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Increasing Unemployment of Teaching Staff: Effect of Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Even though schools are organizations, HR practices have rarely been a part of schools in India. Covid-19 pandemic resulted in huge loss of job, especially of the salaried employees. Purpose: The study is an attempt to understand the selection and retention strategies and policies in the schools of Bhopal city and also examines how they were utilized for retaining and retrenching teaching staff. The paper also compares the job satisfaction level among private and government schools. Methodology: Case study method has been employed and 6 different organizations have been studied. Post Graduate Teachers (PGT) were selected using purposive sampling while students of 11th and 12th standards were selected using simple random sampling. The study is qualitative in nature based on semi structured interviews and utilizes narrative analysis. Findings: It was found that though there were procedures for selection both in Private and Government schools, there are no concrete strategies and policies to retain staff in the schools. Retention and satisfaction was higher among permanent employees in Government schools than the private counterpart. Originality: The paper projects the dynamics resulting in retention and attrition specifically in schools of India especially in COVID-19 times.

Keywords: Job satisfaction, Retention, School, Teaching Staff

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in many global concerns which are not limited to health. One of the worst hit sector is employment where many salaried employees have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic. As per the US Census Bureau (US Census Bureau 2020), India is the world's second most populous country with around 23.6% of the regional population (Young population 2020) which further is projected to be 16.4% in 2030 and 13.9% in 2050 (UN 2020). This suggests a significant proportion of the population which can be employed in different capacities, yet, this also projects cut throat competition and existence of a lot of scope for unfair practices in the employment market. Once this challenge of competition is crossed, next comes the encounter with the process of recruitment and selection ideally aiming at selecting the right person for the right place. The journey of one's career begins with the introduction to an organization and proceeds with all ups and downs finally leading to separation. But, whether separation is voluntary, involuntary or forced? Whether it was a decision from the side of the employees or the organization, and the underpinning factors behind it need to be analyzed in order to understand the reasons behind increasing unemployment of teaching staff in schools of India.

HR: A JOURNEY FROM SELECTION TO SEPARATION

Human resources are the biggest strength of any organization including schools which are thought to be instrumental in shaping the future citizens. Recruitment and selection is the first processes with which the employee interacts, two way processes, where on one hand the organization keenly selects the prospective employees, on the second hand, even the candidate thinks and chooses the job and the organization. Candidates consider cognitive and emotional factors like – compensation, opportunities of growth, availability of better opportunities, attitudes and behaviour of recruiter/ employer, career stage, job security, geographical location, amount of challenge and responsibility to opt for the job (Fried et al. 2011). After crossing the hurdles of recruitment and selection, once there is a match between the candidate and the organization, human resources are governed by different HR policies. The framing of HR policies in turn is governed by various factors like availability of requisite skills and competencies, essential mindset, desired values, customs, supportive institutions, right legal framework and a conducive culture (Budhwara & Sparrow 1998). How well these policies get framed and are implemented becomes a core determinant of commitment and OCBs, finally deciding on who stays, who quits and who gets forcefully separated.

The rightness or wrongness of selection and retention can result in the emergence of different sets of behaviours and attitudes.

Employee OCBs are seen significant for organizational functioning as managers cannot possibly anticipate all opportunities for employees' contribution, monitor all employees' behaviours, or coerce employees to 'walk the extra mile' for the organization. Yet, research on Organizational Citizenship Behaviours (OCBs) have emphasized on how affiliative behaviour aligns with routines and organizational policies (Van Dyne 1995). Affiliative behaviours become relatively important in stable environments, however, such behaviours might actually undermine performance if they support a status quo that needs to be changed (Morrison & Phelps 1999). Research studies indicate that those managers who are incline towards affiliative OCBs become defensive, abusive or retaliatory to the acts that challenge their control and authority (Graham & Van Dyne 2006). Reviews on the antecedents of organisational commitment typically categorise four or five sets of factors (Guest 1992; Mathieu & Zajac 1990; Mowday et al. 1979). These factors are biographical characteristics, like age and educational level; structural features like organisational size and hierarchy; experiences about the extent to which pre-joining expectations have been met; role experiences, in particular scope to exercise responsibility and for development; and human resource practices those that promote a sense of fairness of treatment. Also studies suggest that 'insufficient justification' befalls when threat or reward is sufficient to engage one into or to avoid a behaviour, but it is also insufficient to conclude that the situation caused the behaviour. Insufficient justification may lead people to like something less because they (incorrectly) infer that the reason they did not engage in a behaviour was due to internal reasons, however, opposite may also occur. People may in some cases come to like a task less when they perceive that they did engage in it for external reasons. Another condition namely

'Overjustification' occurs when one views behaviour as caused by the situation, leading to discount the extent to which one's behaviour was actually caused by one's own interest in it (Deci et al. 1999; Lepper & Greene 1978). Rewards which are internal to the activity like praise, acknowledgement of achievements, i.e., those rewards that makes one to feel good increase performance and also the liking towards the activity (Hulleman et al. 2008; Deci & Ryan 2002).

