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## Factors Influencing Banzhurens' Job Satisfaction: An Exploratory Study on a Newly Developed Questionnaire

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**Abstract:** In primary and middle schools in China, banzhuren is the teacher responsible for managing and overseeing a specific class of students. The lower job satisfaction of banzhurens has been a longstanding issue. This study employs a quantitative method to investigate the impact of banzhurens' self-efficacy and burnout on their job satisfaction. A total of 624 primary school banzhurens from G City (in Henan province, China) participated in an online survey assessing their perceived job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and burnout. The data were analysed using structural equation modelling analysis. The results revealed that (a) banzhurens' burnout negatively influenced their self-efficacy and job satisfaction; (b) banzhurens' job satisfaction was positively influenced by self-efficacy; (c) banzhurens' self-efficacy could mediate the adverse effects of burnout on job satisfaction. Therefore, we suggest that banzhurens' job satisfaction can be enhanced by increasing their self-efficacy, particularly in terms of communication with leaders, and by reducing their burnout.

**Keywords:** Burnout, Chinese banzhurens, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, teachers.

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### Introduction

In primary schools in China, every class has a teacher designated as *banzhuren*, who has overall responsibility for and authority over all aspects of the students in their class (He, 2022). The term *banzhuren* is derived from Mandarin pronunciation and is often translated as classroom teacher, homeroom teacher, head teacher, or class teacher; however, a *banzhuren*'s responsibilities and scope of work extend far beyond what is commonly associated with these roles (G. Li et al., 2023). According to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2009), *banzhurens* are selected from among the subject specialist teachers of a class. The selected teacher serves as both a subject specialist teacher and *banzhuren*, thus holding a dual role for the designated class. The role of *banzhuren* exists to ensure the smooth and effective daily operations of a class, which is essential in the Chinese educational system, particularly in primary schools. Meanwhile, these responsibilities often come with heavy workloads and excessive daily hours, causing *banzhurens* to face various work-related stresses and a sense of helplessness. (Geng, 2018). They express their unwillingness to continue to work as a *banzhuren* (Qin et al., 2021), and their job satisfaction is rather low compared with the subject specialist teachers (Yuan, 2019). Thus, there has been an increase in research focusing on job satisfaction and work dilemmas faced by *banzhurens* in recent years. However, this issue is still being researched, and education policymakers have yet to implement relevant policies to improve the circumstances of *banzhurens*. Given the extensive global research on teachers' job satisfaction, self-efficacy has been identified as a significant positive factor contributing to it (for example, Huang et al., 2020; Troesch & Bauer, 2017). In contrast, burnout is a major determinant of teachers' intentions to leave the profession (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Burnout has been highly discussed in studies concerning teachers' job satisfaction and/or intention to quit (such as Okçu & Çetin, 2017; Oropesa Ruiz et al., 2019). Although a large number of research have explored the factors influencing teachers' job satisfaction, little attention has been given to understanding how *banzhurens*' job satisfaction is influenced by their self-efficacy and burnout. This study explores this issue by developing a questionnaire to investigate the relationships between *banzhurens*' job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and burnout.

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## Literature Review

### *Banzhuren in the Chinese Context*

The occupation of *banzhuren* is unique to the teaching system, where school students are grouped and taught in classrooms. In 1862, the Qing government established the Beijing Tongwen Institute, modelled after Western education systems, thus introducing the classroom-based teaching system in China (Ning & Fang, 2020; Shang, 2003). The Beijing Tongwen Institute was an educational organisation where students were taught through grade-based instruction and classroom-based teaching, and the educators were assigned to two main departments: the teaching department and the administrative department (Yu, 2023). The responsibilities of educators in the administrative department were similar to the administrative tasks of today's *banzhuren*, including completing administrative paperwork, supervising students' learning, recording students' performance, and dealing with students' behavioural issues (Zhu, 1986). The term "*banzhuren*" first emerged in Primary School Instruction Guidelines (compiled by the Education Department of Suide County (Yulin City, Shaanxi Province) in 1942, which emphasised the responsibility of *banzhuren* for students' moral guidance (Education Research Institute of Shaanxi Normal University, 1981, p. 278).

Since implementing the *banzhuren* system, numerous Chinese scholars have conducted in-depth research on its various aspects. To assist *banzhurens* in improving their job performance, the following six core competencies for being an effective primary school *banzhuren* have been identified: research ability, a child-centred perspective, patience, innovative skills, coordination skills, and foresight (Y.-C. Liu, 2015). Built on these six essential competencies, the framework of *banzhuren*'s Professional Standards (Jiang, 2018) was developed to provide guidelines for *banzhuren* to effectively perform their duties. The standards are organised into four foundational categories, three core categories, and four ideal categories. The foundational standards are: adopting a student-centred approach, prioritising teacher ethics, emphasising capability, and committing to lifelong learning. The core standards are: class construction, student guidance, and communication and coordination. The ideal standards are: ethical integrity, excellent professional skills, leadership in professionalism, and educational innovation. Overall, the role of *banzhuren* can be defined as a teacher who is in charge of a class, an organiser, a builder, a leader of the communities of students and parents, and a vital person who helps and guides students' growth and human development (Qi & Huang, 2019).

