

The impact of organizational commitment on rural teachers' retention: a moderated mediation study

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Abstract: The study aims to reveal the mechanisms by which organizational commitment influences the retention of rural teachers and how environmental fit and condition support modulate this relationship. It specifically examined the mediating role of environmental fit and the moderating role of supportive conditions in their relationship. A survey was conducted among 4,746 rural teachers across ten regions in Heilongjiang Province. The findings indicate: (1) There is a significant positive correlation between organizational commitment and the willingness of rural teachers to stay; (2) Environmental fit acts as a mediator in the relationship between organizational commitment and the retention intention of rural teachers; (3) Supportive conditions not only moderate the direct prediction of organizational commitment on the retention of rural teachers but also the predictive effect of organizational commitment on environmental fit. Therefore, to more effectively retain rural teachers, the following effective measures can be taken: optimize the rural educational environment to enhance teachers' organizational commitment; refine recruitment and training systems to improve the fit of rural teachers with the rural environment; establish a monitoring system for the retention of rural teachers to enhance local educational supervision and accountability mechanisms.

Keywords: rural teachers; organizational commitment; environmental fit; supportive conditions; retention of rural teachers; teacher retention.

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INTRODUCTION

The reasons for the study

The quality and continuity of rural education are significantly contingent upon the stability and professional development of the rural teaching workforce. The issue of rural teacher retention has consistently been a focal point for educational policymakers and researchers. Organizational commitment, which refers to a teacher's loyalty and identification with their employing organization, is considered a pivotal factor influencing an individual's intention to stay [1]. However, organizational commitment does not exist in isolation. It may be influenced by a variety of factors, including the degree of match between the teacher and the work environment, as well as the support conditions provided by the school. The research question of this study is to explore the following questions: What is the relationship between organizational commitment and the retention of rural teachers? How does environmental fit act as a mediating variable affecting the relationship between organizational commitment and rural teacher retention? What

moderating role does condition support play in the relationship between organizational commitment and rural teacher retention? By delving into these questions, the study aims to reveal the mechanisms by which organizational commitment influences the retention of rural teachers and how environmental fit and condition support modulate this relationship. It is hoped that providing empirical evidence for the formulation of effective policies for the retention of rural teachers will, in turn, promote the stability and development of rural education.

Theoretical analysis and research hypotheses

1. The impact of organizational commitment on rural teacher retention

Organizational commitment serves as a psychological measure of the strength of an employee's relationship with their organization, exerting a significant influence on the employee's emotions, behaviours, and decisions regarding continued employment within the organization [2].

In the specific domain of rural education, the impact of organizational commitment on a teacher's willingness to remain in their position is particularly crucial, given that rural teachers often face a greater array of professional challenges and personal sacrifices. Consequently, understanding how organizational commitment affects the retention intentions of rural teachers is essential for devising effective human resource management strategies.

In the field of organizational behaviour, attitude refers to an individual's internal feelings towards a specific object, and organizational commitment is an attitude that is often examined in research. H. Becker first introduced the concept of organizational commitment in 1960, defining it as the emotional attachment that employees develop towards their organization, resulting in a greater willingness to fully engage in organizational work. Despite decades of research on organizational commitment, there is still no consensus on its definition and structure. Currently, the internationally accepted definition proposed by N.J. Allen and J.P. Meyer in 1991 suggests that organizational commitment comprises three dimensions: affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment [3]. Affective commitment reflects the emotional bond and loyalty between teachers and the organization; continuance commitment relates to teachers' assessment of the costs and benefits of leaving the organization; and normative commitment is based on social norms and professional ethics. Meanwhile, Taiwanese scholars tend to favour L.W. Porter's definition from 1976, which views organizational commitment as an emotional identification with the organization that motivates employees to serve the organization wholeheartedly and maintain their status as organizational members [4]. Mainland Chinese scholars, on the other hand, have adopted the perspective of Ling Wenquan and Zhang Zhican, among others, who argue that organizational commitment is an attitude towards the organization that explains why employees remain with the enterprise, serves as an indicator of employee loyalty, and possesses a multidimensional structure [5].

According to the theory of organizational behaviour, organizational commitment enhances employees' sense of belonging and reduces their intention to leave, thereby contributing to improved retention rates. The organizational commitment of rural teachers may be closely related to their dedication to the education sector, satisfaction with their school, and expectations for personal career development. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that organizational commitment positively affects rural teachers' willingness to remain in their positions (H1).

2. The mediating effect of environmental fit

Organizational commitment is often viewed as a crucial factor influencing employees' decision to remain in an organization. For rural teachers, organizational commitment can influence their willingness to stay in their current positions through various means, with environmental fit being a key factor. Environmental fit refers to the alignment between teachers' personal expectations, values, and professional skills with the work and living environment of their rural schools.

A.L. Kristof-Brown conducted a meta-analysis on the impact of person-environment fit on employees and found that the higher the degree of fit, the more likely

employees are to exhibit positive job attitudes and behaviours. These include greater job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall performance, while also reducing negative behaviours such as employee turnover, propensity to leave, and role stress [6]. The research framework for person-environment fit primarily encompasses two dimensions: consistency fit and complementarity fit [7]. Consistency fit refers to the similarity between the individual and the environment, especially in terms of shared values. D.M. Cable and J.R. Edwards suggest that examining the consistency of values between employees and organizations is the most common form of consistency fit. Complementarity fit, on the other hand, pertains to whether an employee's individual characteristics meet the demands of the environment. Complementarity fit is achieved when an individual's skills or desires satisfy the environment's needs, and the environment, in turn, meets the individual's expectations [8]. Research indicates that these two dimensions of fit can independently influence employee behaviour within organizations through various pathways.

Organizational commitment not only directly influences the intention to stay but may also indirectly affect the intention to stay through the mediating variable of environmental fit. Specifically, a high level of organizational commitment may motivate teachers to pay more attention to and actively seek alignment with their work environment, thereby enhancing their perception of environmental fit. As the perception of environmental fit increases, teachers may experience greater job satisfaction and a sense of professional achievement, which in turn strengthens their intention to stay.

