

Factors Influencing Teacher Attrition in a Thai Context

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Abstract

This mixed-methods research study aims to investigate the factors influencing EFL teachers to leave or consider leaving their teaching profession. Forty-eight participants at the language institute of one public university in Thailand including 29 currently in-service Thai teachers, 13 currently in-service foreign teachers, 3 retired Thai teachers, 2 Thai teachers leaving teaching careers, and 1 Thai teachers moving to another institution completed the questionnaire. Twenty-three of them including 10 currently in-service Thai teachers, 7 currently in-service foreign teachers, 3 retired Thai teachers, 2 Thai teachers leaving teaching careers, and 1 Thai teachers moving to another institution gave an interview. Employment, external, and personal factors are found to be factors influencing teacher attrition. Demotivating work policies, inappropriate salary and benefits, negative characteristics of the profession and family responsibilities are believed to be reasons why EFL teachers leave or consider leaving their teaching career. This study has implications in lowering teacher attrition since understanding the factors of teacher attrition helps policy makers and practitioners prioritize and design teacher retention strategies.

Keywords: Teacher Attrition, Employment Factors, External Factors, Personal Factors

Background

“For a lot of teachers I spoke with, this seems to be the common sentiment: If the overall attractiveness of teaching as a profession gets better, the best teachers will enter the profession, stay, and help increase the effectiveness of schools.”

“To improve the quality of teaching, you need to “improve the quality of the teaching job.” And, “If you really improve that job... you would attract good people and you would keep them.”

(Ingersoll, 2013)

Teacher shortage has long been a global concern. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2016), many areas in the world are now facing the teacher shortage problem. An additional 9.8 million primary school teachers and 22.3 million secondary school teachers will be needed by 2020, rising to 17.8 million primary school teachers and 33.5 million for secondary school teachers by 2025, and 24.4 million primary school teachers and 44.4 million for secondary school teachers by 2030. In Thailand, teacher shortage is also a critical problem, and it is found at all levels and in many fields of study, especially in mathematics, science and foreign languages. The teacher shortage at the basic education level was around 70,000 to 90,000 each year from 2000-2005. 15,915 teachers were requested at pre-primary level, 31,159 at primary level, 25,329 at secondary school level, and 2,549 at special schools.

This shows that teacher shortage is a serious concern, and it will become more serious since 188,071 teachers, or 48% of the workforce, will end their teaching careers between 2010 and 2019 (The Office of Basic Education Commission [OBEC], 2007).

Factors causing teacher shortage have been widely discussed since teacher shortage is costly and greatly affects education quality. Teacher shortage and turnover impose both instructional costs and organizational costs. The instructional costs, which affect both the quality of teachers and the quality of students, occur when schools have to replace the well-experienced teachers leaving the school with novices whose teaching may be weak (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). According to the NCTAF study (2002), teacher effectiveness increases with teaching experience. When departing, the teachers take with them their knowledge, teaching techniques and strategies. This means if many experienced and effective teachers leave their school, students will be taught by inexperienced and less effective teachers, which costs students the educational experience (Rockoff, 2003). Apart from the instructional costs, teacher shortage and turnover impose the organizational costs including the expenses needed to recruit, hire, induct and develop the replacement teachers, which disrupts the cohesion and development of schools, which is a major obstacle to school efficacy (Billingsley, 2007; Neild, Useem, Travers & Lesnick, 2003).

Owing to its great impacts, teacher shortage has brought attention on teacher attrition since many studies showed that teacher attrition was a major cause of teacher shortage, and the studies revealed that there were many factors which influenced teacher attrition (Justice, Greiner, & Anderson, 2003; Houchins, Shippen, & Cattret, 2004; Scheib, 2006).

However, there is little empirical evidence revealing the factors influencing teacher attrition in Thailand. This mixed-methods research study was conducted to investigate what factors influence EFL teachers in Thailand to leave or to consider leaving their teaching profession.

Literature Review

This study is grounded in Billingsley (1993)'s Model of the Influences of Teachers' Career Decisions, which includes three main factors: employment, external, and personal factors. Each factor is regarded an influential factor of teacher attrition and retention.

Employment Factors

Employment factors include work conditions, work rewards, and professional qualifications.

Work Conditions

Many studies showed that the turnover rate was lower in schools with good work conditions and that schools' organizational factors, students' behavior, and teachers' job assignments influenced how long teachers stayed in their teaching profession (Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd, 2012; Ingersoll, 1999; Johnson, 1990). Billingsley (1993) suggested that teachers were more likely to stay in their teaching positions when they worked under favorable work conditions.

Work Rewards

Work rewards are benefits teachers receive from teaching. Sufficient work rewards could decrease teacher attrition (Billingsley, 1993). Intrinsic work rewards come from teachers' psychological satisfaction with their teaching. Intrinsic work rewards include experiences

with students, recognition, cooperation, appreciation from administrators, and those from colleagues. Teachers' psychological satisfaction with their teaching attracts many teachers to stay in their profession (Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd, 2012). Extrinsic work rewards include salaries, benefits, and career advancement or promotion. Salaries and benefits were considered as important factors of teacher retention and attrition in many studies (Certo & Fox, 2002; Imazeki, 2005; Clotfelter, Glennie, H. Ladd & Vigdor, 2006; 2005).

