

What Strategies Should Southern Chinese Universities Undertake to Successfully Recruit and Retain Female Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs)

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ABSTRACT

Recruiting female teachers are common problems universities have to overcome. Based on the perspective of societal and cultural norms, the Chinese education market believes that female foreign teachers are ideal candidates for early childhood education; in contrast, higher education institutions (HEIs) tend to recruit male foreign teachers due to other educational bodies being more successful in attracting potential female teachers. This paper discusses factors affecting the recruitment of female native English teachers encountered in Chinese HEIs. The paper asserts that universities in south China modify their current recruitment policy to include forming recruitment cooperatives, fostering word of mouth recruitment by existing foreign teachers, headhunting desirable qualified teachers from other Chinese HEIs, and participating in job fairs and academic conferences. To retain talented foreign teachers, Chinese HEIs must improve communication, offer training and professional development courses, create classes and opportunities for foreign teachers to assimilate into the community, offer mentorship to new foreign teachers, and develop job advancement opportunities. Implementing one or more strategies, Southern Chinese Universities (HEIs) can enhance their educational competitiveness and improve the learning opportunities for their students.

KEYWORDS: Recruitment Strategies, South China Universities, Female English Teacher, Retention Strategies, NEST

Introduction

A study in 2017 targeting foreign teachers in Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs) indicated the overall number of foreign teachers were increasing in China year to year; yet, the number remained inadequate in size and unevenly distributed nation-wide (Li et al.,

2017). First tiered cities in China had the highest concentration of foreign teachers while developing and rural regions had limited visibility and had the most significant shortfalls regarding foreign instructor recruitment. More concerning is that the study also found that the gender ratio was imbalanced, with foreign male

teachers outnumbering females at an astonishing 9:1 in Chinese HEIs. Foreign teachers employed in Chinese HEIs, are classified into two groups, traditional language instruction and research-oriented studies; however, nearly all foreign teachers are categorized in language instruction, 94% (Li et al., 2017). This article defines 'foreign teachers' as individuals who were born overseas in an officially designated country where English is the primary language of communication; all teachers additional must have completed their undergraduate studies (four-year program) and possess all required Chinese permits for legal employment. Higher education institutions are universities and colleges offering degree and certificate courses to students, the length of programs range among institutions but generally consist of two to three-year certificates or four-year degrees (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2020). All Chinese HEIs are government regulated and monitored, ensuring courses and programs adhere to established educational policies created by the local, provincial, and national governments.

Numerous studies have attempted to link student performance to instructor gender, often with conflicting results. In their research, Oktan and Kıvanç Çağanağa (2015) and Orr (2011) concluded that instructors' gender was insignificant in student learning; while Winkelman (2016) and Mahdi and Al-Dera (2013) found there was minor significance in instructor gender dealing with classroom management and student learning. Controversially, Dee (2006) found students of the same gender as the instructor performed better than by someone of the opposite gender. Eble and

Hu (2019) study supported Dee's conclusions when testing students in China. Dee's findings are contentious and have sparked debate in the influence of gender; societal gender biases have also played a substantial part in classroom instructor diversity. Weaver-Hightower (2011) concluded that men were often deterred from entering education, especially at the early levels, by perceived social beliefs that they are either wasting their ability or deemed motivated by sexual fixations. These underlying biases affect the gender dynamics and hiring practices of educational institutions are prevalent in China, with early childhood educators seeking females and higher education institutions hiring more males to appease students, parents and cultural norms (Miller & Chamberlin, 2000).

Chinese parents, concerned about student competition and a slowing economy, are pushing their children to learn English at a younger age. According to Gamlam (2016), there are approximately three hundred million individuals currently studying English in China alone. This boon for the English learning industry has generated an enormous demand for qualified English instructors in both public and private organizations. Female native English instructors are deemed most desirable for early learners, so numerous institutions concentrate their recruitment strategies on them; while higher education institutions solely seek candidates that meet predesigned educational thresholds.