Due to *banzhurens*' work characteristics and the significant demands placed on them, it is not difficult to understand their career dilemmas. First, as illustrated by the policies and research discussed in the former section, *banzhurens* take on excessive expectations and responsibilities for students' education and development. Second, scholars have pointed out that the boundaries of *banzhuren*'s responsibilities are vague. For example, C. Zhang (2022) found that some of the core work tasks of *banzhurens*, such as managing daily class affairs and paying attention to individual student development, are fragmentary, endless, and hard to define. Third, *banzhurens*' career development is not supported by state education policies. Specifically, the Chinese professional promotion system weighs teachers' subject teaching performance and achievements as being more important than *banzhurens*' work performance (Feng, 2016). Finally, the heavy workload of *banzhurens* is of great concern. For instance, *banzhurens* usually work more than eight hours daily (F.-J. Zhao & Liu, 2018). Their average weekly work time, including teaching, lesson preparation, grading homework and exam papers, and communicating with students' parents, has been estimated as close to 50 hours (Pan & Zhang, 2017), which is nearly 10 hours more than standard hours.

### *Teacher Job Satisfaction*

Teacher job satisfaction is defined as the emotional responses to one's job that result from evaluating various aspects of it to determine whether their value judgments or work expectations are being met. (Cranny et al., 1992; Locke, 1969, 1976). Among teachers, higher job satisfaction usually indicates better job performance, motivation, productivity, and a lower attrition rate within their profession (Brezicha et al., 2020; Ololube, 2006). Student achievement has also been shown to increase when teachers' higher-level job satisfaction produces stronger work commitments (Essien & Gimba, 2017; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Teachers are also less likely to quit when they perceive that their job realities meet their expectations (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Perrachione et al., 2008).

Job satisfaction can also act as a mediator for other factors that influence teachers' attrition rates. For example, teachers' job satisfaction was found to be a key variable that mediated the effects of Norwegian teachers' feelings of belonging and emotional exhaustion on their intention to leave teaching (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Therefore, job satisfaction is important not only for the teachers themselves but for their schools, their students, and the education system.

For *banzhurens* in China, studies have revealed that participating *banzhurens* had a moderate level of job satisfaction (Chen, 2020; Kuai & Zeng, 2016; Pan & Zhang, 2017; Yang, 2016). However, job satisfaction levels would vary based on their personal and professional characteristics, such as gender and length of service. Research on the effect of gender on job satisfaction remains inconclusive. While some studies indicate no significant correlation between gender and job satisfaction or intention to leave (Kuai & Zeng, 2016; Pan & Zhang, 2017; Yuan, 2019), other studies revealed that male *banzhurens* had significantly higher levels of job satisfaction than females (Ding & Wang, 2018; Lin, 2020). Moreover,

mid-career *banzhurens* with 10 to 12 years of experience showed the lowest levels of job satisfaction (Yuan, 2019), similar to the results found among teachers in England (Crossman & Harris, 2006).

Of the other factors influencing job satisfaction, insufficient monetary allowance was identified as one aspect that *banzhurens* were least satisfied with (Chen, 2020; Yuan, 2019); among *banzhurens* working in rural areas, only 10% were satisfied with their allowance (Zheng, 2019). Workload is another vital factor that impacts job satisfaction. In Zheng's (2019) study, over 80% of the participants stated they were bearing a heavy workload and scope of responsibility, which decreased their job satisfaction. Not surprisingly, turnover intentions can be high, with only about 40% of *banzhurens* expressing their willingness to continue in this role (J.-M. Li et al., 2017; Qin et al., 2021). One possible reason for this high turnover intention statistic is that the participating *banzhurens* existed in environments where the stress of unrealistic expectations from schools, students, and families outweighed the support they needed (Ding & Wang, 2018).

Furthermore, in their analysis of the influence of internal and external factors on *banzhurens'* intention to leave, Kuai and Zeng (2016) found that internal factors were stronger than external factors. More specifically, *banzhurens'* decisions to leave the position stemmed more from a lack of achievement, autonomy, self-esteem, and leadership support than from heavy workloads or insufficient financial compensation. For increasing *banzhurens'* job satisfaction, fostering interpersonal support and emotional intelligence may be effective strategies. Studies indicate that *banzhurens* with better interpersonal support demonstrated a higher level of job satisfaction (Pan & Zhang, 2017). Emotional intelligence can also have a positive effect on *banzhurens'* willingness to remain in the position (Deng & Sun, 2021).

