Teacher Job Satisfaction in China, 2021 To 2025: Roles, Determinants, and Outcomes Across Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Education

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review synthesizes 42 China based empirical studies published in English from 2021 to 2025 across preschool, primary, secondary, and higher education. We map how teacher job satisfaction is defined, measured, and positioned as outcome, mediator, moderator, or predictor. Narrative synthesis shows consistent drivers in leadership, professional learning communities, school climate, autonomy, and social support, alongside strain from workload, hindrance stressors, and burnout. Satisfaction links to instructional quality, engagement, knowledge sharing, life satisfaction, professional development intention, and lower turnover intention. Tier comparisons highlight role differences for homeroom and subject teachers, and distinct higher education dynamics involving work family conflict, ostracism, and technology shaped climate. We outline levers and propose measurement standardization and longitudinal evaluation to guide policy and practice.

Keywords: Teacher job satisfaction, China, K-12 and higher education, Leadership and professional learning communities, School climate, Turnover intention

INTRODUCTION

Teacher job satisfaction in China affects classroom practice, staff retention, and institutional capacity. Evidence links higher satisfaction with stronger instructional quality through better teacher–student relationships (Harrison, King, & Wang, 2023). Satisfaction aligns with engagement under specific stressor profiles in universities and with kindergarten work engagement via vocational delay of gratification (Xu, Guo, Zheng, & Zhang, 2023; Zang & Feng, 2023). It supports knowledge sharing when burnout is contained (Wang, Li, Liu, & Zaggia, 2023). Lower satisfaction connects to burnout and multiple forms of turnover intention among university and junior high English teachers (Zhang, Li, & Gamble, 2022; Zhang, Shi, & Teng, 2024). Rural surveys report 21 percent teacher dissatisfaction, which signals risk to staffing in compulsory education (Wang et al., 2022). Across preschool, K-12, and higher education, determinants recur in leadership, PLCs, climate, autonomy, and social resources, while workload, hindrance stressors, and family pressures often reduce satisfaction (Liu, Keeley, Sui, & Sang, 2021; Zhang, Huang, & Xu, 2022; Zhang, Yin, & Wang, 2023; Han, Xu, & Xiao, 2022; Peng, Wu, & Guo, 2022; Hong, Liu, & Zhang, 2021; Su & Jiang, 2023).

The recent literature also shows job satisfaction in multiple empirical roles that vary by tier and context. Leadership and PLCs raise satisfaction through autonomy, collaboration, vigor, and identity, while climate, trust, and psychological well-being reinforce these pathways in schools and universities (Liu et al., 2021; Zhang, Huang, & Xu, 2022; Yiming, Yan, & Jinsheng, 2024; Zhao, Lu, Cheng, & Li, 2022). Autonomy links to mental health through teaching efficacy and satisfaction; personality shapes autonomy-supportive teaching that enhances satisfaction among young teachers (Peng et al., 2022; Li, Yao, Liu, & Zhang, 2023). Workload and role differences matter in middle schools, and challenge versus hindrance stressors differentiate engagement routes in higher education (Zang, Cao, Zhou, Jiang, & Li, 2022; Xu et al., 2023). This review synthesizes 2021–2025 evidence to map how satisfaction is measured and positioned, and to integrate determinants, mediators, moderators, and outcomes across China's tiers for actionable guidance.

Problem Statement

Teacher job satisfaction shows persistent vulnerabilities across tiers, with consequences for instruction quality and retention. Rural surveys report 21 percent dissatisfaction among teachers, which signals widespread risk to staffing and continuity (Wang et al., 2022). Studies link low satisfaction with exhaustion, burnout, and turnover intention in middle schools and English faculties, which undermines engagement and classroom quality (Zang et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024; Harrison et al., 2023). Policymakers have launched major initiatives, including the 2021 Double Reduction policy and 2024 nationwide campaigns to cut non-teaching burdens, yet implementation gaps remain in schools facing compliance and administrative load (MOE China, 2024). Ensuring salary parity with civil servants is a stated requirement, although local fulfillment varies and pressure persists in lower resourced regions (MOE China, 2021). The urgency is high for ministries, local bureaus, principals, and teacher educators who must stabilize workforce morale and protect instructional quality and student outcomes across China.

Research Objectives

1. To map measurement approaches and empirical roles of teacher job satisfaction across Chinese primary, secondary, and tertiary education, 2021 to 2025.

2. To synthesize determinants, mediators, moderators, and outcomes of teacher job satisfaction, and compare patterns across tiers and contexts in China.

Research questions

1. What measurement approaches and empirical roles of teacher job satisfaction are reported across Chinese primary, secondary, and tertiary education, 2021 to 2025?

2. What determinants, mediators, moderators, and outcomes of teacher job satisfaction show consistent or divergent patterns across tiers and contexts in China?