Hockley (2006) determined respect, pay, opportunities, and peer interaction as primary motivators for foreign language teachers in their job choice; however, gender, as a primary variable, was not examined. With at least a

100,000 native English teacher shortfall each year in China (Gamlam, 2016), the market is incredibly competitive, leaving higher education institutions at a disadvantage. Higher education institutions, offering limited financial packages, must adhere to stricter government regulations mandating degree requirements and minimum years of experience for foreign instructors (State Administration of Foreign Expert Affairs, 2017). With higher education institutions failing to recruit and retain native English instructors, student performance, especially in English, is seen to decrease considerably (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). A balanced teacher group improves interaction and understanding for the students through instructor experiences based on cultural and social perspectives through a gender lens. The current disproportional male/female ratio that currently exists in most Chinese universities reduces potential learning opportunities by providing a limited scope to western culture and feminist viewpoints. HEIs in southern China additionally face unique challenges in the recruitment process. While ideally situated near Hong Kong and consisting of four first tiered cities (Dongguan, Foshan, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen), recruitment lags behind other more internationally famous locations (Beijing, Shanghai, or Chongqing) where incentive packages are more attractive and they contain an internationally recognized vibrant history. Southern China has a considerable population (approximately 210 million) with growing demands for foreign instructors but increasing shortfalls.

This paper seeks to understand the factors causing female native English teachers in Southern Chinese universities to select a school, renew their contract, or

resign from their position and compare these to Southern Chinese universities recruitment policies, duty requirements, and retainment initiatives. This paper is going to explore and give recommendations on how Chinese universities better equip even with limited resources, devise better strategies to recruit and retain quality female native English instructors, ensuring gender balance within the EFL university classroom.

The Advantages of Foreign English Teachers in Chinese HEIs

As Chinese visa regulations require foreign teachers to be from countries where English is the primary language, their communicative ability is highly desirable in the university classroom. Although domestic English teachers are qualified and highly proficient in grammatical foundations, apprehension, and anxiety about their speaking ability (pronunciation and accent) limit their focus on communicative practices. Medgyes (1992) states that domestic English teachers, dominated by fear, become obsessed with grammar, and disregard pronunciation and linguistic appropriateness in taught discourse. Foreign teachers are regarded as linguistic exemplifiers through their modeling of discourse in classrooms. Foreign teachers emphasize fluency and communication over grammar and spelling; pedagogical underpinnings target speech patterns, intonation, stress, pronunciation, and word choice as the focal point of classroom learning. Students strive to mimic foreign teacher linguistic mannerisms to mitigate errors in speech patterns and accents commonly referred to as ‘Chinglish,’ so they can sound more ‘natural.’ Foreign teachers are additionally advantageous in

the linkage of language, social and cultural situations. As language and culture are interwoven, it is impossible to divorce the two without significantly impacting the presented value of both, leading to pragmatic failures (Brown, 2007). Domestic teachers may be 'ignorant' about cultural substructures by presenting linguistic form that would be incompatible with real events, a term Medgyes (1983) referred to as referential appropriateness. Foreign teachers tend to use ethnographic references as a supplemental tool, allows for better student insight when engaging textbooks or communicative activities. With less importance on standardized teaching approaches often utilized in Chinese classrooms, foreign teachers inspire students to be enthusiastic participants in a student-oriented environment, improving student ownership in the classroom. Chinese HEIs should not disregard the importance of domestic teachers, but rather foreign teachers and domestic teachers should work together as complementary forces, strengthening each groups' classroom advantages (Medgyes, 2001)

