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An investigation into teacher turnover in international schools

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This study explored expatriate teacher turnover in international schools. Two hundred and eighty-one international teachers completed a questionnaire identifying which variables influenced their decision to leave at the end of their first contract. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, this study revealed that three causal factors were viewed as influential by the respondents; administrative leadership, compensation and personal circumstances. Qualitative data revealed that proprietary schools also suffer from the perception of operational decisions being driven by a profit incentive.

KEYWORDS *international schools, teacher turnover*

Introduction

A teacher's decision to leave a school can be viewed as a very personal choice, as indeed it is. However personal that choice may be it does have an impact on the school the teacher has chosen to leave. Viewed in isolation, the departure of one teacher from a school may be considered to have a minimal impact. Nonetheless, when substantial numbers of teachers leave a school, the cumulative impact on the school grows to be debilitating (Ingersoll, 2001). While the numbers vary depending on the source, studies indicate that in the USA in recent years, somewhere between 16 and 20 per cent of all teachers choose to leave the school in which they are teaching that year (Hanushek, 2004; Luekens et al., 2004). Given the scope and impact of the issue in the USA, a multitude of studies have been conducted to determine the issues behind the phenomenon of teacher retention. A subset of the teacher retention issue is that of teacher mobility, or teacher movement between schools or school systems, also known as teacher turnover. This subset issue and its impact on specific schools

has also been studied in the context of US schools (Davis, 2002; Elfers et al., 2006; Hanushek et al., 2001; Imazeki, 2002; Ingersoll, 2001; Ross et al., 2003; Scafidi et al., n.d.; Vidal and Xu, 1992). Less common are studies examining teacher turnover in countries other than the USA (Falch and Ronning, 2005; Falch and Strom, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2004; Ritchie, 2004; Sargent and Hannum, 2005; Webb et al., 2004). Most rare in the body of literature regarding teacher turnover and its impact on schools is that dealing with international schools (Cambridge, 2002; Hardman, 2001; Joslin, 2002). That does not mean that this phenomenon is not perceived to be an issue in such schools (Cambridge, 1998; Fink, 2001; Gillies, 2001). More accurately it points to the challenges embedded in conducting such a study.

International schools are highly independent institutions (Ortloff and Escobar-Ortloff, 2001). While they often belong to one or more organizations that offer a loosely structured connection to similar schools around the world, they do so by choice, and are free to withdraw when and if they so choose. This independent quality of international schools means that collecting comprehensive and accurate data on issues such as teacher turnover has proven very difficult. The European Council of International Schools (ECIS) and Council of International Schools (CIS) have for some years cooperated in the administration of an annual survey of their member schools, which offers useful data on a number of fronts. However, while the data these surveys offer regarding teachers leaving schools paint a rudimentary picture of the degree of turnover, they do not offer specific enough information to analyze insightfully the phenomenon of teacher turnover in international schools. Nonetheless, in the survey conducted for the 2005/6 school year, among the 270 schools who responded to this portion of the questionnaire there were 3193 teachers who left from the total population of 22,098 (Henley, 2006). That represents a turnover rate of 14.4 per cent, a figure which places at least these international schools close to the troublesome percentages cited for US schools.

A moderate degree of turnover in any organization is generally deemed to be healthy (Ingersoll, 2001). However, the consensus in the literature suggests that teacher turnover percentages are currently in the unhealthy range, particularly in light of dwindling resources available to replace lost teachers (Guarino et al., 2006). In particular, international schools incur heavy costs recruiting teachers, starting with but not limited to the travel associated with doing so (Skinner, 1998). In addition to financial costs, there are high institutional costs also associated with teacher turnover in international schools (Hayden and Thompson, 1998). A starting point for

addressing the issue of high teacher turnover in international schools is to identify the underlying reasons why teachers choose to leave schools at the end of their initial contract, rather than to extend their stay.

Teacher turnover studies from international schools

While references to problematic teacher turnover rates in international schools abound, studies examining the factors associated with that phenomenon are rare. In fact, to date we have only found one such study (Hardman, 2001). Using data collected by means of a questionnaire returned from 30 teachers at international schools in Indonesia, Tanzania, Egypt and Argentina, and supplemented by personal interviews with teachers from five international schools in Buenos Aires, Hardman sought to understand what factors influenced teachers to take up posts at international schools, and what factors might influence them to stay beyond the term of an initial contract. The reason identified by the greatest percentage of respondents for joining and remaining in an international school was professional advancement, with 88.5 per cent citing it as an important factor. Three factors tied for second most cited, at 84.6 per cent. Those factors were a happy working climate in the school, financial incentives and a strong sense of job challenge. A happy working climate was further defined as feeling appreciated and respected by colleagues and administration, a sense of security, and strong relationships with colleagues and students. Hardman also questioned perceptions of the length of an ideal contract. While all teacher respondents agreed that a two-year contract was not long enough, in that it compromised student learning, only 48 per cent had ever renewed a contract beyond the initial two-year offering.