### *Teacher Self-efficacy and Job Satisfaction*

The theory of self-efficacy was first introduced by Bandura in 1977, and he further situated this term in the construct of the social cognitive theory of human behaviour in 1986 (Pajares, 1997). Applying Bandura's conception of self-efficacy to the topic of this study, a *banzhuren's* self-efficacy may be defined as their belief in their own ability to execute a course of activities to facilitate educational tasks and goals (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). This belief determines each *banzhuren's* choice of behaviours (whether and how to pursue the courses of action), how much effort they will expend, and how long they will persevere when facing difficulties (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy possesses a dynamic and cyclical nature (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). More specifically, people with higher self-efficacy tend to invest more effort and persistence in their tasks, resulting in improved performance across various areas. This improved performance, in turn, enhances their self-efficacy. Conversely, those with lower self-efficacy may avoid taking action or give up easily, leading to poor outcomes that further diminish their self-efficacy. Teachers' self-efficacy is most malleable in the early stage of their career and, with their working experience accumulated, their self-efficacy will increase and become firmly established (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

The positive influence of teachers' self-efficacy on job satisfaction has been confirmed by extensive research conducted in various countries (Collie et al., 2012; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Ortan et al., 2021; Troesch & Bauer, 2017; H. Wang et al., 2015) revealing a general conclusion: teachers with a high level of self-efficacy report greater job satisfaction. Among the various antecedents of teacher job satisfaction, including school conditions, leadership, job stress, salary, students' discipline, social support, self-efficacy, and demographic factors such as gender and age (Brezicha et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2012; Toropova et al., 2021; H. Wang, Cousineau, et al., 2022; Y. Wang, Wen, et al., 2022; X. Zhao & Jeon, 2024), self-efficacy is considered one of the most influential contributors to job satisfaction (Naz, 2017). Akomolafe and Ogunmakin (2014) concluded that teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to think more positively about their work and are able to handle challenging work tasks more effectively, thereby contributing to their job satisfaction. Moreover, teachers' self-efficacy in different aspects of their work can also have varying effects on their job satisfaction. For instance, Huang et al. (2020) showed that teacher self-efficacy in teacher-student relationships and school decision making had a more positive influence on teachers' job satisfaction and commitment than self-efficacy in classroom teaching. Building on the previous research about the relationship between self-efficacy and job satisfaction, the first hypothesis in this study is:

*H1: Banzhurens' self-efficacy positively affects their job satisfaction.*

### *Teacher Burnout and Its Relationship with Self-efficacy and Job Satisfaction*

The concept of burnout was first identified by Freudenberger (1974) as a state that occurred among staff members working in free clinics. Freudenberger proposed that the behavioural signs of burnout are "a staff member's quickness to anger and instantaneous irritation and frustration responses" (p.160), and verbally expressing a negative attitude. Subsequently, Maslach and Jackson (1986) developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory scale to assess individuals' levels of job burnout. They described three aspects of burnout syndromes in the workplace: increased feelings of emotional exhaustion, negative and cynical attitudes about one's client, and the tendency to evaluate oneself negatively. Consequently, burnout was predominantly defined by three main components: exhaustion, cynicism, and professional inefficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Of these, emotional exhaustion is regarded as the key element in the teaching profession because teachers often engage in emotional labour (Chang, 2009; Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Skaalvik &

Skaalvik, 2010). For *banzhurens* in particular, their work requires them to establish interpersonal relationships with their students, colleagues and students' parents (Zhou et al., 2024), which may frequently lead them to feel emotionally exhausted.

Previous studies conducted in various regions have clearly defined the negative relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and burnout. For example, self-efficacy was found to be a strong negative predictor of burnout among Iranian English-language teachers (Ghasemzadeh et al., 2019). Moreover, the negative association between self-efficacy and burnout was found to be bidirectional among primary school teachers in Morocco (Hassan & Ibourk, 2021), primary and middle school teachers in Norway (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), and grammar school teachers in Czechia (Smetackova, 2017). However, these relationships have been rarely examined in the studies concerning Chinese teachers or *banzhurens*. Based on such studies about the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and burnout, the second hypothesis of this study is:

*H2: Banzhurens' burnout negatively affects their self-efficacy.*

In contrast to the positive influence of self-efficacy on job satisfaction, burnout has a negative influence on teachers' job satisfaction (Hassan & Ibourk, 2021; Okçu & Çetin, 2017; Oropesa Ruiz et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009) and is a key determinant of teachers' turnover intentions (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Rajendran et al., 2020). Yorulmaz et al.'s (2017) analysis of 29 studies examining the relationships between teachers' job satisfaction and burnout in Turkey found that teachers' emotional exhaustion and reduced accomplishment were negatively correlated to job satisfaction on a medium level, and teachers' depersonalisation and job satisfaction were negatively correlated at a low level. While Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2020) found that teachers' job satisfaction was positively predicted by self-perceived accomplishment (positively measured) and negatively predicted by emotional exhaustion, cynicism (depersonalisation) had no significant influence on job satisfaction. The negative relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among Chinese teachers has also been examined (e.g., Leung & Lee, 2006). Among *banzhurens*, job burnout was significantly higher than for subject specialist teachers (Dong, 2020), and burnout was one of the important factors that decreased their job satisfaction (Yang, 2016). Moreover, in Chen's (2020) study, *banzhurens'* career stress negatively impacted their job satisfaction and further increased their sense of burnout. On the basis of these studies, the third hypothesis of this study is:

*H3: Banzhurens' burnout negatively affects their job satisfaction.*

Based on the existing research, teacher burnout negatively influences self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Conversely, self-efficacy has a positive effect on job satisfaction. This raises the question of whether self-efficacy can serve as a protective factor against the negative impact of burnout on job satisfaction. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis of this study is:

*H4: Banzhurens' self-efficacy mediates the effect of their burnout on job satisfaction.*

In conclusion, job satisfaction among teachers is a well-explored topic globally, with extensive research examining the effects of self-efficacy and burnout across various regions. However, the extent to which job satisfaction is influenced by burnout and self-efficacy remains underexplored among *banzhurens* in the Chinese context. This study seeks to address this research gap.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach, specifically structural equation modelling, to explore the relationships between *banzhurens'* self-efficacy, burnout, and job satisfaction. According to the hypotheses proposed in the previous section, the research framework is displayed in Figure 1.

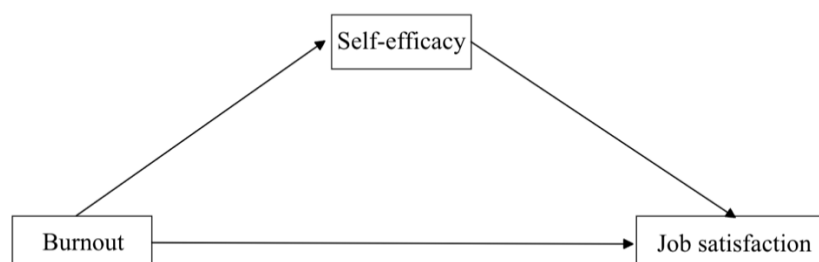


Figure 1. Research Framework

### Research Instrument

A questionnaire consisting of three constructs measuring participants' job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and burnout was distributed through the Qualtrics platform. Participants responded to the questionnaire items using a 7-point Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree (Simms et al., 2019). The questionnaire items were selected from existing research (Ho & Au, 2006; H. Liu, 2003; Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Since the target participants in this study were Chinese primary school *banzhurens*, the items related to burnout and job satisfaction were rephrased and translated into Mandarin from English. Furthermore, the items related to self-efficacy were translated from Mandarin into English, as illustrated in the Appendix, to assist the readers of this study. There were three steps in the translation process. First, we translated the English items into Chinese through ChatGPT. Second, we revised and refined the translations to ensure the expressions were appropriate and accurate. Third, we translated them back into English through ChatGPT to confirm that the original meanings remained unchanged. In summary, the instrument (questionnaire) used in this study consists of three constructs: job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and burnout, with sub-constructs under the constructs of self-efficacy and burnout.

*Job satisfaction scale:* Four items from Ho and Au's (2006) Teaching Satisfaction Scale (TSS) were adopted to measure *banzhurens*' job satisfaction. The expressions were changed to fit the purpose of this study. For example, the original item, "In most ways, being a teacher is close to my ideal", was rephrased to "In many aspects, being a *banzhuren* is close to the expectation of my dream job". The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of this scale was .877. The scale factor loadings were between .705 and .874. The composite reliability (CR) is .877, and the average variance extracted (AVE) is .643.

*Self-Efficacy Scale:* *Banzhurens*' self-efficacy was measured by the items selected from the Primary School Teacher Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (H. Liu, 2003), which consisted of three sub-constructs – instructional strategies, management and administration, and interpersonal support – adding up to 56 items in total. To serve the purpose of this study and according to the theory and previous research (Bandura, 2006; Geng, 2018; Huang et al., 2020), only the items that were highly related to *banzhurens*' daily work were used. Consequently, the scale of self-efficacy used in this study had 12 items, and the original three sub-constructs of the survey were not changed. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .929. The scale factor loadings were between .533 and .805. The CR is .933, and the AVE is .542.

*Burnout scale:* The Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) (MBI), a widely used scale (e.g., Pietarinen et al., 2013; Shen et al., 2015), was adopted in this study. The MBI consists of three sub-constructs: emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and depersonalisation. However, in this study, the items under the sub-construct of personal accomplishment had a strong similarity with the items of self-efficacy. Moreover, emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation have been confirmed as two central elements of burnout (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010;). Consequently, the personal accomplishment items were excluded from this study to minimise multicollinearity among the items, while eight items measuring emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation were retained. Some items were rephrased to better serve the purpose of this study. For example, the item "Working with people directly puts too much stress on me" was rephrased to "Working with people (colleagues and students) directly puts too much stress on me", and to enhance understanding for Chinese participants, the item "I feel like I'm at the end of my rope" was translated and rephrased as "I feel like I'm reaching my limit." The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of this scale was .915. The range of factor loadings is [.656, .884]. The CR is .916, and the AVE is .581.

### Sample

The participants were primary school *banzhurens* who worked in G City, a small city in Henan province in China. Convenience sampling was used. The number of *banzhurens* completing the questionnaire was 624. After deleting the incomplete responses or those not finished within the 200 seconds allowed, 516 valid responses were kept for the analysis. This amounted to around 40% of the total number of *banzhurens* in G City.

