

Cross-cultural Management of Foreign Teachers in International Schools

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Abstract: Economic globalization has accelerated the exchange and integration of cultures among countries worldwide, intensifying the process of educational internationalization. In the new era of educational reform and openness, with the increasing number of international schools, more foreign teachers specializing in various languages and disciplines come to China to work in the international schools. The cross-cultural management issues of foreign teachers have gradually become prominent. This article explores strategies for managing foreign teachers, focusing on recruitment, compensation, training, and performance evaluation, to help international schools better address the challenges of cross-cultural management of foreign teachers in China.

Keywords: Foreign Teachers, International Schools, Cross-cultural Management

1. Introduction

In recent years, In the context of globalization, China has been continuously increasing its efforts to open up education to the world, effectively leveraging top-tier educational resources, and strengthening interconnection, inclusiveness, and mutual learning with various countries worldwide. In 2020, the Ministry of Education, along with eight other departments, issued the "Opinions on Accelerating and Expanding the Opening-up of Education in the New Era," laying the theoretical groundwork for the internationalization of education in the modern era. According to a report from Global Weekly of China Education News in December 2023, as of the end of 2023, the overall scale and structure of international schools in China have remained relatively stable, with the total number of various international schools exceeding 1,300, having over 500,000 students, and employing 150,000 teaching staff. English, as the globally accepted lingua franc, has

become a compulsory course in current international schools. The primary teaching force in international schools comprises Chinese and foreign teachers, with the majority of foreign teachers being responsible for teaching English, Western culture, or some international curriculum courses. The introduction of foreign teachers brings advantages in language learning, helping to create an immersive English learning environment, expand students' diverse thinking, and cultivate their ability for cross-cultural communication. The increasing influx of foreign teachers unavoidably brings about some cross-cultural conflicts and misunderstandings, drawing growing attention from managers in the international education industry regarding the management issues of foreign teachers.

2. Problems and Causes of Foreign Teacher Management

2.1 Recruitment Challenges

According to data from the State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs of China, as of early 2019, the number of foreign workers in China was estimated to be over 900,000, with approximately 50% of them engaged in education and teaching-related roles. Among these professionals, those holding work visas for educational purposes and meeting the language teaching requirements numbered less than 100,000. Due to high market demand and significant disparities between supply and demand, the availability of foreign teachers is limited, making it challenging to control their quality. Overall, recruiting foreign teachers presents certain difficulties.

The recruitment of foreign teachers in international schools involves two main pathways: overseas recruitment and domestic transfer. Some international schools opt for overseas recruitment through intermediary agencies, where the school provides invitation

letters and other entry documents while the intermediary agency handles the immigration procedures for foreign teachers. This direct overseas recruitment method is costly and carries certain risks. Conducting background checks and verifying qualifications of foreign teachers poses practical challenges. Many intermediary agencies prioritize profit over stringent quality control, leading to significant management challenges for schools after the teachers' arrival. Given the greater difficulty in overseas recruitment, most international schools end up hiring foreign teachers already in China through domestic transfers. However, due to limited and unevenly distributed resources, with more foreign teachers in large cities and fewer in smaller ones, and more in the southeast compared to the northwest. Some foreign teachers, driven by financial incentives, tend to move between various international schools. The compensation levels for foreign teachers in the Chinese market have been consistently increasing, surpassing those in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. Whether through overseas recruitment or domestic transfers, the majority of foreign teacher resources are controlled by intermediary agencies, whose quality varies widely. Insufficient background checks on foreign teachers make it challenging to ensure their stability and effectiveness upon joining the school. [1]

2.2 Instability Challenges

From the perspective of school development, the stability of teachers directly impacts students' learning outcomes. The frequent turnover of foreign teachers not only leads to parental complaints but also seriously affects the school's reputation. The stability of foreign teachers is crucial for the development of international schools. According to the entry data of foreign teachers at Beijing M Education Company, more than 50% of foreign teachers have less than one year of work experience, indicating high turnover and poor stability. The phenomenon of poor stability among foreign teachers is relatively common in international schools, and there are many reasons behind it. Firstly, there is the issue of visas. The number of foreign teachers eligible for teaching visas is insufficient, leading to a high probability of resignation for those who do not have the qualifications for educational

visas but are engaged in teaching work due to visa-related reasons. Secondly, some foreign teachers lack professional ethics and moral standards, fail to meet agreed-upon work standards, or chase high-paying positions at other schools, resulting in breaches of contract. Thirdly, there are foreign teachers with low job satisfaction leading to resignations. From the perspective of foreign teachers, the factors they value most in job-seeking are salary level, job attractiveness, employer brand and career development, and paid leave. Some international schools do not have dedicated personnel to manage foreign teachers uniformly, and this "one-size-fits-all" approach indirectly contributes to the instability of foreign teachers. Lastly, some foreign teachers experience stress due to poor cultural adaptation, resulting in physiological and psychological discomfort caused by objective factors such as environment, food, and language, making it difficult for them to adapt to life in China, leading to a lack of belongingness and difficulties in integration, ultimately resulting in resignation.

