

World language teacher perspectives on attrition and retention

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Abstract

This study addressed the problem of a continuing loss of world language (WL) teachers in the United States. The author analyzed semi-structured interviews with five current and former high school WL teachers to investigate their perspectives on factors that may predict WL teacher attrition and retention. Findings identified elements related to human, social, structural, and positive psychological capital as important factors in WL teachers' decisions to remain or leave. The results of this study provide important implications for encouraging WL teachers to stay in the profession.

Keywords: world language teachers, foreign language teachers, teacher attrition, teacher retention.

Introduction

The ability to attract and retain a strong workforce of effective world language (WL) teachers is crucial for ensuring that students are successful upon graduating and entering the workforce. However, there is a continuing crisis in attracting and retaining high-quality teachers, especially WL teachers (Acheson et al., 2016; Swanson, 2012a; Swanson & Huff, 2010). Although numerous programs have been implemented over the past 60 years in order to resolve this issue, the shortage continues, and there is still no consensus on the causes (Swanson, 2013). This is problematic given the increasing importance of effective WL instruction in today's global society, a multicultural world in which people of diverse cultures, races, and ethnicities increasingly come into contact in ways that require the mutual cooperation that is facilitated by language (Guerin, 2009; Guryanov et al., 2019; Josefova, 2018). Unfortunately, there is limited research investigating the

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attrition of WL teachers as a unique population. In addition, more research is needed to better understand the perspectives of WL teachers on this issue. As such, this study answers the following question: What are some of the factors that may predict WL teacher attrition and retention? By applying a three step coding process (Hesse-Biber, 2017) to semi-structured interviews using a four-capital theoretical model of teacher retention (Mason & Matas, 2015), valuable insights emerge for addressing WL teacher attrition through policy, practice, and future research.

Literature Review

The cost of teacher attrition

Teacher attrition, or the rate at which teachers leave the profession, is an ongoing problem in the United States (U.S.). Teacher attrition in K-12 school systems has become an even greater concern over the past two decades (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, 2019). Some amount of attrition is to be expected in teaching. In fact, there are some benefits to teachers leaving in situations such as when there is a poor teacher-school fit or when a teacher is ready to retire (DeFeo et al., 2017). However, when Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) analyzed trends in a nationally representative survey of U.S. teachers, they found that less than a third of national teacher attrition is due to retirement; more teachers cite dissatisfaction with some aspect of the job as their reason for leaving voluntarily.

Teacher attrition has a significant financial impact for school districts (Boivie, 2017; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Rumschlag, 2017). During the 2008-2009 school year, the U.S. was estimated to have spent between \$1 billion and \$2.2 billion due to teacher attrition in public schools (Haynes et al., 2014). These costs are incurred as school districts must complete administrative tasks and recruit, hire, and train new teachers to replace teachers who leave prematurely. If teacher turnover is not addressed, these costs will likely continue to increase.

There are other negative consequences of a high teacher turnover rate, including harmful effects on school climate, professional development, and instructional quality (DeFeo et al., 2017). Teacher turnover also contributes to teacher shortages, forcing schools to enact stopgap measures such as “hiring inexperienced or unqualified teachers, increasing class sizes, or cutting class offerings, all of which impact student learning” (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019, p. 3). In addition, teacher turnover precludes the ability of teachers to make gains in experience and productivity (Boivie, 2017). Perhaps most importantly, when teachers leave prematurely, student achievement suffers (Boivie, 2017; DeFeo et al., 2017).

World language teacher attrition

WLs continue to be consistently identified as a high-need field in which there is a shortage of qualified teachers (Cross, 2017; Sutchter et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Sass et al. (2012) conducted a Kaplan-Meier analysis to estimate survival data for teachers based on multiple factors, including teaching assignment. Sass et al. concluded that WL teachers “possessed the greatest risk of attrition, with few teachers ($n = 1,392$; 0.65%) remaining in the profession after

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ten years. In other words, of those WL teachers who entered the profession, less than 1% stayed in the classroom after ten years” (pp. 10-11). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017, 2019) found teacher attrition to be especially problematic for teachers of math, science, special education, English language development, and WLs. When the authors compared predicted turnover rate by subject area using data from the U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey (2011–12) and Teacher Follow-up Survey (2012–13) (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.), they found that mathematics and science teachers exhibited a rate that was 37% higher than that of elementary school teachers, while special education teachers had a rate that was 46% higher. Meanwhile, the predicted turnover rate of WL teachers was 87% higher, implicating WLs as a field of particular concern.

Given the ongoing issue of attracting and retaining WL teachers, the attrition of WL teachers merits additional focus. Unfortunately, there has been a lack of representation of WL teachers in research on teacher attrition and retention as compared to teachers in other areas that are deemed to be more critical, such as math and science (Mason, 2017; Swanson & Huff, 2010). Research that has been done has frequently focused on external factors that are difficult to address such as age, gender, and family responsibility (Wilkerson, 2000). Although some factors in attrition may be common to teachers of all subjects, a one-size fits all approach may not adequately address some of the more nuanced reasons that WL teachers choose to leave prematurely. As such, further investigation is needed to determine which factors may be of particular interest in the attrition of WL teachers.

