
A Study of Research on Teacher Turnover in China: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Teacher turnover remains a persistent challenge in Chinese schools across rural and urban regions and has been shown to negatively affect student learning. However, evidence on its determinants remains fragmented. This scoping review aims to synthesize empirical research on the factors associated with teacher turnover in Chinese schools and to translate the evidence into guidance for school leaders and policymakers in China and comparable contexts. A scoping review was conducted using online databases to identify empirical studies published over the past 25 years. Studies were screened against predefined inclusion criteria, and 54 studies were retained. Reporting followed the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR). Data on study characteristics, including sampling, research focus, methods, and reported determinants, were charted and synthesized descriptively and thematically. The review found that teacher turnover is associated with a constellation of interrelated factors rather than a single cause. These include professional conditions, pay and allowances, leadership, job satisfaction, burnout, professional development, collective efficacy, and personal conditions. By mapping these determinants, the review contributes to academic discourse by consolidating fragmented empirical evidence and framing teacher turnover as a multi-level phenomenon, thereby providing a foundation for future theory-driven and comparative research. It also offers an evidence-informed basis for principals and policymakers to design targeted retention strategies, particularly by addressing professional conditions, compensation, leadership, and teacher well-being. The findings are relevant beyond China for systems seeking to reduce turnover and stabilize the teaching workforce.

Keywords: *China, Informing School Leadership, Scoping Review, Teacher Attrition, Teacher Turnover*

A. Introduction

The degree of teacher turnover across China is a troublesome and, in many respects, surprising reality. Teacher turnover is not confined to a single region, province, or school type; it persists across rural and urban contexts, suggesting a systemic rather than an isolated problem (Jin et al., 2021; Liu & Fang, 2020). Teachers leave the profession for reasons such as low pay, challenging working conditions, and inadequate support. Such turnover negatively affects student learning, increases costs, and disrupts school stability (Boyd et al., 2008). More specifically, it is costly in terms of recruitment and training, impedes the development of school culture and climate, and perpetuates educational inequalities (Jin et al., 2021; Liu & Fang, 2020; Xia, 2013). These consequences make turnover particularly troubling: it not only creates immediate staffing difficulties but also undermines long-term school improvement and equitable access to quality education.

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However, the existing literature has notable limitations in explaining and addressing this phenomenon. Teacher turnover has been conceptualized as either an individual or a contextual problem (Zhu et al., 2020). Individual explanations may emphasize teachers' personal conditions, job satisfaction, and burnout, whereas contextual explanations may emphasize professional conditions, pay and allowances, leadership, professional development, and collective efficacy. Although these factors are likely interrelated, much of the domestic literature on teacher turnover in China has not been systematically reviewed for understanding. Studies are dispersed across regions, samples, and methodological approaches, making it difficult to identify consistent patterns and actionable implications. Consequently, school principals, governments, and universities lack a coherent evidence base to decide which factors to prioritize and which retention strategies are most likely to succeed.