A related observation that originated in Hardman's study and was elaborated on by Cambridge (2002) was the categorization of teachers in international schools. The three categories were: childless career professionals; career professionals with families; and mavericks. As Cambridge expounded, each category of teacher is motivated by different incentives to join and remain at an international school. While the theoretical framework offers potential, Cambridge only speculates on how teachers in each of the categories might be motivated to stay at or leave a school.

Other references to teacher turnover in the literature on international schools include Powell (2001), who discusses the various stresses that are exerted on teachers when they relocate to and/or from international schools. After more than 25 years living overseas, he offers observations drawn from literature on the subject blended with his personal observations.

While Powell's work was not based on an experimental study, it does profile the challenges that are encountered when teachers move to or from international schools, highlighting that their reasons for doing so are likely to be powerful and compelling.

Also on the topic of teacher relocation, Joslin (2002) examines the specific challenges of a UK teacher's first overseas assignment. It is not a study of the phenomenon, but rather it offers a conceptual model for identifying the transitional challenges that can affect the success of a teacher moving to an international school. Focusing on the characteristics of the school is reminiscent of Ingersoll's (2001) analysis of teacher turnover from an organizational perspective. Where Joslin adds to the usefulness for this study is that she also introduces conditions of the host country, primarily focusing on cultural expectations.

Another article focusing on overseas schools looked specifically at American international schools (Gillies, 2001), and identified the frequent turnover of personnel as a major problem for such schools. Summarizing the results of a handful of studies that profiled the characteristics of overseas teachers, Gillies cites several characteristics as leading to success in overseas schools: adaptability, flexibility and competence. Unsuccessful teachers were described as rigid and escapist. While other studies link teacher characteristics to teacher turnover, Gillies does not explore that connection.

Finally, one study examined a related issue: turnover among international school heads (Hawley, 1994, 1995). Hawley's study examined publicly available data on the 251 international schools accredited by the US Department of Defense between 1980 and 1990. Specifically, he examined the turnover rate of school heads in those schools, and found that the average tenure was 2.8 years among the 336 heads represented by those 251 schools over the decade of data collection. Eighty-three school heads responded to a survey question regarding the reasons why they left, and the most common response identified some dimension of school governance as the impetus to leave.

Purpose

The purpose of the study upon which this article is based was to explore variables that have influenced teachers in international schools to leave the school at the end of their first contract with that school. Using a mixed method quantitative and qualitative study design, collecting and analyzing data by way of teacher responses to a questionnaire, the study sheds light on why teachers choose to leave schools after a relatively short period of

time. A teacher's decision to leave an international school is the function of a complex blend of variables, and the best way to obtain insight into how such a decision is made is to ask teachers directly. Specifically, it was the goal of this study to understand which of the most influential variables are within the scope of control of a school administrator. In examining teacher motivation underlying departure, it is hoped that intervention strategies will be made possible (Kersaint et al., 2007).

Methodology

This study solicited participation electronically from the entire population of teachers in the CIS teacher placement main database. This population was chosen as the target population to study because it is a self-selected group who either have moved schools recently or have the intention of moving soon. Because one major challenge of researchers seeking voluntary participation in completing survey questions is accessing a motivated and representative sample of participants, this group was seen as ideal for fitting both those categories. In April 2007, the main placement database comprised roughly 3000 teachers, representing 10 per cent of the total teaching population of CIS member schools. Of these, only teachers who met the following criteria were recruited: the teacher needed to have left an international school at the end of his/her first contract with that school at some point in his/her career; and the teacher needed to be an expatriate of the country in which that international school operated.

Instrument

The survey instrument itself was a questionnaire comprising 22 questions, 20 of which were combined closed-set response and optional open-ended response, and two of which were open-ended response questions. The questionnaire was built following a careful analysis of the literature regarding teacher turnover. From that analysis, and using the conceptual model of construct categories (Hayden et al., 2000) for analysis and comparison, two construct categories of associative factors and causal factors were used to create the three sections of the questionnaire: teacher characteristics, school characteristics and reasons for leaving. Associative factors are those factors shown in quantitative studies in the professional literature to have predictive associations with teacher turnover. Causal factors are those factors which teachers have reported in qualitative studies in the professional literature to have influenced their decision to leave a school. Table 1 identifies the breakdown of each question item and the factor

Table 1 **Construct categories for survey data analysis**

Factor	*Item number*	*References*
I. Associative factors		
A. School characteristics		
Size of school	14	Ingersoll (2001)
Perceived academic strength	15, 17G	Hanushek et al. (2004), Elfers et al. (2006), Falch and Ronning (2005)
Ownership structure	16	
B. Teacher characteristics		
Gender	5	Imazeki (2002)
Age	6	Ingersoll (2001)
Marital status	7	Stinebrickner (2001)
Children	8	Stinebrickner (2001)
Experience	1, 2, 3	Elfers et al. (2006), Hanushek et al. (2004)
Subject area	11	Ingersoll (2001), Santiago (2002)
Level of education	9, 10	Sargent and Hannum (2005)
II. Self-reported causal factors		
A. School characteristics		
Administrative leadership	17A, 17B, 17J, 17M	Ingersoll (2001) Ingersoll and Smith (2004), Elfers et al. (2006), Johnson and Birkeland (2003)
Working conditions	17C, 17E, 17F, 17H, 17I	Webb et al. (2004) Elfers et al. (2006), Buckley et al. (2005), Johnson and Birkeland (2003), Sargent and Hannum (2005),
Compensation	17K	Ingersoll (2001), Imazeki (2002) Stinebrickner (2001), Webb et al. (2004)
Student discipline	17D	Ingersoll (2001) Rhodes et al. (2004)
Academic standards	17G	Ingersoll (2001), Webb et al. (2004)
B. Host country characteristics	17Q	Joslin (2002)
C. Teacher characteristics		
Personal factors	17N, 17P, 17R	Elfers et al. (2006)
Professional advancement	17L, 17O	Ingersoll (2001), Hardman (2001)

