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Experiences of North American Teachers Working Overseas Who Broke Their Contracts Within One Year

Stephanie L. Kattera

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Concordia University–Portland
College of Education
Doctorate of Education Program

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Experiences of North American Teachers Working Overseas Who Broke Their Contracts

Within One Year

Stephanie Lynne Kattera

Concordia University – Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the

College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Educational Administration

Julie McCann, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Portland, Oregon

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain insight into the experiences of North American teachers working in international schools and why they chose to leave within the first year. The findings offer insights into the following questions: (1) How do these teachers experience relationships with leadership and students? (2) What role, if any, did their recruitment and induction have on these teachers' decision to leave? (3) What role, if any, did the culture of the host country play in these teachers' decision to leave? The struggles experienced from these conditions led teachers to abruptly leave their contracted international positions. The study took place in the Middle Eastern region and the population targeted were North Americans working in international schools within the Middle East. For the purposes of this study the term North American referred to United States and Canadian citizens.

This qualitative study used a phenomenological design and allowed the researcher the opportunity to investigate and gather data through two open-ended interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. Data analyses involved coding to identify themes related to the research questions. The data collected during the interviews established five themes: lack of trust, power struggle, student behavior, lack of vision, and lack of communication the participants experienced while working at their international school. The participants reflected on their individual experiences and shared that they were able to develop personally from their experience. This phenomenological study had 10 participants, and their lived personal, professional, and cultural experience while teaching internationally could be beneficial to current and potential teachers and school leaders in international schools. *Keywords:* lived experiences, school leadership, attrition, international schools, broken contract, power struggle, student behavior, trust, vision, communication, culture

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all the teachers with adventure in their hearts who want to educate all children, with the belief that the spirit of teaching affects the soul of a child.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support and guidance of family and friends.

To my chair, Dr. Julie McCann: Thank you so much for your support, not only regarding the feedback and conversations regarding the dissertation but also the immense support you gave as I navigated several life-changing events and hurdles.

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To my teacher and friend, Erin: It was your music and kindness that led me to teach. I thank you for touching my life so I can continue to touch the lives of the children I teach.

And finally, to my family: Thank you for your support during the past 7 years as I was living and teaching overseas, earning a master's and now a doctorate, while always feeling your love and unconditional support next to me even when we were separated by an ocean.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

It has been the observation of this researcher that international schools, regardless of their transient nature, suffer from low teacher retention rates. The diverse cultures, personal frustrations, emotional tension, lack of support, and negative relationships with school leadership, administration, and board members contribute to the transient behavior. Research pertaining to teacher experiences in international schools is sparse and less studied than teacher retention in the United States (Ingersoll, 2001; Keller, 2014; Mancuso, Roberts, & White, 2010; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). The field of international education would benefit from a deeper examination of teacher attrition rates.

Teacher attrition not only creates additional challenges for school administration, but each departing teacher also impacts the morale and stability of the remaining teaching staff and school community (Changying, 2007). Borman and Dowling (2008) listed several factors they believe affected teacher attrition and retention: teacher quality, demographics, schools with minority and poverty concentrations of students, and salary. Teacher retention can be investigated and even though teacher attrition can be voluntary or involuntary, teachers consider many factors such as “working conditions or personal satisfaction” before leaving the profession (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006, p. 174-175). The aforementioned studies presented factors affecting teacher retention in the United States; however, limited findings are available on this topic regarding international schools.

Research Questions

What was the experience of North American teachers who broke their contracts with international schools after one year? The following sub-questions supported this central research question by:

1. How do these teachers experience relationships with leadership and students?

2. What role, if any, did their recruitment and induction have on these teachers' decision to leave?
3. What role, if any, did the culture of the host country play in these teachers' decision to leave?

Scope and Benefits to the Research Field

Changying's (2007) statement regarding the impact of departing teachers was vital to the focus of this research. When morale is destroyed and rebuilt year after year, school stakeholders and their stability become jeopardized. Witnessing international teacher turnover for the past 6 years, this researcher was determined and intrigued to present international school leadership with methods to adapt practices, procedures, and policies in order to improve staff retention and attrition rates. It was possible that effective school leadership constantly evaluated their methods to integrate new teachers into the existing staff and school culture, as well instituted quality methods for clear communication between these relationships. How does a thorough induction process for new teachers make for a more cohesive and smooth process for teachers when they are entering a new country? What are the criteria for educating incoming teachers about the host country culture before they arrive and how does it aid in reducing their stress upon arrival in the country? These questions, along with approaches to effectively facilitate relationships between incoming teachers and students, were the basis of the interview questions and research of this study.

The purpose of the study was to gain insight into the experiences of North American teachers working in international schools and why they chose to leave within the first year. By examining the participants' lived experience, finding commonality between the participants allowed themes to be established. The scope of this study was important because it is related to Changying's (2007) research on teacher-school relationships and the effect they had on staff morale and departing teachers. School leadership could benefit from

reading the results and data from this study and could use the information to implement new strategies into their leadership style and school. Current international and prospective international teachers, school owners, board members, directors, principals, and heads of school could benefit from this phenomenological study as they make key decisions affecting both incoming and returning staff members.

Decisions made by school leadership could determine whether a teacher will stay or leave, and other underlying factors to those decisions should be taken into consideration. There are high costs in recruiting teachers including the travel and relocation associated with recruitment (Skinner, 1998). Other costs include a settling allowance, health care, transportation, and tuition for teachers' children, and international airline fares for dependents and spouses (Ingersoll, 2001). In addition to financial costs, there were high institutional costs also associated with teacher turnover in international schools (Hayden & Thompson, 1998). Although international schools invest a substantial amount of money in hiring a new teacher, international teachers invest a lot emotionally when accepting a position. The stress of a new country, culture, teaching role, work expectations, and family relationships are among a few stressors. This researcher has observed that improving retention rates and reducing teacher attrition could be important for reducing stress, improving staff morale, student development, school community as well as being a financially smart maneuver for school leadership, school owners, and school boards.

As a former teacher, teacher leader, and a future school leader, this researcher had a strong desire to listen to the concerns and voices of staff members when making decisions for teacher training and technology within my school. Doing so increases morale, which could be a benefit for teachers, for students, and for the whole school community. Leadership within international schools would benefit from engaging in reflective practices, which includes being candid with themselves when they make decisions for the school they serve.

When school leaders use their influence to implement change, it is imperative that they evaluate the mission, culture, procedures, and framework of their school.

An examination of the literature on teacher retention in international schools (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Chandler, 2010; Changying, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001; Mancuso et al., 2010; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009) revealed reasons and factors behind teachers' leaving. Some studies addressed school culture and induction methods (Slough-Kuss, 2014; Kipnis, 2001; Roskell, 2013; Sachs & Smith, 1988; Van Houtte, 2015). Other studies addressed teacher perceptions and experiences (Bunnell, 2005; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Hacoheh, 2012; Hayden, 1998; Hayden, 2000; Hrycak, 2015). Teacher recruitment and induction (Sharplin, 2009; Stirzaker, 2004) and perceptions and analysis of departing teachers (Hayden, Rancic, & Thompson, 2000; Joslin, 2002; Keller, 2014; Kersaint et al., 2007; Machin, 2014; Rhodes, Nevill, & Allan 2004; Savva, 2013, 2015; Smith, 2014; Stinebrickner, 2002) were other topics of research.

International school leaders find it difficult to navigate the transient nature of international schools, such as political issues of the country, personal frustrations, relationships with a diverse staff and school leadership (Chandler, 2010; Hayden & Thompson, 1998; Keller, 2014). The reasons international teachers choose to leave their school could be as diverse as the school itself. Examining similarities and themes will narrow the focus and facilitate dialogues on the areas where international schools should improve. The discussions and decisions surrounding this transient behavior, the teacher attrition rate, and why it occurs will also be presented through the research findings.

Conceptual Framework for the Problem

The researcher sought answers to the research questions by conducting individual interviews to gain an understanding of teacher transience and to align similarities of the participants' lived experiences. In an effort to form conclusions about why teacher attrition

in international schools was high, the key themes identified were taken from the lived experiences discussed by participants. Participants had the opportunity to share their experience of breaking a contract overseas and the events that led them to make that decision.

Three different areas were investigated in relation to teachers who broke their contract within the first year: relationships with school leadership and students, induction and recruitment methods, and host country culture. During the interview process, transcription, member checking, and interpretation of the data by coding took place to enhance understanding and to draw conclusions from the participants' experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of North American teachers working in international schools and why they chose to leave within the first year. For the purposes of this study the term North American referred to United States and Canadian citizens. The data collected could be presented to teachers, school leaders, administration, school boards, and owners of international schools regarding how they could retain their teachers longer, to the benefit teachers, students, and the school community.

Nature of the Study

The study took place over the course of four months and was conducted in the Middle Eastern region. Participants were North American teachers living in the Middle Eastern region and working in international schools. Personal interviews took place at a neutral location outside of the participant's school or via Skype. The study was phenomenological in nature and the aim was to find common themes among lived experiences of the participants. All interviews were voice recorded, transcribed, and coded for accuracy and confidentiality. The interviews were documented in a secure and password-protected computer of the researcher. Participants received a description of the study and a disclosure waiver of consent prior to participating in the study. After the interviews participants were provided

with a transcription of their interview for purposes of member checking and to ascertain the accuracy of the data collected.

Definition of Terms

This section provides definitions of terminology used throughout the dissertation.

Culture. Workplace conditions, school size, administrative control, organizational culture, racial composition, customs, practices, and country beliefs (Van Houtte, 2015).

Host country culture. The beliefs, traditions, and values embraced by the international school to promote the one school-one world view within the school; these can impact a teacher's living conditions and expectations they have or that are placed on them as new members of the school community (Chandler, 2010; Keller, 2014; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Slough-Kuss, 2014).

Induction methods. The process that benefits the newly-hired teacher and the organization by motivating incoming teachers and promoting positive attitudes toward the organization; it is a continuous process that takes place over several months, acclimating the new teacher to the procedures and culture of the organization so that he/she can function effectively and comfortably (Stirzaker, 2004).

International school. There is no universally agreed-upon definition of what an international school is, but it is generally considered to be a school operating in countries outside of the United States, offering an education to foreign and local national students, but that is a fully accredited by an institution, such as the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) offering North American teachers a variety of overseas employment locations (Savva, 2013).

Phenomenological. Describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience, focusing on what all participants have in common (Creswell, 2013).

Recruitment methods. The part of the hiring cycle in which school leadership, normally the head of school, represents themselves and the school profile in particular ways in efforts to hire high-quality educators (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009).

School leadership. The individuals (heads of school, principals, vice principals, board members) in charge of the organizational functions of the school, such as hiring, protocols, procedures, curriculum, recruitment, and daily communication with teachers, which could be perceived as positive or negative (Mancuso et al., 2010).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

It was an assumption that participants in this study would have a similar condition of having broken their contract within the first year. However, it was possible that the reasons for breaking a contract would overlap only slightly, because only 10 participants and only North American teachers were selected for this study. Another assumption was that teachers from different cultures and cultural upbringing would respond differently when placed in the same work environment as their North American colleagues, and would therefore be able to tolerate, or would disapprove of, the same lived experience.

The focus behind the study was to see why the population of North American international teachers broke his or her contract after one year. The researcher assumed that the cultural backgrounds of different individuals would mean that they would react differently in given scenario. Selecting only North Americans narrows the cultural upbringing and therefore how the individuals would react if placed in the same situation. The other limitation is the number of participants intended for the study. A phenomenological study involves a group of heterogeneous members ranging from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15 (Creswell, 2013) The ideal number of participants for this phenomenological study is 8–10, but the researcher may determine that more participants are necessary to provide an accurate account for the lived experiences of the participants.

Summary and Transition

The transient nature of international schools is related to political issues within the country, job related frustrations, relationship with staff and leadership, along with policies and procedures within the organization. This directly relates to teachers' attrition and whether or not the school maintains consistency for the school stakeholders. Examining leadership relationships with staff, retention and induction practices, school culture, and understanding and reflecting on a teacher's reasons for leaving would be vital in reducing teacher attrition. The literature review is presented in Chapter 2, and the selected methodology in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Framework Guiding Review and Review of Literature

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the existing literature that focused on teacher retention and factors that make international schools prone to low retention rates. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of North American teachers working in international schools and why they chose to leave within the first year. Along with the discussed conceptual framework and methodological issues; the researched factors of teacher retention within international schools as impacted by staff relationships, relationships with school leadership, recruitment and induction methods, and cultural influences of the host country were explored. The aforementioned factors were examined in relation to the role they play in teacher retention. Due to their sheer number, international schools are a loosely defined and quickly growing niche in education (Hayden & Thompson, 1998; Keller, 2014).

During this study, I was in my seventh year of international teaching with the desire to move into a leadership position overseas. This topic became an interest after discussing with fellow colleagues and witnessing international school systems that lacked clarity, vision, and purposeful planning. I wanted to understand the lived experiences of teachers who made the difficult decision to leave their international school within the first year. Given the high number and varied locations of international schools, retention studies have focused primarily on a single city or state in the United States, resulting in low sources of data on international schools (Ingersoll, 2001). Research on the topic of teacher turnover in international schools is limited in comparison to the abundance of research available on schools in the United States (Keller, 2014; Mancuso et al., 2010; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). Therefore, this study explored how staff and student relationships, induction and recruitment methods, and cultural influences affected teacher retention within international schools.

For example, The European Council of International Schools (ECIS) and Council of International Schools (CIS) administered surveys to the international schools they accredit. The surveys administered in 2005–2006 included 270 international schools and a population of 22,098 teachers, but only 3193 teachers from this population responded. However, a study conducted in 2005–2006 by Henley (2006) reported that these surveys only represented an average of 14.4% of international teachers leave their school (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). Odland and Ruzicka (2009) concluded: “These surveys painted a rudimentary picture and did not analyze the turnover phenomenon insightfully” (p. 6). High turnover rates offer a perspective on underlying problems, functionality, and quality of the school (Ingersoll, 2001). Even though international schools belong to several of the same accrediting organizations, like the European Council of International Schools (ECIS) and Council of International Schools (CIS); the varying attributes of the individual school makes it difficult to collect data relating to teacher turnover (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009).

International schools are individual institutions and may or may not share the same educational philosophy (Hayden & Thompson, 1998). Culture alone could explain this ideal, and that in a globalized context, the changing and complex terms, such as general terms affecting job satisfaction, and specialized terms outlining expectations could affect job satisfaction (Chandler, 2010). International schools are complex organizations with different missions, values, and systems based on their location and ownership. Given this constantly changing and global society, school leadership needs to be adaptable when new teachers join their staff (Murakami-Ramalho & Benham, 2010). The individuality of international schools, differences in the cultures, and complexity of different values, politics and beliefs make international schools susceptible to challenges that affect the staff and school community.

Conceptual Framework

North American teachers can choose from diverse locations around the world and explore different cultures while working for accredited schools fully recognized by their home country (Savva, 2013). When it comes to joining a school community together for a unified purpose, successful organizations need to have a solid framework in place that supports its employees (Keller, 2014). However, such a framework may not come easily in some parts of the world where cultural expectations and politics control the outcomes. For many international school principals and senior leaders, the financial outcome matters (Machin, 2014); this view differs with a survey of students and teachers that stated, “being international necessitates an open and flexible world view” (Hayden, Rancic, & Thompson, 2000, p. 113). These contrasting views make it difficult to have a unified purpose within an international school.

A conceptual framework makes sense of data, guides presentation, and facilitates the organization of concepts (Wolcott, 2009). The researcher of this phenomenological research study based the concepts of this research on teacher relationships with students and school leadership, recruitment and induction methods, and host country culture and how these concepts influenced the participants’ decision to break their contract after one year. The conceptual frame work of this study and how it related to the research question is relatable to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and the needs of international teachers entering into a new environment outside of one that is familiar to them.

The central research question was: What was the experience of North American teachers who broke their contracts with international schools within the first year? To investigate teacher retention within international schools, deeper sub-questions were developed: How did these teachers experience relationships with leadership and students?

What role, if any, did their recruitment and induction have on their decision to leave? What role, if any did the culture of the host country play on their decision to leave?

The researcher based the concepts for this research on the issues of how relations with staff and school leadership, induction and recruitment, and culture of the host country resulted in the teacher breaking the contract within the first year. The main research question and sub-questions are related to the needs of the individual teacher and how through their lived experience their needs were met or not met. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has five levels and include physiological (basic needs), safety, belongingness, esteem, and the last level of self-actualization. Once the first two levels are met, levels three and four, belongingness and esteem become important (Learning Theories, 2016).

In relation to teachers and their needs from level three and four, relations within their school become important to their success. According to Learning Theories (2016), obtaining level five or self-actualization includes the need for recognition from others, confidence, achievement, and self-esteem. The researcher discussed the idea of what makes international teachers leave after one year, and obtaining self-actualization or feeling valued within their new environment is one assumption. Figure 1, below, provides the conceptual framework and how it related to the main research question and sub-questions.

