

The Incentives to Enhance Teachers' Teaching Profession: An Empirical Study in Hong Kong Primary Schools

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Abstract

This purpose of this study is to investigate the incentives to enhance primary teachers' teaching profession in Hong Kong. The survey technique was employed and 460 questionnaires were collected. The findings showed that 'asking teachers to get certified and get CPD', 'financial incentives', 'teachers' subsequent career progression' 'initial teacher training, 'teachers on-the-job training and support', and 'sufficient time to teachers to prepare their knowledge and skills' were the most useful incentives to remain primary teachers in teaching profession. The findings also showed that 'school resources', 'principal leadership' and 'tending to be employed "close to home"' were the least useful incentives to remain primary teachers in teaching profession.

Keywords: teaching profession, teacher training, incentives, career, Hong Kong

1. Introduction

A new knowledge-based economy has emerged around the world. It has a great impact to the importance of education to individual and societal success. As a consequence, a knowledge-based economy has led to intensive reforms of education systems in most countries. To meet the complex demands of today's education reforms, those countries have emphasized on improving teacher education and recognizing that preparing accomplished teachers who can adapt to the fast advances in knowledge and technologies, different systems and policies, and rapid developments in the wider socio-economic environment. Eventually, schools employ only "highly qualified teachers" (Darling-Hammond, 2005).

However, it appears that no studies have examined the incentives to enhance the teachers' teaching profession. This purpose of this study is to investigate the incentives to enhance primary teachers' teaching profession in Hong Kong.

2. Literature Review

Studies suggested several incentives to spur the teachers' teaching profession. The following paragraphs will discuss the details of those incentives.

The first incentive suggested to spur the teachers' teaching profession is financial incentive (Denlinger, 2002; Harman, 2002; Johnson *et al.*, 2002; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2009). In the highly localized landscape of U.S. education, the meaning of the term "teacher pay" varies from district to district (Harman, 2002). Low salary is a main problem of teacher deficits. Therefore, it is suggested to offer our college students education careers that will give them salaries comparable to those in other career fields (Denlinger, 2002). In order to overcome the competition for high-quality teachers, policymakers in most countries devised ways to make teaching more attractive, such as bonuses, pensions, mortgage subsidies or health club memberships, etc. (Johnson *et al.*, 2002). If financial incentives went up significantly in every school, the job market became more competitive in education. As a result, the shortage of teachers would disappear and the quality of education would improve (Denlinger, 2002; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2009).

The second incentive suggested to spur the teachers' teaching profession is the working condition (Denlinger, 2002; Johnson *et al.*, 2002; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2009). Studies show that poor working conditions can enable good teachers to quit their teaching profession (Denlinger, 2002; Johnson *et al.*, 2002). Besides, school resources directly affect the teachers' teaching profession standards (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2009) and new teachers need support to develop the necessary knowledge and skills (Johnson *et al.*, 2002). However, most schools cannot provide good working conditions for new teachers to cope with difficulties and become better teachers (Johnson *et al.*, 2002).

The third incentive suggested to spur the teachers' teaching profession is principal leadership (Johnson *et al.*, 2002; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2009). The main jobs of principals are to lead teachers (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2009), and restructure schools to support individual, group and organizational learning (Johnson *et al.*, 2002). The principal should play a leading role in establishing faculty norms and facilitating interaction among teachers with various level of experience (Johnson *et al.*, 2002).

The fourth incentive suggested to spur the teachers' teaching profession is the initial teacher training (Beck, 2009). The induction program (Johnson *et al.*, 2002) and mentoring (Kelly, 2002) should be provided to new teachers. However, studies showed that mentoring and other induction programs were limited because they were not embedded within a professional culture that valued and supported these relationships and activities. In the worst cases, school leaders played no role in creating a culture that was welcoming and supportive to new teachers (Johnson *et al.*, 2002).

The fifth incentive suggested to spur the teachers' teaching profession is teachers' subsequent career progression (Harman, 2002; Kelly, 2002; Beck, 2009). Providing opportunities for teachers to promote to higher position (Harman, 2002; Beck, 2009) or to participate in administrative works (Kelly, 2002) can enhance their teaching profession. Some studies found that lead-teacher programs led to "new cooperation, collaboration, and collegial spirit among teachers and administrators", while other reported increased "tension and conflict" (Kelly, 2002).

The sixth incentive suggested to spur the teachers' teaching profession is 'tending to be employed close to home' (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005). Teachers are willing to remain in the teaching profession or performing better if they can work close to their homes (Boyd *et al.*, 2005).