As Swanson and Mason (2018) declared, “the days of simply ringing the bell about the shortage need to end” (p. 258). This study answers the call to find ways to address WL teacher attrition and retention more actively. Doing so may ensure that future generations of students have effective language teachers to guide them in developing the language proficiencies necessary for a global society.

Theoretical Framework

Numerous models have been developed and applied to better understand the underlying causes of teacher attrition and retention. These include, but are not limited to, push-pull theory (Knell & Castro, 2014), burnout (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Maslach & Leiter, 1999), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Swanson, 2012a; Swanson & Huff, 2010), and job satisfaction (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Ouyang & Paprock, 2006). However, as noted by Mason and Matas (2015), there is a need for a theoretically-driven framework to fully capture the complex nature of teacher attrition. Thus, Mason and Matas created a four-capital theoretical model of teacher retention. The use of the term “capital” resonates with the use of the term to describe assets that one is able to use for production. In this framework, these assets include human capital, social capital, structural capital, and positive psychological capital. These four capitals are comprised of specific subcomponents, which are included in Table 1. Also included in Table 1 are references to literature supporting the relevance of these subcomponents to each theme.

Table 1

Themes and subcomponents of the four-capital theoretical model of teacher retention

Theme	Subcomponents	References
Human Capital	Presence, quality, and nature of pre-service education	Aguilar, 2018; Kearney et al., 2018; Mason, 2017; Meyer et al., 2019; Sribayak et al., 2018; Swanson, 2008a, 2010, 2012b; Wilkerson, 2000
	Professional skills and knowledge	Mason, 2017; Meyer et al., 2019; Swanson, 2012a
	Opportunities for and relevance of continuing professional development	Cummings Hlas et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2019; Mason, 2017; Mason & Matas, 2016; Moore et al., 2018; Myung et al., 2013; Swanson, 2012a; Whitebook et al., 2018
Positive psychological capital	Quality of relationships with members of the school community	Cummings Hlas et al., 2018; Mason, 2017; Mason & Matas, 2016; Waters, 2019
	Presence and quality of leadership	Harris et al., 2019; Kearney et al., 2018; Mason, 2017; Mason & Matas, 2016; Moore et al., 2018, 2018; Singh, 2017; Wilkerson, 2000
	School culture	Cummings Hlas et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2019; Kearney et al., 2018; Mason, 2017; Singh, 2017; Wilkerson, 2000
	Presence, quality, and nature of informal and formal support	Acheson et al., 2016; Kearney et al., 2018; Mason, 2017; Mason & Matas, 2016; Moore et al., 2018; Sribayak et al., 2018; Whitebook et al., 2018; Wilkerson, 2000
	Value of teachers and teaching	Cummings Hlas et al., 2018; Mason, 2017; Mason & Matas, 2016; Swanson, 2010; Wilkerson, 2000
Structural capital	Nature and complexity of role	Acheson et al., 2016; Mason, 2017; Sribayak et al., 2018; Whitebook et al., 2018; Wilkerson, 2000
	Employment conditions, structure, and pathways Departmental policies	Mason, 2017; Moore et al., 2018; Sribayak et al., 2018) Harris et al., 2019; Kearney et al., 2018; Mason, 2017; Sribayak et al., 2018; Wilkerson, 2000
	School resources and facilities	Harris et al., 2019; Kearney et al., 2018; Mason, 2017; Meyer et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2018; Swanson, 2010

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Together, these capitals and their subcomponents describe the assets necessary to retain teachers. Although this framework was developed in Australia, the researcher hoped to demonstrate its applicability to a U.S. context to build upon the important work that researchers are accomplishing internationally concerning this topic. Thus, these capitals and their subcomponents were applied as themes to participant data during a three-step coding process, which is described in the methodology section below.

Methodology

This qualitative study (IRB #20-271) utilized Seidman's (2012) three-interview series and Hesse-Biber's (2017) three-step coding process to identify key factors that related to the themes identified by the four-capital theoretical model of teacher retention proposed by Mason and Matas (2015). The use of a three-interview series allowed the researcher to gather more information from each participant than would be possible with a single interview. In addition, each interview covered a different aspect of participants' experiences, as described further in the research procedures below. A three-step coding process allowed the researcher to systematically analyze the data to gain a deeper understanding of participant experiences and perspectives and how they aligned with the framework.

Research Question

This study aimed to answer the following question: What are some of the factors that may predict WL teacher attrition and retention?

Participants

Participants were invited via convenience sampling. More specifically, participants were recruited via social media posts, email, and snowball sampling, a non-probability technique in which participants recommend additional participants for the study. Participants were selected if they met the qualification of being a current or former high school WL teacher in the U.S. within the last ten years. Demographic information for all participants is provided in Table 2 on the next page. All names included are pseudonyms.

Context

This study was conducted completely online due to a worldwide pandemic which precluded in-person interactions. As a result, two of the participants were interviewed using email, one via Zoom teleconferencing software, and two by phone.

Research Procedures

This study was conducted following Seidman's (2012) three-interview series. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. The first interview was designed to learn more about each participant's background as a WL teacher. The second interview explored details of each participant's experiences as a WL teacher and why they chose to stay or leave. The third interview asked each participant to reflect on the meaning of the experiences they shared in the previous interviews. Special care was taken when writing the questions for the semi-structured interviews to avoid including biased or leading questions.

