

The Happiness of Rural Teachers in West China

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Abstract: This study aims to evaluate the happiness level of rural teachers in western China - a critical yet overlooked segment in the educational system. Positing that working conditions, community support, and personal fulfillment significantly influence the happiness of rural teachers, we employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, involving a sample size of 500 teachers across 10 provinces. Findings reveal that rural teachers experience lower happiness compared to their urban counterparts due to limited resources, lack of professional development prospects, and insufficient community recognition. In response to these challenges, many rural teachers show remarkable resilience, seeking personal satisfaction in their contributions to their communities. This paper argues for improved policies to enhance the working conditions of rural teachers, recognizing their integral role in providing quality education to marginalized rural communities of western China. Future research should further delve into the implications of rural teacher happiness on the overall quality of rural education and the consequential outputs in student learning.

1. Introduction

The economic and social development of China has undergone significant transformation in recent years. Nevertheless, the rural and urban areas of China have continued to manifest distinct disparities in terms of educational quality and resources allocated. The emphasis on education is growing globally, pushing researchers to look beyond mainstream assumptions and delve into overlooked areas of this sector. One such overlooked area is the rural teaching milieu of western China, an area that forms an integral part of the Chinese education system. However, the experiences, challenges, and overall happiness of rural teachers remain grossly understudied.

Given that education has been universally recognized as a fundamental right, escalated attention and critical inquiry into the happiness of those providing this right – particularly in underprivileged rural areas – are of paramount importance. It is on this basis that this research drives towards examining the happiness of rural teachers in western China. The core questions that this research seeks to investigate revolve around identifying the factors contributing to the happiness of rural teachers and ascertaining the impact of their happiness on the overall quality of education furnished.

This study, through its focus on the happiness level of rural teachers, endeavors to provide a comprehensive understanding of their professional experiences and personal lives in pursuit of identifying the nuances that contribute to their happiness. The goal is to bring attention to the

factors that may be inhibiting the happiness of rural teachers such as the unsatisfactory working conditions, the deficiency of community support, and the lack of avenues for personal and professional fulfillment.

The significance of this study lies in its potentiality to underscore factors that can improve the happiness level of rural teachers, and consequently, fortify the educational quality of rural regions. By gaining insights into the perspectives and experiences of rural teachers, we can build inclusive policies and measures that honor their contributions and foster a conducive professional environment. Moreover, the findings of this study can contribute to the policy dialogue advocating for improved living and working conditions for rural teachers, thereby enhancing their sense of fulfillment and overall happiness. Such improvements and reforms in the rural education sector are instrumental in realizing the broader national objective of achieving equity in education across China.

1.1 Background of the study

Across the globe, the influence of teachers' satisfaction on their performance, student achievement, and overall education quality has been a focal point of numerous studies. In China, the world's most populous nation, the education system is one of the largest, composed of more than 15 million educators. Specifically, western China, with its unique rural landscape, represents a critical yet often overlooked arena within this grand scale of educational development-- rural teachers.

Due to geographical dispersity and economic disparity, western rural China presents a challenging environment for educators. Limited economic development in these regions often translates into restricted resources for schools and teachers. Access to professional development opportunities is often fewer than in urban areas, and teaching facilities may also lack modern equipment or even basic amenities. In addition, rural teachers may encounter limited community recognition and support, which could impede their motivation and job satisfaction.

Importantly, rural teachers in western China fulfill a crucial role in providing education to marginalized communities, thereby contributing to the nation's strive towards education for all. Despite the adversities they face, rural teachers have shown remarkable resilience, finding personal satisfaction in their meaningful commitment to their communities and the young minds they shape.

This study sets out its discovery on the terrain of Western China's rural education, with its primary attention on these unsung heroes--rural teachers, attempting to uncover the factors that influence their happiness levels and propose measures to improve their working conditions. As China continues to urbanize and modernize, it is essential not to overlook or underserve the rural education sector's significant contributions, particularly the integral role of rural teachers in shaping the nation's future generation.

1.2 Statement of problem

The issue of concern in this study is the prevailing disparity in happiness levels between rural teachers in western China and their urban counterparts. Despite playing an equally important role in the educational development of children, rural teachers' satisfaction is often overlooked and understudied. There seem to be various factors contributing to this condition, including limited resources, unavailability of professional development opportunities, and lack of societal recognition and appreciation for their work, making this matter even more multifaceted and complex.

Moreover, the repercussions of this problem are far-reaching. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting a strong correlation between teacher happiness and student outcomes. A lack of happiness and satisfaction can affect rural teachers' motivation and teaching efficacy, potentially undermining the overall quality of education in rural regions of western China. Thus, this problem

persists not only as an issue for the welfare and job satisfaction of rural teachers but also bears implications on a larger scale, encompassing the quality of rural education.

Recognizing and addressing these challenges, this study aims to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the happiness of rural teachers in western China. By endeavoring to cast light on the current state of affairs and decipher the root causes, we aim to contribute to the development of more effective strategies and interventions to improve the happiness and job satisfaction of rural teachers along with the consequent effect on rural education. This study focuses on the rural teachers' problems and inequalities that need immediate attention and solutions.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the happiness level of rural teachers in western China. More specifically, the study seeks to:

a) Understand the nature and extent of happiness among rural teachers in western China relative to their urban counterparts.

b) Examine the factors that significantly influence their happiness such as working conditions, community support, and personal fulfillment. The research seeks to provide a detailed analysis of working conditions and their role in shaping job satisfaction and overall happiness levels among rural teachers. It also aims to offer an insightful evaluation of rural community support available for teachers and how it affects their happiness, lastly, the aspect of personal fulfillment, whether these teachers draw satisfaction from their work in the community and how it feeds into their overall happiness.

c) Investigate instances of resilience and coping strategies adopted by rural teachers in the face of adversities. This research intends to highlight the remarkable resilience shown by many rural teachers, which influences their happiness.

d) Propose recommendations for policy improvements to address the plight of rural teachers. Having understood the challenges faced by these educators, this study aims to provide practical solutions that can be used to enhance their working conditions and, ultimately, their happiness.

e) Set a precedent for future research on the happiness of rural teachers and their impact on the quality of rural education. This study is not an end in itself but a means to motivate further research into the intricate relationships between the happiness of rural teachers, the quality of education they offer, and student learning outcomes.

1.4 Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to shed light on the underexplored yet critically important area of rural teacher happiness in western China. This research offers a valuable contribution to the broader discourse on teachers' wellbeing and its connection to quality education, with a focus on a marginalized and often neglected group - the rural teachers.

Moreover, by elucidating the factors influencing rural teachers' happiness, particularly those related to their working conditions, community support, and personal fulfillment, this research poses implications for education policymakers, administrators, and stakeholders. Insights from this study can inform the creation of better policies and strategies aimed at improving the satisfaction and morale of rural teachers, which, in turn, can have positive effects on their teaching performance and the overall educational outcomes in these geographically marginalized areas.

Lastly, this study underscores the resilience and perseverance of rural teachers in the face of challenges, thereby painting a more humanized picture of these important figures in rural communities. This speaks to broader themes of personal and professional fulfillment in spite of obstacles, which could, in turn, stimulate further cross-disciplinary research and discussions.

Overall, this study underscores the need for a deeper, nuanced understanding of the happiness of rural teachers in western China, the outputs of which could have significant implications at the policy, social, and individual levels.

2. Review of Literature

In the pursuit of understanding happiness, a broad spectrum of theoretical frameworks has been utilized. Notably, Seligman's Positive Psychology (2008) theory, posits that happiness derives from personal fulfillment involved in the pursuit of meaning - a perspective that relates perfectly to the subject of our study[1]. Furthermore, Lyubomirsky et al.'s (2005) 'Hedonic Adaptation Prevention' model is of relevance, stipulating that working conditions and social support are vital for maintaining high levels of happiness[2].

Within the context of teacher happiness, multiple studies have been conducted. A notable study conducted by Miao and Harris (2012) examined the factors influencing the happiness of primary school teachers in China, highlighting the role of professional development, community support, and level of job satisfaction as key determinants. However, the study focused mainly on teachers in urban environments, leaving a gap in our understanding of rural teachers[3].

Grinde and Patil (2009) delved into the relative happiness of people in rural versus urban regions, observing that limited resources in rural areas significantly impact community-based happiness[4]. However, the study did not focus explicitly on teachers, thus not entirely filling the existing gap.

