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The Relationship Between Intercultural Adaptation and Resilient Development in Kindergarten Teacher and Caregiver in Ethnic Rural Areas of China: A Mediating Model

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to develop a causal model of the resilience development of kindergarten teachers and caregivers in ethnic rural areas of China using relationship quality as a mediator. Basing on an extensive literature review, variables were identified and hypothesized models were constructed, and each variable was scored on a 5-point Likert scale. A valid survey was conducted and questionnaire data were collected from 1,187 kindergarten teachers and caregivers in Sichuan, Yunnan, and Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Regions of China, and data were analyzed using SPSS 23.0 and Smart-PLS 4.0 software. The results indicated that intercultural adaptation had a significant positive effect on the development of resilience in kindergarten teachers and caregivers, and that relationship quality played a partial mediating role between intercultural adaptation and resilience development in kindergarten teachers and caregivers, confirming that relationship quality is an effective mediator that enhances the development of resilience. Kindergarten teacher and caregiver, educational administration, and their staff would benefit from improving the quality of caregiver relationships, and other factors could be used to expand future research in related areas to improve the development of caregiver resilience in rural kindergartens in ethnic areas of China and to promote the retention of high-quality teachers in ethnic areas.

Keywords: Structural equation modeling, intercultural adaptation, resilience development, relationship quality, mediating role.

Introduction

Student populations in disadvantaged areas have been the subject of extensive attention and ongoing research by academics around the world, and the issue of retention of teacher populations in disadvantaged areas is attracting the attention of an increasing number of scholars in a growing number of countries and regions at a time when the challenge of retaining high-quality teachers is common to the field of international education (Abdurrahman, 2006). Rural areas populated by ethnic minorities are affected by a combination of many subjective and objective disadvantages (Lisa et al. , 2023) due to geographic isolation, for example, more economic backwardness (Showalter et al. , 2019; Skyhar, 2020), lack of access to transportation, poorer living conditions, fewer opportunities for advancement, and lack of collegial support, and teachers who are in these areas are faced with more unique stresses-difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers and administrators (Berry et al., 2011), role conflict, ambiguous expectations, physical and emotional exhaustion, difficulty managing behavior, difficulty building relationships with students and colleagues, misunderstood student learning differences and needs, and cultural differences and conflicts (Garwood et al. . 2018), having teachers working in rural areas

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experience more challenges such as burnout than teachers working in urban or suburban areas (Carroll et al., 2022), and increasing teacher turnover and attrition, with staff turnover in schools in economically disadvantaged areas with a high percentage of minority students being 9% higher than in schools in economically developed areas or with a low percentage of minority students (Carver-Thomas et al., 2019), teachers working in minority areas have a higher intention to leave (Billingsley, 2004), and Billingsley and Bettini (2019), in a review of teacher turnover and retention, call for the state to develop specific procedures to proactively address the challenges.

Over the past two decades, teacher resilience development has been emphasized by scholars as a significant predictor of "teacher retention" and "stress" (Yang et al., 2022). Originally developed in the field of psychotherapy for ethnic minority women, resilience development research suggests that individuals become more aware of the difficulties and challenges they encounter with themselves, others, and their unique cultural context through intercultural adaptation, which in turn calls for individuals to continually improve their multicultural counseling skills in multicultural contexts (Judith et al., 2004). Intercultural communication theory further suggests that the participation of members of different cultural backgrounds in interpersonal communication in an intercultural context will involve individuals in an interpersonal network that connects them to their own economic and social backgrounds, which is considered to be the pivot and link for the development of intercultural adaptation and resilience (Kim et al., 1988). As a member of the intercultural environment, the group of kindergarten teachers and caregivers in ethnic rural areas should also have a certain degree of intercultural adaptability (Wang et al., 2006), in order to make better use of the unique local resources related to interculturalism, to positively cope with a variety of challenges that may arise in their work, life, and study (Wosnitza et al., 2018), and to improve their own mental toughness development and promote the retention of high-quality teachers in ethnic areas (Zhu et al., 2019). Based on this, this study proposes the following research objectives, research hypotheses, and hypothesized models in an attempt to explore the causal relationship between intercultural adaptation, resilience development, and relationship quality of kindergarten caregivers in ethnic rural areas, and to provide suggestions for promoting high-quality teacher retention in ethnic rural areas.

