

# The Impact of Teacher Empowerment on Burnout and Intent to Quit in High School World Language Teachers

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## Abstract

The burnout and attrition of teachers is a critical issue both in the United States and internationally. However, there is insufficient empirical research addressing these concerns among world language teachers. This paper reports the results of surveying high school world language teachers across all regions of the United States (N= 313) to investigate the relationship between three constructs: burnout, intent to quit, and teacher empowerment. The results of descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis suggest that teacher empowerment significantly impacts levels of burnout and intent to quit. More specifically, higher levels of professional growth, self-efficacy, and autonomy may predict lower levels of burnout and intent to quit in high school world language teachers. The findings of this study suggest that interventions that focus on increasing teacher empowerment may be effective in reducing burnout and intent to quit in high school world language teachers. Potential interventions focusing on these factors are discussed.

**Keywords:** teacher empowerment, teacher burnout, teacher attrition, world language teacher shortage

## Introduction

Educators have reached a breaking point as research continues to show that the tsunami of teachers leaving the profession about which Der Bedrosian (2009) warned the public may be upon us (Cardoza, 2021; Fearnow, 2020; Swanson, 2022). Steiner and Woo (2021) reported that nearly one in four teachers in the

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United States (US) stated that they were contemplating leaving the classroom by the end of the 2020-2021 school year, whereas one in six were likely to leave prior to the onset of the pandemic. Nguyen et al. (2022) reported that 163,000 US teaching positions were staffed by individuals who were underqualified. Findings from a survey conducted by the National Education Association (2022) indicated that 55% of teachers surveyed intended to depart from the profession earlier than expected.

While the aforementioned findings are alarming, teacher attrition and burnout were worrisome matters well before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Swanson, 2008). A review of the literature showed that Charters (1956) expressed concern about the need for more teachers and the rate of teacher attrition more than 60 years ago. However, concerns related to the teacher shortage can be traced in the US as early as the 1920s (B.R.B., 1920) and the 1930s (Hicks, 1933; Peck, 1933).

With respect to the teaching of world languages (WLs), research shows that Russia's launch of Sputnik accelerated the need for more WL teachers in the US. To that end, US President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the National Defense Education Act (U.S. Congress, 1958) as a means to provide funds to foster not only more science and engineering education in the US, but also WL education (Flattau et al., 2006). Unfortunately, as US President Eisenhower and Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson called attention to the shortage of WL teachers following World War II, as well as others since then (e.g., Burke & Ceo-DiFrancesco, 2022; Ray, 1978; Swanson, 2008, 2012a, 2022), the shortage persists to this day.

According to District Administration (2023), “more than half—53%—of public schools reported “feeling understaffed” entering the 2022-23 school year” (p. 1). Among the 10 most hard-to-fill positions, WLs tops the list, ahead of special education, math, and science. Interestingly, Murphy et al. (2003) reported the same finding 20 years before. Consensus regarding the causes of this shortage has not been achieved. Some report that there is an imbalanced distribution of teachers (García & Weiss, 2019; Sutcher & Carver-Thomas, 2019) while others find a surplus of certified teachers who actively choose not to teach (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001, 2003, Sutcher & Carver-Thomas, 2019). Regardless, there is a shortage of WL teachers at a time of critical need (Swanson, 2022).

### **Review of the Literature**

As noted earlier, the WL teacher shortage in the US has been an issue since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and continues to be problematic. For example, in 2011-2012, the US WL teaching force consisted of 98,993 teachers. That same year, 15,607 language teachers were hired and 14,843 transferred or left the teaching profession (Hlas Cummings et al., 2018). During the 2017-18 academic year, “49 of 56 US states and territories experienced shortages in teachers qualified to teach WLs” (ACTFL, 2023, p. 1). Later, the US Department of Education (2020) reported WL teacher shortages in 44 US states and the District of Columbia.

The shortage of WL teachers also extends well beyond the US; it has become a global phenomenon. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2016) reported language teacher shortages around the world. Specifically, researchers find shortages of WL teachers in Australia (Wel-

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don, 2015), Canada (Canadian Parents for French British Columbia & Yukon Branch, 2015), China (Lin et al., 2012), New Zealand (Richards et al., 2012), and the United Kingdom (Nuffield Foundation, 2000) to name a few countries. While the need for more WL teachers remains a topic of interest mainly in the Western media (Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2016), a review of the literature indicates that the shortage is a complex combination of factors (Swanson & Mason, 2018).