The framework of Hirschman suggests that employee dissatisfaction can result in exit or voice, i.e., dissatisfied employees may quit the organization and switch to other jobs or make recommendations to those who are in power to make changes. He also suggests that loyalty overrides one's intent to quit (Hirschman 1970). However, exit is a terminal episodic behavior in which employees often psychologically detach, or mentally begin the process of quitting, long before they physically exit (Burris, 2008). Why people leave organizations can broadly be classified into 3 factors – economic, organizational or individual reasons (Mobley et al. 1979; Muchinsky & Tuttic 1979). Whether exit is good or bad, the answer to this question varies. Shaw, Gupta, & Delery found that voluntary turnover was associated with the inferior organizational performance (Shaw 2002). Research also suggests that turnover could improve performance. One plausible advantage of turnover is the exclusion of poor performing employees (Price 1989). Staw et al. proposed that turnover might enhance performance if it is a feature with employees having a very long or a very short tenure (Staw et al. 1986). However, turnover reduces morale (Mobley et al. 1979). Reggio asserted that low job satisfaction and low organizational commitment are both related to high rates of turnover (Reggio 2003). Bhatnagar found that attrition depends primarily on organizational culture and career planning along with incentives (Bhatnagar 2007). Organizational support is yet another factor that affects attrition. Who remains and who leaves the organization depend on a lot of factors, yet, an organization needs to work on retention strategies.

Retention strategies should focus on employee's personal aspirations like career development, rewards and recognition in a proactive manner. Retention and job satisfaction should not take a back seat in the organizations (Michelman 2003). Specific policies and practices should emphasize on offering great work environment, competitive compensation and benefit packages, job autonomy, training opportunities, career development, trust and fairness, performance appraisals, potential development and succession planning.

WHY SCHOOLS?

Schools are considered to be the second home of the child. From the perspective of a child school plays a prominent role in personality development. RabindraNath Tagore explains education as, that which empowers the mind to search that ultimate truth which liberates us from the bondage of dust and gives us the wealth; not of possessions but of inner light, not of dominion but of love, constructing this truth its own and gives expression to. Chandra et.al ,explains the comprehensive functions that education serves – development of natural abilities, personality, sense of community living, character building, regulation of basic instincts, preparation for adult life, making of responsible citizens, protection of one's culture, tolerance for other cultures, social welfare, national development and use of

leisure (Chandra and Sharma 1996). Dhawan in his article strongly recommended that the best and brightest must be attracted to the teaching profession to assure best quality education (Dhawan 2015). Author1 urges the need to establish an accountable system of quality in higher education where every stakeholder needs to be recognized, studied, employed and supported to the full extent (Author1 2017).

Such a significant place like school must be understood as a complete system, where interactions take place with the outside environment. A school is an open system where human resources - students and teachers come in and move out. Idealization of the institution of school has resulted in understanding the obstacles in quality education, but very few studies have tried understanding schools as organizations to study HR practices.

Recent loss of employment and pay which became a feature of most organizations including schools, made the researcher to ponder upon the retention policies in school and whether there are ways to discover the functional problems which might result in exit. Also, during the times of economic crisis like the covid-19 pandemic whether the layoff or retrenchment made has followed any guidelines? Around 6 million jobs were lost from May to August, 2020 and teaching was also a worst hit sector (BusinessToday 2020). Also, the famous saying, 'people leave managers, not companies' prompted the researcher to carry on the study in order to find out which factors really work in retaining quality teachers in schools. Also, whether, those who are absorbed, whether they meet quality standards or not. Again, an understanding of the context is imperative,

thus, in the study moral rationality is bounded and extreme cultural or moral relativism is ruled out (Wellman 1963; Donaldson 1989; Stace 1937).

METHODOLOGY

The study incorporates case studies of 6 schools in Bhopal city. All the schools are full-fledged and run classes till 12th standard. Data was collected from the PGT teachers and students belonging to 11th and 12th standards of the concerned schools. PGT teachers having an experience of at least 10 years were selected for the purpose of the study using purposive sampling while the students were selected using random sampling. Teachers were interviewed online. The interviews were recorded, written, listened to and analysed using narrative analysis. Also self-appraisal of teachers and ratings given by students were compared and utilized to assess quality of the retained staff.

