

A Study on the Influencing Factors and Logical Path of County High School Teacher Workload

Zhaoyang Chu, Yukai Wei, Mei Wang*

Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China

Abstract: This study focuses on the workload problem of teachers in county high schools in China. Research shows that teachers in county high schools not only have to deal with objective conditions such as uneven student quality and relatively scarce teaching resources, but also have to undertake excessive teaching tasks and complex daily management work, forming a phenomenon of teacher professional load with Chinese characteristics. It is found that the occupational load of teachers in county areas presents three-dimensional structural characteristics: Firstly, it stems from the external environmental pressure under the urban-rural dual structure; secondly, it is rooted in the structural contradiction caused by the imbalance of teacher allocation; thirdly, it arises from multiple challenges in teaching practice. This research indicates that this compound load is influenced by a four-dimensional mechanism of action, specifically manifested as the spatial imbalance in the allocation of educational resources, the administrative pressure brought about by hierarchical management, the growth predicament formed by the obstruction of professional development channels, and the realistic conflict between the demand for teaching innovation and the limitations of objective conditions.

Keyword: county high school teacher, teacher workload, China

1. Introduction

1.1 The problem of excessive workload on teachers

The heavy workload on teachers has become one of the serious international challenges facing the teaching industry. With the continuous improvement of education policies and social expectations, the issue of teachers' workload has attracted increasing attention from researchers and policy makers (Stacey et al., 2024)^[1]. The workload of teachers changes with social movements, showcasing their unique professional characteristics. On the one hand, the workload of teachers is often a symbol of their competitiveness; On the other hand, teaching requires teachers to constantly invest time and energy in learning new teaching theories and practices, reflecting on teaching, and participating in professional networks, etc. (Zhao, Y., Sang, B., 2023)^[2]. Exploring the composition and influencing factors of teachers' workload is of great practical significance for improving the working environment, enhancing teachers' professional satisfaction and happiness.

1.2 Policy background and current status in China

At present, there are a total of 15400 ordinary high schools in China, with a student population of nearly 25 million. Among them, there are more than 7200 in counties, with a student population of 14.684 million, accounting for half of

the ordinary high schools. Its development has important value and significance for achieving educational equity. However, in recent years, the development situation in the county has not been optimistic. Although the hardware in some counties has been fundamentally improved, due to the monopoly of high-score students by super and elite schools in cities, some high-quality teachers have left, and the quality of education has declined. Therefore, the Chinese government has introduced a series of policies in recent years, aimed at enhancing the overall educational standards of county high schools.

1.3 Labour Process Theory explains teacher workload components

The root cause of the workload on county high school teachers can be interpreted through labor process theory. Due to the scarcity of educational resources and the enormous pressure of educational demand, teachers in the county are burdened with work in the external educational environment such as the government, schools, and society, as well as in the process of generating learning subjects in the classroom with students (Carter,& Stevenson,2012)^[3]. According to the labour process theory, macro distribution of educational resources in county-level areas, administrative management for teachers, and the pressure of teaching are all important sources of teacher workload.

1.4 The Current Study

Based on the theoretical perspective of "entire process of education", this study mainly focuses on the influence paths of the generation origin, stage environment, transfer process and transfer results of the workload of teachers in county high schools.

2. Discussion

Overall, this study relies on the theoretical perspective of the "whole process of education" to conduct a comprehensive discussion on the origin, stage environment, transfer process, and transfer results of the workload of teachers in counties.

Firstly, in terms of the origin of generation, the disconnect between the structural supply of teachers in counties and the actual needs of students will increase the burden of teachers' management and professional development, ultimately affecting their educational and teaching work. This is consistent with previous research. The professional and disciplinary structures of teachers cannot meet the actual needs of students, which inevitably leads to a significant reduction in their teaching performance (Cayupe JC et al., 2023)^[4].

Secondly, in the stage of workload generation, county-level education is in a disadvantaged position in terms of educational resource allocation and supporting infrastructure, leading to the outflow of high-quality teachers and students, ultimately directly affecting students' entrance examination results, resulting in teachers in the county developing a fear of teaching difficulties and adding more workload. Scholars believe that "the scarcity of resources and teacher turnover in county-level schools exacerbate teachers' work pressure" (Kingsford Smith et al., 2023)^[5], which is consistent with this study.

Once again, in the process of transferring of teachers workload, teachers in the county may experience learned helplessness due to limited educational resources. Limited access to quality educational resources coexists with strict evaluations, exacerbating professional burdens. Excessive administrative tasks divert their focus from core responsibilities, causing burnout. Financial constraints in county education further strain teachers through inadequate welfare protections and heightened life pressures. Research has shown that the working environment of teachers is affected by limited time and resources, and teachers in counties may experience emotional fatigue and burden due to the lack of protection of their basic rights and interests (Hojo, M. 2021)^[6].

Finally, in terms of the transfer of teacher workload, teachers' workload stems primarily from teacher-student interactions. County educators struggle with research demands and inefficient teaching processes, exacerbating fatigue. Student performance challenges intensify pressure, as accountability risks arise from unmet academic benchmarks. According to TALIS' survey, the sources of teacher workload include teaching responsibilities, student behavior, and management responsibilities. It also indicates that the important generation field of teacher workload comes from the interaction between teachers and students (Ainley&Carstens, 2018)^[7].

3. Conclusion

Under the framework of intensification thesis derived from labour process theory, county teacher workload influencer can be divided into 4 categories.

Firstly, there is an unbalanced burden on the teacher-student structure. The imbalance of teacher-student structure focuses on the teacher workload caused by the overall imbalance of teacher-student structure, which specifically includes the unbalanced allocation of teaching staff, such as unreasonable subject distribution and professional composition, high mobility of the county teacher team, imbalanced teacher-student ratio, uneven quality of student sources, and uneven distribution of student education stages and regions, all of which increase the work pressure of county teachers.

Secondly, there is a demand based burden on professional development. County high school teachers face demand-driven professional development burdens encompassing academic advancement, pedagogical training, administrative roles, subject expertise renewal, ideological education integration, performance evaluations, career progression pressures, and so on.

Thirdly, the workload brought by external management. It focuses on the challenges faced by teachers at the management level, mainly due to the discomfort caused by frequent job adjustments, the relative backwardness of educational infrastructure and work environment, and the imperfect welfare benefits and security system. These factors constitute the burden of management, affecting teachers' professional satisfaction and long-term development stability.

Fourthly, the workload of teaching tasks. It covers the tense relationship between the surge in student enrollment demand and the supply of educational resources in the county, the task of controlling dropouts and ensuring enrollment in compulsory education, the management difficulties of super large class sizes in the county, the special needs of migrant and left behind children's education, the dual tasks of personalized teaching and comprehensive training for students, the provision of extracurricular tutoring and services, the meticulous work of daily behavior and life management for students, and the comprehensive efforts to improve students' academic performance and overall quality.

4. Limitation

This study did not consider the impact of different teaching environments such as society, family, school, classroom, and office on teacher workload from a field perspective, as well as the differences in teacher workload within different environments. Future research can further clarify the pathways of teacher workload transfer in different fields. In addition, research can also compare county teachers with urban teachers to explore the differences in the logic of workload generation.

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About the authors:

First author : Zhaoyang Chu(1997); male; Han; China; PhD Candidate; Beijing Normal University; Research directions: Educational policy and governance

Co-authors: Yukai Wei(1998);male; Han; China; PhD Candidate; Beijing Normal University; Research directions: Educational policy

Corresponding author: Mei Wang(1998); female; Han; China; PhD Candidate; Beijing Normal University; Research directions: Educational policy