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Recruitment of Teachers and Strategies to Retain Them: A Study Conducted in International Schools in Sri Lanka

Shariffdeen, F. S.

sumaiyashariffdeen@gmail.com

Colombo International School, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Abstract

Teacher recruitment procedures are one of the significant factors in providing effective and quality teaching in schools. However, limited research has delved into how teachers are recruited in international schools. Hence, this study attempts to investigate the factors considered in teacher recruitment procedures and how teachers can be retained in the secondary section of international schools. A sample of 72 teachers from six leading international schools in Colombo was used to obtain relevant information. The study revealed that besides academic and professional qualifications, the six main traits that are considered during teacher recruitment are subject knowledge (80%), language skills (80%), firm personality (70%), voice projection (66%), teaching experience (45%) and teacher-student interaction (35%). There is a shortage of qualified teachers in all streams, especially in the Arts and Technology streams. Nevertheless, teacher turnover rates are also high in these two streams, 44% and 28% respectively. The four main reasons that were identified for teacher turnover are management interference (76%), strict rules and regulations (69%), lack of job security (56%) and overload of work (56%). The four main teacher retention strategies are financial incentives (30%), reducing workload (20%), flexibility and supportive (15%) and improving working conditions (15%). It is recommended that management should rethink about the teacher recruitment and retention protocols by managing human resources more effectively.

Keywords: International schools, Teacher recruitment, Teacher retention, Turnover.

Introduction

Teacher recruitment and retention in schools have been discussed as a national problem by different authors in different countries. According to See et al. (2020), teacher recruitment is the process of employing professionals to the teaching profession while teacher retention is the rate of teachers who remain in the profession after a specific period of time (Clarke, 2022). It is a global consideration to retain employees in any organization and the existing research has proved the effectiveness of employee retention to an organization in several measures such as organizational productivity and performance. However, a school environment is different from a profit-targeted company, and retention

of teachers remains crucial concerning its importance in affecting the development of the learners.

Significance of the study

The importance of teacher recruitment and retention relies on its influence on quality education. A school is responsible for providing quality education to the learners and supporting their development effectively. A teacher plays a crucial role in facilitating learners with an effective learning environment. This implies the significance of having qualified and trained teachers in schools. Further, the teachers should be knowledgeable enough to deliver the respective curriculum of the school. This also signifies the importance of examining the qualifications of the teachers adequately in the recruitment process. Another important factor is that it takes a considerable time for the learners to be comfortable with a teacher and the interaction or the relationship between a teacher and the students is crucial in education. When the teachers resign from their roles quickly, it directly affects the learners. Therefore, teacher retention is a significant factor that contributes to the performance of the school. Thus, this study will benefit the school management, teachers, parents, and students. Recruiting and retaining good teachers should be one of the most important priorities for any school in a country. Hence, this study will be an eye-opener for the school management and relevant authorities.

Literature Review

In Sri Lanka, the criteria for teacher recruitment and the steps taken towards ensuring teacher retention are doubtful. There are no standard

criteria for international schools to recruit teachers. Therefore, it occurs at different levels in different schools which affects the quality of the education provided by these schools. The Job Embeddedness theory proposed by Lee & Mitchell (2011) explains that when the employees of an organization are bound socially and professionally to a specific working culture, there is less tendency for them to leave the job. The theory explains some factors including relationships they have with colleagues, relatives, and friends; individual factors such as personal interests, skills, and knowledge; organizational factors such as job requirements and organizational culture; and other factors such as entertainment and activities. This theory can be utilized to enhance the organizational factors related to the above and consider those factors in the recruitment process as well. The process of teacher recruitment and retention in international schools of Sri Lanka is different from that of government schools. In government schools, teacher recruitment is done according to a systematic procedure where the teachers are selected through interviews and selection tests. After that, they are given three years of practical training. Further, it is also compulsory for them to work in a rural school for five years before being recruited to a school of preference (Nishanthi & Suraweera, 2020). This procedure mostly ensures the qualifications of the teachers and also the compulsory working period encourages them to remain in the profession even with the difficulties.