2.3 Cross-cultural Conflict Issues

Due to differences in values, beliefs, behavioral habits, language, etiquette, social structures, etc., among different countries, these disparities result in varying ways of thinking and behavioral patterns between different cultures, which are particularly pronounced in today's era of globalization. Stemming from the cultural differences between the cultural backgrounds of foreign teachers and our cultural environment, they inevitably encounter cross-cultural conflicts in their teaching work, posing challenges to the management of international schools.

Firstly, due to language barriers and communication issues, there are often information asymmetries between foreign teachers and colleagues or students, leading to misunderstandings or even conflicts in information transmission and comprehension. Chinese is a high-context language where much information is internalized through long-term exposure, relying on implicit understanding rather than explicit communication. In contrast, English is a low-context language where information is conveyed through explicit symbols. Secondly, mismatches can arise between the teaching philosophies, methods,

and students' expectations of foreign teachers. Different teaching methods and styles used by foreign teachers may lead to ineffective teaching or student complaints. For example, foreign teachers may emphasize critical thinking, encourage independent thinking and practical application, focus on personalized development, and utilize interactive teaching, classroom discussions, and group activities, which can sometimes lead to disorderly classrooms. Thirdly, there are significant differences in the time orientation and work habits between foreign teachers and us. We emphasize collectivism and teamwork, while foreign teachers prioritize individualism. This can lead to conflicts in the workplace, such as foreign teachers leaving on time regardless of work completion, without overtime work for unfinished tasks. When collaborating with other teachers, there may be a lack of common understanding and pursuit of team goals and missions, reluctance to share resources and experiences, leading to ambiguity and conflicts. Lastly, some foreign teachers may have different perceptions and understandings of the school's rules, regulations, and management methods, leading to conflicts or misunderstandings with the management. This situation is common in international schools, where foreign teachers may exhibit behaviors of autonomy and disregard for hierarchical arrangements.

3. Analysis of Strategies for Managing Foreign Teachers

3.1 Recruitment Management

International schools should rigorously control the "entry gate," establish specialized positions, and recruit relevant personnel with language and management capabilities to be responsible for the recruitment and management of foreign teachers. Based on the past data and behavioral information of high-performing foreign teachers, a precise talent profile should be created for foreign teachers' positions, clear job requirements should be established and strictly implemented, and it is recommended to specify English-speaking countries as a restricted condition for applicants, recruiting native language teachers who have the qualifications and teacher certifications for language teaching according to the relevant laws and regulations of the Foreign Experts Bureau and immigration

authorities.

International schools should make proper advance recruitment planning. The peak period for the departure of foreign teachers typically occurs around the end of the academic term. Therefore, the human resources department should prepare in advance by conducting a questionnaire survey for foreign teachers in January and July each year to confirm their intention to continue their employment in the new semester. In case of any changes in intention, potential candidates for the new semester should be identified and prepared in February and August. []

International schools should rigorously screen and verify the qualifications and credentials of foreign teachers. Prior to hiring, background checks should be conducted on foreign teachers, and the qualifications and reputation of intermediary agencies should be reviewed and evaluated. When verifying the educational background and professional qualifications of foreign teachers, it is advisable to contact their alma mater to confirm their qualifications, including degrees, teaching certificates, and professional training. When verifying the past work experience of foreign teachers, evaluations can be obtained by contacting previous employers or obtaining recommendation letters to assess their work history and teaching experience, including the schools or institutions they previously worked for, subjects taught, and positions held. To verify the teaching proficiency of foreign teachers, confirmations and evaluations can be done through demonstration classes and past student evaluations. Foreign teachers can be requested to provide teaching evaluation reports, student transcripts, and lesson plans. When verifying the personal background records of foreign teachers, inquiries can be made through government departments, professional organizations, or specialized investigation agencies to check for criminal records, professional disciplinary actions, and creditworthiness. A non-criminal record certificate issued by the local public security department can be obtained as part of the employment documentation. Background checks are a crucial step in the recruitment and management of foreign teachers, and international schools should ensure the authenticity and accuracy of information obtained during the interview process.

Additionally, when conducting background checks, it is important to adhere to relevant laws, regulations, and privacy protection policies to fully respect the personal privacy rights of foreign teachers.

3.2. Training Management

Due to cultural differences and variations in context, foreign teachers tend to prefer clear and explicit on-boarding guidelines. Therefore, international schools need to communicate details such as job responsibilities, benefits, and professional ethics regulations to foreign teachers before their on-boarding. In the contract, it is important to specify salary and benefits, teacher code of conduct, company policies, etc., in as much detail as possible until both parties reach an agreement on the contract content. This approach is more conducive to foreign teachers cooperating with the school's arrangements and management after their on-boarding.

