

Career management strategies and commitment among Chinese elementary school teachers

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Abstract

This study explores Career Management Strategies and Commitment among Chinese Elementary School Teachers, aiming to address a notable research gap in understanding the relationship between career management strategies and commitment within this demographic. Employing a quantitative research design, data was collected from 300 elementary school teachers using convenience sampling. Results reveal a positive correlation between career management strategies and commitment among teachers. Furthermore, no significant differences were found in agreement levels across demographic profiles. This study contributes new knowledge by providing insights into the career dynamics of Chinese elementary school teachers and highlights the importance of proactive career management in fostering commitment to the teaching profession. One significant recommendation arising from this study is the implementation of tailored career development programs for Chinese elementary school teachers, focusing on mentorship, networking, and flexibility. Empowering teachers to actively manage their careers, educational institutions can enhance commitment levels and support teacher retention efforts.

Keywords: career management strategies, commitment, elementary school teachers, Chinese, demographics, quantitative research

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1. Introduction

The field of education stands as a cornerstone of societal progress, with educators serving as the architects of future generations' intellectual and moral development. Within this landscape, the commitment and career management strategies of elementary school teachers hold profound significance, shaping not only individual professional trajectories but also the broader educational ecosystem. On a macro perspective, global trends in education underscore the increasing demand for highly skilled and dedicated educators amidst evolving pedagogical methodologies and technological advancements. As nations navigate the complexities of modernization and globalization, the role of teachers transcends mere instruction to encompass mentorship, leadership, and community engagement. Concurrently, issues such as teacher retention, burnout, and the pursuit of work-life balance emerge as critical considerations in sustaining a robust educational workforce.

The landscape of elementary education in China reflects a fusion of traditional values and contemporary aspirations. Cultural expectations of reverence for educators intertwine with the pursuit of excellence in pedagogy and professional growth. Against this backdrop, variables such as professional development opportunities, job stability, recognition, and personal values intersect to shape the career trajectories and commitment levels of Chinese elementary school teachers. In the context of China, a nation deeply rooted in its cultural heritage while rapidly evolving in its educational paradigms, understanding the dynamics of career management and commitment among elementary school teachers assumes paramount importance.

Career management among Chinese elementary school teachers is multifaceted, influenced by cultural norms, job stability, professional development, and personal motivations. These teachers prioritize ongoing learning, driven by cultural expectations of dedication to their profession. Job security and leadership opportunities within public schools incentivize career commitment, while maintaining work-life balance and fostering community support are essential strategies to sustain motivation. Recognition of teachers' achievements reinforces their commitment, alongside alignment with personal values and career goals. Ultimately, by supporting professional growth and acknowledging contributions, educational institutions cultivate a culture of dedication and excellence in teaching.

Research on career management strategies and commitment among Chinese elementary school teachers is undoubtedly essential given the critical role educators play in shaping the future generation. However, despite the significance of this topic, there exists a notable research gap in understanding the nuanced relationship between career management strategies and commitment specifically within the context of Chinese elementary school teachers. The research gap lies in the lack of comprehensive studies exploring the interplay between career management strategies and commitment among Chinese elementary school teachers, considering the unique cultural, contextual, and institutional factors shaping their professional experiences. Addressing this gap is crucial for informing evidence-based policies and practices aimed at supporting the well-being and effectiveness of elementary school teachers in China.

This study aims to unravel the intricate interplay between career management strategies and commitment among Chinese elementary school teachers, shedding light on the factors driving professional growth and dedication within this vital segment of the educational workforce. By dissecting the main variables influencing teachers' career decisions and commitment levels, this research seeks to offer insights into effective strategies for cultivating a culture of excellence and sustainability in elementary education. The intended output of this study is to provide policymakers, educational administrators, and teacher training institutions with actionable insights to enhance career development frameworks and foster a culture of commitment and excellence among Chinese

elementary school teachers. By understanding the nuanced dynamics at play and leveraging evidence-based strategies, stakeholders can proactively address challenges and capitalize on opportunities to elevate the quality of elementary education in China.

Objective of the Study - This study aims to explore on the relationship between Career management strategies and commitment among Chinese Elementary School Teachers. It determine the career management strategy in terms of seek mentoring, maintain flexibility, build networks, extended work involvement, and self-presentation; assess the level of career commitment in terms of affective, continuance and normative commitment; test the significant relationship between career management strategies and career commitment; and propose an action plan based on the result of the study.

2. Methods

Research Design - This study employs a descriptive research method to investigate the relationship between career management strategies and commitment among Chinese elementary school teachers. Specifically, a correlational analysis will be conducted to explore the associations between various career management strategies and dimensions of commitment among teachers.