In contrast to the recruitment procedure mentioned above, the majority of the international schools in Sri Lanka recruit teachers based on some light-weighted

factors. Although a few reputed and well-established international schools recruit teachers according to a systematic procedure, the majority of the international schools do not consider much about the requirement process (Balasooriya, 2013). This has caused a lot of problems in the school environment and also it has made the retention of the teachers in the profession quite uncertain. According to Odland and Ruzicka (2009), administrative leadership, compensation, and personal circumstances have been identified as the major factors affecting higher turnover rates of international school teachers. This study further suggests that the recruitment process has also affected the above situation. Further, Balasooriya (2013) explains the significance of taking required measures such as providing monetary and non-monetary benefits for the teachers to encourage them to remain in the profession. Starting

in the early 1980s, international schools have no regulation or control by the Ministry of Education as it comes under the Board of Investment (BOI). Due to this, the standard of education varies greatly between schools. According to Gunasekara (2019), these schools are not confined to the expatriate community and anyone with the ability and willingness to pay high tuition fees can join these schools. They follow the British curriculum such as Cambridge or Edexcel. Most top International Schools, recruit well-qualified teachers with experience. Teachers should possess subject-specific knowledge as well as English language skills to enter these teaching jobs as the medium of instruction is English.

However, a study has not been conducted in Sri Lanka to find out the inability of retaining teachers in international schools. This study therefore aims to investigate the followings.

- What factors are being considered in recruiting teachers to international schools?
- What are the reasons for a high teacher turnover in international schools?
- What kind of teacher retention strategies can be implemented in these schools?

Materials and Methods

Sample

The study was conducted based on a survey research design. This is the most fundamental tool for all quantitative research studies, which provides a numeric description of a fraction of a population. The target population in this research was 300 teachers from six leading international schools in Colombo. Based on cost and man power, a sample of 72 teachers was selected purposively from six international schools and from each school, 12 teachers were selected, representing three teachers each from the Science, Commerce, Arts, and Technology streams. These teachers were Heads of Departments (HoDs) and senior teachers. They were selected based on the purposive sampling technique because they are directly involved in recruiting new teachers before it is finalized by the school management.

Questionnaire

A self-developed questionnaire titled “Recruitment and retention of secondary school teachers in international schools was

used to get the desired information from these teachers. Initially, a 20-item questionnaire was developed, whereupon the items were revised based on expert review and the number of items was increased to 25. Three questions were open-ended while the rest of the questions were close-ended questions. A Likert scale was used for the close-ended questions. The questionnaire was divided into two sections (A and B). Section A focused on the demographic background of the respondents, while section B consisted of questions related

to the academic qualifications and professional qualifications of the teachers, other traits considered during teacher recruitment, the procedure of teacher recruitment, perception of teachers towards work, reasons for teacher turnover and what should be done to retain teachers. The questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher to the HoDs and senior teachers. The data was collected during a period of one month and descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency counts, and percentages were computed.