Limitations

This review has three manageable boundaries. First, it covers studies published in English between 2021 and 2025, which may omit relevant Chinese language work and pre-2021 foundations. Second, it synthesizes empirical findings across diverse designs and measures, so effect sizes are not pooled, and conclusions emphasize patterns and robustness checks rather than precise magnitudes. We did not conduct a meta-analysis, so quantitative statements reflect vote-counts rather than pooled effect magnitudes Third, the corpus centers on China and three tiers of education, which supports contextual depth but reduces generalizability beyond China. Last, rural, western provinces, and certain subjects remain underrepresented, which limits the precision of rural–urban and subject-specific contrasts. These choices keep scope focused, enable transparent coding of roles, determinants, mediators, moderators, and outcomes, and provide timely insight that stakeholders can apply across comparable settings. Methodological heterogeneity across instruments, samples, and analytic choices constrains cross-study comparability; our narrative tallies reflect this diversity

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept and Measurement of Teacher Job Satisfaction in China (2021–2025)

Across Chinese preschool, K-12, and higher education, teacher job satisfaction is operationalized through survey scales embedded alongside leadership, autonomy, climate, identity, stress, burnout, engagement, and turnover constructs. Measures draw on large datasets and researcher-administered instruments: TALIS 2018 samples inform national patterns (Liu et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2023), the China Education Panel Survey supports longitudinal analysis (Zang et al., 2022), and university or sectoral surveys are delivered via platforms such as SoJump or Wenjuanxing (Xu et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2022). Studies also recruit through WeChat in higher education climate work (Yiming et al., 2024). Sector-specific contexts include kindergarten and preschool (Xia et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2022; Zang & Feng, 2023), rural and VET settings (Wang et al., 2022; Fang & Qi,

2023), polytechnic and clinical training environments (Xiaoqing & Ye, 2021; Chen et al., 2022), and university faculties across disciplines (Meng, 2022; Xu et al., 2023).

Empirically, job satisfaction plays four roles. It is a dependent outcome in leadership, PLC, climate, autonomy, personality, values, and technology studies (Liu et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022; Xia et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023; Fute et al., 2022; Fang & Qi, 2023; Yiming et al., 2024). It mediates links from job load to exhaustion, burnout to turnover, climate to identity, autonomy to mental health, and ostracism to knowledge sharing (Zang et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022; Han et al., 2022; Peng et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). It moderates effects in burnout models and role-based comparisons (Lu et al., 2022; Zang et al., 2022). It acts as a predictor of engagement, instructional quality, turnover intention, life satisfaction, and PD desire (Xu et al., 2023; Harrison et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024; Meng, 2022; Qi & Derakhshan, 2023).

Theoretical Lenses and Mechanisms

Studies ground mechanisms in well-established frameworks that clarify how work conditions shape satisfaction and downstream outcomes. A JD-R and Social Exchange lens shows burnout and engagement pathways, with perceived organizational support buffering strain that erodes satisfaction (Chen et al., 2022). A transactional stress–coping model explains how challenge and hindrance stressors affect engagement, with job satisfaction suppressing or mediating effects (Xu et al., 2023). SCCT highlights career calling driving satisfaction through occupational self-efficacy among ideological and political teachers (Shang et al., 2022). Self-Determination combined with SCCT links basic psychological needs to self-efficacy and then to job and life satisfaction in universities (Meng, 2022). Conservation of resources theory clarifies how workplace ostracism depletes resources, raising burnout and reducing satisfaction that then lowers knowledge sharing (Wang et al., 2023). Conservation logic also frames work–family conflict effects on satisfaction via burnout, moderated by perceived organizational support (Su & Jiang, 2023). Herzberg's two-factor tradition informs polytechnic work using motivation–hygiene constructs (Xiaoqing & Ye, 2021).

Mechanisms appear as mediators and moderators that position job satisfaction within chains. Mediators include self-efficacy, professional identity, work engagement, perceived organizational support, coping, and vocational delay of gratification (Han et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2022; Zang & Feng, 2023). Moderators include teacher role, proactive personality, perceived support, and technological influence at the organizational level (Zang et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022; Su & Jiang, 2023; Yiming et al., 2024). As an outcome or driver, satisfaction links to instructional quality, engagement, knowledge sharing, mental health, and turnover intention across tiers (Harrison et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023; Han, 2022; Zhang et al., 2024).

Determinants by Domain

Leadership and professional communities feature prominently. Distributed leadership is positively related to teacher autonomy, collaboration, and job satisfaction, with autonomy and professional collaboration mediating effects (Liu, Keeley, Sui, & Sang, 2021). Transformational leadership strengthens all five PLC components, which in turn predict job satisfaction, while leadership also shows a direct positive link to satisfaction (Zhang, Huang, & Xu, 2022). Empowering leadership for kindergarten teachers improves vigor and affective commitment that then enhance satisfaction (Liu, Yang, & Huang, 2021). School culture directly promotes preschool teacher satisfaction, with curriculum autonomy mediating the effect (Xia, Wang, & Zhang, 2023). PLC characteristics in Shanghai, including collective inquiry, shared purpose, supportive leadership, and organizational structure, show positive associations with satisfaction (Zhang, Yin, & Wang, 2023).

