Review

Turnover among Academicians: Research Agenda

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Abstract: Employee turnover is the serious problem worldwide. Researchers and policy makers have great consensus towards solution of this issue in order to improve the organizational performance. Teacher voice is one of the important predictor of turnover intentions. This paper helps in shedding light on working conditions of teachers, role of teachers in decision making process and its impact on career choice of teachers. It is tried to analyze that whether these factors affect turnover intentions of teachers and that whether they continue their services for their current employer or not.

Keywords: Teacher Leadership; Teacher Voice; Teacher Turnover

1. Introduction

Researchers, policymakers and practitioners across the globe have stressed more upon identification of factors that help in attracting and sustain teachers in the teaching profession. Despite of several measures to attract new teachers in the profession, education sector always has faced the problem of misdistribution and shortage of faculty members (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). After the comprehensive research work on interest of teachers in teaching profession, two major issues have been found, first is low interest towards of graduates teaching profession especially high achievers, and high rates of voluntary turnover rate of teachers due to low job satisfaction. Current study will focus on teacher turnover specifically as both issues almost describe the same issue, low levels of teacher satisfaction.

It has been found that among teacher workforce, high turnover rates have been observed among new teaching staff (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001), leaving teaching profession around 50 percent within first five years from the start of their career (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). In addition to this, it is also noted that turnover rate of teachers serving in low-income communities is high as compared to teachers serving in high income communities (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1999). As a result, this turnover affects educational institute’s operations in low income communities and students already living in poverty have to face academic problems as a result of teacher’s turnover.

According to Ingersoll (2001), teacher attrition and teacher migration are regarded as a part of teacher turnover. This turnover may be voluntary or involuntary. A voluntary turnover is the one in which employee itself leaves the organization while involuntary turnover is that in which organization forces an employee to leave the organization. Sometimes turnover has some positive effects on the organizational performance in terms of fresh and active employees or in terms of departure of inactive...
staff from organization. However, when negative effects of turnover are greater as compared to positive effects, then organization has to bear all the consequences in terms of organizational instability. It is a common practice that educational institutes primarily focus on hiring teachers in large proportion and then their focus is on the training and socialization process of newly hired teachers. Despite of this, voluntary turnover of teachers is higher as compared to other professions. This, in turn, affects performance of educational institutes. Turnover results into shortage of employees and to fill these vacant posts, organizations have to spend extra amount of resources (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). According to Carroll (2007), it costs around 7 billion dollars to replace teachers in US, as a result of turnover. As a result, leadership of educational institutes have to tackle it due to vacant posts and shortages of teachers and they even hire under qualified teachers not only for smooth running of the educational institutes but also to meet required demand of teachers. Turnover is not only the cause of stress and cost to school leaders but also it affects school healthy school climate in terms of lowering down morale of staff (Guin, 2004). When junior colleagues find that their senior staff joins other institutes and that they are satisfied in their new job, they also start thinking to quit their current job to look for another job where they find themselves more satisfied. Also, this turnover of staff members also harms the social relationship among professional community as others start perceiving them to be itinerant and uncommitted (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). But the most important issue that appears as a result of teacher turnover is student learning (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). It is important to note that not only the students in the classrooms become the victim of teacher turnover but their peers are also affected indirectly (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013).

Teacher participation in decision making is an important factor that is associated with turnover (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & May, 2016; Johnson, 1990; Johnson 2004; Shen, 1997; Weiss, 1999). According to Deci and Ran (2011) worker commitment and motivational theories show that control over one’s work is highly important in the context of one’s persistence and effort towards work (Deci & Ryan, 2011; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Kanter, 1979; Pink, 2011; Spector, 1986). Worker autonomy and worker participation in decision making are two different concepts. According to Ashforth (1989) worker autonomy is defined as a characteristic of being alone to complete organizational tasks without any interference of other staff member and worker participation is defined as participation of employees in organizational decision making process. The latter has great importance in organizational context as it is related to motivation of employees and organizational outcomes which can result from individual’s opinion regarding betterment of organizational policies and structures that are related to individuals work (Ashforth, 1989; Spector, 1986). Hence, when teachers are given a chance to say about productive policies, they are more committed with their profession and educational institutes.