it helps define. A jury of experts was used to establish face and content validity (Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative analysis

This study used an 'analytical framework' approach to organize and transform the qualitative data into findings (Patton, 2002). Specifically, the data were organized to describe the process of deciding to leave an international school at the end of a first contract. Data that revealed insight into what variables prompted expatriate teachers to make that decision were isolated, categorized and compared against the findings of the quantitative dimension of the study. Written feedback was sorted into two types of data: explanatory comments added in the Likert scale items; and comments offered in the three final, open-ended questions of Section III. The first type of data have already been categorized, as each of the Likert scale items represents an element of a causal factor, as identified in Table 1. As these causal factors were drawn from the professional literature, they are firmly grounded in previous research. The purpose of examining these data was to add validity to the findings offered by the quantitative analysis, and possibly to offer more specific detail regarding each of the causal factors that proved to be instrumental in teachers' decisions to leave a school. These qualitative data were not further sorted by associative factors, but were considered as aggregate responses to each causal factor.

The collection and analysis of the second type of data marked a shift from deductive analysis to inductive analysis. Both the entire quantitative dimension of the study and the examination of the first type of qualitative data are deductive in nature, in that there exists a framework into which responses have been organized. This framework, previously identified as two construct categories and several subcategories, was generated from a careful review of the literature, and thus has the strength of previous research as its foundation. Nonetheless, it seemed prudent to leave open the possibility that causal factors other than those identified in Table 1 might be offered by survey respondents. It is for this reason that three open-ended items were included as the conclusion to the questionnaire. After careful examination, responses to these three items were either added to the written feedback falling into the existing causal factors from Table 1, or they were considered as new causal factors. All new causal factors were inductively analyzed to determine if there was sufficient merit in adding further causal factors to the literature on why teachers leave schools.

Administration of survey instrument

An electronic invitation to participate in the survey was sent in August of 2007 to the 3079 teachers then registered in the main placement database of the CIS teacher placement service. After a period of six weeks of opportunity to respond, a total of 435 participants had logged onto the survey, although only 286 had completed and submitted it. Of those 286 completed surveys, five had to be removed from the data set because they did not meet the criteria as outlined in the study. Three were not expatriates of the school's host country, one broke his/her contract with the school, and one revealed in his/her written responses that he/she had been at the school for eight years, making it highly improbable that he/she had left at the end of the first contract with that school.

A detailed analysis was conducted of both teacher characteristics and school characteristics represented by the 281 valid respondents (although it is beyond the scope of this article to present the findings here). Comparisons were conducted between the above mentioned two characteristics and any data that existed to describe what we know about international schools and their teachers (Canterford, 2003; Garton, 2000; Hayden, 2006; Henley, 2006; Thearle, 2000). On every variable identified by the questionnaire, the respondents were deemed to be a representative sample of international schools and teachers.

Findings from quantitative data

The data in their quantitative form were collected by means of the18 statements that comprised item 17 of the questionnaire. Each statement identified a causal factor and asked participants to rate their level of agreement with the statement, using a five-point, Likert scale response. Table 2 identifies the simple descriptive statistics for each of these statements. The values assigned to the Likert scale responses were 1 for strongly disagree, ranging to 5 for strongly agree. Thus those factors with the highest means were those viewed by participants as having the most influence on their decision to leave the school. This data offers the starting point of the answer to the research question.

Non-parametric data such as the ordinal data generated by questionnaire item 17 required an appropriate test for statistical significance in differences between the means. Thus, the Friedman one-way ANOVA was used to test the distribution of means of the 18 items as identified in Table 2. Tables 3 and 4 identify the results of the Friedman one-way ANOVA for the 18 items that constitute the causal factors.

