

Teacher Retention Problem in Girls Primary Schools in Qatar

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Abstract

Qatar has recently faced a tremendous reform in education that requires changes in many domains and causes a lot of challenges. A very serious challenge is teachers' retention where many teachers tend to leave their schools looking for new jobs. In independent schools as well as governmental schools, teachers switch jobs and therefore schools suffer from teachers' shortage. This empirical study used interviews, surveys, and questionnaires to assess novice teachers as well as experienced teachers from both governmental and independent schools, examining the issues of teacher retention. This problem has risen to an alarming level that has to be considered and investigated. This paper explored the important factors that, as perceived by teachers, drive them to leave their profession.

In this study, we tried to collect as much data as possible to identify the main reasons behind the problem of teacher retention. This investigation will assist school leaders in defining the most important reasons behind teachers leaving their job. This may help them in identifying strategies to help retain teachers and encourage them to become valuable contributors in the school. Maintaining teachers who are capable in their positions builds sustainability in a school. Such sustainability will most likely, as research has shown, lead to a safer more secure student environment which helps raise student achievement.

This research was conducted to focus on the teacher retention problem in primary schools for girls in both independent and ministry schools in Qatar.

Introduction

"In discussing questions about supervision, teaching, and school improvement, as in measuring the coast of Britain, there is no certainty about how to arrive at an answer. The issue of effective schools highlights the human values that drive school decisions and actions."

(Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon, 2007, p. 93)

Teachers are the driving force and the success indicator of any educational organization around the world. Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon described the importance of teachers to school improvement and highlighted the human value and its contribution to school actions and therefore student achievement. A school could run without good curriculum if there is a capable teacher to modify it and make it compatible to students' needs and the most modern

techniques. A school with excellent curriculum and no capable teachers to deliver it is like a nice looking Lexus without a driver. The Lexus will always be attractive to look at but not useful without the driver and so will a school curriculum without competent teachers, it will not be useful and will result in school failure eventually.

Research has shown that an enormous number of teachers are leaving their jobs and/or moving to other jobs. This problem has risen to an alarming level that has to be considered and investigated. In this study, we tried to collect as much data as possible to identify the main and most important reasons behind the problem of teacher retention. This kind of study will assist school leaders in identifying and focusing on the strongest causes of teacher withdrawals. We can then perhaps help propose techniques schools can use to motivate their teachers to stay. Teacher retention will foster a stable environment which in turn will lead to higher student achievement.

Literature Review

Before we began distributing surveys, a review of relevant studies in the areas of teachers' retention in schools was undertaken. Fifteen studies were found but only eight of them could be useful and successfully applied to our model. Some of these studies provided findings and factors that helped in identifying some relevant issues concerning the understanding of the teacher retention problem around the world. This may assist us when studying the condition in Qatar.

In examining issues affecting teacher retention in the studies found, common issues have been raised, investigated and discussed. Salaries are among those issues and are considered to be the most crucial element in teacher retention. A symposium of The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future and NCTAF State Partners in 2002 stated that "There is

substantial evidence that wages are at least as important to teachers in their decision to quit teaching as they are to workers in other occupations. Teachers are more likely to quit when they work in districts with lower wages and when their salaries are low relative wage opportunities.” (p.10). This idea of salaries is also discussed by Cockburn (1999) who explained that “In terms of understanding teachers’ needs it is also important to recognize that financial incentives may have to play a more major role in recruitment.”(p.231) and “In terms of recruitment some of the teachers also considered that attitudes towards the profession were important. It has been suggested that attitudes towards teachers and their salary levels are inter-related.”(p.232). However, as Han found in his study of the impact of teacher’s salary upon retention and recruitment (1994) that:

"Thus salary level likely is not the primary reason why potential teachers would choose teaching as a career. The most important reason respondents gave for wanting to enter teaching was not the salary expected but a strong sense of vocation such as desire to work with children, interest in the subject they would teach, or a desire to be engage in a job that they feel would be socially worth while.”(p.11)

Another issue highlighted in the studies is teaching and family based decisions regarding female teachers. Smethem discussed in her study of *Retention and Intention in Teaching Careers* about the Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT) that "NQT’s projections of career trajectories in five years were divided between promotion in teaching, classroom teaching, leaving teaching and having a family. The choice for women between family and career resurfaced 'Depends if we can start a family. If yes, probably part-time main scale. If no, hopefully head of year' (Anna)" (2007, p.474). She also concluded by saying that

"Motivation and intention to remain teaching tended to be reduced by negative experience of workload, stress, pupil behaviour, relationships with colleagues or school culture. Conversely, positive early experience (in particular encouragement, positive feedback and a sense of success) was found to increase or even instill a sense of vocation and bolster positive intention.”(Smethem, 2007, p.474)

From that we can conclude that personal circumstances like starting a family has a big effect on working women and since teaching is a career chosen by women generally, it makes teacher retention a problem for many schools.

