



Analysis and Solution Strategies of the Early Retirement Trend of Teachers in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study examines the trend of early retirement among teachers in Malaysia. The paper investigates the underlying influencing factors, the implications of the issue, proposes five realistic solutions, and provides a preventive mechanism from an organizational management perspective. The study employed a combination of keyword search and literature review to gather relevant information. The findings suggest that teachers in Malaysia are leaving early due to factors such as excessive workload, health-related issues, family responsibilities, lack of job advancement opportunities, and employment opportunities outside the education sector. The implications of early retirement are far-reaching, including increased workload for remaining teachers, loss of institutional knowledge, and cost of replacing experienced teachers. This paper proposes five realistic solutions, including providing opportunities for career advancement, reducing workload, improving health and safety measures, promoting work-life balance, and offering better compensation and benefits. The preventive mechanism from an organizational management perspective suggests the importance of creating a positive work environment, fostering open communication, providing professional development opportunities, and supporting teachers in their personal and professional lives.

Keywords: early retirement, teachers, Malaysia, influencing factors, implications, solutions, organizational management

1. Introduction

In 2022, the National Union of Teachers in Malaysia reported that over 10,000 teachers had opted for early retirement in the past few years, prompting concern. On March 21, 2022, Senior Education Minister Datuk Dr. Radzi Jidin disclosed that the number of teachers who had retired early was almost equal to the number of instructors who had retired as mandated. This trend is worrying, and may lead to a teacher shortage similar to that seen in Australia.

As highlighted in Sitheravellu's article published on April 23, 2022, in the New Straits Times Online, the issue of early teacher retirement needs to be addressed. This issue is in line with the Malaysia Education Plan (2015-2025) goal of attracting and retaining skilled teachers, which is crucial for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Numerous factors contribute to this trend, as suggested by studies. For instance, according to D'Silva (2022), factors such as mounting administrative work and dealing with difficult students are among the reasons why teachers retire early. This paper aims to explore these underlying factors in detail and suggest possible solutions to address the issue.

2. Literature review

2.1. Teachers are quitting: A global perspective

Nearly one in five teachers in the United States are considering quitting their jobs in 2021, with 50% of them exploring alternative employment options inside or outside the school system, according to Steiner and Woo (2021). This trend is most likely a result of the challenges educators have faced since the COVID-19 pandemic began. At the end of the 2020-2021 school year, 23% of teachers expressed a desire to leave their current positions, with most of them being pandemic survivors. This percentage was higher compared to the 17% of employed individuals who had similar thoughts, as stated in Kaufman et al. (2020). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) reported that 16% of teachers had left their current positions in the middle of the school year before the pandemic. The most significant stressors cited by teachers included remote teaching, adapting to changes in instructional strategies, engaging students, staying in touch with their families, and promoting students' social and emotional learning (Woo & Steiner, 2021).

In the UK, The Teacher Wellbeing Index survey conducted in 2021 revealed that the percentage of teachers considering leaving their jobs remained steady between 2017 and 2021, ranging from 53% to 57%. However, the survey highlighted an increasing number of workers reporting symptoms of anxiety, with 66% of respondents indicating that there was no work-life balance and 64% of respondents stating that excessive workload negatively affected their mental health and overall well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly contributed to this situation, with educators facing various difficulties, such as school closures, staff absenteeism due to COVID-19, teaching online, and issues related to assessment. Despite the pandemic being a significant factor affecting staff wellbeing, the levels of tension and anxiety remain high even without the pandemic (Scanlan & Savill-Smith, 2021). Research from OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries and economies

included in TALIS revealed that teachers reporting high levels of pressure at work were twice as likely to leave teaching in the next five years compared to those reporting less pressure.