School climate and organizational conditions are consistent drivers. A positive school atmosphere predicts satisfaction, with professional identity as a mediator and a chain pathway involving psychological capital and identity, although psychological capital alone does not mediate (Han, Xu, & Xiao, 2022). In VET, school climate increases self-efficacy and satisfaction, with self-efficacy mediating the climate–satisfaction link (Fang & Qi, 2023). Organizational trust lowers turnover intention among rural kindergarten teachers through teaching efficacy and job satisfaction as chain mediators (Zhao, Lu, Cheng, & Li, 2022). Perceived organizational culture correlates strongly with job satisfaction in a Henan polytechnic sample (Xiaoqing & Ye, 2021). In higher education, organizational climate and psychological well-being raise satisfaction, and technological influence

strengthens the climate–satisfaction relationship (Yiming, Yan, & Jinsheng, 2024). Clinical training contexts show satisfaction differences by gender, department, and title, highlighting management levers such as content, conflict balance, leadership attention, and subsidies (Chen, Jin, Zhou, Chen, & Wang, 2022).

Job design, personal resources, and strain also matter. Teacher autonomy links to mental health through teaching efficacy and job satisfaction as sequential mediators (Peng, Wu, & Guo, 2022). Work values raise satisfaction through work engagement during COVID 19 (Fute, Oubibi, Sun, Zhou, & Xiao, 2022). Job load predicts later exhaustion via reduced satisfaction among subject teachers, with role differences relative to homeroom teachers (Zang, Cao, Zhou, Jiang, & Li, 2022). Challenge stressors relate positively to engagement, hindrance stressors relate negatively, and satisfaction both suppresses and partially mediates stressor–engagement effects (Xu, Guo, Zheng, & Zhang, 2023). Burnout reduces satisfaction among rural generalist teachers, with perceived organizational support and work engagement as sequential buffers (Chen, Zhou, Zheng, & Wu, 2022). Personality affects satisfaction via autonomy supportive and controlling teaching styles (Li, Yao, Liu, & Zhang, 2023). Workplace ostracism increases burnout and reduces satisfaction, which lowers knowledge sharing, with burnout and the burnout–satisfaction sequence mediating (Wang, Li, Liu, & Zaggia, 2023). Learning organization dimensions also predict commitment through satisfaction (Wang & Rashid, 2022).

Family–work interface and social resources shape satisfaction and related intentions. Work overload and parenting stress reduce satisfaction via work–family conflict among female preschool teachers teaching online during COVID 19 (Hong, Liu, & Zhang, 2021). For female university teachers, work–family conflict lowers satisfaction through burnout, moderated by perceived organizational support (Su & Jiang, 2023). Social support raises kindergarten teacher satisfaction, with positive coping as a mediator (Yang, Lu, Ban, & Sun, 2022). Satisfaction predicts desire for professional development alongside organizational commitment (Qi & Derakhshan, 2023). Satisfaction relates to instructional quality through student–teacher relationships (Harrison, King, & Wang, 2023), and to turnover intention with differentiated patterns across satisfaction facets and burnout among English teachers (Zhang, Shi, & Teng, 2024). Doctoral lecturers and international high school teachers report satisfaction–turnover links and management related antecedents in local contexts (Jing & Photchanachan, 2021; Mo & Morris, 2024). University samples connect basic psychological needs and self-efficacy to job and life satisfaction (Meng, 2022), and teaching self-efficacy mediates job stress effects on satisfaction across subgroups (Liu, Yi, & Siwatu, 2023). Art teachers' satisfaction reflects leadership, culture, collaboration, efficacy, and exhaustion within an integrated model (Deng, 2025). Rural prevalence data underscore baseline risk for dissatisfaction that amplifies these determinants (Wang et al., 2022).

Mediators and Moderators Involving Job Satisfaction

Mediation evidence is extensive. Autonomy and professional collaboration transmit distributed leadership to satisfaction (Liu, Keeley, Sui, & Sang, 2021). PLC components carry transformational leadership to satisfaction (Zhang, Huang, & Xu, 2022). Vigor and affective commitment convey empowering leadership to kindergarten teachers' satisfaction (Liu, Yang, & Huang, 2021). Professional identity mediates school atmosphere to satisfaction, with a chain via psychological capital and identity, while psychological capital alone is not a mediator (Han, Xu, & Xiao, 2022). Self-efficacy mediates climate to satisfaction in VET (Fang & Qi, 2023), and positive coping mediates social support to satisfaction in kindergarten settings (Yang, Lu, Ban, & Sun, 2022). Work engagement mediates work values to satisfaction during COVID 19 (Fute, Oubibi, Sun, Zhou, & Xiao, 2022), and teaching style mediates personality to satisfaction among young teachers (Li, Yao, Liu, & Zhang, 2023). Satisfaction mediates burnout to turnover intention in universities (Zhang, Li, & Gamble, 2022), links autonomy to mental health in a chain with teaching efficacy (Peng, Wu, & Guo, 2022), and sits in serial paths from burnout through perceived support and engagement (Chen, Zhou, Zheng, & Wu, 2022). Ostracism reduces knowledge sharing through burnout, and sequentially through burnout and satisfaction, while satisfaction is not directly related to ostracism (Wang, Li, Liu, & Zaggia, 2023). Satisfaction connects to instructional quality via teacher–student relationships (Harrison, King, & Wang, 2023), and to life satisfaction through self-efficacy (Meng, 2022). Challenge and hindrance stressors influence engagement with satisfaction acting as suppressor or partial mediator (Xu, Guo, Zheng, & Zhang, 2023).