Therefore, this study proposes the hypothesis that organizational commitment will indirectly influence the retention intentions of rural teachers through the mediating role of environmental fit (H2).

3. The moderating role of supportive conditions

When examining the link between organizational commitment and the retention intentions of rural teachers, it is imperative to consider not only the mediating role of environmental fit but also the moderating influence of supportive conditions. Supportive conditions encompass elements such as school management, collaboration among colleagues, resource allocation, and policy support, all of which significantly impact teachers' daily work experiences and professional satisfaction.

In accordance with the Conservation of Resources Theory, the more supportive resources individuals receive in their work environment, the stronger their capacity to cope with work-related stress [9]. The Conservation of Resources Theory was proposed by S.E. Hobfoll in 1989 and has since become one of the widely recognised theories in the field of Organizational Behaviour. Within the framework of this theory, resources are perceived as subjective assets, encompassing a variety of resources that are valuable to individuals, such as material, individual characteristics, conditions, and energy, as well as the means to acquire these resources. The value of resources varies from person to person, and the classification of resources is quite extensive, including material resources, individual characteristic resources, conditional resources, and energetic re-

sources [10]. The theory posits that individuals strive to protect their existing resources and acquire new ones, which can be used to analyze an individual’s stress responses and coping strategies in relation to their environment. This, in turn, is more likely to sustain a positive work attitude and retention intentions.

The term “moderating effect” refers to the influence a variable has on the direction or strength of the relationship between two other variables. In this study, supportive conditions may serve as a moderator in the relationship between organizational commitment and environmental fit, as well as between environmental fit and the retention intentions of rural teachers. Specifically, a high level of supportive conditions may amplify the positive impact of organizational commitment on the perception of environmental fit and also enhance the positive influence of environmental fit on retention intentions.

Thus, this study proposes a hypothesis that supportive conditions play a moderating role in the relationship between organizational commitment and the retention intentions of rural teachers, as well as in the relationship with environmental fit. This implies that the direct predictive effect of organizational commitment on the retention intentions of rural teachers and the mediating effect of environmental fit may both be subject to the moderating influence of supportive conditions (H3).

Building upon the aforementioned hypotheses, from the perspective of Organizational Behaviour Theory underlying organizational commitment, and integrating the person-environment fit theory of environmental matching along with the Conservation of Resources Theory of supportive conditions, this study constructs a moderated mediation model of factors influencing the retention of rural teachers (see Fig. 1 for details). It also examines the relationships among organizational commitment, environmental fit, and supportive conditions with the retention of rural teachers.

Specifically, this study aims to investigate the mediating (environmental fit) and moderating (supportive conditions) mechanisms by which organizational commitment predicts the retention of rural teachers. The goal is to clarify the mechanisms through which organizational commitment affects the retention of rural teachers and to provide empirical support and theoretical guidance that is more targeted for the retention of rural teachers.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research respondents

To thoroughly investigate how the factor of organizational commitment affects the retention intentions of rural teachers, the research team widely distributed a total of 5,000 questionnaires across 10 different areas in Heilongjiang Province, with an even distribution of 500 questionnaires per area. After careful screening, the number of validly returned questionnaires reached 4,746, with an effective recovery rate of 94.92 %. See Table 1 for details of the study respondents.

Variable design

1. Organizational Commitment Scale

Organizational Commitment Scale based on the “Chinese Employee Organizational Commitment Questionnaire” developed by Ling Wenquan, Zhang Zhican, and Fang Liluo [5], the scale was adapted to survey the organizational commitment of rural teachers. The scale consists of five dimensions: Affective Commitment, Normative Commitment, Ideal Commitment, Economic Commitment, and Opportunity Commitment, covering a total of 25 items (Table 2). Scores are measured using a Likert five-point scale, with higher scores indicating a higher level of organizational commitment. In this measurement, the reliability of the Organizational Commitment Scale was 0.928.

2. Environmental Fit Scale

Based on an understanding of person-environment fit theory and building upon scales developed by related scholars, the Environmental Fit Scale was established considering the actual characteristics of rural teachers and their environments. The scale is composed of two dimensions: Life Environment Fit and Teaching Environment Fit, encompassing a total of 11 items (Table 3). Subjective matching is employed to observe the subjective evaluation made by the respondents regarding their match with the environment. Scores are measured using a Likert five-point scale, with higher scores indicating a greater degree of perceived match between the individual and their living and teaching environments. In this study, the reliability of the Environmental Fit Scale was 0.923.

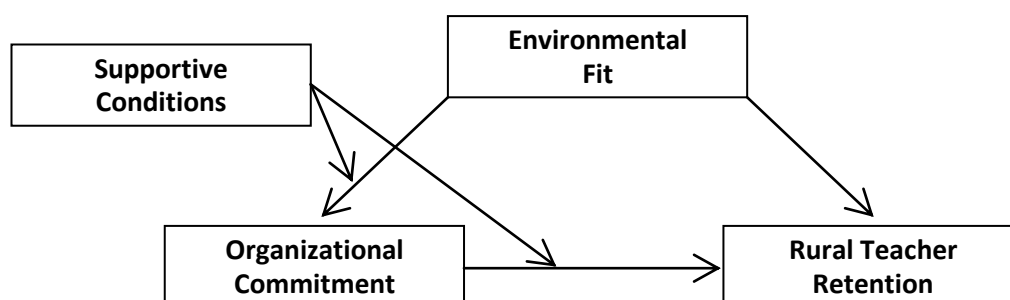


Fig. 1. Hypothetical model of organizational commitment’s mediating role and environmental fit’s moderating influence

Рис. 1. Гипотетическая модель посреднической роли приверженности организации и смягчающего влияния приспособленности к окружающей среде

