



## The Relationship Between Person Organization Fit and Rural Teacher Retention: The Mediating Role of Dimension of Organization Commitment

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Rural teachers are the source of rural revitalization, and the retention of rural teachers is crucial for the development of rural education. This study attempts to understand the factors that influence teacher retention in China's rural schools. It examines the link between person-organizational fit, organization commitment in its various forms (affective commitment, continuous commitment, normative commitment), and retention of rural teachers. **Method:** The structural equation model analysis method was used in this study. The research sample included 339 rural teachers distributed in Nanchong City, Sichuan Province. The data collection instruments were the Personal Organization Fit Questionnaire (POF), Organizational Commitment

Questionnaire (OCQ), and Teacher Retention Scale (TR). Descriptive data processing and hypothesis testing was carried out with SPSS and MPLUS. **Result:** According to the hypothesis test results, it was revealed that retention of teachers was positively correlated with person-organization fit and other commitment-related aspects, with the exception of affective commitment, which did not appear to be directly correlated with retention. Additionally, the correlation between personal-organizational fit and rural teacher retention was mediated by continuous commitment and normative commitment. **Implications for Research and Practice:** We recommend that education departments should pay attention to the retention rate of rural teachers, improve the fit degree between teachers and schools, and enhance the level of organizational commitment. In addition, it is also believed that attention should be paid to teachers' affective commitment to rural schools and their emotional driving force towards rural education should be strengthened.

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## Introduction

The issue of retaining teachers in economically disadvantaged rural regions poses a significant challenge for numerous countries globally (Liu, Liu, & Wang, 2022; Opoku et al., 2020). In the "2030 Education Plan" released by the OECD (OECD, 2020), how to successfully draw in an adequate number of teachers and maintain a high-quality supply of excellent teachers has become the focus of OECD member countries. Due to geographical isolation, limited professional development opportunities, lack of teaching resources, and a dearth of social interactions, rural schools are facing a severe crisis of teacher attrition (Gallo, 2020; Gunn, McRae, & Edge-Partington, 2023; Seelig & McCabe, 2021). The pressing issue of high turnover rates in rural schools necessitates immediate attention and the development of effective strategies to address the existing "retention crisis." (Richardson & Watt, 2006) The aforementioned concerns and obstacles have spurred scholars to examine the determinants that impact educators' choices to remain or depart from an educational institution, thereby presenting possible remedies for the retention of teachers (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Wang & Chen, 2022).

China also faces the problem of keeping teachers in the profession of rural schools (Chen et al., 2022; Ling et al., 2020), especially in underdeveloped areas, paying more attention to teacher retention. To encourage teachers to willingly work in rural areas, remain there, and teach well, China initiated the practice of training government-sponsored teacher candidates starting in 2007 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2016). These candidates commit to returning to their places of origin upon graduation and signing an 8-year commitment with their assigned schools, aimed at retaining teachers. The employment rate of these government-sponsored teacher candidates reaches as high as 99%, with a retention rate exceeding 90% (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022). The "Global Teacher Status Index" (2018) report also highlights China's leading global ranking in terms of teacher status, with 81% of respondents acknowledging the importance of respecting and valuing teachers, placing China at the top position worldwide, while the international average is only 36%.

The level of teacher awareness and dedication to the organization is observed to be higher among practitioners in rural schools. The affiliation with the organization has significant implications for the behavior of teacher retention (Chen et al., 2022). The job satisfaction of teachers has the significant effect on their organizational commitment (Madenoglu et al., 2014). The act of seeking employment in one's hometown following graduation has a significant role in strengthening teachers' emotional connection (Wang & Chen, 2022). When teachers commence their employment in rural schools, they are obligated to enter into an extended contractual agreement spanning a duration of 8 years. This contractual commitment serves to substantially augment the probability of their continued presence and engagement inside these schools (Grillo & Kier, 2021). This underscores the significant role organizational fit plays in decisions to stay or leave (Abbasi et al., 2021). As the tenure in a school lengthens, the level of commitment typically rises, leading to a reduced willingness to depart from the workplace (Bashir & Gani, 2020). Theories of fit have been derived from a substantial body of research on person-organizational fit. This research has extensively examined the dynamics between employees and their work environments, with the aim of comprehending the factors that

contribute to employee retention and other favorable outcomes (Chatman, 1989; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005).

