Recruitment, Retention, and Renewal: Eliminating Teacher Shortage

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ABSTRACT

Recruitment, Retention, and Renewal: Eliminating Teacher Shortage

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The study examined the factors associated with the high attrition rate of teachers among public school teachers in Texas. Personal, organizational, monetary and teaching preparation factors associated with the high attrition rate of public school teachers in Texas were the focus of the research. Data for the study were collected by using a validated survey instrument of factors contributing to the teacher attrition rate. Using a validated questionnaire and conducting interviews with public school personnel directors were the means of collecting data for the study. The sample population for this study was a random sample of 200 from a target population 4577 public school

teachers who left the teaching profession and ten personnel directors from various regions of Texas. Descriptive statistics and comparison of means (ANOVA) were applied to examine the factors associated with the attrition rate of teachers.

The quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that personal reasons are the strongest factors which influence teachers to leave the profession. There were significant findings in the comparison of means with the personal, organizational and monetary factors between age groups. This suggested that age has an impact on each of the stated factors that influence attrition. There was also a significant difference in the mean scores of teacher preparation factors between grade-level. This suggests that grade level has an impact on the teacher preparation factors that influence attrition.

The study was significant in that it provides valuable data to school districts, higher educational institutions and state and federal governing bodies in the prevention and reduction of the teacher attrition rate. This, in turn, affects the teacher shortage and provides a higher level of teaching quality for the children in our school systems.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND RENEWAL: ELIMINATING TEACHER SHORTAGE

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies project that by 2008 public school enrollment will exceed 54 million, an increase of nearly two million children from 1998. Enrollment in elementary schools is expected to increase by 17 percent and in high school, by 26 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). Research also projects that in the year 2010 the United States will need 3.35 million teachers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998). These statistics also indicate that with more than one quarter of all teachers over the age of 50 and the attrition of beginning teachers around 30 percent over the first three to five years of teaching, the demand for teachers will continue for years to come (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Based on these projections a sufficient number of teachers, qualified or not, will not be available to adequately staff the nation's classrooms.

The literature suggests that nearly one half of America's teachers will be leaving the public school system over the next few years to retire or change careers (Southworth, 2000). The increase in the number of teachers leaving the profession in conjunction with the increase in student enrollment creates a national dilemma. Who will teach America's children? This phenomenon makes it desirable to analyze the personal,

organizational, monetary and teaching preparation factors that cause teachers to leave the profession.

With approximately 30 percent of teachers leaving the profession within the first five years, it is desirable to analyze the factors that contribute to the exodus. Research indicates that low salaries, rampant student discipline problems, and little faculty input into school decision-making all contribute to teachers leaving their profession to choose other careers (Ingersoll,1997). A study prepared by the Texas Center for Educational Research (1999) also attributes family moves, family and child rearing considerations and working conditions as factors affecting the attrition rate. An additional complicating factor is the skilled labor shortage in the Texas economy and the competition for people with math, science, and technology backgrounds. Schools have difficulty competing with private industry when they try to recruit individuals who have recently completed an undergraduate degree program with an emphasis in these high-demand fields, and school districts have difficulty retaining teachers for the same reasons (Texas Center for Educational Research, 1999). Although teaching looks attractive to the students of education while they are in college, once they enter the working world the harsh reality of the factors that contribute to the attrition rate cannot be avoided.

The effectiveness of education depends on retaining teachers. This is particularly true in large urban school districts. The American

Federation of Teachers surveyed personnel officers of the nation's 200 largest school districts and revealed that a teacher shortage clearly exists. More than two-thirds of the respondents indicated an insufficient supply of applicants in the 1998-1999 school year (American Federation of Teachers, 1999). Major urban school districts not only suffer from the shortages of teachers but also in the quality of teachers. In fact, the single greatest source of educational inequality is in the disproportionate exposure of poor and minority students---those who fill inner-city schools---to less trained and experienced teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1988).

The exodus of novice teachers from the teaching profession is a concern. In order to examine this phenomenon, the factors that contribute to this exodus need to be investigated. It is desirable to examine the factors that impact why public school teachers in Texas are leaving the teaching profession.

