

The relationship of turnover intention, professional identity and job satisfaction of special education teachers in Chengdu of China

(scientific paper)

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Abstract: *In this study, questionnaire survey was used to study the relationship between turnover intention, job satisfaction and professional identity of Chinese special education teachers. The results are as follows: The average scores of turnover intention are generally low, but still 18.71%, special education teachers tend to leave; the professional identity and job satisfaction of special education teachers is negatively correlated with turnover intention; “Employment Nature, Professional Emotion, Professional Belief, Leadership” are the strongest predictor of turnover intention.*

Keywords: *special education teachers, turnover intention, professional identity, job satisfaction*

1 Introduction

Special education teachers are the foundation of the development of special education and the key to improve the quality of special education. In 2012, the ministry of education of China promulgated *the opinions on strengthening the construction of teachers in special education*, which clearly stated that “the goal of meeting the needs of special schools for the teachers should be realized, and by 2020, a contingent of special education teachers with sufficient numbers and reasonable structure will be formed. *2017 National Statistical Report on Education Development* shows that 578,800 children with special needs are receiving education, and 274,800 children in special schools. However, there are only 56,000 full-time teachers in special schools, accounting for 85.9% of the total teachers, and the student-teacher ratio in special schools is 4.22:1. Furthermore, the research finds that the student-teacher ratio in special education schools in China has shown a sharp upward trend in the past dec-

ade (Wang Yan & Zhu Nan, 2015). A national survey data shows that teachers in most special education schools in China are insufficient. 72% schools in east China, 77% schools in middle China and 82% schools in west China are unable to meet the teaching needs for the number of teachers (Wang Yan & Wang Zhiqiang, 2012). It can be seen that the number of special education teachers in China is seriously insufficient.

Some studies have found that the loss of special education teachers in China is not optimistic either. The difficulty in recruitment and the loss have become the threat factors restricting the development of special education in China (Chai Jiang & Wang Jun, 2014). In the case of a serious shortage of special education teachers, if the phenomenon of dimission cannot be effectively alleviated, the situation might seriously impede the improvement of special education. Because the actual dimission behavior is affected by many external factors and difficult for predicting, researchers suggest to replace the dimission behavior with the turnover intention in the study (Yu Jie, 2010).

Through literature review many variables could explain turnover intention, but professional identity and job satisfaction are two important variables. A large number of studies have shown that professional identity and job satisfaction would significantly predict turnover intention and are important factors for influencing turnover intention (Chen Chen, 2014). Compared with other variables, job satisfaction is first associated with turnover intention. Muchinsky and Tuttle (1979) reviewed 39 studies on job satisfaction and turnover intention, and found that 35 of them showed a negative correlation between job satisfaction and turnover intention, with the exception of 4 studies (Muchinsky & Tuttle, 1979). And organizational identity and job satisfaction could independently predict turnover intention (Tett & Tett, 1993); Moore and Hofman (1998) found that when teachers are strongly criticized by the outside world, their professional identity might, to some extent, guide them to overcome difficulties and dissatisfaction in work so as to hinder their turnover intention (Beijaard et al., 2013; Zhao & Zhang, 2017). In addition, the research also shows that job satisfaction and organizational commitment are important mediating variables of turnover intention, and the influence of other variables on turnover intention is mostly through job satisfaction, organizational commitment, etc. (Mobley, 1978).

Is the relationship between turnover intention, professional identity and job satisfaction the same for special education teachers? In order to answer this question, this study intends to take special education teachers as the subject group and analyze the relationship between the three variables in order to find the remedy for alleviating the turnover intention of teachers.

2 Methodology

2.1 Aim and objective

The objective of this study is to recognize the relationship between turnover intention, job satisfaction and professional identity by taking Chinese special education teachers as subjects. To find out the prediction variables and sustainable solution to reduce the turnover intention of special education teachers. The specific research objectives are as follows:

1. The turnover intention level of special education teachers in Chengdu;
2. Is turnover intention of special education teachers related to professional identity and job satisfaction in Chengdu of China?
3. What are the effective predictors of the turnover intention of special education teachers in Chengdu of China?

2.2 Research design and sample

In this study, 350 questionnaires were distributed from 19 districts and counties, including Shuangliu district, Jinniu district and Pengzhou district of Chengdu, and 326 valid questionnaires were collected (table 1).