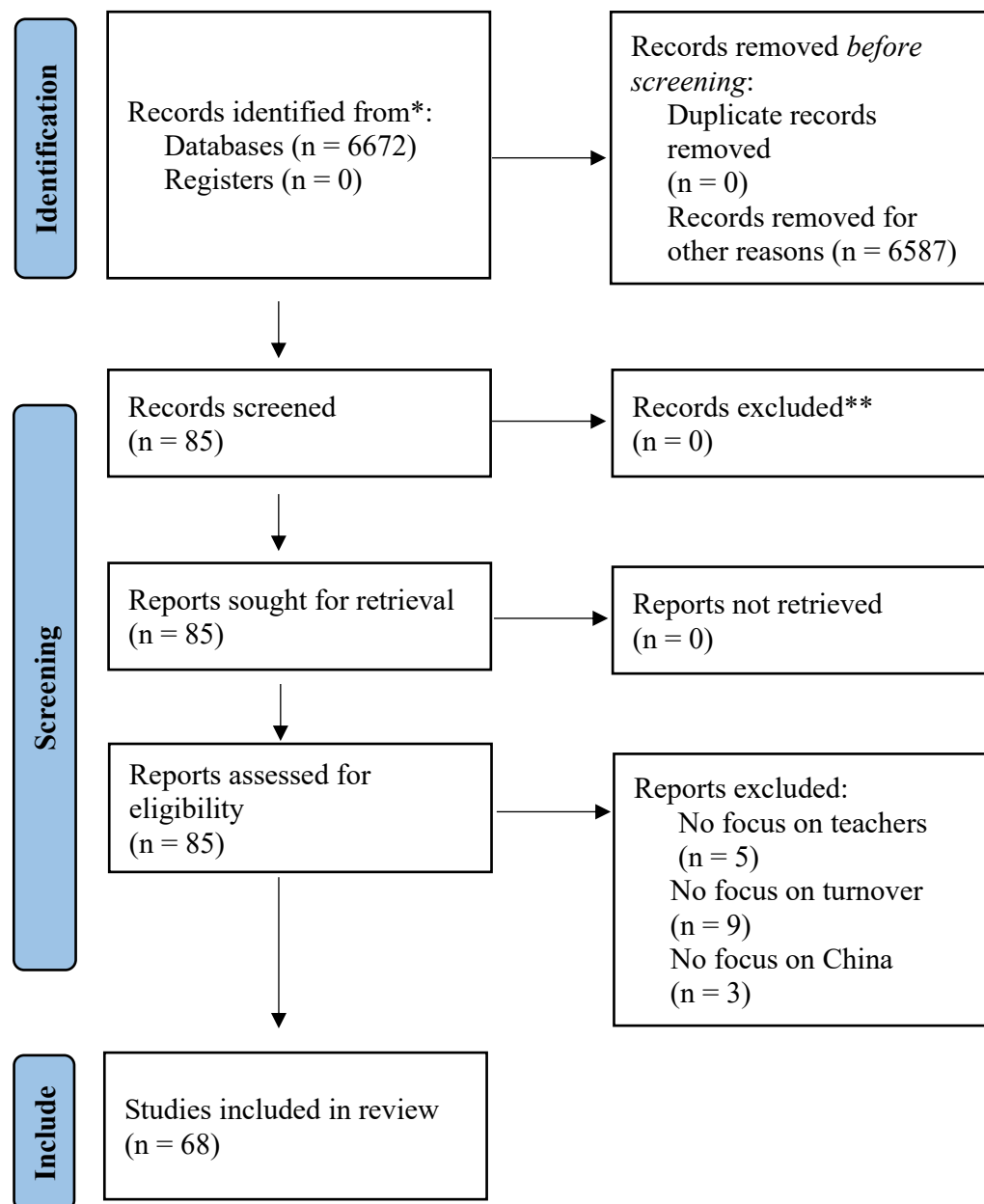
To address these limitations, this study offers a scoping review of empirical research on teacher turnover in Chinese schools. The review collects, analyzes, and synthesizes studies published over the past 25 years, using online databases and predefined inclusion criteria. Reporting follows the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR; Tricco et al., 2018). For each included study, data on sampling, research focus, methods, and reported determinants are charted and synthesized descriptively and thematically. A scoping review is appropriate because the literature is heterogeneous and fragmented: it allows the review to map the breadth of evidence, consolidate dispersed findings, and identify patterns across individual and contextual explanations rather than testing a single narrowly defined hypothesis.

The focus of this study is therefore to evaluate research evidence on the factors associated with teacher turnover in China and to translate that evidence into guidance for school leaders and policymakers. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions: (1) What can principals do in order to reduce teacher turnover in their respective schools? (2) What can governments and universities in China do in order to reduce teacher turnover in schools? By addressing these questions, the review moves beyond a general description of turnover toward an evidence-informed account of what key actors can do to counter it.

This offer is important for both academic and practical reasons. Academically, the review contributes to the discourse on teacher turnover by consolidating fragmented empirical evidence and framing turnover as a multi-level phenomenon shaped by interrelated individual and contextual factors (Zhu et al., 2020). It also provides a foundation for future theory-driven and comparative research on teacher retention in China and comparable contexts. In practical terms, the findings are important for school principals, governments, and universities because they identify priority areas for intervention—such as professional conditions, pay and allowances, leadership, job satisfaction, burnout, professional development, collective efficacy, and personal conditions. In this sense, the review is important not only for understanding why teachers leave but also for informing coordinated retention strategies that can stabilize the teaching workforce, support student learning, and reduce educational inequalities.

B. Methods

To ensure that the review was rigorous in nature, a scoping review in accordance with the “PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews” (Tricco et al., 2018) was employed for this study. A Scoping review provides a “clear indication of the volume of literature while providing a broader overview of its focus” (Munn et al., 2018).