The Advantages of Female Foreign English Teachers

Gender is a dynamic element in the education social construct, impacting the relevance of the language being taught and how students internalize it. Appleby (2014) claims that gender is explicitly linked to different opportunities and constraints that mold the fabric of language teachers. Gender is the foundation of how individuals conceptualize their environment due to socio-cultural designs on how each group should act and behave. Thus, we connect our personal experiences and understanding of societal norms to the

language being presented. Foreign teacher gender shapes how language is presented through word choice, discourse selection, and anecdotal accounts. American scholar Graham Goodwin recorded conversations between men and women of different ages, races, and occupations on Philadelphia's streets and conducted a comparative study. The results showed that men and women used different vocabulary, grammar, and phonological features; females prefer concise and straightforward words, such as friendly and sweet, while men like to use exaggerated words, such as splendid and gorgeous, to describe "good" (Zhu, 1992). Gender impacts class design through pedagogical preference; female foreign teachers motivate students to converse longer in class discussions and prioritize formal grammatical function (Yi, 2012), while male teachers prefer the traditional audio-lingual method. Dee (2006) commented that gender not only impacts discourse in the classroom but presents the teacher as a gender-specific exemplar for students to model. Female teachers offer an alternative feministic stance to the standardized class experience, potentially serving to clarify misconceptions perpetuated in the Chinese paternalistic social structure. Chinese male students may recognize that societal differences exist but have no direct connection to them; foreign female instructors can present a bridging opportunity for a conversation. With leading discussions on a wide range of topics, female teachers (when compared to men) often develop stronger emotional connections with EFL students (Wang, et al., 2020), leading to increased engagement and higher test scores (Dee, 2006).

Factors Impacting Foreign Teacher Recruitment

The recruitment of foreign teachers is perceived by the Chinese government as a platform for students to attain upward mobility within a progressively more competitive globalized China. The Chinese culture assigns immense significance to education, forcing families to endure financial sacrifices to enable their children to access the best educational opportunity assessable (Hou et al., 2014). To accommodate demands, Chinese HEIs actively recruit foreign teachers to assist with student learning demands and secure a competitive advantage in the market. Government education policies have expanded considerably over the past five decades, transcending education localization strategies to an aggressive 21st-century global initiative. Inceptive internationalization policies in the 1980s allowed for hiring foreign experts in Chinese HEIs; however, guidelines requiring strict qualifications and limitations in employment areas led to approximately 10,000 yearly foreign educational expert visas being issued. Current reforms have highlighted the necessity of foreign language skills (principally English) in a globalized China. Immigration policy changes, stemming from further education reforms, have resulted in 900,000 education-based z visas (language teacher) being approved in 2016 for all markets. Although there have been significant increases in language educators entering the market, only a fraction of these visas accounts for Chinese HEI recruitment. According to a study conducted by Yu (2019) examining foreign instructor representation in Chinese universities, foreign teachers only represent 1.1% of the workforce, with

universities facing a 20% (or more) turnover year to year.

The inadequate foreign teacher representation in Chinese HEIs and the inability to maintain a high level of foreign teacher retainment have impacted English department performance and student results. Numerous institutions have altered recruitment strategies from seeking to attract individual foreign academics to persuading academic teams as a means of improving foreign instructor numbers, gender diversity, and long-term stability (retainment); however, these methods have garnered little success (Li et al., 2017). Chinese HEIs are at a strategic disadvantage in the hiring process, impacted by a limited recruitment budget and restrictive regulations imposed by the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) on potential recruit suitability. University human resources and foreign affairs departments are constrained by internal and external factors that ultimately reduce foreign teacher recruitment effectiveness.

Chinese Government and MOE Regulations

All foreign instructor recruitment is subjugated to the Chinese government's approval, with public education institutions additionally restrained by MOE guidelines for appropriateness in teacher qualifications. According to regulations enforced by the State Administration of Foreign Expert Affairs (2017) state that all potential foreign (English) educators must meet the following conditions: 18 – 55 years of age, professional experience, no criminal record, a minimum of a four-year degree from an English medium university, must reside from an approved country, must be in good standing in China. On the surface,