Moderation sharpens boundary conditions. Teacher role differentiates the job load to exhaustion pathway through satisfaction in middle schools (Zang, Cao, Zhou, Jiang, & Li, 2022). Subject specificity matters. English

and EFL samples show clear satisfaction–burnout–turnover pathways and PD intentions, while middle-school analyses differentiate subject teachers from homeroom teachers on job-load routes to exhaustion via satisfaction. Clinical and art teacher samples reveal management and culture levers that generalize as role-sensitive routes to satisfaction. Proactive personality strengthens the satisfaction to turnover intention link (Zhang, Li, & Gamble, 2022). Perceived organizational support weakens the work family conflict to burnout path that precedes lower satisfaction among female university teachers (Su & Jiang, 2023). Technological influence strengthens the organizational climate to satisfaction relationship in higher education, with psychological wellbeing as mediator (Yiming, Yan, & Jinsheng, 2024). College teaching self-efficacy mediates job stress to satisfaction, and the mediation does not differ by experience, ranks, gender, or workload (Liu, Yi, & Siwatu, 2023).

Outcomes Associated with Teacher Job Satisfaction

Evidence links satisfaction to core instructional and professional outcomes. Teachers' job satisfaction associates with higher instructional quality, partly through stronger teacher–student relationships, across Eastern and Western settings (Harrison, King, & Wang, 2023). Teaching engagement relates to stressor profiles, with satisfaction suppressing the effect of challenge stressors and partially mediating hindrance stressors on engagement (Xu, Guo, Zheng, & Zhang, 2023). In kindergarten, satisfaction correlates positively with work engagement, with vocational delay of gratification mediating the link (Zang & Feng, 2023). Knowledge sharing among university teachers rises with higher satisfaction and lower burnout in a pathway initiated by reduced workplace ostracism (Wang, Li, Liu, & Zaggia, 2023). Satisfaction participates in health pathways, linking autonomy and teaching efficacy to improved mental health in primary and secondary samples (Peng, Wu, & Guo, 2022). In universities, self-efficacy relates to life satisfaction through job satisfaction, indicating broader well-being effects (Meng, 2022). Satisfaction also predicts desire to attend professional development alongside organizational commitment (Qi & Derakhshan, 2023).

Turnover intention represents a prominent downstream outcome. Among English teachers, facets of satisfaction and burnout differentially predict intentions to leave the current school, the junior high sector, or the profession (Zhang, Shi, & Teng, 2024). University faculty show a pathway where satisfaction partially mediates burnout to turnover intention, with proactive personality strengthening the satisfaction to turnover link (Zhang, Li, & Gamble, 2022). Organizational trust reduces rural kindergarten teachers' turnover intention through a chain of teaching efficacy and job satisfaction (Zhao, Lu, Cheng, & Li, 2022). Doctoral lecturers display negative associations between satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intention (Jing & Photchanachan, 2021). International high school evidence highlights shifts from early satisfaction to later dissatisfaction that raise retention concerns (Mo & Morris, 2024). System-level surveys report notable dissatisfaction rates in rural schools, underscoring staffing risks that amplify these outcomes (Wang et al., 2022)

Tier and Context Comparisons

Preschool and kindergarten studies consistently show relational and resource pathways into satisfaction. Empowering leadership increases vigor and affective commitment, which raise satisfaction among kindergarten teachers (Liu, Yang, & Huang, 2021). School culture directly improves preschool teachers' satisfaction, with curriculum autonomy as mediator (Xia, Wang, & Zhang, 2023). Social support predicts higher satisfaction through positive coping style in kindergarten settings (Yang, Lu, Ban, & Sun, 2022). Female preschool teachers who taught online during COVID-19 reported lower satisfaction through work–family conflict driven by overload and parenting stress (Hong, Liu, & Zhang, 2021). Rural kindergarten turnover intention falls when organizational trust strengthens teaching efficacy and satisfaction in a chain pathway (Zhao, Lu, Cheng, & Li, 2022). Rural–urban patterns vary. Rural settings show higher dissatisfaction prevalence and stronger climate–efficacy–satisfaction chains, while urban PLC cases (for example, Shanghai) report denser collaboration and direct leadership effects on satisfaction. These contrasts suggest different levers for climate and PLC design across locales. These patterns highlight leadership, autonomy, support, and family pressures as early tier levers.

Primary and lower secondary evidence emphasizes climate, roles, and workload. School atmosphere predicts satisfaction through professional identity, with a chain involving psychological capital and identity, while psychological capital alone is not a mediator (Han, Xu, & Xiao, 2022). Teacher autonomy supports mental health through a chain with teaching efficacy and satisfaction in primary and secondary samples (Peng, Wu, & Guo,

2022). Rural generalist teachers show burnout that reduces satisfaction, buffered by perceived organizational support and work engagement as sequential mediators (Chen, Zhou, Zheng, & Wu, 2022). Job load predicts later exhaustion via reduced satisfaction for subject teachers, with homeroom teachers showing different patterns (Zang, Cao, Zhou, Jiang, & Li, 2022). Rural surveys report 21 percent dissatisfaction, which signals staffing risk in compulsory education (Wang et al., 2022).