(Page, et al., 2021)

Figure 1. Identification of Studies

China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CKNI), ERIC, Google Scholar, and the Kean University library search engines were used to scan for empirical studies published in the last 20 years with keywords "teacher turnover," "teacher turnover in China," and "teaching in China," producing a total of 6672 articles. These keywords were combined in the search to identify all articles related to teacher turnover, including teacher attrition, commitment, loyalty, and stability. This was done because Chinese journals did not explicitly distinguish between these designations. Additionally, for this review, the following databases were selected: Web of Science, Scopus, Chinese Social Science Citation Index (CSSCI) journals, and The Journal of International Studies (Peking University). Studies were reviewed based on their focus, methods, and findings. All data were from teachers. Of the total number of articles found, applying the PRISMA inclusion criteria (see Table 1) reduced the number to 68 for this study. The research

methods used and the number of papers for each are as follows: 53 quantitative, 8 qualitative, 4 mixed, and 3 literature reviews.

A scoping review includes the stages of identifying relevant information, charting data, summarizing and reporting, and consultation (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The results are presented in a descriptive process, followed by a brief consultation of the findings (Gottlieb et al., 2021).

C. Results and Discussion

After examining the articles, it was determined that there were 8 seminal themes concerning teacher turnover: (1) professional identity, (2) pay and allowance, (3) principal leadership, (4) job satisfaction, (5) burnout, (6) professional development, (7) collective efficacy, and (8) personal state.

Professional Identity

For many teachers, professional identity was viewed as an important component of their jobs. Professional identity for Chinese teachers is understood as how school leadership, primarily principals, views and works with teachers within the organizational context (Yang et al., 2021; Zhang & Zhao, 2021). Teachers strongly believed that having positive conditions such as better pay, respect, and opportunities for promotion were key to staying at their current schools (Fu & Zhou, 2019; Hou & Xu, 2020; Yang et al., 2023). For males, professional conditions were a priority because they believed this would increase their odds of marriage (Mi et al., 2015). Job advancement resonated with those feeling stuck in low-paid schools and positions that they considered boring and unchallenging (Xia, 2013; Yang et al., 2023). This view was more commonly held by rural teachers (Li & Wang, 2013). The issues of scarcity, fairness, and stress also shaped teachers' professional identity—positively or negatively (Guo & Wang, 2020; Wang & Wu, 2017; Wei & Song, 2012). Chen & Yang (2017) surveyed 286 special education teachers in Sichuan and Chongqing and found that, despite boredom, emotional fatigue, and family financial pressures, as well as limited prospects for job advancement, they would consider staying at their current schools.

Teachers enter the profession wanting to make a difference (Clandinin et al., 2015). If they feel they are not living up to their aspirations, they begin to look elsewhere (Hong, 2012). Therefore, it is imperative for principals to support the growth and development of teachers (Hatlevik & Hatlevik, 2025). As a starting point, principals may establish teacher mentorship programs at their respective schools. Teacher mentorship programs can also be integrated with professional development training sessions, where mentors can share their expertise in areas such as planning, classroom management, and goal setting. Universities can also play a role by providing workshops, seminars, and sessional courses. With such opportunities, teachers can hone their teaching skills and gain acumen for future promotions in educational leadership.

Table 1. Professional Identity

Authors	Research Focus	Methods	Sample	Major Findings
Chen & Yang (2017)	Professional identity, job satisfaction, and turnover in special education.	Questionnaire survey	286 teachers	Professional identity and job satisfaction reduced turnover. Job satisfaction mediated the effect.

