

A Case Study of Exploring the Reasons for Rural Preschool Teachers' Retention from the Perspective of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

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Abstract: With the high attention given to the development of rural preschool education in China, a large number of studies have pointed out that the phenomenon of rural preschool teachers being unable to stay is worrying. This study selected a purposive sampling method and used a semi-structured interview method to conduct a case analysis of two preschool teachers in a rural X kindergarten in Hubei Province: Teacher A, who is willing to continue teaching in the kindergarten after an internship, and Teacher B, who has served for 3 years and still has a strong desire to stay. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, this study mainly explored the reasons for the two rural preschool teachers' retention from the five dimensions of their physiological needs, security needs, emotional needs, respect needs and self realization needs. Based on the research results, countermeasures and suggestions were proposed to enhance the willingness of rural preschool teachers to stay on duty, in order to provide reference for improving the professional attractiveness of rural preschool teachers, stabilizing the rural preschool teacher team, and promoting the revitalization of rural education.

Keywords: Rural Preschool Teachers; Willingness to Stay on Duty; Case Analysis

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1. Introduction

The rise and fall of national fortune depend on education. If education prospers, rural areas will prosper, and if education is strong, rural areas will be strong. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that "cultivating young children well is a strategic task that is related to the long term". In 2023, the "Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Doing a Good Job in the Key Work of Comprehensively Promoting Rural Revitalization in 2023" emphasized "it is necessary to promote the sinking of basic public service resources and focus on strengthening weak links - rural education". Preschool education teacher students are an important force in the construction of rural early childhood teacher teams. Understanding the reasons for their return to their hometowns for teaching can help build a rural early childhood teacher team that is "go to the countryside, stay, and teach well". This study systematically explores the reasons for the retention of X kindergarten teachers in a rural area of Hubei Province based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, and proposes corresponding countermeasures and suggestions.

2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory: Current Situation and Reasons for Teacher Retention in X Kindergarten in a Rural Area

2.1 Physiological and safety needs have been met - reasonable wages and a relatively stable living environment

(1) Physiological needs

Physiological needs are considered the lowest in the hierarchy of needs. However, they are often closely related to daily life and

play the most fundamental and powerful important role in human development, such as economic sources, food, shelter, etc. [2] In the interview, Teacher A's parents were in poor health and had a younger sister to take care of. When she learned that X Kindergarten in her hometown provided accommodation and a salary of 2800 yuan, she joined X Kindergarten after graduation. Teacher B got married and had a child with a fellow villager after one and a half years of employment, and said, "It's close to home. When the child was born, they had family help. When they went to kindergarten, they followed me every day. It's very convenient. The principal is very concerned about the life and work of the teaching staff, and I feel very comfortable here."

(2) Security needs

Security needs are a state of being prepared for danger based on the satisfaction of human physiological needs. Specifically, human development requires an environment that allows them to feel safe and stable both materially and psychologically [3]. Teacher A is very familiar with the cultural customs of her hometown and has a good grasp of professional skills, and quickly integrates into it. She had a clear direction for future development when she learned of the opportunity to address staffing issues. Teacher B said, "When I first arrived, I didn't have many formal employees, and I didn't feel like I would be very long either. During the probationary period, my salary was only 800 yuan. Later, I kept studying and taking exams, and my salary also increased. The principal often encouraged us to learn and help each other. This place is like a home, and I feel happy and grounded."

Preschool teachers in rural areas generally have low wages and poor living and economic environment, especially for newly hired teachers,

Salary and economic conditions often become key factors affecting their retention. Both Teacher A and Teacher B demonstrated in the interviews that reasonable salaries and a relatively stable work and living environment provide necessary conditions for meeting the physiological needs of preschool teachers.

2.2 Emotional and respectful needs are met - a good work environment and harmonious interpersonal relationships

(1) Emotional needs

Emotional needs include the harmony of social relationships such as friends, colleagues, and family, as well as the need to belong to a group. Specifically, human development requires the existence of relationships that enable them to achieve emotional comfort, security, confidence, and achievement. Teacher A is the only normal student majoring in preschool education at a higher normal university in the kindergarten. The principal cherishes talent and often cares about life and work. Teachers often discuss problems together, and the work atmosphere is harmonious. Teacher B also said, "When I first arrived, I didn't have a certificate. In order for me to integrate into the group more quickly, the principal attached great importance to "passing on help and guidance", often organizing activities to encourage me to learn professional knowledge, and often chatting with parents of young children to enhance my relationship with them."

