

Foreign Language Teacher Attrition and Retention Research: A Meta-analysis

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Abstract

Across English-speaking countries, there is an ongoing shortage of foreign language teachers. Promoting the retention of foreign language teachers in the profession for the long term is one of the most strategically and financially viable ways to address this problem. This article reports on a qualitative meta-analysis study of the international research on foreign language teacher attrition and retention. Data analysis reveals seven overarching themes that are relevant to the discussion: teacher education, transition into teaching, teacher knowledge and skills, workplace and employment factors, value and belonging, supportive workplace relationships, and teacher personality traits. On top of the already considerable demands placed on all educators teaching in modern classrooms, foreign language teachers also often have to contend with a lack of value for foreign language education, and a resulting lack of “space” in schools (curriculum space, physical space, and emotional space). Important steps toward addressing foreign language teacher attrition include giving more attention to challenging the negative perceptions of foreign language education and the development of substantive policies that ensure adequate space for foreign language education in schools.

Introduction

Learning languages is widely acknowledged to have numerous academic, cognitive, and social benefits for individuals (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2017). In an increasingly mobile world in which economies transcend national borders, the ability to engage with and in the languages and cultures of the world is viewed by many governments as a valuable commodity for

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the economic prosperity of nations (Grin, 2002). Accordingly, English-speaking countries have been working toward improving and expanding foreign language programs in their schools in response to the rapidly changing world and the changing needs of their citizens.

However, in many educational jurisdictions, language education is negatively impacted by a shortage of foreign language teachers. In the United States, the shortage has been reported to be worse than that seen in special education, mathematics, and science, all of which also face difficulties in filling vacancies (Murphy, DeArmand, & Guin, 2003). A recent national report found that 44 states and the District of Columbia reported difficulties finding enough teachers to meet foreign language curriculum demands—more than any other subject—and this has led to program cuts and reductions (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2017). A shortage of foreign language teachers is also seen in Canada, particularly to meet the demands of increased interest in French and French immersion programs in recent years (Rushowy, 2015).

From the context of the United States and Canada, a review of the literature on foreign language teacher supply shows that there are seven factors associated with the shortage: teacher retirements, career attrition, increased student enrollments, legislation, personality/ vocational fit, one's sense of efficacy in teaching foreign languages, and perceptions of teaching (Swanson, 2012b). Noting the important role that foreign language education plays in many schools, it is vital to improve the supply of foreign language teachers, who are arguably the “single most important controllable variable in successful language learning” (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 28).

Retaining teachers in the field is just one way of improving teacher supply, but it is a particularly important area of investigation for several reasons. First, there are strategic reasons. Research shows that “the most important element of teacher supply for any given year is the retention of teachers from the previous year” (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2005, p. 34). Second, there are financial reasons. Barnes, Crowe, and Schaefer (2007) reported that retaining teachers is potentially the most cost effective way to build supply, as the costs involved in replacing teachers far outweigh those needed to retain them. In the United States alone, teacher attrition costs school districts \$2.4 billion each year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). When extrapolated to a global level, the cost becomes astronomical at a time when much of the developed world is struggling to retain its teachers, particularly those in the early stages of their careers (Gray & Taie, 2015; OECD, 2013). The loss of a single foreign language teacher represents additional costs to school districts already on tight budgets, but it also compromises students in terms of their academic achievement (Armstrong & Rogers, 1997) and cognitive gains (Stewart, 2005).

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Data on the attrition rates of foreign language teachers are scarce, but what is available shows that attrition is a serious problem that needs to be addressed as part of any attempts to thwart the teacher shortage. In the United States, *The Georgia Public P-12 Education Workforce Status Report 2015* showed that “attrition rates of mathematics and foreign language teachers are highest among all high school subject areas,” with rates at around 44 percent after five years (Stephens, Hall, & McCampbell, 2015). In the United Kingdom, early-career mathematics, science, and foreign language teachers have above average leaving rates in the first five years (Worth & De Lazzari, 2017). In Australia, where data on teacher exits are not routinely available, a commissioned but unreleased report found that foreign language teachers experienced attrition at a rate 10 percent higher than the general teaching population (Rix, 1999). While the study is dated, there have been no discernible improvements concerning the issues that it raised in the intervening years. Anecdotal evidence also “suggests that [foreign] language teachers suffer rates of attrition from the teaching profession considerably higher than those in nearly all other Key Learning Areas” (Australian Language and Literacy Council [ALLC], 1996, p. 24), with many examples of teachers moving out of foreign language teaching and into other discipline areas (de Kretser & Spence-Brown, 2010; Mason, 2010, 2015). This constitutes a hidden attrition, because such losses are not noted in teacher exit statements, nor are they visible in general teacher attrition studies, because the teachers remain in the education system.