Table 1. Information on survey respondents
Таблица 1. Информация о респондентах

Characteristics of the subjects	Number of cases	Minimum value	Maximum value	Mean value	Standard deviation	Variance
Type of specialty	4746	1	2	1.21	0.405	0.164
Working hours	4746	1	6	2.29	1.983	3.933
Gender	4746	1	2	1.70	0.460	0.211
Marriage	4746	1	2	1.12	0.325	0.106
Age	4746	21	68	43.99	9.005	81.087

Table 2. Organizational Commitment Scale entry description
Таблица 2. Описание элементов шкалы приверженности организации

Items	Number of cases	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
1. Do not leave even if the school's effectiveness is poor	4746	1	5	2.15	1.172
2. Have a deep affection for the organization	4746	1	5	1.94	1.067
3. Willing to make any contributions	4746	1	5	1.95	1.066
4. Willing to contribute all of my heart and soul	4746	1	5	1.90	1.054
5. Willing to contribute amateur efforts	4746	1	5	1.93	1.055
6. Has an obligation to the organization	4746	1	5	1.86	1.014
7. Jumping ship is unethical	4746	1	5	2.33	1.284
8. Both should be loyal to the unit	4746	1	5	1.93	1.077
9. Devote oneself to the organization	4746	1	5	1.73	0.966
10. Love your organization as you love your family	4746	1	5	1.78	0.979
11. Learning is useful	4746	1	5	3.48	1.331
12. More opportunities for further training	4746	1	5	3.48	1.298
13. There are many opportunities for promotion	4746	1	5	3.08	1.343
14. Working in the present position is both challenging and difficult	4746	1	5	3.34	1.331
15. The conditions of the current school are conducive to the realization of ideals	4746	1	5	3.09	1.350
16. Leaving is easy to lose benefits	4746	1	5	3.14	1.336
17. Too much to lose by leaving	4746	1	5	3.12	1.334
18. It is hard to leave even if you want to	4746	1	5	2.76	1.307
19. It takes too much time to leave	4746	1	5	2.88	1.305
20. Leaving is easy to cause loss to the family	4746	1	5	3.02	1.344
21. Own low skills	4746	1	5	1.76	0.957
22. Bad wages in other organizations	4746	1	5	2.83	1.270
23. It is not easy to find a suitable job	4746	1	5	3.39	1.323
24. Can't find another organization	4746	1	5	2.22	1.081
25. It is not easy to find a good job	4746	1	5	2.72	1.215

*Table 3. Environment Fit Scale entry description**Таблица 3. Описание элементов шкалы приспособленности к окружающей среде*

Items	Number of cases	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
1. I share the same teaching philosophy with other teachers in my school	4746	1	5	2.11	0.968
2. What I learned in school can solve the practical problems of rural schools well	4746	1	5	2.18	1.017
3. I can accept the management style of rural schools	4746	1	5	2.11	1.004
4. My teaching ability can fully cope with the educational situation in rural schools	4746	1	5	1.87	0.926
5. I can manage student management in the classroom	4746	1	5	1.82	0.923
6. I am very comfortable in my current work environment	4746	1	5	2.16	1.026
7. I am very comfortable in my present living environment	4746	1	5	2.21	1.044
8. The present work environment is very similar to the environment in which I studied in my early years	4746	1	5	2.71	1.243
9. The present living environment is very similar to the environment in one's hometown	4746	1	5	2.46	1.177
10. I have a better relationship with coworkers	4746	1	5	1.69	0.891
11. I have a good relationship with parents	4746	1	5	1.76	0.905

3. Supportive Conditions Scale

The Supportive Conditions section, based on the resource conservation theory and a comprehensive consideration of the external conditions for rural teachers, divides the supportive conditions into three dimensions: living and environmental conditions, work and teaching conditions, as well as support and development conditions, encompassing a total of 21 items (Table 4). Similarly, a Likert five-point scale was used for scoring, with higher scores indicating better perceived external supportive conditions for the participants. In this measurement, the reliability of the organizational commitment scale was 0.941.

4. Rural Teacher Retention Intention Scale

In this section, serving as the dependent variable in the study, direct inquiries were made regarding the retention intentions of rural teachers, specifically asking whether the participants are willing to continue teaching in rural areas. The section includes 6 items (Table 5). Scores are measured using a Likert five-point scale, with higher scores indicating a greater willingness of the participants, who are rural teachers, to remain in their positions. In this study, the reliability of the retention intention scale was determined to be 0.946.

Questionnaire quality

The results indicated that the questionnaire possessed a high level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.967. For the independent variable of organizational commitment, the model fit indices were as follows: RMSEA was 0.097, SRMR was 0.0327, NFI was 0.969, RFI was 0.957, IFI was 0.970, TLI was 0.958,

and CFI was 0.970. These indices suggest an adequate model fit for the organizational commitment construct.

For the mediating variable of environmental fit, the model fit indices were: RMSEA of 0.091, SRMR of 0.0336, NFI of 0.948, RFI of 0.967, IFI of 0.973, TLI of 0.951, and CFI of 0.970. These values indicate a good model fit for the environmental fit construct.

The dependent variable, representing the retention of rural teachers, had model fit indices of: RMSEA of 0.089, SRMR of 0.0088, NFI of 0.995, RFI of 0.986, IFI of 0.996, TLI of 0.986, and CFI of 0.995. These exceptionally low RMSEA and SRMR values, along with high NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI, and CFI values, signify an excellent model fit for the retention construct.

The overall structural model of the questionnaire demonstrated fit indices of: RMSEA of 0.067, SRMR of 0.0554, NFI of 0.964, RFI of 0.957, IFI of 0.965, TLI of 0.959, and CFI of 0.965. The indices for the overall model are within the recommended ranges, indicating a good fit.

The model fit indices for all dimensions of the questionnaire and the overall structural model have met the recommended criteria, indicating that the questionnaire is of high quality. These data suggest that the scales are reliable and valid for the constructs being measured in the study.