While prior research has laid a foundation for understanding teacher retention (TR) from the perspectives of commitment and fit (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Miller & Youngs, 2021; Seelig & McCabe, 2021), there remains a relative scarcity of studies that explore how person-organizational fit (POF) and organization commitment (OC) impact rural teacher retention within the retention status of rural areas in China. The unique background and policy of teacher development in China's rural areas offer an avenue for exploring these relationships in a distinct and significant manner (Ling et al., 2020; Wang & Chen, 2022).

Therefore, the primary aim of this research is to investigate the correlation between POF and TR across three dimensions of OC. Furthermore, this study evaluates the direct and indirect POF on the retention of rural teachers by examining the three dimensions of OC that are the mediators between POF and TR.

## Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

### *POF and TR*

It was found that Billingsley and Cross (1991) first introduced the word retention into the field of teacher research in their research, retention, and turnover are just like the positive and negative sides of the same coin, both a problem and a challenge (Kelchtermans, 2017). Teacher retention is defined as teachers continuing to work as classroom educators (Chatman, 1989). It is an act of a teacher's personal willingness to remain in the current work environment. A series of studies have indicated that teacher turnover and retention are influenced by various factors, including teachers' personal characteristics, professional support, economic needs, levels of OC, job satisfaction, and other related factors (Canrinus et al., 2012; Donglong et al., 2020; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

The theory of person-organization fit for teachers, from the perspective of behavioral mutual influence, effectively explains the correlation between school fit and TR (Miller & Youngs, 2021; Miller et al., 2020). Chatman (1989) introduced the Person-Organization Fit Model, and subsequently, a series of studies focused on job fit as a predictor of voluntary employee turnover, offering foundational data for efficient organizational human resource management (Bashir & Gani, 2020; Jyoti et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2001). The proximity of the relationship network built through the alignment of school-related compatibility presents an original framework for comprehending teacher behavior.

POF is the term used for emphasizing a person's perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization and its surroundings (Gunn et al., 2023). Both organizations and individuals are actively seeking value alignment in terms of values, traits, and goals, and this alignment plays a crucial role in employee retention or turnover decisions (Bogler & Nir, 2015). Compared to teachers' personal characteristics, school features, and principal support, organizational fit has a stronger correlation with TR rates (Jyoti et al., 2020). Existing research indicates that a teacher's commitment to continue teaching and decisions to leave the profession are influenced by their perception of the school culture (Miller & Youngs, 2021). Teachers who lack congruence with the core values and objectives of an educational institution are more prone to experiencing shorter

tenures (Jyoti et al., 2020). Mutual alignment of values and shared educational objectives are more successful in retaining rural teachers (Player et al., 2017). A collaborative school culture implies an extension of teaching tenure due to the sense of mutual cooperation (Miller & Youngs, 2021).

Upon completion of a teacher training program, when teacher candidates return their given hometowns, it indicates a considerable degree of competency in navigating both the internal and exterior atmospheres of schools. The presence of a robust rural identification plays an essential part in bolstering teacher retention within schools (Gallo, 2020; Wang & Chen, 2022). Simultaneously, teachers would experience a stronger connection with the school, enhancing the alignment between the individual and the school, ultimately providing more motivation to stay and continue working (Holtom, Kiazad, & Dandu, 2020). The correlation between an individual's job fit and their attachment to the organization is evident. Hence, there exists a positive correlation between the congruence of a teacher's professional aspirations and the organizational goals, and the subsequent determination of teachers to either remain or depart from schools (Miller et al., 2020). Therefore, drawing from the aforementioned prior research, one can postulate the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** *There exists a significant positive relationship between POF and TR.*

### ***POF and The Dimension of OC***

As an organization committed to ongoing efforts and passionate about hiring and retaining human capital, personnel allocation and retention have consistently been crucial issues in this competitive era (Kundu & Lata, 2017). Meyer and Allen (1991) defined OC as: "a bond that reflects the belonging relationship between the organization and employees, and implies the decision of whether members of the organization are willing to stay in the organization". The Three-Component Model (TCM) of commitment reflected in three reasons why employees are willing to dedicate their efforts to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment (AC) is a kind of positive emotion and recognition, which is an employee's inner initiative. People with strong AC continue to work in schools because they want to do it (Wolowska, 2014). Continuous commitment (CC) is a perceived cost of employees giving up the organization, which refers to the individual's economic gains and losses. Normative commitment (NC) is the employee's moral responsibility to stay in the organization, which refers to behavioral norms and moral constraints.