Of the 516 responses, 96.9% (500) were female and 3.1% (16) were male. According to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2023), 78.7% of full-time teachers in primary schools in Henan province were female. This indicates that a gender disproportion in the data collected. The age of the participants was broken down into three groups: 76 (14.7%) *banzhurens* were under 30 years old; 421 (81.6%) were aged 31 to 50 years old; and 19 (3.68%) were over 50 years old. The *banzhurens*' experiences in this role were also categorised into three groups: 139 (26.9%) teachers had been *banzhurens* for less than 5 years; 221 (42.8%) for 6 to 20 years; and 156 (30.2%) for more than 20 years.

### Data Analysis

The data was collected in November and December 2023. The first step in the data analysis after the completion of data collection was data cleaning using StataSE 16. The 516 valid responses were kept. The second step was descriptive analysis. Then, a set of rigorous reliability and validity tests were conducted by SPSS29 and Mplus8 as the third step to verify that the instruments used were reliable, accurate and effective. The indicators of reliability tests – coefficients of  $\alpha$  were computed by SPSS 29, and the indicators of validity test – factor loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted were computed by Mplus8 and Microsoft Excel 2024.

The fourth step was confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the fitness of the measurement model. The model fit indices employed were well established by previous studies; they included  $\chi^2$  (Chi-Square) / *df* (degree of freedom), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis's Index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardised root mean square residual (SRMR). Referring to Carmines and McIver (1981),  $\chi^2/df$  below 5.0 indicates an acceptable fit of the model. According to Y. Wang, Wen, et al. (2022), model fit can be acceptable if (a) CFI and TLI  $\geq .90$ ; (b) RMSEA and SRMR  $\leq .08$ ; and model fit can be excellent if (a) CFI and TLI  $\geq .95$ ; (b) RMSEA and SRMR  $\leq .05$ .

Before conducting structural analysis, we examined the distribution of the data for the four variables (including the control variable, which was elaborated at the end of this section) through SPSS 29 and confirmed that they follow a normal distribution. Finally, the structural relationships and mediation effect test were conducted by Mplus8 to test four hypotheses. The technique used for testing structural relationships was maximum likelihood estimation, which is suitable for continuous variables and normally distributed data. The technique for mediation effects testing was Bootstrap, which is verified as having a higher statistical power compared with the other methods (Hayes, 2009). Therefore, mediation effect tests were conducted by the method of bootstrapping with 5000 replicates.

The questionnaire also collected data on the participants' genders, ages and years of being *banzhuren*. Due to the disproportionate data for participants' gender distribution, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was not performed for gender groups. Participants' ages and years of experience are highly correlated with each other: years of experience can reflect on teachers' workability and performance more directly, and it is a variable that has been commonly applied in previous studies exploring teachers' job satisfaction, self-efficacy and burnout (e.g., Jentsch et al., 2023; Lauermann & Berger, 2021; Toropova et al., 2021). Thus, years of experience was a variable selected for ANOVA using StataSE 16, and it was controlled in the structural analysis and mediation tests since the variances are significant.

## Results

### Measurement Model

The CFA was conducted four times to test the model fit for the three scales and the whole questionnaire. The results (in Table 1) show that the  $\chi^2/df$  ranges from 1.000 to 3.580. RMSEA ranges from .046 to .071, and SRMR ranges from .009 to .066. TLI ranges from .913 to .998, and CFI ranges from .922 to .994. Thus, the questionnaire, as well as each construct, was acceptable.

Table 1. Fit Indices of Three Scales and the Whole Questionnaire

Fit indices*	$\chi^2_a$	<i>df</i> <sup>b</sup>	$\chi^2/df$ <sup>c</sup>	RMSEA <sup>d</sup>	SRMR <sup>e</sup>	TLI <sup>f</sup>	CFI <sup>g</sup>
JS	4.193	2	2.097	.046	.009	.998	.994
TSE	120.097	51	2.355	.051	.022	.982	.976
BNT	46.384	46.38	1.000	.053	.022	.984	.989
Whole questionnaire	891.499	249	3.580	.071	.066	.913	.922
Standards (Good fit)	-	-	< 5	< .08	< .08	> .900	> .900

\* JS, job satisfaction, TSE, self-efficacy and BNT, burnout.

<sup>a</sup> Chi-Square statistic

<sup>b</sup> Degree of freedom

<sup>c</sup> The ratio of  $\chi^2$  to the degrees of freedom (*df*)

<sup>d</sup> Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

<sup>e</sup> Standardised Root Mean Square Residual

<sup>f</sup> Tucker-Lewis's Index

<sup>g</sup> Comparative Fit Index

Additionally, discriminant validity was assessed. By comparing all pairwise construct correlations with the square root of AVE (the bold numbers in Table 2), the results show that discriminant validity was confirmed, as the diagonal elements (AVE) exceeded those of the off-diagonal elements (pairwise construct correlations) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Therefore, the results (see Table 2) demonstrate that the constructs within the questionnaire are distinctly different from one another. Thus, the questionnaire exhibits good discriminant validity.