Clayton and Schoonmaker (2007) also discussed how school conditions affect teacher retention in that "To be effective, support must develop habits of doing and being that allow such teachers to live out their motivation to be caring teachers, while serious attention is given to creating and sustaining the necessary school conditions to support their ongoing learning."(p.262)

In an online chat to discuss the effectiveness of teacher pay incentives, Laine, the director of the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, also explained that

“Retention strategies are often not paired appropriately with recruitment strategies, and teachers who leave high need schools cite the lack of supportive leadership as their number 1 reason for their decision. Overall working conditions, a supportive mentor and school leader, inadequate preparation for the challenges posed by different learning styles are all issues that need to be addressed in high need schools if financial incentives are to have the desired effect on recruitment and retention.”

(Education Week, 2006, n.d)

We can also draw from that the importance of the school climate or culture on the teacher retention problem. Along with the positive school culture there should be supportive leadership that encourages teachers and foster an environment of stewardship of the school in the hearts of every member of the staff.

In addition, many aspects have been studied which appear to play a critical role in teacher retention. They are considered to encourage teachers to remain in their professions. A.D. Cockburn (2000) argued that” The prime reason the teachers appeared to enjoy the job the opportunity to work with children and to nurture their learning.” and “ The second facet of the job which contributed to teachers’ enjoyment was their relationship with

colleagues.”(p.233) This opens the door for an important factor that is essential for teacher retention which is collaboration. In his book *The Principal as Curriculum Leader*, Glatthorn described the importance of collaboration and linked it to a positive school culture.

"Collaboration is the other critical element in the school's culture. The principal should establish the importance of working together in a cooperative manner, should establish conditions that support collaboration, should model collaboration, and should reward teachers who cooperate." (2000, p. 96)

Methodology and Procedures

This study of teachers' views on retention was conducted during March to May 2008. Those views were obtained through two surveys carried out by regular site visits to four primary girls' school, two of which were ministry of education and two were independent schools spread over a wide geographical area of Doha and the suburban.

Prior to the teachers' surveys, interviews with the four school principals (see appendix A) were conducted. This provided a set of questions on the problem of teachers' retention and their view as leaders regarding this issue. It is believed that school leaders have a deep impact on teachers and in promoting a good and healthy environment for teaching. D. Sparks (2002) argues that "Principals play an essential role in establishing a school culture that promotes quality teaching" (Chapter 7-5). The interview questions looked at general information like how many teachers they had the previous year and how many of those teachers were still teaching in the current year, what circumstances that might lead them to dismiss a teacher, what incentives their school offer teachers, what the hiring procedures at their school are and who makes those hiring decisions. The purpose of such interview was to identify the management style of each principal and to what extent this style could affect teacher retention in their school. In addition, it is also essential to recognize if there is a direct relationship

between teacher's retention and the principal when identifying the style of management. Evans (2001) stresses this idea when he explains that "institutional leadership and management can do much to foster positive job-related attitudes by helping to create and sustain work contexts that are conducive to high morale, job satisfaction and motivation" (Barmby, 2006, p. 252).

During the course of the interviews, a survey was distributed equally to 80 teachers from the four schools under study (see appendix B). This first survey was used as an initial step to check for the interview data and prompts for further information to be placed in a second and final survey for the teachers.

Teachers were selected at random by the principals of the schools so they were all teachers at the primary level. Few details from the first survey including positions, total years of experience in the job, years of experience in the current school and their education level were required for the purposes of authentication only. The first survey was used to collect data on the reasons the teachers choose teaching profession and if it was their choice or not, reasons that force them to leave their teaching job and/or keep them in their jobs. Moreover, it was made to highlight major factors of teachers' retention that were explored and devised into the second survey.