In the current fiercely competitive educational landscape, schools require a highly committed teaching team to ensure improved teaching quality and the long-term development of the institution (Jyoti et al., 2020). In rural schools, a stable teacher workforce is particularly crucial for the development of students facing challenging circumstances (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Zhou, Li, & Gao, 2020).

POF as a significant factor, exerts a positive influence on teachers' OC (Miller & Youngs, 2021; Naz et al., 2020). When teachers perceive their values, beliefs, and goals align with those of the schools, they are more likely to experience a strong sense of organizational identification. This identification fosters a willingness among teachers to strive for the school's objectives and mission, leading to higher levels of dedication and loyalty (Bogler & Nir, 2015; Zheng, Shi, & Liu, 2020).

Similarly, POF plays a crucial role in reducing teacher turnover rates (Holtom et al.,

2020). there is a higher tendency among rural educators for relocating to urban regions in pursuit of enhanced quality of life and job satisfaction (Ling et al., 2020). As a result, the issue of high turnover rates is a prevalent obstacle for schools situated in rural regions, particularly those characterized by elevated levels of poverty (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Holtom et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2022).

POF can indeed reduce teacher attrition rates. When teachers align with the school's culture and values, they are more likely to stay at the institution and continue their professional growth (Holtom et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2020). POF acts as a driving force for OC, with positive organizational relationships leading to psychological attachment and enhanced AC. Conversely, when opportunities for career development are restricted, CC diminishes (Philip & Medina-Craven, 2022). According to Bogler and Nir (2015), a strong alignment between an individual and an organization leads to increased trust and loyalty, fostering a greater level of commitment from employees towards their organization. Hence, it can be inferred that POF has a positive impact on three dimensions of OC. In the present study, a hypothesis is formulated as follows:

**H2a:** POF has a significant positive association with AC.

**H2b:** POF has a significant positive association with CC.

**H2c:** POF has a significant positive association with NC.

### *The Dimensions of OC and TR*

The level of OC primarily stems from employees' work experiences, job satisfaction, job stability, organizational support, and the attractiveness of compensation (Bashir & Gani, 2020; Jyoti et al., 2020). OC, being a significant predictor of employee retention, demonstrates a gap of 0.565 and 0.255 with job satisfaction (Soenanta, Akbar, & Sariwulan, 2020). This discrepancy exists because a high level of OC would achieve better job performance of employees and reduce the emotional search for new job opportunities (Chatman, 1989).

In small rural communities, establishing strong AC with school-level leaders, colleagues, and students is highly important for retaining rural teachers within the school setting (Opoku et al., 2020; Wang & Chen, 2022). Teachers in rural schools can exercise curriculum autonomy and teaching flexibility, leveraging their influence to meet the school's needs (Seelig & McCabe, 2021). The elements of AC are closely correlated with teachers' ongoing commitment to teaching (Canrinus et al., 2012). Moreover, NC reinforces teachers' sense of professional identity, highlighting the significance of their responsibilities as rural educators (Olitsky, Perfetti, & Coughlin, 2020).

Various job challenges are encountered at different stages of one's life, leading to differences in the inclination of rural teachers to remain in their positions. Regardless of their choice to either depart or remain, rural teachers must evaluate the benefits as well as drawbacks linked to their career choices (Liu et al., 2022). High-demand schools in rural areas tend to evoke higher levels of CC among teachers (Olitsky et al., 2020). The academic literature firmly demonstrates a positive relationship between OC and employee retention (Jyoti et al., 2020; Naz et al., 2020). Although some studies have explored the role of OC, the different role of the relationship between the dimensions AC, CC, NC, and TR has not been explored (Zhou et al., 2020). All the above factors related to person-organization fit may enhance employees' OC and increase their retention. Based on these findings, the current study is to investigate whether teachers working in rural schools are willing to remain and

how the dimensions of rural teachers' commitment affect the retention of rural teachers.