Results and Discussion

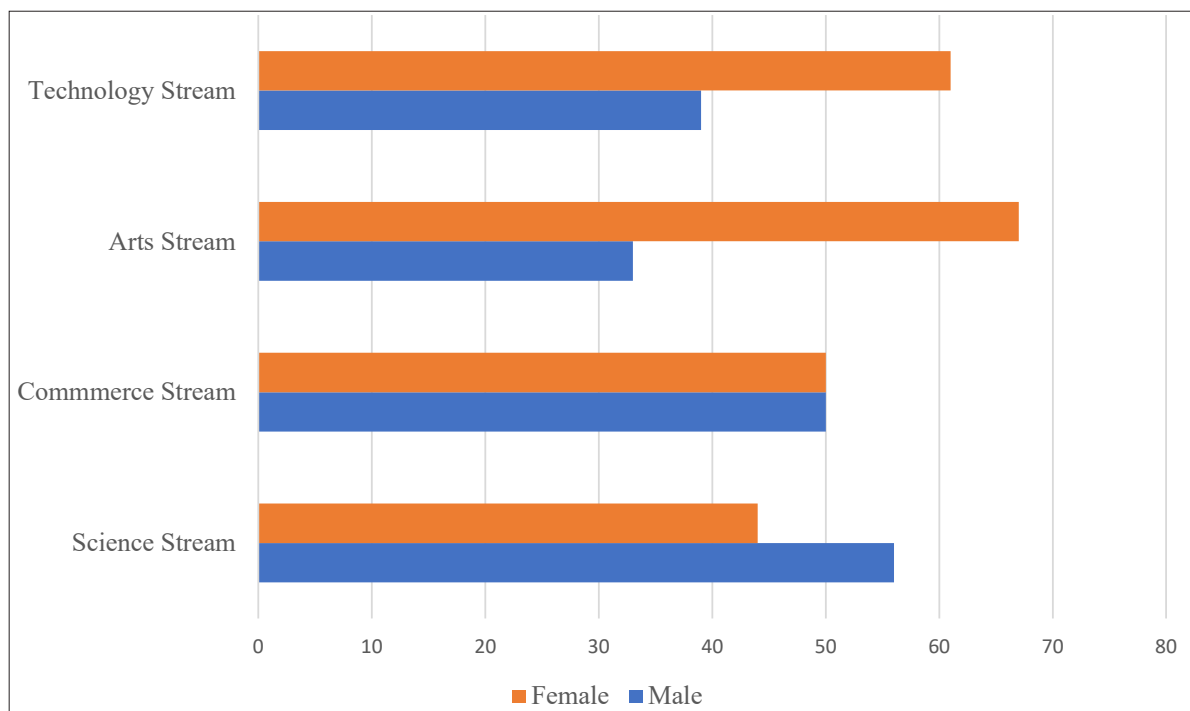
The Respondents' demographic background

Out of the 72 respondents, in terms of gender, 56 % were female teachers and 44% were male teachers. Twelve teachers each from six

leading international schools were selected for the study and the number of respondents in terms of their stream and gender is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Number of respondents per stream and gender.



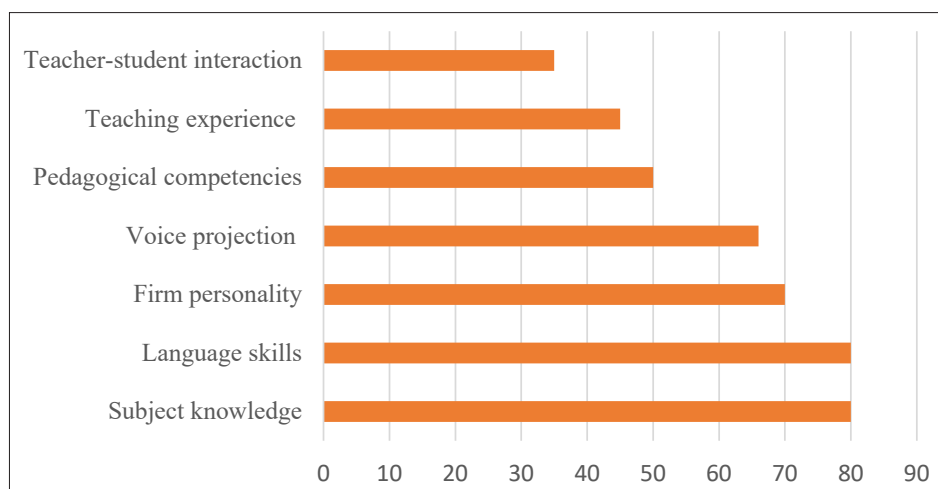
Factors considered during teacher recruitment

The findings first and foremost revealed that these international schools recruit qualified teachers to their relevant streams. 60% of the respondents stated that they recruit teachers who are qualified with a special degree to teach the relevant subject in their respective fields. 30% of the respondents stated that at times they have to recruit teachers with a general degree due to the shortage of subject-qualified teachers. A small number of respondents (5% each) mentioned that they consider Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) and a Master's degree as well. Since many young teachers are recruited into these schools, professional qualifications are not given priority during the recruitment process.

