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Recruitment Criteria for Teachers' Retention in Malaysian International Schools: A Concept Paper

Leong Sok Yee¹, Hamdan Said^{1,*}

¹ School of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Issue related to retention in the organization always begins with recruitment. Suitable people with adequate knowledge, skills, and positive values are important to the organization. The hiring criteria provide a foundation for the management to motivate employees to exert the efforts needed to do their jobs effectively and eventually retain them. The purpose of this study is to investigate teacher recruitment criteria based on international school management personnel perspectives to solve teacher retention issues. The study aimed to provide additional literature to the body of knowledge on this research area. At the same time, the study hopes to provide insight to policymakers and practitioners alike to improve teacher recruitment and retention in schools. This study will use a qualitative design to explore school management personnel perceptions of teacher recruitment and retention issue. Purposive sampling will be used to select 20 school management personnel for the semi-structured interview. Each interview session will be recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically with the assistance of NVivo software. This study potentially promotes positive outcomes especially the sufficient manpower in international schools. The results aim to provide a framework for interested parties to develop and improve their current school environment.

Keywords:

Recruitment criteria; retention;
international school

1. Introduction

The annual report of Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) Malaysia presented by the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) showed that the intention of the Malaysian government to expand its international schools, particularly in Kuala Lumpur and growth Corridors such as the Iskandar Region as these areas are expected to see huge expatriate growth [26]. The report also stated that the international schools are not only to cater to the needs of expatriates but also locals. To support this initiative, the government has removed a total of 40% of the restrictions of the local students to study in international schools [32]. The initiatives taken by the government had opened doors for Malaysians to enrolment their children in international schools. This initiative enables Malaysia to experience a great increase in the number of international schools.

Since 2013, the number of international schools has increased by more than 80% [19]. Despite increases in the number of schools, to date, an increase in the number of teachers does not meet with the number of students. COBIS Report [7] indicated that there are currently substantial teacher supply challenges, which unless tackled with practical solutions, will lead to a serious deficit of professional

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: p-hamdan@utm.my

capital. This report revealed that the most severe challenges to recruit and retain enough international school teachers experienced by the UK and abroad. Similarly, the shortage of teachers is one of the critical problems that interrupting Malaysian international schools. According to the Ministry of Education (MOE) [19], the number of international schools' teachers had increased to 80% while the number of international schools' students had increased 119% within 5 years. The figures showed that the increase in student number does not tally with the increase in teacher number. Various efforts have been put in place by the government to ensure that issues of teachers' shortage at the international schools can be reduced to the minimum. Among the preventive measures taken by the government is allowing several universities to train locals to work at the international schools. On the part of international schools, preventive approaches have been initiated by the school management personnel and policymakers to cater to the shortage of teachers in the schools [18,28].

Issue related to retention in the organization always begins with recruitment. Failure to recruit and retain quality teachers will bring a great loss to the school stakeholders. Recruitment is the first move to avoid mistakes in taking people in who may not be suitable to the organization's culture and may adversely affect the labor relations between employees in the organization [31]. According to Hoi [13], hiring the right employees is important to positively affect the organization's performance, such as lower turnover rate, better organization culture, greater production, and bottom-line profit. Teacher leaving may impact the financial and resources of the schools. The process of recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers requires significant financial costs [4]. Schools may need to hire teachers through well-established advertisement agencies or agents. This process will incur a huge sum of money. For example, Texas Centre for Educational Research [33] showed data that a school will lose at least \$8,000 per recruit who left in the first few years of teaching. The cost increases after nine years of service. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future reported that replacement costs for teachers are now closer to \$15,000 for each teacher who leaves [10]. Additionally, school administrators will need time to interview new potential teachers. This task consumes much time and thus, it is not economic. One of the great laws of labor is that time is money. Furthermore, newly hired teachers often are less experienced, and therefore they require more supports to improve themselves [6, 10]. Therefore, school management personnel should ensure the new teachers that they recruit can stay with the schools longer resulting from appropriate recruitment criteria. School management personnel must select teachers who are the most compatible with the school culture, job description, and management structure, to create teacher retention for longer and more productive for the job [21].