these criteria are standardized in Asia; however, the Chinese MOE sets a more defined and stringent interpretation of these policies for HEIs. The MOE states that foreign teachers must have a minimum of two years of experience teaching, and TESOL or equivalent certificates are now mandated in southern China. University degrees must be certified and be from a university recognized by the Chinese government, federal criminal record checks must be issued from the foreign teachers' home country, and teachers must pass a comprehensive medical check before a visa is issued. While not currently a national requirement, Guangdong province MOE is stressing HEIs recruit foreign teachers with a minimum of a master's degree. To follow strict quality assurance guidelines, Chinese HEIs must limit their recruitment pool of perceptions, reducing their opportunities to fill positions. To further complicate recruitment, proposed regulations would require HEI instructors to attend a minimum of 40 hours of Chinese culture and legal awareness training (unpaid), tighten supervision by local government agencies (frequent visits), more extended work periods (course length), and have each foreign instructors personal information posted on the HEI's website (Australian government, 2020). Private educators and non-traditional institutions (language centers) have substantially fewer requirements set by the government; thus, they are less stifled by excessive MOE guidelines and government mandates. Due to reduced demands in the immigration process compared to HEIs, private educators are in a strategic advantage in the recruitment process, as teachers are not required to perform time-consuming

prerequisites or possess additional credentials.

Institutional Limitations in Recruitment

Like city designation, Chinese HEIs are classified in tiers to correspond with their reputation, academic and research strength, and general student desirability. Outside student recruitment and prestige, the ranking of HEIs impact the government mandated tuition fees the institution can set (and charge) students. Each province sets tuition regulations to correspond with the university rank in their region, with top-flight schools allowed to increase tuition fees for students and receive government financial grants. Second and third tiers (mid to lowered ranked) HEIs have lower tuition fees charged to students and grants provided by government agencies. This financial structure acts as a quasi-marketization approach to the education system, incentivizing institutional performance. Location is additionally a factor in the tuition fees, as each province's MOE and local government are responsible for appointing the tuition cap for their area. In major cities, tuitions are higher because of the cost of operations associated with maintaining university facilities. South Chinese HEIs mainly comprise second and third tiered universities located in second and third tiered cities, reducing the tuition revenue many HEIs are entitled to charge. While student populations in most Chinese HEIs are more than 10,000 students, the relatively low tuition fees impede an institution's human resources (or foreign affairs) department from obtaining adequate budgetary allotment for effective recruitment campaigns.

With limited budgets, Chinese HEIs lack engagement and often depend on

message boards or job forums that are relatively cheap. These job forums online receive numerous hits from potential recruits; however, the volume of competing education groups makes each HEI virtually invisible. Job fairs or other recruitment strategies that require a physical presence from a school representative is impossible. The limited budget is not large enough to cover travel expenses or job fair booth fees; additionally, the time requirement would make it not feasible as foreign teacher recruitment would only be a sliver of their job recruitment. The selection process is stunted by potential job applicants' limited interest, reducing the school's ability to be selective in their hiring practices. Human resource managers are left hiring any person that meets the minimum regulatory criteria by the government. Examining employment suitability or candidate teaching proficiency is often neglected because they seek to fill the position (Wei, 2011; Deng, 2012; Scott, 2021).

Financial benefit packages offered by Chinese HEIs dissuade foreign teachers, as salaries in private institutions or K-12 schools are often two to three times higher. The salary is represented by the required hours in HEIs (approximately 16 hours/week) compared to private and K-12 schools (30 hours+/ week). Chinese HEIs attempt to sell these reduced commitments in-class but often require out-of-class obligations like English clubs, grading, and office hours. Many contracts offered by HEIs are only ten months long, with the summer break considered unpaid leave. Younger foreign teachers often reject the lower salary because of financial pressures related to loan repayments or off-campus living costs (Yang, 2013). Other incentives offered by private education groups like

contract renewals and performance bonuses, sick leave, professional development allowance, or training are extremely rare in Chinese HEIs, further reducing their attractiveness. Female foreign teachers are highly desirable, and many education groups create recruitment campaigns solely to attract females. Private and K-12 may offer reduced hours, smaller classes, better accommodations, and out-of-class opportunities (trips or professional development programs); more importantly, female teachers command higher salaries and are provided are more lucrative contract renewal package. Female desirability steams from Chinese social constructs, where females are considered more nurturing and empathetic to younger student needs (Miller & Chamberlin, 2000). Private institutions commodify their female foreign teachers in their student recruitment campaigns, as Chinese parents perceive female teachers as a more trustworthy option for their child's learning needs (Guo, 2020). In Chinese HEIs, although students may desire instruction from a female foreign teacher, overall student recruitment is not influenced by their presence. The limited number of female foreign teachers and the disparity in incentive package offerings directly results in a considerable gender imbalance of foreign teachers.