Other factors besides academic and professional credentials are taken into account when recruiting new teachers. Seven traits were ranked by the participants as shown in Figure 2. The two main traits which were considered by 80% of the participants were subject knowledge and language skills. It is very important that the teacher possesses a thorough subject knowledge in their respective field to teach the British curriculum. Teachers working in international schools must also be proficient in their language skills. Even if the teachers are extremely qualified, it will be difficult to survive in these schools if they lack language proficiency, especially in English.

Figure 2.

Other traits that are considered during teacher recruitment.



Local students come from an elite background and communicate mostly in English. Approximately 10% of the student population in these schools comprises expatriates from different nationalities. Therefore, teachers must be able to communicate very well in English, so that all students can understand and interact during the lessons. Firm

personality and voice projection are the third and fourth traits which were considered important by the respondents, which are 70% and 66% respectively. Due to the high school fee paid by the parents, strict disciplinary measures cannot be implemented at these schools. Therefore, maintaining discipline and preventing disruptive behaviour in the

classroom can be accomplished by being firm and good voice control is required for this purpose. If not, classrooms might become chaotic, making it impossible for the teacher to maintain any sort of class control.

Local teachers are recruited by conducting an interview. If they are chosen from the interview, thereafter they are expected to conduct a lesson demonstration on a given topic by the head of the department. The above-mentioned personal traits and other factors such as lesson plan and preparation, usage of ICT skills, and time management are also considered during the lesson observation. Due to high standards and expectations, recruiting teachers to international schools becomes a very difficult task in all streams. According to Figure 3, 60% of the HoDs find it difficult to recruit a suitable candidate to their relevant streams with all the above-mentioned criteria.

Figure 3.

Percentage distribution of recruitment of suitable teachers.

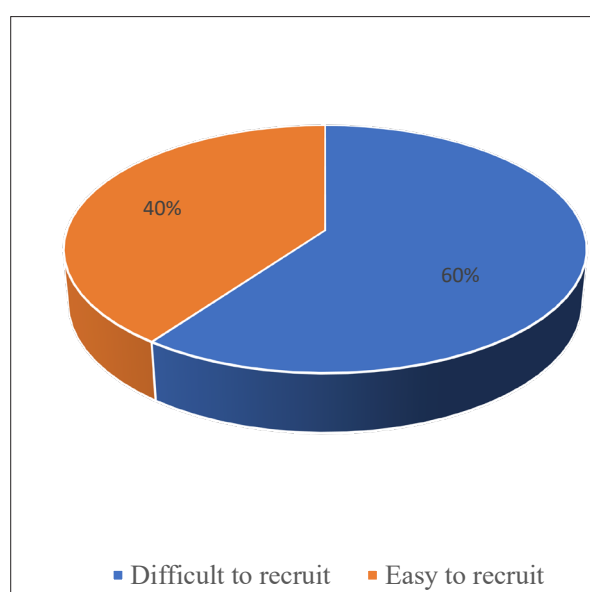


Table 1.

Percentages of shortage of teachers among the four streams.

Stream	% of Respondents
Arts	45
Technology	25
Commerce	15
Science	15

The results in Table 1 confirmed that there is a shortage of qualified teachers in all streams, especially in the Arts and the Technology stream respectively. As per the results, it can be assumed that the teachers who are currently teaching in these schools are overloaded with extra periods that they need to teach per week and they have a large number of students per classroom.

Reasons for teacher turnover

According to Table 2, teacher turnover rates were very high in the Arts stream, which was 44%. The Arts stream represents subjects like History, Geography, Psychology, and Languages such as English, French and German in these international schools.

Table 2.

Teacher turnover rates among the streams.