Participants - The participants in this study consisted of 385 Chinese elementary school teachers from diverse geographical regions and educational settings. The estimated number of participants was determined based on the principles of sample size determination in quantitative research, considering factors such as the desired level of statistical power, confidence interval, and anticipated effect size. A sample size calculation table was used to determine the appropriate number of respondents, ensuring adequate representation across different demographics and school types. The selection of respondents for the study was guided by the goal of obtaining a diverse and representative sample of Chinese elementary school teachers, thereby facilitating a comprehensive examination of career management strategies and commitment within this population. Considering factors such as geographical representation, educational settings, demographic diversity, and sample size determination principles, the study aimed to enhance the validity and generalizability of its findings.

Data Gathering Instrument - The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from previous research that examined career management strategies and commitment among educators. part 1 contained the demographic profile of the respondents, while part 2 contained the career management strategy in terms of seek mentoring, maintain flexibility, build networks, extended work involvement, and self-presentation adapting from the Career Management Strategies Scale (CMSS) developed by Guthrie, et al. (1998). For section 3 of the instrument, this contained the assessment of career commitment in terms of affective, continuance, and normative commitment, adapted from Blau (1989). The reliability of each variable and its sub-variables was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, ensuring internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2003). Face validation, expert validation, and pilot testing were conducted to establish the validity and reliability of the instrument, followed by an ethical review to ensure participant confidentiality and informed consent.

Table 1

Reliability Statistics

Indicators	Cronbach Alpha	Remarks
Maintain career flexibility	0.856	Good
Build networks	0.854	Good
Extended work involvement	0.743	Acceptable
Self-presentation	0.846	Good
Affective Commitment	0.941	Excellent
Continuance Commitment	0.890	Good
Normative Commitment	0.853	Good

Data Gathering Procedure - Data was gathered through an online survey platform, which allowed for efficient data collection from a geographically dispersed sample of Chinese elementary school teachers. Prior to data collection, permission was sought from the authors of the questionnaire to adapt their instrument for use in

this study. Additionally, school administrators and educational authorities were contacted to facilitate the distribution of the survey to teachers within their respective institutions.

Data Analysis - Frequency and percentage distribution were used to present the demographic profile of the respondents. Weighted mean and rank were used to assess the career management strategies among Chinese elementary school teachers, as well as the level of commitment across various dimensions. The result of Shapiro-Wilk Test showed that p-values of all variables were less than 0.05 which means that the data set was not normally distributed. Therefore, Mann-Whitney U test for two groups and Kruskal Wallis test for more than two groups were used as part of the non-parametric tests to determine the significant differences. Likewise, Spearman rho was used to test the significant relationship. All analyzes were performed using SPSS version 26.

Ethical Considerations - Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants were assured that their anonymity would be preserved, and their data would be used solely for research purposes. Also, ensuring the anonymity of responses and providing clear instructions for completing the questionnaire. Additionally, steps were taken to ensure that the research was conducted with integrity and transparency, adhering to established ethical guidelines and standards of professional conduct. Finally, any potential conflicts of interest or biases were disclosed, and measures were implemented to mitigate their impact on the research findings.

3. Results and discussion

Table 2

Summary Table on Career Management Strategies

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Maintain career flexibility	3.18	Agree	1.5
Build networks	3.11	Agree	4
Extended work involvement	3.14	Agree	3
Self-presentation	3.18	Agree	1.5
Composite Mean	3.15	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 2 presents the summary of respondents assessment on Career Management Strategies. The composite mean of 3.15 indicates that the respondents agreed in general. Among the items cited, Maintain career flexibility and Self-presentation ranked first with mean score of 3.18, interpreted as agree.

The high mean score for maintaining career flexibility and self-presentation suggests that respondents prioritize adaptability and self-promotion as key components of managing their careers effectively. This indicates that teachers recognize the importance of remaining agile in response to changes in their work environment and presenting themselves in a favorable light to advance their professional goals. Prioritizing career flexibility, respondents demonstrate a willingness to embrace new challenges, acquire additional skills, and explore diverse opportunities within their field. Similarly, the emphasis on self-presentation reflects an awareness of the importance of showcasing one's strengths, achievements, and professional accomplishments to enhance visibility and credibility within the organization and beyond.