Professional Qualifications

Professional qualifications are teachers' professional preparation and experiences from their past employment. Many studies showed that teachers who were well-prepared for teaching qualifications were more likely to retain in their teaching careers (Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd, 2012; Billingsley, 1993; Boe, Bobbitt & Cook, 1996)

External Factors

External factors include economic, societal, and institutional factors. These factors are external to teachers and institutions and indirectly affect teachers' career decisions.

Economic Factors

Economic factors are trends in the economy that directly affect the labor markets. When there were more employment opportunities in the labor market, teachers were more likely to leave their teaching position (Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd, 2012; Billingsley, 1993)

Societal Factors

Another external factor affecting teacher retention and attrition is societal factors including socioeconomic characteristics of students. Socioeconomic status refers to an individual's level of education, income, and professionalism. Teachers who work in a school having students with good socioeconomic background were likely to stay in their teaching position (Billingsley, 1993).

Institutional Factors

Institutional factors, which indirectly affect teacher attrition, include (1) state policies; and (2) school policies. Undesirable state or school policies led to unfavorable employment conditions and consequently caused teachers to leave their position (Billingsley, 1993; Delors, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Kemmerer, 1990; Yogev, 1994).

Personal Factors

Personal factors include variables such as teachers' demographic characteristics and their family or life circumstances like family responsibilities.

Demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristics include age and teaching experience, ethnicity, gender of the teachers. Many studies showed that teachers were more likely to leave their career when they had demographic problems (Billingsley, 1993; Allen, 2005).

Family Circumstances

Family circumstances are the factors that involve teachers' family matters, family responsibilities and family interaction. Teachers who could not handle their life matters were more likely to leave their teaching career (Billingsley, 1993; Smithers and Robinson (2003).

Research Question

What factors influence EFL teachers to consider leaving their teaching profession?

Mode of Enquiry

The researcher followed the theoretical notions of a mixed-methods research paradigm to design and develop data collection tools. A concurrent triangulation mixed-method design, in which quantitative data and qualitative data were collected and then analyzed during the same period, was used to frame this study.

The quantitative data and their subsequent analysis provided an understanding of the research problem, and the qualitative data and their analysis helped explain the results by exploring participants' views in more depth.

Participants

Sixty-five teachers at the language institute of one public university in Thailand – both Thai and non-Thai teachers – were invited to participate in this study. Forty-eight participants including 29 currently in-service Thai teachers, 13 currently in-service foreign teachers, 3 retired Thai teachers, 2 Thai teachers leaving teaching careers, and 1 Thai teacher moving to another institution completed the questionnaire. Twenty-three of them including 10 currently in-service Thai teachers, 7 currently in-service non-Thai teachers, 3 retired Thai teachers, 2 Thai teachers leaving teaching careers, and 1 Thai teacher moving to another institution gave an interview.

Data Collection Tools and Data Collection Procedures

Two main research tools were used to gather data in this study: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

A questionnaire used in the present study was adapted from those of Giacometti (2005) and Walker (2010). The present questionnaire consisted of three parts: participants' demographic information (12 items); participants' perceptions of ELT (English Language Teaching) as a field (9 five-Likert Scale items); and participants' opinions about reasons why EFL teachers left or might leave their teaching career (81 five-Likert Scale item). Before its actual use, the questionnaire was piloted to ensure the questionnaire reliability.

Adhering to Billingsley (1993)'s Model of the Influences of Teachers' Career Decisions and by considering the previous studies on teacher attrition, the researcher developed a set of interview questions to encourage the interviewees to elaborate on what they think are the factors influencing teachers' decisions to leave or consider leaving their teaching profession. The questions were piloted and then improved before their actual use. The researcher conducted the semi-structured interviews in Thai and English, depending on the participants' preferences. Each interview was audio-taped and lasted 45-60 minutes. All of the interviews were then transcribed.

Ethical Considerations

Considering the rights and privacy of the participants, the researcher sent a letter to the Director of the Department where the research was conducted to ask for permission and to explain the purpose of the study and the data collection methods. After the permission was granted, the researcher sent a letter and a consent form to each participant informing the participant of the purpose of the research study, its data collection methods, and the protection of their confidentiality and privacy. Then, the researcher distributed a questionnaire to and carried out an interview with the participants who voluntarily participated in the study.

Data Analysis

Two data analysis methods were used to analyze the gathered data.

The data from the returned and completed questionnaires were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequencies and percentages were reported concerning demographic information. Descriptive statistics including measures of central tendency such as mean and measures of dispersion such as standard deviation and range were used to analyze the respondents' perceptions of ELT and their reasons why EFL teachers left or might consider leaving their teaching career.