Table 2. The Discriminatory Validity Test of the Whole Scale

Construct <sup>§</sup>	Mean	SD*	JS	TSE	BNT
JS	3.504	1.592	<b>.802</b>		
TSE	5.240	0.891	.583	<b>.736</b>	
BNT	4.485	1.402	-.628	-.478	<b>.762</b>

<sup>§</sup>JS, job satisfaction, TSE, self-efficacy and BNT, burnout.

\* Standard deviation

### Descriptive Analysis

The overall mean of the participating *banzhurens'* job satisfaction is  $3.50 \pm 0.89$ . This indicates that, in general, the *banzhurens* were slightly dissatisfied with their jobs. *Banzhurens* with longer years of experience demonstrated more satisfaction with their job. The mean of the *banzhurens'* overall self-efficacy is  $5.24 \pm 0.89$ , suggesting that they were relatively confident about their work-related tasks. *Banzhurens'* self-efficacy increased with the years of experience accumulated, especially regarding the aspect of management and administration. The overall mean of *banzhurens'* burnout is  $4.49 \pm 1.40$ . Their burnout decreased with the increase in years of experience. In comparison to job satisfaction and burnout, the *banzhurens'* scores on self-efficacy exhibit a lower standard deviation, indicating that the responses for each item are more consistent and less dispersed from the mean. Regarding the two aspects of burnout, the participants reported more emotional exhaustion than depersonalisation. When comparing self-efficacy regarding instructional strategy and management and administration, the participants showed comparatively lower self-efficacy concerning interpersonal support, particularly in communicating with their school leaders.

The results of ANOVA indicate that the *banzhurens* with different years of experience have significantly different levels of job satisfaction ( $p < .10$ ), self-efficacy ( $p < .05$ ) and burnout ( $p < .10$ ). Thus, the variable for years of being *banzhuren* is controlled in the following analysis.

### Hypothesis Test: Structural Model Analysis

To confirm the first three hypotheses, structural model analysis was conducted while controlling for the variable of years of experience to eliminate their influence on the SEM model (Table 3). The results indicate that *banzhurens'* self-efficacy significantly affected their job satisfaction positively, with a standardised path coefficient of .361 ( $p < .001$ ). Burnout had a significant negative impact on job satisfaction (standardised path coefficient of -.554,  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, burnout also negatively influenced self-efficacy, with a standardised path coefficient of -.451 ( $p < .001$ ). Therefore, the first three hypotheses are verified. As well, through comparing the standardised coefficients, burnout exhibited a stronger effect on job satisfaction compared to self-efficacy.

Table 3. Summary of Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Paths	Unstd. <sup>a</sup>	S.E. <sup>b</sup>	Z <sup>c</sup>	P <sup>d</sup>	Std. <sup>e</sup>
H1	TSE → JS	0.736	0.086	8.578	***	.361
H2	BNT → TSE	-0.223	0.024	-9.472	***	-.451
H3	BNT → JS	-0.560	0.042	-13.19	***	-.554

<sup>a</sup> Unstandardized coefficient of the path

<sup>b</sup> Standard error

<sup>c</sup> *t*-value, used to calculate the *p*-value

<sup>d</sup> *p*-value < .1 \*; *p*-value < .05 \*\*; *p*-value < .001 \*\*\*

<sup>e</sup> Standardized coefficient

### Hypothesis Test: Mediation Effect Test

The structural model in the previous section indicates that job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and burnout are significantly related to one another, which raises the question of the role of self-efficacy as a mediating variable in the tested SEM. Therefore, a mediation effect test was conducted, and the variable years of experience was controlled to eliminate its influence on the mediation effect model.

The results are summarised in Table 4. Under the 95% confidence interval, all three path results of the bootstrapping tests do not include zero, which means self-efficacy had a mediating effect on the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis was verified. The results also indicated that teacher burnout had a total negative effect on job satisfaction at 0.297. Within this (can also see Figure 2), the direct negative effect (after the mediating variable self-efficacy was controlled) of burnout on job satisfaction is 0.110, and the indirect effect of burnout on job satisfaction, which was mediated via self-efficacy (i.e.,  $a*b$ ), is -0.187. The ratio of the indirect effect to the total effect (i.e.,  $a*b/c$ ) is often interpreted as the proportion of the total effect that is mediated (Hayes, 2009). Thus, for the mediation hypothesis, adding teachers' self-efficacy to the model reduced 62.96% of these effects. This shows that self-efficacy mediated 62.96% of the negative influence from burnout to job satisfaction.