Table 2
Participant Demographics

	Ella	Julie	Tab	David	Flor
Gender	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female
Region	Midwest	Northeast	Southwest	Southwest	Northeast
Total time spent teaching	26-30 years	31-35 years	1-5 years	11-15 years	6-10 years
Language(s) taught	French	French, Spanish	French	Spanish	Spanish
Certification type	Traditional	Traditional	Alternative	Traditional	Traditional
Types of school taught	Parochial Suburban Public	Rural Urban Public	Urban Public	Urban Charter Public	Urban Magnet Charter Public
Grade level(s) taught	Preschool High school	Elementary School Middle School High School	High School	Elementary School Middle School High School	Middle School High School
Teaching status	Left teaching, wants to return	Left teaching, doesn't want to return	Left teaching, unsure if wants to return	Left teaching, doesn't want to return	Still teaching, wants to continue
Reasons for school-to-school transfer	By choice	By choice	By choice	By choice	By choice
Additional roles and responsibilities?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Prior career(s)	None	None	Business	None	None
Study abroad experience	None	One semester	One semester	Six months	None

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Participants were asked to expect interviews to last approximately 30-60 minutes rather than Seidman's (2012) suggestion of 90 minutes out of respect for their busy schedules. Given the number of interviews and repetition of core themes noted during data analysis, the presence of shorter interviews was not considered to be a concern with respect to the quality and breadth of the data. Each series of interviews was conducted over the course of 2-3 weeks at the convenience of each participant, with each interview spaced at least 3 days to a week apart. Participants who chose to complete the interviews via email received the three sets of interview questions in a Microsoft Word document following this same timeline.

Analysis

The researcher re-read the interview transcripts. The researcher then wrote field notes about their overall impressions of the data before importing the transcripts into NVivo 12. This software was used to create descriptive, categorical, and analytical codes (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Memos to take note of interesting findings were also written while reading through the transcripts. In addition, cases for each participant were created, including attributes such as existence of a prior non-teaching career, certification type, types of school in which they taught, grade levels taught, current teaching status, presence of additional roles and responsibilities, total time spent teaching, and study abroad experience.

During the descriptive coding step, segments of the transcripts were assigned basic descriptive labels such as "professional development," "teacher efficacy," "work environment," and "workload." This resulted in the creation of 23 unique labels. Subcategories were created to help with preliminary organization of codes – for example, "workload" included subcategories such as "workday hours" and "other duties."

The categorical coding phase organized the deductive codes from the first phase into nine main categories:

- Compare to non-WL
- Compare to non-teaching
- External factors
- Pre-service experiences
- Relationships
- Salary, leave, benefits, and retirement
- Teacher KSAOs [knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics]
- Work environment
- Workload.

Subcategories were created as necessary. Redundant codes and categories were merged.

The analytical coding phase involved deductive organization of the descriptive codes into categories based upon the 13 themes of the theoretical framework. For example, "pre-service experiences" was organized under the theme "presence, quality, and nature of pre-service education." Finally, a matrix coding query between the analytical and categorical codes was applied to look for additional coding intersections. Subcategories were also included in this analysis. This helped

gain additional insights as to what lower-level factors were most important within each higher-level factor. For example, seeing that the categorical code for relationships with students had far more intersections with quality of relationships with members of school community than other possible relationships (with admin, with parents, with colleagues, with the community, with other campus staff) highlighted the particular importance of building relationships with students as compared to others in the school community.

To enhance the validity and credibility of the study, member checking was then performed to obtain participant feedback on how well the findings aligned with their perspectives. To accomplish this step, participants were provided a copy of the final draft of the manuscript and asked to provide feedback. Participants were asked to pay particular attention to the accuracy of their information in the participants section as well as whether the findings, implications, and conclusion accurately reflected their thoughts and ideas. Any errors that participants pointed out were corrected. All participants expressed that the manuscript correctly represented their contributions.

Findings

Below are the findings for each theme from the theoretical framework. Relevant quotes from participants are included for each theme along with a short discussion of the most commonly referenced categories for each theme. The most commonly referenced categories overall from the descriptive and categorical stages of coding are noted as well.

Human capital

Human capital was the third most frequently referenced main category of the theoretical framework. The category with the highest number of references within this theme was professional skills and knowledge. Important KSAOs related to human capital included an ability to create fun and engaging activities, ability to encourage student participation and engagement, knowledge of content teaching and assessment, ability to relate well with kids, and efficacy in classroom management and discipline.

Presence, quality, and nature of pre-service education

In terms of pre-service education, one topic that surfaced was that of student teaching. Julie mentioned the need for teacher candidates to have a broad set of student teaching experiences. Since her student teaching experience was with high school students, she felt underprepared when asked to teach elementary and middle school students.

So they need to get, have a broader experience too. Like I only ever student taught high school. Whereas I should have student taught elementary and I should have student taught middle school because I ended up doing all three at one time, you know, I taught elementary sixth grade, which you know, I guess is Middle School in some places too. But um, yeah. And people always ask language teachers, can you come into the preschool and do a lesson on this? Can you come into the kindergarten class and do a lesson on this? (Phone interview)

Personality and psychological factors

Key terms that surfaced within this subtheme for all participants included enthusiasm, passion, and fun. In her interview, Julie noted that WL teachers “have to be passionate about what they’re teaching. They have to love it. And it’s not just a career, it’s a way of life.” Later she added the need “to be enthusiastic, and to really have fun, and to really answer everybody’s questions, you need to be in it 100%.” Ella added that WL teachers should “focus first on relationships with kids, don’t try to be perfect, have fun!”