The transcribed data from the interviews were analyzed using open and axial coding techniques.

Adhering to Mathison's notion of triangulation (1988), the researcher increased the validity of research findings by triangulating the data from all of the research instruments in terms of the consistency, inconsistency, or contradictory within the three data sets.

Results

The statistical calculation of the 48 completed questionnaires revealed family matters, economic trends, extrinsic work rewards, institutional influence, characteristics of job assignments as the main factors influencing their decision to leave their teaching careers (See Table 1).

Table 1. Factors Influencing Decision to Leave the Teaching Careers

| Factors | Mean | S.D. |
|------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Family Matters | 3.56 | 1.22 |
| Economic Trends | 3.345 | 0.13 |
| Extrinsic Work Rewards | 3.227 | 0.53 |
| Institutional Influence | 3.115 | 0.13 |
| Characteristics of Job Assignments | 3.005 | 0.34 |
| Intrinsic Work Rewards | 2.73 | 0.21 |
| Professional Qualifications | 2.37 | 0.17 |
| Characteristics of School | 2.71 | 0.24 |
| Characteristics of Students | 2.40 | 0.59 |
| Demographic Aspect | 2.08 | 0.45 |
| Societal Influence | 2.12 | 0.16 |

Regarding reasons why EFL teachers leave or consider leaving their teaching career, the results revealed that inappropriate and inadequate salaries, limited opportunity in career advancement or job promotion, family responsibilities, stressful job assignments, wage structure or wage systems for teachers, excessive paper work to meet the school requirement, unmanageable workload, inappropriate promotion procedure, excessive out-of-classroom responsibilities, and school policies were the main reasons. (See Table 2)

Table 2. The Participants' Reasons Why EFL Teachers Leave or Consider Leaving Their Teaching Career

| Reasons why EFL teachers leave or consider leaving their teaching career | Mean | S.D. |
|--|------|------|
| Inappropriate salaries | 3.75 | .98 |
| Inadequate salaries | 3.69 | 1.26 |
| Limited opportunity in career advancement or job promotion | 3.60 | 1.23 |
| Family responsibilities (e.g., pregnancy, child-rearing, etc.) | 3.56 | 1.22 |
| Stressful job assignments | 3.50 | 1.19 |
| Wage structure or wage systems for teachers | 3.44 | 1.20 |
| Excessive paper work to meet the school requirement | 3.42 | 1.20 |
| Unmanageable workload | 3.31 | 1.19 |
| Inappropriate promotion procedure | 3.29 | 1.17 |
| School policies (e.g., TQF, SARs) | 3.21 | 1.20 |

The data from the semi-structured interview revealed that demotivating work policies, inappropriate salary and benefits, negative characteristics of the profession and family responsibilities are believed to be the three major factors influencing the teachers' decision to leave their teaching career or moving to another institution.

The analysis of qualitative data from interviews and written documents and artifacts offered deeper understanding about factors causing teacher attrition.

Demotivating work policies, inappropriate salary and benefits, negative characteristics of the profession and family responsibilities are believed to be the factors influencing the teachers' decision to leave their teaching career.

Work Policies

Many participants –both Thai and non-Thai teachers reported that the work policies demotivated and discouraged them. The participants considered too many work requirements, too much paper work, an unfair and unclear evaluation process as demotivating work policies.

Work Requirements

Work requirements, especially research and research publication requirements, stressed these teachers and provoked them to think about leaving. These teachers were unhappy with conducting research.

Four well-experienced currently in-service Thai teachers having taught at this institute for more than 20 years –Faye, Tina, Kim, and Tania –were unsatisfied with research and research publication requirements. These publication requirements discouraged them to

continue being in the teaching career. This made them unhappy and sometimes thought about resigning. They strongly believed that the university should consider teaching responsibility, NOT research, as a priority.

The four currently in-service Thai teachers having taught at this institute for more than 20 years – Faye, Tina, Kim, and Tania – were unsatisfied with this work requirement. To these teachers, whose passion lay in teaching, the work requirements, especially those about research and research publications, were not appropriate and should not be valued as much as teaching.

I am unhappy, VERY unhappy that the university requires us to do what we do not want to. When I decided to work here, no one told me that I had to conduct research or to have my research paper published. I love teaching and I am happy teaching my students. When I was offered a position here, I knew that being a teacher could not make me a fortune, and I accepted it. I even found out later that I had a lot more teaching workload than I expected, and I accepted it. BUT I cannot accept these research requirements. I think one day I will have to leave if I am seriously forced to fulfill these TERRIBLE requirements. (Faye)

I would have to resign when the university seriously requires me to do this. I feel like a drag to my institution. I know I could not make it. I love teaching and will always enjoy it. Why don't they value more on teaching, which is our main responsibility? (Tina)

These research requirements upset me and many teachers. When I started working here, no one told me that I had to conduct research. At that time the focus was not on research at all. I was mainly responsible for teaching, and I really enjoyed that. I was never late for class. I prepared the lessons to help improve my students' English. But now, the university wants to be in the high rank, and what can make it happen is the great number of research publications. But I think we should consider many aspects like the quality of teaching. We are teachers, NOT researchers. Why doesn't the university focus more on our teaching? (Kim)

I don't think I can meet the university's research requirements, and I will quit when I am seriously forced to do it. I still love teaching, so I might apply for a part-time teaching position or I can be a translator. (Tania)

To these teachers, such research requirements did not benefit the students at all and that the main responsibility of teachers is teaching. This would definitely affect teachers who do not enjoy research or are not able to conduct it.

