

Kindergarten Teachers' Resilience Factors

* Guohui Zhang¹ and Anchalee Chayanuvat²

Doctoral Degree Program in Educational Studies
Suryadhep Teachers College Rangsit University, Pathumthani, Thailand

*Corresponding author, E-mail: anchalee.c@rsu.ac.th

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Abstract

Teachers' Resilience is a significant factor that influences a teacher's decision whether to remain on the job. This study aimed to explore factors that affect kindergarten teachers' resilience, influencing a teacher to keep the job or quit the job. The narrative research method was used to collect the data from three volunteering kindergarten teachers in Hubei province. One was a novice teacher, while another was an experienced teacher and the other was an expert teacher. Data collection was done with an in-depth interview about their life stories as teachers. Each interview was conducted through a 60-90-minute VooV meeting. Then, the interviewed data were analyzed by the content analysis. The results of this study found that 1) parents and teachers affect a person's career choice; 2) personality affects a person's career choice; 3) salary and social status affect a person's job choice and whether or not to quit; 4) the work environment affects the turnover rate of kindergarten teachers; 5) professional value affects the turnover rate of kindergarten teachers.

Keywords: *Teachers' resilience; Narrative research*

1. Introduction

Teacher resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back from setbacks and adapt to new circumstances in the challenging profession of teaching (Wang, 2021). Kindergarten teachers play a fundamental role in shaping young children's early learning experiences. Their resilience directly affects the quality of education provided to these children. Resilient teachers can effectively manage challenges and continue to provide high-quality education despite difficulties (Vorkapić, 2012). Hong (2012) emphasizes the importance of resilience responses in navigating challenges such as classroom management and lesson delivery.

In addition, previous studies show that teacher resilience underscores the importance of understanding and promoting resilience among educators to ensure their well-being and longevity in the profession (Beltman et al., 2011; Peters & Pearce, 2012; Hong, 2012). High teacher turnover rates can disrupt the continuity and stability of education for students. When teachers leave their jobs frequently, it can be disruptive for students who

need consistency and nurturing relationships to thrive academically and emotionally (Kubicek et al., 2017).

Constantly hiring and training new teachers is costly for kindergartens. Investigating factors that influence teacher retention can help schools develop strategies to retain experienced and effective educators, saving money on recruitment and training.

2. Research Objective

To explore the factors that affect kindergarten teachers' resilience, influencing a teacher to keep the job or quit the job

3. Research Question

What are the factors that affect kindergarten teachers' resilience, influencing a teacher to keep the job or quit the job?

4. Research Methodology

In this study, the narrative research method was used to collect the data from three volunteering kindergarten teachers in Hubei province. One was a novice teacher, another was an experienced teacher, and the third was an expert teacher. Data collection involved conducting in-depth interviews about their life stories as teachers. Each interview, lasting 60-90 minutes, was held via VooV meeting. At the beginning of the interviews, the participants were informed about the general research guidelines and procedures. Each interview was conducted in a relaxed and conversational way. In addition, all interviews were audio recorded. The collected data were then analyzed using content analysis.

5. Research Analysis

The three cases were A, B, and C (pseudonyms). Their life stories are presented below.

Case 1-A's story

A was born in 2001 in Wuhan City, Hubei Province. She graduated with a degree in preschool education and has been working for one year. She is a novice teacher. She is the only child in her family, and her mom and dad love her very much.

The reasons why she wanted to become a kindergarten teacher

When I was young, I showed a strong interest in young children. The children in my neighborhood always gathered together, and I often acted as a small guide, organizing various games for them to play. At that time, I felt that being with children was a fun and fulfilling experience. I had no idea at the time that this interest would become my future career choice. By the way, I chose the preschool education major alone because I felt I was a good fit for this job. My parents supported me in becoming a kindergarten teacher very much. My parents thought that the job was stable and easy to find a boyfriend.

What she used to think of kindergarten teachers

Since I was a child, I have always thought that kindergarten teachers do a very great job. And I thought working in kindergartens would be happy because there would be no complex interpersonal relationships with young children.