Addressing foreign language teacher attrition requires a more comprehensive understanding of why some foreign language teachers remain in the field for decades, while others leave after a short period. While some foreign language positions are threatened by program cuts, this study is concerned with voluntary attrition. The author is interested in why some teachers *choose* to leave their careers, placing strain on teacher supply when a position is otherwise available. For this purpose, the researcher conducted a meta-analysis of the international literature in the field of teacher attrition and retention as it pertains specifically to teachers of foreign languages other than English. Meta-analysis studies and other forms of systematic review have already been conducted for studies of general teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015), early career teacher attrition (Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012), and special education teacher attrition (Billingsley, 2004). However, there is a dearth of such studies regarding foreign language teacher attrition. Foreign language teachers are a group that is largely ignored in educational research (Endicott, 2011), and so this study gives further attention to an under-researched population of teachers.

The researcher focuses on foreign language teachers in six English-speaking countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Despite their unique historical, political, and linguistic contexts, these countries share important similarities. First, they have been collectively referred to

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as the *Anglobubble*, defined as an area of English linguistic and cultural hegemony, permeated by a misguided belief that it is “only natural that everything should happen in English and should logically be experienced and understood in English” (Hajek, 2014, para. 3). Second, they are each making efforts to develop and expand their policies and programs in foreign language education (Australian Government, 2013; Department of Education [UK], 2012; East, Chung, & Arkininstall, 2012; Duncan, 2010). Finally, and important for this study, the widespread and sustainable success of foreign language programs and policies in these countries is being threatened by a chronic shortage of foreign language teachers (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2011; Friedman, 2015; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2016a; McElroy, 2015; Ratcliffe, 2013; Swanson, 2013).

Three research questions guided this study: (1) How is foreign language teacher attrition and retention being studied globally? (2) Which overarching themes from the meta-analysis appear to have an impact on foreign language teacher attrition and retention? and (3) What, if any, are the challenges that are specific to foreign language teachers? The answers to these questions may provide insights into the specific challenges that are facing foreign language teachers in English-speaking countries, thus helping to work toward the development of discipline-specific approaches for curbing attrition.

Method

A qualitative meta-analysis, the systematic analysis of studies that focus on the same general research topic, was used to answer the research questions. The purpose of analyzing the research literature was to provide a comprehensive description and synthesis of the field of research, and to translate the results into new conceptualizations. It also involved an examination of the methodological approaches used in the field and an “assessment of the influence of the method(s) of investigation on findings” (Timulak, 2009, p. 591).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Included for analysis in this study were peer-reviewed and published empirical research studies published between 2000 and 2016 that directly investigated the career attrition and/or retention of foreign language teachers in predominantly English-speaking countries. For the purpose of this study, a foreign language teacher is defined as one who teaches one or more foreign languages other than English as part of his/her teaching duties in primary/elementary and high/secondary schools. The study excludes educators teaching in universities, and teachers of English as a Second Language, both of whom have their own separate and unique challenges. All studies on foreign language teacher attrition were considered, including those that employed qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, a typical feature of qualitative meta-analysis studies (Timulak, 2009).

Procedures

In order to locate as many studies as possible, searches were conducted of the following electronic research databases: *Social Sciences Citation Index*, *JStor*, *Educational Resources Information Center*, and *Web of Science*. These databases

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were selected as they include a comprehensive range of scholarly journals that cover the geographic areas under investigation as well as the relevant fields of education, languages, and humanities. Multiple searches were conducted of each database using different combinations of the search terms *second, foreign, language, teacher, attrition, retention, turnover, and career path*. Additionally, reference lists of studies that reviewed teacher attrition in other populations were read in an attempt to identify any references to studies of foreign language teachers (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006; Long, McKenzie-Robblee, Schaefer, Steeves, Wnuk, Pinnegar, & Clandinin, 2012; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015). Finally, the reference lists of all retrieved studies were reviewed in an attempt to identify additional literature.