Research Objectives

- a. Exploring the causality of intercultural adaptation using relationship quality as a mediator influencing the development of resilience in child care workers.
- b. Causal modeling of the development of resilience in kindergarten teachers and caregivers using relationship quality as a mediator and intercultural adaptation as an influencing factor.

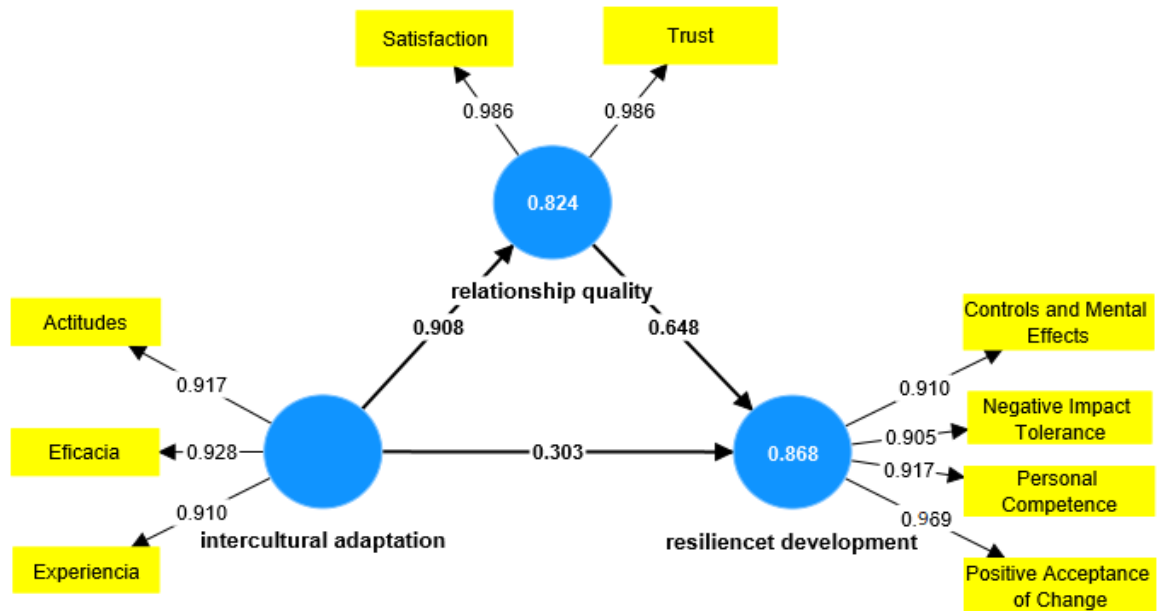
Research Hypotheses

H1: *Intercultural adaptation as a direct positive influence on resilience development*

H2: *Relationship quality as intercultural adaptation has an indirect effect on resilience development*

Hypothesized Model

Basing on the literature review, variables were identified and a hypothetical model was constructed, as shown in Figure 1, which was hypothesized to consist of three variables: intercultural adaptation, resilience development, and relationship quality. The Intercultural Adaptation variable includes three dimensions: efficacy, attitudes, and Experiencia (Berrozpe et al., 2020). Relationship Quality variable as a mediator includes two dimensions: Trust, Satisfaction (Yang, 2022). Resilient Development variable includes four dimensions: Personal Competence, Negative Impact Tolerance, and Positive Acceptance of Change, Controls and Mental Effects (Connor et al., 2003).