The university is too concerned about the number of research studies and research publications. The university wants more research and more research publications just because they want to be in the high university rank. The number of research does not benefit the students at all. It is a good teacher, not a good researcher, who can make a difference in helping improve students. (Kim)

I once thought that when the university put too much pressure about research on me, I would move to another university, but this problem is not only our university's problem but also the nationwide problem. So, I think leaving the full-time teaching career will be a good solution. If I am invited to teach part-time, I will. If not, I just quit being a teacher. (Faye)

Nanny, a young new teacher, also felt negative about conducting research just in order to meet the requirement or just in order to obtain the assistant professorship. This requirement was quite negative to her.

I think the work requirement that teachers need to have the assistant professorship or associate professorships are the negative reinforcement. Why doesn't the university encourage us with the positive reinforcement? I think it is the negative reinforcement since the university says they will not continue our contract if we cannot fulfill the requirements. I am always told that I have to leave if I cannot obtain the assistant professorship in five years. To me, it is like a penalty. It would be much better if they could convince us that this could give opportunities for our professional development and opportunities for us to help the university move forward. I will definitely feel valuable if I, with assistantship, can help lead the institute to the better educational institution. ... We are asked and encouraged to conduct research, but I think we are the ones who know when we are ready for it and what type or topic of research we would like to do. Anyway, the main problem I think is that many English teachers were happier with teaching than carrying out research. I have a friend who left the full-time teaching position and turned to the part-time teaching job in order to avoid being forced to conduct research. (Nanny)

Work requirements affect not only Thai but also foreign teachers. While the Thai teachers thought the new policies demanded too much from them, the foreign teachers felt the policies were not reasonable. Some suggested the university reconsider the ideas and the decisions. Two foreign teachers – Demon and Simon -- said that this would affect their decisions whether move to another institution. They understood that this institution tried to persuade foreign teachers to conduct research because it will affect the quality assurance results, but it was impossible for teachers to conduct research and get their research paper published or to develop textbooks since they have too many teaching hours.

Yes, I thought about leaving. Administrative policy decisions at the ministerial and university level are often bone-headed, when I hear of them. This can be witnessed at many university systems. (Demon)

The institute tried to encourage us to conduct research, but as far as I am concerned, it is UNREALISTIC to ask people who have 28 teaching hours a week to do research or to develop the course book. (Simon)

Work policies, especially those about research and research publication requirements, were proved to be a factor affecting teacher attrition in this institution. It affected a Thai participant, Vicky, who got her first full-time job at this institution, worked for about ten years there and finally decided to quit her full-time teaching career. She said it really discouraged her to continue working as a full-time teacher.

My roles were to teach foundation courses and ESP courses and to do some administrative jobs as assigned. I was very happy with all the teaching jobs but VERY UNHAPPY with conducting research. I wanted to be an English teacher because I like English and teaching English. It is challenging in that I have to keep changing my teaching strategies/activities based on students' English abilities. BUT what I enjoy least is doing research and paperwork..... I cannot remember all the research requirements, but as far as I remember, teachers need to do a piece of research and need to have research publications every year. I felt that I was forced to do what I do not like and at that time I did not have other options for my career at all. So I decided to leave it and work as a part-time lecturer, instead. As a part-time lecturer, I can still pursue my passion for teaching and can choose not to do research. (Vicky)

Too Much Paper Work

Besides research and research publication requirements, too much paper work especially the work required to meet the quality assurance standard made these teachers very unhappy and discouraged them to work as a full-time teacher.

Both highly-experienced and new teachers felt that the university and their institution focused too much on Quality Assurance.

We, teachers, should be encouraged to teach and help students -- not to complete the paper work. I think the authority knows little about this. They just want us to submit the paper. Is that the right thing to do? They just follow or COPY the idea about Quality Assurance form the West. I think QA should be practiced to improve the quality of education -- not just to waste our time on writing and submitting papers. (Faye)

I know and understand that the university wants to reach the educational standard and to meet the Quality Assurance requirements, so they want much -- TOO MUCH paper work from us. But, I don't think it makes sense at all. It wasted our valuable time. Our time should be spent on thinking about and doing for our students. (Nanny)

Diana, another young newly-hired Thai teachers, said she wondered why the university required such paper. To her, the paper work was redundant and unnecessary, and too much paper work took the time that should be spent on their students.