Sample

After applying the aforementioned inclusion and exclusion criteria to the search result outputs, 10 articles were selected for analysis, presented in Table 1. The studies were conducted in four countries: Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. No studies were found from New Zealand or Ireland. Each study is listed in chronological order and has been given an ID number (S1 = study 1, S2 = study 2, and so forth).

Table 1. Studies of foreign language teacher attrition and/or retention, 1997-2016

#	Year	Author/s	Publication	Title	Country
S1	2000	Wilkerson	<i>Foreign Language Annals</i>	“Attrition of foreign language teachers: Workplace realities”	United States
S2	2001	Brown	<i>Cambridge Journal of Education</i>	“Mentoring and the retention of newly qualified language teachers”	United Kingdom
S3	2009	Ewart	<i>Canadian Journal of Education</i>	“Retention of the new teachers in minority French and French Immersion programs in Manitoba”	Canada
S4	2010	Mason	<i>Babel</i>	“Language teacher: To be or not to be”	Australia
S5	2010a	Swanson	<i>Hispania</i>	“Teacher efficacy and attrition: Helping students at introductory levels of language instruction appears critical”	United States

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S6	2010	Swanson & Huff	<i>The Rural Educator</i>	“The relationship of Georgia’s Rural Foreign Language Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy to Teacher Attrition”	United States
S7	2012a	Swanson	<i>Canadian Modern Language Review</i>	“Second/Foreign language teacher efficacy and its relationship to professional attrition”	United States & Canada
S8	2012b	Swanson	<i>Language Teaching Research</i>	“The congruence of vocational interests and the workplace environment: Reducing the language teacher shortage”	United States & Canada
S9¹	2015	Mason	<i>New Zealand Language Teacher</i>	“‘Hey, I’m a real teacher!’ The value of language teachers and the role of Non-Contact Time in Queensland primary schools”	Australia
S10¹	2016b	Mason & Poyatos Matas	<i>Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education</i>	“Social capital: a vital ingredient for retaining foreign language teachers”	Australia

¹These two studies involved the same participants

Analysis

The researcher began by reading and inspecting the sample for relevant data. An important feature of meta-analysis is the appraisal of studies according to their methodological approaches. During the analysis period, information such as conceptual frameworks, sampling methods, data collection and analysis methods, quality controls, and research limitations were noted. While there are a variety of approaches to synthesizing study findings, a common feature is that “they utilize a flexible analytical strategy, which is based on comparison, abstraction, observation of similarities and differences among the original studies, while trying to retain contextual influences and detail in the findings” (Timulak, 2013, p. 12). The researcher used an iterative process of coding and analysis to generate grounded theory, which involved “breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 67).

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Findings

Research Question One

With respect to the first research question regarding how foreign language teacher attrition and retention is being studied globally, the researcher investigated each study's research design in terms of its goals, sampling methods and participants, data collection and analysis methods, and any conceptual frameworks informing the study. The collation and analysis of these data revealed that although all studies were concerned with investigating the attrition or retention of foreign language teachers, there was considerable variety in who was being studied, and how they were being studied.

The studies' researchers adopted qualitative (S1, S2, S4), quantitative (S5, S6, S7, S8) and mixed-methods approaches (S3, S9, S10) to data collection and analysis. Data were collected using interviews, surveys, questionnaires, or a combination thereof. There was an inclination toward cross-sectional design, with the exception of Brown (2001) (S2), who collected data from new teachers at the end of the first term, and again at the end of their first year of teaching. There is a mix of exploratory and conceptually-driven research. Exploratory studies aimed to examine retention from a broad perspective to provide insights and support wider understanding (S3, S4), while others explored specific factors drawn from the wider literature on teacher attrition, in the case of workplace realities (S1), and mentoring (S2). The issue of language teacher attrition and retention was also investigated through various conceptual frameworks, such as self-efficacy (S5, S6, S7), vocational congruence (S8), and social capital (S9, S10).

Sample sizes ranged from 14 to 1,065, with an average of 265 participants, with studies involving either current foreign language teachers (S2, S3, S5, S6, S7, S8), or a mix of current and former teachers (S1, S4, S9, S10). Some studies focused on particular subgroups of foreign language teachers: beginning teachers (S2, S3), teachers of French and French Immersion (S3), teachers of Japanese (S4), and those in rural areas (S6). Studies were generally limited to a particular geographic area within a country (S5, S6, S9, S10), in some cases to graduates from a single university (S1, S3, S4). Only two studies involved large and representative samples that reached beyond state and national borders (S7, S8).

