Educator Perspectives on Teacher Attrition and Retention in Private Early Childhood Schools in India

Swathi Sandesh Menon[1*] and Donna Moucha Brackin[1]

[1]*Swathi Sandesh Menon, Ed.D Walden University, USA.*

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author SSM designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors SSM and DMB managed the analyses of the study. Author SSM managed the literature searches. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

Teacher attrition is a challenge in many countries. This qualitative case study explored the perspectives of teachers and school leaders in India regarding how teacher attrition in private early childhood schools influences the students, teachers, parents, school leaders, and schools and the factors that stakeholders identify as important to retain teachers. Themes related to compensation for increased workloads, positive workplace relationships, schedule flexibility, teaching autonomy and rewards/recognition for work. Sharing these experiences and suggestions of educators on teacher attrition can help education leaders possibly lessen teacher attrition and retention in India.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher attrition is a major problem that assails educational systems in both developed and developing countries [1,2]. Miller and Chait [3] described teacher attrition as educators choosing to leave the teaching profession for work that might or might not be related to education;

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*Corresponding author: Email: menon.swathi20@gmail.com;

attrition can be expected or unexpected, temporary or permanent [4]. Temporary attrition occurs, when teachers leave to complete higher studies or start a family, and then return; whereas permanent teacher attrition reflects teachers' leaving the profession entirely [5]. Previous researchers have shown some of the major reasons for teacher attrition to be teacher discontent, arising out of lack of support from school authorities, increased class sizes, and dissatisfaction with the salary, as well as other factors, such as considering the teaching profession as a disagreeable career option [6].

The effects of teacher attrition are negative for all involved: the students, the students' families, the teachers, the school community, and entire nations. The consequences range from loss of experienced teachers [7], to decreasing teacher inputs and financial burdens of as much as $1–2.2 billion per year [8], and instructional and organizational disruption [8]. Instructional conti nuity, a major requirement for sustainably educating children, is the area most affected by teacher attrition [8]. The exodus of teachers, often in the early stages of their careers, disrupts the smooth flow of instruction that occurs when children have the same teacher; this can lead to adverse effects on children's learning [9,8].

Several researchers attribute teacher attrition to be the result of various causes including low salaries, lack of professional status, work stress, and limited career development opportunities [10-12]. In turn, chronic teacher turnover or attritionhas many negative impacts on students, their families, teachers, the school, and even the nation. This study focuses on exploring teacher and school leader perspectives on how teacher attrition influences their work in private early childhood schools and the factors they view as important for teacher retention, using Bronfen brenner' secological systems theory [EST] [13]. EST has made a seminal contribution to the understanding of the context and processes through which child development takes place. EST proposes that child development occurs within nested levels or interrelated systems of the environment: the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro systems [14,15]. The levels range from the smaller microsystem to the larger and distal macrosystem, often represented graphically as a nested set of concentric circles.

Within the school setting, students and teachers are located at the microsystem level, the most proximal ecological system. This level encom

passes the social relationships, actions, and roles that children experience directly in various settings [16,14]. The negative effects of teacher attrition have long-term consequences for both individual children and educational systems [17,18]. Children's development, particularly of their personalities and social skills, is also hampered by the insecurity they face after the departure of a teacher with whom they had connected emotionally [9,8]. This leads to emotional turmoil for children [19] which can contribute to disruptions to development and a lack of coping skills [20].

The microsystem for the teacher is the classroom [13]. The teacher's microsystem may contain aspects that areunfavorable to teachers and lead to teacher attrition and affecting the in-class learning environment [21,22]. Attrition often leads to increased workloads among teachers as well as reduced morale [9,23]. The teachers left behind often have no choice but to assume extra responsibilities to fill in the gaps, which can leadto no longer managing even their own classes well [19].

High rates of turnover can add significant chaos and complexity to elements of school operations as well [24]. When teachers venture out of the microsystem, the classroom, they enter the mesosystem, the school campus beyond the classroom, where s/he communicates with fellow teachers and other staff. Just like the microsystem, the mesosystem contains aspects that can lead to teacher attrition [21,22]. The efficiency of school organizations as systems is disrupted when teachers leave. High teacher turnover forces school administrators to hire novice, inexperienced teachers, which has a direct adverse effect on children's learning [9]. Teacher attrition also negatively impacts the effectiveness of the school as an integrated system, disrupting the learning environment and educational outcomes [17]. The macro-system level is defined as the overarching set of values, norms, and beliefs under which children develop; these elements are based on the religious, socioeconomic, and cultural organization of societies. This ecological system serves as a lens through which individuals understand and interpret their future experiences [14,15]..