The seventh incentive suggested to spur the teachers' teaching profession is to provide sufficient time to teachers to prepare their knowledge and skills (Sparks, 2002; Johnson *et al.*, 2002). New teachers need time to develop the necessary knowledge and skills. However, few of the new teachers said that their schools provided them sufficient time to prepare the necessary knowledge and skills (Johnson *et al.*, 2002).

The eighth incentive suggested to spur the teachers' teaching profession is on-the-job training and support (Sparks, 2002; Johnson *et al.*, 2002). Staff development programs work best when designed to deepen teachers' knowledge of the content they teach and expand their repertoire of research-based instructional skills. These programs provide ongoing classroom assistance in implementing these new skills, create regular opportunities for serious collaborative work, develop teachers' classroom assessment skills, and content teachers to other professionals within and beyond their schools. But the potential of any educational improvement program will be wasted unless teachers have the training, follow-up, time, and other forms of support they need to implement them. The public needs to support quality staff development. Efforts to expand teachers' knowledge and skills will pay off for students if staff development is tied to clear and high standards for student learning and if every teacher is given sufficient time to learn, absorb, and implement the new techniques and technologies. Then a teaching force can be created to teach in tomorrow's classroom (Sparks, 2002).

The ninth incentive suggested to spur the teachers' teaching profession is to ask teachers to get certified (Denlinger, 2002; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2009). In U.S., teachers are required to be certified by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2009). To get certified, teachers must be able to explain and demonstrate their classroom practices (Denlinger, 2002).

In this study, we involved in the research of what type of incentives being used to enhance the teachers' teaching profession in Hong Kong. To meet the complex demands of today's education reforms, Hong Kong Education Bureau (EB) set a report on the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) (Hong Kong Education Bureau [EB], 2009) for teachers' future development, and required teachers to access to a variety of professional learning experiences through a balanced selection of activities. As a reference for teachers and schools in formulating their CPD plans, the distribution of time among the various modes of CPD is proposed below: (a) in a three-year cycle, not less than 50 CPD hours should be spent on structured learning (for example, short courses, seminars and conferences, workshops, degree awarding programmes) and not less than 50 CPD hours on other modes of CPD (for example, sharing of good or innovative teaching practice within and across schools, sharing of professional readings and ideas in the context of learning / study circles, mentoring, serving in education-related committees, presenting as trainers / facilitators / speakers for professional development programmes); and (b) the remaining CPD hours can be freely apportioned between structured / other CPD modes at individual teachers' own discretion. Time spent on school-organized staff development days should be appropriately registered according to the mode of professional development experienced. Regarding the timing of CPD activities, the three-year cycle provides the flexibility to make adjustments to suit teachers' individual circumstances (EB, 2009).

3. Research Methodology

This research used the survey questionnaire to investigate the perceptions of the primary school teachers what kinds of incentives can enhance the teaching profession. The types of incentives were divided into 9 areas: (1) improving the financial incentives (Denlinger, 2002; Harman, 2002; Johnson *et al.*, 2002; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2009), (2) improving the school resources (Denlinger, 2002; Johnson *et al.*, 2002; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2009), (3) improving principle leadership (Johnson *et al.*, 2002; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2009), (4) improving initial teacher training (Beck, 2009), (5) improving teachers' subsequent career progression (Harman, 2002; Kelly, 2002; Beck, 2009), (6) tending to be employed close to home' (Boyd *et al.*, 2005), (7) providing sufficient time to teachers to prepare their

knowledge and skills (Sparks, 2002; Johnson *et al.*, 2002), (8) providing teachers on-the-job training and support (Sparks, 2002; Johnson *et al.*, 2002), and (9) asking teachers to get certified (Denlinger, 2002; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2009). Five-point Likert-type scales were assigned to all types of incentives. These items were anchored at (5) strongly agree; (4) agree; (3) no idea; (2) disagree and (1) strongly disagree. For the survey, the random sampling method was first used to select different schools from a list of all Hong Kong primary schools and then a purposive sampling for heterogeneity within the group sampled. Thus, 460 questionnaires were collected from a total of 556 which had been distributed to 102 primary schools. This research mainly used mean and standard deviation in the analyses of data.

4. Findings

Table 1 shows the demographic statistics of the respondents. From the table1, 12.2% of respondents have less than 1 year working experience, 29.1% of them have more than 1 year but less than 3 years working experience, 23.7% of them have more than 3 years but less than 5 years working experience, the rest of them have more than 5 years working experience. 12.2% of respondents are under age of 25, 33.9% of them are higher than 25 but less than 30, 22.8% of them are higher than 30 but less than 40, the rest of them are higher than 40. Finally, 7.6% of respondents have not completed the degree yet, 15.2% of them have completed the degree but without postgraduate diploma in education, 60.9% have completed the undergraduate degree and postgraduate diploma in Education, the rest of them have completed master degree.