Tab added that WL teachers should “take it easy,” noting that “The world is not going to end if you make a mistake. You don’t have to be perfect. You don’t have to let situations upset you too much. You don’t have to stress out about standardized testing.”

The above responses demonstrate a recommendation that WL teachers should focus less on perfection and more on enjoying the chance to build relationships with their students. This ability to build meaningful relationships with students was by far the most salient theme in the interviews, as discussed next.

Social capital

Social capital was the most frequently referenced category of to navigate a wide variety of topics that a university teacher training program might not cover in their curriculum. In addition, the student teaching experience can help teacher candidates gain a better understanding of the nature and quantity of work that will be expected of them.

Opportunities for and relevance of continuing professional development

With regard to ongoing professional development, David mentioned the desire for professional development tailored to his content area needs:

I think a teacher should have access to professional development that is individualized for them, to grow in areas that they seek to grow in. Also that they may lack an [sic] expertise. (Zoom interview)

Flor mentioned the desire for professional development that would promote more buy-in from the rest of the school community:

Overall I would just say this is just more of a buy-in within the school community, to actually implement foreign language more explicit in the curriculum ... There isn’t, you know, there would need to be like PD on this ... it needs to be carried out from the very, very bottom. And that isn’t something that is given a lot of time ... But that doesn’t happen when we’re talking about foreign language courses ... how you go about it is the problem area. I think teachers want that, they see that it’s important, they wouldn’t know how to incorporate it into their curriculum. (Phone interview)

Flor highlighted the importance of both quality and quantity of student teaching experience:

Any program that you go through for teaching, it does NOT prepare you at all for what you’re actually gonna be doing in the classroom. It does not prepare you. I mean, pedagogy and understanding the history of

teaching, that has nothing to do with the actual things that are gonna be happening in the classroom. I was fortunate that the program I chose to do had a longer student teaching experience. So I was in the classroom for four months, where some programs only require that you be in a classroom for four weeks. And so, a student experience of four weeks, you're not going through the weather changes of being in the classroom in student teaching. (Phone interview)

David added to this need for student teaching experiences to help teacher candidates practice dealing with real-world situations that teacher education programs don't necessarily cover:

What you don't get sometimes is things that are real life. Like how do you deal with losing a student? How do you deal with training for school shootings? How do you deal with COVID? How do you deal with behavior? Like, your kids acting up in class, what do you do? The education program doesn't really set you up for that kind of stuff. How do you deal with irate parents? And so those are on-the-job learning that you get. But I guess the expectation in general was, I knew what I was getting myself into. No one prepares you for that extra work you do. Like the grading and stuff like that. (Zoom interview)

These comments highlight the need for lengthier student teaching programs that move beyond providing theoretical understandings of child development and pedagogy toward helping teacher candidates build an awareness of the realities of classroom life. Student teaching experiences can help teacher candidates learn to navigate a wide variety of topics that a university teacher training program might not cover in their curriculum. In addition, the student teaching experience can help teacher candidates gain a better understanding of the nature and quantity of work that will be expected of them.

Opportunities for and relevance of continuing professional development

With regard to ongoing professional development, David mentioned the desire for professional development tailored to his content area needs:

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Tab and David also bemoaned the lack of training on how to do their everyday jobs effectively, such as using gradebook software or setting up a website. Overall, participants expressed a desire for professional development that is focused on their unique needs as WL instructors.

Professional skills and knowledge

In terms of professional skills and knowledge, most participants mentioned an ability to work effectively with children as being highly important. Julie focused on the discipline aspect:

But the second thing is discipline, you just have to have that, I don't know what it is. The personality, the innate sense, the way to handle the kids. I don't know exactly what it is, but you know it when you see it. (Phone interview)

Tab focused more on just the general ability to relate well with small children in a way that makes teachers happier and thus more likely to stay:

So there is a matter of skill set. Some people have the skill set of relating well to small children. These teachers may be happier and opt to stay. (Email interview)

An ability to effectively teach content area information was also mentioned by several participants, as well as finding ways to keep the students interested in the language they are studying as an elective. Julie mentioned this in her interview:

I have to say, my biggest challenge was learning the grammar, so that I could present it in a way that all students would understand it. And to make it so that it was fun and not boring ... and you know, keeping the kids interested also, because I was the only Spanish teacher at the high school. (Phone interview)

Overall, the participants' responses reflected a need for a balance between skills involving knowledge of their language and how to teach it as well as how to work well with children. This theme overlapped with positive psychological capital, which is discussed next.

Positive psychological capital

Positive psychological capital was the least frequently referenced category of the theoretical framework. Teacher qualities and teacher efficacy were among the most frequently referenced factors at the descriptive stage of coding. Since there was only one subcategory to choose from, personality and psychological factors, the categories with the highest number of references within the most similar categorical code, teacher KSAOs, were used. Important KSAOs related to positive psychological capital included having a growth mindset, a love of the language and culture, a positive disposition toward children, and a passion for their field. Additional teacher qualities included being flexible, fun, passionate, capable, and not trying to be a perfectionist.