STUDY SITE

Madhya Pradesh is a state located in central India and Bhopal is the capital city of the state. Schools in Madhya Pradesh can be categorized as Government and Private schools. Madhya Pradesh has 2347 Government Higher Secondary Schools, out of which 15 are located in Bhopal district, 8 of which are in Bhopal city (NIC 2020). There are numerous private schools in Bhopal, however 15 schools can be categorized as Higher Secondary Schools [34]. Profile of the schools are produced in a generic manner to keep up confidentiality concerns. There were 6 schools selected from Bhopal city, 3 Private and 3 Government. All schools are affiliated to M.P. State board, thus, there is similar curriculum followed in the schools,

reducing the differences in teaching-learning upto a certain extent.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What selection procedures are followed for hiring school teachers?
- What are the determining factors responsible for retaining school teachers?
- What is the quality of the retained staff?
- What retention policies and strategies are adopted by schools and whether they are responsible for retaining quality staff in schools?
- Which problems results in employee separation in schools?
- How the level of satisfaction varies among Government and Private Schools?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

RQ1: WHAT SELECTION PROCEDURES ARE FOLLOWED FOR HIRING SCHOOL TEACHERS?

There were well defined process for selecting teachers in Government schools, with a primary requirement of B.Ed. as educational qualification and entrance tests for a rigorous selection process. However, there were also instances of malpractices as reported by the participants in the selection process and unresolved issues in the online examination patterns. However, this practice is something that most participants had not been through, as the system was not very well defined and functional during their times of selection. Issues pertaining to placements were also disclosed in the Government sector. Private schools though emphasize on minimum educational requirement to be B.Ed., there were teachers who were non B.Ed. yet hired with the pre-condition to complete the educational requirements within a predefined tenure. The teachers also shared that in the recent times new faculties were not hired by the schools due to shortage of funds, non-payment of fees, low or no provisions by Government.

RQ2: WHAT ARE THE DETERMINING FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR RETAINING SCHOOL TEACHERS?

The interviews with the faculties (TGT teachers) it was found that most of the teachers were passionate about their job. They shared a feeling of worry and fear, especially due to the recent pandemic times when some of the teachers were fired from their jobs as an outcome of the pandemic situation. The teachers were in their mid or late career and had worked with the same school for many years. They had a sense of attachment with the organization and were of the opinion that the school was offering them a relatively good pay. The male staff though felt that their payment alone was not enough to manage their family, but somehow, the family income was substantial to meet their family demands. Few teachers were happy with the work environment, while most had some or the other issue and found the environment to be highly demanding and that there was no time for them to carry on their personal affairs. There was a serious work life imbalance indicated by majority of the staff members in private schools, the government school teachers were relatively satisfied with the work environment. Position in the career path, level of ambition, gender roles and responsibilities, absence of other lucrative jobs in the same geographical region, fear of new roles, and fear of loss of seniority were some of the major factors discussed by the staff members which made them to continue their career in the same organization.

RQ3: WHAT IS THE QUALITY OF THE RETAINED STAFF?

Self-appraisal of teachers was taken where they were to assess their teaching, problem solving, evaluation, communication and administrative skills. The schedule sent to the teachers, comprised of 25 questions, and 20 questions were open ended in order to gauge detailed responses. It was found that most teachers assessed them to be good at teaching, problem solving and evaluation, while 31% had problems of communication. Most issues pertaining to communication were based on internet connectivity and less quality interaction between teacher and student as a result of online classes. Some had expressed concerns towards decreasing interest of the students due to online classes and science and computers teachers had such concerns more. The issues with the practical subjects were detailed in the responses received. However, there was no mention of retention policy of strategies adopted by the school management in order to keep the staff in the school. Most teachers were of the opinion that only few teachers had influence over the administration although each teacher had to do some or the other administrative work. Personal bias was reported and some schools did not have the practice of appraisal at all. Forums to discuss their concerns were also very few and mostly it resulted in retaliated behaviour from the management. A few instances where even some senior teachers were disturbed severely were shared, all as an outcome of retaliation. A discussion was held with the students regarding the quality of the teachers and most students felt that the teachers teaching them were well versed and knowledgeable. Yet, they were of the opinion that the young teachers were more dynamic and approachable as compared to the older ones.

RQ4: HOW RETENTION POLICIES ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR RETAINING QUALITY STAFF IN SCHOOLS?