Figure 1. Hypothesized Mode

Literature Review

Associations Between Relationship Quality and Resilient Development

According to the relational culture theory, individuals' journey of psychological growth occurs within specific relationships (Goldstein et al. 2012). Resilient relationship load theory further argues that the relationship between social relationships and resilient development needs to be generated by individuals in various social relationships, and their interactions with individuals (Robles et al., 2014), the main social relationships in the work and life of rural kindergarten teachers in ethnic areas include: colleague relationships, teacher-child relationships, teacher-school relationships, and parent-teacher relationships (GU, 2014), among which colleague relationships, teacher-child relationships are the core relationships, while the relationship between kindergarten teachers and caregivers is the most critical one. Among them, colleague relationship, teacher-child relationship is the core relationship, and the relationship between kindergarten teachers and caregivers in the colleague relationship is in the most critical position, and the relationship between caregivers and teachers from the frequency of interaction, the distance of the "form of the relationship", to the mutual trust, satisfaction of the "substance of the relationship", are higher than the other colleagues. "The relationship between teachers and caregivers is even more critical than that between other colleagues. Yang et al. (2022) showed that coworker relationships are an important factor influencing the development of teachers' resilience in ethnic areas (Yang et al., 2022), and there is a significant positive correlation between coworker relationships and teachers' resilience development in schools in ethnic areas. Trust, satisfaction, and enduring relationships between colleagues at work provide positive psychological, intellectual, and social environmental support, help both of them to build shared values, professional knowledge, and a sense of teamwork, and promote enduring professional commitment (GU, 2014), which supports teacher resilience development (Li et al. 2014).

Resilience has also been viewed as a significant predictor of successful coping with stress (Kathryn et al., 2003). Sharing professional interests, goals, understandings, and experiences through positive communication interactions among childcare professionals can reduce stress caused by various adversities in the workplace (Lossen et al., 2013) and promote maintaining a healthy state of psychological well-being among each other (Bartholomew et al., 2014), while at the same time, positively

coping with stress to maintain psychological well-being is strongly associated with the team members' There is a strong link between positive coping with stress to maintain psychological well-being and the level of quality of collaborative relationships between team members (Johnson, 2014). Therefore, the developmental status of the quality of relationships among coworkers is an important resource for enhancing the development of individual resilience (GU, 2014).

Associations Between Relationship Quality and Intercultural Adaptation

American anthropologists RedField et al. (1936) opened the field of intercultural research in the early 20th century, arguing that intercultural adaptation is a process of change in two or more different cultural patterns facilitated by groups of people with two or more different cultural backgrounds in the course of sustained contact. For teachers and caregivers in ethnic rural areas, intercultural adaptation not only affects the way caregivers approach the challenges of life and teaching activities, but also affects the way they approach students and the calibration of relationships among colleagues (Wang et al., 2006). In collaborating with each other to jointly carry out preservation activities in ethnic rural areas, kindergarten teachers and caregivers face not only the challenges of individual factors such as unpredictable classroom problematic behaviors of students, heavy preservation workloads, and difficult living conditions, but also the challenges of organizational environments, such as cultural differences among colleagues and a lack of support from favorable leaders, and the challenges posed by the difficulties test the professional commitment of the kindergarten teachers and caregivers, the challenges posed by the difficulties. Colleagues in the earlier studies who encountered difficulties in the organizational environment (e.g., lack of supportive leadership and colleagues) were particularly vulnerable to factors such as stress, job dissatisfaction, and the tendency to escape from difficulties by changing jobs (different schools) or abandoning their previous field of work altogether (Gersten et al., 2001; Billingsley, 2002).