Table 1: *The information of test objects*

Variable	Category	N	%	Variable	Category	N	%
School type	Mentally handicapped school	184	56.4	Sex	male	62	19.0
	Comprehensive school	142	43.6		female	262	80.4
Marital status	unmarried	126	38.7	Employment nature	regular teacher	230	70.6
	married	197	60.4		Non-regular teacher	95	29.1
Age	≤ 29	155	47.5	Years of working	≤ 3	138	42.3
	30–39	84	25.8		4–10	98	30.1
	≥ 40	86	26.4		≥ 11	87	26.7
On-the-job training time	Within a week	109	33.4	Academic diplomas	Junior college or below	82	25.2
	Within a month	116	35.6		Undergraduate	220	67.5
	More than one month	97	29.8		Master or above	23	7.1
Professional qualifications	Level 3 and below	113	34.7				
	Level 2	85	26.1				
	Level 1	104	31.9				
	Senior	23	7.1				

2.3 Instruments

1. Turnover intention scale

Farh, a Hong Kong scholar, designed the turnover intention scale in 1998. There are four questions, and the five-point Likert scale is adopted (1-strongly disagree, 5-strongly agree). Undoubtedly, the higher the score, the higher the turnover intention level of teachers. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.760, and the split-half reliability was 0.755. The correlation coefficient between each item and the total score was ranged from 0.657 to 0.854. The above indicators shows that this instrument is effective and reliable.

2. Professional identity scale of special education teachers

To measure the level of professional identity of special education teachers, the questionnaire was self-designed. The questionnaire is composed of four dimensions: professional cognition, professional emotion, professional belief and professional behavioral tendency. It must be emphasized that these dimensions were established by literature research, personal communication with expert researchers. Thirty-two attitude items were presented in a 5-point Likert format with responses from 1 (Completely agree) to 5 (Completely disagree). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.910, and the split-half reliability was 0.826. The correlation coefficient between each factor and the total questionnaire ranged from 0.761 to 0.856. Furthermore, the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measures of sampling adequacy) was 0.908. And the Bartlett spherical statistical test showed Chi-Square (χ^2) was 3130.351, degree of freedom (df) was 253 and correlation was significant at the 0.01 level ($p = 0.000$). Factor analysis revealed that the cumulative variance proportion of the four factors reached 61.718%. In terms of confirmatory factor analysis, hypotheses of the model were verified via AMOS 21.0. Several indices were calculated to evaluate the fit of the model to the data: χ^2/df , Tacker-Lewis index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), standard root mean-square residual (SRMR). Model Fit Summary showed " $\chi^2/df = 2.098 (< 3.0)$, TLI and CFI exceeded 0.90, RMSEA = .058 (< 0.08), SRMR = .0541 (< 0.1)". All the indicators were significant at 0.01 level. These consequences indicated that the model was considered to have a good fit and the questionnaire "professional identity scale for special education teachers" has good reliability and validity.

3. Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS)

Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) designed by Paul e. Spector et al. The questionnaire is composed of nine dimensions: salary, leadership, promotion, reward, welfare, operating conditions, work itself, colleagues and communication. The scale has also been widely used in many studies, with good reliability and validity. Its Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.940, and the level of each dimension was between

0.608 and 0.819 (Reheiser, Eric & Spielberger, D. Charles, 1994). In this study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of Job Satisfaction Survey was 0.909, and the split-half reliability was 0.918.

2.4 Procedure and data analysis

Teachers filled in the questionnaires anonymously. The data were entered into the SPSS version 21.0. In order to demonstrate the relationship between turnover intention, professional identity and job satisfaction of special education teachers, data were analyzed with Correlation Analysis and Regression Analysis.

3 Results

3.1 Respondents' turnover intention level

It is found in the study (table 2) that the average score of 326 special education teachers' turnover intention ($M = 2.3211$) was lower than the theoretical median. This indicated that teachers of special education have a low turnover intention. However, 61 of them had a high score ($M > 3$), that is, 18.71% of the special education teachers still had a high turnover intention.

Table 2: *Turnover intention level of special education teachers*

Turnover intention	N	M	SD
	326	2.3211	.82532

2.2 Correlation and regression analysis

A Regression equation was established with independent variables and dependent variables. Specifically, the independent variables include demographic variables, professional identity, job satisfaction and the dependent variables are turnover intention for the prediction model. Regression analysis is a mathematical statistical analysis of independent and dependent variables with causal relationship. Undoubtedly, the regression equation is meaningful only when there is a causal relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. Therefore, correlation analysis should be carried out before regression analysis (table 3).

1. Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis is performed between independent variables and dependent variables, and Pearson correlation coefficients is calculated. It is found that the

professional identity of special education teachers is negatively correlated with turnover intention. Likewise, the professional behavioral tendency, professional emotion, professional cognition and professional belief are negatively correlated with turnover intention. The correlation coefficient ranged from -0.636 to -0.336 ($p < 0.01$). It may indicate that the higher the professional identity, the lower the turnover intention of special education teachers; furthermore, there was a significant negative correlation between job satisfaction and turnover intention of special education teachers. Salary, welfare, promotion, reward, operating conditions, leadership, colleagues, work itself and communication are negatively correlated with turnover intention. Consequently, in the majority of cases the higher the job satisfaction, the lower the turnover intention of special education teachers. The correlation coefficient ranged from -0.564 to -0.195 ($p < 0.01$).

2. Regression analysis

Firstly, it is determined whether there is a multivariate collinear problem among independent variables. In this study, the tolerance value between independent variables is between 0.299 and 0.682 ($TOL > 0.2$), and the variance inflation coefficient is between 1.466 – 3.341 ($VIF < 10$), indicating that the multivariate collinear problem between variables is not obvious. Since all demographic variables were classified rather than continuous, all variables were converted to dummy variables prior to the regression analysis. To elaborate the effective predictors of the turnover intention for special education teachers, demographic variables (dummy variables), professional identity and job satisfaction were taken as independent variables, and turnover intention as dependent variables were put into the regression equation. In the first layer, all demographic variables (dummy variables) are put in with the enter method. And in the second layer, Stepwise method is adopted to put in all dimensions of professional identity and job satisfaction at the same time. The regression analysis model of turnover intention is as follows (Table 4). In model 1, taking demographic variables as independent variables, turnover intention as dependent variables, the variance of regression equation explaining turnover intention is 16.6% ($R^2 = 0.166$). “The school type, Employment nature, On-the-job training time” reach significance level in model 1. As a matter of fact, “Employment nature” has the largest beta ($\beta = -223$), and only “Employment nature” in four models have reached significant level absolutely. It unveils that in contrast with other demographic variables, “Employment nature” has a greater impact on turnover intention and is relatively stable. What’s more, the influence is negative ($\beta = -223$), manifesting that the turnover intention of regular teacher is lower than that of the non-regular teacher.

From model 2 to model 4, “Professional emotion, Professional belief” and “Leadership” entered the equation in turn. In model 2, 49.7% variance of turnover intention is explained by regression equation ($R^2 = 0.497$), among which profes-

Table 3: *Correlation analysis of turnover intention, job satisfaction and professional identity of special-education teachers*

	salary	promotion	leadership	welfare	reward	operating conditions	colleagues	work itself	communication	job satisfaction	turnover intention
professional behavioral tendency	-.010	.098	.422**	.011	.195**	-.024	.329*	.465*	.366**	.315**	-.397**
professional emotion	.272**	.160**	.462**	.206**	.509**	.287**	.424*	.687*	.368**	.565**	-.604**
professional cognition	.020	.103	.414**	-.003	.230**	.023	.433*	.517*	.315**	.345**	-.336**
professional belief	.270**	.263**	.377**	.264**	.361**	.198**	.317*	.670*	.325**	.511**	-.617**
professional identity	.200**	.206**	.524**	.173**	.427**	.176**	.468*	.750*	.431**	.564**	-.636**
turnover intention	-.215*	-.195*	-.418**	-.199**	-.370**	-.241**	-.378**	-.564**	-.368**	-.494**	1.00

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

sional emotion alone contributes 33.1%. In model 3, the percentage of variability for the whole independent variables explaining turnover intention reach 54.2% ($R^2 = 0.542$), professional belief accounts for 4.5%. In model 4, all the predicted variables enter into the regression equation. The multivariate correlation coefficient (R) reach 0.744, the coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.553, and the F of the model is 18.197 ($p < 0.001$). Therefore, demographic variables, professional emotion, professional belief and leadership can effectively explain the 55.3% variance of turnover intention ($R^2 = 0.553$). However, “leadership” alone contributed 1.1% of the variance.

To sum up, the variable with the highest predictive power for the turnover intention of special education teachers is professional emotion, which explains 33.1% of variation. A greater percentage of “professional belief” than “leadership” is found in the predictor variable, the former occupies 4.5%, and the latter takes up 1.1%. Moreover, after entering the regression model, all the predictive variables reached the significance level of 0.01, and the beta of the predictive variables was subtractive, indicating that their influence on the turnover intention of special education teachers was negative.