Teacher attrition and retention was measured in several ways across the studies, with some adopting more than one method. One method used was to study teachers over (or after) a period, to identify those who stayed and those who left, and to investigate potential reasons. This method was used in four studies, with data collected at periods from one year (S2), four years (S1), five years (S3), and eight years (S4) after entry into the profession. Another method was to sample current teachers and use their future "intention to leave" as a proxy measure of teacher attrition. In such studies, participants were asked about their intentions to remain, retire, or quit, in the following year (S1, S5, S6, S7, S8), with one (S1) also collecting information about participants' intentions in the medium (5 years) and long term (20 years). In two studies (S9, S10), snowball sampling was used to locate former teachers, allowing for a comparison of their responses with responses from

current teachers. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique used to recruit difficult-to-locate participants, as in the case of former teachers when no formal exit data are collected. The technique involves all participants being asked to nominate another participant, so that the sample grows like a rolling snowball (Neuman, 2011). Other studies elicited the perspectives of the participants concerning the issues that they perceived to have impacted their decision to leave (S4), or the issues that helped retain them, or that challenged them (S3).

Research Question Two

With respect to the second research question concerning overarching themes of foreign language teacher attrition and retention, the iterative coding procedures resulted in the identification of 154 segments of information present in the findings and discussions of the 10 studies under investigation. These segments of information were organized into seven major themes and 25 sub-themes (see Table 2). The major themes were: (1) teacher preparation, (2) transition to teaching, (3) teacher knowledge and skills, (4) workplace and employment factors, (5) value and belonging, (6) supportive workplace relationships, and (7) teacher personality traits.

Table 2. Themes identified in the research literature on foreign language teacher attrition/retention.

Major themes	Sub-themes	Relevant studies
T1. Teacher Preparation	(a) Pre-service education	S1, S3, S4
	(b) Level of preparation for role	S1, S3, S4
T2. Transition to teaching	(a) Formal induction and mentoring programs	S1, S3, S10
	(b) Informal and external support	S10
T3. Teacher Knowledge and Skills	(a) ... in class management	S3, S4, S7, S10
	(b) ... in foreign language pedagogy / methodology	▲ S2, S5, S6, S7
	(c) ... in the target language	▲ S3, S4, S7, S10
	(d) ... in school context and politics	S1, S3
T4. Workplace and Employment Factors	(a) Number and diversity of students	S3, S4, S6, S10
	(b) Access to resources	S3, S4
	(c) Workload	S1, S3, S4, S6, S10
	(d) Foreign language program conditions	▲ S3, S4, S9, S10
	(e) Employment benefits and opportunities	S3, S6, S10
	(f) School culture and politics	S1, S10

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T5. Value and Belonging	(a) Support and value for foreign language education	▲	S1, S4, S6, S9, S10
	(b) Respect and value as a foreign language teacher	▲	S1, S4, S9, S10
	(c) Physical and emotional space in schools		S1, S3, S4, S9, S10
T6. Supportive Workplace Relationships	(a) ... with students		S3, S9, S10
	(b) ... with parents and community		S4, S6, S9, S10
	(c) ... with and support of colleagues		S1, S2, S3, S9, S10
	(d) ... with other foreign language teachers	▲	S2, S3, S9, S10
	(e) ... with administrators and authorities		S1, S3, S6, S9, S10
T7. Teacher Personality Traits	(a) Perceptions of self (efficacy, confidence, identity)		S2, S4, S5, S7, S10
	(b) Personality type		S8
	(c) Responses to stressful situations		S1, S2, S8, S10

▲ *Sub-themes that are specific to foreign language teachers*

T1. Teacher Preparation

The nature and content of pre-service and continuing education programs appear to play a considerable role in the retention of foreign language teachers. The most effective programs are those that develop a spectrum of skills and knowledge that facilitate effective teaching and learning (See T3). While the aim of pre-service education programs is to prepare teachers for their positions, a common complaint across many of the participants was the lack of preparation that teachers had for the so-called “realities” of teaching and managing foreign language programs (See T3). Those who lack insights into these realities, or otherwise feel unprepared for the realities of foreign language teaching, are more likely to struggle with the transition from pre-service to in-service teacher (S1, S3, S4).