Table 1. Demographic statistics of the respondents

Items	Number	Percentage (%)
Working experience in the primary school		
(i) less than 1 year	56	12.2
(ii) more than 1 years and less than 3 years	134	29.1
(iii) more 3 years and less than 5 years	109	23.7
(iv) more than 5 years	161	35
Age:		
(i) Less than 25	56	12.2
(ii) higher than 25 and less than 30	156	33.9
(iii) higher than 30 and less than 40	105	22.8
(iv) higher than 40	143	31.1
Education:		
(i) Without degree	35	7.6
(ii) Only have undergraduate degree	70	15.2
(iii) Undergraduate degree + postgraduate diploma in education (PDIE)	280	60.9
(iv) Have master degree + PDIE	75	16.3
(v) Have doctor degree + PDIE	0	0

Table 2 shows the means of five different kinds of incentives to remain the primary teachers in teaching profession. Among the kinds of incentives perceived by the respondents, 6 out of 9 kinds of incentives were given a mean score of above 3.5. The results showed that ‘asking teachers to get certified and get CPD’ (mean = 4.35, standard deviation = 0.65), ‘financial incentives’ (mean = 4.12, standard deviation = 0.517), ‘teachers’ subsequent career progression’ (mean = 4.09, standard deviation = 0.654), ‘initial teacher training’ (mean = 4.05, standard deviation = 0.754), ‘teachers on-the-job training and support’ (mean = 3.85, standard deviation = 0.56), and ‘sufficient time to teachers to prepare their knowledge and skills’ (mean = 3.6, standard deviation = 0.648) topped the most agreed kinds of incentives. While the least agreed kinds of incentives rated with a mean score of below 3.5 were ‘school resources’ (mean = 3.22, standard deviation = 0.924), ‘principal leadership’ (mean = 3.37, standard deviation = 0.804) and ‘tending to be employed “close to home”’ (mean = 3.2, standard deviation = 0.767).

Table 2. Means of different kinds of incentives

Kinds of incentives	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation (Std. D.)
Financial incentives	1.00	5.00	4.12	0.517
School resources	1.00	5.00	3.22	0.924
Principal leadership	1.00	5.00	3.37	0.804
Initial teacher training	1.00	5.00	4.05	0.754
Teachers’ subsequent career progression	1.00	5.00	4.09	0.654
Tending to be employed “close to home”	1.00	4.00	3.20	0.767
Sufficient time to teachers to prepare their knowledge and skills	1.00	5.00	3.60	0.648
Teachers on-the-job training and support	1.00	5.00	3.85	0.560
Asking teachers to get certified and get CPD	1.00	5.00	4.35	0.650

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Findings showed that ‘asking teachers to get certified and get CPD’, ‘financial incentives’, ‘teachers’ subsequent career progression’, ‘initial teacher training’, ‘teachers on-the-job training and support’, and ‘sufficient time to teachers to prepare their knowledge and skills’ were the most useful incentives to remain primary teachers in teaching profession. This finding was consistent with the evidence shown by Denlinger (2002); Harman (2002); Johnson *et al.* (2002); Goldhaber and Hansen (2009) and Beck (2009). In Hong Kong, the economy became weak after the financial crisis happened in September 2008. Most teachers preferred to find a high pay and more secure job. Besides, most teachers preferred to choose a long term job with a good career progression.

Findings showed that ‘school resources’, ‘principal leadership’ and ‘tending to be employed “close to home”’ were the least useful incentives to remain primary teachers in teaching profession. The findings were consistent with evidences shown by Boyd *et al.* (2005), and Goldhaber and Hansen (2009) that those incentives can remain teachers in teaching profession. Hong Kong is a small city and the transport facilities are convenient. Most teachers did not worry so much about the school

locations. In addition, most principals received training and they could manage schools effectively. Therefore, most teachers did not worry about the leadership skills of their bosses. Finally, Hong Kong government supplied sufficient resources, e.g. computers and projectors etc. to all schools. Therefore, most teachers thought that they must have sufficient school resources for their teaching.

In conclusion, five kinds of incentives are perceived as being useful to remain teachers in the teaching profession, but the degree of their influences is not the same.

6. Limitation and Future Research

There are some limitations of the study. First, and most important, it should be remembered that the findings are based on the respondents' perceptions. Second, generalization of the results is limited by the distribution of the questionnaire.

To improve the validity and reliability, some recommendations are suggested as follows. First a larger sampling scale with larger size and more types of schools widely located in the place studied should be recommended because the larger is the scale of the project, the data obtained will be more valid, reliable, representative and generalized of the whole population. Second, other method of research, e.g. interview, can be used to gain better understanding of whole picture.

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