As a result of this, the following hypothesis can be postulated:

**H3a:** *The dimension AC of OC has a significant positive association with TR.*

**H3b:** *The dimension CC of OC has a significant positive association with TR.*

**H3c:** *The dimension NC of OC has a significant positive association with TR.*

### ***The Mediating Role of OC***

Previous research has empirically established that POF influences TR and there is a positive relationship between OC and TR (Miller & Youngs, 2021; Naz et al., 2020). Studies have demonstrated that OC is a highly significant factor and contributes to motivating and retaining teachers (Bashir & Gani, 2020). According to social exchange theory, perceived consistency from the organization can directly improve employees' OC, thereby rewarding employees with positive attitudes and behaviors (Casper et al., 2002). Many studies have analyzed the mediating role of OC, whether it pertains to turnover rates or intention to stay (Dhar, 2015; Maryam et al., 2021; Suárez-Albanchez et al., 2022).

Research demonstrates that perceived job fit predicts teacher professional commitment, and this optimal fit has important implications for determining teachers' professional behavior (Bogler & Nir, 2015). If teachers perceive the higher the degree of fit, the more it predicts their commitment level, increasing the desire to continue staying within the teaching schools. This means teachers' OC acts as a mediator between fit and intention to leave, however, where there are certain differences in the mediating role of AC, CC, and NC (Maryam et al., 2021). Both AC and NC show significant negative relationships with teachers' intention to leave (Maryam et al., 2021). AC only partially mediates the negative relationship between perceived support and turnover intention (Fazio et al., 2017). The change of AC stands out as the most influential predictive factor and mediates teachers' organizational behavior (Donglong et al., 2020). Given the preceding discussion, it indicates that OC can mediate the relationship between fit and retention. Various dimensions of OC play a mediating role between POF and teachers' retention to stay in the profession.

Henceforth, the above literature leads us to postulate hypothesis:

**H4a:** *Can AC mediate between the relationship of POF and rural teacher retention.*

**H4b:** *Can CC mediate between the relationship of POF and rural teacher retention.*

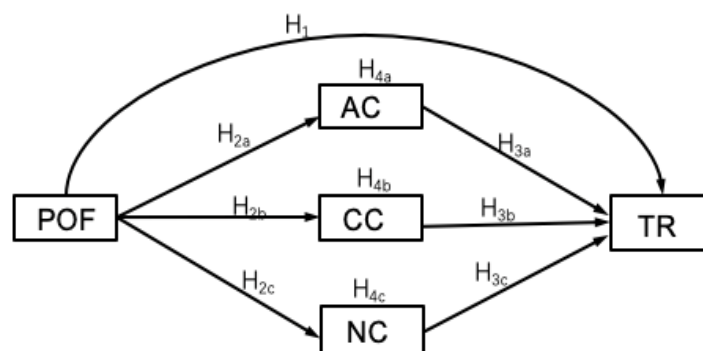
**H4c:** *Can NC mediate between the relationship of POF and rural teacher retention.*

### ***Model Consideration***

This study makes a valuable contribution to the existing body of literature by offering a contextualized viewpoint on the phenomenon of POF and the significant challenge of employee retention in rural regions of China. The research commenced by establishing a conceptual awareness of the variables under investigation. Subsequently, an empirical investigation was conducted by constructing a structural model (Figure 1) to evaluate the impact of POF and OC dimensions on TR. Hence, the various viewpoints put forth support the



conceptualization of commitment behavior as a component of fair reciprocity between a rural educational institution and its teaching staff.



**Figure 1:** Proposed Model Predicting POF, AC, CC, NC and TR

This viewpoint originates from the Person-Organization Fit model proposed by Chatman (1989). It provides a perspective of self-reflection for both employees and organizations regarding the retention and turnover behaviors of human resources within the organization (Abbasi et al., 2021). It is a highly effective method for retaining teachers by having local people return to rural areas to work as teachers and then signing a contractual agreement. When teachers perceive that they are treated equitably and provided with suitable educational institutions, they respond by reciprocating the support through increased dedication and prolonged tenure.

## Methodology

### Population and Sample

The target population of this study comprises teachers from all rural schools in Nanchong City, China. The sampling process in this study was conducted in two stages. Firstly, a cluster sampling technique was employed to select schools from the clusters. Nanchong City is divided into three districts and six counties, making a total of nine clusters. Two clusters were randomly chosen. Then, in the second stage, a simple random sampling technique was applied within the selected clusters. The total population within the selected clusters was 6,748 individuals. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), if the population exceeds 3,000, a minimum sample size of 341 is sufficient. To ensure a sample size of at least 341, this study randomly selected a total of 600 respondents and distributed survey questionnaires among the chosen sample.