I was asked to complete the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF), and my colleagues were asked to do the same paper for the same course. I thought that this wasted our teachers' time. Why do we have to do the same paper work? Too much of our time was spent on it. I think only the course coordinator should be responsible for it. We should spend that much time on teaching and helping our students. Too much paper work definitely affects the happiness we have in our teaching career. We really are NOT HAPPY about it. (Diana)

Inappropriate Evaluation Process

An inappropriate, unfair and unclear evaluation process is another factor that influenced the teachers to think about leaving their position. In this study, the evaluation system was considered by many Thai and foreign teachers unfair and unreasonable.

Many Thai teachers stated that their workplace's currently used evaluation system should be reconsidered and improved. They felt the evaluation criteria were not appropriate. Some of them felt stressed about the evaluation system.

I never understand and I am never explained why some work that I do like writing English Proficiency Tests is not included in the evaluation criteria. I think these test papers are one of the factors of our institution's success. I have helped developing many test papers, but this doesn't count at all. I feel very depressed and sometimes feel myself worthless. (Tina)

I think the evaluation system should be made more appropriate since it affects career advancement, which influences teachers to stay in or to leave our teaching career. (Tania)

Back then, the situation was not so stressful. Some were promoted in some years, and some in others. The system and criteria were fair and reasonable, I think. But now, the administrative team is putting too many aspects in, especially the number of research and research publications. I understand that

these are what the university wants, but should we consider other aspects, too? Some teachers conduct many research studies but are not quite responsible for teaching students. They have many papers published and presented in the conferences but leave the classrooms and their students. Is it the right thing to do? I think we should consider adjusting the evaluation system and criteria like rewarding our teachers who are very responsible for our teaching job. (Kim)

Similar to the currently in-service teachers, some retired teachers -- Palmy and Daniel -- believed that the evaluation system and criteria were not appropriate and should be improved. Many requirements, in their opinion, would discourage the teachers to stay in their full-time position and would leave for the part-time position in which they could still teach but would not have to worry about not meeting the requirement or not being promoted. The suggestions are the reconsideration about and the changes in the requirements and the evaluation system and criteria. They proposed that the university take many aspects in account such as teachers' volunteer work, teachers' participation in the university's activities, teachers' initiations or innovations in teaching, or any contribution that the teachers could give to the university. The university should value the research based on its benefits to the quality of teaching and learning, not on the difficulty in conducting or writing it.

I think we should consider many aspects when evaluating our teachers. In the past, I was evaluated "good" and got promoted since the university at that time considered many aspects including the teaching quality, the academic work, the contribution to the university, and many others. But, right now it seems that we mainly consider only academic work, especially research papers and publications. The teachers who are promoted these days are the ones with many papers and publications. This can upset and discourage the teachers with the high quality of teaching who produce a little research.... I think many of our teachers forget about teaching our students and helping them learn and live successfully, which was our main responsibility. They focus SERIOUSLY and ONLY on their academic work and academic title. I understand that it is very important for them to meet the university requirement. But not everyone can do that, and the ones who cannot meet the requirement will not be happy at all. I've heard that some teachers in other departments quit owing to this inappropriate system. I think the whole system is wrong. The university should reconsider both the requirements and the evaluation criteria, or else we will end up with the failure in teaching and learning and with the departure of our teachers from their job. Teachers who do volunteer work like teaching the disabled students or help organize the university activities should also be promoted. The institute considers this important, but I don't think they believe it is as important as conducting research. (Palmy)

I think our evaluation system and criteria should be reconsidered. The unfair one can discourage our teachers. We should take many aspects into account. Being a committee for the organizations -- both in and outside the institution -- is also academic work. The institute should think about this, too. When doing academic outside the institute, our teachers could represent and bring reputation to our institution. (Daniel)

Inappropriate evaluation process really affected one participant's career growth and also her decision to leave her full-time teaching career.

The new evaluation system for teachers is that they must do research. And it is what I enjoy least about working as a teacher at the university level. I am not interested in doing research at all and I would like to spend time teaching only. I didn't want to quit my full-time teaching career, which I love, but I had no options at all. (Vicky)

Salary and Benefits

Inappropriate salary and benefits are likely to be factors influencing the teachers, especially the young new Thai teachers and foreign teachers to think about leaving their teaching career. Many Thai teachers, especially the young and inexperienced, and some foreign teachers believed their salary was not appropriate. The Thai teachers said that their salary was quite low, compared with that of other careers, and the foreign teachers mentioned that the teachers at many institutions like International schools get much higher salary and better insurance policy.

The young and new Thai teachers – Kate, Susie, and Sue -- said they were very worried about the future since their salary was quite low.