Teacher attrition has led to a paucity of teachers in many countries [25,26]; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] [27,28,29]. Studies on teacher attrition from the United States, Australia, and the United

Kingdom report high percentages of teachers leaving their jobs before the customary retirement age [30]. Researchers in the United States have reported that the percentage of teachers leaving their jobs five years after graduation from a teacher education program is between 30% and 50% [31,29]. In Australia, the rate is 30–40% [32,33], and in the United Kingdom, the rate is 50%, although fewer than 40% enter the teaching profession immediately after graduating from the program [34]. On the other end of the scale, in countries like Hong Kong reportedly only 4.8–5.0% of teachers leave their jobs early in their careers [35].

The negative effects of teacher attrition on educational environments and students' education are matters of concern, yet only a handful of researchers have addressed the quality of instruction and outcomes between public and private education in India [36,37], nor the current state of early childhood education in India as a field [38] Using Bronfenbrenner's EST, India represents the macrosystem, or "the broader political, economic, legal, and cultural influences" [39]. As such, the macrosystem ultimately has implications for the microsystem level where teachers, school leaders, and parents interact with students.

A World Bank [37] assessment of private schools in India showed that a quarter of children in rural areas aged 6-14 attend private school, while more than half of children in urban areas attend private schools. The rise of private schools in India speaks to a contradiction in the country's education system: public schools are more accessible than ever, but students enrolled in the country's public schools consistently achieve below-grade-level results in areas such as reading. One of the measures included in the 2009 Right to Education Act decreed that 25% of seats in the country's private schools be set aside for students from economically disadvantaged families. Based on estimates from the Indian government, Banks and Dheran [40] suggested that fully implementing the plan will require about 20,000 new primary schools, as well as the upgrading of about 70,000 existing primary schools. This act reflects recognition by the government of India that education is integral to the country being able to maintain sustainable long-term growth of its economy [40,38].

Weinstein [41] noted Mumbai is considered the financial capital of India, so the implementation of the Act in its schools is deeply integrated with the city's short and long-term economic growth. People from across the country throng to Mumbai for the job opportunities available within this city. Mumbai is a cosmopolitan city where the expansions of the suburbs happened alongside its western railway lines and the central/eastern railway lines. Due to this expansion, many private early childhood schools have been established to cater to the needs of the ever-growing population.

This qualitative study fills a gap in this area by exploring teachers' and school leaders' perspectives on how teacher attritioninfluences their work in private early childhood schools and the factors they view as important for teacher retention. While important lessons and insights can be gained from other countries, educators and policymakers need to understand the dimensions of phenomena in their local contexts to plan effective solutions. In order to explore the Indian context of early childhood education, we sought to answer two research questions:

- What are the perspectives of teachers and school leaderson how teacher attrition influences their work in private early childhood schools in Mumbai, India?
- What factors do teachers and school leaders identify as important for teacher retention What factors do teachers in private early childhood schools in Mumbai, India?

By answering these questions, this study contributes important insights that can help policy makers and education leaders in India to better understand the problem of teacher attrition, which can lead to developing solutions. This research could help to combat teacher attrition in urban private early childhood schools in India.

2. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

2.1 Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of teachers and school leaders in Mumbai, India, regarding how teacher attrition in private early childhood schools influences their work in early childhood centers, as well as the factors that they identify as important to improve teacher retention in the future. According to Creswell [42], researchers use qualitative methods to delve into social difficulties and understand their components, triggers and

connotations. A qualitative case study research design was used as this involved interactive inquiry and is open-ended and inductive [43]. This study focused on collection of data based on the personal experiences of teachers and school leaders. Focusing on two groups of school stakeholders enabled us to concentrate on a case within set boundaries [44,43,45].