Cross tier K-12 leadership and community structures align toward positive satisfaction. Distributed leadership relates positively to autonomy, collaboration, and satisfaction, with autonomy and professional collaboration as mediators (Liu, Keeley, Sui, & Sang, 2021). Transformational leadership strengthens PLC components that predict satisfaction and also shows a direct effect (Zhang, Huang, & Xu, 2022). In Shanghai, teacher centric and organization centric PLC features associate with higher satisfaction (Zhang, Yin, & Wang, 2023). Distributed leadership also lifts commitment through PLCs and satisfaction in a northern city sample (Xiu, Liu, Yao, & Liu, 2022). Satisfaction links to instructional quality through better teacher–student relationships, which underscores classroom relevance of attitudinal conditions (Harrison, King, & Wang, 2023). TALIS based multilevel work confirms both school level and teacher level correlates of satisfaction, which supports system and classroom targets (Liu, Keeley, & Sui, 2023).

Higher education studies show diverse organizational and psychological levers. Challenge stressors raise engagement while hindrance stressors reduce it, with satisfaction acting as suppressor or partial mediator (Xu, Guo, Zheng, & Zhang, 2023). Workplace ostracism lowers knowledge sharing through burnout and sequentially through burnout and satisfaction, while satisfaction is not directly related to ostracism (Wang, Li, Liu, & Zaggia, 2023). College teaching self-efficacy mediates job stress to satisfaction across subgroups (Liu, Yi, & Siwatu, 2023). Professors report moderate satisfaction shaped by work environment and job nature, with higher ranks more satisfied (Chen, 2023). Learning organization predicts commitment through satisfaction among lecturers (Wang & Rashid, 2022). Work–family conflict lowers satisfaction via burnout among female university teachers, moderated by perceived support (Su & Jiang, 2023). Organizational climate and psychological wellbeing raise satisfaction, with technological influence strengthening the climate link (Yiming, Yan, & Jinsheng, 2024). Personality shapes teaching style that then predicts satisfaction among young teachers (Li, Yao, Liu, & Zhang, 2023). EFL studies connect job satisfaction and resilience to wellbeing and to desire for professional development with organizational commitment (Han, 2022; Qi & Derakhshan, 2023). Specialized contexts extend these patterns. Polytechnic teachers show strong culture–satisfaction correlations (Xiaoqing & Ye, 2021). Clinical teachers report satisfaction differences by gender, department, and title that point to actionable management levers (Chen, Jin, Zhou, Chen, & Wang, 2022). International high school and public university cases reveal early satisfaction that later declines with leadership changes, workload, and unmet conditions, and they flag differences between home and expatriate staff (Mo & Morris, 2024; Morris & Mo, 2023). Full time art teachers present an integrated model where leadership, culture, collaboration, efficacy, and exhaustion shape satisfaction (Deng, 2025).

Synthesis and Gaps

Table 1: Synthesis

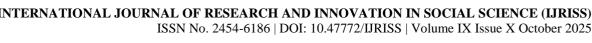| Mechanism	Main pathway	Tiers
Leadership, PLCs	Leadership or PLCs → autonomy, collaboration, vigor, identity → satisfaction	K–12, preschool
Climate, trust	Climate or trust → identity or efficacy → satisfaction	K–12, VET, kindergarten
Autonomy, health	Autonomy → teaching efficacy → satisfaction → mental health	Primary, secondary

Stressors, burnout	Workload or hindrance → burnout or conflict → lower satisfaction → turnover, lower engagement	Secondary, preschool, university
Social resources	Support → positive coping or engagement → higher satisfaction	Kindergarten, university
Technology context	Organizational climate → satisfaction, strengthened by technology; PW mediates	University
Personality, style	Big Five → teaching style → satisfaction	Young teachers
Ostracism, sharing	Ostracism → burnout → satisfaction → knowledge sharing	University
Instructional quality	Satisfaction → teacher–student relationships → instructional quality	Cross settings

Source: Author, 2025

Across tiers, convergent mechanisms appear. Leadership and PLCs enhance autonomy, collaboration, vigor, and identity, which lift job satisfaction. School climate, organizational trust, and supportive culture feed professional identity and self-efficacy that raise satisfaction. Autonomy links to teaching efficacy and then to mental health, with satisfaction in the chain. Stressor profiles sort clearly: challenge stressors can coexist with higher engagement, while hindrance stressors, workload, and burnout depress satisfaction and related outcomes. Social resources matter: perceived support and positive coping increase satisfaction and buffer work–family strain. In universities, organizational climate and psychological well-being predict satisfaction, and technological influence strengthens this climate link. As an outcome or conduit, satisfaction aligns with instructional quality via teacher–student relationships, knowledge sharing when burnout recedes, engagement, PD intentions, life satisfaction, and lower turnover intention.

