

A Critical Review of Commitment Studies: A call for Research in Sarawak School Settings

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ABSTRACT

This article was written to highlight on the lack of emphasis placed on commitment studies on school teachers in Sarawak. Firstly, it discussed related local studies conducted on school teachers, which indirectly questioned teachers' level of commitment to the teaching profession. Subsequently, the consequences of low commitment were put forward. The following section provides a review of existing studies on commitment and the limitations noted in these studies. Implications arising from the research limitations were discussed, with the hope that future researchers would take note of the implications when designing new studies. The article concluded by providing some recommendations for future research in this area. One major recommendation is to explore the professional aspect of commitment, using a multi-dimensional approach.

Introduction

The education system in Sarawak is undergoing structural transformation in response to the changes taking place in the global environment as a result of increasing globalisation and liberalisation and rapid advancement in information and communication technology (MoE, 2002). Beside the global change and technological development, the system is also being challenged by the state's aspiration to be a united and fully developed nation by the year 2002. In response to these challenges, there was an urgent need to create an adequate supply of manpower, that is highly skilled and knowledgeable to support the development of a technologically, globalised and liberalised market environment as well as to achieve the state's aspiration, creating a major challenge for the education system today.

With the convergence of globalisation, liberalisation and technological change, significant revolutionary changes to the education system were introduced to develop an efficient and responsive education and training system to increase efficiency and global competitiveness to prepare for

these new environmental challenges. New educational legislations and reforms were implemented. Among the legislations introduced, in 1995, the education system aspired to develop a world-class quality education system that is flexible and innovative in order to position the country as a regional education hub and a center for educational excellence.

With the recent education reform and restructuring, more emphasis would have to be placed on commitment of the teaching workforce. This is because in line with the educational restructuring to counteract the increasing external pressures that are acting on the work environment today, new educational strategies and approaches were developed. One of the strategies lies in the control mechanism which has also been introduced by many professional bodies. The control mechanism is shifting from the nineteenth century bureaucratic process to a new system that can thrive in the rapidly changing world of the twenty-first century (Lowenberg & Conrad, 1998). Darling-Hammond (1995) emphasised that traditional rigid bureaucratically administered system has not succeeded in implementing change, such as change in education reforms. The emphasis now is more focused on reducing bureaucracy and reducing formalities to implement change. The bureaucratic system that persisted in the last decade has been criticised as less flexible and slow in adapting to change (Lowenberg & Conrad, 1998). Therefore, instead of relying on formal rules and procedures to attain goals and mission, more emphasis is being place on attracting, building and maintaining a committed workforce (Bergmann, et al., 2000; Carlson, et al., 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1995). The success of modern professional bodies today where workers are increasingly expected to display effort, motivation and initiative, depends not only on how the management makes the most of human competencies, but also how it stimulates commitment of workers to the profession (Nijhof, et al., 1998).

Like any other professional bodies, a pool of highly qualified and committed teaching workforce is needed in the field of education. This is important, firstly, if the educational mission of world-class quality education was to be realised (EPRD, 2002). A committed teaching workforce is also particularly crucial as it determines the extent to which teachers identify themselves with the goals of the teaching profession and their willingness to work hard to attain the overall educational mission (Raju & Srivastava, 1994). According to Raju and Srivastava (1994), committed teachers helped to develop students' intellectual and personality development. Students tend to learn more rapidly from the invisible curriculum than from the visible curriculum. Therefore a pool of committed teaching workforce is needed to educate these students, who comprised the young vibrant population, to constantly strive for excellence. These groups of students would eventually form part of the knowledgeable and highly skilled manpower required to meet the changing demands of the society and economy as well as to help the nation realise its aspirations. Therefore, commitment of teachers has to be closely

monitored to find out if teachers are committed to the teaching profession. Do they share the goals and values of the profession? Are they willing to exert extra effort to contribute to the well-being of the entity of interest? In order to address these questions, the next section will highlight some of the relevant local studies conducted on school teachers and how it relates to commitment of these teachers.