The aim of the study was to investigate and represent 200 teachers which are close to the teacher population of the four schools, with the sample weighted out evenly. To get five percent error and 90-95% confidence, we needed to conduct the questionnaire on at least 120 teachers which meant 40-proportion teachers in each of the four schools in order to make this study more valid and meaningful. Our intention was to have sample numbers for teachers inside and outside Doha from which meaningful views could be collected regarding the issue

of teacher retention and to highlight particular issues that were important for teachers and other educationists in Qatar. The sample of teachers was drawn from two Ministry of Education primary girls' schools and two Independent primary girls' schools whose levels are from grade one to grade six.

The second survey was distributed to 140 teachers from the same schools. Only 130 of them participated and the surveys were successfully completed. This is a great figure since the amount of surveys needed to get five percent error was 120. We then used the Delphi technique a method used to prioritize needs developed by the Rand Corporation. (Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon, 2007, p. 221) was used in the second survey. This technique will assist us in prioritizing the reasons of teachers leaving their jobs in order to help school leaders focus their efforts when dealing with teacher retention. Since the two surveys were given to teachers during different times, the data of the first survey was precisely summarized and possible reasons for teachers leaving their jobs were identified. The results of the first survey were used to develop the second survey that summarized the reasons that made teachers leave their jobs for teachers to prioritize them starting with the most important to the least.

Results/Findings

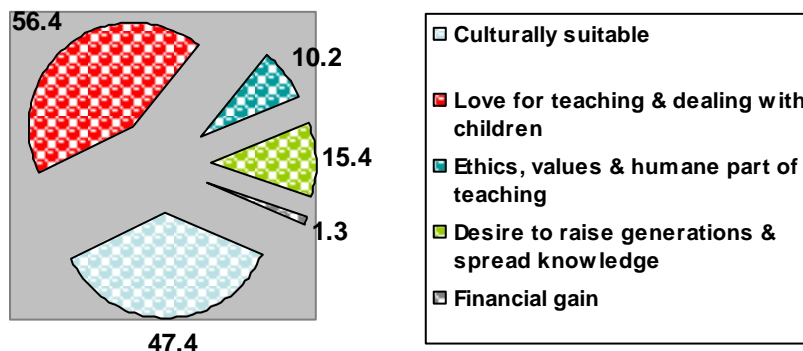
It is important to point out that results of the interviews conducted with the four school principals were all positive which meant that the school leaders have all exercised a democratic leadership style. This judgement was based on the information they provided us with in the interviews. The ratio of the total number of teachers to the number of teachers that stayed with the school for this year gave us an indication that all schools kept a high percentage of their staff for the next year. The other questions about reasons why they would dismiss teachers, the steps of hiring teachers and who makes those decisions also convinced

us that they were all democratic leaders from the language they used to answer the question, such as "I wouldn't dismiss a teacher except after I ran out of ways to support her professionally" and steps to hiring teachers included "Initial interview followed by a mini lesson then a final interview." When the principals were asked about who makes those hiring decisions most of them agrees that it was "A team consisting of the coordinator, the principal and the vice principals" All of which led us to believe that the school leadership environment were all stable.

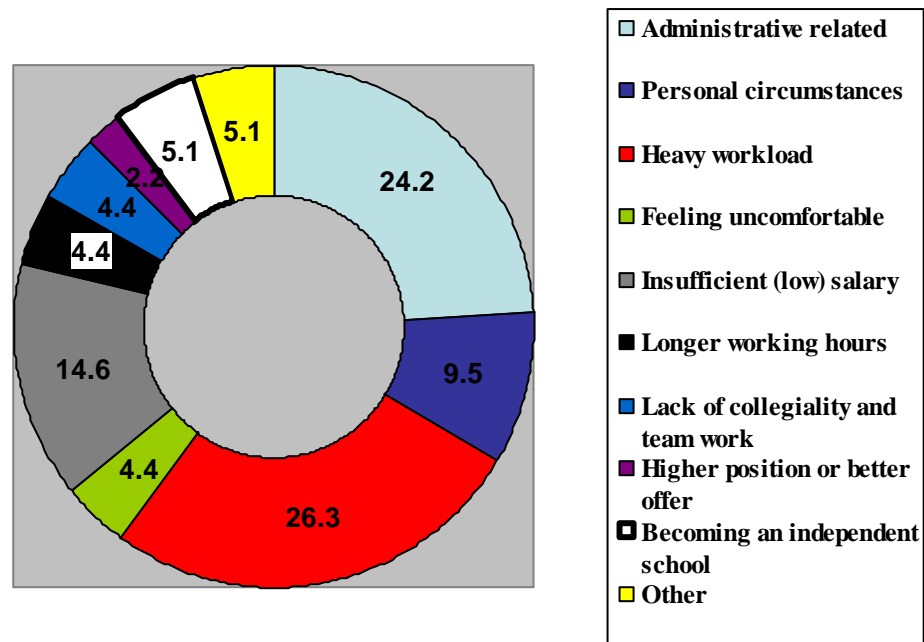
After analyzing the first survey of 78 teachers, we found that the majority of the teachers, 47.4%, had between 1-5 years of experience and 80.8% of those teachers had their experience in that school in particular as identified in the following table:

Years of experience	Experience in the profession	Experience in their current schools
Less than one year	Nil	3.8%
1-5 years	47.4%	80.8%
6-8 years	23.1%	3.8%
9-15 years	21.8%	11.5%
16-25 years	7.7%	Nil

The survey also asked about reasons for choosing teaching as a profession to identify if the teachers surveyed were all in the teaching profession willingly and this give credibility to their answers to the final survey. The results are shown in the following chart:



Teachers were also asked if teaching in that particular school was their choice and 76.9% replied by yes it was their choice. This again gives credibility to their answers later on since most of them are serious about their jobs. When they were asked the most important question from which we used answers to make up the final survey that is "What might persuade you to leave your job?" 137 possible replies were given and were summarized in the chart below:



As outlined in the chart, the reasons identified by many teachers leading them to leaving their jobs were largely about heavy workload, insufficient (low) salaries, administrative related (this included the leadership's lack of appreciation, being controlling and lack of understanding) and finally lack of collegiality and teamwork. The rest of the identified reasons were minor but we still had to include them in our next survey as part of the reasons teachers would have to put in order of importance.

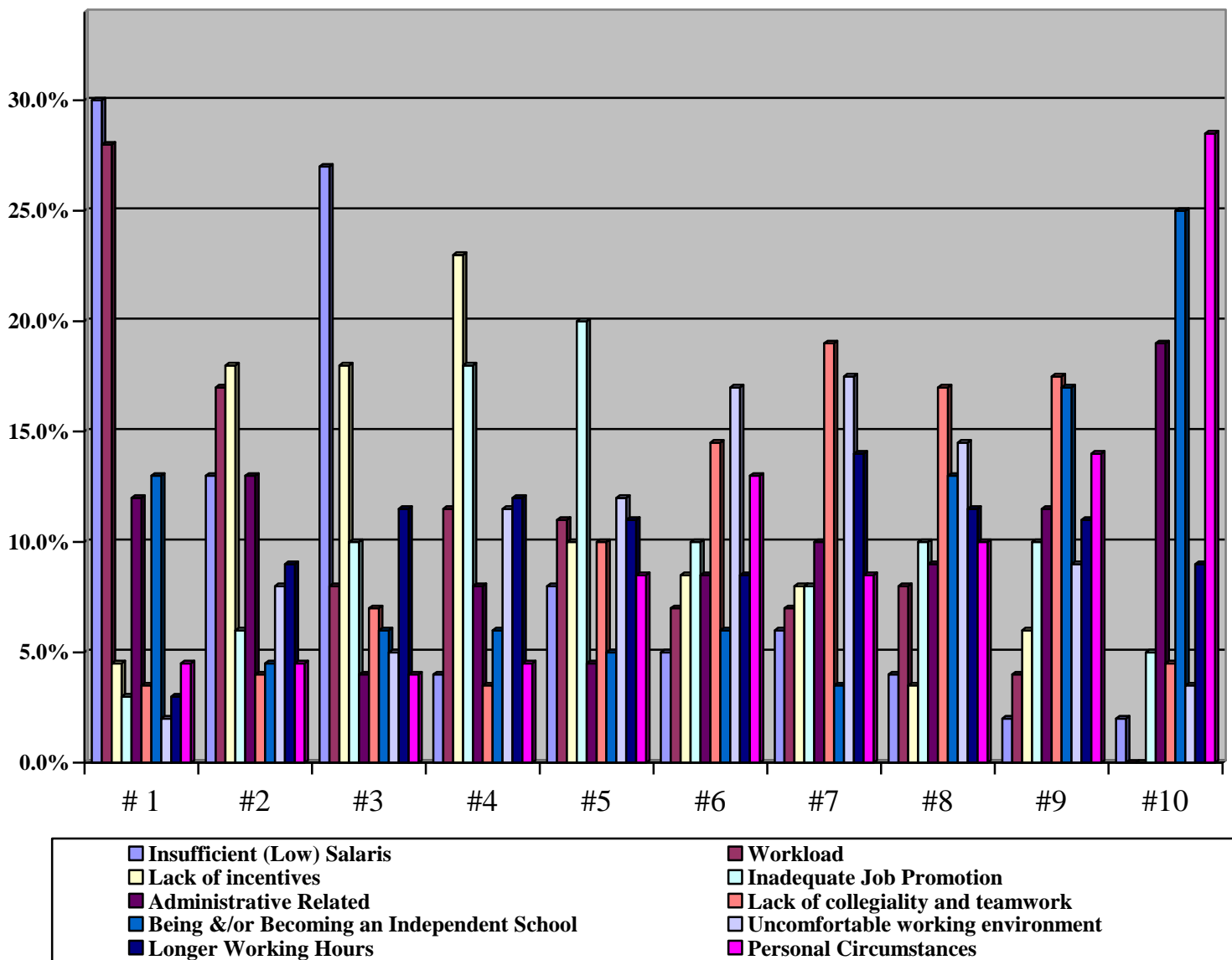
The final results of the second survey were expected, but did not quite match what we had initially seen the results of our first surveys indicated above. The number one choice of reason for teachers leaving their jobs was insufficient (low) salaries at 30% and the second most popular reason as identified by the majority of teachers was workload at 28%. The next