How can this be addressed? Moon et al. (2012) argued that social interpersonal contact can increase opportunities for intercultural adaptation, and Im & Martin (2015), among others, further argued that the need for early childhood teachers and caregivers to be able to adapt interculturally with each other can also, in turn, increase internal colleague support (Gold, 1996). Developing the quality of relationships between caregivers through the establishment of an intimate state of mutual trust and satisfaction through respect for each other's cultural identity and customs, the positive role of the "social glue" of relationships (Goodwin, 2005), and more formal than informal interactions (Collie et al., 2012) in respectful and constructive intercultural contexts, allows caregivers to find and gain benefits from interactions that are "person-to-person" rather than "person-to-work". (Goodwin, 2005), more formal than informal interactions in respectful and constructive intercultural contexts (Collie et al., 2012), and allowing caregivers to seek and obtain positive psychological motivations that contribute to their job satisfaction from a 'person-to-person' rather than a 'person-to-work' perspective (Crossman et al., 2006). Crossman et al., 2006) to help teachers and caregivers in ethno-rural areas to be proactive in addressing difficulties and challenges and to promote teacher retention.

Associations Between Resilience Development and Intercultural Adaptation

Resilience embodies personal qualities that reflect a person's ability to adapt well in the face of stressful situations and to grow positively when encountering difficulties (Joyce et al., 2018). Research over the past 20 years has shown that resilience possesses multidimensional characteristics such as personal competence, tolerance of negative influences, positive acceptance of change, control, and spiritual influence (Connor et al., 2003), and changes with the influence of factors such as time, age, gender, cultural origins, and different life circumstances (Seligman et al., 2000). The development of resilience cannot be separated from a specific cultural environment, intercultural adaptation is significantly and positively correlated with the development of resilience (Mesidor et al. , 2016; Valentina et al. , 2022),

and the interface between the two implies a large number of interactional relationships, and interpersonal interactions safeguard the individual's ability to seek support and gain access to resources in a given situation (Palmer, 2007).

For an individual, a new cultural environment can mean a change in one's values, behaviors, and beliefs, resulting in a degree of intercultural stress (Berry, 2005). Early childhood teachers and caregivers in ethnic rural areas gradually build up intercultural psychological adaptation to the local culture in the process of overcoming intercultural pressures through long-term and sufficient intercultural contacts and interactive experiences with local ethnic minority colleagues, children and other cultural groups. According to the challenge model (O'Leary, 1998), when people face adversity in teaching, life and work, if the risk factors are not too extreme, the intercultural adaptation mechanism will be activated, and they will make cognitive, affective, and behavioral calibration of the adversity scenarios, and then make use of the interculturally relevant resources at their disposal in order to choose specific coping strategies, and at the same time, a person can choose to adapt to the local culture by using the interculturally relevant resources he or she possesses. coping strategies, and at the same time, one's cultural adaptability is enhanced (Ledesma, 2014). As adversity is closely related to resilience development (Schwarzer et al., 2013), preservationists, in the process, better conducted their own behaviors, suppressed negative emotion management, and continued to focus on positive experiences, enhancing their commitment to school and career.

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative research method was used to develop a causal model of intercultural adaptation to explore the causal relationships affecting the development of resilience among kindergarten teachers and caregivers in rural ethnic areas of China. While structural equation modeling (SEM) is considered a statistical method to explore or develop complex and dynamic interactions in educational research and practice (Khine, 2013), this study tested the causal relationships among hypothesized variables by constructing structural equation modeling (SEM).

Sample

Basing on Hair et al.'s (2010) recommendation that the total sample size for a research survey should be 10-20 times the number of variable measurement question items, the revised study identified 37 measurement variable question items, and it was estimated that the recommended sample size for this study should have ranged from 370-740 early childhood teachers and caregivers; however, because the actual response rate exceeded the projected maximum sample size for the study design, the estimated sample was included in the total sample size of the research design, so an additional 460 respondents were added to this study as an additional sample size. The estimated sample for this study was projected to be 1200 respondents.

Research Instrument

The revised questionnaire contains 37 items. Among them, 6 items are information on demographic variables, 7 items are Intercultural Adaptation Questionnaire (Berrozpe et al., 2020), 15 items are Relationship Quality Questionnaire (Zhang, 2020), 9 items are Resilient Development Questionnaire (Connor et al., 2003), and the above questionnaires were adapted according to the researcher's comments.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed to rural kindergarten teachers and caregivers in ethnic minority-populated areas in Z County of Yunnan Province, W County of Sichuan Province, and S County of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China, and the questionnaire collection process lasted for 5 months, and 1,200 questionnaires were returned by July 2023 (100% return rate), and 1,187 questionnaires (validity rate of 98.91%) were returned by excluding 13 invalid questionnaires.