Table 2 **Descriptive statistics for 18 Likert scale items comprising causal factors**

Factor	*Mean*	*Std deviation*
A. The level of support from the principal and senior management at the school was influential in my decision to leave the school.	3.5611	1.47589
B. The quality of the induction program was influential in my decision to leave the school.	2.4198	1.25612
C. Resource support at the school (technological, print or otherwise) was influential in my decision to leave the school.	2.7710	1.37334
D. Student behavior at the school was influential in my decision to leave the school.	1.9618	1.26191
E. Parental support of teachers was influential in my decision to leave the school.	2.1450	1.17524
F. The quality of the school facility was influential in my decision to leave the school.	2.5763	1.34189
G. The academic standards of the school were influential in my decision to leave the school.	2.4427	1.31982
H. The stability of my teaching assignment at the school was influential in my decision to leave the school.	2.3511	1.40565
I. Expectations regarding teacher workload were influential in my decision to leave the school.	2.6794	1.39659
J. Communication between senior management and faculty at the school was influential in my decision to leave the school.	3.6069	1.43907
K. The overall compensation package offered to me was influential in my decision to leave the school.	3.1527	1.48026
L. Opportunities for leadership at the school were influential in my decision to leave the school.	2.6641	1.33109
M. Teacher involvement in decision-making at the school was influential in my decision to leave the school.	3.2290	1.38722
N. A mismatch between my expectations regarding the school and/or my role and the reality when I arrived was influential in my decision to leave the school.	2.9427	1.46497
O. Opportunities for professional advancement elsewhere were influential in my decision to leave the school.	2.9962	1.50223
P. Personal circumstances were influential in my decision to leave the school.	3.1832	1.45850
Q. Living conditions in the host country were influential in my decision to leave the school.	2.5840	1.43526
R. The quality of my personal life while at the school was influential in my decision to leave the school.	2.8015	1.41649

Note: $N = 262$; Likert scale 1 minimum (SD)–5 maximum (SA).

Table 3 **Mean rank values for 18 statements comprising causal factors**

Factor	*Mean rank*
A. The level of support from the principal and senior management at the school was influential in my decision to leave the school.	12.30
B. The quality of the induction program was influential in my decision to leave the school.	8.08
C. Resource support at the school (technological, print or otherwise) was influential in my decision to leave the school.	9.55
D. Student behavior at the school was influential in my decision to leave the school.	6.32
E. Parental support of teachers was influential in my decision to leave the school.	7.07
F. The quality of the school facility was influential in my decision to leave the school.	8.72
G. The academic standards of the school were influential in my decision to leave the school.	8.14
H. The stability of my teaching assignment at the school was influential in my decision to leave the school.	7.90
I. Expectations regarding teacher workload were influential in my decision to leave the school.	9.14
J. Communication between senior management and faculty at the school was influential in my decision to leave the school.	12.61
K. The overall compensation package offered to me was influential in my decision to leave the school.	10.90
L. Opportunities for leadership at the school were influential in my decision to leave the school.	9.11
M. Teacher involvement in decision-making at the school was influential in my decision to leave the school.	11.29
N. A mismatch between my expectations regarding the school and/or my role and the reality when I arrived was influential in my decision to leave the school.	10.09
O. Opportunities for professional advancement elsewhere were influential in my decision to leave the school.	10.46
P. Personal circumstances were influential in my decision to leave the school.	10.86
Q. Living conditions in the host country were influential in my decision to leave the school.	8.81
R. The quality of my personal life while at the school was influential in my decision to leave the school.	9.64

Table 4 **Test statistics for Friedman one-way ANOVA**

Test	*Statistic*
N	262
Chi-square	564.209
df	17
Asymp sig.	0.000

As seen in Table 4, with N = 262, degrees of freedom of 17 and a significance level of 0.000, it is shown that there are significant differences among the mean rank values of the 18 causal factors. Because the Friedman one-way ANOVA does not allow for post hoc tests to determine where the differences are, only a visual inspection of the mean rank values is possible.

While it is clear that there is a significant difference between the highest ranking mean values for items A, J and M and the lowest ranking mean values for D, E and H, this test only offers a starting point for the analysis of these data. Fortunately the collection of data that allowed for qualitative analysis shed further light on the research question seeking to understand which factors were most influential in the responding teachers' decision to leave the school they described.

Findings from qualitative data

The questionnaire contained six separate comment boxes that allowed participants to write their thoughts with no limitation on the word count. All six sets of responses were analyzed separately, with comments being coded and tabulated according to the eight categories of causal variables as identified in Table 1, hereafter called type 1 comments. Type 2 comments, meaning those that do not fit into the existing categories, were compiled and analyzed inductively to determine if a new category was merited. Following the individual analysis of each set of responses, they were then compiled into a table of aggregated results, shown in Table 5. In addition to categorizing comments into the eight causal factors, each causal factor was grouped into school characteristics, host country characteristics or teacher characteristics. Both type 1 and type 2 comments as identified above were tabulated in the table for each question.

The process of aggregating type 2 comments was considerably more complicated than for type 1 comments. The inductive process of categorizing comments that did not fit into existing causal factors had a degree of subjectivity to it. As indicated earlier, this subjectivity was

Table 5 **Aggregated type 1 comments from questions 18–22**

Construct category – causal factors (identified)	*Number of responses*	*Percentage of responses*
School characteristics		
Administrative leadership	346	31.0
Compensation	146	13.1
Working conditions	107	9.6
Student discipline	23	2.0
Academic standards	24	2.2
Host country characteristics	127	11.4
Teacher characteristics		
Personal factors	265	23.8
Professional advancement	75	6.7
Total type 1 comments	1113	99.8

minimized with the use of a process called the 'analytical framework' approach described by Patton (2002), which isolated from respondents' comments those variables to which they ascribed their decision to leave the school, i.e. causal factors. As this process was completed separately for each of the six opportunities for participants to respond, it generated six separate lists of possible new causal factors. Only after completing the first phase of this analysis could we then return to review the six lists together, to see where overlap allowed them to create new groupings to more accurately reflect the collective statements respondents made regarding variables that influenced them to leave the school.