most important reason was lack of incentives where 23% of teachers believed it was important. The results are outlined in the table and clearly indicated in the chart below:

Teacher Retention Problem in Girls Primary School in Qatar
Results from the Dolphi Technique Survey

Reason/Rank	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10
Insufficient (Low)Salaries	30%	13%	27%	4%	8%	5%	6%	4%	2%	2%
Workload	28%	17%	8%	11.5%	11%	7%	7%	8%	4%	--
Lack of Incentives	4.5%	18%	18%	23%	10%	8.5%	8%	3.5%	6%	--
Inadequate job promotion	3%	6%	10%	18%	20%	10%	8%	10%	10%	5%
Administrative Related	12%	13%	4%	8%	4.5%	8.5%	10%	9%	11.5%	19%
Lack of Collegiality and teamwork	3.5%	4%	7%	3.5%	10%	14.5%	19%	17%	17.5%	4.5%
Being &/or Becoming an I.S.	13%	4.5%	6%	6%	5%	6%	3.5%	13%	17%	25%
Uncomfortable Working Environment	2%	8%	5%	11.5%	12%	17%	17.5%	14.5%	9%	3.5%
Longer Working Hours	3%	9%	11.5%	12%	11%	8.5%	14%	11.5	11%	9%
Personal Circumstances	4.5%	4.5%	4%	4.5%	8.5%	13%	8.5%	10%	14%	28.5%

Teacher Retention Problem in Girls Primary Schools in Qatar Results from the Dolphi Technique Survey



Discussion

Data gathered from first survey regarding the teacher retention problem indicated that teachers identified ten reasons as major consequences causing them to leave their jobs. When asked to prioritize it in the second survey, we found that the most probable causes driving teachers to leave their jobs were insufficient or low salaries in the first place, followed by

high workload at the second then lack of incentives at the third place. The next reason as per the prioritization of teachers was inadequate job promotion and then administrative related.

Now that we identified the most probable reasons prioritized from most important to least, we must use this information to figure out solutions to overcome them. To answer to those probable reasons we should assist school leaders with teacher retention problem in the most important areas identified. If insufficient or low salaries are the biggest problem, then school leaders must think of ways to help them in raising staff salaries would be the ideal idea everywhere except in the Qatari context. Qatar's Ministry of Education (MoE) has fixed salaries for teachers that are only subjected to a small percentage of annual raise if any. The situation is similar in Independent Schools (I.S) since schools should set their budgets according to unified accounting policy which restricts I.S operators from raising salaries. If more money is allocated for the salaries fund, it would affect other school funds. Aside from that is the problem of new IS opening and offering higher salaries for teachers. We believe that the Supreme Education Council should be less restrictive on schools regarding the distribution of their budgets so that they have the freedom to allocate their money. We also recommend that SEC should put a limit line for Non-Qatari teachers' salaries so that there is lower difference between schools.