### Data collection Procedure

These selected rural schools were used to investigate how organization factors and teacher retention relate to one another. The survey used a questionnaire-based methodology to gather information from rural teachers. Before collecting data from participants, several procedures had to be completed. The data collection period coincided with a two-month vacation, during

which annual training for rural teachers at the county level was conducted. During this training, the researchers explained the purpose of the study to the teachers. Upon their formal acceptance, the questionnaires were distributed and collected.

In two counties, a total of 370 teachers from 30 rural schools responded to the survey. A total of 370 questionnaires were collected, meeting the required sample size. After excluding 31 invalid responses, the study recruited 339 rural teachers from Nanchong city for the final analysis.

### *Instruments*

Three survey instruments and a demographic survey of teacher characteristics were utilized in this study. The teacher background questionnaire includes participants' gender, age, years of experience, education degree, and school type. Teachers' level of fit with schools had been measured on 7 items scale developed by Lee et al. (2004). It tested teachers' perceived compatibility and comfort with the school environment. One example of an item was "feel like personally valued by this school." A three-dimensional scale of AC, CC, and NC with 12 items total was used to measure the results of the OC Questionnaire (OCQ), which was developed by Meyer and Allen (1991). One item as an example was "I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own." TR scale has been measured on 4 items scale adopted from Torquati, Raikes, and Huddleston-Casas (2007). An example of items is "I am willing to continue working at the current school." All these latent variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree."

## **Results**

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive statistics were computed to characterize the sample of participants in this study. Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of the various profiles and demographic characteristics of the 339 teachers who participated in the survey by completing questionnaires. As shown in Table 1, the respondents are mostly female teachers from primary schools, with their educational background predominantly consisting of associate or bachelor's degrees. This aligns with the basic profile of rural school teachers, indicating a relatively good representation of the sample.

**Table 1**

*Basic situation of sample*

Indicator	Item	Frequency	%	Indicator	Item	Frequency	%
Gender	Female	273	80.5	School	Primary School	233	68.7
	Male	66	19.5		Middle School	106	31.3
Age	21-30	101	29.8	Teaching Age	1-5	63	18.6
	31-40	117	34.5		6-10	71	20.9
	41-50	107	31.6		11-15	66	19.5
	Over 50 year	14	4.1		16-20	86	25.4
	Associate Degree	98	28.9		over 20 years	53	15.6
Education	Bachelor Degree	241	71.1				
	Total	339	100				



**Reliability and Validity**

This study utilizes a total of 23 indicators to measure the items of all constructs. Yet, following to the implementation of a confirmatory factor analysis, the total number of items is reduced to 21. The constructs employed in the study demonstrate a satisfactory degree of both reliability and validity. Table 2 presents the results of the convergent reliability analysis, which includes the factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). The values were computed utilizing statistical software SPSS and Mplus.

Table 2 presents the calculated values for all the metrics that relate to the research construct. This research utilizes the Mplus test command to perform a factor analysis on the variables, with the primary aim of assessing the convergent and discriminant validity of the instrument (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The factor loadings depicted in Table 2 exhibit values exceeding 0.6 (F. Hair Jr et al., 2014). The results indicate that the five dimensions can effectively be reflected by their respective measurement indicators. The Cronbach's Alpha values, all exceeding the standard threshold of 0.7, suggest satisfactory internal consistency for the individual measurement items within each dimension. Similarly, according to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the acceptable threshold for AVE is greater than 0.5. Additionally, Hair Jr et al. (2021) suggest that the threshold for CR should be higher than 0.7. In this case, the values presented in the table meet these thresholds, thus providing evidence of convergent validity for the instrument. This suggests that model has good convergent validity.

**Table 2**

*Reliability and Convergence Validity Examination*

Dimension	Items	Unstd.	S.E.	Z-value	P	Std.	Cronbach'a	CR	AVE
AC	AC1	1				0.728	0.843	0.905	0.705
	AC2	1.424	0.142	10.038	0.000	0.877			
	AC3	1.168	0.12	9.752	0.000	0.815			
	AC4	1.503	0.144	10.44	0.000	0.925			
CC	CC1	1				0.788	0.771	0.780	0.473
	CC2	1.033	0.078	13.172	0.000	0.732			
	CC3	0.782	0.087	8.996	0.000	0.601			
	CC4	0.785	0.079	9.916	0.000	0.613			
NC	NC1	1				0.8	0.769	0.815	0.529
	NC2	1.048	0.072	14.489	0.000	0.815			
	NC3	0.944	0.067	14.089	0.000	0.658			
	NC4	0.853	0.093	9.145	0.000	0.614			
POF	POF1	1				0.808	0.897	0.908	0.627
	POF2	1.295	0.064	20.193	0.000	0.899			
	POF3	1.15	0.064	17.881	0.000	0.844			
	POF4	1.147	0.06	19.031	0.000	0.888			
	POF5	0.899	0.083	10.772	0.000	0.659			
	POF6	0.732	0.068	10.818	0.000	0.603			
TR	TR1	1				0.796	0.798	0.833	0.632
	TR2	1.092	0.094	11.632	0.000	0.615			
	TR3	1.257	0.072	17.578	0.000	0.94			