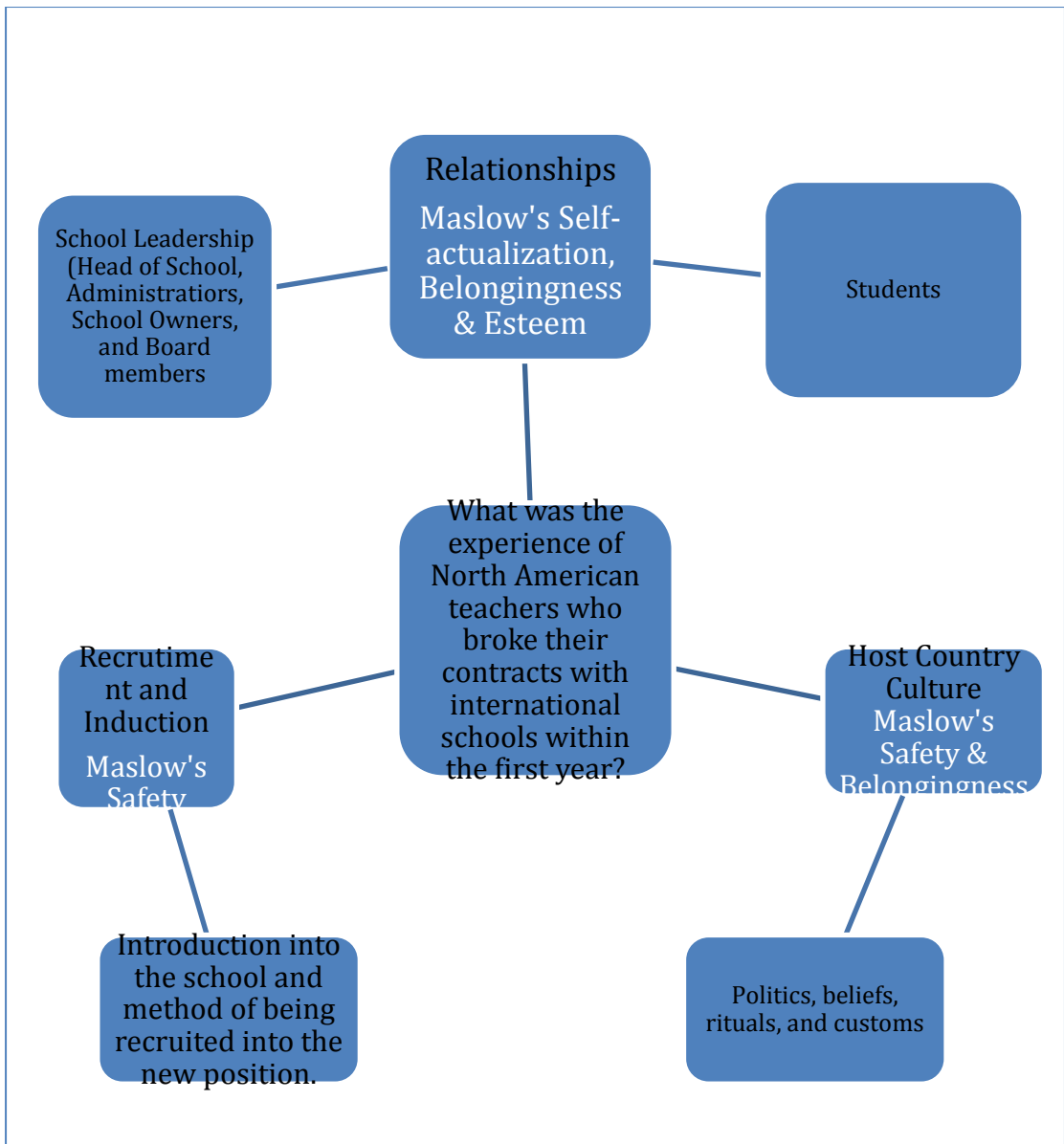


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the literature review.

A qualitative and phenomenological approach focusing on interviews of North American teachers supported this research. During this phenomenological study, individuals and their lived experiences were gathered firsthand during interviews. Finding a common lived experience among the participants and understanding their common lived experiences was the primary component of phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013). The exodus of teachers has jeopardized the normal functioning and quality of schools; teachers are becoming scarce, and a decline in quality education is emerging (Changying, 2007). Any

organization is susceptible to turnover; in moderation, this is healthy, according to Ingersoll (2001). However, Keller (2014) encouraged schools to use a symbolic framework to ensure that they have consistent strategies in place in efforts to create a culture that gives the school meaning and “inspires the school community to have a common faith” (p. 13). Trustworthy behavior and empowerment could reinforce norms and foster a greater level of trust within the organization (Browning, 2014; Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2014).

Keller (2014) proposed that a symbolic framework encourages the leader to create a culture that influences the staff to become a cohesive culture. Supporting the cross-cultural nature of an international school this symbolic framework is achievable since “international educators demonstrate a greater ability to teach from a global perspective” (Savva, 2013, p. 215). By using this symbolic framework, the pattern of turnover, attrition, and teacher dissatisfaction could be reversed only if individual fear is abandoned and focus is given to collective activities. Allowing teachers the opportunity to be part of solutions and initiatives leads to connectedness within the organization. When teachers feel isolated within the international school community, the work of educators and leaders is hindered (Murakami-Ramvalho & Benham, 2010). The result of organizational turnover not only created isolation but also of staffing problems, cohesion, and performance within the school community. (Ingersoll, 2001). Engaging in trusting leadership practices establishes strong relationships of people employed by the organization and is facilitated when leaders gain perspective from staff members that represent a range of people from the organization (Browning, 2014).

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

Mancuso, Roberts, and White, (2010) examined teacher turnover in Near East South Asia (NESA) international schools and to identify teacher turnover. Mancuso et al. (2010) suggested that teacher movement was in relation to satisfaction with salary, perceived effectiveness of school head, and perceived level of faculty input into decisions. The study

included two populations, heads of school with Near East South Asia schools and Western-trained teachers. They represented a wide variety of schools in different countries and school size. A survey was distributed to the 40 NESA heads of schools, 22 of which responded, and 576 teachers of which 56 were excluded and only 248 responded. Mancuso et al. (2010) surveyed both school leadership and teachers, however only 55% of heads of schools and 47 percent of teachers responded. A higher percentage in participants would be ideal, however the research focused in a specific geographic reason. The survey questions also added validity by being qualitative in nature and free of bias. Mancuso et al. (2010) further suggested that noteworthy findings of organizational conditions and how the hiring of heads of school and leadership development have on informing practices.

Odland and Ruzicka (2009) focused on teacher turnover in international schools. They surveyed 281 expatriate teachers identifying variables that cause them to leave at the end of their first contract. They used a mixed method approach and collected data through survey responses distributed to 3079 teachers in the Council of International Schools (CIS) database. However, this only represented 10 percent of the total teaching population in the CIS database. The survey instrument had 22 questions, 20 were closed-set response and optional open-ended response, and two were open-ended response. Out of the 3079 teachers, only 286 completed the survey and five were excluded for not meeting the criteria. Odland and Ruzicka (2009) acknowledged that the data did not have substantiating effect, it still recognized issues among international schools. The welfare of the teachers and how that promotes longevity in international schools and the effectiveness of addressing issues results in a positive impact for student within the school.

Roskell (2013) examined culture shock experienced by international teachers by using a qualitative study to describe the experiences of teachers relocating to international schools. The methodology employed was longitudinal and an ethnographic approach. The study took

place in a British international school in South East Asia where the researcher was employed and involved 12 teachers who were interviewed four times during the entire school year. The findings suggested that host culture characteristics, relationships, and work characteristics contributed to their culture shock and adjustment difficulties into their new school. However, even though the study was longitudinal, included a well-balanced participant pool, and had the opportunity for observation the study focused on only one location. Therefore, not providing a greater insight into the world of international schools and teacher retention.

Literature and the Research Questions

School leadership. According to Murakami-Ramalho and Benham (2010), “leadership dynamics in international schools could reveal valuable insight on personal processes that include continuous learning in order to build vital leadership capital” (p. 640). Sharplin (2009) described the need for higher-level collegial and administrative support and its ability to facilitate pedagogy and cultural adaptation of teachers. McLeod (2002) spent 18 years with the Bay Mills Indian Community learning about leadership. The message conveyed by a Bay Mills elder describes all individuals as equals around a fishing net. McLeod (2002) stated:

Sometimes an individual pulls harder than the next [at the fishing net], but then the next person reciprocates their effort at a different time. Leadership moves in a circle, where there should be equal respect because in the circle is a combination of past, present, or future leaders (p. 1).

International schools are global societies that constantly change and require leadership to be adaptable and constantly change (Murakami-Ramalho & Benham, 2010). Murakami-Ramalho and Benham (2010) adopted the fishing net metaphor to explain the engagement of the members within a school. Since international schools are complex organizations serving not only host-country nationals but also international clients, the values

of both are integrated into the education of the students (Murakami-Ramalho & Benham, 2010). When taking into consideration that international schools service two separate groups of clients, Keller (2014) proposed dualities are “spatial dualities; opening gateways across eras, and temporal dualities bridging boundaries across cultures” (p. 1). Keller (2014) pointed out that working with dualities grants leaders the opportunity to “switch sides between the truth and the equal and opposing truth,” to avoid conflict. Leadership must “maintain integrity as they navigate through situations with opposing forces” (p.2). Balancing integrity while interacting with opposing groups and cultures facilitates success within the organization.

By combining the fishing net metaphor of McLeod (2002) with Keller’s (2014) spatial dualities, it is evident that the leadership of international schools must highlight the ideals within the school as they face a constantly changing school dynamic, and the arrival of new teachers they must lead. Keller (2014) stated these ideals could include the “development of vision and mission documents, building consensus, and maintaining continuity toward a vision that all focuses on the ideals of internationalism, cultural understanding, and related concepts” (p. 4). Many variables such as teaching load, salary, staff morale, policies, and procedures impact a teacher’s decision to leave an international school; however, most of those variables are under the control of the school leadership (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). When teachers leave international schools, their experience, relationships, and knowledge of the school leave with them, leaving gaps in the institution. This requires the remaining teachers to take a bigger portion of the “fishing net” until new teachers join and integrate into the school (McLeod, 2002). When school leaders identify teachers likely to resign early, and then identify what factors, if changed, would retain a member of the “fishing net” circle, this would not only maintain consistency but also as a cost-effective measure for the school.

Difficult situations and problems could be avoided if expectations are clearly articulated from the beginning and the school leadership immerses incoming teachers into the school culture (Stirzaker, 2004). In order to prevent attrition and make teachers enthusiastic to teach, they need to feel respected (Changying, 2007). Leadership capacity depends on the development of incremental organizational learning, requiring all participants to be flexible as changes occur (Murakami-Ramvalho & Benham, 2010). Murakami-Ramvalho and Benham (2010) stated,

“Building and sustaining leadership capacity to create change in international schools depend[s] greatly on individuals who have the competence to recognize emotions in organizations and passion to solve teaching and learning challenges. Purposeful action is successful when those involved generate new and deep learning about the issues they confront” (p. 640).

Leadership and management could affect the culture of the school positively when it establishes and utilizes common communication, practices, and a language (Joslin, 2002).

Teacher retention within international schools presents a crucial need and the loss of key teachers or administrators means a loss of continuity within programs (Mancuso et al., 2010). This loss of continuity affects how efficiently the organization could manage the equality of roles within the school. School leadership feels this strain, but also becomes a strain on the staff and students. Odland and Ruzicka (2009) found that treatment from school leadership and lack of support influenced the teacher’s decision to leave. McLeod (2002) acknowledged that the use of the “fishing net” metaphor may have the potential to hide other flaws. How effective the organization and its people could be affected by organizational tensions and individual agendas (Murakami-Ramvalho & Benham, 2010). When facing challenges of culture shock, living conditions, school adjustment, and a variety of other

challenges, teachers in international schools rely heavily on the leadership serving the school (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009).

Impact of retention and staff relations. International companies often post their personnel in global locations and provide cultural training prior to departure; however, working internationally in the education sector is the choice of the educator, meaning it is ultimately his or her responsibility to engage in cultural preparation (Joslin, 2002). Based on the different experiences of teachers, there is no single set of beliefs or practices that define a teacher. Within international schools, leaders have to navigate the intricate cultural barriers presented by a diverse staff working in a foreign country. Culture, backgrounds, and teacher characteristics make the teaching profession non-homogeneous (Sachs & Smith, 1988). Not only are international schools non-homogeneous, the subcultures and countercultures can lead to expressive or critical views of the given culture (Kipnis, 2001).

These organizational conditions, or intrinsic elements, relate to relationships with colleagues, professional growth, responsibility afforded, and student motivation, to name a few (Mancuso et al., 2010). The development of a vision and mission, building consensus, and maintaining stability focuses on the ideals of internationalism and cultural understanding in international schools (Keller, 2010). Odland and Ruzicka (2009) listed culture shock, language barriers, and living conditions as some of the tensions new recruits face; they observed that support from the school community is heavily needed. Leaders of international schools appear to have difficulty handling these various tensions while integrating new teachers within the school (Keller, 2014). When the school leadership is competently contributing to the culture of the organization, staff are much more likely to feel a sense of trust (Browning, 2014).

The intrinsic elements of international schools vary from country to country, and as leadership changes, incoming personnel introduces new elements. Not only do the

characteristics of the employees matter, but the overall conditions of the workplace also significantly affect an employee's decision to stay (Ingersoll, 2001). Different leadership styles and the integration of new and existing staff shift the dynamics within the school. The dynamics within an international school are always changing. Dynamics change when teachers leave a school and incoming teachers take their place. Relationships start from the beginning, trust needs to be built, and integration into the school community takes time. When schools lack collaboration, networking, and support had higher attrition rates (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Knowing and understanding the causes of teacher turnover is essential to retain high-quality teachers and preserve their learning environment (Mancuso et al., 2010). It is noted that the average tenure of international school leaders was only 3.7 years because they had difficulty handling tensions within the school (Benson, 2011).

International schools are each unique, differing in such elements as curriculum, geographical location, cultural beliefs, and core values. When it comes to shared similarities among international schools, each international school could select an accrediting organization and had the freedom to select which one(s) best fits their school. These accrediting organizations loosely connect one international school to another. This independence makes it difficult to find data on teacher turnover (Ortloff & Escobar-Ortloff, 2001). Intrinsic and extrinsic elements are sometimes out of the control of the leadership within an organization; it is in this case that school leadership, whenever possible, handles the conditions to the best of their ability that are conducive to teacher growth, teacher commitment, and quality of lives to preserve and retain quality within the profession (Rhodes et al., 2004).

Recruitment and transparency. It has been the experience of this researcher, through review of past contracts and job offers, that teachers often had to give notice if they are going to stay early in their second contractual year. For example, many recruitment

agencies and the schools that subscribe to their services begin looking for teachers as early as October when recruiting for the typical August through June school year. Therefore, teachers need to make a decision for their next placement, in most cases, by December 1 at the latest so positions could be filled in a timely matter. Usually, this is due to visa requirements of the country and the time needed to get paperwork certified and translated. The decision to leave an international school varies from teacher-to-teacher and was based on a complex combination of variables both personal and school related (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). School leaders need to be aware that a single set of beliefs that make a teacher does not exist (Sachs & Smith, 1988). Stirzaker (2004) insisted: “All teachers, including experienced ones, require and deserve appropriate induction when they start at a new school” (p. 32). Teachers need time to adjust to unfamiliar content and to properly plan, using their expertise within the new environment (Stirzaker, 2004).

When teachers enter their new international school a strong induction, if provided, allows them to integrate effectively into the school culture, motivating them to be productive and dedicated (Stirzaker, 2004). Providing incoming teachers with a smooth transition into the culture of their new school allows them to adjust to their new setting. First-time teachers tend to be naïve and to have unrealistic expectations about similarities between their home country and their school’s host country (Roskell, 2013). Aspects the individual faces during the job experience are either deeply satisfying or dissatisfying, affecting both morale and retention or exit from the profession (Rhodes et al., 2004). In addition, teachers who get support from their fellow teachers are less likely to be unhappy with their jobs (Sass, Seal, & Martin, 2011).

When filling teaching vacancies, international school leadership must understand that new teachers will change the stability and functioning of the learning community, since relationships are not established (Kersaint et al., 2007). Leadership could ensure effective

induction when people are motivated through continuous induction and learning opportunities, as it familiarizes new teachers with school content, reduces confusion, and encourages them, allowing them to integrate into a positive environment during this critical time (Sharplin, 2009; Stirzaker, 2004). If teachers adjust poorly, it affects their ability to succeed, and their contribution to the school will be inadequate (Joslin, 2002). Careful selection of potential teachers, appointing them into positions that extenuate their skills, and appraising them regularly will aid teachers in adapting to the environment, as well as encouraging dedication and enthusiasm (Changying, 2007; Stirzaker, 2004).

Misrepresentation during recruitment through overselling, confusion regarding salary, workloads, or school dynamics, as this lays the foundation for a lack of trust and a potential point that makes teachers later break their contract (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Stirzaker, 2004). Candidates need to be knowledgeable and informed about the culture and purpose of the school in order to determine whether their skills will be recognized and appreciated (Joslin, 2002). Induction was the key area where leadership could help new teachers make a smooth transition to their new school environment; this could include workplace culture and the culture outside of work (Stirzaker, 2004).

Clarifying expectations and channeling motivation from the onset of induction could help avoid problems and immerse teachers into the organization's culture. Overwhelming newly recruited teachers with information at the beginning does not allow for a smooth transition; when structured and paced induction allows for learning and feedback. Keeping in mind that induction takes several months, not days, continuous follow-up and training is dependent on the individual needs and the situation (Stirzaker, 2004). After a teacher is contracted for a 2-year period, it would be vital to allot time for follow-up and training throughout this time. "The loss of key teachers or administrators could cause a loss of

continuity to programs that could disrupt the work of a school” (Mancuso et al., 2010, p. 307).

Host country culture. Teaching internationally provides a unique experience that transplants the teacher from the familiarity of his or her home country to a foreign experience. This unique experience, though often beneficial, comes with challenges (Savva, 2013). The decision to teach overseas is an individual’s choice; however, the transition could be a life-changing event. Given Sachs and Smith’s (1988) assertion that there is not a single set of beliefs or practices that all teachers embrace, the leader’s role in acclimating new teachers into their school presents a critical task. Many teachers choosing to work abroad are aware of adjustments needed when entering a host culture; they draw from their previous experiences to form a more satisfying culture (Sachs & Smith, 1988). When teachers come from previous experiences they could experience unrealistic expectations in their international school, the differences could make them feel dissatisfied or unsupported. Adjusting to the new work environment could make a teacher feel “deskilled,” this is an element of culture shock and could have an adverse effect on their adjustment (Roskell, 2013, p. 168). School leaders need to anticipate culture shock at the onset of the induction period and have plans in place to motivate and assure teachers that support is in place. When support is lacking, teachers often form “culture bubbles,” relying on support from culturally similar “anchors,” while some “go native,” embracing the local culture (Sharplin, 2009, p. 196). Little is known about why teachers change or exit the work force, mainly because while teacher-specific data were used in previous studies, that data tracked only when the teachers were employed, not their reasons for leaving (Stinebrickner, 2002).

In organizational and educational studies, teacher job satisfaction can be seen as the crossroads of when “confidence and expectations will be met” (Van Houtte, 2015, p. 248). The presence of distrust could lower satisfaction as a person comes to believe he or she

cannot rely on others (Van Houtte, 2015). Promoting positive interpersonal relationships within the school should be a consideration when leaders hire, guide, and welcome new staff (Rhodes et al., 2004). The development of core values and a unified purpose could be difficult when performing routine tasks, such as forming relationships and learning school routines, contrast with the deeper details that are present in the host country (Joslin, 2002). A positive environment could produce an encouraging fit as the teacher integrates into the culture.

Culture is a lived experience, influencing the way people act and their interactions with others, especially between varied cultures (Sharplin, 2009). Entering a new culture involves more than the typical integration into a school within one's own society and community; a non-native teacher in a host country needs to assimilate into two worlds: professional and cultural. Initial interactions of international educators living and working in a country other than their own are likely to encounter "culture shock" (Smith, 2014, p. 118). Leadership cannot compensate for the way society views teachers, consequently school leaders could encourage the organizational culture by creating an environment that could inspire stronger job-related attitudes (Rhodes et al., 2004). Through guidance, teachers could shift their perceptions and mannerisms to acclimate themselves into their new environment (Savva, 2013). According to Savva (2013), once teachers transplant themselves into a new country as the "foreigner" they begin to understand the intercultural challenges and develop "empathy" (p. 220).