The salary is enough for me just for now. But it will not be enough when I plan to buy things – expensive things. And I am not a “government official” teacher, so I will not have pension when I am retired. I think the salary is too low. I think I should plan carefully about my future. No one wants to have financial problems when they are retired, right. I think about having a small business that I can do while still being a teacher. (Kate)

Compared with the salary I got when I worked at the private company, my current salary here is very low. It would be much better if I had higher salary. Now I have to teach a fundamental course offered during the school break to earn some money. Otherwise, I would not survive. (Susie)

Many friends of mine turned to other careers after graduation since they were very concerned about the salary. Compared with other jobs, teachers have lower salary. They are able to earn high income from teaching extra classes, but the monthly salary is low. (Sue)

One former Thai teacher at this institute, Nicky, who is now a teacher at another institution, also mentioned that she had to have extra classes to sustain the costs of living. I had to work extra hours to sustain the costs of living – the rent, the nanny's wage, and many others. I have been teaching in many institutions. Problems are quite the same. (Nicky)

The foreign teachers felt the same way. Some complained that if foreign teachers want to get more money, they have to have more teaching hours. But they already had many or too many teaching hours. Besides, foreign teachers never get a pay raise.

The teachers at international schools got far higher salary with a salary raise and a real school summer break. We have no pay raise. My salary has been about 30,000 baht since I started working here. Everything goes up except my salary. Taxes go up. Food price goes up. But .. not my salary. I can earn more, but I have to teach more hours, and it's impossible. ... I have heard that some of the foreign teachers here teach about 28 hours a week. I wish I could. (Simon)

The salary itself is not enough, and we should have some extra courses like courses for public or for government organization. (Eddy)

Low salary was proved to be one of the main factors of teacher attrition in this institution. It affected Jodie, a Thai participant who got her first job, worked for ten years there and finally decided to quit her teaching career. Apart from her health problem, very low income made her quit working at the institution and has never returned to the teaching career since then.

After teaching for a decade, my last salary was only 16,000 baht. That was ONLY 454 USD a month after tax. What I liked the least about being a teacher was definitely a measly salary. (Jodie)

A retired Thai teacher also believed that the appropriate salary would help to retain the teachers in the career and it could increase the teachers' satisfaction and happiness at work.

I think if the salary is appropriate, our teachers will not have to spend much time teaching extra classes and they will have more time to spend on academic work like research. Then, they will not have problems or complaints about these requirements or evaluation. (Palmy)

Characteristics of the Profession

The characteristics of the teaching profession was claimed to be one of the factors of teacher attrition. Many participants considered the teaching career demanding. Some of them said they were bored and stressed to meet the deadline.

Two young new Thai teachers with less than 5 years of teaching experience at this institute said that it was not easy at all being a university teacher, the work was demanding and never-ending, and University teachers had to always develop themselves professionally.

It seemed to me that we, university teachers, are at the top level position of the education system. So we have to improve ourselves, always. I think I have to update myself on teaching theories. And the university gives us opportunities to develop ourselves professionally; we can attend conferences, seminars, short courses, or workshops or even pursue our doctoral degree with the university's financial support. But, many of us have many things to take care of. Then, it is hard to keep our work-life balance. The ones who cannot handle this may have to quit. And I have heard and seen many teachers leave the full-time teaching career for this reason, which means that they still love teaching, right? (Nanny)

I sometimes felt stressed when the institute said that it was time for me to pursue my doctoral degree. I was told about this since the job interview day. But enjoying spending time with my students, I don't not feel like continuing my education. I know the institute wants the teachers to hold a doctoral degree since it is a good thing both for ourselves and for our students. I want to study one day, but now I am too lazy to prepare for the test and everything. (Diana)

To another participant, being a teacher was a hard work. It was not about teaching only. There was much work that came with teaching.

At my previous workplace, I loved the teaching job, but I got very exhausted with the work that came with it like coordinating coursing, writing exam papers, developing supplementary materials, taping audio materials, and a lot more work. These were time-consuming tasks for me as a young, inexperienced and indecisive lecturer. But as long as it was a teaching related task, I would rather do it and be willing to learn about it. But the part that I disliked was administrative work such as checking office supplies or being involved in any procurement procedure. I felt like I was not trained to do such work and was unhappy having to take responsibility for it. (Nicky)

One participant who left the teaching profession said teaching was boring. This participant, who did not want to become an English teacher at all, said that she was too young and did not know what she wanted. She just found out later that teaching was boring.

I would not say that I wanted to teach English or become an English teacher. Right after graduation, I never figured out what I really wanted to do with my life. I would rather say that it was purely timing how I got into teaching English. I was assigned to teach the Fundamental English courses during the entire 10 years I was at the institute. Frankly speaking, it got pretty boring after about five years of having to teach the very same three courses the whole time. Some teachers stay because they simply love teaching, but I do not. (Jodie)

Family Responsibilities

Family matters and responsibilities were the main factor of teacher attrition. Taking care of family members including parents and children was very important for many participants. This was confirmed by the three teachers who left this institution. One of them left the full-time teaching career to become a housewife; one left for a part-time teaching position, and one moved to another institution located in her hometown.

One participant left her teaching position in order to look after her babies and never returned to work to the teaching profession.

I do not want to return to the teaching career any more. Raising three little boys take almost all of my time. The teaching job is boring and time-consuming. I can't do both at the same time. (Jodie)

Another participant's response was quite similar. It is difficult for her both to teach and do other assigned tasks and to raise her children.