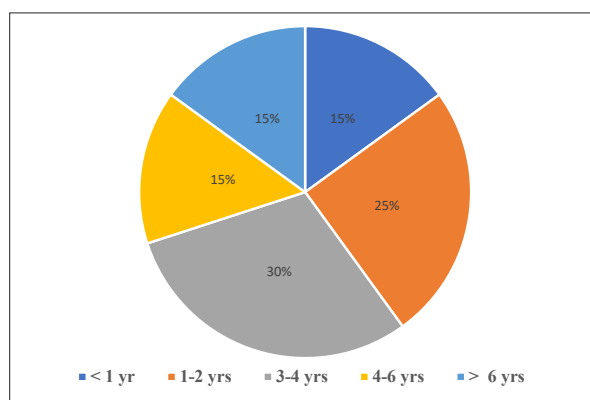
Stream	% of Respondents
Arts	44
Technology	28
Commerce	14
Science	14

The technology stream, which represents ICT and Computer Science, had a 28% turnover

rate while the Science and Commerce streams had a 14% turnover rate each. Due to the nature and the demand of the subject, many teachers resign for better career prospects. Some teachers have also received migration opportunities due to the above reason. Therefore, the turnover rates are high in these two streams which also causes a shortage of teachers in these streams.

The results in Figure 4 suggest that 5% of the newly recruited teachers leave after teaching in less than one year in these schools. 25% leave between 1- 2 years. 30% of the teachers leave between 3-4 yrs. 15 % leave between 4-6 yrs and above 6 years respectively. This clearly shows that approximately 40% of the teachers leave after teaching for a maximum of two years in these international schools.

Figure 4.
Percentage distribution of employment duration of a newly recruited teacher.



The reasons expressed by the HoDs for teacher turnover are shown in Table 3. When the respondents were asked to rank them 1 to 5, 55 out of 72 (76%) respondents felt that the main reason for teachers to leave international schools is the interference of the school management. 69% of the sample felt strict rules and regulations are also another

cause. In some instances, both these factors will be enforced by the management when there are complaints against a teacher such as lack of classroom management, lack of subject knowledge, lack of communication skills, lack of planning and preparation for the lessons, and so on. Lack of job security is another concern for newly recruited teachers.

Table 3.
Percentage distribution for reasons for teacher turnover.

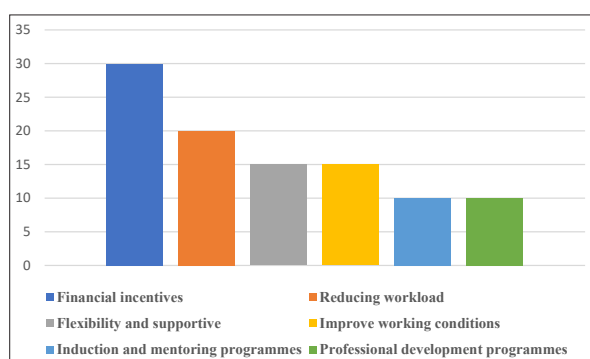
Reason	Percentage (%)
Salary issues	42
Overload of work	56
Lack of job security	56
Strict rules and regulations	69
Management interference	76

In general, all teachers are recruited for a 6 months' probation period. There onwards, they are on a 1-year contract. Contracts will be renewed after an evaluation conducted by the HoD with the recommendations from the Head of Secondary School and the Principal at the year-end. 56% of the respondents think the overload of work is also another crucial reason for teachers to quit their jobs. There is an extensive amount of paperwork and planning, and preparation that is expected from a teacher. Teaching is expected to go beyond textbooks. Teachers must find additional resources to support their students. ICT skills are highly encouraged to use in lessons. Many teachers are unable to handle this additional burden and pressure. As a result, they tend to leave. Moreover, due to a shortage of staff in certain streams, some teachers have to do extra cover work until a new teacher is recruited. This also makes teachers unhappy and frustrated.

Implementation of teacher retention strategies

Strategies expressed by the heads of the departments (HoDs) for teacher retention are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5.
Percentage distribution of teacher retention strategies according to HoDs.