2.2 Setting and Participants

Four private early childhood schools, three located in the western suburbs and one in the eastern suburbs of Mumbai, India, were the targeted settings for this research study. The target schools were located in a densely populated residential locality consisting of upper middle-class families belonging to diverse linguistic communities; thus, the student population reflects the diversity of the locality. Each of the early childhood schools serve approximately 250 students and enrollment is non-selective. At all the schools, each grade level (play group to Kindergarten 2) have an average of 21 students to a class. All the schools work in two sessions per day, with both sessions conducted by the same set of teachers.

Meetings were requested with school management at private early childhood schools to apprise him/her of the research aims. It was verified that the school shad experienced significant teacher attrition. High attrition was determined by asking school management if least one teacher left the school every six months. On confirming which schools had high teacher attrition, verbal and written permission was obtained from the school leaders of the school to recruit participants.Teachers and parents were given letters of invitation to participate. Parents were also approached before or after school, as a personal approach is culturally expected in India.

The homogenous purposive sampling consisted of participants selected based on the objective of the research and with the features of the population in mind [46]. Participants were limited to eight individuals: four teachers who had taught in private early childhood schools for at least two years and four school leaders, who also have been on the job for two years. The participants in the study were all women and in the age group of 20 to 35 years of age with a bachelor's degree and a teachers training certificate.

2.3 Data Collection

Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with all participants and used a semi-structure interview protocol with open-ended questions, so that participants could respond at length and in detail.In India, it is the norm to interview at the school. Given the cultural context, all meetings and interviews were conducted at the convenience of the participants at the school. These took place in a private area of the library. Each interview lasted approximately an hour. Two interviews were scheduled per day across 12 participants. To protect the identity of the interviewees, a number as well as pseudonym was assigned. The transcribed notes were password protected and the notes and recordings will be destroyed after 5 years.

In order to ensure the highest level of data validity, participants were asked to review transcripts and conduct member checking. Each participant was provided a copy of his or her interview transcript so that each could review their respective transcripts for accuracy. Later, participants reviewed a summary of findings and examined the themes that emerged from the data and checked for accuracy.

2.4 Data Analysis

Once all interviews were completed, thematic analysis [47] was used to review the transcripts. This process involved a systematic review of information in order to develop a list of concepts or themes that reflects the patterns within the collected data and is facilitated by a process of thematic coding [48]. Turner [49] described codes as consistent expressions, ideas, and phrases that were commonly found among study participants. Braun and Clarke's [48] thematic analysis steps were usedand entailed searching for and determining the most common and significant patterns from the data gathered. The six phases of the thematic analysis were the following: 1) "familiarization of oneself with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) the production of the final report" [48]. NVivo12 was used to systematically organize, code, and tabulate the final themes.Codes that had same meanings were grouped together and named. For example, the theme of managing increased work responsibilities was referenced by several of the school leaders and teacher participants. Codes under this theme included "stress to maintain

physical and emotional well-being," "taught additional classes," and "given additional responsibilities."

3. RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the perspectives of teachers and school leaders on how teacher attrition influences their work in private early childhood schools in Mumbai, India?

All participants referred to increased respon sibilities as a major influence of teacher attrition on their work. Both group sreferenced the influence on teachers' responsibilities within the classroom, while school leaders also brought up other influences of teacher attrition on the school, such as the larger impact on resources that result from reorganizing staff and faculty responsibilities. The four teachers all mentioned experiences of managing increased workloads and work responsibilities in the micro system layer. These changes in their responsibilities affected their mental and physical health, as well as their daily time management and scheduling. In the face of attrition, the remaining teachers are left with the duties and tasks of the teachers who leave their classes and positions; in our interviews, they shared the difficulties they faced when other teachers left unexpectedly.

Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 stated that, in the face of unexpected resignations by fellow teachers, they had no choice but to manage two classes with two planners, two curricula, and two different sets of children. Teacher 1's long list of daily responsibilities and duties for the children became taxing in the long run:

> "It was like me shuffling between two classes throughout the year; so, it was very difficult for me. It was a great challenge for me to follow two planners, two curriculums, and a different set of children; it was difficult for me but then I took it up as a challenge because I knew that somewhere I had to face it."