After teaching for one year, she changed her view about being a kindergarten teacher

Now I feel that being a kindergarten teacher is not so easy. When I got my schedule at college, I was stunned. More than 20 lessons a week, not only to learn professional knowledge, such as child psychology, kindergarten teachers, and oral training, but also to learn professional skills, such as singing, dancing, painting, and so on. This is when I realized that kindergarten teachers are not as easy as I thought. Kindergarten teachers not only have to teach children culture and knowledge but also have to take care of the children's daily lives, which is not easy and deserves everyone's respect. But the job is very tiring, often overtime, and the salary is very low.

The event or person that has impressed her the most

When I was a kindergarten intern, I encountered a memorable incident: a teacher took over a new class, and when she poured water for the students, she realized that none of the students had said thank you to her. During the lesson, the teacher said to the students, "What should you say when I pour you water?" The students talked and said everything, and finally, the teacher guided the students "What should you say when you show your appreciation?" "Thank you", the students replied. Finally, the teacher said, "In the future, when teachers pour water for you or do other things, don't forget to say thank you." Through a small incident of pouring water, this teacher accomplished a profound educational lesson for her students, which not only opened their hearts to gratitude but also strengthened my determination to become a kindergarten teacher.

I used to think, like many people, that a teacher was a babysitter, but this gratitude lesson changed my mind completely. It turns out that early childhood education is such an important career that it can change a child's life.

Whether she wants to quit

Yes, I want to change my job. After working for some time, I realized that the leaders seldom paid attention to the work of kindergarten teachers, and very few of them went to listen to classes; in the regular meetings of the teachers, the leaders emphasized more on the safety of the students and seldom touched on the quality of the teachers' teaching. Kindergarten teachers were often pulled out to do things that had nothing to do with teaching, and the school's decision-makers subconsciously assumed that one less class would not affect the students.

I was so energized when I first went into the school that I expressed my desire to listen to the experienced teachers and was politely turned down. Later, I proposed to organize teachers to prepare lessons together, which would not only improve the quality of teaching but also strengthen the teachers. However, this offer was rejected. Some teachers privately complained that I like to perform blindly, and said that do not let them work, they want to rest.

Furthermore, I know that as a kindergarten teacher, the pay is low, but I don't expect it to be so low. I only get \$2,500 a month, after rent and food, there's not much left. I wonder many times whether everything will get better when I get my junior title, but I am not sure.

Case 2-B's story

B was born in 1994 in Xiantao City, Hubei Province. He's been working for seven years. He is an experienced teacher. His mother is a primary school Chinese teacher and his father is a junior high school math teacher. B's family attaches great importance to his education.

Reasons for choosing a preschool education major

When I was young, my mother and father bought a lot of books for me, and when I grew up, they enrolled me in all kinds of tutorial classes. However, I am not good at learning, and my college entrance examination results are very poor, so I finally chose to enroll in the low-score preschool education program.

My dad and mom were super pissed when they found out about the preschool program I chose to major in. They thought boys shouldn't be kindergarten teachers because the pay was too low to support a family. My father once said: I wouldn't be so

violently opposed to you even if you were an elementary school teacher. My father wants me to change my career after graduation because he thinks it's a shame for a boy to be a kindergarten teacher and he can't even support his wife and kids in the future. I agree with my father. I didn't want to be a kindergarten teacher either, but because the grades were too low, I had no choice.

What he used to think about being a kindergarten teacher

My father and mother are teachers. As long as I did not study well, my father and mother would say: "Be careful, you won't be able to get into a good university in the future, and you can only go to kindergarten to take care of children." So I always feel that only people with poor grades would become kindergarten teachers and babysit other people's children.

After teaching for seven years, he developed his current view of kindergarten teachers

This year, the fourth group of children I taught graduated. When I see them graduate, I feel an inexplicable sense of pride. They are the witnesses of my hard work and the most valuable harvest in my career.

I used to think kindergarten teachers were babysitters, now I don't think like that. I think I am also contributing to society in my own way. In this kindergarten, which is full of children's innocence and sunshine, I have found my happiness. I not only teach the children knowledge but also irrigate their growth with my heart. As a kindergarten teacher, I feel that I have played an important role in nurturing several loving and responsible future stars for this society. I love my job and am proud to be a kindergarten teacher.