### **Contributory Factors Associated with the WL Teacher Shortage**

While a dearth of research exists, studies regarding the WL teacher shortage suggest that there are multiple contributory factors. Swanson (2008, 2010a) initially identified five reasons that help explain the WL teacher shortage in the United States: teacher attrition, retirements, legislation, perceptions of the profession (e.g., low salaries, low status), and student enrollments. According to Swanson and Mason (2018), a tsunami of baby boomers retiring from their school districts combined with increasing enrollments in pre-K through grade 12 WL programs has contributed to the shortage.

Additionally, federal legislation reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act known as No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002), continues to make it difficult for school districts to find highly qualified WL teachers. Moreover, the legislation prioritized funding to content areas such as math and science (Rosenbusch, 2005; Rosenbusch & Jensen, 2004). Swanson and his colleagues and others have suggested that negative, and—many times—inaccurate perceptions of the teaching profession (e.g., poor salaries, low status, lack of respect for teachers) have defamed the profession (Aldeman, 2023; Swanson, 2012b; Swanson & Mason, 2018).

Later, Swanson (2008, 2012a, 2012b,) identified two additional factors that account for the WL teacher shortage: (1) the congruence between a person's vocational interests and their workplace and (2) one's sense of efficacy (i.e., confidence) in teaching WLs. Investigating the relationship between WL teachers' personality patterns and their decision to remain or leave the profession, Swanson found that a certain vocational profile is more likely to remain as a WL teacher. A person's personality pattern is the congruence between a teacher's vocational interests and the workplace environment. "Occupations represent a way of life—an environment, rather than a set of isolated work functions or skills" (Swanson, 2012b, p. 522). The more similar a person's abilities, competencies, and interests are to the occupational environment, the more vocational stability and satisfaction that person will experience (Holland, 1997). Conversely, the more conflicting one's abilities, interests, and competencies are to the workplace environment, the more vocational instability and dissatisfaction will result.

Holland (1997) posits that "people search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles" (p. 4). Swanson (2008, 2012b) reported that WL teachers who have the Social, Artistic, and Enterprising personality pattern are vocationally satisfied and tend to remain in the profession. That is, individuals who enjoy working with and providing services to others see themselves as expressive,

creative, and enjoy leading people will find vocational happiness in a work environment that rewards such characteristics.

With respect to one's sense of efficacy teaching languages, Swanson (2008, 2012b) reported that WL teachers having the Social, Artistic, and Enterprising personality pattern tended to have a stronger sense of efficacy and a decreased intention to leave the profession. Later, Swanson (2010b, 2014a) reported that WL teachers with a stronger sense of efficacy in teaching languages reported planning on remaining in the classroom compared to those who reported a weaker sense of efficacy in teaching languages. Additionally, Swanson (2014b) found that students of WL teachers who reported a strong sense of efficacy outperformed students of WL teachers with a lesser sense of efficacy on the National Spanish Exams. In general, research shows that teachers with a stronger sense of efficacy exhibit greater enthusiasm for teaching (Hall et al., 1992), display greater levels of planning and organization (Jerald, 2007), are able to appropriately deal with high workload (Klassen & Chiu, 2010), have greater commitment to teaching (Coladarci, 1992), and generally tend to outperform those teachers who report a weaker sense of efficacy (Good & Brophy 2003), and are more likely to remain in teaching (Ware & Kitsantas, 2007).

### **Teacher Empowerment and Teacher Attrition**

According to Lightfoot (1986), "empowerment refers to the opportunities a person has for autonomy, responsibility, choice, and authority" (p. 9) and is a significant factor when examining teacher attrition. For example, Peist et al. (2020) found that US K-12 teachers' feelings of disempowerment impacted their intentions or decisions to transfer, leave the profession, or retire. Similarly, Kang et al. (2021) reported that teachers in low-empowered schools were more likely to leave their school or leave the profession entirely.

### ***Teacher Empowerment and Teacher Burnout***

Teacher burnout can be operationalized as a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job—defined by exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of inefficacy (Maslach, 2003). Specifically, burnout involves the chronic strain that results from an incongruence between the teacher and the job. Initial research indicated that symptoms of burnout can be both organizational and personal (Leithwood et al., 1999). Researchers agree that teacher burnout can be a detrimental factor both at home and on the job (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Schaufeli & van Dierendonck, 1993). Organizational symptoms for teachers include increased absenteeism, performance decline, and poor interpersonal relations with students (Cunningham, 1983). At the personal level, research suggests that teachers who experience burnout are less committed to and involved in their jobs, less sympathetic toward students, tend to have a lower tolerance for classroom disruption, are less likely to prepare appropriately for class, are generally less productive, and have a decreased sense of efficacy in teaching (Blase & Greenfield, 1985; Farber & Miller, 1981; Friedman, 2003).