Data Analysis

This study utilized SPSS 23.0 and Smart PLS 4.0 software for data analysis. In the first step, descriptive statistics were used to determine the frequency and percentage of each variable using SPSS 23.0 analysis software. In the second step, a structural equation hypothesis model was developed using the partial least squares method of the Smart PLS 4.0 analysis software, and the indicators of reliability and validity of the hypothesized model (convergent validity, discriminant validity, external loading, and covariance issues) were tested to establish a formal structural equation model to further validate whether relational quality mediates the development of intercultural adaptation and resilience.

Empirical Results

Demographic Information

In the survey data of 1,187 teachers and caregivers in rural kindergartens in China's ethnic areas, the total sample size was basically balanced across regions (each accounting for about 33%). There were more than 1.6 times as many job-status early childhood teachers (773 teachers; 61.8%) as caregivers (454 caregivers; 38.2%), which is basically close to China's basic job requirement for kindergartens to have two teachers and one caregiver (Kaderavek et al., 2014). The number of female caregivers (897; 75.6%) was three times higher than that of male caregivers (290; 24.4%), which intuitively reflects the relative shortage of male teachers in preschools in China and around the world (Sule et al., 2011). The number of teachers teaching different classes is relatively balanced, with more than 35% of teachers teaching small classes (444, 37.4%). More than half of the total number of teaching staff had a college degree (619, 52.1%), and more than one-third had a bachelor's degree or higher (393, 33.1%), basically reflecting the educational structure of the kindergarten teaching staff in China's ethnic rural areas (Zhao et al., 2008). More than 60% of the caregivers had 10 or fewer years of experience (807; 68%), and more than 40% of the total sample size had 1-5 years of experience (484; 40.8%), which basically reflects the fact that China has seen rapid development of rural preschool education in recent years, with a large number of additions to the staffing level (Zhou, 2011), and that the above samples better represent the situation of the rural kindergarten teachers in the ethnic areas of China and the The above sample better represents the overall situation of rural kindergarten teachers and caregivers in ethnic areas of China.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Kindergarten Educator and Caregiver (N=1187)

Demographics	Frequency	% age
1. Regions		
Sichuan	399	33.6
Yunnan	399	33.6
Xinjiang	389	32.8
2.Job Status		
Kindergarten Teacher	733	61.8
Caregiver	454	38.2
3.Genders		

Male	290	24.4
Female	897	75.6
4.Teaching Classes		
Small class	444	37.4
Middle class	348	29.3
Large class	395	33.3
5. Academic qualifications		
High school/secondary school and below	175	14.7
College	619	52.1
Bachelor degree or above	393	33.1
6. Years of working experience		
1-5 years	484	40.8
6-10 years	323	27.2
11-15 years	102	8.6
16-20 years	72	6.1
21 years and above	206	17.4

Indicator Testing of Hypothesized Mode

Validity and reliability are important indicators of measurement model validation, this study used convergent validity, discriminant validity to test the credibility of the measurement model, cronbach alpha, composite reliability and average variance extract to test the reliability of the model respectively. The reliability of the model (see Figure 1 and Table 2), the Cronbach alpha values for each variable of the measurement model ranged from 0.875-0.971, reaching the recommended value of Cronbach alpha greater than 0.7 (DeVellis, 2003); CR values ranged from 0.916-0.986, reaching the recommended value of CR greater than 0.6 (Höck & Ringle, 2006); AVE values ranged from 0.734-0.972 to reach the recommended value of AVE greater than 0.5 (Chin, 1998).