Conflicts Encountered by Female Foreign Teachers in Chinese HEIs

Working in a Chinese HEI can be rewarding, with opportunities to experience Chinese culture, interact with professional academics while having fewer work obligations (time-commitment) so teachers can participate in out-of-school hobbies or interests. However, a foreign teacher can experience difficulties dealing

with traditional administrative hierarchy, relation-building difficulties with colleagues, and classroom expectations. Female foreign teachers may also experience gender-based conflicts that arise from societal assigned sex-roles, significantly reshaping their workplace satisfaction and future.

Management and Colleagues

Foreign teachers often fall under different departments and managers' supervision, which could create confusion, frustration, and anger. In most situations, the foreign teacher is not an employee of the foreign language department they are assigned, but rather the foreign affairs department. A foreign affairs group representative manages the recruitment, administrative obligations, training (if any), contract negotiations, and discipline. Any complications with visa regulations, living arrangements (on-campus), or health, the foreign teacher is expected to contact the foreign affairs department to assist with the problems. Course assignment, classroom and material selection, out-of-class academic requirements, and performance assessment are under the foreign language department's jurisdiction. A further complication with foreign teacher management is that communication between each department (foreign affairs and foreign language) may be inconsistent, resulting in mixed messages to the teacher (Wei, 2011; Deng, 2012). Management may also lack the appropriate language communication skills to speak directly with the teacher, resulting in liaisons appointed by either group to speak on their behalf. These liaisons are simply proxies, with no discernable decision-making ability, who pass messages between the relative members.

The numerous steps to communicate a problem or request can create gaps in intended meaning, prolonged time gaps between responses, or lack of engagement by principle decision-makers due to distance. The various actors in the communication process can essentially mute a foreign teacher, circumventing their ability to raise a voice in any decision-making process. Frustrations of not being heard can often fester and reduce foreign teacher engagement in the classroom since they do not feel like a valuable institution member.

Relationship Building

Conforming to a new environment, a new school, or a new country, can be stressful even for experienced teachers. Integrating into the community and the department is essential in feeling a sense of belonging. Teachers need to interact with colleagues, form an understanding of expectations, exchange knowledge, and obtain information on students or course material (Fernández, 2020). Forming strong professional relationships with colleagues is instrumental in maintaining teacher motivation over the academic year. Syamananda (2017) noted that relationships with colleagues build the importance of professional accomplishment, intrinsically and extrinsically motivating teachers to build on their professional capacities and strive to achieve personal and department goals. Aligning personal goals with the department or institutional goals promotes long-term commitments by everyone involved. Unfortunately, foreign teachers often are isolated and excluded from the majority of departmental meetings and functions.

Foreign teacher isolation results from various factors that impact how colleagues, management, and institutions perceive them. Language is a principle reason for exclusion in many meetings, as they are conducted in Mandarin, a large portion of the foreign teachers do not have the linguistic ability to participate or understand the topics of discussion. The exclusion may have merits, but an underlying factor for this decision relates to domestic teachers feeling embarrassed or not comfortable speaking English to native English people. Language anxiety within the department creates distance between the foreign teachers and the domestic teachers, where collaboration and team building become increasingly tricky. In studying foreign teacher relationships with domestic teachers, Cao (2017) explained that language anxiety only represents one element of a multidimensional issue. Domestic teachers believe foreign teachers are not committed and likely a short-term employee; as relationship building is time-intensive, the effort is not worth the fleeting interactions (Cao, 2017). Avoiding foreign teachers by administrators and domestic teachers is an additional risk-avoidance (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikahmadi, 2016). As human resources are limited in their hiring options, department management, and domestic teachers question foreign teachers' qualifications and ability. If a foreign teacher underperforms or has negative results, this could reflect administrators or colleagues associated with this teacher. Avoidance is a defense mechanism that uses plausible deniability to shield all administrators or domestic teachers from any adverse consequence or action performed by the foreign teacher.