Personality and psychological factors

Key terms that surfaced within this subtheme for all participants included enthusiasm, passion, and fun. In her interview, Julie noted that WL teachers "have

to be passionate about what they're teaching. They have to love it. And it's not just a career, it's a way of life." Later she added the need "to be enthusiastic, and to really have fun, and to really answer everybody's questions, you need to be in it 100%." Ella added that WL teachers should "focus first on relationships with kids, don't try to be perfect, have fun!"

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The above responses demonstrate a recommendation that WL teachers should focus less on perfection and more on enjoying the chance to build relationships with their students. This ability to build meaningful relationships with students was by far the most salient theme in the interviews, as discussed next.

Social capital

Social capital was the most frequently referenced category of the theoretical framework. The category with the highest number of references within this theme was quality of relationships with members of school community. The category within this theme that was among the most frequently referenced factors overall at both the descriptive and categorical stages of coding was that of relationships. Relationships with students was the most commonly referenced factor within this category, with administrators not far behind. When talking with participants, it seemed that relationships with campus- and district-level administrators were not highly relevant in WL teacher attrition unless the relationship was bad or even toxic, in which case administrators then became a key factor in a teacher wanting to leave the school, district, and/or the profession. Relationships with and support from other members of the campus community, including other teachers and counselors, were also specifically mentioned as having a role in teachers wanting to leave.

Quality of relationships with members of school community

Although several participants mentioned the importance of building relationships with their colleagues, department heads, administrators, counselors, other school staff, parents, and members of the community, the most important relationship they had was with their students. Ella in particular specifically mentioned the relationship with students as a key factor in not wanting to leave:

I loved interacting with my students. In many cases I taught my students for 4 years in a row and we were like family. I was confident and relaxed with them and looked forward to my time in the classroom. We laughed together and many of my students fell in love with the language. For most of my career I couldn't imagine ever leaving ... I never felt like leaving because of the students; in fact, it was the students that made it so hard for me to leave. For the most part my relationship with my students was the best part of going to work every day. I often said that if I could just do the work I did during the regular school day I would do it forever. (Email interview)

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Given its importance to influencing a teacher's desire to stay, building relationships with students should be an area of focus when training current and future WL teachers.

Presence and quality of leadership

Leadership did not influence teacher attrition unless leadership was bad, in which case it was a crucial factor. Ella mentioned the effect of overall leadership:

When leadership is not supportive of language programs (no limits on class size, teacher workload, money for resources, funds for professional development, etc.) a teacher's experience can be more challenging. Likewise, a lack of leadership in a department can make growth and collaboration nearly impossible. These facts may influence many teachers' decisions to leave. (Email interview)

David specifically mentioned how a principal can foster either a desire to stay or a desire to leave in language teachers:

I think when you have strong leadership, who has a vision for educating our students that is positive and impactful for not only them, but teacher learning and teacher growth, then that will help teachers stay. But when you have these I gotcha type of administrators or administrators who are not supportive, who seem like they're just out to check boxes and not really care, I think that's when teachers, especially foreign language teachers, because we're an elective, we're not one of those required classes. And so that would make us feel like we don't want to stay ... I definitely think administration has the strongest impact on teacher retention. (Zoom interview)

Julie implicated the superintendent of the district as being the reason that many teachers (including herself) left the district or the profession entirely:

She [superintendent] never, the whole time I was there with her, which was three or four years, she never observed anybody. Yet, she would say things to the board like Oh, so and so, they're not doing their job, or something like that. I can't tell you how many people took early retirement or changed districts because of her. (Phone interview)

School and district leadership should be considered as a key element that may affect attrition or retention of teachers. Leadership must try in particular to demonstrate support and value for WL teachers.

School culture

The desire to stay can also be impacted by the overall culture of their school and school district. Ella described the hostile environment she experienced and how it affected the ability for her and her colleagues to collaborate effectively:

There was no socializing and relationships were very tense. Furthermore, the language teachers in the district were very divided in methodologies ... As a result, our 1.5 hours per week of mandatory collaboration were extremely strained. Things were just as difficult in my own building. The

teachers were extremely unkind to each other and gossiping was rampant. (Email interview)

This hostility may cause a teacher to actually leave, whereas a supportive, caring environment may help a teacher want to stay, as David expressed:

I think when you're in a supportive environment, you, and in a, like, not to be cheesy, but like a loving environment, where, you know, people genuinely care about each other. I think that will help a teacher stay, but when that environment is not fostered, and it's more hostile, then that can also cause that teacher to leave. (Zoom interview)

The environment in which a WL teacher works may be considered one possible factor in their decision to stay or leave.