Much emphasis has been given towards empowerment of teachers and to play their leadership role in their respective educational institutes. Such influence of teachers is viewed as informal whose basic motive is to improve learning and teaching (York-Barr & Duke, 2003). As a result of turnover, huge cost is faced by organizations. This includes education, organizational, individual and financial costs. Adding to this, turnover results into bad governance in every geographical location especially high poverty areas where already problems of imbalance allocation of resources exists. This study will help practitioners and researchers in understanding that how educational leadership is related to teacher turnover. The main objective of the current study is to review role of teacher participation in decision making and teacher leadership in the context of turnover. Furthermore, it is also aimed that key gaps could be identified which needs to be address in future studies. To begin with, study starts with factors of turnover and then study highlights unhealthy working conditions that result into teacher turnover. Next, study describes that how decision making and teacher leadership helps in reducing negative and unhealthy working conditions. A conceptual framework is provided for future researchers for further exploration of
relationship between variables that how participation in decision making helps in shaping and enhancing teacher satisfaction and career progression.

2. Causes of Voluntary Turnover among Teachers

This review includes empirical studies, reviews on teacher turnover and peer-reviewed research work done by many scholars. Examining the role of working conditions in relation to teacher turnover requires interpretivist lens. This study characterizes educational institutes as workplaces and institute related factors as one which are related to motivation and persistence of teachers in their work. There is no consensus over determining the factors of turnover as it is an individual decision and depends upon individual’s emotion, individual’s perception regarding best match with organization and one’s circumstances related to cost-benefit analysis. So, it’s very difficult to conclude factors of teacher turnover. More research is needed to sort out the factors of teacher turnover. As a result of turnover literature, turnover factors can be characterized into several broad categories which include individual attributes, lack of compensation packages, inadequate support and insufficient working conditions. Each of these has direct associations with employee turnover.

2.1. Individual Attributes

Research shows that individual attributes has direct association with turnover as these attributes have direct impact on intentions to stay or quit in the organization. For example, research shows that beginner, math and science teachers, ones with high academic achievement, licensed and non-licensed teachers, and young individuals have high rates of turnover as compared to others (Borman & Dowling, 2008; DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). These findings show that teachers have to take many challenges during their career and their education, licensing and non-licensing and being a fresh candidate to start their career helps them to tackle such challenges. High turnover rates among math and science teachers are due to the fact that they have better lucrative opportunities other than educational profession.

2.2. Insufficient Compensation

In order to retain professionals with high academic backgrounds and good grades, organizations have now started thinking whether attractive monetary packages might help them to reduce turnover rate. While low salary packages of teachers, as compared to other professions, have resulted into teacher attrition. Hence mixed findings have been found regarding the relationship of compensation and teacher turnover. Low salary packages seem to be an ineffective factor to attract good quality teachers. Research shows correlation between good salary packages and retention of employees. So in order to attract high quality teachers, education administrators must make arrangements for good incentive programs (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2011; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). It is obvious that good salary is an attractive tool for retain and attracting professional staff; there are other forms of compensations that help in retaining teachers. According to Murnane et al. (1991) a good learning atmosphere, working conditions, opportunities for teacher growth and support for teachers are important factors that must be considered in order to retain staff members.

2.3. Insufficient or Ineffective Early Support

High rates of teacher turnover have initiated a serious debate and researchers are trying to identify the factors associated with this issue. Their focus is on the identification of key gaps related to socialization process of teachers and their professional development. It has been found that availability of
professional teachers in the market, who are willing to join the organization, and mentoring programs for teachers help in reducing turnover (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Research shows that despite of induction and mentoring programs, most of the educational institutes have failed to retain their teaching staff (Glazerman et al., 2010). It might be due the fact that teachers don’t prefer to continue their services in low resource based educational institutes.

Research on the working conditions and teacher turnover show that educational institute’s reputation and operationalization, participation of teachers in policy matters of institute and professionalism within institute are one of the important factors that help in enhancing teacher satisfaction and retention.

2.4. Teacher Working Conditions and Turnover

Working conditions is one of the important factors that is related to teacher turnover and dissatisfaction (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2001; Simon & Johnson, 2015). In one study, Ingersoll (2001) examined the problem of teacher’s turnover by taking data from National Center for Education Statistics’ Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). It was found that working condition is one of the most important factor that is directly associated with teacher turnover. Furthermore, Student discipline challenges, lack of teacher participation in decision making process and little administrative support are the key issues faced by teachers during their tenure. Working conditions play an affective role in teacher commitment and loyalty. Besides, teacher autonomy, teacher voice and other inherent challenges of teaching profession also affect teacher’s perception about their career.