Fu & Zhou (2019)	The link between professional identity and job satisfaction and turnover among teachers.	Questionnaire survey	101 teachers	Professional identity and job satisfaction are significantly correlated with turnover.
Guo & Wang (2020).	Professional identity and turnover.	Questionnaire survey	129 teachers	Professional identity reduced turnover. Professional values and behavior influence professional identity.
Hou & Xu (2020)	The connection of teachers' quality of life to turnover.	Questionnaire survey	2,233 teachers	Increased life quality reduced turnover. Professional identity mediated the effect.
Li & Wang (2018)	Factors influencing rural teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire survey	2,505 teachers	Life satisfaction, professional identity, education background, professional development, workload, and income.
Luo (2021)	Organizational factors in young teachers' turnover.	In-depth Interview	6 teachers	Resource scarcity, role conflicts, lack of voice, and unfair seniority drive turnover.
Mi et al. (2015).	Turnover status of middle school teachers in Tibet.	Questionnaire survey	415 teachers	Male and rural teachers show higher turnover. Burnout peaked at 4–6 years' experience.
Wang & Wu (2017).	Professional stress, identity, and turnover in special education.	Questionnaire survey	113 teachers	Professional stress decreased professional identity and increased turnover.
Wei & Song (2012).	Professional identity and turnover.	Questionnaire survey	1,281 teachers	Poor professional identity increased turnover. Job satisfaction partially mediated.
Xia (2013)	Turnover among rural core teachers.	Questionnaire survey	696 teachers	Management, work environment, development opportunities, and economic factors drive turnover.
Yang et al. (2021)	Rural teacher loss through Lewin's Field theory	Theoretical analysis, literature review, and case study	N/A	Professional identity crisis, low satisfaction, lack of emotional care, and stagnation in development.
Yang et al. (2023)	The effects of promotion and training	Questionnaire survey	5,286 teachers	Promotion and training reduced turnover,

	on rural teachers' turnover.			especially for highly educated teachers.
Zhang & Zhao (2021).	Professional identity, satisfaction and turnover.	Questionnaire survey	449 teachers	Professional identity correlated with satisfaction and turnover.
Zhao & Chai (2007).	Attrition and turnover factors among rural teachers in Western Australia.	Questionnaire survey	2,614 teachers	Gender, degree, and experience predicted attrition and turnover.

Pay and Allowances

Pay and allowances were the next significant factor. Fairness was key; receiving salaries similar to other teachers, no matter the setting (rural or urban) or type of school (primary, middle, high school, or special education), was important (Du & Xie, 2019; Gao, 2022; Sun & Du, 2023; Wang, 2023; Zhu et al., 2021). Furthermore, the number of days worked and the length of the working day have been steadily increasing, predominantly among rural school and high school teachers (Peng & Wu, 2024). Overall, the workload and responsibilities have increased, but salaries have remained stagnant (Wang, 2012).

Therefore, all levels of government in China will need to develop strategies to secure additional funding for teacher salaries. In addition, consideration should be given to the frequency of salary payments; rather than monthly, bi-monthly payments may help teachers reduce financial stress. Improved funding for health benefits, retirement plans, and performance bonuses is another way to enhance teachers' well-being. Overall, increasing teachers' sense of financial security will surely alleviate some of the stress associated with the cost of living.

Table 2. Pay and Allowance

Authors	Research Focus	Methods	Sample	Major Findings
Du & Xie (2019).	Salary and non-monetary factors in rural teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire survey	2,643 teachers	Salary dominant. Non-monetary factors, such as students and professional development, are also significant.
Gao (2022)	Job satisfaction and rural teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire survey	516 teachers	Salary, environment, student quality, management, promotion, and teacher-student relationship predicted retention.
Peng & Wu (2024).	Work duties and turnover among young rural teachers.	Questionnaire survey	7, 606 teachers	Work duties indirectly increased turnover through burnout and dissatisfaction.
Sun & Du (2023).	Job Demands-Resources Model for novice teachers in poor rural areas.	Questionnaire survey	4,224 teachers	Student misbehavior and workload increased turnover. Salary and school culture reduced attrition and turnover.

Wang (2012)	Organizational commitment and turnover among special-post teachers.	Questionnaire survey	55 teachers	Low salary and limited promotion opportunities increased turnover.
Wang (2023)	Rural teacher turnover trends under policy support.	Questionnaire survey and field investigation.	5,342 teachers.	The policy supports improved retention; family and career development remain key factors.
Zhu <i>et al.</i> (2021).	Job satisfaction and resignation factors.	Questionnaire survey	1,804 teachers	Salary and benefits, environment, facilities, career prospects, and social status affected job satisfaction and turnover.

Principal Leadership

Teachers' negative views of school leadership performance were a common theme across many of the articles reviewed. “Teachers perceived that educational changes were planned and determined as a top-down decision-making process” (Zhang et al., 2023, p. 41). For instance, teachers had little confidence in the fairness of performance evaluations (Liu & Fang, 2020). Additionally, the aforementioned issues created serious problems in instructional leadership (He, 2020). Principals considered to have poor leadership skills by teachers struggled in their relationships with students and parents (Yang & Wang, 2017). This affected the school climate negatively and caused additional stress for teachers. Overall, the school's climate suffered, resulting in conflict and a general sense of abandonment among teachers (Cai, 2011).