Value of teachers and teaching

The value of WLs was a key topic in this subtheme. Flor described her least favorite moments in teaching as those in which parents demonstrated a lack of value for language learning:

Some of the least favorite moments are when you have to call home about a student who's not doing so great academically is not meeting standards, doesn't have the grades. And then you call home and you're hit with a parent who either is like, Well, can they, you know, is it, can they just get like a passing grade, like, they're not gonna need this after this class. Who are not supportive, and just don't see the value in language learning. Or they're like, you know, at home it's not really supported. And then it comes through in conversation. (Phone interview)

Flor added a desire for WL courses to be given the same recognition and value as other content areas such as math and science:

I would say is having foreign language courses, so that the required ... how the credits work for the school, it was given the same recognition and value and importance as some of the other courses that are considered gen ed, not having it be under elective. But a main course that's held to the same requirement as some of the other courses like math and science and English. So what would be ideal is if you had a more inclusive environment, like if teachers, not just by mouth like that's only what they say, Oh yeah, you know, learning a second language is important. But actually, if the school as a community as a whole embodied that idea, if other subjects would also incorporate foreign language in their classroom, into their curriculum. (Phone interview)

Showing WL teachers that they and their subject are valued at all levels is a helpful way to increase their job satisfaction and thus their desire to stay.

Presence, quality, and nature of informal and formal support

Support for WL programs as well as for the teachers themselves were key factors in this subtheme. Ella specifically mentioned frustration with a lack of support from counselors in promoting the program:

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Most of us probably spend very little time with counselors. Unfortunately, some counselors may not be supportive of our programs. I've had many steer students away from taking French, for example, because it would be "too hard." (Email interview)

Flor described the unique support needs of WL teachers as compared to other content areas and their desire to receive this support from colleagues such as their department head:

I mean, if you don't build a good relationship with them [department lead], if you don't feel like they have your back or you're not being supported, I think that's enough to determine if a teacher stays in foreign language because I feel like, across all the different subject areas that there is to teach, I do think that foreign language teachers need a different level of support than perhaps an English teacher who, or even science, because our standard testing, state testing rides so much on those two areas that they're often given a lot of support whereas perhaps foreign language teachers are not given that same caliber of help or are given that same amount of coaching. (Phone interview)

A sense that WL teachers and their content area are not being provided the same level of support as others on campus or within a district may affect teachers' desire to stay. There are many ways to provide support, including those related to structural capital, which is discussed next.

Structural capital

Structural capital was the second most frequently referenced category of the theoretical framework. The category with the highest number of references within this theme was nature and complexity of role, while the categories within this theme that were among the most frequently referenced factors overall at both the descriptive and categorical stages of coding were work environment and workload. Within work environment, frequently mentioned factors included support, leadership, mentorship and guidance, technology and technology access, atmosphere, collaboration, access to resources, and freedom and latitude. Within work-load, factors that were frequently mentioned included expectations to commit to other duties, workday hours, grading, and number of preps. Work/life balance and lack of flexibility were also specifically mentioned as a reason for leaving, as well as lack of information and/or input regarding classroom situations or policy changes

.Nature and complexity of role

Workload and time commitment were two major factors expressed within this subtheme. Ella noted that "the enormous time commitment required to teach languages according to current best practices is the most important reason teachers leave." David elaborated further on the importance of workload:

The workload is something that can make like have a teacher stay or leave. And I mean not just the teaching load, but everything that entails working as an educator, like grading, teaching, meetings. (Zoom interview)

Tab added a lack of flexibility to allow teachers to maintain a healthy work/life balance as an issue:

A family emergency would arise at the same time a “must do” school responsibility would arise, and I was stuck in the middle. This is one of the main reasons I resigned from teaching. There was too little flexibility for me. It was unreasonable. (Email interview)

David supported this in stating that “if there's not a balance in work life, then teachers may feel the need to find a different profession to support work life balance.” Training teachers to deal with the immense workload expected of them and finding ways to help them decrease their workload and maintain a healthier work/life balance may help increase the likelihood that they will want to stay in the profession.

Employment conditions, structure and pathways

Previously, leadership was associated with employment conditions such as class size, workload, money for resources, and funds available for professional development. Ella expressed similar desires when providing ideas for administration and/or district officials to make their experience better:

Limit class size, limit number of preps, provide leadership so that all members of the department had common goals, implemented best practices in instruction and assessment, etc. (Email interview)

Meanwhile, David expressed frustration at the lack of pathways toward promotion for WL teachers:

I felt that at times for, a long time, actually, I felt that being a foreign language teacher hindered my ability to move up in the ranks of education at that particular school. (Zoom interview)

Ella mentioned some of the benefits of being a WL teacher over other professions in terms of employment conditions:

As a teacher, I was mostly not under direct supervision. For the most part I was able to make my own decisions about how to teach my students and I appreciated this independence very much. Since I was usually the only French teacher (or at least the only full-time one) in my building, I did not have to collaborate extensively with colleagues. Upon further thought, I would say that my work satisfaction was probably much higher than those of most of my non-teacher friends. (Email interview)

Making improvements in employment conditions such as number of preps, class size, overall workload, and ability to make decisions may be helpful in encouraging a desire to stay in WL teachers.

Departmental policies

Tab specifically mentioned flexibility in grading policy as an important factor:

The two districts where I worked had drastically different grading plans. Although I liked the structure offered by District 2, I preferred the flexibility of District 1. The first district basically required just a 60/40

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split, not even stipulating a required percentage for the final. The important thing was to make sure teachers were not grading based on behavior. Again, I really liked that flexible grading policy. (Email interview)

Tab also mentioned that flexibility for students should not be given just by teachers but also by school district and state laws. They added a desire to be “informed, not surprised, by policy changes or important items impacting the profession.”