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity

Variables	Items	Outer Loading	VIF	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Relationship Quality (RQ)	Trust	0.986	4.175	0.971	0.986	0.972
	Satisfaction	0.986	3.175			
Intercultural Adaptation (IA)	Eficacia	0.928	3.206	0.907	0.942	0.843
	Actitudes	0.917	3.067			
	Experiencia	0.91	2.738			
	Personal Competencen	0.917	3.349			
Resilient Development (RD)	Negative Impact Tolerance	0.905	3.054	0.875	0.916	0.734
	Positive Acceptance of Change	0.969	1.408			
	Controls and Mental Effects	0.91	3.194			

After that, this study also investigated the external loadings of the variables, which constituted the external loadings of the variables ranging from 0.905-0.986, and all of them reached the recommended value of external loadings greater than 0.6 (Xiao, 2013). In order to test the issue of covariance between the variables of the measurement model, this study also used the variance inflation factor (VIF) indicator, and the results showed that the VIF values of the variables ranged from 1.4-4.175, and all of them reached the suggested

value of VIF values less than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2016); therefore, there is no evidence of the indicator that directly indicates the problem of covariance bias in the hypothesized model of this study.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker)

Variables	RQ	IA	RD
Relationship Quality (RQ)	0.918		
Intercultural Adaptation (IA)	0.908	0.986	
Resilient Development (RD)	0.891	0.923	0.857

In addition, in order to investigate the discriminant validity of the variables of the hypothesized model, this study assessed the discriminant validity of the model using the Fornell-Larcker and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio criteria, respectively (Hair et al., 2016). The Fornell-Larcker criterion determines the validity of the model by calculating the average variance extracted values of all variables of the model, and after calculating (see Table 3), the initial Fornell-Larcker values of each column of the variables of the present study, are higher than the scores of the remaining items within the columns, and at the same time, the standardized values of the HTMT ratios of all the variables range from 0.866 to 0.886, which is in line with the HTMT values greater than the acceptable range of 0.9 (Hair et al., 2016), therefore, the hypothesized model constructed in this study has discriminant validity. In addition, this study used R2 values to assess whether the structural equation modeling was robust in the initial data (Hair et al., 2016), which showed that the R2 values had an impact value of 0.824 on the quality of relationships among the preservationists and 0.868 on the development of resilience among the preservationists, suggesting that the resultant equation modeling was structurally robust.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Variables	RQ	IA	RD
Relationship Quality (RQ)			
Intercultural Adaptation (IA)	0.866		
Resilient Development (RD)	0.886	0.884	

Hypothesized Mode Testing for the Development of Resilience in kindergarten teachers and caregivers Mediated by Relationship Quality

In this study, a total of 5,000 different samples were selected for the bootstrap method technique in the Smat PLS 4.0 software to statistically validate the model research hypotheses by determining the "T" value and "p" value (Hair et al., 2016). Among them, Figure 2 and Table 5 explain the results of H1 relationship shows that intercultural adaptation has a significant positive effect on the development of resilience of child care workers ($t=89.066$, $p<0.001$), so the research hypothesis H1 is accepted. Additionally, the Beta value for research hypothesis H1 indicated that if the intercultural adaptation of a child care worker produces a one-unit change in their resilience development, a (0.891) corresponding one-unit change in their resilience development will occur.

Table 5: Direct Effects

Variables	Beta	SD	T Values	p Values
IA -> RQ	0.908	0.008	109.002	0.000
IA -> RD	0.891	0.01	89.066	0.000
RQ -> RD	0.647	0.04	16.167	0.000