Several factors contribute to teachers leaving the profession, including external labor market opportunities and the benefits and working conditions of the teaching profession. Personal characteristics, such as age and location, also play a role in stress levels at work. However, the decision to leave teaching is complex and influenced by multiple factors, and the reasons for teacher attrition remain unclear (OECD, 2021). Stressors, such as insufficient time to prepare lessons, excessive administrative work, and student academic progress accountability, are among the reasons for teachers leaving the profession (OECD, 2020).

2.2. Teachers Are Leaving: Malaysia View

In 2022, it was revealed by the National Union of Teachers that over 10,000 teachers had registered for early retirement during the previous three years, which caused concern among many. On March 21, 2022, Senior Education Minister Datuk Dr. Radzi Jidin disclosed that nearly as many teachers have opted for early retirement as there were instructors who were required to retire. This trend is worrying as it may lead to a teacher shortage similar to the one experienced in Australia. Therefore, it is necessary to address the issue of teachers retiring early, as pointed out by Sitheravellu's article published on April 23, 2022, in the New Straits Times Online. He further stated that the Malaysia Education Blueprint's (2015–2025) goal of attracting and retaining skilled teachers is congruent with the issue of teacher shortage, and it is essential to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

According to studies, several factors are contributing to the tendency of early teacher retirement. D'Silva (2022) identified mounting administrative work and picky students as some of the factors. On April 26, 2022, he wrote in the New Straits Times Online that many instructors love their jobs, but the administrative work drains them. Several recently-retired teachers who are also candidates for early retirement stated that they opt for early retirement because they are overburdened with a tonne of irrelevant work that has little to do with teaching. Due to the increase in early retirees and the influx of new applications for early retirement, there may soon be a teacher shortage.

Before and after the pandemic, Malaysian teachers had to adapt to the new norm, which added to their already extensive list of duties. Zamri (2017) identified poor mental health in teachers as a negative factor, which may also lead to poor physical health, including lower back stiffness. Poor physical health can worsen teachers' stress and anxiety in a vicious cycle. In addition, the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NTUP) noted in its posting in 2018 that a teacher may need to oversee 60 children in a class while simultaneously bearing a significant administrative workload. Given that 44% of Malaysian teachers report experiencing stress and despair, these situations should not be taken lightly. The union consistently receives between 30 and 50 reports of stressed teachers each month, which is concerning.

Teachers in Malaysia today are responsible for various extracurricular activities, parent relations, and administrative tasks in addition to their obligations in the classroom (Othman & Sivasubramanian, 2019). Although self-reported symptoms are not medically supported,

responses indicate that a significant number of secondary school teachers in Malaysia believe they are at risk of poor mental health and wellbeing (Pau et al., 2022). Overworked instructors quitting their jobs early and being treated like shirkers and lazy people is a worldwide trend, indicating that teachers have been overworked for a long time. This study examines the situation to determine whether it is similar to the predicament faced by Malaysian teachers and the underlying causes.

3. Methodology

In order to investigate the underlying reasons for the significant number of teachers opting for early retirement in Malaysia, this study employs the indexed keyword "reasons for teachers retiring early in Malaysia" to search relevant reports and academic journals published between 2019 and 2022. The ensuing discussion provides an overview of the reasons for early retirement among teachers in Malaysia as reported in multiple related articles in the national newspaper, *New Straits Times*, and categorizes these reasons into three distinct factors: organizational management factors, social factors, and personal factors.

4. Discussion

To investigate the reasons for the high number of early retirement among teachers in Malaysia, this paper utilized the index keyword "reasons for teachers retiring early in Malaysia" to search relevant reports and journals from 2019 to 2022. This paper provides an overview of the reasons for early retirement among teachers in Malaysia, which are categorized into organizational management factors, social factors, and personal factors.

Organizational factors are identified as the first reason for early retirement. The overwhelmed non-teaching related work assigned to teachers, such as updating student information in databases, resulted in a loss of enthusiasm for the teaching profession and burnout. Second, teachers are not given decision-making rights, leading to a lack of ownership and commitment to the organization. Third, schools lack support in terms of in-school policies, technology, financial aid, and skills training.