Related Studies on Teacher Commitment

A thorough search into the literature on teacher commitment reviewed that studies on commitment of teachers have been extensively conducted on a world-wide scale. However, review of literature failed to identify any local published studies prior to this that investigated on the direct indices of commitment of school teachers, particularly in the region of Sarawak. Instead, several local studies provided indirect measures, which provided clear evidence of the questionable level of commitment of these teachers. This will be explained in the following sub-sections:

Teachers Displayed Intention to Quit

Past studies have reported that more and more teachers are leaving or planning to leave the profession to pursue their career outside of education, which provided an indication of the questionable level of commitment of teachers. In 2001, Chua (2001) conducted a study on all the technical school teachers in Kuching, Sarawak. In her study, it was reported that nearly 50% of the teachers surveyed wanted to quit their current jobs. They indicated that they have considered leaving the current school and will leave their current school in the near future. They also revealed that if they could choose their place of work, they would choose not to teach in the present school.

Similar findings of teachers' intention to quit were also reported in other parts of Sarawak (Ding, 2001; Lau, 2001). Ding (2000) conducted a study among 1365 secondary school teachers in Kuching and reported that 73% of the teachers exhibited moderate to high level of intention to quit their jobs. In her study, 33% of the respondents indicated that they would leave their teaching job in the near future whereas 35% are presently looking for options and making plans to leave their present jobs. Another 24% reported that they would prefer not to work for the government and some 30% indicated that it is unimportant for them to pursue their present career with the government. Similarly, Lau (2001) also reported that 14.1% of the secondary school teachers in Sri Aman, Sarawak indicated their intention to leave and another 52% reported that if other opportunities arise, they also would leave. Studies conducted in the international scene also reported consistent results (Colbert & Wolff, 1992; Odell & Ferrano, 1992; Cetron & Gayle, 1991).

These studies confirmed that more and more teachers are seeking permanent avoidance by leaving or planning to leave their position or even their profession. When teachers have the tendency to quit their jobs, many problems arise. One of the subsequent outcomes that would most likely occur when teachers have a strong desire to quit their jobs is actual turnover. Past studies have indicated that intention to quit is the strongest predictor of turnover (Tett & Meyer, 1993). Therefore, when turnover occurred in the teaching profession, the effectiveness and functioning of the institution would be greatly affected. According to Cano and Miller (1992), teacher attrition could give rise to many other effects such as undermining teamwork among teachers, bringing about a demoralising impact on beginning teachers, creating negative public reactions, causing disruptions to day-to-day activities, decreasing institutional opportunities to pursue growth strategies and lowering performance caused by operational disruptions. Therefore measures should be taken to address the problem of quitting intention among teachers to avoid the adverse effects of teacher attrition or turnover.

Of considerable concern is that there have been repeated findings that those teachers who abandoned their profession were the brighter, more capable and highly trained educators (Brownwell & Smith, 1992; Singer, 1993). When that happened, again, institutions will lose out in many areas especially in terms of expertise, training and talent that have been invested on these teachers. Furthermore, the cost of recruiting, selecting, replacement and training to produce another group of high performer teachers can be tremendously costly.

Another undesirable outcome of intention to quit which is of concern to this study is that employees who demonstrated a desire to quit were found to be lowly committed. Based on literature review there is conclusive evidence to indicate that intention to quit is linked to lack of commitment (Clugston, 2000; Somers & Birnbaum, 2000; Kacmar & Carlson, 1999; Rahim & Afza, 1993; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Chee, 1992; Borg & Riding, 1991). Therefore if technical school teachers have indicated their intention to quit as reported in Chua's (2001) study, there is little doubt that these teachers were also lowly committed to their jobs as well.

Teachers Suffered from Burnout

Another indication of lack of commitment of school teachers is derived from reported findings that teachers suffered from burnout. This is because past studies have found a negative linkage between burnout and commitment (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). It implies that when teachers experienced burnout, their commitment to the profession will be greatly affected.

In the study conducted by Chua (2001), it was reported that 43% of technical school teachers surveyed experienced moderate to high level of

burnout in the teaching job. The study conceptualised burnout as a negative reaction or syndrome of stress which has three sub-components: (1) emotional exhaustion; (2) depersonalisation, a detached, callous attitude towards those with whom one works; and (3) reduced sense of personal accomplishments, a pervasive sense of not having attained significant accomplishment in one's work. These teachers reported that working with students did not provide them with feelings of success or accomplishment. They found the job too stressful, draining and energy consuming. Many reported feeling of physically and emotionally worn out at the end of the day.