Table 4. The Results of the Mediation Effect Analysis

BNT*→TSE*→JS*	Indirect effect					Proportion of relative effect
	B (a*b)	SE <sup>a</sup>	Z <sup>b</sup>	Bootstrapping 95% CI <sup>c</sup>		
	-0.187	0.029	-6.429	[-0.243	-0.129]	62.96%
BNT→JS	Direct effect					
	B (c')	SE	Z	Bootstrapping 95% CI		
	-0.110	0.017	-6.642	[-0.143	-0.077]	37.04%
BNT→JS	Total effect					
	B (c)	SE	Z	Bootstrapping 95% CI		
	-0.297	0.032	-9.25	[-0.358	-0.229]	100.00%

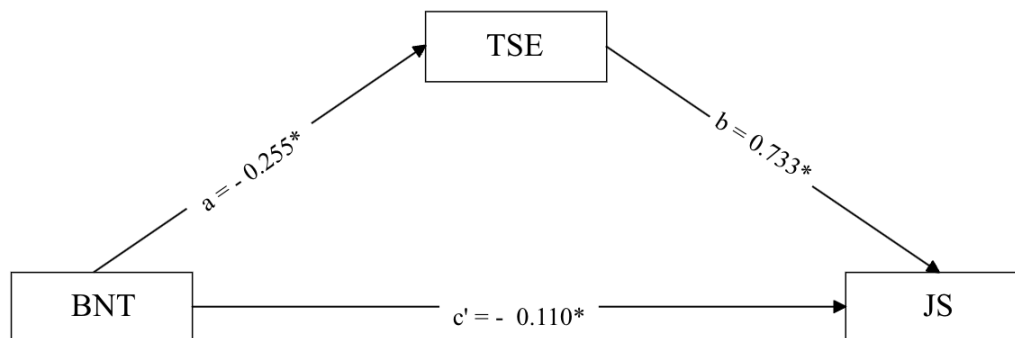
\*JS, teachers' job satisfaction; TSE, teachers' self-efficacy; BNT, teachers' burnout

B Unstandardized coefficient of the path

<sup>a</sup> Standard error

<sup>b</sup> *t*-value, used to calculate the *p*-value

<sup>c</sup> Bootstrap confidence intervals



<sup>a</sup> The variable for years of experience was controlled but not shown in this figure.

\* Unstandardized coefficient of the path

Figure 2. The Structure of Mediation Affects <sup>a</sup>

## Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the relationships between self-efficacy, burnout, and job satisfaction among Chinese primary school *banzhurens* in G city of Henan Province in China. In addition, it examined whether self-efficacy played a mediating role in the effect of burnout on job satisfaction. Within the framework of structural equation modelling, the models used in this study are validated, and the goodness of fit indexes are acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kelloway, 1998).

### Effect of Burnout

Burnout was verified as significantly negatively influencing the participating *banzhurens*' job satisfaction. In other words, the *banzhurens*' job satisfaction decreased if their burnout increased. A few Chinese studies also found negative relationships between *banzhurens*' burnout and job satisfaction (e.g., Yang, 2016). Regarding the impacts of different sub-constructs of burnout, studies from Asian and Western countries (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Yorulmaz et al., 2017) reported a significant influence of emotional exhaustion. A possible reason the *banzhurens* felt burnout might be their excessive emotional exhaustion from their heavy workloads and overwhelming responsibilities (Zhou et al., 2024). As mentioned earlier, their responsibilities involve completing school assessments, managing classroom affairs, and providing guidance and support for individual student development (C. Zhang, 2022). In effect, they become their students' "nanny", "coach", "manager", and "liaison" to varying degrees, whether actively or passively (She, 2021). Teachers' heavy workloads resulting in burnout have also been widely reported elsewhere (e.g., Jomud et al., 2021). Furthermore, because educational policy documents repeatedly emphasise the significance of the role of *banzhurens* in students' overall education, other school members, such as subject specialist teachers and school leaders, tend to perceive them as having the primary responsibility for their students' all-round development (Du, 2016).

Burnout also significantly negatively affects *banzhurens*' self-efficacy, as confirmed through structural equation modelling in this study and reported by Shoji et al. (2016) and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010). Bandura (1977) also proposed that the level of emotional and physiological arousal affects a person's self-perception of their efficacy in the workplace. Therefore, it is likely that when *banzhurens* frequently endure negative mental states such as emotional exhaustion, fatigue, or depersonalisation, their confidence in managing work tasks will also diminish. Conversely, the



positive emotions they experience at work, such as joy, happiness, and a sense of achievement, will enhance their self-efficacy.

### *Effect of Self-efficacy*

The first hypothesis – *banzhurens'* self-efficacy positively affects their job satisfaction– was confirmed through structural equation modelling. This positive relationship among teachers has also been reported in Canada (Klassen & Chiu, 2010), Romania (Ortan et al., 2021), Germany (Jentsch et al., 2023), and Australia (Granziera & Perera, 2019). One of the possible reasons for the positive influence of self-efficacy on job satisfaction may be that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to accept and try new teaching methods and classroom management strategies and to pursue better work conditions that support their efforts; these factors may lead to effective teaching (such as student academic achievement) (Caprara et al., 2006; Klassen & Tze, 2014) as well as less job stress and burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), contributing to a higher level of job satisfaction.