Table 2: List of gaps

Gap	Why urgent	What to do
Measurement standardization and invariance	Limits cross tier comparability	Adopt common scales, test invariance by tier and region
Causal and longitudinal evidence	Cross sectional dominance weakens inference	Use panels, experiments, or policy natural experiments
Policy evaluation	Implementation effects remain unclear	Evaluate workload and salary policies with difference in differences
Coverage of VET and western provinces	Underrepresented contexts	Target VET, rural upper secondary, west regions
Student outcomes link	Sparse China based links	Pair teacher surveys with student learning measures
Subgroup heterogeneity	Role, gender, age, subject effects	Pre register interactions and report conditional effects

Technology measurement	School level tech context is coarse	Add validated tech climate and use indices
Role clarity of satisfaction	Mediator or moderator often underspecified	Enforce temporal ordering and competing model check

Source: Author, 2025

Heterogeneity by tier and context is consistent. Kindergarten and preschool pivot on empowering leadership, school culture, support, and family pressures. Primary and lower secondary foreground climate, autonomy, identity, workload, and role differences between homeroom and subject teachers. K–12 leadership and PLC structures show coherent positive pathways. Higher education adds work–family conflict dynamics, ostracism to knowledge sharing chains, personality to teaching style routes, and the moderating effect of organizational technology. Rural and VET samples emphasize climate, efficacy, and support. International and clinical settings surface management levers such as leadership attention, workload, and subsidies. Overall, job satisfaction functions as outcome, mediator, moderator, and predictor within stable pathways that travel from context and personal resources to classroom and retention consequences.

Research Methodology and Analysis Plan

We conducted a systematic literature review of 42 China based empirical studies published in English from 2021 to 2025. We report frequency tallies of effect direction and statistical significance by mechanism and tier. These tallies complement the narrative synthesis and do not pool effect sizes. The dataset comprises preschool, primary, secondary, and tertiary contexts, including VET, rural, polytechnic, clinical, and international school settings. For each study we extracted tier, context, sample notes, instruments, and how job satisfaction was positioned as outcome, mediator, moderator, or predictor. Besides, we coded design features for each study, including sampling frame, tier, instrument source, and analytic approach, and summarize design spread by mechanism and tier. We also captured reported determinants, mediators, moderators, outcomes, and the stated theoretical frames. Where studies referenced TALIS 2018, CEPS, or surveys via Wenjuanxing, SoJump, or WeChat, we recorded those features as part of measurement context.

Analysis followed a structured narrative synthesis that matches Sections 6.1 to 6.6 and the results in 8.0. We organized evidence into matrices for measurement approaches, theoretical mechanisms, determinant domains, mediator and moderator chains, outcomes, and tier comparisons. We mapped variables to JD R, Self Determination, Social Exchange, Conservation of Resources, and SCCT, then summarized consistent and divergent patterns by tier. We did not pool effect sizes. We built a pathway map and two concise tables, one for synthesis and one for gaps, using only relationships explicitly reported by the included studies. Findings directly answer both research questions and translate into levers for stakeholders across tiers, as presented in 8.0.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Table 3: Summary of findings

Domain	Finding	Representative evidence	Practical lever
Leadership and PLCs	Leadership and PLC components raise satisfaction through autonomy, collaboration, vigor, identity	Liu et al., 2021; Zhang, Huang, & Xu, 2022; Zhang, Yin, & Wang, 2023; Xiu et al., 2022	Empowering and transformational practices, PLC routines
Climate and trust	Climate, culture, and trust lift satisfaction via identity and efficacy	Han et al., 2022; Fang & Qi, 2023; Zhao et al., 2022; Yiming et al., 2024	Climate audits, identity support, trust building

Resources and autonomy	Autonomy improves mental health through efficacy and satisfaction	Peng et al., 2022	Protect classroom autonomy and feedback cycles
Stress and workload	Hindrance stressors and load reduce satisfaction and engagement	Xu et al., 2023; Zang et al., 2022	Cut bureaucratic load and redesign tasks
Social and coping	Support increases satisfaction through positive coping	Yang et al., 2022	Mentoring and peer support
Personality and style	Adaptive teaching style links personality to satisfaction	Li et al., 2023	Coaching for autonomy supportive style
Ostracism and sharing	Ostracism lowers sharing through burnout and satisfaction	Wang et al., 2023	Anti-ostracism protocols and support
Outcomes	Satisfaction improves instruction, engagement, PD, life satisfaction, and lowers turnover intention	Harrison et al., 2023; Qi & Derakhshan, 2023; Meng, 2022; Zhang, Li, & Gamble, 2022; Zhang, Shi, & Teng, 2024	Tie satisfaction metrics to teaching and retention plans

Source: Author, 2025

Question 1. What measurement approaches and empirical roles of teacher job satisfaction are reported across Chinese primary, secondary, and tertiary education, 2021 to 2025?