The Problem

Texas is currently experiencing a teacher shortage that is both a serious and growing problem (Texas Center for Educational Research,1999). Studies suggest that teacher retirement, attrition rate of new teachers and the increase of student enrollment all contribute to this shortage. Though teacher retirement and the increase in student enrollment are inevitable, teacher attrition is an area of deep concern for both educators and educational policy makers. There are several factors

that contribute to the teacher attrition rate ranging from monetary and teaching preparation factors to personal and organizational factors.

Statement of the Problem

The quality of the education that the nation's children receive is a major concern. The present teacher shortage is a direct indication that the numbers of teachers that the school system has available are inadequate. Along with the inadequacy of the number is the quality of uncertified teachers on whom the schools must rely. This study investigated the factors of teacher attrition in selected public schools in Texas.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the factors associated with the high attrition rate of public school teachers in Texas. The factors that were examined are monetary, personal, organizational, and teaching preparation factors.

Quantitative Research Questions

The following questions are posed for this study:

1. What personal factors are associated with public school teachers leaving the profession as perceived by teachers who have left the teaching profession?
2. What organizational factors are associated with public school teachers leaving the profession as perceived by teachers who have left the teaching profession?

3. What monetary factors are associated with public school teachers leaving the profession as perceived by teachers who have left the teaching profession?
4. What teaching preparation factors are associated with public school teachers leaving the profession as perceived by teachers who have left the teaching profession?

Qualitative Research Questions:

1. What personal factors are associated with public school teachers leaving the profession as perceived by school district personnel directors?
2. What organizational factors are associated with public school teachers leaving the profession as perceived by school district personnel directors?
3. What monetary factors are associated with public school teachers leaving the profession as perceived by school district personnel directors?
4. What teaching preparation factors are associated with public school teachers leaving the profession as perceived by school district personnel directors?

Significance of the Study

The evidence from literature revealed that the teacher shortage is an immediate concern. In Texas, the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) estimated there were more than 44,000 teacher vacancies for the 2000-2001 school year, yet there were only 14,000 new recruits available to fill the jobs (Texas A&M University Systems, 2001).

The result of the study provides information about the causes of teacher attrition in public schools in Texas. The study provides a preliminary database from which issues in recruiting and retaining teachers can be addressed.

The identification of the causes of teacher attrition enables governing bodies, university officials, public school administrators, teacher trainers and teachers to initiate changes that may discourage teachers from leaving the profession. The data from the study will also provide areas of investigation for future research in the decline of the teacher attrition rate.

Research Methodology

The methods of research were both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Qualitative research stresses a phenomenological model in which multiple realities are rooted in the subjects' perceptions. A focus on understanding and meaning is based on verbal narratives and

observations rather than numbers. Qualitative research usually takes place in naturally occurring situations, as contrasted with quantitative research, in which behaviors and settings are controlled and manipulated (McMillan, 2000).

The quantitative design of the study was descriptive research. Descriptive research involves collecting data via survey to answer questions concerning the current status of the subjects of the study. This type of study is concerned with the assessment of attitudes, opinions, demographic information, conditions, and procedures (Gay,1996). Analysis of the data will describe the factors that contribute to the attrition rate in their school district at the high school level.

Research Design

The study employed the use of a survey and open-ended interview questions. Research data was generated in both quantitative and narrative form. The quantitative component of the study gathered data using a survey instrument consisting of four factors that contribute to the teacher attrition rate as found in the review of literature. The survey was sent to certified teachers who were no longer teaching. These participants expressed their opinions on teacher attrition factors and how these factors affected their exodus from the teaching profession. The qualitative component of the study collected data through personal in depth interviewing and by engaging participants in a dialogue to

determine the factors associated with attrition in selected school districts.