The second and third most important causes of the teacher retention problem are interconnected. Higher workload is inevitable in both types of schools since teaching is an enormous responsibility and requires a lot of effort. Incentives however are not. School leaders could try to provide an environment rich with incentives for those hard working teachers. Incentives such as a day off from work for putting in extra hours in a school event, giving them a month's bonus on their salaries for the hard work they have put into improving students are all techniques used to motivate teachers. Even providing staff with teacher only

days to have professional development that is rich and meaningful or designating one of those days for fun activities for staff is another way. All of those suggestions can make workload from extra activities seem less than usual since it is appropriately appreciated. Some other workload solutions include providing substitute teachers to take the place of a teacher while she attends professional development trainings. Giving teachers less administrative duties also helps relieve them from some of their workload pressure, but this does not mean they will not be contributing to administrative related or extra-curricular activities and events.

This study not only highlighted some of the issues causing teachers to leave their jobs, but it prioritized it to give us the areas we should focus on rather than trying to deal with all of the issues regarding teacher withdrawals all at once. It is important to mention however that we must be careful when generalizing those findings since they might differ from those for secondary and preparatory schools as well as for boys schools. There was also a concern regarding whether teachers answered this survey in groups or individually. If in groups then, since peer pressure and/or conformity could have skewed some of the answers and therefore the results. An attempt to control this problem could have been asking teachers to do the questionnaire in a room all at once. However, the nature of action research is that it is set in an environment where control is minimal. It is also important to emphasize that this study was an initial attempt to find out some of the problems in teacher retention in general and that further studies to compare results from MoE to results from Independent schools is another important issue worthy of investigation.

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Appendix (A)

Teacher Retention Problem in Girls Primary Schools

School Name: _____ Interview with: _____

1. How many teachers did you have last year? _____
2. How many of those teachers are still teaching this year? _____
3. In your opinion, why do teachers leave their current positions at the school?

4. What circumstances might lead you to dismiss a teacher?

5. What incentives does your school offer teachers?

6. What are the hiring procedures at your school?

7. Who makes those hiring decisions?

Management style:

- Authoritarian Democratic Sloppy

Appendix (B)

استبيان حول

Teacher Retention Problem in Girls Primary Schools

مشكلة بقاء المعلمة في المدارس الإبتدائية للبنات

Teacher retention is a developing problem facing schools world wide. This questionnaire is an attempt by the researchers to diagnose reasons why teachers tend to leave their positions and look for other jobs. This interview and questionnaire's content will only be used for research purposes. Any information disclosed will be strictly confidential and your right to express yourself will be protected and treated with full confidentiality. Please feel free to express your opinions and suggestions when answering the questions below.

إن مشكلة تنقل المعلم في مهنته هي مشكلة متزايدة النمو تواجهها معظم المدارس في العالم. هذا الاستبيان هو محاولة لتشخيص المشكلة والأسباب التي قد تجعل المعلمين يميلون إلى ترك وظائفهم والبحث عن وظائف أخرى. سيستخدم محتوى هذا الاستبيان لأغراض بحثية فقط وأية معلومة مدرجة فيه ستكون سرية للغاية كما أن حقكم في التعبير عن آرائكم سيكون تحت حماية وسرية تامة. الرجاء التعبير عن آرائكم واقتراحاتكم بكل حرية عن طريق الإجابة على الأسئلة التالية.

School Name اسم المدرسة : _____ Position الوظيفة : _____

Years of Experience سنوات الخبرة : _____

Years of service at the school سنوات الخبرة في المدرسة الحالية : _____

Education Level المستوى التعليمي :

- High school مرحلة ثانوية
- Diploma in دبلوم في _____
- Degree in درجة البكالوريوس في _____
- Masters in درجة الماجستير في _____
- PhD in درجة الدكتوراه في _____

Why did you choose the teaching profession?