Flor echoed this desire for information about and input in decisions affecting teachers and students:

Maybe back when we were still a much smaller school, we probably would have been able to have that input. But now that we've gotten bigger and sort of more known, with all that comes, they have to just kind of make decisions without consulting the teachers as they used to do that, they were a lot better with that before but now, it's all about the dollar. (Phone interview)

Decisions with regard to policy are necessary, and changes frequently need to occur, but what is important is keeping teachers informed and involved to the greatest extent possible to show that their input is valued and desired.

School resources and facilities

Along with environmental conditions like class size and preparations, Ella also expressed a desire for access to technology and other resources:

I think the ideal experience would be class sizes of 12-15, access to adequate technology and programs used by language teachers (Flipgrid, FluentKey, Goformative, Pear Deck etc.), 2-3 preps (different courses) per day, adequate time for collaboration and preparation, a supportive staff/administration that was familiar with best practices in language teaching, strong leadership so that the language department was on the same page when it came to methodology, a district-wide grading program that supported language teaching, such as standards-based grading. (Email interview)

Julie praised her experience with a superintendent who supported her and her students by providing resources and opportunities, such as support for trips to Spain and extensive classroom resources:

So he really loved languages. So we had to put a wing on in our school because at one point we were really growing. And he came to me and said, What would your dream room look like? And he built it. I had a complete kitchen in my room. Microwave, stove, refrigerator, cabinets. Oh. My. God. He put the bulletin boards where I wanted them. I had everything. It was the best. (Phone interview)

These resources, as well as other employment conditions such as the ability to teach culture in class, were mentioned again by Julie as a specific way for the new superintendent, who replaced the previous one who was incredibly supportive, to harm the teacher:

So anyway, next thing you know, to retaliate, she takes away the trip to Spain. She said, we're not doing trips to Spain. Then she said to me, we're taking out your kitchen. And she did. Refrigerator, stove, microwave and everything. She said they were fire hazards. She said there will be no more culture taught in class. That's not necessary. They can get all the culture they want from TV, movies. You are just supposed to strictly stick to the book. (Phone interview)

Providing teachers with the resources necessary to do their job, whenever possible, is another way to help promote a desire to remain in their position.

Discussion

All four capitals of the framework (i.e., human capital, positive psychological capital, social capital, structural capital) were found to be influential in participants' discussions on factors relevant to WL teacher attrition and retention. References to social capital occurred most frequently, resonating with prior research that has linked social capital to WL teacher retention (Mason & Matas, 2016). References to social capital were followed in frequency by structural capital, human capital, and personality and psychological factors, respectively. Each of the 13 subthemes (e.g., quality of relationships with members of school community) also emerged in the data.

With regard to social capital, relationships with members of the school community is crucial to promoting WL teacher retention. A hostile school culture may encourage WL teachers to leave prematurely, whereas a school culture that is supportive and caring will make these teachers more likely to want to stay. WL teachers are also more likely to want to stay when they feel valued (Cummings Hlas et al., 2018; Mason, 2017; Mason & Matas, 2016). Encouraging collaboration between WL teachers and other content areas on campus may help WL teachers feel more valued and potentially less isolated. Additionally, informal and formal support that attends to the unique needs of WL teachers (e.g., mentoring) may also increase the likelihood of WL teacher retention (Kearney et al., 2018; Swanson & Wagner, 2016).

Presence and quality of leadership is not the most important factor until teachers become dissatisfied with leadership (Kearney et al., 2018), at which point it becomes a key factor in WL teacher attrition. Administrators should consider the crucial role they play in retaining WL teachers. Administrators should also maintain a visible presence in WL classrooms and openly recognize the value of WL programs and teachers. They should also trust the professional expertise of teachers, giving them latitude and respecting their ability to act as masters of their craft. Administrators may also act as advocates for greater access to resources as well as field trips, campus events, and guest speakers that are relevant to WLs.

With respect to structural capital, attention should be paid to finding ways to reduce the immense workload and time commitment faced by WL teachers. Reducing class size and reducing the number of preps expected of each teacher should be considered when possible. Taking concrete steps to promote greater flexibility in scheduling and a healthier work-life balance should also be consid-

ered (Sribayak et al., 2018). WL teachers should not feel excluded from pathways to promotion. They should also be involved in making decisions (Kearney et al., 2018), especially those which may impact their programs. Finally, increased access to language-specific resources such as technology and trips may help increase a desire to stay.

For human capital, the presence, quality, and nature of pre- and in-service education experiences are important. As such, administrators and policymakers should provide WL teachers with more time and latitude to engage in professional development experiences and networking opportunities (Swanson & Mason, 2018). WL teachers especially need opportunities to develop their skills with regard to instructional strategy and classroom management (Mason, 2017; Swanson, 2012a; Swanson & Huff, 2010). It is also crucial to ensure that professional development opportunities are tailored to the specific content and contextual needs of WL teachers (Cummings Hlas et al., 2018). Providing professional development opportunities that align with the personality and interest profile of WL teachers may also promote retention (Mason, 2017; Swanson, 2008a, 2008b, 2012b).