Experienced overseas teachers have established expectations of students, school culture, and colleagues as well as a developed teaching confidence. When teachers are confronted with "new cultures and with new social and organizational content, they need to modify their expectations" (Sharplin, 2009, p. 200). English-speaking teachers tend to insulate themselves to feel safe inside their school community while they try to gain

meaningful perspectives on the outside culture (Savva, 2013). Through motivation and influencing the emotional climate of the organization, leaders motivate their staff and positively impact the climate and working lives of their teachers (Rhodes et al., 2004).

Review of Methodological Issues

Current research reviewed for this study, pertaining to retention in international schools was diverse and not heavily isolated from one geographical region. Previous research and studies found through this study are limited and range from small populations in specific locations to large populations surveyed, resulting in small returns from participants. The research selected regarding this study involved recruitment practices, cultural perceptions, and the importance of leadership within international schools. The methodologies used within the studied literatures were qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods design, longitudinal studies, and case studies.

The literature discovered during this review centered on qualitative methods incorporating surveys, interviews, and observations (Hacohen, 2012; Hrycak, 2015; Machin, 2014; Mancuso et al., 2010; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Roskell, 2013; Savva, 2013). The literature focused on various topics ranging from leadership practices, staff satisfaction, belief systems, student relationships, induction methods, and culture. The surveys incorporated both open-ended and closed-set questions, Likert scales, and short responses.

Some of the different approaches taken by researchers included a mixed methodology by Hrycak (2015), based on data gathered using different methods, Roskell (2013), using observations and interviews to perform an ethnographic study, and Murakami-Ramalho and Benham (2010), observing leadership dynamics in American international schools in relation to belief systems, values, and actions while working towards change. Hacohen (2012) used a grounded theory method focusing on reasons, actions, and consequences. Comparing

phenomena to each other, to the experience of the research and to previous research in semi-structured interviews provided interpretation of the data.

Populations sampled for the studies varied between large populations and small population groups. Sharplin (2009) had a case study with six participants recruited through snowballing; participants took part in the study while located in Australia. Chandler (2010) contacted four former colleagues, asked them to disseminate the survey to others, leading to the return of 26 surveys giving the experience and opinions of international schoolteachers to be examined. The participant pool included participants of diverse backgrounds. Sharplin (2009) found that that participants encountered difficulties adapting to their Australian placement, four of the participants remained for at least two years, whereas the other two participants stayed less than six months.

Mancuso et al. (2010) conducted research in a specific region where study participants were from varied countries and backgrounds; the variables were specific teacher characteristics, specific school characteristics, and specific organizational conditions and how the abovementioned variables affected teacher turnover. There were two sets of questions: one for heads of schools within Near-East South Asia (NESA), resulting in responses from 22 out of the 44 head of schools, and another for expatriate teachers from the 22 participating schools. Schools were used to select the teacher participants using the well-defined criteria of Western teachers who have been working for more than one year within the NESA schools. Odland and Ruzicka (2009) used the entire population of teachers in the Council of International Schools (CIS) database to conduct a survey with 20 closed-set responses questions and two optional open-ended questions examining teacher turnover. Making questions optional, however, leaves room for missing data and information. The aforementioned studies shared the same passion and examined the factors that made teachers

unsatisfied with their international school and why they decided to leave. The literature reviewed contributed to my understanding and aided in the development of this study.

Synthesis of Research Findings

The actions and results of the aforementioned researchers are diverse and differ as much as the international organizations where the research took place. The various settings and populations researched in the following studies are not specific to one group of individuals but are surveys of people from a region in which there is an international school. Sharplin (2009) and Hrycak (2015) discussed how teachers had a positive experience when they are informed and have knowledge of their location, as compared to those with inaccurate knowledge that causes difficulty with adjustments. International teachers are constantly reflecting on their occupations, experiences, and challenges. This data could be useful to school leadership and incoming teachers and should be present accordingly, thus requiring core values of the organization to be clearly presented to the recruited teachers when they accept their new position (Guarino et al., 2006; Stirzaker, 2004).

Administrative support was not only for new recruits, but the organization requires the voice of the whole staff be taken into consideration when making decisions. Teacher departures affect the morale and stability of the teaching environment and could be prevented when flexibility meets reflection of the organizations (Changying, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001). Unfamiliar work cultures are not uncommon to even the most experienced teachers. When adjusting to a new international school, some conditions out of the teacher's control, such as new policies, expectations, or cultural differences, requiring the teacher to have support to engage in coping mechanisms individually. Leaders should be cognizant of the personal and professional factors that change or need to change over the course of someone's career path (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Roskell, 2013; Sachs & Smith, 1988; Stirzaker, 2004).

International schools and each individual within the organization had their own set of

beliefs and identities. These differences in the systems and cultures are reflected in the individual's emotions, fears, experiences, and culture and need appropriate support. It was important to realize that international school leaders value the differences, educate the whole teacher, and build a culture (Joslin, 2002; Keller, 2014; Murakami-Ramvalho & Benham, 2010). When there was a plan to enhance conditions for school faculty, and address issues within the organization, the impact was positive for the school. However, this requires rigorous evaluation and in order to maintain standards to recruit the most effective teachers (Guarino et al., 2006; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009).

Critique of Previous Research

According to Joslin (2002), international schools can provide exposure to many cultures, international mindedness, balanced curriculums that incorporate the local culture and selected educational standards, and an internal philosophy. However, this exposure is not enough, as the balance between the benefits of international teaching and the introduction to this world needs preparation. In order for the recruited teacher to be receptive to the benefits of this exposure, acknowledging their previous experience, encouragement, and providing balanced support is necessary. Each member of the organization has his or her own "cultural backgrounds," comprised and the development of an international mindset takes time (Stirzaker, 2004, p. 46).

International teachers choose to place themselves overseas, possibly to see more of the world or gain a broader teaching experience, however, the diverse backgrounds represented within the school requires the opportunity for leaders to encourage others to influence the organizational culture (Murakami-Ramvalho & Benham, 2010). School leaders and teachers interested in international teaching could benefit to heed the research of Mancuso et al. (2010) and examine the teacher's ability to have international mindedness, adaptability, and flexibility during recruitment, and continuing that process once they join the

organization for the start of the school year. Leadership styles of international school leaders are also more successful when they center on a transformational or distributed leadership style (Mancuso et al., 2010). These leadership styles allow for the open exchange of views, valuing, and collaboration of staff, as seen in McLeod (2002) “fishing net” metaphor to represent the engagement of the whole organization working towards a shared purpose, and avoiding tensions as they work together.

The literature reviewed for this study was diverse and conducted in several geographical regions. Previous research found for this study were limited and participant groups varied in size, which made collecting data to represent the large population of international schools difficult. The literature selected for this study included recruitment practices, cultural perceptions, and the importance of leadership within international schools. The methodologies used within the studied literatures also varied, but actual studies were limited and did not share similar topics for comparison and contrast of findings.

Chapter 2 Summary

Relocating overseas and entering a culture outside of their own is the choice of the international teacher. Much more than simply “sticking pins in a map” to see the world, teachers are making decisions that greatly affect their lives and future (Chandler, 2010, p. 225). Leaders could keep this in mind when recruiting and inducting new teachers into the school organization and culture. The period of induction was the appropriate time to incorporate the new teacher into the school culture (Stirzaker, 2004). It was an important time to familiarize them with school procedures, expectations, culture, and vision, but also to pace the new teachers as they gain balance in their new (Murakami-Ramalho & Benham, 2010).

Staff members and students need to be nurtured and an “atmosphere of respect” needs to be established such that individual goals could be valued (Hacohen, 2012, p. 122).

Resistance was a normal response as new members enter the organization and country and take the time needed for appropriate induction. As Joslin (2002) stated: “Living and working in another culture requires adjustment to a wide range of multiple systems” (p. 34). With this wide range of multiple systems, cultures, and procedures, it was no surprise that annual surveys administered by the European Council of International Schools (ECIS) “portray a rudimentary picture of teacher turnover in international schools” (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009, p. 6). With the limited studies regarding teacher retention in international schools, whether it was in a small participant pool, or wide geographic location, there was a continued need to examine what the cause and impact of teacher attrition had on an organization.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The research focus of this phenomenological study was determining the experiences of North American teachers working overseas at international schools who broke their contracts within the first year. The research method included an introductory survey that determined eligibility for the study and a series of first round interview questions that were open-ended and allowed for a second follow-up interview and reflective questions. According to Mancuso et al. (2010), international schools lack research on teacher turnover and particularly overseas schools accredited by North American institution. Creating research questions, developing the survey instrument, conducting interviews, and developing qualitative research in the form of phenomenological methodology could discover the factors affecting teacher attrition.

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of North American teachers working in international schools and why they chose to leave within the first year. The phenomena studied were the lived experiences of the participants that resulted in them deciding to break their contracts at their international school within the first year. Open-ended questions assisted in finding themes between the participants and provide a deeper understanding (Creswell, 2013).

The lived experiences of the participants and their relationships with school leadership, the method of recruitment and induction, and cultural influence of the host country and school will be discussed in this phenomenological study. The responses to these sub-questions from the participants could be used to find commonality, and align data for relevant use in the international school setting. The responses to personal interviews and follow-up interviews were the sources of the data, which was subsequently coded. This study

searched for the essence, or core themes, of teachers who broke their international teaching contracts within the first year.

Research Questions

What was the experience of North American teachers who broke their contracts with international schools after one year? This central research question would be supported by the following sub questions:

1. How do these teachers experience relationships with leadership and students?
2. What role, if any, did their recruitment and induction have on their decision to leave?
3. What role, if any, did the culture of the host country play on their decision to leave?

To support this research a qualitative phenomenological research focusing on interviews of expatriate North American teachers, and school directors.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of North American teachers working in international schools and why they chose to leave within the first year. This information could aid leadership within international schools to strengthen or improve practices to retain teachers and maintain consistency for the school, staff, and students. The aim of the study was to discover the contributing factors to teachers' decisions, within the first year, to not complete their contracts. By understanding their lived experience, school leaders could be able to improve their effectiveness and become more transparent in their communications with existing and future recruited teachers. When teachers had a smooth transition from being outsiders to stakeholders they can transfer comfortably to a new country and school. Rhodes et al. (2004) proposed that when school leaders, when possible, create conditions within the school that enhance the quality of the teacher's more they are likely to stay.

Providing international school leaders with the results of this study could allow them to evaluate school policies, practices of recruiting, inducting, and supporting new staff into the existing international school environment. While ensuring that school leadership establishes sustainable and trusting relationships in the school culture with recruited teachers. In addition, allowing all stakeholders to discover how leadership, existing staff members, and other staff members could work together in order to reduce teacher attrition within the first year. Using the collected data, changing recruitment methods, and teacher induction practice; leadership of international schools could discover a way to improve teacher retention. The benefits of improved retention come in many forms from strengthening teacher-student relationships, shared visions, and staff consistency, to spending less time on training and induction.

Design of the Study

The research design for this study was a qualitative phenomenological study design. Discovery of common themes between participants organized their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The sub questions allowed this researcher to use open-ended questions to reach a common conclusion. Sub questions would look at different aspects of the central issue from a variety perspectives (Wolcott, 2009).

Throughout this phenomenological study the researcher looked in-depth at interviews from individual participants, follow-up discussions, and accounts for the teacher's time spent teaching in international schools. The participants were selected from the initial survey dispersed to the selected schools in the Middle Eastern area. The interview discussions would focus on school leadership, relationships with staff and students, culture of the host country, recruitment, and induction methods. Through examining the collected data this researcher gained an understanding and develop knowledge to share with the international teaching community.

A phenomenological study focuses on the shared experience of the participants and assisted in identifying their reasons for breaking their contract after one year. Investigating shared experience among participants' aids in gathering the personal reflections or events from one individual or several individuals (Creswell, 2013). It was through the collection of these reflections and events that this researcher painted a picture of attrition of North American overseas teachers in international schools.

Research Population

The target population in this qualitative phenomenological study was 8–10 North American expatriate teachers. The teachers could be from any content area, however, they must have been a North American expatriate to the country in which they broke their contract. The participants in this study could vary in gender, age, content areas, and years of experience. Due to the researcher's location and proximity to these schools, the target population was North American expatriate teachers working within international schools based in the Middle East. Collection of demographic information ensured that study parameters were met. Interviews took place via Skype and in person, if the teacher lived within the vicinity of the researcher.

Sampling Method

To gain access to possible participants for this phenomenological study, the heads of school were contacted at various international schools in the Middle East. An email to the heads of school explained the study and asked for permission to survey their teachers and to disseminate the introductory email to their staff. The same email included an introductory message to the teachers, inviting the teachers to participate in the study by completing an online questionnaire survey for selection for the study. A snowballing method was used to generate the participant pool. The questionnaire survey allowed the researcher to select the study participants. After collection of the information, the researcher contacted the potential

participants and scheduled the initial interview, answered any questions, explained the role of the researcher, and the participant's role in the study. Member checking took place throughout the course of interviews to align and verify data collected.

If an overwhelming response occurred, participants could be selected based on adding diversity to the study by selecting various teaching backgrounds and countries in which teachers have worked; this would not allow demographic details to omit a possible participant, but instead ensure purposeful sampling by screening the individuals interested in participating. Each participant interested in participating in the study signed a consent form, which allowed him or her to leave the study at any time. Each participant engaged in personal interviews and follow-up discussions, and to preserve anonymity, they were given pseudonyms for all notes, communication, and during the interviews. Contact with the participants included email, phone calls, and personal notes they provided.

Instrumentation

The framework of this study was qualitative and a phenomenological approach using interviews and surveys to report the lived experience of the participants. The collection of data from the involved participants was used to develop a composite description of the shared experience (Creswell, 2013). The main instrumentation tool for this study was interview questions answered by the participants; notes from interviews, and transcribed recordings from the interview sessions served as documentation.

In phenomenological research, identifying a key "what" and "how" the participants experienced is crucial (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). The interviews centered on the individuals during their recruitment, relationships with school leaders, and time in the country where they broke the contract. Questions and discussions focused on their recruitment and induction into the school, school leadership, and culture of the host country and school. To ensure data collected was represented correctly, all interviews sessions were recorded, transcribed, and

member checked by the participants. These discussions took place over the course of four months and had a set of open-ended questions each participant answered to allow deeper discussions to develop, and the development of follow-up questions.

Data Collection

The formation of relevant questions ensured that the participants discussed the meaning of their experience as teachers who have broken contracts within the first year. Open-ended questions focusing on the main question, with attention given to sub-questions of induction, recruitment, relationships, and host country culture, were discussed in detail. To ensure the validity of the interviews, all relevant documents, surveys, and transcribed notes were reviewed, coded, and aligned for similarities. The interviews incorporated standard open-ended questions to allow the interviews to be conducted evenly among the participants. The use of standard questions gave meaning to the study, and allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the lived experiences of each individual as they described their experience.

Identification of Attributes

The variables within this phenomenological study were the selected North American international teachers and their experiences resulting in them breaking their contract within the first year. Other variables were the number of previous international placements, experience in their home country, and cultural elements of the international placement. The sub-questions directed the dialogue toward recruitment, induction, leadership, student, and staff relations, and host country culture.

Data Analysis and Procedures

The recorded interviews were used along with any notes and documents collected during the research process to establish themes among participants. Using coding, themes were formed and synthesized to determine a pattern among the participants. Interviews with teachers were used to draw conclusions and find a commonality among their lived

experiences. The limits of this study ensured that selection of participants met the criteria needed to perform the research.

The conducted interviews helped identify the beliefs held by the participants and developed themes that supported the data for this study. At the conclusion of the study, any reflections by the participants were also collected and used for analysis. The data could be used to evaluate how relationships, recruitment and induction, and host culture lead first year teachers to leave after only one year. By implementing the initial survey questionnaire, open-ended interview questions, and reviewing the recorded interview files; data collected ensured that results are triangulated. Observations of the participants were not possible, since the participants described a past-lived experience. The researcher examined each participant's account of the experience and provided documents to provide validity as the study evolves.

Limitations in the Research Design

Foreseen limitations in this phenomenological study are that the findings were only applicable to improving the retention of North American teachers overseas, as they are the selected population for this study. Including other nationalities would limit the findings further due to the differences in culture and upbringing of other nationalities, and the possibility of different reactions to elements outside of their home country. When interviewing the participants, questions must be worded carefully to obtain as truthful as possible a recount of the events resulting in breaking their international contract. The use of multiple interviews, transcription of interviews, member checking, and coding of the data were used to strengthen research findings.

Another limitation is the researcher's geographical location in the Middle East. The study took place in a Middle Eastern country, with participants based in schools within a larger network of schools within the Middle East. If the first attempt at recruiting participants does not result in the necessary number of participants from schools in the

researchers' country, other schools in the Middle East region will be contacted. Using participants outside of the researcher's country is not necessarily a negative, as the basis for the initial recruitment of participants was the same parameters. It would be simply more difficult connecting and observing the participant's body language and emotions during the interview process.

Validation

The credibility of this study developed through the patterns and connections developed by coding the findings in this study. To code the data in an organized manner, the researcher used the software NVivo. Using pseudonyms for the participants the topics of leadership relationships, inductions, recruitment, culture, and student relationships will be used. Detailed descriptions included time and place of the experience and the context of the experience.

Coding the data helped organize the findings and support the transferability into other areas of international teaching research regarding North American expatriate teachers. The interview process in this phenomenological research allowed the formations of patterns, themes, and connections between the participants and their experiences. Using open-ended questions, group discussions, and individual discussions, the researcher made informed conclusions based on the collected data. The researcher's knowledge of the topic at hand, through the thorough review of sources and documentation of the study as it progresses, established credibility (Creswell, 2013).

Establishing dependability of the study required consistent review of research methods and consistent interactions with the participants to develop, reach, and describe an accurate account of their experience. The participants were asked to recall their lived experiences and answer the open-ended questions with detail, honesty, and openness to the best of their ability. Supporting documents such as questionnaires, interview notes, and

reflections at the conclusion of the study helped triangulate the data. Triangulating the data allowed this researcher to modify initial expectations of the study.

The researcher conferred with a third party to ensure the interview questions being asked were understood by an unbiased observer. Having strong and clearly defined questions gave substance to the inquiry (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) stated: “Written accounts must resonate with their intended audiences, and must be compelling, powerful, and convincing” (p. 248). Taking the measures necessary to gather, document, and concisely represent data ensured its dependability.

Expected Findings

The world of international teaching was already a transient profession for expatriates, unlike the status quo for native teachers, in which finding a job outside their home country is impossible or difficult and, once secured, is retained. However, many factors could make newly transplanted expatriates in an unfamiliar country sensitive to situations that are beyond their comfort level, or out of their control. The result is often an early termination of their two-year overseas contract.

All individuals are unique in their choices and life experiences, as are the stories shared in this phenomenological study. This researcher hoped to find common experiences between the participants in this study regarding how these teachers experienced relationships with school leadership and students, if their recruitment and induction was a factor in their decision to leave, and if the culture of the host country had a role in their decision to leave. This study resulted in recommendations international teachers and school leaders of international schools could use or data for further studies in strengthening teacher retention.