In many universities, the responsibility for preparing foreign language teachers reaches across two faculties—usually Arts and Education. This means not all teachers have access to extensive training specifically in foreign language methodology (S1), and/or sufficient instruction to develop appropriate proficiency in the target language (S4, S10). In one study, a participant noted that in her pre-service training, “the language component of the course was geared toward business and not teaching ... it was completely irrelevant for my intended future career as a German language teacher” (S4)(Mason, 2010, p. 21).

Other teachers engage in alternative certification, and while Wilkerson (2000) found that alternative certification in itself did not appear to be a factor in the attrition or retention of foreign language teachers, there appeared to be a

connection between retention and the in-field experiences within certification programs (S1). Mirrored in Ewart's (2009) study (S3), those teachers who observed and engaged in foreign language classrooms during their teacher preparation, felt better prepared for their roles than those who did not (S1, S3).

T2. Transition to Teaching

Induction and mentor programs can play a role in the successful transition of teachers into the field, as well as their continued professional development (S1, S2). Transition into teaching is best supported when participants have “a named mentor in the language department; regular meetings with their mentor; regular lesson observations; explicit support in the continuing development of their language teaching methodology” (S2) (Brown, 2001, p. 73). However, it appears that induction and mentor programs designed specifically for foreign language teachers are often absent or of poor quality (S1, S2, S3, S10). In some cases, foreign language teachers sought out their own mentor within their workplace, outside of any informal arrangement, which provided them with assistance and support (S1, S2). However, in other cases, a lack of support or a lack of ability or willingness to seek support, led to some foreign language teachers' early departure from the field (S1, S2).

As already noted, foreign language teachers are often the only (or one of only a few) teachers within their discipline in a school, so they may not have access to the support of other foreign language teachers. In response to the lack of support at a school level, language teacher associations and other formal and informal gatherings of foreign language teachers have provided invaluable support to many teachers in Australia (S9, S10). High levels of social capital, developed by seeking and building social connections with foreign language teachers in the wider community, has been correlated to foreign language teacher retention (S9, S10).

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T3. Teacher Knowledge and Skills

The research suggests that teachers with sound content and pedagogical knowledge and skills are more likely to be retained, and this is linked closely to the first theme. Teachers' proficiency in the language they teach is important in developing their confidence and self-efficacy in delivering the curriculum, and thus appears to support retention (S3, S4, S7, S10). However, one concern is the lack of opportunity available for teachers to practice the language, which inhibits proficiency among foreign language teachers. Pedagogical skills and knowledge, such as helping students at introductory levels of language learning (S5), providing alternative explanations or examples when students are confused (S5), and teaching cultural knowledge (S7) have all predicted teacher retention. Teaching students of mixed-ability levels can also provide challenges to teacher retention (S6). The ability to effectively manage students and classes (S3, S4, S7, S10), and a knowledge of workplace politics and “realities” also appears to have a positive impact on foreign language teachers' career longevity (S1, S3).

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T4. Workplace and Employment Factors

The nature of foreign language teachers' roles is a driver of teacher attrition. Foreign language teachers may have heavy workloads (S3, S6, S10), often due to having sole responsibility for the development and implementation of language programs across multiple year levels. This might include teaching, assessing, and reporting on large numbers of students (S4, S10), sometimes as many as 650 per week (S10), and often with diverse abilities and experience in foreign language learning (S3, S6). Foreign language programs may be given limited time in students' weekly schedules (S3) and limited budget and resources (S3, S4). Foreign language teachers may not have a dedicated teaching space (S9) and may be traveling between multiple classrooms and schools (S9). As a result, they may feel that their salary is not commensurate with their responsibilities (S3, S6, S10), and there are generally few opportunities for promotion within the field (S10). The discrepancy between the working conditions for foreign language teachers and those of general education teachers and teachers of other disciplines has led some teachers to move from foreign language teaching into other areas of the curriculum. These teachers have overwhelmingly expressed higher levels of satisfaction in their new roles (S4, S9, S10).

School politics and toxic workplace environments are also threatening teacher retention. Particularly, frustrations were expressed regarding the general apathy toward foreign language education in schools (See T5), leading to ideological clashes between administrators and other colleagues (See T6).