It has been reported that when an employee experienced burnout, it could directly affect their professional lives in their work. As a syndrome, it has been reported that people who suffered from burnout exhibited inappropriate attitudes towards their clients, developed emotional problem, ranging from insomnia to ulcers (Noshpitz & Coddington, 1990), displayed poorer work performance (Spielberger & Sarason, 1991) have high tendency to be absent from work, demonstrated an abnormal desire for vacations, suffered low self-esteem, have difficulty working seriously (Adams, 1990) and experienced helplessness (Lunenburg & Cadavid, 1992). And if they were teachers, burnout often led to teacher attrition and lower quality of education (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). According to Levinson (1996), when teachers failed to make successful attempt to cope with burnout, they have to put up with put up with chronic fatigue and depression, anger at those making demand and self-criticism for putting up with the demands, felt undervalued and alienated, developed cynicism, negativity and irritability and a sense of besieged.

Eventually, the ultimate response to frequent and intense periods of burnout that has been reported by past studies were personal dissatisfaction with teachers' professional responsibilities, changes in their interpersonal interactions with students and colleagues; and most importantly reduced commitment and a desire to leave the profession (Weisberg & Sagie, 1999; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997; Merseth, 1992; Billingsley & Cross, 1991). This is because the complexity of burnout often leaves teachers feeling overwhelmed and their inability to cope with the problem affected their teaching and professional interactions. Collectively, burnout reduced teachers' commitment to the profession. Although lack of commitment may be attributed by a dynamic interaction of several factors, and not solely due to burnout but literature supported the contention that burnout is a salient factor contributing to lack of commitment. Therefore the report that teachers suffered from burnout demonstrated again the questionability of their commitment to their profession.

Teachers Faced Job Dissatisfaction

Further review of literature also found that studies conducted on school teachers locally reported that these teachers are faced with job

dissatisfaction. Among some of the less satisfying features of the job reported were student's behavioural problems, workload, non-teaching duties, confrontation with parents, administrative work, professional development, acknowledgement, collaborative decision making, pay, organisation climate, work environment, promotion prospects (Md Hanafi, 2001; Zaharilah, 1999; Mohd Yusof, 1997; Norihan, 1997; Ishak, 1992). All these factors reduced their satisfaction with their jobs.

Upon further inspection of this construct, it was found that job dissatisfaction was antecedents to a host of work outcomes. Job dissatisfaction has been associated with propensity to leave (Shann, 1998; Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Cano & Miller, 1992; Glick, 1992; McBride, et al., 1992), lower job performance, negative impact on student outcomes (Shann, 1998), stress (Gmelch, 1998; Singh & Billingsley, 1996), burnout (Gmelch, 1998), turnover, absenteeism and illness, (Culver et al., 1990),

Over time, the perennial experience of job dissatisfaction wearies the workers to the point of abandoning their commitment to the profession. This statement was supported with empirical evidence from past studies. Past studies have concluded that there is a direct and negative connection between job dissatisfaction and commitment of workers (Clugston, 2000; Kim, 1999; Shann, 1998; Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Littrell & Billingsley, 1994; Billingsley & Cross, 1992). These researchers maintained that job dissatisfaction is a deterrent to workers' commitment. Since past studies have consistently reported that teachers were experiencing job dissatisfaction, it implies that their commitment would be greatly affected too. Unless steps are taken to overcome their dissatisfaction, commitment of teachers will continue to remain an issue.

Based on what has been discussed, these local studies have provided strong support on the questionability of commitment of teachers. Although there have been no studies investigating directly on this topic, these studies seemed to clearly indicate that this group of teachers is lacking in commitment, which is a critical issue that requires serious attention. Due to the important roles played by teachers to meet demands for manpower as well as for the economic development, measures should be taken to build and maintain a pool of committed teaching workforce. Furthermore, enhancing commitment is considered as crucially important as it can give rise to other work outcomes. The next section will highlight the importance of retaining a fully committed workforce by reviewing some of the adverse outcomes of having a pool of lowly committed workforce.

Importance of Enhancing Commitment

If commitment is lacking among teachers, as implied in the local studies discussed above, it can bring about other numerous undesirable adverse

effects on work outcomes. There have been conclusive evidences provided by numerous past studies on commitment that low commitment was associated with increased absenteeism, increased intention to quit and poor job performance.

