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**WHY DO THEY STAY? AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING
RETENTION OF
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL TEACHERS**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

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2016**

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this university or to another institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.



A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Alicia Ritter", is written over a horizontal dotted line. Below the signature, the name "Alicia A Ritter" is printed in a standard sans-serif font.

Alicia A Ritter

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine factors affecting international teachers' decisions to stay in or leave their international schools. The research questions for the study answered what individual characteristics of teachers impacted retention, how cultural distance, length of time it took to settle in, and school support affected retention, and what guided teachers to remain in their locations. The participants were 100 international teachers in ten schools across four countries. The teachers ranged from younger to older and from newly experienced to more seasoned international teachers who had been working in international schools for a long period of time. The researcher interviewed each teacher personally and used a grounded theory approach to the collection and analysis of data, coding data into themes related to the research questions. The results of the analysis suggested that the most important reasons for staying in an international school were for personal reasons, including for partners or family, age, quality of life, right 'fit', and level of happiness. The second most important reasons for staying in a job included professional reasons such as for the school's philosophy, vision, administration, and for professional opportunities within the school. The third most important reason for remaining in a job was for the salary and benefits. International teachers who made an effort to get involved in their locations seemed to adjust better. The extent to which international adaptations were positive or negative varied depending on the country. The value of the present study was that the interviews gave a personal insight into the experiences of these teachers, the challenges they faced in working and adapting to new cultures, languages, and in different school settings around the world, and how these experiences impacted retention in international schools.

Acknowledgments

International teaching is a career unbeknownst to many educators in their home countries. Once teachers have discovered and entered the realm of international education, many remain in the profession for the duration of their careers. I connected and identified with these teachers very quickly when I began my international teaching career in Beijing, China. I became curious at first as to why many teachers remained abroad, though the benefits revealed themselves quickly. My curiosities then turned to what specifically schools or cultural environments offered to keep international teachers in locations.

I would like to thank the international school heads and principals for allowing me to contact teachers within their schools and would also like to thank the international teachers who set aside time to be interviewed and correspond with me over time about their experiences abroad. It was an all encompassing and indescribable journey getting to travel to the international schools and countries to meet these international teachers in person. I would like to thank everyone who helped make these journeys across the world possible.

I would especially like to thank my two supervisors, Professor Tom Nicholson and Professor Michael Townsend, for their counsel and guidance throughout this project. Without their expertise and encouragement, I could not have completed this journey successfully. Thank you both for your support, inspiration, and friendship over the last decade!

Lastly, thank you to my family who gave unrelenting support throughout the process. Without their love and encouragement I would not have made it through. And thank you to Bella, my daughter, the inspiration to keep going when times were tough and crossing oceans with me on what continues to be an incredible journey.

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