Principal performance has a significant impact on teacher turnover. To begin, it is vital for principals to be highly skilled. Principals coming from teacher backgrounds are desired (Boyd et al., 2008); however, many principals do not come from teaching backgrounds (Cai, 2011). Governments will need to provide additional funding for professional development and mentorships/internships. Organizing such programs will need to be carried out by education bureaus and universities, particularly normal universities. Normal universities (teacher colleges in China) can offer seminars, workshops, and graduate studies in curriculum and instruction.

Table 3. Principal Leadership

Authors	Research Focus	Methods	Sample	Major Findings
Cai (2011)	Professional identity and turnover in rural middle school teachers.	Questionnaire survey	229 teachers	Professional identity reduced turnover. Principal leadership, colleague relationships, student interactions, work rewards, and a sense of belonging affected turnover.
He (2020)	Principals' leadership and teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire survey	943 teachers	Instructional leadership reduced turnover. Positive job satisfaction reduced turnover.
Liu & Fang (2020).	Young rural teachers' turnover factors.	Questionnaire survey	1,007 teachers	Economic, family, and school support, personal preferences, and rural

				adaptability influenced turnover. Lack of school leadership support.
Yang & Wang (2017).	Case study of a young female teacher's resignation.	Case study, observation, and in-depth interview.	1 teacher	Poor leadership, student quality, parents, working conditions, relationships, and career prospects led to resignations.
Zhang et al. (2023).	Turnover and attrition factors among novice female teachers.	Narrative and in-depth interviews.	3 teachers	Workload, environments, student issues, and management conflicts drove attrition.

Job Satisfaction

For teachers, job satisfaction was positively influenced by good communication with students (Chen & Yang, 2017). Likewise, teachers who perceived that their jobs met their expectations were more likely to stay in their current roles (Fu & Zhou, 2019; Huang, 2020; Li & Wang, 2018). However, if this was not realized, they became increasingly dissatisfied, leading to withdrawal and decreased self-worth (Shen & Shu, 2024). For some teachers, the psychological negative impact was severe enough to have teachers seek mental/emotional counseling (Jie et al., 2015; Jie et al., 2018). This typically occurred more so among younger teachers than their experienced peers (Jie et al., 2018). Zhou (2015) argued that, to some extent, the issue of teachers lacking job satisfaction has a history rooted in socio-political factors deeply ingrained in the educational system.

School principal support can make a significant difference (Shuls et al., 2020). Teachers look to principals for developing systems to reduce workload. For instance, simply offering planning time during the workday can reduce teachers' workload outside operational hours (Boyd et al., 2008). Plus, principals can add support staff to assist teachers inside and outside the classroom. Principals addressing and providing realistic workloads for teachers is a step forward to hopefully lowering turnover. The enlarging of support staff will need additional funding from governments. This is where policymakers must recognize that if teachers receive support from support staff, teacher turnover and its consequences can be reduced.

Table 4. Job Satisfaction

Authors	Research Focus	Methods	Sample	Major Findings
Chen & Yang (2017)	Professional identity, job satisfaction, and turnover in special education.	Questionnaire survey	286 teachers	Professional identity and job satisfaction reduced turnover. Job satisfaction mediated the effect.
Fu & Zhou (2019)	The link between professional identity, job satisfaction, and turnover among teachers.	Questionnaire survey	101 teachers	Professional identity and job satisfaction are significantly correlated with turnover.
Huang (2020)	Turnover factors among novice English teachers.	Questionnaire survey and interviews.	219 teachers	Job satisfaction, environment, work variables, and

				professional identity influenced turnover.
Jia et al. (2015).	Collective self-esteem, job satisfaction, and turnover.	Questionnaire survey	224 teachers.	Collective self-esteem reduces turnover through job satisfaction as a mediator.
Jia et al. (2018)	Psychological contract, collective self-esteem, job satisfaction and turnover.	Questionnaire survey	210 teachers	Psychological contract and collective self-esteem predicted job satisfaction and turnover.
Li & Wang (2018)	Factors influencing rural teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire survey	2,505 teachers	Life satisfaction, professional identity, education background, professional development, workload and income.
Shen & Shu (2024).	Turnover in rural schools during education reform.	Literature analysis	Theoretical analyses	Low income, poor working conditions, burnout, limited career development, and low self-worth caused turnover.
Zhou (2015)	Teacher mobility, attrition, and turnover in rural schools.	Literature review	Government data bank	Low salary, heavy workload, limited development opportunities, inadequate resource support, historical and socio-political factors, and attrition and turnover.

