influencing burnout and the association between teacher victimization and burnout [35]. Work-family conflict is directly related to higher turnover intention among teachers in China [27]. Organizational justice and salary satisfaction are crucial factors impacting turnover intention among primary and secondary school teachers [36]. Teacher-community interactions have also been significantly related to a higher intention to stay among rural Chinese teachers [37].

In addition to burnout, school climate, and work-family conflict, other factors contributing to teacher turnover in China include teacher professional rank, initial school assignment location, and annual teacher evaluation results [38]. Teachers with higher professional ranks and those initially assigned to schools far from home are likelier to experience turnover. Failing the annual teacher evaluation increases the probability of a teacher moving to another school the following year. Addressing these factors requires implementing policies that promote fairness and equity in teacher assignment and evaluation processes alongside initiatives that address burnout, work-family conflict, and school climate.

2.3 Teacher Turnover in Macau

Teacher turnover is widely studied worldwide, yet research in Macau is scarce. As pointed out by Dos Santos in 2016 [11], there are currently no official reports or statistics available on teacher attrition rates in Macau. According to a news report, the average teacher turnover rate in Macau has been around 8% since the handover in 1999 [39]. Since implementing the System Framework for Private School Teaching Staff of Non-tertiary Education in 2012, only two pieces of news about teacher turnover exist.

For instance, during the 2014/2015 academic year, 369 private school teachers resigned, with 70% being at levels three to six and 30% (37 retired teachers and 56 others who left for various reasons) being first and second-level teachers [40]. In the 2017/2018 academic year, approximately 6% of teachers in Macau resigned or retired [39]. The lack of research in this area highlights the urgent need to study teacher turnover in Macau and fill the knowledge gap in the literature.

Limited research on teacher turnover in Macau suggests that the situation of Macau teachers is similar to that of teachers in other regions. Luk's study found that Macau teachers experience an average range of burnout in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization but not in personal accomplishment compared to Hong Kong data [12]. A telephone survey conducted by DSEDJ in 2001 found that over 42% of teachers felt stressed or very stressed at work, and 47.56% expressed frequent fatigue at work [40]. Kuok and Lam's study also found that Macau teachers experienced emotional exhaustion, which could be related to implementing policies to enhance teachers' professionalism [41]. These findings suggest that improving the well-being of Macau teachers is necessary to enhance their job satisfaction and retention.

3 Research Methodology

This study employed purposive sampling to select former private school teachers in Macau who had voluntarily left the teaching profession. Participants were chosen based on gender, age, race, and subject teaching, as these factors can influence turnover [2, 29]. After interviewing 13 research participants, theoretical saturation was reached with no new themes or patterns emerging from the data. Therefore, no additional participants were recruited.

Data was collected through individual interviews, lasting 1-1.5 hours, conducted in person or online. Follow-up meetings were held as needed. Participants provided written consent for audio recording and data use, with confidentiality and anonymity assured. Most interviews were conducted in Cantonese, with some in Putonghua or English. Transcripts were translated into English for analysis.

Each participant was assigned a unique code consisting of a letter and number to ensure anonymity. The letter indicated the teaching level of the participant, with K representing kindergarten, P representing primary, and S representing secondary.

4 Results and Discussion

The reasons for turnover and the complex interplay between various factors are explored by using qualitative data from interviews with former teachers. A conceptual framework provides a valuable tool for understanding the multifaceted nature of teacher turnover in Macau.

4.1 50 Reasons for Teacher Turnover in Macau

The analysis identified over 50 reasons for leaving the profession, categorized into 15 factors under three themes: school-related, personal, and other. School-related factors emerged as the most significant contributor to teacher turnover, accounting for 37 of the identified reasons (see Table 1), while personal factors accounted for 11 (see Table 2) and other factors accounted for 14 (see Table 3).

Table 1. School-related factors that contribute to teacher resignation.

School-related factors	37 reasons that contribute to teacher resignation
Work environment	Limited acceptance of diversity (K1) Difficult relationships with colleagues (K1, S4, S5) Workplace bullying and harassment (P4) Assigning new teachers with more job duties (S3) Wrong allocation of human resources (S5) More capable individuals were given more work (S5) Student dissatisfaction (S3) Increasing administrative workload (S1) Complex reimbursement process (S1) School's ignoring attitudes on insufficient resources (K2)
School body characteristics	School is too standardized (K3) School is very unorganized (K3)
Occupational Health and Safety	Under pressure (K3, P5, S1) Too less time to sleep (S1) Work injury - lumbar muscle strain (K3) Got heat stroke while on duty in summer (P4) Damage well-being (P4, K2)
Workload	Heavy workload (P1, S1, S2) Too many non-teaching duties (P2)
Professional development	Limited professional growth (K1, P4, S5)
Student body characteristics	Naughty students (P2, P5) Students lying (K1) Young kids crying (K1) Present Chinese student challenging character (K1) SEN students (K1, P5) Very stressful and burnout to teach worst classes (S1)
Resources	No printer provided (S1) No A4 paper provided (S1) No Wifi is provided for personal devices (P2, S1) Limited printing quotas (1200 paper/ year) (S5) Requirement of registration for color printing (S5) Not enough human resources (K3) Special care on particular students (S3) Unfair distribution of student's resources (S3) Short class time (K1)

Huge class size (K1)
High teacher-student ratio (K1)

Table 2. Personal factors that contribute to teacher resignation.

Personal factors	11 reasons that contribute to teacher resignation
Personality	Impatience (P2) Love to try new things (P5) Do not want to take care of kids (P2) Want to challenge oneself (K1)
Career & personal development	Study (P4, S2, S4, S3, K2) Want different development (K1, S4, S5, P1) Life direction changed (P2)
Personal beliefs	Personal values do not align with the schools' values (K2, P1, P2, S3) Religion (K1)
Personal affairs	Busy with own business (S3) Not lack of money (P5)

Table 3. Other factors that contribute to teacher resignation.

Other factors	14 reasons that contribute to teacher resignation
Policies	Impractical rank and promotion system (P1) Job insecurity (S4) The Requirements of Basic Academic Attainments (BAA) (S5) Ineffective monitoring regulations from the government (K3)
Job nature	Early morning wake-up requirement (P5) High level of demand (P2) Low earning potential (S4) Limited career longevity (K2, K3) Ethical and human rights concerns (K1)
Other opportunities	Have other opportunities (K1, K3, P3) See another possibility (P2)
Local context	Allergic to Macau's climate (S2) Macau is too small (K3) Gradually decreasing respect for teachers (S4)

The findings from this study highlight the multifaceted reasons behind teacher turnover in Macau's private school sector. The most significant contributors were school-related factors, particularly the work environment, workload, and student body characteristics. However, personal factors and other contextual issues also play a crucial role in teachers' decisions to leave the profession.

4.2 Conceptual Framework for Teacher Turnover in Macau

The study participants identified several reasons for their resignation, but how these factors led to their decision to leave varied. It could be single or multiple factors that caused the resignation action, which could have affected the action directly or indirectly. In addition, there is also an interplay between school-related and personal factors in a unidirectional or mutual relationship. Fig. 1. provides a visual representation of the conceptual framework for teacher turnover.

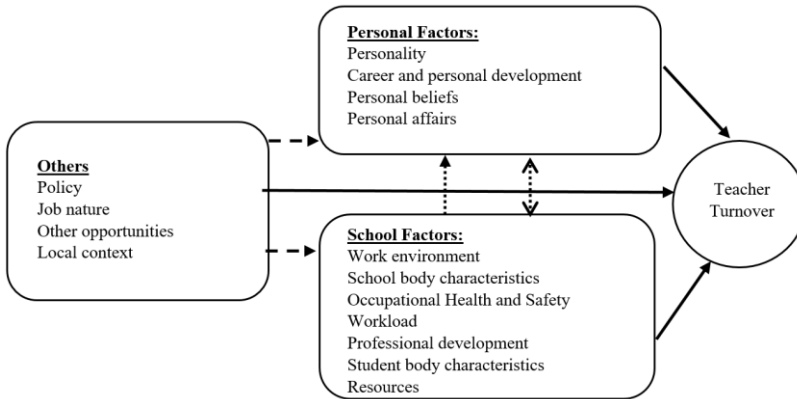


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework for Teacher Turnover in Macau.

Note: This framework is adapted from "A conceptual framework of teacher turnover: a systematic review of the empirical international literature and insights from the employee turnover literature" by Tuan D. Nguyen and Matthew G. Springer (2021) [42]

4.3 Discussion

Teacher turnover is a significant challenge in education systems worldwide, with implications for student outcomes, school performance, and teacher well-being. This study aimed to determine what contributes to teacher turnover and investigate the interplay among the different factors. Qualitative data were collected from interviews with 13 former teachers from different Macau schools. Two key findings emerged:

- **Personal factors as the primary driver:** While school-related factors were frequently cited as reasons for resignation, personal factors were identified as the primary driver for several participants. This aligns with previous research [29, 43], highlighting the importance of considering individual circumstances and motivations when addressing teacher turnover. Addressing these factors may require personalized support and flexible work arrangements to accommodate individual needs and career aspirations.
- **The complex nature of teacher turnover:** The study revealed the complex nature of teacher turnover, with multiple factors interacting and influencing the decision to leave the profession as previous research [42, 44-46]. This finding emphasizes the need for a

holistic approach that addresses not only school-related factors but also personal factors, policies, job nature, other opportunities, and the local context.

This finding explains that teacher turnover is a complex phenomenon with different factors attributing to it differently. It implies that any strategies to decrease teacher turnover must consider the interconnectedness of the diverse factors and target the underlying causes of turnover.

5 Conclusion

This study explored the reasons for voluntary turnover among private school teachers in Macau, revealing over 50 contributing factors categorized as school-related, personal, and other. While school-related reasons were most frequently cited, personal factors emerged as the primary driver for a significant portion of participants. The study also demonstrated the complex nature of teacher turnover, with single or multiple factors influencing the decision to leave, both directly and indirectly. Additionally, school-related and personal factors can interact in unidirectional or mutual relationships, further contributing to this complexity.

The developed conceptual framework visually represents the intricate interplay between various factors influencing teacher turnover in Macau. This framework highlights the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses not only school-related factors but also personal factors, policies, job nature, other opportunities, and the local context. By understanding the multifaceted nature of teacher turnover and the complex interplay of contributing factors, policymakers and school administrators can work collaboratively to develop effective strategies for mitigating turnover and creating a more supportive and sustainable environment for teachers in Macau's private school sector.

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