Social factors are also a contributing factor, with the new generation of children influenced by Western ideas of freedom of expression that reject criticism, limiting the management authority of teachers. Additionally, parents demand an unreasonable level of attention to their children, adding to the teachers' workload.

Personal factors are also a significant reason for early retirement. Long years of overloading and irrational management mechanisms reduce teachers' commitment to the organization, and they suffer from health problems, leading them to pursue personal interests such as recreation or returning to their families.

Early retirement of teachers represents employee turnover, which leads to a decrease in organizational performance and an increase in operating costs. Direct costs are incurred when teachers leave, and additional costs are incurred for training and recruiting new teachers due to turnover. The time cost increases as experienced teachers take longer to develop. Furthermore, early retirement of teachers can reduce organizational performance and affect

team morale. The departure of experienced teachers can disrupt skills and certain instructional management concepts, leading to lower organizational performance and initiative.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to address each of the identified reasons for early teacher retirement:

Firstly, education management should reduce the overwhelming non-teaching workload by separating teaching and administrative tasks. For instance, schools could engage third-party organizations to provide administrative services or mobilize social workers and volunteers to assist in administrative tasks.

Secondly, school management should strengthen two-way communication mechanisms to encourage teacher participation in school affairs. This could be achieved by establishing a teachers' representative assembly to listen to their opinions and enable their collective strength to be utilized. Such initiatives could stimulate teacher ownership and loyalty to the organization.

Thirdly, the school administration and relevant legislation should specify the disciplinary authority of teachers, respect their individualized teaching, grant them teaching autonomy, enhance their subjective status, and enable them to make full use of their talents.

Fourthly, the school administration should establish a fair, open, and transparent management mechanism and create a sound teacher incentive system. This could include preferential welfare treatment, material rewards, and spiritual encouragement for outstanding teachers, to stimulate their enthusiasm and motivation for teaching.

Fifthly, the education administration should urge schools to strengthen home-school cooperation and reinforce the importance of family education to avoid unreasonable demands from parents and society for teachers to excessively focus on their children. Establishing family education training classes could reduce teachers' psychological stress.

6. Implication

In order to prevent problems before they occur, organizations should implement the following measures:

First, good salary and promotion opportunities are crucial to retaining employees. Therefore, organizations should provide material remuneration as a basic guarantee and raise salary levels effectively to prevent teachers from being attracted to other professions. Additionally, organizations should create a complete career plan, offer abundant opportunities for training and further education, and organize various activities that improve teachers' business level and adapt to the technical level of the new era. For example, an information technology competition can promote teachers' professional development and enhance their professional happiness.

Second, appropriate restraining mechanisms should be established to regulate teachers' early retirement behavior. These may include limiting the age and conditions for early retirement, and not approving retirement applications that do not meet the criteria. For key teachers who do not abide by the contract, their personnel materials should be restricted from being transferred, and they should be required to pay a certain amount of liquidated damages.

Third, effective communication mechanisms enhance the attractiveness of the organization to employees. Education management should improve the management system, establish fair, open, and transparent management mechanisms, and create two-way communication channels to reflect information. Teachers should be given the right to participate in expression and a sense of belonging.

Fourth, a positive organizational culture is a key factor in employee retention. Organizations should create a humanistic organizational culture, train teachers to develop a sense of professional identity, and strengthen their own professional ethics.

A strong sense of professional identity will enable teachers to overcome their dissatisfaction with poor working conditions and inspire dedication.

Fifth, performance evaluation is a necessary tool for retaining teachers. Therefore, the management should improve the performance appraisal system for teachers. They should no longer use student achievement and workload alone as the only measures of teachers but adopt developmental and multiple appraisals for teachers, such as work attitudes and business abilities. This will make teachers feel that their hard work is worthwhile, and they will be more willing to contribute to the organization.

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