METHODS

To thoroughly investigate how the factor of organizational commitment affects the retention intentions of rural teachers, the research team widely distributed a total of 5,000 questionnaires across 10 different areas in Heilongjiang Province, with an even distribution of 500 questionnaires per area. After careful screening,

Table 4. Supportive Conditions Scale entry description
Таблица 4. Описание элементов шкалы благоприятных условий

Items	Number of cases	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
1. Housing for teachers in schools is relatively good	4746	1	5	2.69	1.144
2. Teachers' housing is almost always near the school	4746	1	5	2.64	1.178
3. The environment near the school meets my work needs	4746	1	5	2.71	1.202
4. The environment near the school meets my living needs	4746	1	5	2.54	1.256
5. The school is in a relatively isolated location	4746	1	5	3.13	1.300
6. The teaching equipment can meet my teaching needs	4746	1	5	1.84	0.988
7. Teaching network resources are abundant	4746	1	5	1.99	1.088
8. School leaders give attention and support to my work	4746	1	5	2.01	1.030
9. School leaders give help and support to my life	4746	1	5	2.10	1.041
10. District administrative leaders give support to rural education based on national policies	4746	1	5	2.01	1.040
11. The education bureau conducts instructional mentoring programs for new teachers	4746	1	5	2.54	1.160
12. Schools provide effective professional counseling for all teachers	4746	1	5	1.97	0.978
13. Teachers have regular access to various professional trainings	4746	1	5	2.55	1.157
14. Every teacher teaches at least 2 courses	4746	1	5	2.20	1.099
15. Take on more workload other than teaching	4746	1	5	2.34	1.098
16. Educational and teaching exchanges and collaborative activities are regularly conducted among teachers in the school	4746	1	5	2.29	1.058
17. Teachers have more opportunities to participate in teaching and academic exchanges outside the school	4746	1	5	2.07	0.994
18. There are more opportunities for teachers to collaborate with teachers from other schools in teaching and research	4746	1	5	2.13	1.017
19. The school has sufficient IT hardware	4746	1	5	2.44	1.290
20. Guidance on the use of information technology in the school	4746	1	5	2.01	1.083
21. Teachers utilize online teaching materials more frequently	4746	1	5	2.13	1.007

Table 5. Rural Teacher Retention Intention Scale entry description
Таблица 5. Описание элементов шкалы намерения удержания сельских учителей

Items	Number of cases	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
1. I have not considered leaving my current school	4746	1	5	1.99	1.185
2. I plan to keep teaching at my current school in the future	4746	1	5	1.91	1.106
3. I am comfortable in my current work environment	4746	1	5	1.97	1.068
4. I would like to work with my current colleagues	4746	1	5	1.80	0.973
5. I feel comfortable with my current students	4746	1	5	1.92	1.055
6. I like teaching in my current school	4746	1	5	1.90	1.054

the number of validly returned questionnaires reached 4,746, with an effective recovery rate of 94.92 %. Except for the basic information section, other questions in the questionnaire were scored using a Likert five-point scale, where 1 represents the highest degree and 5 represents the lowest degree. The research team conducted an in-depth analysis of the collected data using statistical software SPSS 24.0 and AMOS 28.0.

The questionnaire encompassed five key sections: firstly, basic information of the participants, such as gender, age, education level, marital status, school location, graduate institution, and the duration of their work in rural schools. The main body of the questionnaire was constructed from four scales.

To mitigate the potential for common method bias in data collected through a survey, a Harman single-factor exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted. The results indicated that the first unrotated factor accounted for 30.78 % of the variance, which is below the critical threshold of 40 %, suggesting that there is no significant common method bias present. Further principal component analysis (PCA) revealed 10 components with eigenvalues greater than 1. These components cumulatively explained 68.55 % of the total variance, with the first six components accounting for 64.44 % of the variance. This outcome supports the reliability of the data and provides a solid foundation for subsequent analyses.

To gain a deeper understanding of the impact of organizational commitment on the retention of rural teachers, the author employed hierarchical regression analysis to examine the explanatory power of affective commitment, normative commitment, ideal commitment, economic commitment, and opportunity commitment on the retention of rural teachers, both with and without considering background factors such as gender, age, marital status, school location, education level, graduate institution, and years of work experience in rural schools.

In order to verify whether environmental fit acts plays a mediating effect between organizational commitment and the retention intention of rural teachers, Model 4 in PROCESS V 3.0 was used for analysis. The mediating variable environmental fit acts was put into the model, and the mediating effect estimate, BootSE and 95 % confidence interval were obtained by Bootstrapping method, so as to judge the significance of the mediating effect.

Because different supportive conditions bring different satisfaction to rural teachers, it may have different impacts on organizational commitment, matching degree and rural teachers' willingness to stay. Therefore, this paper takes the teachers' age, gender, marital status as the control variables, and the supportive conditions as the moderating variable, and puts them into the multi-intermediary model. Model 8 in PROCESS V 3.0 was used to test the mediated effect. Further, a simple slope analysis method is used to obtain the adjustment trend of supportive conditions.

RESULTS

Analysis of factors influencing the retention of rural teachers

Organizational commitment, environmental fit, and supportive conditions have been identified as significant factors that influence the retention intentions of rural teachers.

The mean score for organizational commitment is 2.55, indicating a moderate to high level of loyalty and identification with their organization among teachers, which is significantly and positively correlated with their intention to stay. The mean score for environmental fit is 2.1, suggesting that there is room for improvement in the alignment between the teachers' work environment and their personal expectations, and it is also positively correlated with the intention to stay. The mean score for supportive conditions is 2.3, reflecting a moderate to high perception of the support conditions received by rural teachers, which correlates positively with their retention intentions. For specific results, see Table 6.

It is noteworthy that the mean score for retention intentions is 1.91, which is the lowest among all variables, implying that the willingness of rural teachers to remain in their positions is relatively weak. This could be associated with other relevant factors such as affective commitment, normative commitment, and ideal commitment, all of which exhibit significant positive correlations with retention intentions. Consequently, to enhance the retention intentions of rural teachers, a multifaceted approach is necessary. This includes strengthening organizational commitment, optimizing the work environment, providing ample supportive conditions, and considering other influential factors like affective, normative, and ideal commitments. By integrating these measures, the retention intentions of rural teachers can be more effectively improved, thereby fostering the stability and development of rural education.