One's sense of self-efficacy and other factors related to teacher empowerment have been found to impact teacher burnout. Aloe et al. (2014) suggested that self-

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efficacy is a protective factor against burnout indicating that those with a stronger sense of efficacy are less likely to experience professional burnout. Özer and Beycioglu (2010) reported correlations between the attitudes of Turkish primary school teachers toward professional development and their levels of professional burnout. Gavriluk et al. (2013) noted a relationship between burnout and autonomy in university teachers in Russia, while Fernet et al. (2014) noted an indirect impact of autonomy on burnout through passion for teaching in Canadian teachers. These results suggest that self-efficacy, professional growth and development, and autonomy can be potential protective factors against teacher burnout.

With respect to vocational happiness and teacher retention, research has shown that teachers who expressed lower levels of burnout worked in a nurturing environment. Additionally, these individuals experienced decreased levels of burnout when they had cordial relationships with colleagues, felt supported and empowered by school administrators, and overall believed that they were able to make a difference in their students' lives (Richards et al., 2018). Conversely, teachers with elevated levels of burnout viewed their work environment as combative and constrained; they felt governed by an administrative team that was unsupportive or oppressive, and experienced feelings of marginalization as well as a lack of community among colleagues. A sense of marginalization was especially problematic for teachers of non-core subjects such as WL.

Research suggests such constructs of interest will continue to plague education unless they are addressed (Diliberti et al., 2021; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022). However, there is dearth of research regarding the extent to which high school WL teachers feel a sense of empowerment, a lack of which can lead to burnout and an intent to leave the teaching profession. The following research question guides the present study: To what extent does the level of teacher empowerment predict burnout and intent to quit in high school WL teachers?

### Conceptual Framework

#### Teacher Empowerment

Empowerment is defined as “a process whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems” (Short et al., 1994, p. 38). Balyer et al. (2017) posit that “teacher empowerment involves investing teachers with the right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies as informed by their professional judgment” (p. 1). Empowered teachers have the ability to discover their own potential and limitations along with developing competence in their professional development. Teacher empowerment has been studied in relation to a myriad of constructs such as job satisfaction (Rinehart & Short, 1994), participation in decision-making (White, 1992), commitment (Wu & Short, 1996), and instructional practice and student academic achievement (Marks & Louis, 1997). Additionally, as noted earlier, teacher empowerment plays an important role in one's decision to remain or leave the teaching profession.

As shown in Figure 1, teacher empowerment is multidimensional and contains six factors: (1) involvement in decision making, (2) teacher impact, (3)

teacher status, (4) teacher autonomy, (5) opportunities for professional growth and development, and (6) self-efficacy (Short, 1994; Short & Rinehart, 1992). With respect to this study, the researchers focus on Autonomy, Professional Growth, and Self-efficacy.

**Figure 1**

*Teacher Empowerment Framework*



**Teacher Autonomy.** Autonomy—the individual legislation of choice by reason (Kant, 1997)—requires that individuals engage in choices and actions based on their own volition. Teacher autonomy relates to the perceptions of the amount of control they have over themselves as well as various aspects of their work environment (Wu, 2015). Also, it can refer to the extent to which they feel they have the freedom to take control of their own teaching (Sehrawat, 2014), their schedules, and their freedom to decide what to teach as well as the curricula (Short, 1994; Short & Rinehart, 1992).

Research clearly shows that having an increased sense of autonomy has manifold benefits. For example, Nunnery (2021) noted that when teachers have a feeling of ownership in what they do, they are more motivated and even driven to perform well. Additionally, strong perceptions of teacher autonomy are associated with other important factors such as better standards of learning, a more stress-free and healthier work environment for teachers, increasing teacher motivation, and helping teachers achieve the learning goals for their learners faster and more easily (Nayak & Kumar Padhi, 2022). Importantly, teachers with a strong sense of autonomy have been found to be efficient and vocationally satisfied along with having positive perceptions of their work environment in which they feel empowered (Wilches, 2007). Supporting such findings, researchers from the U.S. Department of Education reported that teachers with a strong sense of autonomy were more likely to have increased levels of general job satisfaction and, subsequently, were less likely to leave the profession (Warner-Griffin et al., 2018). Worth and Van den Brande (2020) also noted correlations between autonomy, job satisfaction, and intention to continue teaching, as well as a more manageable workload, for teach-

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ers in England. Conversely, those with a weaker sense of autonomy tend to have low levels of general job satisfaction. As noted earlier, teachers' perceptions of disempowerment played a significant role in teachers' intentions or enacted decisions to transfer schools or leave the profession. Some argue that teachers' working conditions, by either fostering or dampening teacher autonomy, have the most influence on teacher attrition rates (Sparks & Malkus, 2015; Sutchter et al., 2016).