Female foreign teachers may experience increased isolation, as they have significantly fewer opportunities to interact with other foreign females, preventing the strong form of bonds other females experiencing similar situations. If a female teacher associates and socializes with foreign men, others may question her moral character (Jean-Marie & Martinez, 2007); men do not face the same scrutiny about their personal life. The paternalistic culture also promotes gender expectations; women are supposed to be subservient and docile (Carli, 2001). If a female foreign teacher is assertive or independent, colleagues may become intimidated and avoid contact, especially Chinese male teachers. Chinese females face immense pressure to marry at a young age and raise a family. Single foreign females are not welcomed in this family-focused community, as Chinese females feel they do not share the same values or life goals. The isolation from being foreign and then additional scrutiny about their private life has an overwhelming impact on foreign teacher commitment to the job and personal mental health (Syamananda, 2017).

Conflicts in the Classroom

When tasked with designing curriculum, lesson plans, and activities, foreign teachers do so through an ethnographic perspective shaped by their home countries' social norms and educational expectations. With limited training or counseling, lessons may not meet the departmental expectations or match societal beliefs (Yang, 2012; Scott, 2021). Pedagogical approaches differ considerably from a western classroom's student-centered approach to a Chinese classroom's teacher-centered learning

structure. As most Chinese HEIs' classroom structure and expectations are founded on a Confucius ideology, the teacher and student's role may complicate classroom interaction anticipated by the foreign teacher during the curriculum design stage. Chinese classrooms are designed to perpetuate the belief that teachers are vessels of knowledge, authoritatively leading classroom exchanges where students respectfully remain silent and absorb the information provided (Rainey, 2010). Critical thinking is not the primary element of the Chinese HEI experience for students; teachers and textbooks are experts and not to be challenged; thus, rote learning is the students' fundamental learning method. These expectations and styles contrast to most western HEIs, where open discussion created by a student-centered environment is encouraged. Foreign teachers anticipating open dialogue and free-flow of ideas are often greeted with passive students that smile and nod; students are often confused by foreign teacher expectations in the classroom because of the vast difference in styles (Li,2006).

The Confucius ideology additionally impacts female foreign teachers, as females must conform to developed gender hierarchy. Male students may show contempt through passive-aggressive micro-aggressions, challenging the female teacher's authority by opposing instruction or non-engaging in classroom activities (Carnegie Mellon University, n.d). If male students are confronted about their behavior, they may attempt to intimidate the female teacher through physical gesturing (stares) or tone of voice (Larson, 2009). If the female teacher lacks communicative ability in Mandarin, Chinese students may use this to insult or

deflect criticism. While physical intimidation is uncommon in China, students' disengagement and reduced participation are incredibly common, impacting the class design and student linguistic growth's effectiveness. If a foreign teacher consistently faces inactive classes, silence in discussions, and little to no motivation by a large portion of the students being taught, teacher motivation decreases, and job-related anxieties increase.

Conclusion

The increased globalization of the Chinese economy has fueled demands for enhanced language skills by Chinese employers. Over the past few decades, the demands for qualified English teachers have rapidly expanded, resulting in dramatic shortfalls in the market. These shortfalls have significantly impacted regions that are less internationally known, for example, south China. HEIs in this region represents a large portion of the Chinese population but only can attract a fraction of the foreign instructors needed to fulfill the demands by students, parents, and employers. Further complicating the recruitment environment is the substantial gender imbalance of males currently working in Chinese HEIs as foreign language teachers. With females only representing 10% of the foreign teacher workforce, the classroom fails at providing an equal voice and feministic perspective to course material. The lack of equality in the classroom also impacts the students' learning environment, as female foreign teachers are considered gender-specific models; female students may not feel appropriately represented in the curriculum or discussion.