4 Conclusion and discussion

4.1 The turnover intention level of special education teachers is relatively low in Chengdu

The results showed that the average score of turnover intention ($M = 2.32$) was lower than the theoretical median ($M = 3$), indicating that the turnover intention of teachers with special education in Chengdu is relatively low. This is consistent with the research results of Li Yan, who found that the turnover intention of special education teachers is at a low level in southwest China (Li Yan, 2013). The reason for the low turnover intention of special education teachers in Chengdu may be that the party and the state attach importance to this field and support the development of special education in recent years. *Outline of the twelfth five-year plan for national economic and social development of the People's Republic of China (2011–2015)* put forward “care for and support for special education”, *Outline of the 13th five-year plan for national economic and social development of the People's Republic of China (2016–2020)* and *the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China* put forward “ensure the success of special education”. It can be seen that the party and the state begin to pay attention to improve the quality of special education. From 2008 to 2011, the national development and reform commission invested a total of 4.7 billion yuan to support the construction and reconstruction of 1,182 special education schools in western China, so as to improve the teaching conditions of special education schools.

Table 4: Regression analysis of turnover intention

Independent variable		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Model 1	School type		-.221***	-.101*	-.080
	gender				
	female & male		-.090	-.071	-.048
	Marital status				
	married & unmarried		-.027	-.089	-.110
	Age		.006	.065	.079
	30–39 & ≤29				
	≥40 & ≤29		-.149	-.100	-.026
	Years of working				
	4–10 & ≤3		.103	.078	.071
	≥11 & ≤3		.036	.056	.063
	Professional qualifications				
	Level 2 & Level 3 and below		.043	-.019	.032
	Level 1 & Level 3 and below		-.018	-.044	-.041
Model 2	Academic diplomas				
	Senior & Level 3 and below		-.036	-.056	-.071
	Undergraduate & Junior college or below		-.049	-.036	-.031
	Master or above & Junior college or below		.104	.048	.060
	Employment nature				
	regular teacher & Non-regular teacher		-.223**	-.246***	-.220***
	On-the-job training time				
	Within a month & Within a week		-.128*	-.052	-.032
	More than one month & Within a week		-.078	-.032	-.019
	Model 2			-.607***	-.794***
Model 3	professional emotion				-.385***
	Model 3				-.271***
	professional belief				-.539***
	Model 4				-.124**
	leadership				
Model 4	R		.407	.705	.744
	R ²		.166	.497	.542
	ΔR ²		.166	.331	.045
	F		3.478***	16.23***	18.36***

Dependent Variable:turnover intention

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed), ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (3-tailed)

From the perspective of special education teachers' welfare benefits, *the special education promotion plan (2014–2016)* and *the second special education promotion plan (2017–2020)* both clearly point out that “special education teachers' allowance and other wage preference policies should be improved, and the total amount of merit pay should be appropriately tilted to special education teachers.” In recent years, China has promulgated *the professional standards for special education teachers* and the curriculum standards for blind, deaf and mentally retarded students. This provides a path and direction for the professional development of teachers, and also improves their self-confidence and pride. Both from the national policy, funding, welfare and professional system have increased the appeal of the occupation. Therefore, the intention of special education teachers to quit shows a low level.

4.2 Effective predictors of turnover intention include “employment nature”, “professional belief”, “professional emotion” and “leadership” for special education teachers in Chengdu of China

The regression analysis of predictors of turnover intention of teachers in special education shows that “Employment nature” are more stable and stronger than other variables (Model1). The non-regular teachers are more likely to resign than regular teachers. March & Simon (1958) proposed the participant decision model of turnover intention, which explained that the rationality of employees' leaving was often realized and the resistance of leaving was evaluated before demission (Jackofsky & Peters, 1983; Guan Xiaoyu & Yu Haibo, 2015). In contrast with regular teacher, non-regular teachers in resignation procedures are often less worried, that is to say, non-regular teachers have less obstacle for leaving their existing jobs. Because there is no mandatory length of service on the contract between the non-regular teacher and the employer.

