Understanding the Roots of Teacher Turnover: A Transactional Model

Teacher turnover in Hong Kong is a serious problem for schools and the education system as a whole. Governmental figures show that since 2016, about 25,000 teachers have left the profession (out of the entire K-12 teacher workforce of 71,000; 35%; Education Bureau, 2021), and the problem has been further exacerbated by the socio-political uncertainties in the past two years (Chan, 2021). Moreover, record numbers of teachers also report low levels of professional well-being (McInerney et al., 2018), which is characterized by low job satisfaction and high burnout. A turnover decision is originally derived from an intention to quit. Systematically understanding the antecedents of teachers' quitting intentions will help researchers and educators better understand the complexity of teacher turnover.

Previous studies showed that both *individual* factors (e.g., motivation, emotions, teaching experiences) and *contextual* features (e.g., school climate, class characteristics, principal support) affect teachers' professional well-being and quitting intentions. Recent studies suggest that individuals' perception of their fit within the context (*transactional* factors), such as teachers' perception of person-environment fit, which is defined as the match between the person and the environment (Edwards et al., 2006), show the strongest effects (Klassen et al., 2021).

The proposed study includes a quantitative phase that will provide a broad picture of patterns and trajectories, and a qualitative phase that will provide a close-up view from teachers' perspectives. In the quantitative phase, we propose a mediational model in which teachers' perceived usefulness of the teaching career (*utility values*; an individual factor) and school administration values (a contextual factor) both directly influence teachers' professional well-being and quitting intentions, and indirectly influence them via teachers' perceptions of person-environment fit (a transactional factor). To assess school administration values, we examine principals' *actual* administration values and teachers' *perceived* administration values to discern their impacts on teachers' professional well-being and quitting intentions. Nine hundred classroom teachers and their 60 principals from 30 schools (10 kindergartens + 10 primary schools + 10 secondary schools) will complete surveys three times across two years. Multilevel structural equation modeling (Muthén & Muthén, 2018)—an innovative statistical method in which structures of relationships can be assessed at multiple levels of analysis—will be used for data analyses.

Results from the quantitative phase will inform the interviews conducted in the qualitative phase. To prepare for the in-depth interviews, we will first identify profiles/typologies of teachers based on their values, perceived fit, and quitting intentions by conducting latent profile analyses (of Time 1 data). Nested samples of teachers (estimated 5% of total) from each identified profile will be invited for follow-up semi-structured one-to-one interviews (total $n = 45$). The teachers in the interviews will be probed about their teaching values, perceived person-environment fit, and other individual, contextual, and transactional contributors to their high/low levels of intention to quit.

In sum, the quantitative phase will help us understand (1) *who* is more likely to quit (the individual factor), (2) from *which* environment teachers are more likely to quit (the contextual factor), and (3) *who* is more likely to leave *which* environment (the transactional factor). The follow-up qualitative phase will investigate in further depth the reasons and underlying mechanisms of *why* some teachers are likely to quit. Integrating the results of both phases will help researchers, practitioners, and policymakers gain a novel and comprehensive understanding concerning the complexity of teacher turnover and inform subsequent interventions and policy discussions.