Note. Significance level of \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05

Table 3 presents the results of the discriminant validity analysis, which serves to verify the presence of correlations among the various constructs measured by the instrument. When the correlation values exceed 0.9, it indicates a strong correlation, suggesting the presence of multicollinearity, which implies that the predictors are interrelated. Consequently, there exists a possibility of obtaining inaccurate and deceptive outcomes (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). In order to tackle this matter, an assessment has been conducted to determine the discriminant validity of the instrument with respect to the variables. All of the variables exhibit values below 0.9, indicating that the data is devoid of multicollinearity.

According to Fornell et al.'s recommendations, when the square root of AVE is greater than the correlations between the constructs, it indicates good discriminant validity between the constructs. In this study, the correlations among constructs, as shown in Table 3, demonstrate favorable discriminant validity.

**Table 3**

*Discriminate Validity Examination*

	TR	AC	CC	NC	POF
TR	<b>0.795</b>				
AC	0.413	<b>0.840</b>			
CC	0.317	0.363	<b>0.688</b>		
NC	0.383	0.416	0.608	<b>0.727</b>	
POF	0.604	0.507	0.188	0.421	<b>0.792</b>

Note. The bold font on the diagonal is the square root value of AVE, and the lower triangle is the Pearson correlation of dimension

**Structural Model Assessment**

The purpose of conducting a model assessment is to analyze the correlation between the variables. The bootstrapping procedure is employed for this purpose. Table 4 presents the direct impact of the variables among POF, AC, CC, NC, and rural teacher retention. The model visually represents the direct paths and displays the path coefficients along with their corresponding p-values to indicate their significance.

As indicated in Table 4, POF has a positive and significant impact on all dimensions of OC, with Z-values exceeding 1.96 and P-values smaller than 0.05. Moreover, the positive influence of POF on rural teachers' retention is also highly significant. Therefore, it is concluded that the POF positively influences the dimensions of OC and teachers' retention in rural schools in China.

**Table 4**

*The Test Results of Path Relationship*

Hypothesis	Path	Unstd.	S.E.	Z-value	P	Std.	Decision
H2a	POF→AC	0.462	0.062	7.476	0.000	0.57	Supported
H2b	POF→CC	0.406	0.074	5.456	0.000	0.367	Supported
H2c	POF→NC	0.598	0.076	7.82	0.000	0.503	Supported
H3a	AC→TR	-0.092	0.07	-1.306	0.192	-0.074	Unsupported
H3b	CC→TR	0.173	0.059	2.903	0.004	0.191	Supported

H3c	NC→TR	0.186	0.058	3.207	0.001	0.233	Supported
H1	POF→TR	0.731	0.075	9.737	0.000	0.731	Supported

Note. Significance level of \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05

However, the different dimensions of OC have varying effects on the intention of rural teacher retention. Among them, CC and NC have a highly significant impact on rural teachers’ retention, with Z-values of 2.903 and 3.207 respectively, while the influence of AC on teacher retention is not significant in the case of rural teachers in Sichuan Province. Furthermore, from the OC scale, CC and NC are playing an essential role in building the teachers’ commitment within the rural schools of China. Table 4 identifies the independent variables AC that are not significantly influencing the teachers’ retention while CC and NC have a significant influence on TR.

### Mediation Analysis OC as a Mediator

Table 5 displays the results of the mediation in the model. Using Bootstrapping, the sample was subjected to 1000 iterations with a 95% confidence interval setting to test the significance of the mediating effects of different dimensions of OC. Following MacKinnon, Lockwood, and Williams (2004) experimental findings, bias-corrected methods were deemed most effective in the nonparametric Bootstrap approach. Therefore, this study only reports confidence intervals with bias correction.

According to the results of the mediation effects test (Table 5), it is evident that CC and NC exhibit significant mediating effects between POF and TR in rural schools (both confidence intervals exclude 0, P < 0.05). Following Baron and Kenny's criteria, the direct path must be significant (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Specifically, the mediating effects propagated by CC and NC are 0.067 and 0.075, accounting for 10% and 23% of the total effects, respectively. The direct effect indicates a significant relationship between POF and TR, with a value of 0.743, illustrating that NC and CC play a partial mediating role. Nevertheless, the analysis of specific indirect effects reveals that AC does not act as a mediator between POF and TR within the rural teaching population (P>0.05), indicating that does not play a significant role in mediating the relationship. Furthermore, the direct effect of AC on teachers’ retention is not prominent.

**Table 5**

*The mediating effect of Bootstrapping*

Effect Size	Path	Std.	Coefficient Value		Bootstrap			Decision
			SE	Z	LLCI	ULCI	P	
Indirect H4a	POF→AC→TR	0.013	0.042	0.306	-0.073	0.094	0.759	Unsupported
H4b	POF→CC→TR	0.067	0.028	2.405	0.024	0.137	0.01**	Supported
H4c	POF→NC→TR	0.075	0.036	2.107	0.017	0.159	0.035*	
Direct	POF→TR	0.743	0.107	6.933	0.553	0.972	***	Supported

Note. Significance level of \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05. LLCI is the lower limit of the 95% confidence interval, and ULCI is the upper limit of the 95% confidence interval.

## Discussion

Teacher retention in rural areas poses a significant challenge and plays a pragmatic role

in the success of schools. The objective of this study was to ascertain the factors that exert an influence on the retention of rural teachers within rural schools in China. The research was based on the Person-Organization Fit and the theory of OCs (considering its dimensions). It seeks to identify the positive role of POF and the dimensions of OC in determining TR in rural schools, in China. This study aims to address the existing research gap by empirically investigating the relationship between POF and OC, with a focus on the mediating role of OC in rural area schools.

The path analysis shows strong evidence that POF has a significant positive influence on TR. The average organizational fit score for the selected sample of rural teachers in Sichuan Province is 3.324. It has been conceptualized and framed as a strong predictor of TR, thereby supporting H1. These findings are in communication with earlier studies on POF and TR (Miller & Youngs, 2021; Miller et al., 2020). The observed correlation between POF and TR suggests that POF plays a role in ensuring the safety and comfort of teachers, leading to positive attitudes and behaviors. This can be attributed to the perceived responsibility that teachers feel towards fulfilling their duties in rural educational settings. It is evident that recruiting teachers from the local areas in rural schools, in China, to enhance organizational fit and, consequently, retaining teachers is necessary. The results of Hypothesis 1 align with the Person-Organization Fit theory, it explains teachers' retention behavior in the rural schools (Abbasi et al., 2021). Therefore, we can interpret this scenario that POF is applicable to know about rural teacher retention towards rural schools in the case of rural areas.

Findings demonstrate that the dimensions of OC are positively associated with POF thus supporting H2a, H2b and H2c. This view is congruent with previous work on OC or POF (Bogler & Nir, 2015; Miller et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2020). Simultaneously, in this study, AC, CC, and NC are the dependent variables of commitment scale-independent variables. The results also explain the dimensions of rural teachers' OC to explain teachers' willingness to stay at 0.325, 0.134, and 0.253 degrees, raising the commitment of 62% of rural teachers to continue teaching (Grillo & Kier, 2021). This means that the model is very strong in predicting the retention of rural teachers.

The study has found for H3b and H3c, indicating that the CC and NC dimensions of OC are positively related to TR. This implies that there is a positive relationship between the levels of CC and NC among rural teachers, and the strength of their intentions to remain in their teaching positions. Hence, The findings in this particular context are reinforced by OC theory, which is further validated by establishing agreement with prior research (Fazio et al., 2017; Olitsky et al., 2020; Opoku et al., 2020). The more restrictive the teachers' perceived responsibility, the easier it is for the teacher to stay. Such result reconfirmed OC as a key predictive variable to retention which has been well-demonstrated in a great body of member empirical studies (Casper et al., 2002; Zheng et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). Hence, in order to improve teacher retention in rural regions, educational institutions should endeavor to enhance their level of organizational culture (Wei et al., 2021).