The event or person that has impressed him the most

I chose to major in preschool education because of my poor grades, and I didn't know that I had to learn dance, which I had never done before. The competition that made sure I was in dance team training because of the lack of boys at the time became a turning point in my life. There, I met Ms. Luo, who was our dance teacher. When I felt shy and inferior because I didn't do the moves well, she was the one who encouraged me by saying, "Don't feel embarrassed. You haven't taken dance lessons before, and dancing like this is already very impressive, and you're still quite talented at dancing." I know Ms. Luo was comforting me, but her words gave me strong confidence. I firmly believed that I had a great talent for dance, learned dance more and more hard, did not think that my dance was better and better, and then participated in a lot of dance competitions, won a variety of awards.

When I first started at the kindergarten where I work now, the school leader assigned me a teacher and let her teach me how to teach the class and how to deal with things that happen to the students. Mrs. Peng was about 40 years old and very kind. She taught me how to teach, how to deal with problems in the classroom, and told me what I had just taught that I had not handled well, and which method of teaching would be more effective. She tried her best to teach me, instead of hiding it. I have a lot of respect for her.

Whether he wants to quit

I would like to quit my job and find a job that pays me more. I'm very proud of my job. I think it's really rewarding and helps a lot of kids, and I wouldn't want to quit if I had a choice. But I'm a guy and I need to support my family.

Seriously, it's true that it's not a good choice for boys to be kindergarten teachers, the salary is really low. If possible, try to become college teachers. The people you come into contact with in college are different, the social status is a bit higher, and the pay is a bit better. The kindergarten paycheck is more than enough to support a family, so I still need to work part-time on the weekends and teach kids to dance.

Case 3-C's story

C was born into a poor rural family; her mother and father did not have much education. She has been teaching for 21 years, and she is an expert teacher. Her mother and father were very happy for her to become a kindergarten teacher because she was the only one in her family who was working for the government.

The reason why she chose to be a kindergarten teacher

When I was a kid, my family was really poor. My mom and dad had no earning skills except farming. But my mom and dad firmly believed that education could change my fate, so even if they borrowed money from others, they wanted me to study. I was not a smart kid, but I knew that the opportunity to study was very rare for me, so I studied hard. Fortunately, the final result was not bad, and I was admitted to an undergraduate college. But I didn't major in preschool education. I majored in finance.

I'm too introverted to deal with people, so I chose to become a kindergarten teacher after graduation. My parents are very supportive of my choice, and they also think that I am suitable for being a kindergarten teacher. Just that time, the city's public kindergartens were looking for teachers, these teachers would be organized if they got the job. I think that the job was an iron rice bowl, the benefits were pretty good, and I didn't have to worry about losing my job. My mom and dad were very much in favor of

me becoming a kindergarten teacher, which strengthened my belief in becoming a kindergarten teacher. Fortunately, I got in, so I became a kindergarten teacher until now.

What she used to think about being a kindergarten teacher

I used to think the job of a kindergarten teacher was stable and easy. I get along with children every day, there is no intrigue, and there are many holidays, and the salary is good.

After teaching twenty-one years, she changed her view of being a kindergarten teacher

Since I became a kindergarten teacher myself, my perspective on the profession has changed dramatically. I remember two months after I started working, the school held a parent-teacher conference, hoping that teachers and parents could communicate well. I was excited and nervous because I planned to talk about my teaching philosophy at the parent-teacher conference, hoping that I could communicate with parents effectively. As a result, no one cared about my teaching philosophy or the quality of my teaching at the parent-teacher conference. Parents only blamed the teacher for why their children did not have enough food, why their children drank less water, and why their children had injuries. At that time, I realized that although the parents were polite to kindergarten teachers, they did not respect them from the bottom of their hearts; they felt that the kindergarten teachers were just babysitters, taking care of their children.