Teacher 3 explained how overall classroom processes and routines change when teachers leave during the school year. She also touched on the need to manage added tasks such as the planner and the children left with no teacher.Teacher 4 shared that attrition was a tremendous problem for those who remained at his school after a wave of attrition. Teacher 4 discussed how the remaining teachers had to

work together to cover the responsibilities of teachers who left:

> "Over here, there is no extra teacher. There is only one teacher for pre-nursery, there is only one teacher for nursery, there is only one teacher for K1. So, if even one teacher leaves, it falls upon the other teacher to handle everything… That particular teacher has to do overtime and finish her work as well as the missed out teacher's work. So obviously, it really affected the other teacher."

Teacher 2 added that communication with the children in the new class is a particular challenge in this situation. When taking over another teacher's class, s/he found it challenging and time-consuming to get to know the children and address their needs accordingly:

> "There are already so many responsibilities on your head, and now you have to take care of another class. And you do not know the ins and out of that class … the teacher knows best aboutthe child than the new teacher."

School leaders tended to frame the conversation on the increased workload for teachers in terms of their lowered efficiency and innovation in classroom practices.For School Leader 2, the main disadvantage of teacher attrition was that new and burdensome tasks eventually decreased the efficiency of the teachers who stayed behind. This school leader further noted that the teachers who remain lack the energy to be creative and innovative in their lesson planning and presentation, which then affects the quality of the education for students as well:

> "If the other teacher would have been present in the class, she would have worked with the children with a lot of enthusiasm and with a lot of ideas coming to her mind. "Ok, let me try this new activity; let me do something new with the children that they like." All that gets disturbed because then the teacher's mentality becomes to let it be "I don't try anything new." Then again it leads to a downward curve in the creativity of the teacher."

School Leader 3 provided another example of how teachers' efficiency is affected. With the extra tasks and responsibilities, the remaining teachers and their staff members have less time

overall for all work duties, leading to delays in school activities and other schedule matters:

> "It does affect the efficiency when it comes to time, time-bound activities which are expected from you. Like if you have a set time that within this time you need to complete this task and your resources are less, so you need to have an extension at times; you can't do that thing in the delivered expected time."

School leaders also referred to the impacts of teacher attrition on the remaining teachers, but they also included other stakeholders impacted by the departure, such as parents and other staff. School Leader 1 stated that, simply put: "The biggest challenge is managing the curriculum, parents, and the remaining staff. The remaining staff especially are overloaded with work."

Teachers also describedattrition in the context of interpersonal relationships between teachers. For example, Teacher 3 discussed that the teachersbuilt relationships and bonds with each other, and that sudden departures affected faculty morale for this reason: "We are working for so long and we are bonded to each other ... So, we really miss the teacher who is leaving."

School Leader 4 similarly referred to the impacts on inter-personal relationships:

> "By the time a new teacher comes in, it's a long gap to get a new teacher who will fit into this. Then again, the teachers who have a bonding internally because there are two teachers in a class, and they are bonding, and their working relationship … again, you have to start from scratch."

The effects on relationships are among the least tangible consequences of teacher attrition, but the loss of teacher morale can easily lead to more teachers quitting, due to dissatisfaction about their work environment.In summary, all eight teachers and school leaders interviewed were preoccupied by the negative impacts of teacher attrition on morale, workload, and the work environment for teachers and staff.

Research Question 2: What factors do teachers and school leaders identify as important for teacher retention in private early childhood schools?

All four teachers believed in the importance of positive workplace relationships at the microsystem level. Strong relationships can be promoted by building good teamwork and relationships among staff members, communicating openly with teachers, and practicing fair and equal treatment. The teachers identified the importance of a positive atmosphere at work, especially in terms of rapport and relationships with colleagues.

Two teachers felt it was important for school leaders to ensure teachers were getting along and communicating openly, in a positive work environment. Teacher 1 said,"One key cause of teacher attrition in this school is the lack of trust and coordination with other staff members."Teacher 3 also maintained that it was vital for teachers to be exposed to happy and positive environments. Given the nature of the profession, with its heavy workloads and high pressure, teachers need strong relationships with each other. Support from both peers and school leaders can help reduce teachers' work and overall stress:

> "The coordination between the teacher and the staff and the colleagues should be very good and positive. The teacher will adjust herself because she will enjoy, and when you enjoy your work you are happy, even though if you are paid less… I will personally not work in a situation where there is politics or the teachers are not treated as a teacher or something like that."