This process led to the creation of five new categories, presented in Table 6.

Table 6 **Aggregated type 2 comments**

New causal factor	*Number of responses*	*Percentage of responses*
Issues stemming from private ownership	47	27.9
Misrepresentation during recruitment	31	18.4
Conflict with school leadership	26	15.5
Contractual issues	22	13.0
Dissatisfaction with colleagues	19	11.3
Single digit categories combined	23	13.7
	168	99.8
Ambiguous and supplementary responses	111	–

Discussion

The research question underpinning this study is 'What variables do international school teachers who leave at the end of a first contract with a school describe as influential in their decision to leave that school?' The quantitative data collected to answer that question was in the form of 18 statements identifying possible causal factors, to which participants were asked to respond with Likert scale choices, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. The middle choice of 3 allowed for participants to remain neutral, or undecided, on any given statement. Thus, the starting point for examining the data was to see which of the 18 mean scores were above 3, the center point in the set of choices, a sort of 'neutral null hypothesis' (Rhodes et al., 2004). In the most basic fashion, this constitutes the answer to the research question, as only those variables are what the responding teachers collectively describe as influential in their decision to leave the school.

Using that standard, five statements emerged with means greater than 3. Table 7 summarizes the salient details for each statement, presented in the order of their mean rank value. The full range of causal factors is included in Table 1.

As identified previously, the test performed on these data, the Friedman one-way ANOVA, indicated a statistically significant difference between the highest means and the lowest means. While no post-hoc test is available for non-parametric tests such as Friedman's, it seems reasonable using the recommended visual inspection of the data (George and Mallery, 2003) to include these five statements in the group that are significantly different than the bottom mean score of 1.96 and corresponding mean rank value of 6.32. Comparing the mean rank values generated with Friedman's test, shown in

Table 7 **Questionnaire statements with means greater than three**

Questionnaire item number	*Central idea of statement*	*Mean response*	*Mean rank value*	*Causal factor represented*
17J	Communication between senior management and faculty	3.60	12.61	Administrative leadership
17A	Support from principal and senior management	3.56	12.30	Administrative leadership
17M	Teacher involvement in decision-making	3.22	11.29	Administrative leadership
17K	Compensation package	3.15	10.90	Compensation
17P	Personal circumstances	3.18	10.86	Personal factors

Table 3, these same five statements again surface as the top five, as shown in Table 7. Only the 4th and 5th spots change between the two measurements of means versus mean rank values. It is worthy of note that of the five statements that surfaced as most important, the top three fall into one causal factor category, administrative leadership. That three of the 18 overall choices rank at the top, and fit into one category, is a strong statement indeed. This particular finding is very consistent with one of the landmark studies conducted in the USA (Ingersoll, 2001), in which administrative support and faculty involvement in decision-making was found to be significantly correlated to teacher turnover. A more recent study using equally robust data also supports similar findings (Ware and Kitsantas, 2007). Each of the other two statements showing compensation and personal circumstances to have significance in influencing expatriate teachers to leave international schools also has precedent in the literature studying teacher turnover in the USA (Imazeki, 2002; Ingersoll, 2001; Stinebrickner, 2001).

The above findings are also supported by comparing these data with the comments offered in the qualitative dimension of the study. As shown by Table 5, the construct category of administrative leadership (AL) generated over 30 per cent of all comments that fit into type 1 categories of causal factors. While no test of statistical significance was applied to this data, as they were generated by the researchers coding the comments, it is noteworthy that this one category generated such a high percentage of respondents' comments. Examining the composition of the eight categories of causal factors as shown in Table 1, one might argue that AL has the advantage of including four statements in that category. However, it should also be noted that the category of working conditions (WC) included five statements, yet generated less than one third as many comments as AL, and also did not factor into any of the five significant means shown in Table 7.

In addition to the frequency of comments on this topic, the strength of feeling was also very clear. Following are some excerpts taken from the comment banks. 'Basically, I left due to the way I was treated. The lack of appreciation for me as a teacher was astounding.' 'Poor and bullying management.' 'They (administration) were constantly sabotaging each other and had little time for concerns that the staff actually cared about.' 'No one knew where he/she stood … Few positive remarks were made.' 'Management was totally autocratic and there was a definite lack of communication between management and teaching staff.' There can be little doubt that for many of this group of expatriate teachers, the administrative leadership at their school was an influence in their departure. This conclusion is reminiscent of the findings of studies conducted by Ingersoll (2001) and Johnson and Birkeland (2003).