**Professional Growth.** Much like teacher autonomy, professional growth—the “degree to which employees believe that the organization provides opportunities for development of skills and knowledge, including educational opportunities” (Landsman, 2008, p. 113)—has been shown to be an important part of one's decision to remain or leave the teaching profession. For educators, professional growth is the extent to which teachers believe that they have opportunities to develop their professional abilities, knowledge, and skills as well as their attitudes, beliefs, and values (Bakah, 2019; Wang et al., 2014). Professional growth also includes beliefs about being treated as a professional in a work environment, opportunities for collaborating with other teachers in the school, and having opportunities for continued professional development (Short, 1994; Short & Rinehart, 1992).

Researchers for years have reported findings showing that teachers' professional development and growth as an educator are positively related to teacher retention. For example, Pivovarova and Powers (2022) found that by providing novice teachers access to mentorship and professional development opportunities there was an increased likelihood of teacher retention. Specifically, teachers are more likely to remain in the profession if they are allowed to build their own professional development program by selecting which types and topics of professional development they would like to receive (Shuls & Flores, 2020). In terms of WL teaching, Swanson (2012b) reported that language teachers who were able to participate in professional learning opportunities via language teacher associations were more likely to remain in the classroom.

**Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy—a judgment about a person's belief about his/her ability to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001)—plays an important role in one's decision to remain in the profession as well as impacting professional burnout (Bing et al., 2022). Grounded in social cognitive theory, self-efficacy (i.e., one's confidence) emphasizes the exercise of human agency, the notion that people can exercise some influence over what they do (Bandura, 2006). Bandura posits that people are self-organizing, self-reflecting, self-regulating, and proactive. Moreover, individuals set goals, anticipate likely outcomes, monitor then regulate actions, and finally reflect on their personal efficacy in a cyclical fashion. That is, an increased sense of efficacy leads to greater effort and persistence, which in turn leads to better performance and further enhanced efficacy. Conversely, struggling to achieve one's goals tends to lead to a lower sense of efficacy, which in turn, leads to less effort expended, and ultimately, giving up. From this perspective, one's self-efficacy affects his or her goals and behaviors and is influenced by environmental factors. Additionally, Bandura suggests that these beliefs determine how environmental obstacles and opportunities are perceived. These perceptions then can affect an in-



dividual's choice of activities, how much effort is exerted, and how long one will persist when confronted with obstacles.

Research suggests that individuals with a strong sense of efficacy in teaching believe that challenging students are teachable if the teacher exerts extra effort (Bandura, 1997). However, teachers with a low sense of teaching efficacy tend to believe that there is little they can do to teach unmotivated students because students' success depends on the external environment (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Unfortunately, as teachers start to sense that they are less competent, they are more likely to perceive potential problems as much bigger than they may actually be (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). This perception may possibly foster attitudes that can lead to teacher attrition.

According to Bandura (2006), there are four sources from which one's efficacy beliefs are derived: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological reactions. Of the four, Pajares (1997) theorized that mastery experiences tend to be the most influential because they serve as the best predictors of future outcomes. Bandura suggests that these are the most powerful sources of self-efficacy because they develop through past successful accomplishments. Vicarious experiences involve individuals observing others, in this case, observing others teaching. For example, observing a veteran WL teacher succeed can raise a novice's beliefs that he or she, too, possesses the capabilities to overcome obstacles and direct comparable activities required to succeed. However, observing someone's lack of success tends to lower one's judgments of his or her own efficacy.

Social persuasion influences a person's self-efficacy as other individuals convince him or her verbally that he or she too can be successful. Bandura (1997) posited that those who are convinced that they can be successful tend to be more likely to exercise increased effort and sustain it when faced with impediments than those who focus on personal shortfalls or previous failures. Additionally, Bandura warns that the feedback involved in verbal persuasion must be realistic, credible, and task-oriented in order to maximize influence on a person's self-efficacy.

Finally, physiological conditions can affect self-efficacy beliefs. For example, as a novice teacher prepares to give his or her first class of the year, it is common that this individual may experience a variety of physiological issues (e.g., reddening of the face, increased heart rate).

Bandura (1995) suggested that people are generally inclined to interpret these types of physiological responses to stressful situations as a sign of personal weakness and of a possible fiasco. Such negative thoughts can lower perceptions of self-efficacy and lead to negative outcomes. Further, Bandura (1995) noted that it is not so much the apprentice's emotional or physiological reactions to the stressful situation, but how such reactions are perceived and interpreted. Positive interpretation of these responses tends to boost perceived self-efficacy while negative interpretations can reduce it.