Burnout

A heavier workload reported by teachers has been associated with negative mental and/or physical symptoms (Li et al., 2018; Lan et al., 2018; Peng & Wu, 2024; Shang et al., 2023; Sun & Du, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). When teachers feel that their responsibilities at the workplace become unbalanced, work-related stress, exhaustion, and a depletion of confidence become the norm (Chen, 2025; Luo et al., 2023). New government initiatives to reform educational practices seem to add to the workload (Li et al., 2023). Also, emotions of inadequacy beset many teachers, especially older teachers (Zhou et al., 2023). Experienced teachers worried about their ability to adjust to new pedagogy, especially if resources were deemed limited (Chen, 2021).

Principals may wish to involve teachers in decision-making, allow them more autonomy in the classroom and in instructional decisions, and offer leadership positions as promotion. Altogether, teachers need to be recognized for good work by policy-makers, principals, and community leaders.

Table 5. Burnout

Authors	Research Focus	Methods	Sample	Major Findings
Chen (2021)	Job burnout and organizational support in special education.	Questionnaire survey	276 teachers	Burnout increased turnover. Organizational support reduced turnover and partially mediates burnout.
Chen (2025)	Factors influencing turnover.	Interviews	3 teachers	Bored with teaching, emotional fatigue, and financial pressure drive turnover.
Lan et al. (2018)	Emotional exhaustion and gender in rural teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire survey	525 teachers	Low self-esteem increased emotional exhaustion and turnover. Stronger effects for males.
Li et al. (2023)	Burnout on rural teachers' resignations.	Questionnaire survey	516 teachers.	Burnout increased turnover. Social support moderated the burnout-psychological resilience relationship.
Li et al. (2018)	Sense of belonging and turnover.	Questionnaire survey	278 teachers	Sense of belonging directly affected turnover. Emotional exhaustion mediated.
Luo et al. (2023)	Work stress and turnover in special education.	Questionnaire survey	425 teachers	Work stress increased turnover. Emotional exhaustion and professional commitment mediated.
Peng & Wu (2024)	Work duties and turnover among young rural teachers.	Questionnaire survey	7, 606 teachers	Work duties indirectly increased turnover through burnout and dissatisfaction.
Shang et al. (2023)	Job stress and performance in rural teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire survey	683 teachers	Job stress predicted turnover. Satisfaction of performance mediated.
Sun & Du (2023)	Job Demands-Resources Model for novice teachers in poor rural areas.	Questionnaire survey	4,224 teachers	Student misbehavior and workload increased turnover. Salary and school culture reduced attrition and turnover.
Zhang et al. (2023)	Turnover and attrition factors among novice female teachers.	Narrative and in-depth interviews.	3 teachers	Workload, environments, student issues, and management conflicts drove attrition.
Zhou et al. (2023)	Workload, work-family interference, and affective	Questionnaire survey	906 teachers	Miscellaneous tasks increased turnover. Work-family interference and

	commitment among female teachers.			affective commitment mediated.
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Professional Development

Teachers viewed the lack of sufficient professional support as school leadership casting them aside to deal with issues on their own (Du & Xie, 2019). Insufficient opportunities for teachers to develop and craft their pedagogy led to stagnation in their careers, leading them to feel they were missing opportunities for advancement, decreased confidence, and an inability to contribute effectively to their workplaces (Jin et al., 2021; Li & Wang, 2018; Luo et al., 2023).

Professional development would be more valuable if it helped to address the needs and contexts of their specific schools (Luo et al., 2023). Also, teachers, more specifically those beginning their careers, noted the need for better university preparation programs. Programs that offered aspiring educators more rigorous field experiences and, following graduation, high-quality internships (Due & Xie, 2019). This will require school principals and government policy-makers to work together to construct such initiatives and to fund travel, communication technology, and resources for teachers.

Table 6. Professional Development

Authors	Research Focus	Methods	Sample	Major Findings
Du & Xie (2019).	Salary and non-monetary factors in rural teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire survey	2,643 teachers	Salary dominant. Non-monetary factors like students and professional development are also significant.
Jin et al. (2021).	Factors influencing rural teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire survey	5,286 teachers	Poor salary, delayed promotions, and low-quality professional training increased turnover.
Li & Wang (2018)	Factors influencing rural teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire survey	2,505 teachers	Life satisfaction, professional identity, education background, professional development, workload, and income.
Luo et al. (2023).	Factors influencing special-post teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire Survey	119 teachers	Marital stability, emotional satisfaction, welfare, and professional development reduce turnover.