T5. Value and Belonging

In schools in which foreign language education and foreign language teachers are valued, teachers were found to be statistically more likely to stay (S9, S10). However, a number of the studies provide insights into the lack of value afforded foreign language education in many schools (S1, S4, S6, S9, S10). The low status of the discipline has led many teachers to feel isolated in their workplaces, both physically and emotionally (S1, S3, S6, S9, S10), which naturally can lead to attrition. Marginalization can result in foreign language teachers having to fight for resources, space, support, and respect (S1, S4, S9, S10).

In Australia, foreign language classes in primary (elementary) schools are aligned with Non-Contact Time (NCT), allocated time that is set aside each week for planning and preparation. So, while the general education teacher is timetabled for their NCT, his or her students will engage in foreign language, music, or physical education lessons with specialist teachers. A common complaint by participants in the three Australian studies, was the perception that foreign language education is often seen not for its role in the academic and social development of students, but merely as a way to provide NCT. As a result, some foreign language teachers felt they are not perceived as credible or "real" teachers (S4, S9, S10).

T6. Supportive Workplace Relationships

The research shows that foreign language teachers are best supported by strong and close relationships with those in their school communities. Supportive

relationships with workplace colleagues (S1, S2, S3, S9, S10) and administrators appear to be critical (S1, S3, S6, S9, S10). Retention efforts can be enhanced when foreign language teachers feel that they have positive relationships with students (S3, S9, S10) and their parents and the wider community (S4, S6, S9, S10). When strong support is not present within schools, foreign language teachers may be supported in their careers by external networks of other foreign language teachers (S9, S10), although this has been found to assist foreign language teachers into promotional positions outside of schools, particularly into positions teaching in universities, and thus in some cases can actually lead to attrition (S10).

T7. Teacher Personality Traits

Particular personality traits have been seen to better promote retention in the field. Foreign language teachers who have a strong professional identity (S2), who possess self-confidence in their knowledge and skills (S2, S4, S10) and show a strong sense of efficacy in a range of foreign language teaching tasks (S5, S7) have all been shown to be better equipped to cope with the challenges of the role. It appears that foreign language teachers with a highly social personality are more likely to be able to cope with the challenges of the profession and are more likely to be retained for the long-term, because their personality profile is congruent with teaching in schools (S8). Further, those teachers who are able to cope with and adapt to stressful situations (S1, S2, S8, S10), and those who seek support and new knowledge for themselves (S2, S10) are more likely to overcome the challenges that they face.

Research Question Three

In response to the third question regarding the issues that are unique to foreign language teachers, there were five sub-themes that were, by definition, specific to the discipline. These sub-themes, indicated by a triangle (▲) in Table 2, were: knowledge and skill in teaching a foreign language (T3b), knowledge of and ability in the target language (T3c), foreign language program conditions (T4d), support and value for foreign language teaching (T5a), respect and value for foreign language teachers (T5b), and relationships with other foreign language teachers (T6d).

It is important to note that there were a number of issues presented, which while relevant to all teachers regardless of discipline, are likely to be particularly challenging for foreign language teachers. For example, foreign language teachers may face significant challenges in gaining the support of all members of a school community (T6a, T6b, T6c, T6e) and in developing a sense of belonging in schools (T5c) due to the lack of value and respect for foreign language education and thus foreign language teachers. Also, foreign language teachers in elementary schools, unlike general education teachers, often teach very large numbers of students for short periods of time (T4a). With less contact time with students than general education teachers, they may have particular difficulties in developing relationships with students (T6a), and with setting expectations and managing classes (T3a).

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Discussion

It can be said that the research base on foreign language teacher attrition and retention is small. This is surprising considering the widespread acknowledgment of a shortage of foreign language teachers across English-speaking countries, and the considerable attention the issue is given in international media (Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2016a). Nevertheless, the 10 studies play an important role in building our understanding of teacher attrition and retention both as a whole, and as it relates specifically to foreign language teachers.

It is important to recognize the different ways in which attrition and retention are being studied because “subtle differences ... can result in major differences in research findings” (Billingsley, 2004). Within the corpus of foreign language teacher attrition research, different populations of foreign language teachers have been studied at different career junctures and in different ways, and such differences in research design can have an impact on the findings. For example, a study of attrition after one year will likely produce very different results than a study of attrition after five years. Similarly, data collected from current teachers expressing an intention to leave most likely will differ from that collected by those who have already left, although this raises further questions about how far after a teachers’ departure from the field data collection should be acceptable.