The second subtheme that emerged was the need for school leaders to communicate openly with teachers. For one teacher participant, teachers' perceptions and feedback were crucial for improving school processes and overall workplace conditions. By openly communicating, school leaders will have the opportunity to learn about teachers' concerns and attempt to address them, in order to avoid more serious issues that could lead to departure. Teacher 2 indicated:

> "…Counsel, as in have talk with the teachers, not a one-side story; this side also has to be heard. Ask the teachers what the concern is—it is really about the salary matter. If s/he is a really good teacher, then you have to retain the teacher."

Teacher 4 also shared that fair and equal treatment by the school leadership builds teachers' confidence to try new and innovative strategies that could improve their teaching instruction. The school's leaders play a key role in creating a relationship of trust:

 "The head of a school should not be partial—the head of the school should be a person who is crisp and clear … So, I feel a center head should be issued a highly tab of confidentially… If somebody is coming and has been discussing something to me, I have to be fair… to listen to that person and not be listening and telling and going and telling into some other level only."

School Leader 3 suggested that schools must think of ways to periodically relieve teachers' stress and pressure.This participant believed that teachers would appreciate outings and other relaxing activities:

"Take them out for an outing. Like we had a teacher's day, so we all went to Imagica. Teachers will also start bonding because here, it's more like they come to work and they go back home; so, it's very important the teacher's bond with the organization, and then they will start loving come into work; then the attrition is not a part and parcel of their lifeline."

School Leader 3 continued on to say that these outings can also provide learning opportunities for to collaborate with teachers with various areas of expertise:

"Like there are a lot of teachers who are good in their artwork [and t] here are teachers who are excellent in the execution of the curriculum, but they are zero in artwork. So, they get stressed— "How do I balance both?" Just to train the teachers in their grey areas and understand what the problems are. Everyone has their own problems, so help them out."

School Leader 4 also expressed the need for activities and actions that would motivate teachers to work hard. This participant discussed how teachers and staff members must feel that they are well appreciated by the rest of the community. This school leader believed that appreciation could be demonstrated by additional pay, bonus, and other gestures that would make teachers feel valued:

"Also, there should be some kind of motivational things to be given to the teachers. If you are having events, celebration and activities or something like an exhibition, do something for the teachers; do something for the staff that they come

here and do something for you. You cannot expect all these things to happen free of cost. So, motivation, motivation in kind of additional pay, motivational in reward form, motivation in a bonus form."

These examplesfrom school leaders' interviews shows how teacher training, interpersonal relationships, and a good working environment can all come together seamlessly to offer teachers a supportive workplace.

School Leader 2 also pointed to a commensurate salary as an important component of the teacher's work environment, especially given the increased workloads that result from high levels of attrition:

"These are the major reasons I feel that teachers are leaving over here, workload and salary: They feel that the workload is not balanced with the salary that they are getting. Sometimes teachers even wait back until about five thirty to six o'clock. They are appreciated no doubt, but then the teachers would expect something in monetary terms rather than just appreciation."

These comments by school leaders and teachers point to some common understandings between them of the high demands placed on teachers. They also indicate that both groups of stakeholders see the school's leaders as key figures in creating a positive work environment that will encourage teachers to stay on, even during the most stressful periods. Teachers and school leaders appreciate morale boosters, such as celebrations and special days, and also pointed to concrete measures such as salary raises as important factors in retaining teachers.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 RQ1

Cumming, Sumsion, and Wong [20], as well as Buchanan et al. [10], identified excessive workloads as detrimental to teacher retention. The key theme identified under RQ 1 was the excessive workloads for the remaining teachers and respondents identified the need to reduce teacher workloads as significant. Latifoglu [50] identified misuse of school resources, such as diverting funds to support training due to teacher attrition can diminish previous fund allocations and demotivate other teachers, burdening the remaining teachers with unfamiliar subjects

which can reduce teaching quality. This theme manifests as overworking the teachers who remain and training irregular teachers to compensate for the loss of regular teachers, which maps onto the themes from this study of managing increased workloads and knowledge/process continuity.