Ethical Issues in the Study

The study began after receiving consent of the participants; pseudonyms and coding protected their identities. The research steps met the protocol and requirements of Concordia

University. Ethical issues addressed by this researcher included the fact she is herself an international educator who broke a contract and ensuring that this position does not become a conflict of interest or allow uncontrolled bias into the research.

Defined criteria ensured purposeful sampling of participants in this study. The researcher provided details of the study after selection of the participants and their agreement to participate in the study. Participants had the chance to ask questions or withdraw from the study. Participants received and completed consent forms after a detailed description and a question and answer session. The participants were consenting adults, reducing ethical concerns. The participants in the study broke their contract with a previous employer, outside of their current job, and the current employer did not receive participant information. This allowed another layer of confidentiality and ensured the participant that the information shared was secure.

Changing the identities of the participants ensured anonymity throughout the duration and completion of the study. The researcher retains data and records on a USB drive locked in a safe within the researcher's residence for a period of 2 years after the conclusion of the research. All notes and recordings were digitized and backed up in triplicate, paper notes were digitized then destroyed. Consent forms signed by the participants were scanned and saved to the USB drive that the researcher will keep, and the paper copies stored in a locked safe at the researcher's residence for a period of 2 years.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The researcher understands that her role within this study required her bias and her assumptions of her personal experience with breaking her own international contract while working in China to be set aside. The researcher discussed her personal experiences with the participants sharing a similar phenomenon, so they could be set aside to focus on the experience of the participants (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher serves as the Technology Integrationist, which is a leadership position, within her organization. It is a supportive, not supervisory, role. She is also a teacher leader of two student organizations within the school, as well as being involved with music events given her certification background. She had given her current organization 6 years of service. She had no personal affiliation with the ownership of the school or outside entities that serve the school. Her findings give international school leadership of North American teachers a guide for restructuring their interactions with expatriate teachers to increase retention.

Researcher's Position

This researcher conducted her research through interviews between her participants to create awareness among international school leaders of methods they could use to retain and maintain quality teachers within their organization. Teacher and school characteristics, and the structure of the organization in relation to teacher turnover has been overlooked by previous research (Ingersoll, 2001). This researcher evaluated the lived experiences of the participants and drew conclusions through connecting and triangulating similarities. The researcher did not have any supervisory role over the participants, ensuring that there is no coercion of information. The researcher analyzed the data collected and drew conclusions and presented findings. Furthermore, formulating open-ended questions that did not lead participants to a pre-determined conclusion reduced bias. Selecting participants who met the study requirements also reduced bias, and ensured through follow-up interviews that member checking provided clear, accurate, and consistent responses.

Chapter 3 Summary

The lack of research regarding teacher retention in international schools is a concern because the instability of international teachers reduces consistency within the staff, students, and school community. This creates the need for school leaders to investigate recruitment

methods, induction, staff relationships, and host country and school culture to improve school dynamics. When school leaders consider beginning to change existing systems to improve school dynamics, they could see what elements are causing the instability.

The study focused on teacher induction, recruitment, leadership relationships, and host country culture, and the impact of that experience in relationship to teachers breaking their contract within the first year. Participants engaged in interviews and dialogue that provided insight on their shared experiences. The researcher made connections between participant responses, resulting in useable evidence and themes school leadership, administration, school boards, and owners could use to redevelop their schools.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

This research study examined the experiences of North American teachers who broke their contracts with international schools within the first year of their contract. This research study identified the lived experiences of 10 teachers who worked in the international teaching field, as well as previous teaching experience before breaking their overseas contract. A phenomenological approach focused on the experiences of the participants and the meaning they made of that experience (Seidman, 2013). This researcher wanted to present the experiences of the teachers so that their experiences would not remain unknown, and school leaders could benefit from reading their rationale for breaking contract.

The use of phenomenological design in this study enabled a deep insight into the lived experience of the study participants. Focusing on the commonality between the participants represented the human experience and phenomenon they encountered (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenology also facilitated meaningful conversations with the participants and allowed them to speak genuinely about their experience.

The following central research question guided this phenomenological study: What is the experience of North American teachers who broke their contracts with international schools after one year? Three sub-questions supported this central research question:

1. How do these teachers experience relationships with leadership and students?
2. What role, if any, did their recruitment and induction have on their decision to leave?
3. What role, if any did the culture of the host country play on their decision to leave?

Context

The 10 participants were international teachers who consented to be interviewed and profiled individually. Chapter 4 established and presented the themes emerging from the interviews; Chapter 5 will discuss the analyzed results and the conclusions drawn from the

research. The Middle East was the location for this study, in with the interviews via Skype, in person, and telephone. The teachers broke contracts from a variety of schools, held varied positions, and had different teaching specialty areas.

Participant Demographics

For this study, to protect the participants’ identity, I assigned each participant a pseudonym. I applied this action throughout to ensure confidentiality. Table 1 provides a description of each participant’s demographics, including their number, sex, age, years teaching, certification area, and a number of schools before and after they broke contracts. The ten participants in this study included teachers, guidance counselors, principals, mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, spouses, support staff, and volunteers. The participants and their journeys through international teaching were distinctly different from each other.

Table 1.

Participant Demographics

Participant	Sex	Age	Years Teaching	Certification	Schools Before Breaking Contract	Schools After Breaking Contract
1	Male	61	36	Special Education	2	1
2	Female	28	5	K-12 English Speakers of Other Languages and Spanish	1	2
3	Female	56	33	Elementary	1	2
4	Female	32	7	Science Middle/High School	2	2
5	Female	40	9.5	Science Middle/High School	2	1
6	Female	34	9	Health and Physical Education	2	1
7	Female	60	36	Elementary and Learning Disabled	1	0
8	Female	56	27	Visual Art	1	1
9	Female	49	17	Literacy, Special Education, and ESL	4	1
10	Female	55	31	Special Education, Guidance, and Principal	2	1

Participant Profiles

Participant 1. Participant 1 was a 61-year old male, certified in special education, who reported to have 36 years of teaching experience, 10 of which occurred in international schools. When I asked Participant 1 what led him to international teaching, he stated:

I was an administrator in the States, as I am now, and I'm just tired of everything.

Just wanted to get away from it. I was kind of turned off with the American system and the status of education in the United States; pretty burnt out.

Despite feeling burnt out, he went directly into the world of international teaching.

Participant 1 had previous international school experience at a school in the Middle East before he broke a contract in Southeast Asia. He described his setting in the Middle East as “stable, with well-funded resources, security, and solid living arrangements.” He continued to describe that there were minor frustrations with the bureaucratic culture of the Middle East. However, the school “teamed up with governmental relations and eventually navigated through these challenges.” He described the Middle Eastern population of students at his last school as “internationally mixed, compared to the students in Southeast Asia, who were mostly from that region.” He did express that parent relations were better in Southeast Asia than the Middle East. Participant 1 was an administrator at the school in the Middle East and, apart from navigating the culture of Islam and bureaucracy, the way of life was good. The positive aspects of the school in the Middle East were “stable leadership, well-funded resources, good job security, ... financial and living arrangements were pretty solid, just pretty solid experience.”

After completing his contract with the school in the Middle East, Participant 1 and his wife, who also worked with him, moved to a school in Southeast Asia. At that school Participant 1 was also part of the administration team. However, even though he served on the leadership team that did not assist when the school leadership positions were shifted after the director was fired. Participant 1 shared:

It [information given] was a falsehood of when my wife and I got hired. We were laid out a plan of what was going to happen over the next years, even financially. That didn't come to fruition. The director got fired and halfway through the year, and he

was in a direct conflict with the owners and the board of the school. It was just a very tenuous working condition.

These working conditions resulted in him prematurely breaking the contract. Even though the school had a traditional student body with supportive parents, Participant 1 stated: “It was confusing for many people with the change of leadership, with the turmoil of the board or the owners, and the leadership, and not being able to predict.” He said in Southeast Asia his frustration was “a lack of understanding of what school leadership was about, and how to support—how to trust—your administrators, and make things happen.”

Participant 1 served as an administrator at his Middle Eastern school. He described it as a sustainable leadership, “somewhat visionary, and 75%–80% supportive.” Leadership in the Southeast Asia school, however, Participant 1 reported, “It was kind of confusing and they named an interim for the following year, right away [when the director was fired], but that wasn't really a respected choice. It was just a lot of turmoil.” Participant 1 mentioned that the Southeast Asian country itself was great; he had local friends and would sightsee. In his previous country, the prevailing religion was Islam, and now it was Buddhism. He stated the only difference was: “It was Buddhism versus Islam and it was a budding country, growing just like Saudi Arabia.”

When Participant 1 decided to leave the Middle East, he interviewed with two schools: one in Southeast Asia and one in Central Europe. However, the school in Southeast Asia appeared to be a more desirable school. Participant 1 described the director in Southeast Asia as having “a good vision” and talked about collaboration, and moving forward. Unfortunately, as the year progressed, the power struggle between the board, owners, and director resulted in the director being terminated, leaving an untenable situation. “We [the leadership team] tried talking about making decisions together, and we started off on that, and then he [the director] got into kind of a match with the board over [a] power struggle, and

then that shifted away.” Participant 1 mentioned that he could have stayed and perhaps moved up into the director’s position, but with another offer on the table, he chose to leave instead of staying in a “tumultuous situation, that didn’t feel good.”

Participant 2. Participant 2 was a 28-year old female, certified in K–12 English Speakers of Other Languages and Spanish. She reported 5 years of teaching experience, and all five were international. When I asked Participant 2 what led her to international teaching she stated: “I’ve always been drawn to it, ever since I was a little kid.” Participant 2 expressed how much she liked experiencing the culture and getting to know people locally. “It’s more of an experience than what you would have if you were just traveling. You get to stay in those places, and plus you are more central to other places when it is time for vacation,” said Participant 2.

Participant 2 shared that her international experiences were primarily in Central America; she worked for three schools in Central America and described two of them as a positive experience.

They were really positive experiences. The families were really hard-working families. Yes, they were upper class, but they had really good values that they instilled in the kids. They [the parents] were really receptive. They were an amazing group of parents actually, and the kids too. They were really good.

Participant 2 completed 2 years with the first school in Central America. Before Participant 2 discussed the second school in Central America where she broke the contract after a negative experience, she described the third school, where she also the broke contract, but had a positive experience:

The administration was great, very trustworthy, and very responsive whenever you had a question. By that year, I had been teaching for 4 years. The curriculum was wonderful. The only thing that made me break my contract was I got married. My

husband, because of logistics and how things worked out, he couldn't come to Mexico.

Participant 2 also described her time at her second school, where she broke the contract before the year ended. Unlike the first and third school, in which they provided and took care of teacher housing well, and had a comfortable curriculum and a supportive administration which did not “micromanage everything”, the second school was the complete opposite. She described the school as “terrible,” noting:

It was terrible in every single way a school could be terrible. The administration ... I had three bosses and they were super helicopter administration, trying to micromanage everything. The parents were not really receptive, were extremely demanding. The kids, ... the school lied about what grade I was going to be teaching. They lied about how much I was going to make. I ended up teaching 5th graders, and I was supposed to be teaching 1st. The students themselves ... I had a relationship with some of them. [The school was] just terrible in management, thought that the teacher ... Like [the students'] goal was to get the teacher fired. Like that their parents were paying, so “we [the students] own you in some way and you have to do everything we say or else we're going to go complain to our parents,” who would complain to administration. The school housing, it was really far in Mexico City. Transport took a really long time. Transport wasn't provided by the school and took a long time to arrive at school.

Participant 2 said she loved Mexico and the host culture. Living there for 4 years gave her the chance to travel and really understand Mexico:

Speaking Spanish, making Mexican friends, getting to travel to all of the different places and really understand what is Mexico, not just what is Cancun. Like, really see all of it. I was there for 4 years, so I was able to travel every single weekend. ...

Mexico has a lot to see. Mexico's actually one of the most diverse countries in the world. You could one second be in the desert. Then, the next second, be in the jungle, and then be on the beach, and be in the mountains. I didn't realize Mexico was so mountainous. Just getting to know the country, getting to embrace the culture.

When asked why she left and broke the contract Participant 2 stated:

I'm not a person who quits anything really. Everybody in my life was really surprised that I had quit. The core reason why I left is because it was hurting me more than it was helping in any way. I had nightmares. I was so stressed out. I was the skinniest I ever was, and I wasn't able to sleep well. I was having panic attacks while I was on vacation. I was in tears a lot of the time. My mood changed. It was just so incredibly stressful. I'm getting goose bumps. I could not physically handle it anymore, and [what she wanted from a school] was just kind of the lesson that I took ... some fights in life are not yours, so leave them. That fight was not mine.

She even experienced a physical reaction during the interview and said, "I'm getting goose bumps."

I gave it my best, and it just wasn't meant to be. I have that as a lesson on what I'm looking for in a school and what I can do as a teacher to control the environment that I'm in. I learned a lot of lessons but it reached the end and I left because I looked at the amount of money I was going to make ... this was the deciding moment. I looked at the amount of money that I was going to make on a calculator, and I thought, my health is not worth that, that is scrap money, and I quit that day and I left.

Through her experience, Participant 2 examined what she desired in an international school.

Participant 3. Participant 3 was a 56-year old female, certified in Elementary Self-Contained, but also had experience teaching middle school entrepreneurship, English, history, and math. She reported having 33 years of teaching experience, 30 years in the

United States and 3 years at international schools. When I asked Participant 3 what led her to international teaching she stated: “My husband was also a teacher and he wanted to do something different career-wise. He was 10 years older than I was. Our children were all grown and so it was time to have an adventure.”

Before traveling overseas Participant 3 described her experience at her second international placement where the contract wasn't broken as “a regular classroom environment” in a “well-established school in China.” She described the students as “hardworking with super supportive parents who expected their children to attend all the time and perform. The students were self-disciplined and were there to learn.” In relation to school leadership and staff relations, while it was different in that it was an English school, [under British leadership] and not under North American leadership, she regarded the leadership as “approachable and great; a lot of Australians.” Participant 3 had a Chinese co-teacher in the classroom and a diverse teaching staff. She noted: “Relationships between the foreign staff in term of socializing were easier, unless there was a school event, it was difficult to socialize with the Chinese co-teacher.”

Participant 3 had her first international experience at a school located in the Middle East, and this is where the contract was broken. She taught in the elementary classroom:

I really enjoyed my students. I mean, I had really great relationships not only with the students but with the students' parents. Just a very much a sharing of culture since most of the students were from the country itself.

Staff relationships were also strong, she commented:

Oh, wonderful people. Again, I still ... communicate with them on Facebook and just with telephone calls. I've actually visited with some of them. I've worked with some of them [at other international schools]. We talk about vacations and different things we're doing. Yeah, a good relationship with the staff.

Participant 3 mentioned that school was new:

Leadership was in transition. I think that was one of the most difficult parts of it because when you did have a new administrator and a director who knew that she was going to be replaced ... sometimes I think that the communication between the administration was not there all the way, although I felt like I could talk to my administrators there.

Participant 3 was recruited at a job fair for this school in the Middle East, and described making the decision to commit to the contract as “real high pressure.” When asking questions about being a test-driven school and student discipline, the response during the interview differed than what actually proved to be. She stated: “I mean, I felt very welcome, but we [the school] were beginning to implement a new curriculum that was test-driven. It was very clear. I mean, kind of contradictory to policy.”

Participant 3 described settling into both countries, the school in Asia welcomed her and her husband with an appropriate place to stay, but the school in the Middle East differed greatly:

When we did get to our Middle East location, we ... oh, my gosh. We were put up in, like, the hotel from hell. Everyone said that. Doorknobs were coming off the rims and everything. I mean, just even the initial experience was different [between] the two schools. Whereas the other one [in China], they met us, they had food in our apartment; they had bought all the essentials and everything.

In terms of arriving at the school in the Middle East, she felt very welcomed; however, the new curriculum was very test-driven, which was contradictory to what was said during the interview. The school was developing, policies were developing, and the school lacked adherence to the policies that were there, which made helping students not performing

well difficult. Participant 3 felt “forced to try to pick up the pieces here for a policy [attendance policy] that was the administration’s downfall.”

One of the stresses Participant 3 described was the difference between men and women in the Middle Eastern culture. She noted: “The fact that they had a revolution while I was there. Just I felt very much the difference between men and women in the culture as far as the things that they [women] could do and they couldn't do.” Although the school did not have control over the revolution itself, the school “held all the cards.” She stated:

“They were holding you to the fact that you needed to be in there in a situation that wasn't ideal. You were held to all of your end of the contract; whereas there wasn't any ... I don't know ... just all the cards were with them. Everything kept going to their advantage in case of a revolution and should something happen that you terminated it.”

She felt like there was no allegiance from the school to the teachers, the school was only looking out for themselves:

That was a huge decision. Once I felt like that, once I felt like there really wasn't any allegiance there on their part, that they were pretty much just looking out for themselves and not me, then I lost all of my ... what do I want to say? ... feeling for being obligated in that situation. I felt like I was just a pawn and a piece at that point in a scheme ... where they were cutting their losses and trying to not bleed financially. There wasn't anything there as far as feeling for or caring for or taking care of me as an employee. It was all just the school out to protect itself.

Participant 3 stated she had allegiance to the students and staff and finished the year. She also embraced the culture by being involved with the parents; she loved the climate and the sites she could explore in the country. She commented: “The people, my neighbors, my driver, and just the parents of my children, were bubbling over with wanting to share what they had with me.”

She said [her location] became a different country to the one she first entered, she felt the school was doing “as little as they possibly could [during the revolution].”

We actually, right after that revolution, started looking at something else. This was not a comfortable fit anymore. The idea that we were breaking the contract, we knew we were breaking the contract, but you know what? Sometimes in your heart you have to do what is right for you and what feels good and safe for you.

If it wasn't for the revolution, she would have still been there [the school], as both she and her husband loved the country. Participant 3 recalled there were “nasty emails” from the school reflecting on her character when she notified them she would not return. Even though in the end the school backed away [they rescinded the emails], Participant 3 said: “We had to do what was best for us and or our family.”

Participant 4. Participant 4 was a 32-year old female, certified in Middle and High School Science. She reported having 7 years of teaching experience, all of which were in international schools. When I asked Participant 4 what led her to international teaching, she stated: “I fell into it because I moved abroad and wanted to find a career [where] I could continue traveling the world.” This participant had worked in the Middle East and West Africa. She first worked in a school in the Middle East, and described it as “fairly negative and regimented,” but finished the contract. She went abroad to West Africa she felt more autonomous stating: “I absolutely loved it. I had free reign in my classroom where I could do what I wanted to.” When she returned to her home in the Middle East, her new school was not like the first. Participant 4 noted she had “more control, autonomy, and not like a military dictatorship, like her first school in the Middle East.” Staff relationships were described:

The schools within [the Middle East] and even the school in [West Africa], it's very much of [locals] stick together, or the local's stick together, while the expat

community typically sticks together. You're close within your knit, but the two knits never really meshed together very well.