Absenteeism

According to Eby & Freeman (1999), low commitment resulted in higher absenteeism rate. When employees are absent, employers have to bear the costs associated with absenteeism at the workplace. According to Zakaria (1988), absenteeism can be dysfunctional and financially costly. Firstly, it could upset and disrupt the daily operations of an affected unit or organisation. Then, organisations have to bear the extensive cost of absenteeism, which includes both direct and indirect cost such as lost of productivity, use of contingent workers, overtime cost, etc.

Although, there is no estimate on the cost implications of absenteeism in the educational field in Malaysia, however, when teachers are absent from work, not only are replacement teachers sought but these teachers have to be burdened with the workload of the absent teachers. Problems also arise when the replacement teachers are not skilled or unfamiliar with the subject taught giving rise to frustrations on the part of the students and the teachers concerned. Eventually, they felt angry, exhausted and stressed giving rise to lower motivation, increased job dissatisfaction and poor job performance. Thus, this kind of escape-avoidance behaviour would not be beneficial to any profession.

Turnover Intentions

Other studies looked at turnover intentions and actual turnover as the undesirable outcomes of low commitment (Bishop, et al., 2000; Clugston, 2000; Somers & Birnbaum, 2000; Kacmar & Carlson, 1999; Cable & Judge, 1996, Rahim & Afza, 1993; Tett, & Meyer, 1993; Whitener & Walz, 1993; Chee, 1992; Borg & Riding, 1991). According to some estimates, 50% of the teachers leave the profession within five years (Colbert & Wolff, 1992; Odell & Ferrano, 1992; Cetron & Gayle, 1991) and if the teacher was employed in an urban area, the likelihood increased to 75% (Cetron & Gayle, 1991). In Borg and Riding's (1991) study, teachers in the sample reported moderately low level of commitment. Approximately, 46.2% of them reported that it would be very unlikely or fairly unlikely for them to choose a teaching career were they to start their working life over again. Similarly, George and George (1995) reported that one third of the teachers surveyed planned to leave the teaching field to pursue their careers outside of education while some planned to seek other school-based positions such as administrators or counsellors in order to avoid the teaching job. All these studies provided strong evidence that more and more teachers were lacking in commitment to their profession. They were either harbouring an intention to leave or vividly displaying strong dislike for the profession.

When teachers have the intention or inclination to terminate from their jobs, commitment to the profession would be greatly affected like time spent on seeking employment elsewhere. The subsequent outcome that most likely would occur when teachers have a strong desire to quit their jobs is actual turnover. Past studies have indicated that turnover intentions are the strongest predictors of turnover (Tett & Meyer, 1993). Therefore, when teachers indicated intentions to quit, eventually, they would dropout, resulting in teacher attrition. High incidence of dropout among teachers can greatly affect the effectiveness and functioning of the institution. Institutions would lose out in terms of expertise, training and talent that have been invested on them. Thus, valuable human resources would be wasted. In order to avoid the adverse effects of turnover intention and actual turnover, efforts should be taken to enhance commitment of workers to their jobs and profession.

Performance

Past studies have also reported a marginally significant positive interaction of commitment in the prediction of overall job performance (Richards & O'Brien, 2002; Baugh & Roberts, 1994; Ayree & Tan, 1992; Mathieu & Zajac 1990). The greater the commitment level, the greater the performance level. These studies implied that individuals who are committed to the organisation tend to perform at the higher level. This is because committed employees normally put on a greater effort in the workplace (O'Malley, 2000). High commitment as opposed to low commitment also entails a caring attentiveness, stewardship and conscientious towards the relationship that the employee is in. In the teaching profession, teachers who portrayed such behaviour and orientations generally resulted in positive outcomes such as higher students' academic achievements. There are evidences from past studies on this association. A study conducted by Kushman (1992) found a significant association between commitment and academic achievements. When teachers were committed to their work, the academic achievements of students tend to be higher. Related to commitment, Ostroff (1992), also found a positive relationship between commitment and student quality.

Although, it is unclear whether there are any intervening factors but these past studies as mentioned above, concluded that there is a positive link between commitment and job performance, students' academic achievement and student quality. Therefore, having a committed teaching workforce is a worthwhile goal to pursue due to its potential impact on student performance.