It is worth noting that among the 12 items of the self-efficacy assessment scale, the only item with a score below 5 is "*I can communicate my ideas and perspectives with leadership*" (mean rating of  $4.41 \pm 1.59$ ). There are two possible reasons for this. First, the participating *banzhurens* themselves may lack appropriate communication skills. Second, they may not have received satisfactory or expected responses after sincere communication with their school leaders. It is anticipated that the low rating on this item is more likely a result of the second reason. This is because, in some schools in China, school leaders usually adopt bureaucratic leadership approaches and professional strategies that value only praise and effort, while discouraging suggestions and demands (X. Zhang et al., 2022).

The fourth hypothesis about *banzhurens'* self-efficacy mediating the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction was tested as valid. This result indicates that the *banzhurens'* self-efficacy could have reduced the negative influence of their burnout on job satisfaction. In other words, self-efficacy can be regarded as a protective factor against burnout (Shoji et al., 2016). Based on the scores of the participating *banzhurens'* self-efficacy, improving self-efficacy regarding interpersonal support, particularly in communication with school leaders, may be an effective strategy to boost their job satisfaction. This aligns with the findings in previous studies that school leaders' support is crucial for lessening *banzhurens'* emotional exhaustion (Zhou et al., 2024) and increasing their job satisfaction (Kuai & Zeng, 2016). While establishing a positive work environment, school leaders should also emphasise the "relational leadership" strategy, fostering positive norms of trust, mutual respect, and collective responsibility with *banzhurens* (S. Liu & Hallinger, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

One of the major contributions of this study is the establishment and verification as reliable and valid of a questionnaire that measures *banzhurens'* job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and burnout – three significant factors reflecting the working status of *banzhurens*. Moreover, this study confirmed the positive relationship between *banzhurens'* self-efficacy and job satisfaction, along with the negative impact of burnout on both self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Additionally, *banzhurens'* self-efficacy serves a protective role against the impact of burnout on job satisfaction. We suggest that school leaders and other relevant authorities enhance *banzhurens'* job satisfaction by lessening their burnout, specifically through decreased workloads, by demonstrating greater respect, understanding, and support for them, and by encouraging communication to bolster their self-efficacy.

## **Limitations**

Some limitations of this study need to be considered. First, because this is quantitative research, we could not capture the in-depth story behind the three variables. Second, the data was collected from a small city in China; thus, the results cannot be generalised or applied to the entire country of China. Third, although many factors contribute to a lack of job satisfaction, including insufficient allowance, interpersonal support, work stress, and opportunities for professional development, we selected for investigation only two factors – self-efficacy and burnout – which are extensively discussed among teachers in general but rarely mentioned among *banzhurens*.

## **Recommendations**

We recommend that future research investigate the effect of *banzhurens'* self-efficacy and burnout through both quantitative and qualitative methods to better understand how these factors influence job satisfaction and which sub-construct of these two factors holds the greatest significance. Additionally, research could explore whether and how other relevant factors contribute to *banzhurens'* job satisfaction. Collecting data from various locations would provide deeper insights into the work-related dilemmas faced by Chinese primary school *banzhurens*.

## Ethics Statements

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committees of the University of Technology Sydney, with approval number ETH23-8528. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

## Generative AI Statement

As the authors of this work, we used the AI tools ChatGPT and Grammarly for the purpose of translating and grammar checking. After using these AI tools, we reviewed and verified the final version of our work. We, as the authors, take full responsibility for the content of our published work.

## Authorship Contribution Statement

Bai: Concept and design, data acquisition, data analysis/interpretation, writing. Lai: Drafting manuscript, critical revision of manuscript, supervision, final approval.

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## Appendix

Job Satisfaction	1. In many aspects, being a <i>banzhuren</i> is close to the expectation of my dream job.
	2. I am satisfied with being a <i>banzhuren</i> .
	3. So far, in the position of a <i>banzhuren</i> , I have gotten what I wanted.
	4. If I could choose my occupation again, I would still choose to be a <i>banzhuren</i> .
Self-efficacy-instructional strategy	5. I can help students master different learning methods.
	6. I can cultivate students' curiosity and thirst for knowledge.
	7. I can help students understand their responsibilities in both academic and non-academic aspects.
Self-efficacy - management and administration	8. I can enable students to assess themselves accurately.
	9. I can make students aware of my expectations for them.
	10. I can encourage students to view me as a friend.
	11. I can handle conflicts among students effectively.
Self-efficacy - interpersonal support	12. I can create a safe and secure school environment for students.
	13. I can share teaching experiences with colleagues to improve teaching quality.
	14. I can communicate my ideas and perspectives with leadership.
	15. I can obtain understanding and support from parents regarding my work.
	16. I can convince parents of struggling students that their children can make progress through effort.
Burnout-Emotional Exhaustion	17. I feel emotionally drained from my work.
	18. I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.
	19. I feel burned out from my work.
	20. I feel frustrated by my job.
Burnout-Depersonalisation	21. Working with people directly puts too much stress on me.
	22. I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.
	23. I've become more callous toward people since I took this job.
	24. I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally.