

United by Common Goals: Influences of Teacher Goals and School Goal Structures on Teacher Retention

Hong Kong's teaching profession is in crisis, with 18,000 teachers, a quarter of the K-12 teaching workforce, leaving their positions in the past three years (EDB, 2023). This shortage has led to schools hiring more untrained teachers, who are twice as likely to leave (EDB, 2023), worsening what is already the attrition crisis. While it is difficult to track the reasons for those who have already left, we can gain insight into attrition by switching our attention to understanding *retention*; that is, why teachers stay, even in challenging times. This project aims to understand Hong Kong's teacher attrition crisis and provide long-term policy solutions.

Existing research has indicated that both *individual* and *contextual* characteristics contribute to teachers' occupational well-being (i.e., high job satisfaction, low burnout) and retention intentions (Watt & Richardson, 2012). More recent studies, including our own, suggest that the perception of person-environment fit (*transactional* factors), which refers to the alignment between an individual and the work environment, exerts an even greater influence (Wang & Klassen, 2023). By exploring the interactions between context and personal 'fit,' we can gain insight into the intricate dynamics that affect teacher well-being and retention intentions.

Our proposed study consists of two phases. The quantitative phase aims to examine a mediational model where teachers' achievement goals (an individual factor) and school goal structures (a contextual factor; reported by both teachers and principals) directly influence their well-being and retention intentions. These factors also indirectly influence teacher outcomes through perceptions of person-environment fit (the transactional factor). Over 800 teachers and their principals from 30 schools will participate, completing surveys three times over two years. We will use multilevel structural equation modeling to analyze the relationship structures among teachers' and principals' reports.

The quantitative phase findings will inform in-depth interviews in the qualitative phase. We will first establish teacher profiles based on their achievement goals and perceived fit, using latent profile analysis. A nested sample of teachers (~5%; $n = 40$) from each profile will then be selected for follow-up interviews. Teachers will be asked questions about their achievement goals, perceived fit, and other individual, contextual, and transactional factors that explain their well-being and retention intentions.

In sum, understanding the factors impacting teachers' retention intentions can inform strategies to improve retention rates and address shortages. The study also emphasizes the importance of supportive school environments that align with teachers' goals. Policymakers can use this understanding to design evidence-based strategies for attracting and retaining high-quality teachers.