She described the interactions with the students as manageable, but that behavior was not something focused on in the cultures.

Expectations of discipline and everything is pretty much nonexistent. It really depended on the class size; the school in which the contract was broken was better, only because the class size was 11 students, compared to 22 to 23 at the other schools.

She also described the parents in the Middle East as “running the schools here, and have the last word. They pay the bills and that is what [is expected].

Participant 4 recounted that even though there were 13 expatriate teachers on her staff, she and another new expatriate teacher were excluded from the new teacher welcome activities since they already lived in the region. Tensions between the head of school and principals had conflicting interest and “head-butting. [The] tension could be really felt in the room when they were both in the room together.” The school was only about 4 years old, and not only were there leadership clashes; there was a lack of student discipline and poor staff relations. She commented: “They just never saw a need to create anything because most of their teachers [had] [been] previously working in [there], so they never thought they needed an employee handbook for some reason.”

The stresses at work experienced by Participant 4 were the lack of communication, broken promises, and being told “yes, when they actually meant no.” She did admit:

[Its] understanding the difference between when they're telling you the truth, when they're not, when you should expect something, when you shouldn't, and the time frame in which you should expect anything if it's going to get done to get done.

This is just the culture, don't take it personal. It's not that they don't like you. It's not that they don't want to do it, it's just this is their country, and they're always gonna say yes, even though they don't mean it.

She started laughing about the situation, stating: “It became a joke around the school that, ‘inshallah,’ [meaning God willing] maybe something will happen or it won't.” When it came to embracing an aspect of the culture, the biggest thing was “not noticing time.” Being late in the country was not an insult like it was in America. Also, the hospitality of the people welcoming her was notably different than America. “People in this country are always offering food when you walk into a room, [whether] you know them well or not.”

Participant 4's core reason for leaving was the isolation, lack of support, and dehumanizing treatment of the leadership towards her and her son, but also that the “contract wasn't worth the paper it was written on.” She stated she got pulled into the office mid-year and told that due to the school's “financial difficulties and issues facing the school, they could no longer honor the contract terms.” She could stay for half the salary, with no flight home, and a reduction in housing allowance. Participant 4 stated:

[The] lack of communication with housing or with allowance or with salaries or health insurance or anything is strictly up to the school itself starting with admin and filtering down, along with discipline of the students. It can't just be that teachers follow procedures while the admin doesn't follow through and then it becomes a lost cause on the teacher's side.

Even though it was a breach of contract on the school's part, there was little that could be done since she had never received a work permit. She stated, “They [the head of school and principal] laughed at me and told me, ‘Good luck finding another job, mid school year here in [the Middle East].’” Participant 4 stated: “It made my decision fairly easy to leave to leave within the next month.”

Participant 5. Participant 5 was a 40-year old female, certified in Middle School Science. She reported to have 9.5 years of teaching experience; 8 in the United States and the remainder at international schools. When I asked Participant 5 what led her to international teaching, she stated:

One of the reasons was my background in public health. I always wanted to live and work overseas doing that. I ended up going into education when I relocated. One of my older teachers saw an advertisement on TV and remembered that I had shared with her that I wanted to live overseas. She said, “You should interview,” I started researching interviews and was open to it and decided I wanted to do it.

Participant 5 worked for two schools in the United States, then one abroad, and now teaches back in the United States. When describing her time in the school where she did not break the contract, she noted that it was a “great experience.” The school was in a low socioeconomic area and was in critical need of teachers; parent involvement was low due to the language barrier, which is why she felt she “would do well overseas.” Leadership was described as a mix; one school was “stringent” since they weren’t accredited, and the second school was more like her overseas placement, with “more freedom.” Her colleagues were all around the same age and described as “energetic” at the first school, but “more diverse, and difficult to get them involved.” She felt that her experiences in her previous two schools in the United States would be beneficial overseas and she left to try international teaching.

The international school where Participant 5 worked was in the Middle East. She taught middle school science and described the students as “very energetic, creative, but were not used to how [an] American school was run.” The parents were also very active, but portrayed as “helicopter, and needed to let go of the ropes.” She also described them [students] as “talkative,” and remembered thinking, “Oh, my God. They talk more than my African American students.” She described her colleagues as “gumbo,” everyone was from a

different place, with seasoned and unseasoned teachers who were very open, and bonding was easy. “Teachers easily became friends, family, some even married,” she said.

Participant 5 mentioned that the leadership in the Middle East was very good; they were “laid back, had goals and as long as you were following the goals and had a plan to have your kids reach those goals, they’re very open to what you wanted to do.” She also was very positive about her induction into her international school, and said it was “handled as well as it could have been, considering the circumstances [some things are not available] overseas.” Participant 5 clearly articulated she understood that the school was new and going through “new baby growing pains.” She did mention one thing that would have been more enjoyable:

One of the things I think I would have enjoyed much more and I remember stating it was after we received our apartment, [would be] a little bit more ... time before we had to start going to teacher trainings.

Some of the stressful parts about her time internationally with the school were how the school handled disputes with landlords, limited textbooks, and not getting the supplies needed.

Participant 5 said “it would have been nice to have been led by a [local around town] as well,” and that was one of the “things we did document [on the feedback survey].” However, Participant 5 seemed very positive during the entire interview, and stated that as Americans “we have a standard of living, and we just have to be open with that.” The aspects of the culture that Participant 5 embraced were the socializing and fellowship with the parents, and the food, and entertainment. Being invited into people’s homes and culture was something she loved:

I totally enjoyed the food, I enjoyed the entertainment. I enjoyed the fact that I could actually ... how can I say this ... socialize in fellowship with the parents. You don't think about that. Maybe one or two parents you may, but to really literally be out with

all of your parents or being invited into your parents' home and treated to dinner, the culture.

Ultimately Participant 5 left for personal health reasons. “I got engaged. That's another thing. I was one of the people that fell in love overseas so I got engaged, became pregnant and was having some issues.” Even though her physician in that country was trained in the United States, her condition was already a high-risk “geriatric” pregnancy and she needed to return to the United States. She held the school in high regard, from the director to the business office, and for the help the school gave her during this decision. Participant 5 commented that if it weren't for her personal health reasons, she would not have left.

Participant 6. Participant 6 was a 34-year old female, certified in Health and Physical Education. She reported to have 9 years of teaching experience; seven and a half in the United States, and the remainder in international schools. A colleague of Participant 6 said she wanted to teach abroad, so she also checked out a website call TeachAway. When I asked Participant 6 what led her to international teaching she stated:

I was single and I wasn't married at the time and so I felt like, you know, hey, there's nothing to lose, so I went ahead, worked it out and interviewed and was super excited about coming to...work abroad.

Participant 6 described her students in the United States as 85% African-American and 15% white. The students were in high school and hard working. Relationships between colleagues were described as a close-knit family. The staff was 50% African-American and 50% white. Leadership was “kind of laid back.” The principal was male, cared for the teachers, but didn't micromanage. She summarized: “It was a very relaxed, comfortable like, laid-back working environment.”

She went on to discuss and compare the international school, which was located in the Middle East. The majority of her students at her international school were hardworking.

However, at times they “gave a lot of excuses” because:

I feel like no one ever held them to a, not really a standard, well, I guess held them to a standard of “you're going to do this.” It was if they didn't want to, usually they didn't have to, but in my class, it was, “you're going to do it.” It's no ifs, ands, or buts about it.

Colleagues at her school were “great.” Participant 6 stated: “When you are abroad that's who and what you know and so that's your comfort zone, and you... I think you find yourself hanging and dealing with your comfort level.” Participant 6 mentioned that she was robbed and that the coworkers “rallied behind me and helped me.” She wished the school would have done more in this instance. The initial pick up at the airport did not go smoothly and caused some stress, this is an area that could have also been improved.

Participant 6 had a change of leadership during her time at the school, and while both leaders offered individual autonomy, one leadership was described as:

Laid back but “this is what we're going to do, X, Y, and Z,” and the other leadership style was kind of “go for what you know,” kind of figuring it out, well, kind of leaving it up to the individual teacher as to how they wanted to do things versus everyone doing the same thing and [Teachers had] individual autonomy.

As a new teacher, expectations were in place and the “important people [returning teachers] were encouraging and helping.” However, Participant 6 did mention a constantly changing environment within the school. If [teacher needs] would have been planned prior then [the school] would have done better.

There was also a pattern of waiting until the last minute:

Teacher visas ... waited [till the] last minute and then it was rush, rush, rush, "oh, we can't get to yours." My visa ... expired. I'm waiting, [wondering] can I travel or [not]? but I did not [get put out] of the country because I don't have anything, so that [was] one [frustration]. The school was growing and trying to figure it out.

Even though she broke the contract at this school, Participant 6 recounted a positive experience for the most part. The primary reason for her breaking the contract was career advancement. She stated:

Basically, I got another offer. It all boils down to the fact that I got another offer at a school back home and it was something that I wanted to do, I would rather have done than be away, and so that was, in a nutshell of, why.

Participant 7. Participant 7 was a 60-year old female, certified in Elementary, Learning Disabled, and Autism. She reported 36 years of teaching experience; 35 in the United States and one year international. When I asked Participant 7 what led her to international teaching she stated: "My husband suggested it. Because I had taught in the Peace Corps before, it wasn't that big of a stretch to go." Participant 7 was able to take a leave of absence from her school in United States in order to go abroad to the international school.

Participant 7 described her students in the United States as easy to get along with. She taught high school, and had a small classroom. Colleagues at her school were friendly and welcoming, and that it "felt like home," especially with people close to her classroom. The leadership was described as "fine," and she stated,

"They did their best." She was able to teach internationally because her school gave her leave of absence. She said: "We had leaves of absence, so you could try other things and come back. If family matters got in the way or something."

The school overseas was located in the Middle East, and she taught first grade. She described her students as “energetic, and not time-consuming”. She did state: “It was a hard job. It's hard to step into a job in the first year I think. It takes a lot of work to get it up and going. The kids were cute.” Her colleagues on her grade level team were “very friendly, willing to share information, and help you.” Participant 7 said the leadership “wasn't great. There were a lot of observations and stuff; they [had] similar, [styles between the two principals]” “She [the elementary principal] also was gone at the end of the year. I don't know, I got conflicting messages from her. So, I guess a little questionable.”

When Participant 7 went with her husband to a recruitment fair, she recalled that: “There were long lines everywhere except the Middle East. Those guys were really trying to get people to come over to their tables and interview or be interested in what they had to offer.” During her tenure at her school in the Middle East she noted:

I think they [the school] put more attention to [induction] and spent some time helping orient people. We came a week early, I think. There were days before the rest of the staff came, just because I think it was a foreign country and it was going to be a little harder to find your way around.

Items that stressed Participant 7 included that this was the first time teaching first grade, and weekly meetings made her feel like “some of it was just jumping through hoops.” Participant 7 thought the turnover in the administration made it difficult to have a balance of meeting and classroom time.

When Participant 7 and her husband came to the Middle East she recalled, It was during a big riot, we were in Paris and there were big fires, you know on the TV and stuff to show the unrest. But it got worse you know, I mean it had a bad reputation because when we went to the job fairs nobody was really that interested in

the Middle East. It just got worse ... by the time we left everyone said it was no big deal where the school was located though.

Participant 7 commented that she felt safe and that it wasn't the same as what was on the television.

The reason for breaking the contract was family. It had to do with our families. My husband and I are older, and our parents. We told them that we were going to be gone a year, I didn't realize it was a two-year contract until I got to the job fair. We thought we'd go, not day-by-day, but year-by-year. There are just a lot of variables. It was really ... family was the reason that we came back.

Participant 7 decided to leave her international school for family reasons. Although there were difficulties in her host country politically and frustrations within the school she felt safe and comfortable at her international school.

Participant 8. Participant 8 was a 56-year old female, certified in Visual Art. She reported to have 27 years of teaching experience; 26 in Canada and eight months international. When I asked Participant 8 what led her to international teaching she stated:

I first did some volunteer work in Southeastern Europe doing an art program in the summer while I was still teaching and going to university for my degree, and then I just decided it was time to start exploring other parts of the world and I really just felt I needed to go.

Participant 8 described her time in her school in Canada: "The colleagues were great, for the most part, quite supportive. It was a small community, so most of them knew each other for a long time." The students were "your average students with a range of highly academic, special needs, and behavioral. They were overall respectful and easy-going kids." As for the school leadership, she explained:

The leadership varied, depending on the grade level. I would say there was a mix of strong leaders, weak leaders. Leaders that maybe had different ways of recruiting administrators in terms of what they felt was important, whether it was the teachers, the parents, the students. There were some really good administrators. It was quite a range.

The school in which Participant 8 broke the contract was in the Middle East and her first international teaching experience. She described the students as being collectively “out of control,” due to there not being a consistent discipline program and a tone of not wanting to offend the parents. Colleagues were wonderful, supportive, and a very much a community. This was a strong point of the school. Regarding leadership, Participant 8 noted:

I would say they [the leadership] varied, but for the most part they were very good at their jobs. Again, it depends on the personality and your own personality that interacts with the leaders, but a general statement would be that they were very good at their jobs and very qualified.

Participant 8 did not use a recruiting agency; she did her own research and found the position. She did do some work with a non-governmental organization (NGO) overseas, but not in a school setting. Reflecting on it now, she said she would have asked more questions. “I just naively assumed everything would be great.” The school did prepare a fact sheet. She said: “They had quite a fact sheet ahead of time suggesting what to bring, what to expect, different scenarios of where to live, all those kinds of things. It’s always a learning curve.” The friendliness of the people outside of the school made her feel welcomed in her new culture; which made appreciating the country interesting, [with] lots of travel opportunities that were safe and inexpensive. Positives were:

I would say friendliness of the people, the openness, and acceptance of the people. I'm talking about the community at large, not necessarily the school community outside of the teachers. I just think the idea of a lot of cultural differences that made it very intriguing and interesting and [there were] lots of opportunities to travel easily and fairly and extensively.

Participant 8 noted:

The school was accredited [with] visits every year, but it seemed very loosely adhered to it. In other words, it was not what I would consider to be up to that particular country's educational standards or discipline standards, and that it was okay [just] to have their accreditation. The people who owned the school knew what they wanted the school to look like and would actually go over the heads of the administration.

This, along with the student discipline, was frustrating:

I would say the very loud, often out of control behavior of the students and the initial ... I don't know how to word this correctly, but, probably the lack of a really strong discipline procedure that was organized to deal with behaviors. Student's behavior was reflective of their ability to not have a lot [of] consequences.

There was a lack of control from the administrative side, and she noted that the teachers tried to come together. She said: "I think by grade level to some degrees, yes. It just depended on the grades, the kids, and the teachers. Collectively speaking, it was bigger than the teachers and they knew it." The behavior of the students was a school-wide issue for teachers:

I wouldn't say they had the same view, I think some views, because they were more greatly affected by it [student behavior], were far more vocal and intense because what they had to deal with was magnified. Though I'd say collectively, yeah, everyone was on the same page with the difficulties. Others were able to be a lot

more assertive about how they felt about it and some got to the point where they'd just had enough and they left.

The reason Participant 8 broke her contract early was major health concerns with a family member. She said the school held her position for her “longer than would be normally expected.” She sincerely wanted to come back, but the “instability” of her family member’s health and the prospect of coming back to a “very stressful job” she felt was not a good combination.

As the interview concluded she described her reflections on what makes a strong international school:

I think to me what ideally makes a really good international school is strong consistent administration who are aware of all the cultural nuances of their school, who are respectful of the culture, but also recognize that they are accredited by an international governing body. If your name says you're an American or Canadian or whatever school, then you need to have that overriding sense of what that looks like.

Participant 9. Participant 9 was a 49-year old female, certified in Literacy, Special Education, and English as a Second Language. She reported 17 years of teaching experience, 16 in Canada and 1 year international. When I asked Participant 9 what led her to international teaching, she stated:

Divorce, and the way the hiring practices in Ontario, where I'm from, right now it's very difficult to get a full-time job. Because I worked for a school board for 10 years as a special needs teacher, but then when I wanted to get on as a regular teacher it was another whole issue. So, some doors opened up and my kids and I decided it might be a good opportunity, so my middle daughter and I headed to Southeast Asia.

Participant 9 described her previous school before the one in which the contract was broken. She had a good relationship with school leadership and served on committees. She

was very involved with what went on at school and had a multi-cultural classroom, which had well-behaved students. She said: "I ran a pretty tight ship." The parents were wonderful, and there was a strong parent group that hosted events for students and teachers. They were vocal with the teachers, whether good or bad, and she liked that "you knew exactly where you stood with the parents. The parents shared [what they liked and disliked] with the teacher that's a really good place to be."

Participant 9 completed the contract at that school and went to her next international school located in West Africa. The leadership there was described as "not listening to concerns," compared to other schools where she had worked. She expressed: "They would listen or disagree, but regardless, nothing would ever get done." Participant 9 said: "I hate to say it, but it was like lip service. You didn't feel supported as a staff member at all if you had a concern." At this school, she served on the leadership team, but not as an administrator. She was a coordinator and had to teach two classes, which made managing workload challenging, and was where the initial problems began.

The students at this school were described as "good, but chatty." When the students misbehaved the parents would respond by saying they are misbehaving, because [Participant 9] wasn't hitting them. The parents expected the teachers to physically punish the students. Participant 9 said: "I was able to handle the students. I think, by the end, my kids were very well behaved because I run a tight ship. If they can't behave I take away privileges." She stated she came into this school enthusiastic, and her staff members even commented: "Oh, maybe I should be more like [Participant 9], and be more enthusiastic."

However, the atmosphere of the school brought Participant 9 down to the same frustrations as her colleagues. She stated: "After time went on, stuff starts to eat away at you." She was recruited for this school by a recruiter who "over-sold" the school because she previously worked there. However, Participant 9 learned that it had changed greatly since the

recruiter worked there. From the work load, facilities, and management, things were over-sold in some areas and under-sold on workload. Participant 9 stated: “All of us felt the same way, we were kind of over-sold on the facilities of the school, but under-sold on the jobs that we were required to do.”

One aspect of the host culture Participant 9 found difficult was that the school forced children and adults to say a salutation to all persons they pass. She said, “It was considered rude if you didn’t, even if you walked by the same person six times in the same day.” On the street, it’s considered rude if you don’t say good day or good morning. She had three children of her own and she said, “It’s a safety issue more than anything.” Because the culture was so welcoming and open, “there is no confidentiality and having everyone in your business all the time was stressful.”

Participant 9 said she went back and forth on the idea of breaking the contract:

I think, overall, I really wasn't sure whether I was going to break it or not. I really was unhappy. I cried myself to sleep at night because the expectations on me were huge. I'm an A-type personality, so I want to do my 100%. I just couldn't spread myself thin enough to do it.