Population and Sample

The population for the study was 4,475 public school teachers in Texas who left the teaching profession. A random selection of 200 participants were selected from a pool of participants (4,475) identified as teachers who were certified in 1998 and failed to return to the profession after their first three years of service. This pool of subjects was acquired from records in the extant databases in the State Board of Educators Certification (SBEC). Due to the address changes of the participants when they applied for certification, 48 surveys were returned "undeliverable", creating a sample population of 152 participants. The study had a 43 percent return rate. The 66 respondents consisted of 16 males and 50 females. There were 36 White participants, 14 Hispanic participants, no Black participants and 16 participants considered as "others". The population consisted of 28 high school teachers, 22 middle school teachers, 14 elementary teachers and 2 adult education teachers (See table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Frequency distribution of sample population

Ethnicity	Gender Male	Gender Female	High School	Middle School	Elem. School	Adult Ed.	Induction Yes	Induction No
White	06	30	20	08	08	00	10	26
Hispanic	06	08	06	06	02	00	02	12
Black	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
Other	04	12	02	08	04	02	06	10

The qualitative portion of the study included personal interviews with ten personnel directors from various regions of Texas. The personnel directors were selected by utilizing purposive sampling methods. This method of sampling was used because it selected specific individuals or cases because they would be particularly informative about the topic (McMillan, 2000).

Conclusions

The findings of the quantitative and qualitative study have offered the following findings:

Personal Factors

The survey instrument entitled, Teacher Attrition Factor Survey suggests that the strongest personal factor which contributes to the exodus of teachers from the teaching profession was the statement, “Teaching is a stressful profession”. Although teachers agreed with this statement they still felt that teaching is a challenging and rewarding

career. There was a significance difference in the mean scores of personal factors between age groups. This suggests that age has an impact on the personal factors that influence attrition.

While interviewing personnel directors it was noted that the main personal reasons why their teachers left the profession was to start a new family and to relocate due to a spouse transferring jobs. The survey did not support these findings. The survey indicated that family needs such as pregnancy, child rearing and moving due to spouse relocation were not factors in their decision to leave the field.

The review of literature suggests that personal factors do influence the exodus of teachers. A national study reported that a little over a quarter of those who leave the teaching profession leave because of a family move or because they need time for child bearing or child rearing (Texas Center for Educational Research, 1999). The review of literature also endorses the findings of the survey. Farber (1991) states, "Teacher stress and burnout have affected and will continue to affect lives of teachers and their families, administrators and their families, students and their families, and all of society (p.313)."

Organizational Factors

The survey suggests that the strongest organizational factor which contributes to teachers leaving the teaching profession was the statement,

“Discipline is the biggest problem faced by teachers”. The statement, “I am required to do an excessive amount of paperwork as a teacher” had a strong response also. There was a significance difference in the mean scores of organizational factors between age groups. This suggests that age has an impact on the organizational factors that influence attrition.

Interviews from personnel directors and the review of literature endorse the findings of the survey. Personnel directors indicated discipline as the largest organizational factor which contributes to teachers leaving. A survey by Richard Ingersol indicate that inadequate administrative support, low salaries, student discipline problems, and limited faculty input into school decision-making contribute to higher turnover rates (1999).

Monetary Factors

The survey instrument suggests that the strongest monetary factor which contributes to the exodus of teachers from the teaching profession was the statement “Teacher’s salaries are adequate” and “Benefits are competitive with other professions”. Teachers felt that their salaries as teachers were inadequate and that benefits were not competitive with other professions. There was a significance difference in the mean scores of monetary factors between age groups. This suggests that age has an impact on the monetary factors that influence attrition.

The interview with personnel directors and review of literature endorsed the same findings. Seventy percent of the personnel directors

indicated that teacher's salaries were not adequate. Fifty percent indicated that monetary factors played a large role in teachers leaving their districts. The review of literature reveals that monetary factors are of a great concern for teachers. The National Education Association (NEA) president Bob Chase called the present salary data a "disturbing development," since the U.S. Department of Education predicts a million new teachers need to be hired over the next seven years to meet rising enrollments and to replace the large number of teachers who will be retiring.

The only contradiction in the findings was that sixty percent of the personnel directors stated that benefits were not a factor for teachers leaving the profession from their districts. The reason for this contradiction is based on the fact that comprehensive benefits were locally generated to encourage their teachers to stay.