## Methods

### Procedure

Following IRB approval, all surveys were placed into one questionnaire along with a demographic sheet. The Qualtrics online survey management platform was used to deliver the questionnaire. The decision to administer the survey online was due to the continuing worldwide pandemic precluding in-person interactions as well as the following advantages of using the Internet: reduced cost, convenience, automatic coding, high level of anonymity, and access to specialized populations (Dörnyei, 2007). Via the social media outlets for WL teachers and the ACTFL Research Special Interest Group community, potential participants could read the Call for Participation in the study and then access the URL to take the questionnaire. Given that low response rates for surveys can potentially reduce the representativeness of a study population and increase the likelihood of bias, the first author took steps to ensure a higher response rate by following best practices in survey research (e.g., thoughtful timing of invitations and reminders) (Sue & Ritter, 2012). By doing so, threats to the validity of the results were decreased (Manzo & Burke, 2012; Smith et al., 2019). Data collection began in May 2022 and concluded in June 2022.

### Instruments

For the current study, the researcher used three surveys that use the same 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The School Participant Empowerment Scale (Short & Rinehart, 1992) contains 38-items and measures empowerment within six dimensions (Decision Making, 10 items), (Professional Growth, 6 items), (Status, 6 items), (Self-efficacy, 6 items), (Autonomy, 6 items), and (Impact, 6 items). Overall reliability for the scale (0.94) and the six dimensions (0.81 - 0.89) has been shown to have satisfactory consistency for research purposes (Henson, 2001). In addition to verifying the six dimensions, similar reliability coefficients have been corroborated in the literature (e.g., Klecker & Loadman, 1996; Yusoff et al., 2020).

The first author developed the other two instruments: the Intent to Quit Scale and the Perceived Burnout Scale. The Intent to Quit Scale contains five questions that assess a WL teacher's intent to leave the profession voluntarily prior to retirement (e.g., "Voluntarily leaving teaching before retirement appeals to me"). The Perceived Burnout Scale contains five questions to assess participants' perceived levels of burnout (e.g., "I often feel emotionally exhausted as a result of teaching"). To determine content validity—the degree to which a test or assessment instrument evaluates all aspects of a construct (McLeod, 2023)—of these researcher-created scales, the first author solicited the expertise of nine current and former WL teachers.

After developing the statements for each questionnaire, a content validity index (CVI) score—the most commonly used method to calculate content validity quantitatively—for each item was determined. While CVI scores are extensively used to estimate content validity, Wynd et al. (2003) recommend that due to chance agreement this index does not consider the possibility of inflated values; a

Kappa statistic should be calculated as well. Kappa values provide for the degree of agreement beyond chance. Therefore, the first author calculated CVI scores for each instrument and then calculated Kappa values. Results indicated that content validity and reliability were acceptable for the scales and subscales (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Content Validity Analysis for the School Participant Empowerment Scale, the Intent to Quit Scale, the Perceived Burnout Scale*

	<i>Kappa Value</i>
School Empowerment Scale	0.82
Intent to Quit Scale	0.89
Perceived Burnout Scale	0.84

Given that the instruments used a Likert scale, decisions had to be made about using parametric or nonparametric tests to analyze the data. Parametric tests make the assumption that the data are normally distributed whereas nonparametric tests do not make such an assumption. Sullivan and Artino (2013) state that descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations) have unclear meanings when applied to Likert scale responses. For example, “what does the average of “never” and “rarely” really mean? Does “rarely and a half” have a useful meaning?” (p. 542). Therefore, the researchers examined the data to determine if they were normally distributed and found that indeed, the data for each of the instruments were normally distributed. Such a finding indicates that parametric tests, which are described in the Findings sections, were appropriate to conduct (Norman, 2010).

**Participants**

The first author solicited participants (N = 313) by sharing the link to the survey on several social media groups (e.g., Twitter, Instagram) for WL teachers as well as the ACTFL Research Special Interest Group in order to expand the possible participant pool. Participants were required to be current high school WL teachers in the US or have quit within the last 2 years. The majority of the participants identified as female (50.5%), white (72.8%), and not of Hispanic, Latino, and/or Spanish origin (67.4%). Participants reported ages between 20 years of age to 71 years, with a mean age of 36.9 years old (SD = 8.70). Most of the participants had earned at least a master’s degree (53.7%); a quarter of participants had earned a bachelor’s degree and a fifth had earned a doctoral degree. Most participants taught only one (63.2%) or two (23.2%) languages, with the most commonly taught languages being Spanish (21.2%), French (20.9%), German (14.2%), or Chinese (11.4%). Other languages represented included Russian, Japanese, Portuguese, Italian, Korean, and Arabic.