The causal factor ranking fourth in the list of mean rank values was that of compensation. Its mean score was actually fifth, but the differences on both mean score and mean rank value between this causal factor and the statement of personal circumstances was very slight. In the context of this study, compensation was considered a school characteristic, in that international schools are most often highly independent organizations, each of which determines the compensation package that is offered to their employees. This differs from most studies regarding teacher turnover, particularly those using data from the USA, where most data comes from large public school districts. In that context compensation would not be considered a school characteristic. Nonetheless, numerous studies support the conclusion that compensation contributes to teacher turnover (Imazeki, 2002; Ingersoll, 2001; Stinebrickner, 2001; Webb et al., 2004).

Again the quantitative findings regarding compensation are supported by the qualitative findings. As shown in Table 5, this causal factor again ranked in the top three, along with the other two factors represented in Table 7. Comments focusing on compensation as a causal factor constituted 13.1 per cent of the overall type 1 comments. Comments in this section did not tend to have the depth of emotion that typified many in the previous category (AL). Following are some examples of comments relating to compensation. 'We were unable to live on the salary they paid us, as a result we had to use our retirement to get by year to year.' 'Salary not enough to live comfortably with non-working spouse – moved to a place with better opportunities for spouse.' 'The main reason for leaving was that we could not maintain our mortgage at home on the salary package I was on.'

The final statement from Table 7 was the one that focused on personal circumstances, and fit into the causal factor category of personal factors (PF). With a mean rank value of 10.86, it was very close to the fourth ranking statement of compensation at 10.90. Previous studies often show a correlation between certain personal circumstances and teacher mobility, such as having children (Guarino et al., 2006), but few examine personal circumstances as causal factors. One such study that utilized qualitative data generated by a series of surveys did show personal factors to be influential in teacher attrition (Elfers et al., 2006).

In this case the qualitative data offer both strength of frequency and depth of detail to the picture. The category of PF generated 23.8 per cent of all type 1 comments. While some participants offered little by way of detail, others were very candid and detailed about the personal circumstances that provoked them to leave the school. Certainly one of the most common was the desire to experience new cultures and travel in new countries, but there were also a wide range of other circumstances. Following are some

excerpts from the comment banks. 'I wanted to learn about a new culture and a new country was a big (if not the biggest) reason for leaving.' 'Concern for the safety of my ethnically ____ girlfriend on the streets of ____ was a factor in our decision to leave.' 'Grown up children in UK now producing my grandchildren – too far away to keep visiting.' 'My wife (also teaching at the school) was committed to two years away from pets/family in Canada. She was ready to come home after the two years.' 'The quality of my personal life,' 'Boredom,' 'Exhaustion,' 'Engaged.' 'I wanted to return to teaching children with greater learning difficulties than the international school would admit.'

Also relevant in answering the main research question is the qualitative data called type 2 comments. This category was an acknowledgment on the part of the researchers that the survey instrument might not provide all possible causal factors by way of the 18 statements in item 17. Thus they allowed for participants to offer open-ended comments to see if there were other factors that seemed to merit the creation of new causal factors not previously identified in the literature. Table 6 identifies five new causal factors, and the process by which they were determined. Each of them bears some discussion.

The first new causal factor was labeled 'Issues stemming from private ownership', and comprised 27.9 per cent of all type 2 comments. Not only did it rank as the highest in frequency, appearing in all six banks of comments; it also included the most emotively laden language. Terms like 'profiteering', 'profit incentive', 'poor resources vs. huge profits', 'dictatorial owner' and 'lies and manipulation … from owner' were typical of the comments indicating perceptions of the private ownership of respondents' schools. Additionally it should be noted that a somewhat skewed percentage of respondents chose to describe privately owned schools in completing the questionnaire. In the 2006 data collected by the E/CIS, 26.1 per cent of responding schools fit into the category of privately owned, with 62.5 per cent being trust/not-for-profit schools. In this study, 44.1 per cent of respondents chose to describe privately owned schools, compared with 49.1 per cent trust/not-for-profit schools. While speculative, to be sure, it might be argued that the difference in percentages was provoked because of the depth of feeling on the part of teachers who had negative experiences at proprietary schools. People respond to survey invitations for a host of reasons, and perhaps in this case it was because of the need to share their unhappy experiences. Unfortunately nothing in the literature sheds light on this phenomenon, as no study found by these researchers explored the impact of private ownership on teacher perceptions, although there is some similarity to a study of turnover among international school heads

that pointed to governance issues as the most frequent reason for leaving (Hawley, 1994, 1995). One simply cannot ignore the power of statements such as this one: 'I gave this proprietary school a chance, even having heard horror stories about for-profit schools. But after my experience there, I will never work for a proprietary school again.'

