



Influencing Factors and Improvement Strategies for Rural Teachers' Subjective Well-being: A Contemporary Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Teacher well-being is not only an endogenous source of motivation to promote teachers' professional development, but also an important goal to be pursued by teachers, and a major factor determining the quality of rural education. Based on the existing literature, this paper distills the influencing factors of rural teachers' subjective well-being and explores the interaction mechanism among them, from strengthening the balancing role of the government, playing the supporting role of the society, enhancing the strengthening role of the school, and calling for the strengthening role of the school. We propose rationalized suggestions in terms of strengthening the balancing role of the government, bringing into play the supporting role of society, enhancing the strengthening role of schools, and awakening the dynamic role of rural teachers themselves.

Keywords: Rural teachers, subjective well-being, influencing factors, promotion strategies

Rural teachers are the representatives of advanced culture and productivity in rural society and are the backbone of leading, promoting and facilitating the progress and development of rural society (Xu & Dong, 2020). Teacher happiness is not only a source of endogenous motivation to promote teachers' professional development, but also an important goal for teachers' professional development and continuous pursuit, and thus a major factor determining the quality of rural education, so it is important to enhance rural teachers' subjective well-being. The Party and the State have made unremitting efforts to enhance the subjective well-being of rural teachers. In 2019, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council released the China Education Modernization 2035, which calls for the improvement of the teacher treatment guarantee system, the implementation of the rural teacher living subsidy policy, and efforts to improve the political, social and professional status of teachers (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, 2019). The Party and the State have adopted a series of policy measures and have achieved certain results. However, rural areas and rural schools still suffer from a lack of teacher happiness and an inability to attract and retain rural teachers.

In this context, many scholars have conducted relevant research from the theoretical and practical levels. For example, a study by Huang, Y.Z. and Li, X.L. on rural teachers in Guangxi Province found that their happiness was not optimistic, and they had difficulty experiencing happiness in terms of economic income, occupational stress, burnout, and health status (Huang & Li, 2010). Xiao, S.B. also found that rural secondary school teachers' subjective well-being was lower than urban secondary school teachers due to the existence of low salaries, poor working conditions, narrow avenues for further education, low sense of achievement, and marginalized social status (Xiao & Li, 2005).

In summary, there have been a number of studies on the happiness of rural teachers in China, and there are also corresponding empirical research studies, most of which examine the subjective happiness of rural teachers from the perspective of quantitative research. Considering the vast size of China and the uneven geographical development, the situation of

rural teachers varies greatly. A comprehensive analysis of the existing research literature can help us better understand the situation of rural teachers' subjective well-being and the deep-seated reasons affecting rural teachers' subjective well-being and put forward relevant countermeasures and suggestions to provide an objective basis for stabilizing and developing the rural teaching force, promoting the overall optimization of the teacher structure, and advancing the prosperity and development of rural education in China.

1. Factors Influencing the Subjective Well-being of Existing Rural Teachers

From what we have seen so far, both literature analysis and field surveys indicate that rural teachers' subjective well-being is generally low. Combined with the literature, the following reasons affect rural teachers' subjective well-being.

1.1 Remuneration

Satisfaction with basic living needs is the material basis for rural teachers to obtain a sense of happiness. The state has issued many related policies for this purpose. However, due to the lack of a guarantee system to promote the implementation of policies, rural teachers are in the basic living needs of strength, physical health and other aspects cannot be effectively met, which seriously affects the physical and mental health and subjective well-being of rural teachers.

Existing studies have shown that the economic income level of teacher groups significantly affects their well-being, and the well-being level of high-income teachers is significantly higher than that of low-income teachers (Fenget al., 2010). In recent years, the state has successively issued a number of policy texts, which highly emphasize the development of rural education, strengthen the construction of rural teachers, and vigorously improve the salary level of rural teachers. Although the salary level of rural teachers in my country has increased year by year, compared with the rapid increase in prices, The growth rate of wage income is obviously still relatively slow, and the current wage level cannot meet the basic living needs of most rural teachers. At the same time, compared with other comparable groups (such as civil servants, employees of state-owned enterprises, etc.), the economic income level of rural teachers in China is low and the differentiation of salary income is not obvious, resulting in a large psychological gap among teachers (Yang & You, 2017). At the same time, after both the Compulsory Education Law and the Teachers Law have repeatedly emphasized that "the state protects the legitimate rights and interests of teachers", there are still problems with rural teachers' salary arrears and untimely and inadequate salary payments in individual areas.

1.2 Policy Mechanisms

At present, rural teachers are not only unsatisfied in terms of salary and remuneration, but also in other basic survival needs such as occupational stability, living environment, labor intensity and physical health care. In May 2001, the State Council promulgated the "Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education", requiring the appropriate combination of rural primary schools and teaching sites on the premise of facilitating students to enroll

nearby. After that, various regions quickly launched the “removal of schools and schools” in pursuit of economies of scale. The movement aggravated the decline of small villages and teaching sites, coupled with the development of the social economy, the pattern of dual society, the accelerated urbanization process, etc, resulting in the reduction of rural education, the number of rural teachers’ posts also decreased, and the rotation system The elimination system makes rural teachers face the pressure of occupational exit mechanism, which has a great impact on the occupational stability of rural teachers. At the same time, the “Rural Teachers’ Living Allowance” policy has a small coverage and low subsidy standards, which is not attractive to rural teachers. The low social insurance holding rate and physical examination rate also make it difficult for teachers to teach in small rural schools.

1.3 Social Status

During the period of social transition, rural teachers are in an awkward situation where their social status, social support, and social evaluation are relatively low despite their high social prestige in the propaganda sense, and the mismatch between their actual attainment and professional expectations has seriously affected their willingness to teach and their subjective well-being. Some scholars have shown from a sociological perspective that the lack of social capital limits rural teachers’ ability to acquire other capital and makes it difficult to convert their cultural capital into economic capital, thus reducing their social status (Yin & Li, 2016). As a group of intellectuals, rural teachers play an important role in rural education and the construction of rural spiritual civilization. The loss of their social status not only weakens their role as intellectuals but also silences their voice and makes them feel a strong sense of deprivation, which directly affects the construction of their positive role psychology and thus affects their subjective well-being.

1.4 Social Support

Negative social evaluation and lack of social support have led to burnout and a lack of professional well-being among rural teachers. On the one hand, the public’s understanding or lack of understanding directly affects teachers’ emotions, the achievement of teaching outcomes, and the ultimate attainment of their well-being (Miao, 2009). With the marginalization of rural economy and culture, as well as the rapid development of urbanization, the public lacks proper understanding and knowledge of rural teachers, and the ability and professional attitude of rural teachers are questioned by the public, and the quality of rural teachers is no longer trusted. This questioning and mistrust makes the rural teacher community feel depleted and burned out, and their professional happiness is reduced. On the other hand, lagging educational evaluations constrain rural teachers’ healthy physical and mental development. Under this educational evaluation system, teachers’ perceptions of the meaning and value of the teaching profession are external and instrumental, and they rarely feel the joy and meaning of their work and have a high intention to leave their jobs and a low sense of job satisfaction and well-being.

1.5 Professional Development

The development of rural schools is relatively less dynamic, with an ageing teacher force and

a long-standing structural shortage of staff, but has not been better resolved, and the village school management style is solidified, lacking a people-oriented concept. At the same time, the relatively closed and homogeneous teaching life and the high workload under the examination-based education have led to the inability of teachers to leave, the inability of information to be drawn in, the long-term “cultural desert”, the formation of relatively fixed teaching culture, the lack of shared professionalism and public philosophy in many rural schools, the lack of emphasis on teaching seminars, and the difficulty of forming a mutual support network among rural teacher groups (Dai et al., 2019). It is difficult to form a network of mutual support among rural teachers to meet their professional development needs of rural teachers.

1.6 Value Orientation

The world of meaning is the system of values that supports people in the real world and guides the practice of life, and is the origin of happiness. Spirituality is a special existence based on and beyond the material, which is both a concentrated expression of the individual’s overall outlook and a realm that the individual tirelessly explores and strives for (Cui, 2020). A non-ideal rural environment with poor material conditions, monotonous lifestyles, and scarce recreational activities will bring boredom to those who are spiritually barren. Especially for some of the new generation of rural teachers, their strong desire to socialize conflicts with the simple reality, which to some extent reduces their sense of well-being.

At the same time, in China’s rapid urbanization process, dominated by the cultural values of “leaving the farm”, rural schools and rural teachers lack rural ties to the local community, and are basically isolated from the local economic development and social and cultural atmosphere. Rural teachers have become “marginalized” and “strangers” to the rural community, have difficulty in developing a sense of belonging and attachment to the rural community, have a weak sense of cultural construction, lack firm beliefs in education, and have difficulty in developing a love for rural education, and naturally have difficulty in achieving happiness in their work as rural teachers.

2. The Mechanism of Each Influencing Factor of Rural Teachers’ Subjective Well-being

Through the above discussion, the subjective well-being of rural teachers is mainly influenced by four aspects from national system and policy influence, social influence, environmental influence, and self-awareness.