Collective-Efficacy

Collective efficacy in a school setting is defined as the social interaction among school staff, students, parents, and community stakeholders (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). The communications ensure that individuals act in the collective good, even when they do not know one another. Though student–teacher interactions may be complex, for example, a teacher may have students struggling with negative attitudes toward school, leading to destructive behaviors; trust, a component of collective efficacy, can cause a turnaround in the student-teacher connection (Gao, 2022; Guan & Fang, 2013; Jiang & He, 2007). Collective efficacy improves job satisfaction, job

engagement, and intrinsic motivation, reducing turnover (Liu et al., 2004; Liu et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2011). Gao (2022) notes that positive student-teacher relationships create opportunities for effective learning and overall well-being for students and teachers. Such relationships are built on mutual respect, trust, and open communication, creating a safe and supportive environment (Zhang et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2011). The benefits of such relationships are similar for both teacher-parent and teacher-community members (Guo & Fu, 2022).

Table 7. Collective-Efficacy

Authors	Research Focus	Methods	Sample	Major Findings
Gao (2022)	Job satisfaction and rural teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire survey	516 teachers	Salary, environment, student quality, management, promotion, and teacher-student relationship predicted retention.
Guo & Fu (2024).	Self-efficacy and professional identity among music teachers.	Questionnaire survey	720 teachers	Self-efficacy increased professional identity. Positive work engagement decreased turnover.
Guan & Fang (2013).	The link between psychological resilience and turnover.	Questionnaire survey	426 teachers	Psychological resilience reduced turnover. Professional identity and efficacy predicted turnover.
Jiang & He (2007).	Organizational commitment and turnover.	Questionnaire survey	174 teachers	Emotional commitment is connected to turnover.
Liu et al. (2004).	Efficacy and turnover.	Questionnaire survey	1,299 teachers	High self- and collective efficacy reduced the effects of stress on satisfaction and turnover.
Liu et al. (2005).	Collective efficacy and teacher wellness.	Questionnaire survey	1,299 teachers	Collective efficacy improved satisfaction, engagement and motivation reduced turnover.
Liu et al. (2011).	Emotional intelligence, emotional commitment, and turnover.	Questionnaire survey	227 teachers	Emotional intelligence reduced turnover through enhanced commitment.
Zhang et al. (2023).	Turnover and attrition factors among novice female teachers.	Narrative and in-depth interviews.	3 teachers	Workload, environments, student issues, and management conflicts drove attrition.

Zhang et al. (2011).	Teacher efficacy and school culture.	Questionnaire surveys, individual and group interviews, follow-up surveys.	132 teachers	Democratic leadership and teacher collaboration decreased turnover.
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Personal State

Marital status significantly influenced turnover (Li et al., 2019; Luo et al., 2023). Although variables such as gender and age are unchangeable, principals still need to be aware that they are predictors of turnover. Older unmarried males with more education were at higher risk of turnover than their female colleagues, especially those who were married (Li et al., 2019). As well, male teachers have higher turnover due to economic pressures (Mi et al., 2015). The customary expectation that males be the primary money-maker in the family added to family financial pressures, especially when salaries and allowances were below the norm (Lan et al., 2018; Zeng et al., 2023). As previously mentioned, marital stability was also a key factor; couples in which both partners worked at the same school or lived in the same city/town were more likely to remain in their current positions for longer (Sun & Shi, 2024; Luo et al., 2023). Overall, a balance between work and family responsibilities was considered essential for teachers when deciding whether to stay or leave (Guan & Fang, 2013; Wang, 2023; Xu & Tang, 2018; Yuan et al., 2020; Zhou, 2020; Zhou et al., 2023).

As mentioned, marital status, gender, age, and the balance of work and family responsibilities are, for the most part, factors beyond the control of school principals and educational policy-makers. However, educational leaders need to be cognizant of the effects they have on teacher turnover. For instance, when performing mid- and long-range human resource planning.