2.5. Nature of Teachers’ Work

According to Waller (1932) academic staff faces several challenges during the course of their professional career. Lortie (1975) highlighted attributes of teaching profession that differentiate it from other professions. For example, student-teacher relationship is involuntary, that is, both of the parties do not choose each other. Immature students and the ones who are not interested in their studies are difficult to handle. Such situations are difficult to handle and if performance of teachers is analyzed in such circumstances, it directly associated with their motivation (Bandura, 1977). If such working environments are prevailing within organizations, commitment level of employees decreases.

2.6. Social Conditions of Work

Working environment has direct association with the teacher retention and satisfaction. Employee’s social relations within the organizational setup influence individual’s commitment and satisfaction (Simon & Johnson, 2015). For example, in most of the studies, employee’s relations with administrators have been given much importance and their relationship has impact on teacher’s decision about their future career (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Boyd et al., (2011) conducted a survey on teachers in New York City. It was found that 40 percent of the teachers left their job due to dissatisfaction and bad administrative behaviors. Student’s behavioral changes are the second most significant predictor of job dissatisfaction of employees. But in this survey, only 20 percent of teachers reported bad behavior of students as a prominent factor of job dissatisfaction. From the survey, it is evident that behavioral changes of students and relationship with administration have direct association with dissatisfaction with leads towards turnover decision. Besides, there are other several factors like collaboration among teachers, relational trust and collegial relationships (Simon & Johnson, 2015). So measures should be taken in order to provide healthy social environment in which employees feel satisfied and in turn, they tend to continue their services.
2.7. Distribution of Control in Schools

Involvement of teachers in governance matters is also an important factor that facilitates teachers to perform their duties smoothly. According to Ingersoll and May (2016) such teachers are more committed and satisfied which are involved in administrative and decision making process of the organizations. Such employees have low organizational conflicts and intentions to leave their current working environment. In US, most of the teachers have high commitment towards their education institutes who were autonomous in decision making. The only reason is that they feel part of their organization and once they feel secure in their current working environment (Ingersoll & May, 2016). These findings suggest that involvement of teachers in administrative affairs helps in reducing turnover of employees and also improves collegial relationships and reduces quitting behavior of employees. Contrary to it, Davenport (2013) stated that involvement of teachers in decision making process is not the single predictor of employee satisfaction. Besides, there are several other predictors, like job performance, job satisfaction, openness to change, commitment and creativity (Hornung & Rousseau, 2007). If there is any direct influence of control over decision making process and satisfaction of teachers, then institutes must create opportunities and involve teachers in the decision making process to reduce turnover intentions.

3. Teacher Leadership: A Pathway to Teacher Retention?

A wide range of articles, including qualitative and quantitative, have been scrutinized to analyze the relationship of teacher leadership and involvement of teachers in decision making process. Low ranked teachers primarily focus on participation in administrative measures and shown less interest towards teacher autonomy (The Carnegie Task Force on Teaching, 1986). After the emergence of theoretical assumptions for teacher leadership, this phenomenon practically started implementing recently (Wenner & Campbell, 2016) and it has opened ways to examine whether it affects career decisions of teachers or not. Teacher leadership has been studied thoroughly in the literature and has introduced various terms to describe it, for example, teacher leadership (Wenner & Campbell, 2016), distributed leadership (Harris, 2004), teacher empowerment (Bogler & Somech, 2004), participative decision making (Somech, 2010) and collaborative leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Teacher leadership has both positive and negative influence on teacher leader and other teaching staff. According to Wenner and Campbell (2016) teacher leadership opportunities results into stress, increased leadership capacity, increased professional growth and enhanced positive feelings. On the other end, it has negative consequences as well. For example, absence of provision of proper structural accommodation with increased responsibilities which lead towards stress (Wenner & Campbell, 2016). Such problems were faced by New York City teachers when they were subject to additional administrative roles and responsibilities (Baecher, 2012). Contrary to it, as a result of teacher leadership, conflict arises with norms of autonomy and egalitarianism and as a result, such leaders have to face conflicts with other colleagues (Wenner & Campbell, 2016). The intensity of such conflicts increases until roles of teacher leaders are not clearly defined (Margolis & Huggins, 2012). Teachers with undefined roles have to face strain and have low margins of leadership.

While there are some positive attributes associated with teacher leadership practices which include commitment (Wenner & Campbell, 2016) and self-efficacy (Harris, 2004). Empowered teachers are more committed and dedicated towards their tasks and have better performance. But it’s not evident that whether teacher leadership is directly associated with teacher turnover or not.