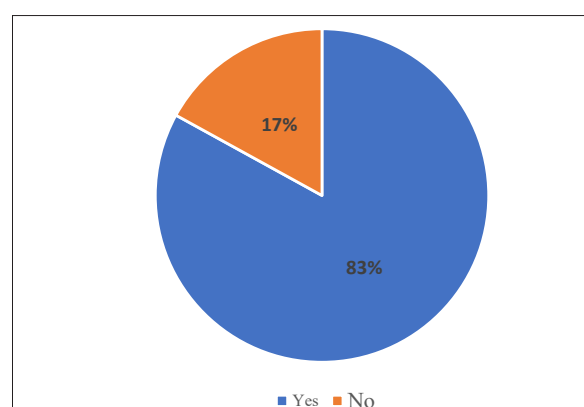
30% of the respondents believed that financial incentives will help to retain teachers and 20% agreed that reducing workload is also important. This is because HoDs feel that the newly recruited teachers are unable to cope in schools which have high expectations. 15 % of the HoDs agree that management should be more flexible and supportive towards the teachers. Instead of interfering, they must appreciate and have faith in the teachers to carry out their duties appropriately.

Improving working conditions (15%) should also be considered as a strategy. Especially, reducing the number of students in a class will help the teachers to manage the classroom better and more individual attention can be given to students which will enhance the quality of teaching. Decades ago, the average class size in international schools was below 20. However, now in some classes, student numbers have exceeded above 30 due to the rising demand for these schools.

20% of the respondents believe that teachers could be retained if more induction and mentoring programmes and professional development programmes were conducted. According to the HoDs, there are very few mentoring and professional development programmes for teachers in these international schools. If the school management could incorporate training programmes and workshops related to ICT; classroom management; lesson planning and preparation; team building and leadership and so on it will be very beneficial for the teachers.

Furthermore, in these schools, higher studies are not encouraged due to the leave factor. Teachers find it difficult to pursue their post-graduate diplomas or master's degrees while in school due to this reason. Teachers are highly discouraged to take leave in these schools. These factors have demotivated many teachers. Therefore, teachers can be retained if there is more empathy, support, and encouragement rendered towards them.

Figure 6.
The status of the need for a system change.



Overall, as depicted in Figure 6, 83% of the HoDs and senior teachers stated that a system change is needed in the international schools where they currently teach due to

the numerous challenges that the teachers face on a daily basis. 17% of those surveyed disagreed with the change. They believe that these modifications won't have an impact on the recruitment and retention of teachers.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Conclusions

The findings of the study show that there are concerns in the teacher recruitment process in international schools. During the interview and lesson demonstration, other professional and personality traits are carefully considered in addition to the academic qualifications. Many of the applicants are ineligible to teach in these schools due to the high standard and expectations. Therefore, there is a shortage of good teachers in all streams. Finding subject expertise with a thorough knowledge of the curriculum and good communication skills for subjects like History, Geography and ICT is not an easy task. Hence, there is a shortage of teachers in the Arts and Technology streams. Further, all teachers have not specialized in their subject, while some have done it as a minor subject at the degree level. A significant number of newly recruited teachers complete only a minimum of two years of employment in a particular school. According to the findings, the teacher turnover rate is very high in the Arts and Technology streams. Managerial interference, strict rules and regulations, lack of job security and overload of work are the top four reasons for this. Teachers who work in these schools are under stress because there are more protocols to follow and more paperwork to be completed regularly. The study also revealed that these schools need a system change. The management should rethink the teacher recruitment and retention

protocols. It is important to retain teachers mainly by giving them monetary and non-monetary benefits.

Suggestions

- New teachers should receive induction and mentoring programmes along with appropriate leadership support during their probationary period. The school should also organize effective professional development programmes with the aim of providing teachers with active opportunities to learn and develop their professional competencies.
- The wider context, in which headteachers and the management operate, can create pressure that leads to an excessive workload which distracts teachers from teaching. This creates an unfavourable working environment and overburdens the teacher. Therefore, the right climate and a supportive school culture should be established. Unnecessary paperwork and interfering in their teaching should be avoided. More focus should be given to teaching and getting the teachers to be accountable for what they teach. An internal digitalized system can be set up to increase efficiency.
- Improving working conditions by maintaining an average class size is essential. Thus, teachers will be more productive and effective. This will also enhance the quality of the teaching and minimize classroom disruption.

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