Table 8. Personal State

Authors	Research Focus	Methods	Sample	Major Findings
Li et al. (2019).	Factors influencing turnover.	Questionnaire survey	5,285 teachers	Gender, marital status, age, and job satisfaction influenced turnover.
Luo et al. (2023).	Factors influencing special-post teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire Survey	119 teachers	Marital stability, emotional satisfaction, welfare, and professional development reduce turnover.
Mi et al. (2015).	Turnover status of middle school teachers in Tibet.	Questionnaire survey	415 teachers	Male and rural teachers show higher turnover. Burnout peaked at 4–6 years' experience.
Sun & Shi (2024)	Local identity and county teachers' resignations.	Questionnaire survey	456 teachers	Local identity reduced turnover and attrition.
Wang (2023)	Rural teacher turnover trends under policy support.	Questionnaire survey and field investigation.	5,342 teachers.	The policy supports improved retention; family and career development remain key factors.

Xu & Tang (2018)	Categorizing teachers' turnover based on experiences.	In-depth interviews and narrative analyses.	20 teachers.	Turnover types: a. External-driven; and b. Internal-driven.
Yuan et al. (2020).	Factors influencing rural primary teachers' turnover.	Questionnaire survey	General subject teachers	Relationships, beliefs, family, and organizational support influenced turnover.
Zeng et al. (2023).	Personality traits and career adaptability in turnover.	Questionnaire survey	970 teachers	Neuroticism increased turnover. Conscientiousness reduced turnover through career adaptability.
Zhou (2020)	Factors influencing the turnover of young rural teachers.	In-depth interviews	4 teachers	Dissatisfaction with economic and social status, workload, and career stagnation increased turnover.
Zhou et al. (2023)	Workload, work-family interference, and affective commitment among female teachers.	Questionnaire survey	906 teachers	Miscellaneous tasks increased turnover. Work-family interference and affective commitment mediated.

D. Conclusion

This scoping review was conducted to collect, analyze, and synthesize empirical research on teacher turnover in Chinese schools over the past 25 years and to translate the evidence into practical guidance for school principals, governments, and universities. Specifically, the review sought to answer two questions: what principals can do to reduce teacher turnover in their respective schools, and what governments and universities in China can do to reduce teacher turnover in schools. By mapping 54 empirical studies that met the inclusion criteria and were reported in accordance with the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR), the review provides a consolidated evidence base on the factors associated with teachers' decisions to remain in or leave their positions at the end of the academic year or of their contracts.

The review's most important finding is that teacher turnover is not attributable to a single cause but is shaped by a constellation of interrelated individual and contextual factors. These include professional conditions, pay and allowances, leadership, job satisfaction, burnout, professional development, collective efficacy, and personal conditions. While some factors—such as gender, age, and family situation—are relatively stable or less directly amenable to school-level intervention, others can be influenced through substantial policy attention and principal leadership that actively develops and monitors a professional community at the school level. Reducing turnover, therefore, requires purposeful strategic plans and systematic, coordinated efforts to create conditions that support teacher retention. For principals, this means prioritizing professional conditions, supportive leadership, job satisfaction, burnout reduction, professional development, and collective efficacy. For governments and universities, it means addressing compensation and allowances, strengthening teacher education and continuing professional development, and creating policies that support teachers' professional and personal well-being.

The review makes both academic and practical contributions. Academically, it consolidates fragmented empirical evidence and frames teacher turnover as a multi-level phenomenon shaped by interrelated individual and contextual factors, thereby providing a foundation for future theory-driven and comparative research on teacher retention in China and comparable contexts. Practically, it offers an evidence-informed basis for principals, policymakers, and teacher education institutions to design targeted retention strategies rather than relying on partial explanations or isolated interventions. In this sense, the review is important not only for understanding why teachers leave but also for informing coordinated efforts that can stabilize the teaching workforce, support student learning, and reduce educational inequalities.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. As a scoping review, the study aimed to map and synthesize the breadth of evidence rather than to appraise study quality in depth or estimate effect sizes. The included studies were heterogeneous in their samples, research foci, methods, and measures of turnover, which limits comparability and causal inference. The review was also constrained by the databases searched, the 25-year time frame, and the possibility of publication bias, and its findings are contextually bound to Chinese schools. Future research should therefore move beyond mapping toward theory-driven and longitudinal designs, validated and comparable measures of turnover intention and behavior, intervention studies that evaluate retention strategies, and comparative analyses across rural and urban regions and provinces. Future reviews could also conduct systematic quality appraisal or meta-analysis where the evidence permits, and further research should incorporate teachers' voices and evaluate the implementation and outcomes of principal leadership and policy interventions aimed at reducing teacher turnover.

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