In the study by Glennie et al. [51], participants were concerned about knowledge and process continuity, given that novice teachers face learning curve challenges. Glennie et al. [51] findings were consistent with the concerns of 50% of the teachers in this study who were concerned about ruptures in knowledge and process continuity when teachers leave, as well as managing increased work and responsibilities. Cumming et al. [20] Price and McCallum [39]; and Wushishi et al. [52] identified the need to manage teachers' workloads from attrition because heavy workloads can cause physical illnesses. Concerns about teachers' mental and physical health were connected to teacher attrition in their school environments: Cumming et al. [20] posited that extra workloads could cause physical problems for teachers, while Wushishi et al. [52] determined that extra workloads affect teachers' morale and school efficiency. In their research in Australia, Price and McCallum [39] focused more on the concept of "fitness" to consider how teachers' retention is tied to their physical and mental well-being. The responses of the teachers and school leaders in this study were consistent with these study findings; some respondents were concerned about health problems due to heavy workloads, while others were concerned about reduced productivity. Participants' responses about the Indian context are generally consistent with the findings from studies carried out in Western countries [17,24,39], and reflect similar teacher stressors as well.

4.2 RQ2

Regarding factors important to retention, the microsystem theme of positive workplace relationships found in this study is consistent with studies by Weiqi [53], Ndoye et al. [54], Ladd [55] and Carrasqueira and Koslinski [56] who identified leadership and administrative support and school climate as important factors in teacher retention. All four teachers identified positive workplace relationships as important for increasing retention. While teachers in this study viewed income increases positively, they only did so in the context of salaries being commensurate

with increased responsibilities. Other studies [10,11,53] have identified adequate salaries as important factors in teacher retention. However, despite the importance of money, teachers in this study rated rewards and incentives as being of low importance in their retention.

In addition to concerns about positive workplace relations, the theme of increased autonomy was important to the teachers; in fact, half of the teacher respondents preferred increased teaching autonomy. Anand and McKenney [57] identified teacher autonomy as a key element in the professionalization of early childhood teachers in the Indian context. Outside the Indian context, Lynch [11], Erss et al. [58] and CGR [59] identified teacher autonomy as important as well; schools that provided higher levels of teacher autonomy had higher-skilled teachers, higher-achieving students, higher retention rates, and better school environments.

Teacher training is another important element of teacher retention. Boyd et al. [60] identified teachers' training as important for teacher retention. In her analysis of recent developments in the professionalization of teaching in India, Gupta [61] argued that the privatization of early childhood education, as well as these kinds of on-demand hiring practices, reflect the influence of global neoliberal economic trends on India's macrosystem. Gupta cautioned that the "quality of training might be compromised to a factory model of quick turnaround supply of 'teachers' who might lack passion or commitment to teaching, and may be swayed by incentives that position teaching as a gateway to a more lucrative career industry" (p. 234). The private preschools featured in this study represent the push-and-pull of these various forces on the teaching staff, which leads to higher attrition of teachers.

The theme of schedule flexibilityis linked to the problem of excessive workloads caused by high turnover rates; several respondents cited this as a negative effect of attrition. Similarly, Ilies, Huth, Ryan, and Dimotakis [62] reported that increased teacher workload did indeed produce other conflicts, not only in their work schedules but also in their time with their families.

One of the other factors was the independence given to the teachers to make decisions regarding their individual classroom management. This important microsystem-level factor affects teachers' job satisfaction. This is

largely in the hands of the school administration, as they decide how independently teachers may conduct classroom activities. The results of this study reveal that teachers derive more job satisfaction if this variable is in their favor, thus choosing to continue with their jobs and helping to prevent teacher attrition.

The themes that emerged in the study were matching increased workloads to proper compensation, schedule flexibility, teaching autonomy, positive workplace relationships, and reward/recognition for work. The data indicated that the teachers could not form collegial relationships with other teachers due to high attrition and that the remaining teachers' mental and physical health and productivity and competence was negatively affected by the increased burden. Satisfaction derived from meaningful work, proper salaries, and positive workplace relationships are important to teachers' assessments of their careers and themselves.

It was revealed that school leaders should give importance to the well-being of teachers, and ensure positive relationship between them and the teachers, as well as between the teachers themselves. It is imperative that school leaders support teacher needs, both physical and psychological, and provide opportunities for them to raise their esteem both in their own eyes and in the eyes of society, so that they remain motivated members of the teaching community and work to the best of their abilities.