لم اخترت مهنة التدريس؟

Was teaching in this school (gender and level) your choice? Yes نعم No كلا

هل كان التدريس في المدرسة الحالية بطبيعة مرحلتها وجنس طلابها من اختيارك؟

Have you ever seriously considered leaving your current position? Yes نعم No كلا

For what reasons? هل فكرت قط وبشكل جدي بترك الوظيفة الحالية؟ في حالة الإجابة بنعم، ما هي الأسباب؟

If you left your current position, would you seek a new position? Yes نعم No كلا

في حالة تركك لوظيفتك الحالية، هل ستبحث عن وظيفة جديدة؟

If so, what position would you seek? Why? في حالة الإجابة بنعم، ماهي الوظيفة التي ترغبين بالبحث عنها؟ ولماذا؟

If you want to stay in your present position, what factors encourage you to do so? (What is it about your current job that makes you want to stay in this position?)

إن كنت ترغبين بالبقاء في وظيفتك الحالية، ماهي العوامل التي تشجعك على البقاء؟
(ماهي الأمور التي تجديها في وظيفتك والتي تجعلك ترغبين في الحفاظ عليها؟)

What might persuade you to leave your current job? ماالأمور التي قد تفودك لترك الوظيفة؟

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us and express your feelings in answering this questionnaire. We again would like to assure you that your disclosed information will be treated with full confidentiality. You reserve the right to find out the outcome of this research upon completion if you wish.

نشكركم على وقتكم الذي قضيتموه في التعبير عن آرائكم القيمة حول بنود هذا الاستبيان. نود أن نؤكد لكم مرة أخرى أن المعلومات التي تفضلتم بها سنعامل بسرية تامة. كما أن لديكم الأحقية في معرفة نتائج هذا البحث بعد الانتهاء منه في حالة رغبتكم بذلك.

Appendix (C)

Teacher Retention Problem in Girls Primary Schools

مشكلة بقاء المعلمة في المدارس الابتدائية للبنات

Directions: The following are possible reasons causing teachers to leave their positions as identified by a number of teachers in four different girls' primary schools surveyed earlier. Please prioritize this list by placing the number 1 next to the most important reason in your opinion, 2 next to the second most important reason and so on, until the ten items listed below are all ranked.

توجيهات: فيما يلي أسباب متوقع أن تكون عوامل تدفع المعلمات لترك وظائفهم كما حدد عدد من المعلمات العاملات في أربعة مدارس ابتدائية للبنات تم استبيانها مسبقاً. الرجاء تصنيف هذه القائمة عن طريق وضع الرقم 1 بجانب أهم سبب من وجهة نظرك و2 بجانب السبب الذي يليه بالأهمي حتي يتم تصنيف العشر أسباب المدرجة في القائمة أدناه.

- _____ أسباب متعلقة بالإدارة (متحكمة- كثيرة النقد- غير متفاهمة) (Administrative related (controlling, un-appreciating, not understanding)
- _____ عدم وجود أو قلة الحوافز (Lack or inadequate incentives)
- _____ رواتب متدنية أو غير كافية (Insufficient (low) salaries)
- _____ ضغط العمل وكثرة المسؤوليات (Heavy work load)
- _____ أسباب شخصية (السفر- المرض- التزامات عائلية- أسباب طارئة وغيره) (Personal circumstances (Travel, illness, family, emergencies and so on)
- _____ كونها أو تحويلها إلى مدرسة مستقلة (Being or becoming an Independent School)
- _____ بيئة عمل غير مريحة (Uncomfortable working environment)
- _____ عدم وجود روح العمل الجماعي أو الزمالة (Lack of team work and/or collegiality)
- _____ ساعات عمل طويلة (Longer working hours)
- _____ عدم توفر ترقية وظيفية كافية (Inadequate job promotion)

Thank you for taking the time to rank the reasons outlined in this survey. We again would like to assure you that your disclosed information will be treated with full confidentiality. You reserve the right to find out the outcome of this research upon completion if you wish.

نشكركم على وقتكم الذي قضيتموه في تصنيف بنود هذا الاستبيان. نود أن نؤكد لكم مرة أخرى أن المعلومات التي تفضلتم بها ستعامل بسرية تامة. كما أن لديكم الأحقية في معرفة نتائج هذا البحث بعد الانتهاء منه في حالة رغبتكم بذلك.