The impact of organizational commitment on the retention of rural teachers

In Model 1 (without considering background factors), affective commitment, normative commitment, and ideal commitment significantly impacted the retention intentions of rural teachers. The regression coefficients were 0.751 for affective commitment, 0.72 for normative commitment, and 0.537 for ideal commitment, all indicating a strong positive effect. These results suggest that in the absence of other background factors, teachers' commitment to their organization is an important predictor of their intention to remain in their positions.

In Model 2 (with background factors considered), after incorporating background information such as the teachers' gender, age, and marital status, the impact of affective commitment and normative commitment slightly decreased but remained significant, with adjusted regression coefficients of 0.738 and 0.706, respectively. The regression coefficient for ideal commitment slightly increased to 0.547. The regression coefficients for economic commitment and opportunity commitment were 0.181 and 0.099, respectively, and their significance in Model 2 also improved, indicating that when background factors are comprehensively considered, the influence of these factors on retention intentions should not be overlooked. The specific results are presented in Table 7.

In summary, all dimensions of organizational commitment, particularly affective and normative commitments, have a significant positive impact on the retention intentions of rural teachers, regardless of the presence of background factors. Consequently, Hypothesis 1 (Organizational commitment positively affects rural teachers' willingness to stay in the profession) is supported.

Table 6. Analysis of factors related to rural teacher retention
Таблица 6. Анализ факторов, связанных с удержанием сельских учителей

Variable	M	SD	Organizational Commitment	Environmental Fit	Supportive Conditions	Retention Intention
Organizational Commitment	2.550	0.728	1	–	–	–
Environmental Fit	2.100	0.764	0.630**	1	–	–
Supportive Conditions	2.300	0.751	0.601**	0.656**	1	–
Retention Intention	1.910	0.955	0.602**	0.661**	0.513**	1

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Примечание. ** Корреляция значима на уровне 0,01 (двусторонняя).

Table 7. Regression analysis of the impact of organizational commitment factors on rural teacher retention
Таблица 7. Регрессивный анализ влияния факторов приверженности организации на удержание сельских учителей

Variable		Model 1	Model 2
Affective Commitment	<i>B (S.E)</i>	0.751 (0.631)***	0.738 (0.626)***
	<i>R² (Adjusted R²)</i>	0.563 (0.563)***	0.571 (0.571)***
	<i>F</i>	6118.876***	901.772***
Normative Commitment	<i>B (S.E)</i>	0.720 (0.662)***	0.706 (0.654)***
	<i>R² (Adjusted R²)</i>	0.519 (0.519)***	0.532 (0.531)***
	<i>F</i>	5113.661***	768.255***
Ideal Commitment	<i>B (S.E)</i>	0.537 (0.806)***	0.547 (0.776)***
	<i>R² (Adjusted R²)</i>	0.288 (0.288)***	0.341 (0.340)***
	<i>F</i>	1923.041***	350.065***
Economic Commitment	<i>B (S.E)</i>	0.181 (0.939)***	0.182 (0.919)***
	<i>R² (Adjusted R²)</i>	0.033 (0.033)***	0.075 (0.074)***
	<i>F</i>	161.121***	55.255***
Opportunity Commitment	<i>B (S.E)</i>	0.099 (0.950)***	0.089 (0.931)***
	<i>R² (Adjusted R²)</i>	0.01 (0.01)***	0.050 (0.049)***
	<i>F</i>	46.652***	35.872***

Note. *** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (two-tailed).

Примечание. *** Корреляция значима на уровне 0,001 (двусторонняя).

Mediation examination of the impact of organizational commitment on rural teacher retention

The results (see Tables 8 and 9) indicate that the predictive role of organizational commitment on the retention of rural teachers is significant ($\beta=0.778$, $t=51.632$, $p<0.001$), and remains significant ($\beta=0.387$, $t=22.424$, $p<0.001$) when the mediating variable is introduced. The predictive effect of organizational commitment on environmental fit is also significant ($\beta=0.666$, $t=56.190$, $p<0.001$), as is the predic-

tive effect of environmental fit on the retention of rural teachers ($\beta=0.587$, $t=35.867$, $p<0.001$).

Furthermore, the direct effect of organizational commitment on the retention of rural teachers and the mediating effect controlled by environmental fit were both significant, as indicated by the bootstrap 95 % confidence intervals not including zero (see Table 4). This suggests that organizational commitment can predict the retention of rural teachers both directly and indirectly through the mediating

Table 8. Mediation model test of environmental fit
Таблица 8. Тест модели медиации на приспособленность к окружающей среде

Regression Equation (N=4746)		Fit Indices			Coefficient Significance	
Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	R	R ²	F(df)	β	t
Rural Teacher Retention	Gender	0.618	0.382	1003.674*** (5)	-0.144	-5.848***
	Marital Status				0.094	2.517***
	Age				-0.014	-9.706***
	Organizational Commitment				0.778	51.632***
Environmental Fit	Gender	0.634	0.401	794.448*** (4)	-0.087	-4.433***
	Marital Status				0.097	3.298***
	Age				0.003	2.320***
	Organizational Commitment				0.666	56.190***
Rural Teacher Retention	Gender	0.717	0.514	1003.674*** (4)	-0.094	-4.276***
	Marital Status				0.037	1.119***
	Age				-0.015	-12.145***
	Organizational Commitment				0.387	22.425***
	Environmental Fit				0.587	35.867***

Note. All variables in the model are standardized and entered into the regression equation, the same below.

Примечание. Все переменные в модели стандартизированы и введены в уравнение регрессии, аналогичное приведенному ниже.

Table 9. Decomposition of total, direct, and mediating effects
Таблица 9. Декомпозиция общих, прямых и опосредованных эффектов

Effect Type	Effect Size	Bootstrap Standard Error	Bootstrap CI Lower Bound	Bootstrap CI Upper Bound	Proportion of Effect
Mediating Effect of Environmental Fit	0.391	0.017	0.358	0.424	50 %
Direct Effect	0.387	0.020	0.347	0.425	50 %
Total Effect	0.778	0.015	0.748	0.807	—

role of environmental fit. The direct effect (0.387) and the mediating effect (0.391) account for approximately half of the total effect (0.778), respectively. Consequently, Hypothesis 2 is supported.