Across tiers, job satisfaction is measured with multi item surveys embedded in large datasets or sector specific instruments. National and city level analyses use TALIS 2018 to model satisfaction with leadership, autonomy, climate, and discipline covariates (Liu, Keeley, Sui, & Sang, 2021; Liu, Keeley, & Sui, 2023). The China Education Panel Survey supports panel style tests of job load, stress, satisfaction, and exhaustion with role contrasts between subject and homeroom teachers (Zang, Cao, Zhou, Jiang, & Li, 2022). University and sectoral studies deploy validated questionnaires via SoJump or Wenjuanxing, often with structural models that position satisfaction within stress, engagement, and climate frameworks (Xu, Guo, Zheng, & Zhang, 2023; Chen, Zhou, Zheng, & Wu, 2022). Higher education climate work samples through WeChat and models organizational climate, psychological well being, technological influence, and satisfaction (Yiming, Yan, & Jinsheng, 2024). Preschool and kindergarten studies apply scales for culture, social support, coping, autonomy, and satisfaction in large samples (Xia, Wang, & Zhang, 2023; Yang, Lu, Ban, & Sun, 2022). Specialized contexts include clinical teachers, polytechnic lecturers, and art teachers with samples linked to leadership, trust, collaboration, efficacy, exhaustion, and satisfaction (Chen, Jin, Zhou, Chen, & Wang, 2022; Xiaoqing & Ye, 2021; Deng, 2025).

Empirically, satisfaction assumes four roles. It serves as an outcome in leadership, PLC, climate, identity, work values, personality, and technology studies (Liu et al., 2021; Zhang, Huang, & Xu, 2022; Han, Xu, & Xiao, 2022; Fute, Oubibi, Sun, Zhou, & Xiao, 2022; Li, Yao, Liu, & Zhang, 2023; Yiming et al., 2024). It mediates links from job load to exhaustion, burnout to turnover, climate to identity or efficacy, autonomy to mental health, and ostracism to knowledge sharing (Zang et al., 2022; Zhang, Li, & Gamble, 2022; Fang & Qi, 2023; Peng, Wu, & Guo, 2022; Wang, Li, Liu, & Zaggia, 2023). It moderates associations such as identity to burnout and role based differences in workload pathways, and it strengthens or weakens turnover paths by personality (Lu, Luo, Chen, & Wang, 2022; Zang et al., 2022; Zhang, Li, & Gamble, 2022). It predicts outcomes that matter for schools and universities, including instructional quality, engagement, PD intentions, life satisfaction, and reduced turnover intention (Harrison, King, & Wang, 2023; Xu et al., 2023; Qi & Derakhshan, 2023; Meng, 2022; Zhang, Shi, & Teng, 2024).

Question 2. What determinants, mediators, moderators, and outcomes associated with teacher job satisfaction show consistent or divergent patterns across tiers and contexts in China?

Determinants converge on leadership, climate, resources, and strain. Distributed and transformational leadership improve autonomy, collaboration, PLC components, vigor, and identity that raise satisfaction in K 12 settings (Liu et al., 2021; Zhang, Huang, & Xu, 2022; Zhang, Yin, & Wang, 2023; Xiu, Liu, Yao, & Liu, 2022). School atmosphere, culture, trust, and organizational climate predict satisfaction through professional identity, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being, with technology strengthening climate effects in universities (Han et al., 2022; Fang & Qi, 2023; Zhao, Lu, Cheng, & Li, 2022; Yiming et al., 2024). Autonomy increases mental health through teaching efficacy and satisfaction, while work values lift satisfaction through engagement (Peng et al., 2022; Fute et al., 2022). Challenge stressors can align with engagement, hindrance stressors and workload depress satisfaction and engagement, and satisfaction can suppress or partially mediate stress effects (Xu et al., 2023; Zang et al., 2022). Social support improves satisfaction through positive coping in kindergarten (Yang et al., 2022). Personality shapes autonomy supportive teaching that improves satisfaction among young teachers (Li et al., 2023). Workplace ostracism lowers knowledge sharing through burnout and then satisfaction in universities (Wang et al., 2023). Effects are stronger in urban PLC-rich settings on autonomy and collaboration. Rural schools display climate and support pathways with retention stakes tied to the documented dissatisfaction rate.

Actionable guidance follows from these patterns and addresses the gaps. For preschool and kindergarten, strengthen empowering leadership, curriculum autonomy, and social support, and mitigate work family conflict to stabilize satisfaction and reduce turnover intention (Liu, Yang, & Huang, 2021; Xia et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2022; Hong, Liu, & Zhang, 2021; Zhao et al., 2022). For primary and secondary schools, develop climate and identity, protect autonomy, and manage workload since subject teachers are vulnerable to job load pathways, and rural schools report 21 percent dissatisfaction that signals retention risk (Han et al., 2022; Peng et al., 2022; Zang et al., 2022; Wang, Cousineau, Wang, Zeng, Sun, Kohrman, & Rozelle, 2022). For higher education, reduce hindrance stressors, increase perceived support for female faculty, address ostracism, and leverage technology enhanced climates to improve satisfaction, engagement, knowledge sharing, life satisfaction, and PD intentions (Su & Jiang, 2023; Xu et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023; Yiming et al., 2024; Meng, 2022; Qi & Derakhshan, 2023). For VET, rural, polytechnic, clinical, international, and doctoral contexts, act on climate, leadership attention, workload, and reward systems to lift satisfaction and reduce turnover risks, while recognizing differences by gender, department, and title (Fang & Qi, 2023; Xiaoqing & Ye, 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Mo & Morris, 2024; Morris & Mo, 2023; Jing & Photchanachan, 2021; Chen, 2023; Wang & Rashid, 2022; Deng, 2025). Future work should standardize measures and test invariance, run panels and causal designs, and evaluate policy effects on satisfaction and retention. Findings should be read with design diversity in view. Cross-sectional dominance and varied measurement reduce causal inference and limit comparability across tiers, which aligns with the stated gaps.