For foreign teacher training, international schools should establish a specialized training system tailored to foreign teachers. Firstly, regular surveys of training needs for foreign teachers should be conducted, and training plans should be developed accordingly. Based on the school's objectives and the individualized development of foreign teachers, customized training plans for foreign teachers should be created. The content may cover aspects such as language training, curriculum design, teaching methods, student assessment, professional ethics, and classroom management. Training formats can be diverse, not limited to lectures but also including seminars and team-building activities. Secondly, since foreign teachers come from different cultural backgrounds, they need to undergo cross-cultural training to understand local culture, student backgrounds, education systems, etc., to help them better adapt to the work environment, leverage their personal strengths, and enhance their teaching professionalism. Thirdly, regular evaluations of foreign teachers' teaching performance should be conducted, with timely feedback and guidance provided. This feedback can help foreign teachers identify issues, improve teaching methods, and promote personal and team growth. Additionally, as school administrators, encouraging collaboration and sharing of teaching experience among foreign

teachers can be beneficial. Organizing teaching workshops, observation sessions, and other activities can facilitate cooperation and interaction among teachers. Lastly, satisfaction surveys should be conducted after each training session, and continuous follow-up on the effectiveness of foreign teacher training should be conducted. Regular evaluations and adjustments to training plans should be made to ensure continuous improvement and enhancement of training effectiveness.

3.3 Compensation Management

Compensation management for foreign teachers is an essential aspect of ensuring fair and reasonable remuneration during their tenure at the school. It is also one of the most crucial job conditions highly valued by foreign teachers. Proper compensation management can help reduce the turnover rate of foreign teachers and retain talented foreign teaching staff. Firstly, conducting thorough research is essential to understand the average salary levels of local foreign teachers and the compensation offered by competing schools. Based on market demand, competitive situations, the educational background, professional qualifications, and teaching experience of foreign teachers, different levels of compensation standards should be established to ensure that compensation matches teachers' abilities and contributions. Secondly, considering that foreign teachers often need to cover living costs such as housing, medical insurance, and education for their children, international schools can provide corresponding benefits or allowances to offset these expenses. Thirdly, establishing a transparent and fair compensation system is crucial. Clear rules regarding salary structures, salary increase mechanisms, and promotion pathways should be defined to inform foreign teachers about their compensation and future development opportunities. Additionally, implementing a performance reward system can motivate teachers to achieve better performance by offering additional rewards or opportunities for salary increases based on their teaching performance and contributions. Lastly, regular adjustments and evaluations of foreign teachers' compensation should be conducted considering factors such as inflation, changes in living costs, and teachers' job performance to ensure fairness and reasonableness in

compensation.

During compensation management, international schools can establish effective communication channels with foreign teachers to understand their salary expectations and needs, provide timely feedback, and address any issues to enhance their job satisfaction and loyalty.

3.4 Performance assessment management

Performance evaluation is a quantitative and qualitative assessment process of teachers' performance in teaching and work aspects, aimed at evaluating their work achievements, contributions, and performances, and providing feedback and guidance for individual and organizational development, with foreign teachers being no exception. The human resources department should, based on the company's development goals and in a fully democratic manner, establish a reasonable and actionable performance evaluation system, ensuring fairness and impartiality in the performance assessment process, avoiding subjective biases and unfair treatment, and ensuring that teachers' rights are fully respected.

Firstly, clear performance indicators should be established, determining performance indicators related to teaching quality, student performance, classroom management, student evaluation, etc., to assess the performance of foreign teachers in various aspects. Personalized performance goals should be developed based on the responsibilities and job content of foreign teachers in different positions, considering their teaching characteristics, subject characteristics, and student needs. After the trial operation, coordination, and finalization of the performance evaluation system, a special meeting should be convened to explain the requirements and implementation methods of performance evaluation in detail, ensuring that foreign teachers have a correct understanding of the content of performance evaluation. Secondly, international schools should regularly evaluate the teaching performance of foreign teachers, including classroom observations, student evaluations, peer evaluations, and other evaluation methods, and provide timely feedback and guidance. While considering student learning outcomes and progress as an important reference for

evaluating teacher performance, it should not be the sole evaluation criterion. Thirdly, international schools should establish reward and punishment mechanisms based on the performance of foreign teachers, encouraging outstanding teachers and motivating others to improve their work performance. Incentives can be in the form of material rewards and spiritual incentives used together, as using only one form of incentive may not achieve the desired motivating effect. Finally, international schools should regularly evaluate the effectiveness and implementation of the performance evaluation system, making adjustments and improvements based on feedback and actual circumstances to ensure the effectiveness and applicability of the system.

Foreign teachers are particularly sensitive to changes in salary, therefore, it's important to clarify this matter in the contract before establishing the performance evaluation. During the execution of the performance assessment, smooth transitions should be emphasized, achieved through methods such as prior notification and comprehensive training, to ensure consensus with foreign teachers regarding performance evaluation.

4. Conclusions

Managing foreign teachers in international schools, although challenging, has yielded numerous lessons and experiences through continuous practice in recent years. Guided by national foreign experts bureaus and immigration policies, international schools have adopted a people-centric approach and developed a set of management practices tailored to their own institutions. By placing importance on the initial selection process, establishing comprehensive systems for compensation, training, and performance evaluation, and enhancing the job satisfaction of foreign teachers, schools have been able to cultivate and retain exceptional talent, build a positive reputation, and contribute to the internationalization of education.

References

- [1] Kim Y Y. *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross - Cultural Adaptation*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001.