Sims [29] pointed out that the recruitment strategies are the necessary steps to take into account by the organizations, not only for attracting new talents but also to enhance its chances for retaining the employees, once they are hired. Recruitment is a move to ensure the supply of sufficient manpower in an organization and it is also linked to the factors that are used to retain quality employees in the organization. Although international school is an independent body in Malaysia, there are some criteria needed to achieve in the process of applying for a license from the government. For example, Malaysian international school teachers must possess a valid teaching permit and suitable qualifications with the major subject they teach [16]. But for non-Malaysian teachers, the government requires those teachers to possess at least a degree in education or relevant academic and professional qualification in the teaching field; certified health level by the medical institutions in Malaysia; and payroll pass from the Malaysian Immigration Department [16]. Compared to the recruitment of local teachers, the process of hiring foreign teachers is complex and time-consuming. To ensure a sufficient supply of international school teachers, the Malaysian government encourages schools to recruit Malaysians as international school teachers. In parallel, a few private higher education institutions (HEIs), such as SEGi University College, UCSI University, University Tunku

Abdul Rahman (UTAR), and Kirkby International College providing places for teachers to obtain academic and professional qualifications so that they can provide service in the international or private schools in Malaysia [26]. With the effort done by the government, international schools can select the right persons from the qualified candidates who meet the specific criteria of the selection in each school to ensure the new teachers can stay in the schools longer.

Suitable people with adequate knowledge, skills, and positive values are important to organizations. These criteria can ensure that the employees can take in the job without unnecessary stress. Thus, the hiring criteria provide a foundation for the management to motivate employees to exert the efforts needed to do their jobs effectively and eventually retain them. An investigation of teacher recruitment criteria is important to solve the teacher retention issue. As such, there is a need to conduct a specific and representative study on the spectrum of recruitment and retention criteria to guide international schools to achieve high recruitment and retention rate.

1.2 Research Question

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- i. What are the structural recruitment plans used by school management personnel to recruit teachers in Malaysian international schools?
- ii. What are the recruitment strategies used by school management personnel to recruit teachers in Malaysian international schools?
- iii. What are the criteria employed by school management personnel to recruit teachers in Malaysian international schools?

1.3 Research Objectives

The goal of this study aims to explore the recruitment criteria which help in teacher retention in Malaysian international schools. Hence, our study objectives are as follow:

- i. To explore the structural recruitment plans used by school management personnel to recruit teachers in Malaysian international schools.
- ii. To identify the recruitment strategies used by school management personnel to recruit teachers in Malaysian international schools.
- iii. To explore the criteria employed by school management personnel to recruit teachers in Malaysian international schools.

1.4 Limitation

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data collection for this study will be conducted online. Potential respondents may face accessibility issues due to poor or no internet connection. Online qualitative data collection may pose difficulty for researchers to gather field data as the researchers cannot carry out observation in this study.

2. Literature

Recruitment is a process to ensure the continuous supply of qualified teachers to a school. During this process, a large number of candidates will be attracted for interviews and suitable candidates will be selected as teachers. However, the recruitment and selection criteria are varying from school to school and country to country. These selection criteria are imposed to ensure that the schools have

recruit quality and suitable teachers for their students. For example, in Malaysia, public school teachers are expected to be fluent in the Malay language and possess a minimum qualification of diploma in education [30]. Yet, this restriction does not apply in private and international schools. The Malaysian government encourages international schools to hire Malaysians who possess a valid teaching diploma and suitable academic qualification with the subject teaching as a teacher [16]. Unlike public schools, the government imposed certain criteria for international schools to hire foreign teachers. These criteria include possess a degree in education or relevant academic and professional qualification in the teaching field; good health level as certified by the medical practitioners in Malaysia; and acquired a payroll pass from the Malaysian Immigration Department [16].

Additionally, like most countries in the world, foreign teachers are required to obtain a visa or an employment pass to work in Malaysia. Generally, each country in the world has its unique policy and requirement for an employment pass application. For example, according to the American Federation of Teachers International Affairs Department [2], in the United States an employment visa is a one-year visa that can be renewed twice, for a total of three years, and then foreign teachers must return to their home countries for two years to fulfill a residency requirement. In addition, the government of the United States also required international teachers to meet the following criteria: 1. be a primary or secondary teacher in their last legal residence; 2. satisfy the standards of the state in which they will be working; 3. be of good reputation and character; 4. want to teach primary or secondary school in the United States full-time, and 5. have a minimum of three years teaching experience [2]. In contrast, the Malaysian government required all expatriate teachers to possess an employment pass. There are three types of employment pass available in Malaysia: Employment Pass (Category I) is for expatriates with a minimum salary of RM10,000 per month and an employment contract of up to 5 years; Employment Pass (Category II) is for expatriates with a basic salary between RM5,000 to RM9,999 per month and an employment contract up to 2 years; Employment Pass (Category III) for Knowledge/Skilled Workers with a basic salary between RM3,000 to RM4,999 per month and an employment contract must not exceed 12 months [14].