The high mean score for maintaining career flexibility and self-presentation suggests that respondents prioritize adaptability and self-promotion in managing their careers. This finding aligns with the literature emphasizing the importance of flexibility and self-presentation in career success and advancement. Keere (2022) underscores the significance of leisure activities and authentic self-presentation in job interviews, revealing sector-specific variations in gatekeepers' evaluation criteria. Teachers who demonstrate flexibility in their career paths and effectively present themselves as proactive and capable professionals are more likely to seize opportunities for growth and advancement within the education sector. Al-Shatti & Ohana (2021) review the impact of instant messaging on career-related outcomes, identifying research gaps and future directions. Thus,

the importance of self-presentation can be deduced from the emphasis on building beneficial relationships and enhancing one's profile (Capello et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, items such as Build networks (3.11) and Extended work involvement (3.14) rated the least. Conversely, the relatively lower mean score for building networks suggests that respondents may not prioritize networking activities to the same extent as other career management strategies. This finding may indicate a potential gap in recognizing the value of networking in advancing one's career. Networking plays a crucial role in fostering connections, accessing resources, and discovering new opportunities for professional growth and development. Teachers who actively engage in networking activities can expand their professional circles, gain valuable insights, and establish mutually beneficial relationships that can enhance their career prospects. However, the lower emphasis on building networks among respondents may stem from various factors, including limited awareness of networking benefits, time constraints, or a preference for more individualized approaches to career advancement. Encouraging teachers to recognize the importance of networking and providing opportunities for networking events, workshops, and mentorship programs can help bridge this gap and support their career development efforts.

The relatively lower mean score for building networks indicates that respondents may not prioritize networking activities to the same extent as other career management strategies. However, research has shown that networking is crucial for career development, providing access to resources, information, and opportunities for advancement (Kong et al. 2020). Teachers who cultivate strong professional networks within and beyond their organizations may benefit from enhanced career visibility, mentorship, and collaboration opportunities, leading to increased career satisfaction and success (Ruparel et al. 2020).

Overall, while respondents generally agree with the importance of maintaining career flexibility and self-presentation in career management, there may be opportunities to further emphasize the significance of building networks and extended work involvement. Recognizing and addressing these areas, educators can enhance their career development and fulfillment within the dynamic landscape of the education sector.

Table 3

Summary Table on Career Commitment

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Affective Commitment	3.21	Agree	3
Continuance Commitment	3.22	Agree	1.5
Normative Commitment	3.22	Agree	1.5
Composite Mean	3.21	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 3 presents the respondents assessment on career commitment. The composite mean of 3.21 indicates that the respondents agreed in general. Among the items cited, continuance and normative commitment ranked first with mean score of 3.22, interpreted as agree.

The high mean score indicating agreement with continuance and normative commitment to their organization suggests that respondents perceive their ties to the organization primarily through practical and norm-based considerations rather than emotional attachment. Continuance commitment reflects a sense of obligation or perceived costs associated with leaving the organization, such as loss of benefits or investment in tenure, while normative commitment pertains to a sense of obligation or loyalty based on societal or organizational norms and values. Respondents who agree with these statements likely feel a strong sense of duty, responsibility, and loyalty towards their organization due to factors such as tenure, social norms, or a sense of moral obligation. They may prioritize stability, security, and fulfilling perceived societal or organizational expectations in their decision-making regarding their career and organizational loyalty.

The high mean score suggests that respondents agree with continuance and normative commitment to their organization. Continuance commitment reflects the perceived costs associated with leaving the organization,

while normative commitment is based on a sense of obligation or duty to remain. Employees who feel strongly attached to their organization due to perceived costs and obligations are more likely to remain despite having opportunities to leave. This finding underscores the importance of perceived costs and obligations in shaping employees' intentions to remain with their organization. Normative commitment is driven by a sense of obligation, whether through moral imperatives or feelings of indebtedness (Caniago & Mustoko, 2020 Oh & Sawang, 2021). Continuance commitment, on the other hand, is based on the costs associated with leaving, such as the loss of investment or lack of employment alternatives (Omar et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, affective commitment (3.17) rated the least. The lower mean score for affective commitment suggests that respondents may feel less emotionally attached to their organization compared to continuance and normative commitment. Affective commitment reflects an emotional attachment and identification with the organization, including feelings of belongingness, pride, and loyalty stemming from positive experiences and interpersonal relationships within the workplace. Respondents who rate affective commitment lower may perceive their relationship with the organization as more transactional or duty-bound rather than deeply rooted in emotional connection or personal investment. This finding may indicate that while respondents acknowledge their practical and normative ties to the organization, they may not necessarily experience the same level of emotional attachment or sense of belongingness, potentially impacting factors such as job satisfaction, engagement, and long-term retention. Understanding these nuances in commitment can inform organizational strategies aimed at fostering a more holistic and supportive work environment that addresses both practical and emotional needs of employees.