The loss of her monthly salary after currency conversion also wasn’t ideal, and she didn’t find out her workload for the next year until the last day of school. She said she didn’t really have a way to make the position work. She discussed the issue with her family, and stated, “When I went home my children basically said, ‘Mom, what are you doing? Just move on.’” She said she realized it wouldn’t be a place to go back to: “I basically cut my losses and moved on.”

Participant 10. Participant 10 was a 55-year old female, certified in Special Education, Guidance, and Administration. She reported having 31 years of teaching experience, with 25 in Canada and 6 years at international schools. When I asked Participant

10 what led her to international teaching, she stated: “To do something different, change of scenery, and to experience living in another culture.” Participant 10 had one international school before and one after the school where she broke the contract. All her international schools were in the Middle East.

She described the students when she taught in Canada as “no different than here, there were good days and bad, as well as easy and difficult days.” Colleagues in her home country were easy to get along with, but “not as open-minded as teachers overseas.” She felt that her colleagues at home were “just a little bit different, I don’t know.” She found the leadership to be “good” and had good experiences with leaders. However, she stated: “It just seemed more of a job there rather than a career, like it was just doing it, getting the paycheck. They didn’t seem to be so invested in everything.”

Focusing on her time in the school where the contract was broken, she said the students were a little bit more “hyper” overall:

I found the kids are a little bit more hyper over all, a little more high-strung. The parents are over-protective, more over-protective than they were [elsewhere]. I was in the public [local] school there, too, so that could be the difference. Over-protective and want to fight their kid’s battles all the time. Make everything right.

She noted that the school did not have a difficult admissions process, and basically children from other schools with behavioral issues were easily admitted to her school. “Basically, kids that were kicked out of other schools because of poor behavior were able to get in there, but then that lowered the expectations right across the board because ... so many of those kids that just pulled everybody down.” Her colleagues were described as “great,” a “nice mix” of American and Canadian teachers. “They were very good teachers but very frustrated and very tired. Putting in a lot of effort to get very little in return.”

Participant 10 was an administrator and guidance counselor in this school and she got along with the other administrators. She said: “Upper management is where the problem was. The senior leadership disregarded efforts to support the teachers, and no matter what the administration was willing to do was “overruled by the [upper management] higher-ups.”

Participant 10 applied to this school via Apply for Education. She was previously hired a few years before by this school but decided to take a placement at another school.

When she saw the position posted years later she said:

I just saw a posting on Apply for Education and applied for it, but I'd already been hired by that school a few years ago, but I reminded them that they'd already hired me and told them that I was interested in the position.

She came into this position with two previous administrator experiences but arrived late in the year so she did not go through any induction program to the school. Regarding the culture in the host country, it was “friendly and welcoming,” but she had been in the country for a while and had begun to see “different sides,” between locals and expatriates, but still liked it. She began to understand the double standard and struggles the local people faced. However, one stressful aspect of the culture was the speed at which things are done:

It's very slow in the school that I left. You have to repeat frequently the same thing over and over and over before they finally catch on. I found that in the school that I left though, it was ridiculous things. Even to get toilet paper. You'd order pencils for your class and you'd get 10 pencils. You have 20 kids. Everything was ... it was like they were personally paying for them out of their own pocket because they didn't want to share much at all.

Even though there were leadership meetings, Participant 10 felt that: “After asking for something frequently, they would just pretend to listen, or say ‘it's not possible.’” She said:

“It also didn’t help to complain about one area of the school because the worker in that area would be fired instead of fixing the problem.”

Participant 10’s role was 80% administration and 20% guidance at this school. She felt frustrated because it was supposed to be 60%–70% guidance and 20%–30% administration. She could not find time to balance priorities since administration required her to “act when you need it.” She said she “felt guilty that the students didn’t seem ready,” but also knew it wasn’t her fault: “It was more that the expectation was put on the guidance counselor rather on the kids.” In the end, Participant 10 left because she said she “didn’t really trust the people in charge that were really running the school.” She commented that:

She and her colleagues were working hard, but flaws were noted instead of accomplishments. “I didn’t feel secure in my position because they were getting rid of people all the time.” The school atmosphere was not stable, and teacher efforts were going unnoticed. In the end, she stated: “I thought, what am I doing this for? It's not worth it. That's mainly why.”

Themes

Themes are broad units of information combined to form a common idea when coded (Creswell, 2013). Themes are key concepts identified as being of relevance and interest. “Themes are the aspects of field, study, or discipline that contribute to research” (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2010, p. 259). The themes identified in phenomenological research provide structure and logic after interpreting and sharing interview material (Seidman, 2013). Interview material from phenomenological research participants could align with existing literature to convey the essence of their experience (Creswell, 2013).

For this phenomenological study, a 14-question interview protocol guided the study participants for the first round of interviews. Initial questions explored the background, certification, years of experience, experience in previous schools, and experience related to

the broken contract of and by the study participants. Follow-up interviews occurred with each participant and focused on clarifying points and expanding from the first interview. The open-ended interviews were conducted via Skype, in person, and, for some of the follow-up interviews phone calls were used due to internet difficulties. A digital recorder and the GarageBand computer program ensured that a back-up existed of the interviews. Each participant received their transcribed interview via email, which gave them the opportunity to check for accuracy.

After completing the 20 voice-recorded transcriptions and member-checking data, analysis began. Reading the transcriptions multiple times provided a deeper understanding of each participant’s experience and illuminated similar themes. Outlining themes among the participants began with reading the transcriptions and taking notes; the NVivo computer program to complemented the coding and documenting of themes. The codes originated from verbatim statements made by the participants and repeated similarities. Notes included descriptions of each participant and their experiences.

The exact quoted descriptions from the participants aided in the conformability of the qualitative research. Presenting the data and discussing how it was obtained provides sufficient details and conformability (Wolcott, 2009). Thick, rich descriptions provided detail of the items characterized and reasons for actions. These descriptions are used in intricate or specific ways to view something in a negative or positive manner (Kirchin, 2013). When interviewing the participants in this phenomenological study, a recreation of the story gave a visualization of the experience as it happened.

Table 2.

Summary of Codes and Themes

Theme	Participant	Codes
Trust	1	Lack of understanding of what school leadership was about, and how to support, how to trust your administrators.

Power Struggle	2	Have a little bit more trust than your teachers, who they hire.	
	3	Once I felt like that, once I felt like there really wasn't any allegiance there on their part, that they were pretty much just looking out for themselves and not me.	
	10	I didn't really trust the people in charge.	
	1	We tried talking about making decisions together, and we started off on that, and then he got into kind of a match with the board over [a] power struggle.	
	3	I think the direction came more than from the new principal than it did from her as the director. I think that their philosophies were a little different.	
	4	I know that between the secondary vice principal and the principal itself, there was a lot of conflict.	
	9	I think there was a lot of running to the admin and that's where this situation has gotten out of control.	
	10	I think it didn't matter what we were willing to do for the teachers or to support them because it would often be overruled by the higher ups.	
	Student Behavior	4	Expectations of discipline and everything is pretty much nonexistent here [at my school].
		6	However, at times they have a lot of basic excuses because I feel like no one ever held them to a, not really a standard.
8		I would say collectively the students were out of hand, out of control for the most part.	
10		Very hyper. Very difficult to manage. Not just hyper, but difficult to manage.	

Table 2, continued.

Summary of Codes and Themes

Theme	Participant	Codes
Lack of Vision	1	The main difficulty was selling the lack of leadership, or transition of leadership, without a kind of a vision going on.
	4	The school was about four years old and they just never saw a need to create anything because most of their teachers that they had was already previously working in [the Middle East].
	5	The school was new. It wasn't brand new, but it still was in its new baby growing phases.

Lack of Communication	6	I just think it was a time to figure out kind of thing. Yeah. The school was growing and just trying to figure it out.
	8	It was more about the people who owned it and what they wanted the school to look like.
	1	No, I think they just said we don't know. Yeah, transparency of ignorance.
	2	I would say that they were wavering in terms maybe of their expectations and how they clearly communicated that to you. Like I said, inconsistency within the team of administration.
	3	Sometimes, I think that the communication between the administrations was not there all the way.
	4	It was between lack of communication between admin and teachers, changing of contracts mid-year, basically dehumanizing my son, and not following through with discipline actions and other things like that.
	7	I got conflicting messages from her. So, I guess a little questionable.
	9	There was no communication. There were teachers that were crying.

After analyzing the data, the following five themes emerged from the research study: trust towards leadership, power struggles, student behavior, lack of vision and lack of support from school leadership, as shown in Table 2. The themes depict the experiences the participants encountered daily while they worked in their international school placement. Codes were developed by analyzing the transcribed interviews and finding similar themes among the participants and their descriptions of their lived experiences.

Trust. Perceived trust from school leadership was one of the first themes to emerge from this study. School leadership included: administration, school board members, and the owners of the school. Study participants were candid about their interactions with their school leadership and the challenges and disappointments they experienced while working internationally. Participant 1, an experienced administrator himself, served alongside his fellow leadership team members. He commented: “I think the frustration there was just a lack of understanding of what school leadership was about, and how to support, how to trust your administrators, and make that happen.” Participant 1 was an administrator at the school

in which he broke the contract, and he attempted to reconcile the difference between the owner, leadership team, and teachers. When asked if the staff had trust in the leadership, Participant 1 responded, “No, they didn't trust the board at all [board members had conflicting visions] and [the staff] didn't trust what was going on, and so they [the staff] still felt really uneasy about everything.”

Consequently, Participant 1 faced a challenging situation as he attempted to serve both realms of the school. Participant 1 admitted that the situation was an untenable working condition, noting:

Just kind of give them [the teachers] updates and information [to] try and provide some confidence and trust for them, a place for them to vent, for them to do that, provide supportive feedback to them if they needed. Again, just trying to meet their emotional and professional needs the best I could.

Participant 2 served as a teacher at her international school and also had issues regarding trust with leadership. In her situation, she felt as if her abilities were questioned:

Yeah, you don't need to check that [all] teachers are checking their notebooks. That's kind of ridiculous. I have a little bit more trust than your teachers. Who they hired, we were all certified. We've all gone to the university, we've all got Bachelor's degrees, and we've all worked in education. Everybody had previous experience. They just weren't very trusting. They didn't really consider how hard we had to work and give us our prep time that we needed.

In Participant 2's situation, she was faced with doubting her ability and efforts, and recounted, “The core reason why I left is because it was hurting me more than it was helping in any way ... My mood changed. It was just so incredibly stressful.” Her stress was triggered speaking about it as she shared during the interview, “I'm getting goose bumps.”

Participant 3 also served as a classroom teacher at her school. She addressed trust issues that stemmed from the instability of the country:

In a situation like that, the school held all the cards and the teachers didn't hold anything. They were holding you to the fact that you needed to be in there in a situation that wasn't ideal. You were held to ... your end of the contract, whereas there wasn't any ... I don't know, just all the cards were with them. Everything kept going to their advantage in case of a revolution and should something happen that you terminated it. That was a huge decision. Once I felt like that, once I felt like there really wasn't any allegiance there on their part, that they were pretty much just looking out for themselves and not me.

Participant 3 made the decision to break her contract based on the reactions from the school and the political situation that faced the country. However, the school did not show allegiance or compassion towards the teachers:

Because once we were in the revolution and we figured out that ... we didn't know where the country was going. We did ... talk about that allegiance thing. There was allegiance. I had allegiance to my students and I had allegiance to my staff.

Participant 10 served as an administrator at the school where she broke her contract and communicated an issue with trust and school leadership. Even though she held one of the leadership positions, she stated: "I didn't really trust the people in charge that were really running the school. Everybody was working so hard. Everybody was giving 100% and they didn't appreciate that." She noted that her fellow leadership team members were supportive and had a good relationship. The issue was with the interactions with upper management and the leadership team. Participant 10 noted that school leadership [administration] faced difficulties with the Upper management [and that's] where the problem was. "I think it didn't

matter what we were willing to do for the teachers or to support them because it would often be overruled by the higher-ups.”

Trust in relation to the four aforementioned participants affected their decision to break their contracts. Participants described the importance of trust and the impact it had on their ability to effectively build relationships with their leadership teams. Establishing and developing trust is crucial for school leadership; trust is not only for the moral interactions, but ethical decision making (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2014). The challenges participants faced in terms of trust affected their health, safety, and ability to lead effectively. Trust in the organization could be facilitated when teachers trust the leadership or head of the school. The ability, support, and diligence of school leadership strengthens the trust within the school culture.

Power struggle. The power struggles between the different powers within the schools; administration, board members, and heads of school were the second theme that emerged from this study. Five of the participants in this study recounted situations where power struggles within their school posed a problem or caused stress. Regarding the board and leadership team, Participant 1 reported: “We tried talking about making decisions together, and we started off on that, and then he got into kind of a match with the board over power struggle, and then that shifted away.” The participants regarded the leadership as receptive and not apprehensive to ideas, but not the owners. He stated: “I think it was confusing for many people with the change in leadership with the turmoil of the board or the owners and the leadership and not being able to predict [the outcome].”

Participants 3 and 4 shared similar experiences with the power struggle being among members of the leadership team. Both participants speculated how power struggles among the leadership team members affected decisions within their schools. Participant 3 stated that “the director was going to be replaced” and noted:

I think that she was maybe limited because I think the direction came more than from the new principal than it did from her as the director. She was just in that limbo time.

I think that their philosophies were a little different. Whereas, if she was going to stay her philosophy might have prevailed, whereas his seemed to supersede hers.

In this case, the principal was exercising more power than the school director because of the limited time the director had remaining. Similarly, Participant 4 stated:

I know that between the secondary vice principal and the principal himself, there was a lot of conflict. There was a lot of head-butting. Therefore, the tension could be really felt in the room when they were both in the room together.

Participant 4 said relationships between teachers and leadership also lacked stability:

If the head principal liked you, it was a very warm and welcoming relationship. If, for whatever reason, she didn't like you or you got on her bad side, it was a very closed door in your face attitude and just deal with it some other way.

Participant 9 also faced a different power struggle, which centered more on staff to leadership relationships:

I think there was a lot of running to the admin and that's where this situation has gotten out of control. I think sometimes the management tended to get involved in that and they shouldn't have as well. They should have just let the two parties deal with it as adults. "Go and talk to that person and deal with it." But instead, the person, because the management used their title to call the person in and reprimand them for something they might have said or whatever. Then, it just makes it worse.

Participant 10 struggled much like Participant 1 and faced obstacles with senior leaders. She stated: "I think it didn't matter what we were willing to do for the teachers or to support them because it would often be overruled by the higher-ups."

Many participants indicated that power struggles prohibited progress and caused tension between various areas of their schools. Between the owners, board, administration, teachers lost their voice before it was even heard, causing feelings of neglect. This feeling was felt by participants who served as school leaders as they had limited means of correcting the situation. It is critical for a leader to “make sense” of how “power differences” contribute to different cultural conceptions of leadership (Keller, 2014, p. 11). The concept of leadership should relate to the school mission and cultural objectives.

Participants provided perspectives that when school leadership is aware of the diversity of their school; decisions could have purposeful and grounded results. School leadership within schools should be aware of how power is distrusted, being used, and if decisions are being made through “hierarchical structures” such as committees in order to make decisions (Keller, 2014, p. 11). The participants in this study were subject to inequitable use of power between the ones making the decisions and the ones in charge making it difficult for them to lead the staff they served.

Student behavior. Student behavior was the third theme identified, and, although the participants did not break contract due to student behavior, there were similarities among teachers from the Middle East, particularly with the lack of expectations and behavior support. Participant 4 stated: “Expectations of discipline and everything is pretty much nonexistent here in [the Middle East].” Similarly, Participant 6 noted: “At times they have a lot of basic excuses because I feel like no one ever held them to a...standard.”

Participant 8 noted: “I would say collectively the students were out of hand, out of control for the most part.” The students contributed to the stressful situation at her school:

I don’t know how to word this correctly, but, probably the lack of a really strong discipline procedure that was organized to deal with behaviors. Student’s behavior was reflective of their ability to not have a lot of consequences.

Participant 8 ultimately broke her contract due to personal family reasons but discussed that the student behavior contributed a great deal to her stress. Student behavior serves as a source of stress for many teachers since the greater part of the day is spent with students (Sass et al., 2011).

Participant 10 had a similar experience in relation to behavior and stated that students were

Very hyper. Very difficult to manage. Not just hyper, but difficult to manage.

Basically, kids that were kicked out of other schools because of poor behavior were able to get in there, but then that lowered the expectations right across the board because you so many of those kids that just pulled everybody down.

Support from school administration in relation to student discipline problems, and allowing faculty input into school decision-making would lead to lower turnover rates (Ingersoll, 2001).

Lack of vision. The lack of vision or unclear vision was the fourth theme identified and affected some of the participants' reasons why they left their school. Participants discussed how school leaders and their visions should be focused on the complexities of the cultural exchanges within their school. Understanding these cultural exchanges are critical to the possible innovations within their school (Slough-Kuss, 2014). Participants 5 and 6 had similar experiences. Participant 5 stated that one of the factors was that the school was new: "It wasn't brand new, but it still was in its new baby growing phases. Someone's going to be the guinea pig." Similarly, Participant 6 stated: "I just think it was a time to figure out, kind of thing ... The school was growing and just trying to figure it out."

Participant 1 served on the leadership team in a school in Southeast Asia and described a tenuous work environment. He worked closely with teachers, stating: "The main difficulty was selling the lack of leadership, or transition of leadership, without a kind of a

vision going on.” Participant 8 also encountered a challenge with unclear vision and direction at her school. When discussing the challenges faced by the teachers she noted: “It was more about the people who owned it and what they wanted the school to look like.” Participant 4 worked in a couple of schools in [the Middle East] before the one where she broke the contract. Not only did she feel separate from her new colleagues, due to her previous experience living there, but also reflected on what she experienced in the leadership’s decisions. She explained: “The school was about 4 years old and they just never saw a need to create anything because most of their teachers that they had were already previously working in [the Middle East].”

Lack of communication. The lack of communication between the participants and their school leadership was the final theme identified. Participants discussed their experience interacting with school leadership and how transparency and communication failed.

Participant 3 was an elementary teacher in a new school within the Middle East. She stated:

Leadership was in transition. I think that was one of the most difficult parts of it because when you did have a new administrator and a director who knew that she was going to be replaced and ... sometimes I think that the communication between the administration was not there all the way.

Participant 4 was in a school that was only 4 years old and shared experiences similar to those of Participant 3:

It was between lack of communication between admin and teachers, changing of contracts mid-year, basically dehumanizing my son, and not following through with discipline actions and other things like that.

Participant 7 was also an elementary teacher and often felt that feedback was not consistent from her principal, saying: “She [the principal] also was gone at the end of the year. I don't know, I got conflicting messages from her. So, I guess a little questionable.”