Most participants (49.5%) taught a language that was the same as their primary language, either as the only language they taught or as one of multiple languages taught. However, almost as many participants (48.6%) taught a language that was different from their primary language. Participants reported having approximately six years of experience teaching a WL (M = 6.20, SD = 5.94) on aver-

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age, with most of the participants having one to five years of experience (56.0%). Most participants reported having taught in an urban (63.9%) or suburban (26.5%) school setting. In addition, most participants reported having taught either public (54.6%) or private (36.7%) schools. Survey responses showed representation for all regions of the US to varying degrees, including the Southwest (25.9%), the Southeast (21.4%), the Northwest (16.6%), the Midwest (16.6%), the West (10%), the Mid-Atlantic (7.4%) and the Northeast (7.4%). Overall, the age, gender, ethnicity, and level of education of the participants in this study aligned with the general demographics of public-school teachers in the US (Zhang-Wu, 2021) as well as those of WL teachers in the US and Canada (Swanson, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2012b, 2013, 2022).

### Findings

Following data collection, the data were imported into SPSS 28 for data analysis. To begin the data analysis phase, reliability coefficients were calculated for the three instruments (see Table 2). Overall, the three scales have acceptable internal consistency (Henson, 2001) with coefficients ranging from 0.93 to 0.94. Next, with respect to the research question guiding this study, "To what extent does teacher empowerment predict burnout and intent to quit in high school WL teachers?", the researchers first calculated means and standard deviations for the School Participant Empowerment Scale's six dimensions (Short & Rinehart, 1992). As shown in Table 3, Decision Making was scored far higher than the other five factors. Status, Self-efficacy, Professional Growth, and Impact were scored similarly. However, the participants scored Autonomy the lowest of the six factors.

**Table 2**

*Reliability Analysis for the School Participant Empowerment Scale, its six dimensions, and the Intent to Quit and the Perceived Burnout Scales.*

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha
School Empowerment Scale	0.93
-Decision Making	0.85
-Professional Growth	0.85
-Status	0.80
-Self-efficacy	0.77
-Autonomy	0.70
-Impact	0.70
Intent to Quit Scale	0.94
Perceived Burnout Scale	0.94

**Table 3**

*Means and Standard Deviations for the six dimensions of the Teacher Empowerment Scale*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Decision Making (max. 50 pts)	34.15	7.28
Status (max. 30 pts)	24.92	2.88
Self-Efficacy (max. 30 pts)	24.79	2.89
Professional Growth (max. 30 pts)	24.11	3.77
Impact (max. 30 pts)	23.48	3.01
Autonomy	14.38	3.06

Professional Growth, and Impact were scored similarly. However, the participants scored Autonomy the lowest of the six factors.

Afterward, the researchers calculated means and standard deviations for each of the five statements of the Intent to Quit scale in descending order. As shown in Table 4, and keeping in mind the 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), the participants were uncertain about the appeal and consideration of voluntarily leaving teaching prior to retirement. Additionally, the participants expressed that they do not foresee voluntarily leaving the teaching profession if they had the opportunity.

**Table 4**

*Means and standard deviations for the five statements of the Intent to Quit Scale*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I have considered voluntarily leaving teaching before retirement.	3.03	1.26
Voluntarily leaving teaching before retirement appeals to me.	2.90	1.24
I do not see myself voluntarily continuing to teach in the future.	2.87	1.22
I would voluntarily quit teaching if I had the opportunity.	2.82	1.30
I frequently think about voluntarily quitting my job as a teacher.	2.76	1.26

Next, means and standard deviations were calculated for each of the five statements of the Perceived Burnout Scale (see Table 5). Keeping in mind the aforementioned 5-point Likert scale, the participant[s] seemed not to have a strong sense of professional burnout.

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**Table 5**

*Means and Standard Deviations for the five statements of the Perceived Burnout Scale*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I often feel stressed as a result of teaching	3.35	1.227
I often feel burned out as a result of teaching	3.17	1.216
I often feel emotionally exhausted as a result of teaching	3.12	1.283
I often feel overwhelmed as a result of teaching	3.01	1.242
I often feel unable to cope with teaching	2.76	1.213

Finally, the researchers conducted multiple regression analysis to explore the effect that teacher empowerments had on burnout because multiple regression is used for prediction purposes. Results revealed that teacher empowerment significantly explained 35% of the variance with a moderate effect size ( $F(6, 286) = 26.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .35$ ,  $R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = .34$ ). Analysis of the six dimensions of teacher empowerment (Decision Making, Professional Growth, Status, Self-efficacy, Autonomy, and Impact) identified Professional Growth ( $p < .001$ ,  $\beta = -.29$ ), Self-efficacy ( $p < .05$ ,  $\beta = -.16$ ) and Autonomy ( $p < .001$ ,  $\beta = -.29$ ) as significant predictors of burnout.