Apart from the above-mentioned recruitment criteria, there are other criteria that schools need to seriously consider although they are not enforced by the government to ensure the quality of the school workforce. As mentioned by Tan [32], recruiting the right candidates for teaching involved getting people with the right aptitude (what and how of teaching) and attitude (sense of commitment to teaching). Barber and Mourshed [3] agreed to this notion and stated that a person becomes an effective teacher when he/she possessed a certain set of characteristics such as a high level of literacy and numeracy, strong interpersonal and communications skills, high willingness to learn, and have a great motivation to teach. Otoo, Assuming, and Agyei [24] added to the criteria, the work experience, and communication or interpersonal skills, that are mostly required by the schools. They reported that work experience and qualifications are the measures of competence concerning the applicant's technical skills, whereas communication skills are related to cultural adaptation, social competence, and language proficiency. Apart from that, Darling-Hammond [10] who explored factors affecting teacher recruitment and retention in high-need schools also found that hiring better prepared and experienced teachers can reduce attrition and they provided higher levels of competence. Abdou [1], a researcher who is interested to understand teachers' recruitment and selection practices found that international schools in Egypt require credentials, appearance, self-confidence, communication and interpersonal skills, positive attitude, self-composure, content, and pedagogical knowledge. She noted that some schools cared about marital status especially newly married female applicants. She reported that the schools are more likely to inquire about the pregnancy plans, and how the applicants expect to manage their newborns and their job commitments. According to Bogatova [5], employers will use various tests such as ability tests, integrity tests, personality tests, group situational tests, and

work simulation tests to understand better the applicant and to determine his/her abilities, talents, skills, and qualifications to match with the applied position. The main purpose of setting up these tests and criteria in the process of recruitment is to recruit a capable and high-quality teacher who can work towards the school goal and stay in the school longer. Thus, it is safe to conclude that recruitment criteria are closely related to the retention rate of teachers.

Teachers' selection and recruitment processes are reported to be more effective and meaningful with the involvement of school management personnel [1,23,38]. It is the responsibility of the school management personnel to recruit and select the right persons as their school teachers. The involvement of school management personnel throughout the process of recruitment is very important since recruitment involved high costs, time, and manpower. These costs include recruiting, hiring and processing, and training new teachers and new hires [11]. A study conducted by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission found that the cost of replacing a teacher who left was \$11,976 to \$ 16,387 [22]. Besides, the study by Wilkin [36] showed that the recruitment process needs to take almost 30 days which involved vacancies announcement, process application, interview, and selection. This recruitment process involves various departments and people to recruit a teacher. School management personnel must select the teachers who are the best compatible with the school culture, job description, and management structure, to ensure teacher retention for longer and more productive for the job [21]. Therefore, school management personnel should ensure that the new teachers that they recruited can stay with the schools longer through the application of appropriate recruitment criteria.

A common strategy of recruiting teachers in international schools' ranges from internal searches, referrals, and contacting employment agencies, to advertising vacancies with college and university placement services [37]. As such, Rao [27] divided recruitment strategies into 2 main groups: internal (present employees, retired/former employees, previous applicants, and employee referrals), and external (advertisement, campus recruitment, recruiting agencies, job portals/organizational websites, job fairs/exhibitions, headhunting, and other sources). Internal recruitment strategy is a way to inform current employees about an open position in the school. They can be informed regarding the positions by internal advertisements, e-mail, or in person [5]. The advantages of this type of recruitment strategy are time-saving, more reliable than external recruitment, promotes loyalty among teachers, is less expensive than external method, and requires less orientation and training [25]. However, there are some drawbacks with this strategy such as limited choice of candidates may discourage the flow of new blood into school, and the selection of a candidate may be unfair based on the management's likes and dislikes [5]. Therefore, an external recruitment strategy offers an alternative way to recruit potential teachers although it is more expensive compared to an internal recruitment strategy.

To ensure the recruitment process is smooth and efficient, a comprehensive plan is essential. Thebe and Van der Waldt [34] suggested common sequential steps in the recruitment process: 1) Identify the need to recruit/determine whether a vacancy exists; 2) Update the job description, specification, and profile; 3) Determine the key performance areas of the job/recruitment planning; 4) Consult the recruitment policy and procedure; 5) Consider the sources of recruitment (searching); 6) Choose the appropriate recruitment method; 7) Develop the recruitment advertisement/strategy development; 8) Place the advertisement in the most appropriate and suitable communication medium/implement a decision; 9) Ensuring availability of application blanks/ensure a pool of potential qualified applications/allow sufficient time for responses; 10) Screen responses/screening; and 11) Recruitment evaluation and control. Besides, the University of South Carolina [35] offered a recruitment step as the following: 1) Create or update position description; 2) Develop a recruitment plan; 3) Decide on the use of a search committee or interview panel; 4) Submit the requisition to post

the position; 5) Screen candidates; 6) Interview candidates; 7) Check references; 8) Make recommendation to department head; 9) Secure salary approval; 10) Initiate background check; and 11) Write an offer letter. Although, different organizations or schools will have their recruitment plans, yet, all the plans aim to recruit the right person for the position. These steps help an employer to get better knowledge about a candidate, his or her abilities, motivation, background, and additional information which is useful for making a decision [5]. The right person for the position is a way for retention. Thus, a good recruitment plan is the first key to teacher retention.