The second new category of causal factor was labeled 'Misrepresentation during recruitment', and generated 18.4 per cent of type 2 comments. This topic also generated some strong language regarding teachers' perceptions of how they were treated in the recruitment phase of the hiring cycle. The following are some examples from the comment banks. 'Mismatch between what I was told in interview and what the real situation was.' 'Chances to teach what my original contract said were nil.' 'Promises regarding salary and conditions promised at interview not fulfilled.' 'Lies about package during recruitment procedure.' 'School misrepresented itself. Not international with 90% student population being (host nationality).' As Garton (2000) identified, the recruitment of new teachers may be the most important responsibility carried by an international school head. As such, Garton's treatment of this issue focused primarily on how the head can develop efficient and effective recruitment practices. In his treatment of the subject, Cambridge (2002) focused on the impact of globalization on recruitment trends. Hardman (2001), meanwhile, in his description of the phases of the recruitment process, touched on the need for clarity and accuracy in presenting the school's profile, while Hayden (2006) discussed the complexity of the recruitment process with attention to both the recruiter's and the applicant's point of view, and offered insight into possible reasons why first-time international teachers might feel that the situation was misrepresented when they arrive and take up the job they accepted. What is clear from the findings of the current study is that when teachers feel that the situation has been misrepresented during the recruitment phase, they sometimes choose to leave the school.

The third new causal factor was labeled 'Conflict with school leadership', and generated 15.5 per cent of all type 2 comments. It might be argued that this topic could be folded into the existing category of AL, but these researchers felt that many of the comments went beyond a simple judgment that the leadership of the school was not competent. It seemed that often the comment indicated that the conflict with the leader had become personal and hurtful. The following are examples of comments classified in this category: 'The owner was uncaring about the school and a nasty person who had sycophantic, mean-spirited people working for him.' 'I felt that the Head of the school wanted only British teachers, and, as she was not there when I was initially hired, it was evident that she couldn't wait to get

me out.' 'Professional jealousy and a hate campaign directed by the senior administrators at me drew my job to a conclusion.' 'The new director was openly hostile to me and made it pretty impossible to stay.' None of the studies focusing on national data seem to extract this type of scenario in their analyses. Given the paucity of actual studies drawn from international school data, it is not surprising that there are no parallel findings available there either. However, several sources describe the nature of international school teaching in a way that is helpful in understanding the phenomenon revealed in this study.

The complexity of international schools is well documented (Joslin, 2002; Stirzaker, 2004), as is the commensurate complexity of international school leadership (Blandford and Shaw, 2001; Hayden, 2006). While this principle is true of schools the world over, in the climate described above, relationships among the constituents of the international school community become increasingly important. Faced with the challenges of culture shock, language barriers, potentially adverse living conditions, and a host of other possible challenges, international school communities come to rely heavily on support from within their own community. When relationships go sour, particularly between senior administrators and members of their staff, the potential for feelings such as those expressed in this study are perhaps higher in international schools than in other contexts.

On that note, it may be worth momentarily skipping over the fourth new category to address the fifth, which is 'Dissatisfaction with colleagues', responsible for 11.3 per cent of type 2 comments. In much the same way that relationships with their administrators have substantial influence on international teachers' overall quality of life, perhaps even more so is this the case with their colleagues. In this study, 19 comments surfaced that pointed to dissatisfaction with colleagues as influential in the teacher's decision to leave. The following are some examples: 'I also felt that the staff there were quite unprofessional in their behavior, constantly backbiting and involving themselves in other people's private affairs.' 'Being in _____ the school attracts many teachers who are there for personal enjoyment and almost see it as a bit of a holiday posting. The quality of the teaching in some departments was low, and as a member of a very hard working department with a heavy workload of marking this was in the end making me too angry.' 'The poor quality of other teachers.' 'Negativity throughout the pre-existing staff.'

The final new causal category, which ranked fourth in the list, was labeled 'contractual issues' and generated 13.0 per cent of the type 2 comments. This feature of international school hiring practices is well documented in the literature as a constant source of friction among staff and between staff and

administrators (Cambridge, 2002; Garton, 2000; Hayden, 2006; Richards, 1998). The most common feature of contractual dissatisfaction is the practice of offering several categories of contract, often for teachers filling the same positions. Put simply, teachers hired on a local contract are often paid a fraction of what teachers hired on an overseas contract are paid. This issue certainly featured heavily in the comments offered in this study. There were additional specifics, such as the desire for more home leave, that seem to have factored heavily in the respondents' decision to leave the school. The following are samples taken from the comment banks: 'Some teachers were offered different contracts and pay scale to others when they threatened to leave, in order to reduce the turnover of staff.' 'Therefore this promise of a position later on came down to finances. Obviously local hires were cheaper.' 'Retirement age 62 and they take away one's housing.' 'Ambiguity over contract renewal i.e. teachers asked to sign contracts without knowing their salary or benefits.'

Recommendations

In combining the type 1 causal factors and type 2 causal factors into one list of key causal factors, eight factors emerge. These factors are summarized in Table 8. The table is presented at this late stage in the discussion because of the powerful message it communicates to international school administrators. For an international school administrator, this list has sobering implications, for this is a summary of why some of our teachers have said they left the school at the earliest opportunity. It is sobering because three of the eight categories fall squarely on the shoulders of said administrators, and two others are shared with the governing body of the school. Only one is clearly out of the purview of the administrator, the type 1 category of personal factors. All others have strong implications for two categories of school leaders.

Table 8 **Combined list of key causal factors, abbreviated**

Type 1 causal factors	*Mean rank order*	*Type 2 causal factors*	*Rank by comments*
Administrative leadership	1	Private ownership	1
Compensation	2	Misrepresentation/ recruitment	2
Personal factors	3	Conflict with leaders	3
		Contractual issues	4
		Colleagues	5

The first group is the one referenced above, comprising the principal, superintendent, director or head of school depending on the institution, and his or her senior leadership team. It falls to this group to address the level of support offered to teachers, to communicate well with them, to offer them appropriate opportunities for involvement in decision-making, to represent the school accurately when teachers are being recruited, and to minimize the impact of inter-personal conflict when it occurs. While none of this should be new to international school administrators, the degree to which these factors push teachers out of a school may well be a surprise. Any factor that exacerbates an admittedly high turnover rate in international schools must be examined closely by administrators. When so many of them seem to point to the effectiveness of the leadership of the school, administrators have the sobering responsibility to address their own practices in light of the details revealed in this study. It would also be wise for this group to consider implementing a policy that exists in Florida, where principals are required to conduct exit interviews with all teachers who are resigning (Kersaint et al., 2007). This data is collected by the state Department of Education, and collecting such data would be more challenging for international school administrators to orchestrate, but not impossible. Collecting and sharing such data could prove invaluable in addressing the issue of high teacher turnover.

The second group of school leaders is the group that comprises the board of directors or trustees, depending on the institution. First, compensation must be reasonable relative to that of a teacher's home country, balanced against living expenses of the host country. As Cambridge (2002) pointed out, expatriate teachers often remove themselves from pension schemes in their home countries, risking potential long-term financial exposure. Boards must also consider the complexities of contractual issues, starting with policies that are both transparent and consistent among staff. For example, the establishment of a set of criteria to identify characteristics by which a teacher is compensated is an excellent practice. Of course, it must be universally applied to be effective. The practice of offering local contracts to local hires is not likely to disappear soon, given the financial exigency of such a practice. Nonetheless, it should be considered as to how best to manage the potential for dissatisfaction among staff provoked by this policy.

The directors or boards of both privately owned and corporation owned schools have a special responsibility, as shown by the comments offered in this study. Clearly there is a strong perception that decisions made in proprietary schools are driven by a profit incentive. While that may or may not actually be the case, it points to the need for transparency in the financial statements and budgetary decision-making procedures of such schools. This

perception of 'profiteering' is exacerbated when directors of proprietary schools are seen to be directly involved in the management of the school, sometimes referred to as micromanaging. The governance structure of proprietary schools needs to be as transparent as their financial statements. If the lines of authority for decision-making are well defined, making for a clear understanding on the part of all school constituents, the likelihood of accusations of profiteering will be minimized. If at all possible, board chairs or key directors should attend a board training workshop. There exist many such sessions, including an excellent one offered by the cooperating organization for this study, the CIS.

Two of the eight categories in Table 8 have little or no direct responsibility for school leaders. Personal circumstances are always going to factor heavily on a teacher's decision to leave a school. The only implication for a school leader is to offer the best support that can be reasonably expected in the context of the decision. The issue of dissatisfaction with colleagues has some bearing on a school leader, as he or she must take responsibility for shaping the climate of the school. However, this is a responsibility that truly must be distributed to all members of a school community.

Conclusion

This study has focused on the issue of expatriate teacher turnover in international schools. While the data substantiating this as a problem in international schools are not as powerful or complete as those which describe the issue for US schools, it is nonetheless recognized as an issue among international schools as well (Cambridge, 1998; Fink, 2001; Gillies, 2001). Because of the independent nature of international schools, the capacity to track teacher movement from school to school is severely limited. As such, some of the traditional methods employed in US studies for examining teacher turnover are not possible in the international scene. Thus it is that this study sought to understand this phenomenon from the perspective of what departing expatriate teachers had to say about the schools they left. The findings offered and explained above will hopefully contribute to international school administrators' understanding of, and ability to address and manage, the issue of teacher turnover in their schools.

While this study has focused virtually exclusively on the welfare of teachers, and sought their opinion on how it can be enhanced to promote greater longevity in international schools, the most fundamental purpose of schools should be returned to in the conclusion of this study. Schools are about students, and as Hardman (2001) pointed out, international schools often serve as a haven of security and stability for their students. Any plan

to enhance the effectiveness of a school's teaching faculty by addressing the issues that push them away from the school is certain to have a positive impact on that school's students as well. In fact, while this study has revealed that there are issues that must be addressed by international school administrators, it has also offered some gems to celebrate. Embedded in the findings of this study, hidden among the causal factors that were dismissed because they were not deemed to be 'key causal factors' is a quality of international schools that should be celebrated. At the very bottom of the list of mean rank values is the causal statement, 'Student behavior at the school was influential in my decision to leave the school.' The 281 teachers who participated in this study viewed that variable as the least influential in their decision to leave the school. Compare that with the study that found student discipline to be a frequent source of job dissatisfaction leading to departure from the school (Ingersoll, 2001). Truly, international educators are blessed to work with wonderfully diverse, inquisitive and open-minded students. It is for their ultimate welfare that this study sought to identify administratively mutable variables that will help reduce expatriate teacher turnover in international schools.

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