Examination of the moderated mediation model for the impact of organizational commitment on rural teacher retention

The results (Tables 10 and 11) indicate that after incorporating supportive conditions into the model, the interaction term between organizational commitment and supportive conditions significantly predicts both the retention of rural teachers and environmental fit (rural teacher retention: $\beta=0.208$, $t=14.557$, $p<0.001$; environmental fit: $\beta=0.065$, $t=5.634$, $p<0.001$). This suggests that supportive conditions not only moderate the direct effect of organizational commitment on the retention of rural teachers but also the predictive effect of organizational commitment on environmental fit.

Further simple slope analysis indicates (Fig. 2 and 3), as shown in Fig. 2, for participants with lower levels of supportive conditions ($M-1SD$), organizational commitment has a significant positive predictive effect on the retention of rural teachers, with a simple slope of 0.243, $t=12.329$, $p<0.001$. For participants with higher levels of supportive conditions ($M+1SD$), the positive predictive effect of organizational commitment on the retention of rural teachers is even more pronounced, with a simple slope of 0.555, $t=25.101$, $p<0.001$. This suggests that as the level of supportive conditions increases, the predictive effect of organizational commitment on the retention of rural teachers shows an upward trend (see Table 6).

As depicted in Fig. 3, for participants with lower levels of supportive conditions ($M-1SD$), organizational commitment exhibits a significant positive predictive effect on environmental fit, with a simple slope of 0.351, $t=23.125$, $p<0.001$. For those with higher levels of supportive conditions ($M+1SD$), the positive predictive effect of organizational commitment on environmental fit is even more substantial, with a simple slope of 0.448, $t=26.797$, $p<0.001$. This indicates that as the level of supportive conditions increases, the predictive effect of organizational commitment on environmental fit trends upward. Additionally, across the three levels of supportive conditions, the mediating effect of environmental fit in the relationship between organizational commitment and the retention of rural teachers also shows an increasing trend (see Table 6). That is, with the enhancement of supportive conditions, organizational commitment is more likely to promote the retention of rural teachers by increasing the level of environmental fit. Consequently, Hypothesis 3 (Supportive Conditions Moderating the Relationship Between Organizational Commitment and Rural Teachers' Willingness to Remain and Environmental Matching) is supported.

DISCUSSION

Teachers' organizational commitment significantly influences the retention of rural teachers

This study, through empirical investigation, has identified organizational commitment as a key factor influencing the retention intentions of rural teachers. Organizational

commitment, as a psychological state, reflects the teachers' loyalty and identification with their organization. Data analysis has revealed a significant positive correlation between organizational commitment and the retention intentions of rural teachers. Specifically, the mean score for organizational commitment is 2.55, indicating that the teachers' loyalty and sense of identification with their organization are at a moderately high level. Furthermore, through hierarchical regression analysis, it was found that affective commitment, normative commitment, and ideal commitment all have a significant positive impact on the retention intentions of rural teachers, regardless of the presence of background factors. The impacts of affective and normative commitment are particularly notable, with regression coefficients of 0.738 and 0.706, respectively, indicating that teachers' strong emotional attachment and normative identification with the organization are important predictors of their intention to stay.

The mediating effect of environmental congruence on the retention of rural teachers is significantly pronounced

Environmental fit, serving as a mediating variable, plays a pivotal role between organizational commitment and the retention intentions of rural teachers. It pertains to whether the personal expectations, values, and professional skills of teachers align with the work and life environment of the rural schools where they are employed. The study found that the mean value of environmental fit is 2.1, indicating a need for improvement in the alignment between teachers' work environments and their personal expectations, yet it correlates positively with the intention to stay. Through mediation effect testing, it was discovered that organizational commitment can not only directly predict the retention of rural teachers but also predict it indirectly through the mediating role of environmental fit. The predictive effect of organizational commitment on environmental fit is significant ($\beta=0.666$), and the predictive effect of environmental fit on the retention of rural teachers is also significant ($\beta=0.587$). This suggests that a high level of organizational commitment may motivate teachers to pay more attention to and actively seek alignment with their work environment, thereby enhancing their perception of environmental fit and, consequently, strengthening their intention to remain in their positions.

The moderating effect of supportive conditions is significantly pronounced

Supportive conditions, encompassing living environment conditions, work and teaching conditions, and support and development conditions, significantly impact the daily work experiences and job satisfaction of rural teachers. According to the Conservation of Resources Theory, the more supportive resources individuals perceive in their work environment, the stronger their capacity to cope with work stress, thereby increasing the likelihood of maintaining a positive work attitude and retention intentions. This study, through the examination of a moderated mediation model, found that supportive conditions not only moderate the direct effect of organizational commitment on the retention of rural teachers but also the predictive effect of organizational commitment on environmental fit. Specifically, the interaction term between organizational commitment

Table 10. Test of moderated mediation model
Таблица 10. Тест модели модулируемой медиации

Regression Equation (N=4746)		Fit Indices			Coefficient Significance	
Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R	R ²	F(df)	β	t
Environmental Fit	Gender	0.723	0.522	863.341** (6)	-0.053	-3.036**
	Marital Status				0.077	2.932**
	Age				0.001	0.950
	Organizational Commitment				0.399	29.810***
	Conditional Support				0.431	33.370***
	Organizational Commitment × Conditional Support				0.065	5.634***
Rural Teacher Retention	Gender	0.732	0.536	783.229*** (7)	-0.145	-3.942***
	Marital Status				0.094	0.421
	Age				-0.014	-12.061***
	Environmental Fit				0.535	29.913***
	Organizational Commitment				0.399	22.182***
	Conditional Support				0.052	2.933**
	Organizational Commitment × Conditional Support				0.208	14.557***