I like teaching, but it was not only the teaching job that I had. There was a lot more work. I would like to spend my time teaching only, and I also needed more time to take care of my kids and do a lot of activities with time. This greatly influenced me to leave the full-time teaching career. (Vicky)

Not only the leavers, some currently in-service teachers also thought that family responsibilities play a major role in many people's decisions whether to stay in or to leave the teaching profession.

I think personal matters like family responsibilities are important for many people. Some have to take care of their parent or themselves. Some have to leave their full-time teaching job to become part-time teachers. Doing this, they still can look after their family. I heard that one of our teachers got married and then had to resign since she had to move to the United States. (Susie)

The institute has tried to persuade me to further my study abroad. This upset me. I kind of thought much about it. It was quite hard to live and study very far away from my family. I once thought about leaving this institute for another university where I don't have to be apart from my family. (Nina)

Conclusion and Discussion

With adherence to the notion of a mixed-methods paradigm, a clear picture of factors influencing teacher attrition was revealed. Findings from the questionnaire and the interviews showed that employment factors, external factors, and personal factors were the factors the participants perceived affecting teacher attrition. This study also uncovered what the Thai and non-Thai participants thought and how negative they felt about those factors.

Based on Billingsley's (1993) model focusing on three main factors – employment, external, and personal factor, one of the employment factors found in this study was characteristics of job assignments. This study revealed that excessive non-teaching job assignments demotivated and dissatisfied many teachers and then affected their decision to leave or to have an intent to leave the teaching profession. The study showed that the teachers considered teaching as their main responsibility, but they felt that the institute and the university valued non-teaching over teaching duties. Not only that, they found excessive paperwork, especially that paperwork for Thai Qualification Frameworks for Higher Education (TQF), was assigned to them just in order for the institute to meet the university's quality assurance requirement. To them, this work was time-consuming and unnecessary and gave no benefits to them and the students. They found filling the TQF forms, in which the five domains of the students' learning outcomes including ethical and moral development, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and responsibilities, analytical and communication skills, and numerical analysis, communication and information technology have to be reported, was complicated. Doing this excessive paperwork took a large amount of time which they believed should be spent on preparing and teaching classes. Many participants complained that these excessive job assignments discouraged them from continuing their teaching career. This factor affected the majority of the teachers – both the well-experienced and the less-experienced teachers. Most of these teachers also felt that too many non-teaching jobs, especially conducting research, were a big burden for them. They thought they could not meet such requirements that they have at least one research article or research paper published in every two years mainly owing to their teaching workload and their lack of interest in research. Apparently, it was the reason why the three participants, two of whom still loved teaching, left their full-time teaching career. One of them was deciding to even leave the part-time teaching career when learning that academic work publication would also be required for the part-time teachers. To several participants, these requirements also affected their job promotion since the requirements were one of their work evaluation criteria. Consequently, these participants found the evaluation criteria and system inappropriate, which also affected their decisions about their teaching profession. Also, to many participants, non-teaching responsibilities including conducting research and supervising theses should not be valued more than teaching when evaluating work performance. Another employment factor in this study was extrinsic work rewards including salary and benefits. This study showed that inappropriate and inadequate salary and benefits greatly displeased many teachers – both Thai and non-Thai. To most of the Thai teachers, the salary for teachers in Thailand was too low. The monthly salary of 30% of the participants in this study was 20,000-30,000 baht (600-900 USD), which was quite low when compared with other careers with the same educational qualifications and experience. Evidently, one Thai participant said that she left the teaching profession mainly because of her low salary. To non-Thai teachers, there was no salary increase, and their monthly salary was only 20,780-30,790 baht (629-933 USD). To earn more, they needed the extra classes, so they felt financially insecure. Even though the teachers at this institute could earn additional money by having extra teaching hours, they needed to spend more time on teaching, which might affect their time on other job responsibilities, especially on academic work. It seemed that the solution of one problem could lead to another problem or another factor for attrition.

The results of this study about employment factors are neither far different from the previous studies conducted by Delors (1996) and Kemerer (1990), which revealed that undesirable policies and burdensome tasks greatly influenced teacher attrition nor from Allen, (2005), which showed that negative extrinsic work rewards, especially low salary, could affect teacher attrition, and an increase in salary could reduce the rate of attrition.

External factors, especially institutional factors including university policies, were also found in this study as factors for teacher attrition. Many participants were dissatisfied with the institute and university policies requiring them to do many non-teaching assignments. Many complained that these policies were so demanding that could lead to their departure from the teaching profession.

This is in complete agreement with previous studies by Kemerer (1990) and Liu (2007) in that when educational institutions needed to cope with changes in curriculum or to meet the requirements in institution or in state policies, teacher were forced to do more work. This could dissatisfy the teachers and discourage them to continue in their teaching career.