The interviews disclosed that as such there were no formal retention policies and strategies adopted by the school administration. The permanent teachers in the school however felt lot safer than their counterparts. Almost all respondents assigned retention to their pay and increment. Grievance redressal and complaint addressing committees was not a feature of most schools and some even shared that they were made to realize that they should be thankful as they have a job in the pandemic times. The issues were not even disclosed during inspections because any kind of disclosures, especially in the private schools lead to adverse situations for the staff, sometimes which was as harsh as expulsion. It was found that any flaw or shortcoming reported was dealt in a casual manner and it was up to the management whether they would consider it or not. Moreover, such staff members then mostly had to face discrimination and unfavourable work environment. It was also reported that among the victims some had switched jobs, some left jobs while some continued to face the circumstances, among them, most were assumed to be searching for jobs at some better place. It was also shared that the earlier work places also had a political environment and most schools teachers are facing the same situation. The education sector was not different from any other employment sector, yet, the teachers mostly were contended with the fact that they were contributing to building better citizens.

RQ5: WHICH PROBLEMS RESULTS IN EMPLOYEE SEPARATION IN SCHOOLS?

Most of the teachers were not the main earning member in their family, but were supporting their families. Some were employed to keep themselves engaged. Different genders had different responses, while the male staff members were more concerned of their income, they reported that they would leave the schools for better pay. Emotional attachment and sense of belonging was less in males as compared to their female counterpart. Female teachers perceived their jobs worthy as they related themselves to the end results of education system. They felt responsible for shaping the future nation. However, very few had a say on switching their jobs, as mostly the female staff was really not inclined towards earning. They felt that when the situation turns intolerable, staff leaves. Yet most cases of separation were due to transfer of husband, and as a result of other family responsibilities. Gender roles had a prominent role is deciding the reasons behind separation. Discriminatory behavior and better opportunities were among the organizational factors which resulted in separation. Maternity was also a reason for separation in female staff. Upon inquiring it was discovered that there was loss of employment in all schools. Almost 10% of the teachers had lost their jobs as a result of the recession due to COVID-19 pandemic. Mostly the ones with very less experience or very much experience became the victims. It was thought that the teachers with high experience were removed as their pay was substantial and somewhere it was also presumed that technological advancement will be a problem at their age. There was no concrete rule in place that was followed to retain or remove staff.

RQ6: HOW THE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION VARIES AMONG GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS?

Permanent employees in the Government schools reported higher levels of satisfaction as compared to the contractual employees in the Government sector. Similar situations were observed in private schools as well. The qualified and confirmed teachers were reported to be more satisfied than the untrained ones. Yet, dissatisfaction was due to the behavioural issues between management and staff. Comparatively, the Government employees reported more instances of satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The study depicts that though there was an absence of well-defined retention policies and strategies still, there were certain factors which strongly affect retention, like, compensation, career stage (Fried et al. 2011) and, display of affiliative behaviours (Morrison & Phelps 1999). It was also found that economic, organizational and individual reasons (Mobley et al. 1979; Muchinsky and Tuttic 1979) were responsible for teachers to exit their job in schools. Another interesting finding was that a display of non-affiliative behaviours had resulted in some extreme consequences like retaliation based discrimination and even poor exit. It was also found that there was no concrete guideline followed for retaining and laying off of the teaching staff. Permanent staff had more job security than those on contract. It was found that COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in crisis situation in education sector as reported in the news.

The study indicates that there were defined strategies for selection and the interviews indicated that right fits were retained in the school. However, the right fit was not just

to do with the educational qualifications but how much affiliative behaviours were demonstrated by the teachers. As per the notion of 'quality' held by the employees, the interviews did not specify any association between selection strategies and retention of quality staff. It was also found that there were barely any retention policies and strategies adopted by the school administration. Also, attrition rates had increased slightly as a result of Covid-19 pandemic. The rates were higher in private schools than Government schools. Yet, it was also found that the attrition rates were typically higher for the employees on contract. Permanent staff hardly faced any loss of job, though problems such as deductions in salary were shared by majority of the respondents. More instances of satisfaction were found in the Government employees, which was again higher with those who were hired on a permanent basis. Teaching staff of Government schools was found to be more satisfied than those employed in private schools of Bhopal city.

Unfortunately, retention and job satisfaction are not much of botheration in schools of Madhya Pradesh, and as described by Michelman, the retention and job satisfaction do hold a back seat in the schools of M.P (Michelman 2003).

However, the study was a cross sectional one and was limited to certain schools of Bhopal district. As the study incorporated case study method for a better focus, further studies can be conducted using other methods and even longitudinal studies can be conducted to study retention across different time zones as situations change in the pandemic times.

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