Based on the findings of past studies, the importance of commitment cannot be further denied. It is something worth developing in employees as the consequences to an organisation or profession with employees displaying low commitment can be extensively and financially costly. Therefore, it is an issue that deserves serious attention from the management.

In the teaching profession, the importance of commitment is equally important. According to Hartmann (2000), the study of commitment is important in the field of education as it receives large amounts of public funding and has an important role in developing the skills and knowledge of the community. Therefore, teachers' attitudes towards their work and profession are important. Lowly committed teaching workforce can result in a devastating deterrent to the successful performance of the pedagogue's duties of the teachers. It can also affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the institution, the overall teaching profession and ultimately affect the accomplishment of predetermined educational goals.

Consequently, a pool of well-educated, highly skilled and strongly motivated and committed teachers becomes increasingly crucial. In schools, they determine the effectiveness of education and training and they also work towards achieving world-class quality education. Hence, maintaining a well-established and highly committed teaching force, with teachers displaying willingness to exert efforts and time on behalf of the profession and at the same time working closely with the system to achieve its educational goals, is vital.

In order to illustrate the importance of commitment, the next section will provide an extensive review of past studies conducted on commitment.

Studies on Commitment

Commitment has received a great deal of attention in business and organisational studies. It has been extensively studied across various occupational groups both teaching and non-teaching professions over the last decade.

Among the recent international studies conducted in the non-teaching professions looked into commitment of accountants (Ketchand & Strawser, 2001); hospital employees (Somer & Birnbaum, 2000); nurses (Bergmann, et al., 2000); salespeople in the pharmaceutical industry (Mathieu, et al., 2000); automobile workers (Kim, 1999); hospital managers (Kacmar & Carlson, 1999); police officers (Koslowsky & Caspy, 1991). In the local context, recent studies were conducted among banking employees (Che Aniza, 2001; Hussain, 1999); Telekom employees (Sarminah, 2000); production workers (Lahai, 1997; Garib Singh, 1994) and youth leaders (Turiman, 1991).

Studies on commitment among teachers are also not few in numbers. Among the recent studies covered kindergarden teachers (Seifert & Atkinson, 1991); primary school teachers (Xin & MacMillan, 1999; Abdul Manaf, 1998); secondary school teachers (Darchan Singh, 1998; Shann, 1998; Burrows & Munday, 1996); primary and secondary school teachers

(Mueller, et al., 1999; Singh & Billingsley, 1998; Wu & Short, 1996); special and general educators (Littrell & Billingsley, 1994; Billingsley & Cross, 1992); and tertiary academic staff (Hartmann, 2000).

Limitations of Past Studies on Commitment

Based on the review on past studies of commitment, it implies that studies on commitment have been extensively conducted by previous researchers, both in the education and non-education settings, locally and internationally. Such extensive exploration of the commitment issue on a world-wide scale provided clear evidence that commitment has been a topic of increasing public and professional concern. However, an in-depth examination of past studies on commitment reviewed many research limitations in these studies.

Extensive Research on Organisational Commitment

One of the inherent limitations that have not failed to catch the researcher's attention was the intensity of research looking at commitment of employees towards the working organisation. Previous research examining on commitment, whether conducted in the international or local scene, were predominantly focused primarily on organisational commitment (Che Aniza, 2001; Mathieu, et al., 2000; Sarminah, 2000; Eby & Freeman, 1999; Gun, 1999; Hussain, 1999; Kacmar & Carlson, 1999; Razali, 1999a, 1999b; Azzat & Barcelona, 1997; Lahai, 1997; Tanakinjal, 1997; Azzat & Mohamad Salmi, 1996; Burrows & Munday, 1996; Garib Singh, 1994; Hart & Willower, 1994; Turiman, 1991). By looking into the context of employee's commitment to organisation, a great deal of knowledge about this type of commitment has been learnt today (Levy & William, 1998; Shore & Wayne, 1993). This knowledge would likely be applicable to organisations for many years to come. However, significantly limited number of studies investigating on professional commitment was conducted (Bergmann, et al., 2000; Meyer & Allen, 1997).