The lower mean score for affective commitment suggests that respondents may feel less emotionally attached to their organization compared to continuance and normative commitment. Affective commitment is based on employees' emotional attachment, identification, and involvement with their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Employees who feel affectively committed experience a strong sense of belongingness and loyalty, leading to greater job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behaviors (Özdemir et al., 2021). The lower agreement with affective commitment may indicate that respondents prioritize perceived costs and obligations over emotional attachment in their commitment to the organization. Affective commitment refers to an emotional attachment, where the individual remains with an organization because they want to, often driven by positive work experiences and job satisfaction (Zhao & Sang, 2023). Affective commitment, which reflects an emotional attachment to the organization, is influenced by leadership styles, years of service, and workaholic tendencies, and affective commitment increases with years of service (Owan, 2021). Workaholic tendencies also predict affective commitment (Kim, 2022).

Table 4

Relationship Between Career Management Strategies and Commitment

Maintain career flexibility	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Affective Commitment	.425**	0.000	Highly Significant
Continuance Commitment	.282**	0.000	Highly Significant
Normative Commitment	.160**	0.005	Highly Significant
Build networks			
Affective Commitment	.246**	0.000	Highly Significant
Continuance Commitment	.183**	0.001	Highly Significant
Normative Commitment	0.043	0.453	Highly Significant
Extended work involvement			
Affective Commitment	.716**	0.000	Highly Significant
Continuance Commitment	.587**	0.000	Highly Significant
Normative Commitment	.617**	0.000	Highly Significant
Self-presentation			
Affective Commitment	.787**	0.000	Highly Significant
Continuance Commitment	.673**	0.000	Highly Significant
Normative Commitment	.724**	0.000	Highly Significant

Table 4 presents the association between Career Management Strategies and Commitment. The computed

r-values indicates a strong direct correlation and the resulted p-values were less than the alpha level. This means that there was significant relationship exists and implies that the better is the career management strategies, the more that they are committed.

The strong direct correlation suggests that as individuals engage in more effective career management strategies, such as seeking mentoring, building networks, and maintaining flexibility, they tend to exhibit higher levels of commitment to their careers. This aligns with the notion that proactive career behaviors, such as goal setting, skill development, and networking, contribute to increased career satisfaction and commitment. The strong direct correlation observed between effective career management strategies and career commitment suggests a robust relationship between the two constructs. Specifically, it indicates that as individuals actively engage in various career management strategies—such as seeking mentoring, building networks, and maintaining flexibility—they are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of commitment to their careers.

One possible explanation for this correlation is that effective career management strategies contribute to a sense of empowerment and agency in individuals' career development journeys. For example, seeking mentoring allows individuals to gain valuable insights, guidance, and support from experienced professionals, which can enhance their skills, confidence, and career clarity. Similarly, building networks enables individuals to expand their professional connections, access new opportunities, and stay informed about industry trends and developments. Moreover, maintaining flexibility in one's career approach allows individuals to adapt to changing circumstances, seize emerging opportunities, and navigate career transitions more effectively.

As individuals proactively engage in these strategies and actively manage their careers, they are likely to experience greater satisfaction, fulfillment, and alignment with their career goals and aspirations. This, in turn, fosters a deeper sense of commitment and dedication to their chosen career paths. Moreover, individuals who feel empowered and supported in their career development are more likely to invest time, effort, and energy into advancing their careers and contributing positively to their organizations and professions.

From a theoretical perspective, this correlation aligns with the notion of self-determination theory, which posits that individuals are intrinsically motivated to pursue goals and activities that satisfy their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Effective career management strategies provide individuals with opportunities to exercise autonomy in their career decisions, develop competence through skill-building and learning experiences, and cultivate relatedness through meaningful connections and relationships with others in their professional networks.

Research has shown that individuals who actively manage their careers are more likely to experience greater job satisfaction, higher levels of organizational commitment, and increased career success. Investing in their professional development, seeking out growth opportunities, and building supportive networks, individuals can enhance their sense of purpose and engagement in their careers. Najib & Aljanabi (2020) illuminate the direct impact of career adaptability and commitment on career motivation, with commitment acting as a crucial mediator, particularly in developing nations.

Understanding the positive relationship between career management strategies and commitment has implications for HR practices and organizational support systems. Employers can facilitate employees' career development by providing resources, mentoring programs, and opportunities for skill enhancement and advancement. Fostering a culture of continuous learning and development, organizations can promote employee engagement, retention, and overall organizational success.