Note. *** indicates a statistically significant correlation at the 0.001 level (two-tailed);

** indicates a statistically significant correlation at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Примечание. *** указывает на статистически значимую корреляцию на уровне 0,001 (двусторонняя);

** указывает на статистически значимую корреляцию на уровне 0,01 (двусторонняя).

Table 11. Mediation effects at different levels of conditional support and comparisons
Таблица 11. Эффекты медиации на разных уровнях условной поддержки и сравнений

Support Condition	Effect Value	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	Support Condition
Moderated Mediation Effect	eff1(M-1SD)	0.188	0.013	0.162	0.214
	eff1(M)	0.214	0.013	0.188	0.240
	eff1(M+1SD)	0.240	0.016	0.210	0.271
Comparison of Moderated Mediation Effects	eff2-eff1	0.026	0.006	0.015	0.037
	eff3-eff1	0.052	0.011	0.030	0.074
	eff3-eff2	0.026	0.006	0.015	0.037

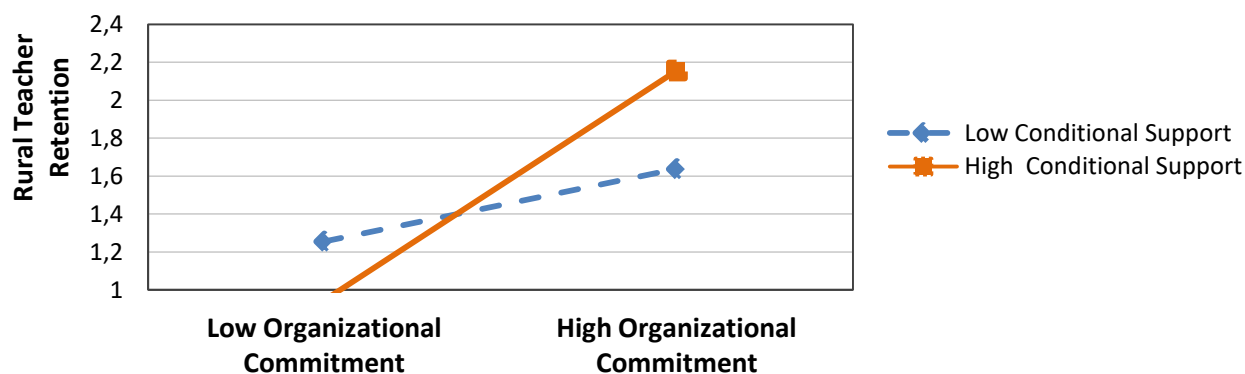


Fig. 2. The moderating role of support conditions in the relationship between organizational commitment and rural teacher retention

Рис. 2. Смягчающая роль условий поддержки в отношениях между приверженностью организации и удержанием сельских учителей



Fig. 3. The moderating effect of support conditions on the relationship between organizational commitment and environmental fit

Рис. 3. Смягчающее влияние условий поддержки на отношения между приверженностью организации и приспособленностью к окружающей среде

and supportive conditions significantly predicts both the retention and environmental fit of rural teachers, indicating that as the level of supportive conditions increases, the predictive effect of organizational commitment on the retention of rural teachers shows an upward trend.

In summary, teachers' organizational commitment is a significant factor influencing their intentions to remain in their positions. Affective commitment, normative commitment, and ideal commitment play central roles in teachers' retention decisions. Environmental fit significantly mediates the relationship between organizational commitment and the retention intentions of rural teachers. Enhancing teachers' satisfaction and fit with their work environment contributes to strengthening their willingness to stay. Supportive conditions significantly moderate the relationship between organizational commitment and the retention intentions of rural teachers. Favorable support conditions can intensify the positive impact of organizational commitment on retention intentions and enhance the mediating effect of environmental fit.

Policy Recommendations

1. Optimize the rural education environment and enhance teachers' organizational commitment

To improve the working environment for rural teachers and enhance their level of organizational commitment, it is essential to initially focus on optimizing supportive conditions. The existing data clearly demonstrate that favorable support conditions can intensify the positive impact of organizational commitment on retention intentions and enhance the mediating effect of environmental fit. Therefore, providing robust supportive conditions and elevating the level of teachers' organizational commitment are effective approaches to strengthening the retention intentions of rural teachers [11].

First and foremost, creating a harmonious rural community environment is crucial to ensure that rural teachers can work in a conducive educational and living environment. Providing them with ample administrative support will significantly enhance their sense of satisfaction, happiness,

and belonging. This will enable them to genuinely experience the joy and value of working in rural areas, fostering their willingness to commit to long-term teaching positions in these settings [12].

Educational and administrative support are vital for enhancing teachers’ job satisfaction. When rural teachers perceive solid support from administrative departments, they tend to focus more on students’ growth and their own professional development, thereby achieving a higher level of organizational commitment. Guided by the “Rural Teacher Support Program (2015–2020)”¹, it is imperative to provide rural schools with necessary teaching equipment and facilities to ensure the smooth conduct of educational activities. Additionally, encouraging rural teachers to participate in school management and decision-making allows them to play a more significant role and realize greater value in their school communities, strengthening their sense of belonging and responsibility [13].

Furthermore, schools should actively foster a cultural atmosphere of human care, ensuring that rural teachers feel warmth and respect in their work. Additionally, the promotion of learning communities among rural teachers, through collaborations with local universities, educational research institutions, or other urban and rural schools, can provide more opportunities for learning and exchange. This will enhance their sense of achievement and participatory consciousness, thereby increasing their level of organizational commitment [14].

By optimizing supportive conditions and elevating the organizational commitment of rural teachers, we can effectively address the issue of teacher shortages in rural education and provide strong support for the sustainable development of rural education.

2. Optimize recruitment and training systems to enhance the fit of rural teachers with the rural environment

Analysis of statistical data has revealed that under real conditions, a high degree of match between rural teachers and the rural environment significantly positively affects teachers’ retention intentions. Therefore, rural schools should place greater emphasis on the adaptability of teachers to the rural context when allocating teaching staff. When recruiting, cultivating, and training rural teachers, relevant departments must prioritize the degree of match between teachers and the rural environment, which is key to improving the retention rate of rural teachers.