In the field of education, commitment to the teaching profession is becoming increasingly more important than organizational commitment or commitment to the employing school division. According to Mueller, et al. (1999), teaching represents an occupational labour market in which teachers are relatively free to move from school to school within a particular school district or to another district. This also reflects the same scenario in Malaysia. Due to the high mobility of teachers between schools, when they are not satisfied or lacking in commitment in a particular school, they might quit the employing school and opt for transfer to another school (it has been established in the preceding chapter that lack of commitment is associated with intention to quit and actual quitting). There is still hope of teachers gaining commitment in the new school. On the other hand, when teachers

are not committed to the profession, it can have a detrimental effect on the education system as a whole. First, quitting from the teaching profession can take place and it means wasted years and money spent in training colleges or universities to acquire valuable knowledge and skills. To the government, it is a lost of expertise and human resource and retraining and recruitment can be time consuming and financially costly.

Additionally, the main aim of teacher training is not to prepare teachers to serve and be loyal to a particular group of students or a particular school they are being put in. But training involves internalisation of values, norms or roles entailed in teaching to develop their total commitment to the teaching job, the students and to the teaching fields. This kind of commitment goes beyond the boundary of a school where ones happens to teach. It also means that one is committed to remain in teaching now and in the near future, whether that includes the school where the teacher currently practices. Therefore, commitment should not be confined to a particular school but should be extended to the overall teaching profession.

Furthermore, past studies have revealed that professional commitment is positively related to organisational commitment (Ali, 2002; Wallace, 1993; Billingsley & Cross, 1992). This implies that if teachers were not committed to the profession, it would be very unlikely for them to be committed to any school division that they were posted to. This finding again provides substantial evidence on the importance of professional commitment over organisational commitment.

Extensive Research on Uni-Dimensional Construct of Commitment

Literature review also indicated an imbalance in the attention given to studies on commitment. Most widely studies viewed commitment as a unidimensional construct with strong emphasis on affective commitment (Mathieu, et al., 2000; Somers & Birnbaum, 2000; Eby & Freeman, 1999; Mueller, et al., 1999; Burrows & Munday, 1996; Wu & Short, 1996; Littrell, et al., 1994; Billingsley & Cross, 1992). However, conceptualising commitment on a singular construct has been criticised as being too simplistic and therefore, should be abandoned (Benkhoff, 1997). This is because other researchers (Wong, et al., 1998; Meyer & Allen, 1997) have identified and tested different components of commitment, thereby casting doubt on the uni-dimensionality of the concept. For instance, Meyer and Allen (1997) argued that commitment could take different forms. According to them, commitment is a multidimensional construct which comprised of affective, continuance and normative commitment, and they admitted that research pertaining to the multidimensional construct of commitment is rather limited.

In the teaching profession, it would be potentially important to find out the different types of commitment that could be exhibited by the teachers in order to further comprehend the true nature of professional commitment so

that relevant strategies could be targeted to enhance their commitment to the profession.

Extensive Studies based on Western Contexts

Studies on commitment have been extensively conducted by past researchers, both in the teaching profession and non-teaching professions. However, most of these studies were conducted in the western countries. Due to lack of studies addressing the issue of commitment in Malaysia, it is questionable whether western findings can be applied in the non-western context, like Malaysia. The question of whether western frameworks, models and theories that have been derived in one country is applicable in multiple settings or applicable to one culture, has yet to be uncovered. Moreover, it has been argued that employee attitudes, beliefs and values vary across countries (Clark, 1990). For instance, people in the western countries have an individualistic orientation toward work whereas people in the Asian countries generally have a collective orientation (Greenberg & Baron, 2000). Therefore, more studies are needed to erase the doubt on the applicability of western studies in the Malaysian context.

Extensive Local Studies on Non-Teacher Commitment

Among the limited studies on commitment that were conducted locally, most of these studies investigated on a diverse professionals groups composing of banking employees (Che Aniza, 2001; Hussain, 1999); Telekom employees (Sarminah, 2000); production workers (Lahai, 1997; Garib Singh, 1994) and youth leaders (Turiman, 1991). Only few studies addressed the problem pertaining to commitment among teachers in the Malaysian context. Even more limited or possibly none of the published studies look into this issue among school teachers in the region of Sarawak. Due to this limitation, there is a need to conduct more studies to help fill the literature gap in this discipline.