In an emerging field of research, a lack of consensus regarding key definitions is inevitable (Billingsley, 2004; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015), but the result is that the findings from each study may not be able to be generalized to a wider population of teachers. In order to move forward, it is key to have a common, clear definition of teacher attrition and retention for the case of foreign language teachers, inasmuch as current definitions generally place foreign language teachers within broader populations of teachers, potentially overlooking peculiarities to the discipline (Wilkerson, 2000; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015). Drawing on the knowledge gained from the meta-analysis, the author offers a definition of voluntary foreign language teacher attrition for comment and consideration. That is, voluntary career attrition for K-12 foreign language teachers occurs when a teacher ceases to engage in foreign language teaching in schools, voluntarily and for reasons other than retirement. These teachers may move sideways into positions teaching in other disciplines or into general education; upward into administrative roles or university teaching positions; or outward, leaving the educational system altogether to pursue other careers.

This meta-analysis study has revealed a number of common issues raised across the countries under investigation. Some of these issues are faced by all teachers regardless of discipline, while others are unique to, or potentially intensified for, foreign language teachers. This discussion will focus on two of the challenges identified in the meta-analysis as having a negative impact on the retention of foreign language teachers. These two closely-related challenges appear to be central to many of the issues impacting foreign language teacher attrition and retention: the lack of ‘space’ given to foreign language education, and the perceived lack of value for the discipline.

Lack of Space for Foreign Language Education

It can be said that in many schools and educational jurisdictions, foreign language education is not given adequate space. Space, according to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) is both a physical and a social concept which “prescribes its particular values and possesses its own regulative principles (which) delimit a socially structured space in which agents struggle, depending on the position they occupy in that space, either to change or to preserve its boundaries and form” (p. 17). In regard to foreign language education, there are three ways in which a lack of space manifests: a lack of space for the discipline in the curriculum, a lack of physical space for teaching and learning, and a lack of emotional space for foreign language teachers.

The time dedicated to language learning is considered an extremely important factor in learning achievement (Scarino, Elder, Iwashita, Kim, Kohler, and Scrimgeour, 2011; Scarino, Liddicoat, & Kohler, 2016). There are numerous frameworks available that postulate the instructional time required to reach proficiency, one of the most well-known being that developed by the American Foreign Service Institute [AFSI] (Atlas & Boots, 2016). The AFSI approximates that it can take anywhere from 600 hours to learn languages that are linguistically similar to English to 2200 hours for languages that are considered most difficult for native English speakers. The ASFI framework was not made for the school context, but it does show two things: that considerable instructional time is required to reach proficiency, and that there are differences in instructional time for different languages. However, these two factors are not always acknowledged in foreign language education policy or programming decisions.

The time given to foreign language learning in students’ weekly timetables varies significantly from school to school, and is not mandated at national and often state levels. The time dedicated to foreign language education in English-speaking countries is low, particularly when compared to other developed countries, particularly those in Europe (European Commission, 2015). The OECD (2014) showed that of 30 countries where data were available, the least time dedicated to foreign language instruction was seen in the three English-speaking countries involved: Ireland (9.54%), England (8.78%), and Canada (6.79%). In the case of Canada, instruction in Alberta has been calculated to be 96 hours per year, leading one researcher to ask, “How will Alberta’s second language students ever achieve proficiency?” (Eaton, 2012). The answer, according to Eaton (2012), was that without further supplementary study, they will not. Both the UK and Australia have had recent curriculum reform and the introduction of a national curriculum, with foreign language education given core positions within their retrospective curricula. In the UK, elementary school programs were largely less than 45 minutes per week (British Council, 2014). In Australia, national guidelines recommend 5 percent to 8 percent of curriculum time to be dedicated to foreign language education, although it is up to each state to decide if and how foreign language instruction is implemented at the school level. In the United States, media reports are often made about the lack of foreign language education in schools, in terms of time as well as the number of programs available to students (Friedman,

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2015; Skorton & Altschuler, 2012). Overall, the time allocated to foreign language education is often not enough to be conducive to effective learning, nor to the development of student-teacher relationships, nor to the building of student motivation, all of which are important facilitators of foreign language acquisition (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) conceptualization of space also includes physical space, and several studies in this paper reported inadequate provision of space for foreign language teaching and learning (S4, S9, S10). This is not a concern that appears to be raised for disciplines with a perceived higher status. When schools provide "a quality environment for students, this will facilitate the acquisition of skills that are important for society" (OECD, 2011, p. 6). Thus, where a quality environment for foreign language teaching and learning is not provided, foreign language acquisition is impeded. Further, the lack of physical space is a visible manifestation that perpetuates the perception that many students and community members already hold, that foreign language education is unimportant.