The event or person that has impressed her the most

Many of my colleagues treat their work irresponsibly. They think that the kindergarten curriculum is so simple that they don't need to prepare lessons in advance and just do whatever they want. But Ms. Li never thought of it that way. She believes that the job of a kindergarten teacher is very important because the students are like a blank sheet of paper and the teacher is the one who draws on the paper, so Ms. Li takes the job very seriously. She would prepare her lessons in advance and look for easy-to-understand teaching methods on the Internet. To improve her teaching level faster, she also actively participated in open classes. After class, she would play games and sing songs with her students and do her best to take care of them. Her serious working attitude infected me, and I began to take my work as seriously as she did. Slowly, I found that my teaching ability was getting stronger and stronger, my leaders and colleagues respected me more and more, my students liked me more and more, my children's parents respected me more and more, and I was often praised by my leaders.

Whether she wants to quit

When I first started working, I wanted to quit every day because the salary was really low and the workload was huge. Now I don't want to quit. I'll work until I retire. Because I have been awarded the highest professional title, am a professor-level figure, all the teachers respect me, and my salary is quite high. The most important thing is that I feel I can do something more for early childhood education. I can help kindergartens train new teachers. I can also give lectures everywhere to teach the relevant theoretical knowledge.

6. Discussion

Overall through the interviews, we found out the reasons why these three individuals entered early childhood education, how they viewed the job before they became kindergarten teachers, how they viewed the job after they became kindergarten teachers, and whether or not they wanted to quit their jobs.

Table 1 : The Four Steps of Three Kindergarten Teachers

Teachers	Reasons for entering this job	Thought about this job (Before)	Think about this job (Now)	Decision on whether to leave the job
A (Novice Teacher)	1. Interest in young children at a young age 2. Supported by parents	1. A stable job 2. Easy to find a boyfriend 3. A great job 4. A happy work, 5. Sample interpersonal relationships	1. Heavy workload 2. Work overtime 3. Low salary 4. Need professional skills 5. A job worthy of others' respect 6. Bad work environment	Want to quit
B (Experienced Teacher)	1. Because of the low score 2. Influenced by teachers	1. Low pay 2. A shameful job for boys 3. Low social status 4. A babysitter	1. A job worthy of respect 2. Low pay 3. Heavy workload 4. Love this job 5. Proud of this job 6. Good work environment	Want to quit
C (Expert Teacher)	1. Her personality was too introverted 2. Supported by parents	1. A stable job 2. Good pay 3. An easy job	1. Respected by leaders 2. Respected by colleagues 3. Loved by students 4. High salary 5. High social value 6. Proud of this job	No plans to quit

Parents and teachers affect a person's career choice

Through the interview, we found that, in addition to their personality, children's career choices are affected by parents and teachers. In particular, the parental relationship significantly shapes children's identities (Aquilino, 1994), with parents exerting a substantial impact on professional identity formation (Berrios & Allison, 2005) and career growth (Lauer et al., 2010). Monrouxe (2016) stresses the importance of parents' opinions and involvement in shaping children's career paths, guiding them based on their own experiences and understanding of work's significance. In addition, teachers themselves serve as pivotal influences in shaping professional identities, supported by teacher education programs and environmental factors (Bullough, 1997; Cooper & Olson, 1996). Past school experiences and relationships with teachers significantly influence students' aspirations to become educators (Hong, 2010). Additionally, mentor teachers play a crucial role in molding the professional identities of pre-service teachers, fostering confidence and skills through positive mentoring relationships (Izadinia, 2015).

In conclusion, the motivational influence and guidance provided by parents and mentors play a vital role in shaping individuals' professional identities and career paths, ultimately impacting their personal and professional development.

Personality affects a person's career choice

Personality plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' career choices, as evidenced by the insights gathered from interviews and supported by existing research. The influence of personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience is particularly notable in guiding individuals toward professions that resonate with their unique characteristics and preferences (Judge et al., 1999; Poropat, 2009).

Specifically, agreeableness, characterized by warmth, empathy, and cooperation, plays a significant role in career decisions that involve helping others and making a positive impact (McCrae & Costa, 1999). This trait often leads individuals to pursue careers in fields such as teaching, counseling, social work, healthcare, or community service, where they can utilize their interpersonal skills and compassion to contribute meaningfully to society.

Overall, recognizing the influence of personality on career choices is essential for individuals to align their strengths and motivations with suitable career paths. Understanding these dynamics can lead to greater job satisfaction, fulfillment, and

success in chosen professions, ultimately benefiting both individuals and the organizations or sectors they serve.

Salary and social status affect a person's job choice and whether or not to quit

Through the interviews, it became evident that salary and social status held significant importance for the three kindergarten teachers both in their decision to pursue a career in kindergarten teaching and in their considerations when contemplating leaving the profession.

Brown and Sessions (1999) highlight that the significance of salary cannot be understated, as competitive salaries and financial benefits are fundamental in providing a sense of security and well-being. Higher salaries also serve as powerful motivators for individuals to remain dedicated to their professions, as evidenced by studies across various industries.

Furthermore, social status holds substantial importance in job choice and retention. Jobs associated with higher social status or prestige not only attract more candidates but also tend to have lower turnover rates. The studies by Rowed (2023), Thompson and Subich (2006) underscore the impact of social recognition and respect within a job, highlighting their influence on job satisfaction and the decision to stay or leave a position.

Recognizing the significance of salary and social status can help kindergartens and policymakers develop strategies to attract and retain talented kindergarten teachers. Providing competitive salaries, financial benefits, opportunities for career advancement, and fostering a culture of social recognition and respect can contribute significantly to teacher satisfaction, retention, and overall workforce stability in the education sector.

The work environment affects the turnover rate of kindergarten teachers

Through the interviews, we found that the work environment plays a crucial role in influencing the turnover rate of teachers. A positive and supportive work environment can lead to higher job satisfaction, increased motivation, and greater commitment, ultimately reducing turnover rates. On the other hand, a negative or unsupportive work environment can contribute to stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction, leading to higher turnover rates among teachers.

Several factors within the work environment can impact the turnover rate of teachers: Leadership and Management: The critical role of effective leadership and supportive management practices in cultivating a positive work environment and reducing turnover among educators. Transformational leadership, characterized by inspiration, motivation, clear direction, and support, plays a pivotal role in fostering teacher satisfaction and commitment (Leithwood et al., 2008). Moreover, collective teacher efficacy and positive leader relationships contribute significantly to reducing turnover intentions by ensuring that educators feel valued, supported, and part of a collaborative and growth-oriented culture (Goddard et al., 2000). By implementing these leadership practices and fostering a positive organizational culture, educational institutions can create an environment where teachers thrive, leading to improved outcomes for both educators and students alike (Harris & Chapman, 2002).

Colleague Relationships: Positive and supportive relationships among colleagues can contribute to a sense of belonging, job satisfaction, and overall well-being, leading to lower turnover rates. Conversely, negative or strained colleague relationships can create stress, dissatisfaction, and a desire to leave the profession, resulting in higher turnover rates. Goddard et al. (2000) and Hakanen et al. (2006) emphasize the significance of collective teacher efficacy, good colleague relationships in lowering turnover intentions among educators. The findings of the research found that teachers with perceptions of high support and collaboration among their colleagues were more likely to express low turnover intentions and high job satisfaction. Ansley, Houchins, and Varjas (2019) posit that positive colleague relationships are a key factor linked to a supportive work environment, and help reduce turnover rate of educators.

Workload: Excessive workload, unrealistic job demands, and lack of resources can contribute to stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction among teachers, ultimately leading to higher turnover rates. Research by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) highlight the impact of workload on teacher well-being and turnover intentions. The study found that teachers who experienced high levels of workload and job demands were more likely to report higher levels of stress and burnout, which in turn increased their likelihood of considering leaving the profession.

Organizational Culture: A positive organizational culture that values collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement can contribute to a supportive work environment. Van Lankveld et al. (2017) point out that teachers felt that their departments were hierarchical, competitive, untrustworthy, or prioritized research over teaching, which had a restrictive effect on their professional identity. Teachers who worked in such settings felt alone and were afraid to ask for assistance, and had few professional options that were dependent on their effectiveness as teachers. Research by Song et al.