4. Synthesis

Aim of this paper is to explain the predictors of teacher turnover by shedding light on teacher’s voice relationship with their career, decision making process and also to understand the impact of teacher’s
influence on teacher leadership and its impact on teacher’s performance. Teacher turnover not only results into institutional cost but also impacts student learning process. In addition to improper working conditions, lack of administrative support and control over decisions has great influence on teacher turnover. With the help of teacher leadership efforts, teachers have been empowered up to some extent but they are facing the issue of stress due to extra burden to leadership without the provision of balanced structure to tackle this responsibility. Existing literature of teacher turnover shows that participation of teachers in policy making is amongst one of the several predictors which are linked with turnover. But it’s not the only substitute that might help teachers to improve other working conditions which impact teacher’s job experiences (see fig). It might be possible that collective efforts to improve working conditions of teachers can help in overcoming the issue of teacher turnover. For example, teacher leadership can reduce the distance between class-room and decision makers and teachers can directly align themselves with instructional needs and it will in turn reduce the top management authority to take turnover decisions as teachers are better able to cope with academic needs of pupils. In this way, teachers are more motivated as they enjoy the full psychological control over work (Deci & Ryan, 2011).

Conceptual framework in the figure highlights the relationship between decision making, teacher leadership, teacher’s career decision and working conditions. In this framework, decision making and teacher leadership collectively constitute working environment and these might also contribute towards other working conditions. For example, some institute may give high level of teacher’s involvement in decision making process and as a result of this, other working conditions like trust between colleagues, autonomy and working hours might also influence due to the personal involvement of teachers in such matters. Contrary to it, working conditions might also influence and shape the teacher leadership and decision making of teachers. For example, when teachers are not the part of decision making process and they are isolate from administrative affairs, they act differently about their career choices as compared to those teachers which are involved in decision making process.

Focus of the teacher leadership research characterizes it as an influential factor that impacts policy matters for the betterment of institutions. By giving them special training and providing them with better social structure, teachers are in a good position to highlight issues that hinder their performance and dissatisfaction which in turn leads towards turnover. However, when teachers are not granted involvement in non-instructional matters (like hiring, formulating discipline policies or scheduling), teachers may feel that they are not being heard. Insufficient distribution of organizational resources might not be as much helpful to empower teacher leaders. So, they cannot perform well. There is still gap which needs to be filled out that whether balance and proper control over organizational matters can allocate resources accordingly? This thing needs to be further analyzed.
5. Opportunities for Future Research

There is further need to explore that whether teachers, who are active participants in decision making process of institutes, have high or low turnover intentions. In future, research can be done to validate whether traditional led educational institutes have high turnover rate as compared to modern institutes where teachers are given more autonomy. Finding the answers of these questions might be helpful for academicians to reduce turnover rate of faculty members which in turn will lead towards better performance of students.

6. Concluding Thoughts

It is evident from past research that administrators within educational institutes have great impact on attitude and career decision making of teachers. When there is no support from administrators, teachers are not only dissatisfied and they tend to leave the institute (Boyd et al., 2011) but also it impacts effective teacher leadership practices (Wenner & Campbell, 2016). Also, there is also need to train the top management and also fair distribution of policy matters among majority of team members so that work overload could be distributed equally.

Teaching is a very complex profession. Gaining desired outcomes out of educational policies is very hard job. The reason is that students are rarely cooperative and they are changing themselves with the passage of time. So in order to get desired outcomes, immediate response from teachers is required. Teachers must respond in the real time to tackle their situation. Teachers must have autonomy they require to handle the situation but sometimes they need support from administrators and other top management to overcome any prevailing situation. By authorizing teachers to take necessary action in raising issues helps them to broaden their professional skills. There is lot more pressure in transforming schools from traditional-led schools in which teachers are not given as much autonomy as compared to modern ones where teachers take active part in policy making and infrastructure development. Such institutes are breaking down the barriers to ensure active participation of teachers to make the educational institutes more engaging and attractive. Though this paper aimed at highlighting the issue of predictors of teacher turnover, but there is another important issue which is the low response of graduates towards teaching profession (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). If teachers are given more autonomy, more decision making authority in overall institutional matters, then how many chances are there that young graduates will be more attracted towards this profession? Currently, workforce has diversified skills and expertise and they want to utilize their skills and knowledge to resolve the organizational problems in innovative ways. So, if they think the organizations grant them autonomy in utilizing their skills and expertise, they prefer to join the profession of their choice. Hence, granting formal decision making authority among teachers is the right gateway to attract professional teachers and also to shape the institutes a kind of workplace which is helpful for both teachers and students.

7. References