Among the dimensions of professional identity of teachers in special education, only “professional belief” and “professional emotion” enter the regression equation. According to Price-Mueller's turnover motivation model, employee's demission is mainly affected by environmental variables, individual variables, structured variables and mediating variables. Individual variables include training, work participation, and positive/negative emotions (Price, 2001). Professional emotion is the teachers' understanding of the social value and self-value of the occupation they are engaged in and the feelings they get from the educational activities, which is an internalized and relatively stable psychological emotion and value judgment (Xiong Wen, 2014). It could be divided into positive professional emotion and negative professional emotion. Teachers with positive professional emotion often show good mentality and stable emotions in work, and can achieve the perfect combination of life and work.

They love special children, are willing to devote themselves to education and have low turnover intention. Conversely, teachers with negative professional emotion only take occupation as a means of making a living, lack of work enthusiasm and professional responsibility, are full of complaints, and show a high turnover intention. Likewise, professional belief has stability, once formed, it is not easy to change. And stable professional belief often plays a great role in the process of human development, as well as the role of motivation and restraint, which affects the tenacity of behavior (Zhou Lizhu, 2017). Teachers with strong professional belief can hold a sense of trust to their profession even in the face of complicated assignment every day. However, teachers with weak professional belief often lose heart due to the lack of spiritual support and inner motivation when facing emotional exhaustion, and even have the idea of giving up (Liu Junqi, 2014). On the other hand, in all dimensions of special education teachers' job satisfaction, only "leadership" enters the regression equation, which indicates that comparing with other dimensions "leadership" has a stronger predictive power for the turnover intention of special education teachers. In this study, "leadership" includes teachers' perception of superior competence, fairness and care. Graen & Dansereau (1975) et al. proposed the leader-member exchange (LME) theory, in which superior leaders establish different relationships with different employees due to time and energy constraints. In addition, more attention will be paid to "in-circle" personnel while less attention will be paid to "out-circle" (Green, 1996; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991). The "leadership" would affect employees' sense of organizational justice, job satisfaction and turnover intention (Zhang Jiarui, 2011).

5 Directions for the future

Based on the results of this study, it is hoped to provide suggestions for the education department to formulate policies or the management of special education schools to reduce the turnover intention.

It is found that the special education teachers' "employment nature" is the vital influencing factor of the turnover intention, to be specific, the regular teacher keep lower level than that of the non-regular teachers in turnover intention. However, at present, the regular teacher is seriously insufficient in China, in other words, a large proportion of non-regular teachers exist in school. From the perspective of policy, the "*special education promotion plan (2014–2016)*" clearly put forward that all regions should settle the problem of staffing according to the actual situation, and allocate enough regular staff to ensure the teaching and management. So far, some provinces and cities in China have explicitly stipulated the standards for the ratio of students to regular teachers in special education schools, such as Beijing, Shandong, Guangzhou, Heilongjiang, etc, nonetheless, the majority of regions have not finished yet. Huang

(2011) & Zhang (2015) found that Sichuan and Jilin province has not issued relevant policies on the regular staff standards for teachers of special education, and special education schools can only refer to the standard of teacher-student ratio of ordinary schools, namely 1 : 20 (1 regular teacher : 20 students). Under these circumstances, the areas in China that have not issued the regular staffing standards for special education school should implement them as soon as possible according to the actual situation of each region. Education departments should give priority to special education schools when allocating regular teachers.

Teachers of special education bear a heavy burden, not only in school, but also in counseling and home teaching. If there is no strong psychological foundation – professional belief and professional emotion, it is easy to generate turnover intention. There is little attention paid to professional belief and professional emotion in special education directly from the existing research. Generally speaking, both professional belief and professional emotion belong to professional ethics. Wang (2013) found that the pre-service training of special education teachers in China currently focuses on knowledge and skills, while ignoring or even saying nothing about professional ethics (Wang Yan & Li Huan, 2013). By this token, paying more attention to professional ethics such as professional belief and professional emotion is especially necessary. Nevertheless, the cultivation of positive professional belief and professional emotion should be a continuous process, which will permeate into every link of pre-service training and post-service training.

By the same token, it was found that “leadership” played an important role in predicting the turnover intention. At present, leaders of special education schools do not show enough care and support for teachers. Compared with teachers, leaders care more about parents and students. Secondly, teachers in special education schools are dissatisfied with the way of leadership and management, and their participation and autonomy in decision-making are low. Many things are decided by leaders and lack of humanity (Song Wenxia, 2007). When interviewing the decision-making mode of the superior, teachers often use such words as “rigid”, “stubborn” and “compulsive” to summarize (Chen Xia, 2015). Therefore, managers of special education schools should strengthen humanistic care for teachers and build a benign interpersonal atmosphere between superiors and employees.

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