With limited space in the curriculum, and limited physical space in schools, foreign language teachers may face challenges in integrating into school communities, unable to develop a sense of belonging which has been linked to career retention in a wide variety of occupations (American Psychological Association, 2014). Further, because foreign language teachers are often the sole teacher within their discipline in their workplace, they do not always have immediate access to other like-minded colleagues who might otherwise provide a professional support network (Bulgrin 2007; Lamb, 2012). Foreign language teachers may be marginalized and disconnected from teachers of "more important" disciplines, particularly when institutional stakeholders have different and competing priorities (May, 2010). Without value, foreign language teachers may be "relegated to support functions rather than being utilised as leaders and change agents" (Gigante & Firestone, 2008 in Hancock & Scherff, 2010, p. 336). As a result, school climate may suffer, and foreign language teachers are often powerless to instigate school level change.

Lack of Value for Foreign Language Education

At the core of the lack of space for foreign language education and foreign language teachers, is the lack of value and general apathy in English-speaking countries toward learning other languages (Skorton & Altschuler, 2012; Worne, 2015). In a context in which the teaching profession is already facing a crisis in reputation in most developed countries (OECD, 2013), foreign language education is placed firmly toward the bottom of a well-established curricular hierarchy (Robinson & Aronica, 2009). This places foreign language teachers in a particularly precarious position, where they are constantly required to advocate for their subject matter and to defend its existence in the curriculum

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to colleagues, students, and the wider community (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009). Thus, when foreign language teachers leave the field, they may choose to move into other areas of the curriculum in which they are afforded a higher status, and with it a sense of value and belonging in school communities. The successful move of foreign language teachers out of foreign language education and into other areas of the curriculum signals that these are indeed specific challenges faced by foreign language teachers (ALLC, 1996; de Kretser & Spence-Brown, 2010; Mason, 2010; Sherlock, 2015; Tarica, 2011).

The concerns raised in this study impact not only foreign language teacher retention, but they are all issues which have been continually raised in discussions about quality foreign language education, particularly through various professional standards frameworks for effective foreign language teaching and learning (Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations, 2005; The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015). In what has become a perpetual cycle, the lack of value for foreign language education has led to the voluntary departure of foreign language teachers from the field, putting greater pressure on teacher supply. With every loss of personnel, the quality of foreign language programs suffer, and foreign language education is further devalued. While the lack of value for foreign language teaching and learning in schools remains unchallenged, it will become even more difficult to address the teacher shortage.

Conclusion

The lack of space and value afforded foreign language education in many schools and education systems, stands in stark contrast to the rhetoric surrounding foreign language education, and the important role it plays in the economic and social health of countries in an era of increased globalization. As noted by Pufahl and Rhodes (2011) following a survey of more than 5,000 US schools, there is a “huge mismatch between what is happening in our schools and what the country is demanding; that is, an education system that prepares all children to be competent world citizens, who can communicate in more than one language” (p. 272). On the one hand, policies are drafted which promote and encourage the expansion of foreign language education in schools. On the other hand, they are often not supported by substantive implementation and assessment plans to ensure quality foreign language education at the school level. Without explicit guidelines, and with schools facing increased pressure to produce results in other areas of the curriculum, foreign language education often takes a back seat.

The lack of space and value afforded foreign language education in many schools and education systems, stands in stark contrast to the rhetoric surrounding foreign language education, and the important role it plays in the economic and social health of countries in an era of increased globalization.

Challenging ingrained monolingual mindsets is far from a simple task, but it is central to many of the problems impacting foreign language teacher attrition, and in turn, the foreign language teacher shortage. Foreign language programs at the school level need to be supported by substantive policy with explicit minimum

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standards for programs, including clear stipulations for time and resource allocations, and a dedicated space for teaching and learning. This will go some way to improving the status of foreign language education in schools, although building value for foreign language education is a much more difficult task. As such, more research is needed to investigate the perception of foreign language learning in different communities, how monolingual mindsets are formed, and what can be done to challenge negative perceptions of foreign language education.

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