Firstly, rural schools should adopt targeted strategies during the teacher recruitment process. In line with the “Guiding Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of Rural Teachers in the New Era”² issued by the Ministry of Education and five other departments in 2020, there is an encouragement to innovate in public recruitment me-

thods to attract talent to teach in rural areas. Localities should increase local recruitment efforts, implement local talent strategies, and prioritize the recruitment of teachers with local backgrounds or rural life experiences to enhance teachers’ adaptability and comfort in rural settings. At the same time, recruitment should focus on the alignment of teachers’ expertise with the teaching positions in rural schools to reduce teaching pressures arising from professional misalignment.

Secondly, the pre-service training and in-service professional development of rural teachers should take into account the rural environment. Local universities should incorporate relevant content about rural education into the curriculum and practical teaching segments of teacher pre-service training to ensure that future teachers can correctly understand and adapt to the rural educational context [15]. Local education departments should provide in-service teachers with training in school-based curriculum development and teaching material handling capabilities to enhance the adaptability and teaching skills of rural teachers in the context of rural education.

Lastly, relevant departments should establish platforms for the exchange of teachers between urban and rural areas, achieving the sharing of educational resources and meeting the professional development needs of rural teachers, thereby enhancing their sense of professional achievement and job satisfaction [16]. Through these measures, the match between rural teachers and the rural environment can be effectively improved, promoting the sustainable development of rural education.

3. Establish a monitoring system for rural teacher retention to enhance local educational supervision effectiveness and accountability

To ensure the stable retention of rural teachers and optimize the allocation of teaching staff in rural education, establishing a comprehensive and detailed monitoring database for the retention of rural teachers is particularly necessary [17]. This database will not only provide real-time monitoring and accurate assessment of the retention status of rural teachers but also serve as a key tool for understanding and addressing issues related to the teaching workforce in rural areas.

Firstly, we must establish a diverse participation mechanism that encourages local education management departments, educational supervision personnel, school leaders, teachers, students, parents, community members, and the public within the entire county to actively participate in this work. Each individual can provide valuable information on the retention of rural teachers from different perspectives, thereby ensuring that we obtain comprehensive and accurate data.

Secondly, for the information in the database, we need to conduct regular analysis and organization. Local education management departments should regularly organize experts, scholars, and relevant personnel to conduct in-depth research and discussions on the data of rural teacher retention to reveal the underlying trends and characteristics. Such analysis will not only help us better understand the motivations and difficulties behind the retention of rural teachers but also provide strong support for formulating more effective policies. Schools should improve various systems related to teacher compensation, welfare, incentives,

¹ Notice of the General Office of the State Council on the Issuance of the Rural Teacher Support Plan (2015–2020). The State Council The People’s Republic of China. URL: https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-06/08/content_9833.htm.

² Opinions of the Ministry of Education and other six departments on strengthening the construction of rural teacher teams in the new era. Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (2020, July 31). URL: http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A10/s3735/202009/t20200903_484941.html.

evaluation, and reform, and further establish a comprehensive monitoring and safeguard mechanism to ensure the implementation direction and efficiency of various policy systems [18].

Additionally, to ensure unimpeded information flow, it is essential to establish effective communication channels for retention monitoring. These channels can range from face-to-face direct communication to online interactive platforms. Through these channels, we can promptly acquire the latest updates on the retention of rural teachers and make corresponding adjustments based on actual conditions [19].

Lastly, for areas where the retention of rural teachers is poor, we should implement a strict accountability mechanism based on monitoring data. This will not only ensure that rural schools receive adequate teaching support but also motivate relevant departments and personnel to actively fulfill their responsibilities, jointly promoting the healthy development of rural education. Through these measures, we will be able to build a rural teacher workforce that is both numerous and of high quality, laying a solid foundation for the long-term development of rural education.

CONCLUSIONS

1. There is a significant positive correlation between organizational commitment and the willingness of rural teachers to stay. To address the issue of rural teacher turnover, the critical aspect lies in enhancing their level of organizational commitment. Therefore, we must first attach great importance to and strive to improve the organizational commitment of rural teachers.

2. Environmental fit acts as a mediator in the relationship between organizational commitment and the retention intention of rural teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to improve corresponding external systems, optimize the rural education environment, and enhance the compatibility of rural teachers with the rural environment.

3. Supportive conditions not only moderate the direct prediction of organizational commitment on the retention of rural teachers but also the predictive effect of organizational commitment on environmental fit. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that rural schools receive sufficient support.

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Влияние приверженности организации на удержание сельских учителей: исследование модулируемой медиации

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Аннотация: Исследование направлено на выявление механизмов, посредством которых приверженность организации влияет на удержание сельских учителей, а также на то, как приспособленность к окружающей среде и благоприятные условия модулируют эту связь. Изучена посредническая роль приспособленности к окружающей среде и смягчающая роль благоприятных условий. Опрос проводился среди 4 746 сельских учителей в десяти регионах провинции Хэйлунцзян. Выявлено, что: 1) существует значительная положительная корреляция между приверженностью организации и готовностью сельских учителей остаться; 2) приспособленность к окружающей среде выступает в качестве медиатора в отношениях между приверженностью организации и намерением удержания сельских учителей; 3) благоприятные условия не только ослабляют влияние приверженности организации на удержание сельских учителей, но и смягчают эффект влияния приверженности организации на приспособленность к окружающей среде. Для более эффективного удержания сельских учителей предлагается предпринять следующие меры: оптимизировать сельскую образовательную среду для повышения приверженности учителей организации; усовершенствовать системы набора и обучения для повышения соответствия сельских учителей сельской среде; создать систему мониторинга удержания сельских учителей с целью улучшения механизмов местного образовательного надзора и подотчетности.

Ключевые слова: сельские учителя; приверженность организации; приспособленность к окружающей среде; благоприятные условия; удержание сельских учителей; удержание учителей.

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