The lack of communication caused Participant 9 her and her colleagues most distress because the lack of communication affected their jobs greatly. Participant 9 recounted an event on the last day of school about teacher jobs and placements:

If you're going to make that kind of move, there should be a discussion ahead of time. "Oh, so and so, can we speak to you? Okay. This is what we're thinking. Can we get some input?" Whatever. There was none ... it was just like that dictatorship. "This is what you're doing. This is your assignment." There was no communication. There were teachers that were crying [on the last day of school].

Teachers could not have a say or prior communication about their job preference or placement for the following year. She continued describing the event:

There were teachers that, if they didn't mention your name, it means you weren't coming back...Some Nigerian staff never heard their names. Well, that meant that they let them go. Really? That's how we're going to handle it? Yeah. No. Frustrating. I was sitting there and I didn't hear my name for a bit and I'm like "oh, maybe they let me go." Then, my name came out and it was "oh, grade four, grade five literacy, no!" [It was] not a good way to handle things, for sure.

Summary of the Findings

In this study, information the 10 participants shared during their interviews provided valuable insight into the decisions to break their international contract prematurely. Themes began to emerge and I began to understand similarities between their experiences. The interviews allowed perceptions and dialogues of the participants to be shared openly in a confidential setting and to discuss their experience through the research questions. The major themes that emerged among the participants were trust, power struggles, student behavior, and lack of vision and communication from school leadership.

Concerns about health, family, and what they were willing to settle for were tested, and ultimately one of the aiding factors in making the decision to leave their school. The emotional and stressful toll this placed on the participants was greater than the contractual penalties for breaking contract. Participants were also able to articulate what aspects made up a successful school and environment that was beneficial for all stakeholders within a school setting. The participants discussed relationships with all stakeholders of the school and how that helped them form similar connections with colleagues during difficult situations.

Each participant participated in two interviews, which allowed both the participant and researcher time to reflect, develop deeper questions, and explore areas more thoroughly in the second interview. Recording and documenting these dialogues allowed the researcher to benefit from the findings. The interviews helped the researcher immensely to understand the process each participant took to make a major life decision with their career. The interviews provided the opportunity to see their growth and their reflections on a difficult life decision they each had to make. Chapter 5 will provide a conclusion and findings related to the common themes and research questions.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain insight into the experiences of North American teachers working in international schools and why they chose to leave their contract within the first year. I examined the experiences 10 North American teachers had while overseas, with school leadership, their students, recruitment, induction, and the culture of the host country. Also examined were their perspectives and attitudes towards the aforementioned items and how it impacted their experience. The 10 study participants were comprised of core subject teachers, specialist teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators.

The research findings in this qualitative study resulted from two interviews with each participant. During the first interview, the participants were all asked the same set of questions in order to gather baseline data. During the second interview, an in-depth review of their transcribed interviews led to more personalized questions for each participant. The interviews were conducted in person, via Skype, and phone discussion. Participants were selected from an initial survey prior to the start date of the data collection.

This study serves to provide international teachers, school leaders, administration, school owners, and board members with data that could inform their decisions, practices, and actions within their respected schools in order to reduce teacher attrition rates. The previous 4 chapters outlined and laid the foundation for the research and its findings. I connected with 10 teachers with international teaching experience, and interviewed them, allowing them to share their experiences with me. The participants shared past international experiences, successes, disappointments, and growth that shaped them into the teachers they are today. Their experiences clarified aspects of international teaching and allowed the researcher to examine teaching internationally from different perspectives.

This chapter will discuss the findings and align them with the previous literature research, methodology, and research findings.

Summary of the Results

As more educators enter the international school system, their experiences need to be an essential part of the conversations in future studies. When a teacher decides to leave their international school, it is a very personal choice and has a direct impact on the school itself (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). There is a need for more attention to be given to reasons teachers leave their international school. North American teachers are taking advantage of an industry where qualified English-speaking teachers are in high demand (Savva, 2013). With the need for North American teachers, investigations into why they decided to break their international contracts can add to the existing understanding and knowledge. The data collected from this study will provide a greater understanding of why attrition prevention is valuable knowledge to teachers, school leadership, board members, school owners, and the educational community. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of North American teachers working in international schools and why they chose to leave within the first year. The findings inform ways to retain teachers and maintain consistency for the school, staff, and students.

Qualitative methods were used to conduct this phenomenological study, and allowed the researcher to investigate and gain a thorough understanding of study participants' experiences through detailed descriptions. A snowballing method (Creswell, 2013) was used to obtain the participant pool due to my location overseas and my direct access to the population. The recruitment letter and initial survey link were sent via email, and after the participants were selected personal interviews were scheduled via email. Study participants were teachers with a variety of certification areas, specialties, and positions within their

respective schools. Through the data analysis process, themes emerged that were related to the environment within the school and the teachers' decision to break their contract.

By discussing the personal, professional, and cultural experiences of these 10 international teachers from North America, this study addressed a gap in literature regarding teacher retention in international schools. Participants' lived experiences, portrayed challenges, successes, and disappointments that came with being a teacher overseas. However, the lessons the participants learned from their experience shaped and led them to reflective practices as they moved on to their next school. The final chapter of this study presents a discussion of the results, how they relate to the literature, a view of the study's limitations, implication of the results for practice, policy, and theory, recommendations for further research, and the conclusion.

Research Questions

The following central research question guided this phenomenological study: What was the experience of North American teachers who broke their contracts with international schools after one year? This central research question was supported by these sub-questions:

1. How do these teachers' experience relationships with leadership and students?
2. What role, if any, did their recruitment and induction have on their decision to leave?
3. What role, if any, did the culture of the host country play on their decision to leave?

Discussion of the Results

Research question 1. The first research question asked how these teachers experienced relationships with their school leadership and students. School leadership included principals, board members, and school owners. This question focused on the experience the teacher had with this population within their individual schools. Teacher attrition within schools affected student learning; in some cases, this could have positive consequences, but it most commonly was negative (Mancuso et al., 2010). As previously

outlined in Chapter 3, each participant was interviewed twice. During the first round of interviews, each participant was asked the same set of questions to collect base line data. Subsequent interview questions were developed in response to the participant's first interview. The questions were general in nature and provided the participant the ability to answer freely and in an unrestricted manner in the first interview setting.

Regarding relationships with students, there were similarities noted from five of the seven participants who broke their contracts in the Middle East. Participant 3 noted that she had great relationships with her students and that she was still in contact with some of them via social media. Participant 7 said they were "cute and energetic, but required a lot of work to keep going." Participants 5 and 6 had similar experiences in that they also had good relationships with their students, but they both noted that their students made "a lot of excuses," were not used to the American system, and that discipline was difficult. Participants 5 and 6 were teachers in middle school. The other three participants—Participants 4, 8, and 10—described their middle school students with non-existent behavior systems in place, who were out of control and hard to manage. Participants 3–8, and 10 experienced similar interactions with their students, and noted that lacking or non-existent discipline systems, helicopter parents or cultural norms to be the causes of this similarity.

Participant 2 worked in Central America and had an experience similar to participants 4, 8, and 10. Participant 2 described that she had a relationship with some students, but they were "terrible in management," could not be controlled and that their main goal was to get the teacher fired by having their parents complain. Participant 1 worked in Southeast Asia and Participant 9 worked in West Africa. Both noted that they had good relationships with their students. Participant 1 reported his students were "traditional, and they were just kids, nothing different," and Participant 9 noted her students were good and that she had good

classroom management. One aspect of the West African culture was that parents beat their children; she said, “Parents expected us to hit their children.”

In relation to experiences with school leadership, there were similar themes between participants. Most common were the themes of lack of trust, power struggles, lack of communication, no clear vision or policy, and lack of behavioral control. Participants 1 and 10 commented that upper management affected leadership and that there was a lack of trust. Participant 10 stated, “I didn't really trust the people in charge that were really running the school.” During a follow-up question, Participant 1 was asked about staff morale, and stated: “No, they [the teachers] didn't trust the board at all and didn't trust what was going on, and so they still felt really uneasy about everything.”

In terms of “growing pains” of their respected schools, Participants 5, 6, and 7 noted that their schools were in transition or developing since they were relatively new schools. Despite the growing pains of the school, Participant 5 described her principals as good and laid back, “as long as you were following the goals of the school” and Participant 6 noted that her principals changed during her time there, and described the first administrator as laid back and the second having the attitude of “go with what you know.” Similarly, Participant 7 indicated that her school had growing pains as well, but her administration “wasn't great.” She noted instances of conflicting messages, and questionable and inconsistent actions.

School vision was another theme amongst those interviewed. Participants 2, 4, and 9 described a lack of communication between school leadership and teachers. Participant 2 described her principals as micromanaging, with “terrible” management skills and no communication with staff. Participant 4 said:

I think anytime when it comes to communication it's always controlled by the leadership. It doesn't matter what the culture is or not. When you walk into a

business or a profession, your culture kind of gets left behind and you play by the rulebook.

Participant 9 actually served on the administrative team and stated: “Upper management was where the problem was. I think it didn't matter what we were willing to do for the teachers or to support them because it would often be overruled by the higher-ups” and she “didn't really trust the people in charge that were really running the school.”

Participant 3 did not use the term “growing pains,” but mentioned leadership [principal and director] was in “transition,” and stated:

Leadership was in transition. I think that was one of the most difficult parts of it because when you did have a new administrator and a director who knew that she was going to be replaced and ... Sometimes I think that the communication between the administration was not there all the way.

Participants 1 and 3 noted that their respective schools lacked a vision, or policies waived. Participant 1 stated: “The main difficulty was selling the lack of leadership, or transition of leadership, without ... vision going on.” He went on to state, “They were owners and very naïve about how to run a school or a business. It was just them [the owners]. It was kind of an inconsistent, incoherent vision.” Along with inconsistent vision, a lack of adhering to policies created stress for the participants. Teachers felt the stress of the lack of adherence and repercussions to policies and student performance. In relation to the attendance policy at her school, Participant 3 said, “look, you have this policy and you're not following through on it. It's a problem. What's happening is you're forcing me to try to pick up the pieces here for a policy that ... for your downfall.”

Participants 9 and 10 mentioned that feelings of not being listened to were a constant issue with the school leadership. In a follow-up question regarding foreign and local teachers

feeling unsupported and not listened to, and if one was favored more, Participant 9 responded:

Yeah, it was everyone. Everyone, unfortunately. Yes ... that's disheartening, really, when we know that we're not asking for any more than the average person, but, yeah, definitely, nobody felt supported, whether it be [a] local or foreign [teacher].

Participant 10, being on the leadership team herself, recounted:

We would have ideas, [the principals], we [had] ideas and other ways that things could be done and we would recommend that but quite often maybe they listened to part of what we said and made a few minor changes, but, overall, they pretended they were listening but they never put anything into action.

Regarding student behavior, as previously mentioned, Participants 2, 4, 8, and 10 discussed student behavior and lack of administrative support, saying schools had non-existent behavior systems in place, and students were out of control and difficult to manage.

Participant 8 stated:

I would say because there was not a consistent discipline plan program because there was quite a tone of wanting to not offend the parents... Constant changes of administration, and styles, and it was a multi-layered issue.

When asked what the school leadership could have done to relieve the stress of the lack of a behavior policy, Participant 8 stated: "Definitely, a more consistent discipline plan that is initiated from day one with stronger consequences, standing up to parents, just no tolerance for things."

The relationship between international teachers and their interactions with students and school leadership is the main component of their day. This triad of teacher-leader-student works properly only when each element is in sync with others and operating effectively. The cohesion among families, teachers, and students leads to school success and

effectiveness (Ingersoll, 2001). The participants from the Middle Eastern region noted that students were difficult to manage, had poor behavior, and trouble adjusting to expectations. The participants referred this back to the lack of support from school leadership. None of the participants related their decision to leave as being based on their interactions with their students.

The responses regarding school leadership identified similarities between the participants. Leadership dynamics, including principals, school owners, and board members are related to the interaction of school leadership and teachers. Murakami-Ramalho and Benham (2010) stated: “The short life cycle of heads of school, coupled with the short life cycles of teachers, students, and families, posed a threat to generating sustainable environments for teaching and learning in American international schools” (p. 639). The interviews showed six of the 10 participants were teaching in schools that lacked vision, communication, and caused stress, self-doubt, and misleading interactions with their school leadership. The other four participants stated they left for other reasons, but still discussed areas of stress regarding the lack of vision within their international school.

The reasons varied between intrinsic and extrinsic elements that they noted were a direct relation to school leadership. The factors of intrinsic satisfaction included relationships and self-growth, and extrinsic, such as the pace of educational climate, communication, and school leadership, overall predicted job dissatisfaction (Sass et al., 2011). The effectiveness of school leadership was a result of reflective practices, collaborative and sustainable visions, and implementing programs that were supportive of teacher’s development (Murakami-Ramalho & Benham, 2010; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Sass et al., 2011).

Research question 2. The second research question asked what role, if any; the participants’ recruitment and induction had on teachers’ decision to break their contracts. If managed well, induction is the process where both the newcomer and organization work

together to become effective members of the organization (Stirzaker, 2004). Overall, seven of the 10 participants' consensus of their individual schools reported some sort of induction and welcome to the culture of the school and country. Participants 1 and 2 noted that there "really wasn't anything" and it was "land on your feet and go." Even though Participant 3 stated there was an induction, she had limited time to develop a rapport with the parents and "work around parameters."

Participant 4 was excluded from the induction with another colleague because they had "previously worked in [the Middle East]" and were presumed to be familiar with the culture already. Participant 9 missed her induction due to visa issues, and Participant 10 missed her induction because she arrived late. However, both Participants 9 and 10 stated that their schools did offer induction for new teachers. Participant 9 stated, "people assume you knew what you needed to," even though she missed the information, and Participant 10 stated she was already in an administrative role in two previous schools, "and then I came late."

Other aspects of the participant's induction experiences were similar regardless of their location, culture, and position within their schools. Similarities centered on aligning curriculum, understanding the host culture, and preparing their classrooms. Participant 8 was the only person to receive a fact sheet prior to arriving at her school, and Participant 6 stated: "she got to meet the "important people." Participant 7 said: "We came a week early, I think. There were days before the rest of the staff came, just because I think it was a foreign country and it was going to be a little harder to find your way around." The response from seven of the 10 participants on induction was positive and did not affect their decisions to break their contract. As stated in Chapter 4, all 10 participants had the desire to become international teachers and desired to be overseas teachers for various reasons.

Recruitment of international teachers is not straightforward, as it requires the school to assess what will attract teachers to that location and have a strong concept of what it means to live in that part of the world (Chandler, 2010). The participants in this study used recruiters, job search websites, or job fairs. Recruitment interviews took place via Skype or in person at job fairs. Participants 3 and 7 were recruited at the same Iowa job fair in the United States. Participant 3 stated: “Actually, it was real high pressure as far as ‘you need to commit to this and you need to commit to it now.’” Participant 7 indicated: “There were long lines everywhere except [for] the Middle East. Those guys were really trying to get people to come over to their tables and interview or be interested in what they had to offer.” Both participants indicated that there was pressure in the recruitment from their schools.

Participants 2 and 10 were already in country when they applied for their schools. Participant 10 had even been hired previously but didn’t take the position at the time. After she reminded them of that she was hired for her position. Participants 1, 4, 5, 6, and 8 used online services to find their schools and conducted interviews on Skype. All participants except participants 4 and 9 commented that their contracts were honest, simple contracts that were upheld during their employment. Participant 4 commented, “It’s basically the contract wasn’t worth the paper it was written on. Anything that was written in there was pretty much a lie.” Participant 9 stated: “I usually go through a recruiter when I end up at a school, and the recruiter, unfortunately, over-sold the school because she used to work at that school and she liked it. But since she [left] things had changed.” Participant 9 also noted there was information misrepresented on the school’s website. Participant 10 commented that the contract was honest, except for the fact that:

I was hired originally as a guidance counselor, for secondary school. Then, it turned into vice principal [and] guidance counselor. I was told it would be about 60% or

70% guidance and 30% admin. It actually turned out to be about 80% admin and 20% guidance...They wanted two full-time people out of one person, basically.

Overall, the participants had a generally positive experience during recruitment and induction. As indicated in Chapter 4, none of the participants broke their contract because of induction or recruitment.

Teacher recruitment and retention are two aspects that go together when schools search for teachers. Working conditions such as salaries and benefits determined a teacher's decision to work at a particular school (Guarino et al., 2006). The implications of recruitment were straightforward and required schools to draw attention to the benefits of the location and school (Chandler, 2010). Participant 9 had a negative experience when the recruiter who worked at the school previously oversold the school. It was noted that the participants revealed the importance of being supported, listened to, appreciated, and given a chance to grow. When a teacher is well informed of the culture and purpose of the school they could be confident accepting the position and know that their skills will be appreciated (Joslin, 2002).

When an individual starts a new placement, it is an anxious experience, but starting a career in a foreign country with different cultural expectations at work and home could be especially stressful (Stirzaker, 2004). The participants in the study all had previous experience before going to their international school and were familiar with how to set up and structure the beginning of a school year. Among the participants, the induction period was relatively uniform, and none of the participants noted a lengthy induction period. Two of the participants missed their induction periods and the other participants said it was adequate, but landed on their feet and went forward with the school year.

The participants reported they were realistic in their expectations and discussed areas of flexibility and creativity regarding areas of the culture that presented roadblocks. The

participants did not comment negatively on their induction experience and none of their decisions to leave were because they were ill-prepared to work in their overseas placement. Induction should be an area where school management aimed to make a smooth and positive adjustment (Stirzaker, 2004). Interviews of the participants indicated that their induction and recruitment provided adaptability as they began their school year as international teachers.

Research question 3. The third research question asked what role, if any, the culture of the host country played on teachers' decision to leave. The 10 participants shared the experiences they had in their host country. Even though there were some negative aspects of their respective countries, the participants discussed having flexibility regarding their expectations. North American teachers have the opportunity to work in accredited schools that are often recognized when they return home to work in their home country. The locations are plentiful and allow teachers the opportunity to explore the cultures, which are different to those they are familiar with at home (Savva, 2015).

The participants immersed themselves in their host culture. Participants 1, 2, 3, 7, and 10 particularly mentioned going sightseeing. Embracing the culture and their love for the local people was a comment that all 10 participants made. The locals were described as warm, friendly, welcoming, open, embracing, and kind. The sense of a family away from home was also highly regarded. Participant 3 noted: "The [local] people, my neighbors, and my driver, and just parents of my children were bubbling over with wanting a desire to share what they had [there] with me."

Participants also commented on the strong sense of a school family and the ability to try new foods, cultural activities, and taking risks to embrace the culture of a diverse staff. Participant 10 stated: "Now that I've been here a little bit longer I'm seeing different sides of people ... but I still like it." She elaborated that:

I guess because now I know more [locals]. I'm friends with more [locals] and I see how hard their life is, how unfair their life is, some of the ways they treat their employees. There's a double standard for foreigners compared to [the local] people. I'm not talking about our school, either. I'm just talking in general.