(2011) and Jamil et al. (2022) underscore the role of organizational culture in reducing teacher turnover.

In conclusion, the work environment significantly impacts the turnover rate of teachers. Creating a positive, supportive, and conducive work environment through effective leadership, colleague relationships, manageable workloads, and a positive organizational culture is essential for retaining teachers and promoting their well-being.

Professional value affects the turnover rate of kindergarten teachers

Through the interviews, we found that B enjoys his job and finds it rewarding. He wants to quit his job because he needs to support his family, but he hasn't quit his job yet, and the only reason he's holding on to it now is because he finds the job valuable. It was also found that the expert teacher doesn't want to quit her job and wants to contribute to the kindergarten and society.

Research by Ingersoll and Strong (2011) highlight the importance of professional value in teacher retention. Their study found that teachers who perceived themselves as valued and respected by school leadership and colleagues were more likely to remain in their positions. Conversely, teachers who felt undervalued or experienced a lack of support were more inclined to leave the profession or switch schools. Santoro (2021) finds that teachers who perceived their work as meaningful and impactful on students' lives were more likely to remain in the profession. This perception of professional value was closely linked to job satisfaction and overall commitment to teaching.

In conclusion, professional value is a crucial factor that affects the turnover rate of teachers. When teachers feel that their job is meaningful, fulfilling, and aligned with their values, they are more likely to stay committed to their roles. Conversely, if teachers perceive their jobs as lacking value, unfulfilling, or incongruent with their values, they are more prone to turnover.

7. Conclusion

Based on these three case studies, it is evident that several significant factors influence teachers' decisions to either remain in the profession or leave. Initially, many young pre-service teachers perceive the job as straightforward and manageable, especially given that they are dealing with young children. This misconception is often due to a lack of comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in teaching. As they transition into their roles, they quickly realize that the profession demands a substantial amount of overtime work and comes with a heavy workload. This revelation can be quite overwhelming and disheartening for new teachers.

One of the primary factors contributing to teachers leaving the profession is the discrepancy between their expectations and the reality of the job. At the beginning of their careers, teachers often underestimate the extent of the administrative tasks, lesson planning, grading, and extracurricular responsibilities that extend beyond classroom teaching. The heavy workload and the need for extensive preparation time can lead to burnout, especially if the teachers lack adequate support and resources.

Additionally, compensation plays a critical role in job retention. Many young teachers find the pay insufficient, especially when compared to the amount of work required and the emotional investment involved. The combination of low pay and high workload can lead to job dissatisfaction, prompting teachers to seek alternative careers that offer better financial rewards and work-life balance.

Furthermore, the support system within the school environment significantly impacts teachers' decisions to stay. Teachers who receive robust mentorship, professional development opportunities, and emotional support from colleagues and administrators are more likely to persist in the profession. Conversely, a lack of support can exacerbate feelings of isolation and frustration, contributing to higher turnover rates.

Teachers who remain in the profession often exhibit high levels of resilience. Resilience enables them to navigate the challenges and stressors associated with teaching. These teachers typically develop strong coping strategies, such as seeking support from peers, engaging in continuous professional development, and maintaining a positive outlook despite adversities. They are also more likely to find intrinsic motivation and fulfillment in their interactions with students and the impact they have on their students' lives.

Moreover, job satisfaction among teachers who stay is often linked to their sense of purpose and commitment to the education field. These teachers derive a sense of accomplishment from their students' progress and achievements, which reinforces their dedication to the profession. The intrinsic rewards of teaching, such as fostering a love of learning and making a difference in children's lives, can outweigh the external challenges.

In summary, while the initial perception of teaching as a simple and easy job can quickly be dispelled by the realities of heavy workloads and low pay, those who remain in the profession are typically characterized by their resilience, support systems, and intrinsic motivation. Addressing the factors that lead to teacher dissatisfaction and turnover, such as workload management, competitive compensation, and robust support networks, is essential for improving teacher retention and ensuring a stable and effective educational environment.

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