Teacher Preparation Factors

The survey suggests that the strongest teacher preparation factor which contributes to teachers leaving the teaching profession was the statement, "My college education program prepared me for student discipline problems". They disagreed with this statement. The teachers felt that they should have been better prepared to deal with the student discipline problems. The teachers also disagreed with the statement, "My education did not prepare me for teaching". The teachers felt that their colleges did prepare them for teaching. The personnel directors disagreed

with this finding. Ninety percent of the directors interviewed stated that colleges were not preparing the teachers for the reality of teaching.

A concern expressed by the personnel directors was the amount of time the universities were providing for field-based activities in the classroom. One hundred percent of the participants stated that the colleges needed to get the future teachers in the classrooms earlier. They felt that this time would help the teachers be prepared for the realities of the classroom better. The teacher's response in the survey regarding field-based activities was not significant. The teachers' response to the statement, "My college education program allowed adequate time for field-based activities in the classroom" scored a mean of 3.45 which indicates a noncommittal response. This is in conflict with what the personnel director's responses.

The review of literature endorses the need for increased knowledge in classroom practices. A major finding of "How Teaching Matters" reveals that classroom practices greatly influence student achievement, and that more attention needs to be paid to improving classroom practices (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2000). These findings also support the need for content-specific pedagogy, the how to teach portion of teacher development.

Additional Findings

- Analyzing the quantitative data suggests that 73% of the teachers who left the profession did not participate in an induction program.
- Personal factors had the strongest responses. The scores tended to fall in the extreme of Strongly Agree or Strongly Disagree.
- The strongest response came from, “Marriage led me to leave teaching”. Teachers disagreed with this statement. Another strong response came from the statement, “Teaching is a stressful profession”. The teachers agreed with this statement.
- There was a significance difference in the mean scores of personal, organizational and monetary factors between age groups. This suggests that age has an impact on each of the stated factors that influence attrition.
- There was a significance difference in the mean scores of teacher preparation factors between grade-level. This suggests that grade level has an impact on the teacher preparation factors that influence attrition.

Contributions to the Literature

The study has contributed an element of research unique to the field of teacher attrition studies. It has examined a population not normally found in the literature. A sample population of teachers who left the profession within their first three to five years of teaching, yielded data which is exclusive to this type of study. Past studies have concentrated on populations of teachers who are currently employed as teachers. Additionally, the study contributes a qualitative component from the view point of a district level human resource administrator that adds a balanced perspective of factors of teacher attrition.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based upon the findings and conclusions of the study. (These recommendations are organized in the attrition factors as designated in the study.)

Personal Factors

- The stress that is involved in teaching is an important factor to address. It is recommended that induction and mentoring programs be implemented and assessed for effectiveness.

- It is recommended that staff developments in stress management should be a requirement for all school districts in Texas.
- It is recommended that school district offer day care opportunities for their employees at a discounted cost.

Organizational Factors

- It is recommended that staff developments be conducted on classroom management skills on a practical level on a yearly basis for newly inducted teachers.

Monetary Factors

- It is recommended that considerations be made in increasing teacher salaries and benefits.

Teacher Preparation Factors

- It is recommended that colleges of education increase the amount of time education students spend in field-based classroom activities.
- It is recommended that colleges of education start education students in field-based classroom activities earlier.
- It is recommended that colleges of education require courses on classroom management that are approached through a practical perspective rather than just a theoretical approach.

Recommendations for Further Studies

- It is recommended that another qualitative component be added to the study. Interviewing the teachers who left the profession could add an interesting perspective into the factors of attrition.
- It is recommended that a longitudinal study be conducted to compare factors with the status quo.
- It is recommended that a comparative study be conducted with other states to compare factors and look for solutions.
- It is recommended that further studies be conducted to analyze college of education's preparation programs for future teachers.
- It is recommended that further research be conducted in other factors that affect the attrition rate using qualitative means.
- It is recommended that a follow up study be done on the non-renewal rate of the teachers that were surveyed.

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