Regarding personal factors, this study revealed that family responsibilities, especially in child-raising, and health problems strongly and evidently affected teacher attrition. Three participants left their teaching position owing to not being able handle their family circumstances while working full time, and one left due to her health problems.

This study is also in line with a school survey carried out by Smithers and Robinson (2003), which revealed that 9 of every 100 teachers left the school for maternity or family care, and in many other studies indicated that family circumstances such as pregnancy and child raising contributed to teachers' decisions to leave their career (Billingsley, 1993)

Obviously, many aspects of employment factor, external factor, and personal factor play an important role in teacher attrition. However, some findings in the current study differ from those in some previous studies. Unlike the studies by Allen (2005) and Ingersoll (2001), showing that age and teaching experience affect how long teachers stay in their career, age was not a major factor in this study. Also, socioeconomic characteristics were not found to be the main factor in this study, unlike the study by Billingsley (1993), which reported that teachers with a low socioeconomic background faced more challenges regarding learning resources, which negatively affected their performance and then influenced their decision to move to another school or to leave their teaching career and those having students with low socioeconomic background were likely to leave their teaching position as well.

Implications

As stated in *the 2009 Literature Review on Teacher Retention and Attrition*, teacher turnover imposed instructional costs and organizational costs. The results from the voices of the EFL teachers in this study about factors affecting teacher attrition can help provide a framework for keeping people in the teaching profession. This study has implications for lowering teacher attrition since understanding the factors of teacher attrition can help policy makers and practitioners prioritize and design teacher retention strategies.

Implications for Policy Makers

The lessons that policy makers --the institute and the university --could learn from this research study include the need for an improved recruitment process in which the teacher candidates are informed of the organization goals, the expectations the institute has of a hired teacher and the missions of the institute and the university in order for the candidates to

decide whether or not their qualities and the needs of the institute match. Furthermore, the institute and the university should always keep the teachers informed of their roles and responsibilities that apart from teaching, teachers at public universities' responsibilities include "developing English language teaching and interdisciplinary research studies and to integrate them into their teaching and academic services; developing textbooks and other teaching materials to facilitate English language teaching; providing academic services, including courses for students, faculty members and the staff of other institutions, improving their English and to provide training sessions for English teachers around Thailand to improve their English proficiency and teaching methodologies; preserving and integrating culture into language teaching and research; continuously promoting presentations and publications of academic work at the national and international level; and establishing and maintaining regular quality assurance procedures for sustained development". The policy makers should also consider increasing motivating work policies and appropriate salary and benefits. More attention about work requirements, especially research and research publications, should be given since it affected both Thai and non-Thai teachers at the institute. Also, the salary and benefit scheme and the career path scheme might be reconsidered, especially those for non-Thai teachers. Besides, the new schemes could financially support and help retain experienced Thai teachers having family burdens. Additionally, the policy makers should pay more attention to work conditions such as promoting collaboration among teachers and providing more opportunities in professional development since it helps increase job satisfaction and retention and reduce the teacher attrition rate. Also, the institute should take many aspects into account when evaluating teachers for job promotion. Appropriate evaluation criteria and system should be used to ensure the fairness of the evaluation and work promotion. Most importantly, the policy makers should give opportunities for teachers to express their voices and listen to those voices so that they will understand how satisfied or dissatisfied teachers feel and then will be able to make appropriate policies in order to retain their teachers.

Implications for Teachers

In order to work satisfyingly and to continue in the teaching profession, teachers should have a clear understanding of their roles – both teaching and non-teaching roles. The lack of understanding of their roles can lead to job dissatisfaction and then quitting. Teachers should be aware of the importance of keeping abreast of current roles and responsibilities. Moreover, the teachers should know what the institute and the university expect from them in order to meet the expectations. Teachers should also develop themselves professionally in order to have sufficient knowledge and experience, especially in research, so that they will be able to work effectively, and then will be able to stay in their teaching career happily.

Limitations of the Study

Although this research has reached its objectives, there are some unavoidable limitations of this study that need to be addressed. First, the questionnaire return rate was not as high as the researcher had expected. Due to the time constraint, some respondents did not return the questionnaire because of their busy work schedule. However, the data collection time was beyond the researcher's control. Another limitation was that the results of the study may not

be generalized to other populations since the study was conducted in only one Thai public university, the context and culture of which might be different from other universities. Moreover, even though teachers' voices can be a reflection of the situation, voices from teachers' alone might not be enough to investigate the situations and the factors influencing teacher retention and attrition at the university level, in which many groups of people are involved.

Recommendations for Further Studies

The recommendations for further studies are as follows: First, similar studies could be done in other public universities in Thailand in order for the people involved to ascertain more knowledge and understanding about teacher retention and attrition situations in public universities in Thailand and their factors. Such additional knowledge and understanding would help policy makers and practitioners prioritize and design more effective teacher retention strategies. Moreover, in order to have a clearer picture of the situation and factors influencing teacher retention and attrition at the university level, more research studies should be conducted on other groups of population who are involved such as administrators and candidate interview committees, to name just a few.

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