In summary, the strong direct correlation between effective career management strategies and career commitment underscores the importance of proactive career planning, skill development, and networking in fostering long-term career success and satisfaction. Empowering individuals to take ownership of their career paths and providing them with the necessary support and resources, organizations and educational institutions can cultivate a culture of career development and commitment among their employees and stakeholders.

Table 5*Proposed Action Plan for Improvement*

Key Result Area	Objectives	Strategies	Desired Outcome	Persons Involved
Career Management Strategies				
Maintain career flexibility	To enhance career flexibility among teachers to improve overall job satisfaction and commitment to their profession.	Implement a Flexible Work Arrangement Program	Increased flexibility in work schedules, allowing teachers to better balance professional and personal commitments, resulting in higher levels of job satisfaction and commitment to their careers	Human Resources Department, School Administrators, Teachers.
Build networks	To strengthen professional networks among elementary school teachers to foster collaboration, support, and knowledge sharing.	Establish a Mentorship Program	Formation of mentor-mentee relationships, providing opportunities for knowledge exchange, skill development, and emotional support, leading to enhanced professional networks and increased commitment to teaching.	Professional Development Committee, Experienced Teachers, New Teachers.
Extended work involvement	To promote work-life integration and prevent burnout among elementary school teachers through effective work involvement strategies.	Implement a Wellness and Work-Life Balance Program.	Increased awareness and utilization of resources for stress management, self-care, and work-life balance, resulting in reduced burnout rates, improved job satisfaction, and sustained commitment to teaching.	Wellness Committee, School Counselors, Teachers.
Self-presentation	To enhance self-presentation skills among elementary school teachers to boost confidence and professional presence.	Conduct Workshops on Effective Communication and Presentation Skills.	Improved communication skills, including verbal and non-verbal cues, as well as effective presentation techniques, leading to greater confidence, professionalism, and perceived competence among teachers, thereby strengthening their commitment to their roles.	Professional Development Committee, Communication Experts, Teachers.
Career Commitment				
Affective Commitment	To strengthen affective commitment among elementary school teachers to foster a sense of belongingness and emotional attachment to the organization.	Implement Recognition and Appreciation Initiatives.	Increased acknowledgment and appreciation of teachers' contributions, achievements, and efforts, fostering a positive emotional connection with the organization and reinforcing their commitment to the school community.	School Leadership Team, Human Resources Department, Teachers.
Continuance Commitment	To enhance continuance commitment among elementary school teachers by emphasizing the benefits and opportunities associated with long-term employment.	Develop Career Advancement and Growth Plans.	Clear pathways for career progression, professional development opportunities, and recognition of tenure, leading to a stronger sense of commitment and investment in long-term employment with the organization.	Career Development Committee, School Administrators, Teachers.
Normative Commitment	To reinforce normative commitment among elementary school teachers by promoting a culture of loyalty, responsibility, and shared values within the organization.	Implement Values-Based Leadership Training.	Increased awareness and alignment with the organization's mission, vision, and values, fostering a sense of duty, loyalty, and obligation among teachers towards the school community, thereby strengthening normative commitment.	Leadership Development Team, School Administrators, Teachers.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

The Chinese elementary school teachers agreed on various career management strategies, including seeking mentoring, maintaining flexibility, building networks, extended work involvement, and self-presentation. These insights shed light on the strategies that are most and least commonly practiced among teachers. In terms of career commitment, the Chinese elementary school teachers, agreed on the indicators including affective, continuance, and normative commitment. This implies that teachers' emotional attachment, perceived costs of

leaving, and sense of obligation towards their profession. There is a significant positive relationship between career management strategies and career commitment. This underscores the importance of engaging in effective career management practices to foster greater commitment and dedication to the teaching profession. An action plan was developed based on the result of the study.

Educational institutions may develop tailored career development programs that address the specific needs and preferences of Chinese elementary school teachers, focusing on areas such as mentorship, flexibility, networking, and self-presentation. School administrators and policymakers may implement initiatives to promote career commitment among teachers, emphasizing the value of emotional attachment, perceived costs of leaving, and sense of obligation towards the teaching profession. Human Resource Office may be promote diversity and inclusion within the teaching profession, ensuring that career development opportunities and support services are accessible and equitable for all teachers. Stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, policymakers, and educational researchers, may collaborate on action planning efforts to implement evidence-based strategies and initiatives aimed at enhancing career management and commitment within the teaching profession. Future research may conduct further research and evaluation are needed to monitor trends in career management strategies and commitment among Chinese elementary school teachers, allowing for the refinement and adaptation of interventions over time. The proposed action plan may be utilized for further continuous improvement.

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