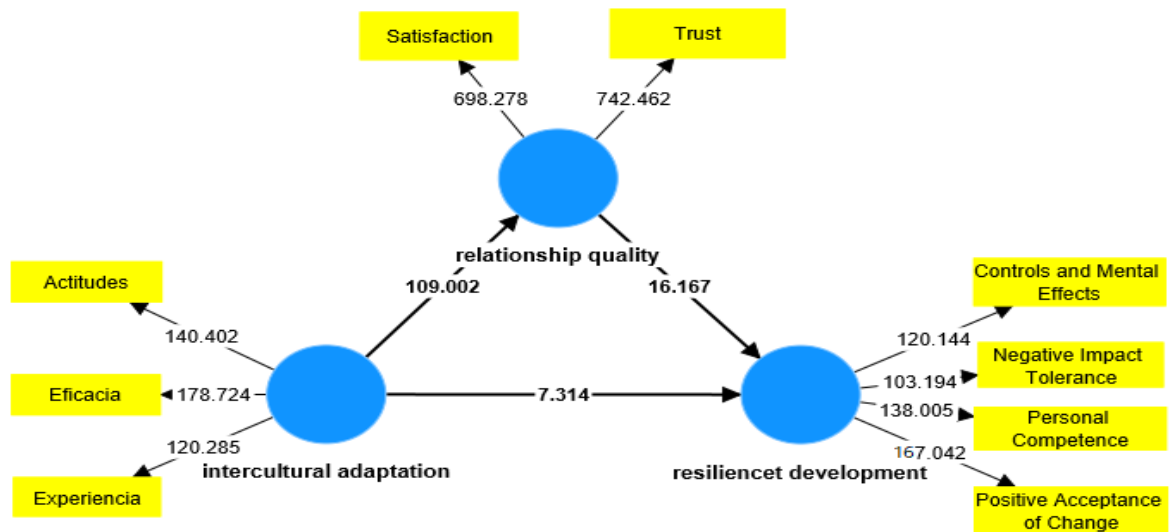
Table 6 shows the effect of intercultural adaptation and resilience development on mediated relationship quality of the kindergarten teachers and caregivers. The results showed that there was a mediated relationship between relationship quality of the kindergarten teachers and caregivers and intercultural adaptation and resilience development ($t=16.198$, $p<0.001$), therefore, the research hypothesis H2 was

accepted. The quality of relationship was calculated to play a mediating effect of 66.90% in intercultural adaptation and resilience development, according to which it was judged that the quality of relationship plays a partial mediating role between intercultural adaptation and resilience development of kindergarten teachers and caregivers (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 6: Indirect Effects

Variables	Original sample	T Values	p Values	VAF
IA -> RQ -> RD	0.588	16.198	0.000	66.90%

Figure 2. Structural Model



Conclusions and Research Significance

This study empirically constructed and validated a causal model of resilience development of kindergarten teachers and caregivers in ethnic rural areas of China in terms of the effects of intercultural adaptation and relationship quality. Quantitative methods and analyses have explained the effects of the main variables on the resilience development of childcare workers, and the mediating role of relationship quality in intercultural adaptation and resilience development of childcare workers. The results of the study provide a causal relationship with the quality of provider relationships, intercultural adaptation, and resilience development together to provide early childhood teachers, caregivers, and educational administrators in ethnic rural areas with a better understanding of the theory and practice of kindergarten provider retention in ethnic rural areas.

This study provides a theoretical framework for predicting the retention of early childhood teachers and caregivers in ethnic rural areas of China, using teacher resilience development as a significant predictor. Its findings can fundamentally deepen the understanding of relationship quality, intercultural adaptation, resilience development, and their interaction mechanisms among early childhood teachers and caregivers in ethnic rural areas and provide effective recommendations for reducing the mobility and attrition of early childhood teachers and caregivers in ethnic rural areas. This model is applicable to ethnic rural areas in China, as well as to areas of ethnic minority origin in other countries or regions. The survey can be extended to groups of early childhood teachers and caregivers in ethnic urban areas, or to groups

such as university, middle school, and elementary school teachers and their colleagues in ethnic areas, and different respondents may produce different but interesting findings.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. First, the quantitative research design implemented in this study is suboptimal for interpreting the details. Future studies can conduct case studies. Secondly, because of the diverse background of participants, the issue of cultural differences might arise. Future studies can include cultural factors to enrich the relevant findings.

Data Availability

All data, models, and code generated or used during the study appear in the submitted article.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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