Institutional and policy impacts are reflected in material treatment and security, and work pressure. In recent years, rural teachers’ salaries have been significantly improved, but the rate of salary increase is far less than the rate of price increase, and teachers are in a state of disproportionate imbalance in both material and spiritual aspects due to the mental and physical overload of their work. The satisfaction of material needs is a fundamental component of rural teachers’ happiness, and to a certain extent determines the generation of rural teachers’ subjective well-being.

Social influences include imbalanced social status, social support, and learning opportunities. Although rural teachers are of great significance to the economic and educational development and cultural inheritance of rural society, their profession is not fully recognized and respected by society, and they do not receive more resources for education and teaching, which makes many rural teachers fail to experience the sense of professional accomplishment and professional happiness as teachers. Support and understanding from society are the basic conditions and external factors for rural teachers' happiness.

The influence of the environment is mainly reflected in teaching autonomy and humanistic care, etc. In many areas, rural teachers are either confined to the backwardness of teaching equipment and environment or subject to the dehumanizing management of the school normative system. The physical strain and the psychological burden arising from the heavy expectations of rural teachers are not understood and cared for, making them physically and mentally exhausted and unable to obtain a sense of teaching achievement and happiness. A sense of achievement is an important factor that continues to motivate rural teachers' development and is an emotional pillar for happiness.

The influence of self-awareness is mainly reflected in subjective attitudes and value ascription. When teachers have difficulty in deriving spiritual fulfilment from the job and gaining meaning for the realization of their life and life values, they tend to assign instrumental meanings to the job and thus lose enthusiasm and motivation for the work. For rural teachers, experiencing self-fulfilment and the abundance of the world of meaning is an intrinsic motivation for their happiness acquisition.

3. Strategies to Improve the Subjective Well-being of Rural Teachers

Based on the above analysis, enhancing the subjective well-being of rural teachers requires cooperation from the government, society, schools, and individuals to accomplish.

3.1 Strengthening the Balancing Role of Government

The government should fully recognize the importance of rural education to social and economic development and social stability, pay sufficient attention to the treatment of rural teachers when formulating various education policies and systems, and implement the law on performance pay for rural teachers. The government should ensure that the average salary level of rural teachers is not lower than the average salary level of national civil servants and that it is gradually increased. At the same time, governments at all levels should further increase their policies, implement policies that favour teachers who work in rural areas for long periods of time in terms of wages, and improve the standards of allowances to increase the career satisfaction of rural teachers. At the same time, the social security level of rural teachers should be effectively improved. Improve the social security system of rural teachers' medical care and pension, pay attention to the survival and development of rural teachers, improve the living and working conditions of rural teachers, and relieve the worries of rural teachers' work and life.

3.2 Play the Role of Social Support

Social support and trust are important components of a teacher's source of well-being. An atmosphere of public trust and support will give teachers a high sense of self-esteem and will view teaching as a career to be pursued and thus have a positive, affirmative view of it (Hong & Lu, 2015). Social media should publicize more excellent achievements and advanced deeds of rural teachers in order to form a good sense of social trust in teachers, relieve them of relevant worries about their work, be able to provide a safe and comfortable working and living environment and to create a harmonious social atmosphere, which will naturally improve their work efficiency and allow them to enjoy that high sense of accomplishment in their work, and their happiness will naturally increase.

3.3 Enhancing the Strengthening Role of Schools

School management needs to democratize management by taking into account the special psychological needs and nature of teachers' work. The design and reconstruction of the time system in school organizations should be based on positive human assumptions and humanistic feelings, giving teachers respect by trustfully giving them free time and dignity by giving them the right to use their time freely, so as to restore their inner sense of subjective self (Cai, 2015). To provide a platform for mutual learning and communication, and to enable rural teachers to participate in national and municipal training courses and high-level teaching evaluation and observation activities. This will enable rural teachers to broaden their horizons, develop their courage and make up for their shortcomings. Schools should actively organize support activities such as group lesson preparation, teaching seminars and subject research to form a good atmosphere for teachers' learning and professional development.

3.4 Awaken the Active Role of Rural Teachers Themselves

Enriching rural teachers' leisure life and improving life satisfaction Teachers' leisure life has important value implications for teachers' overall life quality improvement, autonomous professional development and self-actualization. The activities that rural teachers engage in during their leisure time can greatly enrich the spiritual world, make the mind completely relaxed, enjoy the joy of freedom, and become the master of their own lives, leading teachers to establish good professional cognition and accurately grasp their professional roles. They should overcome the instrumental value of teaching and establish the life value of teaching, guide the teachers' group to experience and recognize the potential of happiness in the psychological aspect and the part of self-actualization, and properly adjust the psychological state of imbalance between reward and payment on the basis of raising teachers' salary level.

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