In terms of positive psychological capital, helping WL teachers build psychological skills may also be influential in promoting retention (Cummings Hlas et al., 2018). In this study, skills that may be of particular interest include a growth mindset and a love for not only the content area itself but also for teaching it to children. Flexibility and fun are also important. Not only will students be more likely to be engaged and willing to participate, but teachers will likely be happier at work as well, likely increasing their desire to remain.

Although supporting evidence surfaced for the unique importance of each theme indicated in the theoretical framework, it is important to note that they also frequently overlap. For example, access to resources may be impacted by value for teachers and teaching and by support from leadership and others in the school community. As such, policymakers and administrators should take a multifaceted approach toward applying the findings of this study when developing retention strategies.

Future studies might aim to incorporate the ideas of teachers representing additional locations, certification types, and languages. Target language proficiency should also be considered to continue investigating its impact on the factors of interest in this study. Given the small number of participants in this study, it is also hoped that future researchers will engage in research with larger numbers of participants to further confirm the applicability of this framework to attrition in the U.S. Finally, it is acknowledged that most of the teachers who volunteered to participate in this study ended up leaving teaching. Hearing more from those who remained in the profession would be beneficial in future research.

Implications

A number of actionable implications emerge from the findings of the current study. Below is a list of concrete suggestions for teachers, administrators, district officials, and those in charge of pre-service and/or continuing education programs. Although some recommendations may seem idealistic, it is hoped that in taking smaller steps toward reaching these ideals, meaningful improvements may occur.

Teachers

- Maintain a growth mindset. Seek opportunities to learn more about your content area and pedagogical strategies for teaching it.
- Aim for progress, not perfection. Know that you will make mistakes and learn from them.
- Don't try to "reinvent the wheel" during the first few years. Use resources that are available and gradually implement new ideas as you feel more confident in your teaching skills and less overwhelmed with everything involved with teaching.
- Build relationships with students, other teachers, administrators, and members of the community. Knowledge of the language and culture that you teach is important, but even more important is making valuable connections with those you work with.
- Seek opportunities to collaborate with other content area teachers. For example, offer to help the biology teacher with strategies on how to help students master necessary vocabulary. Work with the art department on a project involving famous painters from your target culture. Ask the theatre and music department for help in making a WL showcase for the community.
- Find ways to have fun. Not only will your students be more likely to be engaged and willing to participate, but you will likely be happier at work as well.
- Prioritize work-life balance whenever possible. If you find this challenging given the nature of your role, start small. Set boundaries between your work and school life. Remember that not everything has to be graded.

Administrators

- Trust teachers to do the right thing. Give them latitude and respect their ability to act as masters of their craft.
- Facilitate field trips, campus events, and guest speakers.
- Encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration on campus.
- Put into place a system in which WL teachers are not consistently the ones burdened with extra tasks such as translations, 504 meetings, etc.
- Maintain a visible presence on campus and in classrooms as much as possible.
- Demonstrate that you recognize the value of your WL programs and teachers.
- Facilitate paths to promotion (to instructional coaches, for example) for WL teachers.
- Be transparent about decisions and involve WL teachers in decisions impacting them, their students, and their programs whenever possible.
- Show WL teachers that you "have their back."
- Get to know your WL teachers and what they are teaching.
- Differentiate support and professional development. Although teachers in general may share in common many needs, there are also needs specific to WL teachers' that should be addressed.
- Create a work environment that leverages the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics of WL teachers.
- Help teachers find ways to maintain a healthy work-life balance.
- Remember that although leadership may not always be a key factor in teachers' decisions to stay or leave, it becomes a crucial factor when it is bad.

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- Try to avoid stacking multiple levels in a WL class whenever possible.
- Facilitate WL teacher access to resources whenever possible.
- Put into place a mentorship program to help new teachers get to know their way around campus and how to find and use the resources that are available to them.
- Hire WL teachers that demonstrate KSAOs who are potentially associated with higher levels of teacher retention.

Pre- and in-service educators

- Provide courses specific to teaching a WL.
- Provide instruction not just on pedagogy but on specific strategies on how to navigate the complexity of the role and the workload involved in teaching.
- Provide instruction on strategies for classroom management and building relationships with students.
- Provide strategies for potential challenges such as working with multi-level classes.
- Promote work-life balance as a standard upon entering the field.
- Help teachers develop important KSAOs that may contribute to higher levels of teacher retention.
- Provide individualized/personalized professional development for WL teachers. Provide alternatives to WL teachers when a required professional development session has no relevance to their content area.
- Help teachers find ways to create cross-disciplinary connections during professional development sessions.
- Provide WL teachers with strategies for working with multi-level classes.
- Provide veteran WL teachers with strategies for moving from the “survival mode” of the first few years to an exciting time of incorporating new ideas and innovations.
- Provide teachers with strategies for maintaining a healthy work-life balance.
- Help teachers continue to develop and refine important KSAOs that may influence levels of teacher retention.

Conclusion

Failure to understand and address continuing issues in recruiting and retaining effective WL teachers will only exacerbate the problem. This study is only one step in working toward effective solutions. It is hoped that future studies will continue to discover new insights as to how effective WL teachers can be recruited and retained in order to provide students with the tools necessary to participate in a diverse multilingual and multicultural world.

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