With respect to one's intention to quit teaching, multiple regression indicated that teacher empowerment significantly explained 36% of the variance with a moderate effect size ( $F(6, 286) = 26.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .36$ ,  $R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = .34$ ). Follow-up coefficient analysis indicated that of the six predictors of interest, decision making ( $p < .01$ ,  $\beta = .19$ ), professional growth ( $p < .001$ ,  $\beta = -.38$ ), self-efficacy ( $p < .05$ ,  $\beta = -.16$ ), and autonomy ( $p < .05$ ,  $\beta = -.13$ ) significantly predicted intent to quit.

### Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine WL teachers' perceptions of their sense of empowerment, intent to quit the teaching profession, and their level of professional burnout. As noted earlier, the demographics of the sample resemble the demographics for the national teaching population in general (Zhang-Wu, 2021) as well as the demographics in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and level of education for WL teachers in the US (Swanson, 2008a, 2010a, 2010b, 2012b, 2013; Swanson, 2022).

Overall, the results of the present study corroborate earlier findings that teacher empowerment is an important construct of interest when examining the WL teacher shortage, especially with respect to three of the factors of teacher empowerment: professional growth (Pivovarova & Powers, 2022, Shuls & Flores, 2020; Swanson, 2012b), self-efficacy (Swanson, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2012b, 2014, 2022), and autonomy (Peist et al., 2020; Sparks & Malkus, 2015; Sutchter et al., 2016; Warner-Griffin et al., 2018; Wilches, 2007, Wu, 2015). Each of these factors are discussed further below.

## **Professional Growth**

As discussed previously, professional growth is a key factor of interest in research addressing teacher attrition and commitment to the profession (Aliakbari & Amoli, 2016; Bogler & Somech, 2004; Pivovarova & Powers, 2022; Swanson & Mason, 2018) as well as teacher burnout (Özer & Beycioglu, 2010). The findings of the current study support the need to provide WL teachers with opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as their attitudes, beliefs, and values. Providing WL teachers, particularly those who are novice teachers, with professional growth opportunities in the form of mentorship and professional development is crucial (Pivovarova & Powers, 2022). Participation in professional learning communities may also be helpful, as previous research has shown that it is positively correlated with teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy (Yoo & Jang, 2022).

Furthermore, WL teachers should have voice and choice with respect to the professional development that they receive (Shuls & Flores, 2020). Rather than asking WL teachers to spend their valuable time to participate in generic professional development experiences, WL teachers should instead be encouraged to participate in learning opportunities that are tailored to their unique needs and experiences, such as those provided by language teacher associations (Swanson, 2012b). Offering WL teachers the opportunity to create their own professional development workshops may even provide a greater sense of autonomy. The content of these workshops may also foster a stronger sense of self-efficacy by providing ideas on how to improve knowledge, skills, and abilities with respect to teaching the target language. It is also important to provide WL teachers with the time necessary to take advantage of these opportunities (Swanson & Mason, 2018). In addition to time, incentives such as monetary support to attend content-specific professional development are suggested to help teachers overcome barriers to professional development (Fang et al., 2021). Information about stipends that have been created to help novice teachers attend conferences like ACTFL should also be shared. Overall, the findings of this study along with previous research show that by providing WL teachers with opportunities to grow professionally, they may become more efficacious and, thus, less likely to burn out and leave the profession (Swanson, 2012a).

## **Self-efficacy**

As discussed earlier, one's sense of efficacy is cyclical (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Each proficient performance a WL teacher has helps to create a new mastery experience, which then shapes future efficacy beliefs. A stronger sense of teaching efficacy leads to increased persistence and effort, which leads to better teaching performances later, which, in turn, leads to even stronger efficacy beliefs. However, a weaker sense of efficacy leads people to expend less effort and give up easily, which leads to poor teaching outcomes, and ultimately a decreased sense of teacher efficacy. Research on WL teachers continually shows an association between such negative feelings and the shortage of language teachers (Swanson 2012, 2022; Swanson & Huff 2010).