In the Indian context in particular, Sharma [63] pointed to other compounding factors in the exit of the country's teachers from the profession, or from simply practicing the profession in India. She stated:

Moreover, due to falling attractiveness of the teaching profession in comparison to other corporate high-paying jobs, youth are not entering this field which further deepens the problem. Where teachers have been trained at public expense (subsidized public education system) and where their skills and expertise cannot easily be replaced, their loss may represent a major impediment to the achievement of educational goals. (p. 272)

The larger macro system context of the teaching profession in India has a deep impact on the retention of qualified and passionate teachers. The unavailability of teachers is compensated by

increasing the workloads of the continuing teachers as per the themes that emerged.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study has four principal limitations. First, the sample size was small, including only eight participants (four teachers and four school leaders). This affects the transferability of the research findings. Second, the study was limited by the fact that individual responses differed even within the same context; for example, even though all respondents were affiliated with schools that had teacher attrition, not all respondents viewed the issue with the same level of concern. Transferability is also limited because study participants came from four private, early education institutions in India. Different types of schools may lend themselves to different stressors or different responses in their respective environments. Third, each interview was conducted for only an hour for the convenience of the participants. The limited length of the interviews also made it challenging to establish rapport with the participants, which could have led to more detailed and complete responses. It is possible that the level of richness of the data from these individuals might be considered a limitation. The teachers interviewed may not have been as honest and truthful in their responses, given their fear of being identified by the school leaders; they may have hesitated to fully express their thoughts and feelings when answering the interview questions. Interviews took place in the school library, and school leaders did not know who participated or who did not. Participants were reminded of the confidentiality of their identities, and that their names would not be mentioned now or in future use of the research results.

The themes that emerged in the study were matching increased workloads to proper compensation, schedule flexibility, teacher autonomy, positive workplace relationships, and reward/recognition for work. Researchers conducting future studies should look into the three themes: flexible schedules, reduced workloads, and teaching independence, all of which the teacher respondents in this study considered valuable. Investigators could study how these three in particular compare with each other to determine which is the most influential. Such studies could also aid in understanding other factors not mentioned in this study that could affect teacher retention. Further research should also include larger samples and perhaps

a comparison of both public and private schools to determine if other factors influence attrition.

This research could be a resource for educational entities that serve urban private early childhood schools. The findings in this study demonstrate the need to have schedule flexibility in order to retain teachers. Schedule flexibility may be related to teaching freedom and independence, in that teachers might need to balance their school and personal schedules. If overwork is contributing to attrition, the empirical data here indicate that school leaders must be open and willing to reduce workloads despite the barriers in resources. Although the school leaders in this study did not see schedule flexibility and teaching independence as important, they might still promote these policies so that teachers feel less stressed, pressured, and overworked. To counter the emotional frustration, depersonalization, and demoralization, the themes that the teachers identified as significant need to be examined and incorporated by the school leaders and teachers as much as possible.

In summary, the following suggestions may be employed by the key policy and school decision-makers: reducing teachers' workloads, increasing salaries to match increased responsibilities, and fostering positive school and teaching environments. While increased salaries are important for teachers who must meet greater responsibilities, they are not a solution for teacher retention because, for some, the workloads are part of their responsibilities. Increased salaries commensurate with increased responsibilities should be considered to moderate the stress of increased workloads. Listening to teachers' concerns and taking positive actions to help them could help foster positive workplace environments. With the application of these recommendations, teacher attrition may be decreased in the long run.

The results of the current study are most suitable in the Indian education system. These findings have the potential to generate positive social change that fosters an environment in which teachers are treated as professionals by their school management and given respect and support. This could inspire teachers to translate their positive energy into effective classroom instruction, which will help early childhood schools to improve their sustainability, promote organizational growth, and be more profitable.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The interviewed teachers at private early childhood schools in Mumbai, India, with high levels of teacher attrition mentioned that increased workloads and responsibilities were their greatest concerns.
- In addition to sharing the teachers' concerns about increased teacher workloads, the interviewed school leaders also mentioned the impacts of teacher attrition on the school as a whole, including the stress of reorganizing work responsibilities among other staff.
- Both teachers and school leaders mentioned the importance of creating a healthy and supportive work environment for teachers, including morale boosters and increased salaries.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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