However, in the case of AC, the situation is the other way around. In this study, H3a has not been validated. The research findings are inconsistent with the previous discoveries by scholars (Opoku et al., 2020; Wang & Chen, 2022), which suggested that AC holds significant implications for retaining teachers. While in the direct path, AC cannot predict

the intention of teacher retention in rural schools. This could be attributed to the greater challenges rural teachers face, such as heavy workloads and limited professional development opportunities, leading to a lack of emotional attachment to rural schools (Gunn et al., 2023; Ling et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2022). This also indicates that the extended 8-year contract could enhance teachers' continued retention in terms of CC and NC (Olitsky et al., 2020), but may struggle to enhance rural teachers' AC.

The hypothesis H4a, H4b, H4c proposed the mediating role of "dimensions of OC between POF and TR." The present research presents surprising results by offering empirical evidence that there no mediation impact of AC on the POF and TR in rural schools, which is inconsistent with previous studies (Fazio et al., 2017; Maryam et al., 2021). So H4a is not accepted. The findings also reveal that in the CC, NC is still positive. During years of teaching in rural schools, rural teachers have carefully assessed the sacrifices required for leaving as well as the responsibilities bestowed upon themselves by the commitment. This means that educational institutions can increase the TR of the rural schools by enhancing their level of commitment (Grillo & Kier, 2021; Seelig & McCabe, 2021). Based on the above discussion, it can be deduced that POF exhibits a noteworthy and favorable impact on the dimensions of OC, and in rural schools, only through CC and NC can the retention of rural teachers be enhanced. Due to heavy workloads and insufficient social support, rural teachers are prone to developing negative emotions (Liu et al., 2022). This provides us with inspiration: the relevant person in charge of rural school need to further focus on teachers' internal emotional needs and crest a supportive teaching environment to help rural teachers remain in the profession (Li & Xue, 2021), rather than just relying on external factors such as contractual obligations and the costs of leaving, in order to retain teachers (Gomba, 2015).

### Implications of Research

Keeping teachers in the profession is a challenge for rural areas (Ling et al., 2020; Richardson & Watt, 2006). For those who stay, their reasons may be varied and it is worth further examination. This study aims to examine the relationship between person-organization fit and its influence on commitment levels, which in turn may affect teacher retention in the rural school context of China. Hence, in a theoretical sense, this study has the potential to be unique in its exploration of the aforementioned pathway by utilizing POF and OC to predict TR in rural schools. This study aims to identify different organizational variables and evaluate their role on TR by reviewing the dimensions of OC. To elaborate more on this, in rural schools, the higher the alignment with the organization, the stronger the commitment, and the easier it is for rural teachers to continue to stay and teach at that school.

This research provides practical guidance to policymakers regarding the prioritization of factors that are crucial in the context of rural schools. Specifically, it highlights the significance of organization fit and commitment as robust indicators in this regard. Educational administrators and policymakers need to motivate the enthusiasm of rural teachers, stimulate their work initiative, and enhance teachers' willingness to commit to rural education services from a professional and emotional perspective (Li & Xue, 2021; Wei et al., 2021). Hence, it is imperative for practitioners to adopt strategies that effectively enhance the academic

competence of teachers. Additionally, the research supplies aim to cultivate enthusiasm among rural educators by providing them with desires and encouragement, especially the need to pay attention to rural teachers' spiritual needs and enjoyment.

### **Limitations of the Research**

Although, the research identifies the facets of commitment and fit degree to rural teacher retention. Yet, leave massive areas to be explored in rural school context. One of the main drawbacks is that data is obtained from respondents, and it is assumed that they provide accurate answers and are familiar with their teaching schools. Facts can be weakened by teachers' partial responses to their schools. Another drawback is that people's perceptions and needs can change with respect to their country, economic situation, and cultural norms. Therefore, if demands in one area are not required for another area, there may be a generalizability problem. In China's Sichuan Province, only rural schools have been the subject of this study. Conducting the same research in numerous schools, cities, and nations is necessary to ensure validity across various work contexts.

The use of a cross-sectional design, which is likely to include common method variance, is the following restriction. However, efforts have been made to minimize it using the techniques given in MacKinnon et al. (2004). A longitudinal design can be used to ensure the causality of the relationship between latent variables in order to achieve better results. It would be a good idea to include further variables in the TR, such as positive teaching attitudes and behaviors (teaching satisfaction, engagement, performance, and knowledge sharing behavior).

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