Implications and Recommendations

In view of the importance of commitment in the teaching profession and its extensive coverage on both the local and international scenes, it is an issue that cannot be overlooked. Ideally, complete loyalty to the profession is warranted but the underlying question is 'Are teachers committed to the profession?' This issue still remains unclear as there have been no studies investigating on direct indices of commitment of these teachers in Sarawak. Although it has been consistently reported that teachers in this region were leaving and planning to leave their jobs coupled with reports that they were suffering from burnout and job dissatisfaction, all indicating that their commitment was questionable, these reports on lack of commitment have been based on theoretical linkages. The exact level of their commitment has yet to be investigated. Therefore, future researchers should acknowledge

this limitation and make a theoretical effort to conduct more commitment studies in order to contribute significantly to address this knowledge gap as well as to contribute to the established knowledge in this field. This added knowledge would serve as an important foundation for future researchers who are interested to investigate further into this construct.

Even though the evidence is strong for the existence of job dissatisfaction among teachers and they also indicated intention to quit their jobs, undocumented school records have shown that the turnover rate is very minimal. Therefore, the question as to their nature of involvement in the teaching profession is still unclear. Therefore, answers pertaining to the underlying forces that commit them to their profession must be addressed. However, past studies using a uni-dimensional construct of commitment failed to consider many factors that served as the driving force behind teachers' commitment. For example, a committed teacher besides being affectively committed to the profession, might be committed because the cost of leaving the profession is higher (continuance commitment) or that he is she is committed due to moral obligation to remain in the profession (normative commitment). Since, past studies have failed to address all the three aspects of commitment as they were more predominantly focused on a uni-dimensional aspect and also other researchers have provided evidence that commitment is a multi-dimensional construct, future researchers should investigate commitment using the multiple-component construct. Additionally, this type of study would be more comprehensive as it would be able to provide a deeper insight into the true nature of teacher's commitment towards the profession. This is because there are different components in commitment and each component is derived from different experiences, which is capable of bringing different implications to the education system. Until today, available data reporting on the multiple components of commitment are still very much lacking and inadequate. An improvement of the quality of data is needed to provide a rich source of information to relevant authorities who are concerned on the importance of instilling and promoting commitment among teachers. By exploring all the different components of commitment authorities concerned can also introduce intervening mechanisms to help address commitment-related problems which are found to be emerging in the educational system today.

Despite the plethora of studies on commitment on the world-wide scale, past studies on teacher commitment have been extensively focused on organisational commitment (school). Unfortunately, studies on professional commitment are still significantly limited. That means past studies have overlooked the significant role of professional commitment, which involves extending commitment beyond the boundary of a school. In the field of education, teachers are liable to serve in any schools at any time their service is needed. Hence, commitment should not be confined to a particular school but should be extended to the overall teaching profession.

Since there are significantly limited studies to measure the extent of the teacher's total commitment to the teaching profession, this construct requires further theoretical development and elaboration.

Additionally, studies on commitment have also been widely conducted among diverse professional groups but literature search reviews that only a few studies addressed commitment among teachers whereas no published studies were found that dealt specifically on the issue of commitment among teachers in Sarawak. Instead, numerous studies were conducted in the west. Although the debate continues on the applicability of western findings, not much is known as to whether their findings have cross-cultural validity. Therefore, the applicability of such findings still remains unclear, which makes it an important research agenda. Furthermore, in the absence of data reporting on the commitment of teachers in Sarawak, it would be a good move to conduct more studies that can contribute significantly towards filling the literature gap in view of the importance in building a strong and committed teaching force in Sarawak.

Conclusion

Commitment of the teaching workforce is particularly important in Sarawak. Their commitment is crucial as they are not only responsible in ensuring that they achieve the educational goals and mission, but equally important in their role in providing world-class quality education, and at the same time producing students who are well-equipped with the required skills to exploit the state's rich and abundant resources, to meet the needs of the rapidly developing industries as well as to help the state achieves a competitive edge in the challenging global market. Ultimately, the main objective is to speed up the development of the state in order to help the state realises the aspiration of becoming a developed state by the year 2020. Since a thorough search into the literature found that commitment studies are very limited, more studies should be conducted to address this missing link in the Sarawak education system.

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