(2) Respect needs

Respect needs are the ability and achievement of a person. The desire for full recognition and respect from the family and society leads to a sense of confidence in oneself, a high emotional level of contribution to society, and a positive view of one's social status. Many parents often take the initiative to communicate with Teacher A after learning that she is a student majoring in preschool education at a higher normal university. Teacher A often feels that she is needed, recognized, and respected by parents. Teacher B also stated that during the probationary period, the principal also encouraged, praised, and respected their ideas. They also maintained their image in front of parents, earning them the respect and trust of colleagues and parents, and promoting Teacher B to be more proactive in their work.

The identity of preschool teachers, especially those who are not in the workforce, has not been able to enjoy the same treatment as primary and secondary school teachers as stipulated in the Teacher Law. When discussing the work of the kindergarten, both Teacher A and Teacher B expressed that they can feel warmth, respect, and love from the humanistic management style of the principal. All in-service teachers have very harmonious interpersonal relationships. Therefore, they are always able to maintain a positive attitude in their work.

2.3 Needs for self-realization have been met - fair opportunities for external learning and professional development

Self actualization needs to be at the highest level, as individuals hope to continuously improve themselves through various means, in order to maximize their potential, become the person they aspire to become, and achieve their ideals and beliefs. [4] Although the management system of kindergartens is not perfect, they all value the professional development of preschool teachers and often

encourage them to go out and learn. Teacher A said, “The principal often communicates with me, asking me to share the learning content from college, which has helped me gain a sense of achievement and I hope to do better.” Teacher B said that the kindergarten often provides training opportunities, and professional abilities have developed through the combination of theory and practice, enhancing work enthusiasm.

From the experiences of Teachers A and B, the principal plays a positive role in the professional development of preschool teachers. For example, the principal often provides professional training and further education opportunities for preschool teachers, encourages each teacher to go out for learning and supports teachers in professional training. Teachers A and B continuously improve their comprehensive literacy in theory and practice, and ultimately have a strong sense of professional identity.

3. Countermeasures and Suggestions Based on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory

3.1 Government should increase support for the development of rural preschool education

The Ministry of Education and the State Council of China have issued a notice on the issuance of the Rural Teacher Support Plan (2015-2020) by the General Office of the State Council. However, the development of rural preschool education is still the weakest, and many county-level governments, especially in underdeveloped areas in the central and western regions, are “powerless” in providing support for the development of preschool education. Therefore, the government needs to increase support for rural preschool education, understand the actual situation of preschool teachers, and meet their physiological needs as the starting point, such as ensuring that their wages can meet the needs of their families in various aspects, providing them with resting accommodation and working meals, etc., in order to improve the willingness of rural preschool teachers to stay on duty and enhance the stability of the preschool teacher team.

3.2 Kindergartens should strengthen the construction of a good work and learning environment

A good kindergarten culture can effectively increase the attractiveness of rural preschool teacher positions. Therefore, kindergarten managers must always understand the physical and mental state of each preschool teacher and their level of needs, and then adopt corresponding incentive methods to fully mobilize their work enthusiasm, effectively enhance their professional identity, and obtain a sense of professional happiness. For example, for new kindergarten teachers, cooperation and communication between teachers should be increased to help them establish good interpersonal relationships; For teachers who have emotional and respectful needs, they can publicly praise and reward them. For teachers with a need for self actualization, professional development planning should be done, such as subscribing to professional journals, providing training and learning opportunities, and encouraging their participation in organization and management.

3.3 Universities need to establish a good mechanism for cultivating quasi preschool teachers

China’s universities have gradually added preschool education majors, and it is necessary to establish a high-quality mechanism for cultivating quasi preschool teachers and develop scientific targeted talent training plans. When recruiting students, they should actively establish long-term and stable cooperative relationships with rural kindergartens, such as the construction of practical bases and targeted training of rural talents. Rural prospective preschool teachers are assisted in reducing potential discomfort during the early stages of their work, enhancing their willingness to stay on duty, assisting in the revitalization of rural talents, and providing talent security for the comprehensive revitalization of rural areas.

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