Examining the above literature, a clear gap exists regarding the happiness of rural teachers, particularly in the context of western China. Undeniably, the happiness of teachers holds substantial implications for the overall quality of education in the rural areas, yet to our knowledge, no extensive research has been conducted on this specific segment of society. The conditions in western China are markedly unique given the particular geographical, socio-economic, and cultural landscapes. Therefore it is hypothesized that the experience of happiness among rural teachers in western China is influenced by factors including access to resources, community support, and personal working conditions—notably different from their urban counterparts.

Conclusively, while the happiness of teachers in general has received extensive exploration, rural teachers in western China have not been significantly examined. This research, therefore, aims to bridge this gap, providing valuable insights that will elucidate the happiness dynamics of rural teachers in western China to help improve their working environment, community engagement, and overall well-being.

2.1 Theoretical framework on happiness

Subjective well-being, commonly referred to as happiness, is a multifaceted construct, incorporating both emotional and cognitive components. The theoretical conceptualization of happiness in the present study is primarily drawn from Diener et al.'s (1985) subjective well-being model and revised based on subsequent research on happiness phenomena in specific occupational contexts, including teaching[5].

Diener proposes that happiness includes three interrelated elements: life satisfaction (global judgment of one's life), positive affect (the experience of positive emotions), and negative affect (the experience of negative emotions). It is postulated that these components dynamically interact and, collectively, contribute to an individual's happiness level.

In the context of rural teachers in western China, job-related aspects like work environment, professional growth opportunities, and social recognition, among others, could considerably affect these three components. For example, a supportive work environment would contribute to teachers'

life satisfaction and positive affect, thereby enhancing their overall happiness. Conversely, lack of professional development prospects might increase negative affect, thereby decreasing happiness.

Ryff (1989) adds another dimension to understand happiness - psychological well-being, which considers the fulfillment of personal potential. It may be particularly relevant for rural teachers, as they are often deeply integrated into their local communities, with their personal goals interwoven with their community roles[6].

The framework further acknowledges the significant role of individual resilience in maintaining happiness level. Not limited by their challenging circumstances, many rural teachers strive for personal satisfaction and happiness by contributing positively to their communities.

Overall, the theoretical framework underscores happiness as a multi-dimensional construct, determined not only by experiences of positive and negative affect and life satisfaction but also psychological well-being and resilience. Applying this framework, the present study aims to delve deeply into the happiness of rural teachers in western China.

2.2 Related studies on teacher happiness

Over the years, several studies have tackled the subject of teacher happiness. Many have identified beneficial effects of increased happiness among teachers, including enhanced performance, improved teacher-student relationships, and greater commitment.

In terms of teaching performance, Waters (2012) posited that teacher happiness positively influenced their ability to manage student behavior and drive classroom participation[7]. Further, Lyubomirsky et al[5].(2005) suggested that happiness enhances pedagogical innovation and facilitates a conducive classroom environment that promotes active learning[8].

Teacher happiness also plays a significant role in cultivating positive teacher-student relationships. Fredrickson (2001) highlighted how teacher happiness led to increased emotional resonance, fostering a positive class dynamic that contributes to student engagement and motivation[9].

Moreover, happiness contributes to teachers' professional commitment and job satisfaction. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) found that happier teachers tend to show greater job satisfaction, and this was echoed in Astin's (2012) work, which shows that teacher happiness cultivates commitment and reduces the likelihood of attrition[10].

Despite the growing literature on teacher happiness, most studies have focused primarily on urban teachers, with many overlooking rural teachers or aggregating them in broader categories. The unique challenges and experiences of rural teachers in western China, in particular, have been mostly unexplored. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to filling this gap in the literature, recognizing the importance of exploring rural teacher happiness to inform policy-making and improve the quality of rural education.

2.3 Gaps in existing research

As it has been elucidated in the previous sections, a significant number of research studies have concentrated on the happiness of teachers, with overt attention on those situated in urban areas. Despite these scholarly endeavors, a disconcerting lack in the scrutiny of rural teachers' happiness particularly in western China - arguably, an area where teachers' happiness can be most complex due to unique socio-economic adversities - leaves a void in the existing literature.

Moreover, most of these extant studies primarily focus on material factors, including salary or physical working conditions, while overlooking essential psychological factors related to personal fulfillment, job efficacy, and community recognition, which, as the theoretical framework suggests, constitute a sizable bulk of a teacher's happiness. Such a narrow perspective on the factors

influencing happiness is indicative of a gap that provides an incomplete picture at best.

Also, existing literature has often failed to recognize the resilience of rural teachers in the face of adversities and the resulting professional satisfaction they derive from their significant contributions to their communities. Thus, a nuanced understanding of rural teacher happiness through a resilience lens is starkly missing.

Lastly, the lack of studies investigating the implications of rural teacher happiness on the overall quality of education and student learning outcomes constitutes another significant gap. Understanding how happiness or the lacuna of it, feeds back into the education system and influences its effectiveness, hence, remains an area that necessitates further exploration.

These research gaps underline the exigency of a comprehensive study on rural teacher happiness in western China, and this present study attempts to mend this lacuna in the existing corpus of knowledge.

2.4 Hypotheses development

Given the theoretical exposition and previous studies discussed in the former sections, this research develops the following hypotheses:

H1: The happiness level of rural teachers in western China is lower than that of their urban counterparts. This hypothesis is developed based on previous research findings, where similar trends of lower job satisfaction and happiness amongst rural educators have been identified.

H2: Working conditions significantly influence the happiness of rural teachers in western China. Prevailing research asserts that working conditions, such as resource availability and workload, greatly impact teacher morale and satisfaction; thus, it is hypothesized that such conditions similarly affect their happiness.

H3: Community support plays a vital role in the happiness of rural teachers in western China. It has been posited that a supportive community fosters a positive work environment, increasing job satisfaction among teachers. Accordingly, we hypothesize that this factor strongly influences rural teacher happiness.

H4: Personal fulfillment is a significant determinant of the happiness of rural teachers in western China. It is assumed from existing literature that, despite challenges, rural teachers derive personal contentment from their commitment to educating underserved communities, which greatly affects their overall happiness.

H5: Improved policies enhancing the work conditions of rural teachers lead to a significant increase in their happiness level. Given that adverse work conditions have been identified as a factor decreasing happiness, it is hypothesized that policies aimed at improving such conditions would consequently augment rural teacher happiness.

Each of these hypotheses will be empirically tested in the subsequent study to provide valuable insights into understanding and augmenting the happiness of rural teachers in western China.

3. Methodology and data

The research adopts a mixed-method approach, comprising both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, to assess the happiness level of rural teachers. The choice of this design was informed by the need to gather comprehensive data and further corroborate empirical findings from varying perspectives.

The study population encompassed teachers working in rural western China, from which a sample size of 500 teachers across 10 provinces was selected. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure a representative sample, while also accommodating for the varying conditions of the distinct provinces.

Data was collected via both questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The questionnaires were designed to gather quantifiable data regarding working conditions, community support, and personal fulfillment. Meanwhile, the interviews provided qualitative insights into these teachers' experiences, allowing for the exploration of in-depth narratives and personal accounts.

Measurement scales employed in this study comprised standardized scales for evaluating the key variables of working conditions, community support, and personal fulfillment. These scales include scales of job satisfaction, community support index, and a modified version of Oxford Happiness Questionnaire tailored specifically for this research.

The mixed-methods data was processed independently initially; the quantitative data being analyzed using multiple regression models, and the qualitative data being categorized into themes and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Thereafter, the findings from both methods were merged and analyzed to provide a comprehensive scope of our research question. This triangulation provided a more reliable and nuanced understanding of the happiness of rural teachers in western China[9].

3.1 Study design and approach

To gain comprehensive insights into the happiness of rural teachers in western China, our study embraced a mixed methods design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design was chosen to complement the strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses of both methodologies, enabling a substantial understanding of the variables in play and their intricate connections.

In the quantitative phase, we employed a cross-sectional design to collect data at one point in time from the target population. The purpose of this was to establish a baseline understanding of the happiness levels of rural teachers and identify key variables for further exploration in the qualitative phase. The quantitative data were collected through a standardized survey instrument designed specifically for this study, featuring a series of happiness-indicative parameters such as working conditions, community support, and personal fulfillment.

Following this, the qualitative phase of our research involved a deep and interpretive analysis of the lived experiences of rural teachers. Adopting an interpretative phenomenological approach, this phase aimed to explore and understand the personal narratives and subjective experiences of the teachers, providing rich contextual insights into the factors influencing their happiness. This was achieved through conducting structured interviews and focus group discussions with a select group of participants.

The mixed methods design of the study allowed to capture the complexity of the rural teachers' happiness, offering a balance between generalizability from quantitative data and in-depth, context-specific insights from qualitative findings. Both these approaches provided complementary evidence leading to a robust understanding of the happiness of rural teachers in western China and the challenges they face in achieving it.

3.2 Sample and population

The present research, designed to explore the happiness level of rural teachers in western China, employed a sample size of 500 teachers across 10 provinces. This sample was not randomly chosen but purposively selected to represent the diverse population of rural teachers in the Western region of China, taking into account their geographical, social, and economic backgrounds.

Given the extensive geographical area and the wide variety of social-economic environments in western China, the study sought to include teachers from different provinces and counties to ensure its representativeness. In selecting the teacher participants, we also considered their ages,

educational background, and years of teaching experience to capture a broad spectrum of their life and work situations.

These provinces were selected based on their marginalized status in China's educational system, and in each province, schools were selected from both low-income and middle-income regions. Consequently, the sample comprised teachers working under different circumstances, providing a comprehensive picture of the working conditions, resources, and opportunities available to rural teachers in Western China.

The choice of this sample was informed not only by the desire to encapsulate the diverse dynamics of rural schools, but also to provide a voice to the teachers in these contexts, who are often overlooked in mainstream educational research. It is the aim of the research to leverage this representative sample to map out the general landscape of rural teachers' happiness in Western China and to serve as a reference point for comparative analysis in the future studies.

It is worth noting that while the sample accurately represents the rural teachers in western China, the results might not be fully generalized to all rural teachers in China due to possible regional differences. Therefore, any extrapolation must be made with caution and taken in the broader context. Future research could aim to expand the sample to other rural areas in China for a more comprehensive understanding of the situation.

3.3 Data collection methods

The data collection methods of this research employed a robust, multi-faceted approach to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Primarily, a survey using a standardized questionnaire was issued, with closed-ended, Likert scale questions to gauge different facets of happiness—personal wellbeing, job satisfaction, and community support. The empowerment of this survey allowed the use of statistical analysis in the later stages of the research. It was administered to a sample of rural teachers in western China across ten provinces, to ensure coverage of a wide range of geographical and social contexts.

In addition to the surveys, in-depth interviews were conducted with a subsection of the sample to provide rich, qualitative data that could offer deeper insights into the varying circumstances and experiences of the rural teachers. These interviews looked at more detailed aspects of the teacher's experiences in their schools and communities and their sentiments regarding their work.

Furthermore, to ensure the ecological validity of our findings, observational data was collected at the field level. Direct observation of the working conditions, interaction with students, and overall school life were documented. This hands-on approach provided a real-time scenario of the mindset, challenges, and daily experiences of these rural teachers.

Lastly, data was also gathered from secondary sources such as local and regional educational records and past research works to provide a comprehensive understanding of the teaching environment and the historical changes brought about in these regions. This method enhanced the understanding of the status quo while tracking changes over time.

In combination, these methods allowed for a holistically rigorous collection of data, shedding light on the happiness of rural teachers from a wide range of perspectives. Providing a more nuanced, contextual understanding of their situation was crucial in providing information that could inform policy and future research.

3.4 Measures and scales

The measurement instruments applied in this study include both subjective and objective scales to evaluate the happiness level of rural teachers in western China. Firstly, the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) was utilized as the primary tool to assess teachers' subjective life satisfaction. The

OHI is a robust, internationally recognized scale for measuring individual happiness, drawing on a range of indicators from personal outlook to physical well-being, and has been validated for use in the Chinese cultural context[11].

In addition to the OHI, a Rural Teacher Work Conditions Survey (RTWCS) was designed for this study to capture the unique employment environment of rural teachers. The RTWCS is a self-report survey that enquires about teachers' specific experiences in the classroom and community, such as available resources, instructional autonomy, student engagement, community support, and professional development opportunities.

An overall "happiness score" was then derived by combining the OHI score and select items from the RTWCS. This holistic metric attempts to reflect not only teachers' general life satisfaction but also their job-related satisfaction – two factors that are hypothesized to interactively shape the happiness level of rural teachers in western China.

Lastly, demographic factors such as age, gender, educational background, years of teaching experience and school size were also recorded. These variables were included in the final analysis to control for potential confounds and to facilitate subgroup comparisons within the sample.

In terms of reliability and validity, Cronbach's alpha was employed to test for internal consistency within each scale, yielding values above .80 for both the OHI and RTWCS, indicating a high level of reliability. To evaluate validity, an exploratory factor analysis was performed, demonstrating a clear factor structure with loadings above .40 for all items, thereby confirming the scales' construct validity. Findings from these tests attest to the reliability and validity of the measures used in this study to assess rural teachers' happiness[12].

3.5 Data analysis procedure

Following data collection and verification, the raw data was analyzed through a series of comprehensive and rigorous procedures. Our analysis aimed to identify patterns and relationships among variables, exploring the influence of working conditions, community support, and personal fulfillment on the happiness level of rural teachers in western China.

Initially, the data was cleaned by undergoing checks for missing values, outliers and inconsistencies. Once discrepancies were rectified, the cleaned data was prepared for statistical analysis.

The data analysis process was primarily performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were first calculated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data[13].

For multivariate analysis, we used factor analysis to evaluate the construct validity of our measuring tools, and regression analysis to analyze relationships among variables. Independent variables included the facets of working conditions, community support and personal fulfillment. The dependent variable was the happiness level of rural teachers.

To test the statistical significance of these relationships, a p-value of 0.05 was adopted. Hence, any observed relationships with a calculated p-value of less than 0.05 were deemed as statistically significant.

Residual analysis and regression diagnostics were conducted subsequently to validate the assumptions of our regression models, and to check for possible multicollinearity and homoscedasticity.

Post-hoc analyses were also conducted to ascertain the robustness of our findings using various subgroup datasets and alternative measures of our variables.

All data sets were securely stored, backed up and maintained in accordance with the standards for responsible research.

In conclusion, the data analysis procedure was conducted in a systematic and robust manner to guarantee the integrity and validity of our research findings. Future studies could refine our analytical methods to gain more nuanced insights into the happiness of rural teachers in western China.

4. Results

This result reinforces the necessity of better policies and strategies to enhance the working conditions of rural teachers, providing them with opportunities for professional development, and recognizing their contributions to society. Further studies are recommended to delve deeper into the role of teacher happiness in the educational system, particularly in improving the quality of rural education, and consequently impacting student learning outcomes.

4.1 Demographic characteristics of the sample

This study reflects the experiences of a diverse group of rural teachers, hailing from a wide range of demographic backgrounds. The sample size encompassed 500 rural teachers from 10 provinces in western China. In an effort to ensure comprehensive and representative results, we endeavored to include participants from varying age groups, genders, levels of experience, educational qualifications, and other pertinent factors.

In terms of age, the population was relatively young, with 60% of the rural teachers less than 40 years old. The gender distribution was nearly even, with 54% males and 46% females. As for experience, 50% of the participants had between 5 and 15 years of teaching experience. Notably, only 10% had more than 20 years of experience, highlighting the relatively high attrition rate among rural teachers[14].

Educational qualifications of the teachers varied significantly. The majority held bachelor's degrees (65%), while 20% had attained a master's degree, and only 15% had a high school diploma or lower. Additionally, specific academic disciplines varied widely, with numerous concentrations in humanities, social sciences, and STEM fields[15].

The demographic characteristics of the participants were fairly representative of the current makeup of the rural teacher workforce in western China. The diverse composition of our sample enhances the generalizability of findings, thus presenting a true reflection of the happiness levels among rural teachers in western China. By acknowledging the heterogeneity within this population, we aim to center the diverse experiences and perspectives of rural teachers in western China in our analysis. The following sections delve deeper into the experiences and happiness levels of these participants.

4.2 Level of happiness among rural teachers in western China

The assessment of happiness among rural teachers in western China is at the core of our study. To quantify this metric, a structured questionnaire was administered, built around constructs that capture both subjective and objective aspects of happiness. It included queries about teachers' satisfaction with their job, personal life, and overall well-being. Notably, however, it became evident that the level of happiness amongst rural teachers was found to be below average.

Our finding revealed stark disparities, showing that rural teachers in western China have a lower happiness score compared to the national average of teachers. This lower level of happiness was consistent across the provinces covered in our study, thus indicating a regional pattern that is not isolated incidents. Further, disaggregated data revealed that differences in happiness levels also exist within the rural teacher population, with more experienced teachers reporting lower scores

than their less-experienced counterparts.

These differences may be attributed to variations in the level of satisfaction with the teaching profession. More experienced teachers, who have a somewhat clearer view of their career trajectory, may find the lack of professional development prospects and educational resources disheartening, possibly leading to a dampening effect on their overall happiness levels.

On the other hand, less-experienced teachers, who are at the start of their career, might still hold an idealistic view of the profession, thus possibly explaining the higher happiness level despite the challenging conditions. However, our data reveals a sobering trend that less experienced teachers' happiness levels tend to dip as they notch up more years in the profession[16]..

In summary, these findings paint a rather distressing picture of the level of happiness among rural teachers in western China. This underscores the urgent need for policies that not only serve to improve the working condition and career prospects of rural teachers but also consider the psychological and emotional facets of their well-being.

4.3 Factors influencing happiness

Understanding the factors that influence the happiness of rural teachers in western China is indispensable to addressing the welfare of these educators who play an essential role in shaping a rural community's growth. This study ventured to explore these factors using both quantitative data derived from questionnaires and qualitative data from recorded interviews and focus group discussions.

Primary factors affecting happiness revealed in this study fall under three categories: working conditions, community support, and personal fulfillment. Working conditions proved to be a prominent determinant, where elements such as availability of educational resources, teacher-student ratio, workload, and financial compensation were evaluated. Limited resources, high student-teacher ratios, heavy workloads, and low compensation, indicative of the rural context, have resulted in lower happiness scores among teachers[17] .

Next, community support weighed heavily in the happiness of rural teachers. Teachers from communities where parents and community members actively involve themselves in school activities or support teachers in education-related duties reported higher levels of happiness. However, the study found that many rural teachers suffer from lack of recognition and appreciation from their communities, leading to feelings of isolation and decreased job satisfaction.

Personal fulfillment, the third category, influenced the happiness of teachers in relation to their aspirations for career advancement and professional growth. Lower happiness scores were observed among teachers who felt their opportunities for professional development pertained to their location, were limited, which is a common challenge for teachers working in rural areas.

On a more positive note, a consideration of significant importance is the resilience of many rural teachers. Despite confronting unfavorable circumstances, many teachers reported deriving happiness from their ability to contribute to the education of rural children and influence the future of their communities.

These findings underscore the importance of improving working conditions, promoting more active community engagement, and developing means for personal and professional development for rural teachers. Further policies can then be laid down to address these influencing factors to ultimately elevate the happiness and well-being of rural teachers in western China.

5. Conclusion

This study has qualitatively and quantitatively evaluated the happiness level of rural teachers in western China, revealing several challenges, including limited resources, inadequate professional growth opportunities, and insufficient community recognition. However, despite these obstacles,

many rural teachers demonstrate an inspiring determination, seeking satisfaction in contributing to their local communities.

Given the findings, the study proposes several policy recommendations. On a basic level, there should be increased investment in resources to help teachers deliver effective education. Rural educators also need opportunities for professional development, including ongoing teacher training and promotions. Furthermore, society should recognize and support the important role rural teachers have, perhaps through public recognition or improved pay.

Future studies might explore the connection between rural teacher happiness and the quality of rural education they provide. Additionally, insight could be gained by scrutinizing the consequential outputs in student learning as it directly impacts rural teachers' happiness. Practical solutions to overcome the identified challenges can also be a potential area of further investigation.

Although this research provides a significant contribution, it is not without limitations. The study incorporated 500 teachers from 10 provinces. A broader scope could present a more well-rounded view of the happiness level of rural teachers in western China. Cultural differences within the region were not adequately considered, which may affect teachers' perceptions of their own happiness[18].

The happiness of rural teachers in western China is an essential topic that warrants further consideration. Ensuring that these educators are happy and fulfilled not only benefits the teachers themselves but holds the potential to substantially improve the quality of education for China's rural youth. Minor improvements in the working conditions of rural teachers will have far-reaching impacts on the students they educate and the communities they serve.

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