South Chinese HEIs are financially limited in their recruitment strategies, reducing their opportunities to attract qualified candidates. Most institutions resort to free or low-cost job forums, where their posting is lost among the countless other postings uploaded daily. The limited budget limits their screening of the limited applicant pool because there is considerable pressure by the department leaders to fill the position with any person that meets the minimum requirements, no matter their classroom ability or suitability. The fill now and worry later philosophy creates numerous issues for the foreign teacher and the department. Foreign teachers are considered short-term contract employees, not part of the department or the institution. Communication between management and foreign teachers is minute and often requires many go-betweens to convey a message or request. Long delays in responses or miscommunication create frustration by both groups, reducing the value of the relationship. Chinese teachers also avoid forming relationships with foreign teachers because of language fears and concerns that relationship-building effort will not be worth the foreign teachers' limited time.

Isolation is frequently used by foreign teachers to describe their experience in Chinese HEIs. This isolation can be compounded in south China as many HEIs are in more rural or small-town settings, making it more difficult for teachers to form healthy relationships. Female foreign teachers face increased scrutiny, as cultural expectations create a judgment of their perceived behavior if it does not follow prescribed Chinese conventions. Chinese patriarchal culture additional stress on many female foreign teachers as females are expected to be doting submissive wives.

Foreign female teachers rarely conform to these conventions, isolating them from Chinese males who are intimidated by their assertiveness, and by Chinese females focused on relationship building with other 'mothers'. Female teachers may also experience micro-aggressions by male students who attempt to challenge female authority. These students may disengage from the class or distract other students by talking in Chinese. Without appropriate communicative channels, foreign female teachers face difficulties dealing with disruptive students.

Recommendations

To utilize foreign teachers' advantages and specialties, Chinese HEIs and the Chinese government must take positive and effective measures to continuously optimize an attractive teaching environment. Southern Chinese provinces need to promote attractive regional characteristics by offering information and services that stress features that make working in their province appealing to foreign teachers. The following recommendations aim to promote effective foreign teachers recruitment and methods to improve the current imbalance in foreign teacher gender representation.

Recruitment Channels

Chinese universities need to re-evaluate the importance foreign teachers play in developing student language ability and understanding of global cultures. Chinese HEIs must prioritize female instructors, allowing for better dialogue on topics and strong gender-specific role models to existing in the classroom. Once Chinese HEIs integrate foreign teachers into their long-term strategic plan,

appropriate funding and support for their recruitment will then occur. Southern Chinese HEIs must emphasize their regional advantages during the recruitment process, having their institution and the region stand out from other locations vying for the limited number of qualified candidates. HEIs need to expand beyond free (or low cost) web portals and expand their recruitment strategy. While the most common alternative to web postings is an intermediate recruitment agency, this paper offers the following four additional suggestions:

1. Create a regional HEI cooperative

As outlined previously, budgetary limitations and institutional ranking impose significant challenges towards the recruitment of qualified foreign instructors, predominantly female foreign instructors. The creation of regional HEI cooperatives tasked with recruiting foreign experts for their representative institutions would reduce the cost and effectively promote the area. The cooperative will reduce the dependency on third-party recruitment agencies primarily concerned about financial compensation for instructor placement instead of suitability and regional appeal. The pooling of financial resources could afford a more active presence by the represented HEIs, allowing for more vital foreign teacher awareness.

2. Promote word of mouth

Current foreign instructors are a valuable resource as many have direct links to numerous other teachers; having them promote the institution and referring potential teachers will improve the recruitment process and increase the accountability of those hired. Smaller or rural southern Chinese HEIs can significantly benefit from this method, as

the current teachers can further promote the region's benefits more enticingly. Rewarding current teachers with referral bonuses can invite a more robust involvement.