3. Methodology

This study aims to explore international teacher recruitment and retention criteria using a qualitative research design. In this design, the study explores the unknown teacher recruitment and retention criteria for Malaysian international schools which are registered with the Ministry of Education (MOE). Currently, there is a total of 153 Malaysian international schools [20] with an estimated 612 school management personnel (include principal, vice-principal, head of the department, and HR manager).

The study will interview 20 international school management personnel who will be selected through purposive sampling. It is deemed that the interview data will reach a saturation point by this figure. The data collection then will be continued for one or two more school management personnel to ensure and confirm that there is no new information emerged. The samples of school management personnel will be selected from the total population based on the following four criteria: 1) school management personnel from the oldest international schools in Malaysia; 2) school management personnel that have at least 20 years of leadership background; 3) school management personnel who are successful in leadership positions and granted with awards or recognitions; 4) school management personnel who are recommended by other international schools or any international school associations. These selection criteria are needed to enable the researchers to obtain meaningful information from the respondents to answer the research questions. With the experience in leadership, the respondents are expected to be able to provide the recruitment criteria employed to recruit international teachers which are closely related to the issue of teacher retention in school.

In this study, semi-structured one-to-one interviews will be used. The aim of using semi-structured interviews for data collection is to gather information from the international school management personnel who have personal experiences, perceptions, and thought about the research topic. This action is in parallel with the suggestion made by Lincoln, Yvonna, and Guba [17] that the researchers can use semi-structured interviews to collect new, exploratory data related to a research topic, triangulate other data sources or validate findings through member checking. Open-ended questions will be used in this study to allow the researchers to explore participants' views of reality [12]. In this way, the researchers can understand the recruitment criteria that international schools of Malaysia utilized to retain quality teachers from the school management personnel perspective. This study will render the school management personnel the best time to present their views on the research topic. Certain questions will be prepared to guide the researchers in the semi-structured interview towards achieving research objectives, but additional questions will be made during the interview sessions to clarify the data. Due to the time and geographical limitation, skype interviewing will be employed in the process of collecting data. After receiving agreement from the participants in taking part in the interview which will be conducted through Skype, the time of the interview session will be fixed and both interviewees and interviewers will then meet on Skype to conduct the interview sessions. As a result, the interview session will be conducted in the participant's favorite conditions to increase the participation rate. Although the Skype interview does not involve a face-to-face interview, it still allows

the researchers to access verbal and non-verbal cues through a webcam. Moreover, it also provides an opportunity to record the whole process of interview sessions which eventually eases the coding process. Despite the benefits, the necessity of access to high-speed Internet, familiarity with online communication for both parties, and having digital literacy will affect the nature of the interview [15].

Each interview session will be recorded, transcribed professionally, and analyzed using a content analysis approach with the assistance of the NVivo version 11 research software programme. In this study, the content analysis is used to analyze the content of the interview transcripts to derive the themes. The validation of interview transcripts will be checked through member checking techniques to avoid bias from the researchers. The dependability and confirmability will be checked through the audit trail technique. All recorded interview sessions and transcribed notes will be kept for audit. All the evidence related to the interview sessions will be checked by the auditors. In this study, the auditor selection technique proposed by Lincoln and Guba [17] will be used to select the appropriate auditors. The three selection criteria, supported by Lincoln and Guba [17] to select auditors, are 1) someone with the methodological expertise to conduct an audit of a qualitative study; 2) someone who has sufficient experience and credibility to be considered trustworthy, whose accounts will be considered valid by others; and 3) a disinterested party, who has no connection to or affiliation with the study, and no stake in the outcomes. To maintain consistency, all the changes and revisions to the interview protocols and transcripts will be documented to keep a trackable record of when and how the changes are implemented. Besides, the researchers also will keep a record of how certain themes and codes emerged in NVivo for audit purposes.

4. Results and Discussion

The expected results of this study are the recruitment plan, strategy, and criteria employed by the school management personnel to recruit teachers in Malaysian international schools. The results of this study will be used to provide a framework for interested parties to develop and improve their current school environment.

5. Conclusion

The result of the study hopes to provide to the body of knowledge additional literature in this research area. The study also hopes to reveal effective recruitment and retention criteria from the perspective of school management personnel which can provide practical guidance for international education policymakers and school administration to recruit and retain quality teachers in Malaysian international schools. This study potentially promotes positive outcomes especially the sufficient manpower in international schools.

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