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Findings of this study support previous research asserting that efforts to address teacher burnout and attrition should be made to reinforce WL teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy (Bing et al., 2022; Swanson, 2008a, 2012a, 2012b; Swanson & Huff, 2010). Pre- and in-service professional development should be designed specifically by content area. In this case, professional development should focus on what will benefit WLs teachers to strengthen their proficiency not only in the target language but also in developing the strategies necessary to promote student engagement (Swanson & Huff, 2010). WL teachers may participate in training or workshops that promote the development of their sense of efficacy as well as the ability to participate meaningfully in a professional community, which can provide them with the skills necessary to create positive learning environments for their students (Hlas Cummings et al., 2018). Novice WL teachers in particular should have "opportunities to observe and experience mastery early in teacher-preparation programs" (Swanson, 2012b, p. 95), which has been shown to alleviate WL teacher attrition. Teacher education programs should also provide WL teachers with the preparation necessary to feel highly efficacious in both traditional and remote environments, particularly when a change of context is necessitated by challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic (Swanson, 2022). Finally, in order for teachers to build and maintain their sense of efficacy teaching WLs, the researchers strongly recommend that schools provide more funding and opportunities for professional development. Research has shown that WL teachers who participate with their specialty professional organizations have a stronger sense of efficacy than their peers who do not and tend to remain in the profession (Swanson, 2012a).

### **Autonomy**

As mentioned previously, autonomy has also been presented as a factor of interest in teacher burnout and attrition (Fernet et al., 2014; Gavrilyuk et al., 2013; Peist et al., 2020; Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). The findings of the current study corroborate earlier research where WL teachers should be empowered to have control over themselves and their environment when teaching (Wu, 2015). School administrators should support the development of autonomy in new teachers in particular (Fernet et al., 2014). The researchers advocate pairing new WL teachers with more experienced teachers because the veteran teachers may be able to help novices develop more confidence in their abilities, which may in turn lead to a stronger sense of autonomy. Meanwhile, singleton teachers should be provided with the support necessary to take action to grow their programs.

WL teachers should be granted the freedom and latitude necessary to make their own choices with respect to their teaching practices (Sehrawat, 2014; Wilches, 2007). WL teachers need access to the resources necessary to enact these teaching practices. For example, WL teachers should be provided with the technology to create multimodal, engaging lessons. In addition, WL teachers should have the opportunity to be involved in decisions related to curricula and scheduling (Short, 1994; Short & Rinehart, 1992). This could involve encouraging WL teachers to help choose textbooks and other classroom materials. Whenever possible, the authors believe that WL teachers should also have a say in student placement,



particularly in situations in which WL teachers have the most information about a student's proficiency and language learning needs.

School administrators should adopt an autonomy lens when reviewing policies and practices, particularly with respect to professional development (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). Teachers must feel that professional development opportunities are relevant, but also that they are able to have input about these opportunities. Taking steps to ensure a more manageable workload may also provide WL teachers with the time and energy necessary to focus on making important decisions that may affect their professional experience. Ultimately, by developing a comprehensive approach which incorporates professional development, self-efficacy, and autonomy as independent, yet interconnected, factors, steps forward may be taken to increase retention and reduce burnout in WL teachers.

### **Conclusion**

For the past 70 years, US presidents, researchers, and organizations have been calling attention to the shortage of WL teachers (Swanson, 2012a). Finding that nearly a quarter of US teachers were contemplating leaving the American's classrooms by the end of the 2020-2021 school year (Steiner & Woo, 2021) was alarming. Learning that 22% of the US WL teachers surveyed during the COVID-19 global pandemic were considering leaving teaching (Swanson, 2022) is a serious threat to the teaching and learning of WLs in the US. The literature is replete with reports of US teaching positions being staffed by individuals who were under-qualified because of the shortage of qualified and certified WL teachers (Nguyen et al., 2022).

As shown in the present study, burnout and attrition are serious issues confronting WL programs as well as other content areas. Of particular importance are professional growth, self-efficacy, and autonomy. By addressing these factors when creating and implementing interventions at all levels, key stakeholders may promote a greater sense of well-being and desire to remain in the profession of WL teaching. While this research has important implications for the WL teaching profession, it does have its limitations. First, the survey data were self-reported, which does not allow the participants' survey responses to be verified for accuracy. Follow-up qualitative interviews with participants would offer deeper insight into burnout and one's intent to quit teaching languages. Additionally, responses were collected for a single moment in time; longitudinal studies may provide additional insights on how the constructs studied change over time. The findings of the current study are specific to the experiences of high school WL teachers in the US. The researchers suggest that future research focuses on the extent to which these constructs may apply in other contexts (e.g., middle school WL teachers, WL instructors in higher education).

Nevertheless, the researchers call for more research on the shortage of WL teachers not only in the US but globally. The shortage is not unique to America as shortages are reported around the world (Swanson & Mason, 2018). It would be informative to know more about why WL teachers choose to change professions. Additionally, it would be helpful to know more about veteran teachers' profes-

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sional development journeys, how they construct their professional autonomy, and how those with a strong sense of efficacy have built and maintain their confidence teaching languages in the face of professional burnout. It is time to stop alerting the public to the shortage of teachers in general and work actively toward the promotion of activities that retain highly efficacious teachers.

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