3. Headhunting

The current proposed educational reform draft calls for foreign teacher information to be posted on the Chinese HEI's website. As this information is openly accessible, south Chinese HEIs can initiate conversations with qualified teachers that meet their requirements. As the female foreign teacher size is minimal, appealing to existing teachers in China through attractive financial packages or favorable working conditions can fill gaps in many south Chinese HEIs.

4. Attend job fairs and education conferences

Although more costly, offering a physical presence and directly communicating with target foreign teachers can increase interest by recruits and offer a more robust way to promote and market the HEI. Speaking directly with foreign teachers can also act as a filter for candidates that do not meet the requirements.

Retaining Qualified Teachers

After finding and hiring qualified foreign teachers, institutions must be more engaged in retaining talent that benefits the students and the HEI as a whole. The constant cycling of foreign teachers reduces the communicative effectiveness and relationship building in the department; long-term foreign teacher retention policies can reduce department conflicts and improve student performance.

1. Clear and concise communication channels

Foreign teachers are faced with the arduous task of communicating ideas and concerns to the appropriate decision-makers. The numerous actors involved making the communication and decision-making process laborious that often demotivate foreign instructors from contacting the institution. Creating a direct link to a representative that speaks English and has decision-making abilities (in most situations) streamlines the communication channel and allows for a better flow of information. The institution can relay information and request directly to the foreign teachers, and the foreign teachers can have an open dialogue regarding suggestions and concerns.

2. Develop pre-service training and professional development

A well informed and trained teacher can perform their role at a higher level than individuals maintaining a stagnated approach. Pre-service training can help new teachers prepare for the job-specific demands related to their specialized class or HEI needs. Pre-service training allows new foreign teachers to ask questions and develop the necessary skills to perform their job best as outlined by the department. Existing teachers should be provided professional development opportunities, allowing for new approaches and understanding to be adopted in their classrooms. Unfortunately, foreign teachers receive little attention from the department in their professional development. The investment will not pay long-term dividends. The inclusion of foreign teachers in professional development signals the department values their participation, forming stronger relationships. Chinese colleagues may change their perception towards foreign teachers if the teachers are retained long-

term; this would directly improve department relations as teachers believe foreign teachers are part of their academic community.

3. Assist with language development and culture awareness

A significant issue with foreign teachers not developing long-term relationships in China is language. Offering language and culture classes can motivate teachers to participate more in the out-of-school community. Field trips, department gatherings, or other non-work related activities can strengthen the department relationship and increase foreign teacher motivation. Female teachers can benefit from these groups, as female-only clubs and groups exist on university campuses in China. Offering support and inclusion to female teachers, as many are unaware they exist, will help with their sense of belonging. This recommendation is not stressing that female teachers should only associate with other females, but an opportunity to communicate with others with a shared gender experience.

4. Offer assistance with curriculum design and classroom engagement

Open communication by senior department teachers and leaders with foreign teachers can reduce potential conflicts with curriculum design and classroom participation. New foreign teachers may not be aware of class size or expectation; experienced teachers can act as mentors, providing suggestions and ideas. These mentors do not tell the foreign teacher how to design their curriculum or lead their class but provide information and recommendations that could provide insight. Asking new foreign teachers to sit in a lesson taught by another teacher before their program beginning, could also

help create a model for the new foreign teacher to model. Feedback is essential, not as a method of punishment but an area to foster classroom and curriculum reflection. Providing differing ideas or suggestions in a non-judgmental manner, foreign teachers can improve their classroom and overall motivation. Mentorship can also be necessary for female foreign teachers that are faced with gender-related issues or dilemmas. Providing a professional senior female teacher, the female foreign teacher can speak with her concerns, which may prevent problems from escalating.

5. Provide job advancement opportunities

Many foreign teachers are faced with the long-term prospect of the occupational glass ceiling, reducing the benefits of long-term commitment. If the Chinese HEI assigns positions to foreign teachers according to domestic teachers, foreign teachers may strive to climb professionally. If foreign teachers can connect their long-term commitment to professional advancement, contract renewal will be more common. While salary increases with each subsequent contract signing may be appealing, long-term retainment is more associated with position and rank.

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