RECOMMENDATION

Table 4: List of recommendations

Stakeholder	Action	Supported by	Expected effect
School leaders	Run PLC cycles and empower teachers	Liu 2021; Zhang 2022; Zhang 2023	Higher satisfaction and retention
Principals	Protect autonomy and manage workload by role	Peng 2022; Zang 2022	Better mental health and lower exhaustion
Rural bureaus	Add POS, mentoring, trust initiatives	Chen 2022; Zhao 2022	Lower turnover intention

Deans	Cut hindrance stressors, support WFC buffers	Xu 2023; Su 2023	Higher engagement and satisfaction
HR in HE	Enforce anti-ostracism, invest in climate and PW	Wang 2023; Yiming 2024	More sharing and well-being
Faculty dev.	Coach autonomy-supportive teaching, fund PD time	Li 2023; Qi 2023	Higher satisfaction and PD uptake
Policy teams	Standardize measures, start panels	Liu 2023; Zang 2022	Stronger evidence for decisions
Boards	Align rewards and grievance systems	Chen 2023; Wang & Rashid 2022	Commitment and retention boost

Source: Author, 2025

For preschool, primary, and secondary schools, prioritize leadership and community routines that lift autonomy, collaboration, vigor, and professional identity. Implement distributed or transformational practices, and run PLC cycles with shared purpose, deprivatized practice, and reflective dialogue (Liu, Keeley, Sui, & Sang, 2021; Zhang, Huang, & Xu, 2022; Zhang, Yin, & Wang, 2023; Xiu, Liu, Yao, & Liu, 2022). Protect classroom autonomy and curriculum discretion, which support teaching efficacy, satisfaction, and mental health (Peng, Wu, & Guo, 2022; Xia, Wang, & Zhang, 2023). Manage workload with role-sensitive timetables because subject teachers show job-load pathways to later exhaustion through lower satisfaction, and rural schools report 21% dissatisfaction that signals retention risk (Zang, Cao, Zhou, Jiang, & Li, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). Build perceived organizational support and peer mentoring, which buffer burnout and raise satisfaction among rural generalist teachers and kindergarten staff through positive coping and trust pathways (Chen, Zhou, Zheng, & Wu, 2022; Yang, Lu, Ban, & Sun, 2022; Zhao, Lu, Cheng, & Li, 2022).

For universities, audit stressor profiles and redesign work to reduce hindrance stressors while channeling challenge stressors toward mastery goals since satisfaction suppresses or mediates their effects on engagement (Xu, Guo, Zheng, & Zhang, 2023). Strengthen perceived organizational support to weaken the work-family conflict to burnout path that precedes lower satisfaction among female faculty (Su & Jiang, 2023). Enforce anti-ostracism norms and early burnout detection to protect satisfaction and knowledge sharing (Wang, Li, Liu, & Zaggia, 2023). Invest in organizational climate with psychological well-being services, and use technology affordances that reinforce the climate to satisfaction link (Yiming, Yan, & Jinsheng, 2024). Support young teachers with coaching on autonomy-supportive teaching styles and structured PD time since satisfaction aligns with PD intentions and adaptive styles (Li, Yao, Liu, & Zhang, 2023; Qi & Derakhshan, 2023). Improve work environment and grievance systems that matter to professors, and develop learning-organization practices that raise commitment through satisfaction (Chen, 2023; Wang & Rashid, 2022). Link satisfaction metrics to instructional improvement because higher satisfaction relates to stronger teacher–student relationships and instructional quality (Harrison, King, & Wang, 2023).

To close system gaps, standardize satisfaction measurement across provinces and tiers using validated instruments already common in the corpus, including TALIS-referenced items and widely used survey platforms, then test invariance across tiers and regions (Liu, Keeley, Sui, & Sang, 2021; Liu, Keeley, & Sui, 2023; Xu, Guo, Zheng, & Zhang, 2023; Chen, Zhou, Zheng, & Wu, 2022). Build longitudinal panels that extend CEPS-style tracking to rural, VET, and western regions to clarify temporal ordering and role clarity for satisfaction as mediator or moderator (Zang, Cao, Zhou, Jiang, & Li, 2022; Fang & Qi, 2023; Wang et al., 2022). Integrate satisfaction and turnover-intention dashboards into staffing plans for English teachers, doctoral lecturers, and international-school staff to guide retention levers on workload, leadership attention, and rewards (Zhang, Shi, & Teng, 2024; Jing & Photchanachan, 2021; Mo & Morris, 2024; Chen, Jin, Zhou, Chen, & Wang, 2022). Use these data to target coaching and support where satisfaction predicts gains in engagement, knowledge sharing, and instructional quality (Xu, 2023; Wang, 2023; Harrison, 2023).

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