Participants embraced the idea of having a complete cultural experience.

Some of the cultural stresses that affected teachers ranged from governmental changes, the lack of speed at which things were completed, lack of administrative support, cultural boundaries between men and women, negotiating to obtain supplies, and language. Although these stresses were not a determining factor for breaking their contract, they were present during their time abroad. Participant 10 indicated:

The speed in which things are done ... it's very slow in the school that I left. You have to repeat frequently the same thing over and over and over before they finally catch on. I found that in the school that I left, though, it was ridiculous things. Even to get toilet paper. You'd order pencils for your class and you'd get 10 pencils, and you have 20 kids.

Participants 2 and 3 mentioned the struggle to get around and lack of transportation due to their location. Participant 2 stated: "Transport took a really long time. Transport wasn't provided by the school," and Participant 3 commented on the lack of a transportation system. Participants 4, 5, and 10 had a similar experience with obtaining the required supplies. Participant 4 noted: "It's not that they don't want to do it, it's just this is the country, and they're always gonna say 'yes', even though they don't mean it." Participants indicated during the interviews that they had realistic expectations about their experiences and adapted to the restrictions they encountered. Participant 5:

Little stuff, best summarizes it. You found out in the whole scheme. This is little stuff in the whole scheme of life. They didn't have a 3-ring binder for this or

whatever. This stuff that you must have. You found out that that's when your creative juices really get ... going when all that stuff is taken away from you because you can't get it or it's just out of reach.

There were various reasons why teachers decided to leave their international school. The desire to experience new cultures is a common reason to leave an international school, but there are often other circumstances (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). The 10 participants in this study noted that they did not leave their school for this reason, but rather embraced the culture rather well. They allowed themselves to form “families” within the school culture and the local culture of their countries.

There were some negative aspects of their individual countries and cultures, but that did not have an impact on their decision to leave. Many of these elements were not controlled by the school but engrained in the culture itself. Roskell (2013) asserted: “Teachers that felt they were adjusting successfully in their school may have felt more positive about the host culture” (p. 166). Since the participants in this study integrated well during induction, set realistic expectations for working internationally, and immersed themselves in the culture, the anxiety of culture shock did not play a role in their decision to break their contract.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

This section will provide analysis of the results of this study. The following themes emerged during data analysis: lack of trust, power struggle, student behavior, lack of communication, and lack of vision. It will also review the literature further as it relates to the themes of the study. Following the conclusion of the study and the analysis of the results, it became clear the themes among participants led them to break their contracts within the first year.

Lack of trust. Participants in this study indicated that international schools depend on foreign teachers to take a leap of faith and enter not only a new school but also culture, life, and surroundings, trust is a crucial element to this adjustment. A school is a “living system” and trust is vital to the well-being of that system (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2014, p. 107). Trust could be built or broken, but trust is what promotes positive experiences, working conditions, and relationships (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2014). Not every individual reacted the same way in their new surroundings and participants indicated that school leadership needed to be prepared to handle teacher reactions and what they need to be successful. Supportive school leaders are cognizant of their leadership style and influence school culture, resulting in good practice and teacher retention (Rhodes et al., 2004).

Several participants discussed the issues of lack of trust from the principals, board members, and owners and how it affected their decision to leave their international school. A lack of trust affected 4 of the 10 participants when they made their decision to leave. Two of the participants were classroom teachers and reported that the lack of trust resulted in them not developing relationships and developing feelings of inadequacy. The other two participants, who were administrators, experienced a similar experience of lack of trust from upper management. They described that the lack of trust resulted in a lack of support for what the teachers needed to trust in their abilities to serve as professionals. The four participants noted that the responsibility of leadership is the development of their teachers through the offering of trust; by providing feedback that doesn't impede their ability to perform their duties, mentoring and offering support, if required. This action from school leadership showed that they trusted their employees and were there to support them (Browning, 2014). International school leaders needed to serve in the capacity as a mentor, supporting their diverse staff, and encouraging them in their new surroundings.

Power struggle. Three participants who taught in the Middle East described that their schools experienced “growing pains.” This included changes in administration, and being a brand new school. According to Roskill (2013), “Teachers who anticipate no, or minimal, difficulties are more likely to experience initial euphoria as a result of unrealistic expectations. In addition, if their needs are under met they are likely to be highly dissatisfied with the outcome” (p. 166). Being seasoned teachers, these particular participants had realistic expectations and outlooks of their choice to work internationally. Participant 5 stated: “You’re not gonna be able to please everyone 100% of the time.” During the second interview, she stated: “Someone's going to be the guinea pig. I think in some areas we were the guinea pigs and it was good for the next group coming in.” Effective leadership includes maximizing the potential of people within the organization (Browning, 2014). Regarding international schools and growing pains, participants indicated that it would be beneficial for school leadership to assess where the growing pains were coming from and if it was cultural, financial, political, or other outside elements. In terms of this study, further research in an international setting would provide deeper insight into how a school developed through such growing pains.

Student behavior. Data analysis showed that student behavior did not have a direct impact on the participants’ decisions to break their contract, but it added to already stressful situations. Teachers who experience a balanced workload and job control became more dedicated, but a major component of stress was teacher workload in relation to instruction and keeping current on new trends (Sass et al., 2011). Several participants noted that there was a lack of support, inconsistency, poor or missing procedures, and lack of a common language made student behavior a challenge. When teachers felt unsupported in dealing with student behavior and given limited input into decision making this led to higher rates of turnover” (Ingersoll, 2001). Participants especially the ones located in the Middle East,

expressed the need for consistent behavior support and support when dealing with misbehaving students.

Lack of communication. Participants in this study described a lack of understanding, communication, conflicting messages, and a lack of urgency for teacher concerns being resolved. When teachers experienced regular and supportive communication with school leaders, attrition rates were lower, compared to when bureaucracy was present, resulting in higher attrition rates (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Participant 3 stated: “Sometimes I think that the communication between the administration was not there all the way.” Similarly, Participant 4 noted: “Lack of communication between admin and teachers, changing of contracts mid-year, basically dehumanizing my son, and not following through with discipline actions [with parents and students].” Another participant had a similar experience. Participant 9 stated:

Most of the leadership will either tell you they disagree with what you think, or they let you know where you stand or how they can help you, so there was just not that communication level... You didn't feel supported as a staff member at all if you had a concern.

Participants' comments surrounding communication were not new to education, but through personal experience and closely related relevant researchers (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Keller, 2014; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). A recommendation for international school leadership is to become skilled in cultural proficiency, welcome collaborative discussions, and develop a sense of community where teachers, staff, and leaders could discuss concerns and solve them collaboratively was noted among the participants.

Lack of vision. Another issue that surfaced during this study was the lack of vision within the participants' schools. Caffyn and Cambridge (2006, as cited in Slough-Kuss, 2014) stated: “The danger for management is that, by having grand school visions and

strategic plans, they could lose sight of subtle complexities” (p. 225). Participant 1 demonstrated this issue:

The director at that time had a good vision and was talking about collaboration, putting a brand-new team together and moving forward...Then when we got into the year, it became this huge power struggle between the director and the board.

Participant 7, who also mentioned the growing pains of her school, stated: “I wish there was a better balance so that you could spend more time preparing to teach, and less time on things that you don't value as much.” An important step for international school leaders is to be cognizant of the school’s vision and incorporate that into their decision-making and support to teachers. If the institution does not have the capacity to reconcile decisions between hired school leadership, the board, and its owners, it would be wise for the three groups to engage in collaborative discussions that would facilitate a vision all could agree to implement.

Limitations

There were several limitations that must be considered. This phenomenological study focused on the personal, professional, and cultural lived experiences of only 10 North American teachers working in international schools located in the Middle Eastern Region. “While retention research in U.S. schools abounds, there has been little on teacher turnover in international schools and particularly American schools overseas” (Mancuso et al., 2010, p. 307). The result of this data demonstrated the need for further research to be conducted.

The study did not take other regions into consideration, and although the teachers all had a varied and experienced teaching background, seven of the 10 participants broke their contracts within the Middle East. This study did not intend to only interview participants that broke their contract in the Middle East; instead, the researcher used this region as a home base to conduct the interviews. Results might not be representative of other North American

teachers breaking contracts in other regions of the world. Further, the only data collected were study participant interviews: Observable data was not collected from the participants' school; and colleague and administrator perspectives of the participants' leadership styles and abilities were not accounted for in this study. A snowballing method was used to gather participants. Out of the 10 participants, nine were female and one was male. Along with gender limitations, only North Americans were selected for this study, excluding participants from other countries.

In qualitative research, the researcher needs to be cognizant of how bias is a present component of their methodology and cannot be completely omitted. The researcher utilized member checking, reflexive note taking, and thick, rich descriptions to reduce bias (Creswell, 2013). Although these strategies were valuable in reducing bias, qualitative research, by design, accounts for the researcher's experiences. Phenomenological research reports the experiences of several individuals and what they have in common (Creswell, 2013). The conclusions in this study may be subject to other interpretations and analysis for future research.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of North American teachers working in international schools and why they chose to leave within the first year. The need for international teachers is growing rapidly and it is essential for school leadership and school owners to critically examine their practices to improve efforts on teacher-leadership relationships. The themes and outcomes of this study suggest the need for school leaders, owners, and board members improve on these skills.

The results of this study support the need for further research and the limitations of this study can be addressed in future studies. The following questions have been developed from findings in this study, personal insight, and reflections, and are in no particular order.

- Would similar results emerge if participants were interviewed in other geographical regions?
- Does gender play a role in a teacher's decision to break their contract?
- How does the culture of the host country affect the behavior of the students in international schools?
- What effect does teacher turnover have on student development?
- Does early education and communication regarding the host country and school impact the teacher's decision to stay?
- What relationship should recruitment agencies have with a school when recruiting teachers for schools in challenging geographical areas?
- What role should international school owners have on educational decisions?
- What aspect of an international school encourages a teacher to stay for a long period of time?

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Several participants in this study noted the possible connection between school leadership, owners, and board members familiarity with the various characteristics of their international school; could make them aware of struggles teachers encounter. One suggestion by Ingersoll (2001) was to focus on the characteristics of the school for analysis of teacher turnover from an organizational perspective. Participants in the study experienced levels of stress and support that contributed to teacher's intention to stay or leave. Participants in this study reinforced the facilitation between teachers and school leaders utilizing communication, support, and trust to help maintain morale, or encourage teachers previously lacking support from their leadership. During a conversation with an international school principal, he told this researcher: "I only get one good year out of a teacher who fulfills their two-year contract. This is a result that during the first 6 months, the teacher gets acclimated

to the school. The following year they find their momentum and understand the school. However, the last 6 months they are thinking of their next teaching placement.” Therefore, the implications of this study indicate that emphasis be given to the lived experiences of departing teachers, especially international teachers in relation to attrition.

An international school commits a great deal logistically and financially when they recruit new teachers, and teachers commit to a new life when making a decision to work overseas. When a teacher decides to teach internationally it comes with the cost of entering into the unknown and experiencing both exciting and stressful situations. Participants reinforced the need for teachers, school leadership, school owners, board members, and school administration to meet regularly and engage in reflective practices and develop data that shows why teachers left. Participants in this study articulated the need for school leadership and teachers to work together by being open to honest feedback and being resilient enough to grow and develop from the feedback. Along with data from participant interviews, research suggested, school leadership facilitates trust and growth within the school, and although they have the monumental task of managing the many facets of the school, the needs of the people should be fulfilled first (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2014).

As suggested in Chapter 1, international schools would benefit from a deeper examination of teacher attrition by finding ways international teachers and school leadership could adapt practices, procedures, and policies to incorporate collaboration with teachers and improve teacher retention. Having a healthy balance between the managerial side and personnel side would provide school leadership success when implementing decisions. The findings suggest that teachers, school leadership, board members, and school owners need more collaborative efforts for relationships within the schools to be successful. When building resilience, “everyone should feel like they can contribute, that their answers are valued, their experiences are valued” (Hacohen, 2012, p. 119). A supportive international

school facilitates this by having an inclusive ethos (Hacohen, 2012). The major findings of this phenomenological study related to the following themes: lack of trust, power struggle, student behavior, lack of communication, and lack of vision.

The participants in this study came from diverse teaching experiences and disciplines and were candid in sharing their experiences. Waters (2016) stated: “[The] goal in phenomenological research is to describe the essential meaning of your participants' lived experience” (p. 1). In terms of data collected during the interviews, the findings, and literature on teacher attrition in international schools indicates further research would be beneficial. The participants’ individual experiences, though different, shared common themes and emotional distress, which isolated them from interacting normally with their new surroundings. Teachers who have experience teaching abroad are better at understanding what it feels like being an outsider (Savva 2013). It was essential to present what the participants desired and considered as important traits a school leader possesses.

In addition, this study revealed that owners of international schools are not required to have educational training or education certification. This defect in the international school business caused some of the participant’s distress following decisions that affected the educational process for them and their students. Participants noted that money shortages to pay salaries, ignoring infrastructure needs, such as better Internet, and unequal distributions of funds resulted in job frustrations. After examining the participants’ reasons for leaving their international teaching assignment and analyzing the descriptions of their experiences, it was apparent that these seasoned teachers had clear ideas of who they were as teachers, what they wanted in an international school, and how they could serve their schools.

The participants appeared to be honest about their capabilities, inabilities, and the values they thought were essential to be a successful international school leader. Participants discussed how communication needed to be transparent and positive, but truthful to enable

recruited teachers to make informed decisions to accept a position or leave their international school. If the information turns out to be false or unrealistic this will jeopardize and create a lack of trust in the relationship (Stirzaker, 2004). Although some aspects of school operations were different depending on the culture, the findings suggest that the five themes, lack of trust, power struggle, student behavior, lack of communication, and lack of vision in the school setting were common among the participants. The governing structure of the school has a special responsibility to be transparent when it comes to decisions, especially to avoid misperceptions from school constituents (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009).

The participants in this study selected their international teaching placement based on their principles, abilities, and experience in mind. In examining the themes of this phenomenological study, the need for a strong and purposeful leadership team that offered stability and support was the recurrent theme. The findings suggest that when school leadership takes into account others' voices to make decisions and trusts in the abilities of the teacher, teacher retention can improve. In addition, participants in this study expressed concerns of not being supported, professionally developed, or there was a complete lack of development. Participants also commented on the cultural misunderstandings that their principals and heads of school faced and how that impacted decision-making. The findings of this study, simplistically stated, would be that North American teachers depend on trust, vision, communication, and support from school leadership. When these factors are used in alignment with the mission of the school and culture teachers feel productive, valued, and successful.

Study findings could influence teachers and school leadership and the decisions they implement at their international schools, how they interact with their staff, the ability they have to gain trust and to match their personal beliefs with the vision and mission of the school. School leadership and teachers could be equally reflective and contribute to the

improvement of international schools and teacher attrition. The findings, as described by the participants, would lead to healthier relationships between teachers and school leadership and reduce job related stress. The results of this study are intended to aid international school leadership and school owners in gaining a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of international teachers who break their contracts within the first year.

Conclusion

Throughout the study, I had some setbacks along the way: participants who didn't meet the criteria, fear of not having enough participants, school holidays delaying interviews, and technology and communication challenges. However, as I began to write my study and reexamine the data, I was surprised how reflective and open the participants were in talking about their experiences. Their stories resonated with me as I synthesized the data and presented the results. Their words were honest and absent of anger. At the end of the final interview, the participants personally reflected on their experience and took this experience with them to their next school.

The participants were receptive to my questions and had the desire to add to the limited research on why teachers leave their international school. Significant research on teacher retention in U.S. schools is available, however very little is available on international schools (Mancuso et al., 2010). The struggles that these 10 participants experienced now serve as real-life examples of making the hard decision to leave an international school and begin a new career. Dialogue with my participants and examination of the research validated many of my initial considerations. Some of these included that school leadership must be willing to be reflective in their practices, trusting in the abilities of his or her teachers by being transparent in decisions, and allowing for collaborative feedback.

Although induction was not a factor in the participants' decision to leave their school, several commented that their induction was reminiscent of previous inductions and adequate

to begin the year. The participants in the study were experienced teachers and the common need was for more time to setup their classroom and integrate with the staff. Collectively, the participants in the study shared their experiences immersing into the host country, forming “families,” and experiencing what the country had to offer. Some frustrations in each host country were related to the culture, but that did not play a role in any participant’s reason to depart prematurely.

I have learned that international school leaders have additional layers that they encounter daily. Some of these include language barriers, culture barriers and expectations, international laws and restrictions, working with a school board and owner of the school, and a diverse staff, not only in age and experience but also ethnicity. When facing these additional layers, school leaders must be willing to be flexible with the concerns of their staff, and not look at them as a “squeaky wheel,” but rather as a partner in a solution. School leaders in international schools need to step into their positions with the courage to lead through adversity and be willing to facilitate and welcome teacher dialogues.

I have also learned about my leadership style and my identity as a future female school leader. After several discussions with both male and female leaders, I am aware of the challenges I face. During an informal discussion, a fellow female principal said: “Not only are we in a man’s world, we have to be assertive enough to be taken seriously as a leader, but not too much to come off as a bitch.” I have found this to be true in my current leadership position. In my current role, I serve the whole school and have to make decisions, train teachers, and have the patience for various levels of abilities. I have asked for feedback and have realized that, as a leader, I need to work on my patience. I need to adapt my training to the needs of my staff and not package them all into one box. As I take action, implement decisions, and make changes, I must learn through these actions, be humble when they fail, and celebrate when they are successful.

In conclusion, I share an excerpt that resonated with me throughout the course of this study. Keller (2014) shared: “The role and purpose of schooling could vary greatly between cultures” (p. 11). I have realized that teachers and leaders, not only in the United States, but also internationally, must be chameleons. How I serve as a leader in the Middle East will not be the same as how I serve in the United States or wherever my next journey leads me. My hope is that this dissertation might serve as a benchmark for teachers and school leaders to use as they adapt their practices into their new school culture, staff, practices, and self-development.

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Appendix A: Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University- Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.



Digital Signature

Stephanie Lynne Kattera

Name (Typed)

June 1, 2017

Date

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Personal Questions

What is your age?

What is your teacher specialty area?

How long have you been teaching? In USA and Internationally.

School Related Questions

What led you to International Teaching?

How long have you been teaching? In USA and Internationally.

How many schools were before the one where the contract was broken? How many after?

What were your experiences in the schools in which the contract was not broken?

What were your experiences in the schools in which the contract was broken?

What were the differences in recruitment between those schools?

What were the differences in induction between those schools?

What experiences in the host culture did you embrace?

What experiences in the host culture cause you stress at work?

What experiences in the host culture cause you stress at work were controllable by school leadership? Which ones were not?